

HR Excellence in Research Award

King's College London: 10 year Self-Assessment Report, July 2022

Summary

King's College London (KCL) has provided for research staff since funding became available in 2003 under the Roberts Agenda. Following success in this area and recognition of the importance of this agenda, King's established the Centre for Research Staff Development (CRSD) in 2016 with responsibility for implementing the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Researcher Concordat). We now have long established practices addressing this agenda and are moving towards delivering major collaborative projects with input from faculties and directorates across the university. These have full support and personal engagement from the President and Principal and the Vice-President and Vice-Principal (Research). This report outlines progress on our action plan for the HR Excellence in Research Award over the last two years and describes our priorities and actions for the next three years.

This report is accompanied by a retrospective action plan and review for the 2020-22 period and a future action plan for 2022-2025, both summarised below. Items are referenced according to the Researcher Concordat Principles in the plans.

Internal review process

College Research Committee (CRC), chaired by the Vice-President and Vice-Principal (Research), has overall responsibility for KCL's commitment to the Concordat. The CRSD leads on implementation. The CRSD is guided by an Oversight Group (CRSD OG) comprised of representatives responsible for research staff from seven of our nine academic Faculties and two research staff representatives. The research staff representatives are drawn from the Research Staff Representative Committee (RSRC) that covers the entire university.

The CRSD has conducted an in-depth review of progress to date, through:

- Analysis of the results of the 2021 King's Research Staff Survey (KReSS) and comparison with longitudinal data from the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), forerunner of the KReSS
- Ongoing engagement and discussion with the RSRC regarding issues of particular concern
- Faculty updates on progress and individual action plans via the CRSD OG
- Updates from relevant Professional Services departments and other interested parties
- Analysis of progress on Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charter initiatives

Key achievements and progress against the 2020-2022 action plan

KCL's commitment to delivering tangible benefits for research staff is exemplified by:

- Recognition by the faculties of the need to engage with workplace culture and the principles of the Researcher Concordat and the elevation of the priority they are now giving this agenda
- Our three main projects addressing research culture issues and their impact specifically on research staff culminating in a series of recommendations that have led to major cross-university actions to bring about profound changes
- The establishment of a growing network of colleagues across the nation delivering professional development opportunities collaboratively

Examples of progress against each of the three Researcher Concordat principles are outlined below, with additional details provided in the accompanying updated action plan for 2020-22.

Environment and Culture (Principle 1)

- Awarded Institutional Silver Athena SWAN and Bronze Race Equality Charter. ECI2.1 and 2.2.
- Event to showcase the many contributions around King's to implementing the Researcher Concordat bringing in up to 100 senior leaders, professional services staff, managers of research staff and research staff themselves to celebrate, learn and share best practice. ECI1.3
- Three projects emanating from results of the CROS generated increased awareness of the issues across the university and contributed to major initiatives to address bullying and harassment and career precarity. EI3.1, EI3.2 and EI3.6

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- Code of Conduct in IoPPN relating to protected characteristics signed by 521 faculty members. ECI4.5
- Research Staff virtual meetings continue to be held every other month to facilitate two-way dialogue and trust between research staff and King's Vice-Principal and Vice-President (Research). Attendance maintained at more than 200 each meeting with 75% reporting the meetings are useful or very useful in the KReSS. ECI6.2
- Appointment of Integrity Advisers in all faculties and their subsequent contribution to disseminating the requirements and expectations in this area. ECI5.3

Employment (Principle 2)

- Faculties doing more to engage with induction processes. EI2.1
- Research staff taking up the opportunity to engage directly with the new Principal and President and influencing his stance on the use of fixed-term contracts. This and the outcome of the project on careers emanating from the CROS have led to a review of the use of fixed-term contracts and how they can be minimised. EI3.1 and PCDR5.1
- An update to the existing policy on fixed-term contracts has resulted in more efficient transfer of those who have been employed by King's for more than 4 years. EI6.1

Professional & Career Development (Principle 3)

- CRSD's programme of courses being transferred to online delivery resulting in greater collaboration between universities, for example Leadership in Action involving 9 UK-based institutions and WriteFest involving 18 institutions. PCDI4.1
- Exponential growth of attendance at CRSD's programme of courses with an increase from 722 in 2019-20 to 1781 in 2021-22. PCDI4.1
- Restructuring and reinvigorating of the research staff networks following their almost complete collapse in the early stages of the pandemic. e.g. PCDI4.2
- The successful application by two of our UKRI Future Leaders Fellows for funding to support the generation of a managers toolkit, resulting in a national consultation and collaborative working with Vitae to generate the toolkit. PCDM2.3
- Recognition of the contribution that research staff make to policy and practice resulting in invitations to the Chair of the Research Staff Representative Committee to top level meetings. PCDR5.1
- More than 100 technical staff each year supported to gain professional accreditation from the Science Council. PCDR1.3

Next steps and strategy for 2020-2022

As faculties at King's engage more with the Researcher Concordat and research culture is given greater prominence we are expecting to see greater co-operation and enthusiasm for actions that enhance the lived experience of research staff at King's. With a new and highly supportive President and Principal at King's and consequent updating of our strategic plans there is opportunity and eagerness for bold projects.

In our previous plan we began to focus less on what is now routine within central provision. As we have done this, greater engagement with the Researcher Concordat within the faculties has led to each one identifying particular issues that they are keen to lead on locally and address individually rather than be led centrally. Some of these are included in the action plan to provide examples while others have not been included for brevity. The central focus for the next 3 years will be on 3 areas that have arisen from the priority projects identified in the previous action plan. While these actions have started with a small number of contributors it is anticipated that they will ultimately draw on resources from and have an impact on those involved in research across entire university.

1. Bullying and Harassment
 - i. Positive Workplace Initiatives (ECI3.1). King's has launched a major programme to address bullying and harassment, focusing on four connected themes; "Leadership", "Training and Awareness Raising" "Reporting, Monitoring, Support" and "Reward, Retention and Recognition". This recognises the need to promote positive behaviours while also demonstrating that King's acts when unacceptable behaviour is experienced.

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ii. Supporting Positive Workplace Initiatives (ECI3.2, 3.3 and 3.4). Most of the faculties now have and/or are developing local measures to address bullying and harassment. Included in this plan are some examples of new actions.

2. Career Precarity

i. Minimising the use of Fixed-Term Contracts (EI6). This project has been commissioned by the Principal and President following a meeting with research staff and influenced by the Research Culture Task and Finish Groups' Careers project. Over the next 6 months the CRSD will lead on an investigation into the steps that need to be taken to move research staff completely onto open contracts. Following this initial investigation and depending on the findings the project will begin to involve a range of departments, faculties and directorates for implementation. It is anticipated that significant restructuring of our processes may be required.

ii. Mitigating Career Precarity (PCDI5). While minimising our use of Fixed-Term Contracts may have some impact on career precarity, there are other approaches to this issue that may have a more profound impact. In a collaborative project the CRSD and King's Careers and Employability are commissioning a review of the literature around careers beyond academia and generating case studies describing career trajectories of researchers who have made the transition. The outcomes will feed into supporting research staff managers and provide a wider range of resources for use in careers conversations.

3. Manager engagement with supporting research staff

Co-creation approach to manager support (PCDM5). We are taking a new approach to engaging the managers of research staff with gaining the needed skills to support their staff. This has begun using a co-creation model and will be added to as the programme continues, according to the outcomes of the first phase of the project. It will also connect to the Managers Toolkit spearheaded by King's UKRI Future Leaders Fellows Katie Sheehan and Andy Guise and developed together with Vitae.

Selected additional projects

- Events to showcase how King's is implementing the Researcher Concordat. ECI1
- Enabling of flexible working. EC12.2
- Local resource generation and events to support research staff. EC12.3, EC12.4, EC16.1, ECR1.1
- Local Mental Health First Aid and wellbeing training. EC14 and ECM3
- Local reporting of bullying and harassment issues. ECR4
- Research integrity, ethics and governance training as a collaboration between central and faculty teams and raised awareness of these agendas EC15/ECM2.1
- Inclusion of research staff in academic promotion rounds in Social Science & Public Policy. EI3.1
- Improved recognition of research staff who support PGR students. EI3.2
- Placement projects for research staff based on information interviewing. PCDI3
- Technical network secondments to increase breadth of skills. PCDM4.1
- Public statements supporting research staff and PhD students in their career choice. PCDM2.2/3

Success measures

Alongside timely completion of the specific deliverables detailed in the action plan, the following indicators will be used to measure success:

- Ongoing improvement of all metrics in survey data in 2022-2025 compared to previous years
- Outcomes and improvements brought about by the priority projects, e.g. a move away from fixed-term contracts
- Improved understanding of the nature and impact of bullying and harassment and opportunities to contribute to the debate and associated initiatives
- Improved mental health and ability to support others who are struggling with it
- Greater awareness of the existence of the Researcher Concordat and what it signifies
- Increased engagement with research integrity through attendance at courses and awareness of a research integrity code of conduct

Dr Kathy Barrett, Head of Research Staff Development, Centre for Research Staff Development, July 2022

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