

Keele has held the HR Excellence in Research (HR EIR) Award since 2013 and has continued to work diligently to progress delivery of its Concordat Implementation Action Plans, against the challenging backdrop of a global pandemic. This report details progress made in achieving the actions and outcomes set out in our current 2019-21 Concordat Action Plan (aka HR EIR action plan) and the formulation of a new Action Plan 2021-23, which together form part of Keele's eight-year review for the HR Excellence in Research Award. These documents are available on our [website](#).

1. Internal review process

Development and implementation of Keele's HR EIR Action Plan is overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Group (HR EIR), chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Research and Innovation, and meets at least three times per year. Membership of the group comprises a wide range of stakeholders from across the University including diverse research staff representation from each of the three faculties (including School Research Directors, Research Managers, Professors through to Early Career Researchers and research only staff) along with professional teams supporting research (*Research Innovation & Engagement (RaISE), Human Resources, Organisational Development, Careers Service, Keele Doctoral Academy (KDA), Communications and Branding*). Keele University is committed to understanding and responding to the views of all its researchers, which includes over 100 research only staff, over 400 research and teaching staff and 524 postgraduate researchers (PGRs). This is why in our action plan we focus on activities which will benefit all research staff and PGRs, not just research only staff.

Evaluation of the action plans and progress is conducted through the HR EIR Group at regular intervals throughout the period, coordinated by the Researcher Developer. The work of the group relates closely with the University Research Strategy, in particular in terms of creating a positive research culture and retention of research staff. The HR EIR Group regularly receives updates from interactions with other key stakeholder representatives such as Researcher Forum, Athena Swan, Keele Women Staff Network, BAME Staff Network, Disability and Inclusion, Keele Postgraduate Association (PGR student representative body). Researcher voice is gathered in a number of ways, e.g. individual, group and online conversations around specific themes such as PGR Supervisor support, researcher career development, anonymised training and other CPD feedback; collective Faculty researcher views fed back by researcher representatives at the HR EIR Group; the analysis of anonymised survey data (including PRES 2019, 2021, and CROS/PIRLS surveys 2019, CEDARS 2021 and internal survey). All researcher voice input is reviewed by the HR EIR Group and used to agree and shape actions that will improve the researcher working environment and career development opportunities. This process informed the development of the new 2021-23 Action Plan, which the HR EIR Group will continue to work on in collaboration with the wider researcher body and other key stakeholders. Oversight of the implementation of the HR EIR action plan is the formal responsibility of the University's Research Committee (URC), chaired by the PVC for Research

and Innovation (who also chairs the HR EIR group), which reports directly to Senate. Updates to the Concordat Action Plan are reviewed by the URC, before being published online bi-annually.

2. Key achievements and progress against the strategy set out in your original action plan and two-year review, using metrics to highlight success

The 2019-21 actions have been regularly monitored and coordinated by the HR EIR group (at least three meetings a year). During this period various researcher networks have been established, (for example PGR students, PGR Supervisors, Research-only staff, Research leaders) which have enhanced the communication and delivery of the action plan.

Recruiting, selecting and retaining research staff

New Workload Allocation guidance was developed and introduced for the 2021/22 academic year, we have also delivered a range of workshops through Organisational Development (OD), the Keele Postgraduate Associate (KPA) and the Start to Success Project, and have created opportunities for development through the newly established virtual networks for PGR students, PGR supervisors, Research-only staff and Research Leaders. We have representation of research staff on the HR EIR Group, with representation at the regular meetings from academic staff, research only staff, early career researchers, through to Professors (membership renewed annually).

Staff appraisals

In the CEDARs survey 2021 **86.6%** of research staff surveyed reported having **engaged in appraisals** in the last 2 years. Of those **53.4%** of research staff reported their appraisal as useful or very useful. Researcher Development is included in appraisal training and has been updated to include links to the UK Professional Standards Framework from HEA. **Only 31.4%** of research staff reported that they felt the institutions values developing researchers, so our hope is to increase this value to **over 50%** through the new emphasis on development in the appraisal process.

PGR Supervision

PGR supervisor training reviewed, revised and relaunched, with ongoing evaluation embedded and attendance monitored. Monthly KDA newsletter established to highlight training, events, resources and changes to regulations.

Recognise, celebrate and share researcher contributions

The weekly communication to all staff via **Week@Keele** (distributed to over 3,500 staff), now has a **strong research presence**, celebrating and promoting research successes for all career stages of researchers. In addition, good practice is being regularly shared through the [Research talks series](#) (Women Research Leaders, Research Integrity, Research Excellence Framework), the annual [Impact & Engagement Festival](#), the annual [University Postgraduate Conference](#) and the annual [Researcher Summer School](#). A successful postgraduate fellowship scheme was launched in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

In order to offer additional opportunities for researchers we have engaged in a range of activities; for example, **13 Grand Challenge lectures** were hosted by the Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences, providing opportunities for researchers to engage in cross-disciplinary discussions around research. In addition,

MICRA (Midlands Innovation Commercialisation of Research Accelerator), of which Keele is a member organisation, have run a total of **68 workshops** over the 2019-2021 period.

Research Concordat and HR Excellence in Research Award awareness

The KDA references the award during the main University PGR Induction, within the KDA handbook and website. It is also highlighted to new supervisors as part of the mandatory training.

Supporting researchers' wellbeing and mental health

In 2020 the [Health & Wellbeing Strategy](#) was launched. In addition, the KPA has launched a **Blue January campaign** and **Mindfulness Mondays sessions**, both of which are available to all PGR students. Also, the **Start to Success** project has delivered wellbeing workshops to PGRs tackling 'Imposter Syndrome' and 'Myths around a PhD', plus additional resources produced, including 'PhD in a Pandemic'.

Diversity and equality

To inform our decision making around researcher-related diversity and equality issues we used the **Athena SWAN charter and Race Equality Charter** to progress gender and race equality across the institution, and recently ran the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index survey. The **Disability Confident Employer Award** has been in place for 3 years at Keele, and we now have a mandatory training module on Equality in the Workplace launched recently, of which **61%** of staff have currently completed, and we continue to work to increase the completion rate.

Research Integrity and ethics

We have appointed an Academic Lead for Research Integrity and Improvement, which is a new post at Keele. The role works with the new Faculty Research Integrity Champions and the UKRN Institutional Lead to form the Academic Research Integrity Team. The champions support their faculties with addressing subject-specific research integrity considerations, provide appropriate training and attend Research Committees at School, Faculty and University-level. Keele has delivered a range of research integrity and ethics-based training sessions aimed at PGRs and research staff, both in person and online over the past 3 years, including hosting external experts as part of our Research Talks seminar series.

3. Outline of the strategy for the next four years, including broad but SMART success measures

We are currently 1 year into our 5 year [University Research Strategy](#), which will stretch until 2025. Underpinning this strategy are 7 Strategic Pillars (Research Excellence, Innovation, Collaboration & Partnership, Excellence with Impact, Reach & Significance, Integrity, Inclusion), which are embedded within all of our research activities, including the Action Plan for this award. Further within this strategy are specific objectives on aspects of research ranging from increased research income to fostering a stronger community of PGR students. Below are a selection of these research objectives and how they are supported by the new HE EIR Action Plan:

- **Research Excellence** – There is a target to increase research spend to £25m per annum by 2023. The Action Plan will help in the achievement of this through a number of the targets aimed at improving research staff skills (e.g. project management) and job security – allowing them more opportunity to successfully apply for external funding.
- **Knowledge Exchange & Impact** – The aim of delivering the [Keele Deals](#) programme involves collaboration with a range of local policy makers and local businesses, which in turn will provide

our researchers with opportunities to collaborate, develop their research goals and lead to improved career opportunities.

- **People** - A key target of the strategy is to encourage, support and promote leadership in research, within and beyond the institution, which will be achieved through a number of targets including a minimum of 16 research staff per year completing the HEA 'Transitions to Leadership' programme.
- **Research Integrity** – The plan is to deliver a stronger culture of research integrity, through a range of activities, including improved training on research reproducibility, updated research integrity resources online, and the use of the Keele University Research Assurance System (KURAS)