

This report provides the institutional context for Keele's HR in Excellence in Research (HREiR) award and is submitted with an update on our action plan for 2021-2023, and a copy of our new action plan for 2023-26.

Institutional Context

Keele University was founded in 1949 with the founding mission of "Making a difference in society by providing innovative, high-quality education for students from all backgrounds and by undertaking world-leading research that transforms understanding and brings benefit to society, communities and individuals." The [Our Future Strategic Vision](#) places an emphasis on the university as a propagator of world-class research and researchers that push at the limits of current knowledge and understanding; ensuring that the outputs have impact through our teaching, public engagement and the partnerships we form.

Our strategy for research is led by our Pro Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation, Professor Eran Edirisinghe, who is supported by staff across our three Faculties (Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences); and five research institutes ([Institute for Global Health](#), [Institute for Social Inclusion](#), [Institute for Sustainable Futures](#), [Institute for Liberal Arts & Sciences](#) and the [Digital Society Institute](#)).

To underpin our long-term strategy for research, we will be launching our Research Culture Commitment in January 2024, which will span the next 10 years. The associated Research Culture Action Plan will help us to drive forwards our aims to meet our obligations to the Researcher Development Concordat and will ensure that we continue to provide a fair, safe and nurturing environment for all of our researchers.

Keele has successfully retained the [HREiR Award](#) since it was first received in 2013. Following the 8-year review in 2021, we have continued to implement a range of initiatives to support researcher development, with positive progress made, despite this being a challenging period for the sector.

Our HREiR targets all research active staff and postgraduate research students. Staff data is drawn from our latest HESA return in December 2022, where we recorded 100 Research-Only staff and 415 Research & Teaching staff. Along with this, as of September 2023, we had 522 Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) registered with us.

Governance Structures & Internal evaluation process

Oversight of the implementation of the HREiR action plan is the formal responsibility of the University's Research Committee (URC), chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation which reports directly to Senate. Updates to the [Concordat Action Plan](#) are reviewed by URC, before being published online bi-annually.

Development and implementation of Keele's HREiR Action Plan was originally overseen by the HR Excellence in Research Group (HREiR), chaired by the PVC for Research & Innovation. Membership of the group comprised a wide range of stakeholders from across the University, including diverse research staff representation from each of the three faculties along with professional teams supporting research. In 2022, Keele formed the Research Culture Oversight Group which aimed to explore and establish mechanisms to improve research culture at the University, and led development of Keele's first Research Culture

Commitment, which will guide activities around creating the required cultural change over the next 10 years. The Research Culture Commitment includes five core pillars:

1. **Recognition and reward** for all colleagues involved in the research process, including professional services and technical colleagues.
2. **Supporting researchers to be successful** through initiatives including a mentoring programme, leadership training and more.
3. **Encouraging good research citizenship** through acknowledging and rewarding those who engage in supportive activities within our research culture, such as peer review.
4. **Ensuring opportunities for all** by helping researchers develop professionally and supporting those with outside caring and other responsibilities.
5. **Fostering a vibrant an inclusive research culture** with useful and engaging activities for those working on and off campus.

Following its establishment, the Research Culture Oversight Group took responsibility for monitoring the existing HREiR action plan and developing the new plan, with the aim of ensuring clear alignment between plans for enhancement of research culture with HREiR objectives. Evaluation of the action plan and progress has been conducted through these groups at regular intervals throughout the period, coordinated by the Researcher Developer. These groups have also received regular updates from other key stakeholder groups including Athena Swan, Keele Women Staff Network, BAME Staff Network, Disability and Inclusion, Keele Postgraduate Association (our PGR student representative body). A final meeting (and subsequent online discussion) with representatives from Research and Innovation, HR, Organisational Development, Academic Registry, Strategic Communication & Brand and the Keele Doctoral Academy was used to ensure accurate completion of the 2021-23 Action Plan and informed population of the 2023-26 Action Plan.

Researcher voice is a key element of the evaluation of our action plan and is gathered in several ways, including through individual, group and online conversations around specific themes such as PGR Supervisor support; researcher career development conversations; anonymised training and other professional development feedback and feedback from researcher representatives. Analysis of anonymised survey data is also undertaken, focusing on both PRES and CEDARS. However, despite efforts to improve participation in these surveys, response rates have declined in recent years and remain lower than we would like. This will be the focus of targeted action in our new action plan.

All researcher voice input is reviewed by the oversight groups and is used to agree and shape actions that will improve the researcher working environment and career development opportunities. This process informed the evaluation of the existing action plan and development of the new action plan.

Looking ahead to monitoring of the 2023-26 action plan, the Research Culture Oversight Group will be amalgamated into a new Research Culture Committee, which will be established in January 2024 and will be co-chaired by the Director of Research Strategy Delivery and the Pro Vice Chancellor Research & Innovation. This committee will meet quarterly and report directly to URC. The new committee will contain a range of professional services colleagues (including representation from Research, Innovation & Engagement; HR; Strategic Communications & Brand; Organisational Development; Keele Doctoral Academy) and representation from researchers and research-related colleagues from across all three faculties and all career stages, including PGRs. The main responsibility of the

committee will be to implement the action plan for the new 10-year Research Culture Commitment, also to be fully launched in January 2024. The group will also oversee delivery of the HREiR action plan, which will become a key operational document, used to underpin the Research Culture Commitment.

Progress and achievements

As noted, we are pleased with the progress we have made on delivery of our action plan over the past two years. We are keen to highlight the following key achievements:

- Improved communication of research - our weekly communication to all staff (Week@Keele), has a strong research presence and regularly celebrates and promotes research successes of researchers at all career stages. We have established monthly Research at Keele Newsletters which feature information related to policy updates/new policies related to research, there is also a monthly Keele Doctoral Academy newsletter which is distributed to PGRs and supervisors. We have updated our internal research pages to better showcase resources, materials and news. Good practice is also regularly shared through our Research Talks series, our programme of impact & engagement events, our annual University Postgraduate Conference and our annual Researcher Summer School.
- Improved engagement with our researchers through the establishment of Research Culture Cafés, attended by 60 research staff during 2023 and culminating in the development of our Research Culture Commitment.
- Launch of new mandatory training on Managing Health, Safety and Wellbeing, with excellent completion rates by researchers and managers.
- Review and re-launch of PGR supervisor training, with improved mechanisms to monitor completion.
- Positive work around equality in the workplace and achievement of our targets for BAME recruitment, gender, and ethnicity representation.
- Implementation of a new researcher development programme, with an expanded range of workshops for PGRs and research staff, plus new community events including the Keele PGR Symposium and the Keele Research Conference.
- Strengthened induction processes for researchers, with a new researcher Induction to be rolled out during early 2024. A new PGR induction has recently been established with new asynchronous content to improve support for new PGR starters.
- Introduction of a range of new resources related to open research and research integrity, with a number of well attended training sessions delivered during the period.

We are particularly proud of our continued delivery of a broad range of training workshops and community events for researchers, both in-person and online. These have included:

- The Keele Doctoral Academy (KDA) and Research & Innovation Support Enhancement (RaISE) delivered a range of events and workshops, including two Researcher Summer Schools which saw 50+ sessions delivered to hundreds of attendees, and around 100 separate ad-hoc workshops delivered to over 1000 attendees, on topics such as research integrity, PGR progression and researcher mental health.
- The first Research at Keele Month was in March 2023 and saw an attendance of 559 over 47 sessions across a very busy month of activity. Attendance was a mix of researchers, professional services, technicians, undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, and postgraduate researchers.
- The first Keele Research Conference in June 2023 saw 185 members of our research community come together to experience the range of research being

conducted across the University. We also saw a record 250 attendees at our PGR Research Symposium in March 2023.

- We have also continued to successfully deliver our Grand Challenges Lectures, which have seen over 1000 people attend 14 lectures in the past two years. We also organise a range of other public lectures, including regular Inaugural Lectures.

Strategic objectives and implementation plan

In preparing this submission, we have reflected on our experience of implementing our previous action plan. In total we submitted over 50 individual actions in our 2021-23 action plan, each of which required individual monitoring. This not only led to significant administrative burden, but also made our action plan difficult for our research community to engage with. We have reflected on this when planning our 2023-2026 action plan and have sought to concentrate on a smaller number of more comprehensive actions, to ensure a coherent and focused approach.

The new Action Plan focuses on a smaller number of key areas for development, which have been identified through the processes undertaken in the development of our Research Culture Commitment. These key areas were identified as:

- The need for a more formal and systematic research staff appraisals process, with more effective training for managers and a new monitoring process. There will also be an improved focus on staff professional and career development.
- Implementation of a new Researcher Induction Programme, so all research-staff and associated research technicians and professional services have an improved introduction to the research community and processes at the University.
- Improved mental health and wellbeing support and training for research staff and PGRs, with a focus on marginalised groups, e.g. international, distance learners and part-time.
- Continuing to drive forward our work around research integrity and open research.
- The embedding of an environment which supports researchers to engage in citizenship activities, rewarding this through improved promotion opportunities.
- The launch of a new mentoring scheme using the software SUMAC.

The new Action Plan represents an opportunity for us to launch a number of new and exciting initiatives for the University. The new Research Culture Committee will be a driving force for institutional change around researcher development and will oversee a further step-change improvement in conditions and environment for our research staff and postgraduate researchers.