

HR Excellence in Research Award: 10-Year Review

Goldsmiths, University of London is a comparatively small, specialist higher education institution with approximately 9,800 students, located on a campus-based community in the southeast London borough of Lewisham. The College is internationally recognised for its disciplinary expertise in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and creative computing, delivering leading research that is highly innovative and often interdisciplinary in nature. The research staff of the institution is comprised of:

- 45 staff on Research-Only Contracts
 - 9 Post-doctoral Researchers
 - 12 Research Assistants & Associates
 - 4 T&R staff on R-Only Secondments
 - 20 Researchers, Guest Professors, & Other Research Roles
- 32 of the R-Only staff hold solely Fixed Term Contracts
- 427 staff on contracts that include Teaching & Research
- 382 staff on contracts that are Teaching-Only

Goldsmiths recognises all research-active staff as beneficiaries to the institution's commitments to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, regardless of contract type. While applying the benefits of the Concordat widely, we regard our research-only staff as the core beneficiary in implementing and evaluating this work.

Evaluation & Renewal Process

Internal evaluation of 2021/23 action plan success measurements has been a continuous activity throughout the reporting period, with post-event feedback submissions, 1:1 and group feedback supporting the ongoing reporting of progress against action points. Earlier in 2023, Goldsmiths invested significant effort in increasing researcher engagement with the Culture, Employment and Development in Academia Survey (CEDARS), resulting in an impressive response rate increase from 5% in 2021 to approximately 25% in 2023. When isolating for those who opted to provide details of their contract type, Goldsmiths managed a response rate of 24.3% of individuals contracted to conduct research and a 10% response rate when isolating on those who self-identified as being on a research-only contract. Among researcher respondents, 54 self-identified as managers of researchers, providing further details of their experiences as stakeholders with distinct managerial commitments towards the implementation of the Concordat.

Consultations were held with departmental Directors of Research, the highest-ranking strategic leadership role for researchers within academic departments at the College. Reflections and priorities were solicited in the context of the termly Directors of Research Meeting (x3), chaired by the strategic lead for the implementation of the Concordat. Further research manager perspectives were solicited through a cross-institution focus group chaired by the Concordat strategic lead, feeding back on the experiences and needs of the institution's research community in conversation with Vitae. Members of the Early Career Research Network and all researchers on Research-Only contracts were directly invited to participate in the evaluation and forward action strategy development in focus groups (16), via anonymous free-text response forms (2), or via a 1:1 with the researcher development team (2). The wider research support community was consulted through participation in CEDARS (145) and subsequently through the opportunity for 1:1's with the Concordat administrators (Researcher Development Officer & Head of Organisational Development & Wellbeing).

Researcher interviews, focus groups, survey and feedback responses were collated by the Head of Organisational Development & Wellbeing and the Researcher Development Officer with findings, ideas, and areas of concern fed back to the College's Research and Enterprise Committee. Outcomes of the action point success measure analysis and proposed forward actions were developed in

consultation with researchers, the Concordat strategic lead, and the Research & Enterprise Committee. A draft was then submitted to Vitae for feedback. Revisions and a final version were reviewed and approved by the Research & Enterprise Committee.

Governance Structure

Delivery and direct oversight of the College's work towards implementing the principles of the 2019 Researcher Development Concordat are coordinated by the Research and Enterprise Committee. The committee is comprised of 14 members of research-active staff (including one R-Only, Postdoc Fellow) and 3 professional services staff (Director of Research & Knowledge Exchange, Director of the Library, and committee secretary). The committee is chaired by the Pro-Warden for Research and Knowledge Exchange, who is also the strategic lead for the implementation of the Concordat. Administration and implementation of the Research and Enterprise Committee's Concordat activities is collaboratively managed between the departments of Research and Knowledge Exchange and People & Organisational Development. The Research and Enterprise Committee reports to the Academic Board which has principal authority and leadership over academic and research activity at the College. The strategic lead for the implementation of the Concordat similarly progresses action plan activity through membership on the College Council, the senior governing body of the institution.

Work towards implementing the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat is integrated with the College's activity in the retention of the Athena Swan Bronze Award, Stonewall Silver Award, Race Equality Charter, Race Justice Strategy, and status as a Disability Confident Employer. This integration is coordinated at multiple levels from strategy, to engagement, to delivery. Staff (researcher) consultation, data sharing, and delivery collaboration is supported by monthly meetings between the Researcher Development Team and the College's Heads of EDI and Organisational Development, who administer these complementary awards and accreditations. The EDI team sit within the wider People & Organisational Development department, which co-administers the Concordat in collaboration with Research & Knowledge Exchange. The strategic lead for the Researcher Development Concordat contributes to the institutional governing body's pursuit and resourcing of these awards and accreditations through membership on the Senior Management Team and is responsible for research-related actions in the College's Race Justice Strategy.

Key Achievements

The two-year period since the previous evaluation and submission has seen notable achievements in researcher development support and researcher engagement activity at Goldsmiths. As post-pandemic, hybrid working practices become new working-norms, we have taken advantage of the flexibility and resource-generating opportunities afforded by continued advances in software development and have embedded flexible working practices into institutional policies. The period has seen the development of a new 10-year strategy for Research and Knowledge Exchange at the institution which not only foregrounds research culture but identifies it as a priority area for future contribution to sector leadership. The period has been one of celebrated successes and distinct challenges, both of which have been sources for institutional learning and idea-generation towards our HREiRA Year-10 strategy.

Environment and Culture: The period has seen a concentrated effort towards improving and increasing engagement and support for researchers at the College. Engagement infrastructure such as the Early Career Researcher Network and Researcher Development Hub have become widely used resources, greatly surpassing action plan success-evaluation metrics. Researcher survey responses and focus groups affirmed the value and utility of these resources, a development that is further supported by ever-increasing active-user and site-visit analytics detailed in the concluding action plan evaluation. Recent participation in the industry-wide Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey dramatically increased to nearly 25% of research-contracted staff, providing a wealth of information about the health and needs of our research

community. We have increased and standardised researcher feedback mechanisms, ensuring researcher voices actively guide and improve researcher development and wider policy activity in this area. The College's ongoing actions and commitment to the Concordat are now highlighted at termly all staff inductions and at all centrally delivered researcher training events. Finally, Goldsmiths has contributed to sector-wide discussions towards improving the research culture at industry level and with the AHRC towards improving conditions for practice researchers.

Employment: All new research staff are now welcomed to Goldsmiths via a College-wide hybrid induction programme, introducing key policies, departments, and institutional leaders to support researchers' transition into our research community. Managers participating in the hiring process are now invited to fair and transparent recruitment and selection training, supporting research managers to recruit diverse and experienced researchers. All research managers in Head of Department roles are enrolled in this recruitment training before they begin recruiting in their roles. To build project management capacity among research staff, a research grant management training session was devised alongside a digital grant management induction guide. The session supported ECR's to navigate the project management process in the context of institution-specific support and reporting processes, supporting both researchers and research managers to meet their reporting commitments detailed in the Concordat. Attendees unanimously reported the session increased their capacity in this area and that their learning can be readily applied to their research practices. The accompanying digital resource can be used independently of the session by all researchers at the institution. This document highlights and summarises key policies and practices relevant to research staff and supports researchers in meeting their funder and institutional reporting requirements.

Professional Career Development: The institution-wide researcher development programme has seen an exponential increase in the quantity and diversity of researcher development training events delivered across the period. The RD programme expanded annually from 12 events with 305 attendees in 2020/21 to 30 events with 567 attendees in 2022/23, effectively doubling in scale across the period. Distinct training programmes and opportunities were developed to address specific career stage barriers for both early and mid-career researchers. Internal expertise was employed to share good practice and strengthen research community ties. External opportunities, such as The Diversity Practice's 'Stellar HE' strategic executive training for BAME researchers, was engaged to provide a more robust and expansive programme to support researcher development. The period also saw multi-front progress towards increasing the number of researchers supported by mentorship pairings. A new programme of research project development mentoring for ECR's supported three cohorts of researchers, further adding to the range of existing mentorship opportunities operated at department and school levels. In collaboration with a panel of researchers, the College submitted a bid for external research culture funding to partner with Vitae to develop a large-scale, institution-wide researcher mentoring programme offering researchers mentorship opportunities with senior researchers and industry leaders, with particular focus on researcher career development through EDI support.

Challenges Encountered

Goldsmiths has not been immune to the financial and political pressures facing the higher education sector at large. The duration of the concluding reporting period has seen the implementation of a university-wide recovery programme to address a significant financial deficit. Researcher feedback through CEDARS has stressed that navigating the period of institutional transition into new staffing structures and ways of working has contributed to perceptions of time scarcity, with respondents feeling the need to prioritise teaching-related administration and student wellbeing over research, professional development, and research culture activity. The forward action plan seeks to address these challenges through actions such as:

- Consultation towards implementation of workload models across all departments that ringfence time for research and professional development [E15]

- Increasing accessibility to researcher development activity through standardising the practice of making training recordings available via the RD hub and introducing cloud-based researcher training in researcher career development and research integrity [ECI5 / ECM2, PCDM1]
- Improving researcher support infrastructure, simplifying complex processes, and prioritising building relationships to support the research community [ECI1, ECI2, ECI6, ECR1]

The Goldsmiths research community worked collaboratively to increase engagement and feedback on researcher development activity, managing an impressive 24.3% researcher response rate in CEDARS 2023. This notable increase of 20%, compared to the previous survey in 2021, was supported by a targeted effort over the period to improve researcher engagement channels and expand contact with the researcher development offer. That said, improving engagement with researchers on research-only contracts through survey-based feedback mechanisms progressed at a slower rate than the rest of the research community. R-only staff engagement was more effective through the lens of Early Career Researcher Network activity or thematic focus groups convened to feed into concrete research culture initiatives. When isolating CEDARS results by researcher contract type, the response rate for those voluntarily identifying their contract type as R-Only was 10%, compared to a nearly 25% rate for those contracted to do research at large. The forward action plan seeks to address this engagement disparity through:

- Researcher development embedded into research project activity, building relationships with research teams and incoming research fellows from project inception [EI2, ER4]
- Prioritising a practice of direct communications to R-only staff, avoiding the practice of information 'trickle down' from research managers [ECI2]
- Piloting a researcher induction event, building in-person connections between the College's researchers and the staff who support the research endeavour [EI2]

A third challenge in the reporting period has been the desire (and external pressure) to match the ever-increasing expansion of support infrastructure offered by larger HEI's. As Elizabeth Gadd points out in her recent article spotlighting the increasing movement towards research culture as an area of competition between HEI's, 'a research culture post costs the same whether it's in Cumbria or Cambridge, but it will absorb a much lower proportion of a £1M budget than that of a £50K one.'¹ Current funding allocation models for research culture based solely on institution size reinforce ongoing disparities in economies of scale in this area across the sector. With FRAP's announcement of an increased weighting of research culture activity in REF 2028, research environment and culture become solidified as another site of increasing competition as institutions seek to increase (or at minimum maintain) their allocations of QR funding. This disparity affects capacity and resource towards the development of tailored, innovative programmes to support researchers working in small research institution contexts. The forward action plan seeks to address this challenge through:

- Actively participating in sector-wide, practice sharing opportunities – positioning research culture as a place of collaboration over competition; sharing development and innovation time-investment across institutions [PCDI5]
- Actively bidding for external resource to support investment in researcher development to increase development opportunities for researchers [PCDI3]
- Maximising the potential for research community and culture development at relatively small institutions, prioritising relationship-building, and the capacity for 1:1 support with researchers [ECI2, ECI6, ECR1, ER4]

Strategy for 2023-2026

Guided by lessons learned from the challenges of the preceding years, the generous contributions of our research community, the institutional and wider environmental contexts, and our ambition to

¹ Gadd, E. (2023) [My research culture is better than yours | Wonkhe](https://wonkhe.com/blogs/my-research-culture-is-better-than-yours/) Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/my-research-culture-is-better-than-yours/> (Accessed: 06/09/2023)

become a research culture innovator, Goldsmiths seeks to further develop the structural support and creative solutions necessary to sustain a thriving research culture and the careers of our researchers. Drawing on institutional strengths of interdisciplinary collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, we will develop innovative ways to adapt and implement ever-evolving industry best-practices, while collaborating internally to experiment with creative solutions to the challenges that arise within our unique research environment. The ambition of this strategy is championed in the College's recently launched 10-year Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, which articulates our strategic objective towards recognition as 'a sector leader for innovating and diversifying research culture and researcher development' by 2033.

We have identified distinct strands of activity as priorities towards the realisation of this vision. Building on the developments of the preceding period, we seek to further increase the quantity and quality of researcher engagement to ensure researcher perspectives lead our support strategy. We will generate innovative infrastructure to support researcher careers, prioritising equality, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental to our vision of a thriving research culture. We will embed research culture and researcher development into the research project infrastructure using unique approaches and engagement at multiple levels. Finally, as a relatively small, specialist institution, (a perspective often absent from research culture industry-wide forums) we will build upon the strengths of our unique context and diverse community to innovate and share our successes and challenges both internally and with the industry at large.

1. Engaged researchers driving strategy and research culture priorities

- Developing innovative engagement mechanisms directly with researchers, where researcher-perspectives effectively influence institutional activities. [ECI1, ECI2, ECI6, ECR1, ECI3, E17]
- Increasing engagement with research culture development initiatives such as CEDARS and researcher development post-event feedback responses. [ECI6]

2. Researcher development embedded in research project activity

- Researcher Development Team supporting PI's to navigate the responsibilities of managing researchers from the earliest stages of grant set-up; promoting PDR's and career development opportunities for research staff before recruitment commences. [E12]
- Supporting new PI's to access relevant recruitment, management, EDI, and career development training. [E12, EM3, E14, EM4, PCDI3]
- Researcher Development Team supporting incoming research fellows to navigate the available support, relevant policies, and opportunities for engagement. [ER4, E12]

3. Innovative infrastructure to support researcher careers, prioritising equality, diversity and inclusion

- Consulting researchers towards the development of workload allocation models, responsive to disciplinary practices and ringfencing time for research, mentoring, and professional development activity. [E15]
- Situating EDI as fundamental to our research culture strategy; training to support PI's incorporation of EDI best practices into research project structures; and developing opportunities to support the career development and promotion of a diverse research community. [E13, PCDI1, PCDI3, ECI4, ECM1, ECR2]

4. Research Culture as a collaborative act; practice-sharing both internally and sector-wide

- Devising new and engaging mechanisms for sharing information about the Concordat, success stories, lessons learned and community activity. [ECI1, ECR1, E17, PCDI5]
- Contributing to public policy dialogues through increased researcher engagement. [PCDR6]
- Contributing to sector-wide Research Culture practice-sharing opportunities, championing the unique experiences of practice researchers, and advocating for Research Culture as a space of collaboration and innovation. [PCDI5]