

Kingston University Researcher Development Concordat - Annual Report 2023-24

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In January 23, Kingston University retained its HR Excellence in Research Award after our 6-year review. The award is recognition that we are demonstrating our long-term commitment to the career development of researchers and implementing the principles of Vitae's Researcher Development Concordat.

Governance

Our Research Staff Development Strategy, which is available on our website is overseen by our Research Staff Development Group (RSDG). Our RSDG has representatives from our Early Career Researchers, School Directors of Research, contract researchers, Principal Investigator (PIs), HR and the Research & Impact Directorate. RSDG is chaired by the Graduate Research School and the Head of Researcher Development, Prof Priscilla Harries. The group meets each term, and reports to Research Governance Committee (named Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee since October 2023).

Environment and Culture

In terms of institutional progress, we have

- Implemented our Research staff strategy, (approved by RSDG and the Research Governance Committee);
- Expanded membership of our RSDG to 26 members: key stakeholders are now actively contributing to RSDG and supporting action delivery; in 2023/4 we included the Fellows of the Knowledge Exchange and Research Institutes (KERIs) who were appointed to support the anticipated launch of the KERIs.
- Held two induction events to 68 new staff, including coverage of the Concordat;
- Delivered two, one-hour, workshops on work-life balance to 27 staff during the Summer Festival of Research and Knowledge Exchange.

In terms of supporting researchers

- We held a RSDG away day (full day) in May 2024. RSDG gave updates on progress against the Research staff strategy. Epigeum provided a speaker to share updates on the university provision, including the Impact module which Kingston University academics had co-designed. One faculty presented an innovative programme they had implemented that provided academic support & group mentorship to ECRs. Another Faculty provided a session on AI in research, by sharing new tools available and guidance on how to use them. The Chair of the RSDG convened and chaired a panel of contract research staff who shared their experiences of working in these roles; the researchers co-designed the panel topics for discussion. Finally, participants discussed how best we can integrate researchers including doctoral researchers with the planned institutes, with regard to research leadership, conferences, events, development and training opportunities.

- We held two further away days; one for our PGR community and one for our research ethics community. Both included training events, updates on developments at the university and opportunities to share examples of best practice across the university.
- The Research Staff Forum meeting was held termly in 23/24; attendees reported feeling better informed about the 10 development days and support/resources/training on offer. PIs and contract research staff were supported to learn about the value of Personal Development Plans; a PDP staff template and guide was developed, and these resources were shared through an online briefing session and Q&A.
- All academics, research staff and PGRs were invited to Summer Festival of Research and Knowledge Exchange.

At Kingston we see diversity as a strength and value the rich variety of backgrounds, identities and experiences our staff and students bring to the University. We are a diverse university with an established commitment to embedding equality and diversity in everything that we do. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, we refresh and renew our equality objectives every four years, with our current objectives covering 2021 to 2025. Our latest Public Sector Equality Duty report was published in March 2024.

To enable us to foster an inclusive environment, Kingston University is engaged with and has Membership status with several Charter Marks, Pledges and Accreditations. Kingston continues to work hard to reattain and implement both the Race Equality Charter (REC) and Athena SWAN, with both the institutional REC and Athena SWAN seeking Bronze renewals in 2022. Since 2021, two Faculties hold Athena SWAN Bronze awards, with others holding at least one silver award. In 2022, our Gender Equality Plan (GEP) was also published in line with EU Horizon funding requirements.

In 2024 we became a Disability Confident (level 1) employer, committed to enabling and supporting all staff to work and fulfil their potential. This includes adjustments and adaptations to working arrangements, equipment and software to ensure equal opportunity to work and access the workplace.

Kingston's adoption of the Anti-Racism Pledge, which was originally developed by the Scottish Funding Council for HEIs and FE Colleges, highlights our university's commitment to calling out racism and creating a better working and social environment that embraces equality, diversity and inclusion. Working closely with, and at the recommendation of our staff and students through the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff network, the pledge already underpins some of the objectives within the Public Sector Equality Duty that was set last year and will strengthen our future policy and practice, not least in our commitments to improving on our current race equality charter mark. Kingston University has signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant and pledges to uphold its key principles, around understanding and respecting those who serve or who have served in the armed forces. The covenant was signed by Vice-Chancellor Professor Stephen Spier and includes a series of pledges, such as a commitment to be an Armed Forces-friendly organisation and to consider the needs of military personnel and their families regarding employment and educational opportunities.

Kingston are proud to be one of the few Universities, indeed institutions/companies, who have produced an Equality Pay Gap Report which goes further than the legal requirement to report on the Gender Pay Gap, by also reporting on ethnicity and disability pay gap data. The Report is underpinned with clear commitments to addressing the issues and removing barriers and addressing structural inequalities.

Our commitment to EDI awareness raising and education continues to grow. In addition to our core compulsory modules of "Equality Essentials" and "Unconscious Bias", our offer includes both face-to-face sessions and online modules on such topics as, Anti-racism, LGBTQ+, Courageous Conversations, Active Bystander and wider-range of pedagogy-based sessions.

Employment

Institution

- Kingston University has embarked on a radical transformation programme, driven by our Town House Strategy, that aims to make the University sought after by students and staff as a place to further their ambitions and to have an impact on our communities. Our new **Values Framework**, launched in 2023/4 is a physical expression of our vision to become ever more **ambitious, inclusive, innovative and enterprising**. These values are embedded in our advertisements for new positions and current staff now align their appraisal objectives with these values. We are continuing to embed our values in all processes and procedures.
- Recruitment has commenced for the KERIs Director positions. The Directors will commence in Spring 2025. The Values Framework will help drive the research culture and environment of the KERIs. A set of research contract job descriptions and personal specification templates for Grade 5-9 have been developed by RSDG as these didn't exist. The drafts were consulted on widely and approved by HR. They are now available for PIs to download from the HR intranet recruitment pages.
- Our Academic Domains Career Development Framework has been fully implemented; it will underpin promotion/ career development stages. Research and KE will form the basis of KERI membership.
- HR Recruitment now follows the principles of the KU policy on the use of research metrics: if a candidate provides metrics (e.g. journal impact factors) as part of their application, these will not be used to assess the candidate's research performance; peer review will be paramount. A statement has been added to the job application form to guide applicants in the responsible use of research metrics. HR updated their guidance to recruiting managers to add these bullet points: to discourage the use of non-specific metrics such as impact factors in job applications and to recommend recruitment managers to remove any such non-specific metrics provided or to brief the panel to disregard. Applicants are now aware and compliant; no significant breaches have been notified from recruitment panels to date.
- Workshops for experienced supervisors of research students have been expanded to encompass broader principles of researcher management. We also delivered a training course for people with intellectual impairment to become researchers; we have a number of trainees who are Co-PIs who are staff.

Professional and Career Development

Researcher Training

- We have been successful in securing a number of collaborative training opportunities with partner institutions. Kingston University, together with colleagues from Sheffield and Glasgow successfully lobbied and supported the UKSA in their efforts of obtaining £4.9M from DSITS to support the wider R2T2 program (i.e. 30 PhDs in Space propulsion and launch activities over the next 5 years, split into three cohorts of 10 starting in 2024/5, 2025/6 and 2026/7). [Space for Our Future: UK aims to join Atlantic Constellation with funding for new Earth observation satellite - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/space-for-our-future-uk-aims-to-join-atlantic-constellation-with-funding-for-new-earth-observation-satellite). In addition to our AHRC funded DTP 'TECHNE', our 'SEDarc' ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) bid led by Royal Holloway, University of London, was successful. This was a partnership bid with Surrey, Sussex, Kent and Reading universities. We were invited into the partnership bid following our strong university reputation in EDI, alongside our excellent REF 2021 outcomes in UoA3 (3+), specifically related to the research and impact undertaken by staff submitted from the Centre for Applied Health and Social Care Research. Access to SEDarc [Postdoctoral Fellowships](#) was secured, as part of the ESRC-funded SEDarc Doctoral Training Partnership. These collaborative awards will enrich the breadth of the doctoral and post-doctoral researcher provision at Kingston.
- Twenty-six training events for researchers were facilitated by Research and Impact Directorate during the 2023/24 academic year, with a total of 857 attendances. In addition, a Festival of Research and Knowledge Exchange was held; it featured 16 events with 505 attendees. As part of this, the KERI Fellows chaired an interdisciplinary, one-day event; this provided an opportunity for PIs to share their top tips on how to

successfully secure funding awards. In addition, HR Organisational Development ran two workshops (Part 1 and Part 2) on 'Looking after yourself as a researcher'.

- Our researcher training provision has been expanded. Following a vitae gap analysis and prioritisation of training with the research staff development group (at an away day), a revised and expanded programme, which had been mapped to the vitae domains and subdomains were delivered for staff and doctoral researchers during 2023/24. The expanded training was listed on newly developed, intranet sites and made available for booking through the new university events facility. Additional sessions included 'navigating academic careers', 'developing yourself as a researcher', 'how to get published in a journal', and 'the KU research leadership academy- what it covers and how to apply'. These were well received. We also developed and launched a module in contentious research, national security and export control.
- We held a joint event with other London HEIs for our part-time researchers at Woburn House. This focussed on supporting them with their needs as part-time researchers (see below). (Permission to share photo given by attendees.)



- We held our annual key training sessions that were specifically for Early Career Researchers. Our ECR network currently has 155 subscribers. All staff with research management responsibilities (primarily PI's) provided with full access to Epigeum's online researcher courses: "Research Integrity", and "Research Career - Strategies for Research Leadership" and associated workshops. We advertised a Research Team Leadership 2 two-day programme. 16 staff were allocated places across academic and professional services staff.
- Research mentorship is available through the university Beyond Barriers scheme and the Graduate Research School (GRS) peer mentorship scheme. The GRS mentorship scheme was reviewed in partnership with doctoral researchers and updated for 23/24 relaunch. The Rise Research Leadership Academy runs annually

from January to June and is held by the Head of Researcher Development and the Graduate School, Professor Cilla Harries. As part of the RISE Academy a session on career development pathways was delivered 'Research Leadership Journey from PhD Student to International Impact: Illuminations on the Road to Success'. This academy has been published as a [case study](#) on the Vitae website. This six-month RISE programme was delivered in 2024 for researchers across all Faculties within the university. Eighty-five academics and PGRs from across all Faculties have now completed the Academy, following a formal application process. Health and Social Care researchers from Kingston University also participated in the NIHR ARC Research Leadership Academy, also led by Professor Harries. An end of Academy celebration event brought the two groups together to reflect on their learning:



Academy members were encouraged to bring potential future applicants, including KU researchers from diverse backgrounds to the celebration event:



(Permission to share photo given by attendees.)

Researcher funding schemes

In 2023/4, KU re-launched several funding schemes to support researchers at different stages of their career. The two new schemes were available to all academic staff through an open call.

1. **First KU Grants:** Open to academic staff who are within six years of the start of their academic career and who are contractually eligible to apply for independent funding.
Awards are intended to provide pump-priming grants to initiate work on research projects which must, in turn, result in a high-quality application for external research funding. Grants of between £5-10k were awarded. £85,000 across ten academics was awarded.
2. **Kickstarter Scheme:** Open to academic staff requiring additional support before bidding externally for grants. This included need to demonstrate initial capability or scaling up and need to build/demonstrate the coherence of a consortium. Grants of between £5-10k were awarded. £50,000 across six academics was awarded.

After an encouraging performance in REF2021, and in line with the University's Town House Strategy, we aimed to increase our research capacity and performance by making significant investment in the generation of external research income. The University has identified significant sums to invest in research to building the KE and Research Institutes (KERIs) to full capacity. In line with REF 2029 priorities, we are also looking to invest in projects or initiatives that enhance research culture at institutional or disciplinary level and/or contribute to impact. The 'Research Investment Group' considers any bids relating to improving the ability to carry out funded research, included but not limited to the following: Maintenance of Research Facilities / To protect and licence research / Collaborative and Interdisciplinary Research Grants to bring together research / Impact with end users.

Looking forward (24/25)

Through our Research Staff Development Strategy, we will continue to review our training portfolio to ensure it best supports the Academic Domains Career Framework, has an appropriate balance of online and in-person events, and will work towards ensuring all researchers are offered the opportunity to engage with 10 development days a year pro rata. We will:

- Aim for improved CEDARs engagement (consistent with national benchmarking averages) and plan ways to address any feedback.
- Work towards higher accreditations in Athena Swan and Disability Confident (Level 2) by the end of 2025.
- Continue to monitor the contractual status of our contract research staff, to ensure open contracts are in place where appropriate, as recommended by the Concordat and build our knowledge of career pathways.
- Move towards an Institute model, combining research and KE activities. We are currently recruiting the Directors. Once appointed we will work with the Directors to drive improvements in research culture and management and provide a framework to embed researcher training and experience.
- Ensure representation of researchers in the implementation of the newly procured 'Current Research Information System' (CRIS)
- Upskill staff in Research Team Leadership (Research Team leadership 2-day training for 16 staff)
- Deliver on the requirements to support our new collaborative awards such as the ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership and post-doctoral awards.
- Ensure the Chair of the Research Staff Development Group is a member of the university REF 2029 Steering Group, thereby representing researcher opportunities for engagement, in relevant working groups.
- Launch a revised 'Diversity in the Workplace' training provision
- Engage with all stakeholders on the development of our new 2025 to 2028 EU HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) action plan, as part of our 9-year award review.