

HR EIR Four-year review report

SECTION 1: Context of institution

Staffordshire University attained the HR Excellence in Research (EiR) Award in 2018, at the start of a period of transformation and growth. Research was afforded greater prominence than ever before through the Research, Innovation, and Impact Strategy (2018-21). Our [two-year internal review](#) in January 2021 charted our early progress toward embedding the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (hereafter 'The Concordat'). As we reflect on four years of the Award, we are proud of the advancement of the research environment and culture, and the support we offer researchers. This review reflects on our growing maturity, confidence, and ambition for research at Staffordshire, while recognising the significant progress still required. We have put in place important support infrastructure since 2018 and expect that the next review period (2023-26) will witness improvements for our growing research community.

Our 2022-27 Research, Innovation, and Enterprise (RIE) Strategy states ambitious aims to increase the numbers of research-active staff, while simultaneously improving the quality of our research and its impact. This Strategy, and the accompanying 'implementation plan,' have a strong focus on developing institutional research environment and culture, and delivering an 'integrated, collaborative and inclusive culture in which research, innovation, and enterprise are embedded in the everyday activities of the university.' The university embraces its reputation as an institution that is 'research inspired, and teaching led.' While research is increasingly prioritised, the institution naturally focusses on delivering excellent teaching. This is reflected in the contracts of our academic staff, with 17% on the Teaching, Research, and Innovation (TRI) contract, and the majority (83%) on the Teaching, Advanced Scholarship, and Knowledge Exchange (TASKE) contract. Our cohort of staff who have research as a part of their contracted duties remains relatively small (n=103).

Section 4 outlines important progress made in several key areas of the 2021 EiR action plan, most notably in equitable recruitment, days available for CPD activities, and contribution to policy and decision making. However, structural changes have made delivery of aspects of the action plan difficult. For instance, our 2021 report highlighted the important introduction of Associate Deans for Research and Enterprise (ADREs) and the creation of two distinct career pathways for staff. However, within five months of the review period only one ADRE remained in post. Moreover, while the teaching and research career pathway has allowed staff time for research, there is not currently a mechanism for movement between the two pathways.

In many cases the actions outlined in the 2021-23 action plan have been completed, but we have not yet witnessed a positive change in staff perceptions. Many of the issues addressed by the Concordat take time to see a step-change: both in culture, and in staff perceptions of that culture change. This cannot realistically be achieved in a two-year period, so we will prioritise work in key areas for our 2023-26 Action Plan. Some of the success measures set in 2021 were deliberately 'stretch targets' and in some cases were significantly above the CEDARS sector benchmark. We intended to show institutional commitment beyond the low levels witnessed in the sector. In some of these we have made some pleasing gains but recognise that there is much work still to be done.

As with all HEIs, the impact of COVID-19 continues to present challenges for researchers' engagement. While new ways of working have brought some benefits, notably confidence with virtual training events and the routine recording of these as a permanent resource, we have not yet returned to the scale of face-to-face training, development, and networking sessions as was common-place pre-pandemic. This continues to influence our research culture.

Target audience for the Concordat

We have an inclusive interpretation of ‘researchers.’ We seek to support staff currently engaged in research, as well as those aspiring to be research active. For the 2022 CEDARS survey, we included within our definition of ‘researchers’ all research-only staff, all TRI staff, all staff who have published in the last two years, and all staff associated with a research centre. We consider these staff as our core audience for the Concordat:

Post Grouping	Count	Audience (direct beneficiaries of the action plan)	Count
Professor	28	Research staff	5
Associate Professor	28	Research and Teaching staff (TRI)	98
Senior Lecturer	74	Teaching-only staff (TASKE)	117
Lecturer	39	Technicians	1
Other (Management, Professional Support, P/T Hourly Lecturers, Post Docs)	58	Professional Support staff	2
Grand Total	227	Other	4
		Grand Total	227

In addition to these staff, our 370 PGRs are an important part of our research community.

Research only staff

We have five research-only staff (two ‘research fellows,’ two ‘research associates,’ and one ‘research officer’). The vast majority of our research active staff also have significant teaching responsibilities. Despite the small numbers, these research-only staff are an important part of our research community and are included in all initiatives to support the research environment. Our 2022 CEDARS survey, which forms the evidence for much of our 2021-23 action plan, included seven respondents citing their ‘job family’ as ‘Research-only’. As such, we are confident that the views of our community of research-only staff have been captured in this review.

SECTION 2: Internal evaluation

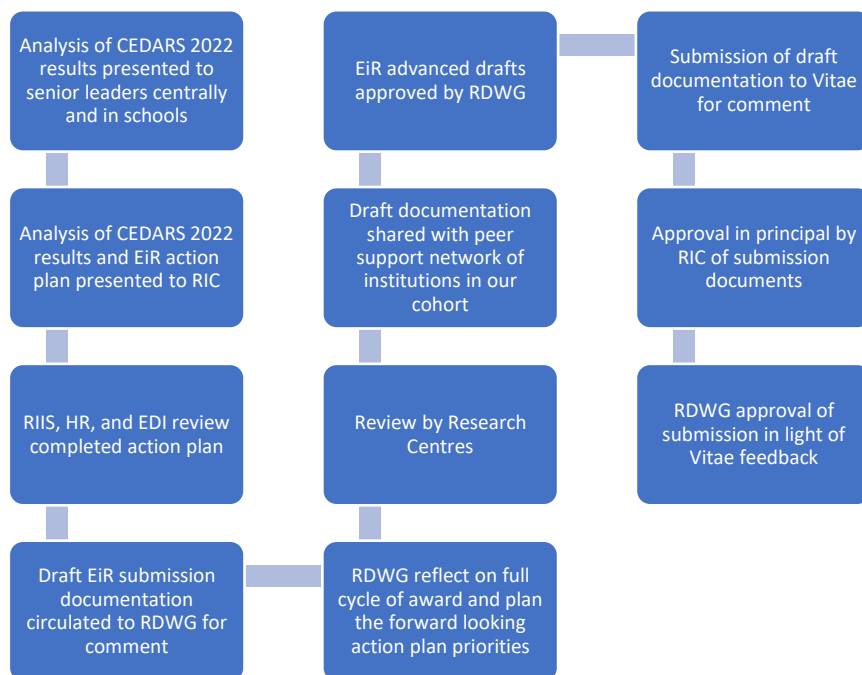
Review has been ongoing and iterative throughout the period of the EiR award through the Researcher Development Working Group (RDWG) and annual CEDARS surveys. The RDWG, established in autumn 2021 consists of 22 members from across the university, providing invaluable insight and feedback from the research community. This group meets three times a year, each meeting focussing on issues pertinent to one of three areas of the EiR action plan (environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development). This RDWG reviewed progress against the EiR action plan throughout 2021-22 academic year and identified future priorities.

Annual CEDARS surveys have been an invaluable insight into researchers’ experience. We have three consecutive years of data on all aspects of the research environment, and a robust evidence base for the EiR action plan. We have widened the inclusion criteria for the survey each year to capture views of current and aspiring researchers.¹ However, the trade-off of this inclusivity is that results between annual surveys are not directly comparable, given the much wider pool of respondents. The 97 respondents to the 2022 survey capture a representative sample of our research active staff and are evenly split between gender, contract type, and academic school. There is a lower proportion of

¹ The first ‘baseline’ survey (2020) included research-only and teaching and research (TRI) staff (n=112). In 2021 we also invited anyone ‘actively researching’ (defined as published within two years), (total n=175). In 2022 we also included in our survey anyone aligned to one of our ten research centres (total n=227).

respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to the academic body, so caution should be taken that responses may not fully represent the ethnicity of the research staff body.

As detailed further in section 3, the EIR Award is a standing item on all meetings of the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC), the governance committee with oversight of EIR Action Plan progress and implementation the Concordat principles. This internal review process is outlined below:



SECTION 3: Governance structures

The RDWG has responsibility for coordinating the EIR Action Plan. It reports to each meeting of RIC, the university-level committee responsible for strategy and policy development for research, innovation, and enterprise. RIC is chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor reporting directly to Academic Board, the most senior committee at the university, chaired by the Vice Chancellor. The membership of RIC includes senior representatives from academic schools and institutes, as well as senior managers from relevant professional support departments (library, digital and technical services, strategic planning, and Research, Innovation and Impact Services). Researchers are represented via an ECR representative, the Head of the Professoriate, two PGR representatives and, for 2022-23, up to two additional academics co-opted by the Chair. There is shared membership of RIC and RDWG via several Committee members. The RDWG includes members linked to working groups focusing on other concordats and agreements, most notably the Staffordshire University Inclusion Group (SUIG). In the next period, we will engage the university 'change champions' into the work of the RDWG, part of a long-term institutional culture change initiative 'Staff make Staffs.'

SECTION 4: Past progress and achievements

We have seen significant improvements in several key areas, as indicated by the 2022 CEDARS results and other metrics. However, as outlined in the 'lessons learnt' section, there are areas where we remain some distance from our target, and where our research community have made clear we have considerable work to do. In many instances, we have completed our planned actions but are yet to see these 'flow through' to improved staff perceptions. All of the below initiatives are open to

all research-active staff (research-only and teaching and research staff). Due to the small numbers of research-only staff, we have not disaggregated their responses to CEDARS to ensure anonymity.

Environment and Culture:

We have put in place significant measures to strengthen the research environment and culture: the establishment of an **institutional level Researcher Development Working Group**, the **Researcher Training Programme** was reviewed by the Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice (SCoLPP) against Vitae's RDF framework; and a **researcher development network** has been established via Microsoft Teams for as a hub for development resources and updates, and to foster a community of good practice. This network currently has 233 members. We saw a pleasing increase in the proportion of researchers who felt that their **contribution to institutional policy and decision making** was valued, increasing from 23% in 2020 to 33%, and in the opportunity to contribute to institutional decisions, increasing from 50% in 2020 to 57%, just short of the target of 60%. The collaborative nature of the development of the new RIE Strategy in 2022, including 'Town Hall' and focus group consultations including over 170 staff, was likely a contributing factor to this increase. Our Research Centres have grown their influence, providing increased CPD, mentoring and masterclasses to support the research environment.

Employment:

CEDARS 2022 results demonstrated strides we have taken in **recruitment, selection, and appointment**. The vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the recruitment, selection, and appointment process had been fair (93%), inclusive (97%), transparent (93%), and merit-based (93%). These represented significant improvements from the 2020 baseline survey and surpassed our target in our 2020 Action Plan of 80% for each question. We also saw pleasing progress in the number of respondents agreeing their **induction** was very useful or useful, particularly at a department (67%) and local (63%) level. We have also witnessed a continuing positive trajectory considering **fair and equitable opportunities for career progression**, as witnessed through successful professorial and associate professorial applications to the annual Professorial Calls. In the review period (2020-22 inclusive), the success rate for female applications is 64% (compared to 57% in 2017-19), and the success rate of applications from staff from ethics minority backgrounds is 50% (compared to 36% in 2017-19).

Professional and Career Development:

We are progressing towards achieving the Concordat commitment of researchers engaging in a minimum of ten days **professional development** per year. CEDARS 2022 results saw an increase of respondents reporting they had spent 10 days on professional development rising to 24%, from a baseline of 17% in 2020 (exceeding our target of 20%, and the sector benchmark of 13%). In the 2021 review we recognised significant progress is needed in this area to meet the Concordat principals, and so we set an interim 'step change' target of 50% of respondents having spent five days on professional development by 2022. While this is not yet achieved, we experienced an increase to 43%, from a baseline of 27% which is significantly above the sector benchmark of 25%. We have made progress towards a long-standing priority to implement a formal mentoring system across the university, which will remain a key priority for the next review period. Advanced mentoring training programmes have been successfully piloted and will be further rolled out in the next cycle. This is reflected in CEDARS results where the proportion of staff who have undertaken mentoring training increased from 32% to 44%.

Lessons learnt

While we are pleased with our successes, there are undoubtedly areas where we have not been able to achieve our aims in the review period. These include regular career development meetings with

managers, awareness of support for CPD, and staff time to develop their leadership skills and research identity. Areas that have been consistently raised through our internal evaluation, RDWG consultations and CEDARS surveys include: absence of meaningful research career development reviews (currently overwhelmingly focussed on teaching, not development of research skills, identity, and careers); research and associated external engagement activities encouraged but not recognised in workload allocation models, instead relying on staff's own time; leadership training offered by HR not resonating with research staff needs; time and workload persistent barriers to professional and career development. These concerns influence our forward-looking action plan.

SECTION 5: Strategic objectives and implementation plan

In summer 2022, the university launched its new Strategic Plan (2022-27). This Plan centres on four interdependent priorities. One of which, 'Next Generation Environments,' focusses on embedding a 'healthy, creative and empowering culture' in which to work and study. The new RIE Strategy cites 'compliance with the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' as a key success measure. Embedding supportive cultures and environments for staff to thrive is therefore central to the university's mission, and there is institutional support for implementation of the EIR Action Plan. Our priority areas over the next review cycle are informed by this strategic context, as well as consultation and opinion polls with the RDWG in Autumn 2022. For this review period we will undertake CEDARS as the end review point (in summer 2025). Researchers will be consulted annually for their views on different aspects of the research environment via targeted internal 'pulse' surveys. We propose that if in CEDARS 2025 there are 10 or more respondents who are 'research-only', we will analyse the results for this sub-set of staff. However, if, as in previous surveys, this figure is below 10 staff we will not disaggregate the data to preserve anonymity.

Over the next review period we will prioritise:

Environment and culture: We will embed a culture of the highest standards of research integrity, building on work undertaken in this review period. Research communication and engagement will be a priority and, working with EDI colleagues, we will ensure that research policies and practices are inclusive, equitable and transparent, and are well-communicated to researchers. Consultation with the RDWG highlighted mental health and wellbeing support as a priority and we will endeavour to ensure that the excellent support available to students is equally as visible and accessible for staff.

Employment: We will develop and implement a comprehensive and supportive induction for all research active staff ensuring they are welcomed and supported in the institutional research community. We will develop long-term structured support for staff to develop their applications for promotion and progression, embedding equality and diversity in the future pipeline of associate professors and professors. The RDWG prioritised the recruitment and retention of talented staff. Clear promotion routes for research staff (that do not require a 'switch' to teaching and research) will be reviewed in the period.

Professional and Career Development: We will work with HR to launch and embed the new career development framework 'YOURCareer@Staffs' and an associated mentoring platform and ensure the development needs of researchers are reflected. We will support staff in taking ten days per year for professional and career development, with 35% taking 10 days and 60% of staff taking a minimum of five days per year. The RDWG advocated prioritisation of career development support, and meaningful and useful career development reviews, which optimises the days made available for professional development.