



HR Excellence in Research Award: Cardiff University's twelve-year review (2018-2022)

**Cardiff University Researcher Pathways Working Group
(September 2022)**

1. Context

Target audience: Our target audience for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (RD Concordat) is any staff member employed on our research-only career pathway – population 1004 (31st July 2022). This includes Research Assistants, Research Associates, Research Fellows, Senior Research Fellows, Principal Research Fellows, and Professorial Research Fellows. Our decision to limit the target audience to this group was based on the concern of our researchers that extending it to other groups may both dilute its impact for research-only staff and lead to less attention being paid to key issues that characterise the employment experiences of those on the research-only pathway, namely job security and opportunities for progression. **Institutional context:** Cardiff University is a member of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities. We employ 7733 members of staff, of which 48% are academic staff. Research staff constitute approximately 27% of our academic staff. Responsibility for delivering our research and innovation sub-strategy sits with our Pro Vice Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Enterprise (PVC-R), and during the review period (in May 2022) Professor Roger Whitaker was appointed as successor to our previous PVC-R, Professor Kim Graham. Professor Whitaker is supported by three College Research Deans and our Dean for Research Environment and Culture, Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (prior to April 2021 this role was held by Professor Claire Gorrara). We have in place a University Research Culture Action Plan which sets out clear actions for improving the University's research culture and environment for all those who conduct or support research, and progress against this is overseen by the University Research Culture Group (RCG). Our implementation of the principles of the RD Concordat is part of this broader work to enhance research culture and environment. The Research Culture Action Plan complements our University strategies for improving the working environment for *all* staff such as the University People Strategy; Staff Wellbeing Strategy and our Strategic Equality Plan. **Governance structure:** Our RD Concordat action plan is developed and overseen by the Researcher Pathways Working Group (RPWG), which reports to the University RCG. We present an annual progress report on our implementation of the RD Concordat to Council, via the Open Research, Integrity and Ethics Committee and Senate, as well as the University Executive Board.

2. Internal Evaluation

The evaluation of progress was conducted by our RPWG which is chaired by the University Dean for Research Environment and Culture. The group includes 11 members of staff whose remit includes conducting research, including the co-chairs of the Cardiff University Research Staff Association (CURSA), a CURSA representative from each of our three Colleges, and a senior researcher representative for each College. Professional Services are also represented on the group, including Organisational and Staff Development, Human Resources, and Research and Innovation Services. This Group developed our 2020-22 action plan. The work of the RPWG is scrutinised by the RCG, also chaired by the Dean for Research Environment and Culture, which receives an update on progress at each of its meetings. Our 12 year review was informed by evaluation of data from the **Careers in Research Online Survey (2019)** (29% response rate); the **Cardiff University Staff Survey (2019)**, filtered by career pathway (46% research staff response rate); and from a **CURSA Research Staff Experience Survey (2020)** (12% response rate); data gathered from the research staff population via pulse surveys (e.g. **Wellbeing Pulse Survey** (22% research staff response rate); **Concordat awareness survey** (21% response rate); and virtual events such as the all-staff webinars; and the **annual research staff event**. The University scaled back its requests for feedback from staff during the period 2020-2022, including staff surveys, in response to the wishes of staff and to allow us to support the University community to deliver those areas identified as fundamental priorities at the onset of the pandemic and outlined in '[The Way Forward 2018-2023: Recast COVID-19](#)'. Surveys have been short and limited to priority areas (wellbeing for all staff; Concordat awareness for the research staff group). All-staff webinars and local meetings have been used to consult with staff, as have our formal staff networks (e.g CURSA) and dignity and wellbeing contacts. We will be conducting a research culture survey in Autumn 2022 and our staff survey will run in 2023.

3 Key Achievements and Progress 2018-22

COVID-19 Pandemic: The working lives of our researchers were severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and although we have now passed the peak of this disruption, the impacts of the pandemic continue. The

pandemic called for major adjustments to the way we support all staff and for consideration of the differential impact on staff groups, including staff involved in research. We provided support and online development for research staff from the outset of the crisis, including one-to-one careers coaching sessions (112 were held in 2020-22). We also provided enhanced guidance on supporting staff for all line managers and developed training sessions on leading and managing remotely. In 2021, our College of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences conducted a review of the impact of the pandemic on the research and working lives of its research community. The results of this have informed the strategic priorities outlined in our Research Culture Plan.

Progress against the RD Concordat Action Plans 2018-2022

i. Raising awareness across the institution of our commitments and responsibilities under the Researcher Development Concordat:

The University became official signatories to the Concordat in November 2020, and this was marked with a **virtual launch event** in December 2020 (98 attendees). A progress update was presented at the **researcher showcase event** December 2021 (40 attendees). Our gap analysis was conducted in early 2021 and our 2020-22 action plan was revised in October 2021 to reflect this. We condensed our 2020-22 action plan into a **one-page summary** for research staff and their managers and produced a **video presentation** about our commitments under the RD Concordat. This was sent to all research staff, all current Principal Investigators (PIs), Directors of Research, and Heads of School (HoS) in March 2022, and as at 20 September 2022 it has been viewed 345 times. In 2021, we started delivering a **rolling programme of presentations** at School and College meetings about the Concordat and support for research staff. A **new web resource for research staff and their managers** has been developed and will be launched in autumn 2022. Feedback suggests that our work in these areas has been effective, with **82% of research staff** who responded to our pulse survey in July 2022 (response rate 21%) **indicating that they were aware of the RD Concordat**. This represents a 49% increase over our results in CROS 2019 when 55% responded that they were aware of the Concordat.

ii. Extending and diversifying researcher personal and professional development opportunities:

Professional and career development opportunities: Following consultation with the research community, guidance notes were produced on **10 days' CPD for researchers**. The guidance was refined following a pilot in three Schools and it will be published as part of the launch of our new web resource for researchers in Autumn 2022. 87% of eligible staff on the research-only career pathway completed their **Performance Development Review (PDR)** in 2019 and the RPWG led on reviewing and revising the PDR documentation for research staff so that they more clearly reflect the needs of research staff and their line managers. A session on 'Getting the Most from your PDR', developed for researchers in 2019, is now offered through the Cardiff Researcher Programme, along with an online resource '**PDR for Researchers**'. Our approach to Performance Development Review became much more light-touch during the peak years of the pandemic, which limited the ways in which we could use this process to support development of researchers. Our priority for the coming review period is to re-establish a strong culture of conducting and recording annual PDR for all staff. In 2019-20, the **Cardiff Researcher** programme ran a pilot scheme for research staff in partnership with **LinkedIn Learning**, presenting collections of key modules for researchers. The success of this scheme and our move to greater online provision during the pandemic led to LinkedIn Learning being made available to all members of staff. During the period we also piloted a **blended learning MOOC on career planning**, as well as a **peer coaching session**, and we developed and ran new sessions on **insights into a lecturing career, strengths profiling, and stress and resilience**. A new programme for aspiring Principal Investigators, '**Moving into Research Leadership**', was developed and is now offered through the Cardiff Researcher. We have collaborated with other HEIs to offer places on a '**Leadership in Action**' programme, and to develop a programme on **networking and profile building for researchers**. Since September 2020, the University has participated in the WT's pilot '**Broadening Horizons**' mentoring programme for researchers in the health sciences. In collaboration with the Doctoral Academy, a new web resource, '**Career Journeys for Researchers**' was launched in October 2020 and includes resources on exploring career options; developing strengths, skills, and experience; succeeding in academia or beyond.

Career progression opportunities: The University extended its **promotions scheme** to research-only staff in 2018-19. The scheme supports promotion from Grade 7 Research Fellow to Grade 8 Senior Research Fellow

and beyond (up to Professorial Research Fellow). We have completed 3 promotions rounds (2021/22 cycle to be completed September 2022) with 34 applications from research staff, 29 of whom were promoted. This gives a success rate of 85% for research staff, with an average of 5% of the eligible pool being promoted per annum. During the review period, we have presented information on **reward and recognition schemes** in different formats. A session on '**reward and recognition: grading review and academic promotion**', first held at the CURSA annual symposium in 2018, has been developed into a stand-alone session offered through the Cardiff Researcher programme. We produced a **briefing note** for research staff on reward and recognition schemes. A task and finish group was set up in 2022, with members drawn from professional services and the research community, and it has developed **draft guidelines for grading review** and a '**model role expectations**' document for the research-only pathway. A **bespoke re-grading briefing session for research staff** was piloted and will run again in 2022-23. However, it is clear from engagement with research staff that recognition, reward and promotion is an area where further work is required – specifically around opportunities for progression from grades 5 through 7. This will be one of 6 priority areas for the next review period.

iii. Amplifying the researcher voice and visibility in University policy-making and strategy

Co-working with CURSA has been crucial to the work of the Researcher Pathways Working Group, listening and responding to researcher views and feedback. In 2019, CURSA reviewed the structure and operation of both the Steering Committee and the wider Association. This led to the quarterly CURSA representative meetings being opened to all research staff; better links between CURSA representatives and research staff members of School-level committees; and the CURSA Committee having two co-chairs to support succession planning and continuity. Throughout the period the visibility of CURSA has been raised through regular email communications; the CURSA Yammer group; and CURSA Symposium, open to all research staff. In 2020, CURSA published its first survey of the research staff community and these results informed both our Concordat gap analysis and our Concordat action plan. We continue to work to ensure that researcher voices are heard across University networks, committees, and initiatives and that they have opportunities to develop as strategic leaders. We have **research staff representatives** on 23 of our 24 School Research Committees and an Early Career Researcher representative in the remaining one. All relevant University research committees now have research staff representation, including the University RCG. Our emergent Research Culture Action Plan is based on feedback from the researcher community and, **following consultation with the RPWG**, now includes an action on the need to review the research staff pathway from grades 5-7, and how the University supports and rewards independence, and will be modified in autumn 2022 to include an action around improving job security. The publication of our first **Research Staff Annual Report** provided a clear and robust snapshot of the composition of our research staff population and establishes baseline data for future reporting on patterns of employment, progression and participation in development opportunities, as well as a summary of research staff responses to various University surveys. This was sent to all research staff, PIs, HoS and other key stakeholders. Since 2020, we have held an **annual research staff showcase**, a themed event where research staff share their work in an open forum.

iv. Improving researcher equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), including support for well-being and mental health, to enable all our research staff to thrive.

EDI: During the review period the University retained its **Athena SWAN Bronze** award, with eleven schools having bronze awards and three silver. Our School of Physics and Astronomy has achieved **Juno Champion** status. The new Head of EDI at Cardiff will sit on the RCG, which will allow integration across activities. We have incorporated an analysis of promotion and re-grading figures for research staff by gender and ethnic background into our **annual reporting and monitoring**. We have run two cohorts of the **Elevate** programme partnered with Bristol, Bath, Exeter and UWE. The programme has received two awards for its innovative approach. We run **career development programmes** for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and for female academics. **Wellbeing:** 225 (22%) research staff responded to our **Wellbeing Pulse Survey** in March 2021 and 79% agreed that the University demonstrated its commitment to their wellbeing and had been supportive during the COVID-19 pandemic and 71% agreed that wellbeing support offered during the pandemic was timely and well-focussed. Research staff (71.5%) identified increased mental health training for line managers as being the highest priority. Four **I-ACT mental health awareness sessions** were arranged specifically for PIs

during the period and 32 PIs completed these. In 2020-22, unique page views to our intranet pages for line managers on 'supporting staff' increased by 54% compared to the previous two years (2018-20).

4. Strategy for 2022-25

We have identified 6 priority areas for targeted initiatives to improve the lived experience of research staff over the next three-year period. The remaining 10 areas have been identified as having broader applicability than our research staff population and will be addressed through other University action plans and initiatives, as outlined in our 2022-25 RD Concordat action plan. It has become clear to us over the last review period that our approach in 2022-25 needs to be streamlined, with a limited number of clear priorities which are well-communicated to our research staff and those who manage and support them. Feedback from our researcher community has suggested that while the proliferation of institutional action plans is positive insofar as it represents an institutional commitment to improving the working environment for staff, it has led to some confusion and lack of clarity. Many of the commitments in the RD Concordat relate to the general working environment of the University and reflect commitments we have made to *all* our staff at Cardiff. We have in place a University 'People Strategy' and several action plans to address specific areas, including our Strategic Equality Plan and Athena SWAN Action Plan, which address our priorities relating to EDI, and a Wellbeing Strategy and action plan which go beyond those commitments in the RD Concordat. Cardiff University is a signatory to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and following our self-assessment a medium-term action plan will be in place by January 2023. Our emergent Research Culture Action Plan aims to improve our research environment and culture and applies to all staff who conduct or support research and therefore has a broader target audience than our work under the Researcher Development Concordat, whose direct beneficiaries at Cardiff is limited to research-only staff. We have decided to channel our resources into a smaller number of more ambitious plans, specifically those around the 2 areas of most concern to our researchers, **job security and career progression**. The nature of this work will mean that although our 2022-25 action plan sets out our strategic priorities for the next 3 years, it will be a live document, to be modified in line with the development of more detailed plans and measures as they emerge. With our next three-year plan, we are seeking to making a step change in terms of increased job security and opportunities for career progression for researchers. This is an ambitious goal and the period 2022-25 will be used to complete the necessary scoping and piloting. Our intended impacts for each of our priority areas are outlined below:

- 1. Awareness and engagement:** All stakeholders will be aware of their responsibilities, and the responsibilities of others, under the RD Concordat. Research staff and their managers will understand how to access information related to the RD Concordat.
- 2. Policy development:** Researchers and their managers will be more aware of opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making and will help shape Cardiff's research environment.
- 3. Job security:** All stakeholders will have a clear understanding of the types of contracts used for employing research staff at Cardiff and managers will understand how open-ended contracts may be issued to research staff within the current University systems. We will have a clear University decision about the feasibility of extending our use of open-ended contracts by adopting alternative models of employment.
- 4. Recognition, reward and promotion:** Research staff and their managers will understand the current processes in place for recognition, reward and promotion of research staff and ways to progress within the current system. We will have a clear University decision on whether we should institute a formal process for progression from 5-7 on the research-only pathway based on individual performance. We will have greater clarity on the University's position on developing, reward and recognising independence of research only staff.
- 5. Championing professional development:** Research staff and their managers will understand the requirement for research staff to undertake 10 days' CPD pro rata per annum, will demonstrate awareness of the different forms of development that might contribute towards this, and are satisfied with the ways in which Cardiff supports development in its broadest sense.
- 6. Diverse careers:** Research staff and their managers will demonstrate awareness of the opportunities that are available in different employment sectors to researchers, and an understanding of the benefits of moving between, and working across, employment sectors. Research staff and their managers will demonstrate clear awareness of the support available in preparing for diverse careers and for gaining experience of the wider research system.