



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



## **HR Excellence in Research Award: Cardiff University's ten-year review**

**Cardiff University Researcher Pathways Working Group  
(February 2021: resubmission)**

## 1 Internal Evaluation

The evaluation of progress was conducted by our Researcher Pathways Working Group (RPWG), a University group set up by our PVC for Research, Innovation and Enterprise (PVC-R) and chaired by our Dean for Research Environment and Culture. Its membership encompasses the co-chairs of the Cardiff University Research Staff Association (CURSA), a CURSA representative from each of our three Colleges, a senior researcher representative for each College, Professional Service representatives from Organisational and Staff Development, Human Resources, Research and Innovation Services and the three Colleges. The Group has monitored progress against the action plan since its establishment in July 2019. The formal two-year review was informed by data from the Careers in Research Online Survey (2019) (29% response rate); the Cardiff University Staff Survey (2019), filtered for data pertaining to research staff (46% researcher participation rate); and from a CURSA Research Staff Experience Survey (2020) (12% response rate). Cross-reference has been made to the following University strategic initiatives: The Strategic Equality Plan, 2020-2024, Staff Well-being Strategy and Mentally Healthy University Strategy (2020), REF Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group and institutional COVID-19 guidelines on working practices and staff support.

## 2 Key Achievements and Progress

**Leadership:** The University created a *new senior leadership position* in May 2019: Dean for Research Culture and Environment. The remit of this role is to support the PVC-R to develop a more inclusive, collaborative, and creative research environment. The role was created with three priority areas, one of which was to implement and extend University action plans to improve the research environment for staff on research-only contracts and early career researchers on the teaching and research pathway. This has led to partnership working with CURSA to understand the lived experience of researchers at Cardiff (see the CURSA Research Staff Experience Survey, undertaken in 2020 for the first time); training on responsible research assessment with researcher colleagues and advocacy for researcher perspectives and experiences with institutional senior research leaders. The Dean works in partnership with the Wellcome Trust (WT) around their work on 'reimagining research cultures' following the January 2020 WT survey and report. Cardiff hosted the WT's first regional e-townhall event on 18 September 2020 on research cultures. The findings from this event and ongoing partnership have informed a scoping of research culture across the University, aligned to developing interventions to address identified barriers to an inclusive research culture.

**Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic:** The working lives of our researchers have been severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. One impact was the delay to signature of the revised Concordat, agreed by the University Executive Board in February 2020. This took place in November 2020. The pandemic has 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. The PVC-R wrote to research-only staff with information on support available and advice on research funding during the first national lock-down. We have endeavoured to provide online development for research staff since. We focussed initially on well-being support and have developed a full suite of online skills development as digital has come to replace face-to-face training. We continue to offer careers counselling, via video conferencing. We anticipate ongoing use of digital environments to build online researcher communities; combat researcher isolation; and ensure continuity of support.

**Progress against the Action Plan.** The submitted HREIR review (2018-20) details fully our progress in the period under review. The following sections also highlight indicative Concordat actions (2021-2):

**A. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION:** The University signed up to the *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment* in November 2019 and appointed a *WT funded Responsible Research Assessment Officer*. We are committed to research assessment based on quality and not proxy indicators of value, such as outlet. We have a strategic action plan for responsible research culture change centred on senior leadership and advocacy; training and awareness raising; review of recruitment and selection policy and practices; more inclusive probation and PDR documentation and guidance; responsible use of database and informatics and improved monitoring and reporting including identifying poor practice and non-compliance. A suite of interview question, underpinned by the principles of responsible research assessment, is now in use with Cardiff academic recruiters. We will promote fair, equitable and transparent recruitment and selection processes and improve guidance and support for researchers in post (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 1:2*).

**B. RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF RESEARCHERS:** In 2018/19, the University opened its *promotions scheme for research-only staff* for the first time. The scheme supports promotion from Grade 7 Research Fellow onwards. In the first year 5% of the eligible pool made applications for promotion (100% success rate; 5% of eligible pool promoted) and this increased to 8% in 2019/20 (79% success rate; 6% of eligible pool promoted). A session on 'grading review and academic promotion' now sits within the Cardiff Researcher Programme. We are committed to delivering enhanced training on regrading (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 2:3*).

In 2019, a *new award* was introduced to our annual staff 'Celebrating Excellence' awards scheme 'Rising Star – Early Career Academic'. This recognises excellent researchers from both research-only and teaching and research career pathways. Further, one of the three finalists in the 'Excellence in Leadership' category 2019 was nominated because he champions early career researchers. Both the promotions route and these new awards demonstrate our commitment to recognising and rewarding researchers for their support and achievements. We intend to develop such work by increasing awareness of and application to rewards, benefits and recognition schemes by researchers and their line managers (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 2:3*).

**C. SUPPORT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT:** 87% of eligible staff on the research-only career pathway completed their *Performance Development Review* in 2019. A session on 'Getting the Most from your PDR', developed for researchers in 2019, is now offered through the Cardiff Researcher Programme, with an online resource 'PDR for Researchers' available for all staff. The Researcher Pathways Working Group supported the review and revision of PDR documentation for research staff. We will work with researchers and research managers to improve understanding of their responsibilities under the Concordat (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 1:1*).

The Cardiff Researcher Programme has *piloted partnership with LinkedIn Learning* (May 2019-September 2020) with internally curated collections of modules in key areas for researchers. 138 members of research staff had activated licences by August 2020. We have also piloted a blended learning MOOC on career planning and developed new sessions on insights into a lecturing career and stress and resilience. 44 researchers completed our programme for aspiring Principal Investigators, 'Moving into Research Leadership'. Line manager training is mandatory in two of our three Colleges. We will engage further with line managers to support them to meet the needs of their researcher colleagues (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: action: 4:4*).

Over a third of mentees registered on the *Academic Staff Mentoring Programme* in 2019 were research staff. The CURSA Research Staff Experience Survey 2020 recommends further promotion and development of mentoring programmes. In response to feedback from users, the Academic Staff mentoring programme will focus on support for research careers; grant and fellowship

applications; and preparing for academic promotion. From September 2020, the University is participating in the WT's pilot 'Broadening Horizons' mentoring programme for researchers in the health sciences. Training, support and recording of the minimum of ten days' professional development p.a. for researchers is a priority for 2021-22 (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 2:1*).

*Co-working with CURSA* has been an important dimension of 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 and we will work to increase broader recognition and celebration of our researcher community (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 3:5*).

**D. RESEARCHERS' RESPONSIBILITIES:** All members of academic staff are expected to complete *training modules on research integrity and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* every three years. In collaboration with the Doctoral Academy, a *new web resource, 'Career Journeys for Researchers'*, was launched in October 2020. It includes resources for developing researcher strengths, skills and experience and succeeding in academia or beyond (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 2:5*).

**E. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY:** WE are committed to increasing inclusion and support for under-represented groups and those with protected characteristics. This is evidenced by our retention of the *University's Athena SWAN Bronze award* in 2018, with twelve schools having bronze awards, two silver and one school achieving Juno Champion status. There are areas for improvement, like our network of Dignity and Wellbeing champions where only 9 of 84 Well Being Champions are researchers. Initiatives on gender and ethnicity leadership interventions and career development for under-represented research staff are a priority area (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 4:2*).

We are working hard 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. We have no researchers currently on our Gender Equality Steering Committee. Developing further opportunities for strategic leadership for our researchers is a key action for 2020-22 (*see Concordat action plan 2021-2: 3:4*).

### 3 Next Steps

Cardiff University signed the revised Concordat in November 2020, aligning future reporting requirements of Concordat and HR Excellence in Research awards. We will conduct a gap analysis and publish our *Concordat Action Plan (2021-2022)* in Autumn 2021. The two-year action plan here is a 'live' document, to be updated in September 2021. *Success measures* will be evaluated against:

1. **Raising awareness across the institution of our commitments and responsibilities under the Researcher Development Concordat** to support a positive research environment for our research staff.
2. **Extending and diversifying researcher personal and professional development opportunities** to ensure that all of our research staff are informed and equipped for their future careers.
3. **Amplifying the researcher voice and visibility in University policy-making and strategy**, empowering research staff to help shape our research cultures and environment.
4. **Improving researcher equality, diversity, and inclusion**, including support for well-being and mental health, to enable all our research staff to thrive.