

Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Universities and Research Institutes

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A. Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers (max 500 words)

Cardiff University (CU) is committed to fostering a positive research culture, defined as supportive, collaborative, creative, open, inclusive, transparent, and honest. We aim to shape an environment where individuals thrive and work together to produce excellent, impactful research, supported by clear structures and systems.

Responsibility for delivering our research and innovation priorities lies with the **Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Enterprise (PVC-RIE)**, supported by three College Research Deans and a Dean for Research Environment and Culture. The Research Culture Development Group (RCDG), chaired by the Dean on behalf of the PVC-RIE, is tasked with implementing our research culture action plan. It includes representatives of research staff and reports to the University Research Committee. These structures have been in place for several years providing continuity and a mechanism for representing the views of our researcher community.

The past two years have marked a period of significant transition for CU. During 2023/24, the Vice Chancellor (VC) and leadership team collaborated with staff, students, and stakeholders to define our priorities and aspirations going forward in the new strategy '**Our Future, Together (2025-35)**'. The 2025/26 academic year initiated the process of implementation, alongside a consultation on proposed changes designed to realise our ambitions and secure the University's long-term vision, the transformation programme, '**Our Academic Future**'. This programme took high priority, impacting progress against certain strategic objectives and projects. The transformation process aims to develop an academically and financially sustainable University, with enhanced research and teaching, improved staff and student experience and delivering value for Cardiff and Wales.

Like many in the sector, CU has faced unprecedented financial uncertainty, driven by declining international student applications and increasing cost pressures. At the outset of this transformation, 1,800 colleagues were in-scope of redundancy. While this number was significantly reduced through consultation, the impact of the proposed changes on staff has been significant in particular areas. The transformation process remains ongoing.

To reduce pressure on staff during this challenging period, large-scale staff surveys were paused. Consequently, annual surveys such as the All-Staff Survey and Research Culture Survey, which would have informed this report, did not take place during the reporting period. Nevertheless, the researcher voice remains a vital source of insight for our Researcher Development (RD) Concordat reporting and broader research infrastructure. To further amplify this voice, we will launch a **Research Staff Survey** in Autumn 2025, in collaboration with the CU Research Staff Association (CURSA). The survey will align with RD Concordat data requirements and, where appropriate, the new Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey (CEDARS) framework to enable UK-wide benchmarking. Additional data will be gathered through the University Culture Survey (2025), designed to enable the University to understand the experiences of our staff and a

dedicated research culture survey (2026), providing rich datasets and a strong foundation for future action planning.

Despite these challenging times, we continue to pursue a positive culture for everyone involved in research. We recognise the varied experiences of staff during this transformation and continue to support our research-only career pathway staff (over 900 researchers) through our RD Concordat commitments and is an integral part of our broader work. We remain focused on implementing its principles and addressing key issues affecting the research staff employment experiences.

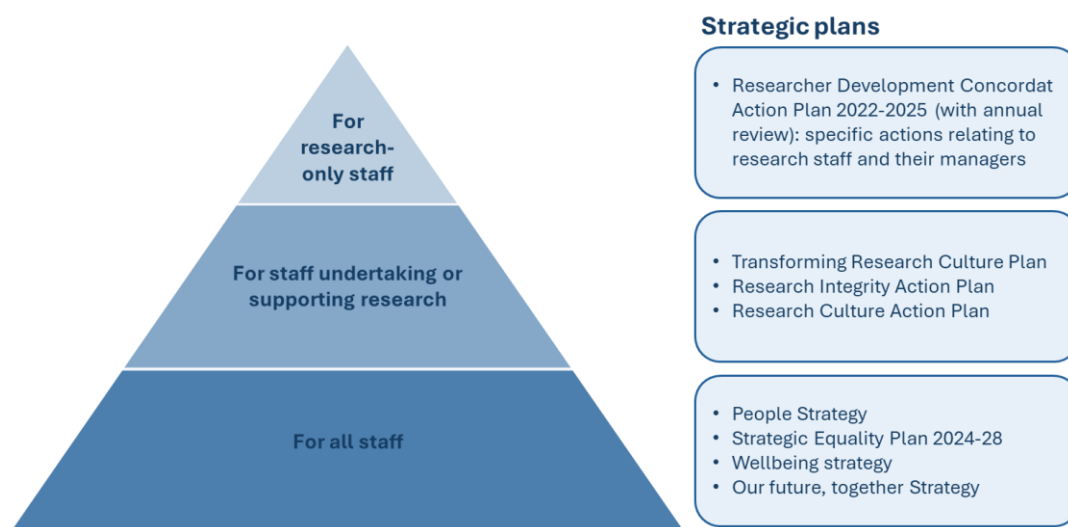
Our streamlined approach to RD Concordat implementation focuses on priorities identified through consultation with our researcher community. The working environment for researchers is shaped by three strategic levels:

- University-wide foundation – shaping the working environment for all staff.
- Research-focused initiatives – enhancing the culture for all involved in research.
- Research staff-specific activities – discussed in detail in this report.

Our approach is summarised in this schematic:

(600 words)

Creating and upholding a positive and inclusive environment for research staff



B. Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success (max 600 words)

Work has proceeded on the prioritised six areas within the three pillars of the RD Concordat (see below), each identified as having the greatest potential to improve the lived experience of research staff at CU. Our approach focuses on two priorities per pillar, ensuring our plan is sufficiently broad. The actions vary in terms of the overall possible progress anticipated within the period, especially those actions around improving communications. Other elements are more ambitious, such as career progression, and also challenging, specifically those around approaches to job security. It is right that these be part of longer-term considerations for making a step-change in the areas that are of most, and longest-standing, concern to our research staff. We recognise that progress will need to be framed against available resources, and we are using the period 2022-25 to complete the necessary scoping and to understand practices from elsewhere in the sector. The commitments include:

Environment and culture

- 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:** Research staff and their managers will be more aware of opportunities to engage with relevant organisational policy and decision-making and will help shape CU's research environment.

Employment

- 3. Job security:** All stakeholders will have a clear understanding of the types of contracts used for employing research staff at CU. Managers will understand how open-ended contracts may be issued to research staff within current University systems. We will have reviewed the University position on 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 current processes in place for recognition, reward and promotion of research staff and progression routes within the current system. We will have reviewed the University position on whether we should institute a formal process for progression from 5-7 on the research pathway based on individual performance. We will have greater clarity on the University's position on developing and recognising independence of research staff.

Professional Development of Researchers

- 5. Championing professional development:** Research staff and their managers will understand the requirement for research staff to undertake 10 days' Continuous Professional Development (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 CU 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.

Measures of progress and success include:

- Availability of clear and robust data on the research staff population to inform University policy and practice.
- Measures of engagement and participation (e.g. communications, events).
- Representation of research staff and their managers on relevant committees and working groups.
- Target levels of awareness, understanding and satisfaction for research staff and their managers.
- Target outputs for pilot schemes (e.g. number of mentoring partnerships, events, case studies)
- Availability of guidance on how open-ended contracts may be issued to research staff within *current* University systems.

Availability of clear statements of university strategy relating to research staff independence and progression, and to the feasibility of extending the use of open-ended contracts using alternative models of employment.

(600 words)

C. Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/Pis); Researchers]

Key: I- Institution, M - Academic Managers of Researchers; R – Researchers

1. Environment and Culture (max 600 words)

CU continues to strengthen its commitment to a positive research environment and culture, guided by the RD Concordat principles. Our approach focuses on improving communication, representation, and engagement with our research staff community.

1.1 RD Concordat Awareness Raising

We are continually reviewing and enhancing how we communicate with research staff to raise awareness of the RD Concordat and related policies and provisions.

1.1.1 Intranet Communication (I, M, R)

Our dedicated intranet resource for research staff is structured under three key areas, partially aligning, with the RD Concordat principles: Supporting your employment; Supporting your research; Supporting your professional and career development. We actively monitor page views and have introduced 'in-page' feedback surveys, enabling us to respond to researcher needs and improve content and accessibility.

1.1.2 Direct Communications (I, R)

The Cardiff Researcher newsletter and blog series continue to align with RD Concordat themes and key events in the research calendar. Distributed to all research staff and their line managers, the newsletter includes links to blog articles authored by the Researcher Development team and contributions from the researcher community.

Throughout the action plan (2022-date), we have increased the frequency and variety of the mechanisms used to communicate with research staff (e.g. newsletters, blogs). Early indications suggest that while improvements in communication have been made (e.g. increased attendance at events), achieving broad engagement remains a challenge, particularly in tracking the effectiveness of information signposting and uptake.

1.2 Representation (I, R, M)

We conduct annual reviews of research staff representation across CU research committees. Research staff and line managers of research staff are now included in the RCDG and the Open Research, Integrity and Ethics Committee. The RPWG which oversees delivery of the RD Concordat action plan, also includes representatives of research staff and managers of research staff from each college.

1.3 Research Culture

Our vision for a positive research culture is values-led: supportive, collaborative, creative, open, inclusive, respectful, fair and grounded in integrity. The Research Culture Fund (2024/25), supported by Medr, invited applications for activities that foster positive research cultures across the institution. Of the 30 successful proposals, four were led by research staff, demonstrating their active role in shaping the research environment.

1.4 Researcher Community Showcase

In October 2024, we hosted our annual Researcher Community Showcase, celebrating the achievements of research staff under the theme "Co-creating research with user communities and interdisciplinary colleagues". The event provided an opportunity for staff to engage with initiatives supporting the RD Concordat action plan.

A total of 84 staff attended, including 46 research staff, representing a significant increase from the previous year (35 attendees, of which 10 were research staff in 2023). This strong engagement provides a solid foundation for the 2025 event.

(454 words)

2. Employment (max 600 words)

CU remains committed to improving transparency, recognition, and job security for research staff. Our work in this area continues to evolve, particularly in the context of sector-wide challenges and institutional transformation.

2.1 Review and Baseline Data (I, R)

As part of our RD Concordat action plan, we prioritised transparency in employment practices including improved access to data on contract types, length of service, pay grades, grading reviews, promotion applications and outcomes.

These insights are shared with research staff, Heads of School, Directors of Research, and senior leaders via the **Annual Research Staff Report**. The report provides a comprehensive snapshot of our research staff community, including employment types, demographic data, and researcher feedback. We have published reports annually since 2021, with a five-year trend analysis planned to inform future strategy.

2.2 Recognition, Reward and Promotion

We continue to review systems for recognising and rewarding research staff, and for improving understanding of progression pathways. Many processes were paused in 2024/25 due to transformation activity and are now under review for possible reintroduction in 2025/26.

2.2.1 Grant Grade Progression (I, M, R)

HR and The Research Service collaborated to clarify the process for building in grade progression for existing research staff in grant applications. This process, reviewed by CURSA in 2022, was communicated through direct messaging, training sessions, and intranet content which received 547 views from 331 unique users during the reporting period.

We are exploring alternative approaches to recognising and rewarding research staff independence, particularly in the transition from Grade 5 to Grade 7. Initial scoping research will be undertaken in 2025/26 to understand practices across other HEIs.

2.2.2 Celebrating Excellence Awards

The **Excellence in Research Award** was opened to research staff from 2012. In 2024, the **Commitment to Enhancing Research Culture Award** was introduced, recognising individuals or teams who have made exceptional contributions to fostering a positive research culture. Of eight nominations, one was a research staff colleague.

The **Rising Star – Early Career Academic award** recognises individuals with up to three years in role who have demonstrated significant impact on their work colleagues, students or the wider community. This year, the award was presented to a research staff member.

For 2025, the **Celebrating Excellence Awards** have been refreshed to align with the University's new strategy. Ten categories will be open to research staff, including:

Research and Scholarship for a Better World, Sustainability & Environmental Leadership, Co-creation and Participative Leadership, and Research Culture Enhancement.

2.3 Job Security

2.3.1 Working Group on 'Relevant Factors' in Contracts (I)

University contracts aim to balance fairness, legal compliance, and institutional sustainability. Due to the scale of transformation in 2024/25, progress on reviewing open-ended contracts with a relevant factor was limited. However, working groups were established and will resume in 2025/26. An audit is underway, and a second group is exploring funding models to support more secure employment practices, which remains an ongoing sector-wide challenge.

2.3.2 Reviewing Alternative Models

Progress has been constrained by limited access to detailed information on employment models used by other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) making it difficult to assess suitability for CU. Initial desk-based reviews highlighted the complexity and context-specific nature of these systems.

To address this, CU joined a Wellcome-funded project led by **Nottingham University**, bringing together HEIs to explore alternative employment mechanisms. Running until April 2026, with plans for continued collaboration, the project will offer reliable insights into pilot schemes and their relevance to CU.

Our Research Deans and PVC-RIE continue to advocate for sector-wide improvements in job security through engagement with funders and alongside peer institutions, including the **GW4 Alliance** and the **Russell Group**.

(600 words)

3. Professional Development (max 600 words)

We continue to enhance our professional development offer for research staff, focusing on improved communication, broader access to opportunities, and support for career progression across diverse pathways.

3.1. Improved communications (I, R)

Weekly training bulletins highlight development opportunities for research staff and link to intranet resources such as the *Supporting Your Professional and Career Development* section, which received 105 views from 65 unique users between October 2024-2025 (257 views and 143 unique users since its 2023 launch). Newsletters and blog posts have focused on professional development themes, including 10-days commitment to CPD, Assessing and Addressing Your Development needs, Leadership at CU.

3.2. Recording development activity (I, M, R)

A learning management platform was identified to record development activity, but financial constraints have prevented implementation, at this time. Meanwhile, strengthened collaboration across departments ensures formal training and development activities outside of Staff Development provision, are captured in our HR system. Work to record informal activities, e.g. public engagement, attending conferences, is currently paused due to other priorities.

3.3 Made in Wales: Researcher Career Stories (R)

In partnership with seven other Welsh universities, we delivered the *Made in Wales* series in 2025, highlighting researcher career stories beyond academia. Three online events attracted 136 attendees, including 26 CU staff.

Feedback was highly positive:

- 100% of respondents found the sessions helpful in understanding how research skills transfer to other careers.
- 82% gained insight into the factors influencing career decisions.

3.4 Increasing the Breadth of Development Opportunities

3.4.1 Cynau | Ignite (I, R)

Launched in September 2024, this pilot supports leadership development and engagement with research culture. Of the 123 participants, 27 were research staff. Six researcher-led proof-of-concept projects were funded and are due for completion in October 2025.

3.4.2 Welsh Crucible (I, R)

The Welsh Crucible programme for personal and professional leadership development (led by CU) has confirmed continuation of funding from its partner institutions and Medr until December 2027. In 2025, seven CU staff participated, including four research staff. Of the five funded interdisciplinary seedcorn projects, one was led by a CU research staff member.

3.4.3 GW4 Crucible (I, R)

As part of the GW4 Alliance, CU staff are eligible for the GW4 Crucible. In 2025, the theme was ‘**Creative Societies and Cultures, Cultural and Public Good?**’ and 10 of the 30 places available were awarded to CU staff, six of whom were research staff.

3.4.4 Knowledge Exchange and Impact Development Programme (I, R, M)

This CU programme supports skills in public engagement, commercialisation, and policy impact, which are rapidly growing in-scope across academia. In 2025, there were 287 registrations, from 201 individuals including 50 research staff, representing 17% of total registrations.

3.4.5 Researchers 14 Networking and Profile Building (I, R)

This programme, delivered in collaboration with 12 Russell Group institutions, had 15 CU delegates registered in 2024/25.

3.4.6 Welsh Universities Research Leadership Programme (I, R)

CU participated in this cross-institutional programme in 2024/25, delivered by senior leaders across Wales. Seven CU staff attended, including five research staff. The programme included engagement with our PVC-RIE and College Research Deans.

3.4.7 Cardiff Researcher Development Programme (I, R, M)

The programme was refined in 2024/25 to better meet the needs of research staff, with new workshops focusing on practical, collaborative, digital, and wellbeing skills. Attendance decreased slightly, likely reflecting shifting priorities during the transformation period.

In 2025/26, the programme will be mapped to the new **Vitae Researcher Development Framework** to identify gaps in provision. Alongside the newly launched *Career Directions for Researchers* guidance, the **Cardiff Researcher Development Hub** will support career planning and help researchers address skills gaps.

(599 words)

D. Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. (max 500 words)

1. Our Academic Future, Transformation Programme

As outlined earlier in this report, the 2024/25 academic session was shaped by the large-scale consultation on the *Our Academic Future* transformation programme, focused on achieving academic and financial sustainability. The final proposals are now being implemented.

The [business case](#) was developed with the University community. Staff were invited to contribute feedback through multiple channels, including:

- Submission of 54 alternative proposals
- Participation in [five UEB all-staff webinars](#), where 730 questions were asked and answered
- Numerous meetings and discussions across the institution

As a result of this engagement, the proposals evolved significantly. However, the scale of change and its impact on the University, its community, and strategic plans cannot be underestimated. The achievements made during this period, and the continued commitment to research culture and staff development, are particularly noteworthy given the challenging context.

2. HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Reporting Process

CU has held the **HREiR** award since its launch in 2010. The next submission was originally scheduled for September 2025. However, Vitae is currently revising the submission process to streamline it. Considering this, and due to current resource constraints and timing, CU has opted to delay its submission until the new process has been established.

Work on the existing **Researcher Development Concordat (RDC)** action plan will continue uninterrupted, and outputs will remain consistent. Pausing the HREiR submission allows greater flexibility in shaping the future of our RDC action plan—enabling us to be more responsive to the evolving needs of our researcher community and to align more closely with the University’s new strategic direction. The revised submission date is now set for **September 2026**, and the action plan will be extended accordingly (2022–2026).

3. Communications Strategy

A significant proportion of our RDC actions involve capturing the **researcher voice**. We have trialled pulse surveys via newsletters to gather feedback on a range of topics. However, engagement with this format has been low. In the next reporting period, we plan to launch a more detailed survey to collect comprehensive feedback from our researcher community. These insights will directly inform future planning and development.

As part of our **Researcher Development communications strategy**, we have used social media to engage with our research community—particularly via the *Cardiff Researcher* Twitter account. Since the start of our action plan in 2022, academic use of social media has shifted away from Twitter/X, reflected in declining engagement with our account.

Informal data suggests that **Bluesky and LinkedIn** are becoming more prevalent among researchers. In response, we plan to pilot the use of Bluesky and LinkedIn as new platforms for social media engagement with our research community.

(437 words)

E. Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period (max 500 words)

Ongoing Commitment and Future Activities

Cardiff University remains in a transformative phase, shaped by organisational change to facilitate sustainability. Despite these challenges, we continue to prioritise support for our research community. The working groups established to guide this support will remain actively engaged, contributing to co-creation opportunities and monitoring the impact of change, both positive and negative, on staff.

We remain committed to the following key activities:

1. Communication with Research Staff and Their Managers

- **Research Staff Survey (2025/26)**

In collaboration with CURSA, we will contribute to the design of the Research Staff Survey. The question set will align with other sector-wide surveys to enable benchmarking. We will also support the development of the next Research Culture Staff Survey, ensuring that responses from both research staff and their managers can be filtered for targeted analysis. These surveys will provide a platform to capture the researcher voice and inform future RD Concordat-related activity.

- **Ongoing Communications**

We will continue to publish *The Cardiff Researcher* newsletter and blog series, sharing relevant updates and encouraging contributions from the research community.

- **Social Media Engagement**

We will launch a *Cardiff Researcher* account on Bluesky, piloting this platform as a new route for engaging with our research community.

2. Reward, Recognition and Promotion

- **Academic Promotions Review**

We will contribute to the ongoing review of academic promotions and continue to gather feedback from research staff on their experiences. We have contributed to the newly proposed Cardiff academic framework that will better support development.

- **Recognition Processes**

Researcher voice will be incorporated into any reviews of university reward and recognition processes undertaken in 2025/26.

3. Job Security

- **Exploring Career Progression Models**

As part of our Research Culture Action Plan, we remain committed to exploring job security and career development pathways. This includes reviewing sector best practices for progression from Grades 5 to 7, with a focus on independence and development support.

- **Embedding Survey Outcomes**

Insights from the Research Culture Survey and resulting action plan are embedded in our current strategy. These long-term issues remain a priority, and we will continue to progress them where possible, despite sector-wide challenges.

- **Examples of effective practice from other institutions**

CURSA's forthcoming survey will include questions aimed at identifying examples of positive practice in research staff progression from Grades 5 to 7, based on experiences at other

institutions. Where necessary, follow-up with HR departments will be undertaken to clarify and validate these practices.

(398 words)

F. Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body (*max 200 words*)

Our RD Concordat action plan, and all associated monitoring and review, is developed and overseen by the RPWG, which is chaired by the University Dean for Research Environment and Culture. The group includes 20 members of staff whose remit includes conducting research, including the chair of the Cardiff University Research Staff Association (CURSA), and a research staff representative and a line manager of research staff representative from each College. Professional Services are also represented, including Organisational and Staff Development, Human Resources, the Pro-Vice Chancellors' Office, and Research and Innovation Services. The RPWG presents an update on progress to each meeting of the RCDG.

An annual report was developed by the RPWG and presented to the RCDG on October 7th, 2025. Input from the Dean of Research Culture and Environment and Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Enterprise has been incorporated. It was presented to Senate on November 12th, 2025, and Council, the University's Governing Body, on the November 26th, 2025.

(160 words)