

The University of South Wales (USW) HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award Eight-Year Review and Future Strategy (2022-2025)

The University of South Wales was first awarded the HR Excellence in Research (HREiR) Award in November 2013 and retained the award at subsequent review points. This report summarises progress against the 2019-2021 action plan and our focus for the upcoming three years. USW recently (October 2021) became a Concordat Signatory, reaffirming our commitment to our research community.

Context | The University of South Wales (USW) is organised into three faculties: Business and Creative Industries; Computing, Engineering and Science; Life Sciences and Education. The faculties are located across our campuses in Cardiff, Newport and Pontypridd. We are a multi-disciplinary university with a strong track record of collaboration with external organisations in both our teaching and learning and research and innovation. Our USW Strategy 2030 has two pillars, one of which is research and innovation impact.

The University regards all academic staff who have protected time for research at 20% or more of their FTE to be research active and are therefore referred to as researchers/research active staff throughout this document. Most academic/research staff have combined teaching and research contracts as part of the historic philosophy of the university. When compared to other Universities, USW has a limited number of researchers on Fixed Term Contracts (FTC), there are 47 researchers on FTC, 11 of which are Research Fellows.

USW is committed to supporting and developing our research community. As signatories to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Researcher Development Concordat), investment has been made in the Research and Business Engagement Department to ensure there is dedicated support for our research community and environment. Each Faculty has a Head of Research and with our Director of the Graduate School, this team works closely with the PVC Research to ensure support for research is high quality, responsive and wherever possible, consistent across all areas of the university.

Our University Research Committee is chaired by the PVC Research and members include the Heads of Research with representation including Postgraduate Research Students (PGRs), Early Career Researchers (ECRs), The Director of the Graduate School, Research Governance Manager, Research Librarian, EDI Manager, Professors, PVC Innovation and Engagement, and research support staff. Research Committee reports formally into Academic Board. The Graduate School Board reports into Research Committee as does the University Ethics Committee (which also receives faculty Ethics Committee reports). Each Faculty has a Faculty Research Committee, and these also report into Research Committee, ensuring there is a two-way flow/confirmation of actions.

Eight-Year Review

1. Internal evaluation process: In 2021, the University Executive established its Strategy Implementation Group (SIG) to oversee the progress and delivery of the 2030 strategy. Led by the PVC-Research, the Research 2030 SIG has five workstreams designed to support our talented staff to continuously develop and to recognise them for their work in innovation and impactful research.

Previously, our internal evaluation process had remained unchanged. The HREiR Award Steering Group had led this work and met regularly to monitor progress against action plans. Having become a signatory of the refreshed Researcher Development Concordat, we took the opportunity to review our internal evaluation and have further embedded this work within the Research 2030 SIG workstreams. The Researcher Development Concordat SIG was created to meet the University's obligations as a signatory of the Concordat to Support the Development of Researchers, reporting to: Research Committee; Academic Board; Culture, People and Values Committee. The SIG will also be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the HREiR Award.

The eight-year review was led by the Researcher Development Concordat SIG, co-chaired by the PVC Research and the Director of Research and Business Engagement with members representing the three faculties

including research active academics including ECRs, contract research staff, lecturers, Associate Professors and Professors and professional services staff with a remit to support researchers.

To update our action plan, we have drawn information from several sources including the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS), the research student annual monitoring process, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) as well as workshops and surveys exploring Development and Performance Review (DPR) and career progression. Priorities have been identified via the SIG and other researcher-led strategic groups such as the Faculty Research Committees and the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team. Priorities were considered against the QAA indicators, Researcher Development Framework (RDF) subdomains, Concordat Principles and the UK Research and Development (UKRI) statement of expectations. The Researcher Development Concordat SIG will oversee the ongoing fulfilment of the action plan and strategy and will report directly to the Culture, People and Values Committee, and Faculty and University Research Committees.

Review Process | The Researcher Development Concordat SIG is overseeing the HREiR Award programme of work, Concordat Gap-analysis and has drafted this report and action plan. Inputs to our review included CEDARS, PRES, our ECR Network, Research Committee, meetings with our Heads of Research from each Faculty, university-wide surveys, data and feedback from participants on our Research and Innovation Development Programme and focus groups leading on the People Plan currently under development.

Hearing the Voice of Researchers | Researchers, PGRs, and those involved in providing support for researchers (including staff from Research and Business Engagement Department and managers of researchers), have been involved in the process of review via their membership of research related groups and committees. Our ECR Network has also enabled us to hear the voices of the ECR community. In addition, national surveys have been used to inform our plans. These include the results of the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) and the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS) 2019 (response rates of 40% and 26% respectively) as well as CEDARS 2020 (overall response rate of 28%) and CEDARS 2021 (overall response rate of 38%).

2. Key achievements and progress:

Recruitment and Selection | A new online recruitment system has been implemented and as part of this work all recruitment and selection documentation including policies and guidance have been reviewed and updated providing much needed clarity on ensuring recruitment involves research active staff. A new HR Recruitment Working Group has been established whose role is to continuously monitor engagement with the system and track applicants through all stages of recruitment and appointment.

Recognition and Value | The fourth USW Innovation and Impact Awards were held in May 2022. This year we expanded the award categories to include the impact of our PGR students. Every shortlisted applicant had a professional video made about their research. Our feedback from previous shortlisted colleagues has indicated that this recognition has been valuable in a number of ways including career progression and deepening their relationships with external partners.

Career pathways | Our goal was to provide all applicants for Associate Professor/Professor with proactive one to one support before and during the application process. Over the last two years, over 90% received one to one support with several being allocated an informal mentor to also provide support specific to either the route of the application or the candidate's discipline area.

Support and Career Development | During the pandemic we continued to provide our calendar of events for research active staff online. All development events were recorded, and webinars made available, so colleagues are able to engage asynchronously. Our own CPD provision is complemented by external programmes including the Times Higher award-winning Welsh Crucible. We have also invested in Epigeum which provides another set of online resources which expand our development for researchers. The University

now offers a comprehensive Research and Innovation Development Programme accessible to all researchers which includes PGR students.

Our ECR Network was launched following three externally facilitated sessions with our ECR community to explore their training and development needs. The ECRs have developed the network with coaching from our external facilitator with members taking on actions which together will help to address the needs of the ECR community at USW. It will launch formally in June 2022.

Following feedback from focus groups we have updated our regulations governing progression to Associate Professor and Professor, ensuring staff working part-time or with absences for ill health/caring have clear mitigation. In response to feedback from researchers about the need to increase awareness of the challenges facing research active staff and managers responsibilities to support them, a programme of development for Heads of School was designed and delivered to enable them to be more competent research leaders and managers. All Heads of School attended the sessions with one faculty cascading the programme and expanding it to their Academic Subject Managers.

Diversity and Inclusion | We achieved our Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze Award in 2020. Work to implement our action plan has continued and includes our Women Development Programme and our Women in STEM network which includes both academic staff and students. Our staff are visible role models for ECRs and PGRs. The Women in STEM network has responded to feedback of focus groups and provided career progression talks and clinics to a range of colleagues including ECRs, research active lecturers and Associate Professors. Final year PGR students have also engaged in some of the career development sessions. We have expanded our work in USW to the Welsh HEI sector and USW is now leading on the Wales Women in STEM Network. The Network aims to expose and address the barriers that women face working in STEM. It brings together those who implement change within the sector, and those who work to create a positive environment where women and girls can thrive. The Network provides support, events, and networking opportunities to facilitate female participation in STEM at all career stages, from school learners to industry professionals and research leaders.

In the light of Black Lives Matter, we have consulted extensively on race equality and have appointed a Race Equality Champion and a Race Equality Group in preparation for an application to the Advance HE Race Equality Charter in 2024. We have also engaged in an intensive training programme to help prepare for submission to the Charter.

Researcher Responsibilities | Our mandatory academic induction programme has been extensively updated in response to feedback from past participants. It now includes a focus on the available research support services and the offer of one-to-one sessions with members of the central Research and Business Engagement Department. The induction also provides access to online resources in terms of research which we intend to expand following gap analysis work undertaken for the refreshed Researcher. New academic starters are also offered an appointment with the Head of Research during induction.

In relation to research governance, research integrity (RI), and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (CSRI) are standing items on the University Ethics Subgroup agenda. The University Code of Good Research Conduct describes the expectation placed upon researchers by the CSRI and refers researchers to the relevant documentation. The University has invested in comprehensive training in RI for all staff and students, including new starters and existing staff and this training is complemented by the availability of the Research Governance Manager to guide and advise researchers in relation to RI queries they may have. Research ethics applications require researchers to describe how RI is upheld by proposed research. Research and Innovation Services publish and disseminate communications which highlight the relevance and applicability of RI via central communication channels regularly throughout the academic year.

As part of the pre-award approval process and post award monitoring, researchers are required to comply with all research governance and integrity requirements and are supported to ensure they can meet and understand those obligations.

Implementation and Review | We have invested in a new role which was recruited to in February 2022 to provide proactive support to deliver the Researcher Development Concordat gap analysis and new action plan. In addition, a new process is in place to strengthen the formal mechanism for developing our plan and monitoring our progress. The new Researcher Development Concordat SIG is responsible for design, implementation, and monitoring of action plan programme of work. This SIG reports into University Executive as well as our formal governance structures through Research Committee and Academic Board ensuring that the SIG is held to account and that the work has a much wider reach. We have also continued to run CEDARS as well as internal surveys and these results (along with data from other sources) have been considered by the SIG to help inform our review.

3. A Summary of Future Strategy:

Our future strategy to support our research community is informed by the refreshed Researcher Development Concordat as well as the Research Integrity Concordat, the Knowledge Exchange Concordat and our own USW Strategy 2030 of which Research and Innovation Impact is one of our two pillars. Our future actions have been informed by our work on a range of initiatives including: open access; our People Plan; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work including Athena SWAN; Stonewall; Race Equality Charter (REC); and our work to develop our new Research Strategy. This work will be guided by the Researcher Development Concordat SIG and delivery will involve colleagues from across the institution as set out in our action plan. Our future focus includes:

Implementation and Governance – to embed the implementation of the Researcher Development Action Plan and raise the profile of the work

Using our new Researcher Development Concordat SIG, communication, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms will be improved via effective and inclusive governance. CEDARS will provide evidence of effective communication and via regular monitoring, our action plan should be delivered within agreed timescales.

Research culture and environment – to embed a positive research culture and environment which has transparency and inclusivity as core components

Learning from our experience of working with Athena SWAN via a network of Champions, we are expanding the model to other protected characteristics and appointing a network of Inclusion Champions that will be present in every academic school and professional support services department. Inclusion Champions will have protected time to allow them to fully engage with their role. We will supplement this with a network of colleagues who have lived experience of protected characteristics. Investment in University wide continuous learning and development opportunities will be made available, for example, we have also invested in Advance HE's Race Equality Charter training which is an online resource available to all staff. Alongside this, significant investment is being made to expand the EDI team to ensure the University addresses race inequities for colleagues and students.

Research Leadership, Management and Development – to provide proactive support to equip and develop those managing researchers to be effective

We will launch a new mentoring programme for researchers and managers of researchers. This will complement the successful Heads of School programme which will be expanded to include all managers of researchers. We will measure the impact of these interventions by monitoring feedback from researchers via a range of mechanisms including CEDARs and our ECR Network. The University is investing in a system to match mentors and mentees and their progress. The tendering process is now complete, and the University is assessing potential suppliers with a view to implementation in September 2022.