



HR Excellence in Research Report

2021



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

OUR POSITION AS A RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Swansea University is a research-intensive institution with 4,694 staff, of whom 476 are research-only staff. The results of the Research Excellence Framework (REF2014) placed Swansea University 26th overall and 22nd for Research Impact in the UK. Swansea University delivers excellent research across all disciplines and is committed to creating a research environment and culture that supports strategic growth in staff, students, income, infrastructure and esteem indicators. We have achieved our ambition to become a Top-30 research-intensive University, with over 90% of our research being classed as world-leading or internationally excellent. Now we have reached our centenary, we look forward to continuing our research and making a positive difference to the health, wealth, culture and wellbeing of society and the economy.

OUR EVALUATION AND PROCESS

This evaluation was led through the Research Staff Working Group (RSWG) chaired by Professor Perumal Nithiarasu, Director of Research and Institutional Academic lead for Research Impact. The RSWG has been active since September 2016 with defined Terms of Reference. Research staff representatives from all colleges are integral members of this group. The group meets with the purpose of supporting personal, professional and career development aligned to the Researcher Development Framework and oversees the delivery of the Concordat Action Plan for Research Staff. This evaluation was coordinated by the Learning and Development Manager, Rose Cooze, supported by the RSWG, and reporting into the Committee for Research and Innovation Strategy (CRIS). A special working group convened by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and made up of members of the research community, including RSWG members, has contributed to our forward action plan. Oversight and strategic leadership has been provided by the Director of Human Resources and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), who chairs CRIS, thereby demonstrating Institutional commitment to researcher support at a strategic level.

OUR EVIDENCE AND SUCCESS MEASURES

Career Researchers Online Survey (CROS) survey, direct consultation with researchers and central support via the RSWG; Institutional work on Athena SWAN, the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and the Race Equality Charter; the University vision and Strategic plan. The review has also been informed by minutes from the RSWG and feedback captured from research staff in relation to the research environment, employment and professional and career development.

OUR KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRESS SINCE 2018

PRINCIPLE 1 Recruitment and Selection

- ◆ We have evaluated and improved the University induction programme for researchers new to Swansea and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic developed a digital University induction product to enable all new starters to participate and connect with colleagues working remotely or on campus.
- ◆ The University continues to promote gender equality and addresses challenges in different disciplines and the number of female applicants in Science, Technology, Mathematics & Medicine (STEMM) has increased by 24% this year (August 2019 – July 2020) in comparison to the previous year.

PRINCIPLE 2 Recognition and Value

- ◆ We are committed to a culture of Performance Enabling to support and enable University staff to achieve their potential, succeed in their roles, and thereby deliver the University's key strategic outcomes. Our Professional Development Review process provides the opportunity for every eligible member of research staff to have a meaningful professional development conversation with their line manager. 100% research staff participated in 2019 and 2020.
- ◆ The University continues to shine a spotlight on the important contribution of our researcher community to our outstanding research. Our centenary edition of 'Momentum' showcases the work of three research staff, and includes the feature 'Young Researchers', illustrating the career path they have taken.

- ◆ Over the last two years, the University has continued to increase research fellowship appointments with 43 new fellowships since the 01.01.19 at £18.9 million.
- ◆ Our research staff community have participated in numerous events during this period, including [Swansea Science Festival 26 October 2019/2020](#), [Research as Art 2019/2020](#), [Three Minute Thesis 2019/2020](#), and [Famelab 2019/2020](#),
- ◆ The University continues to commit a funding budget and engage in the [Welsh Crucible](#) as a means of developing future research leaders. Over the last two years, Swansea has supported 10 researchers, four of which are research staff, on this prestigious programme.
- ◆ The University continues to celebrate the role of Early Career Researchers via the [University Research and Innovation Awards](#) (January 2020). The total number of nominations increased in 2020 (112 in 2020; 87 in 2018), with 13 for the prestigious Early Career Researcher Rising Star Award. This year's prize was awarded to a Technology Transfer Fellow from the College of Engineering.

PRINCIPLES
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Support,
Career
Development and
Researchers'
Responsibilities

- ◆ Support and training for researchers is coordinated and delivered by Research Engagement and Innovation Services (REIS), the postgraduate Research Office, Library Research Support and HR. Between January 2019 and up to October 2020, 309 workshops took place, of which 4,598 staff attended. Areas have included funding opportunities, project development and costing research, training on research data management, open access publishing, media training, and ECR network sessions, as well as soft skills courses, such as time management and assertiveness. The postgraduate research suite of training modules has been revised and supplemented by an online [supervisor toolkit](#) (December 2019) to support supervisors and enable flexible access.
- ◆ 80% of our courses scheduled during this period were of 3.5 hours or less, an 8% increase on the previous period.
- ◆ The University continues to develop its [promotion process](#) for research staff. Written feedback has been introduced for all unsuccessful applicants with an opportunity to discuss this with the Director of Research. The number of successful applicants for both Research Officer and Senior Research Officer has increased by 50% since 2018. Extensive external benchmarking on the Research Promotion career routes across the sector has been undertaken and we continue to work on the Research Promotion Criteria to mirror Academic Career Pathways.
- ◆ Overall, 113 (68 in 2019 and 45 in 2020) academic Principal Investigator's (PI's) took part in 360 leadership feedback based on our [leadership expectations](#). Research staff with line management responsibilities are also invited to participate in this process and gain feedback on their leadership. This directly feeds into the Professional Development Review process.
- ◆ PI's are able to access a range of development and support including online resources to support career conversations with research staff ([information and support for PI's](#)). PI's continue to view developing research staff as being very important (98%), and remain more confident in providing career advice than the benchmark group (Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey [PIRLS] measure is 88% compared to 71% nationally).
- ◆ We have strengthened our process for allocating mentors to new research staff following feedback from CROS (2019) and the RSWG. All new researchers are allocated a named mentor on appointment and the mentor is now included in the welcome email to new research staff starters. We have delivered seven mentoring skills workshops since 2019 to support mentors in their role.
- ◆ Researchers are responsible for the integrity of their research and ensuring it is conducted in an honest and ethical manner. 462 current staff have undertaken the Research Integrity training to date and work is progressing to ensure 100% Research staff undertake this training.
- ◆ Researchers continue to provide a voice via the RSWG and research staff representatives. In December 2020, RSWG representatives developed and implemented a virtual Researcher Development Day (*by the Researchers for the Researchers*) attended by 226 colleagues. Key speakers included Head of Research Programme Development - Welsh Government and our Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation).

PRINCIPLE 6

Equality and Diversity

- ◆ The University's commitments to Equality and Diversity are set out in our [2020 Strategic Plan](#) and we continue to engage with the Athena SWAN Charter as a means to identify and embed good practice. In comparison to 83% of researchers nationally, 88% of our researchers agree or strongly agree that Swansea is committed to equality and diversity (CROS, 2019).

PRINCIPLE 7

Implementation and Review

- ◆ Research staff representatives are nominated by the Head of College/Director of Research. The flow of information and communication to and from the RSWG has improved through research staff representation at CRIS and at their local Research Committees.
- ◆ A special working group convened by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), made up of members of the research community including RSWG members, was used to inform our forward action plan. Our researcher community provided feedback on the principles of the new Concordat and this feedback was used to support our actions.
- ◆ Progress against the action plan and forward actions under the new Concordat have been overseen by CRIS, and approved by University [Senior Leadership Team](#).
- ◆ The University continues to be committed to CROS/CEDARS. The results will be reported to the RSWG, CRIS, and University [Senior Leadership Team](#), and will inform the development of the next Concordat Action Plan.

OUR FUTURE FOCUS, STRATEGY AND SUCCESS MEASURES

Our strategy and focus for the next two years is summarised below. An updated action plan has been developed that sets out areas of focus. This plan will continue to evolve and be focused on the new Concordat, as a gap analysis is completed and actions are developed to fill the gaps and strengthen our researcher support. Progress will be monitored via CRIS and reported to the University Senior Leadership Team.

Success measures include:

- ◆ Increased awareness of the Concordat commitments across Swansea.
- ◆ Researcher voice and visibility in University strategy and policy making.
- ◆ Implementation of an Institutional list of professional development activities to enable PIs, supervisors and mentors to have meaningful conversations about professional development. Continued participation of research staff in the professional development review enables participation in training to be recorded and discussed.
- ◆ Responding creatively to a changing research landscape and funding opportunities post COVID-19.
- ◆ EDI and Unconscious Bias training and development for researchers and line managers, including support for well-being and mental health in line with our Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- ◆ Progress against actions reported, including seeking and responding to researcher feedback.