**Institute of Cancer Research HR Excellence in Research 2023 Summary Report**

**1.Context of the institution**

The ICR is a college of the University of London and specialist Research Institute rated second in the UK among all HEI (REF 2021). It has no undergraduate teaching and therefore all ~150 students here are studying towards a MSc, MDRes or PhD degree. It employs ~1200, of whom ~370 in professional services and ~800 within the scientific divisions. It works closely with the Royal Marsden Hospital, having several joint clinical appointments, to form a comprehensive cancer centre, with the goal of translating research from bench to bedside. Scientific staff can be grouped as those on:

1. an academic career track: postdoctoral training fellows, research fellows and equivalent grades (~200, typically 3-year fix term roles) this includes staff scientists and analytical scientists grades 3 and 4, career development faculty (tenure track equivalent, 5-6 year fix term roles) (~20) and tenured faculty (~70)
2. a technical career track: comprising scientific professionals and scientific officer grades 400 (made up of scientific officers, higher scientific officers and senior scientific officers plus those in software/trials roles)

The audience for the Researcher Development Concordat was agreed in 2020 by Research Leadership Board as group a (above) i.e. those on the academic training career track whose primary role was conducting research. Key support roles e.g. Scientific Professional and Scientific Officer Grades are the audience for our Technician Commitment which has its own working group with research staff representatives and a Faculty champion.

In 2021 the ICR appointed Prof Kristian Helin as its new CEO, and Carol Ford as its Chief People Officer. In late 2022 it launched its new 5-year research strategy (see section 5 below)

2**. Internal evaluation**

**Staff networks**

ICR has a number of staff networks (Scientific Officer Association (SOA), Student Liaison Committee, Postdoc Association (PDA), Clinical Academic Forum, Career Development Faculty (CDF) and fellows network, Race Equality and Cultural Heritage (REACH) forum, Access for All and LGBTQ+ which meet monthly to quarterly. Reps from each of these groups participate in both formal and informal committees and groups e.g. Academic Board, Equality Steering Group and the Culture and Engagement Steering group. Reps also participate in the CEO forum which is an opportunity to meet with the CEO and raise questions/concerns on behalf of their groups to them directly.

The SOA and PDA were formed >10 years ago with additional groups having formed since to engage with staff in new areas e.g. the Clinical Academic Forum which supports those with a dual clinical and academic career & the challenges associated with that (see section 4 below). Certain staff networks have Twitter pages to highlight events being run internally and externally e.g. Postdoc Appreciation Week & Technician Commitment events, national development programmes e.g. Herschel Women in Leadership as well as internal away days and careers conferences (<https://twitter.com/Postdocs_ICR> <https://twitter.com/ICR_SOA>)

Staff group consultations feed into Researcher Development Concordat and Technician Commitment action plans to enhance current initiatives or drive new ones. Examples of feedback gathered from postdocs during the 2022 Postdoc Appreciation Week included:

* Improving wider engagement by running short surveys to all postdocs to gather views on topics ahead of monthly meetings when fewer people may be able to attend
* Increasing the number of career specific seminars run
* Increased opportunities & support for those not wanting to go on to lead teams in academia
* More socials for postdocs from both sites to build the network and community

**Internal training**

ICR staff can book themselves onto the training courses they wish to attend via the centralised training portal. ICR runs ~100 courses and 250 iterations per year with ~40% of the training programme focussed on researchers, ~35% suitable for all staff, 11% aimed specifically at managers, 14% aimed specifically staff groups e.g. students (vivas, thesis submission), postdocs, clinicians and scientific officers. When analysed by theme 25% of the training is technical skills training, 25% succeeding in academia, 15% personal development, 12% leadership and management and the remainder on enterprise, careers specific training and mandatory training.

**Surveys**

In addition to the face-to-face engagement with staff associations, the ICR runs triennial all staff and student attitude survey as well as interim pulse surveys. These usually achieve a completion rate of ~60-69% and are an important monitoring tool for our Research Culture activities & Researcher Development Concordat objectives. Completion rate for postdoc and equivalent grades, the main Concordat audience, was ~59% based on 124 responses for a current population of 210. Collecting limited demographic data e.g. Division, Gender and Job Type to allow us to retain anonymity but explore the results in greater detail e.g. identify areas we need to explore further and run focus groups before developing an action plan to address highlighted challenges. The resulting actions are then agreed and owned by a particular board or committee who will track progress of the actions.

In the last two years the main areas of focus have been:

1. working with staff groups to respond to survey data identifying that some respondents lacked confidence in the ICRs actions to tackle bullying and harassment concerns, with actions including implementing a “Report and Support” platform to identify, track and report on how concerns were being addressed
2. Prioritising wellbeing for all, appointing a wellbeing & occupational coordinator, raising the profile of wellbeing events and developing a wellbeing action plan with the input of wellbeing advisors, staff groups and HR.

3.**Governance structures**

Upon becoming signatories of the Researcher Development Concordat, the Research Leadership Board appointed Prof Jyoti Choudhary as the Faculty champion for this area of work and put together a working group comprising the current chair of the Postdoc Association, the Researcher Development Manager, the Deputy Director of HR (Operations) and the Research Grants Coordinator. The Technician Commitment has its own working group with a Faculty champion, Head of Core Research Facilities, Researcher Development Coordinator and 2-3 reps from the Scientific Officer Association.

The Researcher Development Concordat annual report provides an update on the current action plan and priorities for the upcoming year. It is presented to Research Leadership Board which in turn feeds into the ICR’s Board of Trustees. RLB includes our 7 Heads of Division and the Chief Executive plus the Dean of Academic and Research Affairs. From 2023 it will become known as Research Committee.

Activities to monitor and improve research culture at the ICR currently fall across several frameworks and Concordats including Athena SWAN, Race Equality, Researcher Development Concordat, Technician Commitment and Research Integrity Concordat. The current challenge organisationally is that each of these has its own (at times overlapping) action plan, submission/review dates, work owners & governance structure. As a result, we are currently exploring how we could centralise or coordinate these different action plans into a single operational plan to simplify monitoring and maximise the impact of the initiatives run. This aligns with an ongoing UUK Research Initiatives and Concordats review which the ICR is feeding into via our Registrar and Director of Academic Services Dr Barbara Pittam.

4. **High level detail of the backward facing action plans**

In Jan 2021 we retained our [HR Excellence in Research Award](https://www.icr.ac.uk/about-us/our-mission/responsibility/hr-excellence-in-research) and mapped our forward facing actions to the updated Researcher Development Concordat principles. This formed the starting point for a gap analysis by the working group to select the areas to focus on.

A summary of the main activities of the group since the last award have been:

* Defining the audience for the Researcher Development Concordat work at ICR particularly those postdoc equivalent grades working in statistics and informatics who do not use the Postdoc Training Fellow (PDTF) job title (together with the audience for the Technician commitment managed by a separate working group)
* Agreeing a training definition including examples of activities which could go towards 10 days of professional development per year, how to record this & updating the Postdoc Codes of Practice (sent to all new starters) accordingly
* Adding a new section into the appraisal paperwork for all staff to encourage researchers and their line managers to reflect on the training undertaken and planned for the upcoming year – explicitly stating the 10 days.
* Including a question to measure Researcher Development Concordat awareness into the annual training needs survey sent to researchers each summer. Awareness amongst researchers was 35% for 2021 and 50% for 2022.
* For 2022 we included a new question to see whether researchers felt able to take up 10 days of professional development. >75% felt able to take up to 5 days per annum and 15% felt able to spend 10 days or more a year on it (in line with the results of the national CEDARS 2021 survey) and addressing this is an area of focus in our forward-facing (2023-2025) action plan.

There are a number of particular successes and achievements which have emerged from this work in the last two years:

**Environment and Culture**

Wellbeing (institution) - One of the areas of most notable and timely improvement was the appointment of the ICRs first wellbeing & occupational health coordinator. This role has been instrumental in bringing together existing but disparate wellbeing activities and formalising the support offered at ICR e.g., developing employee wellbeing policies, centrally managing wellbeing initiatives, coordinating these with those offered by the Employee Assistance Programme & Occupational Health as well as training and coordinating the ICRs volunteer wellbeing advisors.

Wellbeing (managers and researchers) - The results of the staff attitude survey showed that 72% of staff felt the ICR provides good guidance and support for mental health and wellbeing. Scores around openness to discuss mental health were lower (48%) so addressing this and raising these scores will be an ongoing focus for us.

**Employment**

Induction process (institution) - There has been a large effort to clarify induction process and guidance to managers at ICR. This includes mandatory training for all recruiting managers before they can be added to the online recruitment system, creation of induction checklists as well as guidance for holding 1-, 3- and 5-month review meetings with new starters to formalise the probation period.

Fixed term contracts (managers, researchers and institution) - A review of how to better manage fixed term contracts remains a priority for the Researcher Development Concordat working group and one that was not addressed in the last review period due to pandemic disruption and changes in senior leadership. Work will begin on designing guidance for managers on offering contracts for the full duration of research funding wherever possible to encourage good recruitment practice.

**Professional and Career Development**

Support for Career Development Faculty (CDF)(managers & institution) – CDF are a priority group being first time managers with funding to set up and lead their own research teams. During the pandemic they requested more frequent, quarterly, meetings to both share common challenges of starting their research teams with each other and be able to raise concerns with the Dean of Academic and Research Affairs Prof Clare Isacke (and in turn Executive Board). We were also able to offer new additional training to this group in partnership with our research institute network on topics including negotiation skills, managing conflict and managing employee relations. Despite significant constraints on their time, the more frequent sessions have resulted in several positive actions including approval for contract extensions to account for covid disruption, highlighting where HR guidance was needed for recruiting overseas staff and enhancing the guidance for those undertaking midterm tenure review process.

Support for clinical academics (researchers) - Clinicians frequently undertake a research degree during their clinical training and therefore need to return to the clinic afterwards to successfully complete it. Options to return flexibly or part time are limited which make remaining research active after completing a research degree a huge challenge & results in the loss of clinical talent in research.

The creation of a Clinical Academic Forum (researchers, institution and managers) - Aims to connect Clinical Academics at different career stages across the ICR together to support and mentor one another through common challenges of these key transition periods. The strong attendance at these quarterly meetings & the consistently high interest in the associated mentoring scheme suggests there is an appetite and interest in building the skills and knowledge needed to enable them to remain in research. CAF meeting topics have included inviting clinical academics to talk about negotiating research time in clinical contracts, getting grants and sharing their own career journeys with trainees.

5.**Strategic objectives**

In Nov 2022 the ICR launched its [new 5-year research strategy](https://www.icr.ac.uk/about-us/strategy-2022-27). One pillar of this is “Inspiring Tomorrow’s Leaders – supporting early career scientists and clinicians to become research leaders”. The are 6 specific strategic objectives under this pillar with specific activities set out across the 5-year strategy period and which are shaped by the postdoc association, the Researcher Concordat working group and monitored annually by Academic Board. The success/impact of these will be measured in 3 ways (listed for each below)

1. Ensure we provide a research culture that enables everyone to thrive - measured by attitude survey data on workplace culture measures
2. Provide our postdoctoral researchers with the knowledge, skills and support to succeed – meeting our commitments in the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers - measured by attitude survey data relating to skills and careers support and monitoring of next destinations
3. Support our postdoctoral clinical academics to make the transition to independence - measured by next destination data
4. Offer postdoctoral researchers leadership and people management support and personal development experiences, to help them obtain senior roles across the research ecosystem including in industry - measured by attitude survey data, attendance at leadership and management events and next destination surveys
5. Develop researchers from multiple disciplines, specialisms, and backgrounds, maximising our national and international reach - measured by next destination data
6. Offer postdoctoral researchers leadership and people management support and personal development experiences, to help them obtain senior roles across the research ecosystem including in industry - measured by next destination data, uptake of training programmes

Examples of specific activities which hope to meet these strategic objectives for years one and two include:

* Enhanced induction for new team leaders (launching in Nov 2023) to cover:
  + Key operational processes & core facilities
  + Research finance
  + An overview of Research Culture expectations to help embed Researcher Development Concordat awareness & good practice
* Additional places on external leadership development programmes to support early career researchers
* Continuing our quarterly Thinking Ahead programme of Alumni returning to speak about their scientific career since being at ICR to support current ECRs
* Refreshing our alumni next destination data though self-service surveys rather than manual data gathering – aiming to gather data on >50% of our alumni in this way and simultaneously growing our LinkedIn group for alumni to over 350 by 2025.