HR Excellence in Research Award – 15 year review

Institute of Cancer Research - Summary Report

1. **Institution's research context**

The Institute of Cancer Research is a College of the University of London employing approximately 1100 members of staff, of which over 700 are scientific staff. It was ranked 2nd nationally in the last REF exercise (2021).

Scientific staff are made up of Research Staff (Faculty, Career Development Faculty, Staff Scientists and Postdoctoral researchers and equivalent grades e.g. Analytical Scientist grades 3 and 4 and Principal Statisticians. There are also ~150 Research Degree students (MDRes or PhD) and together these and research staff form the audience of the Researcher Concordat action plan and HREiR audience. The remaining scientific staff comprise our Research Technical Professional staff (including Scientific Officer and Research Management grades) who are represented by our Technician Commitment Action plan. The is no undergraduate teaching at the Institute and therefore no teaching-only staff employed here. Postdoc training fellows (PDTFs) are considered training roles which, together with PhD/MDRes students, make up our Early Career Researcher population. PDTFs are subject to a workforce agreement (employed in that role for a maximum of 7 years, including postdoctoral experience elsewhere). This training focus shapes the support offered to our early career researchers, encouraging them to start planning their next career steps early, whether as independent academic researchers or as leaders within the wider scientific ecosystem. Some of our researchers are clinical academics at different stages of their clinical training – joining ICR for an Academic Clinical Fellowship, a Research Degree, a Clinical Lectureship or as a CDF/Clinician Scientist or member of Faculty. We have a joint post with our Biomedical Research Centre dedicated to supporting the continuation of this important career pipeline which is essential to our research ambitions.

Researchers belong to one of 8 research divisions, which are split across 2 sites twelve miles apart (Sutton and Chelsea). Virtual research centres also exist as to deliver cross-disciplinary elements of the ICR Research Strategy (2022-2027). The recruitment of new research teams or areas of expertise is led by a dedicated committee and aligned to the objectives of the research strategy.

Central training provision at ICR is provided at no cost to research teams. The programme is grouped into 3 pillars: academic skills, technical skills and career development, with most of the programme open to all staff. Researchers are encouraged to take responsibility for their own development and agree training their needs with their line managers, reviewing this together as part of their annual appraisal.

Since the last award cycle, we have sought to integrate different facets of 'research culture' as a central theme of all our training programmes e.g. making our case-study based Research Integrity session mandatory for all new starters, relaunching Supervisor refresher training in-person to allow time and space for peers to meet in person, reflect on their practice and share challenges to ensuring that more technical courses address how to edit images with integrity or version control and open sources for code generation. In a 2024 survey, we asked postdocs to describe the culture at the ICR: 85% of the comments were positive, describing ICR as friendly, inclusive, collaborative, with opportunities to learn and develop. Only 7% of those responding to the survey said they wouldn't recommend the ICR to prospective postdocs.

In 2024 the ICR started a significant change programme to implement a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) tool which has enabled a number of new directions for our forward action plan. The whole employee lifecycle will be joined up within a single platform which will enable: more accurate/on demand reporting, processes to be redesigned and streamlined and the creation of training pathways for researchers, making support and resources more visible to them and their managers.

2. Internal Evaluation and Gap Analysis

Since the last reporting cycle, we have taken part in REF 2029 pilot return and separate audits from our funders. These, together with the obligations of external frameworks (Research Integrity Concordat, Researcher Concordat, Technician Commitment and Athena SWAN) have helped identify and strengthen organisational gaps e.g.

1. Expanding our **Research Integrity** programme to all scientific staff (previously just for research degree students)
2. Developing a **CPD policy** mandating a minimum of 10 days of professional development per year for all staff (this previously only applied to our Researcher Concordat audience but is now expanded to all scientific and non-scientific staff)
3. **Implementing a new ERP** to integrate HR, financial and research information in a way that was not previously possible – this is the largest programme of work undertaken at ICR in over 15 years. Researchers, operations managers and members of the Concordat working group are feeding into the implementation to ensure it has functionality we need. The ERP will enable several additional benefits including:
    i. **Improving our internal reporting** capabilities (e.g. Athena SWAN and gender pay gap data, end-to-end recruitment to onboarding pipeline)
    ii. Gaining a **Learning Management System** - enabling researchers to access more on-demand support on all training topics (e.g. new managers) and easily record training taken and skills gained and improve visibility of this for line managers to prompt regular career development conversations

    Since the ERP programme started in June 2025, the project team have:

    i. Reviewed all existing HR policies and processes (2024)
    ii. Developed a bank of SCORM training ready for launch
    iii. Migrated existing training records to the new system to automate refreshers on key topics such as supervisor training and research integrity

4. **Forming a single ICR Equality steering group** - Several committees with overlapping briefs are now being integrated into a single Equality Committee who will monitor a single action plan to help us more strategic and effectively deliver on the key actions. A clear reporting line from the Equality Committee into Management Committee has also been agreed, raising the profile of its activities. The committee will have reps from across our staff associations and faculty ensuring a strong researcher voice.

5. **Appointing a Postdoc Dean -** The CEO and Board of Trustees, wanted to formalise support for postdocs at ICR and appointed Prof Pascal Meier as Postdoc Dean in Sept

2025. Academic Board continue to have academic oversight of the whole early career researcher pipeline from PhD to postdoc. Postdoc Dean is now working closely with the Postdoc Association to understand the key needs for this group at has secured an annual budget to help deliver their aims: to formalise and better communicate the support offered at ICR to prospective postdocs and to offer additional career development and networking opportunities for existing postdocs via links with partner institutions.

6. **External networks and information sharing -** The ICR is part of a national network of research institutes and funders (lead by the Francis Crick Institute) who meet quarterly to collaborate, share ideas and practice. Members of the Concordat working group also regularly attend external events to inform our activities e.g. by UK Reproducibility network, UK Research Integrity Office and funder-led sessions e.g. "Driving Research Excellence though supporting postdoctoral talent workshop" (UKRI) and the "Mid-Career Leadership Symposium" (Wellcome).

3. Governance Structures for Delivering the Researcher Development Concordat

The Researcher Development Concordat working group comprises the Postdoc Association chair, a senior HR manger, Wellbeing lead, Learning and Development and Research Support (grants and research integrity).

In the last cycle, the working group performed a gap analysis of the Concordat obligations to agree priorities with a focus on encouraging 10 days of professional development. As outlined above, a number of wider organisational changes have taken place since 2024, providing momentum and wider scope for what we can include in our forward action, which will be monitored by this group.

The Annual Researcher Concordat report is drafted by the working group and presented by the HR Director at the Joint Research Strategy Board November meeting. This ensures that the work highlighted and the priorities chosen link to other quality assurance or recognition frameworks. Recent initiatives include re-establishing in person recruitment training delivered by the Head of Talent Acquisition (Athena SWAN action plan) and is a requirement for posting new vacancies on the recruitment portal.

Since 2024, the annual report goes from Research Strategy Board to ICR Board of Trustees for final sign off. At the request of the Board, the item includes a presentation by the Postdoc Association co-chairs and the Postdoc Dean. This reporting structure has raised awareness of the Researcher Concordat amongst leadership and has resulted in beneficial outcomes for researchers themselves including Board of Trustees offering contacts to speak at the Postdoc Careers Conference as well as the creation of the Postdoc Dean role.

4. Progress since the last review (2022-2025 action plan)

Environment and Culture

- Appointment of a **Postdoc Dean** whose responsibilities will include:
    - building links with partner institutions to offer ICR postdocs more development and networking opportunities

- o Structuring and communicating the ICR's postdoc training offer for postdocs and their managers as well as to prospective postdoc applicants via our external webpages
  - o Presenting these plans to all faculty at the annual faculty retreat
- Launching the **Wellbeing Working Group** who will co-develop a single wellbeing action plan and report directly into the ICR's Health and Safety committee
- **Relaunch of Women in Science series** in collaboration the Business and Innovation directorate – a programme of invited speakers and professional development sessions for 2025-2026 using the existing networks of the BIO team
- ICR s**taff associations continuing to co-design an annual programme of events** e.g. Ensuring speakers and topics in the programmes represent the wider population and their interests
- **Postdoc Association** invited to **present annually at Board of Trustees** in addition to Academic Board and the CEO forum. This is clear messaging that the organisation wants to hear from Early Career Researchers and as such the associations have an annual budget to support training and travel.
- Mandated **Research Integrity training for all new scientific staff**, sessions are co-delivered by member of faculty meaning that examples of good practice can be embedded and course is continually reviewed and enhanced

Recruitment

- Completion of the **in-person recruitment training** is now mandatory to be added as a hiring manager on the e-recruitment system – training is designed and delivered by Head of Talent - 120 hiring managers have now completed this training since it was introduced last year
- Formation of an **Integrated Academic Training Committee** with dedicated support from the Clinical Career Development Manager. The committee monitor the clinical talent pipeline and coordinate bids to fund the required training posts. The Clinical Career Development Manager has enabled a number of improvements to the recruitment and onboarding of new clinical researchers including: inducting them as a cohort, meeting each trainee 1:1, providing them with a mentor and linking them into the ICR's existing Clinical Academic Forum to facilitate connections with other clinical academic across the ICR

Professional and Career Development

- **More than 2/3 of postdocs are taking up 10 days of professional development** per year – this was captured as part of the annual appraisal submission. The new ERP Learn module will offer more insights as to the types of training undertaken.
- The 10 days postdoc training model has informed **a new ICR wide CPD policy,** which will make the 10 days professional development available to all staff
- **Renewed the supervisor training programme** – the course is now centred around 3 bespoke case studies touching on key themes encountered by the Academic Dean's Team. Once 90 supervisors had attended the in-person events, we ran an additional version online, also using reflective practice and case studies. This helped us to reach clinical supervisors with additional clinical commitments who could not attend in

person. Feedback for the course has been excellent: One of the clinicians fed back: "*I just wanted to thank the team for creating these online refreshers. It allowed me to fit into clinic schedules without too much pain.*" Another commented: "Supervisor refresher training one of my favourite events across the ICR-RMH".

5. Forward looking priorities (2026-2029)

The new 3-year action plan is informed by priorities emerging from the 2025 Athena SWAN Silver renewal and the ERP implementation programme (due for launch Sept 2026). Consultation and testing by researchers and research operations managers aims to ensure that the tools will support rather than create additional workload for researchers.

To create meaningful improvements for researchers and the research culture at the ICR, Professional Services will to continue to work closely and collaboratively e.g.

- L&OD and Research Operations co-delivering fellowships training to keep adviceup to date and prepare researchers for independent academic positions
- L&OD and Registry continuing to work with the Dean's Team to develop realistic and relevant case studies to include in the supervisor refresher training
- HR business partners joining with our CDF forum to offer support and guidance around team set up and people management challenges
- Working with partner institutions to share course places to increase the training offer and be able to achieve minimum viable numbers for senior leader training

Alignment with organisational objectives:

Environment and Culture Actions (1-3) – Introducing a wellbeing working group with a direct channel into formal committee structure will provide an organisational-wide focus to prioritise and monitor wellbeing activities though existing tools and existing and new data sources (e.g. Report and Support and Engagement Survey data and new ERP)

Employment Actions (4-6) – Ensuring maximum benefit from the recent investment in an ERP e.g. having simple mechanisms to ensure all managers are equipped and supported to recruit well, with standardised reporting capacity to track progress on our organisational wide priorities like our gender pay gap

Professional and Career Development Actions (7-9) – A brand new programme of activity guided by the newly appointed Postdoc Dean to offer prospective and existing postdocs a clear view of the structured support available and new opportunities to expand professional networks to encourage research independence.