UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2029

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Athena Swan Ireland
Silver Award
EQUALITY CHARTER

Introduction

Launched by the European Commission, HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) supports the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code for the Recruitment of Researchers. In 2011, University of Limerick (UL) formally endorsed the principles of the charter and code[1]. University of Limerick has successfully participated in the HRS4R process, first awarded it in 2013, successfully completed the interim assessment in 2015, awarded in 2022. This strategy and action plan is for the period 2026-2029.

In reviewing progress against our previous action plan, UL is proud to reflect on significant expansion of its supports for researchers including but not limited to the establishment of our Doctoral College, investment in a Research Information System (Pure), expansion of supports across Post-Award, HR, Research IT, investment in a staff intranet system, UL Connect. Key areas will continue to be a focus within our organisational strategy, including but not limited to talent and career development, equality diversity and inclusivity, wellbeing, sustainability, open science and mobility. We take great pride in being part of the HRS4R process and we are committed in every way to growing as a sustainable and socially engaged University.

University of Limerick

University of Limerick is a research-led, energetic and enterprising institution with a proud record of innovation and excellence in education and scholarships. We value creativity, curiosity and excellence in our inclusive community which is committed to social good. Our motto Eagna chun Gnímh translates as Wisdom for Action reflecting our mission to contribute to the discovery of new knowledge for a better

Research is not just central to UL's identity; it is the engine driving our future. UL has enormous research potential and over the coming years, we will be channelling our full energy into advancing UL as a truly research-intensive institution. We see this as a pivotal moment in our evolution. We are resolved to grow our existing strengths, forge new interdisciplinary pathways, and invest in emerging areas of inquiry that respond to the world's most pressing challenges. UL already boasts an enviable record of innovation and excellence. Our researchers are tackling global issues, from clean energy and ethical AI to public health, education, and social inclusion. Their approach to their disciplines is defined by creativity, rigour and impact. Our vibrant research community spans all faculties and disciplines, supported by world-class institutes such as the Bernal Institute and the Health Research Institute, and a network of national centres including SSPC, Lero, and EPI•STEM. The University's Wisdom for Action Research Strategy (2022-2027) sets out a bold vision: "to build a vibrant community where research excellence is valued, supported, and central to all facets of the organisation."

Legislation and National Developments

The Irish Universities Association (IUA) have endorsed the European Charter and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and in 2006 the Universities heads signed up to the charter as part of the co-operation accord.

In 2021, the Irish Universities Association published the Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework[2] and University of Limerick had made great strides in its implementation. UL has established a comprehensive career supports framework aligned with the European Charter and Code, delivering structured, coherent supports for researchers across all stages of their career journey. This framework is embedded within robust governance structures, guided by the University Research Committee and the HRS4R Working Group, ensuring active monitoring and continuous enhancement.

Recruitment and Onboarding at UL

UL's recruitment processes adhere to Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) principles. Recruitment policies are regularly updated, supported by mandatory interviewer skills and unconscious bias training. The transition to a digital recruitment workflow has significantly improved efficiency, transparency and sustainability, enabling the timely processing of research competitions, fellowships and mobility-related authorisations.

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[1] Irish University Association (2006) Endorsement https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cc-declarations/ie_ul.pdf

[2] Irish Universities Association (2021) Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework https://www.iua.ie/for-researchers/researcher-career-framework/

Support for Mobility

UL provides strong institutional support for researcher mobility, recognising its importance for career development, internationalisation and alignment with European Research Area (ERA) objectives. HR Research provides end-to-end assistance with hosting agreements and work authorisations. UL's dedicated Secondment Policy and Procedure provide clear criteria and processes for facilitating secondments supporting researcher mobility.

UL's implementation of the IUA Framework further supports mobility by encouraging the development of transferable skills and preparing researchers for varied career pathways. The PD1/PD2 classification acknowledges the transitional nature of postdoctoral roles and promotes mobility across sectors and countries. The Researcher Development Programme includes training in career planning, leadership, stakeholder engagement and collaboration beyond academia. Systems-level supports—such as Elsevier Pure—enhance researcher visibility and discoverability. Together, these measures reflect UL's commitment to international, and intersectoral mobility.

Onboarding, Induction and Integration

New researchers receive tailored research induction covering research governance, systems and supports, complemented by insights from former postdoctoral researchers now in PI roles. The relaunched Researcher Journey portal provides centralised guidance across the research lifecycle.

Research Contract Management and Career Structure

UL has integrated the IUA Framework into employment practices for all new postdoctoral hires. Researchers receive an entitlement to 5 days of continued professional development (CPD) annually. The Researcher Contract Management Policy ensures employment contract durations reflect the longest feasible period, enhancing stability.

Career Development and Skills Enhancement

The Researcher Development Programme aligns with the EU ResearchComp framework and offers structured training across key competency areas. Training Needs Analyses inform programme design, and specialised initiatives such as *Navigate: Researchers Beyond Academia*, *Aspiring Research Leaders* and the *UL Advance Mentoring Scheme* support researcher development. Completion of core elements is recognised through a digital badge, enhancing visibility and employability.

Recognition and Research Culture

Researcher visibility is enhanced through the UL's President's Research Excellence and Impact Awards which recognise contributions across all career stages and align with DORA and CoARA principles, supporting a responsible, inclusive and sustainable research culture.

Equality Diversity & Inclusion

In 2023, UL became the first institution in Ireland to receive a prestigious Athena Swan Silver Award The Kemmy Business School (KBS) at UL also received a Silver Faculty Athena Swan Award in 2023, the first business school in Ireland to do so, marking ongoing efforts in achieving equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Our commitments under ED&I are built into our HEA performance agreement 2024-2028 UL Performance Agreement 2024–2028. By 2029, UL aims to be the first institution within the Irish HE sector to have achieved a Gold Institution Athena Swan award, together with several Silver Faculty and Department awards as well as four Professional Directorate awards

University of Limerick's Egalitarian University mission champions equal opportunities, rights, and representation across all levels, actively addressing barriers in admissions, academia, and governance. With a commitment to celebrating diversity and ensuring all members flourish irrespective of their backgrounds, rooted in the values of social justice, inclusivity, agency, respect and empowerment, the university adheres to the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty through consistent assessment, action, and reporting.

As the first recipient of a Silver Institution Athena Swan award in 2023, UL is recognised as a national leader in striving to achieve gender equality and has a number of action plans and initiatives in place to make progress in this regard (i.e. Athena Swan Action Plan (2022–2026); Race Equality Action Plan

(2023–2026); Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027; Gender Action Plan (2024–2027); Consent Framework Action Plan (2020–2024). The Athena Swan/EDI (AS/EDI) Culture Survey 2022, together with later surveys and evidence point to the need to address dignity and respect training which is reflected within our HRS4R Action Plan.

UL as a University of Sanctuary

UL continues to commit to its University of Sanctuary designation which focuses on encouraging, promoting and enabling refugees and asylum seekers to access third-level education through various activities and scholarship programmes. This commitment it outlined in our HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028.

Strategy and Action Plan - Governance and Process

University Research Committee (URC) acts as the steering committee for HRS4R adoption and implementation. URC is chaired by the Vice President Research and Innovation and its members include senior research leaders across the organisation and researchers from different career stages. Membership consists of the Provost, Directors of Research Institutes, Associate Vice President Doctoral College, Deans of the Faculties, Director of Research, Director of Technology Transfer, Director of Glucksman Library, a representative of the Postgraduate Students Union, representatives of Early Career and Mid-Career Researchers, Research Finance, Research Strategy and Policy, Legal, Research Governance. Chairs of related sub-committees and working groups are members of the committee. URC reports to the University Executive Committee.

A working group was established to undertake the renewal of the HRS4R award, this group included representation across disciplines and career stages. Membership as follows:

HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)– Working Group

- HR Business Partner, (Co-Chair of Working Group), Caroline Lynn
- Research, Strategy & Policy Manager (Co-Chair of Working Group), Christine Brennan
- Assistant Dean Research Education & Health Sciences, Prof Ann MacPhail
- Assistant Dean Research Science & Engineering, Prof Ronan Courtney
- Assistant Dean Research Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences and Chair of UL's Research Assessment Reform Implementation Committee, Prof Christina Morin
- Assistant Dean Research Kemmy Business School, Prof Michael Morley
- EU and External Funding Programmes Manager, Sharone O'Loughlin
- Postdoctoral Researcher and representative of YES (Young Engineers and Scientists) Bernal, Bernal Institute, Dr Shubham Vishnoi
- Assistant Director, REPPP Programme, School of Law, Helen Fitzgerald
- HR Research, Executive Administrator, Charlotte Long
- Project Manager, Doctoral College, Dr Gerard Downes
- Transformative Pedagogy Lead, Centre for Transformative Learning, Dr Michael Wride
- Head of Learning and Development, Human Resources, Alison O'Regan
- Senior Talent Development Specialist, Human Resource, Marguerite Leen
- Data Analyst - Athena Swan/EDI Projects Officer, Michael O'Brien

Methodology/Steps taken

1. **Self-assessment**. The working group undertook an internal gap analysis, examining the actions and key performance indicators of the previous HRS4R action plan which informed our internal review.
2. **World Café Style Focus Groups**. Two focus group sessions were held with a view to gaining qualitative insights from researchers and PhD students. Representatives of the HRS4R working group took part to host/facilitate discussions. The feedback gains has informed the HRS4R Action Plan.
3. **Consultation**. The University Research Committee were consulted as part of the self-assessment and action plan development.
4. **Informed by organisational reviews.** During the period a number of quality reviews have been undertaken which inform our action plan.
    - Thematic Quality Review of Professional Supports for Research March 2023
    - Research Ethics Quality Review May 2024

Researcher representation and networks

Researchers are represented in several fora including HRS4R Working Group, University Research Committee, Postgraduate Students Union, Doctoral College and through engaging with the Assistant Deans Research for each faculty. The Assistant Deans Research represent their stakeholders at university meetings including Academic Council.

The University Governing Authority includes elected representatives from Professors/Associate Professors, Academic Staff & Teaching Staff, Research Staff together with the President of the Postgraduate Students Union and undergraduate student representation from UL Student Life.

In addition, the university incorporates researcher representation across various committees and working groups including but not limited to Athena Swan and its associated Engaging Researchers Sub-Committee, Sustainability Committee, University Research Committee, Talent and Career Development Sub-Committee, and the University Research Ethics Governance Committee (ULREG).

Informal networks have been established across the organisation, including Young Engineers and Scientists (YES) Bernal (a network of early career researchers within the Bernal Institute), UL Emerge (a peer support network for early and mid- career academics) In addition, HRED&I have established the Apex Network to support networking, engagement and relationship building opportunities for all UL staff.

HR Excellence in Research Key Recommendations and Action Plan 2026-2029

Significant progress has been made to support and enhance the researcher experience at the University of Limerick.

The key recommendations arising from conducting our internal gap analysis and ongoing interaction with the researcher community are outlined below under the four main headings; (i) Ethical and Professional Aspects; (ii) Recruitment; (iii) Working Conditions & Social Security; (iv) Training. We have also reflected the priorities of sustainability, open science, mobility and wellbeing across our action plan.

UL remains dedicated to continuous improvement through the HRS4R process and looks forward to implementing the 2026–2029 Action Plan in alignment with its strategic vision

HRS4R Action Plan 2026-2029

No	Dimension	Action Item	Key performance indicators	Responsible Unit	Timeline
1.1	**Ethical and Professional Aspects**	Champion good research practice	Review of Research Integrity Policy completed to incorporate advice on the use of AI	OVPRI	Q1 2026
			Monitoring of research integrity training completion rates	OVPRI	Q2 2026
			Review and enhancement of Research Ethics training	OVPRI/ULREG	Q2 2026
			Implementation of the recommendations of the 2024 ethics quality review	OVPRI	Q4 2027
			Raising awareness of issues relating to good research practice.	OVPRI	Q1 2026
			Academic Integrity Unit established with supports, policies and advice available to all staff	Provost	Q1 2026
1.2	**Ethical and Professional Aspects**	Champion Open Science and reform of research assessment	Open Science data monitored and KPI's set within UL's HEA Compact (UL % of publications Open Access is ahead of national average, 76% in 2024.	Provost/Glucksman Library	Q4 Annual
			Implementation of systems development with deployment of new research repository	Glucksman Library/OVPRI	Q2 2026
			Publication and Implementation of UL'S CoARA Action Plan	Reform of Research Assessment Committee	Q4 2027
			Open Science post within UL Glucksman Library approved	Executive Committee	Q4 2026
			Responsible use of metrics statement published	Reform of Research Assessment Committee	Q3 2026

1.3	**Ethical and Professional Aspects**	Establish systems to generate efficiencies across areas supporting research	Investment in research ethics system secured	OVPRI	Q2 2026
			Procurement and implementation of research ethics system	OVPRI	Q4 2026
			Roll out of additional Pure Research Information System functionality	OVPRI	Q2 2026
			Development of a business case for High Performance Computing for UL	OVPRI / ITD	Q1 2026
			Roll-out of UL Learning Management System and ongoing monitoring of number of training courses available via the LMS and rates of completion	HR	Q1 2026
			Explore best practice in the use of AI to support organisational efficiency.	HR/OVPRI/ITD	Q4 Annual
1.4	**Ethical and Professional Aspects**	Champion the sustainability agenda across the research ecosystem	Extension of number and level of UL labs accredited for My Green Labs (Research Ireland supported Sustainable Lab Certification initiative)	Faculty of Science and Engineering, Bernal Institute, B&E	Annual
			Sustainability for researchers outreach initiatives held annually during Science Week; engage researchers in delivering outreach activities	Technical Officer / Faculty of Science & Engineering	Annual
			Implementation of the Optimising Power @ Work energy behaviour change campaign (Office of Public Works supported campaign) in UL, including research labs	Buildings & Estates	Annual
1.5	**Ethical and Professional Aspects**	Enable international collaboration, interdisciplinarity and enhance the visibility of our research community	Continued development of UL's Research Week	OVPRI	Annual
			Ongoing development of UL's research centres and institutes	OVPRI	Annual
			Progression of the Emerge - European University Alliance coordinated by UL	VP Global	2029
			Continued membership and engagement with YERUN	UL Global	Annual
			Continue to avail of opportunities for staff and PhD students for mobility via Erasmus funding. Seek to increase % of research staff availing of Erasmus mobility opportunities from approx. 10% to 30%.	UL Global	Annual

2.1	**Recruitment**	Review recruitment process and policy to ensure they reflect best practice including OTMR.	Review of recruitment processes and policies in line with UL Policy Framework and Quality Management Systems	HR	Q4 2026
			Embed the use of narrative CVs into research recruitment and selection processes, aligning with evolving EU frameworks for researcher assessment	HR	Q3 2026
2.2	**Recruitment**	Communicate and raise awareness of the range of supports available to incoming staff	Increase engagement with UL Connect	Marketing, Communications and Public Affairs	Ongoing
			Monitor completion rate of Research Induction Programme	HR	Annual
			Continued development of New Starter Support Site	HR	Q3 2026
			HR Research to attend HR Clinics across campus, to support onsite research communications and support	HR	Ongoing
2.3	**Recruitment**	Enhance supports and provide up-to-date advice regarding researcher mobility	Monitor trends in researcher mobility queries and volume of hosting agreements and work authorisations issued included in HRS4R Annual Reporting.	HR	Annual
2.4	**Recruitment**	Implementation of the IUA Researcher Career Framework	Document UL's internal process for progression for researchers from PD1 to PD2 in accordance with the IUA Researcher Career Framework.	HR	Q2 2026
3.1	**Working conditions and social security**	Champion diversity, equality and inclusion principles for our research community.	Athena Swan Accreditation retained. Number of Academic Units with Athena Swan Ireland Awards monitored as per HEA Compact (currently 1 Institutional Silver, 4 Department Silver, 2 Faculty Silver, 10 Department Bronze)	Human Rights, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion / HR	2029
			RESPECTFUL UL Campaign implemented	Human Rights, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion / HR	Q2 2026
			Dignity and respect training completion rates for all staff tracked for the organisation (via HEA Compact, currently at 70% for 24/25)	HR	Annual

			Staff Disability Committee Established	HRED&I	Q1 2026
			Continue to develop and implement new policies which support aspects of working conditions relating to ED&I Policies	HRED&I/HR	Q4 Annual
			Continue to support UL's University of Sanctuary programme	Provost	Annual
			Support UL's Scholars at Risk initiative	VP Global	Annual
			Continue to support initiatives arising from UL's Ethnic Diversity Forum	HRED&I	Annual
			Implementation of UL's Race Equality Action Plan	HRED&I	Q4 2027
3.2	**Working conditions and social security**	Continue to support the provision of career enhancement opportunities for researchers	Monitor the completion rates of Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Higher Education Programmes (PGCert/Dip)	Centre for Transformative Learning	Annual
			Monitor completion of pilot of TRUST-SET Survey (Time to Reflect and Understand Students)	Centre for Transformative Learning	Annual
			Establish a UL Doctorate Supervisory Network	Doctoral College	Q2 2026
3.3	**Working conditions and social security**	Continue to invest in and sign-post staff to health and wellbeing supports for our community	Development of policies to support staff health and wellbeing (including but not limited to menopause, surrogacy, blended working)	HR	Annual
			Continued rollout of mental health supports across campus	HR	Annual
			Continued rollout of Healthy Campus programme	HR	Q4 2027
			Monitoring via staff satisfaction survey	HR	Annual
			Raise awareness of Employee Support Service (confidential counselling service)	HR	Annual
			Doctoral College to raise awareness of student counselling supports to PhD Cohort	Doctoral College	Q4 Annual
3.4	**Working conditions and social security**	Continue to support and seek opportunities for cross sectoral and	Number of commercialisation, entrepreneurship training and engagement events available to UL researchers	OVPRI	Annual
			Roll-out of the UL Innovation Awards	OVPRI	Annual

		industry collaboration	Number of Licences, Options and Assignments delivered by UL (as monitored via KTI and HEA Compact)	OVPRI	Annual report
			Continue to support funding applications for industry placement and secondments	OVPRI	Q4 annual
4.1	**Training**	Continue to invest in high quality training for our research community	Review and publish updated Researcher Development Programme training suite	HR	Q3 Annual
			Roll-out of Doctoral College training for PhD supervisors (digital badge available) and PhD Students, which includes weekly webinars on research skills, a winter school and summer school on generic and transferable skills, and year-round workshops on quantitative and qualitative research methods.	Doctoral College	Q4 Annual
4.2	**Training**	Examine barriers to engagement with the Researcher Development Programme.	Obtain and analyse feedback from training surveys and Performance & Development Review training needs data and establish barriers to engagement	HR	Q4 Annual
			Monitor and report on PDR completion rates across the organisation	HR	Q4 Annual
4.3	**Training**	Develop a communications plan to raise awareness of the range of training supports for all Researchers (Staff & PhD) and increase uptake.	Examine engagement levels with Researcher Development Programme annually	HR	Q1 Annual
			Prepare quarterly communication plan to raise awareness of Researcher Development Programme training	HR	Quarterly
			Continued growth of weekly PhD Pulse podcast on Spotify led by Doctoral College in which UL PhD candidates discuss their research with Doctoral College staff	Doctoral College	Q4 Annual
4.4	**Training**	Raise awareness of career planning training available as part of the Researcher Development Programme.	Monitor career planning training completion rates	HR	Q1 Annual
4.5	**Training**	Increase the accessibility of training sessions	Review the delivery mechanism of each training course across the Researcher Development Programme to ensure it is delivered in a	HR	Q1 Annual training report

		by utilising different formats and online scalability.	suitable mode, and that there is a mix of online and in-person training options available		
4.6	**Training**	Continue to champion the importance of quality supervision, leadership and mentoring across the community	Raise awareness and profile of; Staff Mentoring programmes, Management and Leadership Training programmes	HR	Q4 Annual
			Implementation of enhanced PDRS format and system	HR	Q3 Annual
4.7	**Training**	Link and scale existing formal mentoring programmes to provide a clear communication of the supports available.	Communication to all staff of supports available	HR	Q2 2026-Q4 2029
4.8	**Training**	Promote awareness of the multiple career options available to researchers at all stages.	Provision of the Aspiring Research Leaders programme	HR	Annually (Navigate Q2, ARL Q4)
			Provision of Navigate: Researchers Beyond Academia programme. Both of these programmes support researchers to progress in academic research roles and those who wish to consider career pathways outside of academia	HR/HRED&I	Q2
4.9	**Training**	Support individual career planning through workshops	Make available Career Strategy for Researchers workshops	HR	Q1/Q2, Q4 Annual
			Ensure career planning and strategy for research careers is built into Induction for Researcher events	HR	Quarterly
			Tailored induction for postdocs rolled out	HR	Q2 2026