

2020

UCC Research Survey Report

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University College Cork



2020

■ ■ UCC Researcher Survey Report ■ ■

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, University College Cork ('UCC') gained the *HR Excellence in Research Award* in recognition of the University's on-going commitment to adopting the principles of The European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. ***In 2018 UCC became the first University on the Island of Ireland to renew the award.*** The aim of the Charter and Code for Researchers is to ensure that the nature of the relationship between researchers and employers is conducive to successful research performance and to the career development of researchers.

As we strive to continuously improve the working conditions for our research staff the European Commission has also recognised the importance of training and development for researchers and has included **Article 32** in all Horizon 2020 grant agreements. It is hoped that **Article 32** will feature in the Horizon Europe grant agreements also. Article 32 relates to the working conditions, recruitment processes and career development of research staff paid from EC funded H2020 awards and is tied into the Charter and Code for researchers and the HR Excellence in Research Award which UCC has attained.

This is an evolving process that enables HR to place the principles of the European Charter and Code at the core of its policies for research staff. It's a voluntary process that UCC has committed to wholeheartedly. It is not a requirement for participation in EU funded programmes but when you consider that every UCC Principal Investigator signs up to its principles when an EC grant is awarded then you can understand how important this award is to UCC and how seriously the European Commission considers it.

These surveys form part of UCC's strategy within the HR Excellence in Research. The results of the Researcher Surveys are outlined in this report. It is notable that there are significant improvements in results of the internal researcher survey of 2020 compared to the results of the 2016 survey which [can be found here](#).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Researcher survey report provides an analysis and evaluation of current and former research staff in UCC under the four headings prescribed by the European Commission: Ethical and Professional, Recruitment, Working Conditions, and Training and Development. The surveys were conducted in late 2019 and early 2020. Methods of analysis, types of questions asked, and results are described in detail within the report below.

Overarching Results

The data analysed shows a widespread up-swing in results since the 2016 Researcher survey. In general, research staff in UCC are enthusiastic and motivated about their research work. They feel part of a team and are appreciated for their contribution to that team. They take part in professional training and development programmes and are encouraged to do so. They believe that UCC practices open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment and are aware of the necessity for, and their responsibility towards, the University Code of Research Conduct. Importantly, areas for improvement (gaps) have also been identified. These gaps will inform actions within the 2021 -2024 HRS4R Action plan.



BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The University College Cork Researcher Survey 2020 and “Where are you now?” 2019 survey are a measure of UCC’s commitment to our research staff and to the European Commission HR Excellence in Research Award. The provision of favourable terms and conditions of employment for researchers and open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment are of considerable importance to UCC. Also, training and development opportunities and upholding the principles of research integrity are of great significance to the university.

Survey Content

The surveys engaged with research staff within and external to the University. The questions requested information on researcher’s views and attitudes across a number of topics relating to the research environment here in UCC namely: research culture; ethics; their role; their research group; facilities for research; engagement; training and development; and recruitment. Gender equality is addressed in [UCC’s Athena Swan programme](#).

Identifying Areas for Action

One of the main objectives of these surveys is to provide data to help inform the HR Excellence in Research process in UCC where change or further development is required.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The internal survey was launched on March 3rd, 2020 and closed on 31st May 2020. During that period UCC employed 1014 research staff.

The “Where are you now?” external survey was launched in November 2019 and closed on 28th February 2020. 117 people responded to the survey.

At analysis stage the data from both surveys was reviewed to ensure that it was representative of the known profile of the employees surveyed. As a result, 5 responses were removed from the internal survey as the respondents were not in the catchment profile. Both surveys were multimodal and were accessible through PC/Laptop and Mobile/Tablet.

The internal survey was conducted on-line and consisted of 35 questions, which included demographic, open ended, rating scale, and dichotomous questions. The survey gathered information on the four key areas identified by the European Commission within the Charter and Code for Researchers as being of direct relevance to research staff:

- i. Ethical and Professional Aspects
- ii. Recruitment
- iii. Terms and Conditions of employment
- iv. Training and Development of research staff.

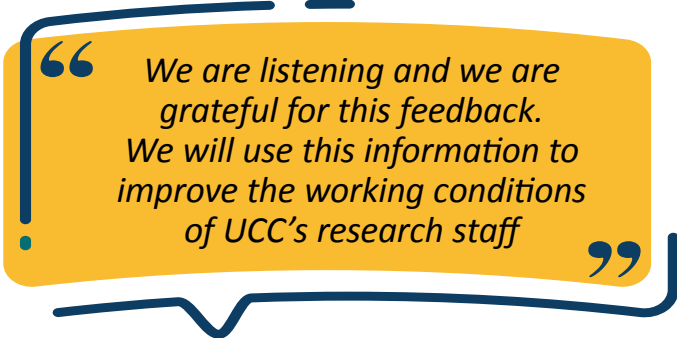
The external survey was conducted on-line and consisted of 35 questions, which included demographic, open ended, rating scale, and dichotomous questions. The survey gathered information on where our researchers are now and how their careers have evolved since they left UCC. This survey will inform UCC’s HRS4R action plan to improve the working experiences of our current research staff.

Response Rate

There were 175 responses to the internal survey, which equates to a response rate of 17.5%. Due to disruption caused by COVID 19 UCC’s response rate is less than anticipated however we believe this represents a good sample.

There were 117 responses to the external survey. This also represents a good sample.

For the purposes of this survey, and to clarify inclusion, a researcher/research support professional is someone who has been recruited by UCC and is paid from research funding.



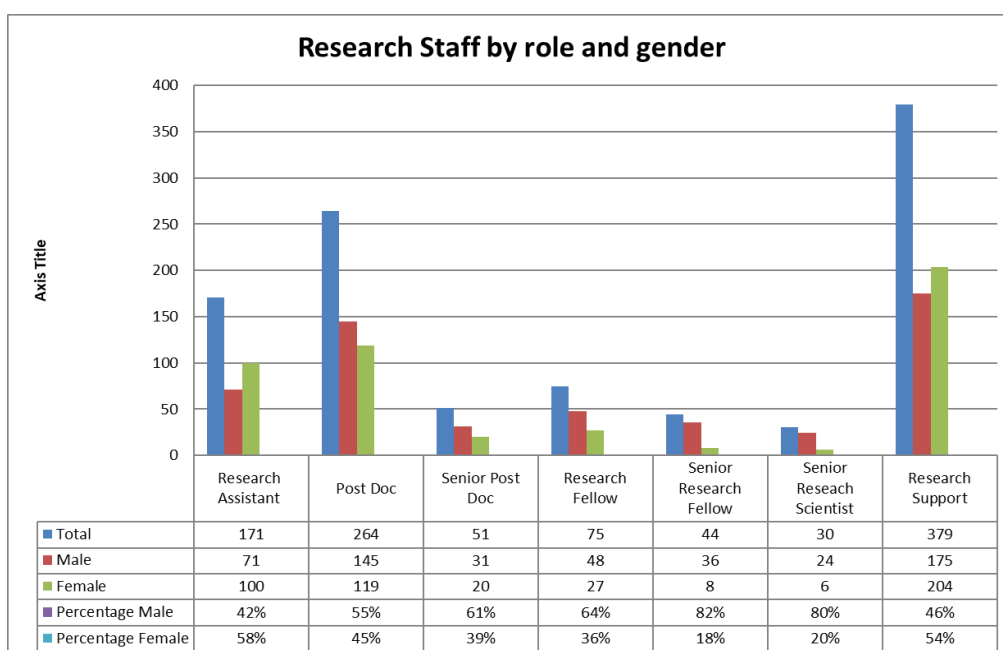
“ We are listening and we are grateful for this feedback. We will use this information to improve the working conditions of UCC’s research staff ”

DEMOGRAPHIC APRIL 2020

Research staff numbers total 1014 - All Researcher Numbers All Colleges and Units

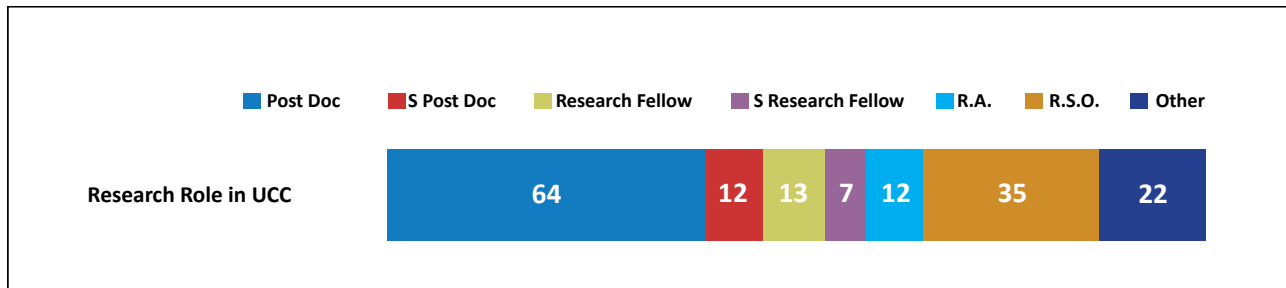
All Researchers by Category - All Colleges and Units

- The College of Medicine and Health has the highest number of research staff
- Research staff gender balance in UCC is 48% Female and 52% Male

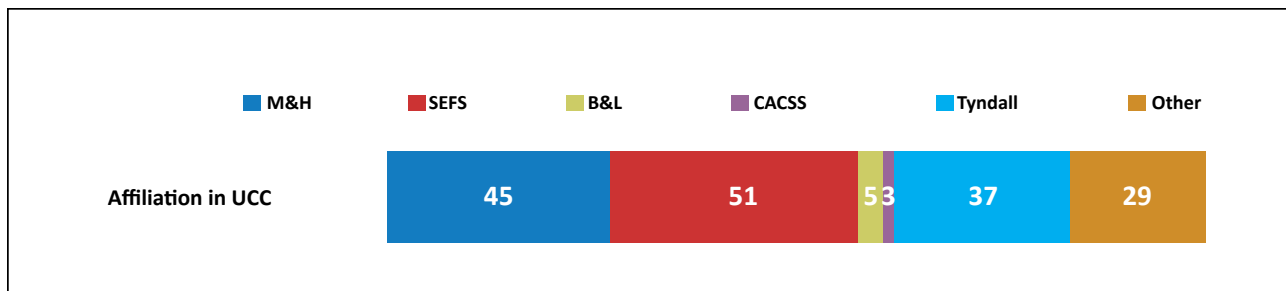


INTERNAL SURVEY

Demographic of those who participated (170)

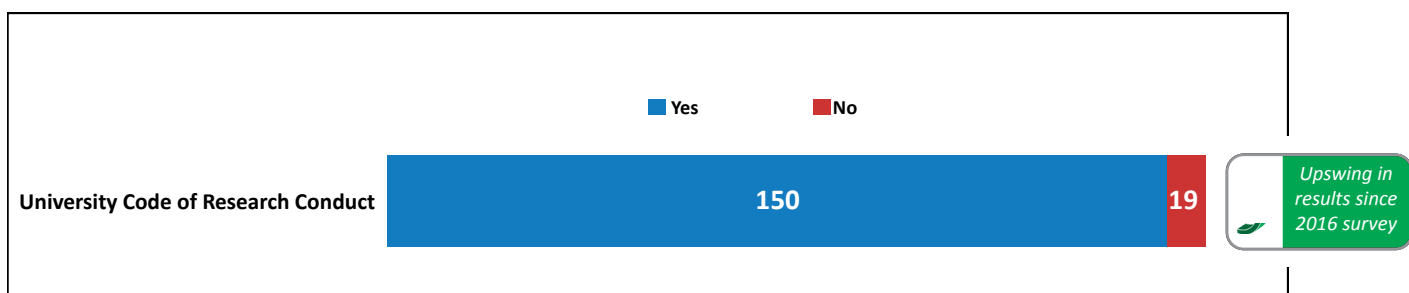


- More post docs contributed to the survey than any other research staff category.



- More researchers from SEFs contributed to the survey than from any other College/Research Centre.

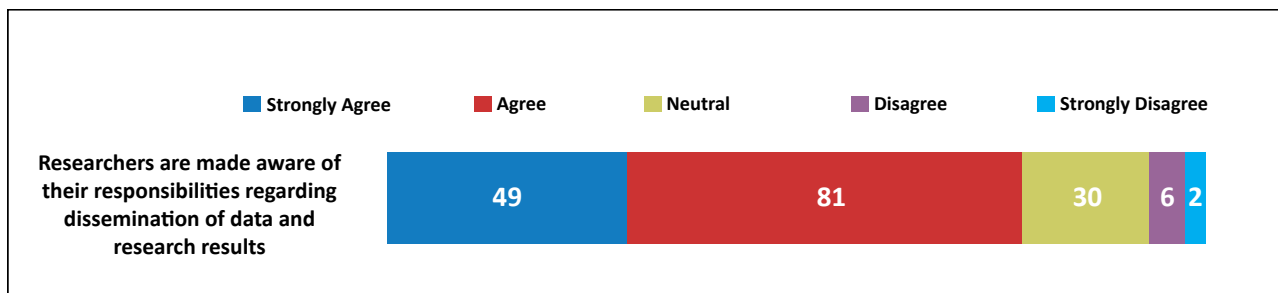
ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS



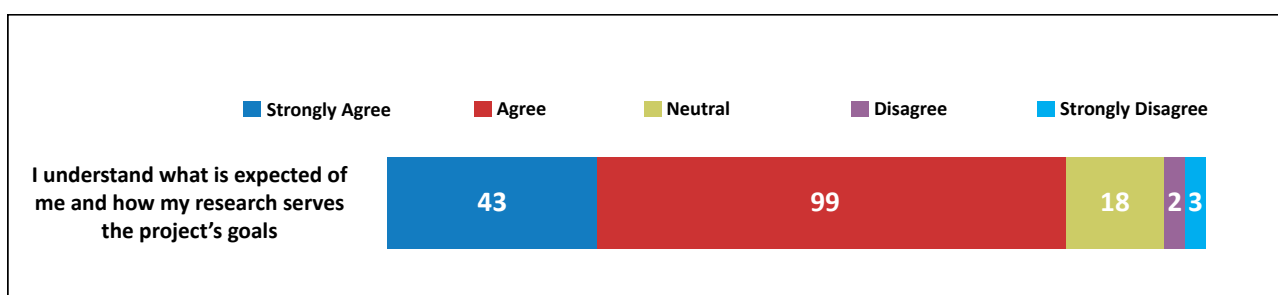
- Vast majority of researchers are aware of the University Code of Research Conduct.

2020

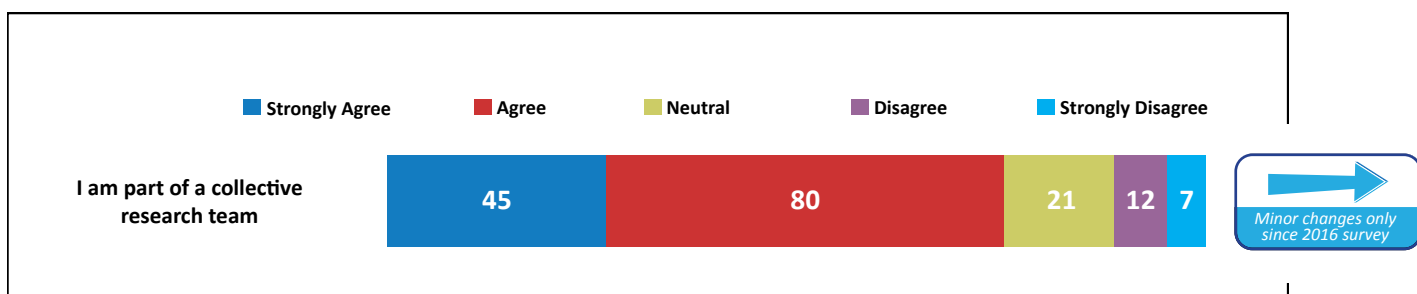
UCC Researcher Survey Report



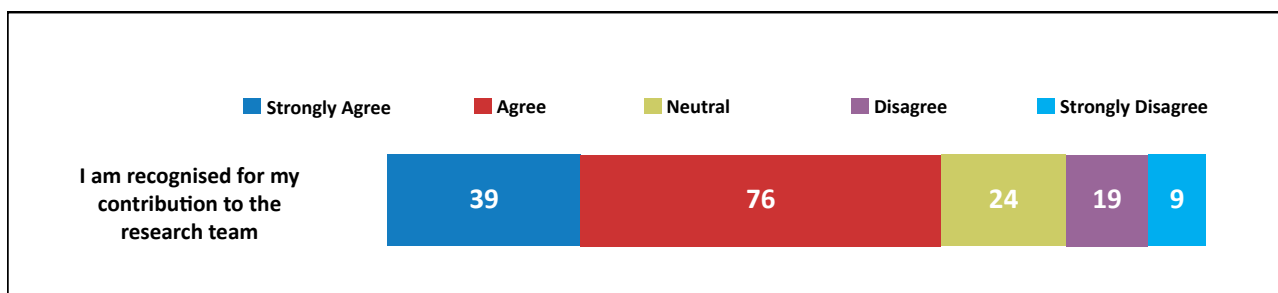
- Most researchers agree that UCC ensures researchers are made aware of their responsibilities regarding dissemination of data and research results.



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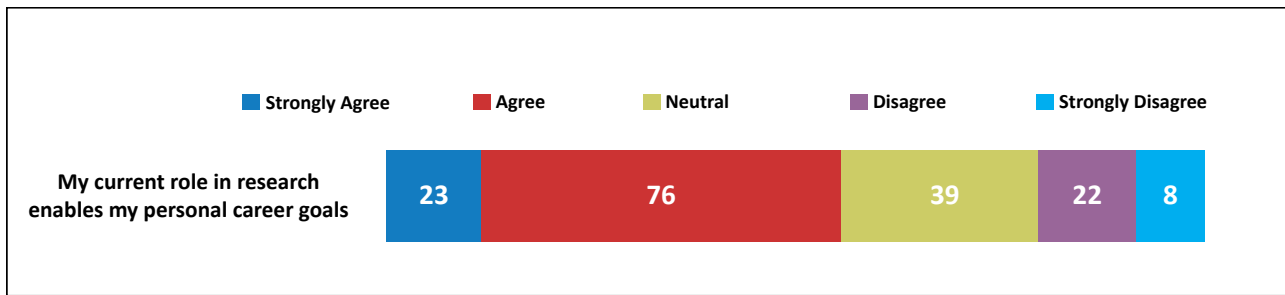
- Most researchers agree that they are part of a collaborative research team that shares a common goal and works well together.



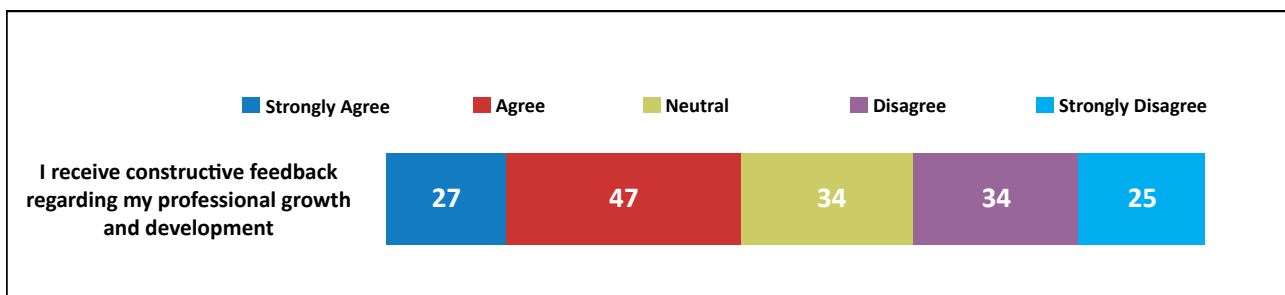
- Most researchers feel recognised for their contribution to the team.

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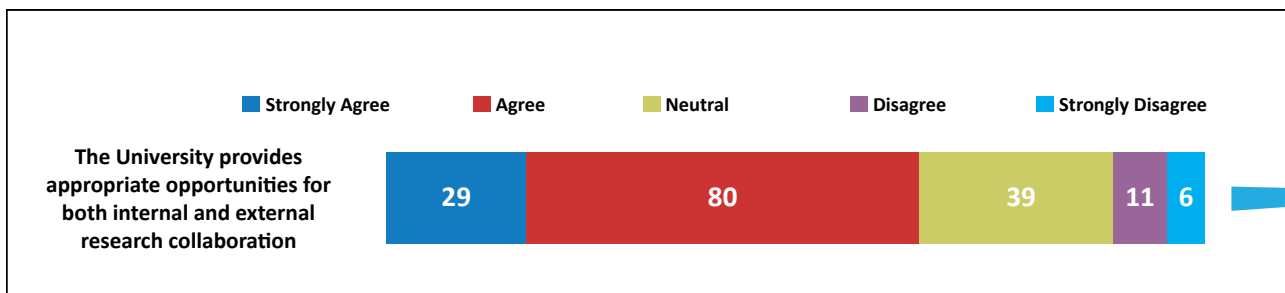
UCC Researcher Survey Report



- Most researchers agree that their role enables their personal career goals



- There is a very mixed response regarding whether researchers receive constructive feedback on professional growth and development



- Most researchers agree that the university provides opportunities for collaboration

QUOTES FROM THE SURVEY

“

“I would like to say that thus far, I have hugely enjoyed working at UCC. In particular, I have found, even with the COVID lock down, the team I am working at in UCC to be excellent, and the admin support I have received to be great. Thank you very much for this.”

”

“

“I enjoyed my time at UCC, and I found the intake and support of researchers to be excellent.”

”

“

“UCC is an internationally reckoned university. UCC has an awesome team and good global ranking. The facilities for the project staff and the work environment are great. The HR department is very efficient. They have family friendly policies too.”

“

“Good conditions, opportunity to learn transferable skills”

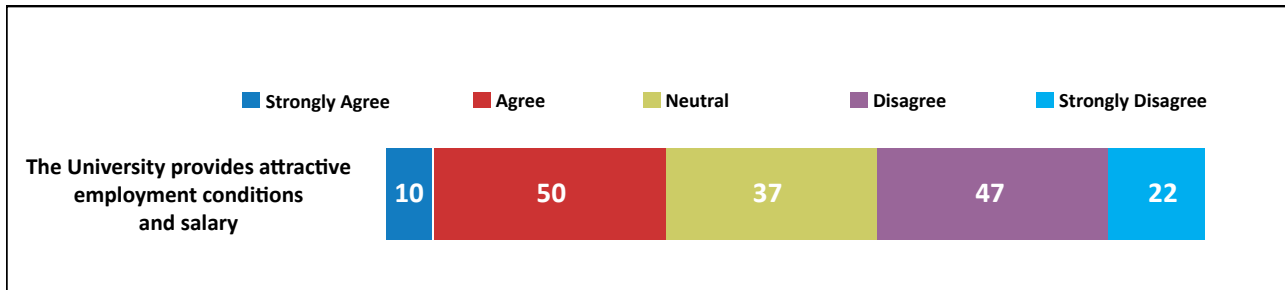
“

“Having already moved multiple times for post-doc work, it would be massively beneficial to have the option to stay in one place. It would be nice to see UCC try to keep post-docs on long term and show a level of loyalty to those on short term contracts - especially since many people may have uprooted their lives to come work here believe more effort should be taken to inform researchers (especially newcomers) of all the facilities, equipment, funding options (e.g. for equipment purchases, conferences etc.), and support options (e.g., for grant-writing, publications, dissemination), in one document/ induction. As this is my first post doc position, I have no other institute to compare UCC to personally, and I tend to assume that I have to do most things myself, rather than assuming there is support available.”

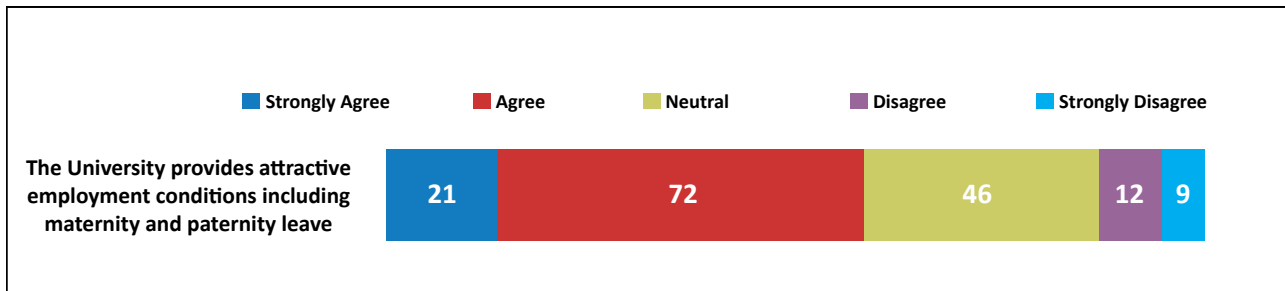
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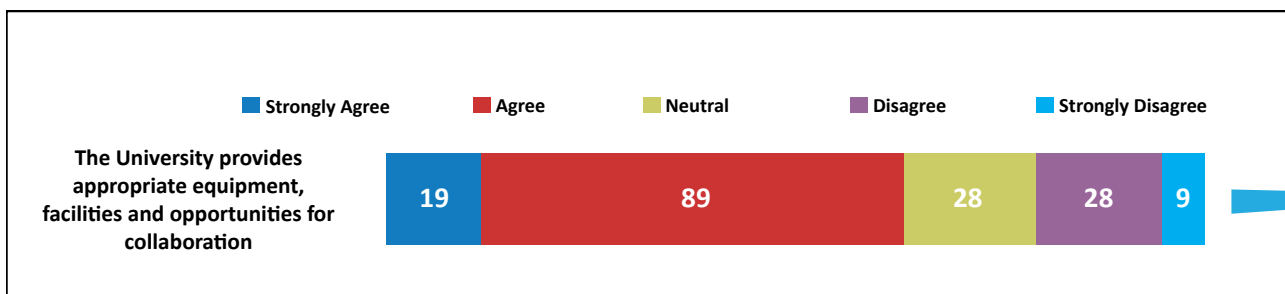
TERMS AND CONDITIONS



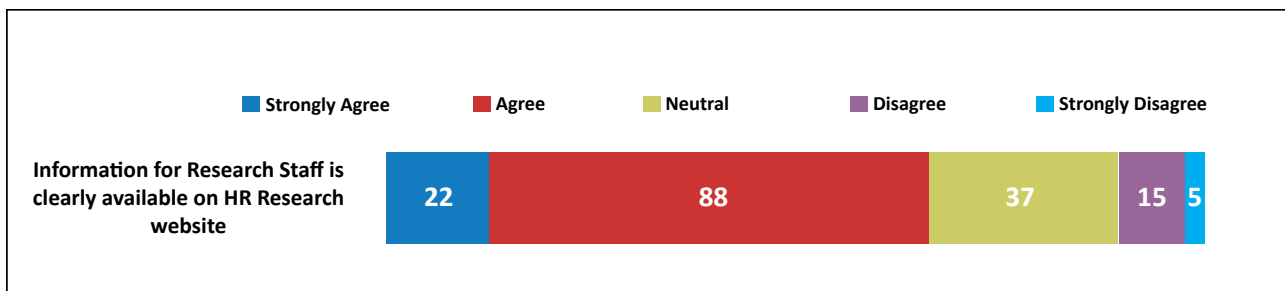
- There is a mixed response regarding attractive employment conditions including salary and pension.



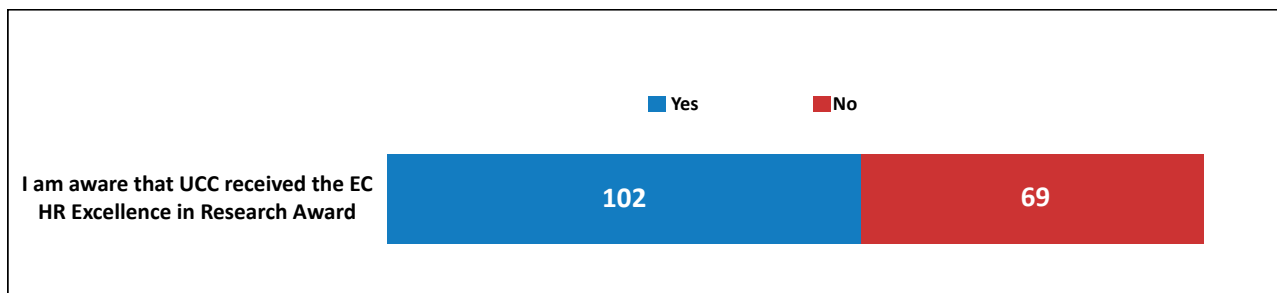
- Most researchers agree that the University offers attractive maternity and other benefits.



- Majority of researchers agree that the University offers appropriate facilities.

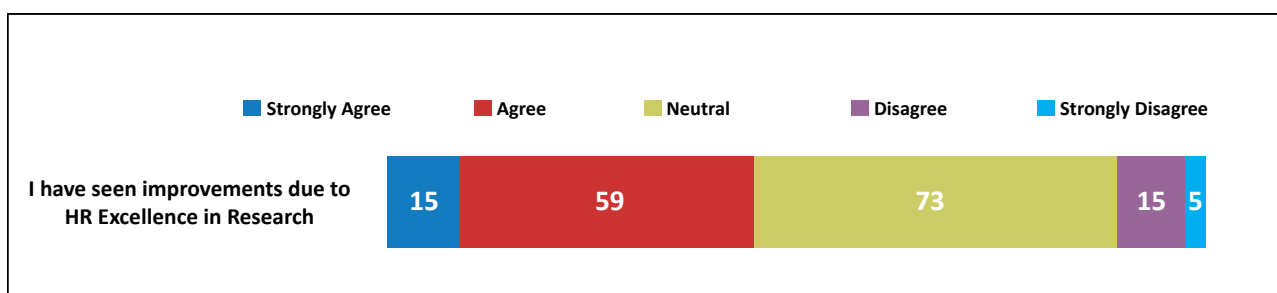


- Majority of researchers agree that the information on the HR Research Website is clear.

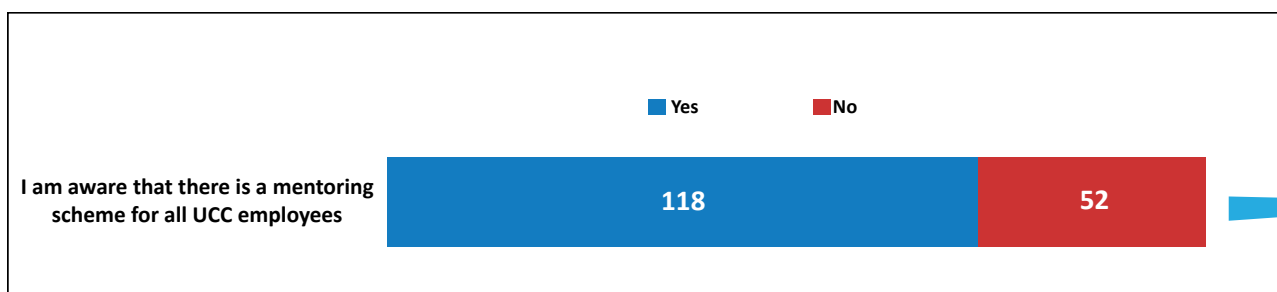


- Most researchers are aware that UCC has received the HR Excellence in Research Award.

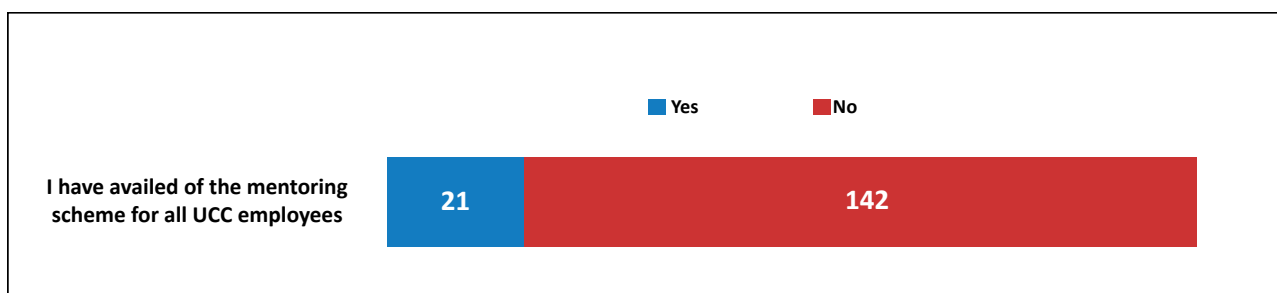
First time this question was asked in yes/no format.



- Most researchers are neutral to improvements from HR Excellence in Research (e.g. induction, training, HR conference etc.).



- Most researchers are aware that UCC has a mentoring scheme for all staff.



- Most researchers have not availed of the mentoring scheme for all staff.

First time this question was asked.

QUOTES FROM THE SURVEY

“Schools/Departments/Colleges need to ensure that research staff are represented on committees etc, as per the President’s communication on this.”

“I liked the freedom of research and possibility to explore interesting topics.”

“I strongly believe that researchers should be afforded more job security instead of simply going from contract to contract for one/ two/ three years. We build up a huge amount of expertise and knowledge and we know that our P.I’s and colleagues need research assistance so I believe that researchers should be offered longer term and secure contracts, not just post-doc etc. roles.”

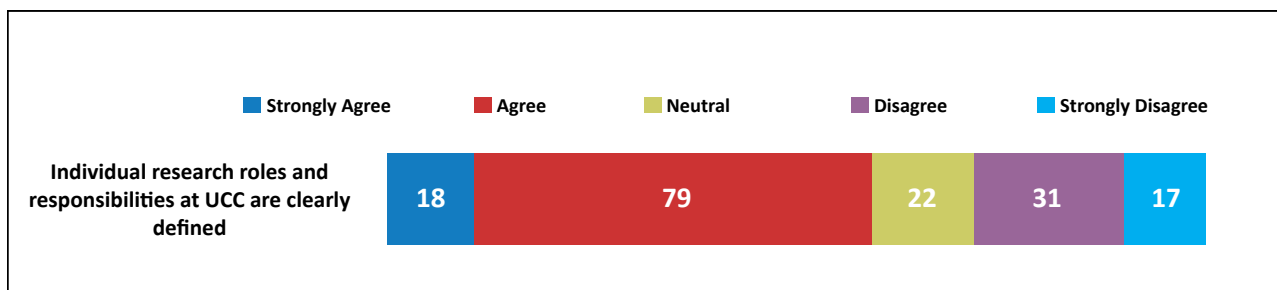
“Good training opportunities and good HR support.”



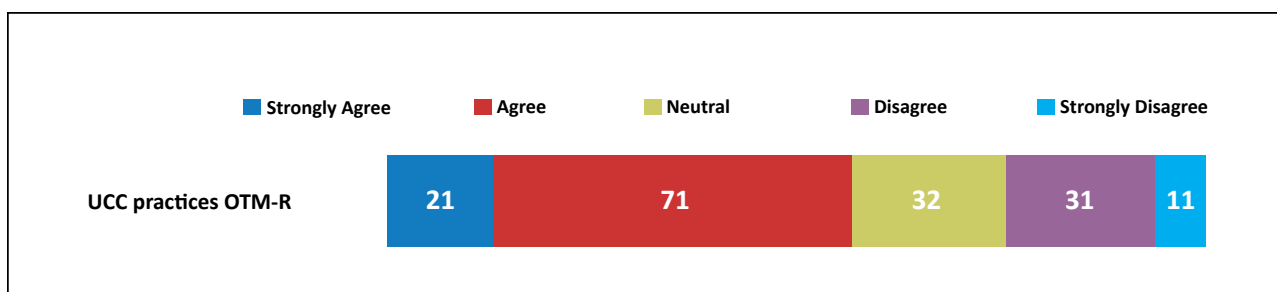
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RECRUITMENT / OTMR

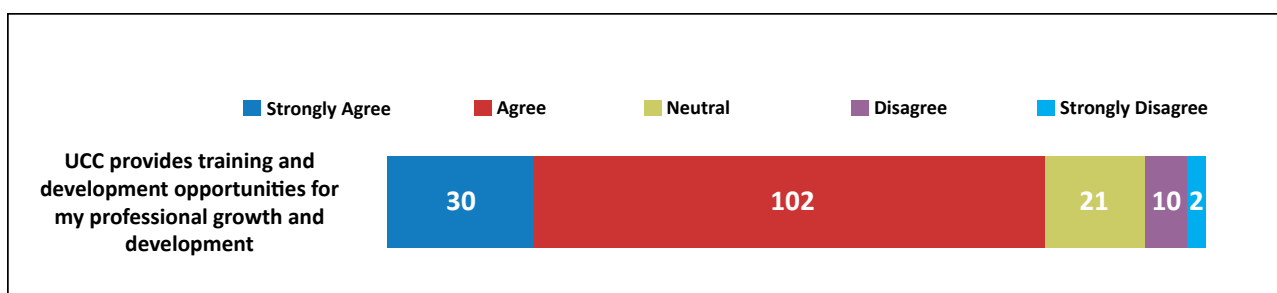


- Most researchers agree that individual roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

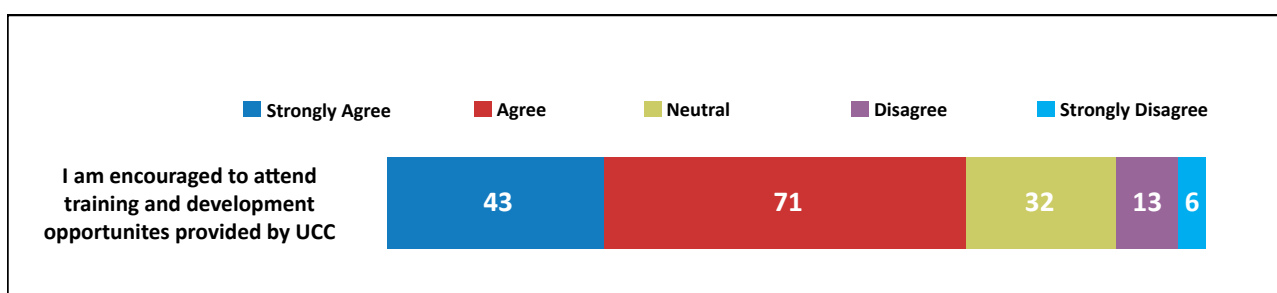


- Most researchers agree that UCC practices Open Transparent and Merit based Recruitment.

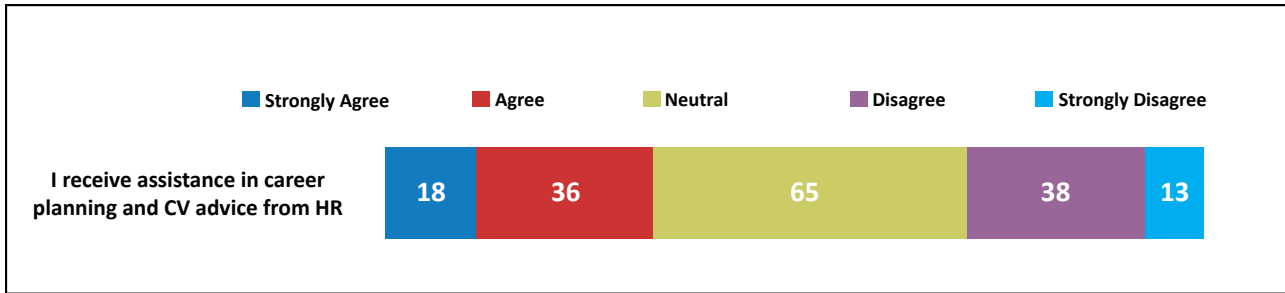
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR RESEARCH STAFF



- Majority of researchers agree that training and development opportunities are provided

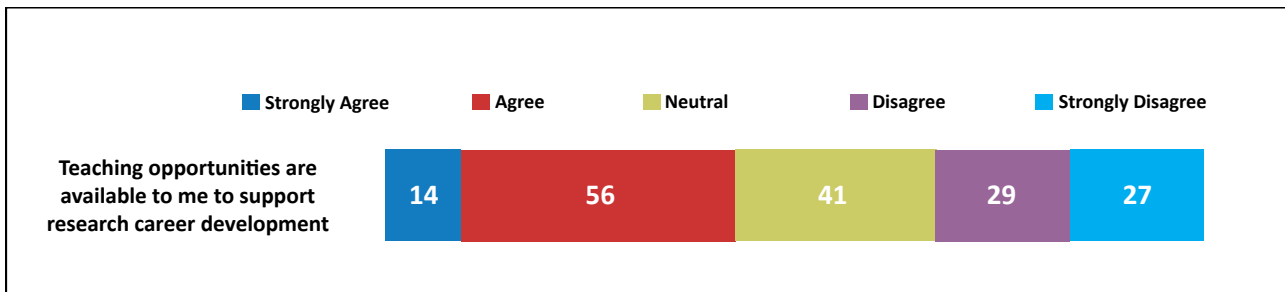


- Most researchers agree that they are encouraged to attend training provided by UCC.

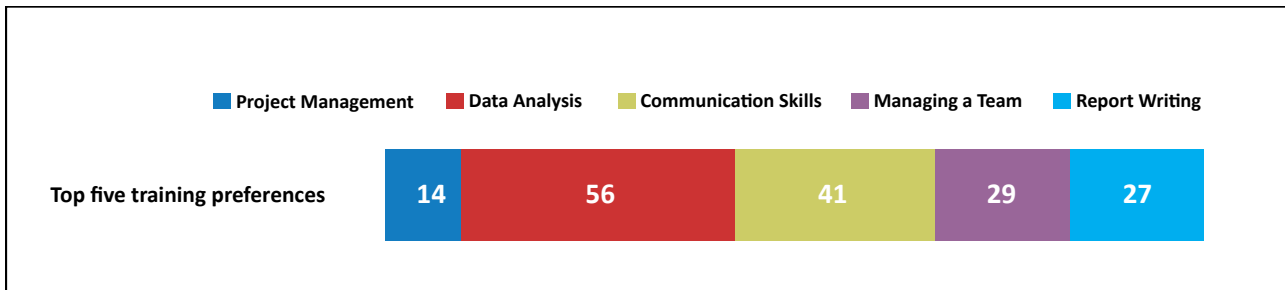


- There is a neutral response regarding CV and career planning.

First time this question was asked.



- There is a mixed response to this question regarding teaching opportunities.



- Researchers indicated they want more training in the above.

QUOTES FROM THE SURVEY

“Great Environment and facilities. Outstanding career opportunities. Friendly work Environment fostering collaborations. Great Network. Wide range of Career development and Training opportunities at UCC.”

“All looks good. Thanks for caring.”

“Funding insecurity has placed the post-doctoral researcher in a very vulnerable, stressful and very unpredictable place – UCC supports undergraduates and new faculty staff well. However, this does not apply to post-doc, all my colleagues have had the same experience unless they are funded by Marie Curie, etc...where external bodies require feedback. I hope this can be improved in the future.”

“Generally, the training and development opportunities are offered during the day on the main campus, this can be very difficult to avail of when you are working on projects. It might be good to explore if more of there could be offered online over a certain (fixed) period of time.”



GENDER OF THOSE SURVEYED

Those Surveyed	
Male	80
Female	89
Non-Binary	1

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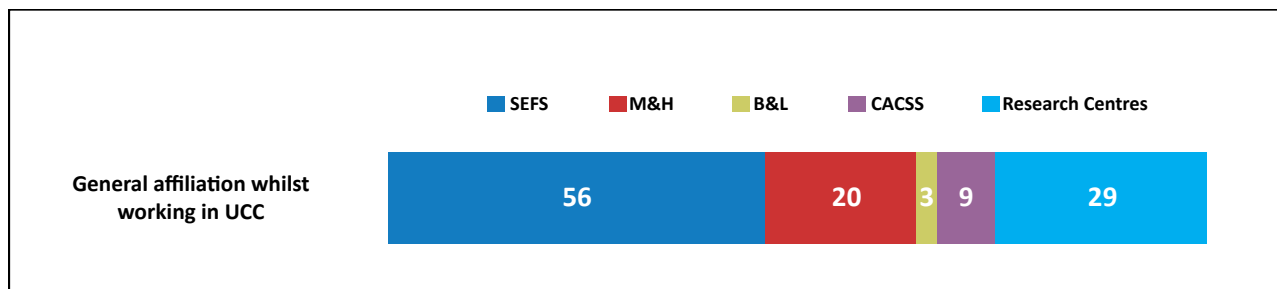
RESEARCHER SURVEY: WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Responses from all over the globe

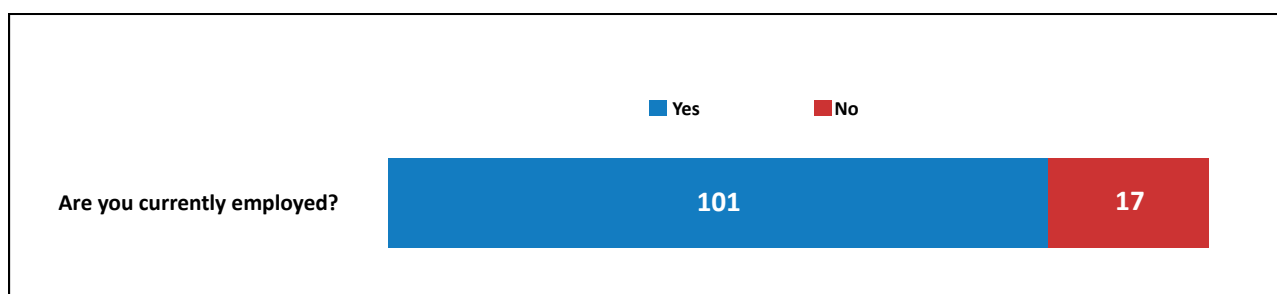


Irish UK French German Spanish Italian Iranian Chinese
Australian American Polish Swiss and many more....

DEMOGRAPHICS - 117 ANSWERED SURVEY

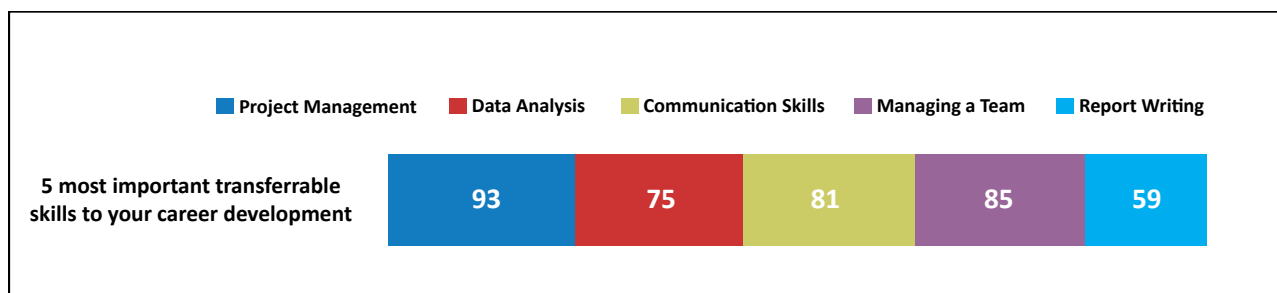


- Most worked in SEFS whilst employed by UCC.

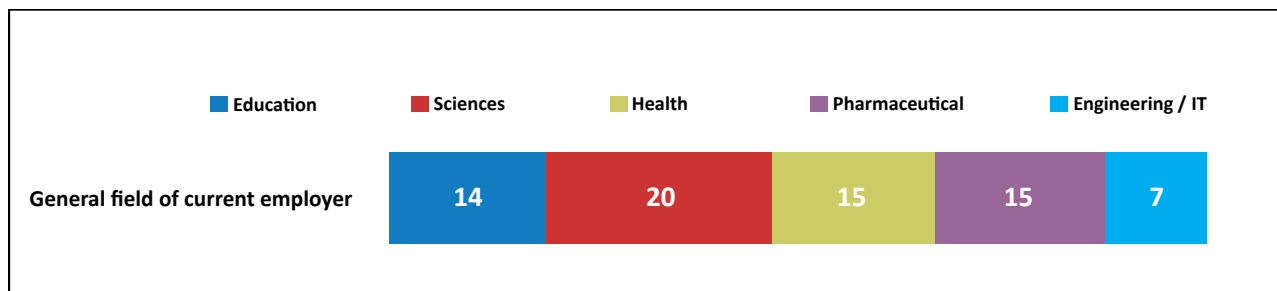


- 87% are employed.

GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS



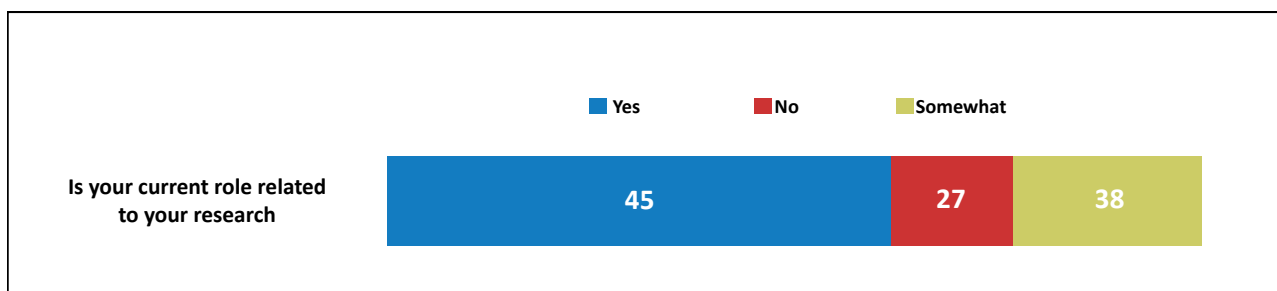
- The 5 most important transferable skills that you consider of importance to your career development.



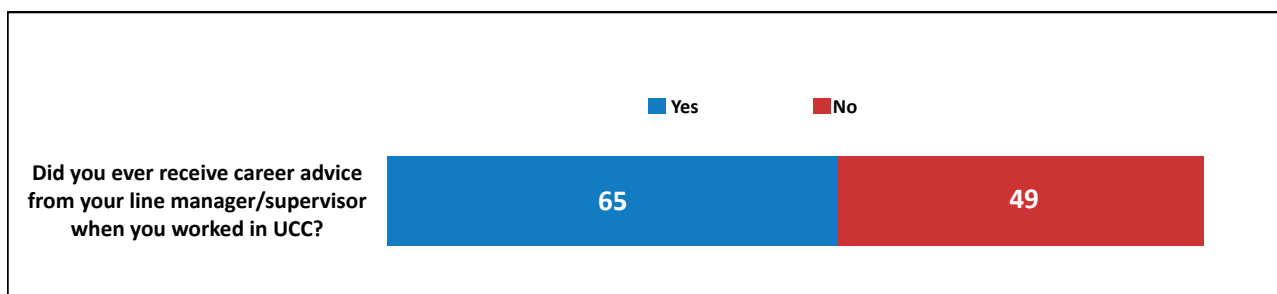
- The Sciences, Pharmaceutical and Health are the most common employment destinations for researcher respondents.

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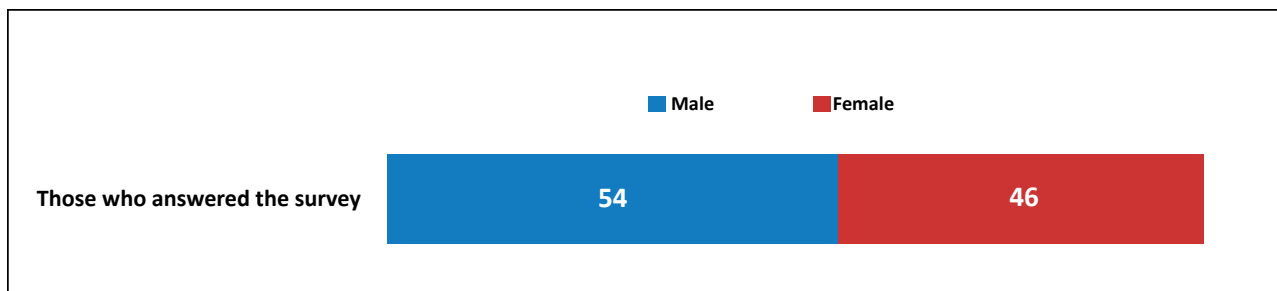


- Most are still working in positions where their research experience is relevant/useful.

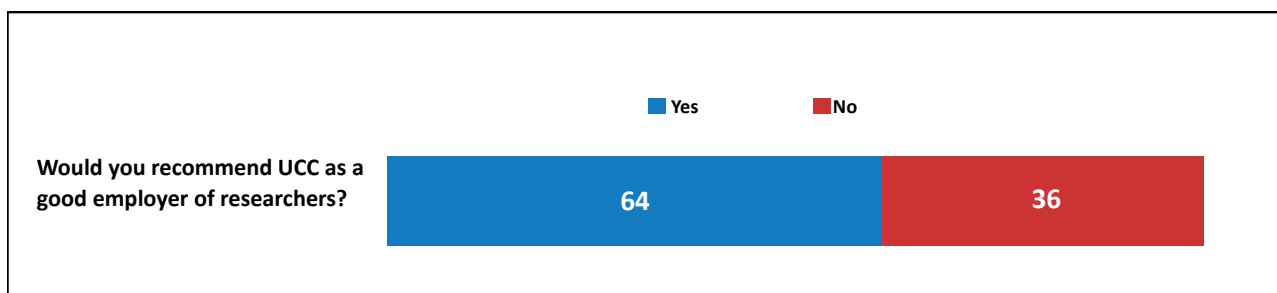


- Most of those who answered the survey say they did receive career advice however a significant number said no.

First time this question was asked.



- Male 54% Female 46%



- This metric has decreased since 2016 where the result was 73%.

SUMMARY OF POSITIVE FINDINGS

Positive Findings

- There is an upswing in positive results compared to the 2016 researcher survey
- Researchers in UCC are enthusiastic and motivated about their research work
- They feel that they are part of a team and are appreciated for their contribution to that team
- They appreciate the facilities available to them and the opportunities for research collaboration
- They partake in training and development opportunities provided to them and are encouraged to do so
- They mostly believe that their current role enables their personal career goals
- They believe that the University offers attractive employment conditions e.g. maternity leave
- HR information is clearly and easily available to them
- Most researchers know that UCC has gained the HR Excellence in Research Award
- Individual research roles are clearly defined
- UCC practices open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment
- Most researchers are aware of the University Code of Research Conduct and of their responsibilities in that regard



RECOMMENDED AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

- Most senior research roles are occupied by males – actions in the Athena Swan Action plan aim to address this. A further action is currently being prepared to address this in the HRS4R 2021 – 2024 action plan.
- Further embed HR Excellence in Research Award in policy and culture of the university. Actions will be prepared to address this in the 2021 – 2024 action plan.
- Target further training to those areas as indicated by past and present research staff.
- Even though individual CV clinics are available to all research staff many either do not know about it or the advice provided should be enhanced. Actions will be prepared to address this in the 2021 – 2024 action plan.
- Even though there is a high level of awareness of the UCC mentoring scheme many research staff do not avail of mentoring. Actions will be prepared to address this in the 2021 – 2024 action plan.
- A high proportion of researchers said that they did not receive career advice. Actions will be prepared to address this in the 2021 – 2024 action plan. In these actions we will endeavour to identify if researchers wish this feedback to come from PI's or other career advisors.
- There is a mixed response to the availability of teaching opportunities for research staff. Action/policy is being progressed to address this in the 2021 – 2024 action plan.
- There is a mixed response to the questions regarding salary and pension which are prescribed to Irish Third Level by Government.
- The result from the “would you recommend UCC as a good employer of researchers” question decreased from 73% in 2016 to 64% in 2020. UCC will address this in the overarching report to the European Commission as part of the submission for UCC's second award renewal.

THANKS TO THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED

1. Research Staff who completed the survey both inside and outside of UCC
2. Mr Barry O'Brien, Director of Human Resources
3. Professor Anita Maguire, Vice President for Research, and Innovation
4. Paul Ryan, Deputy Director, HR
5. Dr Anne Gannon, HR Manager
6. Helen O'Donoghue, HR Manager
7. Mary Ward, HR Manager
8. Niamh Healy, HR Manager
9. Maeve Doyle, HR Manager
10. Kieran Creedon, HR Manager
11. Laura McSweeney, Research Contract Management
12. Niamh Buckley, Research Contract Management
13. Kasia Wloch, Research Contract Management
14. Tracy Eagles, HR Central Services Manager
15. Dr Ruth Ramsay, Dean of Graduate Studies, UCC and School of BEEs UCC
16. Dr Helena Buffery, Department of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Studies UCC
17. Dr Elizabeth Kiely, School of Applied Social Studies
18. Dr Paidi O'Reilly, Research Fellow in the SFI funded INFANT Research Centre in UCC
19. Professor Chris Lynch, Restorative Dentistry UCC
20. Dr Maria Buckley, Chair of the UCC Research Staff Association, Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics
21. Professor Anthony McDonnell, Cork University Business School (CUBS)
22. Dr Pauline Scanlan, School of Microbiology, UCC
23. Professor Brian Ó Gallachóir, Energy Engineering UCC and Director of SFI MaREI Research Centre
24. Dr David O'Connell, UCC Research Support Services, Office of Vice President Research, and Innovation
25. Ms Colette Ormonde, Department of Human Resources, Tyndall National Institute
26. Dr Michael Nolan, Research Group Leader Tyndall National Institute
27. Dr Rosarii Griffin, UCC Research Staff Association Committee
28. Dr Mark Jessopp, School of BEES College of SEFS, and UCC Research Staff Association Committee



UCC

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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh