



University of Crete
Strategy for Researchers
Report of the HRS4R Survey 2022



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

University of Crete Strategy for Researchers

Introduction

The University of Crete (UoC) was the first Greek University to sign [the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#) (Senate 271/ 17.12.2009). In 2012 UoC also became the first Greek HEI to join the group of European institutions entitled to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo in recognition of our commitment to implementing the Charter and Code principles through the 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers' ([HRS4R](#)) process.

The University has recently re-affirmed its endorsement of the Charter and Code principles and our continued commitment to the [HRS4R process at UoC](#). To this end, an *ad hoc* HRS4R Review Committee was established by decision of the Rector's Council (288/02/06/2021) with the remit to evaluate progress made in implementing the University's existing HRS4R Action Plan and to update it accordingly, with particular reference to the University's Strategic Plan (2018-25). The Committee's report was duly released on 18.03.2022 with recommendations for ongoing and new actions ([pdf](#)).

To complement the committee's recommendations, and to provide a reality check on progress made to date in implementing the Charter & Code principles at the UoC, a survey of the University research community was conducted (24 March-18 April 2022). This was addressed to researchers¹ at all career stages: doctoral students, research support staff, postdocs, and faculty members. The response rate was encouraging, with 9 responses to the English version and 229 responses to the Greek version, giving an overall response rate of 15%. As Table 1 indicates, however, the response rate among PhD students was significantly lower. This suggests scope for targeted focus group discussions to engage these early stage researchers.

Table 1: UoC Strategy for Researchers Survey: response rate [18-04-2022]

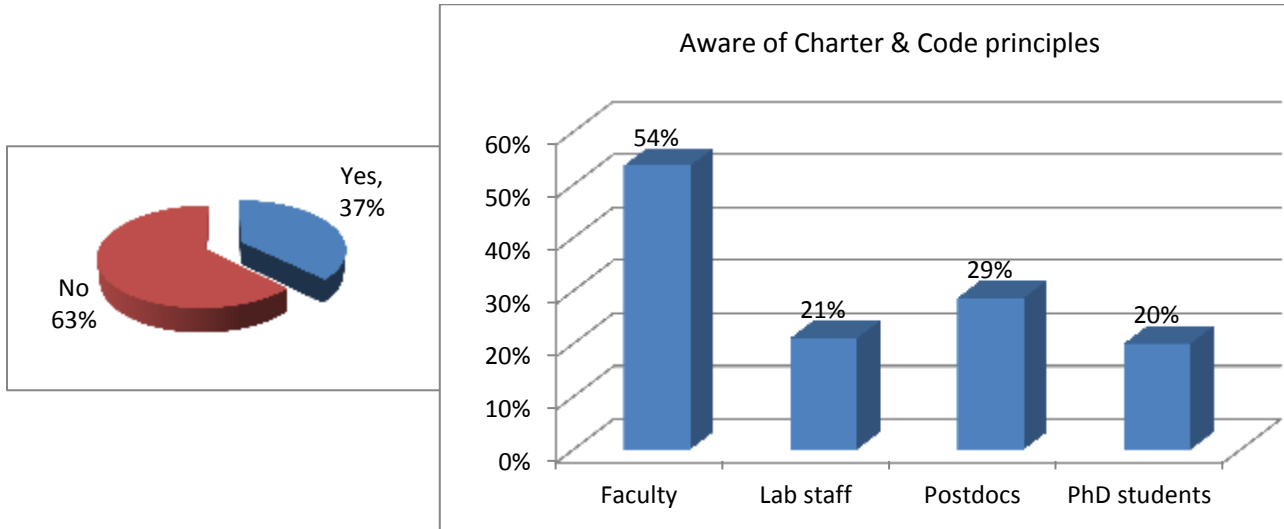
2022 survey	Faculty	Lab staff	Post docs/Assoc. Researchers	PhD students	Σ
Sample Frame	444	54	146	919	1563
Responses	112	19	42	65	238
Rate	25.23%	35.19%	28.77%	7.07%	15.23%

The results of this survey, which provided critical input in determining priorities of the UoC's [new Action Plan](#), are presented in this report.

¹ 'Researcher' is used throughout the text in a generic sense, corresponding to the [descriptors used by the EC](#) in the 2011 policy document '[Towards a European Framework for Research Careers](#)'.

2022 Survey Results

Have you heard of the principles in the EC's Charter & Code for Researchers?



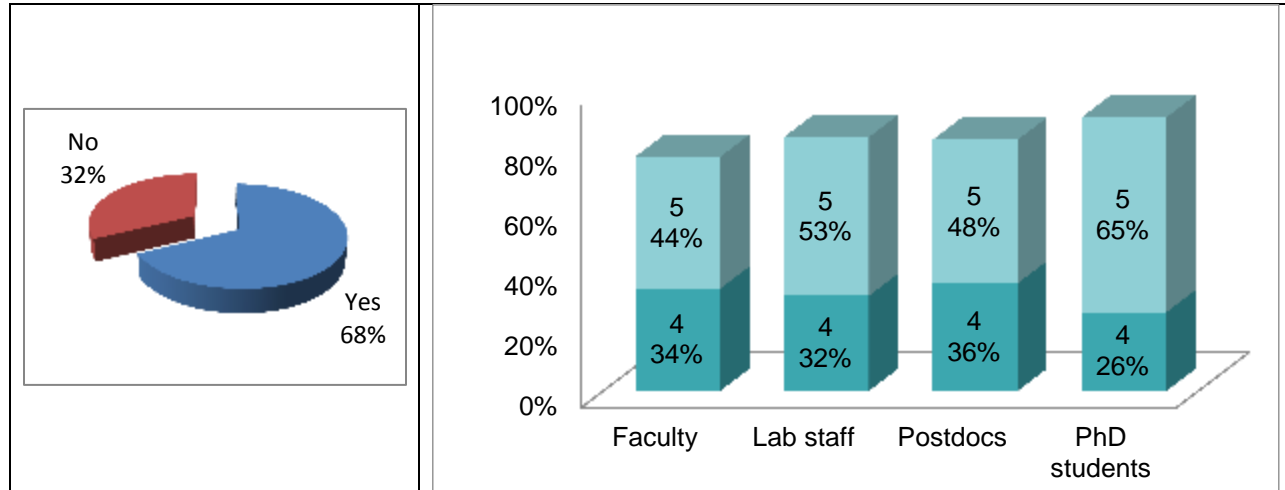
Just over a third of survey participants were aware of the Charter & Code, with significant differences apparent between faculty and early stage researchers as well as lab staff.

This reinforces the recommendations of the HRS4R review committee that awareness raising actions are a priority

Questions were grouped according to C&C principles and participants were asked to respond based on their experiences at UoC. For each question **significance** was rated on a 1-5 point scale:
1 -not important, 2 quite important, 3 important, 4 very important, 5 highly significant

Ethical & Professional Aspects

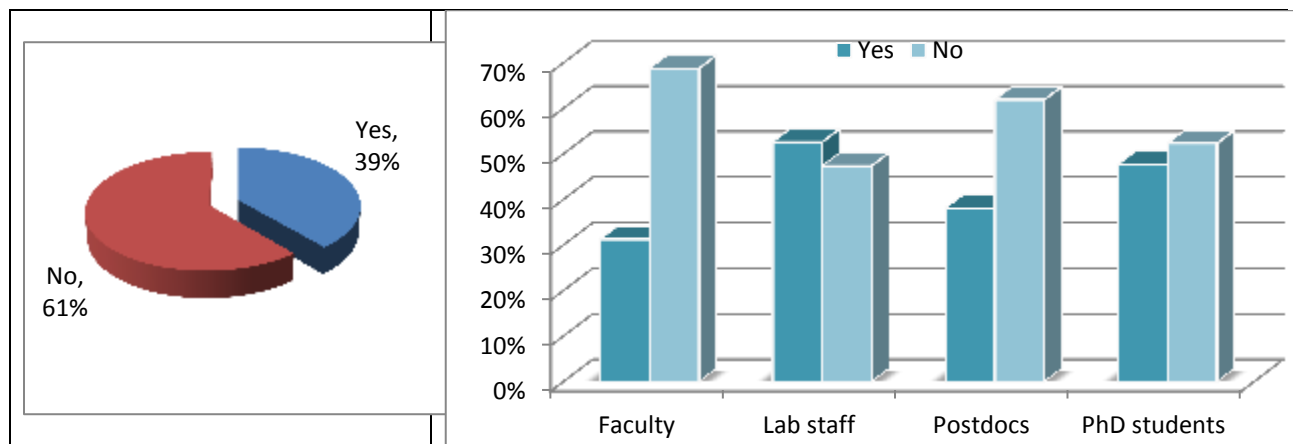
1. The rights and responsibilities of researchers with reference to research freedom, ethical principles and the professional conduct of research are well understood.



The rights and responsibilities of researchers with reference to research freedom, ethical principles and the professional conduct of research were considered to be well understood by two thirds of respondents. **Significance:** 83% of respondents overall considered these principles to be very important[4] /highly significant [5], with PhD students in particular scoring these principles as highly significant.

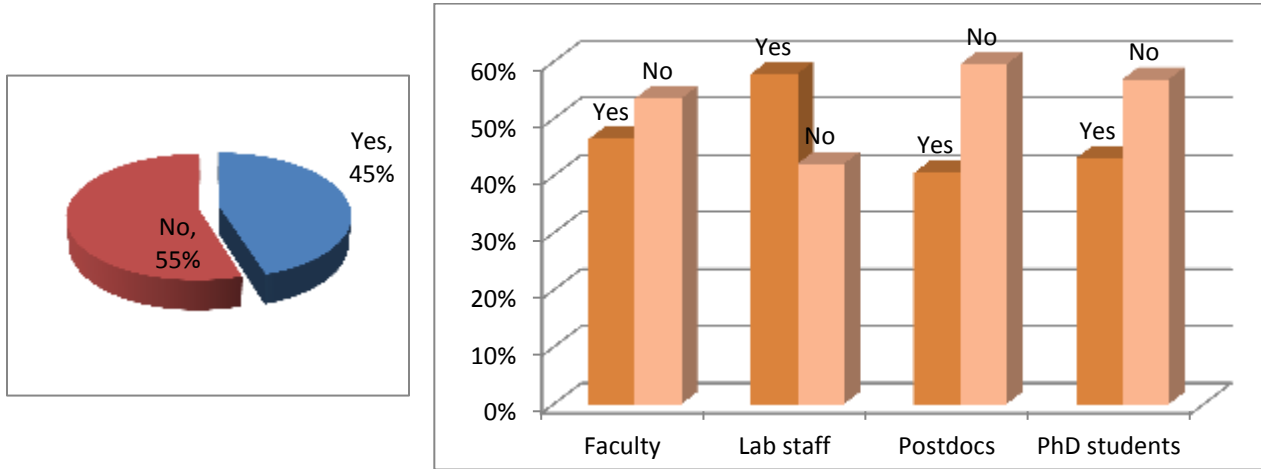
The question phrasing & responses suggest that these principles may have been considered in a fairly abstract sense. There is nonetheless scope for actions by the University Ethics Committee and the Research Ethics Committee in detailing the specifics involved in practice in realizing these principles.

2. Researchers are well informed about their contractual and legal obligations, including IPR, and how these impact on the results of their research (e.g. thesis, publications, patents).



In contrast to responses to the first question, the majority of respondents - and in particular faculty and postdocs - did not consider researchers to be well informed about their contractual and legal obligations. It should be noted that faculty members were likely to be referring to early stage researchers rather than applying this to themselves. These issues were considered very important [4] /highly significant [5] by 85% of respondents overall, with no significant difference according to category/career stage.

3. Researchers are well informed about safe working practices, data protection, and confidentiality protection requirements



The majority of faculty, postdocs and doctoral students did not consider researchers to be well informed about safe working practices, data protection, and confidentiality protection requirements. These issues were considered very important [4] /highly significant [5] by 79% of respondents overall, with PhD students scoring this more highly than other survey participants (85%)

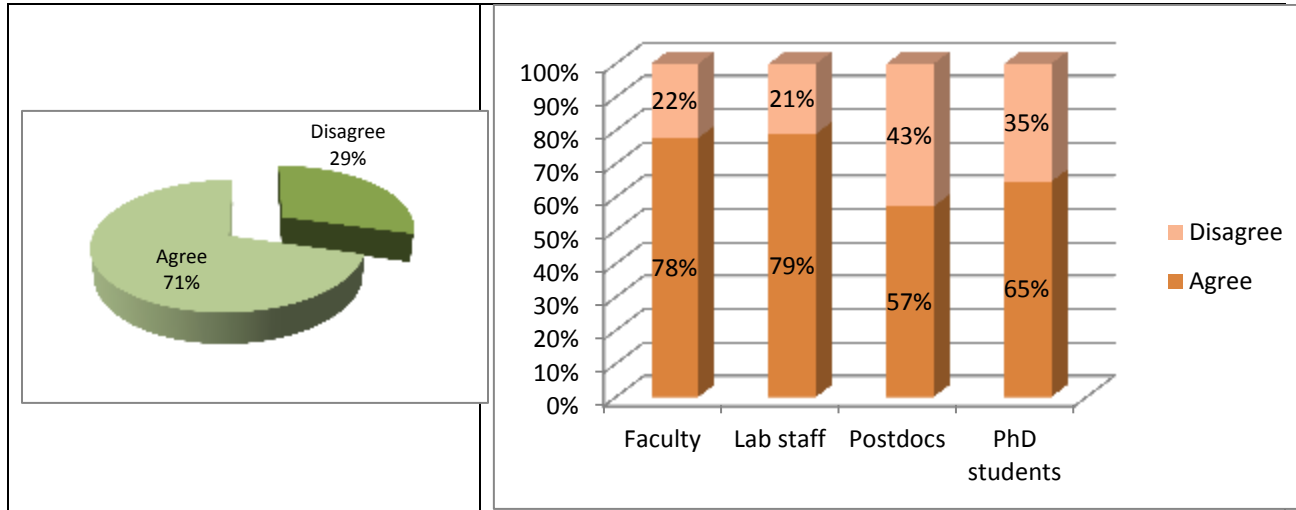
Ethical & Professional Aspects

The issues raised about ethical and professional aspects of research conduct generated a great deal of commentary and many suggestions for appropriate actions, revolving essentially around information and awareness actions. These ranged from the procedural (eg the faculty member who proposed that all PhD candidates and postdocs should be given an official University document setting out all relevant provisions which they would then be required to sign, acknowledging that they had been informed) through to many recommendations for mandatory induction courses/seminars on all relevant themes; on-line guides and interactive modules; periodic seminars and workshops; a central webpage with relevant signposting, and information events. Doctoral students in particular stressed the need for seminars and information events, with specific reference to guidance on GDPR (requirements, good practice and software) to ensure the protection of the data they manage, and also their IP rights.

These results dovetailed with the recommendations of the HRS4R review committee and have been embodied in the new Action Plan (actions 1, 5, 8 & 10).

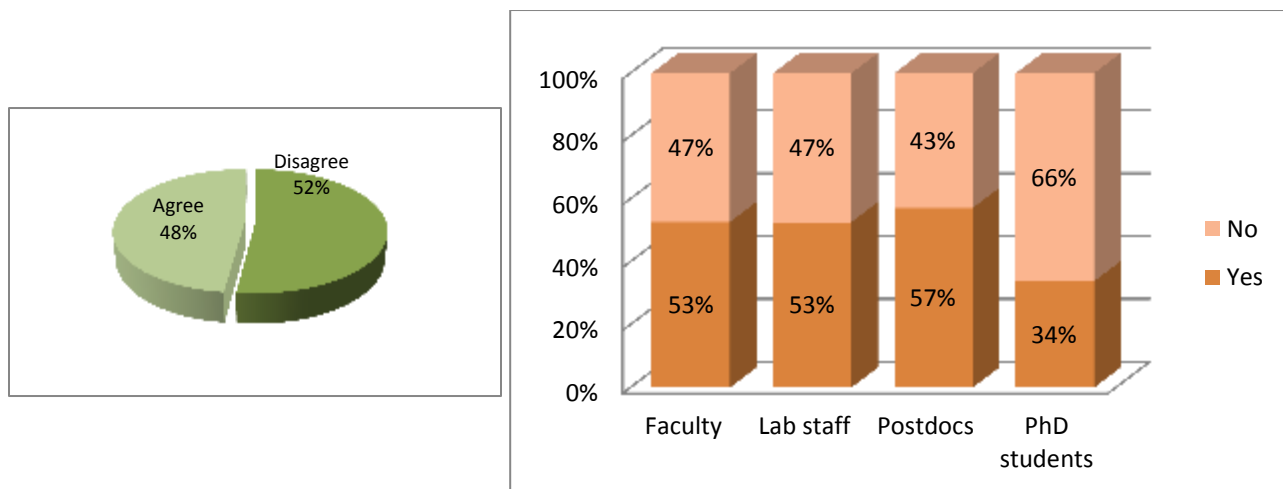
Recruitment

4. Selection procedures are fair and transparent, with clear evaluation criteria and appropriate recognition of varied experience & qualifications



The majority of respondents agreed that the University has a robust OTM-R system. There are, however, significant differences in perception among early stage researchers (postdocs and PhD students), with the recruitment and appointment system for fixed-term/freelance and casual positions viewed negatively by over a third of these respondents. The fact that a fifth of faculty respondents considered selection procedures in the same light is interesting, given that faculty members are the PIs and evaluators for these contracts. The majority of respondents overall (86%) considered this issue to be very important [4] /highly significant [5], with no significant difference by career stage.

5. There are clear rules and explicit guidelines for the recruitment and appointment of postdoctoral researchers, including the maximum duration and the objectives of such appointments



There is, however, significantly less agreement overall on the existence of clear rules and guidelines for the employment of postdoctoral researchers. Respondents were more or less evenly divided in opinion, but with PhD students more likely to disagree that these measures are in place. The majority of survey participants gave again a high overall significance score (81% very important [4] /highly significant [5]) with no notable difference by career stage.

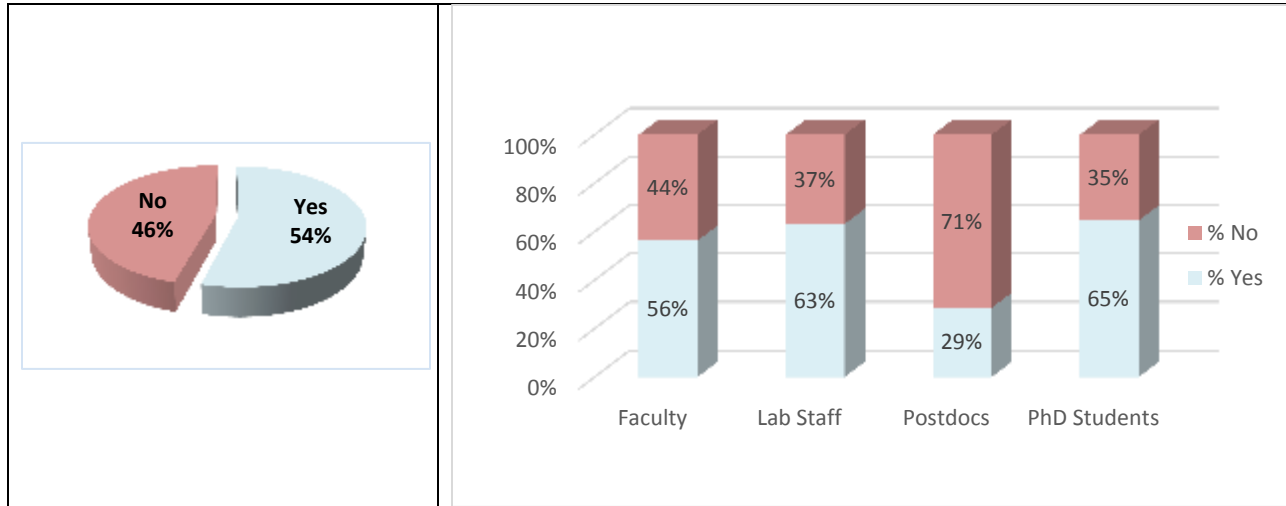
Recruitment/Appointments

Comments of survey participants ranged from the pragmatic (the faculty member who observed that “..The simple rules that already exist are sufficient, provided they are followed ...”) through to the jaundiced (the doctoral student who believed that “Criteria are tuned so as to maximize the probability that the PI’s friends and family members will get a certain position”)/ the postdoc in Humanities who considered these questions to be “out of step with the current reality, since in practice...researchers either bring in projects and actually shape their job position, or they are selected in the context of a pre-agreed Partnership. Not a high percentage of advertisements are made blindly, without the person selected being already known.” Most adopted the tone of the STEM postdoc who observed that “On recruitment, obviously all criteria are formal and there is transparency in that, but the final decision is clearly down to the people/committee and what/who they want. On contracts there is no information and as a result we accept whatever is offered.”

Early stage researchers appeared to be unaware of existing rules embodied in the UoC code on postdoctoral research, or of the University Research Committee [rules on recruitment and appointment](#) of the Special Account for Research Funds (ELKE). Posting these provisions more prominently on-line would be useful. In addition, the new HRS4R Action Plan addresses these mixed reactions with the proposed new action #12; the commitment to review recruitment and selection procedures and incorporate specific reference to OTM-R in simplified guides.

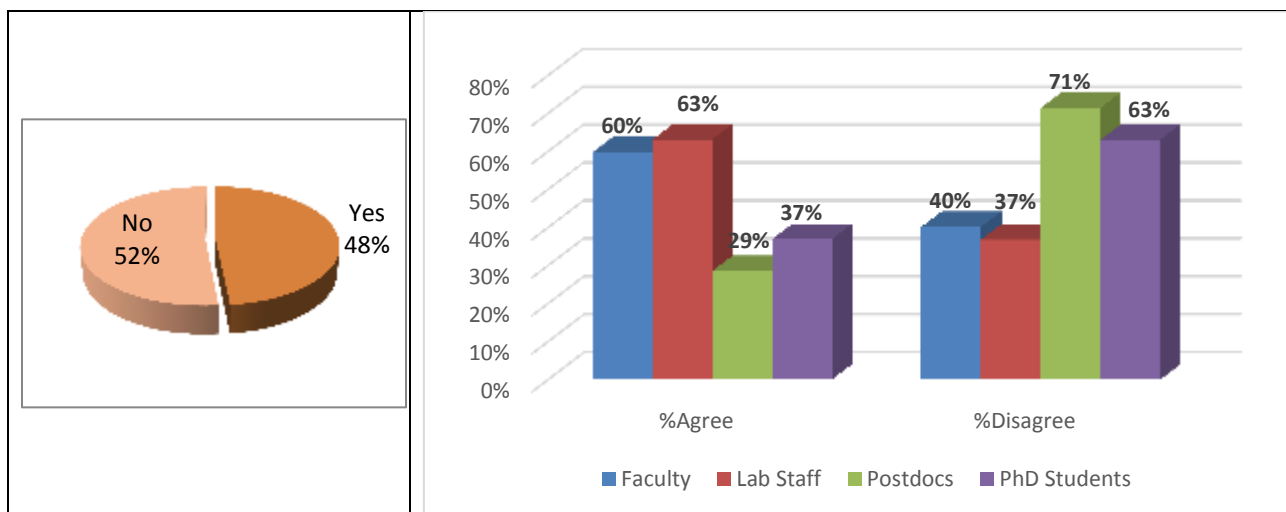
Working Conditions and Social Security

6. Every effort is made to ensure that the performance of researchers employed on third-party fixed-term contracts is not undermined by the instability of contracts.



Instability of contracts was highlighted as an issue by postdoc respondents, the researcher category most affected by this issue, with 71% not convinced that sufficient effort was made to prevent this. 84% of survey participants scored this issue as very important [4] /highly significant [5], ranging from 63% by lab staff through to 90% for postdocs.

7. Funding & Salaries: As far as possible, the University ensures that researchers enjoy fair and attractive conditions of funding &/or salaries with adequate and equitable social security provisions (including sickness and maternity benefits, pension rights and unemployment benefits). This includes researchers at all career stages, including early-stage researchers, commensurate with their legal status, performance and level of qualifications &/or responsibilities.



These issues were considered significant by the vast majority of respondents, with 89% overall scoring this as very important [4] /highly significant [5]. While there were only marginal differences between respondent categories in priority ratings, respondents were more or less evenly divided overall as to whether the University ensured that these principles were applied. Moreover, there were distinctive differences between those with permanent positions (faculty and lab staff) and early stage researchers (postdocs and PhD students). Fair and attractive funding &/or salaries with adequate and equitable social security provisions were highlighted by these early stage researchers as major issues.

Systemic constraints were noted in the internal review as impacting terms and conditions (including legal regulations & HEI funding) as well as academic C&P. The subject generated a lot of comment from the survey participants, eg

Faculty member (STEM): "The majority of researchers work on project contracts and freelance contracts. This creates major problems, is an unacceptable practice and should be changed immediately. These contracts do not even acknowledge years of service in the subsequent advancement of researchers. It is inappropriate to discuss all the other questions raised in the questionnaire when central issues such as this remain unresolved ...Changes in legislation and mentality are needed".

Postdoc (AHSS): "The precariousness of Postdoctoral Researchers is not an issue of the UoC alone, but falls within the general strategy for research and the conditions under which it is carried out in Greek Universities and Research Institutions. It is a larger problem that lies at the core of research in the academic research context. The UoC has an excellent ELKE which makes every effort to support researchers"

Postdoc (Medicine): "On a personal level, my professors at UoC have made every effort to ensure that I have access to the best possible conditions and salary for my postdoctoral research. I do not know if there is a central policy of the UoC in this regard, and what measures are taken in this direction. I know, of course, colleagues who have suffered from job insecurity, and I myself do not know whether I will have an income by the end of the year. But I do not know whether it is the obligation of the UoC to provide me with job prospects or security".

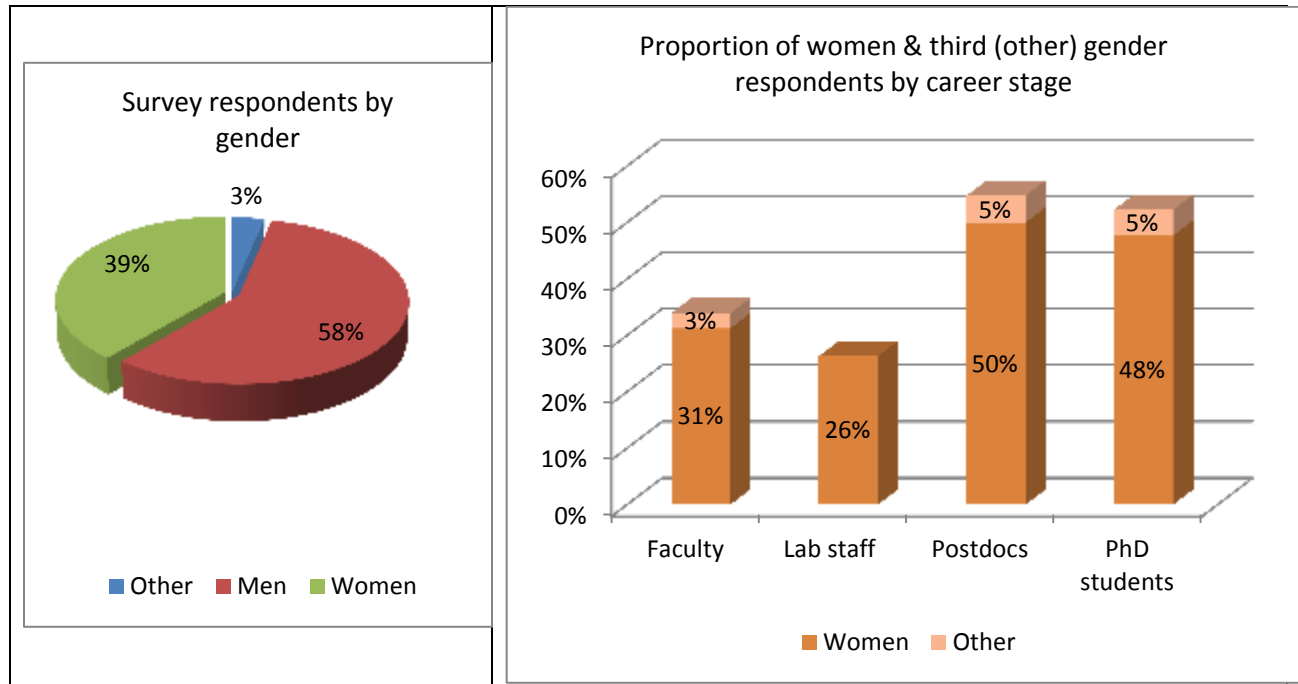
Doctoral students commented on the lack of health & social security cover, the limited availability of scholarships, the limitations of the fixed-term contracts open to them through the University, and the necessity for many to work. As one postgrad (STEM) put it:

"Unfortunately most researchers at PhD level do not have an employment contract, or the employment contract is for a limited period of time. In this way the graduate student cannot continue his/her work unhindered and is forced to look for a second job or is forced to interrupt his/her studies to be able to cope ... We live paycheck to paycheck"

Action #13 in the new HRS4R Action Plan is designed to bring these issues into focus in the context of researcher support services, with the commitment to produce a simplified code on terms & conditions of fixed-term contracts.

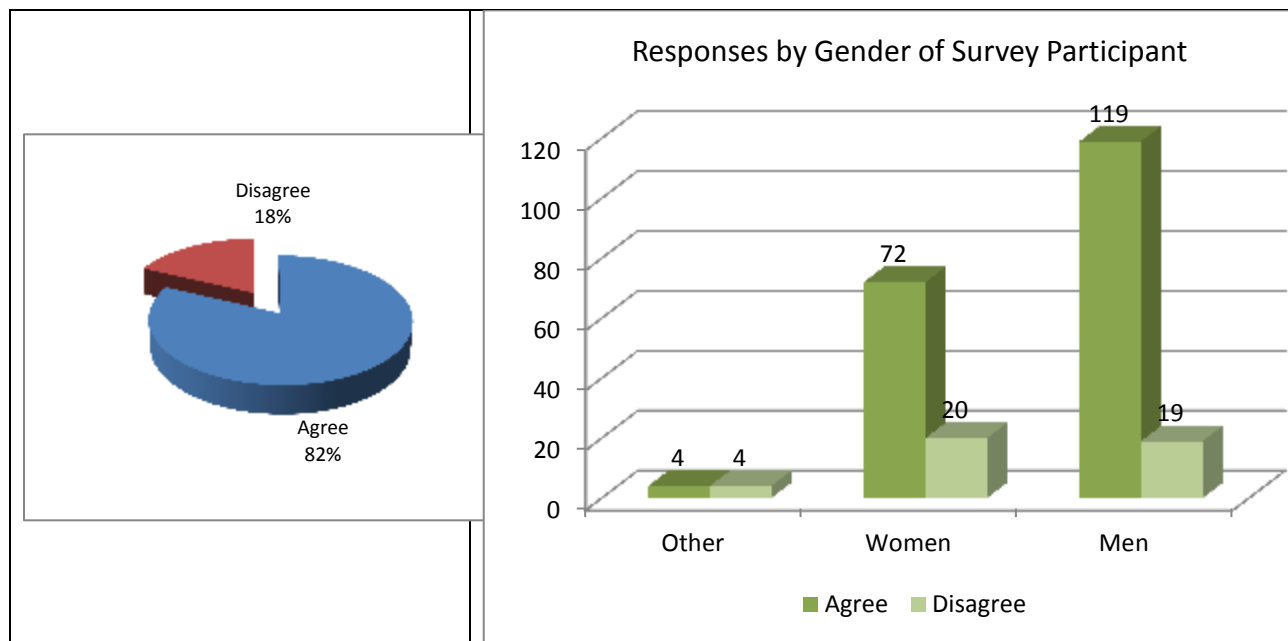
Gender balance and non-discrimination policies

The survey had two questions explicitly referring to the basic principles of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. To see these responses in context, we note that the gender breakdown of the survey participants closely [approximates proportional gender representation](#) across the researcher categories with the exception of lab staff, which comprises ~50% women across the University



8. As a matter of policy the University promotes equal opportunities and aims for a representative gender balance at all levels of staff.

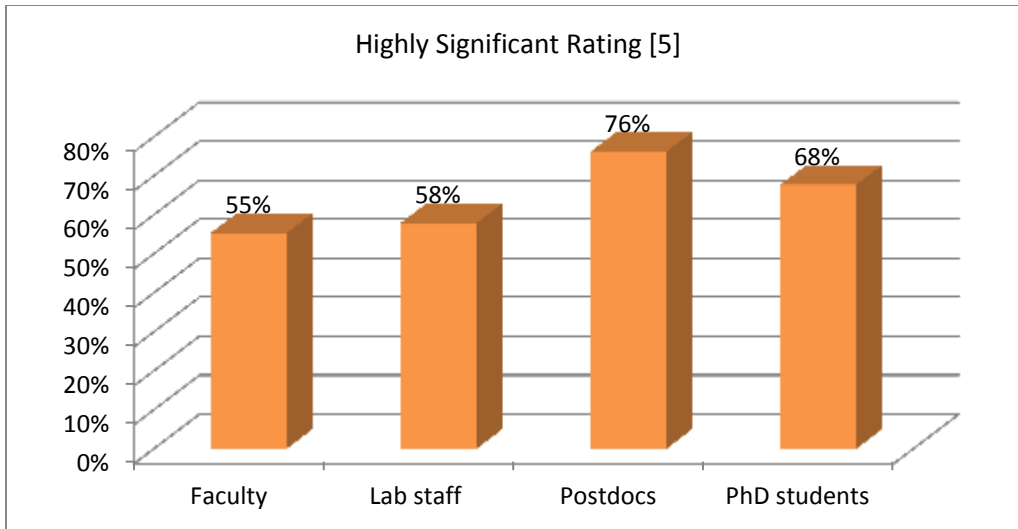
The great majority of survey respondents (82% overall) agreed that the University, as a matter of policy, promotes equal opportunities and aims for a representative gender balance at all staff levels. The actions of the [University Gender Equality Committee](#) are undoubtedly influential in this respect.



79% of survey participants overall considered these issues very important [4] /highly significant [5]. It is interesting to note that, with one exception, participants identifying as 'other'/third gender all considered this to be highly significant. Women faculty members did not differ from their male colleagues (73% & 71% respectively) whereas women at other career stages gave a higher priority ranking to these issues than their male counterparts.

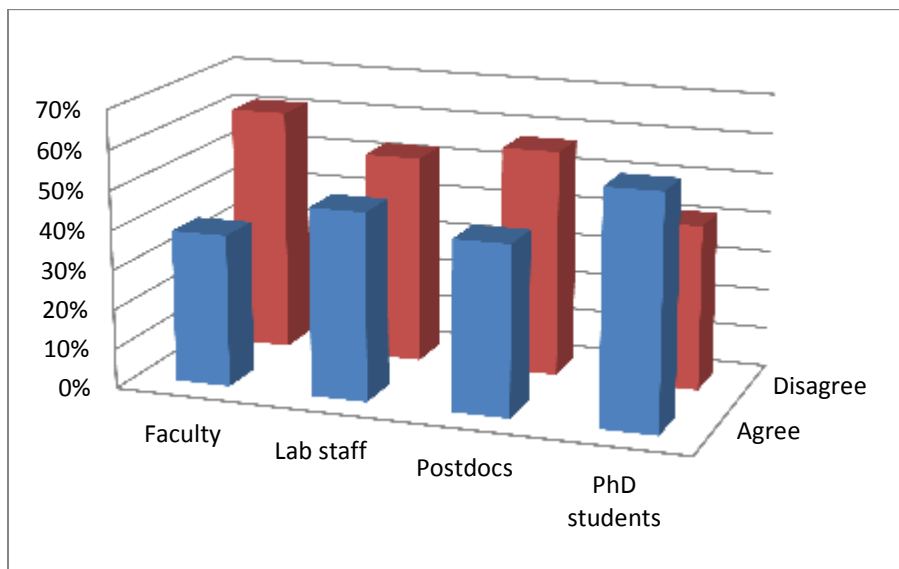
9. The University does not discriminate against researchers on the grounds of gender, race, religious or political beliefs or any other distinguishing characteristic.

There was virtually unanimous agreement among respondents (92% overall) that the University is non-discriminatory in outlook/practices and policies. Between 80-95% of respondents ranked this principle as very important [4] /highly significant [5], but with a noticeably greater propensity among early stage researchers to score this with the highest significance rating.



It is possible the phrasing of the question in terms of the institutional entity of 'the University' as opposed to a statement such as 'there is no discrimination in the University', may have affected the result. It also seems likely that relatively limited exposure to cultural diversity on campus plays a role given that the UoC community is to date fairly homogeneous in terms of race and religion. The Gender Equality Committee is taking actions to address issues such as unconscious bias and sexist language, with a broad remit that encompasses LGBT in concepts of gender. A review of good practice/enabling actions for under-represented groups (eg refugee scholars, disabled scholars) would take compliance with non-discriminatory principles up a notch.

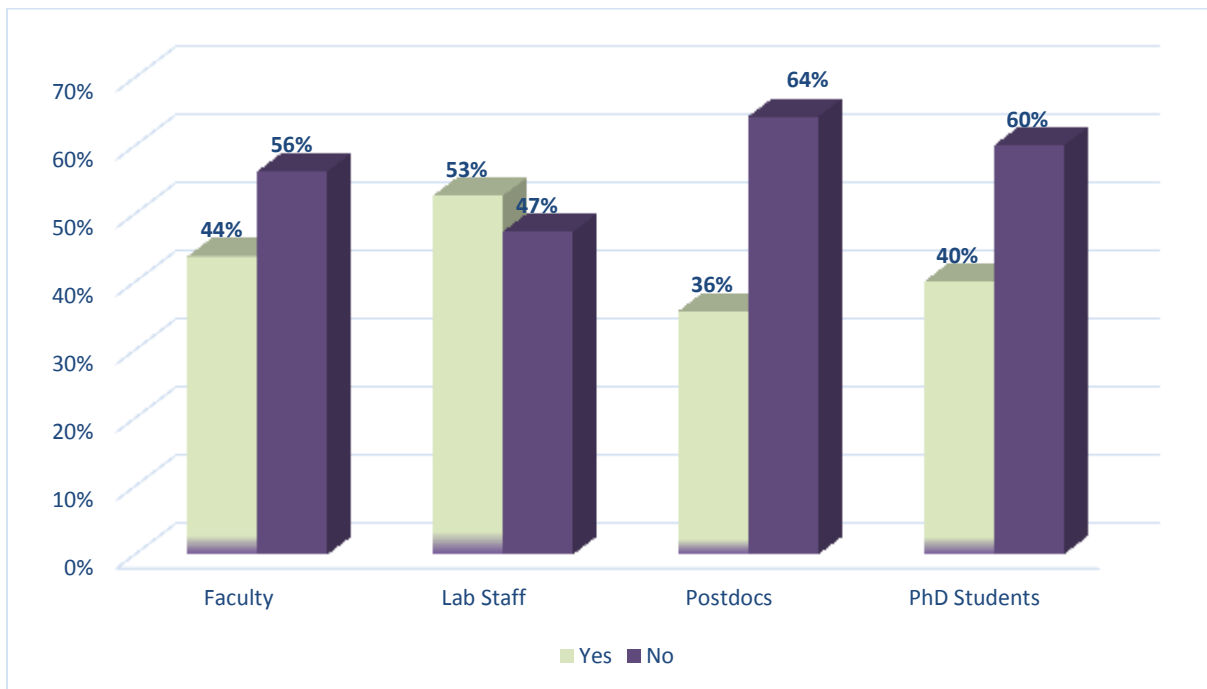
10. The University has a career development strategy for researchers at all stages in their career, which includes the availability of mentors and recognizes the value of mobility (geographic, inter-sectoral, and inter-disciplinary).



Over half of the survey participants (55% overall) do not agree that the University has a career development strategy for researchers at all stages in their career, including the availability of mentors. Disagreement was most pronounced among faculty members (62% disagreed) whereas agreement was most pronounced among PhD students (58%).

Overall weight given to these principles was again high, with 76% of survey participants considering these issues to be very important [4] /highly significant [5], but with a noticeably greater propensity among postdocs (90%) to score this highly.

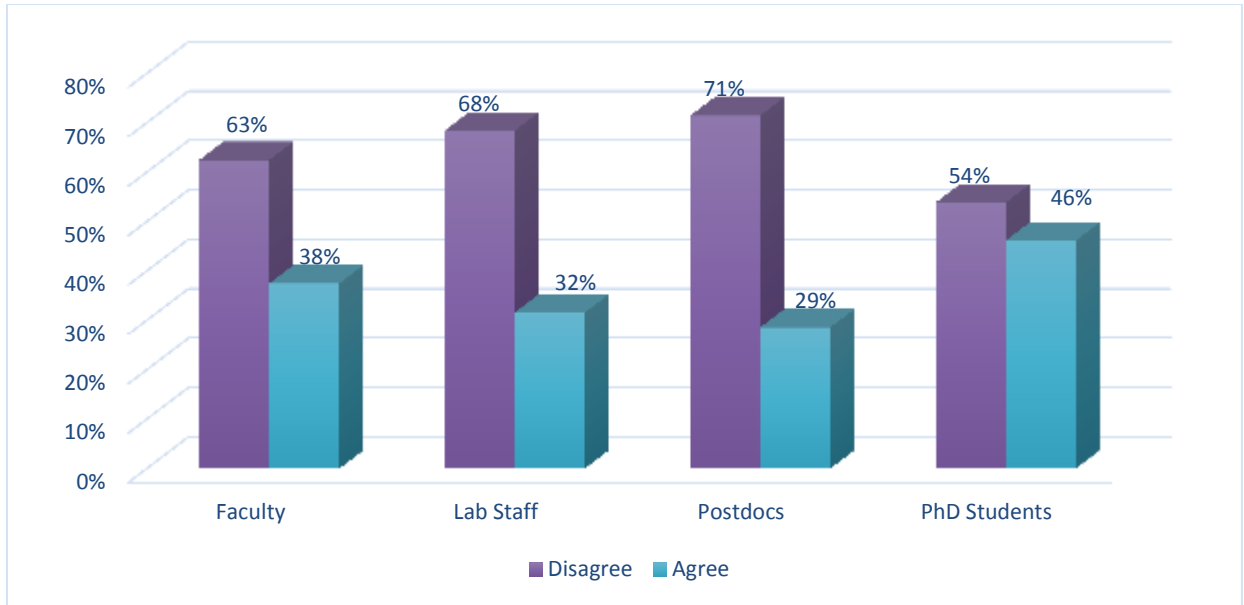
11. Appropriate formal and informal complaints/appeals procedures exist to resolve work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, including conflicts between supervisor(s) and early stage researchers, with the aim of promoting fair and equitable treatment.



A significant majority of survey participants (58% overall) did not agree that appropriate complaints/appeals procedures existed, with this disagreement being most pronounced among early stage researchers (64% postdocs & 60% PhD students). This was accorded a high priority rating overall with 80% considering these issues very important [4] /highly significant [5], with no notable variations according to career stage.

Awareness of and recourse to existing complaints/appeals procedures was noted as an issue in the HRS4R review, with action #2 of the new Action Plan committed to a review of existing research conduct complaints procedures with a view to establishing an ombudsman.

12. Researchers are fairly represented in the relevant information, consultation and decision-making bodies of the University.



The majority of survey respondents overall (62%) did not agree that researchers are fairly represented in the University's governance bodies. It should be noted in this context that 'researchers' as a term is likely to have been interpreted by faculty and by lab staff as postdocs, with responses related to representation of postdocs rather than their own staff category.

This issue was rated as being very important [4] /highly significant [5] by 71% of survey participants overall. There was however a noticeable difference between faculty and lab staff (~60% rated 4/5) compared with early stage researchers (>80% rated 4/5)

The HRS4R review noted that whereas all staff categories and students are (to date) represented on Departmental and University wide decision-making bodies, postdocs have no similar rights to representation. Proposals incorporated in the new action plan to address this and other issues are encapsulated in action #3; the commitment to form a post-doc advisory committee to review current C&P and to oversee the form and content of relevant actions.

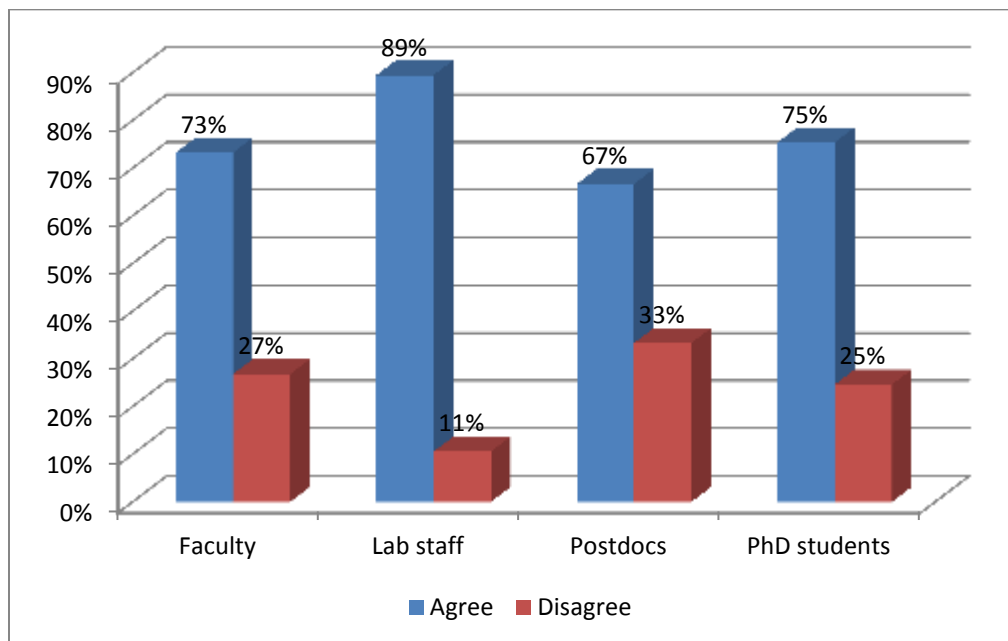
Training

13. Do you know if your Department has guidelines for doctoral training?

92% of participants overall were aware of their respective Departmental code/rules on Doctoral Studies, but 11% of doctoral students were not. Overall the existence of these codes was considered very important [4] /highly significant [5] by 88% of respondents, with faculty members (88%) and doctoral students (92%) scoring these codes most highly.

The HRS4R review paid particular attention to promoting the quality of doctoral training and the possibilities of harmonizing doctoral training codes (incorporated in the action plan as action #4).

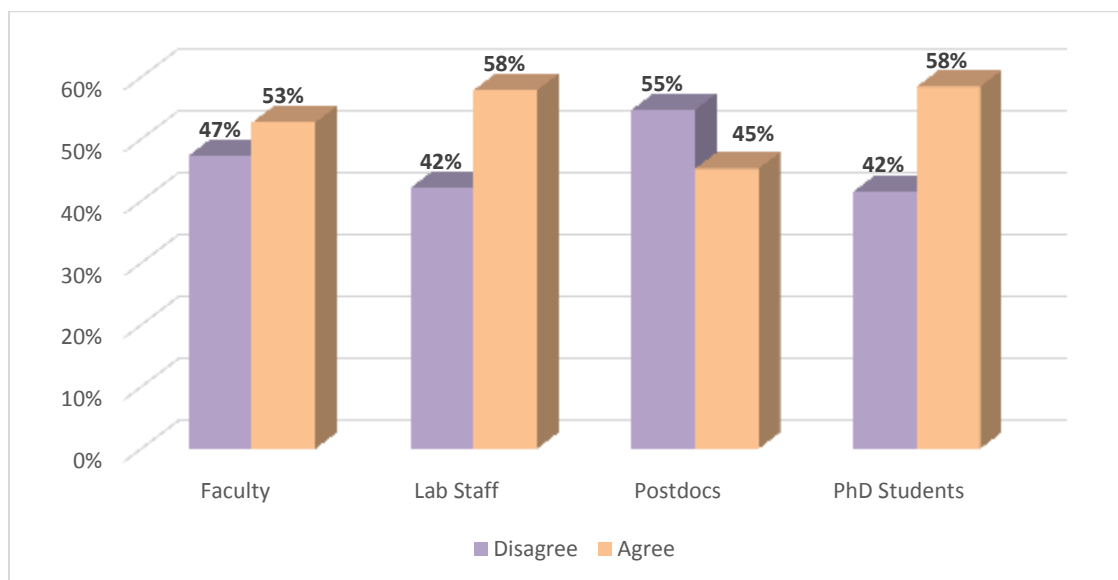
14. In your experience at the University, senior researchers recognize and act appropriately on their multi-faceted role as supervisors, mentors, career advisors, leaders, project coordinators, managers or science communicators.



The majority of survey respondents (74% overall) considered that senior researchers did recognize and act appropriately on their multi-faceted role. 82% overall attributed a high rating to this issue, with no significant differences by career stage.

Comments revolved around the academic ethos of senior faculty, variability between individuals, and the possibility of assisting senior faculty (eg through seminars) on best practices for mentoring young researchers.

15. All researchers at any stage of their career, regardless of their contractual situation, are given the opportunity for professional development and for improving their employability through access to measures for the continuing development of skills & competencies (e.g. formal training, workshops, conferences, e-learning).



Survey participants were more or less equally divided on this issue, with 53% overall agreeing and 47% disagreeing that all researchers had the opportunity for professional development and access to measures for the continuing development of skills and competencies. As anticipated, disagreement was most pronounced among postdocs (55%) This issue was considered very important [4] /highly significant [5] by 82% of survey participants overall, with the only notable difference by career stage being lab staff who were less inclined to score this issue highly (58%).

Several survey participants noted the dependence on project funding as a primary consideration (eg funding to attend conferences) and there were suggestions for better promotion of available skills development opportunities.

These responses bear out the assessment of the HRS4R review committee. The new action plan addresses the issue of transferrable skills training (actions #6-8) and equitable access to career development opportunities (action #14)

CONCLUSION

This survey confirmed the conclusions of the HRS4R review committee that whereas there have been significant developments to meet the principles of the Charter & Code for Researchers, there is a lack of awareness among early stage researchers particularly of many existing policies and services, as well as persistent gaps in provision. The 2022-25 HRS4R Action Plan aims to address those issues within the UoC's scope for action/redress to improve the position of researchers and the research environment. This is seen as being central to the University's capacity to train, attract and retain a critical mass of research talent.

The urgency of such action is underscored by the concluding comment of one Postdoc (Medicine):

"To many of your questions the answer is not agree or disagree only maybe, sometimes or occasionally. But in general I think the biggest problem is that researchers often do not see a future since their contracts are dependent on the projects and the recognition from the University is limited and non-institutionalized. That is why they often come and then leave for abroad."
