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 2021 UCC became the first University on the Island of Ireland to be renewed twice with 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.

In our ongoing efforts to enhance the working environment for our research staff, the European Commission has through this award, acknowledged the significance of providing training and development opportunities for researchers and aligning with the Charter and Code. These initiatives aim to attract and retain research talents within Europe. Overall HR Excellence in Research greatly supports researchers in the European Research Area.

At UCC, the HRS4R process empowers us to integrate the principles of the European Charter and Code into our policies relating to research staff. While it is a voluntary initiative, UCC is committed to its implementation. Although not mandatory for engagement in EU-funded programs, it is significant. Every UCC Principal Investigator signs up to the principles of the Charter and Code upon receiving an EC grant. This underscores the importance that UCC places on this award and reflects the seriousness with which the European Commission regards it.

This survey forms a part of UCC's strategy within the HR Excellence in Research. The results of the Researcher Survey are outlined in this report. Previous surveys can be found here.

Executive Summary

The Researcher survey report conducts an assessment and appraisal of the existing research staff at UCC based on the four categories outlined by the European Commission: Ethical and Professional, Recruitment, Working Conditions, and Training and Development. The survey took place in the third quarter of 2023. The report provides a comprehensive description of the analysis methods, question types, and detailed results, as outlined below.

Overarching Results

The data analyzed shows a steady state in results since the 2020 Researcher survey. In general, research staff in UCC are enthusiastic and motivated about their research work. They feel a strong sense of belonging to a team and are recognized for their contributions. Actively engaging in professional training and development programs is encouraged, and they perceive UCC's recruitment practices as open, transparent, and merit based. They also recognize the importance of, and their responsibility towards, adhering to the University Code of Research Conduct. Notably, areas for improvement (identified as gaps) have been acknowledged. These gaps will play a crucial role in shaping actions within the 2024-2027 HRS4R Action plan.

Background and Objectives

The University College Cork Researcher Survey 2023 is 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 survey engaged with research staff within 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 the survey 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 survey was launched in September 2023 and closed October 2023. During that period UCC employed 1038 research staff.

At analysis stage the data from the survey was reviewed to ensure that it was representative of the known profile of the employees surveyed. As a result, 10 responses were removed from the survey as the respondents were not in the catchment profile. The survey was multimodal and accessible through PC/Laptop and Mobile/Tablet. The visuals depict the distribution percentage of individuals who responded to the specific question.

The 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
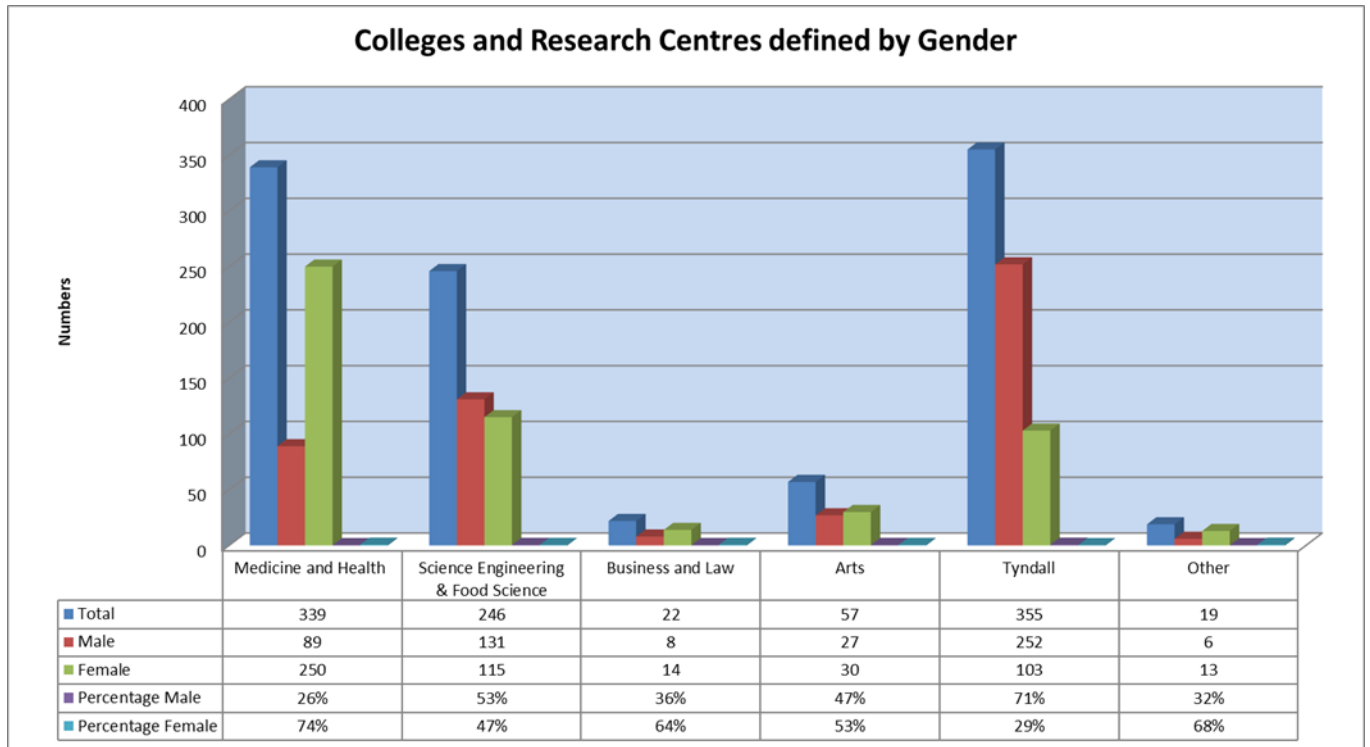 iv. Training and Development

Response Rate

There were 198 responses to the survey, which equates to a response rate of 19%. We believe this 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.

Demographics October 2023

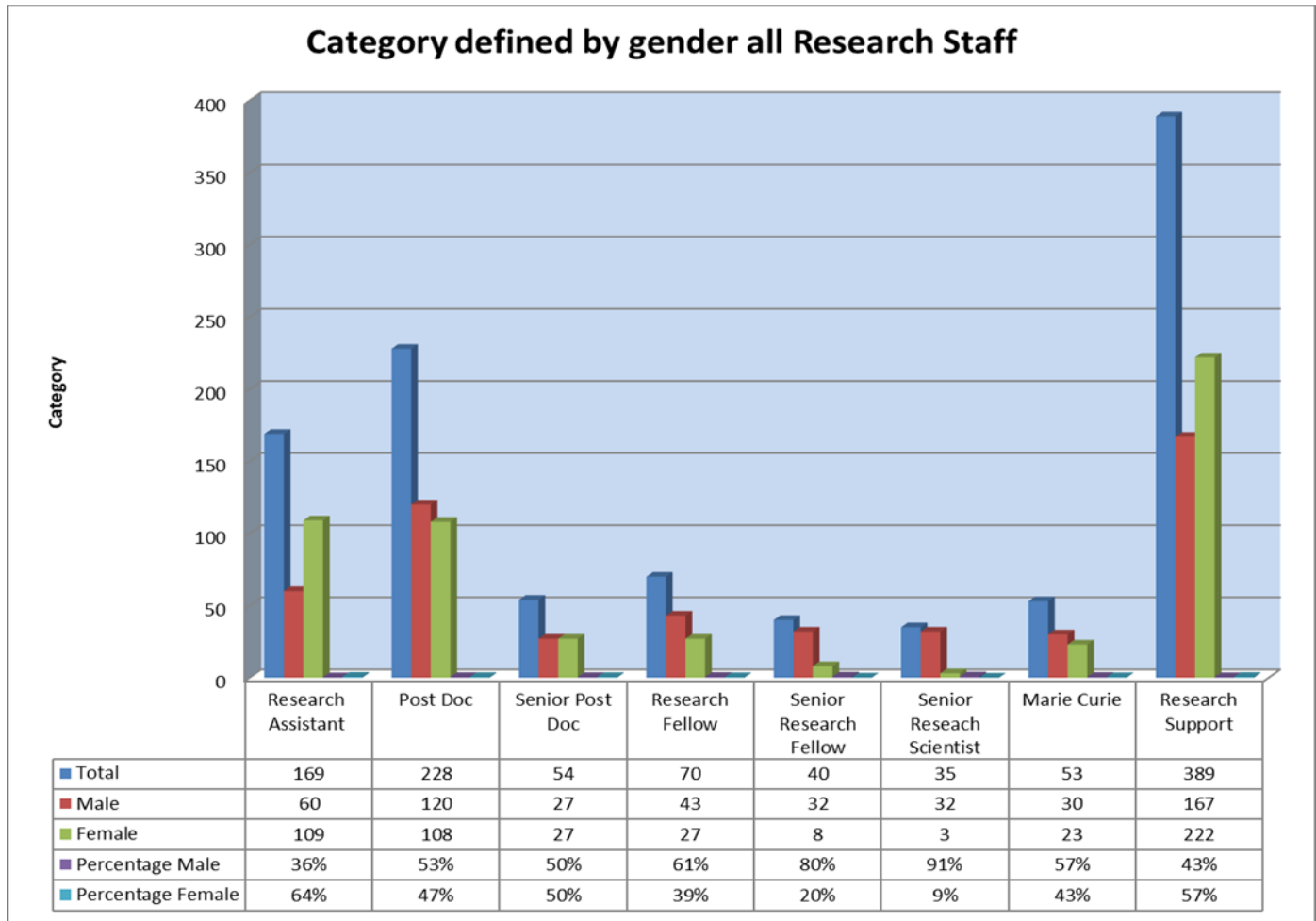**Total Research Staff as of October 31, 2023, = 1038**

Colleges and Research Centers Defined by Gender.

Colleges and Research Centres defined by Gender

	Medicine and Health	Science Engineering & Food Science	Business and Law	Arts	Tyndall	Other
■ Total	339	246	22	57	355	19
■ Male	89	131	8	27	252	6
■ Female	250	115	14	30	103	13
■ Percentage Male	26%	53%	36%	47%	71%	32%
■ Percentage Female	74%	47%	64%	53%	29%	68%

Tyndall has the highest number of research staff.

Research staff gender balance in UCC is 49% Male and 51% Female.

**Role Category Defined by Gender all Research Staff.**

Category defined by gender all Research Staff

	Research Assistant	Post Doc	Senior Post Doc	Research Fellow	Senior Research Fellow	Senior Reseach Scientist	Marie Curie	Research Support
■ Total	169	228	54	70	40	35	53	389
■ Male	60	120	27	43	32	32	30	167
■ Female	109	108	27	27	8	3	23	222
■ Percentage Male	36%	53%	50%	61%	80%	91%	57%	43%
■ Percentage Female	64%	47%	50%	39%	20%	9%	43%	57%

All researchers by role category – all colleges and units.

Research Support includes Research Support Officers, Senior Research Managers, Senior Research Coordinators, Research Nurses, Research Technical/Lab Managers and Research Engineers.

Demographic of those who participated (198)

Please indicate your research role in UCC - Selected Choice
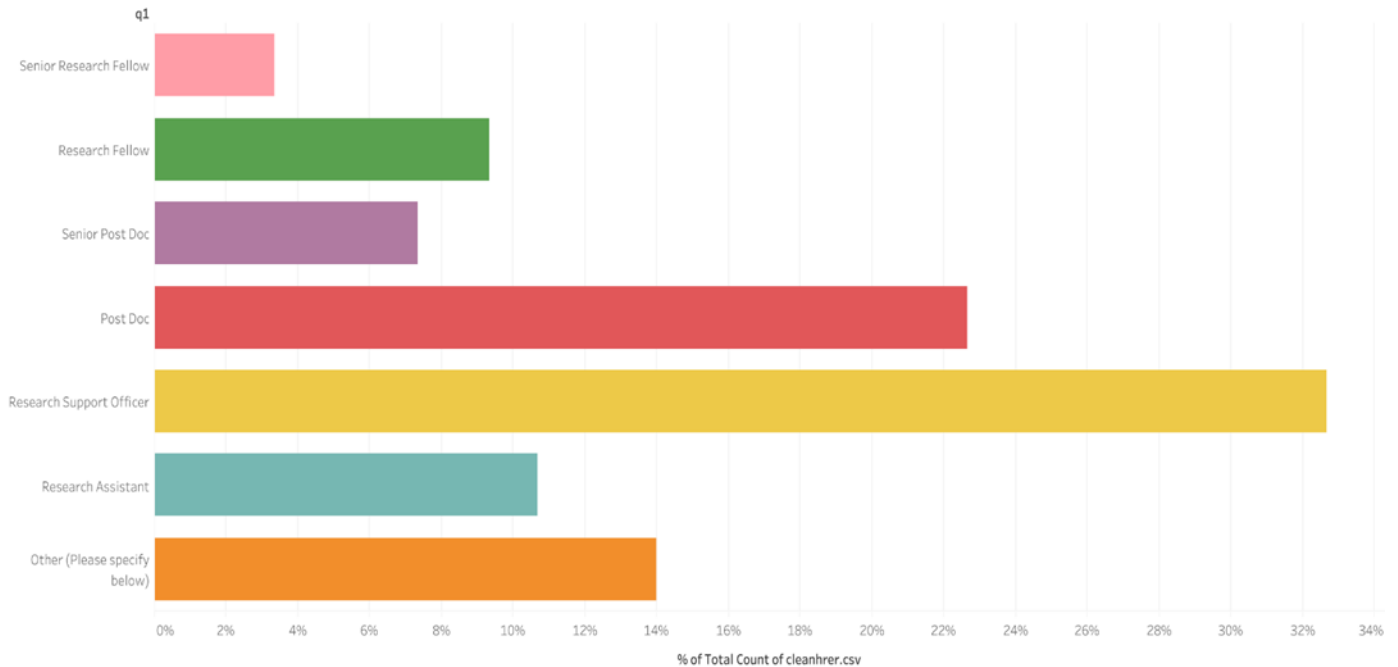
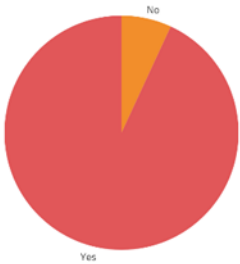More Research Support Officers contributed to the survey than any other research staff category.

Broadly indicate your general affiliation in UCC - Selected Choice
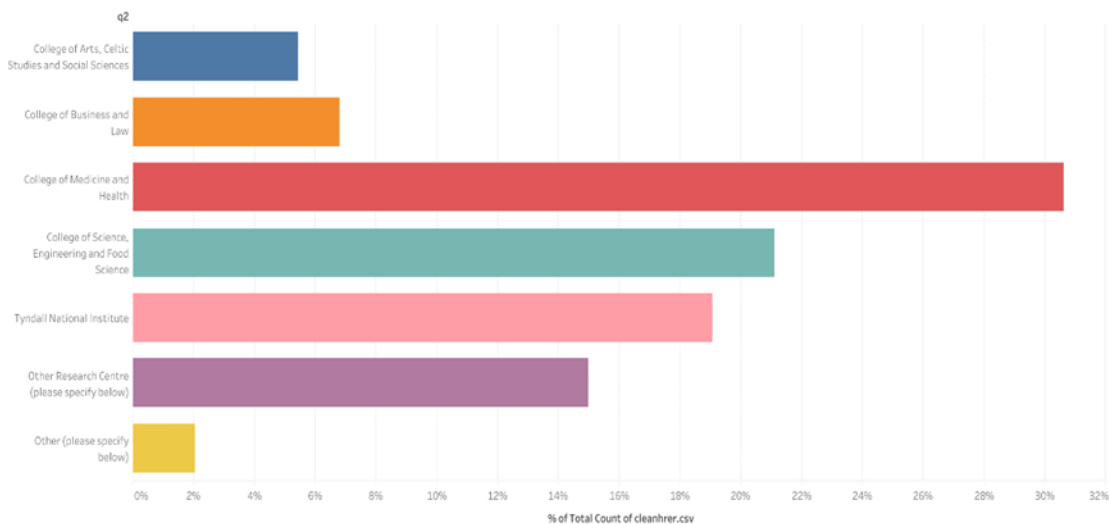
More researchers from M & H contributed to the survey than from any other College/Research Centre
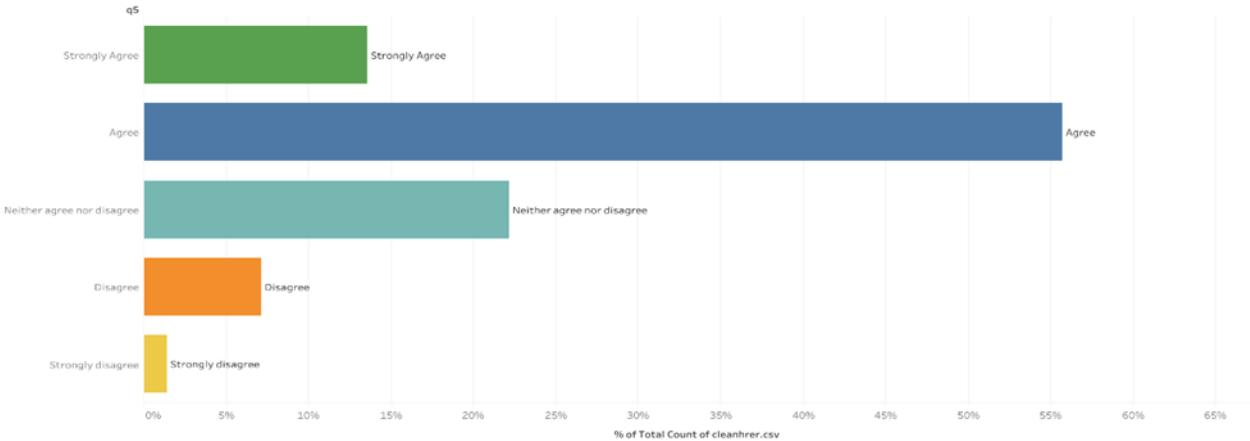
Ethical and Professional Aspects

Answer I am aware of the University Code of Research Conduct

Most researchers are aware of the University Code of Research Conduct

UCC ensures researchers are made aware of their responsibilities regarding dissemination of data and research results
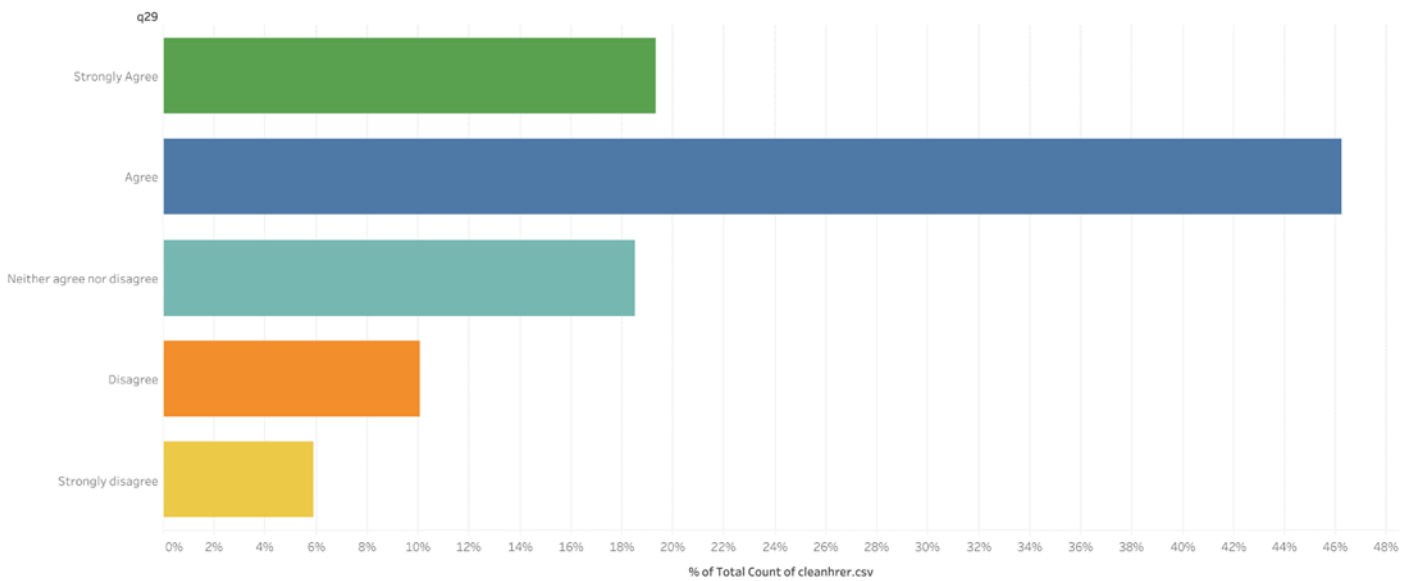

Most researchers agree that UCC ensures researchers are made aware of their responsibilities regarding dissemination of data and research results.

I understand what is expected of me and how my research serves the project's goals

q28


% of Total Count of cleanhrer.csv
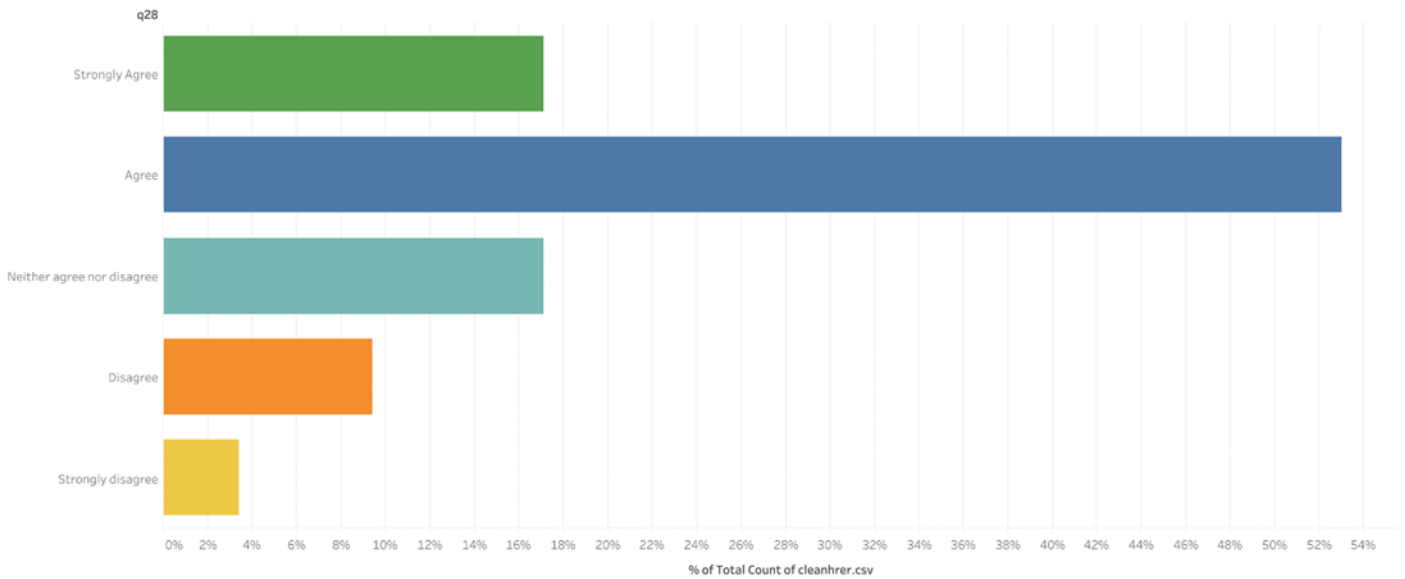
Most researchers understand what is expected of them and how their research serves the project's goals.

**I am part of a collaborative research team that shares a common goal and works well together**

q29

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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.

I am recognised for my contribution to the research team
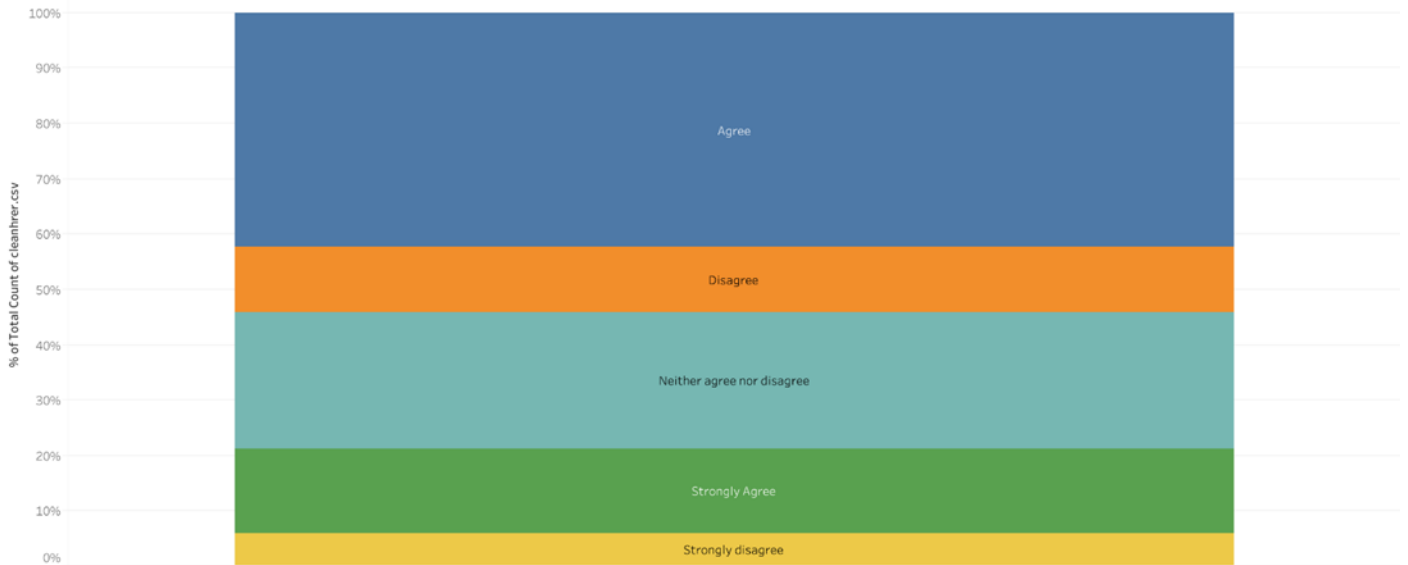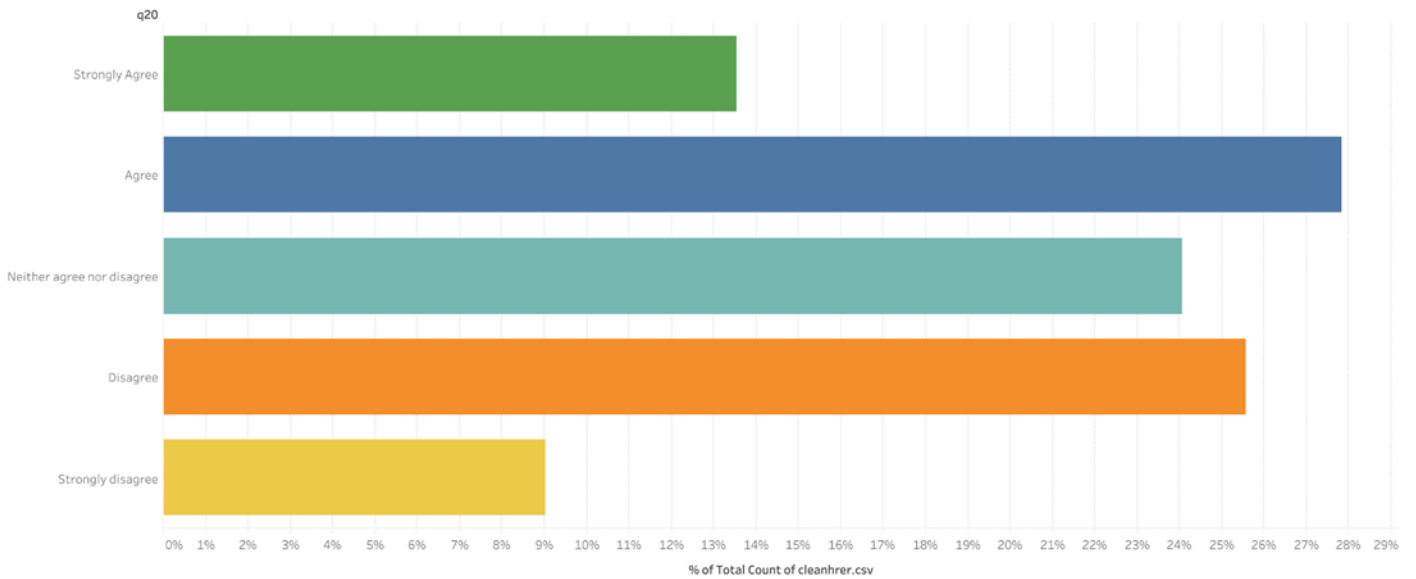

Most researchers agree that they are recognized for their contribution to the team.

My current role in research enables my personal career goals
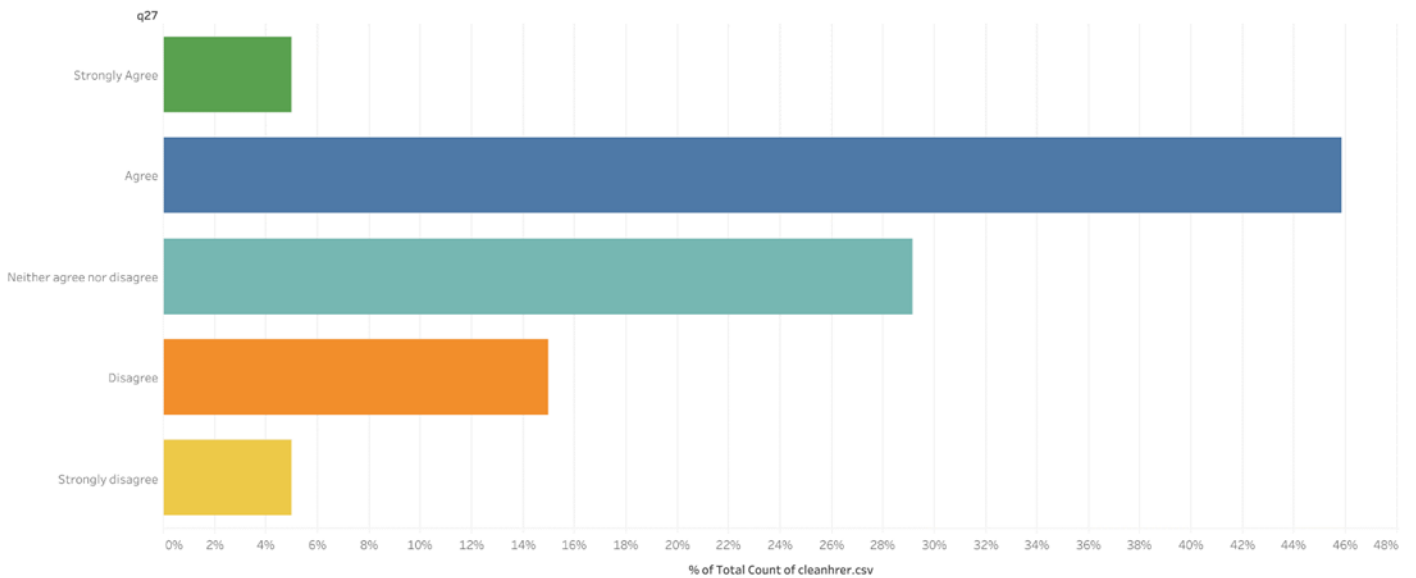
Most researchers agree that their role enables their personal career goals.

I receive constructive feedback regarding my professional growth and development from my line manager

There is a mixed response regarding whether researchers receive constructive feedback on professional growth and development from their line manager.

The University provides appropriate opportunities for both internal and external research collaboration
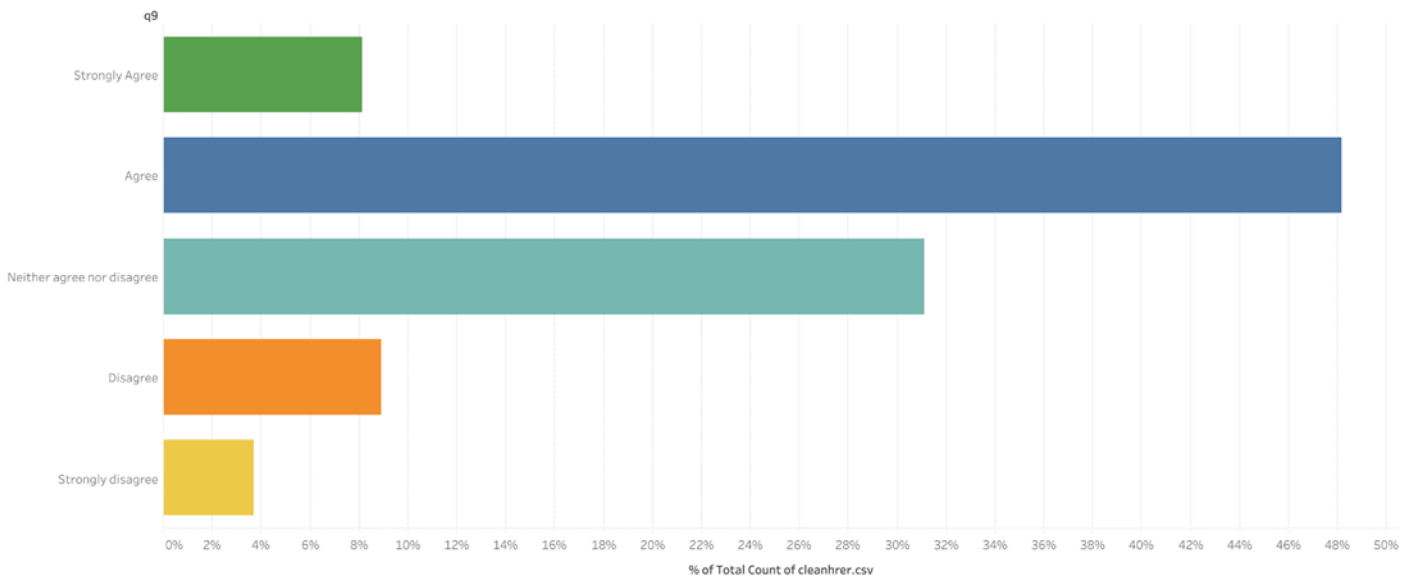
Most researchers agree that the university provides opportunities for collaboration.

Quotes from the Survey

"I think UCC and national funding policies make it difficult for ECRs to gain independence and demonstrate funding income as they are not eligible for many schemes due to short contracts, and this has impacted my international competitiveness"

"To encourage research there needs to be an infrastructure investment from UCC not dependent on HEA funding with labs staffed by personnel that can be retained to provide a research legacy/foundation rather than short term post docs whom have to leave after 3 years."

"More statistics courses, bioinformatics courses, or courses about methods in molecular biology, microscopy etc. would be nice to have.."

"For researchers outside the RA and Postdoc scales, namely Research Support Officers- (over 400 in UCC) are prevented from any form of personal progression or even an annual increment. These staff members are being treated extremely unfairly in relation to other staff members in our community. Their T&Cs are in direct contravention of at least two UCC strategic goals: 4.2 "Embed a culture of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging in UCC, embracing our differences as a key institutional strength". 4.4 "Establish career development frameworks and structured programmes to support all categories of staff on their career journey". I would strongly encourage the University to consider this group of individuals who are instrumental to the success of so many research projects. (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 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."

"The work undertaken by Mary O'Regan and the HRS4R working group has been valuable in enhancing UCC support of researchers and this must be recognized and commended."

"Research career pathways beyond senior research fellow are still poorly defined. "

Terms and Conditions

The University provides attractive employment conditions to research staff including salary and pension in accordance with University policy and legislative requirements
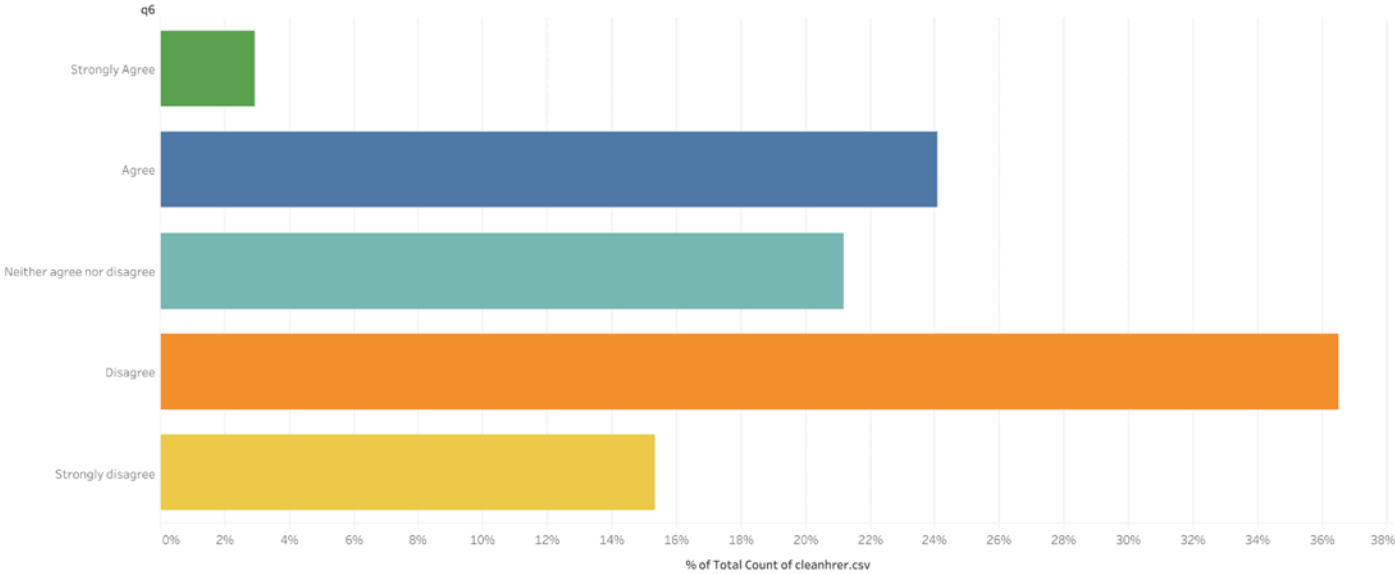

There is a mixed response regarding attractive employment conditions including salary and pension.

The University provides attractive employment conditions to research staff including maternity leave, paternity leave, sick leave, parental leave in accordance with University policy and legislative requirements
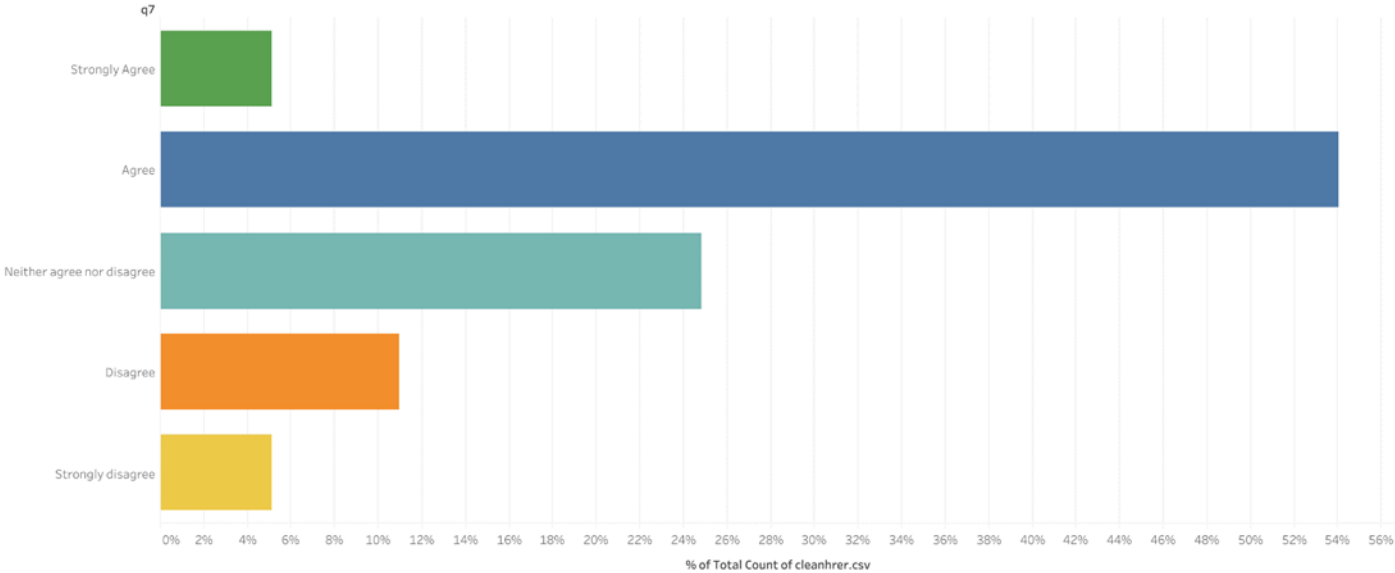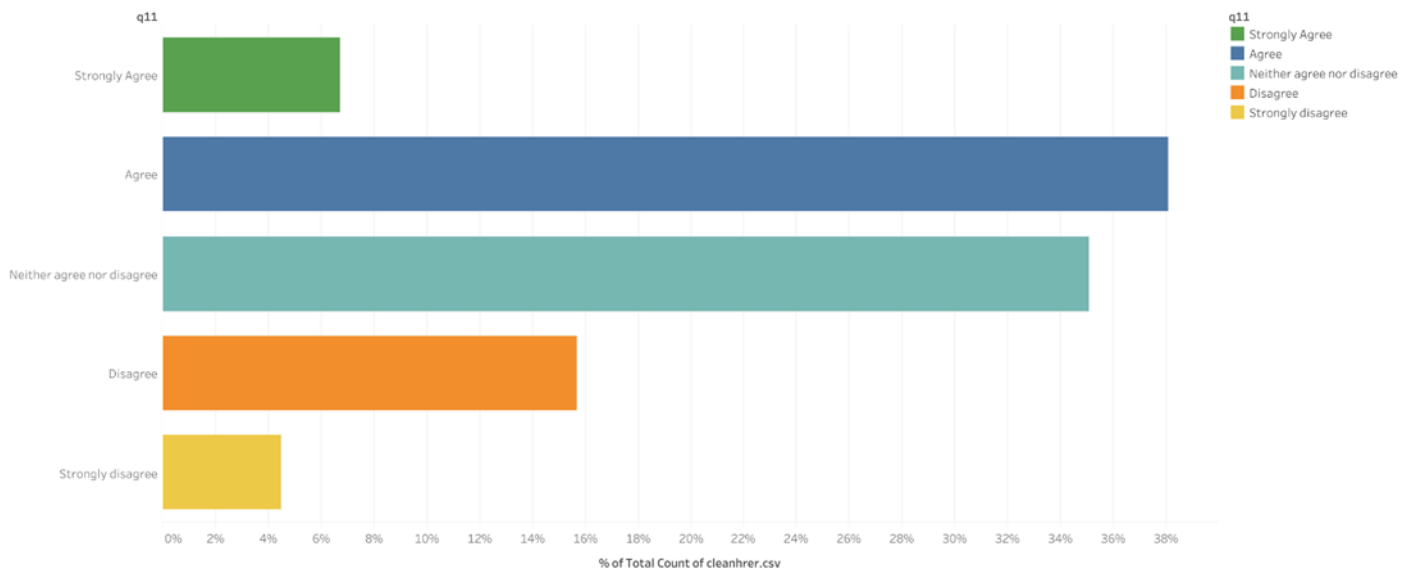

Most researchers agree that the University offers attractive maternity and other benefits.

The University provides appropriate equipment and facilities for researchers
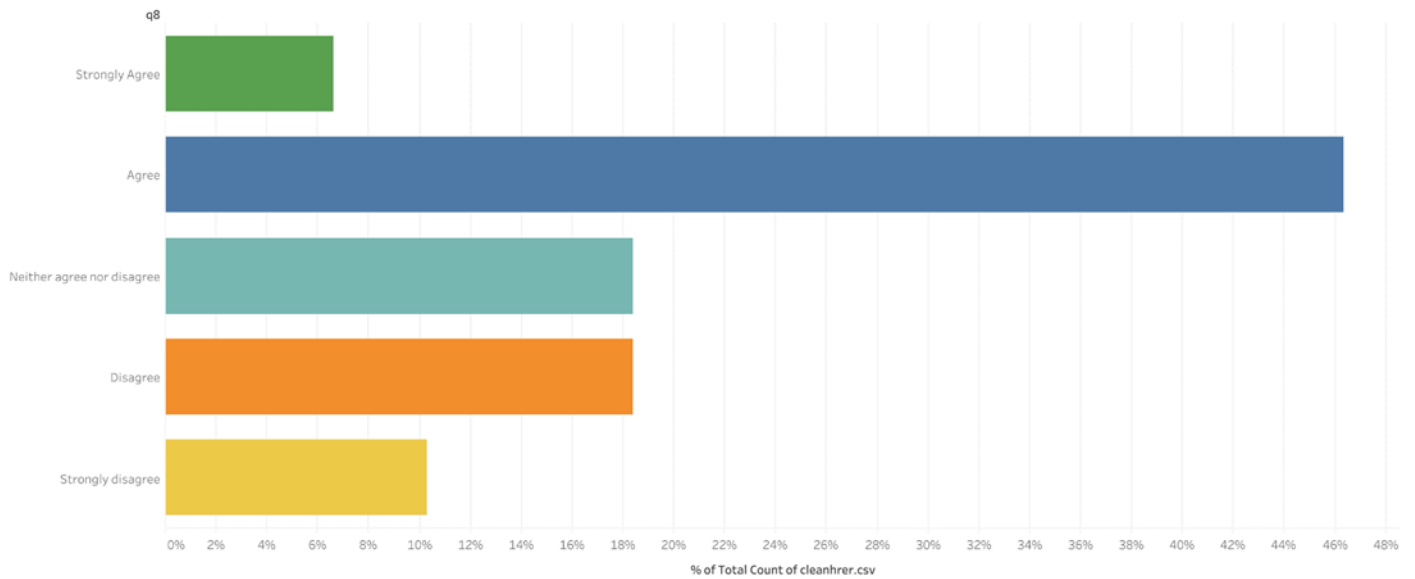

Majority of researchers agree that the University offers appropriate facilities.

Information for reseach staff is clearly available on line on the HR Research website

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

I have seen improvements (e.g. induction, training and development opportunities, researcher conference etc.) as a result of actions relating to the HR Excellence in Research Award
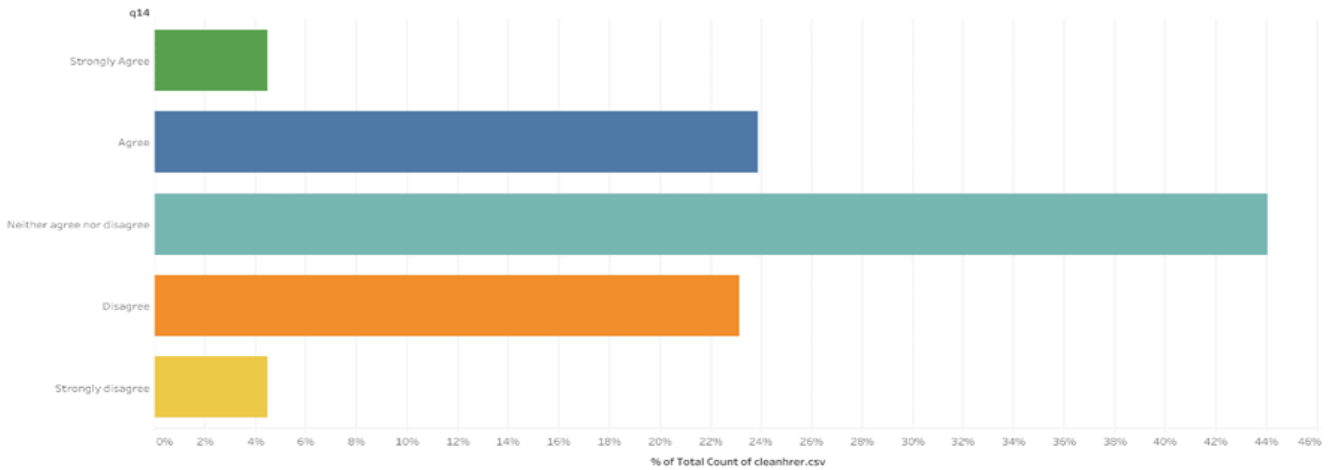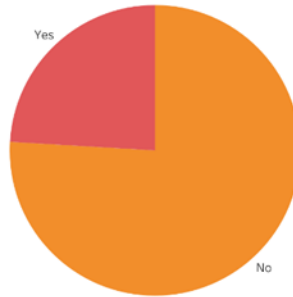

Most researchers are neutral to improvements from HR Excellence in Research (e.g. induction, training, HR conference etc.)

I am aware that there is a mentoring scheme for all UCC employees

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.

More Quotes from the Survey

"A postdoc society/community beyond the postdoc development hub would be great, especially for new joins and those relocating into Ireland."

"Better pay for research staff is urgently needed; also, better long-term career paths."

"Given my position it was decided that I would be benefit from a member of ULT as a member to focus on my leadership development. This was a very beneficial experience utilising the experience of a member of senior management in making the transition to a leadership role in Tyndall."

"Excellent, quite ad-hoc as there were no clear guidelines for my mentor, however I am now a mentor myself and the training available and resources are really useful."

"Flexible working location is central to facilitating ECRs, a hybrid workplace should continue to be adopted particularly owing to a lack of housing in Cork County. This is central to the comfort, success, and continued employment of ECRs and in particular, post docs. Help with accommodation would also be greatly appreciated to new arrivals."

"We are not encouraged to participate in training due to time constraints. I often feel that I have to fight to be granted time for training opportunities."

"I have participated in seminars and workshops and have learned very important information that benefits my research duties."

"I've found the mentoring programme really useful in terms of helping me develop my researcher identity and foster a career path."
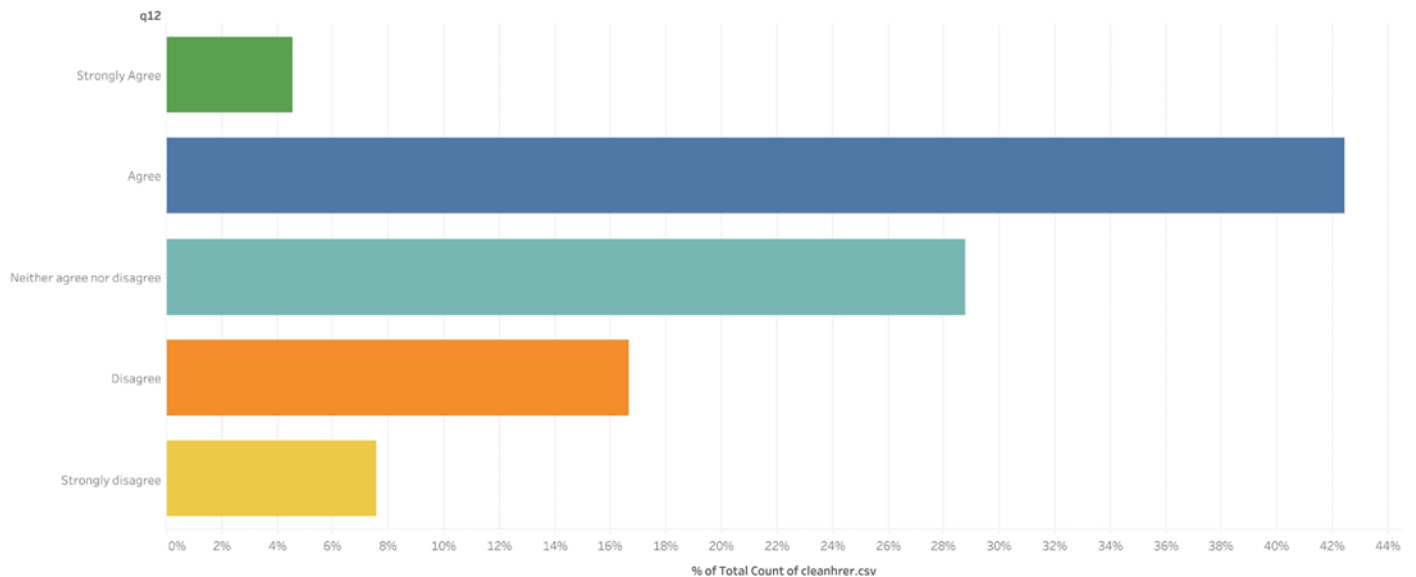
Recruitment/OTMR

Individual research roles and responsibilities at UCC are clearly defined (e.g. selection criteria, job descriptions, working conditions and entitlements etc.)
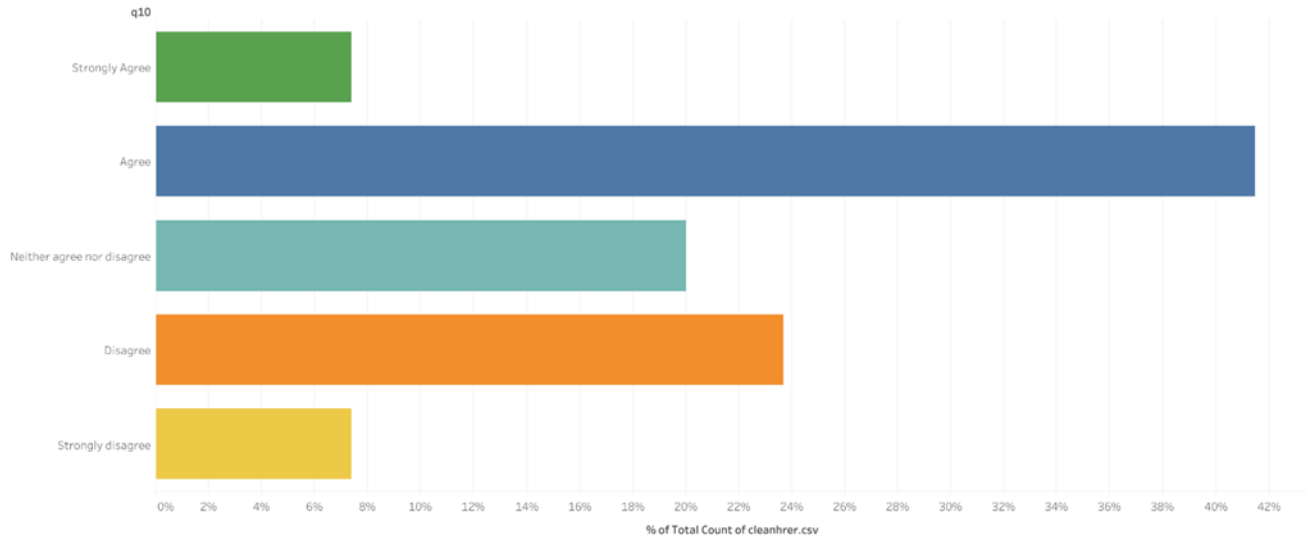
Most researchers agree that individual roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.
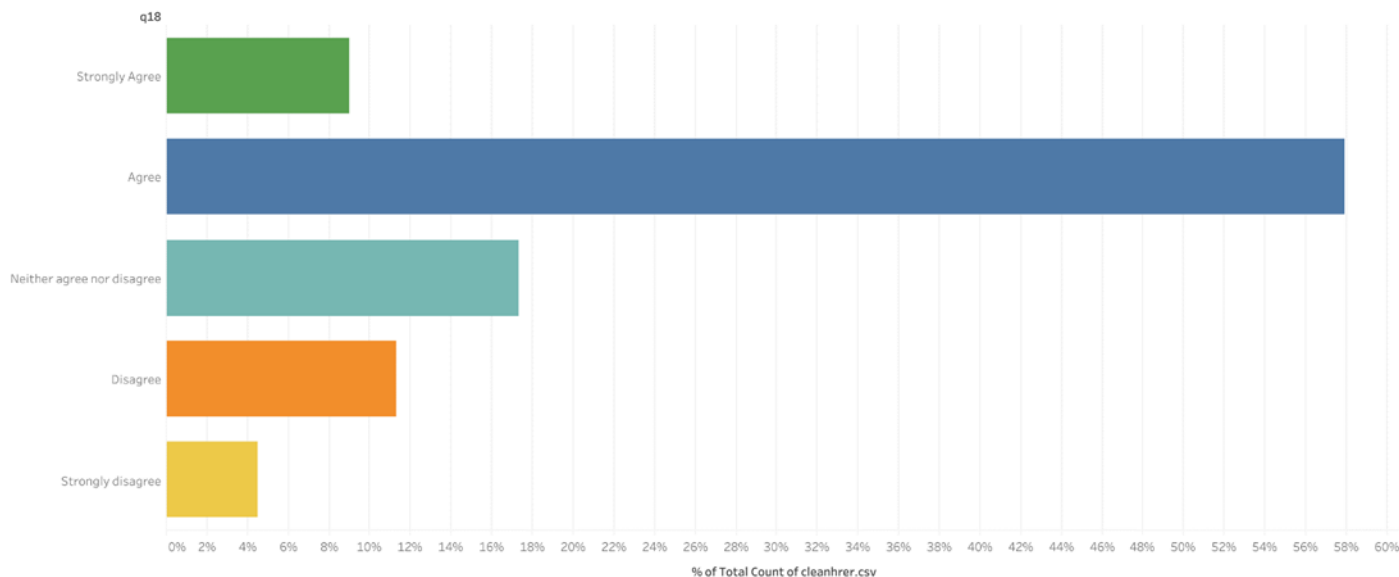
UCC practices open, transparent and merit based recruitment for research staff

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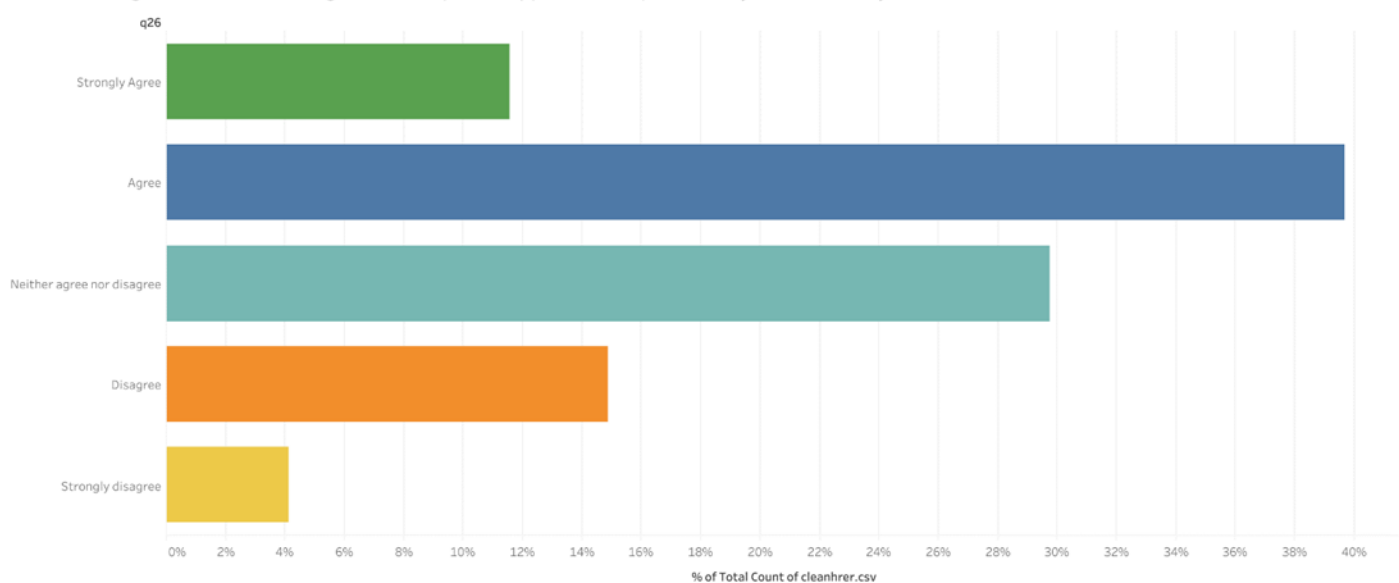
Training and Development

The University provides training and development opportunities for my professional growth and development
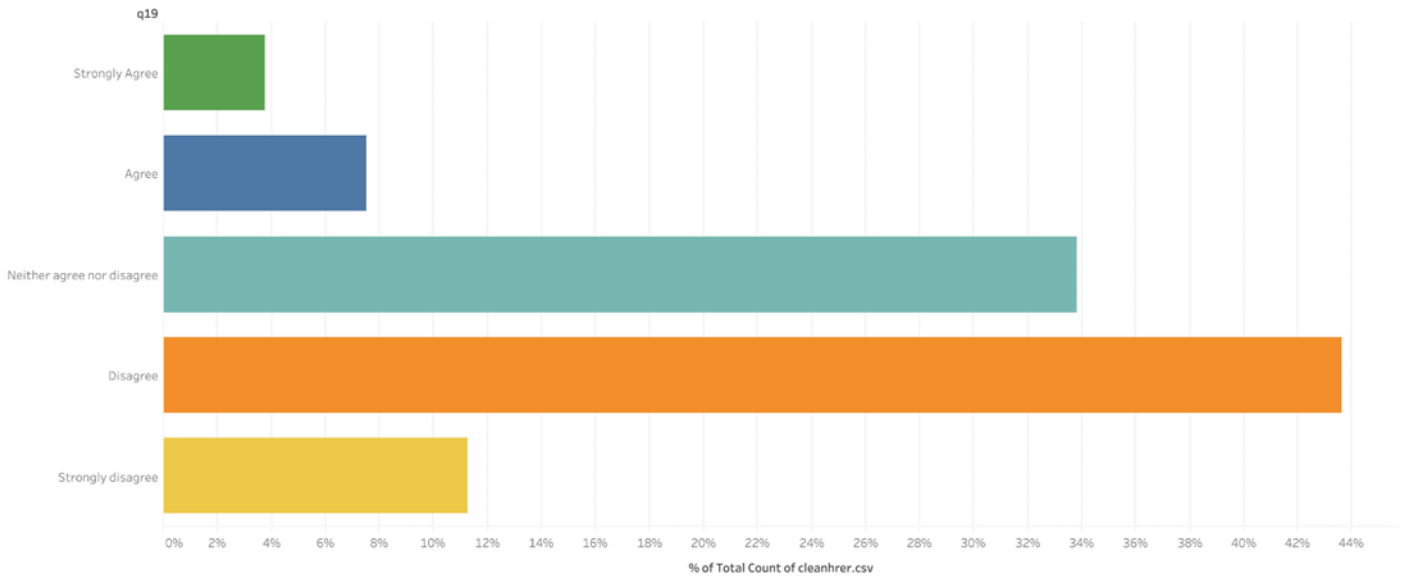

Majority of researchers agree that training and development opportunities are provided.

I am encouraged to attend training and development opportunities provided by the University
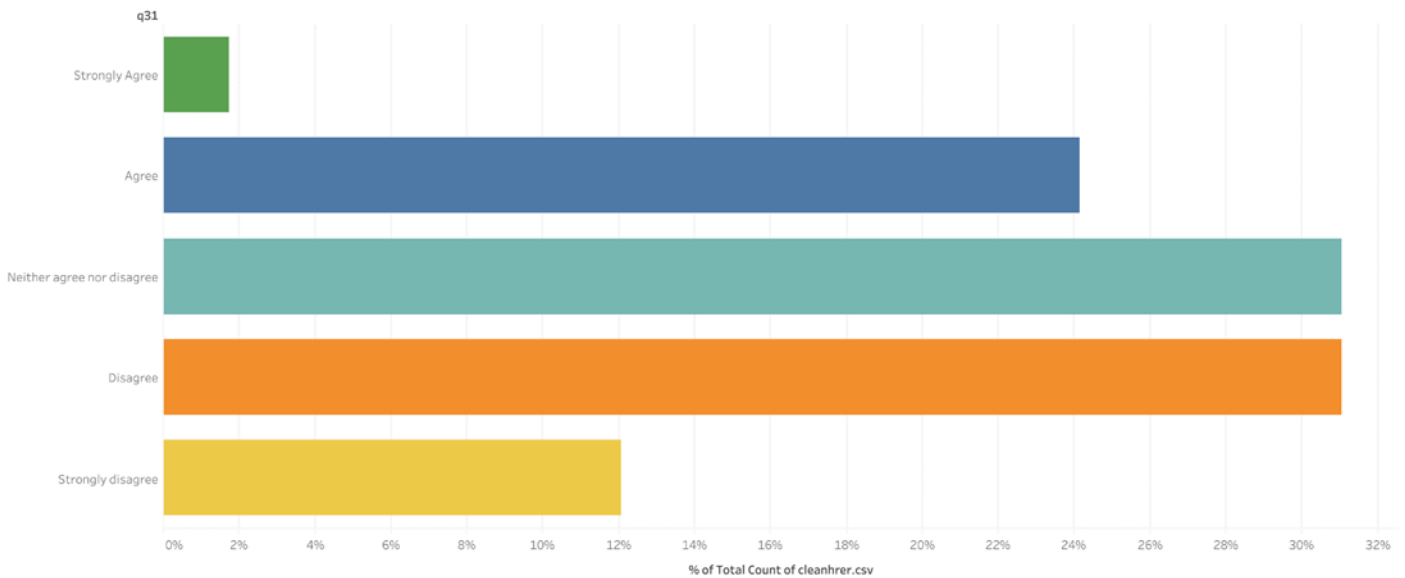

Most researchers agree that they are encouraged to attend training provided by UCC.

I receive assistance in career planning and CV advice from Human Resources

There is a mixed response regarding CV and career planning.

Teaching opportunities are available to me to support research career development

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

Training Requested

There was a large variety of responses related to training options and transferrable skills. To identify the most popular training options, the responses were categorised based on recurring themes.

The five most popular training options are:

1. **Budget/Financial Skills:**
   - Appears in almost every response.
2. **Project Management Skills:**
   - Frequent mention in responses.
3. **Communication Skills:**
   - Commonly cited as important.
4. **Leadership Training:**
   - Mentioned in several responses.
5. **Data Analysis Skills:**
   - Highlighted in multiple responses.

Gender of those Surveyed

With which gender do you identify?
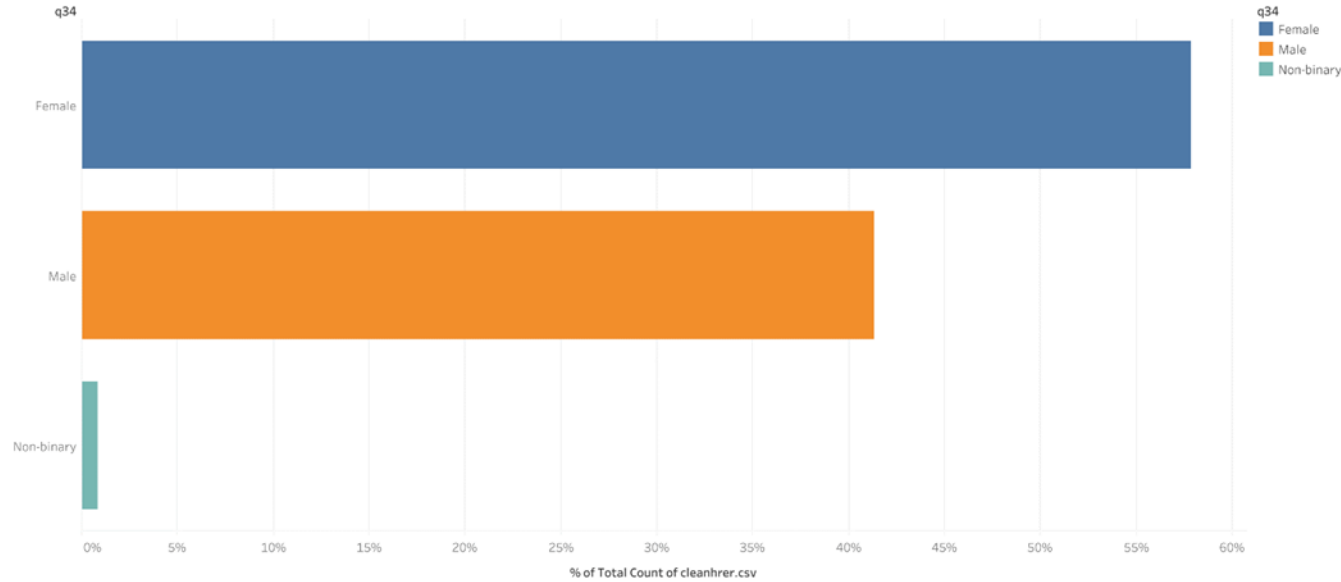
Summary of Positive Findings and Recommended Areas of Improvement

Positive Findings
- ✓ Overall UCC has reached a steady state when compared to the results of the 2019 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.
- ✓ 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 for Improvement

- Further embed HR Excellence in Research Award in policy and culture of the university.
- Target further training to those areas as indicated in the results by our research staff e.g. Project Management and Research Finance.
- 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 again to address this in the 2024 – 2027 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 again to address this in the 2024 – 2027 action plan.
- There is a mixed response to the questions regarding salary and pension which are prescribed to Irish Third Level by Government.
- Based on quotes within the survey a comprehensive approach to a career progression framework for Research Support Officers/Research Managers should be considered and linked to work currently underway by CARDEA