



Investing in career development and research culture knowledge for researchers and research enablers: Cynnuau | Ignite

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Barriers to developing a positive research culture

Cardiff University’s research culture survey (2022) (1) highlighted gaps between our aspirations for research culture and what our research communities are experiencing.

While colleagues have positive perceptions of their immediate research environment, they experience challenges finding the time to develop networks across disciplines and to contribute to the development of an institutional research culture.

The survey findings also revealed challenges to building an attachment to positive research culture values due to factors including contract precarity, lack of career development opportunities, and lack of recognition for positive behaviours.

Additional systemic challenges include a scarcity of funding for research culture activities in the devolved context of Wales, and structural barriers to creating a unified research culture across our institution.

The Programme (the intervention)

Cynnuau | Ignite is a leadership development programme for researchers (ECRs) and professional services, technical and specialist colleagues who enable research activity at Cardiff University.

The broader aim of Cynnuau | Ignite is to enable participants to embody leadership for a positive research culture during their day-to-day research and research support activity, beyond the end of the programme.

We also want to understand whether this programme can impact longer-term culture change at Cardiff and will be formally evaluating its effectiveness.

The programme aims to:

- contribute to a vision for positive research culture that is authentic to Cardiff University
- recognise the value of participants’ leadership contributions in the context of developing a positive research culture
- provide opportunities for participants to build community with peers from different disciplines and contexts
- provide a safe, supportive space to explore positive research culture values, and how participants can embody these values in their everyday contexts and more widely
- co-create an exploration of how values-led approaches to research culture can enable positive culture behaviours across different disciplinary contexts
- generate evidence and learning that will benefit both the University community and the wider sector

Pilot timeline: Sept 2024 – November 2025

Outputs

- **8** modules designed and delivered
- **123 Participants** completed the programme
- **41 Small grants** awarded (academic cohorts)
- **6 Group ‘development of practice’ projects** (professional, technical and specialist cohort) funded
- **91% of learners** participating in the formal evaluation

Evaluation

Cynnuau | Ignite is being formally evaluated. More information on the evaluation is available at the conference:

Poster: Gameiro S, ‘Positive research culture practices of early career researchers and research enablers at Cardiff University: Insights from the Cynnuau | Ignite programme.’

Talk: Protocol for a theory-based, mixed methods evaluation of Cynnuau | Ignite: an active learning programme to foster positive research culture at Cardiff University, ‘Metrics that Matter – Measuring Progress for the Future’, 12.00pm (OC1.09)

Results expected February 2026

Feedback (formative)

- Over **90%** of participants would recommend the modules to others
- Key themes**
- Participants value time and space for reflection
 - Participants value opportunity to meet and discuss with others
 - Participants generally enjoy the activities and exercises
 - Disciplinary differences affect participant experience of the programme
 - Participants feel more senior colleagues would also benefit from the programme

Figure 1. The Cynnuau | Ignite ‘Philosophy’



Programme Design

The Cynnuau | Ignite Philosophy has been developed to position our programme content in relation to the broader conversation about research culture, and to ensure a consistent, cohesive narrative underpins the various modules.

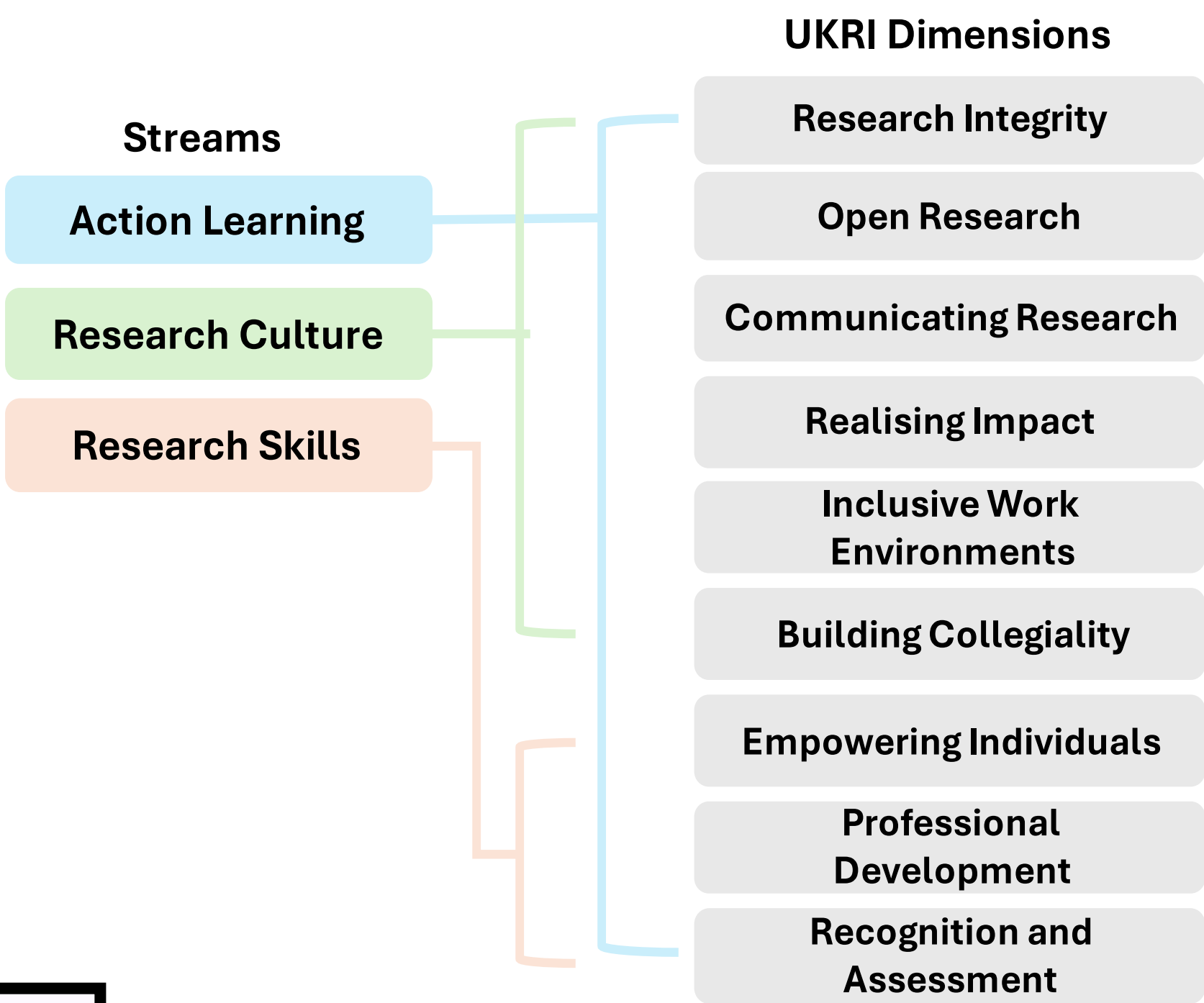
Overall, the Ignite Philosophy aims to instill empowerment and self-reflection, prompt practical application of learning, and expand on individual experiences, while also leveraging the collective experience of all participants.

Content must be:

- Based on the lived experience of the University, as well as the individuals
- Focused on participants’ own locus of control, and the do-ability and manageability of change from the ground-up, but complementing top-down strategy
- Centered on the concept of moving from individual ‘self-leadership’ (2) in the day-to-day, to being able to influence culture change more broadly

A network of 40 internal contributors were involved in design of the content.

Figure 2. UKRI Research Culture Framework dimensions targeted by Cynnuau | Ignite



1. Cardiff University 2023. *Research Culture Survey Report: 2023 Executive Summary*. Available: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/documents/2741029-research-culture-survey-report-2023-executive-summary>

2. Du Plessis, M. 2019. Positive self-leadership: A Framework for professional leadership development. Theoretical approaches to multi-cultural positive psychological interventions, pp. 445 – 461