

## Irish Research Staff Association Newsletter

Dear IrishRSA Members,

It has been a busy quarter since our last update. I'd like to relay a snapshot of the work that is underway.

We're excited to announce our **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual IrishRSA Forum on Research Careers, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023**. Our Annual Forum promises to be another stimulating mix of informative talks and engaging discussion. As always, we welcome all to join the sessions and discussions and to participate in full. You can find some more detail below, and stand by for the imminent release of the schedule!

Speaking of research careers, IrishRSA has been rather busy gathering data, planning consultations, and gathering perspectives on research careers and precarity. **Our multi-party consultation, *Policies and Practices Relating to Employment Precarity and Career Options for Research Staff*, led by Professor Cláudia Sarrico**, is underway. We would like to thank all of our stakeholder consultation participants in advance. I have no doubt that the planning, dialogue, consultation, data, and robust analysis of this consultation will move our professions forward.

Foundational information, particularly on the policy and funding landscape, is essential. Our consultation will also benefit from IrishRSA's development of a **Country Note for Ireland, led by Dr Andrew Allen**, that follows the format of the OECD's (2021) report, *Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers*. Together, the consultation and the country note, will permit the integration of knowledge and data about the status quo with the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. We look forward to both being indispensable contributors to informed decision-making, policy formation, and, ultimately, progress.

In addition to our own research and consultation activities, our international partner, **ICoRSA**, is engaged in international data collection for a **longitudinal research project on research careers**. We strongly encourage our members to participate. It hardly needs to be said, but perhaps it bears repeating for the sake of posterity:

the more data, and data of good quality, that we obtain on research careers, precarity, lived experiences, and policies, the better!

The National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers is currently underway, exploring supports and pathways for those currently undertaking a PhD. As relevant stakeholders in the doctoral education process and post-doctoral career pathways, **IrishRSA is pleased to be participating in the review process**, and looks forward to continued contribution and engagement.

On supports, just one more thing: IFUT, our trade union partners, recently held a **webinar on obtaining a contract of indefinite duration**. I suspect it would be of keen interest to many of our members. And it's available for free!

I would like to take this opportunity to **thank our membership**, across multiple HEIs, for their energy, ideas, and enthusiasm—it is your IrishRSA. Across IrishRSA, many are buoyed by witnessing membership growth in recent months. That doesn't materialise out of thin air; it takes a lot of dedication to communication and organisation (in all senses of the word). Following on from that, it's as good an opportunity as any to extend thanks to our Committee Members and IrishRSA Administrator, Dragana Mitrović, for the work they do week in, week out.

Our door is always open!

Very best wishes and see you down the road,



Dr Richard Vance  
*Chairperson, Irish RSA*

## 3rd Annual IrishRSA Forum on Research Careers: Save the Date!

IrishRSA are delighted to announce our **3rd Annual Irish RSA Forum on Research Careers**. Our Forum will be held on **May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023**.

Our Annual Forum provides an opportunity for dialogue on issues pertinent to research staff and research careers in particular, and between various stakeholders in the research ecosystem.

Previous fora, such as our **2022 Forum**, have focused on issues such as research careers, researcher mobility, pan-European pension reform for researchers, open science, and equality, diversity and inclusion. Previously, speakers and panellists have been drawn from, for example, the European Commission, UNESCO, International Consortium of Research Staff Associations (ICoRSA), universities in Ireland, VitaeUK, Technopolis Group, and the Irish Federation of University Teachers, to name a few.

This year's Forum will be held at a time of considerable flux and change in the Irish research landscape, particularly in relation to the establishment of a new state research funding, and promises to be an engaging and informative event.

## IrishRSA Stakeholder Consultation: *Policies and Practices Relating to Employment Precarity and Career Options for Research Staff*

To better understand career options for research staff in Ireland, the Irish Research Staff Association is conducting a stakeholder consultation, ***Policies and Practices Relating to Employment Precarity and Career Options for Research Staff***. The consultation is being undertaken with **Professor Cláudia Sarrico**, Professor of Management at School of Economics and Management, University of Minho, Portugal, and builds on work in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers*.

Although different policies and broader policy instruments with relevance for research careers have been developed, there is still relatively little readily available data or knowledge about the precise effects or relationships these policies may have with research careers. The relatively high degree of international and intersectoral mobility among research staff, and high staff turnover, present challenges for gathering information on research staff.

**To this end, IrishRSA will consult with relevant stakeholders** (e.g., research staff, policymakers, representatives of HEIs), who have a range of expertise and viewpoints on recent, existing, and planned policies, information on the policy process, observed effects of policy, and factors influencing impact. We will conduct a limited number of focus groups with relevant representatives. Feedback from these focus groups will help guide and improve policy in this area and its implementation.

The project is generously supported by general funds from the Irish Research Council towards the activities of the Irish Research Staff Association. However, the views expressed in any of the outputs of this project do not necessarily reflect the views of the Irish Research Council.

To inform our stakeholder consultation on employment precarity led by Prof. Sarrico, IrishRSA is in the process of preparing a Country Note for Ireland that will align with the OECD structure of country notes developed for other jurisdictions.

If you have any questions about this consultation, please do not hesitate to contact us at [irishrsa@gmail.com](mailto:irishrsa@gmail.com).

## IrishRSA's Participation in the National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers

The *National Review of State Supports for PhD Researchers* is currently underway. As a relevant stakeholder, IrishRSA is pleased to have had the recent opportunity to contribute. Dr Richard Vance, IrishRSA Chairperson, and Dr Féaron Cassidy, IrishRSA Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer, are engaged in ongoing contribution and consultation on behalf of IrishRSA.

PhD scholars are not merely excellent researchers, but also integral to the functioning of the research and academic system, very often responding to demands far beyond their individual PhD scholarship. The available evidence shows that, presently, PhD scholars are typically living close to or at the poverty line.

IrishRSA supports the reform of state supports to ensure not only that PhD scholars are enabled to meet their potential, but also to protect their standards of living, health, well-being, and quality of life. We support progressive reform of remuneration, conditions, and safeguards, and protection of scholars from exploitation.

We acknowledge that the research and academia is a complex web with multiple, competing priorities. Nevertheless, we believe that this is a priority issue, which speaks to human health and well-being, as well as core values of research and

academia: progress, humanism, reason, and evidence. We reaffirm our commitment to working with the spectrum of stakeholders to design and deliver the research and academic practices and systems of the future.

Recently, we released the *IrishRSA Statement on State Supports for PhD Scholars*, enclosed separately, and available on our social media channels and via our website.

### IFUT Webinar on Obtaining a CID

Irish RSA works closely with The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) in areas such as employment rights, precarity, and sustainable research careers.

IFUT recently held a webinar on *Claiming a Contract of Indefinite Duration*. Contracts of indefinite duration, or CIDs, are similar to permanent contracts of employment.

IFUT's webinar aims to support researchers' understanding of their legal rights regarding eligibility for a CID and the application process for one. **This webinar is now freely available online.**

### ICoRSA Research Project on Research Careers

Last year, our international partner, ICoRSA—**International Consortium of Research Staff Associations**—launched its first of a series of surveys that will form part of a longitudinal study attempting to track the researchers' careers and whether they have improved or not over time.

The second survey is now online and it would be very much appreciated if you could participate. We strongly believe that research like this will help to advance research career pathways, opportunities, sustainability, and inclusion. This research is distinct from the IrishRSA consultation and country note. **You can find the ICoRSA survey here.**

