HR STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS (HRS4R)

Progress Update Report

Research culture, researcher development and engagement, 2025–2026

National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT)

October 2026



nibrt
National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

NIBRT holds the European Commission's "HR Excellence in Research" award in recognition of its commitment to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

About this report

NIBRT first received the "HR Excellence in Research" award in January 2020 and successfully retained it following its two-year interim review in November 2022. The award recognises NIBRT's commitment to the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (the Charter and Code), which set out equal rights and obligations for researchers across Europe.

This report summarises the progress NIBRT has made on its HRS4R Action Plan since the Internal Review. It is organised by theme, and each section identifies the related actions in the NIBRT Action Plan, sets out our commitment and describes what has been achieved.

Across every theme, a common thread emerges: activities that once took place as one-off events or compliance exercises are now embedded in NIBRT's everyday research culture. Public engagement, research integrity, career development and researcher visibility are supported through regular, structured programmes such as the Research Bites series, the Visiting Minds Seminar Series and the annual NIBRT Research Conference.

Progress at a glance

Theme	Actions	Highlights
Public engagement	3, 12, 23	European Researchers' Night 2025 and 2026; Transition Year Programme; STEM Passport for Inclusion
Research integrity	7	Integrity themes built into Research Bites; publication ethics session; continuing integrity training
Dissemination of research	14	NIBRT Research Conferences 2025 and 2026; Research Centre of the Year award; expanded research news and digital channels
Researcher visibility	15	First ERC Starting Grant; EIT Health membership; partner in three Research Ireland Rinn Centres
Career development	18, 46, 47, 48	MSCA Global Postdoctoral Fellowship success; NIBRT Mentoring Programme with senior leaders; PhD community supports
External speakers and career pathways	25	Visiting Minds Seminar Series; international conference speakers; Women+ in STEM engagement
Research Handbook	28, 44	Comprehensive update of the Researcher Handbook; handbook topics delivered through Research Bites
Research environment	36, 45	Research Neighbourhood recognised as good practice; staff wellbeing initiatives; EDI policies and mandatory inclusion and neurodiversity training
Gender balance	43, 49	Gender Pay Gap Summary Report 2025 published with action plan

1. Public Engagement and Science Communication

Action Plan reference: Actions 3, 12 and 23

> **Our commitment: Increase public engagement with, and the visibility of, NIBRT research.**
> Since the Internal Review, NIBRT has significantly expanded and professionalised its public engagement activity. The appointment of a dedicated Research Communications Officer and the development of a Public Engagement Strategy have created a structured framework through which researchers engage with schools, communities, industry and the wider public. Public engagement is no longer limited to individual events; it is now an embedded part of NIBRT's research culture and research impact strategy.

Progress since the Internal Review

1.1 European Researchers' Night and open lab events

European Researchers' Night has become one of NIBRT's most important public engagement activities. In September 2025, NIBRT opened its doors for Inside NIBRT Research: An Open Lab Event, giving visitors direct access to researchers, laboratories and research facilities. More than 25 colleagues from Research, Training and NIBRT's Community Engagement committee worked together to deliver demonstrations, tours and interactive activities showing how NIBRT research contributes to health innovation and the biopharmaceutical sector.

European Researchers' Night 2026. On Friday 25 September 2026, NIBRT once again opened its doors to the public as part of European Researchers' Night, an EU-wide celebration of research expected to welcome over one million people across 40 countries. The free, family-friendly event invited visitors of all ages to build DNA models from sweets, examine real cells under the microscope and play science board games, with NIBRT researchers on hand to answer questions. The format was adapted to allow local primary and secondary schools to visit during school hours before the main public event from 4pm. Throughout the day we welcomed over 120 people to our facility.

1.2 Inspiring the next generation through schools outreach

NIBRT's annual Transition Year Programme remains one of the Institute's flagship community engagement activities. Students gain hands-on exposure to biopharmaceutical science through laboratory demonstrations, pilot plant experiences, facility tours and conversations with research scientists. The programme continues to attract strong national interest and very positive feedback, and participants include students from DEIS schools, reflecting NIBRT's commitment to widening access. Applications for the January 2027 programme opened on 1 October 2026.

Beyond the Transition Year Programme, NIBRT continues to build relationships with local schools and educational initiatives, giving students the chance to meet researchers and learn about careers in STEM and the biopharmaceutical industry. These activities also contribute to Ireland's future research and innovation talent pipeline.

1.3 STEM Passport for Inclusion

NIBRT has increased its involvement in the STEM Passport for Inclusion programme. NIBRT researchers and staff act as mentors, providing one-to-one guidance to students from under-represented communities, particularly students attending DEIS schools and those who may not traditionally consider STEM careers. NIBRT has doubled the number of employee mentors taking part and continues to offer dedicated student placements through the TY Programme.

The programme reflects NIBRT's values of inclusion, diversity and equitable access to education, and shows how public engagement has evolved from awareness-raising into sustained mentoring for future scientists.

1.4 Building public trust and research visibility

Through open laboratory events, science outreach, educational programmes and mentoring, NIBRT researchers engage directly with the public and communicate the value of their work. This strengthens public understanding of research and showcases NIBRT's contribution to healthcare innovation, advanced biopharmaceutical manufacturing and workforce development.

2. Research Integrity

Action Plan reference: Action 7

> **Our commitment: Provide research integrity and ethics training for researchers.**
> NIBRT has moved beyond a compliance-driven training model towards a visible, continuous and embedded culture of responsible research. Alongside mandatory training modules, NIBRT now supports ongoing discussion, awareness initiatives and practical learning so that research integrity remains an active topic across the research community, connected to wider conversations about research culture, publication standards, ethical practice, governance and responsible innovation.

Progress since the Internal Review

2.1 Strengthening research integrity through Research Bites

NIBRT's Research Bites programme is now used to reinforce key integrity and ethics themes. Maintaining high standards of research conduct requires regular discussion rather than one-off training, and Research Bites gives researchers the opportunity to learn from current issues, ask questions and share experiences of responsible research practice.

Topics from the NIBRT Researcher Handbook are now built into the monthly Research Bites sessions, keeping guidance on ethics, authorship, intellectual property, dissemination, governance and compliance visible and relevant throughout the year.

2.2 Predatory publishing and publication ethics

A dedicated Research Bites session, delivered by a recognised research information specialist, helped researchers to identify and avoid predatory journals and conferences. The session explored:

- the characteristics of predatory journals and misleading publishing practices;
- the risks associated with poor-quality publication outlets;
- protecting researcher reputation and the credibility of the scholarly record; and
- responsible publication practice.

The session was particularly valuable for early-career researchers navigating an increasingly complex publishing environment.

2.3 A continuing commitment

Publication ethics, responsible research conduct, compliance, governance and research culture feature prominently in researcher communications and engagement programmes. By building integrity discussions into communication channels, researcher events and Research Bites, NIBRT ensures that integrity remains an ongoing conversation rather than a periodic compliance exercise.

3. Dissemination of Research Results

Action Plan reference: Action 14

> **Our commitment: Increase the visibility and dissemination of NIBRT research.**
> Research dissemination at NIBRT now extends well beyond publications and conference outputs. A structured research communications programme led by the Research Office ensures that research achievements, funding successes, international collaborations, scientific events, publications and researcher accomplishments are communicated regularly to a wide range of audiences.

Progress since the Internal Review

3.1 Communicating research achievements

Major successes communicated during the period include NIBRT's role in three of the new Research Ireland Rinn Centres, European funding partnerships and collaborations, and the growth of the CONCEPT infrastructure and translational research activity. Communicating these achievements consistently has raised awareness of NIBRT's research strengths among researchers, collaborators and stakeholders.

3.2 NIBRT Research Conferences

The NIBRT Research Conference 2025 and the NIBRT Research Conference 2026 brought together researchers, industry representatives, policymakers, healthcare stakeholders and international collaborators. Early-career researchers, PhD students, research scientists and research groups from across the Institute presented talks and posters and engaged directly with leading experts from Ireland, Europe and the United States.

3.3 International recognition and awards

NIBRT was named Research Centre of the Year at the Irish Pharma Industry Awards, external recognition of the quality, impact and leadership of NIBRT's research portfolio. This and other successes, including international keynote invitations, European collaborations and funding awards, have been promoted

through NIBRT's growing digital channels, including LinkedIn, extending the reach of NIBRT research to national and international audiences.

3.4 An integrated communications approach

Research dissemination now includes regular research news, impact stories, funding announcements, strategic partnerships, infrastructure developments, public engagement activities and awards, ensuring that research achievements are visible both inside and outside the Institute.

4. Researcher Visibility and External Engagement

Action Plan reference: Action 15

> **Our commitment: Increase the visibility of researchers and their external engagement.**
> The original action focused on LinkedIn engagement and external promotion. Activity during 2025–2026 shows that researcher visibility is now supported by a dedicated communications programme, promotion of achievements, international engagement, conference participation and recognition of researcher successes.

Progress since the Internal Review

4.1 European networks and recognition

In February 2025, NIBRT became a member of EIT Health, one of Europe's largest healthcare innovation communities, giving NIBRT researchers new opportunities to engage with European innovation ecosystems and collaborate with leading organisations. NIBRT researchers and research leaders have also taken part in EuropaBio activities and European biotechnology discussions, highlighting NIBRT's capabilities in biopharmaceutical manufacturing and advanced therapies.

A landmark achievement was the award of NIBRT's first European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant, valued at €1.86 million, to Dr Alan Costello. The award strengthens NIBRT's international research profile and demonstrates its ability to support world-class, investigator-led research.

4.2 National research leadership

In June 2026, Research Ireland launched the Rinn network of national research centres. NIBRT is a partner in three of the new centres: Rinn Advanced Therapies, Rinn Pharma & Biopharma and Rinn Medical Devices. These roles raise the national profile of NIBRT researchers and give them the opportunity to help shape large-scale collaborative research programmes over the coming years.

4.3 Conferences and scientific events

NIBRT's annual research conferences provide visibility for researchers at every career stage. Through presentations, poster sessions and panel discussions, researchers communicate their findings to industry partners, academics, policymakers and international collaborators, supporting both professional development and wider recognition.

4.4 International collaborations

Researchers are increasingly visible through international partnerships, participation in IBISBA, engagement with PRECISEU, activity within Horizon Europe networks and participation in international conferences and scientific forums.

4.5 Celebrating research excellence

NIBRT's recognition as Research Centre of the Year at the Irish Pharma Industry Awards provided significant visibility for its research community. Research achievements, awards, funding successes and individual accomplishments continue to be promoted through NIBRT's communications channels, including LinkedIn, expanding professional networks and raising the profile of NIBRT researchers nationally and internationally.

5. Career Development

Action Plan reference: Actions 18, 46, 47 and 48

> **Our commitment: Support supervisors and researchers to have long-term career conversations.** Career development is now a prominent and recurring theme across NIBRT's research communications, researcher development activities and funding support. NIBRT has increased the visibility of fellowships, funding pathways, independent researcher schemes and leadership development opportunities, encouraging researchers to look beyond immediate project requirements and explore the full range of career paths open to them in academia, industry, research leadership, innovation, funding agencies and translational research.

Progress since the Internal Review

5.1 Supporting independent research careers

Throughout 2025, NIBRT promoted the Research Ireland Pathways Programme, which supports outstanding early-career researchers in establishing independent research careers and moving into research leadership roles.

A strong example of career development in practice is the success of a NIBRT postdoctoral researcher, who was awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Global Postdoctoral Fellowship. The fellowship supports an international research project involving the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Zurich, offering valuable opportunities for independent research, international collaboration and career progression.

5.2 Investigator and fellowship opportunities

NIBRT actively supports researchers in pursuing prestigious national and international funding opportunities, including:

- the Research Ireland Investigators Programme;
- Royal Society Research Fellowships;

- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Fellowships; and
- European Research Council (ERC) grants.

Promoting these schemes raises researchers' awareness of future funding routes, gives supervisors concrete examples to discuss during performance reviews and career conversations, and encourages researchers to take ownership of their long-term development. These programmes are not only sources of funding but routes to research independence and leadership experience.

5.3 Research conferences as career development platforms

The NIBRT Research Conferences in 2025 and 2026 were designed as opportunities for professional growth as well as scientific exchange. Researchers presented their work, showcased posters, met international speakers, networked with industry leaders and funding bodies, and built communication skills and professional confidence. The 2026 conference placed particular emphasis on the contribution of early-career researchers and on emerging research leadership within NIBRT.

5.4 A culture of career development

Career development is no longer treated as a once-a-year activity. Regular communications highlight researcher development opportunities, funding pathways, mentoring, international fellowships, leadership development and European networking. This normalises career planning conversations and gives supervisors up-to-date opportunities to discuss with researchers throughout the year.

5.5 NIBRT Mentoring Programme

Through the NIBRT Mentoring Programme, researchers can be paired with a mentor from NIBRT's senior leadership and management team. Mentoring gives researchers access to the experience and perspective of senior colleagues, offering a confidential space to discuss career goals, professional development, leadership and the challenges of building a research career. The programme complements supervisor-led career conversations and helps researchers broaden their networks across the Institute.

5.6 HR support for career planning

NIBRT's HR team regularly encourages Principal Investigators and line managers to hold structured, long-term career development conversations with researchers that go beyond annual objectives and short-term training needs, covering career aspirations, research leadership, funding opportunities and long-term pathways. Annual and mid-year review processes include built-in prompts for these discussions.

HR has also strengthened support for PhD students through regular information and engagement sessions on researcher supports, career development and the wider PhD experience. Dedicated online channels now connect PhD students as a community, supporting peer networking, knowledge sharing and access to information across NIBRT.

6. External Speakers and Career Pathways

Action Plan reference: Action 25

> **Our commitment: Expose researchers to external speakers and career opportunities.**
> Through seminar programmes, annual research conferences and networking initiatives, NIBRT researchers now have regular contact with leading figures from academia, industry, policy, innovation and translational research. This has broadened their perspective on possible career paths and given them access to successful role models from across the life sciences.

Progress since the Internal Review

6.1 Visiting Minds Seminar Series

The Visiting Minds Seminar Series gives researchers direct access to internationally recognised experts across a wide range of disciplines, and the chance to learn from leaders who have built successful careers in academia, research infrastructure and technology development. Recent speakers include:

- Dr Junli Xu (University College Dublin), who spoke on analytical excellence and methodological rigour in emerging research areas; and
- Dr Rennos Fragkoudis, Head of the Edinburgh Genome Foundry, who presented on automation, DNA technologies and synthetic biology.

6.2 International conference speakers

The NIBRT Research Conference 2026 programme featured internationally recognised scientific leaders, including:

- Prof Garret FitzGerald, University of Pennsylvania;
- Prof Jimmy Gollihar, Houston Methodist Research Institute;
- Prof Helen McCarthy, Chief Scientific and Technology Adviser for Northern Ireland; and
- researchers from K-NIBRT and other international institutions.

Hearing from leaders whose careers span academia, translational research, industry, regulatory science and innovation helps NIBRT researchers understand the breadth of opportunities available within and beyond academia.

6.3 Women+ in STEM

NIBRT hosted the UCD Women+ in STEM Society, with members of the Research and Training teams sharing insights into careers in research, bioprocessing, innovation and advanced manufacturing. The visit gave NIBRT researchers the opportunity to act as role models and supports NIBRT's commitment to an inclusive and representative research environment.

6.4 Funding experts and research leaders

Researchers are increasingly engaging with experts in research funding and European programmes through sessions on Horizon Europe funding, support for MSCA and ERC applications, promotion of the Research Ireland Investigators and Pathways programmes, and guidance from national and European

funding experts. These activities show researchers how successful careers are built through competitive funding, collaboration and leadership.

6.5 A culture of career awareness

Career awareness is now embedded across NIBRT's activities. Rather than relying on isolated events, researchers encounter career pathway discussions through seminars, conferences, Research Bites and funding sessions, giving them continuous exposure to people who have built careers across diverse sectors and disciplines.

7. Researcher Handbook

Action Plan reference: Actions 28 and 44

> **Our commitment: Implement and embed the Researcher Handbook.**
> The NIBRT Researcher Handbook has evolved from a reference document into a practical engagement, communication and education tool that supports researcher development, promotes research integrity and reinforces good practice. Researchers are regularly reminded of handbook themes through dedicated sessions, awareness activities and research communications.

Progress since the Internal Review

7.1 A comprehensive update

In 2026, the Researcher Handbook was extensively revised to serve as a comprehensive reference across the entire research lifecycle. It now brings together guidance on research integrity, intellectual property, authorship and dissemination, health and safety, research governance, grant management, HR policies and supports, and professional responsibilities. The handbook is designed not simply as a repository of policies but as a practical resource that helps researchers apply good practice at every stage of their work.

7.2 Bringing the handbook to life through Research Bites

Key handbook topics are now integrated into the monthly Research Bites programme. Rather than relying on researchers to read the handbook independently, NIBRT discusses policies, expectations and good practice collectively, recognising that a strong research culture is built through dialogue and shared understanding rather than documentation alone.

7.3 Reinforcing integrity and professional conduct

Activities during the review period that reinforced handbook themes include the Research Bites session on predatory publishing and publication ethics, continued communication on research integrity standards and the ongoing promotion of responsible research practice.

7.4 Shared standards and expectations

By establishing shared standards, principles and guidance, and by linking handbook topics to Research Bites, seminars and research culture initiatives, the handbook supports consistency across research groups and helps ensure that NIBRT's values are reflected in everyday research practice.

8. A Collaborative, Supportive and Inclusive Research Environment

Action Plan reference: Actions 36 and 45

> **Our commitment: Provide a collaborative research environment.**
> NIBRT has continued to build on the success of the Research Neighbourhood, strengthening collaboration, knowledge sharing and engagement across the Institute. In parallel, NIBRT has introduced researcher-led seminar series and a new Space Allocation and Equipment Management Process to improve access to infrastructure and shared resources. HR has also placed a strong focus on staff wellbeing and on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), so that every researcher can thrive at NIBRT.

Progress since the Internal Review

8.1 The Research Neighbourhood

In October 2025, NIBRT highlighted the Research Neighbourhood as an example of good practice in its contribution to the All-Island Research Culture Network's Call for Evidence on Research Culture. The Research Neighbourhood was designed to support collaboration, interaction and different working styles, and it continues to add value for researchers several years after it was introduced.

8.2 Research seminar programmes

Researcher-led seminar series and summer research seminars have increased the visibility of research across groups, encouraged scientific discussion and strengthened collaboration among researchers from different disciplines and career stages.

8.3 Access to infrastructure and shared resources

A new Space Allocation and Equipment Management Process, developed with input from Principal Investigators and researchers, ensures that laboratory space and research infrastructure are managed transparently and effectively. It supports collaboration, improves access to shared facilities and keeps the research environment flexible as new projects and research groups emerge.

8.4 Staff wellbeing

NIBRT's HR team continues to prioritise the wellbeing of researchers and staff. Wellbeing initiatives, such as on-site massage sessions, give colleagues practical opportunities to take a break, relax and look after their physical and mental health. Alongside NIBRT's award-winning Hybrid Working Framework, these initiatives reflect NIBRT's recognition that a healthy, supported workforce is essential to a positive research culture.

8.5 Equality, diversity and inclusion

NIBRT is committed to an inclusive workplace in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect. This commitment is set out in NIBRT's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and supported by related policies including the Dignity at Work Policy, the Gender Equality Plan and the Menopause Policy and Guidelines, all of which are available in the HRS4R supporting documentation on the NIBRT website.

To embed these values in everyday practice, all staff complete mandatory training on inclusion and neurodiversity. The training builds awareness of different backgrounds, perspectives and ways of thinking and working, and helps colleagues create a research environment in which everyone can contribute fully.

8.6 A positive research culture

The research environment is further supported by Research Bites, the Visiting Minds Seminar Series, participation in the All-Island Research Culture Network and the development of a NIBRT Research Charter.

8.7 Working together across NIBRT

Collaboration between the Research, HR, Training, Facilities, Finance and Business Development teams has strengthened, including joint work on researcher onboarding, infrastructure projects, funding support and new training and research initiatives. This coordinated approach gives researchers joined-up institutional support.

9. Gender Balance

Action Plan reference: Actions 43 and 49

> **Our commitment: Support gender balance initiatives.**
> NIBRT has published its Gender Pay Gap Summary Report 2025, which is publicly available in the HRS4R supporting documentation on the NIBRT website. The report presents NIBRT's gender pay gap data alongside an analysis of contributing factors and an action plan focused on improving gender balance, supporting career progression and strengthening female participation in STEM and research careers.

Progress since the Internal Review

9.1 Publication of the Gender Pay Gap Summary Report 2025

The completion and publication of the NIBRT Gender Pay Gap Summary Report 2025 is a key milestone in NIBRT's commitment to transparency, accountability and evidence-based action on gender equality.

NIBRT continues to strengthen the future female STEM and research talent pipeline through initiatives such as hosting the UCD Women+ in STEM Society and expanding its participation in the STEM Passport for Inclusion programme. The report identifies these initiatives as key actions supporting greater female participation in STEM and research careers.

9.2 Schools engagement and future talent

NIBRT's Transition Year Programme continues to engage students from DEIS schools and under-represented backgrounds. The Gender Pay Gap report builds on this work with specific actions to increase the participation of female Transition Year students through work experience and outreach.

9.3 Organisational actions supporting gender equality

NIBRT's approach extends beyond outreach to organisation-wide measures, including:

- an award-winning Hybrid Working Framework;
- inclusive recruitment practices and unconscious bias training for hiring managers;
- mandatory inclusion and neurodiversity training for all staff;
- leadership and mentoring programmes, including the NIBRT Mentoring Programme;
- equitable access to learning and development;
- family leave supports; and
- tailored performance management and career planning processes for researchers.

Further information

NIBRT's HRS4R Action Plans, survey results and supporting policies are available on the NIBRT HRS4R web page. For any questions about NIBRT's HRS4R accreditation, please contact hr@nibrt.ie.