

Comillas Research Mentoring Programme (CRMP)

Purposeful Mentoring for Research Excellence and Career Development

Aligned with the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)



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Introduction

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), promoted by the European Commission, supports universities, research-performing organisations, and research funding bodies in implementing the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. Through this initiative, institutions are encouraged to create attractive, supportive, and excellence-driven research environments that foster career development, mobility, transparency, and equal opportunities.

In December 2020, Comillas Pontifical University was awarded the HRS4R Award by the European Commission. This recognition identifies institutions that actively promote a stimulating and supportive environment for researchers and demonstrates the University's commitment to aligning its human resources policies and practices with European standards and recommendations.

In accordance with the European Charter for Researchers, experienced researchers are expected to contribute not only through their scientific expertise but also through their roles as supervisors, mentors, career advisors, and facilitators of knowledge transfer. Effective mentoring is recognised as a key mechanism for supporting researchers' professional development, strengthening institutional research capacity, and enhancing long-term career prospects.

Against this backdrop, Comillas Pontifical University has established the **Comillas Research Mentoring Programme (CRMP)**. The programme is designed to support junior and newly recruited researchers by connecting them with experienced researchers and research leaders who can provide guidance, support, and strategic advice throughout their research careers.

1. Objectives and Scope

Strategic Objectives

The Comillas Research Mentoring Programme seeks to:

- *Strengthen research competencies and professional development among researchers.*
- *Foster interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange.*

- *Promote talent retention and sustainable research careers.*
- *Facilitate the implementation of HRS4R principles within the institutional research culture.*
- *Support researchers in developing transferable skills and career-management competencies.*
- *Enhance researchers' employability and long-term professional prospects.*

Target Groups

The programme is open to:

- Predoctoral researchers.
- Postdoctoral researchers.
- Researchers at intermediate career stages, where appropriate.
- Newly recruited researchers requiring support in their integration and professional development.

2. Programme Structure

Core Components

Mentors

Mentors are experienced researchers with recognised academic leadership and a demonstrated commitment to supporting the development of colleagues and early-career researchers.

Mentees

Mentees are researchers seeking guidance and support in developing their research skills, career strategies, professional networks, and academic trajectories.

Duration

The pilot phase of the programme will run for ten months.

Delivery Format

The programme combines:

- One-to-one mentoring meetings.
- Group workshops and training activities.
- Online mentoring sessions.
- Hybrid events and networking opportunities.

3. Selection and Matching Process

Mentor Selection

Participation as a mentor is voluntary and based on a commitment to supporting researcher development.

Effective mentors are expected to:

- Provide guidance and constructive feedback.
- Encourage reflection and independent decision-making.
- Share professional experience and networks.
- Support career planning and professional growth.
- Promote confidence, motivation, and resilience among mentees.

The mentor's role is not to supervise or direct the mentee's research activities, but rather to act as a trusted advisor and facilitator of professional development.

Mentee Selection

Priority will be given to researchers seeking support in their professional development, particularly those at the early stages of their research careers.

Matching Criteria

Mentor–mentee pairings will be established on the basis of:

- Research areas and disciplinary expertise.
- Professional interests and career aspirations.
- Development needs and mentoring objectives.
- Potential for productive and constructive collaboration.

4. Training and Support for Mentors

Mentors will receive dedicated preparation covering:

- The objectives, structure, and expected outcomes of the programme.
- Roles and responsibilities within the mentoring relationship.
- Establishing expectations and mentoring agreements.
- Effective communication and active listening.
- Constructive feedback and coaching techniques.
- Managing mentoring relationships and addressing challenges.
- Application of HRS4R principles within mentoring practice.
- Ongoing support will be provided through:
 - Periodic review meetings.
 - Exchange of good practices.
 - Access to guidance materials and resources.
 - Opportunities for peer learning among mentors.

5. Training and Support for Mentees

Mentees will receive guidance on:

- Programme objectives and expectations.
- Roles and responsibilities within the mentoring process.
- Setting realistic goals and development plans.
- Maximising the benefits of mentoring relationships.
- Effective communication and proactive engagement.
- Career planning and self-reflection.
- HRS4R principles and responsible research careers.

Continuous support will be provided through regular follow-up activities and opportunities to share experiences and challenges.

6. Programme Implementation

Planned Activities

The programme will include:

- *Introductory training sessions.*
- *Regular mentor–mentee meetings.*
- *Professional development workshops.*
- *Networking and knowledge-sharing activities.*
- *Mid-term review sessions.*

Individual Development Plans

Each mentee will work collaboratively with their mentor to establish an Individual Development Plan (IDP) identifying:

- *Professional goals.*
- *Skills development priorities.*
- *Career objectives.*
- *Action plans and milestones.*

Continuous Monitoring

Progress will be reviewed regularly to ensure that mentoring objectives remain aligned with the mentee's evolving needs and aspirations.

7. Evaluation and Quality Assurance

The effectiveness of the programme will be assessed through a comprehensive evaluation framework including:

Participant Feedback

- Satisfaction surveys.
- Individual interviews.
- Reflection reports.

Key Performance Indicators

- Skills development and competency acquisition.
- Participant satisfaction levels.

- Researcher retention.
- Career progression outcomes.
- Research outputs and collaborative activities.
- Expansion of professional networks.

Final Evaluation Report

A final report will analyse programme outcomes, identify lessons learned, and provide recommendations for future editions.

8. Communication and Dissemination

To maximise institutional impact and visibility, the programme will include:

Internal Communication

- Promotion across faculties, departments, and research institutes.
- Information sessions and awareness campaigns.

External Dissemination

- Sharing outcomes through institutional channels.
- Publication of case studies and good practices.
- Participation in HRS4R and EURAXESS-related activities and networks.

9. Benefits for Mentors

Participation as a mentor provides opportunities to:

- Strengthen leadership and coaching competencies.
- Contribute to institutional capacity building.
- Expand professional networks.
- Gain recognition for contributions to researcher development.
- Engage with emerging perspectives and innovative approaches.
- Experience personal and professional fulfilment through supporting colleagues.

10. Benefits for Mentees

Participation as a mentee offers opportunities to:

- Develop research and transferable skills.
- Receive strategic career guidance.
- Increase professional confidence and motivation.
- Access broader academic and professional networks.
- Gain insight into funding opportunities and career pathways.
- Benefit from personalised support tailored to individual development goals.

11. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Commitment to Confidentiality

The mentoring relationship is founded on mutual trust, respect, and confidentiality.

All participants agree to maintain the confidentiality of information shared during mentoring activities and to create a safe and supportive environment that encourages open and honest dialogue.

Data Protection

Comillas Pontifical University ensures compliance with:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR).
- Applicable Spanish legislation on data protection.

Personal data collected for programme administration will be used solely for:

- Programme management.
- Mentor–mentee matching.
- Monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Personal data will not be shared with third parties without prior authorisation unless required by law.

Security Measures

Appropriate technical and organisational measures will be implemented to ensure data confidentiality, integrity, and security throughout the programme.

12. Managing Unsuccessful Matches

Although every effort will be made to ensure successful mentor–mentee pairings, mentoring relationships depend on interpersonal compatibility and mutual engagement.

Should significant difficulties arise, either party may contact the programme coordinators to discuss possible solutions, including additional support, mediation, or reassignment where appropriate.

13. Pilot Programme Timeline

Phase	Activity	Indicative Timeline
Planning	Definition of objectives and programme design	<i>Month 1</i>
Recruitment	Selection and matching of participants	<i>Months 2–3</i>
Training	Preparation of mentors and mentees	<i>Month 3</i>
Launch	Initial mentoring meetings	<i>Month 4</i>
Implementation	Ongoing mentoring and development activities	<i>Months 4–11</i>
Mid-term Review	Evaluation and adjustments	<i>Month 6</i>
Closure	Final evaluation and reporting	<i>Month 12</i>

14. Institutional Impact

The Comillas Research Mentoring Programme contributes significantly to strengthening the University's research ecosystem and strategic commitment to researcher development.

Expected benefits include:

- Enhanced researcher satisfaction and engagement.
- Improved career preparedness among doctoral and postdoctoral researchers.

- Stronger interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Increased institutional attractiveness for prospective researchers.
- Reinforcement of Comillas' position as a research-intensive institution committed to excellence and responsible research careers.

The programme also contributes to broader European objectives relating to researcher development, employability, mobility, and the creation of attractive research environments.

Conclusion

The Comillas Research Mentoring Programme represents a strategic investment in people, research excellence, and institutional development. By fostering meaningful mentoring relationships and supporting researchers throughout their professional journeys, the programme contributes to a culture of continuous learning, collaboration, and excellence aligned with the principles of HRS4R and the European Research Area.

Through this initiative, Comillas Pontifical University reaffirms its commitment to supporting researchers, promoting responsible research careers, and strengthening its role within the European research landscape.