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Protocol for a theory-based, mixed-methods evaluation of Cynnau | Ignite: an active learning programme to foster positive research culture and leadership development at Cardiff University

Submission date	**Recruitment status**	[X] Prospectively registered
25/07/2024	No longer recruiting	[X] Protocol
Registration date	**Overall study status**	[_] Statistical analysis plan
19/08/2024	Completed	[_] Results
Last Edited	**Condition category**	[_] Individual participant data
07/11/2025	Other	[_] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

This study was created in response to a UKRI call for rigorous evaluation of positive research culture initiatives in Higher Education Institutions.

Cynnau | Ignite is a research culture training program designed and implemented by Cardiff University, intending to foster positive research culture, leadership and skills development in Teaching, Research, and Professional Service staff across all disciplines in the university and is being piloted between 2024 and 2025.

In this study we aim to evaluate the effectiveness and acceptability of Cynnau | Ignite active-learning programme in fostering staff positive research culture practices and leadership development.

Who can participate?

This study is targeted at Cardiff University staff, who may or may not be enrolled in the Cynnau | Ignite training programme. The programme features twelve training modules, across three streams - Research Culture, Research Skills, and Active Learning - and is tailored towards three cohorts: those employed on Teaching and Research (T&R) and Research-only (R) contracts, as well as Professional Services staff, technicians and Specialists (PST/S). This study will assess how effective the programme is for each of these cohorts, compared to a control group of staff who received no training.

What does the study involve?

Learners enrolled in Cynnau I Ignite, participation will involve:

- Filling in a 30-minute online survey about their research culture experiences before and after completing the programme. In addition, learners in the Research-only cohort will be asked to fill

in the survey a third time, 6 months after completing the programme.
- Completing one short ten-minute survey at the end of each learning stream to discuss learning experiences
- Agreeing to being observed as part of a wider group while attending the program

For the control group who are not enrolled in Cynnau | Ignite:
- Filling in a 30-minute online survey about their research culture experiences at time of recruitment, and 6 months later.

In addition, the engagement of all learners will be observed during training. Overall programme acceptability and suitability (e.g., how well it works for all those involved at Cardiff University) will also be assessed with semi-structured interviews with a sub-group of learners and others involved at Cardiff University, including the programme delivery team, learners' line managers, Heads of School, and wider stakeholders.

What are the possible risks or benefits of participating?
We do not anticipate any direct risks or benefits arising from participation in this study.

Where is the study run from?
The study is run from the School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Wales, UK.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
April 2024 to November 2025

Who is funding the study?
Both this study and the Cynnau | Ignite programme is funded by the Wellcome Trust (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Please contact Charlotte Hennah (HennahC@cardiff.ac.uk) with any questions.

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Scientific, Principal investigator

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Study information

Scientific Title
Protocol for a theory-based, mixed methods evaluation assessing the effect of Cardiff University' s Cynnau | Ignite programme on learners' positive research culture practices and leadership development, compared to a control group

Study objectives
The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the Cynnau | Ignite programme and reach a conclusion about its contribution to improve positive research culture practices (as defined by the UKRI Research Culture Framework) at Cardiff University.

We aim to test the following hypotheses:
1. Cynnau | Ignite can be implemented as planned, and learners and other stakeholders - heads of school/line managers, senior management and delivery team - will engage with the programme and value it
2. Cynnau | Ignite will increase learners' intentions and behavioural enaction of positive research culture practices at Cardiff University in comparison to a control group, across multiple dimensions of the UKRI Research Culture Framework (specifically research integrity, open approach to research, communicating research, ensuring an inclusive work environment, building collegiality, and realising impact), via promotion of positive values and attitudes towards positive culture, development of a relevant skills set (research career development, leadership), and creation of a community of practice that normalises positive culture practices.
3. Learners' enaction of PRC practices will have a ripple effect at organisational level, improving perceptions of and indicators of positive research culture at Cardiff University.
4. Cynnau | Ignite can be adapted to fit other HE organisations or career development stages

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 03/06/2024, Cardiff University's School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (Cardiff University, Tower Building, 70 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT, United Kingdom; +44(0) 2920870707; psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk), ref: EC.24.06.11.7023G

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Single-centre theory based mixed-methods and multi-informants pragmatic evaluation

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Positive research culture practices among staff at Cardiff University

Interventions
Cynnau | Ignite is an active learning programme intended to foster positive research culture and leadership development at Cardiff University for researchers and research enablers, with funding from the Wellcome Trust.

During the 2024/25 academic year, Cynnau | Ignite will provide tailored training for three cohorts: Early Career Researchers on Teaching and Research (T&R) and Research-only (R) career pathways, and Professional Services staff, Technicians and Specialists (PST/S) staff across all disciplines in the university. Learners will be allocated to one cohort based on their career/role.

Learners will undertake one of three tailored training programmes, depending on their cohort:
- T&R cohort will undertake the full twelve training modules spanning three topics, or 'streams': Research Culture, Research Skills, and Active Learning
- R cohort will undertake six training modules, including Research Culture, and a modified Research Skills stream
- PST/S cohort will also undertake six modules, including Research Culture and a modified Action Learning stream.

To determine Cynnau | Ignite’s effectiveness we will compare how learners’ positive culture practices change over time, both within the learner cohorts (T&R, R, PST/S) and between learners and a control group, who received no training. Data will be collected at Baseline (T1, before any training is received), Follow-Up 1 (immediately after programme completion for the learners, or six months after Baseline for the control group), and Follow-Up 2 (six months after programme completion- R cohort only due to scheduling allowances).

In addition, we will further evaluate Cynnau | Ignite and its suitability for use at Cardiff University through observation of participant engagement, short acceptability questionnaires, filled out by learners after each module stream, and by using semi-structured interviews with a subgroup of learners, as well as the programme delivery team and those involved in the wider impact of the programme, such as university management and stakeholders.

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)

Learner intentions to carry out, positive research culture practices (according to key behaviours stated in the UKRI Research Culture Framework: Research Integrity, Open Research, Communicating Research, Inclusive Work Environments, Building Collegiality and Realising Impact) will be assessed at Baseline (before any training takes place), at Follow-Up (after training for programme participants, or six months later for those in the control group), and Follow-Up 2 (six months after the initial Follow-Up) for programme participants in the R cohort, as scheduling allows

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Positive culture behaviours and implementation (according to the UKRI research Culture Framework) will be measured in learner and control group participants at Baseline and Follow-Up, and Follow-Up 2 (R cohort only)
2. The value participants place on leadership development, and whether they see themselves as 'leaders', will be measured in learner and control group participants at Baseline and Follow-Up, and Follow-Up 2 (R cohort only)
3. Creation of research culture-based communities of practice at Cardiff University will be evaluated in learner and control group participants at Baseline, Follow-Up, and Follow-Up 2 (R cohort only)
4. Learners' perceptions about the acceptability of Cynnau | Ignite modules, and their suitability for use at Cardiff University and Higher Education Institutions, will be assessed after each training stream (Research Culture, Research Skills, and Action Learning), as applicable
5. The wider impact of Cynnau | Ignite on organisational awareness and perceptions of positive research culture values, and the perceived increase of positive research culture initiatives in the organisation. This will be assessed during semi-structured interviews with learners, the programme delivery team, university management, and stakeholders due to take place throughout 2025, and in Cardiff University's biennial Research Culture Survey

Completion date
30/11/2025

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Participants must be a current employee of Cardiff University, at grade 5 to 8
2. Participants must have either a Teaching and Research, Research-Only, Professional Services, Technicians, or Specialists contract
3. Participants may either be enrolled as a learner in the Cynnau | Ignite programme (learner group: T&R, R, PST/S cohort) or not (control group)

Participant type(s)
Employee

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
157

Key exclusion criteria
1. Learners who do not receive all allocated training (those who fail to attend >1 session) will be excluded from analysis, in line with recommendations from the programme design team

Date of first enrolment
01/09/2024

Date of final enrolment
01/06/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

Wales

Study participating centre
Cardiff University
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Sponsor information

Organisation
Cardiff University

ROR
https://ror.org/03kk7td41

Funder(s)

Funder type
Charity

Funder Name

Wellcome Trust

Alternative Name(s)
Wellcome, WT

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a publicly available repository (UKDataService). This will include fully anonymised quantitative and qualitative data from surveys, and potentially interviews. Participant consent will be sought before this anonymised data is made open access.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol article		27/02/2025	28/02/2025	Yes	No