

Research career models as a bridge between responsible assessment and institutional policies



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Research assessment directly informs recruitment and career progression decisions. Therefore, the reforms must be consistent with national legal frameworks and institutional employment policies.

The diversity of real-life research careers and employment models within national system remains insufficiently explored. **We combine two perspectives:**

- 1) a mapping of actual research career pathways in Poland, focusing on employment stability and research independence,
- 2) an institutional case study of career reform at Jagiellonian University, including measures developed within our CoARA Action Plan.

The traditional linear academic career model – from PhD candidate to professor – **no longer captures the diversity of actual pathways**. Many researchers remain fully dependent on grant-funded employment, while new roles, essential to comprehensive modern research projects are emerging outside traditional career structures.

A preliminary mapping by the Polish National Chapter task force (coordinated by Dr. Katarzyna Świerk) revealed **a diversity of career pathways in Poland**, classified as:

model	autonomy	stability	critical point	major risk
research & teaching	moderate to high	high	habilitation	metric-driven productivity pressure
grant-funded PI	very high	low	grant award team formation	loss of funding
postdoc	low to moderate	low	autonomy & job stability	no follow-up contract
research manager	moderate (operational)	moderate	role formalization	lack of recognition
infrastructure specialist	moderate (operational)	moderate	specialization	low visibility
teaching	high	high	teaching autonomy	undervaluation
academic leader	high	high	leadership responsibility	reduced research time

Emerging and cross-cutting roles, e.g.: *researcher-advisor*, combining research with external advisory work and societal engagement; *data steward*, supporting researchers in managing, organizing, documenting, and sharing research data.

Three cross-cutting patterns:

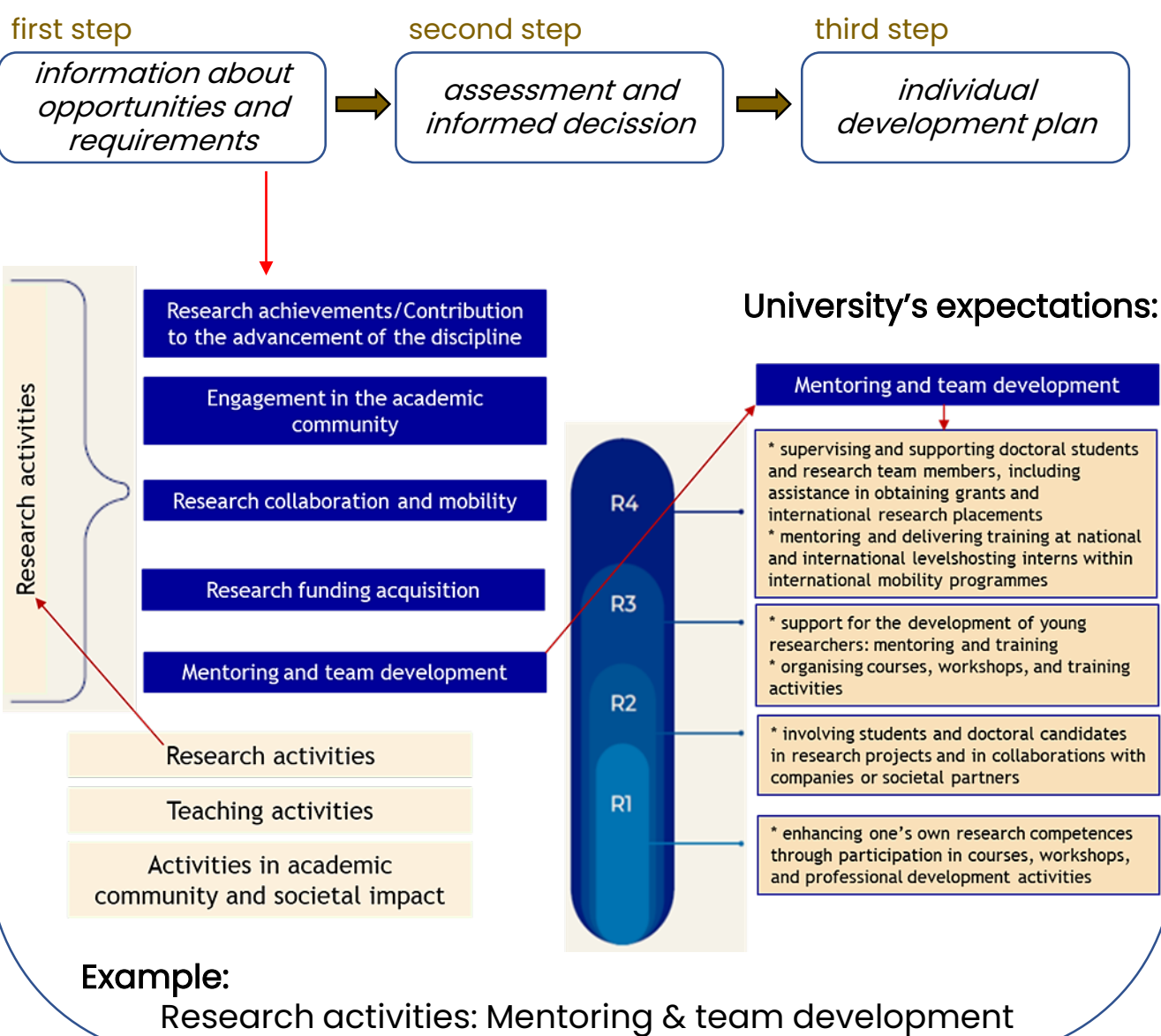
- 1) **Autonomy without stability**. Independent research and team leadership may coexist with precarious employment, requiring successive grants to sustain both the researcher's position and the team existence.
- 2) **The "invisible academia"**. Essential professional contributions remain poorly recognized by conventional career and assessment systems.
- 3) **Unexplored tracks**. Teaching, leadership and other specialized academic roles can provide autonomous and valuable career pathways without following the traditional publication- and promotion-driven route.



Case report:
Jagiellonian University
(founded in 1364, ~35,000 students)



- Flexibility of the proposed career framework**
(in line with the JU CoARA Action Plan, AP)
- (AP1) Possibility to move between research, teaching, and research-teaching paths according to individual needs.
 - Professional development support through institutional trainings, workshops, and mentoring programs.
 - (AP2) Criteria defining university expectations for each path, guiding researchers (R1-R4) and assessment:



Jagiellonian University Action Plan (AP) for Responsible Research Assessment

Fragment:

AP1. Increasing the **flexibility of career paths** through changes to institutional regulations.

AP2. Establishing the **desired profiles of researchers** at stages R1-R4, recognizing diversity of research outputs and specificities of disciplines.

AP3. Proposing and implementing **a bridge support** for scientists employed on a short-term basis, enabling the beneficiaries to apply for and secure another grant.

AP4. Proposing and implementing the **tenure-track option** for the most talented researchers. Eligibility for the program will be based on a qualitative assessment by a panel with the participation of external experts.

implementation – ongoing

Research assessment reform should be considered as a driver of employment and career policy reform. The new approach should recognize diverse contributions and career paths while helping to reconnect research autonomy with employment stability. Many of these changes can be initiated at the institutional level, but national frameworks should support them.