

Background/Introduction

Within Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), the Researcher Concordat Sub-Committee (RCSC) maintains oversight of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research Award. RCSC reports to the University Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) and meets twice a year, with additional sub-group meetings as required. This will increase to three times per year from Academic Year 2016-17 onwards. RCSC includes senior and Early Career Researcher (ECR) staff representation from each of our four faculties along with representatives from central directorates - Human Resources (HR), the Research and Innovation Office (RIO), and the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development (LEAD) team.

SHU is one of the UK's largest universities, with specific areas of research excellence focused largely in research centres. As a result of our strategy to employ researchers on permanent contracts, 96% of our academic staff on research-only or teaching and research contracts are permanent and we have a relatively small pool of research-only staff on temporary contracts (head count ~35). Our target audience for the Concordat is broad, due to our diverse pool of staff involved in research, from professionals with little research expertise through to active senior researchers. A particular focus, therefore, for our work has been supporting academic careers through enhancing the quality and impact of their research. To give an indication of scale, we are aiming to include >500 research-active staff in our regular research assessment process in 2017.

It is important to note that we adopt a flexible definition of ECR at SHU - our ECRs can be established academics who would not consider themselves 'early career' yet may still be relatively new to research. Staff generally view themselves first and foremost as academics, involved in both teaching and research, and the use of 'researcher' as a staff category is generally restricted to staff working in research centres/institutes within SHU, who are undertaking full time contract and academic research (head count ~140).

Internal Review Process

Responsibility for ongoing monitoring of the action plan and developing new actions rests with RCSC. RCSC has always included senior faculty representation, but the composition was refreshed in 2016 to ensure representation and input at the appropriate level - both senior and ECR - from all four faculties. All members are expected to contribute to, and feedback from the committee to those they are representing. All members contributed to the action plan review and development of the new plan.

SHU participated in the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) in 2013 and 2015, and the Principal Investigator and Research Leader Survey (PIRLS) for the first time in 2015. We also have a University Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) which is conducted every 3 years - the last one being in 2014. We have challenges in interpreting the data from these surveys - CROS and PIRLS because the number of responses were low (48 and 38 respectively), EOS because it is not possible to disaggregate the academic staff results into those who are, or are not, active researchers in all areas of the University. However, all surveys have provided useful information and a priority for us is to try and achieve a more representative CROS and PIRLS in 2017.

An internal newsletter was sent to research staff in December 2016, which outlined progress against the Concordat principles and future priorities. Staff were invited to comment on the priorities and provide input into the direction of the SHaRD (Sheffield Hallam Researcher Development) programme. A priority for the future plan is to re-launch the SHaRD blog site and Twitter to better direct and improve communications with interested staff.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation is leading, through the University's RIC, a piece of work which aims to make wide-ranging improvements to the support for ECRs at SHU. As part of that, we are establishing an ECR Forum, which will provide targeted researcher development, peer support and will act as a key forum for improved two-way communication. The Forum's launch event will be held in early 2017.

Achievements and Progress¹

The full details of specific achievements and progress against our action plan can be found here <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/researchers-concordat>

In the four years since first receiving the HR Excellence in Research Award (2013) we have been working towards a genuine step change in the support and training we have offered to researchers. The University has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at raising the quality of research, as well as strengthening provision around research ethics, integrity and good practice. We have taken a developmental approach, providing constructive feedback and support to individuals to enhance their research skills and outputs. Interventions have been designed to enhance the quality of research outputs and to increase the satisfaction levels of researchers and these are outlined below:

Mini-REF [Principles 3, 4 & 5, Actions 2.9, 3.8]: To build on our success in REF 2014, we introduced a regular assessment of our research, termed the 'Mini-REF'. The overarching aim is to provide early indications of the quality of outputs and arising impact to support decision making for REF 2021 and beyond. The process has been designed to be inclusive and developmental for research-active staff and, as well as monitoring UoA progress against REF 2014 strategies and identifying potential impact case studies, the process identifies the support and development needs of researchers to maximise their potential through the publication of research outputs.

All staff are invited to submit their most accomplished output for internal review by subject-specific reading groups, who then provide supportive feedback to the researcher, either verbally or in writing, on the quality with the aim of supporting staff to understand the requirements to produce high quality publications. The process is lead locally by the UoA Co-ordinators (A. 5.5). The first Mini-REF took place over the summer/autumn 2015; 518 staff submitted outputs, giving us a better understanding of the depth and breadth of our research, as well as embedding a wider understanding of the importance of REF in the academic community and its requirements. The process has identified areas in which we could change our practice, to grow our research and innovation activity and some of these are highlighted in our action plan. Individual faculties have also made local responses, such as developing subject-specific training and a second exercise will take place in early 2017. Highlights include:

- In mini-REF 2015 calculations of Grade Point Average at 2*, 3* and 4* together with the increased volume of outputs resulted in a significant increase in research power compared with REF 2014.
- The University has seen record numbers of research grant applications: 263 applications were submitted in 2015/16 compared with 199 in 2014/15 and 167 in 2013/14.
- Scopus data reveals that the University published 621 outputs in 2016 compared with 566 in 2015 and 560 in 2014.

Research impact [Principles 3 & 4, Action 3.7]: The mini-REF identified research impact as a key area for targeted support and development. In response we have established an annual Impact Fellowship programme to develop new collaborations, pump prime contract research and collaborative R&D, and to exploit University expertise, facilities and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). The programme provides a mechanism to enable SHU researchers to work with research and knowledge exchange leaders from industry, public, third sector and cultural organisations. The fellowships of up to £6,000 are awarded through a competitive process led by the PVC Research and Innovation; 21 fellows were supported over the periods 2014-16 with a further 8 commencing in 2016/17.

A Research Support Officer for Impact and Performance was recruited (November 2016) to provide institutional support on achieving the University's strategic objective of maximising research impact. This support officer will work with researchers from across the institution, together with senior staff in RIO, to establish a framework of support for impact. We have also invested in an online training course 'Enhancing research impact' as part of our suite of online resources available to doctoral and staff researchers.

Overarching policies and guidance have been put in place to promote good practice in research:

- Open access to our research [Principles 3 & 4, Action 3.8]: The University implemented [research data management](#) and [open access](#) policies in 2015, and invested in a central open access fund to promote open access publishing alongside the formation of a new Library Support Team (4 FTE) to assist researchers with this process (2016). This team provides training and development to the University's

doctoral and staff researchers on library resources, open access and research data management. In the first quarter of 2016-17, 97% of outputs in our repository that are within the scope of the (revised) HEFCE Open Access Policy, were compliant with the policy.

- Personal publication strategies [Principles 3, 4 & 5, Action 2.7]: Aimed at Early Career Researchers and those new to research at the University, a comprehensive guide to developing a personal publication strategy has been developed to ensure that researchers make well-informed choices regarding when, where and with whom to publish, considering personal and University strategic objectives. This guidance is available on the internal [mini-REF 2017](#) pages.
- Peer support [Principles 3, 4 & 5, Action 4.5]: We have implemented a [peer support policy](#) in 2016, with the aim of raising the quality and increased success rates of research grant proposals, which will be of particular benefit to early career researchers. A series of subject specialist funding guides have been developed to highlight potential opportunities, including guides focused specifically on early career researchers and female researchers.
- Research ethics [Principle 3, Actions 3.8, 3.9]: The external [Research Ethics webpages](#) have been updated and a range of guidance documents have been produced, as additional resources for all staff and students undertaking research in the University.
- International research collaborations [Principle 3, Action 3.7]: We established a [travel fund](#) to enable research staff to travel within Europe to develop collaborations, specifically for the purpose of producing joint publications and making applications for EU research funds and the Global Challenges Research Fund. Researchers may also invite colleagues from European countries to SHU to foster collaboration. Since its introduction in November 2015, the University has awarded almost £40k to 47 researchers.

The University has also made significant investments in doctoral training [Principles 3 & 4]. We launched our Doctoral School in autumn 2015, under the academic leadership of the Director Doctoral School and Head of Doctoral training (both new posts, alongside a new post and non-pay investments in the Research and Innovation Office). The SHU Doctoral Training Series was established in 2015/16, to deliver training in the essentials of doctoral research, aligned with key doctoral milestones and Vitae's Researcher Development Framework. The Series is supplemented with *ad hoc* sessions, the 3 Minute Thesis Competition, and regular 'Question Time' style panel events. The University has seen a record number of doctoral completions for 2015/16. In the first three years of the Research Excellence Framework 2021 window, doctorate conferments have been 81, 83 and 100, compared with a yearly average of 54 in REF2014. The increase is above recent admissions growth, indicating that it is attributable to improved recruitment quality, supervision and support.

More generally, the University's research degree provision has been boosted by the introduction of the Vice-Chancellor's PhD Scholarships in 2014, as well as a number of external training partnerships including the White Rose ESRC-funded Social Sciences Doctoral Training Partnership in 2016 and the University Alliance Doctoral Training Alliance (DTA) programmes. The latter was founded in 2015, with SHU as a lead partner and described in a [Vitae Occasional paper](#). Involvement in the DTA has advantages for ECR PhD supervisors of networking at DTA events with other academics to share expertise, as well as benefiting the students.

Other achievements include:

- The capturing of researchers views, via CROS (2013, 2015), PIRLS (2015), and the Employee Opinion Survey (2011, 2014), has generated data on the experiences of researchers at SHU and areas for action. However, as mentioned above, we have had challenges in drawing meaningful and representative conclusions from these surveys, and a priority for us is to improve our response rate to CROS and PIRLS in 2017. [Principles 2 & 7, Action 2.5].
- As highlighted in our two-year review, we introduced the Sheffield Hallam Researcher Development Programme (SHaRD) in November 2013. Alongside this, an Academic CPD group was formed to bring together staff developers from SHaRD, HR and Learning Enhancement and Academic Development (LEAD). Three annual Academic CPD conferences with audiences >100 have delivered a range of presentations on academic career development, including presentations on career development routes, personal case studies/stories, and the development of resources available at SHU. [Principles 3 & 4, Actions 2.1 & 3.8].
- New routes for academic progression have been implemented for the Reader and Professor roles. [Principle 4, Action 2.8].
- We have introduced two guidance documents for managers of research-active staff to enhance the research appraisal process. [Principle 4, Action 2.7].
- Multidisciplinary researcher-led and research community-focused initiatives have been introduced, some local and some cross-University, including annual poster sessions and a writing for publications event

involving senior staff who are journal editors. These will be taken forward under the new plan with the launch of the University-wide ECR Forum in 2017. [Principles 3 & 5, Actions 3.8 & 5.4].

- Mentoring opportunities have been introduced, including Aspire and Aurora schemes (both aimed at female staff) and departmental mentoring schemes (e.g. Psychology) where mentors come from across the University. All readers and professors are expected to mentor staff (included in the job specification), and senior staff, including the PVC for Research and Innovation, have been involved in mentoring junior colleagues. Our Aspire programme was the subject of a case study published by Vitae (<http://bit.ly/2hfSCCg>). [Principles 3, 4 & 6, Action 4.5].
- The University has prioritised support for ECRs at SHU and we have reviewed the experiences of and support available to ECRs at SHU, resulting in a number of recommendations to the University's RIC (spring/summer 2016). These actions are at different stages of progress, and are incorporated into our new action plan (see below). [Principles 2, 3, 4 & 5, Actions 2.7, 2.9, 3.10 & 4.5].
- In 2016, we established a new PVC-level responsibility for equality and diversity. Professor John Leach, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Academic Staffing and Equalities and Dean of the Faculty of Development and Society, will be working across the University to lead the University's equality and diversity strategy, focusing on academic staff deployment and development. [Principle 6].

Strategy and actions from 2017ⁱⁱ

Over the next four years, we will continue to focus on implementing initiatives and actions to enhance researcher careers and performance, and thereby the quality of our research as well as staff satisfaction. Details of our planned actions and success measures can be found in our updated action plan here: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/researchers-concordat>

Some specific plans for 2017-2021 include:

- ECRs: The PVC Research and Innovation is leading, through the University's RIC, a piece of work which aims to make wide-ranging improvements to the support for ECRs at SHU. As well as the ECR Forum mentioned above, the work encompasses appraisal, formalised time allocation for research, mentoring and career development support. [Actions 2.2, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2 & 5.1].
- REF 2021: We will continue our preparations for REF 2021, with periodic mini-REF exercises to provide developmental support and feedback to researchers. We will continue to encourage all academic staff to engage with the Mini-REF. Alongside this, we will monitor the impact of our new peer review process on grant submissions and success rates. [Actions 2.3 & 5.2].
- Recruitment and selection: we will continue to embed an awareness of unconscious bias into our recruitment and selection training and practice, as well as a commitment to ensuring research-active staff as interview panel members, where appropriate. [Actions 1.1 & 1.2].
- Communications: our staff composition means it is not possible to readily specifically identify researchers for the purposes of communication via email. We therefore disseminate information via the Heads of Departments and Research Centres and other senior research leads, but recognise that targeted communication with researchers, particularly ECRs, is not consistent. We therefore plan to relaunch the SHaRD blog and Twitter to provide better communications, alongside the ECR Forum as mentioned above. [Principles 3 & 4, Action 5.1].
- CROS and PIRLS 2017: we intend to participate in these surveys again in 2017, and will be looking at our communications and targeting of respondents to try to ensure we capture the views of as many researchers as possible. We will also be running the employee opinion survey again in 2017. The targets for responses are 58% for EOS, and a minimum of 60 and 40 responses for CROS 2017 and PIRLS 2017 respectively. [Actions 2.1 & 7.2].
- Equality: we will link the work of the RCSC to other University committees e.g. Athena SWAN Self Assessment Team, to ensure greater efficiency of reporting and approach so that we have complementary action plans in place. [Action 6.3].
- Diversity: we will investigate how we can improve our development offer for our part-time and distance learning researchers, including doctoral students, through (for example) peer support groups and online channels. [Action 4.2].

ⁱ In this section, the action numbers refer to Concordat Action Plan v2.0 (June 2014)

ⁱⁱ In this section, the action numbers refer to Concordat Action Plan v3.0 (January 2017)