

HR Excellence in Research Award: Two-Year Internal Review

Background

Sheffield Hallam University is committed to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (Researcher Concordat), and strives to create an excellent environment for all its researchers.

Sheffield Hallam received the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2013 in recognition of its commitment to the Researcher Concordat. More information about the award and process can be found at: www.shu.ac.uk/research/researcher-concordat.html. The original Concordat action plan can be found at: www.shu.ac.uk/research/downloads/concordat-responce-action-plan.pdf

Upon receipt of the award, a Research Concordat Sub-Committee (RCSC) was established to support and guide work in this area and to be the custodian of the action plan. RCSC reports to the University's main Research and Innovation Committee. A series of new initiatives, processes and resources, aimed at enhancing the career development of researchers at SHU, have subsequently come into place as a direct result of work co-ordinated by this group.

Internal Review Process

This internal review has been undertaken by the RCSC. As the committee meets at least biannually, the process of evaluating progress against the University's Researcher Concordat action plan has been continuous (a fixed agenda item), rather than a one-off exercise. This report provides a narrative to that and summarises some of the progress and evolving focus of the past two years, as well as plans for the coming two. The full set of RCSC minutes and materials can be made available to the European Commission/Vitae on request.

The RCSC is made up of senior academic representatives from each of the University's four faculties, key post-holders from the relevant professional service departments (research office, HR and learning & teaching services) and three representatives from the early career researcher community (2 PGR students and 1 ECR staff member). All members are expected to feed into and feedback from the committee to those they are representing.

The ongoing review undertaken by RCSC is principally seeking, at each meeting, confirmation and details from those responsible that actions have been completed accordingly. In terms of outcomes, a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence has been collated on researchers and their research environment, which has informed interventions and will continue to be collected and measured to record impact. Regarding researcher input, as well as the committee representatives, the results of the 2013 Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) survey stimulated a series of actions in response. Measures of the success of these will not be possible until this survey is repeated in spring 2015 (comparative data from the next triennial internal all-staff survey will also be available early in 2015 and will be used in a similar way).

Achievements and Progress

The key achievements and milestones to date have included:

- In December 2012 a new 1 FTE Researcher Development Adviser post was created to co-ordinate training and development for researchers. This post has responsibilities for the 'people' element of research environment (including serving as Secretary to the RCSC), alongside the operational design and delivery of research training ([Principle 3-4](#))

- In January 2013 RCSC was inaugurated and terms of reference and a communications strategy were agreed. The committee has met at least biannually ever since (P. 7)
- A 'Career Management and Development Guidelines for Research' statement was produced and disseminated to all academic and research staff. This set out the provisions for researcher career management and development at the University, and provided recommendations and sources of information for researchers and their managers (P. 2)
- The University participated in the CROS for the first time, with a response rate of 54%, double the national average. Full analysis was done and a specific action plan was produced to respond in an evidence-driven fashion to any key area where SHU scored 5% or more below average (P. 2)
- A full baseline report was produced which drew together information about researcher career development at SHU, identifying themes and making recommendations. This organisational development approach to researcher development was shared nationally and internationally as good practice at the 2013 Vitae conference and through subsequent publication: <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/8504/> (P. 7)
- A key recommendation of the baseline report was the introduction of a comprehensive researcher development programme. The Sheffield Hallam Research Development (SHaRD) programme launched in November 2013, providing strategic and accessible development opportunities for all researchers at the University: <http://shardprogramme.wordpress.com/>. SHaRD has been incredibly well-received by the research community, with attendances at sessions averaging 74, and feedback averaging 4.9 out of 6 (scale: 6 = excellent, 1 = poor). The range of topics covered can be seen in the past events section of: <http://shardprogramme.wordpress.com/upcoming/> (P. 3-4)
- An Academic CPD project has integrated researcher development provision with local learning & teaching and personal effectiveness training, and actively promoted the value of CPD within the institution (P. 3-4)
- Mentoring to support career development and progression has been introduced at a number of levels, including cross-institutionally for mid-career female academics, and within several departments for earlier career researchers (both genders). In total 57 researchers were mentored through formal schemes in 2013-14 (P. 3-4 + 6)
- In March 2014 the University's Strategy 2014-20 was launched, which for the first time explicitly committed to 'supporting, developing and growing researchers' and to establishing 'frameworks to support the development of researchers and their careers' (P. 2)
- In light of new intelligence from the European Commission and Vitae about the likely shift of the HR Excellence in Research Award to a common standards framework, SHU used the draft framework compiled for consultation purposes to undertake a benchmarking and gap analysis exercise, in an effort to keep 'ahead of the curve' (P. 7)
- In recognition that the original action plan was more than two years old and the internal review was approaching, a fully refreshed action plan v2.0 was produced in June 2014 (also informed by the above gap analysis), which took stock of progress and set new, more ambitious, objectives (P. 7)
- There was a concerted effort to improve the consistency of researcher appraisals ahead of the summer 2014 appraisal round, including the production and dissemination of 'Supplementary Prompts for Appraisers of Research-Active Staff' and 'Statement of Expectations for the Management of Research-Active Staff' statements (P. 2)
- SHU's research environment was assessed in REF 2014 as being 65% internationally excellent and above (3-4*) / 96% international standard and above (2-4*) (P. 7)

The full details of specific completed actions from the action plan can be found on pages 4-5 here: www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics/documents/concordat-action-plan-v2.0.pdf

Next Steps

A substantial part of the first two years since the HR Excellence in Research Award (2013-14) has focused on gathering evidence, setting direction, establishing infrastructure, and energising and engaging the research community. The next two years will build on this to create a genuine step change in both the

quality of research outputs being produced (success measured through increases in the volume and quality of REF-able publications, doctoral completions, and research and KT income) and the satisfaction levels of researchers (success measured through CROS 2017 and internal surveys).

Some particular plans for 2015-16 include:

- The introduction of approximately ten 0.1 FTE academic 'Research Environment Champions' (formerly referred to as 'Researcher Concordat Co-ordinators') to co-ordinate researcher career development (as well as research integrity, equality and diversity, and public engagement initiatives) locally ([Principle 5](#))
- A new PGR Office (administrative unit) and School (University-wide community) to enhance the University's PGR offer. These will launch for autumn 2015. Five new posts are being created to support this, including new academic heads of PGR and PGR Training, a PGR manager, a PGR administrator and a research training administrator ([P. 3-4](#))
- The participation in surveys of researchers (CROS and the internal all-staff survey) for a second time to generative comparative data that will give a much stronger indication of how much progress has been made to date, and emerging areas to prioritise ([P. 2](#))
- More proactive use of management information, including exploiting a new e-recruitment system, to identify any equality-related barriers ([P. 1](#))
- The continued expansion of the SHaRD programme, with particular emphasis on doctoral skills training ([P. 3-4](#))
- Work to further enhance the quality of researcher appraisals, by developing more guidance and support for appraisers and appraisees ([P. 2](#))
- Leading a flagship doctoral training centre in collaboration with other University Alliance universities ([P. 3-4](#))
- More researcher-led and research community focused initiatives, such as PGR and ECR multidisciplinary research cafes ([P. 5](#))
- The expansion of research mentoring programmes, including possible thesis mentoring ([P. 3-4 + 6](#))
- Building a new £10m STEM Centre, with particular focus on it being a publicly accessible environment, within which will be a dedicated space for researchers to engage the public ([P. 5](#))

The full details of specific actions on the new action plan can be found on pages 1-3 here: www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics/documents/concordat-action-plan-v2.0.pdf. The 'Nurturing our Research Base' section of the new Research and Innovation Strategy has embedded many of these ambitions: www.shu.ac.uk/research/about/Sheffield_Hallam_University_research_strategy.doc

Assessment

Sheffield Hallam believes it has achieved all the objectives it set in its original Researcher Concordat action plan which were scheduled for the first two years, except one or two where an alternative path was considered better and pursued instead. A recent reflective exercise resulted in a full refresh of the action plan, which has become more ambitious, in response to the greater-than-anticipated pace of enhancement that has so far been achieved.

Researcher input into this work has primarily been provided by committee representatives and the results of the CROS survey. Their participation is expected to increase over this next two-year period, both as CROS 2015 provides robust evaluation-of-progress data, and as efforts to nurture stronger researcher-led community and engagement empowers SHU ECRs and PGRs to become more active partners in developing the Researcher Concordat agenda.