Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

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Statement on how the organisation creates, maintains and embeds a research culture that upholds a positive and inclusive environment for researchers at all stages of their careers *(max 500 words)*

Excellent research requires an excellent research environment. We're working hard to develop our research culture and foster a community of inclusion, support and collaboration.

The University of Sheffield's (TUoS') definition of research excellence emphasises that how we conduct our research, our environment, and how we support our researchers, are of equal importance to the outputs and impacts generated from our research. TUoS sets out in its 'Vision', an institution with outstanding people, working as one, in pursuit of excellence. The 'One University' ethos is central to the key values it espouses – collaboration, inclusivity, a sense of responsibility for each other in the University and the wider world, and a striving for openness and transparency.

We continue to engage with our research community to understand the strengths of our environment, identify areas to improve on and create the future of our research culture together. Activities have included a PGR research culture survey, an external consultancy project with 'Research Consulting' using interviews and focus groups to report on the university research culture, the Deputy VP for Research, hosting a Research town hall and establishing a mid-career academic task and finish group to review the provision and make recommendations for future support for this career stage.

TUoS recruited a new post 'Assistant Director for Researchers and Culture' and established a Steering Board for Research culture, chaired by the Deputy Vice-President for Research with representation from colleagues across the University. The Board provides leadership and coordination to develop our research culture. Using Research Culture funding from Research England, the Board pilots new and innovative approaches to open research, EDI, and researcher/career development through several central projects each year. It has also established a fund for research culture community projects. In 2022-23, 14 projects were delivered from across all five faculties, professional services and cross-faculty teams.

It is our intention to put the development of our research staff and the culture in which they work, at the heart of our vision for world-leading, impactful research. After signing the Concordat, commitment to mentoring and support of ECRs was explicitly stated in the university's research pillar of the new 5 year vision strategy (2020). This senior level commitment endorsed the development of a robust governance structure to ensure researchers have a voice at all levels. We have ensured that all faculties have a research staff association/forum where representatives sit on departmental research committees and faculty committee's such as an ECR Committee made up of both ECR reps and academic leads for each department.

This led to the establishment of a University Early Career Researcher Committee (UECRC), chaired by the Deputy VP for Research, appointed membership includes; faculty ECR reps and academic leads which link to faculty ECR development

committees, researcher development, HR and the Careers service. The Committee has responsibility for the Concordat implementation as has begun activities described in the [Concordat action plan](). The action plan was developed by UECRC through extensive consultation with a wide range of researchers, academics and members of research support and was approved by Senate Research & Innovation Committee.

Provide a short summary of the institution's strategic objectives and implementation plans for delivering each of the three pillars of the Concordat (environment and culture, employment, and professional development of researchers) for your key stakeholder groups together with your measures for evaluating progress and success *(max 600 words)*

TuoS has developed several themed workstreams to address the implementation of the action plan across the 3 pillars:

Environment and culture

- **Research Culture Survey and Ongoing Feedback**: Carry out a baseline assessment of the research culture in the University and develop mechanisms to establish ongoing feedback and measures of success. Activities will include development of a research culture survey to report levels of awareness against several actions around the existence of new resources and changes in the environment and processes. Results will act as a measure of success against several actions below.

- **Develop a communication strategy** to ensure all researchers are aware of the Concordat,action plan, relevant resources, changes to processes and support available. To consist of a live concordat action plan, web pages, videos, newsletters, targeted emails to ECR specific and academic mailing lists and resource/presentation packs for leads, ECR reps and professional services to present at both departmental and faculty/university level. Resources will be highlighted at research staff induction, academic induction/probation and annual appraisal (SRDS, Staff Review and Development Scheme). Measure: Existence of the communication methods

- **ECR Governance:** Establish ECR committees in each faculty governed by a standardised set of Terms of Reference, that include departmental representatives, share practice via research staff associations, report to UECRC and are represented on Faculty Research & Innovation Committees. Measure: Open access to committee minutes.

Employment

- **Review and enhance SRDS for academics and research staff:** Ensure that all ECRs have an annual review and that full use is made of the correct documentation in order that development can be discussed, planned, evidenced and reflected upon. For non-independent ECRs the review should be

standardised and encouraged to be carried out in conjunction with an additional member of staff who can provide support for career planning and professional development aspects. For those who manage research staff ensure they are asked how they support the researchers they manage, leadership and career development during their own SRDS. Measure: Monitor completion rates and survey responses.

- **ECR Induction:** Provide a harmonised ECR induction process at departmental and university level ensuring essential training on topics such as ED&I and research integrity is incorporated. Measure: Monitor engagement with induction sessions and associated training.

- **Academic Induction:** An induction/transition process is set up for newly promoted entrants to both academic and professorial career stages. This should highlight the development expectations of, and support within, the institution.

- **Reward and Recognition:** Develop a suite of rewards for those who promote good research culture practices and celebrate examples of excellent management of research staff via nominations and case studies.

- **ECR Job Security:** Exploration of the viability of open-ended contracts (linked to funding) for researchers on grant funding lasting more than two years and the feasibility of bridging funds for those applying for research funding.

Professional Development of Researchers

- **Academic Leadership and Professional Development:** Provide a suite of development opportunities, resources (e.g. case studies on demonstrating generous leadership) and mentoring for managers of research staff and explicit links as evidence under the ACP. Measure: Monitor academic engagement with development opportunities.

- **ECR Career Pathways:** Develop a clear and transparent pathway for progression within and outside of academia, including a specific development provision and support offered to those aspiring to gain external research fellowships. Establish a mechanism to collate destination data and highlight researcher alumni to current ECRs

- **ECR Professional Development:** Provide staff with the equivalent of 1 day/month time allocation for professional career development. Encourage development reflection through the use of development plans and creation of case studies to showcase a variety of development opportunities such as work shadowing, knowledge exchange with non-academic partners etc.

Summary of actions taken, and evaluation of progress made, in the current reporting period to implement your plan to support the three pillars in respect of each of your key stakeholder groups [Institution; Academic Managers of Researchers (Deans, Heads of Schools/Departments/PIs); Researchers]

Environment and Culture
(max 600 words)
	1. **Researcher Development Strategy** produced 2022 (action 1.2)
	
	2. [**External consultancy on Research Culture**](#) commissioned a report on research culture. TUoS gathered input through a series of interviews and themed focus groups, with 53 participants representing senior leadership, early and mid-career research staff, research and technical support staff and PGRs.
	
	We wanted to know:
	   • What are the key features of excellent research cultures?
	   • What is good about the culture at Sheffield currently?
	   • What are the barriers to an excellent research culture at Sheffield?
	   • What changes would have the biggest impact on culture?
	
	Participants identified several positive aspects of our research culture, including:
	   • A basis for a University-wide collegiate and collaborative research culture
	   • A supportive environment for postgraduate students with a wide range of training and development opportunities
	   • Proactive measures in place to improve ED&I
	   • An Academic Career Pathway (ACP) is a progressive step forward
	
	Participants also identified issues with the current environment, including how research is valued and prioritised and their experience of day-to-day process and delivery.
	
	Many improvements are already taking place in the ongoing plans to enable an excellent research culture for all, in some cases involving tweaks to existing policies and processes to ensure they are appropriately communicated and put into practice.
	
	3. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) training launched as mandatory for all staff (action 1.8). 74.4% academic and research staff completed by end of reporting period (3 months after launch). This e-learning module raises awareness of key topics and issues, covers our legal requirements and offers an introduction to how ED&I can affect our University.
	
	4. During 2022-23 the **UECRC established three sub-groups** to develop resources and recommendations relating to:
	   • Enhancing the induction of ECRs (action 2.3)
	   • Enhancing SRDS guidance and processes for ECRs and reviewers

- Examining reward and recognition processes and outcomes for ECRs

Academic Managers of Researchers

5. **Improvement to SRDS**:

A review of the SRDS process recommended modifications (listed below) and also highlighted the critical importance of the role of the SRDS reviewer – both in terms of the effectiveness of the review and the positive experience of the reviewee. It showed inconsistent practice in terms of the identification of reviewers across academic departments, their engagement in the process, and their knowledge and capability. In 2022 the following changes were introduced;
- An improved form for all staff
- Improved online and in-person training programme for all reviewers
- Introduction of a workload SRDS reviewer role for academics. Heads of department appoint a small number of academic reviewers who undertake appropriate training and ensure an aligned and consistent approach to reviews
- A suite of example objectives for academic staff and guidance to help reviewers/reviewees ensure objectives are SMART and aligned with the ACP.

6. **Creation of Charters** stating the responsibilities of managers and expectations of research staff (action 1.3) to uphold the principles of the concordat and create an environment which supports the career development of researchers. The charters are shared with research staff at induction and during SRDS.

7. Launched new **training aimed specifically at managers:**
- New Manager Inductions (90mins, F2F/virtual) (launched March 2023, 27 academics attended to date)
- How to have a wellbeing conversations (53 academic/research staff completions since March 2023-August 2023) (action 1.9)

Researchers

8. **ECR SRDS process review** (action 2.21): A UECRC subgroup (September 2022 - June 2023) was tasked with examining current SRDS provision for ECR colleagues and recommending how processes and guidance could be enhanced. A report has been presented to University Executive board and recommendations fed into modifications in the Concordat action plan.

	9. **Postdoc Appreciation Week** programme and recognising our outstanding postdoc awards ([131 nominations in 2023](#))
Employment *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** **10. ECR Reward and Recognition**: The sub-group was tasked with analysing existing University data on reward and recognition outcomes for ECRs and make recommendations, for both data collection/ monitoring and reward and recognition processes. Members consulted with networks on their experiences of reward and recognition processes. The subgroup was also provided with data from HR on accelerated increments, promotions, and the use of recognition awards for G6 to G8 research and research and teaching staff from 2019 to 2023, in addition to census data on the number of staff in each category. Recommendations include; ● a need to raise awareness of accelerated increment and promotion eligibility and procedures amongst ECRs, including at induction stage, and an equal need to raise this awareness among their line-managers ● seek to gather data about the proportion of submitted promotion and accelerated increment cases for ECRs, in addition to the numbers of successful cases. **Academic Managers of Researchers** **11. Mandatory PGR supervisor CPD**: TUoS recognises the crucial role that supervisors play in the experience of PGR students and provides them with opportunities to develop their practice at regular intervals. Based on a set of Senate agreed principles, supervisors must undertake CPD based on their individual level of experience forming part of a licence to supervise: ● New supervisors complete the introductory online 'Supervising Doctoral Studies programme', and a further 10 hours of 'Supervisionaries' workshops. 58 new supervisors have completed all CPD requirements for new supervisors to date. ● Experienced supervisors who are new to Sheffield will be required to engage with 2 hours of online material. 22 completions to date. ● Experienced colleagues who are not new to Sheffield will participate in two-hour discussion-based workshops, delivered locally, every two years.

Researchers

12. Enhancing ECR induction (action 2.3): Development of a range of resources and support new for 2022 including;

- ECR specific additions to the managers induction checklist, with linked guidance, for the induction of all new ECRs joining the University including meeting with the departmental academic ECR lead

- Online research staff induction pack containing ECR relevant information, documents and links such as;
    - Researcher Development Concordat
    - Understanding who represents ECRs and their voice
    - ECR Charters
    - Employment sustainability (updated 2023, action 2.26)
    - Report and support system, supporting anyone who has experienced any form of discrimination
    - Information on contracts and entitlement
    - Policy on FTC
    - Responsible Research
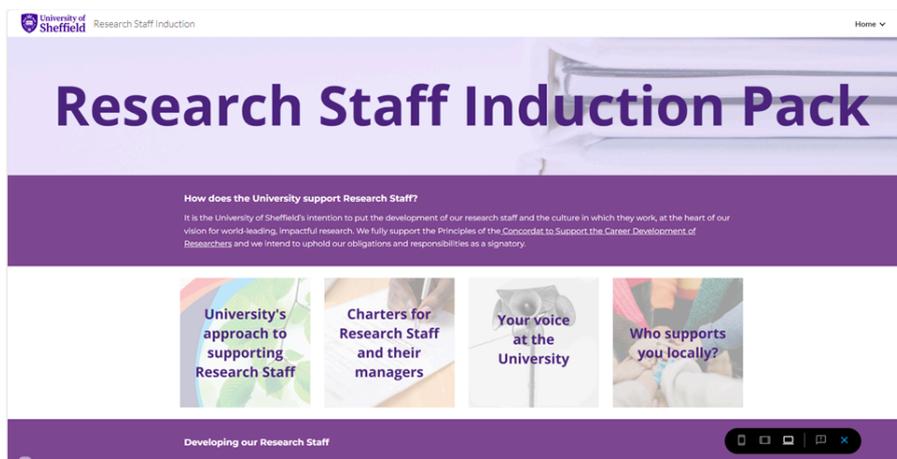
- Quarterly in-person Research Staff Inductions linked to monthly HR reporting allows for direct invitations to new starters each month. Supports researcher development team visibility, engagement with the support available, knowledge of the Concordat and associated support for dedicated 1 day per month development, community and network building. Attended by research staff association representatives. (52 attended 2022-23)

13. Associate Supervisors scheme (action 2.10) is a professional development framework that recognises ECRs contribution to and

	quality of teaching. Numbers completing the programme reached **62** in 2022-23. **14. SRDS completion is monitored** across the university and for academic staff (which includes research staff) completion rates in 2022 ranged from 64%-91% across the faculties (average 79%) We are currently unable to identify the numbers of research staff SRDS specifically and will look into monitoring this in the future.
Professional developmen t *(max 600 words)*	**Institution** **15. Changing the University's development culture** Training and development activities for researchers at the University is delivered by several development providers. Previously researchers found it difficult to know what development was available for them, who it was delivered by and how to navigate access. Additionally those who provided development often worked in isolation causing activities to either overlap or create gaps in provision. We formed a University Staff Development Strategy Board to bring together the development providers. Initial focus has been driven by the procurement and implementation of a new learning management system. Launched in January 2023, this is a central hub for all learning and development opportunities for all staff and PGR students, with a powerful search function. The system allows engagement with online learning, event management, and maintains individual training records supporting the building of evidence portfolios to support career management. Managers of researchers are also able to assign and review the development of their research team and will be linked to discussions during appraisals. The project has driven a dramatic culture change between development providers, improving collaboration to such an extent that the researcher development and people development teams have been awarded a new joint Academic Developer post (see point 17). Additionally the first mandatory training (on ED&I) was launched in the system and the engagement/completion of the course has doubled from the previous online platform it was housed on. The new system will improve our ability to monitor and report researchers and their managers' engagement with development (action 3.16) and monitors their time spent on development which will support reporting against the commitment to provide 1 day per month professional development (see below). **16. Improving development visibility** (action 3.2).

To ensure development for both researchers and their managers is visible and accessible, a new staff development hub webpage was created. It contains links to key development providers from across the university including researcher development specific webpages that house all the resources across all career stages of researchers.

Academic Managers of Researchers

17. Invested in the creation of a new post (Academic Developer, in post July 2023) to specifically support development of established researchers and the creation of an Established Researcher Forum. Priorities will also include creation of an ED&I toolkit for academics and enhancement to academic induction.

18. New Head of Department (HoD) development programme;

- Creation of a HoD development hub
- 1 year development programme for new HoDs to introduce key people, policies and procedures. It identifies the resources, management skills and leadership behaviours that will allow them to consistently perform in their leadership role. It incorporates a blended learning experience via workshops, social learning, personal reflection and action planning alongside opportunities for coaching and mentoring (14 HoD completed in 2022-23)
- Community of practise and peer learning sets for ongoing HoD development
- Bespoke development for HoD coming to the end of their tenure

Researchers

19. TUoS has made a commitment to the entitlement of a minimum of 1 day a month professional development for research staff and guidance on what constitutes research staff CPD has been created (action 3.1).

20. A bi annual Researcher-led activities funding scheme received 33 applications (2022-23) where 11 came from research staff. 6 research staff projects were funded out of the 16 funded.

21. New Commercialisation Journey is TUoS's programme for supporting researchers in the commercialisation of their novel ideas. We provide a comprehensive package of training, mentoring and investment through a structured four-stage process (Understand - Explore - Develop - Launch) to deliver high-quality spinouts and licences.

	22. Piloted a 'New Research Leaders Development Programme' (action 3.8) 28 independently funded fellows joined a 12 month cohort programme of development

Comment on any lessons learned from the activities undertaken over this period and any modifications you propose to make to your action plan and measures of success as a result. *(max 500 words)*

- **Need for improved communication and transparency** throughout the action plan's implementation process. This includes ensuring that all stakeholders, from researchers, academics and professional services staff are kept informed about progress including new initiatives, changes to processes and resources created. We have identified that without a clear and consistent communication strategy, there is a risk that the impact of the activities is reduced, and ultimately, there could be resistance to the changes being implemented.

- **Ensuring a consistent approach to embedding governance** to ensure ECRs are given equal representation across the University has been slower to establish than we anticipated.

- **Equity across research career stages**:The ECR SRDS review identified that while the ACP provides a useful framework for academics, the absence of a similar framework for research staff is a barrier to systematic support for their development being put in place. Building on a proposed new ACP for research staff there is a need for SRDS documentation and guidance to be more explicitly and robustly linked to the a framework and to the Concordat. There is also a need to enhance record-keeping and monitoring to ensure that all ECRs have an SRDS review. The action plan will be modified to reflect this.

- **Monitoring progress** via the use of surveys has been problematic due to timings clashing with an all staff survey. The Concordat related survey therefore didn't take place as it was felt it would lead to low response rate through survey fatigue. We need to work closely with HR to address this in the future.

- Concordat implementation operates within a **complex landscape of external requirements** and guidelines, such as those set by committees, concordats, DORA, and Athena Swan. **Aligning the actions** being implemented with these external requirements is crucial to ensure compliance and avoid potential conflicts. A comprehensive mapping exercise may be necessary to identify where actions align with existing requirements and where adjustments may be needed.

The main modification to the action plan this year will be a change to the proposed completion dates for some actions and associated measures of success. This is the result of unrealistic timescales being described originally as it was unclear the complexity of some tasks and what resources would be needed to achieve some of the outcomes described.

Outline your key objectives in delivering your plan in the coming reporting period

(max 500 words)

1. **Consolidate on UECRC activities**, creating implementation plans for the recommendations and maximise the success of what has been achieved for ECRs to include.
   - **Embedding induction** resources ensuring a consistent procedure is adhered to, sharing resources with all new research staff.
   - **SRDS** to enable changes to be made to the 2024 round
   - **Recognition and reward:** to enhance the data gathered, visibility and support offered

2. **Continue to improve the visibility** and communications from UECRC. There is still more work to enhance communication of the committee, the concordat and implementation of the action plan. The University is undergoing a restructure and the Committee will be key to ensure the representation of ECRs across the University is maintained. Actions include creation of resources/pack for academic ECR leads and reps to use within their own departments/faculty to support communications.

3. **Design and launch development and support specifically for Established researchers.** Activities include recruitment of academic leads for a Established Researcher Forum, expansion of our mentoring scheme to be available for all researcher career stages and design/launch a cohort-based academic leadership development programme co-delivered by our people development, researcher development and teaching development teams.

4. **Focus on improving the access to/availability of data**, measures for evaluation, reporting and measures of success across the entire action plan. With the launch of the new learning management system there is a wealth of data being generated but reporting procedures for this are yet to be established. There are also challenges with collating data/gaining access to data from schemes such as the 'Support & Support' which need to be addressed.

5. **Researcher Employability: Delve In, Try Out: Facilitating opportunities for contract research staff to connect with employers outside academia**
   Researchers lack confidence in the transferability of their professional skills and have very limited direct experience outside academia. The opportunity to gain applied experience of work in non-academic organisations would offer researchers an excellent way to build confidence, test roles and types of work and develop insights that can be drawn on in subsequent applications. At present however, there are no established mechanisms for research staff to gain external experience.The project will research, design and pilot a scheme to support researchers who wish to gain hands-on experience of workplaces outside academia.

6. Researcher Wellbeing 2 Day Conference June 2024

Wellbeing in academia continues to be an important area of concern and, indeed, research. We began developing researcher wellbeing provision in 2015, and now run a comprehensive researcher wellbeing programme (#ResearchWell), which comprises three areas: support and skills development, socialising and community-building, and influencing processes and procedures within the university. For 2024 we will host a conference focusing on research and practice around researcher wellbeing, complementing the work of the university's Mental Health Strategy Group, providing a way for colleagues from within the university and from other HEIs and partners to come together to discuss latest research and good practice.

7. Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Training for ECRs

To raise awareness and improve engagement with the new Commercialisation Journey a series of basic level workshops including; 'What is IP?' and 'Consultancy Bootcamp' will be delivered.

Please provide a brief statement describing your institution's approval process of this report prior to sign off by the governing body *(max 200 words)*

The report has been created by the University Early Career Researcher Committee, chaired by Professor John Flint (Deputy Vice-President for Research). Consultation was carried out with academic leads and ECR representatives from each faculty of the University, alongside the researcher development team (based within Research, Partnerships and Innovation) HR and the Careers and employability service. The report was then approved by the VP for Research on behalf of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee.

Signature on behalf of governing body:

S.E. Hartley

(Professor Sue Hartley, VP for Research and Innovation on behalf of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee)

Contact for queries: Dr Lucy Lee (Head of Researcher Development) Email: l.lee@sheffield.ac.uk

This annual report will be analysed by Universities UK, secretariat for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, to identify good practices, themes for development and information to improve national research culture policy and practice.

If you have any questions, or suggestions on how the reporting process could be improved, please contact the secretariat at CDRsecretariat@universitiesuk.ac.uk

www.researcherdevelopmentconcordat.ac.uk