Report for the UK HR Excellence in Research Award panel 1st September 2014

Outline how the internal evaluation was undertaken (including how researchers' views were taken into account during the review and, where relevant, how the review links with existing QA and other implementation/monitoring mechanisms)

Evaluation of The University of Sheffield's (TUoS) progress against its HR Excellence in Research Award action plan has been ongoing over the last two years. Rather than take the approach of a two year point only review, it was deemed far more impactful to regularly evaluate and re-position in order to adapt the strategy to have the greatest impact.

In order to keep stakeholders up to date, a formal review has been compiled by the secretary to the Research Staff Development Committee (RSDC) at the end of year 1 and year 2, formulated on the basis of ongoing communication with research staff fora, colleagues supporting the plan and meetings of the RSDC. The RSDC comprises of academics from all faculties, representatives from Human Resources (HR) and Research & Innovation Services (R&IS) and a research staff representative. The committee's role is to, "take a strategic perspective, focusing on how best to further enhance TUoS's provision for fixed term contract researchers (FTCRS)".

Since receiving the HR Excellence in Research Award in September 2012, 6 formal committee meetings have taken place (November 2012 / April 2013 / July 2013 / October 2013 / January 2014 / June 2014). In that time, the committee has developed from being a task and finish committee sub-group focused only on the HR Excellence in Research Award to a strategic committee embedded in governance structures. This has enabled the on the ground progress to be supported by cross-university senior level investment in change.

The step-change to fully meeting the aims of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers began with establishing a university-wide Researcher Professional Development (RPD) team, purposely placed within and across R&IS, the Careers Service and the university's five faculties. This team of nine diverse specialists was consolidated between August & December 2012, bringing skills across career management, coaching and mentoring, enterprise, female specific researcher development, leadership, teaching, employer engagement, HR practices, learning and development (design, delivery & evaluation), events management, stakeholder involvement, partnership building and most importantly the ability to build trust with and the engagement of ECRs.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, the team established itself and expanded its delivery across the whole university, embedding Think Ahead, a research-led framework, "for the continuous professional development of researchers at the University of Sheffield, supporting individual career ambitions in and beyond academia." During 2013-2014, it has built upon the solid foundations, further shaping the framework based on reflective practice and steer and ideas from all stakeholders.

At TUoS, Early Career Researcher (ECRs) (encompassing the target FTCRS as well as PGRs, those on open ended contracts and some early academics) are engaged in change through a variety of mechanisms, key ones being the existence of researcher steering groups embedded in governance within the faculties (ECR Associations, Early Career Group, Researcher Development Group) who use their collective voice to actively shape the Think Ahead framework as well as to contribute to improvements for ECRs more widely across the institution. The RPD team routinely seek the feedback of ECRs through methods including formal evaluation tools, the team email account and casual conversations. Key departments and people have been allocated specific areas of work/tasks to ensure ownership for completion of HR Excellence in Research Award plan actions. Themes from the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) have also been aligned as the process has progressed, to ensure all pieces of the strategy are pulled together and to make the action plan easy to understand.

Detail key achievements and the progress against the strategy, indicators and actions identified in the original action plan

Key achievements (related Concordat Principle number in brackets)

As mentioned above, over the two years there have been significant changes to the internal support structures for ECRs e.g. establishing of the RPD and repositioning of the RSDC. (7.)

Access to continuing professional development (CPD) is now available tailored in each faculty as well as across the university, thus meeting local need whilst promoting a culture of collaboration and interdisciplinary networking. In the last two years, over 2500 researcher have engaged at least once with over 400 events and 1500 1-1 careers or mentoring conversations have taken place. ECRs are also invited to engage in the Sheffield Leader, a pan university culture and leadership development initiative. (3.)

A mentoring programme where ECRs are mentored by academics is fully established across the university and a thesis mentoring programme for PGRs has been piloted. 237 mentoring pairs have been created across four intakes for ECR mentoring and 60 across two intakes for thesis mentoring. The latter is largely provided by ECRs who have previously been mentored, which gives them the experience of mentoring a new cohort of researchers. Impact is in part measured through nominations by mentees for 'Dedicated Outstanding Mentors' (webpage). (4.)

The UREC Research Ethics & Integrity programme has ensured all 1st and 2nd year PGRs have chance to explore ethical and moral issues and understand both the legislative and cultural challenges and opportunities within research. This has reached around 1000 students in the last two years. (5.)

There has been a drive to create a balance of CPD opportunities that focus on careers within and beyond academia. These have included careers expositions on healthcare careers and careers in Professional Services and since December 2013, a 'v i s t a' seminar series inviting back PhD alumni and friends who have gone into a variety of careers beyond academia. Ten sessions have taken place attended by 335 researchers (some of those repeat attendees). (3.)

A university wide over-arching statement of expectations was created to provide a baseline for practice that could then be translated within faculties to create common understanding. (2.)

There has been greater support and information for PIs regarding recruiting and supporting ECRs, including centralised web information (as requested in the Principal Investigators & Research Leaders survey (PIRLs)) and improved new academic induction (webpage). (1.)

Induction for new ECRs has been reviewed to ensure consistency of information, whilst allowing faculties to shape the process to make it effective for their staff (webpage). (2.)

Information for ECRs has been pulled in to a 'one stop' research staff web portal, with localised information being provided at faculty level also (webpage). (4.)

The TUoS staff appraisal and development scheme paperwork (SRDS) has been revised for ECRs to bring focus to career development and support for their development activity.
As part of its ongoing review of the staff environment, TUoS has undertaken a review of several key policies and practices which support the needs of ECRs as well as other staff groups. TUoS has a new set of equality objectives and work towards these objectives is wide-ranging and ambitious (webpage). (6.)

There is a university-wide 'Parents@TUOSNET' network, which supports all staff, including ECRs. This model supports inter-departmental communication and broad networking and support structures (webpage). (6.)

Quotes

"I plan to pursue a career in academia and am currently applying for fellowships. The skill set I have developed through Think Ahead makes me stand out, and I also feel confident that I would make a strong candidate if I was to pursue a career outside of this field." (Early Career Researcher)

"I work with approximately 2,000 researchers a year in academia and research institutions both in the UK and globally. I have been working with the University of Sheffield for four years now, and the Think Ahead initiative stands out for me in a number of ways. It is a truly collaborative project, unique in the way it genuinely brings a collaborative partnership to life." (Think Ahead partner from The Mindset Method)

Outline next steps and the focus of the strategy for the next two years, including success measures.

We commit to continuing to build on the excellent progress made over the last two years.
In addition, the new focus for the next two years is in the following key areas:

- *Enhancement of access to the redeployment process for RS on FTCs*
  Success measures
  1. Investigation in to the potential for researchers to be able to search vacancies to self-select
  2. Provision of information and support to ensure RS complete their profiles to maximum impact
- *Production of faculty tailored statements of expectations between RS, PI & the relevant faculty*
  Success measures
  1. Professional expectations between PI and RS are articulated and communicated from induction (reciprocal expectations need to be clarified upfront)
  2. Professional expectations between academic department and research staff are articulated and communicated from induction (i.e. minimum standards governing provision for research staff in academic departments, including CPD)
- *Increased integration of RS in departments, including through membership of committees and RS associations* (improved practice will be measured through staff consultation and departmental/faculty review of the implementation of faculty statements of expectation)
  Success measures
  1. Integration into appropriate groups/committees.
  2. Building and sustaining research staff communities/associations through informal and/or formal practices/processes.
- *Increased support to PIs to enable them to competently and confidently manage and support their staff*
  Success measures
  1. Tailored management development for PIs within the MANAGE programme (numbers engaged)
  2. Improved web resources available for PIs – launch of PI specific pages and leaflet
  3. SRDS training
  4. Awareness raising of Think Ahead – people know what it is when asked to explain
- *Development of mechanisms to broaden and communicate the recognition and value of researchers*
  Success measures
  1. Roll out of Kroto Research Inspiration – successful launch of the awards & competitions
  2. Build on the 'Faculty of Science Researcher Awards' model – duplicated in at least one other faculty
- *Extending the mentoring provision to include access to mentors in careers beyond academia as well as wider activity under the strand,* 'v i s t a: carers beyond academia'
  Success measure
  1. Activity has occurred under the strand e.g. seminars, mentoring, careers expo
- *Recruiting academic champions in each department for RS matters*
  Success measure
  1. The existence of such a person in each department