



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# Guidance for writing ECA recommendations

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# Agenda

1. What are ECAs and why do we have them
2. Deciding who to recommend and the grounds for recommendation
3. Writing a recommendation
4. Things to avoid
5. Consolidated ECAs

# What are ECAs?

- Are for all staff on the University of Sheffield Grading Scheme (Grades 1 – 9), including staff on academic probation.
- Are payable as a lump sum in the first year, and consolidated into an increment in the second successive year of award.
- Recommended staff must have a rating of 1 in their SRDS review.

# What are ECAs?

- Recommendations can be made for:
  - Exceptional contribution in the review year **OR**
  - Sustained excellent contribution over a number of years.
- Can only be recommended by the Head of Department following agreement at the Departmental Review Panel. There is no self submission.

# Why do we have ECAs?

- To financially reward staff whose contribution has far exceeded the expectations of their job or grade.
- To financially reward staff whose contribution has exceeded the expectations of their job or grade over a number of years.
- To enable accelerated progression through the normal range of grades, and progression within the exceptional range, through successive ECA awards.

# ECA process

SRDS reviewer identifies exceptional or sustained excellent contribution and writes draft recommendation



Departmental Review Panel considers all draft recommendations from the department and decides which are worthy of submission to the faculty panels



Head of Department completes and signs ECA recommendations and submits them to Human Resources



Faculty panels meet to consider all recommendations from departments in the faculty



Outcomes and feedback are communicated to Heads of Department in December



Successful staff receive letters informing them of the award and its value in January

# Who considers recommendations

## Academic Faculty

- Faculty PVC (Chair)
- FDO
- Faculty Head of Department
- A senior University manager
- A senior HR manager
- Lead HR Adviser for the faculty

## Professional Services

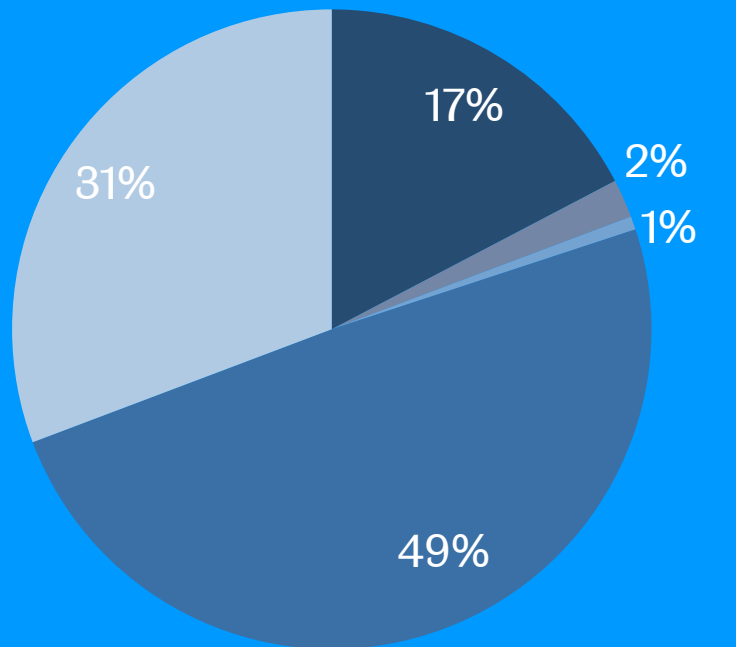
- Registrar & Secretary (Chair)
- 2 Heads of Professional Services departments
- A senior University manager (from academic faculty)
- A senior HR manager
- Lead HR Adviser for Professional Services

# Who to recommend

- SRDS assessment rating of 1, but not all 1s
  - Done something **far beyond** what was expected in the last review year
- OR**
- Contributed **beyond** expectations over a number of years

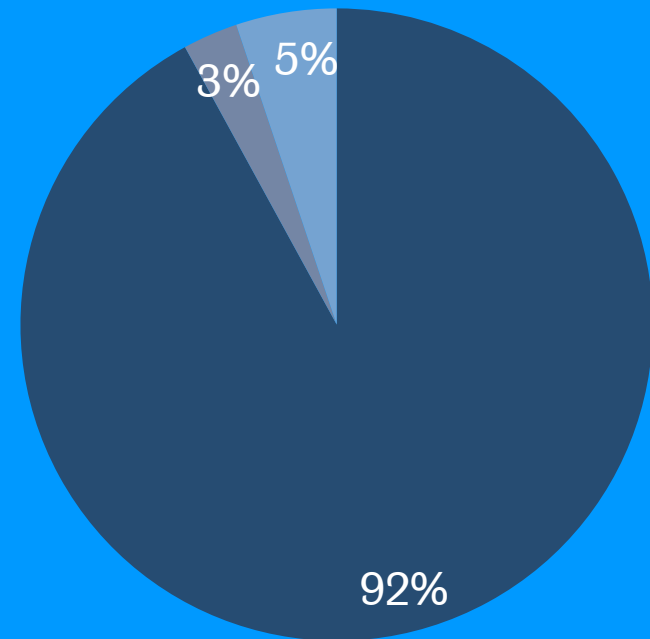
# Numbers of recommendations

## SRDS ratings



■ No SRDS ■ No rating ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1

## ECA recommendations



■ Not recommended  
■ Not approved  
■ Approved

# Grounds for recommendation

## Exceptional contribution

- Clearly recognisable contribution **far beyond** expectations of grade, job role or SRDS objectives within the last review year
- Must have received 1 rating in SRDS review
- Not all 1s are exceptional

# Grounds for recommendation

## Sustained excellence

- Clearly recognisable contribution **beyond** expectations of grade, job role or SRDS objectives over a number of years, normally more than two
- Must have received 1 rating in SRDS reviews over the past few years and not received an ECA in that time
- Not all those rated 1 over a number of years demonstrate sustained excellence

# Making a recommendation

- Reinforce positive message of 1 rating
- Draft recommendation
- Departmental Review Panel decides to recommend to faculty panel
- Inform member of staff (if this is the approach taken in your department)

# Writing a recommendation

- Normally started by SRDS reviewer
- Use the ECA form, limited to one side of A4
- Recommendation to the faculty panel must be agreed by the DRP and the form signed by the Head of Department.
- No self-submission

# Writing a recommendation

## Brief outline

- Important section of form
- Tells panel what is expected of the member of staff
- Best taken from their job summary, or About the Job document

# Writing a recommendation

## Description

- Describe what the contribution was.

## Evidence

- Provide some evidence of the output and/or impact of the contribution

## Context

- Explain why the contribution is exceptional or excellent

# Exceptional contribution

Brief outline: (Grade 5) To be responsible for the operation of departmental undergraduate and postgraduate examination processes.

Recommendation:

X handles all the administrative work associated with examinations to a high standard.

X has on her own initiative reviewed the exam board procedure and has implemented a new electronic system for recording marks in exam board meetings.

This has enabled quicker, and more accurate recording of assessment results, especially in cases where results are adjusted.

# Sustained excellence

Brief outline: (Grade 6) Administrative work in recruiting undergraduate students, and coordinating visit days.

Recommendation:

X plans and organises the department's open days. Applications have doubled in the past four years, and X has ensured that the increased volume has not affected the quality of events and service provided to applicants.

The quality of the department's open days was recognised by SRAM two years ago as having examples of best practice that have been passed on to other departments. X and the admissions team were recently presented with a Customer Service Award.

# An aide-mémoire

“Person A did B, which is exceptional / sustained excellence because of X, Y and Z.”

Always describe the contribution and explain why it is exceptional or sustained excellence. Never do one and not the other.

# Things to avoid

## **Forgetting the effect of 1 rating**

Remember to be positive that a member of staff has been rated 1.

Focus on the fact that the reviewee has exceeded your expectations.

# Things to avoid

## **Not managing reviewee expectations**

Remember that not all those rated 1 are recommended for ECAs.

Ensure that reviewees are aware that the fact they are rated 1 does not necessarily mean they will be recommended for an ECA.

# Things to avoid

## **Submitting speculative cases**

Only put forward those cases where you definitely think there is exceptional contribution.

Don't submit cases where you aren't sure, or to make other cases look better.

# Things to avoid

## **Making assumptions about panel's knowledge**

Even though decisions are being made within the faculty, cases should still be clear and provide clear evidence of exceptional contribution or sustained excellence, and explain the context of the contribution.

# Things to avoid

## **Writing a job description**

A case should do more than just describe what a member of staff does. Without context, it is difficult for the panel to judge whether the activities constitute exceptional contribution or not.

# Things to avoid

## Using jargon

ECA cases should explain in a clear and understandable way what a member of staff does, without relying on technical jargon, or assuming that the panel will understand the jargon you use.

# Things to avoid

## **Basing the case on learning new skills**

Learning new skills is not in itself exceptional contribution.

You could think about what impact the application of the new skills has had, and whether this is exceptional contribution.

# Things to avoid

## **Basing a case on an increased volume of work**

Having more work to do does not necessarily constitute exceptional contribution.

Innovative approaches to managing the increased work may be exceptional, but the increase itself is not enough.

# Things to avoid

## **Basing a case on long service**

Exceptional contribution awards should not be used to reward long service.

# Things to avoid

## **Writing a promotion case**

If someone's duties have increased significantly, and this will continue permanently, this individual should be considered for promotion.

However if someone has contributed exceptionally, but their duties have increased significantly as well, they can be recommended for and receive both.

# Things to avoid

## **Writing a case for someone covering duties**

If someone is temporarily covering someone else's duties whilst they are absent, this should be dealt with as a Special Responsibility Allowance.

# Consolidated ECAs

- **Different** to sustained excellence
- ECAs consolidated where awarded in two successive years
- Must be for different contribution
- Approach writing recommendation in same way

# Consolidated ECAs

- Second successive ECA can only ever be awarded for exceptional contribution

	Year 1	Year 2	Why
Possible combinations for consolidation	Exceptional	Exceptional	Year 2 must be achieved over one year
	Sustained excellence	Exceptional	

# Consolidated ECAs - Example

Examinations Secretary – Grade 5

Year 1

Review process and implement new procedure, enabling quicker and more accurate recording of marks.

Awarded ECA.  
Paid as a lump sum equivalent to an increment.

Year 2

No further changes to process, but marks still recorded more quickly and accurately than before.

No ECA awarded

Reviews process and implements new procedure enabling improvements to the presentation of marks to exam boards.

Awarded ECA.  
Paid as a lump sum equivalent to an increment, plus a consolidated increment.

The year 2 case needs to be based on different evidence than the year 1 case.

# Summary

- Be positive about 1 rating
- Be selective about who you recommend
- Always describe contribution and explain why it is exceptional or excellent



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