

The University of Sheffield (TUoS) invests resource and passion in developing its Early Career Researchers (ECRs). Inspired by the UK Concordat and utilising Roberts funding, pockets of excellent work began to appear across the faculties and professional services as early as 2006.

In Spring 2012, TUoS Doctoral Researcher Development Committee (DRDC), which included an ECR representative, led a strategy to establish a university-wide Researcher Professional Development (RPD) team, purposely placed within and across Research & Innovation Services (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."

In its first ten months, Think Ahead encompassed over 200 events, reaching in excess of 2500 ECRs. These group experiences were complemented by 750 1-1 career, mentoring or coaching conversations. Think Ahead has real impact because of the combination of symbiotic relationships and their translation into quality support.

Mirroring the drivers of the research environment, Think Ahead is by design collaborative and promotes interdisciplinarity. Think Ahead operates a 'productive partnership' model at all levels, utilising expertise from within and beyond TUoS. Current exemplary partnerships exist with ECRs themselves, within the academic community and governance structures, with other professional services such as HR, research managers (within both R&IS and industry Gateways), Sheffield UCU, reciprocal universities, external specialists, employers and alumni.

The RPD live these values by working together across cognate disciplines. The team actively collaborate and has fostered a culture of open dialogue which is sometimes challenging but always productive. Events are designed to germinate conversations and to bring together ECRs who might never before have ventured out of their department.

The productive partnerships with our researcher communities are the most central to the work of Think Ahead. ECRs are engaged as partners in many ways, particular examples 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.

In light of the above overview and the specific examples within the supporting materials, I am championing Think Ahead for the Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers category. Think Ahead epitomises a productive partnership model and it is unique in the sector.