

## Introduction

Within the first ten months of existence, the RPD team facilitated, organised, delivered, coordinated and signposted a breadth of programmes, workshops, seminars, conferences, courses, 1-1 support interviews (including careers advice and guidance and matched mentoring), peer support groups and applied learning experiences. These were for post graduate students, research staff and early career academics, to support their development of both transferable & independent research skills.

## Productive partnerships

We utilise a 'productive partnership' model to ensure Think Ahead is balanced, inclusive and underpinned by collaborations with a breadth of stakeholders. Below is an overview of some of 2012-2013 highlights.

### *Collaboration in action*

- **Developing relationship with employers** – our Careers Advisers routinely liaise with employers at steering groups, over the telephone, through professional visits and at the careers fairs they arrange, increasing the number of employers that target the University's ECRs as potential employees.
- **With other professional services such as HR** – we are all members of the pan-university Staff Development Network, sharing practice and solving challenges. We also promote other wider university initiatives to ECRs, such the Sheffield Leader.
- **External specialists** – we resource the input of many external consultants and experts to provide additional perspectives for our researchers, to name but a few, these include; Paul Stokes (Sheffield Hallam University), Helen Lawrence (Helen Lawrence Training), Kevin Parker (KKI Associates), Caron King (Kingswood Plus) and Janet Wilkinson (Three Times Three Consulting).
- **Alumni** – our alumni offer their time in many ways, a great example being the 'Coffee & Careers' seminar series on post-PhD careers beyond academia.
- **Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE)** – The scheme provides research associates and PGRs with opportunities to manage their own research project and gives undergraduate students vital lab experience. Researchers are trained and supported in processes including recruitment, applying for externally funded student stipends, project management and student supervision. 13 successful projects were undertaken in 2012-2013 - ECRs gained a small grant for consumables and applied externally for the student stipend.
- **Springboard for Women programme** – a career and personal development programme for women in research and scholarly work from across the five faculties. Offered twice a year for up to 60 participants, 54 took part in 2012-2013. This project has led to the development of a parallel undergraduate programme 'Sprint', which will hopefully have an impact on encouraging undergraduate women take on a PhD by enhancing their confidence, which is particularly important in some disciplines.
- **The Sheffield Crucible** – a programme for researchers, developing interdisciplinary working, innovation and collaboration. It is 3x 2-day residential and brings a diversity of researchers at different levels (Postdocs, fellows, early career academics & clinicians as well as university teachers) as well as from the five faculties. It offered funding of £5K and £10K for seed funding projects for these multidisciplinary projects. Involvement in a public engagement event is a requirement of the application process as is engagement of members of the public on feedback on the proposed project prior to application. 18 projects were put forward by the 30 Crucible participants and 10 were fully funded.
- **Sheffield University GRAD school** – a three day non residential experience for PGRs based on Vitae's model but adapted internally for our PGRs (59 participated in 2012-2013). This is delivered by seven members of the team in partnership with academics, professional services colleagues and external facilitators.
- **Mock interview panels** – led by senior academics and lead to researchers' self-reported success as result of attending (for jobs both within and beyond academia).

Application for THE awards 2014 category 'Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers'  
**The University of Sheffield supporting document 1 – Partnership and impact**

- [Science Brainwaves](#), [Science in Policy Group](#), [Engineering YES](#), [BiotechYES](#) – we support ECRs & PGRs to become independent through setting up their own organisations or networks and to participate in externally run development competitions.
- [Reciprocal relationships](#) – we have established sharing relationships with other universities to pool talent and resources. A primary example of this is our tutor exchange for GRADschool with Cambridge.
- [Broadening Horizons](#) – based on Vitae's programme, a three (non-consecutive) day career and skills development programme for ECRs postdoctoral researchers in the faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences (around 30 ECRs participated in 2012-2013).
- [White Rose Social Sciences \(WRSS\) DTC poster competition and exhibition](#) – we drove up participation, showcasing TUoS PGRs to both of the partner universities.

### ***Mentoring and coaching partnerships***

Whilst developing academics as mentors, six members of the Think Ahead team are themselves trained coaches and are undertaking ILM Coaching and mentoring qualification at level 5/7. Productive partnerships are evident in the 1-1 relationships of mentors and mentees and coaching conversations around a variety of topics:

- [1-1 support for writing the ESRC future leaders scheme T&D plans and the Marie Curie Actions Research Fellowship Programme](#) – researchers declared that they did not feel they would have scored so highly or succeeded without those discussions.
- [Research staff mentoring expanded and established in every faculty](#) – 132 pairs met and conversed over the year.
- [Scoping of a portal for external mentoring](#) – alumni were surveyed to ask if they would like to be external mentors and 63 signed up at conception.
- [Thesis mentoring programme piloted](#) – 30 PGRs being supported by PhD mentors from all faculties and members of professional services.
- [Piloting the design of a mentoring programme for new academic clinical lecturers \(Department of Clinical Dentistry\)](#) – a key target area for increasing quality of ECR and PGR supervision.

### ***Additional collaboration, including in academic governance structures***

In addition to the day to day provision of the Think Ahead framework, the team engaged in a breadth of activities that further demonstrate productive partnership and interdisciplinarity, e.g.:

- Committee meetings in all faculties and cross-university
- Securing funding from EEUK for the development of enterprise learning materials
- Delivering collaborative professional development provision with colleagues from the Universities of York and Leeds University, as part of the WRSS DTC
- Contributing to the Research Ethics & Integrity training for PGRs (organising, programmes, facilitating, training ECRs for small group teaching, evaluating)
- Liaising and coordinating with employers for PhD internships as part of the BBSRC DTP *Mechanistic Biology*
- Steering and enhancing TUoS Women's network
- Participating in external Vitae groups (CROS / PIRLs steering group, Researcher Development Advisory Group)
- Memberships of department Athena Swan panels
- Delivering national conference workshops and presentations
- Surveys & consultation on research specific topics e.g. acgas "Getting That First Lecturship" survey
- Contribution to strategic, pan-university working groups (inc. meeting the needs of 'Off Campus' PGRs, visa extensions, placements, HEA accreditation, BBSRC EWI competition)
- Supporting TUoS Mobile University initiative
- University Senate membership

### **Comments and feedback**

The comments and perspectives of ECRs and our collaborators are contained within the additional supporting documents and provide an enhanced perspective on the above.