Fostering an effective research environment

During 2014-15, a series of semi-structured interviews were held with Heads of Department/Directors of Research from across the University, to investigate the characteristics of an effective research environment (i.e. one which supports successful and productive world-leading research, as well as supporting behaviours and practices that are expected in world-leading research environments). The key aim was to identify and showcase good practices which will help research leaders to foster an effective research environment (and thereby also contribute to a strong performance in REF 'research environment' assessments).

The project findings have been grouped into 8 sections; each section has been split into sub-sections that contain short quotes from interviewees - text in boxes gives more detail on particular departmental practices.

NB. It is these features together, not in isolation, that contribute to an effective research environment: the full features of 2 separate departments involved in this project are provided [**here**]

Key themes arising from the project:

- The importance of recruiting the 'right' people (high quality & the right ethos/'fit')
- Focus on development and mentoring of PGRs and research staff, including new academic staff
- Inclusive decision-making structures and processes
- A culture of collaboration and trust - open discussion of research ideas/proposals/papers and providing constructive feedback.

READ ON TO FIND OUT WHAT THE INTERVIEWEES TOLD US, PLUS CASE STUDIES FROM THEIR DEPARTMENTS (the findings are also presented in this **webpage**)

1. Fostering Quality Research

a. Centrality of Research

"Research goes right down from staff to undergraduate and everyone is aware of its centrality...the dominant culture is one in which individuals value research and value research time and the activities which go along with it, opportunities to disseminate and so on"

"My leadership style is about community building – I try to make people feel valued and try to make time for people to do research. I very much encourage people to have 'buy out' time to focus on research activities...putting research as central to the mission"

b. Quality not quantity

"Writing papers requires practice! There is no pressure to publish a large amount of papers within the Department; encouraging a focus on quality is more important"

c. Inclusive strategy development

"[Our] research strategy is very flexible, some top-down, some bottom up, liable to change. [We] have occasional whole department discussion of strategy, so it is approached strategically"

"We are going to be discussing the research strategy at the next departmental committee (which involves all academic and research staff)"

d. Focus on individual research interests

"We have a focus on personal interests and work towards high quality results, no pressure to publish within short timescales. This encourages research that does not attract funding, but only within certain limitations ('Friday afternoon research' – this has value but not for the whole week. Everyone has a responsibility to generate some income, and the fun should be shared)"

"I think the key to a research culture is trying to find people's 'organic interests'. Not the RCUK's top down priorities – you start from where people are at"

e. Focus on leaving a legacy

"Legacy is a keyword in our Department – this encourages everyone to push themselves within their own area (publication, innovation, etc)"

f. Encouraging individual researchers to be strategic

"We try and encourage staff to be strategic, and that's why the individual research meetings with the Director of Research are important – to ensure no one is frittering away research time on things that will not qualify for the REF. It's encouraging people to think through why they might accept an invitation rather than automatically accepting; getting people into the habit of thinking things through; not just publishing at any cost - it's a matter of saying, is it actually worth spending another 3 months making this much, much better?"

g. Fostering a style of inclusive leadership

"The hiring strategy is really central to this…to invest in people who are research leaders"

"When I first became Head of Department, people were saying 'support recruitment to my field' – then I got research leaders around a table and asked them to consider the good of the whole Department – this worked for the first recruitment round [following the meeting] and there may have been some slippage back but since then more people are a lot more respectful [of each other and other research areas]"

h. Focus on the next generation

"It's important to provide RAs on soft money with some career development to help them towards an academic position e.g. supporting them to submit papers as a first author, supporting them to submit grants of their own etc…through the induction process we aim to ensure that when new RAs join they know what is reasonable to expect, e.g. some time off to do their own research, the opportunity to put in grants in their own name etc, making sure authorship issues are sorted out. Important things include mentoring to put in grants, going through people's CVs to help them develop it, giving sufficient attention to people's development"

2. Recruitment

a. Strategy - employing the right people

"Research staff have to be competitive in the most competitive research arena, but fitting in with the departmental ethos is key too – we appoint colleagues who are excellent researchers but who will fit as team members. We seek those who are of a collegiate/collaborative mindset, who are technically capable, excellent teachers and researchers, and who have a broad perspective"

THE DETAIL - "The Department carries out cohort recruitment of post-docs, involving an interview day where the candidates have to give a 20 minute presentation about their research to undergraduates and the interview panel, where their teaching ability is assessed as well as their research, followed by a formal interview and then a social meal in the evening where staff can really get to know the candidates and decide who will fit best. There is a formal interview panel but all academic staff can attend the presentations and a member of the panel will stay behind after the event to enable these staff members to provide feedback. In addition, all academic staff can see the candidates' CVs and all have the opportunity to rank them (most do so and in most cases these are in line with the panel's views as well; this helps all staff feel involved in these key decisions, and this process reinforces the kinds of attributes the Department is seeking and hence the departmental culture)."

"All staff model high standards, so this becomes the norm/expectation. We have a strong emphasis on hiring people who are excellent researchers AND good colleagues. Collegiality is vital for the culture of trust. With the right people, the research culture is perpetuated with little effort…", "If someone would not be a good colleague they are not hired, although not at the expense of research excellence. We would choose to hire no-one rather than someone who would not be a good colleague, or someone without the excellent research"

THE DETAIL - "The Department has a more extensive recruitment procedure than is typical in this country. We want to ensure we recruit the right people, good colleagues. We always have a 2-day recruitment – 1½ hour job talk, 45 minute discussion, lunch, dinner, get to know them. We have a Committee of 4/5 people to shortlist (with consultation), the whole department can attend the presentation and dinner/lunch. Everyone gives feedback to the committee. This has been tremendously successful as an approach. We want people who are good colleagues as well as excellent philosophers. We consider being a good colleague to be a necessary condition, and we won't hire someone who clearly won't be."

"Quality of research is always an incredibly important part of the appointment of a new member of staff [as well as] being a team player, being collegial and demonstrating an understanding of the diversity in the School"

THE DETAIL - "There is a tendency to longlist and then call in work and read the work. Research potential is a major reason for someone being employed and we look at the potential to make a big research impact. If you are appointing people with good potential then with support and mentoring and time they should be able to achieve that. In the different fields we would expect them to evidence recognition of standards in the field.

We are looking for people who are aware and are well trained or if not completely well-trained have great potential. All of our staff are asked and do indeed expect to do teaching that is research-driven or research-led. They are given the opportunity to identify where

there will be, how that will fit and that kind of thing. There is considerable autonomy and there's a lot of responsibility - they've got to make sure that they are going to take the students with them. So the brief is to make research really central -there is not an expectation that teaching and research will be completely separate.

When we advertise, we tend to advertise quite a broad area of teaching needs that we have to meet but we don't tend to be very prescriptive about what we expect... (so we have) room to appoint the best person for both teaching and research, regardless of what they might be researching...

Being a team player, being collegial and demonstrating an understanding of the diversity of the School is quite important. We want them to be clever, ambitious people but they've got to think for instance that students are important; demonstrate a sense that they know about us as a department and what they will contribute collegially. We have not given jobs to people whose research is fantastic but who didn't demonstrate any interest in us apart from paying them a salary. We won't have those people.

From start to finish; we identify the need and it is usually generated by a need in a specific teaching area. We want very active researchers, we only have teaching-only staff for fixed term contracts in order to cover a temporary need. If at all possible we turn those posts into full academic posts. If the job is fairly straightforward we advertise, as widely as we possibly can, and we advertise internationally. We try to attract the best and the biggest pool that we can. We tend to recruit to grade 8 - it's unusual to appoint to other (higher) grades but we do so occasionally where there is a clear need for research leadership in a particular area that we need to develop in particular. We've done that in a couple of areas in the last three years but it's not usual.

We have a recruitment panel that is chaired by a trained senior person who is a specialist in the subject, and the panel includes some relatively junior people. We try to make sure that there is a good mix of disciplines, then the standard HR person. Depending on the post we may longlist against the criteria and then ask for work sending in, an article. The panel then produces a shortlist and at that point people are invited for interview, where they give a presentation - it varies depending on the field but it will typically be an opportunity to talk about an undergraduate module, perhaps offer a module that they might have designed for postgraduate taught course, talk about their research plans, that kind of thing. Everyone is invited to the presentations and to feedback on them, including staff and postgraduate students - feedback forms get handed into the Chair. There's also time for discussion where everyone in the room can feed back what they thought about it after the applicant has gone. Then there is an interview with the panel, so it's a full day selection process with the interview in the morning then lunch and the presentations in the afternoon. Depending on the subject area they will have a tour around the School and they will meet people and generally get a feel for what's going on. Increasingly that's important as it's difficult to get a sense of a person over 40 minutes. This does enable the person being recruited to get a proper sense of the environment they're coming into.

Although our recruitment process is quite compressed, we do have a good reputation for how we treat people at interview and then after interview where everyone would be contacted individually as soon as possible and given feedback. Comments have been received from a number of previous candidates about how welcome they felt and how supportive the environment is. We do a lot of work to make the atmosphere supportive and collegial so that they can perform their best. We're also very good at seeing through nerves and making allowances for nerves - realising that we are not necessarily seeing people at their best.

> If we are appointing associate teachers it is made clear to them that because their timetables are flexible we will ensure that they can be given some space so that they can pursue and continue their research. Those colleagues tend to be research-active, they're not teaching-only people and these fixed-term contracts can be pretty hazardous if they were prevented from pursuing or developing their research. We've got to make sure that they feel that they are supported and that there is an opportunity for development."

"Employing the right people is important in maintaining a positive attitude to research – get it right from the outset"

"My main objective (since taking over as Head of Department) has been to get some more people in who are research leaders…it's about fostering a style of inclusive leadership. The main things I look for are track record, ability to publish, delivery… but personally, I like to work with people I can trust, who are collegiate – you make an unconscious judgement at interview – as well as having some ambition and drive"

"High quality is the primary criteria when recruiting…this means people who have got an excellent track record in research (published and have a track record of independent funding). That they can communicate and want to be part of something bigger, that they are ambitious not just for themselves but for the wider picture. The team working and 'soft skills' are critical. We also look for their understanding of the department, who they anticipate they will collaborate with…Recruiting the right people is essential to creating a successful research environment; it is a critical contributory factor to changing culture for the better"

b. Inclusive processes

"I want people to be actively involved in the recruitment process and to feel that they participated fully – even if the strategic appointment is not going to be in their area, its important strategically for the department and useful that the process is inclusive"

"The department carries out cohort recruitment of post-docs, involving an interview day where the candidates have to give a 20 minute presentation about their research to undergraduates and the interview panel, where their teaching ability is assessed as well as their research, followed by a formal interview and then a social meal where staff can really get to know the candidates and decide who will fit best. All academic staff can attend candidates' presentations and review their applications, and all have the opportunity to rank them – most do so and in most cases these are in line with the panel's views as well; this helps staff feel involved in these key decisions, and reinforces the kinds of attributes the department is seeking, and hence the departmental culture"

"People are invited for interview, where they give a presentation – it varies depending on the field but it will typically be an opportunity to talk about an undergraduate module…everyone is invited to the presentations and to feedback on them, including staff and postgraduate students – feedback forms get handed into the Chair. There's also time for discussion where everyone in the room can feedback what they thought about it after the applicant has gone."

"We always have a 2-day recruitment - 1½ hour job talk, 45 minute discussion, lunch, dinner, get to know them. A committee of 4/5 people to shortlist (with consultation), the whole department attends the presentation and dinner/lunch. Everyone gives feedback to the Committee. This has been tremendously successful as an approach"

3. Staff Development

a. Focus on induction

"All new staff are allocated a senior staff member as a mentor, someone who is already established in the department and understands how things work"

"We have an informal buddying system for new members of staff…"

THE DETAIL - "We have a buddying system and a mentoring system. For the mentoring system, staff will be mentored by a senior person either in their field or outside of it. We try to pair people carefully. The buddy is really important, it's a person who has been here for just two or three years so that they know the kinds of questions that a new person is likely to have and they can help them really settle in and feel that there is no stupid question. It's an important confidence- building mechanism. When we have a number of people coming in at the same time we have School inductions which means people learn about ethics, they are made familiar with the structure of the School, learning and teaching matters, research matters etc. We try to make sure they are given a really good orientation to the School.

"We like to give new staff an opportunity to do a 'Window on Research' (short informal presentation to the department) when they arrive…"

THE DETAIL - "We like them to give an opportunity to do a 'Window on Research' [an informal presentation to the School] when they arrive, as not everyone will have been to the interview presentation. It's also very different to giving an overview of your research when you've actually got the job, it's a nice forum. There are other social things that we do. As soon as someone is appointed there will be a point of contact for them, usually the Chair of the panel who can answer any questions e.g. about where to live in Sheffield. They get a reduced teaching load in their first year. Immediately after they arrive they liaise with the School manager about the kind of equipment that they need. Their offices are set up, we try to make people feel at home also they get support ahead of time through the kinds of modules that they're going to teach. They're also deliberately given a small admin role so it gives them insight into how the School works but in a way that isn't onerous. It might be being part of the team, having a small and quite straightforward job but it helps embed them quite quickly."

"My department spends a lot of time and energy on the induction and development of new staff, so that behaviour is embedded, as well as understanding of why things are done in the way they are…I meet with new staff every 6 weeks as a group throughout their 3 year probation period, to discuss teaching/research/grants etc."

b. Focus on mentoring

"The School has introduced a formal requirement for all junior academic staff to have mentors for both teaching and research (where applicable; the School aims for mentors selected to have an overlap of research interest with their mentees)"

"Staff will be mentored by a senior person either in their field or outside of it. We try to pair people carefully"

"An ECR in my department was recently paired with a senior academic staff member to mentor them through the grant application process; two other ERCs were recently awarded

their first grant and have been provided with experienced mentors to provide support and guidance on managing a funded research project"

"For more senior academics, mentoring is still available but it is less formal and they can choose to seek a mentor for particular activities/aspects of their work (e.g. submitting a grant application to a particular funding body if they have not done this before)"

"Through the induction process we aim to ensure that when new Research Associates join they know what is reasonable to expect, e.g. some time to do their own research, opportunities to put in grants in their own name, making sure that authorship issues are sorted out...important things include mentoring to put in for grants/personal fellowships, going through the person's CV to help them develop it...giving sufficient attention to people's development. All research staff have mentors and we have a written mentoring policy, although the specific arrangements vary; the mentor will be someone more senior than them in their field and not their PI"

"We have what we call "bite-size sessions" within the School. People get information about all sorts of things; putting in a Fellowship application would be a typical topic, anything on proposal writing, ethics, use of the web, Twitter. They are regular lunchtime sessions, it's organised at School level but it is entirely "bottom-up" - they are half an hour long. They are well attended and its been a big success."

"We want to facilitate internal peer reviewing of papers and make that far more a part of people's culture. Particularly junior researchers - to get comments from senior colleagues on papers is important. An area where we provide a lot of help and support is Fellowship applications. Again it is junior staff, who are not all that confident, they tend to get a lot of support. They also get an opportunity to present their Fellowship ideas within the School. There is a formal mentoring system too - it is voluntary, for people who decide they want someone outside their research area to help them with their professional development."

"Staff are encouraged to take up the training they need, go on courses etc. (including external training). If someone needs to learn a technique, we fund it. We have internal training like the bite size sessions, as well as in-house staff development days which are ½ day courses on particular aspects like writing papers, preparing research proposals, promoting impact of your work. There was one on mindfulness. It covers a broad range of staff development on topics that staff want (staff are asked for their input)"

4. Discussion of research

a. Mechanisms for developing research ideas

"The department has a culture of lots of reading groups – these can be set up by individuals as required and are open to anyone; they create a lot of discussion and allow people to expand their research interests"

"(We have) 'Lunch munch and think' – informal lunchtime meetings where interested staff can discuss particular funding calls and develop ideas for relevant funding applications"

"For years we have had six-monthly meetings between academic staff and the Director of Research, to look through research plans, provide a sounding board and encouragement of

ideas, and space for planning and feedback… this also means that someone in the School knows what other people are doing – having someone with that overview is really essential"

"Research group meetings provide a supportive network for research, where researchers can receive advice and transfer information about their research activities and good practices; everyone knows what each other's involved in, know who's using which equipment, etc"

"We've worked very hard to get people across the School talking to each other – things like informal 'Windows on Research' where people give informal presentations about their research"

> **THE DETAIL** - "People from different fields present 10 minutes maximum of anything that they've been doing. Typically some people come off research leave and the following semester we will have a couple of Thursdays where three people in a row will just talk about their research. Everybody's really encouraged to come (around lunchtimes). So they can just listen, they can find out about what other people are doing…it's very important so that people get a sense of what's going on. They get ideas themselves and we increase the knowledge across the board about what people do"

"We have a Department-level seminar series, and clusters set up their own seminars and events too (e.g. reading groups, symposia). We also have 'brown bag' sessions at Department level where people bring along a paper they are working on for colleagues to have a look at it. Cluster leaders are sent an email requesting ideas for brown bag sessions and asking what sessions people want to be put on. Last year they were approximately 1 per month but the timings were not set in stone. In the long run we may make some of these things compulsory e.g. re PGR attendance –regular routines and expectations are all absolutely key to research culture"

b. Informal feedback on research proposals

"There is… a culture of asking colleagues to look at proposals - a lot of our proposals involve six, seven, eight collaborators. There is definitely a culture of going to people for advice. Our success rate is very high"

"Getting people used to the idea of having peer review before they submit something, to be consultative and seek "critical friends", and trying to reciprocate that. Encouraging people to not stop trying, keep going and identify what are fundable ideas. Starting small and getting into the habit of applying. It's important for individuals to feel comfortable and supported. It can seem really quite threatening when the University is saying you really need to up research funding, that can feel really tough. It's really important to find an environment where you can talk through those kinds of issues"

"We do encourage people from the outset to peer review informally… we communicate this through our research portal which contains all the relevant support information for academics, and we send monthly updates which remind people of things such as this, as well as one to one support from the Departmental Manager"

"The School has developed an informal peer review process and staff are encouraged to submit proposals for critical feedback…this enables the School to be aware of research at an earlier stage and help to develop and progress the proposal (– e.g. by arranging an appropriate mentor)"

"(We hold) a 'dragon's den' event where academic staff can pitch their research ideas to a School panel and receive critical feedback'

"Trust (amongst staff) leads to sharing of work, reading of each other's papers and grant applications to make them as strong as possible"

"We instituted this year a system whereby there is an initial peer review not mandatory like the Faculty one but strongly encouraged. It's a formative thing so that people can talk through ideas"

THE DETAIL - "What we also do is to circulate successful grant applications and models and things like that, so for example British Academy and AHRC. I think we've got a sense that the School is building up a bank of good resources so that's useful. But then to provide an opportunity to talk to people and ask 'how close does this look to what's needed?'. We know people who have been on the AHRC review panels so we make use of those people's expertise and experience. To give good feedback that's really important. So we have a shared folder on the M:drive with information and advice, resources and checklists about applying for a grant, organising a conference etc. E.g. the checklist about applying for a grant asks, have you told the Head of School, have you consulted with others (and then there's a table of people in the School who've served on AHRC or been successful holders of grants and then they can choose one of those to take it to)"

c. Formal peer review

"The Department has introduced a new annual peer review process for all grant applications (part of a strategy to be more successful in this process). The Department aims for quality rather than quantity of applications (despite the Faculty and University using the number of grant applications as a measure for calculating financial income for the Department, rather than how many are actually won)."

THE DETAIL - "The first stage of the process involves applicants giving a 10 minute presentation on the proposed research, its importance, why it is timely etc. The event is open to all from the Department and critical feedback is given by the panel and others (many attended the first one and it was very informative, involving sharing of good practices). The second stage involves providing a 1-page summary of the project to the panel (part of the grant application anyway, so not 'extra work'). I would not sign off any proposals without this process being followed (except in exceptional circumstances). In the recent round, some applicants were advised not to go ahead (usually due to the 'packaging' of the project rather than the science itself), others were effectively 'self-policing' and realised that they needed to re-think their proposals (which I feel was more effective). A similar process to the above exists for Research Fellowship applications. Other types of research, whilst not covered by a formal peer review process, are subject to informal review via local systems (e.g. a strong culture of discussing and offering critical feedback on research ideas and proposals at regular research group meetings, attended by staff and students of all levels)."

"We do have peer review systems in place formally for ESRC applications..."

THE DETAIL - "Initially we ask people to go through their clusters and to have other people within their clusters to look at their application informally. They then come to (the Departmental Manager) and it goes out for formal review within the Department – we ask them to identify two people within or outside the Department who they would like to undertake this formal review. After this it will go to a sub-committee of the Research Panel,

so the Director of Research and Head of Department will have a say, and then it will go to Faculty. We do encourage people from the outset to peer review informally and we are hoping that will be the case for other applications, not just ESRC. We communicate this through our research portal which contains all the relevant support information for academics, and we send monthly updates which remind people of certain things, such as when panels are, as well as one to one support from (the Departmental Manager). Aside from ESRC applications, a lot of people do have their research applications drafted and looked at by other people. When people who are putting in an application I always ask to have a look at a draft to have a look at the costings, and that's normally sent to the HoD or DoR to consider as well, so for other applications it is very rare that something will go through which hasn't been looked at by several sets of eyes."

d. Active seminar programmes

"The School recently re-organised its research seminar programme, with responsibility for planning and organising seminars being rotated amongst academic staff. More external speakers are encouraged, and because staff are only responsible for a short period of time, they are tending to put more into the programme" – Information School

"Staff are encouraged to give departmental or research group seminars, sharing their ideas and/or talking about their on-going research activities. This encourages students to understand what's expected of a researcher (e.g. transparency in their science); it also helps researchers to develop collaborations, and enables researchers to gain critical feedback on their ideas before presenting them in a more 'public' arena (e.g. submitting a journal paper/grant proposal). It is part of the culture of the Department to critique each other's ideas in this way and be open about their research, so people are comfortable with this process."– APS

"We have funded research seminars and recently we've devolved the responsibility for that to the elected members of the Research Strategy Committee because they can take a leadership role and actually establish and set the agenda. Its another opportunity to learn more about the research culture across the School." - English)

5. Departmental structure

a. Inclusivity

"The policy committee used to only consist of 4-5 very senior academic staff but the committee has now been developed to be more representative and more flexible, with 10-12 members, some much younger and earlier in their careers; some are invited onto the committee specifically when relevant issues are discussed"

"There's a Policy Committee that has representatives ex officio – the Postgraduate Director, Director of Research, Head of School. However, this Committee and our other important committees have elected members as well. So you can represent colleagues not just because you have got a role, it gets other voices in there. It's a nomination process and you can nominate yourself or get someone else to nominate you, then there is an email election and the individuals elected serve for two years as members. That's really important because it means there are the voices of people other than the usual suspects. This always presents really good, fresh perspectives and that's really important"

"We have a flexible, egalitarian approach, no 'prima donnas' – Athena Swan came fairly naturally, it fitted into the environment…the culture is organic, bottom-up"

"A former research institute I was involved with had a very flat structure, very inclusive – the division between the senior staff and the PGRs, and those in between, was very small. We had PGRs organising research seminars and a seminar that ran every week and attracted good numbers; we had a very vibrant research culture… we expected our PhD students to publish in the top journals, and we encouraged and mentored those people who were capable to apply for grants"

b. Discussion and collaboration

"We deliberately mix people of different disciplines together. A lot of things are done at School level – there's a School Research Committee, a School seminar series, School away days and events…moving into the Jessop West building has made a huge difference – physical structures are really important for enabling the community environment"

"We are working towards a more coherent research culture where everyone understands each other's areas and can discuss and generate ideas, and develop more collaborative research. We encourage more development of research ideas and collaboration through cross-group activities ('Lunch, munch think', 'dragon's den'). Both these events have been successful in terms of improving the School's research culture, providing more motivation to staff and opportunities to talk through and develop their ideas informally. There have been some grant successes too, although these can't be directly attributed to these events!"

"We've tried to encourage people to work with those they don't usually work with at away-days ((e.g. we have invested £5k to develop a 'wacky' research idea between 4 specialisms across the department)"
"I think the fact that most of us are geographically located in the same building really helps… [it's] geography: its people crossing over (meeting on the corridors, meeting in social situations). Things will happen organically, you start to spark off them if you see them on a daily basis - it builds. You get to know people and it makes it so much easier when you're putting together a proposal in a short space of time you don't have all the formalities to go through – you know who to approach, who has the expertise, who has the right personality."

"Each research group is also funded according to the number of PGR students in the group, the number of activities they run etc. (i.e. the aim is to incentivise groups to be active, and the funding can be spent as the group wishes)"

SEE ALSO: Section 3: Discussion of research.

6. Culture

a. Expectation of excellence

"If you are in an excellent research culture the assumption is that you'll just publish in the top journals. Excellent research is aspiring to publish in the best places with the best people"

b. Openness

"There is an attitude within the Department that it is acceptable to disagree in public – academics are open to challenge"

"People are not afraid to challenge each other's ideas and this is expected; openness not antagonism. People know they won't offend others and they won't be offended themselves if they offer their critical feedback"

"There is a huge openness with people giving ideas about what they need – openness and consultation. I think the thing is, really encouraging lots of ideas for people to bring forward initiatives…there's also a culture of celebrating success and that also means that less experienced members of staff will go and talk to those people when they want advice about things. It's very open and encouraging, rather than thinking 'oh, they are not going to talk to me'. We don't have any of that attitude"

c. Trust

"The Department is built on collaboration and trust rather than internal competition (which would undermine these)…trust leads to sharing of work, reading each other's papers and grant applications to make them as strong as possible"

"The Department is very coherent with competent teams in place, and the level of trust between its members is high"

d. Collegiality and community

"I think the key to a research culture is trying to find people's 'organic interests'… creating a strong research environment is about the individual people being good, but also about how you configure the ethos"

THE DETAIL - "When I arrived [in this Department] and started trying to do some work on the research cultures, there was quite a lot of interest in doing more things together, from people who felt quite isolated. So that's about putting time into what I call 'research development work', trying to find common interests, bring on PhD students and early careers people in particular, and integrate them into a research culture. That requires generosity and leadership from more senior staff. It's about getting people together, identifying common interests and how to configure those relationships – a lot is about personal relationships. Isolated academics can be quite calculating and rational in some ways, and there can be elements of 'what's in it for me?' When you create a good research environment then the norm becomes working for the common good, and that is beneficial for the individuals involved too, you have a fantastic collegiate environment"

"The Department invites everyone to attend a half hour coffee break every morning, which is a legitimate break that all staff and students are permitted and which is incredibly important for the sense of community in the Department and is key to its culture of collegiality. Lots of departmental business takes place and many issues are dealt with on an informal basis. Community is the most important factor of the research environment. Another key element of this is the time that members of the Department spend together outside of work, and there is an informal social event every Friday afternoon"

"We tend to have an informal culture around departmental events – coffees before, drinks after"

"We are a very collegial school, we do socialise together, that's an important part of the culture. People will socialise after work and there are official events like Christmas dinners, examiners' dinners and so on. It's not forced, people like each other and it's through those informal chats that people find out what each other are doing. Then if you are in

conversation with someone in another faculty who is looking for someone to do X then you are able to say 'who you need to talk to is…'"

"I think the Department sees itself as a sociable department and I think it is committed to a sense of collegiality…there are social ties across the Department."

"We have the odd event where we are all together and I do think that it's important - Christmas parties at School level, and we have research day in May when the majority of people come. It's usually around a particular topic, we usually get an entertaining external speaker, there's a nice lunch and it's just a chance to see everybody. This involves group activites and they are really productive days, helps with a sense of belonging, having a common purpose etc. This is very important, especially as we're so big now, to have 2 or 3 events like that a year."

"We have an away day, a Christmas meal, Volidays (Volunteering days). We have good newsletter that we send round once a month, and another called 'Even Better News' produced by the admin support team which is not specifically around work. We have a number of coffee rooms, which are very important for interacting with others and for space to get away from work for 5 minutes. We have a meditation group which consists of 30 to 40 people in total and which meets over lunchtimes. We have ScHARR football teams, lots of people cycle to work; it's quite an active, dynamic group of people."

e. Cooperation and support

"There is a strong desire to be competitive externally, better than other departments elsewhere. Internally competitive is not a good thing – we aspire to be more cooperative"

"Cut throat competition within the department would be counterproductive so in many ways we are trying to balance the need to compete in the external environment with the need to co-operate within the department and the University"

"There is an ethos of solidarity… The secret for me is to create a culture where people think that collaboration is the right thing to do, not competition. The overall ethos is what structures the whole set up, we can't escape that"

7. Management

a. Granting autonomy

"I aim to give staff the opportunity to do well and to 'let them get on with it' to a considerable extent, in particular giving responsibility to young researchers"

"Managers are given plenty of leeway to make their own decisions within their teams, although it is made clear what really matters (e.g. professionalism). Management is by boundaries and expectations rather than fixed rules"

"We can't change the times of big lectures, but we are still allowed to choose when we teach our own classes and that is really valuable, having that autonomy of your own timetable. It means that you can clear a day – either Monday or Friday tend to be days that people clear,

but then other people might think "actually I work best in the morning". That autonomy is essential for allowing people to keep the research going during term time"

"I trust people to get on with doing their jobs without micro managing them"

b. Protecting research time

"For people on a full-service research/teaching post it is expected that there is room in the timetable for a day a week of research. That turns out to be less than for some other departments"

"My leadership style is about community building – I try to make people feel valued and try to make time for people to do research. I very much encourage people to have 'buy out' time to focus on research activities…putting research as central to the mission"

"We can't change the times of big lectures, but we are still allowed to choose when we teach our own classes and that is really valuable, having that autonomy of your own timetable. It means that you can clear a day – either Monday or Friday tend to be days that people clear, but then other people might think "actually I work best in the morning". That autonomy is essential for allowing people to keep the research going during term time"

c. Inclusivity

"Making people part of the decision-making process, opening out the Department's management structure, has been really essential to the Department's success. I maintain an oversight of policy and strategy, but remain open to ideas and suggestions from colleagues at all levels"

"…in things like the research away days, everyone is involved. Everyone's got a chance to feed in. At the individual research meetings (with the Director of Research) there is a standard question about what ideas do you have for improving the research environment of the School. What would make your research life easier?"

"During preparations for the recent REF we did a lot of work around making everyone feel involved in the process, even those ones who were not being returned for various reasons. Before then we did a lot of work on laying out the lie of the land, so that if their work was not returned it was not seen as an indictment of them as a researcher. This was a snapshot at a particular time…Even after people had been told they would not be returned they were included in the environment narrative. Those people were fully involved in the process and had not detached themselves, that was a really big positive" – English

SEE ALSO: Section 1: Recruitment & Section 4: Strategy

d. Celebrating and sharing success

"Once a month on a Friday I provide cake for the whole department and then I announce what I want to announce. It's an attempt to celebrate success publicly"

"Staff are congratulated when research grants are won and the success is communicated round the School. One researcher was asked to give a presentation at a staff meeting about the process of making a successful NIHR application – this was a way of communicating her success but also helped to make other staff aware of how much work had to be put into the application and how she managed to make the time for this with all the other pressures she faced. The researcher found this a supportive and helpful exercise"

"Communicating successes across the School [help to motivate and reward staff]. It is encouraging – people are identified as role models, giving people a huge amount of confidence"

"We communicate information on grant successes, monthly and on the research portal too"

e. Head of Department involvement in SRDS

"I conduct the SRDS process for all academic staff; I feel this is worth the effort as it has a very positive knock-on effect. Staff know I have oversight of all areas of activity, hence they are more likely to speak to me directly about issues. The process also generates a level of trust in what the HoD is saying as they have confidence that I have oversight of all areas and that all academics are getting the same treatment"

8. Doctoral Researchers

a. Encouragement of PGR-led events and groups

"PGR students have desk space in the building, we organise them in the same way we organise ourselves, they are extremely collegial and they operate in School groups. PGR students have a postgraduate colloquium every year and they organise that themselves. It used to be an internal event now they have outside speakers and it has become quite competitive. They have a 'work in progress' meeting that they run almost fortnightly, where they get feedback from their peers across the School and that emulates what we (the academics) do. Reading groups and so on are always done as a School wide invitation and are organised by individuals"

"A PGR discussion group has been set up by a postdoc (staff sometimes go as well), providing an informal, once a month opportunity for researchers to meet and discuss a key topic relating to research (either a particular type of research or a more generic issues such as viva experience). PGRs have also set up a 'critical thinking' group, and ran their own School PGR conference last year (using funding provided by the School). This was very successful, run professionally including external speakers, and staff were excluded from most of the event to enable uninhibited discussion amongst the PGRs. The event is being organised again for this year by a new set of PGRs"

b. Departmental seminars that support graduates' development

"Seminars are supportive, and people feel able to ask honest questions to expand their knowledge (e.g. what does that mean?) rather than use the seminar to try to put down others' work. This fosters a supportive environment, and held people to develop their ideas (rather than simply defend). Seminars are held up as a good example within the discipline as the way seminars should be run, using seminar rules ('one question per question' rule, call on those who are heard from least, first question must come from a graduate/undergraduate rather than staff)"

c. Development opportunities

"There's a lot of professional training and support for PGR students, work shadowing. Postgraduates will be involved in public engagement, there's lots of training courses for them and workshops around various subjects. We encourage them to apply for grants that they are eligible for...quite a few of our PGR students do internships through the University

Careers Service. That's really important in terms of seeing beyond the PhD, particularly if they're not necessarily thinking about going into academia. That's been pretty successful"

"A commitment to graduate education was at the absolute centre of the research culture (of a highly successful research environment worked in previously)… we expected our PhD students to publish in the top journals if they were capable, PGRs organised research seminars and we had a successful seminar that ran every week. We had a very vibrant research culture"