



AHRC RESEARCH TRAINING FRAMEWORK – EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

Version control

Version number	Date	Summary of edits
1.0	July 2015	First version of RTF released by AHRC Programmes.
2.0	October 2020	Invalid links removed and replaced with active ones, acronym 'RCUK' changed to 'UKRI' where applicable, new AHRC branding applied; Page 4: Reference to 'Pathways to Impact' removed; Page 8: Content related to the Researcher Development Concordat updated to reflect the 2019 Concordat.

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Introduction

This document covers the AHRC's expectations in respect of support and development for **Early Career Researchers (ECR)**.

AHRC's formal **definition of an ECR** is as follows:

- an individual who is within eight yearsⁱ of the award of their PhD or equivalent professional training, or
- an individual who is within six yearsⁱⁱ of their first academic appointment.

AHRC's overarching aim for researcher development in the arts and humanities is to support excellent researchers – both for the health of the UK research base and the wider sectors which draw on high-level capabilities in the arts and humanities.

AHRC-Funded Postdoctoral Researchers

Whilst we have a particular interest in those ECRs who are in receipt of AHRC funding, either as postdoctoral researchers on AHRC grants, or as early-career academics with their first AHRC funding, we hope this document would be used as a framework for ECRs in the arts and humanities more widely, including those *early stage* post-PhD ECRs who are currently seeking their first academic appointment (see section 3 below).

It is expected that Research Organisations will provide the development opportunities that ECRs funded on AHRC grants need in order to undertake high quality research, as well as opportunities for their wider development. We expect ECRs to engage in wider career development activities beyond the immediate needs of their research.

As members of staff it is likely that AHRC-funded ECRs will have regular appraisal or performance reviews, which will include career development. It is the responsibility of the ECR and their manager to ensure that any development needs that are identified are pursued.

We also expect that Principal Investigators will ensure that the contribution of postdoctoral researchers to a project is appropriately recognised and credited in the project outputs, and that postdoctoral researchers have opportunities to give talks and papers about the research they are involved in.

A Needs-based Approach

AHRC's definition of an ECR is deliberately very broad, but this means that individuals falling within its scope will have a diverse range of skills and experience, and their development needs will vary considerably according to the nature and demands of their research area and their aspirations.

It is important, therefore, that there is a needs-based approach to their training and development, with a continual process of review and reflection to ensure that any new needs arising from their research or career aspirations are met. AHRC encourages all parties to be innovative, flexible and responsive when considering support for career development. Our vision of training is one of partnership between the ECR, the academics they are working with, the Research Organisation and any partner organisations involved. All parties are encouraged to look beyond the immediate needs of the research project to consider what other development opportunities are available.

Skills Development for ECRs in the Arts and Humanities

In considering the specific needs of arts and humanities researchers below, we have drawn on the Researcher Development Statement and Framework (RDS and RDF) developed by [Vitae](#) (see 'Resources and Further Information' for more details about Vitae). These represent a resource available to all stakeholders in helping to define, develop and document the researcher's development needs.

ECRs are encouraged to look for opportunities to develop both **research skills** as well as **wider skills**, for example, in relation to pursuing the impact of research. Both sets of skills below are closely connected, and both are important for careers within and outside academia.

Research-related skills

- Engaging with different approaches, techniques and tools, and understanding how they can be applied. Being open to exploring new avenues.
- Developing a deep understanding of the research context of the project, and of trends in the discipline. This includes an appreciation of how your research might have an impact on the discipline and adapting to any new knowledge or approaches which emerge during the course of the project.
- Building and developing networks and research collaborations, including internationally.
- Expanding your knowledge and understanding of related disciplines and being aware of, and open to, opportunities to work with other disciplines. Pursuing these interactions and collaborations where there is benefit to your research.
- Developing or strengthening language skills in order to read secondary literature or facilitate better networking with overseas researchers, recognising the increasingly international context for research in all disciplines.
- Expanding your knowledge and understanding of existing approaches, techniques and tools, and keeping up-to-date with new developments e.g. numerical, data management and statistical techniques or software, web and social media

communication tools. Also, developing the necessary expertise to use new approaches, techniques and tools appropriately and optimally.

- Understanding and meeting the requirements of a professional researcher e.g. ethical requirements, codes of practice, legal requirements, social responsibility etc.

For ECRs wishing to pursue a career in academia there are more specific development needs that the Research Organisation will wish to address, these include:

- Opportunities to lecture or give seminars, with accompanying training to ensure that they can do this to a high standard.
- Advice and resources to help ECRs publish their research.
- Advice on administrative commitments that academics face.
- Advice on applying for funding from internal and external sources, which should include an overview of the funding and political context in which Research Organisations and funders operate.
- Advice and training on mentoring and pastoral care of students. This would include supervisor training and ongoing support for any ECRs who are supervising or co-supervising postgraduate students.

Wider skills

ECRs are encouraged to look for opportunities to develop wider skills and experience. AHRC grant and fellowship holders are expected to have plans to pursue the wider impact of their research (see below), and this can lead to the creation of valuable development opportunities for research staff funded on a grant. The following are relevant to careers both within and outside academia.

- A full range of **communication skills** and awareness of communication media so that both specialist and non-specialist audiences can be appropriately addressed. Public engagement activities provide a useful context for developing the necessary skills for communicating academic knowledge to a non-specialist audience. This includes understanding the wider political, social and economic context in which academia operates and in which the researcher's own research sits. For example, the role of government and funding bodies, whether their research has any political or ethical implications or interest for particular community groups or sectors, or whether the research has commercial applications.
- **Project management skills**, including: designing and managing a project; team-working; delegation skills; time-management; risk management; resource management, including effective engagement of team members in terms of their time and expertise; working proactively with team members to ensure the effective delivery of objectives; and the ability to recognise key issues and prioritise their own and others workload.
- More general aspects of **working with others and managing teams**, including: communicating and collaborating effectively; sharing knowledge and experience; learning from others within the team; encouraging innovation and creativity amongst team members; recognising the skills and expertise of team members; mentoring; initiating and developing new contacts; and, managing work within the team in the most efficient way.
- The ability to **self-motivate and motivate** others.

- **Enterprising and entrepreneurial attributes, skills and behaviours** such as: taking initiative; the ability to solve problems, adapt to new situations and make effective decisions; innovation and creativity; open mindedness and working to remove barriers e.g. negotiating a mutually beneficial solution or finding alternative routes to achieving the goal; the ability to recognise opportunities, take them forward effectively and bring a project to fruition; social, commercial and relevant employment sector awareness; and, personal enthusiasm, self-improvement and motivation.
- **Leadership skills**, including: the ability to engage with and influence others; the ability to recognise knowledge, experience and expertise in others and help them to reach to their full potential; the potential to develop as a leader in the field and to represent your area of research positively within and outside academia.
- **Networking** opportunities such as participating in workshops and conferences and undertaking activities with academic and non-academic partners within and outside the UK. This might also include initiating and leading on the development and running of a new network or collaborative activity. Such peer networks can be a source of informal help and advice as well as providing potential research opportunities.
- **Collaborative working** such as initiating and building partnerships with organisations and businesses and developing negotiating and listening skills.
- **Organisational skills**, including: managing and organising own workload effectively by prioritising tasks; anticipating future workloads; and, keeping and maintaining good records.
- Ability to **proactively take ownership of one's own career direction and development**. Motivation and perseverance to pursue and succeed in the chosen career, in whatever sector that might be. This includes the ability to highlight skills and qualities to any prospective employer.

Wider experience and impact

AHRC grant and fellowship holders are expected to look for opportunities to maximise the wider impact of their research. We wish to promote not only subject-specific development, enabling researchers to actively establish an academic career in their field, but also wider skills that provide researchers with the capability to pursue successful careers both within and outside academia. The skills and understanding needed to work collaboratively and flexibly with partners in other sectors are increasingly beneficial within academic careers too.

Applicants for Research Council funding need to be able to make the case for the potential impact of their research beyond the academic sphere, and impact is assessed as part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF)ⁱⁱⁱ.

It is worthwhile for ECRs to gain experience of activities designed to pursue wider impact whenever they can. This will provide valuable experience for developing an academic career but will also help more broadly in any career setting. Impact activities are a valuable tool for networking and engagement and offer the potential to open up new avenues of research.

As part of an AHRC grant application, the award holder will have set out initial plans for pursuing the wider impact of the proposed research. Equally, new opportunities may arise during the course of a research project. These might involve public and policy engagement, for example, through performance or exhibitions or work with cultural

partners, local or central government policy-makers or community groups. This might include contributing to the design or development of new products or services. AHRC would encourage postdoctoral researchers employed on its grants to discuss how they can get involved with the impact side of a project, and not just its academic side.

We would also emphasise the importance for arts and humanities researchers of understanding any ethical implications of working with groups outside academia. You will need to consider carefully whether this applies to the research or engagement activities that you intend to pursue, and ensure that you seek advice and approval from the necessary bodies. The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) has a useful guide on the ethical and social issues of public engagement: <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/ethical-and-social-issues>

To find out more about impact, there is information on AHRC's website: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/impact/>

Visit the UKRI website for further information on public engagement: <https://www.ukri.org/public-engagement/research-council-partners-and-public-engagement-with-research/guides-policies-research-and-publications/>

Guidance for Early-Stage Post-PhD Support

Doctoral graduates are encouraged to think very broadly about the range of career paths which can draw on their research training^{iv}. Where individuals do take on teaching or other roles in academia, with the intention of pursuing an academic career, they are strongly encouraged to look out for opportunities to widen their skills and experience. This could be, for example, through projects with cultural, civic or community partners which arts and humanities colleagues may be developing.

Universities are increasingly seeking to engage with wider cultural, civic and community partners, and this means that there is a key role for highly trained PhD graduates in a range of public, private and third sector organisations that want to work in partnership with academic researchers. It is vital, therefore, that universities and academics support and encourage early stage ECRs to be aware of other career options and encourage them to consider opportunities to use their training outside of academia.

Universities might consider workshops or networks that bring together ECRs and contacts from non-academic sectors to facilitate engagement, raise awareness of skills needs and showcase alternative careers.

Universities and Departments will also wish to consider how best to support the research aspirations of many individuals who take on hourly paid or other teaching-only posts. This might include, for example:

- Policies limiting the creation of short-term, teaching-only fellowships using funding for PI and Co-I time costed on AHRC grants, as opposed to temporary lectureships.
- Ensuring library access outside of term time.
- Encouraging the continued use of university affiliation in conference talks.
- Providing mentoring and ensuring mentors understand the importance of individuals seeking wider development opportunities, building on their research.

Universities should also work to counter the view often held by early stage doctoral graduates, that academia is the natural career choice for individuals with research training. AHRC welcomes and encourages PhD-holders to consider the wide range of sectors in which they can make a significant contribution.

Institutional Responsibilities

In terms of the Research Organisation's responsibilities, we are keen that researchers receive advice and support during the early post-PhD stage to enable them to consider all the options which might be open to them.

We encourage universities to ensure that there is support available to allow ECRs to develop the skills, knowledge and experience needed to develop their careers, in whatever field they choose. To make the most of training and development opportunities, Research Organisations should also be advising ECRs on how to fully document and present their skills and experience to any prospective employer.

Institutions should be mindful of the feelings of anxiety and insecurity that many ERCs may experience in the early stage of their career, post-PhD, particularly when employed on fixed-term contracts, given the intense competition for permanent academic positions⁹.

There is also an onus on ECRs to find out what is available to them, and to engage with these opportunities, noting that such support and provision might be both formal and informal. ECRs may also wish to join relevant Subject Associations or Learned Societies for support and networking opportunities.

Universities will also wish to give particular consideration to the support provided to newly appointed academics – both in terms of lecture course preparation and the time needed to establish their own research profile.

Mentors

Research Organisations should consider the provision of mentors for ECRs to provide support and advice. This was raised in the Oakleigh report (see References and Notes), noting that mentors who were close to the ECR in career stage were valued as having a better understanding of the challenges people face at this stage in their careers. It is important that the mentor is not connected with the management chain so that individuals can share their concerns openly. It is worth noting that it is a requirement of the AHRC's Leadership Fellows ECR strand that a mentor is in place. The Research Organisation can also help by providing some recognition of the time and effort needed to mentor effectively and this is an area in which tailored training can be valuable.

This is also an area in which Organisations might wish to collaborate across institutions, or if there is scope for subject associations or learned societies to provide mentoring at a subject level.

AHRC encourages its Peer Review College members to engage within their Organisation: providing advice and assistance to ECRs might be one way that Organisations can take this forward.

Resources and Further Information

AHRC Schemes and Resources

AHRC has streams within its Research Grant scheme and Research, Development and Engagement Fellowships scheme specifically for ECRs who are eligible to apply for AHRC funding (i.e. typically those employed by universities on lecturer or equivalent contracts):

<https://ahrc.ukri.org/skills/earlycareerresearchers/fundingtrainingopps/>

<https://ahrc.ukri.org/newsevents/news/community-announcement-changes-to-ahrcs->

[leadership-fellows-scheme/](#)

RCUK developed a '*Statement of Expectations for Research Fellowships and Future Research Leaders*' that can now be found on the UKRI website, which sets out common principles for the support of all Research Council funded fellowships and future research leaders. This is to ensure that they are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly complex global research environment: <https://www.ukri.org/skills/policy-and-frameworks/>

ECRs might also consider some of the other schemes as a way to gain a range of experience e.g. Research Networking: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/apply-for-funding/current-opportunities/researchnetworking/>

There are other targeted opportunities which are open to ECRs e.g. the New Generation Thinkers (<https://ahrc.ukri.org/innovation/new-generation-thinkers/>). We would recommend that ECRs monitor our website or Twitter feeds or sign-up for email alerts to ensure that they see these opportunities, as they arise.

For ECRs who are considering applying to AHRC for funding, there are resources, hints and tips available on our peer review pages: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/skills/earlycareerresearchers/ecr-resources/>. University Research Offices will normally provide advice and help throughout the application process.

For ECRs who are considering career options outside academia, in 2012, AHRC published a report, commissioned through DTZ^{vi}, which analyses the careers AHRC-funded students go into. The Report describes the skills gained during their doctoral study, the most important skills and competencies for their current career, and those skills that they feel should have been given greater emphasis during their PhD.

AHRC also publishes career case studies, inspiring doctoral students and ECRs to explore opportunities available within and beyond academia: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/skills/alumni/>

Networks

There are opportunities to network both within university structures and within the discipline, and individuals need to explore the routes which will work best for them in terms of their career development needs.

Subject Associations and Learned Societies often have resources and networks tailored specifically to meet the needs to ECRs, as well as the opportunity to engage more broadly with experts within the discipline. There are too many for us to list here but do explore their web pages.

Many Universities have Research Staff Associations (RSAs) which are supportive networks, specifically for ECRs, within the Organisation but which are connected at a UK-level. Whilst these are often focussed more towards the sciences, the general areas of concern are widely applicable. Greater arts and humanities engagement in these networks will help to widen the focus and increase the benefits for arts and humanities ECRs through this route. RSAs provide a forum for sharing concerns, but also a common voice for ECRs both locally and nationally. Engagement with networks such as these can raise the profile of ECRs collectively, as well as providing a development opportunity for the individual ECRs who take the lead within these networks. More information can be found at: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/research-staff/uk-research-staff-association>

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (commonly known as the Researcher Development Concordat)

The Concordat^{vii} is an agreement between employers and research funders on the expectations for the professional development and employment conditions of researchers in the UK. It aims to improve the UK's research culture by encouraging more inclusive recruitment, better support for flexible working requests, promotion of researchers' wellbeing and support for professional development activities.

The original 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' was published in 2008 by Vitae and was reviewed in 2018 by an independent group led by Professor David Bogle. The review found that improvements had been made but there was more that could be done to create a healthy and supportive culture which would allow researchers to thrive. Following a further consultation, a revised 'Researcher Development Concordat' was produced and launched on 12 September 2019 at the Universities UK Annual Members' Conference. UKRI is a signatory of the Concordat and published a Funder Action Plan in July 2020 (<https://www.ukri.org/news/ukris-action-plan-to-support-research-careers/>).

There are three Principles in the Concordat covering:

I. Environment and Culture: Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture

Healthy working environments attract and develop a more diverse workforce, impact positively on individual and institutional performance, and enhance staff engagement. This Principle recognises that a proactive and collaborative approach is required between all stakeholders, to create and develop positive environments and cultures in which all researchers can flourish and achieve their full potential.

II. Employment: Researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contribution

Provision of good employment conditions for researchers has positive impacts on researcher wellbeing, the attractiveness of research careers, and research excellence. This Principle recognises the importance of fair, transparent and merit-based recruitment, progression and promotion, effective performance management, and a good work-life balance. All stakeholders need to address long-standing challenges around insecurity of employment and career progression, ensuring equality of experience and opportunity for all, irrespective of background, contract type and personal circumstances.

III. Professional and career development: Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential

Researchers must be equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse global research environment and employment market. This Principle recognises the importance of continuous professional and career development, particularly as researchers pursue a wide range of careers.

For each of these Principles the Concordat outlines the key responsibilities for the main stakeholder groups:

- researchers,
- managers of researchers,
- institutions employing researchers,
- funders.

For the full text of the Concordat see [Vitae's website](#).

Vitae

Vitae is an organisation which works in partnership with other organisations 'to meet society's need for high-level skills and innovation and produce world-class researchers': <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/>. It has a range of resources available for all stakeholders involved in researcher development. There are dedicated resources for Research Staff: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/research-staff>. Vitae also support the UK Research Staff Association which, as noted above, provides a collective voice for research staff: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/communities/uk-research-staff-association>.

Vitae publishes analyses of researcher careers post-PhD in the 'What do Researchers do?' series. These cover all subjects but there is data on the arts and humanities. In addition, they include information and case studies on career destinations. They are available to members of Vitae at <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers>

Oakleigh Report

In 2014, AHRC and the British Academy commissioned Oakleigh Consulting Ltd to undertake a study on the support for Arts and Humanities researchers immediately post-PhD. The report was particularly concerned with those intending to pursue an academic career.

Oakleigh Ltd undertook a quantitative and qualitative survey of ECRs and staff in universities. The report looked at the types and duration of contracts, roles undertaken, perceptions around the Concordat, ECRs main concerns and types of available and desirable support. There was a section on the experiences of those on AHRC-funded research grants and how AHRC might better support them.

The report identified areas of good practice and these are areas which might be considered by ECRs and Research Organisations:

- Careers advice and support should be made available at an early stage.
- There should be a broad-based approach to identifying ECRs in the arts and humanities.
- Advice should be provided on a broad range of possible careers.
- ECRs' requirements should inform the advice and support made available.
- Senior academics need to be informed of support available and be enabled to provide this.
- Where mentoring is set up, mentors should be chosen who understand and have experience of the situation ECRs currently face.
- Networks should be supported which enable ECRs to share experience (online and face-to-face).

The report has been discussed at a range of events to raise awareness and consider ways forward. A link to the report and summaries from these events can be found at: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/skills/reportsandresources/oakleighreport/>

Other relevant publications and organisations are:

The 2017 RCUK Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct which continue to apply to UKRI investments: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/>

National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement:
<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about>

UKRI information on public engagement, including RCUK Public Engagement with Research Strategy: <https://www.ukri.org/public-engagement/research-council-partners-and-public-engagement-with-research/guides-policies-research-and-publications/>

References and Notes

- ⁱ These durations exclude any period of career break, e.g. for family care or health reasons.
- ⁱⁱ By 'first academic appointment', this is paid contract of employment, either full-time or part-time, which lists research and/or teaching as the primary functions.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Research Excellence Framework website: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>
- ^{iv} Vitae's 'What do Researchers do?' report shows that 50% of arts and humanities doctoral graduates were in 'Teaching and lecturing in HE' and 7.5% were in 'HE research occupations' in 2008. Whilst in the 2010 survey, only 36.9% were in 'Teaching and lecturing' and 9.3% were in 'HE research occupations'.
<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/reports>
- This report is based on HESA data and compares the 2008 and 2010 'Longitudinal Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' (L DHLE) responses from doctoral graduates three and a half years after graduation. In 2020 the L DHLE survey has been replaced with a Graduate Outcomes survey - please see here:
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/blog/11-06-2020/dont-mistake-graduate-outcomes-dlhe>
- ^v AHRC and the British Academy commissioned Oakleigh Consulting Ltd to undertake a study on the support for Arts and Humanities researchers in the period immediately post-PhD. The report presents a mix of quantitative and qualitative analyses of the types of support available and includes some examples of how this might be improved:
<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/What-We-Do/Research-careers-and-training/Pages/Oakleigh-Report.aspx>
- ^{vi} 'Career paths of AHRC funded PhD students' final report, P Innes and D Feeney, DTZ, 2012:
<https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/career-paths-of-ahrc-funded-phd-students-final-report/>
- ^{vii} Full text of the 2019 Researcher Development Concordat is available here:
<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/full>