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Policy for Management and Progression of Research Contract Staff (RCS)

This policy was originally prepared by the School of Social Sciences Research Committee (SRC) and the RCS Policy Working Group (Rachel Gibson, Helen Beebee, Philippa Walker, Jennifer Prattley, Bridget Byrne, Bethan Harries, and Ian Fairweather) and was approved by the School Policy and Resources Committee (SPRC) on 14 February 2018.

What follows is an updated version of the above, prepared by Tina Hannemann, Philippa Walker, Mark Kelly and Andrew Miles, to be considered by the SRC and approved by SPRC in November 2023.

Contents

1. Introduction and Background

Research contract staff (RCS) management and progression is a priority area for the SRC. This links to the SoSS Grant Management and Administration Team (GMAT) that was established in 2018. It is now called the SoSS Research Operations Team and manages recruitment and some administration for most of the RCS in SoSS (soss-research-operations@manchester.ac.uk).

The term 'RCS' covers a variety of fixed-term research positions. Some are part-time and/or very short-term (less than a year); some are much longer (up to three years). Some RCS are employed to conduct specific research for a project that someone else leads; some are autonomous researchers with their own projects. Some are affiliated with one of the School's research centres, while others are not. However, all RCS are in a precarious professional situation, given the nature of their short-term contracts and P&OD regulations that can affect them differently compared to permanent staff.

2. Contract Management, Roles of Principal Investigator/Line Manager

2.1 Probation period and policies

- The contractual [probation period](#) for all positions is 9 months. Probation objectives should be set at the initial meeting (see below).
- The PI should conduct regular reviews (at least three) with individual RCS during the probation period and prior to the probation meeting. These should include review of interim objectives if the contract is 18 months or less.
- A probation meeting should be held to review the agreed objectives. If probationary objectives are fully met, the PI/line manager will inform and return paperwork to P&OD. If some objectives remain un-met, the probationary period can be extended by a maximum of 2 months. If unmet objectives are a major cause for concern, then the PI should speak to relevant HoD and P&OD Partner about how to proceed as soon as possible. A date for the exit interview should be provisionally scheduled at this stage to ensure that it happens.
- More information on the University's Probation Policy can be found [here](#)
- The probation form can be found [here](#)

2.2 Initial Meeting

- This should occur as soon as possible, but at least within the first month of appointment and set probationary targets (see above) and a schedule to review them regularly.
- Identify training and development needs, including teaching interests and opportunities.
- Allocate the RCS to a Department and inform SOSS Research Operations Team after the initial meeting took place.
- Where possible, establish a connection with a suitable research centre.
- Allocate a suitable mentor for each new RCS and inform SOSS Research Operations Team (more details in §2.4).
- Agree on a time allocation for research staff to work on development of their own research agenda and career development. This should amount to 10-20% (pro rata) of the RCS's time, to include any teaching, training (except where required by the project), independent research and other career development opportunities.
- Outline funding sources available for research support.
- Explain the process of P&DR in full.
- For more guidelines and checklist for induction, please see the StaffNet webpage for new staff [here.](#)
- HoD to provide RCS with a template welcome letter detailing ways in which RCS can participate in activities of the Department, including addition to departmental mailing list, a list of Dept staff meetings, and seminar schedule. Encouragement should be given to participate in departmental research and to discuss possible teaching activities (if desired by the RCS), and relevant research theme or cluster leader within Department should be identified. RCS to be introduced to key staff members for orientation, including departmental Research Director (DRD) and Departmental Director of teaching and Learning (DTL).
- PIs can check their full duties and responsibilities as line managers [here](#) and find advice on how to support researcher development [here](#)

2.3 Ongoing Contract Management

- HoDs will include RCS in the annual P&DR planning for their department. For RCS the P&DR meeting should normally be conducted by the line manager or a senior member of staff within the Research Centre, Institute or their home Department. The PI should provide the reviewer with a brief report in advance on the RCS's progress against the specific work requirements of the project.
- End of Contract: RCS should receive letters and advice from P&OD at 6 months, 3 months and 1 month before the end of their contract. There is a formal procedure to follow at each of these time-points that must be adhered to. Support is available from the School and P&OD Partner in navigating this period and the relevant policies.
- At the end of contract PI/Line manager will conduct exit interview / send a short questionnaire to gather information from RCS about post-contract employment plans and future contact information. Information should be forwarded to SOSS Research Operations Team who collate, and report results annually to SoSS Research Committee. As for §2.1 above, a potential date for the exit interview should be scheduled at the probation review. It is the respective HoD's responsibility to ensure exit interviews take place.

2.4 Mentoring

- The main mentor should be someone who is not directly involved in the RCS's project but should be a member of the RCS's Department. (NB a provisional mentor should already have been assigned as part of the P&OD process for new appointments; however, the mentor can be changed at this stage if appropriate.)
- Additionally, there are mentoring schemes at the University such as Manchester Gold that are open to RCS. Typically, the onus rests with the individual staff member to seek out these additional resources that go beyond the assigned mentor from their own department.
- Opportunities and needs for additional mentoring should be discussed in the regular meetings between RCS and PI or line manager.

2.5 RCS working on more than one contract/project

Some RCS are dividing their time between two or more independent projects, sometimes with different PIs, funded from different sources, and/or with different start/end dates. This can create additional problems, e.g., the work for a given project is often impossible to split evenly across the lifetime of the project. A more holistic approach needs to be taken towards RCS in this situation, to ensure that conflicts do not arise in the management of their time:

- SOSS Research Operations Team to inform all involved PIs and Research Centre Directors/HoDs (as appropriate) if any of their RCS fall into this category.
- RCS and all relevant PIs to meet periodically – e.g. once a month – to ensure that workload can successfully be managed over the next (e.g.) month.
- The senior member of staff overseeing the annual P&DR (usually a HoD) should ask all of the involved PIs to make any comments on progress and issues that need to be discussed in advance of the meeting.

3. SoSS Operations Team and RCS Lead

- A permanent member of staff to be recruited to manage and run the Network – RCS Lead. The workload will be recognized in the WAM. The appropriate FTE to be agreed by the HoS and SoSS Research Director.
- RCS Lead will:
  - Have a formal role within the school's committee structure; i.e., reports to the Research Director on a regular basis and attends the School Research Committee.
  - Be responsible for advising RCS and organising RCS-focussed events in conjunction with the School Research Director.
  - Be responsible for organising the selection of RCS representatives to sit on the School Research Committee.
  - Organize an induction / welcome event for RCS staff to take place at the start of each semester.
  - Direct RCS to online resources for training, funding and general resources available to RCS within the School, Faculty and University.
  - Promote a more pro-active and formal mechanism of offering mentoring opportunities to all RCS within SoSS. This could be built into departmental practice rather than based in Centres/Institutes, to allow for more integration of RCS into the ongoing life of the University.
- Administrative support for running the RCS Network to be provided by SoSS Research Operations Team.
- A database of RCS to be established and updated regularly to include any new incoming staff. This will contain key information about their location, Department affiliation, PI, mentor and project, level, start and end dates as well as the expertise of the RCS. Information should be stored in a secure sharepoint folder with limited access by SoSS Research Operations Team and the RCS Lead.
- SoSS Research Operations Team to notify relevant Head of Department of RCS allocation and ask HoD to add RCS to staff mailing list.
- Feedback from the exit interviews should be discussed with the RCS lead and Rep regularly to improve the RCS conditions in SoSS.
- A SoSS RCS Network to be established and administered by SoSS Research Operations Team.

4. Teaching, Training and Supervision

Opportunities for RCS to gain teaching experience are important for their continuation into full-time permanent academic positions once their contract expires. RCS need to be informed of the opportunities for gaining teaching experience within their relevant department and also of training courses open to them to improve their teaching skills. It should be the default expectation of PIs that RCS will do some teaching for career development purposes. The Humanities New Academic Programme (HNAP) and Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) are not available to RCS.

Current options within Humanities include:
- CMI Short courses
- Faculty methods@manchester, artsmethods and researcher development programmes
- Department teaching assistant role
- Guest lectures, or co-teaching a UG or PGT course unit

- Co-supervision of PhD students, PG and UG dissertation supervision
- Teaching training just as [LEAP](#)

A list of teaching and training opportunities can be found on StaffNet [here](#).

Where possible and appropriate, RCS should be given opportunities to gain experience in supervision by contributing to supervisory teams. The rules for use of RCS in PhD supervision are currently being updated at Faculty level; when available, these should be made available to the School's PGR Director to incorporate into student /supervisor handbooks. This information should also be made available to PIs and RCS for the initial meeting.

Where RCS meet the criteria for PhD supervision and RCS are interested to gain experience in this role, they should inform their PI. The PI should then arrange for the RCS to discuss possibilities for supervision with the relevant departmental PGR Director.

5. Research Grants Support

Due to the conditions of RCS contracts, research grant criteria and requirements need to be checked carefully to establish eligibility. RCS are encouraged to discuss plans for any grant applications they wish to make early in the development process with their DRD and the SoSS Research Operations Team. A list of currently available research grant schemes for early career researchers can be found here [enter link].

6. REF Policies for RCS

The format of the next (2028) REF is currently subject to consultation and will be confirmed in the Spring of 2024, after which guidance about output returns by RCS will be distributed to all DRDs, RCS and line managers / PIs. The current understanding is that RCS who are working on other people's projects are ineligible to submit outputs, while those on their own project, e.g. Simon and BA Fellowships, are eligible, even if they are no longer employed by UoM on the REF census date. DRDs should therefore ensure that members of the latter group are included by departments in RRE self-assessment training and the [RRE submission process](#). Additionally, the School RCS Lead should liaise with the School Impact Lead and Facilitator to identify and support RCS involved in the production of Impact Case Studies for the REF.

It is important for the purposes of securing a permanent position that RCS internalise the REF grading norms and develop a long-term publication strategy in accordance with these norms as far as possible, even if their publications during the lifetime of their contract turn out not to be eligible for the REF (at Manchester or elsewhere). Therefore, RCS who are currently not formally included in REF (those who are working on other people's projects) are invited to submit publications for informal review, managed by the School's RCS lead, that will mirror the RRE process.

7. Career Development Allowance

Previously, while some RCS – e.g. those on Simon or BA Fellowships – had access to funds to develop and disseminate their own research, project-based RCS only had access to funds that have been costed in the grant application, which can only be spent on project-related research activities.

Those RCS, who do not have access to project-independent funds, will therefore be given a Career Development Allowance (CDA). This could be spent on, for example, attending and presenting at conferences and workshops and attending career development events/training outside Manchester and academic memberships. This allowance should not be spent on project-related activity, which should be funded from the project grant.)

The CDAs for RCS will be managed by SOSS Research Operations Team; guidelines can be found here: Career Development Allowance.