

Early Career Network (ToR)

Introduction

UKRI's Early Career Network (ECN) is a recognised staff network, operating in line with the UKRI Staff Networks Framework of Operations and Engagement.

The ECN is a volunteer, member-led network supported by the Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (WEDI) team and plays a key role in amplifying employee voice, building community, and informing organizational practice.

Purpose

The ECN exists to:

- Create opportunities for networking and connection for early career staff across UKRI
- Support skills development and career progression pathways
- Provide insight to inform UKRI policies, practices and culture
- Build strong and visible early career community
- Support recruitment, retention and engagement of early career staff

The ECN operates as a mechanism for peer support, engagement and insight, and does not replace formal consultation, trade unions or relevant subject matter expertise.

Scope and Membership

- Open to all staff who self-identify as early career (broadly defined and inclusive of varied career pathways)
- Open across all UKRI councils, institutes, and functions
- Allies are welcome to engage where appropriate

Membership is voluntary and flexible. Members are able to leave the network at any time via email request, and their data will be removed from all network activity from that point onwards.

Roles and Responsibilities

Network responsibilities

The ECN will:

- Represent collective insight, not a single authoritative view

- Gather and communicate member perspectives to stakeholders
- Deliver activities aligned to networking, development, and career pathways
- Support organizational initiatives through engagement and feedback
- Develop and review mission, vision, and priorities annually

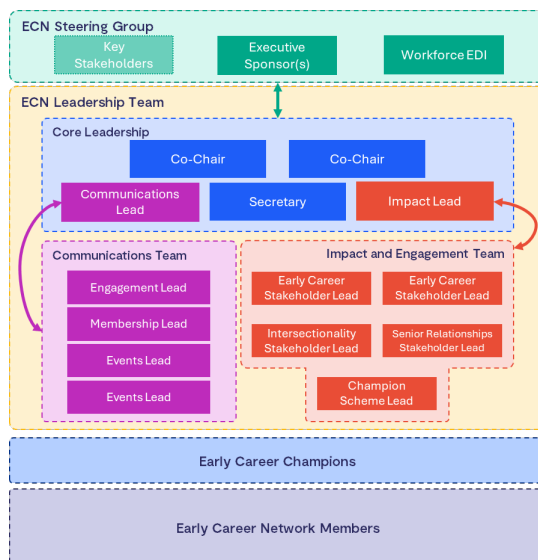
Limitations

The ECN will not:

- Own or implement policy
- Provide formal training or professional advice
- Act outside its remit as a staff-led network

Leadership and structure

The ECN is led by a leadership comprising the following:



- Co-chair(s)
- Impact and Engagement Team Lead
- EC Stakeholder Lead x2
- Senior Stakeholder Lead x2
- Intersectionality Lead
- Champion Scheme Lead
- Communications Team Lead
- Engagement Lead
- Membership Lead
- Events Lead x2

Additional roles may be created as required.

Sub-team responsibilities

Communications Sub-Team:

- Deliver coordinated, high-quality communications
- Promote ECN activities, events, and opportunities
- Ensure alignment with UKRI communication channels and standards
- Engage the membership and administer a yearly survey to support the continuous improvement of the network

Impact and Engagement Sub-Team:

- Lead stakeholder engagement activity
- Build relationships across UKRI and with senior stakeholders
- Gather insights and feedback from engagement activity
- Contribute to strategic priorities of:
 - Connecting colleagues
 - Generating advocacy
 - Increasing organisational presence

Leadership roles are:

- Recruited transparently
- Time-bound (reviewed after 3 years)

A senior sponsor will support the ECN through advocacy and connection to senior leadership.

Governance and Reporting

The ECN:

- Operates under UKRI governance structures and reports through appropriate channels, including the People and Workforce Planning Committee (PWP) where required
- Maintains and annually reviews this Terms of Reference
- Develops an annual plan aligned to mission and priorities
- Provides updates to WEDI and relevant stakeholders

Mission, Vision and Priorities

The mission of the ECN is to grow future leaders, support each other, and influence UKRI.



ECN strategy as of Apr 2026.



These priorities are reviewed annually.

Meetings and Operations

- Minimum of 4 leadership team meetings per year
- Regular sub-team meetings as required (typically bi-weekly)
- Network-wide events and activities delivered throughout the year
- Focus on key decisions, actions and outcomes

Stakeholder Engagement

The ECN adopts a structured approach to stakeholder engagement, led by the Impact and Engagement Sub-Team.

Approach:

- Engage a range of stakeholders including:
 - EC staff
 - Senior leaders
 - HR, EDI and corporate teams such as Leadership and Learning
 - Cross-council stakeholders
- Categorise stakeholders by influence, interest and relationship type
- Track engagement activity and outcomes

Intended Outcomes:

Stakeholder engagement activity aims to deliver:

- Improved content and relevance of ECN activities
- Increased access to development opportunities and resources
- Greater visibility and advocacy for early career staff
- Increased membership, participation, and cross-council engagement
- Enhanced relationships with senior leadership

Success will be measured through:

- Event feedback and survey data
- Membership and engagement metrics
- Number and quality of stakeholder interactions

Communications

The ECN will:

- Use appropriate channels (e.g. Teams) to communicate effectively
- Coordinate communications through the Communications Sub-Team
- Ensure messaging is clear, inclusive and aligned with organisational standards
- Use data and feedback to inform communications

Behaviour and Culture

All ECN activity will:

- Align with UKRI values and expected behaviours
- Promote a respectful, inclusive and psychologically safe environment
- Ensure responsible and proportionate engagement

Concerns or breaches will follow defined escalation routes and in the first instance be brought to the WEDI team.

Budget and Resources

- Funding may be accessed in line with UKRI guidance through the WEDI team
- Expenditure will comply with organisational rules including restrictions on travel funding
- Activities will be delivered proportionately to available resource

Support from Workforce EDI

WEDI provides:

- Guidance and advisory support
- Brokerage with organisational stakeholders
- Periodic engagement with the Co-Chairs (monthly)

Review

This Terms of Reference will:

- Be reviewed annually by the Leadership Team
- Be updated in line with ECN priorities and UKRI framework changes
- Be shared with members and stakeholders