



SCCJR

The Scottish Centre
for Crime &
Justice Research

SCCJR Statement on Early Career Researchers

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Precarious working conditions have become endemic in Higher Education. Almost half of people in teaching-only roles are on a fixed term contract, while over two-thirds of research staff (68%) do not have a permanent post. Consequently, those hoping to establish an academic career may face many years of unstable, short-term and often poorly paid employment. This might include working across multiple universities at the same time, or moving between numerous different institutions, roles, and job categories. This creates stress, anxiety, long working hours, poor mental health, and financial pressures (Wånggren 2018). It is also an equality and diversity issue: international workers may be left vulnerable without the consistent employment needed to satisfy visa conditions; while those without other financial resources may be forced out of academia, especially if they have dependents, caring responsibilities, or additional health needs. Citizenship, class, disability, race and gender may therefore all intensify the pernicious effects of precarity (Murray, 2018).

Alongside these multiple human costs, precarious work also damages social science. Without a diversity of voices, our scholarship becomes poorer. As a community of scholars from across institutions and career stages, we wish to formally extend support and solidarity to our Early Career colleagues, and to engage proactively with a growing movement seeking to secure better working conditions that might address the harms of precarious work. Members of the SCCJR recognise the precarity experienced by Early Career Researchers and commit to supporting and collaborating with them in ways that facilitate their professional development as independent scholars, prioritise their well-being, and protect them from exploitation and the harms of insecure employment.



We seek to do this in two ways:

1. Endorsement and adoption of the Vitae Concordat on Researcher Development

The Concordat sets out clear obligations which must be met by researchers, managers, institutions and funders to afford research staff the working conditions in which they can thrive. However, the Concordat also has limitations, the most obvious being that these obligations do not extend to those on teaching, knowledge exchange, or professional services contracts. We therefore set out below what we see as the minimum standards we expect of academics working with the SCCJR, to properly recognise, support and remunerate our early career colleagues and the value of their contributions. When employing and working with ECRs, SCCJR PIs will:

- Ensure that the terms of the Vitae Researcher Development Concordat are met
- Arrange employment in ways that most provide stability and fair remuneration
- Proactively support ECRs to secure further employment when reaching the end of current contracts
- Provide ECRs with the time, space and guidance to develop their own research and publication profile as independent scholars

2. Proactive inclusion and recognition of ECR colleagues in decision-making

Many precarious academics are conducting or have recently completed cutting-edge research, yet Early Career scholars frequently struggle to find the time to publish their work as they contend with high teaching loads and frequent moves from contract to contract (Jones and Oakley 2018; Lopes and Dewan 2015). The loss of academic and public goods which flow from this situation is significant and growing, not least because the PhD affords protected research time which, as workloads continue to grow (Mountz et.al, 2015), is increasingly inaccessible to academics further in their careers. These conditions seem particularly jarring in relation to criminology, a discipline explicitly concerned with issues of social justice and inequality.

As a Management Committee SCCJR commit to:

- Creation of an SCCJR ECR network and an ECR lead to the SCCJR Management Committee
- Developing opportunities for independent scholarship and career progression through mentoring, development grants and writing retreats
- Providing material support for ECRs who are not securely employed by facilitating the Scottish Justice Fellowship scheme and providing, where possible, email addresses and library access.

References

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