The revised Concordat

What do research active staff say?

University and College Union
December 2018

One of the great challenges for the Concordat consultation, which launched in November 2018, was always going to be to ensure that the voice of research active staff themselves was heard. UCU wanted to ensure that research active staff had the opportunity to respond to the key proposals in the revised Concordat that related to them and their careers. Inevitably in a consultation aimed at staff, employers, funding bodies and research councils alike, the full consultation survey is a long document and UCU was concerned to ensure that the maximum possible number of staff had the opportunity to complete the sections directly relating to them.

On 6 November, UCU launched a survey which focused on a few key proposals in the revised Concordat. We asked staff to comment on the following questions taken from the Concordat consultation:

1 Do you agree with the recommendation that the new concordat should explicitly broaden the definition of 'researchers' to include all staff engaged in research?

2 Do you agree that the new Concordat should support researchers to develop their research identity?

3 To what degree do you agree with each of these ways of supporting researchers to develop their career and research identity?

- Funders place 'increased emphasis and support on uptake of 10 days' training'

- Employers place 'increased emphasis and support on uptake of 10 days' training'

- Allocated time within grants for developing researcher independence'

- 20% of a researcher's time allowed for developing independent research and skills'

4 To what extent do you agree with this statement: 'The new concordat should explicitly encourage solutions to the problems associated with fixed-term and time-limited contracts'

5 In what ways could the new concordat help encourage solutions to the problems associated with fixed-term contract?

The survey closed on 30 November. 4,682 people began the survey, of whom 3,418 completed it in full. More details on the respondents can be found at the end of this report

MASSIVE SUPPORT FOR BROADENING THE DEFINITION OF 'RESEARCHERS'

89.3% of respondents agree or strongly agreed that the definition of researchers used in the Concordat should be expanded to include all staff engaged in research. This percentage rose to 93% when only 'research' staff results were analysed.

Figure 1: Do you agree with the recommendation that the new concordat should explicitly broaden the definition of 'researchers' to include all staff engaged in research?
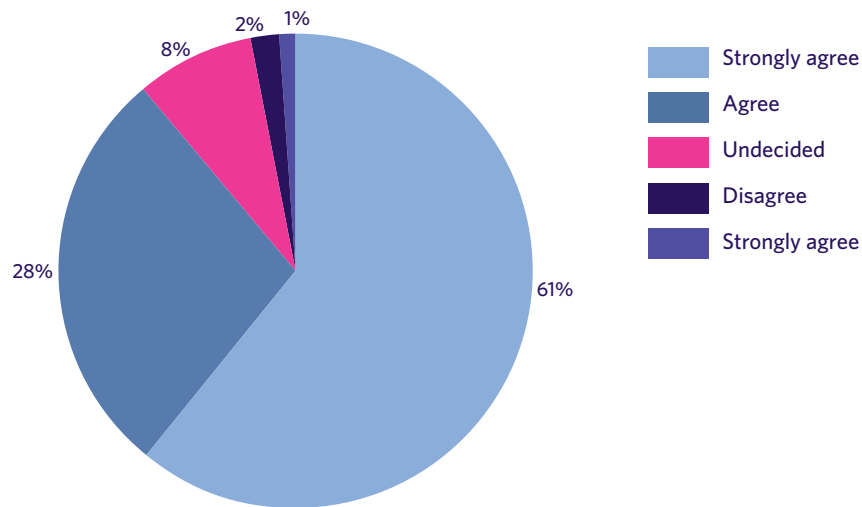

Table 1: Do you agree with the recommendation that the new concordat should explicitly broaden the definition of 'researchers' to include all staff engaged in research?

VALUE	PERCENT	COUNT
Strongly agree	61.0%	2,295
Agree	28.3%	1,066
Undecided	7.4%	280
Disagree	2.2%	84
Strongly disagree	1.0%	38
	Totals	3,763

'I think it is really important to have a wide definition of what a researcher is because universities are full of researchers, but they are treated very differently depending on the nature of their contract. But the universities will still count any materials produced by the employee as theirs for as long as the employee is with them. All researchers need support, but early career or hidden researchers even more so because they do not naturally qualify for the existing support.'

ALMOST UNIVERSAL SUPPORT FOR ASSISTING RESEARCHERS TO DEVELOP THEIR RESEARCH IDENTITY

A staggering 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the revised Concordat should support researchers to develop their research identity with a mere 2% disagreeing. This is a controversial area which is likely to encounter some resistance from employers and some funders. However, there can be no doubt that it commands near universal support among research active staff.

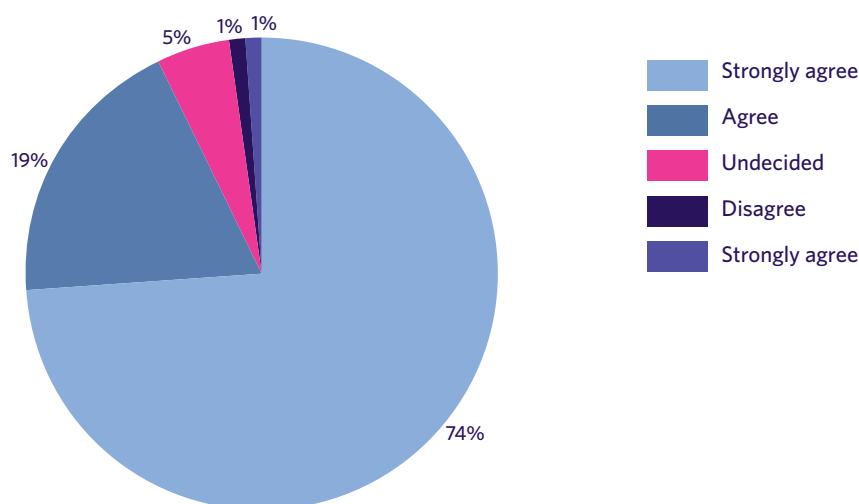**Figure 2: Do you agree that the new Concordat should support researchers to develop their research identity?**

Table 2: Do you agree that the new Concordat should support researchers to develop their research identity?

VALUE	PERCENT	COUNT
Strongly agree	74.2%	2,719
Agree	18.7%	684
Undecided	4.9%	180
Disagree	1.3%	49
Strongly disagree	0.8%	31
	Totals	3,663

'This is essential in the current academic context. In terms of career progression being able to develop a research identity is vital in securing and retaining positions and developing a career trajectory. People on precarious contracts have to undertake their own research aside from the projects on which they are explicitly employed if they are to have any hope of moving into permanent positions. It is crucial that this 'extra' work is recognised as being, in fact, an integral part of their working lives.'

OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSALS TO ASSIST RESEARCHERS TO DEVELOP THEIR CAREER AND RESEARCH IDENTITY

Perhaps the most controversial proposal in the draft of the revised Concordat is the proposal that 20% of a researcher's time should be allowed for the development of independent research and skills. Some funding bodies and many employers have tended to see this as work that is of no immediate benefit and which should be done in the researcher's own time, in spite of the fact that in practice many universities make use of these outputs for REF submissions.

Yet the proposal that there should be allocated time for independent research and development activity commanded support from 90% of respondents. The specific call for 20% of time to be available enjoyed the support of 84% of respondents, with only 6% disagreeing.

There was strong but significantly reduced support for training. Comments revealed that training was seen to be too generic and too much of a 'tick box' exercise and that time in contracts and grants was more important.

Table 3: How should the Concordat support researchers to develop their career and research identity?

	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total
	Count	Row	Count	Row	Count	Row	Count	Row	Count	Row	Count
Funders place increased emphasis and support on uptake of 10 days' training	1,474	42.7%	991	28.7%	660	19.1%	214	6.2%	116	3.4%	3,455
Employers place increased emphasis and support on uptake of 10 days' training	1,585	46.1%	980	28.5%	576	16.7%	192	5.6%	108	3.1%	3,441
Allocated time within grants for developing researcher independence	2,231	64.5%	889	25.7%	229	6.6%	61	1.8%	49	1.4%	3,459
20% of a time allowed for developing independent research and skills	2,150	62.0%	763	22.0%	347	10.0%	132	3.8%	73	2.1%	3,465

'[_____] University is a wonderful place to work as a grant-funded researcher, because they offer 20% FTE to work on 'professional development'. This has been crucial for me during my current grant, because it means I can maintain existing collaborations with other institutions and work on projects outside of my grant. In some cases, this involves publishing papers from previous grants, containing excellent research which would otherwise go unpublished. I am truly grateful to this University for supporting me to develop my own research identify by allocating me time for this within my contract, and I feel strongly that this should be mandatory across all Universities. Where researchers are not supported in this way, the only way they

can work on outside projects and collaborations is in their spare time, which leads to stress, overwork, anxiety and illness. I believe that this proposed revision would improve staff wellbeing.'

'From my experience, TIME is most important in order to develop your own research avenues. As a contract researcher it takes all your time to fulfill the research obligations of the contract/research post you are working on and it is up to the PI as to whether they actively encourage and give you time for your own work. Most do not do this. Training days are always given as they help you meet personal development goals and are easily measurable i.e. tick box, I have attended this course and from employers perspective 'they have attended this course'. So this criteria is less important in my experience than TIME'

I'd agree that we should recognise staff and they should be eligible to apply for funding etc. my concern would be if there is then another drive to force all such staff to be included in the REF, it could be negative for the careers of those staff who predominantly do teaching but contribute a smaller amount of research.

'Training is far less useful than time to develop one's own profile. Our career progression is a result of our outputs, therefore we need time to produce our outputs.'

'For many researchers, the reality is that any time taken away from producing data and papers is a detriment to their career. Maybe this shouldn't be the case but, in reality, if you spend 10 days on training then you've lost 10 days of productivity against your competitors. As for allowing 20% of researchers' time for developing independent research and skills, as my previous comments, this is basically a good thing but needs to be worded and disseminated in ways that don't backfire on some groups of researchers.'

'It is always difficult to implement these kinds of commitments in reality, but to have it written into funder and employer responsibilities at least gives some leverage to researchers in receiving this support and the more it can be promoted, the more it will become part of our research culture.'

'Having been a research assistant on someone else's project, I know the difficulty of developing one's own research while doing someone else's project. Allocating 20% to this on all research contracts would be a huge benefit to those in that situation.'

'For a completely grant-funded research unit, it is very important that either the research funder or the employing HEI agrees to fund the 20% of research's time.'

MASSIVE SUPPORT FOR ENCOURAGING SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FIXED-TERM CONTRACTS

The prevalence of fixed-term contracts and the short-term nature of funding is the biggest issue facing researchers today. No one is saying it's easy to solve and the funding councils have a major role to play but for UCU there is no doubt that universities can do more than most of them do to create greater employment security.

UCU believes that a major weakness of the original Concordat of 2008 was that it failed to send a clear message to universities that research active staff should be employed on open-ended contracts. The union believes that a revised Concordat which contained a clear steer to universities to work to reduce fixed-term contracts could have a positive effect on the sector.

The respondents to our survey overwhelmingly agree with this position. 91.5% of respondents agreed with this proposal with 75% strongly agreeing.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree with this statement: 'The new concordat should explicitly encourage solutions to the problems associated with fixed-term and time-limited contracts'

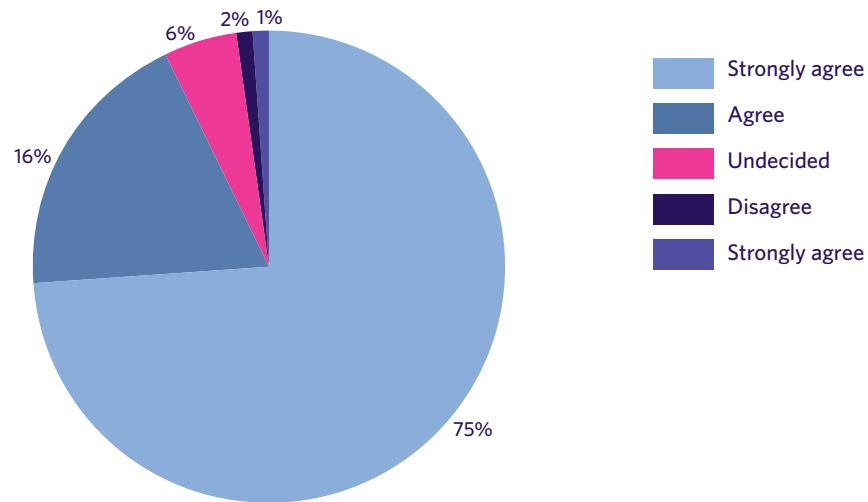**Table 4: To what extent do you agree with this statement: 'The new Concordat should explicitly encourage solutions to the problems associated with fixed-term and time-limited contracts'**

VALUE	PERCENT	COUNT
Strongly agree	75.1%	2,612
Agree	16.4%	570
Undecided	5.8%	201
Disagree	2.1%	73
Strongly disagree	0.7%	23
	Totals	3,479

'I think the point about mortgages is crucial. As a post-doctoral researcher if you are on a stipend - you are not seen as properly employed - either by banks or universities - this needs to change.'

'Mortgages are increasingly difficult to obtain on fixed-term contracts. If universities want quality new staff they need to actually empower those staff to be able to establish roots in the towns/cities in which they are located.'

'Universities should have to justify the need for fixed-term contracts which should be used only in specific circumstances eg maternity leave cover. Funders should make it obligatory for Universities to put in place measures for considering continuation of employment of researchers on fixed-term contracts, or to do away with fixed-term contracts altogether and replace them with managed redundancies. Universities should put these procedures in place in consultation with the union'.

'Fixed term contracts should be shifted to open ended contracts - which means that universities and institutions would then hold the burden and the responsibility to support the career development of staff or manage and pay for redundancies. Funding councils should create longer grants and clear grant progression career paths within them so that the nurturing and growth of a research career can be clearly articulate through the research councils as well. Research council grants should have clear stipulations about the contractual obligations and employment conditions that it funds (ie, less fixed term and no zero hours contracts allowed). Universities and institutions should engage in creating the political will to increase public funding for their work, and need to engage with unions (UCU and others) to negotiate these improvements.'

'Bridging funds make sense. Some enforcement of green circling of staff to allow then to retain a role in their institute, while expanding their experience would make sense. At the moment the employers tend to look outside the university when they would be better assessing their internal resources first.'

'Universities should be encouraged to see researchers as permanent members of staff, who are appointed on open-ended contracts. The university invests time and money in training a researcher and therefore has a vested interest in retaining the researcher, rather than appointing new staff. Research projects should be drafted so as to permit this to happen (i.e. allocating sufficient funds to avoid appointing staff at the bottom point of the salary grade). Institutions should be encouraged to retain staff between projects at their own expense so as to avoid unnecessary redundancies.'

'There should definitely be more bridging funding available, that is easily applied for. Projects don't just end when a grant ends and there is often on-going and valuable work that can be undertaken to 'add value' to a research project and to increase impact. People who have worked on a project are well placed to disseminate results, and to ensure successful research has an effect in the wider world. Funding bodies bear a great deal of the blame for demanding unrealistic timescales.'

'Solutions include: building in buffering time at the beginning or end of contracts. By this I mean either dedicated time to continue grant application work at the beginning of a contract that is short, or time at the end where the university might support the researcher in principle for a potential grant application. Start discussing grant writing with researchers at the start of their contract, not towards the end when they will not be employed long enough to be named. Allow researchers dedicated time to grant write as this may need to be funded by some form of staff development fund. Bridging funding to retain researchers between grants, to allow them to develop skills and write grants is absolutely necessary but it is a temporary solution. A policy of longer contracts once you are at a certain grade to allow for grant development. Create a budget to retain key staff who repeatedly deliver on projects and can support grant writing activity.'

WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY?

A total of 4,682 people began the survey of whom 3,418 completed it.

98.6% of the respondents were UCU members and their profile was a cross section of the academic profession (see Figure 4). Of these, 671 (19.63%) were either postgraduates, postdoctoral researchers, research assistants, research fellows or principal investigators, who might be said to be engaged in pure research. 2,362 (69%) respondents were from people with a broadly teaching and research role.

Of the respondents, 51.5% were female and 48% male.

Figure 4: Roles performed by respondents

Legend:
- Lecturer 24%
- Postgraduate student 3%
- Postdoctoral fellow 5%
- Principal lecturer 2%
- Professor 16%
- Reader 9%
- Research assistant 3%
- Research fellow 8%
- Senior lecturer 24%
- Teaching assistant 1%
- Teaching fellow 1%
- Principal investigator 2%
- Professional staff supporting researchers/research (eg researcher developer) 2%
- Senior teaching fellow 0%
- Section head/manager (non academic) 0%

Table 5: Roles of respondents

VALUE	PERCENT	COUNT
Lecturer	24.2%	940
Postgraduate student	3.2%	123
Postdoctoral fellow	5.1%	198
Principal Lecturer	2.3%	89
Professor	16.1%	627
Reader	8.6%	336
Research Assistant	3.1%	121
Research Fellow	7.6%	295
Section Head or Manager (non-academic)	0.3%	12
Senior Lecturer	24.4%	950
Senior Teaching Fellow	0.3%	10
Teaching Assistant	0.6%	23
Teaching Fellow	0.8%	32
Principal Investigator	1.6%	62
Professional staff supporting researchers/research (e.g. researcher developer, research support officer, careers professional)	1.9%	74
Totals		**3,892**

Figure 5: Subject areas of respondents

- Arts and humanities — 30%
- Social sciences — 37%
- Science and engineering — 21%
- Medicine and biosciences — 12%
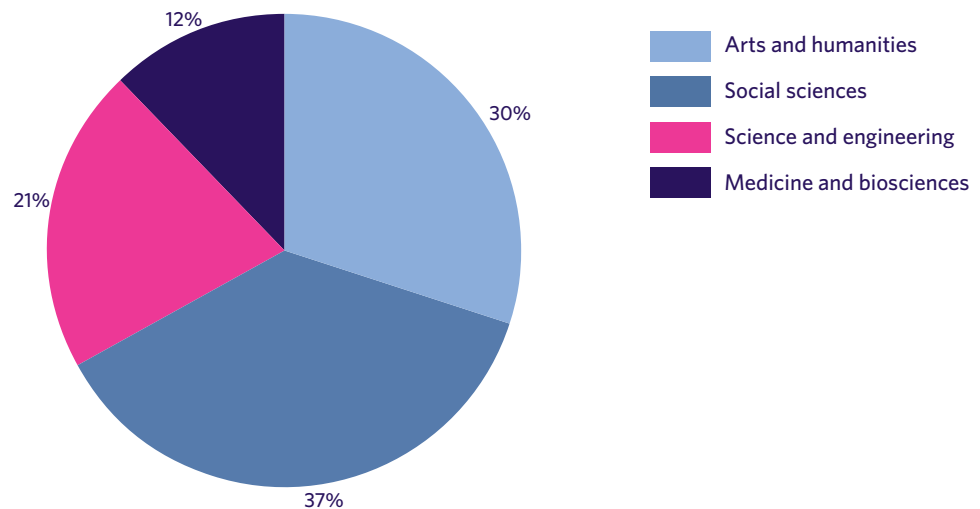
Figure 6: Age profile of respondents

Legend:
- 18 to 24 0%
- 35 to 45
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- Prefer not to say
- 75 or older 0%
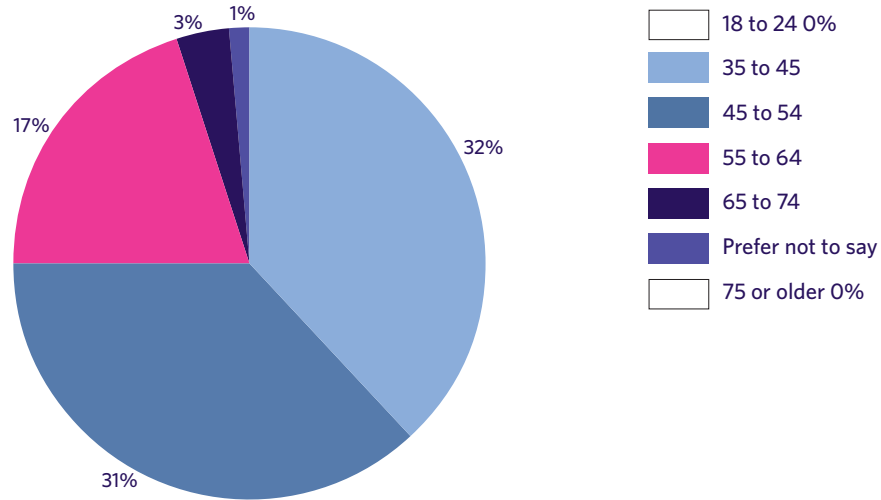
Table 6: Institutions of respondents

	PERCENT	COUNT
Aberdeen, The University of	0.8%	30
Abertay University	0.2%	9
Aberystwyth University	0.3%	12
Anglia Ruskin University (ARU)	0.7%	26
Arts University Bournemouth (AUB)	0.0%	1
Aston University	0.4%	14
Bangor University	0.4%	17
Bath Spa University	0.4%	14
Bath, University of	1.0%	39
Bedfordshire, University of	0.3%	10
Birkbeck College, University of London	0.5%	18
Birmingham City University (BCU)	0.4%	16
Birmingham, University of	1.5%	57
Bishop Grosseteste University	0.1%	2
Bolton, University of	0.1%	4
Bournemouth University	0.7%	28
Bradford, University of	0.4%	16
Brighton, University of	1.0%	39
Bristol, University of	1.7%	63
Brunel University	0.5%	18
Buckinghamshire New University	0.1%	3

Cambridge, University of	1.5%	57
Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)	0.5%	19
Cardiff Metropolitan University	0.3%	11
Cardiff University	1.8%	70
Chester, University of	0.4%	17
City, University of London	0.8%	32
Courtauld Institute of Art	0.1%	2
Coventry University	1.1%	42
Cranfield University	0.3%	11
Cumbria, University of	0.1%	5
De Montfort University (DMU)	0.6%	23
Derby, University of	0.2%	7
Dundee, University of	0.4%	16
Durham University	1.7%	63
East Anglia, University of (UEA)	1.4%	52
East London, (UEL)	0.7%	28
Edge Hill University	0.5%	18
Edinburgh Napier University	0.0%	1
Edinburgh, University of	2.1%	80
Essex, University of	0.9%	36
Exeter, University of	1.5%	57
Falmouth University	0.2%	6
Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)	0.4%	15
Glasgow School of Art	0.2%	6
Glasgow, University of	1.8%	67
Gloucestershire, University of	0.5%	18
Glyndwr University	0.0%	1
Goldsmiths, University of London	1.0%	38
Greenwich, University of	0.4%	14
Guildhall School of Music	0.0%	1
Harper Adams University	0.1%	5
Heriot-Watt University	0.3%	11
Hertfordshire, University of	0.9%	36
Huddersfield, University of	1.0%	40
Hull, University of	0.7%	28
Imperial College London	0.6%	24
Keele University	0.6%	24
Kent, University of	1.6%	61

King's College London (KCL)	2.0%	75
Kingston University	0.4%	17
Lancaster, University of	1.0%	39
Leeds Arts University	0.1%	3
Leeds Beckett University	0.7%	27
Leeds Trinity University	0.1%	3
Leeds, University of	2.2%	83
Leicester, University of	1.4%	55
Lincoln, University of	0.9%	33
Liverpool Hope University	0.3%	13
Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)	0.9%	34
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	0.1%	5
Liverpool, University of	1.7%	65
London Metropolitan University	0.2%	7
London School of Economics (LSE)	0.8%	29
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)	0.7%	25
London South Bank University (LSBU)	0.2%	9
Loughborough University	1.0%	40
Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)	1.4%	55
Manchester, The University of	2.2%	84
Medical Research Council	0.0%	1
Middlesex University	0.4%	17
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC)	0.0%	1
Newcastle University	2.0%	75
Newman University College	0.3%	10
Northampton, The University of	0.3%	10
Northumbria University	1.3%	48
Norwich University of the Arts (NUA)	0.0%	1
Nottingham Trent University (NTU)	1.4%	53
Nottingham, The University of	1.9%	74
Open University (OU)	0.8%	31
Oxford Brookes University	0.8%	30
Oxford, University of	1.6%	60
Plymouth, University of	0.5%	19
Portsmouth, University of	1.0%	37
Queen Margaret University	0.2%	7

Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL)	0.9%	33
Queen's University of Belfast (QUB)	1.0%	38
Ravensbourne College	0.1%	4
Reading, University of	1.2%	47
Regent's University London	0.1%	2
Robert Gordon University	0.1%	4
Roehampton University	0.6%	24
Royal Academy of Music (RAM)	0.0%	1
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (CSSD)	0.1%	4
Royal College of Art (RCA)	0.3%	10
Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL)	0.9%	36
Royal Northern College of Music	0.1%	2
Royal Veterinary College, University of London (RVC)	0.1%	2
Ruskin College	0.0%	1
Salford, University of	0.4%	16
Senate House, University of London	0.1%	4
Sheffield Hallam University	1.2%	46
Sheffield International College	0.0%	1
Sheffield, University of	2.5%	94
SOAS, University of London (The School of Oriental and African Studies)	0.5%	19
Solent University	0.1%	5
South Wales, University of	0.5%	19
Southampton, University of	1.7%	65
St Andrews, University of	0.8%	30
St George's, University of London	0.1%	3
St Mark & St John, University of	0.1%	5
St Mary's University College [Belfast]	0.0%	1
St Mary's University, Twickenham	0.2%	9
Staffordshire University	0.3%	10
Stirling, University of	0.6%	21
Strathclyde, University of	0.5%	20
Suffolk, University of	0.0%	1
Sunderland, University of	0.2%	7
Surrey, University of	0.7%	28
Sussex, University of	1.2%	46
Swansea University	0.5%	20

Teesside, University of	0.6%	24
Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance	0.0%	1
UAL Camberwell, Chelsea & Wimbledon	0.1%	2
UAL Central St Martins	0.2%	8
UAL London College of Communication	0.1%	5
UAL London College of Fashion	0.2%	6
UHI (Scottish Association for Marine Science)	0.0%	1
Ulster University	0.7%	27
University College London (UCL)	2.1%	82
University College London	0.7%	25
University for the Creative Arts	0.1%	4
University of Central Lancashire University of(UCLan)	0.9%	36
University of Chichester, University of	0.1%	5
University of Sunderland	0.1%	4
University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)	0.1%	5
University of the West of England (UWE)	0.6%	24
University of the West of Scotland	0.1%	5
University of Wales	0.1%	2
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	0.1%	4
University of West London, (UWL)	0.2%	7
Warwick, University of	1.2%	47
Westminster, University of	0.5%	18
Winchester, University of	0.5%	19
Wolverhampton, University of	0.4%	15
Worcester, University of	0.1%	2
Writtle University College	0.0%	1
York St John University	0.3%	13
York, University of	1.6%	62
Other	0.8%	31
Totals		**3,816**