

HR Excellence in Research Award: Two-year internal review

Brunel University is actively committed to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and, with the help of its Concordat Action Plan 2011, has sought to increase support for research staff and to enhance opportunities for their personal and professional development. Following receipt of the HR Excellence in Research award in September 2011, the University has developed a range of initiatives and sought to improve relevant University practices, policies and procedures. The associated action plan provides a framework for some of these initiatives. This document reviews progress made against the stated actions and reaffirms the University's on-going commitment to support its researchers.



Background and context

Transformational Change Programme

The University launched a programme of transformational change in April 2013. This process will result in a number of structural and process changes within the University, including a reformulation of its eight academic Schools into three academic Colleges and three Research Institutes, and a reorganisation of central service provision. This includes the development of a new School for Professional Development, which will coordinate a range of services relating to transferable skills, employability skills and language skills to enhance coherent support and training in these and related areas.

Action and progress made against Action Plan since September 2011

Review of action against the original action plan was conducted through a number of regular meetings and focus groups with research staff. Twelve meetings occurred between September 2011 and July 2013 with discussions linked to Concordat action points and principles. An annually conducted Staff Wellbeing Survey also enabled a review of feedback from research staff. CROS and PIRLS were conducted between March and May 2013, providing timely data for incorporation into our review process. Review against actions included key stakeholders in progress meetings chaired by the University's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, with formal papers and recommendations presented through the University's *Staff Development Strategy Group*. Following changes to the University's committee structures, actions and progress relating to the plan will be reported through the Equal Opportunities and Human Resources Committee, a standing committee of Council, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

A: Recruitment and Selection

Principle 1

No immediate action was required following our initial gap analysis and review. However, our processes are subject to regular audit and monitoring to ensure best practice.

B: Recognition and Value

Principle 2

In accordance with proposed actions, training for principal investigators (and supervisors) has been provided through the Staff Development programme, raising awareness of the Concordat Action Plan, the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), appraisal and good research staff management practice. However, further work needs to be done to engage larger numbers of senior staff in available activities. Promotion procedures and criteria are transparent and clearly stated, and workshops to help prepare researchers for appraisal and promotional interviews are regularly run. Initiatives have been aligned, where appropriate, to other relevant activities within the University (e.g. REF and Athena SWAN) and good communication between internal stakeholders has resulted in the heightened awareness and accessibility of research and career development training for research staff.

C: Support and Career Development

Principle 3 & 4

Coordinated internal provision

The University has made progress in bringing together various sources of information and integrating support for its researchers. Closer liaison between internal stakeholders, particularly the Graduate School, Research Support and Development Office (RSDO), Staff Development and the Placement and Careers Centre (PCC) has enhanced development activities for research staff.



Opportunities for personal and professional development are provided by the Graduate School through a dedicated Researcher Development Programme (for staff) and also by Staff Development. Researchers have access to both programmes. Feedback from CROS 2013 suggested that our researchers participate in more development activities than researchers generally within the sector, and there were 354 attendances at Staff Development activities alone by research staff between 2011 and 2013 (September).

Key highlights and progress against action points are detailed within the Action Plan.

D: Researchers' Responsibilities

Principle 5

There has been greater active involvement from research staff themselves within the University. This resulted in the formation of researcher-led action learning sets, encouraging better peer communication and collaboration, and inspiring additional researcher-led initiatives.

The creation of a local Research Staff Association (RSA) is underway, headed by a steering committee of researchers. A consultation exercise has been run and the launch of the new association is currently being planned. This, in turn, will strengthen the visibility of research staff and their representation within the university.

E: Diversity and Equality

Principle 6

In the last three years, the number of employees on research contracts at the University has risen from 158 (10/11) to 225 (12/13), with women making up 36% of this population. Less than 2% are known to be disabled. These proportions have remained relatively unchanged between 2010 and 2013.

Academic year	10/11	11/12	12/13		Female	Male
No. researchers	158	190	225	10/11	61	97
				11/12	69	121
				12/13	81	144
				Total	211	362

In April 2012, the University gained a Bronze Athena SWAN award, and shortly afterwards introduced the Athena SWAN Research Awards scheme to support staff seeking to continue their research careers following maternity, adoption or paternity leave. Three awards have been made under the scheme to date.

The University further highlighted its commitment to equality and diversity in 2012 through the creation of a series of equality objectives (2012 – 2016). Objectives 1 to 5 are of relevance to research staff and are detailed within the updated Action Plan. Particular actions linked to these objectives include:

- The promotion of a mentoring scheme for Black and Ethnic Minority staff amongst academic and research staff (April 2012 and 2013).
- Plans for gender and race equality tasks in Social Sciences – enhancing gender equality initiatives beyond the traditional STEM domain of Athena SWAN (Launch October 2013).
- A new mentoring scheme proposed for development in the coming year, linked to Athena SWAN initiatives (to run and be monitored during 2013 / 14).
- The establishment of a committee to address an observed lower incidence of promotional applications amongst female academics and research staff (October 2013).



Future direction and next steps (2013 – 2015)

The Concordat Action Plan will continue to be implemented under the leadership of the Graduate School, with integrated support from the other key stakeholders within the University. We plan to continue to build on the successful actions of the preceding two years and also to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address any gaps and shortcomings identified through recent surveys (CROS / PIRLS 2013) and through continued regular consultation with research staff. 	Survey review and consultation with research staff and Brunel RSA (Sept – Dec 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share and discuss summary data from recent surveys with research staff and their managers to inform on-going and new developments. 	Research staff networking meetings scheduled every six weeks (Sept 2013 to Jul 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and support a local Research Staff Association (2013/14). 	Consultation and pre-launch workshop 26-09-13; Launch event January 2014 (date tbc)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the Graduate School's Researcher Development Programme (Staff) to include more career development activities, with relevant expertise from Placement and Careers and external collaborators where appropriate. 	Termly career-development focus group meetings (continual activity)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and develop the induction process for research staff, to ideally capture all new research staff early and provide clearer orientation, information and signposting to relevant opportunities. 	Jul – Oct 2013 (re-launch process following completion of Transformational Change Programme, Oct 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue and expand one-to-one career coaching and mentoring opportunities for researchers. 	Already implemented; new mentoring schemes under consultation (July – Dec 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better engage PIs and Research Leaders in the available training (both as co-deliverers and as participants). 	Already actioned – Researcher Development and Staff Development programmes 2013-14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support actions linked to the staff-related University Equality Objectives (2012 – 2016). 	As detailed in updated Action Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot Brunel's Ready for Work Programme: A new stand-alone graduate skills/employability programme, which enables researchers to facilitate small groups of students working on projects that address themes / topics important to the University and its mission. This provides an opportunity for researchers to develop teaching, learning and employability skills, and to gain a greater awareness of contextual issues relevant to the business of the University. 	July 2013 to April 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Grant Academy programme in 2013/14 for researchers in the humanities, targeted on facilitating the development of new research grant proposals. 	Oct 2013 start (RSDO)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor actions and progress relating to the plan through the Action Group, chaired by PVC (Research), comprising representation from the Graduate School, HR / Staff Development, RSDO, PCC and local RSA. Progress will be reported to University Council through the Equal Opportunities and Human Resources Committee (new committee structure). 	Termly from November 2013