

University of Birmingham

Researcher Concordat 4 Year Review

Purpose

The University of Birmingham (UoB) achieved the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2011. This document reviews our progress since then and outlines our vision and the practical actions that demonstrate our continued commitment to supporting and developing our research staff. The accompanying 2013-15 Action Plan Review and 2015-17 Action Plan provide more detail on specific achievements and actions for the future.

Background

The University Strategic Framework “Shaping Our Future” and the associated HR Strategy underpinned our activity in 2011 – 2015. Being a destination of choice, enhancing our performance and status as an engaged university and enhancing our research power have guided our commitment to The Concordat. The University and HR Strategies have been revised and will be launched shortly. The vision and strategy for 2015 - 2020 builds on the sound principles of the past 5 years and charts a course that will allow us to succeed as a world leading University.

Since the first submission in 2011, an underlying principle for Birmingham has been that HR best practice is applied across the entire University. We believe that this pragmatic approach provides the most appropriate environment for all staff, including those engaged in research, and will best support the achievement of University goals. However where there is a demonstrable need, specific support and interventions are applied.

As of August 2015 UoB has 1207 staff employed primarily to carry out research. These are distributed as below:-

College of Social Sciences (CoSS)	67
College of Medical and Dental Sciences (CMDS)	554
College of Life and Environmental Sciences (CLES)	202
College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (CEPS)	333
College of Arts and Law (CAL)	38
Central Facilities	13

While overall research staff (RS) matters are the responsibility of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Research & Knowledge Transfer, the size and diversity of the RS population means that most development and support is designed and carried out at a local level. In general this involves College Directors of Research, Heads of School, local researcher development or representative groups. These are supported by College Heads of HR and College aligned People and Organisational Development (POD) Consultants. The HR Excellence process is managed by POD, reporting to the Director of HR and the HR Leadership Team.

How the evaluation was undertaken

The primary source of data underpinning this review is the Careers in Research On-line Survey (CROS). We have compared responses from 2010 and 2015. Researchers have provided additional specific feedback and proposals for this review and action plan via local researcher College network groups (CMDS, CLES, and CoSS). In addition, data has been used from the University’s internal staff engagement surveys, as well as HR and other internal recording systems. Consultations have also taken place with specialist support teams – HR, Research Support.

Key Achievements by Concordat Principle

A significant number of policies and guidance documents underpin the development of the HR environment. These are continually reviewed and updated to maintain best practice and ensure compliance with legal and statutory requirements. Recruitment and Selection, Promotion and Appointments, Re-deployment, Equality and Code of Practice for Research were updated in 2014 / 15.

1. Recruitment, selection & retention of researchers

There is an on-going commitment to best practice in recruitment and selection (R&S).

- Central and locally tailored training continues to be available, including the requirement since 2014 for all recruiting staff to attend mandatory R&S briefings before being allowed to sit on any promotions or selection panels. 873 academic staff have attended the briefings which include input on unconscious bias. Unconscious bias training is also offered as a more in-depth session which 89 academic staff have attended.

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- Some improvement in retention of research focused staff. Resignations before scheduled contract end date reduced by 12% in the period 2011-15 compared with 2007-10
- The institutional induction process was reviewed during 2014. New guidance, including a tailored template for Early Career Researchers, was launched in January 2015. The new processes are currently being evaluated. Local areas continue to develop induction provision for all staff including RS where appropriate. For example CMDS introduced a bespoke induction for RS managed by the local RS development group.
- The central induction event was revised in 2013. CROS 2015 data shows 67% found this event useful, a 13% increase between 2010 and 2015. Role inductions continue to be highly valued by staff. Over 80% reporting these to be useful in CROS 2015.
- The number of RS reporting not having been offered induction has reduced by 12% between 2010 and 2015. While this is a positive change, the number of staff not able to benefit from a structured induction is still higher than we would like. Our aim is to ensure that all staff receive an induction to the University.

2. Researchers recognised & valued

- Whilst there has been a small reduction in RS agreeing that their contribution across a range of activity is valued and recognised, there remains a consistently high level of agreement that specific contributions to publications are valued and recognised.
- The Performance Development Review (PDR) system, re-launched in 2012, is now fully embedded for all staff including RS. Internal data indicates that in the period 2014 – 15 67% of RS have completed a PDR, an increase of 5% since 2010. CROS 2015 reports that 6% more staff describe the PDR as useful overall than did in 2010. Significantly, in 2015, 84% report PDR being especially useful for reviewing progress compared with 71% in 2010.

3. Researchers Equipped & Supported; and

4. Personal & Career development of researchers

- Centrally provided researcher specific training & development activity from POD, has evolved as required; overall 248 people participated since January 2012. This includes new Impact & Engagement programmes (56 participants since 2013) and Grant and Journal Article Writing (163 participants since 2013)
- Developing as a Research Team Leader programme has had 46 Post-Doctoral and Early Career Researcher participants since June 2013. This collaboration with The University of Nottingham is a 5-day programme delivered over 6 months and is now recruiting its 4th cohort. The programme forms part of the integrated leadership development portfolio which has seen 100 senior and 69 emerging leaders attend since 2011.
- RS have also engaged with general leadership and management development programmes, including recruitment & selection, unconscious bias and challenging conversations (353 participants since 2011).
- Central provision from other specialist areas has also evolved in line with University priorities, specifically in the areas of funding and ethics; c700 participants attended.
- Colleges have adopted tailored approaches to researcher development reflecting the nature of the discipline, resources available and the local and organisational priorities. CMDS and CoSS have implemented annual programmes of researcher development activities (training, workshops & conferences). CEPS and CLES have delivered specific sessions for targeted groups of staff and CAL maintains individually tailored support to meet individual needs. For example 100 research staff attended a College Research Gala in collaboration with University of Nottingham. An average of 40 attendees at monthly College Research Staff Master Classes on topics including fellowship applications, 4* publications and research impact, 40 participants attended a College Post Doc Away Day focused on researcher careers.
- The coordinated system of support for researchers seeking grant funding across all Colleges, implemented in 2013, continues to be valuable. Bespoke advice and guidance is available to all staff in making research grant applications. This includes fellowships and funding aimed at staff at specific stages in their career. Across all research activity, 2014/15 saw the highest level of awards from RCUK ever at £53M, a >20% increase on the next previous highest of £43M in 2011/12.
- Local researcher networks and development groups have been maintained over the period in the Colleges of MDS and LES. Funding in CMDS is well established to provide coordination and administrative support for researcher

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specific web pages, a mentoring database, organisation of master classes, one-off lectures, the annual postdoctoral research gala and targeted communication detailing up-coming programs and training sessions and highlighting early career researcher funding. The new funding secured to provide dedicated support in CEPS / CLES is a significant new initiative and has been approved in principle for the following academic year. This will enable more focused and consistent career and development support to be provided over the next 18 months. CoSS re-launched its group in 2015 with significant support from the Head of College and Director of Research. CAL, having significantly fewer researchers, maintains an approach to provide tailored support to individuals as necessary.

5. Researcher Involvement

- Local researcher support and development groups continue to champion and promote RS specific activity. CMDS committee members meet at least bimonthly, and more frequently near to major events, to plan and organise activity and champion central initiatives. Researchers across all Colleges are encouraged to contribute concerns/ ideas to their school representative who raises them at the next meeting. Local surveys are used to determine early career researcher interests and development priorities. E.g. teacher training workshops and the format that would be used for these.
- Researchers specifically invited to provide input and feedback to this review via their local groups.
- CROS participation increased from 193 (21%) in 2010 to (327) 30% in 2015.
- CROS data indicates that between 2010 and 2015 a consistently high percentage of RS are encouraged to engage in career management activity (73%). In addition there has been a slight increase (2 – 3 %) in RS taking personal responsibility for and developing a CPD plan.

6. Equality & Diversity

- The “Advancing Equality in Employment” project was launched in 2014. The University’s co-ordinated strategy embeds fair and equitable principles and practices across the institution culminating in the award of the HR Excellence National Award for Diversity and Inclusion in July 2015 and a place in the top 100 of the Stonewall Index.
- Training to date includes: - 80% of staff having undertaken on-line E&D training; equality and unconscious bias featuring significantly in recruitment and selection training and unconscious bias being offered as a stand-alone programme. In addition 41 staff attended the HEFCE Aurora Leadership Programme with another cohort scheduled for autumn 2015.
- We have recently appointed a Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor with specific responsibility for Equality & Diversity and have appointed a Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Staffing, with a particular focus on the integration of effective staffing practices within the academic community, adding insight, advocacy and quality assurance to institutional wide staffing policy and practices.
- Each School & Budget Centre has appointed an Equality Champion resulting in 48 people across the University who have specific responsibility for driving the equality agenda.
- Athena Swan continues to be a significant measure of commitment to E&D principles. CMDS achieved Athena Swan Silver award in November 2013. As of July 2015, all Schools in CLES hold Bronze Awards and 6 of 9 Schools in CEPS hold awards including one Silver award. Schools in CAL and CoSS have begun preparation for Athena applications following the expansion of the charter to non-STEMM subjects in May 2015.
- A central budget has been created to fund maternity pay. Schools retain the individual’s budgeted salary to make appropriate cover arrangements. 81 members of staff were supported by the central maternity fund
- Full moderation of decisions is made at each stage of the remuneration and promotion processes based on key E&D characteristics
- CROS data reports that
 - 91% RS agree UoB is committed to E&D compared with 85% in 2010
 - 89% feel they have never been discriminated against compared with 85% 2010
 - Significantly 97% RS agree there is equal opportunity of access to training & development, compared to 89% in 2010

7. Regular Review

Review activity over the last four years has included

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- CROS 2015
- Internal staff engagement surveys 2011 & 2013, including where operationally possible specific identification of RS.
- Local surveys and review of RS support activity by College support networks
- Specific data recording RS development interventions as a distinct population within UoB
- Specific evaluation of researcher specific central training activity

Actions for the future

The new Strategic Framework recognises that “We have created a research environment where academic rigour, innovation, and delivery are made possible by brilliant people, outstanding facilities and strong collaborative networks. Our goal now is to do more and better research”. It goes on to state “Our staff and students are our greatest resource: their success is our success. Their work and achievements are rooted in the University’s vibrant intellectual environment, and we focus our resources on building, maintaining and enhancing the environment.”

The strategy identifies the need to focus on

- Attracting, retaining and celebrating talent
- Growing leadership capacity – specifically research leadership, including supervision of research students
- Collaboration including working with other Universities.

The new HR Strategy supports these aims by focusing on recruiting, selecting and developing talent; supporting, managing and rewarding performance; developing and building leadership and management capacity; inclusivity and well-being. A detailed action plan for the next 2 years can be found at

<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/birminghamacademic/researcher/index.aspx>

Key areas of focus and success measures are outlined below.

Key Area of Focus	Key Principle
Institutional support for and monitoring of Concordat implementation It is recognised that more robust and formal structures would enhance our ability to meet the Concordat principles including increased involvement of RS in development and evaluation activity.	5,7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee is formally committed to regular review of RS development and support and progress against Concordat action plans. • Establish an operational working group to manage the day to day Concordat activity 	
Research Leadership & Management Effective leadership and management are critical to our success.	1,2,3
Continue to develop and deliver and evaluate existing leadership programmes, including Senior and Emerging and introductory Leadership Programmes	
Pilot a management programme for new College Board members to deploy the essential “nuts and bolts” of good subject leadership and management skills – September 2015 Pilot new Research Leadership Programme – June 2016	
Recruitment, development and support of talented staff While there has been some success in establishing local researcher development groups there remains inconsistency and duplication in activity. Specific resource is allocated to ensure best practice in local researcher support & development is shared across Colleges and coordinated with central initiatives. Keep RS at the heart of the process by developing local RS Groups.	3,4
CROS data has identified specific areas that may require further exploration at both organisation and local level. These key areas include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction – reduce numbers of new researchers “not offered” induction to 5% • Training & development – e.g. design & pilot “Career Development” activity by July 2016 • PDR – increase percentage of RS undertaking PDR to 80% 	
Equality & Diversity Our aim is that all staff are treated with dignity and afforded respect as key aspects of their wellbeing. We will build on existing success in this area.	2,3,6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athena Swan targets – 3 Remaining STEMM Schools obtain awards in 2016 • Non STEMM Colleges obtain Gender Equality Charter Recognition by July 2017 • Based on CROS 2015 E&D responses, Colleges identify and implement 1 action to improve 	