

University of Birmingham

Researcher Concordat 2 Year Review 2016-18

The University of Birmingham (UoB) successfully regained the HR Excellence in Research Award in January 2016. 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 2015 - 17 Action Plan Review and 2018-20 Action Plan provide more detail on specific achievements and actions for the future.

How the evaluation was undertaken

A key milestone in the current Action Plan has been the establishment of a university wide group in 2016 – the Researcher Development Support Group (RDSG) - to coordinate Early Career Researcher (ECR) support and development activity. This group includes ECR and senior academic representation from all Colleges who have made a significant contribution to delivering the actions and to this review. The group reports periodically (at least annually) to the University Research Committee.

Significantly, the Vice Chancellor (VC), Provost and Registrar have also recently held joint meetings with ECRs to explore their key concerns and issues. These discussions have informed this review and have contributed to the revised action plan.

Local College network groups have carried out a variety of consultation activities including surveys, focus groups and a strategy away day in one College. These have provided useful feedback on progress in key areas and helped identify key priorities.

We continue to apply the core principle of applying HR best practice to all staff unless there are very specific issues to address for research staff. Where actions relate to institution-wide activity these are monitored and evaluated via individual project timelines against key milestones.

An important primary source of data underpinning this review is the Careers in Research On-line Survey (CROS); we have compared responses from 2015 and 2017 and discussed these with the RDSG. HR and other internal recording systems have provided additional data as have consultations with specialist support teams e.g. Research Support.

The review is also completed in consultation with the PVC for Research, University Research Committee and HR Director.

Key Achievements and Progress

The 2015 – 17 plan focuses on four key themes: -

- Enhancing the institutional commitment to the Concordat
- Developing research leadership
- Recruiting, developing and supporting talented research staff
- Equality & diversity

Key achievements against these themes are described below. Detailed progress against actions is provided in the associated Action Plan Review

Institutional support for and monitoring of Concordat implementation (Principles 2, 7)

1. VC breakfast meetings with ECRs identified two key areas of interest. The role of mentoring and the importance of the induction process were highlighted as being particularly important. It was suggested that the approaches to both are currently variable between different Schools and Colleges and that requirements will vary based on the nature of individual academic disciplines. The University Executive

Board (UEB) has now agreed a number of actions to be taken by Heads of College and Schools. (Detailed in the Action Plan 2018-20)

2. Established an operational cross-university working group - the Researcher Development Support Group (RDSG) - chaired by a Deputy Head of College and meeting monthly, to monitor and manage the day-to-day commitments to the Concordat. Membership includes senior academic and ECR representatives from all five Colleges plus representatives from relevant professional service departments. The group presented three key areas for focus to the University Research Committee in 2016-17.
 - I. Provision of career advice for ECRs
 - II. Implement a consistent approach to Performance Development Review for ECRs.
 - III. Implementing best practice in researcher induction

It is clear that both initiatives have yielded very similar outcomes that clearly support the current Action Plan. Specific activities are detailed in the Action Plan review.

Research Leadership & Management (Principles 1, 3, 4)

We have continued to develop and deliver a suite of leadership development programmes that will enhance UoB leadership capability at all levels.

1. Three new programmes specifically focused on researchers and the academic environment have been developed and piloted during this period; Research Leaders Programme, Developing as an Academic Team Leader and New College Board workshop. Eighty-one staff have attended across the three programmes. Initial feedback on all programmes is consistently good. Specifically the contextualisation of leadership to the academic environment and the opportunity to network and learn from peers were particularly helpful. Specific early impacts have included prioritising and delegating, developing team vision and critical analysis of current approaches to leadership and research. Actions to evaluate the behavioural impact of these programmes are shown in the 2018-20 Action Plan.

Recruitment development & support of talented research staff (Principles 1, 2, 3, 4)

1. Based on CROS 2017 data a 14% increase in ECRs having an appraisal compared to 2015. Induction continues to be a concern with only a slight increase (7%) in local induction participation, and a decrease (4%) in central induction participation compared to 2015. The reported support for personal and career development has increased by 5% between 2015 and 2017.
2. ECR support and development groups are now established across all five Colleges. Significantly, two of the groups involve pairing of two colleges. This develops cross-disciplinary networks and increases the efficiency of delivering activities where Colleges have relatively low numbers of Post Doc / ECR staff.
3. Internal College funding has been provided to maintain administrative support for ECR support groups where external funding has been withdrawn.
4. PVC Research has agreed to further exploration of the proposal to fund a dedicated careers advisor.
5. Two Colleges (LES, EPS) have agreed, and communicated to staff the minimum expected time for ECR CPD – an average of 2 hours per month.

E&D (Principle 6)

1. Of the three STEMM Schools, yet to obtain Athena Swan accreditation, one has now achieved Bronze.
2. All Schools have reapplied for accreditation as necessary
3. Non-STEMM Schools are now applying for Athena Swan. Two will submit in November.
4. An additional member of staff focused on the equality agenda was appointed in December 2015 and the new Institutional Equality Plan was launched in autumn 2016

There have been no significant changes to Concordat related university policies or procedures.

Actions for the future

Building on our current Strategic Framework 2015- 2020, our vision for Birmingham 2026 sets clear and challenging goals to raise the academic performance of the University. To achieve these we will continue to invest in people and the intellectual environment and aim to be a destination of choice for the best researchers and students in the world. As we work towards these goals, the current 2015-2020 strategy continues to focus on the following Concordat related areas:-

- Attracting, retaining and celebrating talented staff
- Growing leadership capacity – specifically research leadership, including supervision of research students.

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 are outlined below: -

1. Institutional support for and monitoring of Concordat implementation

- Senior leader meetings with ECRs continue
- Proposals following institutional review of induction are approved and implemented
- Review of formal monitoring of and reporting on Concordat implementation plans

2. Recruitment, development and support of talented research staff

- Pilot revised approach to induction, performance & development review and mentoring implemented and evaluated in College of Engineering & Physical Sciences. Significant increase in participation and usefulness of induction and Performance Development Review reported via CROS 2019
- Design and delivery of specific targeted researcher development programmes in Ethics & Integrity, Impact & Engagement. Pilot sessions delivered between June and September 2018, evaluated 2019.
- Consolidation of research funding training programmes – revised programme announced autumn 2018, evaluation 2019

3. Equality & Diversity

- On-going commitment to Athena Swan new awards and reaccreditation
- Submission to Race Equality Charter Scheme