

HR Excellence in Research: Self-assessment (10-year award)

Introduction

The University of Bristol employs 1,500 staff on research-only (Pathway 2) contracts. The research staff population makes up approximately 50% of all academic staff at the University. The majority of research staff are employed through externally funded projects. Research staff at the University of Bristol are supported through [Bristol Clear](#) which was established in 2018 as the University's Research Staff Hub. Research staff have always been supported through the Academic Staff Development team, however in 2018 Bristol Clear was established in recognition of the specific needs of research staff, who are in the majority employed through external project funding. The remit of the Bristol Clear team is to provide skills and career support for academic staff with a research focus at the University. The team sits within the HR division in the Academic Staff Development (ASD) Team, which is part of a bigger Organisational Development Team, and it works closely with the [Research Staff Working Party](#) to strategically develop researcher development at the University.

Governance and Research Staff Representation

The Concordat Governance Group (CGG) oversees the implementation of the action plan and our internal assessment processes, which include consultation with key stakeholders such as our [Research Staff Reps Committee](#), and it draws on data from surveys such as CROS and our whole staff survey, as well as data from regular internal monitoring processes and data collected through Research Staff Reps. The CGG reports to the RSWP, whose remit is to promote and support the careers and working environment of externally-funded and early career research staff, and it reports to the University Research Committee. The Research Staff Reps Committee represents research staff from across the institution with at least one Rep per school and facilitates engagement within the University. The committee meets six times a year, either side of the Working Party meetings.

The CGG's membership comprises of: Chair of the Research Staff Working Party, (Associate) PVC Research, Chief People Officer, Director of People and Organisational Development, Co-Chairs of Research Staff Rep Committee, PIs and Head of Academic Staff Development (CGG Chair). Research staff views are regularly sought through our own staff survey, CROS, staff focus groups, and close collaboration with the Co-Chairs of the Research Staff Reps committee.

Key achievements and progress against the action plan after our last external evaluation

This section provides a summary of key progress and actions completed over the last two years. We have measured success through analysing employment data, CROS and all staff surveys, feedback from Researchers (collected through Research Staff Reps, and provided directly from the wider research staff community), feedback from other Academic staff (for example, PIs), and workshop participation data.

Bristol Clear is now widely recognised and we have been able to build on our initial success: 84% of CROS respondents stated they were aware of the [Bristol Clear Research Staff Hub website](#), compared to 45% in the previous CROS survey. Over the last two years, 700 individuals engaged with Bristol Clear through over more than 1700 bookings on workshops. In the CROS 2018 survey, 86% of respondents recognised Bristol Clear and 80% were familiar with the Bristol Clear Mentoring scheme, which has made over 100 matches to date. Our workshop programme has been [mapped](#) against the Researcher Development Framework, offering systematic support for Researcher Skills Development. We launched the **Bristol Clear Mentoring scheme** and purposely built it up slowly to establish high quality processes and ensure a focus on skills development for mentors and mentees that can be maintained. Over 100 mentoring matches have been made to date, and 100% of mentors and mentees would recommend the scheme to colleagues. As the scheme is now established with a six-monthly intake across the University, this presents an excellent opportunity to expand the scheme in the future. Bristol Clear also manages a small Researcher Development Fund (£3,000), which researchers can bid for if they wish to create and implement initiatives and opportunities that will develop research staff and improve communication and collaboration across research teams. While the available sum is low, one of the development aspects is for researchers to learn about applying for funding through receiving detailed feedback on their application.

Continued move to Open-ended contracts (with fixed term funding) for Research Staff. As of December 2020, out of a total of 1,500 research staff, 1,205 were employed on an open-ended contract. The percentage of 80% on open-ended contracts (2020) compares to 27% nationally in 2017.

The VC Fellows scheme recruited 40 University-funded Vice Chancellor Fellows over three annual recruitment intakes. All Fellows are supported through a tailored programme of development including a coaching and development programme, and through a small research expenses budget. Of our 40 fellows funded to date, 8 have been awarded permanent lectureships, 2 have received further post-doc positions, 2 have been awarded prestigious Henry Dale fellowships and 1 has been successful in getting a highly competitive UKRI future leaders fellowship.

Gender pay gap (GPG) project: In January 2020 the University and the Bristol branch of the University College Union (UCU) signed a [Collective Agreement](#) setting out ambitious plans to eliminate the gender pay gap at the University. The agreement includes measures such as increased opportunities for progression for women, greater opportunities to work flexibly, a bridge funding pilot scheme for research staff, and training for all staff involved in recruitment and promotion. The [pay gap report](#) published in March 2020 showed that the median and mean gender pay gap has improved by 2.5% since 2017. The report also shows that the median pay gap for both academic and professional services workforces is now below 10%. The data for research staff /Pathway 2 (P2) shows 23% of P2 women are employed as Research Fellow/ Senior Research Fellow/ Professor, which is slightly higher than the percentage of P2 men (22.6%); whilst 40% of P2 women are employed on the two lowest grades, which is less than the 50% of P2 men.

The University of [Bristol's People Plan](#), which identifies six People Commitments for 2019/20 was informed by the 2018 all staff survey. One result of the People Plan has been that Research Staff Reps have now access to senior school committees.

Workload Agreement: To reinforce the need for the fair, reasonable and equitable allocation of work, the University created a set of [Workload allocation principles](#) as an appendix to the existing [Workload Agreement](#) (covering staff on grades J (Senior Research Associate) and above. These were published in August 2019.

Continued support for schools to apply for Athena Swan and submit for an institutional silver award: UoB continues to work towards an institutional silver award, but we were advised by Advance HE to postpone our application due to Covid-19. This work is supported through the University's Diversity and Inclusion team. Across the university, individual schools currently hold 10 bronze awards and six silver awards. All STEMM schools applied. Out of non-STEMM schools, two applied and achieved Bronze awards and all other non-STEMM schools currently have a target to apply in 2021/22.

Postdoc Appreciation Week: this year the Co-Chairs of Reps and the Bristol Clear team contributed to the co-organisation of activities to mark the [Postdoc Appreciation week](#), which included university wide events, school specific events, and national online events. Some of the week's events were dedicated to the University's action plan for the implementation of the Concordat and provided an opportunity for staff across the University to input directly into our plans going forward.

A detailed progress report can be found in the updated action plan template.

Future plans

The University of Bristol has signed up to the 2019 Concordat to support the career development of researchers. Led by the CCG, we have undertaken a progress review and detailed gap analysis, which informed our action plan for the implementation of the Concordat. The action plan has been formally approved by the RSWP and the University Research Committee, chaired by the PVC Research and Enterprise.

We all aspire to work in an environment where everyone can achieve their full potential. We believe that each of the actions will contribute to improving that environment for researchers. In fact, we expect that in some areas there is already good practice that can be shared, and we will be building on the achievements already made. We are also realistic in that change will take time and see it as a collaborative endeavour across the whole University.

To measure success, we will collect data through CEDARS, the University's staff survey, pulse surveys and our new LMS. We will also analyse employment data, and we will collect information through our Research Staff Reps, Concordat Champions and managers of researchers to underpin this data. Detailed objectives and timelines can be found in our action plan.

Below presents a list of *key new* actions:

Environment and Culture

Establishment of Research Concordat Champions at each school: The Champions will be members of the School's Research Committee (or equivalent) and will be a key contact for the Research Staff Reps; they will play a key role in making sure all academic staff are aware of the Concordat and understand their role in supporting careers of research staff. The Champion role will include working with fellow PIs and HR to support and facilitate changes to how we conduct research and support careers of researchers. Champions and Reps may also work together with Heads of Schools and others, such as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion managers, to establish further ways to address the local research culture. Success measure in 20/21 will be the successful appointment of a champion in each school and co-designed role descriptions which will be tailored for the individual school's context. Success measure for 21/22 will be co-designed by the Reps and Champions. (ECI1, ECI6)

Extension of workload model to Research Associate level: [The University agreed a Workload Agreement with the Joint Trade Unions](#) for all Academic Staff including Senior Research Associates (Grade J) and Fellows (Grade K) in 2019, which is linked to the [Academic Workload Allocation Principles](#). We will extend this to include Research Associates (Grade I), which is the first/entry level for academic research staff at the University. This will be monitored locally through HR teams and the Research Staff Champions. (ECI3, E15)

Employment

Pilot of a support programme for managers of researchers: We will pilot a support programme for PIs and managers of researchers, focussing on people-management responsibilities and their role in supporting the career development of researchers. This will include a practical handbook, and targeted workshops to support staff in their role and with their responsibilities. (E14)

Professional Career Development

Career development and choices initiative: Launch a "Career choices" initiative to promote activities and discussions around active career development, supported by workshops and talks. This initiative will emphasise the commitment by the University to enable research staff to spend at least 10 days per year on wider development activities. We will measure success by pulse surveys and measuring of engagement in workshop and talks. (PCDI1, PCDI6)

Supporting PIs with Staff Review conversations: The University will implement a new Staff Review and Development system, with a focus on supporting academics to undertake meaningful staff review conversations which support researchers with developing their careers. We will test out different approaches to supporting PIs to facilitate strategic career development planning. We will measure success through the CEDARS survey and information collated through Research Staff Champions and Reps. (PCDI2)

Implementation of a new learning management system (LMS): We will implement a new LMS across the University. The new LMS will co-ordinate staff learning and development content, activities and opportunities in one user-friendly location, and it will allow staff to record their development activities (i.e. the system can be used to evidence compliance with essential training requirements). This will allow more effective monitoring of engagement with development activities by researchers and their managers, and it will support researchers with their strategic career planning. (PCDI6)

Developing the offer of Bristol Clear: Informed by CEDARS, the staff survey, information from Research Staff Reps and Research Champions, we will continue to develop our opportunities to ensure quality and breadth of opportunities. This may also include a **development programme for senior research associates**, which includes themes such as research governance, management and introduction to leadership. This development programme will be linked to the ongoing Academic Career Development Programme and will support participants to move towards the career profile of a research fellow or lecturer. The development programme will be mapped against career development stages in Dec 2021 and a pilot of the programme will be completed in July 2022.