Brunel University London
HR Excellence in Research Award: Four-year report

1. Background and overview

Brunel University London has 228 research staff and remains committed to the principles of the Concordat. Since our last review (2013) we have built steadily on our original Concordat action plan to enhance provision and support for our research staff. We have made demonstrable progress in a number of key areas – delivering on a range of initiatives and creating new ones, and have identified needs and areas for further improvement.

During 2013 – 2014, the University underwent significant organisational restructure. This restructure had a strong research focus and considered the needs of research staff in terms of integration, collaboration and development.   Research was organised into three Institutes and 15 Themes, addressing global challenges through inter-disciplinary methodologies. In addition, all research staff were positioned within one of three new Academic Colleges, creating opportunities for them to engage with broader elements of academic practice development.

Within the new University structure, the visibility of research staff has been raised so that we now have three elected members on the University's Senate, and research staff representation is actively encouraged on all relevant committees and working groups. A Dean of Research has been appointed with the explicit inclusion of research staff development within her remit. She was also appointed Career Development Champion for research staff. The University has also established two new centres – the Brunel Educational Excellence Centre (BEEC) and a Professional Development Centre (PDC).These aim to further enhance the central provision of training and the accessibility of career development opportunities.

Our action plans provide both an overview of our activity to date and planned activity over the next two years. To oversee our progress in this area, we have established a (Researcher) Concordat Implementation Group (RCIG), chaired by the Dean of Research / Career Development Champion and comprising: The University Lead for Research Staff Development, the University's Planning Manager (Research Strategy), a Senior HR Consultant, the Equality and Diversity Manager, and research staff. Reports and actions from the RCIG fall within the scope of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) and are reported to Executive Board.

Our key areas of focus for 2015-17 are to expand our provision in relation to leadership and career development, to demonstrate impact through improved monitoring of outcomes, and to promote and embed good practice in research staff management.

2. Evaluation

The (Researcher) Concordat Implementation Group evaluated progress against our Concordat strategy using feedback from the following:

CROS and PIRLS (2011 – 2015): We have participated in these surveys since 2011, and results have provided us with regular insight into researchers' opinions on local support for their development.Our completion rates for both surveys are consistently at or above sector averages (for 2015: CROS 29%, PIRLS 44%). Following the completion of each survey, outcomes were presented, as a priority, to research staff for discussion and feedback.

The Brunel Research Staff Association (RSA): This was launched in February 2014, and its committee members meet regularly with the University Lead for Research Staff Development, based in the Graduate School. Consultation and discussion with the RSA has provided opportunities to gain insights, discuss outcomes and plan interventions. They actively distribute and communicate information to staff at College / Departmental level, encouraging engagement and feedback. The Association has independently facilitated two focus groups of research staff to highlight and explore awareness of the Concordat and views on the strategy. A comprehensive report resulted, with recommendations for future activities which have informed the new action plan, and we have extended the Graduate School website to include an RSA page and links to resources.

Feedback from Research Staff Network meetings: A series of regular lunchtime meetings held throughout the year (4 to 6 times per annum) provide an opportunity for research staff to share and informally discuss key topics / issues. Guest speakers

are invited to present information on topics including the University's research strategy, funding opportunities and career development.

The evaluations, organised by Concordat principle, noted key achievements against our action plans (2011 and 2013) and identified areas for improvement. These have been used to formulate the new action plan (2015).

3. Key achievements and progress against strategy

A: Recruitment and Selection

Principle 1

Feedback from the RSA report indicates that no immediate actions were required for recruitment and selection. Policies in this area are regularly monitored and reviewed to maintain the highest standards. However, retention has been identified as an issue, and researchers reported a need for more experience in grant proposal writing to support their progression. A trial scheme has been launched (MINT) to support researchers towards the end of their contract period in developing this skill.

A new HR Director was appointed in 2014 and is leading a process of review and consolidation of best practice in this area.

B: Recognition and Value

Principle 2

We have strengthened training to support the development of supervisors and PIs (BEEC and GS) and invested in the co-development of online provision. As a result, we now have **six** online courses including Research Integrity, Doctoral Supervision and Research Leadership Skills, available to all researchers and staff. The University has also joined international implementation groups linked to these courses, through which we plan to gain clearer usage data to monitor their uptake and effectiveness.

CROS 2013 and 2015 data indicated poor provision in appraisals / Performance Development Review (PDR), with only 50% of research staff receiving an appraisal compared to a national average of 67% (CROS 2015 UK Aggregate Results). This was consistent with feedback on PDR reported by other staffing groups across the University (Brunel Voice Staff Survey 2015). A new mandatory PDR process for all staff was introduced in July 2015 throughout the University, supported by a series of workshops for reviewers and reviewees. It is our expectation that this will result in all research staff undertaking an annual appraisal and review. Learning and development needs will be extracted from the reviews to inform staff development planning / provision. We note from the PIRLS survey that only 46% of our respondents felt valued in relation to their contribution to the management and supervision of researchers. We have commissioned workshops /seminars on the management of research staff and related issues to further engage PIs and managers on this topic, and are exploring mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding good research staff management. Feedback from research staff will be central to this process.

C: Support and Career Development

Principles 3 & 4

Following the review activity completed as part of our 2013 plan, we have built on the opportunities for internal stakeholders to collaborate in supporting researchers. The Graduate School (GS), now part of the PDC, continues to run a dedicated Researcher Development Programme for staff, working with BEEC, Careers (PDC), the Research Support and Development Office (RSDO) and the Research Institutes (RIs) to plan new programmes. For example, the GS and RSDO plan to pilot a collaborative cross-University development programme to enhance research performance skills such as securing funding, profile and output management, and delivering impact.

New systems have been introduced, with corresponding training, in Research Ethics, Research Integrity and Data Management. Researchers have been encouraged to undertake Research Integrity and Data Management training – both supported by the development of new online resources. The online training in Research Integrity has been promoted to all

staff through a programme of departmental presentations and is mandatory for research students as part of their first year progression.

Feedback from CROS 2013 suggested that our researchers participate in more development activities than researchers generally within the sector, and 82% of researchers in our CROS 2015 agreed or agreed strongly that they are treated equally to other members of staff in terms of access to training and development.

Researchers have had opportunities for greater involvement in mentoring schemes both as mentees and mentors. A Ready for Work programme was successfully delivered, in which researchers acted as project facilitators and mentors. Feedback from the programme was excellent, leading to an enhanced programme this year. A successful mentoring scheme was also run as part of a 'Women in Engineering' programme (2014-15).

The new Research Institutes have piloted awards and processes to increase opportunities for researcher integration, collaboration and development. These include:

- **M**onthly **Int**ernship Scheme for Postdoctoral Researchers (MINT): Bridging funds can be applied for to support a short period at the end of a research contract to write papers and develop grant proposals.
- **Awards** to support research visibility, idea development and interdisciplinary research (between £4k and £25k).
- **Post-Doctoral Career Development Programme**: Supports the most promising researchers through a series of leadership development and career planning activities, coaching and mentoring.
- An **induction checklist** for all new projects for PIs, which draws attention to the processes and responsibilities relevant to research staff.

A university-wide induction day, along with equality and diversity training, is compulsory for all new staff. However, feedback from CROS 2013 suggested that 32% were not offered or chose not to attend this, and only 47% of attendees found it to be useful / very useful (with similar figures in CROS 2015). We have therefore introduced a supplementary induction process, specifically for research staff whereby they will be contacted individually within three months of appointment, and invited to a workshop run by the GS and RSA, to provide a more tailored induction.

Two cohorts of 12 participants have undertaken ILM level 5 training in Coaching and Mentoring for Management, providing an internal pool of coaches. This has enhanced the development of a coaching culture at Brunel and provides further opportunities for researchers to benefit from coaching as part of their development.

D: Researchers' Responsibilities

Principle 5

As indicated in our 2013 plan, we have developed collaborative training opportunities working in conjunction with other regional Universities. This arrangement has delivered between 4 and 6 events per annum, focused on providing researchers with networking and collaboration training and training on developing professional reputations. These training opportunities have been particularly popular with researchers, with 95% of our participants rating the quality of the workshops 'high' and identifying *'the opportunity to network with a diverse range of researchers'* as most valuable.

A direct output of this collaborative training has been the **Research Life project** – a research staff-led initiative that aims to provide web-based collegial discussion between early career researchers and more established, experienced researchers. Using video podcast interviews, the project aims to disseminate knowledge and guidance on different aspects of academic research, ranging from the birth of ideas to the delivery of original work, and the development of different careers: http://www.brunel.ac.uk/research/research-support/research-life.

Better awareness of the value of personal development plans (PDP) and continuous professional development (CPD) has been encouraged. An institutional license for the Vitae RDF planner has enabled us to encourage research staff to use the planner to record and plan their development, which links to the University's new PDR process. We are asking researchers to reflect on their learning and development earlier through the introduction of the Brunel 3D Researcher Development Tool©

for research students. By their first annual reviews, research students are required to record their development in **D**oing, **D**isseminating and **D**eveloping their research, thus conducting an early needs analysis and PDP.

E: Diversity and Equality

Principle 6

Since our 2013 report, the number of employees on research contracts and the female to male ratios have not changed significantly, with 36% of those on fixed-term research contracts being women (see Table below). However, research staff are now better represented throughout the University within decision-making groups (e.g. University Senate, Athena SWAN Committee, University and College Union). The University also submitted 85% of eligible staff to the REF and made special efforts to assess the eligibility of researchers on fixed term contracts. As a result, we submitted one of the highest percentages of eligible staff in the sector.

Only five other UK universities are as ethnically diverse as Brunel. This places us in a unique position with some unique challenges. As such, the University regularly reviews its policies and practices in relation to diversity & equality. Staff network groups (e.g. for BME and LGBT staff) are centrally supported, and the University is re-accrediting its bronze institutional Athena SWAN award (submission November 2015). Our Mathematics department holds a bronze award and two further departments (Computer Science; Electronic and Computer Engineering) and a College (Life and Health Sciences) are submitting individual applications for Athena SWAN awards.

Brunel has developed and launched a new *Equality and Diversity Strategy* which specifically references the University's commitment to meeting the equality implications of the Concordat. CROS 2015 indicates that 84% of respondents agreed that the University is committed to Equality and Diversity (90% in CROS 2013). However, we note that a small number of individual comments have identified gender equality for women as an ongoing issue.

As part of our 2013 action plan, the University conducted women-only career development workshops and *Gender in Research* workshops in support of this issue. A University-wide *Women's Mentoring Scheme* to encourage career development and applications for promotion (resulting in an increase in female promotions) has been launched and has shown good take-up, and 12 places on the Leadership Foundation's Aurora programme for women are sponsored annually. The University continues to include support for gender equality as part of its action plan for 2015.

Furthermore, the support profile of diversity and equality has been raised by the appointment of a Pro-Vice Chancellor (Equality, Diversity and Staff Development) and an Associate Dean for Equality and Diversity (E & D) within every College, further embedding activity and awareness.

Numbers and proportions of research staff at Brunel University, by gender and disability:

	Total	M	F	Disabled	M %	F %	Disabled %
2010-2011	151	91	60	3	60%	40%	2%
2011-2012	181	117	64	4	65%	35%	2%
2012-2013	210	133	77	4	63%	37%	2%
2013-2014	234	154	80	3	66%	34%	1%
2014-2015	228	146	82	2	64%	36%	1%

Future direction and next steps (2015 – 2017)

The Concordat will continue to be implemented under the leadership of the Graduate School, with guidance from the RCIG and integrated support from key University stakeholders. We will build on the successful actions of the preceding four years and in particular will address feedback from the RSA report , CROS and PIRLS and HRE accreditation reviewers.

Further information about our activities and plans are detailed within the Action Plan 2015.

Glossary

APEX - Academic Practice and Professional Excellence Framework

BEEC – Brunel Educational Excellence Centre

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic

BRAMNET – Brunel Research Administrators and Managers Network

BUL – Brunel University London

CROS – Careers in Research Online Survey

E&D – Equality and Diversity team

GS – Graduate School

HR – Human Resources

HRE – HR Excellence (in Research)

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender

MINT – **M**onthly **Int**ernship Scheme for Postdoctoral Researchers

PDC – Professional Development Centre (containing the Graduate School, Careers, Innovation Hub and Modern Languages)

PDP – Professional Development Plan

PDR – Performance and Development Review

PIRLS – Principal Investigators and Research leaders Survey

RCIG – (Researcher) Concordat Implementation Group

RIs – Research Institutes

RSA – Research Staff Association

RSDO – Research Support and Development Office

ULRSD - University Lead for Research Staff Development

VLS – Virtual Learning Environment

Links:

RESEARCH LIFE resource – www.brunel.ac.uk/researchlife /
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1Jdnkv3OPtb1td9lHma0fQ

BUL Concordat implementation plans and strategy - http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/administration/policies-and-other-important-documents