

Oxford Brookes University four-year review: supporting statement

(1) How the internal evaluation was undertaken

Context of the review: a time of positive change and progress

Our four-year review has taken place against a background of positive and dynamic change at Oxford Brookes University (OBU). Our commitment to, and valuing of, our research staff is reflected in our strong performance in the REF2014, where we emerged as one of the top ten UK universities for progress, based on research power (41% increase) since RAE2008. 94% of our research was judged to be internationally recognised and 59% internationally excellent or world-leading.

Since our two-year review in 2014, there have been key changes in our senior management:

- Professor Linda King, herself an active researcher who has developed a highly successful research career at OBU over the last 20 years, was appointed as Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) for Research and with an expanded portfolio encompassing Global Partnerships.
- Professor Anne-Marie Kilday, another active researcher and Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, was appointed to the newly-created PVC portfolio for the Staff Experience, which encompasses staff recognition, development and equality.
- Alison Cross was appointed HR Director shortly after the last review. Since her appointment, we have benefitted greatly from her views, expertise, and previous experience of supporting researchers in research-intensive universities.

Formal mechanisms for ongoing consultation and review

As actioned in our original 2012 'Gap Analysis and Action Plan', the HR Excellence in Research Award has become a standing item on the agenda of the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). This practice is now firmly embedded and will continue, thus ensuring that both our action plan and consideration of how we address the principles of the Concordat are reviewed regularly and formally in the context of our research strategy.

RKEC is an inclusive group, chaired by the PVC Research and Global Partnerships, which encourages and facilitates the input of researchers and their representatives at every level, and across the University. Its members include:

- The Associate Deans for Research & Knowledge Exchange for each of our four faculties
- Research Leads and Research Managers from each faculty, on a rotational basis
- Two research student representatives appointed by the Research Students' Committee
- A member appointed by, and from, the university's Contract Research Staff
- The Commercial and Knowledge Exchange Director from the Research and Business Development Office (RBDO)
- The Research Support Director from RBDO
- The Chair of the Research Degrees Committee
- The Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee.

Members of the committee are responsible for 'feeding down' information from the committee to researchers in their areas and there is close two-way communication between the university RKEC and the four faculty RKECs, which also have broad researcher representation. Thus, the Gap Analysis and Action Plan have been regularly and formally reviewed since we were granted the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2012. The views of researchers have been taken into account at every stage, including the current four-year review process.

Establishment of a working group

As for the two-year review, RKEC agreed the formation of a working group to oversee the four-year review process. As planned after our two-year review, we carefully considered the composition of the group in order that it should best reflect the interests of researchers and, in particular, we ensured that a greater proportion of researchers, and researchers at different levels of seniority and from our four faculties, were included.

The working group was as follows (those who are actively engaged in research are identified *):

- Professor Linda King, PVC Research and Global Partnerships*
- Mrs Alison Cross, Director of HR

- Dr Louise Grisoni, Associate Dean Research and Knowledge Exchange, Faculty of Business*
- Dr Marcel Vellinga, Reader in Anthropology of Architecture and Research Lead, School of Architecture, Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment*
- Dr Barbara Giraud, Senior Lecturer in French, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences*
- Dr Verena Kriechbaumer, Early Career Researcher, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences*
- Mrs Sarah Taylor, Research Support Director, RBDO
- Dr Susan Brooks, University Research Training Co-ordinator and Reader in Cell Biology*

The review

The working group thoroughly reviewed both our original 2012 Gap Analysis and Action Plan and our updated 2014 Action Plan and ensured that all aspects of the Concordat were carefully mapped against university policies, procedures and practice. We paid particular attention to the 2014 Actions and considered whether they were completed, ongoing or whether practice was now embedded and no further action was required at the present time.

We took full advantage of mechanisms for canvassing researchers' views and for reviewing data and evidence of researcher experiences that were available to us. This included analysis of CROS 2015 where, in comparison to CROS 2011 and 2013, and as a result of an action emerging from our 2014 review, we saw an improved response rate (from 16% in 2011 and 2013, to 30% in 2015) giving us greater confidence that the survey better represented researchers views.

In parallel to our four-year review for the HR Excellence in Research Award, we worked towards an application for renewal of our Athena SWAN institutional 'bronze'. This was submitted in April 2016 under the new charter that covers all academic disciplines. The application required in-depth analysis of data on research staff at all levels, their career development and key transition points, including focus groups considering specific aspects of provision for research staff (maternity, paternity and adoption leave, and training and career development). Results of the 2014 university staff survey (administered by Capita Surveys), which achieved a response rate of 55%, were also considered and results for academic staff were given particular scrutiny. Accordingly, the evidence and actions of the Athena SWAN analysis were also taken into account in the current HR Excellence in Research review. One issue that arose from this analysis was that part-time staff overall and female staff in non-STEMM subjects might benefit especially from enhanced career support.

During 2015, a new university Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2015-21 was developed, approved and launched following extensive consultation with researchers. This included, for example, an extended RKEC away day in September 2015, discussion at faculty and university RKECs and e-mail consultation with all research active staff. Again, aspects of the strategy, informed by researcher views, parallel and support our HR Excellence in Research actions, thus embedding them in wider university initiatives.

(2) Key achievements and progress (mapped against key concordat principles)

(a) A new university Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy (principle 1.1, 5.2)

A new university Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2015-2021 was developed, after extensive consultation with researchers, and was launched earlier this year. A key element is the introduction of, and investment in, a Researcher Development Matrix, described in more detail later in section 3(b) below, as part of a new, integrative Academic Development Framework.

(b) Enhanced careers support and guidance for researchers (principle 2.6, 3.2, 3.5, 5.5, 6.3, 6.4, 6.8)

In our original 2012 gap analysis, we identified that while careers advice and guidance for researchers was offered, it should be strengthened and steps taken to raise awareness of its availability.

To raise awareness of the provision to researchers via the Careers Centre we have created a dedicated Researchers page on the Careers website, produced high-quality colour fliers which have been distributed at induction and other events, and via e-mails from the Faculty Research Managers who now also send reminder e-mails to research staff for every upcoming event. Attendance at careers training events has risen notably. Attendance at events increased by 35% in 2013-2014 and 158% in 2014-15 in comparison with 2012-13, with 118 participants attending 25 hours of bespoke training during 2014-15. The number and range of events has also been enhanced. Popular events in

2014-15 included 'managing an academic career' (34 participants) and 'enhancing personal effectiveness using MBTI' (30 participants across two workshops).

In addition to core provision, we piloted a 'researcher careers pathways' event aimed at early career researchers in January 2014. As a result of feedback from participants, we reviewed and revised the content and ran a repeat event in January 2016. This was attended by 76 participants and in evaluation, 95% of those who completed evaluations (40) said that they would 'recommend this event to others'. This will continue as a biennial event.

To support career progression of more senior research-active staff, in 2015 we initiated a series of 'promotion roadshows' exploring the criteria for promotion to principal lecturer, reader and professor through our five different promotion pathways. This included showcasing researcher case studies of promotion through different routes. Roadshows have been well attended and their impact is demonstrated through an increase in applications for promotion from 33 applications for principal lecturer / reader / professor in 2014-15 to 41 in 2015-16.

(c) Improved communication with, and provision for, newly appointed researchers (principle 2.3, 3.3, 3.6, 4.11)

In our original 2012 gap analysis, we identified that while the 'Your First Three Years' programme for newly-appointed research staff <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/research-support/training-events/research-methods-and-management-training-for-research-staff/> was well established, not all staff eligible for the programme were successfully being identified by HR and invited to attend. The programme introduces people, practices, policies and support for research-active staff. We reviewed the way in which staff were identified and invited and, as a result, have seen an increase in uptake of the programme from 42% of those eligible attending in 2012-13, to 48% in 2013-14 and 72% in 2014-15. We reviewed and revised the programme content in light of participant feedback in 2012-13. It will be integrated into the new Researcher Development Matrix, described in section 3(b).

(d) A mentoring scheme for researchers (principle 3.8, 4.14, 5.4, 7.1)

In our original 2012 gap analysis, we identified that while a university mentoring scheme existed, it was little used by research staff. We therefore developed a mentoring scheme specifically for research staff. It was launched in April 2013 and is now recruiting its fourth cohort of mentor-mentee matches. The scheme is open to all research-active staff from early career researchers to senior professorial staff. It attracted 39 mentees in 2013-14, 31 in 2014-15 and 23 in 2015-16. The fall-off in uptake may reflect an initial need for mentoring being met, followed by a more steady state of new mentees coming forward, but at this early stage in the scheme's history this is not possible to evidence. Details of the scheme can be found at <https://www2.brookes.ac.uk/research-support/mentoring>.

We undertook a full review of the first two years of the scheme in 2015. An email questionnaire was sent to 85 individuals who had acted as mentor, mentee or both in 2013-14 or 2014-15. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. For example, in response to the question 'how would you rate your experience of the mentoring relationship?' from 1 'not at all positive' to 10 'very positive', the average score was 8.4. In response to the question 'to what extent did you / your mentee achieve their goals by the end of the mentoring period?' from 1 'not at all' to 10 'completely', the average score was 7.8. The mentoring scheme will support the new Researcher Development Matrix described in section 3(b).

(e) Commitment to equality diversity and inclusion (principle 6.4, 6.10)

The university has been a member of the Athena SWAN Charter since 2009 and in our 2012 review for the HR Excellence in Research Award, we identified an action to apply for institutional 'bronze' status. We achieved institutional 'bronze' in 2012 and went on to apply for, and achieve, departmental 'silver' for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences in 2015. We have just (April 2016) applied for renewal of institutional 'bronze' under the new Athena SWAN charter, thus including all subject areas, not just STEM.

(3) Strategy for the next 4 years (see actions highlighted in green in the action plan where clear mapping to key concordat principles is given)

(a) Ongoing review of good practice through the HR Excellence in Research Award

The original 2012 Gap Analysis and Action Plan was drawn up during a time of restructuring and change within the university. As a result of positive engagement with the HR Excellence in Research Award process, many aspects of good practice are now firmly embedded and this will be an ongoing legacy. Awareness of, and compliance with, the Concordat will also continue to be ensured by formal review at university RKEC meetings, where it will continue to be a standing item on the agenda for regular discussion.

(b) Enhanced support for career development, a new Researcher Development Matrix (actions 3, 4, 5)

Career development of researchers remains a clear priority. A major project begun in 2015-16 is the integration of research, teaching and learning, and leadership development programmes under an integrative Academic Development Framework. This will emphasise the interconnectedness of the strands in terms of careers pathways, and support research-active staff at every level of seniority in diverse career progression routes.

One element of this is a new Researcher Development Matrix. This initiative, a key element of the university Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2015-2021 (see 2(a) above), has been developed in wide consultation with research-active staff at every level and across the university. It will build on our success in enhancing career support for early career researchers (see 2(b) above) and integrate this and existing provision for newly-appointed research active staff (the 'Your First Three Years' programme described in 2(c)) with enhanced support for research-active staff at every level of career progression. It will be rolled out in phases over the next two years. We will review uptake and feedback from participants, and it will be developed and shaped in response to this.

Three strands of support and training will be developed for: (1) early career researchers (2) mid-career research-active staff (e.g. senior research fellows, lecturers, senior lecturers) (3) senior research-active staff (e.g. readers, programme and research leads, professors).

The research staff mentoring scheme (see 2(d)) will be integral to the matrix and we will encourage greater research staff engagement with mentoring and measure success by seeing an increase in applications from mentees who specifically request mentoring to support an application for promotion (in 2015-16, for example, no mentees specifically requested mentoring for promotion through the programme, although informal mentoring with this aim did take place). The 'researcher careers pathways' event (see 2(b) above) for early career researchers will continue as a biennial event. It will alternate with a new event for mid-career research-active staff 'successful senior researcher stories', and be integrated with promotion roadshows (see section 2(b)) to showcase diverse role models and publicise the support for different career and promotion pathways. To enhance this, we will develop and produce a 'parent, carer, academic' booklet based on the Royal Society's 'parent, carer, scientist' role models publication. We will continue to assess the success of these and other career development initiatives by reviewing attendance at events by researchers, collecting feedback from them, and acting to continually improve provision.

We have also introduced a new centrally-funded research leave scheme. Success will be measured by recipients of funding being successfully returned to the REF2020.

(c) Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (actions 1, 7, 8)

In parallel with our working towards retaining the HR Excellence in Research Award, the university will continue to strengthen its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion through not only robust internal procedures, policies and initiatives but also through working towards application for departmental Athena SWAN awards. As previously described, we have applied for renewal of institutional 'bronze' through the new charter (April 2016). We have established a steering group to oversee the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences 'silver' award action plan and intend to apply for renewal in 2017. The faculty of Technology, Design and Environment will re-apply for 'bronze' in November 2016. If we are successful in achieving institutional 'bronze' this year, then our faculties of Business and Humanities and Social Sciences will work towards application for departmental awards in 2018. Success will be measured by our retaining institutional and faculty of Health and Life Sciences awards and achieving awards in the other faculties. Alongside this, we are proactively working towards BME recruitment and career progression. We are embedding and developing practice and policies in order to work towards application for the Race Equality Charter Mark as well as LGBT inclusivity, having become a Stonewall Diversity Champion in 2015.