

HR Excellence in Research

EIGHT-YEAR EVALUATION REPORT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS AT

Queen Mary University of London

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Focus Groups with the Blizdocs Research Staff Association (8 postdoctoral researchers from the Blizard Institute)

Institutional Context

Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) is organised into three Faculties: Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry (SMD), Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), and Science and Engineering (S&E), that are further sub-divided down into 24 Schools and Institutes, located across three main research campuses in The City and East London. QMUL has approximately 664 researchers, further detailed by type in Appendices A & B.

Support for QMUL researchers is a collective effort that includes several academic and professional services stakeholders. This is currently being reviewed along with the support provision for postgraduate students by the Director of Research Services, Dr Sharon Ellis, who will report findings later this year. The Researcher Development team (RD) leads on continued personal development (CPD) for researchers. Following a restructure, RD will sit within the newly launched QM Academy (within the office of the Principal; due to launch in March 2020) with reporting into the VP-Education (Prof Stephanie Marshall) and the new VP-Research (Prof Andrew Livingston).

The impact of the launch of the QM Academy and the findings of the review by Dr Ellis may identify new work or priorities, and thus changes to the actions reported in this plan may result.

How Internal Assessment was Undertaken

I undertook an internal review of the progress against AP2018 in consultation with HR colleagues, and relevant stakeholders in the QMUL research community, including researchers (through interviews, surveys), Faculty/ School/ Institute research managers and administrators, researcher developers and senior academics. Data was collated from sources including Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2019 (192 respondents; approx. 30% of those on research contracts), and the experience of researchers across QMUL through a focus group with the Blizdocs, the Research Staff Association (RSA) for the postdocs at the Blizzard Institute (one of the larger postdoc populations at QMUL), engagement data and participant feedback from various development providers at QMUL, and HR Systems (staff appraisal) data. Examples of good practice were collected through 1-to-1 consultation with research staff, Athena SWAN self-assessment teams, research managers and local research staff groups and research managers based in Schools and Institutes. I drafted AP2020, mapped to the 2008 version of the Concordat with the Head of RD, Dr Anna Price. Additional input and feedback was received from postdoctoral researchers from each faculty (Dr Rosemary Hall from HSS, Dr Jose Torres-Perez from S&E, and Dr Claire Pardiou from SMD, who also attended the focus group), the Faculty Strategic (HR) Partner for S&E, Samantha Holborn, and Prof David Kellsell, a senior member of academic staff who has run early career researcher funding and recruitment programmes at the Blizzard Institute. Final approval of AP2020 involved the Vice Principal for Research and the Director of Research Services. This feedback informed the final action plan and report submitted to Vitae for review and [published online](#) on Friday 24 January, 2020.

This report details our method of assessment, the progress made at QMUL in implementing the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers since our 6-year report and action plan (AP2018), and our new aims moving forward, in the Action Plan for 2020-22 (AP2020). AP2018 aims are colour-coded by status (**Green** – aim complete/good progress; **Amber** – incomplete/progress is slow; **Red** – progress stalled) and summarised in table form in Appendix C (see accompanying Appendices Document). Details of compliance and aims moving forward with estimated time frames and success measures for AP2020 are listed by relevant Concordat Principle below are summarised in the accompanying Action Plan document. Relevant metrics and success measures or deadlines are reported, as appropriate.

Highlighted Achievements

- **Improved processes to record appraisal completion rates of researchers, and a >10% increase in number of researchers reporting appraisals useful for focusing on career aspirations and identifying development opportunities** (AP2018: Aim 1) following induction training introduced for both managers and appraisees.
- **Growth of QMUL's RD and training programme to include more courses to develop intellectual abilities domain (A) and academic writing** also saw a **19% increase in engagement**, with approximately 72% of researchers attending at least 2 workshops, classes or events (AP2018: Aim 3)
- **[QConsult Researchers](#) placed 67 researchers into bespoke consultancy projects in and around London.** Participants report a better knowledge of their skills and in a better position to achieve their career goals.
- More than **double the response obtained from CROS and PIRLS surveys** obtained in 2019 (AP2018-Aim 7)
- **QMUL holds 9 Equality and Diversity awards** including an institutional Athena SWAN Silver award, seven departmental level awards, and is a Stonewall Diversity Champion providing external validation of our efforts to making QMUL a more inclusive institution.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

Context

QMUL's Performance Appraisal Scheme involves an online form that researchers fill out that has space to contemplate career goals, the year's achievements and experience, document CPD, and then set aims for the coming year, along with planned developmental activity for the year. The appraisal process is supported by separate training for appraisers and appraisees that was introduced in the summer of 2017. The online form is meant to frame a discussion between the researcher and their line manager, where they agree on upcoming year's aims. Yearly completion rates are monitored during the appraisal period that runs from April to August of each year. During our previous reporting period, QMUL could only report overall staff completion rates.

Recent Achievements and Progress

(AP2018 - Aim 1 | Action Complete): reporting on researcher progress and completion rates in our staff appraisal was in place by November 2017. Institutional average engagement rates for research staff are about 74%, with highest completion rates in our science and medical faculties. CROS 2019 respondents reported a greater usefulness of yearly appraisals in helping them focus on career aspirations and in identifying development opportunities, compared to those queried in 2017. New online appraisal forms and guidance for managers in conducting appraisal discussions were developed by 2018 that will come into use for the 2020 appraisal period.

Aims for the next 2 years

Aim 1 – Review appraisal systems for researchers. Levels of engagement with staff appraisal mechanisms are in line with other institutions in the sector, however completion rates across faculties vary significantly and the usefulness of these processes (fed back through CROS 2019) is not universally supported. Guidance was produced last academic year but will not be implemented until the 2020 appraisal period. A review will be conducted following the closure of the 2020 appraisal period (**Sept-Dec 2020**), exploring practices across all academic units, focusing on those where completion rates have been historically lower than institutional averages. Results will be fed forward to appropriate stakeholders (e.g. HR/OPD and School/Institutes). **Aim 1a – Develop guidance and training for managers for conducting appraisals with research staff** informed by this review with training to be piloted in **Sept-Dec 2021**. Success Measure: Appraisal completion rates to be equalised across the institutions; 10% increase in overall usefulness as reported in CROS.

Principles 3 & 4: Support and Career Development

Context

QMUL [aims](#) to create a world-class research environment focused on our strengths, to attract research talent from all corners of the globe, and develop them to flourish and work across disciplinary, organisational, and geographical boundaries. Researchers are invited to attend an all-staff QM Welcome event run by our Communications team that runs three times per year (attended by approximately 33% of newly hired researchers). CPD for research staff is a collaborative effort delivered by RD, Schools and Institutes, Careers and Enterprise, Occupational and Professional Development, and [other providers](#).

Recent Achievements and Progress

(AP2018: Aims 2 /2a | Action carried through to AP2020 – Aim 2): welcome packs for researchers were developed collaboratively between local and institutional RSAs in November 2017 as means to help new colleagues acclimatise to their new environments. This aim was intended to provide a means for keeping the information up to date, together with producing a short leaflet version to be distributed when researchers sign their contracts. These are available online through local RSAs (e.g. [WHRI Postdoctoral Network](#)), although the leaders on this action, the QRSA, disbanded in December 2018 (see Principle 5) as researchers moved on to subsequent posts before replacements were found.

(AP2018 – Aim 3 | Action Complete): Over 20 courses have been added by RD and Careers, with five new courses specifically to support development in knowledge and intellectual abilities (RDF domain A), a category of desired training that is often fed-back via CROS and RD programme feedback requests. An abbreviated list of opportunities that were added or modified during this reporting period is available in Appendix D. Engagement with QMUL's RD programme saw a 19% increase in attendance since our last report in 2018, meaning over 70% of our research staff attended at least two courses or workshops per year in our CPD programme, exceeding our target aims from AP2018 (Aim3), suggesting a good culture of engagement with CPD amongst our researchers. [One-to-one support](#) is available as via a research management consultation, writing advice from a Royal Literary Fund fellow, Careers Advice, and Developmental Coaching. [QConsult Researchers](#) is an award-winning consultancy programme run by our Careers team that places researchers in non-academic organisations to participate in an interdisciplinary group consultancy project. Enough funding to run 3 rounds of the programme was secured since our last report and has

placed for 67 PhD and postdoctoral researchers in interdisciplinary consultancy teams, contracted to deliver projects for host organisations across London. Of researchers who have participated, more than 80% report an increased understanding of the sector they consulted with, a greater awareness of their employability their transferrable skills, and consider themselves in a better position to achieve their career goals.

(AP2018 – Aim 3a | Action in progress): AP2018 outlined an intention to form a ‘researcher training board’ which would regularly review local and institutional RD provision, together with a drive to increase engagement with our RD programme. The Director of Research Services began a review of postgraduate and early-career researcher support in mid-2019 that is currently ongoing and will report findings later this academic year. This review along with annual internal reviews of the RD programme functionally replace this training board aim.

Aims for the next 2 years

Outcomes and actions resulting from the review of Research Support Services will be reported in our next report and action plan (AP2022). **Aim 2 - A new series of researcher induction events and resources** to better integrate new researchers who join QMUL to follow on from institution wide induction events (3x per year) to include RD, Careers, and HR staff. The first researcher induction to **coincide with May/June 2020 QM Welcome event**; updated researcher welcome packs **by August 2020**; online portal for these resources to ensure information is kept current **by December 2020**. Success Measure: Attendance from at least half of the researchers attending the institutional induction event, with a majority (over 66%) reporting them useful (as reported through event feedback); over 50% engagement of new-hire researchers with online welcome resources.

Aim 3: Explore the barriers of researcher engagement with CPD provision. QMUL researchers engage well with our CPD programme with over 70% attending at least two sessions per year, and according to CROS 2019, about 2/3 of our researchers engage in 1-5 days of CPD, a level comparable to other UK HEIs. However, 13% are either not engaging in CPD or doing so less than 1 day per year. With Concordat 2019 suggesting a minimum of 10 days CPD, and in line with the recommendations of the Roberts Review (2002), we will explore some of the barriers to engagement with CPD reported in CROS by running focus groups with researchers and managers of researchers from each faculty (proposed timeline of events in Appendices E and F).

As part of this, we will investigate and trial a better way for researchers to track and plan their CPD, so that we can ensure our researchers are maximising their development opportunities whilst a staff member here. QMUL is in the process of procuring a new education management system scheduled for implementation in September 2020. This tool offers functionality in this area that we will investigate for its fitness to offer researchers a simple tool to help them track and plan their CPD activity. Success Measures: Focus groups with researchers and managers to run with representation from all faculties. Contingent upon the tool being fit for purpose, feedback from researchers participating in the trial to be collected in **Nov 2021**, with a majority (>66%) of participants finding the process/tool useful to record and plan their CPD.

Aim 4 – Increase coaching and mentoring opportunities for Researchers. Yearly mentoring cohorts are small (approx. 5% of researchers) and efforts are primarily aimed at postdoctoral researchers. As part of this aim, RD will investigate why researchers opt to not engage with mentoring (CROS 2019: 36%), or those that would like to engage with it haven’t (38%, down from 47% in 2017). The review will include input from focus groups with researchers (to run in **May-June 2020**) and investigate whether the centralised delivery model should be augmented to a local model (or some mixture of the two) for some Schools or Institutes (development from **Sept-Dec 2020**, and **trialled throughout 2021**). Success Measure: a doubling in the size of mentoring cohort (approx. 10% research staff) for the trial, with Actions to follow in AP2022 directed at being able to offer mentoring to all researchers who desire it.

Principle 5: Researchers’ Responsibility

Context

(AP2018 – Aims 4/4a/4b/5 | Aim carried through in AP2020 – Aim 5): The QRSA, an institution-wide RSA that ran from 2015 until 2018, disbanded as members moved on without finding replacements. This dynamic is unfortunately common in RSAs, given the transience of postdoctoral researchers’ contracts. The QRSA’s remaining members went on to support local RSAs within their own Schools or Institutes, like the Blizdocs (Blizard Institute), or the WHRI Postdoctoral Network. AP2018 featured several actions that the QRSA were to lead on, including expand its representation across QMUL, set out terms of service, set out a comms strategy, and review researcher engagement with decision making processes. Moving forward, instead of trying to maintain an institutional RSA alongside local

efforts, efforts will shift to supporting the continuity (or establishment) of local RSAs and bringing these local groups together periodically to network and share practice.

RD has surveyed Schools and Institutes for examples of researcher involvement in decision making structures, and some examples include representation on research (strategy) committees, recruitment panels, Athena SWAN committees, and committees related to strategic frameworks (e.g. REF, and TEF). We present a summary of these along with other examples of good researcher support practice on our [Concordat webpage](#).

Aims for the next 2 years

Aim 5: RD will provide greater support to help maintain local RSAs to ensure greater continuity of these organisations that help support and amplify the researcher's voice within an organisation. In addition, QMUL will enable a regular event that will bring all local RSAs together to share experience and practice. RD will carry out: a systematic review of local RSA status with action and succession plans moving forward by **March-April 2020**; event to run in **May 2020** to support new RSAs forming. Success Measures: first QM-wide RSA meeting by October 2020 to include representation from new or revitalised RSAs from at least 5 Schools or Institutes.

Principle 6: Equality and Diversity

Context

The core values communicated in our [Strategy 2030](#) reflect the sentiments of this principle, ensuring that we provide an inclusive, nurturing and supporting environment to all our staff and students. We hold 9 externally-accredited [Equality and Diversity awards](#). CROS (2015-2019) respondents echo these sentiments, with over 85% of respondents agreeing that QMUL is committed to equality and diversity.

Recent Achievements and Progress

(AP2018 – Aim 6 | Action Complete): QMUL is compliant with the reporting required by the Minority Act (2010), and published a [Report on Gender and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic \(BAME\) Pay Gaps in 2019](#). Therein, we reported a mean gender pay gap of 13.7% (mean HE sector benchmark: 14%) and a BAME pay gap of 21.9% (no sector data available yet). We will continue to report these on an annual basis, along with proposing actions and improvements to better understand and close these gaps, such as continued investment in unconscious bias training for staff, greater support for transgender staff, and a targeted action plan to close the pay gap between BAME and non-BAME female staff.

Aims for the next 2 years

QMUL will be launching a new dignity disclosure service in 2020 to better handle and investigate breaches in workplace dignity (e.g. bullying and harassment). Queen Mary [became a signatory](#) of the Race Equality Charter Mark in July 2018. A requirement of membership is that the university apply for an award within 3 years. **Aim 6: QMUL will be submitting for an ECU Race Equality Charter award by February 2021.** Success Measure: Bronze ECU Race Charter Awarded by **August 2021**.

Principle 7: Implementation and Review

Context

Biennial research staff survey, CROS, provides an excellent feedback instrument to capture the QMUL researcher experience of our environment and culture, our employment and management practices, and our programmes of researcher career development, as well as to benchmark these against appropriate benchmarking groups. Response rates were traditionally about 10-12% of the researcher population.

Recent Achievements and Progress

(AP2018 – Aim 7 | Action Complete): A new communications and engagement strategy was launched that resulted in a 2.6-fold increase of engagement with CROS (surveying approx. 1/3 of researchers) and a 2.2-fold increase of engagement with the Principle Investigator and Research Leaders Surveys (PIRLS), from 2017.

Aims moving forward

These approaches are now adopted as standard practice, and the level of response represents our new institutional benchmark. We are aware that the new CEDARS survey will replace CROS and PIRLS, as it is mapped to the 2019 Concordat. We intend to use is instrument to help benchmark our researchers' perceptions of our environment, culture, and practices as a research organisation. In addition, we will **(Aim 7) create a new Concordat Implementation Group (CIG)** to oversee future action plans and to review progress. The CIG will include representation from researchers and managers of researchers across all three Faculties, be supported by the Queen Mary Academy, and report to the Senior Executive Team (SET). CIG will **announce its membership and meet for the first time by October 2020**, and **declare its Terms of Service, reporting lines and processes by February 2021**.