

The [Researcher Development Working Group](#) (RDWG) was set up following Kent's award submission and is the focus for progress against the [University's excellence action plan](#) and for our compliance with the Concordat principles. The working group includes a membership of researchers and research managers from each of the three Faculties, and key professional services representation and is a good example of collaborative working across the University. RDWG meets four times per year – usually three to four weeks before the meeting of the Research & Innovation Board (RIB). RDWG reports to RIB which reports to Senate. The Working Group is supported by an assigned HR Learning & Development adviser.

Research and the effective dissemination of new knowledge are at the heart of what the University of Kent does. Our **vision** is to facilitate a strong, supportive system to help staff develop their research careers and to engage with research staff across all three faculties to identify key areas for continuous improvement.

Organisations that hold the HR Excellence in Research Award submit evidence of progress through internal and external assessments. The timeline for University of Kent is for us to complete an internal self-assessment (May 2015) followed by a full external reassessment (May 2017).

RDWG progress against the HR Excellence action plan

The RDWG Work Plan covers nine themes distilled from the full 28-page [HR Excellence in Research action plan](#). A tenth underpinning theme entitled Communicate and Consult was added.

1. Implement and monitor the Reflect, Plan, Develop process ('appraisal') for research staff and provide training to research managers/academics in facilitating positive RPD discussions
2. Develop the new 'Staff Connect' HR information system to monitor RPD, uptake of development opportunities and to support workforce planning for researchers across the University
3. Document and demonstrate evidence of new skills being developed and applied by researchers (e.g. teaching, managing) through HR 'Staff Connect', network events, training/development and role models
4. Develop and encourage the continued development of a network of researchers through researchers' forum meetings for all research staff and encouragement of local researcher network meetings in each faculty, in a form relevant to faculty research staff
5. Enable access to management training for research staff in supervisory positions, as a continuation of current leadership development for academic leaders and professional service managers.
6. Develop and promote personal development tools (including the [Vitae Researcher Development Framework](#)) for use by researchers in line with the University's Personal Development planning process (PDP)
7. Expand and signpost researcher development opportunities (HR, Induction, the Graduate School, UELT)
8. Enhance external profile through tangible progress with Athena SWAN, Two Ticks, Stonewall and Vitae
9. Recognise the importance of support for researchers through career pathways which are relevant both to the University and to an individual's career
10. Communicate and consult internally and externally regarding all initiatives.

Examples of progress against each theme:

Theme 1: HR has carried out a review of RPD including input from a researcher perspective. Information specifically for researchers is now included in the new RPD booklet / website and revised RPD training will include examples relevant to researchers.

Theme 2: Changes to the 'Staff Connect' project could impact on some commitments made in the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan. This will be reflected in our May 2015 review report with actions identified that are now more appropriate to the 2015-2017 period.

Themes 3-7 are being addressed through, for example, the Early Career Researcher Network and the development of a new web-based resource centre. The 'Researcher Development at Kent' website will be the central University access point to development opportunities and other support for researchers. The new website will ensure that development provision is comprehensive and clearly signposted, so that research staff are better positioned to discuss career options with their manager. The website will set out, in one place, the range of development support that is currently available across several centres in the University (Faculties, Schools and Central Services) and externally. Designing the website is highlighting gaps in current provision which RDWG is addressing.

Theme 8: Researcher development aspects were highlighted in preparing Athena SWAN applications given gender differentials to career progression, particularly in the Sciences. Five School applications across the Faculty of Sciences were submitted in November 2014 and one award has been granted (SMSAS). The Athena SWAN application process led to links on researcher development with Schools not previously engaged with the HR Excellence agenda. It is anticipated that the Gender Equality Mark for Humanities and Social Sciences will also influence researcher development planning.

Theme 9: In addition to career development resources that will be made available through the website, RDWG are working with the Careers and Employability Service (CES) to highlight how they provide support to contract research staff.

Theme 10: RDWG conducts an extensive programme of researcher and research leader consultation and involvement to ensure that researcher views are taken into account. Ongoing researcher involvement has built on what was started in 2013. That initial review enabled the development of a number of new researcher network groups in schools as a forum for researchers and encouragement of the 'researcher voice'.

For more information on researcher development support at Kent please email s.richards@kent.ac.uk