University of Bristol: CROS report 2019 – key findings

1. Demography, conditions, matters arising

Response to CROS

- Bristol’s CROS return was significantly higher than that of the Russel Group (RG) average. 48% in comparison to 30% (CROS survey 2017: 39%).
- Length of time researchers are at Bristol is marginally higher than that of the RG average (57% vs 60% < 4 years, 22% vs 17% > 8 years), and experience elsewhere is lower (52% with no other UK experience, vs 48%), (69% with no non-UK experience vs 63%).

Workplace offering in comparison to the RG

- Bristol has slightly more part-time researchers (18% vs 12%) of those 81% of p/t are female and 54% of p/t have been at Bristol over 10 years.
- We have considerably more open-ended contracts (with fixed-term funding) (42% vs 15%), and fewer fixed-term contracts (42% vs 72%).
- Redeployment is almost double the RG average at 7% (vs 4%), and there is evidence of ‘rolling contracts’ – i.e. 65% of researchers at 6 years’ service, 45% of researchers at 8 years’, 37% at 10 years state that they’ve only had 1 contract.
- A greater percentage of contracted time is allocated to research (87% vs 77% at over 80% research).
- We have a slightly greater degree of ‘Brexit-proof’ funding security (51% vs 38% UKRI and UK Gov).

Typical researcher profile in comparison to the RG

- Age balance and length of work as a researcher, is roughly in line with the RG. However, there are predominantly two communities represented:
  - Under 6 years’ experience = 50/50 male female.
  - Over 10 years’ experience = 65% female and only 25% male (stated = 90%).
- Gender of respondents is 5% higher male than RG average (45% vs 40%). This is up 3% on 2017.
- Disability is 2% lower than the RG average (2% vs 4%).
- Sexual orientation is marginally more heterosexual than the RG (84% vs 81%). LGBT numbers have dropped, with a shift to ‘prefer not to say’.
- British national is 8% higher (63% vs 54%) – at the expense of EU states (19% vs 28%), and UK nationals are 88% white (vs 78%)

Researcher awareness, engagement, agency

Researchers at Bristol are less aware of issues of ‘fairness’, linked to “… age, ethnicity, disability, gender, caring responsibilities…” than their RG counterparts. The percentage of staff who answered ‘don’t know’, when asked if they felt staff were treated fairly were: linked to age: 25%, linked to ethnicity: 28%, disability: 38%, gender: 18% and caring responsibilities: 32%. With Bristol researcher averages for ‘Don’t know’ up to 13% higher than the RG average.
## National initiatives:

Similarly, in terms of national initiatives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Bristol researchers who have ‘never heard of it’</th>
<th>RG researchers who have ‘never heard of it’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athena Swan</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECU Race Equality Charter</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordat to Support Research Integrity</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REF</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</table>
2. Career development. Awareness, planning and engagement

Career strategy and planning
Researchers at Bristol are more aware than those in the wider RG that the university encourages them to engage in personal and career development (80%, vs 76% in the other RG). However, fewer than the RG average have a career plan (46% vs 52% in the other RG) or maintain a record of ongoing CPD (51% vs 60% in the other RG).

Uptake of training
Uptake of training is relatively low: 40% of Bristol researchers did one day or less of training in the last 12 months compared to 31% nationally.

Researcher engagement
Evidence from CROS suggests that researchers at Bristol feel more integrated within their local (79%), and wider (64%) disciplinary communities, than they do within the university’s researcher community (57%).
3. Information provision, and informed choices

Researcher awareness and signposting
CROS data indicates that Bristol Clear has been successful in reaching researchers. The unit is recognised by 86% of researchers, with a weekly email readership of over 60%, and services such as the Clear mentoring scheme is known by over 80% of researchers.

It is, in part, from this improved communication that we have raised the CROS response rate to approximately 50%.

Increased visibility has led to an increase in researchers engaging with information supplied to them. From 2017 to 2019, awareness of the Research Staff Hub website rose from 45% of researchers aware, to 84% aware. Rises were also seen in awareness of the general Academic Staff Development web pages, and information about Promotion and Progression.

Joiners information and orientation
One gap identified by CROS is in the information and initial orientation support provided to new researchers. Bristol researchers are less likely to be provided with documentation and information about their roles than their colleagues nationally.

This is a considerable issue for those who have previously worked or studied at Bristol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Worked or studied at Bristol immediately before taking a RS contract</th>
<th>Arrived at Bristol from outside</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Were not provided with a job description or other documentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were not offered local induction</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were not offered institutional induction</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of documentation, this situation is improving for more recent appointees. However, the availability of induction remains static.

As 50% of our new researchers come from within the university, a large proportion of research staff miss out on essential induction activities.

Career expectations
The challenge of communicating the reality of postdoc careers to researchers is shared by the sector as a whole. Between 2017 and 2019, an increase in expecting a research only role in HE was observed at Bristol.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bristol 2017 CROS</th>
<th>RG 2017 CROS</th>
<th>Bristol 2019 CROS</th>
<th>RG 2019 CROS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expect a research only role in HE</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Navigating the employment environment

Personal, and PI impact

33% of our research staff expect a long-term career in HE research. However, only 20% of our researchers have a ‘clear understanding of what they need to do to progress’ as a member of research staff on Pathway 2.

In addition to quantitative data, CROS also captures qualitative comments.

After comments regarding productivity (259), the next largest number of comments (176) concerned perceptions of career progression processes, with the next largest number again (145) addressing perceptions of ‘fairness’ in the initial allocation of roles and grades.

43% of our researchers suggest that research staff grades are not allocated fairly, and although 18% suggest that the Progression and Promotion policy is clear and transparent, only 8% believe that other research staff are progressed or promoted fairly, transparently, and consistently in real life.

They cite variance both between (14%) and within (26%) Schools and point to a wide range of reasons including (in rough order):

- Lack of consistent connection between role description, researcher performance and grade.
- Under costing of roles to either/and keep costs down, free up funds locally.
- PI variance and individual researcher agency.
- Non-progressivity of roles, and glass ceilings.

Researchers also report feeling substantially powerless to either negotiate better terms, or challenge inconsistencies. Beyond their PI, 60% of researchers ‘don’t know’ where to find information, or who to ask.

Staff Review

In these circumstances, regular engagements with supervisors/line-managers through staff review, become crucial.

In this area, we largely match the wider RG for completion, at 71%, and are higher than the RG for usefulness (66% versus 58%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>Not useful</td>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>Not useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify strengths and achievements</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading to training or other CPD</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing personal progress</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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</table>
Leading to changes in work practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant applications</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing resources</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervising staff</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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As an additional note, we differ considerably from the RG is in our researchers’ belief (over 20% versus 10% in the sector) that it is their responsibility to initiate a staff review.

**Indications of individual researcher agency**

CROS reports that 50% more male, early career researchers (< 2 years in post) hear of their role by word of mouth, than do female researchers (30% vs 20%). This suggests that, even at the point of awareness of a role, information is reaching different communities in significantly different ways.

CROS also demonstrates that, the extent to which researchers agree that the institution both recognises and values their contributions, varies by gender depending on the activity. In this table, while the very ‘visible’ work on grant applications and publications is perceived as valued almost equally, the less visible ‘managing resources’ and ‘supervising’ teaching’ is seen by females to be less valued and recognised.

**Value and agency**

A consistent issue across HE, including at Bristol, is the extent to which researchers feel that they are valued by their host organisations. In 2019, UoB researchers added a number of questions to CROS which explored this issue and the extent to which researchers feel valued and recognised by the organisation.

**Voice**

In 2017, 52% of researchers agreed that they had opportunities to participate in decision making processes. In 2019, that number was 47%.

There is clear evidence that voice is directly linked to scale. While 63% of researchers at Bristol feel that they are heard, and can influence their group/department, only 24% believe the same of the university as a whole.

**Research environment**

A linked area of perceived value that figures prominently in CROS, is the extent to which researchers perceive the university supporting them to deliver their work.
49% of our researchers believe that they are not as effective in their work (the wording was ‘productive’) as they could be.

The reasons for this vary, but are (with ranking appended for male and female researchers, see below):

- Inefficiency and other issues with wider infrastructure and organisational units (frequent complaints are about IT tools and support, finance, HR, administrative issues etc.) (male = 1st, female = 2nd)
- Well-being, mental health, perceptions of value, community membership (male = 3rd, female = 1st)
- Supervision and guidance by line-managers (mostly too little, occasionally too much) (male = insignificant, female = 4th)
- Additional work roles (teaching, admin, etc.) (male = 2nd, female = 3rd)
- Environmental (noise and distractions, lack of working space) (male = 4th, female = 5th)
- The need to be looking for future employment, job-security (male = 5th, female 6th)

Again, there is a clear gender difference here, with male researchers suggesting that they become more (up to 60%) efficient during the first few years of their research career, while female researcher move in the opposite direction, becoming less effective (to 40%) by mid-career.

Additional working hours

79% of our researchers work more than their contracted hours (on average 5 more per week) with 65% of those stating that one reason is that they need to do the extra time to complete their contracted work.

The areas that fall by the wayside, due to time pressure, are in generic and specific career development. On average, only 25% of researchers suggest they have enough time within their working week to

- Write applications for funding
- Engage in career planning
- Develop opportunities for secondments and placements
- Produce additional publications
- Develop their own research autonomy/visibility/networks