

2009 GLOBAL HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AWARD FROM THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS LTD (IFTDO)

WHAT IS A PWE?

PWE stands for Positive Working Environment, a process with the aim of making working life at the University of Bristol, UK, productive, rewarding, enjoyable and healthy for all colleagues - 'A Best Place to Work.' For its PWE initiative, the University has won many awards. It was selected for one of the three 2009 Global Human Resource Development Award awards from the International Federation of Training and Development Organisations Ltd (IFTDO) for its comprehensive people-oriented Performance Management initiative. The IFTDO Global HRD Award was recently instituted to recognize high performing and innovative organizations. The announcement appears at its website and in its Newsletters. These awards are a new development for IFTDO and recognizes at an international level those contributions to the development of HRD best practice and research. Ensure that your best practitioners are represented by nominating them now. An international award winner brings credit and recognition to the winner and their parent institution/organization.

Also, according to a '2009 Best Places to Work in Academia' survey conducted by 'The Scientist' magazine, Bristol University was identified, besides the United States, as the third best research institution to for life scientists to work at. In addition, the University holds the Employer of the Year award given by local training providers for its commitment to apprentice development.

IFTDO described the PWE initiative as *"an example of outstanding leadership and vision combined with excellent practice resulting in improved motivation and performance."*

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

During the summer of 2003, the University commissioned The UK Work Foundation to carry out a staff survey - perhaps the most thorough one ever undertaken in its history. This survey identified the University's strengths and weaknesses as an employer. It showed the need to get better at:

- ❖ Developing co-operation and support across different teams
- ❖ Developing systems to ensure that managers are aware of issues on the ground
- ❖ Explaining how university-wide resources are distributed
- ❖ Fostering a stronger sense of the wider organisation
- ❖ Developing a pleasant physical working environment
- ❖ Addressing levels of stress, workload and work-life balance among some staff groups
- ❖ Aligning training and development with team and University goals
- ❖ Highlighting career development opportunities
- ❖ Developing the skills of managers and the consistent application of good management practice
- ❖ Developing and raising awareness of university-wide systems available to support staff, together with policies around diversity
- ❖ Addressing issues of bullying and harassment
- ❖ Developing further job evaluation and promotions systems
- ❖ Encouraging a different view about flexible working opportunities

It is worth emphasising that this effort is not so much a project or initiative but a process that describes the values it wants to have as an employer and develops a series of actions to implement them. The PWE agenda can be steered and monitored from the

centre, but everyone must have a role in taking it forward. It should be an aspect of 'the way we do things around here', with all staff playing their part. The result of the project was the Positive Working Environment (PWE) agenda.

A Positive Working Environment at the University of Bristol demonstrates:

- ❖ A high degree of trust and respect between all levels of staff
- ❖ A warm and friendly climate in which colleagues feel valued, and have a strong sense of loyalty to the organisation
- ❖ High quality leadership and management
- ❖ Open discussion that leads to resolution of conflict
- ❖ A measure of self-determination over how work is undertaken
- ❖ A culture where diversity is respected and valued
- ❖ A lack of exclusive clubs and cliques
- ❖ Opportunities for personal development and career progression
- ❖ A high level of creativity and job satisfaction, arising from teamwork and co-operation.

Action was steered and monitored by the PWE Steering Group, chaired by Professor Len Hall, Pro Vice Chancellor and other key leaders. The process began with an identification of five 'Commitments' to staff based upon the findings of the employee survey. Then an action plan was developed. Evaluation of impact will take place each year and communicated through a PWE Steering Group Annual Report.

PWE ACTION PLAN

The action plan had the following purposes and strategies.

Commitment 1: Staff Support and Development

Employees will benefit from a supportive environment that helps you develop a rewarding and enjoyable career. This commitment will be supported through:

- A common job evaluation process and the harmonisation of terms and conditions of employment
- Positive changes to the promotions process for academic staff
- The establishment of a working group to explore the development of a single central resource supporting social activities for all University staff
- The promotion of the concept of flexible working, and the piloting of flexible working approaches in four areas of the University
- Training and development targeted at specific staff groups and linked to the development of career paths
- The enhancement and further promotion of staff support systems (e.g., counselling, mediation, dignity at work, careers guidance)
- The launch of an online diversity training package
- The launch of a number of support groups for particular groups of staff
- The offer to all staff of recreational sport activities and a series of staff wellness days
- A 'PWE week' featuring a series of events for all staff
- An annual conference for research staff
- An annual conference for support services staff.
- An annual conference for technical staff
- An action plan to tackle stress at work
- An action plan to address gender issues faced by people at work
- An action plan to reduce excessive workloads
- The recognition of further departments as having met the Investors In People (IIP) standard
- Initiatives to develop, support and enhance staff volunteering
- Initiatives to help staff with their travel-to-work arrangements.



Commitment 2: Leadership and Management

Leaders, managers and supervisors will have access to appropriate, tailored, professional development to prepare them for their roles and to support them in achieving strategic and operational goals. This commitment will be supported through:

- A new senior leadership and management development programme
- An enhanced programme for heads of department
- Focused development initiatives for specific groups of people with management and supervisory responsibilities
- A programme for 'emerging leaders'
- A regional leadership development programme for new Pro Vice-Chancellors
- A conference for University of Bristol leaders and managers (PWE-focused)
- Shadowing and mentoring programmes for new managers
- Tailored one-to-one coaching for senior and middle managers
- Enhanced appraisal processes for leaders and managers
- Team-building and strategic development away days
- Further accredited programmes in supervisory management.

Commitment 3: Communication

Employees will have the opportunity to influence the development of departmental and University practice through efficient internal communication processes, and employees will be made aware of the PWE support facilities open to them. This commitment will be supported through:

- A new PWE website
- Departmental representatives for research staff to enhance two-way communication at all levels
- Departmental representatives to enhance communication on issues connected to PWE, equality and diversity
- A 'Diversity and PWE' newsletter (three issues per year)
- 'Positive Communications' leaflets on a variety of PWE-related subjects, attached to payslips
- Departmental PWE commitment statements
- An extension of the direct communications approach currently adopted for research staff and technical staff to other staff groups
- The establishment of a specialist internal communications post.

Commitment 4: Physical Environment

The internal and external quality of buildings will be maintained at a consistent level across the whole estate. Areas of heaviest wear and tear were prioritised earlier and some of the University's oldest properties will also be brought up to a high structural quality. This commitment will be supported through:

- Buildings that are both wind and watertight
- Spaces that are maintained at an acceptable internal temperature during the cold months
- Specialist areas that are cooled when necessary during the hot months
- Appropriate active security management controls that restrict the threat of crime
- High decorative standards
- A support system that reacts quickly to physical environment emergency requests
- A support system that encourages a responsible attitude to the environment by making it easy to recycle waste materials and conserve energy
- Physical facilities that promote the philosophy of the Transport Plan, including cycle parking, showers and walking routes
- A support system that encourages alternatives to single-occupant car use
- A programme of building works in order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2001

Commitment 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

Progress towards developing PWE will be highlighted to all staff at regular intervals. This commitment will be supported through:

- A further survey of staff views
- Annual Key Performance Indicators of staff satisfaction built into Faculty / Division quality assessment processes
- Results that are highlighted to all staff in a PWE Annual Report.

Promoting Positive Communications

In response to issues raised by staff as part of the PWE staff opinion survey, the University is dedicated to improving communications. One of the means to achieve this is through a series of leaflets entitled 'Positive Communications' issued to all staff (three or four per year) highlighting some development tips on a range of subjects. Back copies are sent to all new staff one month after they start at the University to make sure they don't miss out on the complete set.

Supporting Staff at work

The University takes staff 'well being' very seriously and is introducing a number of developments to help address the causes of issues that some staff may face. Many of these are highlighted elsewhere in this site such as the section entitled 'career development and training', or are part of other PWE related initiatives such as the programme of management development.

However it is recognised that advice and guidance can come from a variety of sources and cover a range of issues. As a result a number of different services are available to employees to help address issues that they may face at some time during their career at Bristol. These may be issues of career direction, personal problems, workplace conflict or perhaps stress.



Staff Counselling Service

This service can be used for personal as well as work-related issues such as stress, relationship and family issues. Confidentiality is paramount.



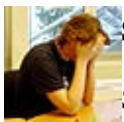
International Staff Adviser

Support, advice and information specifically for International Staff both before and during their time at Bristol. The International staff web site contains a wealth of relevant information together with details of how to get in contact for more advice.



Dignity at Work and Study Advisers

Advisers are members of staff across the organisation who have volunteered and trained to undertake the role. They provide a confidential and informal advice service for anyone subjected to bullying or harassment or facing allegations about their behaviour. They support people in reviewing their options and deciding what action, if any, to take.



Staff Mediation Service

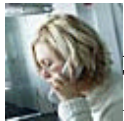
Staff who have work-related grievances or interpersonal problems now have access to trained mediators, all experienced members of University staff, who will use their expertise to assist

those involved in disputes to work through the relevant issues and try to find their own resolution. This is a confidential service.



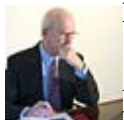
Careers Guidance for Staff

Giving employee time to review their jobs, audit their skills, and plan their future will improve their job and salary and motivation. Employees can choose to update their resumes, fill in skill gaps by attending some training, or talk to colleagues about future possibilities.



Personnel Manager

All departments have a Personnel Manager responsible for a range of people related issues. The job of a Personnel Manager is to provide advice and support to ensure that the University is making the most of the people it employs. As a result Personnel Managers should not solely be viewed as a resource for line managers and are happy to advise on a number of employment related people issues.



Line Manager

All line managers have a vested interest in ensuring colleagues have a happy and productive time at work. Every line manager has a responsibility to help and support you at work so talk to them about the issues you are facing.

Trade Unions



The University values the role of trade unions. It has excellent working relations with the six trade union branches who, between them, represent all the various staff groups. The unions provide advice and support to members over a wide range of matters such as management issues, relations in the workplace (including bullying and harassment), job descriptions and grading, work load, health and safety, pensions etc. The support can vary anywhere between providing informal advice to carrying out formal negotiations on behalf of individuals (or groups) as is appropriate. There is good co-operation between the unions and they work in partnership with management on all of the major issues affecting staff throughout the University.

Lessoning Stress

Another part of the University's commitment to creating a Positive Working Environment is reducing work-place stress. This is a large and complex undertaking with many different strands. Most people would probably say that the thing that creates most stress at work is having too much work to do and not enough time, people or resources to do it. The University's decision makers are aware of this and are committed to considering how work will be varied out before agreeing to any new projects or initiatives. Managers are being asked to look carefully at their teams and to identify things that could cause stress and what could be done about them.

There are also things that individuals can do to get control of work-related stress and there are people, support networks and development opportunities that for help. Specifically, the University provides On-line guidance and articles on mental well-being and stress reduction.

Courses

There are many factors that contribute to pressure at work and learning to control some of these may help employees improve their well-being and keep stress at bay. A variety of free courses on different subjects are made available. Some were designed

to meet the particular needs of staff in certain roles where some demands of the job are unique, for example academic staff, line managers and senior managers.

Help for managers

A first point of reference and guidance for all managers is the document [Staff Well-being: Avoidance and Management of Work Related Stress - Guidelines for Managers](#) and it is strongly recommended that colleagues with a 'people management' responsibility read this document. The document guides managers through two possible routes, one to do with the avoidance of stress in employees, and the other how to deal with stress problems that arise. Avoidance is clearly the preferable route and the clear advice to help this process is to undertake within the department. A Stress Identification quiz is made available.

Results

Professor Eric Thomas, Vice-Chancellor of the University, said: *"The University is honoured to have won this major international award. It's a tribute to a great deal of sustained hard work by many committed colleagues. We aim to foster a collegial culture at Bristol, based on a clear set of values including excellence, transparency and equity. Our PWE initiative has aided progress towards this goal, but we recognise that there will always be scope for improvement and that the work will never be complete."*