



## Mark of Excellence

### Case Study: Academic Professional Services within the University of Bath

Our Academic Professional Services, comprising the three Faculties (Engineering & Design; Humanities & Social Sciences and Science) and the School of Management were the second group to be awarded the Mark of Excellence in 2016, as recognition for the way in which we have embedded the CPD Framework within our professional services teams; from recruitment through to probation and ongoing professional development, the framework forms an integral part of everything that we do. The submission was led by Iain Forster-Smith (the then Director of Administration for Engineering & Design), Ann-Marie Hartland (Director of Administration for Humanities & Social Sciences) and Amanda Harper (Director of Administration for Science).

Our decision to embark on securing the Mark was the result of attending a launch session delivered by John Ryan, during which we realised that we were already undertaking the types of activity and engagement that the Mark was seeking. Our engagement with the framework commenced in 2010, with Ann-Marie in the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences embarking on a pilot appraisal process, which centred around the behavioural framework. Given that this followed a significant restructure of the Faculty's professional services team, this was an invaluable opportunity to allow staff to have in-depth conversations with their managers about behavioural expectations within our newly formed team and to lay the foundations for ongoing collaborative working.

Having reviewed and made adjustments to the pilot, the appraisal process was rolled out across the other Faculties and School. Once the benefits of this new approach were realised, we then worked on developing documentation to support all stages of the employee lifecycle; from embedding the CPD framework into probation to changing the way in which we recruit and reflecting on the professional development opportunities that we offer. One invaluable exercise that we carried out in preparation for the Mark was to review all of our training and map it against the behaviours, which highlighted some interesting gaps in provision, one of which was 'embracing change.' Perhaps this was a reflection of how far we had come with our thinking and ability to adapt since the restructure or the absence of a significant change had made us rest on our laurels – whatever the reason, the absence of managing change training and development was quickly rectified!

For us, the launch of the Mark of Excellence came at a very opportune time when the CPD Framework had already become embedded in what we were doing. It wasn't a mechanism for accelerating change but a recognition of what we were already doing and the culture we had created, which made the process so much easier. Working with the advisor enabled us to tease out all of that good practice and also started us on the pathway to thinking about what our aspirations would be going forward. It also helped us gain recognition at an institutional level for the work we had done, with our sponsor, the Director of Finance, Diane Aderyn (now retired) endorsing our achievements: I am delighted that the impact of this work has been recognised in the achievement of the Mark of Excellence; really effective performance by professional services is vital to the success and development of the University and this achievement will provide additional impetus to our plans to relaunch the Framework across the wider University.



If we were to give one piece of advice to others, it would be to ensure that the institutional backing is there and that you are confident in your embedding of the CPD Framework, as the assessor will speak to a broad range of stakeholders before reaching his/her conclusions. Also, the paperwork is not as daunting as you might think but try not to consider it a form filling exercise anyway; it is a great opportunity to gain recognition for what you are doing already but also undertake some reflection on what you could do in the future.

Since we achieved the Mark, we have further developed our probation and appraisal processes, refining them to minimise documentation whilst ensuring that they facilitate effective conversations between managers and their team members. We have also developed an outline of what behaviours are expected at what grade, so that staff have a clearer idea of where they might need to focus in order to move towards progressing to the next grade. Our training courses are centred around the CPD Framework, with our most recent 'Step up to Management' course resulting in a personal development plan, tailored to the behaviours that individuals need to develop in order to facilitate progression. We are also spreading the word with other departments at the University and are sharing our best practice with them and the wider community. When we come to the renewal stage, we anticipate being able to add to the numbers of areas where the CPD Framework has been embedded. Iain Forster-Smith and Ann-Marie Hartland also presented at one of the AUA Development Days, reflecting on the work that they have done and sharing best practice with the aptly titled 'It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it!'

More recently Ann-Marie Hartland has led an initiative to encourage Accredited Member and Fellowship applications, which provides recognition of an individual's commitment to their own professional development and in the case of Fellowship, the development of others too, all within the context of the CPD Framework. The initial cohort of 6 AUA members achieved a 100% success rate, with the quality of the applications highly commended. The second cohort of 9 are currently being reviewed, so fingers crossed. As a result of all the great work at the University of Bath, we were also successful at securing the AUA Networks Team Award at the AUA National Conference!