

Recognition and Reward Scheme Procedure

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Procedure

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Procedure must be read in conjunction with the Recognition and Reward Scheme [Policy](#), which sets out the criteria and eligibility requirements for an individual or team award.
- 1.2 This document describes the procedures for awards for Academic, Research, Academic-Related, and Support Staff (up to Grade 9 and Academic Grade 4) through additional pay for their individual or team contribution.
- 1.3 This document describes the procedure for awards:
Recognition:
 - a) GEM Awards (reinstated and live from 14 April 2025)
Rewards:
 - b) Merit Awards (paused)
 - c) Additional increments and discretionary points (paused)

2. Communication

- 2.1 The Recognition and Reward Scheme details should be circulated to staff annually, along with timetables.
- 2.2 Units are encouraged to publish (anonymous) extracts from previous successful cases in their unit, as indicators of the type of contribution considered worthy of an award.
- 2.3 Units may publish the number of awards etc. granted in their unit, but will not publish the names of individuals who received awards.

3. Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Awards *reinstated from 14 April 2025

- 3.1 GEM Awards are available for line managers to use as a way of recognising and rewarding outstanding individual or team contributions by staff throughout the year.
- 3.2 The criteria for GEM Awards are set out in the Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy, and [Appendix 1](#) below.
- 3.3 It is the responsibility of the line manager to:
- Identify the opportunity for a GEM award, although suggestions for a GEM Award may be initiated by any work colleague.
 - To ensure nomination meets the criteria for GEM Awards, set out in Reward Policy.
 - Secure the agreement of the Head of Business Unit and People Business Partner. In meta units such as Academic Services and CIO, the designated Head of Unit may be unit within the overall business unit, for example, SRF or IT.
 - Raise the approved GEM Award on the Success Factors system for payment.
- 3.4 For agency workers, details of any individual award approved, should be sent to the People-Hub@open.ac.uk for processing.
- 3.5 GEM Awards are paid at any time, as close as possible to the event that triggered the award. See [Appendix 1](#) below for further information on GEM Awards.
- 3.6 The administrative process of system entry and validation must be completed before the payroll deadline. Entries made later than this date cannot be guaranteed to be processed in time for that month's payroll.

4. Allocation of funds

- 4.1 We recommend limiting the total annual number of awards to no more than 20% of a unit's headcount. This figure is provided as a guideline, and it will be the responsibility of each unit to manage its award-related expenses.

Rewards

Please note that Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary points are suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice.

5. **Merit Awards** *suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice

- 5.1 Merit Awards are awarded principally based on evidence gathered through the CDSA process, where individuals have made an outstanding contribution in the short-term on a focused task/project.
- 5.2 The Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy and [Appendix 2](#) below sets out the criteria and eligibility requirements for a Merit Award.

6. **Additional increments and discretionary points** *paused for contribution made in academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24 (the pause will be reviewed for academic years 2024/25)

- 6.1 Additional increments may be awarded to accelerate progression towards the top of the pay scale in recognition of sustained excellent contribution.
- 6.2 Discretionary points are points above the top of the normal grade salary points, and progression to these points is not automatic.
- 6.3 The Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy sets out the criteria and eligibility requirements for additional increments and discretionary points.

7. **Nominations for Merit Awards, and additional increments and discretionary points**

- 7.1 The nomination and OU Consistency Panel process is the same for Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary points recommendations.
- 7.2 **Self-nomination:** Staff may self-nominate; any self-nomination will be referred by the People Business Partner to the nominee's line manager, who will have the opportunity to comment on the nomination in advance of the Business Unit Review Panel.
- 7.3 **Line manager led nominations:** Before submitting any recommendations, line managers must:
- a) **Merit Awards:** Consider all their direct reports who meet the eligibility criteria.
 - b) **Additional increments and discretionary points:** Consider all their direct reports who meet the eligibility criteria, and ensure they are not inadvertently penalising those whose contribution may have been disproportionately impacted for any reason, including individual circumstances, such as part-time staff, or those on maternity/family leave or sickness absence etc.
 - c) **Identify and reference the evidence** on which their recommendation is based (usually documented within the CDSA).
 - The CDSA should be a major source of evidence for exceptional achievement. Other evidence of positive achievements and behaviours will inform the process.
 - Staff will not be unreasonably refused an award in the absence of a CDSA, if there is evidence of exceptional achievement where the reason for the CDSA not being undertaken is due to the manager, and the member of staff has not contributed significantly to that delay.

- As part of the CDSA process, line managers who have direct reports with line management responsibility are asked to discuss how they will be applying the Reward Scheme for their teams.
- CDSA is not applicable to agency workers, and managers should draw on other sources of evidence.

- 7.4 For all nominations, support in writing cases is available to individuals in the form of a '[hints and tips](#)' guidance for managers, and voluntary mentoring locally within units (where available).
- 7.5 Recommendations must be submitted using the nomination form no later than the submission deadline. There is a 500-word limit for each question that requires a long answer.

8. OU Consistency Panel

- 8.1 The proposed Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary points will be subject to the scrutiny of the OU Consistency Panel.

The **Terms of Reference for the OU Consistency Panel** are set out below in [Appendix 3](#).

- 8.2 The OU Consistency Panel will be responsible for:
- a) Identifying any discrepancies between the workforce and award profile for the University as a whole, and at business unit level.
 - b) Bringing to the attention of the Head of Unit and the Unit's People Business Partner, any discrepancies between the workforce and award profile that require further consideration.
 - c) In particular, the Consistency Panel will be empowered to challenge and seek rationale from the Head of Unit as to why there may be an unfavourable gap for any of the EDI characteristics e.g.

above or below 10% tolerance. If the rationale is not substantial or equitable, the Consistency Panel has the right to decline such awards.

9. Feedback to business units

- 9.1 At the start of the process, People Services will provide each Business Unit Review Panel with a spreadsheet on which to record their nominations and their decision against each nomination.
- 9.2 Spreadsheets will be populated *inter alia* with staff EDI profiles (unit compared to university as a whole). This data will be updated throughout the process and should be used to help guide units in their decision making when proposing nominations and outcomes.

10. Business Unit Review Panel

- 10.1 Local panels will usually consist of Senior Leadership Team members and/or a cross sectional group of individuals, and must include the Unit's People Business Partner.
- 10.2 It will be the Unit's decision at a local level, to provide opportunities for colleagues across different roles, grades, and staff groups, to volunteer for a place on the review panel (on a rotational basis).
- 10.3 Participants on a review panel are required to exercise strict confidentiality to ensure there is no breach of GDPR.
- 10.4 Local variation can be exercised where detailed decision making cannot be done through a single group.
- 10.5 The Business Unit Review will be responsible for:
 - a) Ensuring each nomination meets the:
 - Criteria of the Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy
 - Eligibility of the postholder for the award

- b) Determining the actual monetary value of any Merit Award based on one of three options as set out in the Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy. This is the responsibility of the Head of Unit, and must reflect the contribution of the individual, relative to others.
- c) Recording the decision for each nomination on the spreadsheet provided by People Services.

11. Submission of successful nominations to People Services

- 11.1 The Head of Unit will be responsible for ensuring all columns within the spreadsheet are completed, including the text to be incorporated in the letter explaining the reason for the award.
- 11.2 For agency workers, details of any individual award approved, should be sent to the People-Hub@open.ac.uk for processing.
- 11.3 The Head of Unit is responsible for submitting the completed spreadsheet containing the decisions against each nomination to the Reward team at reward@open.ac.uk by the submission deadline.

12. Payment

- 12.1 The People Services Hub will enter the Unit approved additional increments/discretionary points and Merit Awards on SuccessFactors.
- 12.2 System validation/approval of additional increments/discretionary points and Merit Awards will be completed by the individuals' Head of Unit, Finance Business Partner and People Business Partner.
- 12.3 The People Hub will process the additional increments/discretionary points and Merit Awards on SuccessFactors and issue the letters.
- 12.4 Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary points will require authorisation within SuccessFactors before they can be processed. Once authorised within the SuccessFactors workflow, payments will be made

through the payslip backdated to 1 October following the end of the academic year to which any award applies.

- 12.5 The administrative process of system entry and validation must be completed before the payroll deadline. Entries made later than this date cannot be guaranteed to be processed in time for that month's payroll.

13. Communication of outcomes

- 13.1 Letters notifying employees of the successful outcome of their line manager's nomination or their self-nomination will be produced by the People Services Hub. They will be signed and sent to the Director/Head of Unit, who will distribute the letters to the relevant line managers to pass on to the successful nominees.
- 13.2 Notification letters are not produced for nominees who have not been successful.

14. Useful references

- 14.1 Recognition and Reward Scheme [Policy](#)
- 14.2 OU Consistency Panel Terms of Reference ([Appendix 3](#))
- 14.3 GEM Nomination Form
- 14.4 [Values in Action](#) Framework
- 14.5 Additional guidance '[Hints and tips](#)' for drafting successful award cases
- 14.6 [EDI Statement in relation to the Reward Scheme](#)

Version Number 2 – effective from 10 April 2025.

Summary of revisions: Added section 4 Allocation of funds.

Appendix 1: Criteria for Going the Extra Mile (GEM) Awards

From the 2024/25 Academic year, GEM Awards will transition to align with the Open University's updated behavioural framework, focusing on reinforcing the university-wide [Values in Action](#), for both individual and team efforts.

Acknowledging the importance of regular contributions that align with core values reinforces the University's commitment to fostering a collaborative, inclusive, and high-performing community.

Individual GEM Awards

Criteria

GEM Awards recognise individuals who embody the University's core values in both exceptional actions and routine contributions. Nominees need to demonstrate qualities that bring these values to life.

- **Inclusive:** Being **respectful** and **proactive** in contributing to a culture of belonging for all colleagues and students. Has the nominee recognised, supported, and championed diverse voices in their work? Have they made significant contributions to a culture of belonging for all in their team or unit?
- **Innovative:** Being **curious** and **collaborative**, connecting across the University, and sharing learning and ideas. Has the nominee introduced creative solutions or continuous improvements in regular workflows that have had a lasting positive impact?

- **Responsive:** Being **flexible** and **outcome focused**, ensuring what we deliver is simple, effective and mindful of the needs of colleagues. Has the nominee been quick to address new demands or the needs of colleagues and students within business as usual? Have they flexed and adapted to deliver a better end result in their work?

Team GEM Awards

The Team GEM Award recognises groups of employees who collaboratively achieve impactful results aligned with the Open University's [Values in Action](#).

This can be within local teams or cross-unit teams i.e. project groups. Each team member who qualifies for a Team GEM Award will receive £125, ensuring fair acknowledgment of collective success.

Criteria

- **Collaboration impact**

Teams are recognised based on demonstrated success through collaboration, with each team member's role and contribution clearly identified and aligned to the [Values in Action](#) Framework.

- **Individual and collective impact**

The team's accomplishments need to meaningfully contribute to the University community, either through specific projects or by demonstrating that they have gone above and beyond in their collective everyday roles.

Team GEM Award examples

- **Innovation and problem-solving:** Project teams delivering significant improvements through innovative collaboration.

- **Process adaptability:** Department teams displaying flexibility and responsiveness that benefits the University.
- **Inclusive initiatives:** Cross-departmental teams that prioritise inclusivity, ensuring diverse perspectives are valued in project development.

Approval process

The rules and monetary value for GEM Awards are the same for both individual GEM Awards and Team GEM Awards. All individuals, and each team member who qualifies for a Team GEM Award, will receive £125 (gross).

It is the responsibility of the line manager to identify the opportunity for a GEM award, although suggestions for a GEM Award may be initiated by any work colleague.

For all GEM Awards, approval must be obtained before the line manager submits the request in SuccessFactors. Line managers are responsible for understanding and adhering to the Unit's specific nomination and approval guidelines, which may vary by department and include a localised review process. This ensures consistency and compliance with all procedural requirements prior to submission.

Final approval by the Head of Unit (or designated nominee), with agreement from the People Business Partner, is required before the line manager submits the GEM Award nomination via SuccessFactors.

Local team (within same unit)

For Team GEM Awards for local teams, the line manager should nominate the team for an award, verifying that each team member played a role in the achievement.

Cross-unit team (project teams)

For Team GEM Awards for cross-unit teams, the project lead(s) should nominate the team for an award, verifying that each team member played a role in the achievement. The project lead should discuss this with each colleague's line manager, who will need to review the nomination. Units may have their own local processes in place, and flexibility may be needed to accommodate requests to ensure equity across the whole team.

Appendix 2: Criteria for Merit Awards

Criteria

Doing a job well is expected of all Open University employees. The decision to nominate for a Merit Award assumes this. However, when an individual or team has gone beyond what might normally be expected for their role/s and this can be shown to have had a positive impact on any or all University stakeholders (including students, employees, alumni, donors and Council members), it will be appropriate to nominate for such an award.

Examples

- Achieving excellence in a specific task or project which has been included in a work plan or agreed objectives, or which was required unexpectedly
- Making a significant contribution to the team's work, where the absence of such a contribution would have jeopardised the achievement of an important task or objective
- Contributing to the maintenance of a high level service during an unplanned absence of colleague(s) or lack of implementation of an anticipated system
- Exceptional performance in handling or averting a crisis, emergency or one-off event
- Proposal and implementation of an innovative approach or solution for improvement of a working practice or process with short to medium term consequences
- Providing exceptional mentoring, coaching, training or other professional support to a colleague(s) or group/team

- Going above and beyond to fix an issue for a student/employee or group of students/employees and/or other stakeholders that would otherwise have had a significant negative impact
- Participation in a cross-unit or cross-university project, which has been regarded as highly successful
- Demonstrating how an individual or team has truly lived and breathed the University values in accordance with behavioural expectations

Appendix 3: Terms of Reference for the OU Consistency Panel

Purpose

The central Consistency Panel forms part of the annual reward review process and meets twice a year to:

1. Scrutinise relevant pay review data to determine if the reward framework is being applied consistently and equitably.
2. Consider the number of a) nominations and b) awards proposed in relation to the 20% of eligible staff guidance amount.
3. Consider the potential impact of this analysis on the gender pay of the profile of nominations made.
4. Review the allocation of pay awards to understand the distribution of awards based on ethnicity and other OU Equality Scheme characteristics.
5. To examine this distribution of nominations and of awards against the University's overall workforce profile.
6. Highlight any trends in the distribution of nominations at both a university and unit level.
7. Highlight any significant discrepancies in the allocation of awards that may require further exploration.
8. Provide feedback to units regarding the outcomes of this review via the People Business Partners. The Consistency Panel will seek rationale from the Head of Unit as to why there may be an unfavourable gap for any of the EDI characteristics e.g. above or below 10% tolerance. Should the

rationale not be substantial or equitable, the Consistency Panel has the right to reject such awards.

9. Provide overall reassurance to the Vice Chancellor's Executive team that the pay awards overall have been awarded with the necessary EDI scrutiny and that outcomes were equitable.

It should be noted that it is not the remit of the panel to review individual nominations, but to offer advice and insight for the Units to consider any trends relating to the distribution of nominations and awards made including, but not limited to, an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) perspective.

Nominations

The data to be examined by the panel:

- Relates to roles up to Grade 9/Academic Grade 4
- Includes nominations from both line managers and self-nomination submissions for additional increments/discretionary points and Merit Awards
- Will be summary nominations at a university and unit level only

Membership

The membership consists of:

- Director of EDI (Chair)
- Director of People and Partnering
- Faculty Director of Strategy, Planning and Resources (DSPR)
- Chief People Officer
- Nation Director
- Senior Manager (to be nominated by the University Secretary)

- Senior Employee Relations Manager
- Senior Reward and Performance Manager (Secretary)

Members may send a delegate in exceptional circumstances with agreement from the Chair.

In attendance

- Reward, Benefits and Performance Adviser
- Independent Adviser (optional)
- One UCU and one UNISON local representative (as observers)

Frequency of meetings

The central consistency panel will meet twice each year.