

Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy

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Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University operates various methods of rewarding staff. The Recognition and Reward Scheme Policy applies to Academic, Research, Academic-Related, and Support Staff (up to Grade 9 and Academic Grade 4) for their individual or team contribution. Some agency workers may be entitled to be considered for awards (see section 14).
- 1.2 Professorial and Senior Academic and Related Staff are rewarded through the Senior Staff pay review mechanism.
- 1.3 This document describes the policy 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)

Recognition

2. Recognition Scheme aims

- 2.1 Through our recognition schemes, the OU recognises individual and team efforts that go above and beyond normal day to day activities and expectations.

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

- 3.1 GEM Awards are a one-off payment of £125 (gross) to an individual to recognise specific actions that go beyond normal day-to-day expectations, and stand out because they have made a real difference.

- 3.2 GEM Awards reflect the University's [Values in Action](#), for both individual and team efforts. They are used to highlight behaviours that bring positive impact to the University community, reinforcing the OU values such as inclusivity, innovation and responsiveness.
- 3.3 The criteria for GEM Award nominations are provided in Appendix 1 in the Recognition and Reward Scheme Procedure.
- 3.4 It may be appropriate to award staff on secondment a GEM Award, provided any payment or associated costs are taken from the secondee's receiving unit.
- 3.5 GEM Awards are a one-off payment of £125 (gross). The payment is awarded as close to the event as possible, and is independent from the CDSA process. Nominations must be agreed by the Head of Unit. A maximum of four GEM Awards (individual and team awards combined) are allowed per person in each academic year.
- 3.6 This award is designed to reward [Values in Action](#) behaviours. Any member of staff can recommend another member of staff for a GEM Award, which should go through the nominee's line manager for approval. Once the Unit sign off has been agreed, the line manager can submit the nomination in SuccessFactors.
- 3.7 The GEM Award is non-contractual, and the University may, at its discretion, amend or withdraw it at any time. The payment is subject to deductions for tax and is not pensionable.
- 3.8 The GEM Award is a separate recognition scheme and does not follow the criteria for additional increments/discretionary points or Merit Awards.

4. Local reward-based initiatives

- 4.1 All payments/awards/gifts of appreciation to all staff groups known as “incentives” must be made in line with the agreed Open University framework and policies. Units must involve People Business Partners in any local reward-based initiatives.
- 4.2 People Business Partners must be involved prior to any decision relating to staff rewards to ensure consistency and fairness, and that the University and staff are not placed in a position of liability with HMRC.
- 4.3 The guiding principle is that the use of casual incentives such as vouchers and gifts to staff are not appropriate, as these would be classed as equivalent to cash and therefore subject to PAYE.
- 4.4 A local award may be made to groups of staff to celebrate a significant work achievement, i.e. the successful completion of a project. This can include a meal, a social event (e.g. bowling, paint balling), or an activity day at an off-campus location etc. Local awards should not be used for gifts for leavers, Christmas parties or presents etc. The costs will be charged to the Unit’s budget.

Reward

5. Reward Scheme aims

- 5.1 The purpose of the Reward Scheme is to recognise and reward excellence of contribution, both in terms of outcomes and behaviours consistent with the [Values in Action](#) Framework, over and above the standards of performance and behaviours expected of all staff at the Open University.
- 5.2 Please note that Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary points are suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice.

6. Reward principles

- 6.1 For all categories of Academic, Research, Academic-Related, and Support Staff, the evidence for contribution to the achievement of the University's strategic objectives will consist of:
- Outcome and results (**what** has been achieved)
 - Individuals' behaviours, skills, and knowledge (**how** it has been achieved)
- 6.2 Decisions will be evidence-based, using a nomination form, providing information principally through CDSA processes, considering criteria such as:
- The achievement of objectives where these proved to be unexpectedly or particularly demanding
 - Outstanding individual contribution to a team
 - Successful adaptation to change
 - Undertaking additional responsibilities (other than substantial permanent changes that would justify re-grading)
 - Significant contribution beyond reasonable normal expectations for the role-holder
- 6.3 Individuals whose roles make providing evidence of sustained excellence of contribution through measurable outcomes more challenging, may optionally draw on their sustained demonstration of the desired behaviours (based on the existing [Values in Action](#) Framework).
- 6.4 Additional increments and discretionary points will be awarded on the above measures of sustained excellence over a substantial period, and are anticipated to continue.

- 6.5 Outstanding contribution in the short-term or a focused task/project is recognised through Merit Awards. Note that Merit Award is referred to as a Special Award within Terms and Conditions of Employment.

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

- 7.1 Prior to the submission of cases, all colleagues with at least six months' service in their current role as of 1 October, are automatically eligible for consideration for an award.
- 7.2 Merit Awards are awarded principally on the basis of evidence gathered through the CDSA process, where individuals have made an outstanding contribution in the short-term on a focused task/project.
- 7.3 Suggested criteria for deciding whether to nominate for a Merit Award (as opposed to an incremental award) can be found in Appendix 2 in the Recognition and Reward Scheme Procedure.
- 7.4 To achieve consistency between units on the amounts of awards across the University, one of the following amounts should be nominated:
- Achievement over and above – £500
 - Exceptional achievement – £1,000
 - Truly exceptional achievement – £2,000
- 7.5 The actual amount awarded will be linked to the FTE of the recipient. For example, if an individual's FTE is 0.5, they will receive 50% of the amount of the award.
- 7.6 Such cases will be rewarded through a non-recurring, one-off award and it will not be consolidated into basic pay (so is not pensionable). Units must consider equity in the distribution of awards.
- 7.7 Merit Awards are suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice.

8. Additional increments and discretionary points *paused for contribution made in academic year 2025/26

(A decision about whether the pause will continue into the 2026/27 academic year will be made later this year, and an update will be provided in early 2027)

- 8.1 As part of the agreed pay and grading framework, each grade (up to Grade 9 and Academic Grade 4) has associated salary scales with spinal points/incremental steps. Staff who have been in post for a minimum of six months will automatically advance to the next highest incremental point on 1 October each year. All eligible staff moving from one job to another on the same Terms and Conditions and the same grade will receive normal incrementation increases.
- 8.2 Normally one, but in exceptional circumstances, up to two additional increments may be awarded to accelerate progression towards the top of the pay scale in recognition of sustained excellent contribution.
- 8.3 Discretionary points are points above the top of the normal grade salary points, and progression to these points is not automatic.
- 8.4 Prior to the submission of cases, all colleagues with at least six months' service in their current role as of 1 October, are automatically eligible for consideration for an award. This review is delegated to line managers who are expected to evidence that contribution of all eligible colleagues was considered. Nominations must evidence sustained excellence of contribution through measurable outcomes that are expected to continue. Cases should be based on the outcomes of the CDSA and/or Academic Promotions process.
- 8.5 An individual on the top spinal point for their grade cannot be awarded an increment above that point. If they meet the criteria, they might instead be

considered for a Merit Award. (Merit Awards are suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice.)

- 8.6 Additional increments and discretionary points can only be effective from 1 October each year. Additional increments and discretionary points have been paused for the contribution made in academic year 2025/26. A decision about whether the pause will continue into the 2026/27 academic year will be made later this year, and an update will be provided in early 2027.

9. Staff on secondment

- 9.1 Staff who are seconded on the same grade as their substantive role shall not be given a permanent increase in salary (through the award of additional increments or discretionary points) during their secondment, without the agreement of the individual's substantive Head of Unit.
- 9.2 It may be appropriate to award staff on secondment a Merit Award, provided any payment or associated costs are taken from the secondee's receiving unit. (Merit Awards are suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice.)
- 9.3 Where a member of staff is seconded to a higher graded role and awarded an additional/discretionary increment:
- (a) In relation to their **substantive role**, their secondment salary will not be adjusted. When the member of staff reverts to their substantive role, they will then receive the increased salary.
 - (b) In relation to their **secondment role**, their secondment (but not their substantive) salary will be adjusted. When the member of staff reverts to their substantive role, they will revert to the same substantive salary they were receiving prior to starting their secondment (plus any

automatic increment/national pay award increase to which they are entitled).

- 9.4 In any other circumstances, line managers should discuss individual cases with their People Business Partner.

10. Staff receiving an allowance

- 10.1 For staff receiving an allowance, their substantive role will continue to accrue any automatic increment/national pay award increase.
- 10.2 Staff will see an incremental increase in their substantive salary. The allowance will be recalculated using the new substantive salary, to the agreed spinal point of the grade the individual is acting-up into. When the allowance ends, staff will revert to the increased substantive salary amount (where applicable). Line managers are encouraged to discuss changes to pay with their staff member.
- 10.3 If the national pay award increase occurs within the allowance period, all salary scale points will be updated and the allowance will be recalculated using the updated figures.

11. Exceptions

- 11.1 In exceptional circumstances, additional increments and discretionary points may also be used for reasons of internal comparability, but always contingent on outstanding contribution. This is to ensure equitable pay is maintained, where over time, recruitment activity may have led to a salary anomaly between colleagues doing the same role.
- 11.2 Professorial and Senior Staff rewards are considered separately through the annual Senior Staff pay review mechanism.

- 11.3 Rewards may not be awarded to any individual unless they have completed a recent CDSA (normally in the preceding 12 months). Similarly, managers will not receive awards unless they have undertaken (or have plans to undertake) CDSA for their staff.

12. Manager nominations and self-nominations

- 12.1 Nominations can be submitted by the line manager, or an individual member of staff may make a personal submission for any award (known as 'self-nomination').
- 12.2 In exceptional circumstances, peer-to-peer nominations can be made, but such nominations should first be discussed and agreed with a People Business Partner, who will raise them with the individual's line manager to discuss and agree whether it can form part of a line manager's nomination, or the individual can use it as part of a self-nomination case.
- 12.3 Heads of Unit make the final decision on any and all successful reward nominations.
- 12.4 When a manager nominates an individual for an award, they do not need to share this with the individual. If they choose to do so, they will be expected to manage the expectations of that individual in so far as the nomination may not be approved and it would not be unreasonable for an individual to request feedback as to why it was turned down.
- 12.5 An individual who chooses to self-nominate, does not need to consult their line manager about doing so, although they may do so if they wish. At the point that that nomination is considered by the respective Business Unit, the Review Panel will be expected to invite the line manager to comment on the self-nomination.

- 12.6 Where both a manager and individual have each put forward a nomination, and there has not been any consultation between them about this, these nominations will each be considered together in the usual way by the respective Business Unit Review Panel.

General principles

13. Equity and fairness

- 13.1 Policies are inclusive of all Open University staff. At business unit and university levels, the distribution of awards (in terms of team, equality and diversity, hierarchical, geographic, and part-time/full-time split), will be scrutinised by the People Business Partners. They will report their findings annually to, and work in partnership with, business unit leaders. This will ensure the use of awards and decision making processes are fair, transparent, and equitable, with particular regard to the impact on under-represented groups.
- 13.2 The University will continue to implement an OU consistency panel for Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary points for the purpose of pro-active challenge to discrepancies between outcome and workforce profile at university and unit level.
- 13.3 It is important that staff on long term absence from the University e.g. due to sickness or maternity/family leave or external secondment, are considered as part of this process in the same way as staff who are present. It is recognised that such consideration will relate to the period(s) where these individuals have been at work.
- 13.4 [EDI guidance](#) is provided to line managers on ways to avoid unconscious bias when considering which individuals to nominate for an award. We

recommend that all colleagues complete the [Understanding Unconscious Bias](#) module on My Learning Centre. In addition, the [Equality Essentials](#) module is a mandatory module that requires recertification every two years – please refer to the [Compliance Training Policy and Procedure](#).

- 13.5 **Full-time and part-time staff:** Previous reward scheme processes highlighted the risk of part-time staff potentially being over-looked relative to their full-time colleagues, and in the past they have been under-represented. Line managers should ensure they give equal consideration to part-time staff as they would to full-time staff, when determining which of their staff to nominate for an award.
- 13.6 **Support and other types of staff:** Previous reward scheme processes highlighted there was a risk of support staff being under-represented compared to other types of staff. Line managers should ensure they give equal consideration to support staff as they would to other staff categories, when determining which of their staff to nominate for an award.

14. **Agency workers and recognition/reward**

- 14.1 Under the Agency Workers Regulations, agency workers will be eligible for consideration under the Scheme after 12 weeks in the same role. The rules about continuity of service are complex, and advice about whether an agency worker qualifies should be sought from People Services.
- 14.2 Agency workers must be provided with the opportunity to achieve GEM Awards, and Merit Awards, subject to their personal performance. (Merit Awards are suspended from 1 August 2023 until further notice.)
- 14.3 Line managers must consider such agency workers along with all other employees reporting to them. Personal submissions from agency workers for

an award will be permitted, although managers will need to complete a separate nomination form.

15. Evaluation and monitoring

15.1 Evaluation of the Scheme is undertaken by People Services in several ways:

- Through review of any available trend data in relation to the distribution of awards (in terms of team, equality and diversity, hierarchical, geographic, and part-time/full-time split) at unit and university level
- Through proactive scrutiny of the distribution of award outcomes through the OU Consistency Panel (for Merit Awards and additional increments/discretionary awards)
- Management feedback
- Staff feedback on perceptions of fairness and consistency, using exit interviews and staff engagement surveys
- Annual reporting

15.2 These steps help to mitigate inadvertently rewarding one category of staff more than any other.

16. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

16.1 Our policies are inclusive of all Open University staff, regardless of age, care experience, caring status or dependency, civil status, disability, family status, gender, gender expression, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnership, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or trades union membership status.

17. Useful references

- 17.1 Recognition and Reward Scheme [Procedure](#)
- 17.2 OU Consistency Panel Terms of Reference (Appendix 3 in Recognition and Reward Scheme Procedure)
- 17.3 GEM Nomination Form
- 17.4 [Values in Action](#) Framework
- 17.5 Additional guidance '[Hints and tips](#)' for drafting successful award cases
- 17.6 [EDI Statement in relation to the Reward Scheme](#)

Version Number 3 – effective from 9 June 2026.

Summary of revisions: Updated section 8 and 8.6 regarding additional increments and discretionary points pause.