

REWARDING AND DEVELOPING STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**APPLICATION FOR FUNDS
(HEFCE CIRCULAR 02/09)**

FULL HUMAN RESOURCE PLAN

May 2002

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Introduction

This "full" HR Plan is submitted by Aston University, in response to HEFCE Circular 02/09, and in respect of the indicative funding to be allocated to the University, as a result of the additional resources announced by the Government to help institutions recruit, retain, reward and develop staff, as well as helping to modernise human resource management practices. It builds upon the "emerging " HR plan approved by HEFCE in 2001 and now addresses priority areas a-f, as defined by HEFCE.

- a. Address recruitment and retention difficulties in a targeted and cost-effective manner.
- b. Meet specific staff development and training objectives that not only equip staff to meet their current needs but also prepare them for future changes, such as using new technologies for learning and teaching. This would include management development.
- c. Develop equal opportunities targets, with programmes to implement good practice throughout the institution. This should include ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, using institution-wide systems of job evaluation. This could involve institutions working collectively- regionally or nationally.
- d. Regular reviews of staffing needs, reflecting changes in market demands and technology. The reviews would consider overall numbers and the balance of different categories of staff.
- e. Annual performance reviews of all staff, based on open and objective criteria, with rewards connected to the performance of individuals including, where appropriate, their contribution to teams.
- f. Action to tackle poor performance.

The Plan has been reviewed by the "HR Planning Review Group", the "Personnel and Employment Committee" and will be submitted to the 19 June meeting of the University Council for final approval. In addition, the plan has been the subject of consultation with the campus trade unions, who thanked the University for the open and constructive way in which it had shared ideas and proposals.

Aston welcomes the opportunity, supported by the additional funding, to develop a more strategic approach to its planning of human resource management in a way that is more synergistic with the overall strategic aims and objectives of the University. Aston will be submitting its institutional five-year strategic plan, 2002-03 to 2006-07 to HEFCE in July 2002. This HR plan has been developed with those overall university objectives in mind and within the context of external drivers such as the ever increasing volume and complexity of legislation and codes of practice which impact upon the employment and management of staff.

The development of the "emerging" plan was generally welcomed within the University and by the University Council. The HEFCE initiative has been instrumental in raising the profile of human resource management to a more strategic level and the contribution made by the HR Division has reflected this shift of focus. The designated Personnel Officers, for example, have been closely involved in the drafting of School and Support Department HR plans.

In reviewing the targets set in the "emerging" plan, in the light of progress actually made during the period, it is recognised that although good progress has been made in implementing a

challenging agenda, not all the targets have been met in all the priority areas. A significant limiting factor has been the departure of a number of key senior staff within Human Resources. Action is being taken to fill these posts and the timescales for some activities have accordingly been amended in this "full" plan, from those initially indicated in the "emerging plan".

Linkage with Current Institutional Mission and Strategic Objectives

The University mission statement signals Aston's commitment to maintaining and further enhancing its reputation as "an international centre of excellence in teaching, research and consultancy".

In the strategic plan 2002-03 to 2006-07, the following institutional objectives are set out:

- At least a further 20% growth in student numbers by 2006-07 with no diminution in academic standards;
- Continuing diversification of the University's sources of income to reduce Aston's dependence on HEFCE funding.

These objectives are complemented by the specific strategic aims of:

- 5* ratings in the next Research Assessment Exercise with at least a 5 rating in each Unit of Assessment;
- An emphasis on the growth in postgraduate taught programmes;
- The promotion of increased diversity in non-HEFCE income to include the commercialisation of research;
- Exploitation of Intellectual Property Rights;
- The growth of further "spin-out" companies;
- The initiation of development fund-raising.

The overall "twin-track" approach of Aston will be:

- Growth with widening access to undergraduate programmes whilst maintaining academic standards and teaching excellence
- The pursuit of focussed research excellence and its application.

The four themes that will characterise Aston's development over the next five years are:

Future growth
Focussed research excellence
Extension of the University's links with outside bodies (Schools, Colleges, Industry, the City and the Region)
A major Estate Development Programme

These overall objectives will have a direct impact upon the range of skills and abilities, which will be required by academic and support staff who will operate in an increasingly sophisticated IT environment.

The University's strategic plan recognises the critical contribution of the University staff to the achievement of its strategic objectives, and states its continuing commitment to the recruitment and retention of high-quality academic and support staff, and to their continuing development through the provision of a comprehensive range of staff training and development programmes.

In addition, the following supporting strategies make specific reference to HR issues, critical to their attainment:

Quality Strategy:

- To strengthen the quality of research training across the University.
- To raise the profile of research in staff development activities, focussed on sharing good practice.

Teaching and Learning Strategy:

- To ensure the continuing personal and professional development in teaching and learning, for all staff who support student learning.
- The development of teaching is encouraged through processes such as peer review, mentoring appraisal and reflective practice.
- The development of expertise in using technology to support learning.

Research Strategy:

- To aim to recruit only research active staff, providing an attractive research environment and infrastructure to encourage retention.
- To develop a robust approach to succession planning and to provide a supportive research environment for young appointees.

ICT Strategy:

- An ongoing programme of skills upgrading for ICT staff and for the implementation of flagship projects in Schools.

The achievement of the University's objectives is dependent on the University's ability to recruit, develop and retain high-calibre academic and support staff, and on ensuring that the overall staff profile and skills mix is appropriate to meet the current and future needs of the organisation. The essence of any HR Strategy depends on:

- A systematic HR planning process to determine the current and future staffing profiles necessary to achieve the overall institutional objectives;
- A strategy for recruiting, retaining and developing staff in an increasingly competitive labour market;
- A range of HR policies and procedures which provide a working environment, characterised by equality of opportunity, in which staff are able to maximise their performance, commitment and contribution to the aims of the University and its constituent Schools and Support Departments.

Implementation and Monitoring of the Plan

The implementation of this plan will be the shared responsibility of managers and HR staff. The policy framework, which will underpin the initiatives, will be drafted by the HR Division in close consultation with senior staff in the Schools and Support Departments and, where appropriate, the campus trade unions. Formal approval of policies and associated processes, together with subsequent monitoring of progress will be by the University's Personnel and Employment Committee and, ultimately by the University Council. The following "specialist" committees will provide advice to the University and generally oversee the more detailed implementation of initiatives, relevant to their remit:

- Equal Opportunities Forum
- Staff Development Steering Group
- HR Planning Review Group
- Job evaluation Steering Group
- Working Party on Contract Research Staff

Communication of the Plan

Once approved, the HR Plan will be circulated widely within the University and placed on the Intranet HR Website. Progress reports will be made to the Personnel and Employment Committee and to the University meetings with the Campus Trade Unions. Articles will be included in the internal magazine "Aston Aspects" in order to maintain the plan's profile. The overall provisions of the HR plan will be reviewed as part of the annual, internal planning process and in the light of the School and Support Department HR plans, referred to in **Priority Area d**, below.

Risk Assessment

Aston recognises the critical contribution made by its staff to the achievement of its overall strategic objectives. Staffing costs represent around 58% of the University's expenditure. Any continuing failure to recruit, develop, motivate and retain high quality staff represents a risk to the University. In addition, failure to ensure compliance with the ever increasing and complex employment legislation exposes the University to the potential external litigation which may have a financial implication and may damage to the institution's reputation.

The following major, high level risks have been identified as a result of not taking action under the HEFCE priority areas a-f:

Priority area a: **To Address Recruitment and Retention Difficulties**

Inability to recruit and retain key staff would adversely affect the University's ability to achieve its institutional objectives (e.g. enhancement of RAE outcomes, widening participation, teaching quality).

Priority area b: **To Meet Specific Staff Development Needs**

Staff without appropriate professional and managerial skills would restrict the University's ability to achieve its institutional objectives (e.g. poor teaching, lack of people management skills)
Lack of training in activities underpinned by legislation and statutory codes of practice would expose the University to external litigation (e.g. health and safety activities)

Lack of up-to-date IT skills would create a competitive disadvantage as compared with other HE Institutions.

Priority area c: **Equal Opportunities Targets and Good Practice, together with Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value and Job Evaluation**

Much of this activity is governed by legislation; failure to ensure compliance would expose the University to costly external litigation and potential damage to its reputation as an employer and as an institution which has embraced widening participation.

Failure to implement flexible, family friendly policies may lead to the loss of valued staff to competitor employers.

Priority area d: **Regular Staffing Reviews Reflecting Changes in market Demands and Technology**

Failure to plan for changes in staffing requirements in sufficient time to take appropriate action would impede the University's ability to attain its institutional objectives.

Priority areas e & f: **Performance Reviews of all Staff and Rewards Connected to Performance; Action to Tackle Poor Performance**

Failure to assess and meet staff development needs through appraisal mechanisms and the ability to recognise and reward good performance may lead to higher than acceptable attrition rates, with outstanding staff leaving to join competitor organisations. Lack of action to tackle poor performance would impact on the reputation of the University and may increase the likelihood of good staff leaving.

Priority Area a:

Address Recruitment and Retention Difficulties in a targeted and cost-effective manner

In the 2002-03 to 2006-07 University Strategic Plan, Aston recognises the critical contribution made by its staff to the achievement of its strategic objectives. The University remains committed to the recruitment and retention of high-quality academic and support staff and to their continuing development through the provision of a comprehensive range of Staff Training and Development Programmes.

In its Rules for Appointment, the University re-affirms its belief that "the selection and recruitment of staff is one of its most important activities". Over the past few years there has been considerable success in the recruitment of outstanding professorial and other academic staff, and the overall quality and commitment of all staff has contributed to the University's high teaching-quality assessment scores and its increasing reputation in research, reflected in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

The difficulties faced by Aston in the recruitment of outstanding staff occur in those subject or professional areas, highlighted in the Bett Report, as areas of general difficulty across the Sector, specifically;

- Finance & Accounting (both academic and support staff)
- Information Technology; Computer Science (both academic & support staff)
- Information Engineering; academic staff
- Electronic Engineering (specifically Photonics); academic staff
- Subjects allied to medicine (Optometry and Pharmaceutical Sciences); academic staff

Clearly, current University pay scales are not sufficient to close the "market gap" in these areas even with the use of discretionary incremental points above the normal salary maxima. Aston has a Performance-Related Pay (PRP) scheme (attached as **Appendix 1**). This, in part, is designed to give Heads of Schools and Support Departments the flexibility to address recruitment and retention issues through the devolved authority to award one-off merit payments, discretionary increments above the normal scales, or accelerated increments within the normal scales. In addition, and with the agreement of the Trade Unions, local discretionary increments have been added to the Academic-Related Grades 3 and 4. In some areas of recruitment these pay enhancements have not proved to be sufficient to match pay rates in the private and commercial sectors. The failure to recruit and retain high-calibre staff clearly has a detrimental effect on the attainment of the overall institutional objectives.

The strategic aims of the University include diversifying its sources of income, increasing research income, and commercialising research opportunities through interaction with business and commerce. It is placed, therefore, in direct competition with not only other HE institutions but also the private sector in attracting staff with these skills and experience.

Currently, Aston believes it does not have sufficient knowledge about its recruitment patterns, including why people choose to join, leave or do not apply for posts at the University. Equally, it has not systematically reviewed the effectiveness of current recruitment practices, including the choice of media, the use of head-hunters etc.

The outcome of such an analysis will enable the University to determine how additional resources could most effectively be directed.

Following HEFCE's approval of Aston's "emerging" HR Plan and the consequent release of first year funding, the university initiated a number of actions under **Priority area a**.

- The development of exit questionnaires, to be launched in August 2002, in order to gather data which will enhance our understanding of why staff choose to leave Aston
- The initiation of a review of the way in which benefits, associated with employment at Aston, are publicised in the recruitment media and further particulars for posts, including:
 - Staff development opportunities
 - Performance related pay
 - Pension arrangements
 - Campus facilities – sports and leisure
 - Family friendly policies including job share and part-time arrangements
 - Consultancy arrangements
 - Other "fringe benefits", such as travel loans and subsidised health care schemes
- The introduction, following consultation with the campus trade unions, of "market related supplements" to existing pay scales in areas of difficult recruitment. The authorisation for the use of such supplements at the advertisement stage is exercised by Personnel Services on the basis of independent market pay data provided by an external agency.
- The University now offers dowries, as part of the recruitment package, to be available to some academic appointees for the purpose of contributing to the set up costs of establishing their research disciplines at Aston or the appointment of supporting staff for a fixed period.
- A critical factor in successful recruitment is the ability to act speedily in the placing of advertisements and subsequent response handling. In recognition of this, the Human Resources section has developed its own recruitment web-site, as part of the University's main web site. This enables prospective candidates, on a global basis, to access directly details of posts, information about the University and Birmingham and to download the relevant application and equal opportunities forms. The University will monitor the effectiveness of this approach by means of analysing recruitment timescales.
- In order to facilitate succession planning, the University has made funding available under this initiative, to permit the early recruitment of replacements in key posts on the basis of the HR plans submitted by Schools of Study and Support Departments. Such funding may be used, for example, to facilitate overlap appointments, or the use of Search Consultants. This expenditure will increase in years 2 and 3 of the funding period, since succession planning, together with any associated shift in staffing profiles, will be critical to one of Aston's key strategic aims of further enhancing its research ratings on the next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).
- An issue of concern raised by the Working Group, which helped formulate the "emerging" plan related to unequal teaching workloads, both within and across Schools of Study, which are perceived as having a detrimental effect upon promotion opportunities, upon staff retention, and in some cases upon high-quality research output. The University has initiated a review of academic staff teaching workload, with a view to introducing load models for all Schools of Study.

A new initiative under this priority area relates to the career management and development of externally funded Contract Research staff. The University recognises that the achievement of one of Aston's strategic objectives of further enhancing its research ratings in the next RAE, relies significantly upon well-qualified and motivated research staff who are primarily externally-funded and employed on a fixed-term basis. As indicated in the "Concordat on the Career Management of Contract Research Staff in Universities and Colleges", the University accepts that such staff may have the potential to become research leaders or to be appointed to a full academic post involving teaching and/or research. A number of research staff at the University build up a research career on the basis of a series of fixed-term posts.

The University has set up a Working Group, chaired by a member of the professoriate, to investigate and develop a policy, code of practice and guidelines on the career management, training and development provisions, and employment terms of externally funded contract research staff.

The University will make available from 2003-04, funding under this initiative to establish a 'Bridging-fund' to cover the employment of selected Contract Research Staff where there is a gap between successive research contracts in order to secure the retention of outstanding staff.

A summary table showing the objective, targets, timetable and costs for this area follows.

Priority area a: To address recruitment and retention difficulties

Objective: To improve the University's ability to recruit and retain high quality staff in a cost-effective manner by evaluating and enhancing the effectiveness of current recruitment and retention strategies.

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
To develop & implement a process for conducting exit interviews for all leavers	From Aug 2002	From existing resources		
To develop & implement a scheme of market pay supplements (approx. 10 –15 posts by Year 3)	From Dec 2001	£63k	£100k	£120k
To gain access to external pay data	From Dec 2001	£4k	£4k	£4k
To establish a start-up "dowry" fund for key academic appointments (approx. 15-20 posts for the 3 year period)	From Oct 2001	£100k	£100k	£200k
To establish a succession planning fund in key areas (approx. 10 posts for the 3 year period)	From Oct 2001	£50k	£60k	£160k
To review the distribution of teaching loads across and within Schools of Study Appoint researcher (1.0 FTE) for 1 year located in the PVC's office	From Oct 2001	£17k	£17	£0
To establish a Contract Research Staff bridging fund	From Aug 2003	£0	£0	£47k

Evaluation: Recruitment and attrition data will be made available to Schools and Support Departments as part of the HR Planning Process, in order that they may monitor and review progress in "delivering to plan". At the centre, Personnel Services will monitor the effectiveness of measures detailed in this section by collecting and evaluating:

- Application rates
- Shortlist rates
- Recruitment timescales
- Institutional attrition rates
- Media effectiveness
- Trends and issues arising from the application of exit questionnaires

Priority Area b: Meet Specific Staff Development and Training Objectives that not only equip staff to meet their current needs but also prepare them for future changes.

As previously noted, the University Mission Statement signals Aston's commitment to maintaining and further enhancing its reputation as "an international centre of excellence in teaching, research and consultancy". Fundamental to the achievement of that goal is the ability to recruit, retain, reward and develop high calibre, well-motivated staff across the institution. The contribution made by staff development to this end is widely acknowledged. The principles underpinning the University's Staff Development Policy, (attached as **Appendix 2**), are that provision should:

- Be inclusive of all staff
- Promote continuing professional development and lifelong learning
- Support institutional effectiveness
- Contribute to the realisation of strategic aims

Currently, the University is operating within a challenging external environment. At the national level, there is an increasing need to meet the requirements of external accountability, exemplified by the demands of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the new Quality Assurance Agency arrangements for Academic Review. This has a number of implications for University managers, including the need to be able to produce detailed performance data, and to ensure that the University's preferred collegial model of decision-making is compatible with the ability of the centre to meet external demands for consistency in policy implementation.

Meanwhile, the expansion of HE within a stringent funding climate necessitates carefully planned development with high levels of efficiency. Aston is committed to expanding student numbers at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, consistent with its strategic aims and objectives. The University has successfully embraced the Widening Participation agenda through a range of initiatives. Recruitment of students from non-traditional backgrounds, whilst safeguarding academic standards, is being pursued in a number of ways, including outreach activities and collaboration with local schools, Sixth Form and FE Colleges. Another strand in the diversification of the student body arises from the recruitment of overseas students, and collaborative arrangements such as student exchanges. There are significant staff development implications in all of this, particularly with respect to learning and teaching.

Similar considerations apply in respect of curricular diversification, where the University is in the process of expanding the range of programmes in its portfolio and the approach taken to their delivery in terms of learning and teaching, assessment and student support. As noted in the University's ICT Strategy, the expanding role of ICT offers the opportunity to enhance both the shape and quality of provision. This will bring with it the need for an appropriate technical infrastructure to support new developments, and for staff who possess an understanding of the potential applications of ICT together with the necessary skills to maintain and update ICT systems.

Alongside the growth in revenue produced by expanding student numbers, Aston seeks also to diversify its sources of income. Funding via research and consultancy will be critical in this endeavour. One of the University's key educational objectives is to extend its "innovative and high quality research through the recruitment of leading academics and the provision of state-of-the-art equipment and specialist laboratories". This will require significant capital investment as well as highly skilled planning and financial management at institutional, School and subject level.

It is within this contextual framework that staff development needs should be located. Staff development priorities for the next 3-5 years have been identified in the Strategic Plan, together with a specific development plan and targets for the academic year 2001-02. The University Staff Development Steering

Group has endorsed this. Part of the plan relates to meeting the objectives of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy, drawing on TQEF monies, which have been made available to sponsor a range of projects and initiatives.

Aston already has a well developed staff development programme, details of which are contained in the 2001 staff Development Newsletter, attached as Appendix 6. In particular, it has developed a successful Postgraduate Professional Certificate in Teaching and Learning and an innovative Professional Development in Higher Education Award, aimed primarily at support staff.

Funding from the Rewarding and Developing Staff initiative will support further the work already in progress and enable additional activities to be undertaken. This funding will make a significant contribution to the enhancement of provision in support of institutional strategic aims and objectives.

Four key areas have been identified for the allocation of funds:

- Management development
- Research
- Learning and teaching
- IT skill development

Each area is dealt with in turn below.

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Existing staff development provision for Aston managers is targeted largely at first-line and middle managers. Already on offer are:

- A 3-day development programme for new, first-line managers, offered collaboratively with the Universities of Birmingham and Leicester, with the opportunity for candidates to gain the NEBS Introductory award
- Various events of relevance to managers within the Staff Development Open Programme, including sessions on Budgets, Delegation, Leadership and Appraisal
- Sessions specifically for administrative managers organised through the Midland Universities Administrative Training Consortium (MUATC), including Project Management and Supervision Skills

Additionally, there are plans in hand to introduce:

- A 4-day development programme for middle managers, offered jointly with the Universities of Birmingham and Leicester, leading to the NEBS Introductory Diploma.
- Central funding to support those staff with management responsibilities in undertaking the MBA offered by Aston Business School (ABS).

The need now is to focus on developing relevant provision for senior managers who are tasked to improve institutional effectiveness and meet corporate objectives. There are three specific proposals:

In-house Development Programme

In year one, the design and initiation of in-house sessions, drawing on specialist internal and external contributors, on a range of HR issues such as recruitment and selection, the management and development of teams, identifying development needs and managing underperformance. In each of years two and three, we will develop and implement a further series of sessions on other topics relating to the realisation of the University's key strategic objectives.

Development Days for Senior Managers

Twice-yearly development days for the Senior Management Team, focusing on a single key theme at each event. Areas for consideration would be identified by the team, and will include: fundraising, entrepreneurship, the management of teams performance management and reward mechanisms. Funds will be used to pay for the events, including the services of appropriate external facilitators.

Development Opportunities for School/Departmental Heads

Funds will be made available to support relevant development opportunities for School/Departmental Heads. This could include attendance at conferences, visits to other HEI's in the UK or overseas, and networking and other forms of information exchange. Opportunities would be sought with particular relevance to managers of specialist areas not traditionally catered for by in-house staff development provision – for example, the Director of Library & Information Services and the Head of Information and Communications Technology – Infrastructure Development and Support Group. Funding from year two onwards will be made available to support participation by senior managers in the Higher Education Staff Development Agency (HESDA), "Top Managers Programme" or other agreed provision.

The aim of this new provision, taken together with what is already in place, would be to create a more comprehensive, systematic framework for the Continuing Professional Development needs of Aston managers. The framework would cater for managers at all levels and at every stage of their careers. It would embrace a range of approaches to management development, combining individualised learning, generic skill development, task-oriented provision and context-specific development opportunities. The intention would be to foster central and local management teams well equipped to deal with the complex demands imposed by the external agenda and our own institutional priorities.

RESEARCH

Aston has a strong and improving track record in research, reflected in its performance in the 2001 RAE. In many fields Aston researchers have acquired national/international reputations for their work. The University is keen to consolidate this position, ensuring its ability to attract, retain and develop research staff of the highest calibre. In particular, there is a desire to focus on promoting excellence in research within each of the four University Schools. To date, central staff development provision in the field of research has been modest, and targeted mostly generically. In pursuit of excellence there is a need to develop provision aimed at researchers who are potential leaders in their field. To this end, there are two specific proposals for new provision, both of which have commenced in 2001-02 and will continue for the life of the funding period:

Visiting Scholars Programme

Funds will be made available to Schools to establish/support a Visiting Scholars programme, whereby eminent researchers of international repute would be invited to the University. The precise nature of their contribution would be determined by identified School-based need, but could include delivery of specialised workshops/seminars in research issues, presentations on their current work, acting as consultants to Aston research groups. Where appropriate, researchers from other Schools may have the opportunity to participate in particular activities.

Infrastructure Provision

Funds will be made available to enable School/Subject Areas to purchase the latest IT search support facilities for research staff. Increasingly, top-level researchers rely on having the appropriate software for access to relevant information sources, facilities are not always available on-site to Aston colleagues.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

The University has in place a range of existing staff development provision in learning and teaching, including:

- The PG/Associate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) and the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT), targeted at new and existing members of staff with teaching responsibilities
- Various sessions offered within the Staff Development Open Programme to support learning and teaching
- Short programmes developed at the request of Schools for PG students who carry some teaching responsibilities
- A number of projects and initiatives sponsored by the TQEF allocation

This provision reflects Aston's aim to achieve excellence in teaching. The University has performed well in recent teaching quality assessments, including outstanding assessments in Pharmacy and Business Studies, and is keen to strengthen further its profile in this respect. In pursuit of this objective there are two proposals to support specific new developments:

Technical Support for Information & Communication Technology (ICT) in Learning and Teaching

An emerging need has been identified for increased technical support for academic staff seeking to employ teaching and learning technologies within programmes. A particular area of need is for on-line learning developments to convert new or existing material into appropriate formats. This could include reformatting lecture notes or handouts from standard office applications (Word, Powerpoint etc) into web format (HTML, Java etc) and/or inputting questions into an assessment tool such as Question Mark Perception. These materials could be integrated into a virtual learning environment such as Web CT or Blackboard. Funding would be used to employ technical support on a fixed-term contract basis as required. This resource would complement the professional advice and guidance role of the Teaching and Learning Technology Specialist by producing needs-driven course materials for the delivery of learning. It would constitute a central resource for front-end users as part of the University's drive to strengthen the place of technology and multi-media applications in learning and teaching.

Provision for Specific Groups

The addition of further Professional Development Advisor resource (approximately one day per week), would support the development and implementation of, first, a short induction programme in learning and teaching for new staff and, second, provision in learning and teaching targeted at PG students with some limited teaching responsibilities. The intention would be to develop and implement the induction programme during year one, to review that programme and to develop the provision for PG students during year two, and to have both embedded within mainstream staff development options by year three. The provision will be based on a distributed learning model incorporating learning and teaching technology applications as appropriate.

IT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Currently, general IT training is offered through PRAXIS Solutions, an independent training company which provides training for Aston staff at an agreed price funded by Schools and Departments. PRAXIS offer a portfolio of short courses in Word, Excel, Access, Powerpoint and so on at basic, intermediate and advanced levels, as well as opportunities to gain recognised qualifications including Computer Learning and Information Technology (CLAIT) and European Computing Driving Licence (ECDL). Additionally, the

ICT Infrastructure Development and Support Group (ICT-IDSG) offers a limited number of workshops within the central Staff Development Programme linked to specific IT skills development. The University IT Task Force has asked the Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development (CSAPD) to ascertain the current IT training needs of staff and, in light of this, to review existing provision. Informal feedback from colleagues suggests the need for increased flexibility of access and delivery, some specialist training for certain groups of staff, general training in identified areas of need and the availability of training at no extra cost to Schools/Departments. On the basis of this feedback there are two specific proposals for the use of additional funding in this area:

IT Training for Specialist Staff

Aston's ICT Strategy identifies the need to undertake a major upgrade of the University's IT facilities and technical infrastructure. This in turn will require a substantial commitment to skills development for those members of staff who maintain the technical infrastructure. The training needs of this group, which will include colleagues in LIS, ICT-IDSG and School Computer Officers, are highly specialised. Funds will be used to support the training required by this relatively small team of staff, and to provide cover during their training.

IT Training for Other Staff

There is an identified need to provide specific, targeted IT skills development training for individuals or small groups of staff in support of School/Departmental needs. Funds will be used to pump prime bespoke training provision for local areas delivered in diverse ways – through PRAXIS, via the ICT-IDSG, using external trainers or by purchasing additional Professional Development Advisor support. Self-supporting resources could be purchased or developed to meet needs common to several areas.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

A full-time Administrative Officer post on ALC 2 grade within CSAPD will be required to lead on the administrative planning and co-ordination of the staff development component of the Rewarding and Developing Staff scheme. The postholder will work directly to the Head of Centre who will retain overall responsibility for co-ordination of this element of the initiative.

EVALUATING OUTCOMES

Evaluation of the development initiatives, under this priority area will take place at three levels:- individual, School/Department and University, in order to ensure effective assessment of the programmes and to reinforce links with strategic and operational plans. An outline of the areas to be evaluated and the information and methods used is set out below. In order to carry out the evaluation process effectively, the appraisal scheme needs to be fully embraced and operating effectively across the University. A proposed review of the appraisal scheme is discussed under **Priority Area e** of this plan. The output of appraisals should determine the profile and effectiveness of the centrally delivered staff development programme, through the annual HR plans prepared by Schools and Support Departments, part of which will review the extent to which development needs identified in the preceding year's plan have been met.

Priority Area b: To meet specific staff development and training objectives that not only equip staff to meet their current needs but also prepare them for future changes.

Objective 1: To enhance management development opportunities, with particular reference to senior managers (Heads of Schools/Departments and above)

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
To fund an in-house development programme for senior managers	From Oct 2002	£0k	£4k	£6k
To fund twice-yearly development events for the Senior Management Team	From Oct 2001	£2k	£2k	£3k
To establish a fund to promote networking, information sharing and other development opportunities for School/Departmental Heads	From Oct 2002	£0k	£22k	£29k

Evaluation: Course evaluation through the use of questionnaires
 Individual appraisal
 Review through the annual HR Planning Exercise
 Monitoring by the University's Staff Development Steering Committee

Objective 2: To support colleagues with significant research potential to become outstanding researchers

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
To establish and fund a visiting scholars programme for researchers	From Oct 2001	£14k	£17k	£20k
To purchase IT search support and other facilities for research staff	From Oct 2001	£6k	£8k	£10k

Evaluation

Individual appraisal
Dissemination of outcomes and sharing of good practice across the University
Review through the annual HR Planning Exercise
Monitoring by the University's Staff Development Steering Committee

Objective 3: To develop good practice and promote innovation in teaching and learning

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
To purchase fixed-term contract technical support for the integration of ICT into learning and teaching practice	From Oct 2001	£20k	£25k	£30k
To purchase additional professional staff resource at ALC 3 to extend developmental provision in learning and teaching for new staff and postgraduate research students with teaching responsibilities	From Oct 2001	£10k	£10k	£10k

Evaluation: Individual appraisal
 Review within annual HR Planning Exercise
 Monitoring by the University's Staff Development Steering Committee

Objective 4: **To extend the range and availability of IT training provision for staff**

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
To pay training and cover costs for specialist staff involved in developing and maintaining the technical infrastructure	From October 2001	£20k	£20k	£10k
To provide bespoke IT skills development through purchase of training provision and/or self-supporting resource materials	From October 2001	£10k	£15k	£20k

Evaluation: Individual appraisal
Review through the annual HR Planning Exercise
Review by the ICT Users' Group

Objective 5: **To lead on the administrative planning and co-ordination of the staff development component of the initiative**

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
To appoint a full-time Administrative Officer at ALC 2	From Oct 2001	£20k	£26k	£28k

Evaluation: Individual appraisal
 Review through the annual HR Planning Exercise

Priority Area c **Develop Equal Opportunities Targets, with programmes to implement good practice throughout the institution, including ensuring Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value and implementing institution-wide Job Evaluation Systems**

1. **Equal Opportunities**

Aston's Council approved the University's Policy. Code of Practice and Guidelines on Equal Opportunities in Employment in 1995 (attached as **Appendix 3**).

Section 1.2 of the Policy Statement commits the University to:

"pursuing a comprehensive policy of equal opportunities in employment in which individuals are selected, promoted and otherwise treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities and are given equal opportunities within the University".

The University's Strategic Planning document 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 refers to this key commitment in supporting the overall strategic aims and objectives of the institution. The University's Widening Participation statement commits the University to providing a high-quality learning environment for all its students, which includes responding to a diverse student population and student profile. Aston believes that this educational objective must be supported by diversity within the staff population, and a culture of equal opportunities in the organisation as a whole.

The overall responsibility for Equal Opportunities in Employment is delegated by the University Council to the Secretary-Registrar, who, prior to 2001, was assisted at the operational level by a Personnel Officer who undertook this work in addition to other responsibilities. An Equal Opportunities Forum with wide representation including the campus Trade Unions has overseen the implementation of the policy and reviewed it in the light of developing legislation and codes of practice. The University Council considers an annual report from the Forum.

A number of process-related initiatives were already established prior to the "Rewarding and Developing Staff" initiative including:

- The establishment of an Equality Adviser network
- The formulation of Recruitment and Selection Good Practice Guidelines, which complement the University's recently revised formal Rules for Appointment and the associated Recruitment Process Statement

The Fourth Annual Report to the University Council (June 2001), recognised, however, that the ability to move forward from the aspirations contained in the Equal Opportunities Policy to a positive programme of action, to identify and redress any imbalances in the staffing profile, continued to be hampered by an underlying lack of appropriate resource. The Equal Opportunities Forum, at its meeting on 1 December 2000, determined that there was a need for the creation of a dedicated Equal Opportunities Adviser and Assistant to accelerate progress in this area.

The first year HEFCE funding under the "Rewarding and Developing Staff" initiative, enabled the University to set up a dedicated Equal Opportunities Unit, staffed by a part-time Equal Opportunities Adviser and a supporting full-time Clerical Assistant. This has ensured rapid

progress in initiating a range of actions, determined as priorities by the Equal Opportunities Forum. The action plan set out below, shows those equal opportunities in employment targets achieved to date (by means of a tick), together with an challenging action plan for the next two years.

It has become increasingly apparent, however, that the University needs to provide an appropriate structure for dealing not only with equal opportunities employment issues, but also with academic and student issues. Increasingly, external legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000, have far reaching implications for organisations as employers and service providers. The Equal Opportunities Forum have approved a proposal that the staffing level and remit of the Equal Opportunities Unit be increased to support equal opportunities issues, generally, across the University. The Equal Opportunity Adviser post will be increased from 0.5fte to full time, subject to review after three years.

Staff Well-Being/Work-Related Stress

A policy and supporting procedures (attached as **Appendix 5**) relating to staff well-being and work-related stress are currently proceeding through the final stages of committee approval within the University. In parallel, a working group, chaired by a senior member of the academic staff, is formulating an implementation plan, to ensure that the package of measures is introduced and operated in an effective way. The aims of the policy are to:

- Identify and control, reduce or, where possible, avoid stress through effective and sensitive management;
- Develop, by on-going risk assessment, working practices that reduce the factors which may lead to stress in the work place;
- Encourage School and Support Department action plans to reduce stress levels
- Develop procedures to manage problems that do occur and to support individuals who are experiencing work-related stress
- Increase awareness of stress and methods to combat it
- Assist staff in managing stress
- Establish procedures for the re-integration of staff into the workplace after stress-related absence
- Monitor procedures and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of the policy

The successful implementation of the Policy, when adopted, will require resources including the need for staff training, the development of action plans within the Schools and Support Departments and the overall monitoring of the Policy at the University level.

In addition to the resources associated with implementation, shown in the "emerging " plan, the University will allocate further funding to provide external counselling to individual members of staff, where the university considers it to be appropriate.

Tables showing a summary of expenditure and detailed targets & timetable for this area follow:

Priority area c: **Develop equal opportunities targets, with programmes to implement good practice throughout an institution**

Objective: **To further develop the effectiveness of Aston’s Policy & Code of Practice on Equal Opportunities in Employment**

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURE

	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Appoint dedicated F/T Equal Opportunities Adviser: ALC Grade 3 - FTE – 3 years	From Oct 2001	£20k	£40k	£43k
Appoint Assistant: Clerical 3 - 1.00 FTE – 3 years	From Oct 2001	£17k	£17k	£17k
Initial set-up costs: (PC’s etc.)	From Oct 2001	£5k	£0k	£0k
Recurrent non-pay costs	Throughout	£4k	£4k	£4k
Design action plan and implement, seeking advice from a range of external agencies including the Higher Education Equality Advisory Service e.g. to conduct a targeted recruitment campaign	By Sept 2003	£5k	£0k	£10k
Implement Staff Well-Being/Stress Policy	By Dec 2002	£0k	£11k	£11k

Target Area 1: Work Life Balance Policies

Objectives: Improved retention of staff; More satisfied, more motivated and less stressed staff; Reduction of absenteeism; More flexible working arrangements for staff and managers

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	
Write Work-Life Balance Policy Statement	Oct 2001	✓
Produce Parental Leave Scheme from agreement	Oct 2001	✓
Write Paternity Leave Scheme	Oct 2001	✓
Review flexible working/Family Friendly Policy to ensure inclusive of all staff	Dec 2001	✓
Review Compassionate Leave/Leave in the Event of Urgent Domestic Circumstances	Feb 2002	✓
Review Maternity Leave Schemes for Support and Academic Staff	Mar – Dec 2002	✓ Support Staff Acad Staff not completed
Review Flexible Working Hours Scheme	Mar – Dec 2002	
Review Job Share guidelines	Mar 2002	✓
Write Guidelines for request to amend working hours	Mar – Dec 2002	
Review requirement for Policy Statement on part time working	Mar – Dec 2002	
Produce Project Plan for Challenge Fund	Feb/Mar 2003	
Write management guidelines for implementing current Work-Life policies and procedures	May – Dec 2002	
Review Child Care Facilities	Jan – Dec 2003	
Review other work-life balance initiatives utilised by other organizations	May – Sept 2002	
Publicise current Work-Life Balance Initiatives	May 2002-ongoing	

Evaluation:

- Survey staff on work-life balance needs and implementation
- Review survey results
- Review take-up of work-life schemes
- Review exit interview results
- Commence review and evaluation of current work-life policies and procedures
- Produce report to Equal Opportunities Forum

Target Area 2: Monitoring

Objectives: To identify the University's staffing profile; To identify the University's applicant profile through monitoring the recruitment and selection process; To identify areas of under-representation or inequality; To establish and review equality targets

TARGET	TIMESCALE	
Establish database of current staff equal opportunities information	Nov 2001	✓
Update and validate data	Dec 2001	✓
Establish data fields are appropriate	Dec 2001	✓
Review membership of Monitoring Working Group	Dec 2001	✓
Establish new terms of reference for Monitoring Working Group	Dec 2001	✓
Identify checklist of required external information and identify sources of data	Dec 2001	✓
Gather data concerning composition of local/national workforce in relevant occupational areas	Dec 2001	✓
Identify via Forum data analysis required	Dec 2001	✓
Review recruitment and selection monitoring system and establish database	Jan 2002	✓
Establish a procedure for linking Personnel Services data	Jan 2002	✓
Undertake analysis of baseline internal statistics	Mar-Sept 2002	In progress
Identify external comparators/benchmarks to be utilised	Jan-Dec 2002	
Undertake comparative analysis of internal and external statistics	Jan-July 2003	
Identify areas of under-representation or inequality	Jan 2002-July 2003	In progress
Determine priorities for attention	July-Sept 2003	
Identify quantitative and qualitative objectives	Sept 2003-July 2004	
Consult relevant parties i.e. TradeUnions, Schools/Depts	Ongoing	
Design and implement an action plan	Sept 2003-2004 *Ongoing annual basis	
Establish criteria for annual report to Equal Opportunities Forum	Sept 2002	

Evaluation Review action in the light of targets

Target Area 3: Equality Support Scheme

Objectives: To improve effectiveness of the existing scheme; Enhance the skills of the Equality Contacts; To ensure staff are aware and have access to the scheme.

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	
Assess the usefulness of looking at other university's schemes	Dec 2002	✓
Plan training programme (to include role plays)	Jan - Mar 2002	✓
Implement training programme	Sept 2002	
Assess the effectiveness of the contacts – introduce some test cases	Sept - Dec 2002	
Reinstate the contact meetings	Aug 2002	
Publicise the scheme – leaflet to go to each member of staff, posters etc	Dec 2002	
Update web page – include names	Dec 2002	

Evaluation Monitor the number of complaints of harassment from staff and the methods used for dealing with them e.g. Contacts, Equal Opportunities Adviser, Personnel Officers, Trade Unions Representatives.
Review number of staff requesting assistance and information from the Contacts.
Assess staff confidence in the scheme through survey questionnaire.

Target Area 4: Membership of Equal Opportunities Forum

Objectives: To formalise the Membership and Terms of Reference of the Forum; To widen representation from under-represented groups; To increase involvement from the Schools of Study/Support Departments; To establish an appropriate structure for dealing with academic and student related equal opportunities issues; To ensure that the members of the Forum are up to date with equal opportunities legislation

TARGET	TIMESCALE	
Review the Terms of Reference & Membership of the Forum	Dec 2001	✓
Devise update training programme for members	Dec 2002	
Implement training programme for members	Jan-June 2003 & ongoing awareness sessions	

Evaluation: Identify whether representation has improved
Review whether academic/student structure is effective
Survey staff/students to establish whether they feel they have access to the formal equal opportunities structures

Target Area 5: Recruitment & Selection

Objectives: To ensure good practice in the recruitment and selection process; To implement a University-wide system for recording recruitment & selection decisions; To ensure the recruitment and selection process is fair, equitable and consistent; To update and develop the skills of those involved in the recruitment & selection process

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	
Review the Recruitment and Selection Good Practice Guidelines	Feb-Dec 2002	
Ensure CUCO guidelines on age and sexual orientation are reflected	Feb-Dec 2002	
Devise feedback form for unsuccessful candidates to assist in monitoring recruitment procedures	Mar-Dec 2002	
Evaluate application forms to ensure meet EO requirements	Mar-Dec 2002	
Ensure EO statement is included in all job advertisements	Mar-Aug 2002	
Publicise the procedures	May-Dec 2002	
Ensure those involved in recruitment and selection are aware of procedures	Jan 2003-ongoing	
Devise training programme at appropriate levels	May - Sept 2002	
Implement training programme	Sept 2002-Jan 2003	
Devise a recommended standard testing package for specific job areas	Jan 2003	
Review tests for validity and possible discrimination	Feb 2003	
Devise procedure for monitoring occupational standards applied in specific job groups/grades	Mar 2003 (link with Job Evaluation Project)	

Evaluation: Analyse recruitment & selection statistics (see item 2)
Analyse information from selection decisions;
Identify areas of under-representation or inequality;
Survey new staff on experience of recruitment and selection process;
Analyse feedback forms from unsuccessful candidates;
Assess training feedback forms;
Review the use of person specifications.

Target Area 6**Awareness/Publicity****Objectives:**

To ensure staff have open access to the equal opportunities unit; To assist equal opportunities in becoming more mainstream in the University; To increase awareness of equal opportunities policies and procedures; To ensure equal opportunities information is ‘user-friendly’; To assist the University in increasing its external profile as an equal opportunities organisation.

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	
Update web pages	Feb 2002-Ongoing	✓
Include a briefing page and news page	Feb 2002	✓
Devise an information leaflet for EO	Feb-June 2002	
Ensure University EO statements have more prominence	Feb-June 2002	
Produce programme for induction	Feb 2002	Amended via discussion with Staff Devpt
Produce annual newsletter	Apr-May 2002	
Evaluate usefulness of drop-in awareness sessions	July-Dec 2002	
Devise standard programme of formal awareness sessions on specific EO issues	Sept 2002-April 2003	
Produce articles for Aston Aspects	Ongoing	
Tap in to local/national events	Ongoing	

Evaluation:

Identify number of hits to website and use of feedback route;
 Survey new staff to identify awareness of equal opportunities unit
 Review number of staff requesting assistance & information from the Unit
 Assess profile of equal opportunities on Personnel & Employment Committee & University Council;
 Use the members of the Equal Opportunities Forum to identify profile within Schools of Study/Support Departments;
 Review the take-up and success of tapping into events

Target Area 7: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

Objectives:

To ensure that:

the University meets its statutory duties under the RRAA; Race equality is mainstreamed in the University; the aims and objectives as they relate to race equality outlined in the University's Equal Opportunities policies can be achieved; Senior staff are aware of race equality issues, particularly in relation to policy decisions and take a leading and proactive role in promoting race equality; Staff and students and those in partnership with the University are aware of our aims and objectives relating to race equality; Policies and Procedures in relation to staff and students are free of unlawful racial discrimination; Wide representation of staff and students from different ethnic groups; Develop relationship with local community groups and national organisations; Enhance the student and staff experience through delivering race equality.

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	
Review CRE codes of practice	Dec-Feb 2002	✓
Respond to consultation questionnaire	Feb 2002	✓
Establish Procedure for incorporating student issues	Feb/Mar 2002	✓
Establish appropriate race equality forum	Feb/Mar 2002	✓
Identify relevant functions and policies	March 2002	✓
Identify schedule of priorities	Mar-May 2002	
Establish appropriate consultation procedures	Mar-June 2002	
Set up Race Focus Group	By May 2002	✓
Identify Monitoring requirements/Review monitoring categories	Mar-Dec 2002	
Identify arrangements for publishing REP and monitoring data	Mar-May 2002	✓
Produce draft Race Equality Policy	By May 2002	✓
Produce draft Race Equality Action plan	By May 2002	
Review training needs	April-Dec 2002	
Identify race equality aims (link to Equal Opportunity action plan - item 2 - Monitoring)	June 2002	
Identify ongoing review procedure	By May 2002	✓
Commence impact review of relevant functions and policies	June 2002-2004	* 3 yr prog

Target Area 7: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (continued)

<u>Approval route for Race Equality Policy and Race Equality Action Plan</u>		
Student Affairs Committee	14 May 2002	
Personnel and Employment Committee	20 May 2002	
Senate	29 May 2002	
University Council	19 June 2002	

- Evaluation:**
- Undertake impact assessments
 - Identify areas of under-representation or inequality
 - Determine Race Equality targets
 - Review action in the light of targets

Target Area 8: Policy for the prevention and management of work-related stress

Objective: To implement a policy and supporting procedures which:
Promotes a culture of encouragement, participation and open communication;
Increases awareness of work-related stress and the methods available to combat this;
Assists staff in managing stress in themselves and others;
Provides appropriate and confidential support for those who are experiencing stress

TARGET	TIMESCALE	
Approve policy for the prevention & management of work-related stress	May 2002	
Complete development of Implementation Plan	Oct 2002	
Implement and publicise plan and supporting procedures	Oct-Dec 2002	
Train appropriate staff	Oct-Dec 2002	

Evaluation: An appropriately constituted forum, including trade union membership will monitor the effectiveness of the policy and supporting procedures, by identifying trends, training needs and any required modifications to the policy. An annual report will be made to the University Council on the operation of the policy.

2. Job Evaluation & Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value

Aston currently has four separate Job Evaluation Schemes:

- Clerical and Secretarial: an in-house factor based scheme
- Academic-Related: an in-house factor based scheme
- Manual: Local Authority Scheme
- Technical : the Blue Book

When the two in-house schemes were developed in 1991, with the help of PE Inbucon, the initiative was considered to be innovative and a considerable improvement upon the generalised grade-descriptions contained in the then National Agreements. Aston now recognises, however, along with most other HE institutions, that it is vulnerable to potential claims of equal pay for work of equal value. The University is committed to introducing a generic Job Evaluation scheme. However, national discussions, referred to earlier, need to be brought to fruition in order for any job evaluation outcomes to be mapped onto a single pay spine, with the facility to address market related factors in a way originally envisaged by the Fender Report. The University has already carried out some preliminary evaluation of the Higher Education Role Analysis scheme (HERA) including a presentation to a representative group within the University. The initial reaction was favourable, particularly as the scheme would potentially speed-up the evaluation process and the outputs may be used for a range of other developmental activities. Preliminary discussions were also held with campus Trade Unions, some of whom attended the presentation.

The timescales set out in the "Emerging HR Plan" have not proved to be realistic, since the university wishes to proceed with these initiatives on the basis of a recommended approach and methodology, agreed at national level by the Employers' Association (UCEA) and the trade unions.

Aston welcomes, therefore, the advice issued in UCEA Circular 02/10, on 26 March 2002, concerning the implementation of equal pay reviews and job evaluation which have arisen from a joint employer/trade union working group.

The advice recommends that Higher Education Institutions should:

- Adopt a job evaluation/role analysis system for all staff
- Consider a range of available schemes, but that the "Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) scheme could be recommended
- Carry out Equal Pay Reviews in partnership with the recognised trade unions.

Aston is committed to accepting these recommendations and the Full HR plan has been amended to take account of the likely timescales and resources required to implement them.

As part of the consultation process associated with the development of this plan the University's Equal Opportunities Forum has endorsed the proposals, as have the Joint Campus Trade unions, with the exception of the AUT.

The AUT's position, as set out in a letter to all Vice-Chancellors from the National President, is that:

- It is strongly committed to securing equal pay for work of equal value;
- It support the implementation of pay audits;

- It believes that proprietary job evaluation schemes such as HERA are not capable of valuing the professional roles of higher education staff and will not ensure equal pay for work of equal value;
- It has developed and is testing an alternative model, which seeks to establish national grading arrangements which can be cross-referred with locally applied job evaluation mechanisms.

In the light of the AUT's comments, the University will continue to assess a range of job evaluation methodologies with the Joint Unions, with the aim of determining and implementing a preferred scheme with undue delay. In addition, the Human Resources Division will carry out a pay review. To this end, the responsibilities of a senior member of the Personnel Services Staff have been reconfigured to provide sufficient resource to be devoted to the management of job evaluation, the implementation of pay reviews and the implications arising from the introduction of the single salary spine later this year. The Equal Opportunities Unit will also continue to support these activities.

A summary table showing the objective, targets, timetable and costs for this area follows.

Priority area c: Job Evaluation and Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value

Objective: To achieve the legal and ethical obligation to give pay for work of equal value and to eliminate any unfair inequalities in pay by: establishing whether there are any pay inequities arising because of gender, race or disability; analysing in more detail the nature of any inequities, the factors creating inequities and diagnose the causes; Determining action required to deal with any inequities revealed; Implementing & maintaining a non-discriminatory job evaluation scheme which defines the relative worth of jobs within the university in order to establish internal relativities and provide the basis for designing an equitable grade structure, grading individual jobs within that structure and managing relativities.

TARGETS	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE		
		2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Set up Steering Group to select & implement JE Scheme	From June 2002			
Redesignate senior member of Personnel Services staff to lead project (ALC 4)	May 2002	£18k	£36k	£36k
Review HERA & any other alternative schemes in detail	By December 2002			
Consult with Trade Unions and Heads	Throughout			
Assume purchase of HERA	By January 2003	£0k	£16k	£0k
Appoint Job Analyst to support Schools & Support Depts : ALC Grade 2 - 1.00 FTE (2.5 year apptmt)	By June 2002	£5k	£29k	£29k
Licensing Agreement & Operating Costs		£2k	£4k	£4k
Train all appropriate staff	By April 2003			
Evaluate Jobs	By May 2004			
Conduct appeals	By November 2004			
Adopt Grading Structure & map onto single salary spine	By 1 August 2004			
Implement Pay Review	By June 2003			

Evaluation: Implementation and outcomes of Job Evaluation will be continuously monitored and evaluated by the Project Group and the Personnel & Employment Committee. The outcomes of the Pay Review will be considered by the Personnel & Employment Committee & assessed against the process templates contained in UCEA Circular 02/10.

Priority Area d:

Regular reviews of staffing needs reflecting changes in market demands and technology. The reviews would consider overall numbers and the balance of different categories of staff.

Current Position

Aston recognises the critical importance of Human Resource Plans, as an integral part of its overall institutional planning process. Although the University had previously required staffing projections as part of the internal planning process, these have primarily been used for budgetary purposes. As part of the 2002-03 internal planning round, Schools of Study and Support Departments have been required to produce broader HR Plans for the first time.

In launching this initiative, in February 2002, Schools and Support Departments were advised that:

“The primary purpose of HR planning is to provide a systematic and continuing process of analysing and organising the University’s HR needs, in the light of changing circumstances, and developing personnel policies appropriate to the longer term effectiveness of the organisation. HR planning is an integral and central part of the overall strategic planning process. Such plans will be the “living blueprint” for action within the Schools and Support Departments, and will be a key driver for the development of institutional HR policies and procedures which will enable the local plans and the University’s objectives to be met”.

The first round of HR planning has been pitched at a relatively simple level, with a view to developing and refining the process in subsequent years. This approach reflects the need to increase the HR planning experience and skills, of both departmental and personnel staff, and the requirement to implement a Human Resources IT system, which is critical to the provision and analysis of staff data; Aston does not currently have such a system in place.

In the light of the above, Schools and Support Departments were asked to adopt a more narrative approach to the provision of the following information:

- The identification of the major HR issues facing the School/Department over the five year planning period, e.g.
 - Staff development
 - Mix of skills
 - Structural issues
 - Staff turnover
 - Age profile
 - Grade distribution
 - Performance issues
 - Absence issues
- An indication of any actions to be taken locally, or at the institutional level, to address any of the above;
- An indication of any specific changes to personnel policies and procedures, required to enable local objectives to be met;

- Specifically, for 2002-03:

Known vacancies to be filled and timescales;
Identification of any posts likely to be difficult to fill and proposed actions to overcome the problem;
Staff development needs;
Restructuring Plans

In preparation for the planning exercise, Schools and Departments were provided with basic staff data, including:

- A full in-post staff list, showing grade, contract type etc.
- An age profile and retirement indicator
- An analysis of labour turnover

and were provided with support and advice from their designated Personnel Officers.

Future Developments

In order to develop and refine the HR planning process in future years, the following targets will be set:

- The expeditious selection and implementation of an HR IT system, with the allocation of appropriate resources to support this initiative;
- The provision of training for appropriate School and Support Service Staff in HR planning techniques;
- The provision of increasingly sophisticated data to assist in the planning process and the monitoring of plans;
- Enhanced support from the designated Personnel Officers in the drafting of HR Plans.

The University also recognises that, in order for the review of staffing needs to be translated into action, there needs to be a much better understanding of the current and future, external labour market. Aston will obtain this intelligence by developing its relationship with a number of external agencies, including Hay, who have provided advice on the use of market pay supplements, as outlined in the response to **Priority Area a**, within this plan.

A summary table showing the objectives, targets, timetable and costs for this area follows.

Priority Area d: Regular reviews of staffing needs, reflecting changes in market demands and technology. The reviews would consider overall numbers and the balance of different categories of staff

Objective: To develop a systematic and increasingly quantitative mechanism for determining the University's staffing requirements over any planning period. To enable the University, the Schools and Support Departments to implement HR policies and procedures which respond to those needs in an effective and timely manner

TARGET	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE	
		2002-03	2003-04
First round HR Plans	From February 2002	From existing resources	
Review of HR Plans	May/June 2002		
Link with Staff Development Programme	From June 2002		
Develop External Labour Market Data	From October 2002		
Training on HR Planning	From December 2002		
Enhanced HR Plans	2003-04 onwards		
Appoint Project Manager - IT System Development	From September 2002	48K	48K
Evaluate/Select HR IT System*	By December 2002		
Implement HR IT System –training costs	By December 2003	From existing resources	
*Note: Funding for IT Package within normal University Budget			

Evaluation: Assessment of School/Support Departments' annual HR plans by a newly constituted "HR Planning Review Group" – a sub-group of the Council's Personnel and Employment Committee.

Priority Area e

Annual performance review of all staff, based on open and objective criteria, with rewards connected to the performance of individuals including, where appropriate, their contribution to teams.

Current Position

Aston re-launched its Appraisal Scheme (attached as **Appendix 4**) for all staff in 1999, reaffirming its commitment to the process as a means of:

“Developing the contribution of staff and engaging staff in the achievement of the University’s strategic aims”.

Furthermore the Appraisal Policy Statement states that:

“The University sees appraisal as a fundamental part of the normal management process whereby managers and staff meet regularly to discuss issues of importance to the individual, the team, Schools and Departments and to the University.”

The scheme, which is voluntary, is based on a staff development model and is currently divorced from considerations of pay. The University wishes to maintain this separation. A recent survey carried out by the Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development, suggested that around 50% of staff had not received an appraisal in the year preceding the survey. In addition, whilst within some Schools and Support Departments, the concept of appraisal seemed to be well-embedded in the management practices, in others there was a view that there was a lack of senior management commitment to the process.

The scheme envisages that the staff development needs identified by the appraisal process will be incorporated into School/Support Department training plans, which will help to ensure that the training opportunities provided centrally are relevant and cost effective. A major weakness of the current arrangements is that such training plans have not been provided to the Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development. This deficiency is now being addressed by the production of the HR plans, described under **Priority Area d** of this plan.

As indicated in the emerging plan, Aston operates a Performance Related Pay Scheme (PRP) (attached at **Appendix 1**) for all staff groups. The Scheme is devolved to Heads of Schools and Support Departments and, in the case of Professorial and equivalent staff, to the Council's Remuneration Committee. They operate the process using broad institution-wide criteria adapted to the specific aims and objectives of their areas. 3.8% of the pay bill for academic and related staff is withheld to create a targeted element of funding for distribution to Schools and Departments, to fund the award of PRP to these groups of staff. PRP awards to other staff are funded from School/Support department resources.

In some areas, such as Aston Business School (ABS), PRP is perceived and applied as a powerful recruitment, retention and motivational tool. The Business School HR Plan states:

“ABS’s PRP is a unique and powerful mechanism that gives ABS a huge advantage in the market. Because of centralised systems in other universities, our PRP is hard for the competition to match and is sufficiently sensational for staff in other business schools to know about it. Besides rewarding high performing teachers, researchers and

entrepreneurs in ABS, it also means that ABS staff who are doing well are automatically paid above national rates. PRP is getting to be enough money to make it very hard for the competition to recruit our staff horizontally". In support of the value placed on the PRP process, ABS supplement the University allocation of funding, with significant top-up sums from the School's "own" resources.

The operation of the scheme in ABS is characterised by clearly articulated criteria, and a systematic and rigorous method of assessment, which "triggers" the award of PRP. Defined amounts of money are awarded, when performance levels are met or exceeded.

Schools and Departments are required to submit an annual report to the Personnel and Employment Committee detailing the process and outcomes of each annual PRP review. The University acknowledges that, in some areas of the university, the processes operated are not as rigorous or as well formulated as in areas of good practice. This has led to the emergence of anecdotal evidence suggesting that the scheme engenders feelings of unfairness and perceptions of a "closed process" amongst some staff.

Consultation with the campus Trade Unions, conducted in the development of this "full plan", has reinforced this view. The Trade Unions wish to see appraisal remain as a staff development tool, but would not rule out the concept of separate, individual performance reviews, for all staff, linked with the PRP process.

With the help of a consultant from the Office of Public Management (OPM), a senior management seminar held on 6 May 2002, considered the implications for Aston of **Priority area e**. The main conclusions were:

- Aston wished to recognise and reward good performance;
- Appraisal mechanisms should contain, as a key component, the translation of overall institutional objectives and School/Support Department objectives into the individual contributions people can make in attaining them;
- There is a need to define and, where possible, measure performance criteria;
- That there is not sufficient sharing of good practice across the University;
- That the definition and identification of good performance, would be assisted by greater, top-down communication of the University's mission and objectives;
- That the University does not know enough about what factors motivate staff and that this information was critical in deciding how we set about designing reward, recognition and staff development initiatives. An appropriate way of gathering this information would be to design and implement a staff attitude survey, perhaps initially on a pilot basis. Such an exercise would need to be repeated on a regular basis in order to assess the impact of any changes in policies. It would also be used in conjunction with data derived from the exist questionnaires, proposed under **Priority Area a** of this Plan.

Future Actions

In the light of the above, Aston will:

- Design and implement a staff survey, covering motivational factors, reward and recognition mechanisms and the way in which staff development needs are identified and met;
- Undertake a further review of its appraisal and PRP schemes in the light of the survey outcomes with the aim of ensuring that:

Reward and recognition mechanisms are valued by staff and felt to be fair in their application

Such mechanisms do impact on the retention of valued staff

Outcomes of individual appraisals are reflected in the Schools/Support Departments annual HR Plans

Training programmes provided by the Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development are consistent with the defined needs of the University's staff and operational units, and any overriding University needs.

Priority Area e: Annual performance reviews of all staff, based on open and objective criteria, with rewards connected to the performance of individuals including, where appropriate, their contribution to teams

Objective: To ensure that the University has effective and well utilised mechanisms for managing, reinforcing and encouraging the performance of individual staff and their contribution to the attainment of School/Support Departments and University objectives

TARGET	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE	
		2002-03	2003-04
Design and carry out staff survey and evaluate	By November 2002	From existing resources	
Review Appraisal Scheme	By February 2003	From existing resources	
Link Appraisal with Central Training Programme	By February 2003	From existing resources	
Review Performance Related Pay Scheme	By May 2003	From existing resources	
Consider & Implement Individual Performance Reviews	By June 2003	From existing resources	

Evaluation: Participation rates in the current or any modified appraisal scheme will be monitored centrally. The Centre for Academic & Staff Development will undertake periodic attitude surveys of staff. An annual report will be considered by the Staff Development Steering Group, a sub-group of the Personnel & Employment Committee.

In considering annual HR plans from Schools/Support Departments, the HR Planning Review Group will ensure that staff development needs arising from individual appraisals are consolidated into a staff development element of the plan. The "Staff Development Steering Group", which is chaired by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor and reports to the University Council's Personnel and Employment Committee will ensure that the central staff development provision is determined in accordance with School/Support Department needs.

Evaluation of any modified PRP scheme following the review, will be by consideration of annual reports from School/Support Departments on process and outcomes by the University's Personnel & Employment Committee. The University will facilitate the sharing of good practice. Periodic staff surveys and exit interviews will also be analysed.

Priority Area f

Action to tackle poor performance

Current Position

Aston believes that this priority area should be more appropriately entitled “Managing Performance” and as such, encompasses a wide range of supportive procedures and management techniques, within which, formal disciplinary action should be considered a measure of last resort. Aston already has a raft of procedures relating to the management of performance, including:

- Induction
- Probation
- Staff appraisal
- Mentoring
- Staff Development activity

These procedures either support the development of staff performance or help to ensure that any performance issues are identified and addressed in a timely way. Aston’s current disciplinary procedures for support staff, currently under review, provide a mechanism which attempts to cover a wide range of circumstances, from matters of conduct, including gross misconduct to capability issues, which may be resolved through the provision of training. Aston is currently assessing the draft revisions to the Model Statute, including disciplinary procedures affecting academic staff. It is recognised that the primary responsibility for the management of performance rests with line managers, who must have the will to exercise disciplinary action if it is warranted. The University has a responsibility to ensure that all managers have an understanding of, and are trained in appropriate procedures and techniques, and are professionally supported by their designated Personnel Officers.

Future Action

The University will conclude the current review of disciplinary procedures for support staff and will consider, in consultation with the campus trade unions, the introduction of a separate "Capability Procedure". This will be designed to deal with performance and health issues, as distinct from matters relating to conduct. A review will also be undertaken by Human Resources of the interrelationship of existing performance management processes, such as probation and mentoring, with a view to ensuring clarity of purpose and use.

In respect of the new disciplinary and other procedures for academic staff, contained in the proposed revisions to the Model Statutes, the University will consider their usefulness to Aston and, if adopted, will develop supporting, procedural Ordinances, consistent with statutory guidelines on good practice.

A module will be included in the senior management development programme referred to under **Priority Area b** of this plan on managing performance

A summary table showing the objectives, targets, timetable and costs for this area follows.

Priority Area f: **Action to tackle poor performance**

Objective: **To ensure that mechanisms are in place whereby performance and capability issues are managed in a fair and consistent way, taking into account both the requirements of the University as the employer and the needs of individual members of staff.**

TARGET	TIMESCALE	EXPENDITURE	
		2002-03	2003-04
Consider Revised Model Statute for Academic Staff	By November 2002	From existing resources	
Review existing Disciplinary Procedures for Support Staff	By December 2002	From existing resources	
Formulate and Implement Capability Procedure	By September 2003	From existing resources	
Review other performance management processes e.g. mentoring	By September 2003	From existing resources	

Evaluation: **Human Resources will monitor the incidence of disciplinary and capability cases, together with the number of appeals which arise from actions taken under the procedures. In addition, the effectiveness of any remedial action arising from these procedures will be monitored in terms of an improvement in individual performance within the required timescales.**

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE FOR PRIORITY AREAS a-f.			
		Expenditure	
	2001-02	2002-3	2003-4
	£	£	£
<u>Recruitment and Retention (a)</u>			
Market pay supplements	63,000	100,000	120,000
Access to external pay data	4,000	4,000	4,000
Dowries for some academic staff appts	100,000	100,000	200,000
Succession planning fund	50,000	60,000	160,000
Teaching load review	17,000	17,000	0
Research staff bridging fund	0	0	47,000
<u>Staff Development (b)</u>			
Snr Management Development	2,000	28,000	38,000
Research Support	20,000	25,000	30,000
Learning & Teaching Support	30,000	35,000	40,000
IT Development ICT	30,000	35,000	30,000
Admin Support	20,000	26,000	28,000
<u>Equal Opps and Job Evaluation - c</u>			
EO Adviser: 1 FTE ALC 3 (3 yrs)	20,000	40,000	43,000
Appoint Clerical Asst: 1 FTE Cl.3 (3 yrs)	17,000	17,000	17,000
Set up costs (PC etc)	5,000	0	0
Annual non-pay running costs	4,000	4,000	4,000
Equal Opps recruitment initiatives	5,000	0	10,000
Implement Work-Related Stress Policy	0	11,000	11,000
Redesignate existing staff member as Project Leader: ALC 4 (2.5 years)	18,000	36,000	36,000
Purchase HERA	0	16,000	0
Licensing & Operating costs	2,000	4,000	4,000
Appoint Job Analyst to support Schools & Support Depts: 1 FTE ALC2 (2.5 yrs)	5,000	29,000	29,000
<u>HR Planning (d)</u>			
Project Manager HR IT System	0	48,000	48,000
<u>Performance appraisal & reward (e)</u>			
	0	0	0
<u>Tackling Poor Performance (f)</u>			
	0	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	412,000	635,000	899,000
<u>HEFCE Grant Available</u>	423,000	635,000	899,000
<u>Balance</u>	11,000	0	0

ASTON UNIVERSITY

POLICY FOR THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

Definition of Stress

The University accepts the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition of stress. Currently, the HSE states.

"We define work-related stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.

This makes an important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulating, motivating, and can give a 'buzz') and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or 'pressures' that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.

Who experiences work-related stress? Everyone can, in principle. No-one is immune. Work-related stress exists where people perceive they cannot cope with what is being asked of them at work. It is important to remember that work-related stress is not an illness, but if it is prolonged or particularly intense, it can lead to increased problems with ill health." [HSE, *Tackling Work-related Stress: A manager's guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being*, 2001]

Responsibilities of the University: A Policy Statement

The University recognises that its staff are its most valuable asset, and that only through their personal and professional development - in a healthy and safe working environment - can they be encouraged to contribute fully to the life of the University in the achievement of its strategic aims. What follows is an attempt to outline the nature of work-related stress, and consider ways in which Aston University may respond. This policy and accompanying guidance was approved by Council (on date) but it is not incorporated into individual contracts of employment or otherwise binding.

Whilst the University has no control over external factors, as a good employer it wishes to promote the physical, psychological and social well-being of all its employees. It is committed to ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, that no member of staff is subjected to an excessive and sustained level of reasonably foreseeable work-related stress that is detrimental to their health. Employees suffering from excessive and sustained levels of work related stress will be treated in accordance with the Policy, Code of Practice and Guidelines on Equal Opportunities in Employment and appropriate related present and future policies. The needs of people with disabilities will be given particular consideration.

Objectives of the Policy

The University aims to help understand the phenomenon of work-related stress and put in place both preventative and reactive measures including:

- promoting a culture of encouragement, participation and open communication.
- increasing awareness of the phenomenon of work-related stress and the methods available to combat this.
- assisting staff in managing stress in themselves and others
- providing appropriate and confidential support for those who are experiencing stress.

Responsibilities of all Employees

Employees have a responsibility to take reasonably practicable steps to minimise their own stress-levels and those of their fellow workers who may be affected by their acts or omissions. They also have a legal responsibility to comply with the Health and Safety at Work legislation and other statutory regulations to take reasonable care of their health and safety and that of other persons with whom they work. Employees should, therefore, draw the attention of the University

to any concerns about work-related stress which might present a health hazard to themselves or other persons (See The Occupational Health Management Protocol).

Responsibilities of Managerial or Supervisory Staff

In order to enable managers and supervisors to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of instances of excessive and sustained work-related stress which are brought to their attention (cf. The Occupational Health Management Protocol), they will receive information about, and training in, the basic physical and psychological symptoms of stress (as referred to in the Guidance for Managers and Supervisors in Relation to the Care of Staff) in order to take appropriate and reasonable action to avert this. The manager or supervisor is not expected, or presumed, to have specialist knowledge in this area and should seek assistance accordingly.

Risk Assessment

There are difficulties in undertaking risk assessments in respect of work-related stress. In *Tackling Work-related Stress* the HSE states:

“One of the key goals of the work-related stress policy and guidance is to promote advice for all staff in identifying the main risk factors”.

The Guidance for Managers and Supervisors in Relation to the Care of Staff, which should be read in conjunction with the University Policy, is provided for this purpose. A leaflet for all staff will also contain basic information on the prevention and management of work-related stress.

THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL FOR STAFF EXPERIENCING WORK-RELATED STRESS

This protocol provides a unified Code of Practice for the care of staff experiencing work-related stress across the University.

Referral Pathway:

1. When a member of staff notices symptoms of stress in themselves or experiences any health issue which effects their work, they should consider discussing this with their manager or supervisor in the first instance. If the staff member decides that this is not appropriate, or the matter requires additional professional guidance, reference should also be made to Human Resources who may, depending upon circumstances, suggest to the staff member that he or she be assessed by the University Occupational Health Physician (OHP), or, if circumstances require, refer the member of staff to the OHP direct.
2. The involvement of the Occupational Health Physician at an early stage can help facilitate the co-ordination of communication between the University and a staff member's own General Practitioner as well as providing advice as regards future management.
3. If a member of staff consults the Occupational Health Physician directly, a report will not be released to the University without the member of staff's consent. However, when the referral, is made through either the line manager in the School, Department, or Human Resources, a report will be sent to Human Resources. The member of staff will have a right to view the report prior to it being sent to the University.
4. The release of medical information from an employee's general practitioner requires his or her specific consent in accordance with the Access to Medical Records Act 1988.
5. When it is brought to the attention of a manager or supervisor that a member of staff has symptoms of stress, including frequent short-term absences, which is affecting their work, there should be a joint discussion with the person concerned in the first instance.
6. If both the manager or supervisor and the member of staff consider that the matter requires additional professional guidance, reference should also be made to Human Resources who may, depending upon circumstances, suggest to the staff member that they be assessed by the University Occupational Health Physician (OHP), or, if circumstances require, refer the member of staff to the OHP direct.

7. It is essential that managers or supervisory staff keep records of the advice and action they have taken in relation to an employee suffering from work-related stress. In accordance with the Data Protection Act, the employee has the right to access such information. Progress should be recorded, monitored and reviewed appropriately.

8. Wherever reasonably practicable, an employee experiencing excessive and sustained work-related stress will have their work adapted, including the possibility of alternative employment within the University, so as to remove the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level. A joint strategy will be agreed with the person concerned, their manager or supervisor, the OHP and Human Resources as appropriate. If there is no suitable alternative employment within the University which would not involve the risk of reasonably and foreseeably exacerbating their condition, an employee should recognise that, ultimately, it may be necessary, for sufficient reason, to terminate their employment.

The Policy in Practice: Monitoring and Evaluation

As with the Equal Opportunities Policy, the University Council will have overall responsibility for determining the Work-related Stress Policy. Similarly, the formulation and implementation of the policy will be delegated to the Secretary-Registrar, supported by other appropriate senior officers of the University. An appropriate forum with clearly defined reporting lines and remit will be established with suitable membership, including trade unions, in which matters of work-related stress can be considered.

A member of Personnel Services will be given responsibility for advising the University's senior management, and other appropriate administrative and academic staff and committees of the University, on matters of work-related stress and for producing an annual report to Council in conjunction with the consultative forum.

Each employee of the University will be issued with a copy of the University's Policy on Work-related Stress and Guidance and all new staff will be briefed on it as part of their induction, both at institution and School/departmental level. Every staff member will be made aware of his or her individual responsibility to ensure that the policy is effective. The development and dissemination of good practice, the recognition of the symptoms of stress, and the raising of university-wide awareness of work-related stress will be monitored through Human Resources in conjunction with the Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development. Training and Development opportunities will reflect the University's Policy on Work-related Stress.

The Work-related stress Policy will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis not exceeding three years to:

- identify trends, the need for training and areas where change or improvements to policies or procedures may be needed.
- An annual report will be made to Council on the operation of the Policy on Work-related Stress.

CURRENT UNIVERSITY RESOURCES TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY BE EXPERIENCING WORK-RELATED STRESS INCLUDE:

Human Resources and Personnel Department; Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development; The Counselling Service; The Health Centre; The University Chaplaincy; The Trade Unions; The Staff Handbook; The University Sport and Recreation Facilities.

ASTON UNIVERSITY

POLICY FOR THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS IN RELATION TO THE CARE OF STAFF

The information contained in the Guidance for Managers and Supervisors should be read in conjunction with The Work-related Stress Prevention and Management Policy. The Guidance is put forward to assist Managers and Supervisors in fulfilling their workplace responsibilities.

Effects of Stress

While each individual's response to stressors is unique, some common symptoms are discernible:

- Behavioural - withdrawal, hostility, excessive eating, drinking or smoking, poor concentration, being too busy to relax, absenteeism;
- Emotional - Loss of confidence, lack of self esteem, anxiety, frustration, anger apathy;
- Physical - difficulties in sleeping, frequent and unspecified aches and pains, digestive problems.

Displaying some of these symptoms does not automatically indicate that a person is experiencing stress, but they point to such a possibility.

SIGNS OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

An individual's stress can be detrimental to themselves and adversely affect the efficiency, image and costs of an area or School. The knock-on effect on other staff, and on students can be considerable, and, in turn, increase their stress levels. Morale and health tend to suffer, resulting in inefficiency, poor relationships, sickness absences, and high staff turnover.

In general, potentially harmful levels of stress are most likely to occur in the following circumstances: when pressures or stressors, accumulate or are prolonged; when an individual perceives themselves as being unable to exert any control over the demands that are placed upon them, and/or are left feeling confused by conflicting demands that are made upon them. Some of the common symptoms of stress problems in an organisation include: inferior work performance, loss of motivation and commitment, tense relationships at work and increased sickness absence.

Responsibilities of Managerial or Supervisory Staff

All employees can contribute significantly to maintaining a positive workplace culture. This is especially true of those in a managerial or supervisory role who contribute by displaying a leadership style which encourages their colleagues to discuss feelings of stress without the stigma of this being interpreted as a sign of weakness or failure. The responsibilities of managerial or supervisory staff are set out in the University Policy.

As the University Policy and Occupational Health Management Protocol States: "Wherever reasonably practicable, an employee experiencing excessive and sustained work-related stress will have their work adapted, including the possibility of alternative employment within the University, so as to remove the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level. A joint strategy will be agreed with the person concerned, their manager or supervisor, the OHP and Human Resources as appropriate".

A SUPPORTIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT CAN BE PROVIDED BY:

Leadership Style:

- Dealing with staff in a sensitive and caring fashion.
- Regular monitoring of staff satisfaction and well-being.
- Ensuring that staff know whom to talk to about problems.
- Fostering a team approach and good relationships between members of staff.

Communication:

- Having regular two-way communication with staff, not only at formal meetings - making sure there is also an opportunity for informal discussion.
- Communicating and discussing team objectives.
- Recognising and praising individual or group achievements; hard work and efforts.
- Giving support and providing constructive criticism when required; making opportunities for staff to discuss their concerns. Listening sympathetically and taking appropriate action.
- Assessing the impact that your actions and decisions have on the staff for whom you have responsibility, e.g., preparing staff for proposed changes in staffing levels, work tasks and responsibilities.

Work and work design:

- Setting out clear roles and responsibilities for your staff which they understand and which they can work to.
- Regular reviewing of known work pressures such as excessive workload, tight deadlines, staffing levels, and the need for staff skills development.
- Identifying jobs where stress has been or is a problem and see what can be done to reduce the risk of stress to jobholders.
- Ensuring that instructions and requests to staff are clear and are not conflicting.
- Allowing flexible work schedules when this is reasonably practicable.

CURRENT UNIVERSITY RESOURCES TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY BE EXPERIENCING WORK-RELATED STRESS INCLUDE:

Human Resources and Personnel Department; Centre for Staff and Academic Practice Development; The Counselling Service; The Health Centre; The University Chaplaincy; The Trade Unions; The Staff Handbook; The University Sport and Recreation Facilities.

Other sources of help can be provided by a person's own general practitioner who may be able to arrange counselling through the NHS and a range of organisations including: The British Association of Counselling; CRUSE Bereavement Care; Relate (Couple Counselling); The Samaritans.

**ASTON UNIVERSITY STAFFING PROFILE
AS AT 21 MAY 2002**

Current FTE Totals			
Staff Group	Gender		Grand Total
	Female	Male	
Academic	48.40	179.10	227.50
Academic Related	73.35	83.79	157.14
Clerical & Related	221.51	59.01	280.52
Manual	52.04	68.48	120.52
Other Related	19.66	21.77	41.43
Research	26.10	49.80	75.90
Technicians	10.50	50.66	61.16
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Grand Total	451.56	512.61	964.17