

Funders' response to request for implementation plans

22 October 2009

In line with the recommendations of the Executive Group in March 2009, the Chair of the Strategy Group wrote to all the Funders that signed the Concordat requesting that they outline how they are implementing the Concordat. An initial letter was sent to the lead officers for the concordat on 21 July 2009. A follow-up letter was sent to Chief Executives on 21 August 2009. The text of the August letter is available at Annex I.

The following sets out the responses received from some of the funders.

The **Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)** noted that their statutory duty was to provide funding for Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) whilst preserving HEIs' autonomy.: HEFCE drew attention to the £300m Rewarding and Developing Staff initiative to support improvement in HR practices in England. Evaluations of this fund show the significant effect it and other measures have had in improving HR practices, including for those in research careers. Specific actions to support the Concordat include providing half the funding (jointly with other national Funding Councils) of the Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator. HEFCE also support CROS, PRES and other Vitae initiatives, and co-fund the Equality Challenge Unit. Assessment panels for the RAE (and, it is expected, for the REF) as part of the research assessment process consider the research environment, which includes training and skills provision. HEFCE staff also actively promote the importance of good practice in research career management. HEFCE funds good practice building and sharing projects through its Leadership, Governance and Management Fund. It also ensures the principles of the Concordat are adhered to in its Clinical Senior Lectureship Awards. HEFCE monitors and publishes analyses of HESA data to provide valuable information on research careers to support understanding in the sector. The Concordat is emphasised in its 2009 Workforce Framework.

The **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)** have helped found the Scottish Research Career Coordination Forum to bring together research career professionals to share practice and coordinate activity. It first met in May 2009 and will meet again in November. The Forum is directing a series of postgraduate experience workshops, organised in collaboration with the QAA and Vitae, the first of which was held on 11 September 2009. In addition, SFC joined with other funders to support the Scottish Crucible events in April and May and is supporting the launch of individual university events. SFC explicitly recognised the contribution of early career researchers in its Research Excellence Grant funding model. The SFC is continuing the Overseas Research Student Award Scheme in order to provide support for the highest quality international research students and bolster a vibrant and multinational research postgraduate community. SFC also jointly provides half the funding for the Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator.

The **Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)** sees its role in the context of its wider objective of developing a better strategic engagement with HEIs, with particular reference to research and postgraduate research training. Its ongoing dialogue with the Welsh Assembly Government is

important in this respect. HEFCW launched the Concordat in Wales via a conference, jointly organised with the South West and Wales Hub of Vitae, in January 2009. The aim was to raise the profile of the Concordat among staff from across the HE sector in Wales (PVCs, heads of schools, heads of HR, research directors and officers, heads of graduate studies, etc). The conference focused on themes ranging from managing staff in uncertain income streams, career development for researchers, and supporting principal investigators and supervisors. Further engagement with senior staff directly responsible for the research agenda has since been followed through via presentation and discussion with the Higher Education Wales Research Advisory Group and HEFCW's Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee and further activity will be taken forward via these channels and with Vitae's SWW Hub. HEFCW jointly provides half the funding for the Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator.

The **Department for Employment and Learning** (DELNI) is the Northern Ireland government department responsible for higher education funding. As well as being the fourth co-funder of half the Concordat Coordinator's post, DELNI includes the adoption of the principles of the Concordat within the Letter of Offer that authorised project funding under their research initiatives.

In June 2009 the **Research Councils UK** (RCUK) Executive Group discussed Concordat implementation. They recognised the importance of the agenda and identified three areas for attention: People (the audience); Signalling (the message); and Tangible Change (What can be done). Research Councils UK also recognised the centrality of its role in maintaining the momentum of the Concordat; that in the long term changes to peer review may prove necessary; and that the Research Councils have a unique level of interaction with Principal Investigators which may assist them in implementing the Concordat, which makes Research Council programme managers a key audience. RCUK agreed to develop and communicate key messages to PIs on the expectations of RCUK by autumn 2009.

The Wellcome Trust welcomes the Concordat as it has long recognised the need to support the careers of researchers and, in many respects, has led the way in the development of funding policy and practice in the area. As a signatory, in addition to complying with the basic requirement that "The Wellcome Trust expects organisations that hold Wellcome Trust grants to adopt the principles of the revised Concordat for the management of their researchers"¹, the Trust has numerous policies and practices which are fully consistent with the Concordat. Some key examples are listed below with reference to the most relevant Concordat principles in the full document, which is published separately on the Concordat website. These examples illustrate that providing a high-quality experience for researchers, as well as supporting excellence in research has driven the development of Trust funding schemes and policies. One of our current Strategic Aims is focussed on developing people to foster a research community that can advance and use knowledge. Going forwards we envisage that funding the brightest scientists with the best ideas will remain at the heart of Trust funding.

The **British Heart Foundation** has clear guidelines for grant applicants on the pay and grade of researchers, which conform to the aims of the Concordat. The BHF support continuity of employment by providing research grants and fellowships at all levels, and expect the best researchers to use these schemes until they are successful in finding tenured employment. They are

¹ <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Policy/Policy-and-position-statements/WTX049387.htm>.

currently analysing the results of a survey of BHF-funded PhD students and Fellows to determine their attitudes and concerns about academic careers. BHF takes into account the quality of skills training provided by HEIs when awarding PhD studentships. A Career Re-entry Fellowship scheme assists non-clinical scientists to return to research after a career break. Funds are provided with each grant to support researchers' attendance at external scientific conferences. A Science Communications team liaise with BHF-funded researchers to help them publicise their results for a lay audience. BHF encourages HEIs to develop good practice and to adopt the Concordat, particularly at quinquennial site visits to each of the cadre of around 30 BHF chair holders across the UK. At site visits senior faculty are expected to present the HEI's overall future cardiovascular strategy, including their specific plans for salary and infrastructure support for the chair holder and his team, and these plans influence the level of support that the BHF will provide. In addition, for new chair holders the HEI is normally expected to provide at least one senior lecturer's salary support.

The **Association of Medical Research Charities** (AMRC) did not respond formally to the letter. AMRC are monitoring activity in, and will be following the lead of, the Wellcome Trust and other major medical research funders. AMRC also wish to assess the practicality and cost of implementation before taking any action. AMRC feel that responsibility for implementation falls primarily within HEIs. However, they highlighted work the British Heart Foundation is undertaking to look into career structures.

The **Royal Society** met with the Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator to discuss how they might promote the Concordat. Ideas included the promotion through Royal Society publications, conferences and seminars and by highlighting it to recipients of their fellowships.

TP 19-11-09

Annex I: Text of letter from Sir Ivor Crewe to Chief Executives of funding bodies – 21 August 2009

Implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

It is now a year since the launch of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and as a signatory you will be aware that its implementation is central to its success. The Concordat has been widely circulated within all UK higher education institutions and I encourage you to ensure it is promoted and championed within your own organisation. It will also be important that each organisation now considers how the principles set out in the Concordat can be embedded into policy and practice.

To oversee the implementation and review process a Strategy Group has been formed, with me as Chair. The Strategy Group has appropriate representation across the sector with members from higher education institutions, researchers, funders and professional bodies. Our role will be to maintain momentum, promote the Concordat, discuss and monitor progress, and develop an understanding of where further action may be required.

To assist institutions with implementation we have employed a full time coordinator, Thomas Papworth, based at Universities UK. His role is to ensure that we generate real progress towards making research careers more attractive and sustainable. In addition he will coordinate the review process so that the Strategy Group can demonstrate clear advances by 2011. The contribution of the Funding and Research Councils in supporting this post is a crucial contribution to the promotion of the Concordat. If you wish to contact Thomas Papworth you can call him on 0777 137 2971 or email him at Thomas.Papworth@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk.

The membership, terms of reference and the papers of the Strategy Group are published on the Concordat web site: <http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/>. At our first meeting a number of implementation and benchmarking projects were agreed. One of these benchmarking projects is to consider the responses of funding bodies to the Concordat. The Strategy Group did not think it appropriate to tell funders how to incorporate the Concordat into their policies; we are aware that implementation will differ according to the type of funding organisation. It is therefore important to identify how the Concordat has and will continue to influence funders' policy and practice. This is important both with regard to the implementation of the Concordat and to the need to address the common perception in HEIs that, irrespective of funders' terms and conditions, grant applications that include provision for the career development of researchers are regarded as less competitive by review panels.

The Concordat highlights a number of areas which may be relevant to your organisation. These include:

- The need to ensure that guidance about the pay and grade of researchers and any permitted flexibility in grants is clear(Section A 5)
- The need to support continuity of employment of researchers - funders are expected to make it a priority to consider how their policies, guidance and funding can be enhanced to help employers to achieve this objective (Section B 4)
- The importance of ensuring that policies and guidance highlight the communication and other skills that are needed to be both an effective researcher and a highly-skilled professional (Section C 3)
- The signatory funders need to ensure that the terms and conditions of, for example, their project grants include the expectation that the employers they fund will adopt the principles of the revised Concordat (Section F 3)
- The need to recognise the value of policy and operational innovation and of sharing good practice between institutions and the promotion of these throughout the implementation and review process (Section F 4)
- The desirability of the funding signatories aligning their support for transferable and career development skills (Section F 4)

The Research Councils have recently agreed to undertake an Implementation project and a paper on this is available on the Concordat web site: it may highlight useful areas for implementation in your own organisation.

The Strategy Group has written to your organisation's representative on the Strategy Group to request that they provide a brief response which outlines how your organisation is implementing the Concordat. We hope that this will inform a report to the next Strategy Group meeting, which will take place on 22 October 2009.

Thank you for your help in driving forward this important work and do please let me know if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely

Professor Sir Ivor Crewe
Chair, Concordat Implementation Strategy Group