

Concordat Implementation in Scotland: Report

March 2009, Edinburgh



Incorporating the UK GRAD Programme and UKHERD

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Overview

The Concordat Implementation in Scotland event provided an opportunity for stakeholders in Scotland to:

- share institutional practice on researchers' management and support
- consider their own roles and responsibilities relating to the implementation of the Concordat

The event was intended for staff concerned with the recruitment, management and career development of research staff within Scottish HEIs. Research staff, Vice Principals of Research, Senior Managers, Deans, Heads of Academic Departments, Principal Investigators, Research Staff, Human Resource Directors, Careers Advisers and Staff Development specialist were invited to attend the event.

The event comprised of plenary presentations, panel discussion, workshops and discussion groups. This report provides a summary of links to the plenary presentations, and an overview of the workshops, and the outcomes from discussion groups.

Morning Plenary presentations

Dr Iain Cameron, Head, Research Careers & Diversity Unit, RCUK: RCUK & the Concordat

Prof David Gani, RSE Director, Research Policy & Strategy, Scottish Funding Council: Implementation of the Concordat in Scotland

Practice Sharing Workshops

Research Staff Societies:

Dr Patrick Hadoke (University of Edinburgh)

Dr Patrick Hadoke from the University of Edinburgh, one of the founders of the first research staff societies within the university, spoke about aspects of the research experience and how a staff society and the Concordat can impact on that experience.

The Endocrinology post-doctoral society arose from the fact that a research career can either be excellent, or a negative downwards spiral due to:

- Uncertainty of short term employment – constant spectre of unemployment
- No clear career ladder
- Need to win funding
- Need to publish
- Success not just being down to how hard you work – luck involved too!

The society started in March 2004 with just 9 individuals from a possible 17. Society members felt that the 'post-doctoral researcher' job varied so widely between institutions, departments and even research groups that it was difficult to find reliable

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sources of advice. This meant that post-docs were more reliant on their line manager/PI and not always able to access objective advice. The first task was to determine if there was a remit for the society, the outcome was a remit of:

- Enabling integration of post-doctoral research staff
- Improving communication, usually by means of informal gatherings
- Informal events
- Dissemination of information
- Feedback to the department
- Peer advice
- Careers symposium
- Vocational workshops supported by Roberts funds
- Guide to Edinburgh for new starts
- Creation of a researcher identity

The University now has 11 societies, spread across the schools, and some school societies are uniting for common support. The Concordat was welcomed as a supportive initiative in which research staff could share the responsibility for their development and for the implementation of the Concordat itself.

Dr David Proctor (University of Dundee)

Dr David Proctor, Chair of the College of Life Sciences Post-Doctoral Association at the University of Dundee, spoke about the process of starting up the association in Dundee and its successes and difficulties.

The Post-Doctoral Association in Dundee was instigated by a Principal Investigator (PI) who felt the need for representation for this group of staff and held an AGM to determine need/interest. As a result of this meeting a committee was formed of College representatives, with a PI sitting in an advisory capacity. As the committee evolved, it came to consist of interested individuals with a defined role to which they were elected (e.g. co-chair, treasurer etc) which improved activity and communication.

The Association quickly gained the support at the highest level from the College, and received assistance in setting up a website to communicate to their community and, after discussions and the writing of a business plan, the College also financially supported the Associations in its activities.

The Committee now has two College appointed Staff advisors (PIs) and the College is committed to providing this support, however the association is still run by post-docs for post-docs. Generic Skills Dundee also attend the meetings and provide some funds for activities. The association is able to give feedback, and request training from the unit as it represents the Post-docs. Finally the College is now providing secretarial assistance to the association due to the level of activity and commitment being so high for volunteers. The Committee also reports to the College board and University level committees to ensure information flow and that researchers have a voice.

Questions:

Relationship between research staff societies and PIs – varies but generally supportive. Unlike Dundee, Edinburgh has no staff representation on the committee

Importance of scale in the success of societies – numbers between nine and fifteen are sustainable, with ambitions proportional to the numbers involved. Small, subject-oriented societies tend to work best with a common career path and common stresses to bring the society together.

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University of Edinburgh Code of Practice for the Management of Research Staff:

Prof Andrew Jarman and Sheila Thompson

The Edinburgh Code of Practice (CoP) was created 'hand-in-hand' with the Concordat, with the aim of making clear institutional statement about the value it places on supporting its research staff. The CoP aims to provide a reference point for the consistent and continuous improvement of research management and best practice across the University. The CoP also encourages staff to capitalise on the professional and career development opportunities on offer, and to contribute to the creation of a culture of shared responsibility.

An important component of the Code is the emphasis it places on the role of formal review meetings during the life of a project. A clear distinction was made between the need for project review meetings aimed at monitoring project progress against agreed milestones; and development review meetings which consider in a more structured way, the personal and career development of researchers including institutional and bespoke induction and the opportunity for early career researchers to work with a volunteer mentor.

A description of how the Code was developed provided a very useful reference point for workshop participants. The importance of local ownership was explored; the role of the Vice Principal for Research Training was described in detail as the Chair of the Robert's Management Group, along with the important contribution made by Principal Investigators, research staff and Human Resources, to a Working Group during its creation. An important stage in the development of the Code was the pilot which provided vital feedback from schools which subsequently allowed the refinement of the document before general circulation.

Finally, Prof Andrew Jarman explained how the School of Biomedical Sciences within Edinburgh University had adapted and implemented the CoP to better suit their own context, specific needs and requirements.

Supporting Principal Investigators:

Prof Sheila Rowan (University of Glasgow)

Professor Rowan focused her talk on her personal experience as a PI as a way of highlighting some key issues PIs need to consider as part of their professional and career development. Prof Rowan introduced the presentation with the idea that researchers can also be Principal Investigators (PI), but researchers can and should work to be a PI.

How Professors spend their time was then explored; on average this is 59% teaching, 18% doing research and 23% administrative service. However departments often expect 175% research, 20% teaching and 20% service.

Professor Rowan went on to depict how her career has progressed over the last 18 years from her PhD, giving the audience an idea of the development path Professors can take; managing around £15m, 8 postdocs and 6 research students while sitting on a number of national and international advisory boards.

The requirements for success as a PI from Professor Rowan's experience are:

- the ability to foresee the next five years and know the direction for career development
- establishing a collaborative base in the department, nationally and internationally
- essential to balance research, teaching and administration
- contribute to relevant committees but not sit on too many
- teach with enthusiasm but maintain efficiency
- pay attention to Faculty and Department strategy and discuss aims with HoDs where appropriate
- talk to department/Faculty Research Convenor
- keep abreast of research opportunities but don't apply for everything – prioritise
- select funding opportunities carefully and make every effort to obtain assessment criteria
- construct funding applications to match grant criteria addressing assessment guidelines

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- gain experience of reviewing grants to understand what makes a successful/unsuccessful grant application
- applications need to be written simply and clearly
- check costings on all grant applications – don't under ask or over ask
- have fun and enjoy research and aspire to research leadership

Universities can help this success by:

- implementing a transparent workload model where workloads are shared across departments
- aim to implement effective but efficient teaching methods
- be aware that women may be pushed into pastoral roles or, where there are few women in a department, they are asked to sit on numerous recruitment panels to provide a gender balance
- provide courses for new and aspiring PIs where discussions of the above can be raised
- ensure clear channels of communications and regular progress reviews
- have a structured method of advertising upcoming grant/fellowships/studentship calls to new PIs and researchers early
- provide mentoring from experienced staff on how to apply for grants
- provide researchers with examples of successful grant applications
- managers of PIs should systematically work to nominate more junior staff for peer review committees when calls are made
- mentoring should be provided by research coordinators who are experienced in signing off grant applications
- have in place strong financial and administrative support for application costings, e.g. a course on constructing budgets
- Provide courses on presentation skills, time management, teamworking and other transferable skills courses for research staff
- Clearly communicate to PIs the requirements and goals of REF and how departments plan to manage the process as soon as possible

Professor Rowan concluded that a PI aspiring to research leadership should support the career development and personal aspirations of their students and postdocs as their success is a PIs success.

Dr Sharon Gordon & Joy Wooten (University of Aberdeen)

The overall aim of the PI Development Programme was Research Excellence together in:

- Research Management
- People Management
- Managing Research Budgets
- Managing Research Careers

This programme to support PIs came out of 'achieving the best' – embedding a performance management culture and supporting the development needs of research and technical staff with the College of Life Sciences and Medicine.

Key aims of the programme, which also included a skills matrix, management handbook and competency framework, were to address:

- the development needs of research and technical staff

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- links between individual roles and wider objectives
- supervisory/management skills development
- career management skills
- ongoing College initiatives

PI development and the Concordat: The University of Aberdeen has recognised the seed and soil approach as an integrated way to introduce the Concordat in the following ways:

- Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research
- Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research
- Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment
- The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.
- Individual researchers share the responsibility for, and need to proactively engage in, their own personal and career development and lifelong learning.
- Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.
- The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK
- supporting PIs is critical to implementing the Concordat.

Supporting International Researchers and Mobility:

Dr Gill Clark (The Scottish Government)

Dr Clark spoke on the subject of attracting researchers to Scotland and also encouraging researchers to consider the importance of their own mobility in their career. The role of the Scottish Government in this process was also discussed, in particular that of the Office of Chief Researcher. Career prospects from this particular Government office for researchers were considered key to retaining top international researchers in Scotland, if not in academia, and enable return to home country and subsequent work in Scotland.

Dr Brendan Barker (Royal Society)

Dr Barker highlighted the importance of Scotland as a research intensive country, producing more citations per head of research population and more citations per £100 research spend than any other country in the world. The UK is also the host nation to the largest research student population outside of the United States, with many research and academic staff also

The Concordat was considered helpful in improving the attractiveness of the UK for international researcher and also in providing support for researchers during their career. However, the practical issues of bank accounts, visas, language etc were still barriers to attracting international researchers to the UK and Scotland.

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Afternoon Plenary Presentations

Ellen Pearce, Director of Vitae: Vitae and the Concordat

Dr Jon Turner, Vitae Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub Coordinator: The Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub

Facilitated Discussion Groups

The afternoon discussion groups focused on 'What does the Concordat mean for you? – Implementation Issues'. Participants were assigned to groups dependent on their job role and were provided with copies of both the Concordat and the Stakeholder Briefing Documents produced by Vitae, in order to stimulate discussions. Each group had a facilitator tasked with ensuring relevant discussion and providing three key outcomes for discussion in the final plenary of the day.

The outcomes of each Discussion Group were:

Senior Managers, facilitated by Prof Andy Walker, Heriot Watt University

- The principles of the Concordat apply equally to all staff categories but emphasis should be on early career, researchers, particularly on fixed-term contracts
- Require engagement of senior managers and PIs to ensure that Concordat is perceived as an important document to the typical researcher. Challenge is to offset other pressures to allow this focus and buy-in
- Clarify underlying purpose of Concordat: career welfare of research staff or value for money for the funders? Probably both but does lead to tension

Human Resource Specialists, facilitated by Sheila Gupta, University of Edinburgh

- The importance of induction and having clear structures and systems for induction at all levels that highlight the importance of the concordat
- The tension that can exist between meeting funding body rules and requirements, and the longer term management of people
- Consider opportunities to mirror the collaboration and consolidation between institutions in research with HR practice and policy (e.g. identifying end of contract employment opportunities across all institutions rather than just in host institution).

Staff Developers, facilitated by Dr Rob Daley, Heriot Watt University

- Increase collaboration between institutions to provide joint training opportunities and share practice.
- For Vitae to organise a showcase event on researcher development where institutions can share practice and discuss approaches that **don't** work as well as those that do.
- Invite the concordat implementation officer to Scotland to meet researchers and careers, HR and staff development specialists.

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Careers Specialists, facilitated by Jane Weir, University of Glasgow

- Emphasise relevance of Roberts to Concordat implementation and research staff careers.
- Need clarification (within institutions) on roles and responsibilities connected to the implementation of the Concordat, and to seek opportunities to join up the different groups within institutions who are contributing to this agenda.
- Involve careers specialists in development initiatives and other aspects of Concordat implementation.

Managers of Researchers, facilitated by Prof David Donaldson, University of Stirling

- Deal with dinosaurs (PIs who are either unaware of or sceptical of the concordat) by embedding the principles of the Concordat in appraisal and developing consequences for not meeting these obligations.
- Find ways to address the critical mass challenges of implementing the Concordat in institutions or departments with small numbers of researchers or where researchers are widely distributed at a low density.
- Be careful with the use of labels like PI and researcher. Use the fact that PIs are also researchers and that many research staff also play a PI/research manager role.

Research Staff, facilitated by Dr Tristram Hooley, Vitae

- Broad support for the development of an increased voice for research staff (e.g. through research staff societies).
- Greater transparency in funding and how funding is allocated within institutions.
- More teeth to support the implementation of policy documents like the concordat.
- Emphasise the role and responsibility of the researcher themselves to be proactive, to make themselves aware of this agenda and take the opportunities available to support their career development.

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Contributions

The Vitae Scotland and Northern Ireland Hub would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their generous support of the Concordat Implementation in Scotland Event:

The Scottish Funding Council	Prof Peter Holmes
RCUK	Dr Iain Cameron
Universities Scotland	Prof David Gani
ScotHERD	Dr Alison J. Douglas
Dr Elizabeth Adams	Dr Patrick Hadoke
Dr Ruth Neiland	Dr David Proctor
Dr Charles Marriott	Prof Mary Bownes
Claire Jackson	Prof Andrew Jarman
Dr Kathryn Cook	Sheila Thompson
Dr Christine Milburn	Dr Jon Turner
Dr Donna Murray	Prof Sheila Rowan
	Dr Sharon Gordon
	Joy Wooten
	Prof Alan Miller
	Dr Gill Clark
	Dr Brendan Barker
	Ellen Pearce
	Prof Andy Walker
	Sheila Gupta
	Dr Rob Daley
	Jane Weir
	Prof David Donaldson
	Dr Tristram Hooley

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10.30	Registration, tea and coffee <i>Ozone space</i>		<i>Chair/Presenter/Facilitator</i>
11.00	Welcome Room: Biosphere Green		Chair: Prof Peter Holmes , OBE, FRSE; Chair, SFC Research & KT Committee
11.05	RCUK & the Concordat		Dr Iain Cameron , Head, Research Careers & Diversity Unit, RCUK
11.25	Implementation of the Concordat in Scotland		Prof David Gani , FRSE Director, Research Policy & Strategy, Scottish Funding Council
11.45	Practice Sharing Workshops: 1-4	1. Research Staff Societies Room: Hutton	Dr Alison J. Douglas (University of Edinburgh) Dr Patrick Hadoke (University of Edinburgh) & Dr David Proctor (University of Dundee)
		2. University of Edinburgh Code of Practice for the Management of Research Staff Room: Biosphere Blue	Prof Mary Bownes; Prof Andrew Jarman & Sheila Thompson (University of Edinburgh)
		3. Supporting Principal Investigators Room: Salisbury	Dr Jon Turner , (University of Edinburgh) Prof Sheila Rowan (University of Glasgow); & Dr Sharon Gordon & Joy Wooten (University of Aberdeen)
		4. Supporting International Researchers and Mobility Room: Biosphere Green	Prof Alan Miller , FRSE (University of St Andrews); Dr Gill Clark (The Scottish Government); Dr Brendan Barker (Royal Society-Uni.of Dundee)
12.30	Lunch & networking <i>Ozone space</i> <i>Exhibitors: Vitae, Royal Society of Edinburgh, The Scottish Government, Beltane Beacon for Public Engagement</i>		
1.15	Plenary: Vitae and the Concordat Room: Biosphere Green		Ellen Pearce Director of Vitae
1.30	What does the Concordat mean for you? – Implementation Issues and Practice: 1-6 <i>Facilitated group discussions</i>	<i>Groups:</i>	<i>Facilitators</i>
		1. Senior Managers Room: Biosphere Green	Prof Andy Walker Vice Principal, Management Services, Heriot-Watt Uni.
		2. Human Resource Specialists Room: Boardroom	Sheila Gupta HR Director, University of Edinburgh
		3. Staff Developers Room: Biosphere Blue	Dr Rob Daley Researcher Development Programme, Heriot- Watt University
		4. Careers specialists Room: Salisbury 1	Jane Weir , Careers Service, University of Glasgow
		5. Managers of research Room: Hutton	Prof David Donaldson University of Stirling, SINAPSE Research Pool
6. Research staff Room: Salisbury 2	Dr Tristram Hooley , Vitae		
2.15	Concordat Implementation Room: Biosphere Green	Feedback from groups:	Dr Jon Turner , Vitae Scotland & NI Hub and Ellen Pearce , Vitae Director
2.45	Final discussion	Discussion and closure of Implementation Event	Prof Peter Holmes OBE, FRSE