

Funders Forum 1st December 2009

1st Annual Report on the Implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Background

1. The Funders Forum meeting of 17 July 2008 noted the publication of the Concordat, the plans for a coherent and sustained implementation plan, and that the Research Concordat Strategy Group would report annually to the Funders Forum.
2. This report is the first annual report from the Research Concordat Strategy Group

Research Concordat Strategy Group

3. Membership of the Strategy Group provides full coverage of the sector and ensures that appropriate expertise is available. The Group is chaired by Professor Sir Ivor Crewe, and its membership, terms of reference, details of its meetings, agendas, papers and minutes are published on the [Concordat web site](#). The Strategy Group, which meets at least annually, takes a high level view and provides Signatories, Supporters and all relevant parties with strategic advice and guidance on the implementation of the Concordat.
4. The Strategy Group is supported by an Executive Group comprising a subset of its members in order to oversee the benchmarking process, to progress the actions in the implementation plan and to ensure that momentum is maintained. The Executive Group meets at least quarterly and both the Strategy and Executive group are supported by the Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator, a post based in UUK and funded by the signatory funders.

Implementation

5. The Strategy Group agreed an Implementation Plan at their first meeting and this has now been built on and now has a clear framework for the future. The plan sets out how the Strategy Group, those leading the delivery of the Concordat and the sector as a whole will ensure that the principles of the Concordat are embedded throughout the sector. The Plan also sets out the publications and other deliverables that stakeholders may expect over the next two years. A summary of the Plan is attached at Annex 1.
6. Vitae: Vitae, which was launched with the Concordat and is funded by Research Councils UK, is the national organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes. It has held two UK-wide conferences focused on career development of researchers with the Concordat featuring in many sessions.
7. The Vitae Regional Hubs have hosted a series of launches, seminars and practice-sharing events about the Concordat with institutions in their regions. These events have raised awareness, and helped the sharing of practice across the sector.
8. Vitae are also promoting their database of practice as a mechanism for sharing examples of institutional practice and they have produced a series of briefing sheets explaining the Concordat to specific stakeholder groups. These will be used to target specific audiences, eg human resources specialists, careers advisors
9. Universities: Many universities have held launch events, seminars and conferences either specifically about the Concordat or have highlighted the Concordat in other university events.
10. Many universities have established groups to take forward Concordat implementation through specific action plans and activities, e.g. gap analysis of current policies and procedures or the development of codes of practice for research staff. Some have already published their own local Concordat or Code of Practice for research staff.

11. Funders: HEFCE are promoting the importance of good practice in research career management and the Concordat will be emphasised in their HE Workforce report due for publication in early 2010.
12. The Scottish Funding Council has helped to found the Scottish Researcher Career Development Coordination Forum to share practice and coordinate activities. HEFCW is considering a similar forum for Wales which may include the South West region.
13. The Department for Employment and Learning directly promotes the Concordat's principles to the research community within the higher education sector in Northern Ireland. It reinforces this by including a requirement for the Northern Ireland universities to adopt these principles in each Letter of Offer which it issues to projects receiving financial support from any of its sponsored research initiatives.
14. Research Councils UK have published a short implementation plan which has as its first priority developing key messages for principal investigators about expectations for the management of researchers.

Benchmarking

15. The Strategy Group agreed six initial benchmarking projects:
 - Understanding the research staff cohort
 - Exploring the experiences of research staff through the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS)
 - HEI approaches to embedding career development for researchers in HEI strategies
 - Reviewing the use of fixed term contracts
 - Views and perceptions of principal investigators
 - Funders responses to the Concordat
16. Understanding the research staff cohort: The aim of the project is two-fold:
 - To improve the quality of the data collected on research staff, by discussing how the collection of data might be improved with HEIs, data collectors and analysts and those that rely on these outputs, and
 - To produce a follow up report looking at the 2009/10 data with the ambition of producing triennial reports hereon.
17. This Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator is leading the project, which includes representatives of HESA, the Funding Councils, UUK and the sector.
18. Exploring the experiences of research staff through CROS: CROS is a web-based survey designed to gather anonymously the views of research staff in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) about their experiences, career aspirations and career development opportunities. CROS is seen as a key tool for both individual HEIs and the HE sector collectively in reviewing progress of achieving the principles of the Concordat.
19. The [CROS 2009 Analysis of aggregated UK results](#) was published in September 2009. The executive summary is attached at Annex 2.
20. Overall the messages from CROS are positive. Most researchers feel valued, are satisfied with their work-life balance and believe their institutions are committed to equality and diversity. Institutions appear to recognise the importance of supporting career development and there is clear improvement in the uptake of induction, appraisal, and training and development opportunities by research staff compared to previous CROS results.
21. HEI approaches to embedding the career development for researchers in HEI strategies: This project will take a strategic look at how career development of research staff is embedded within institutional structures and policies, for example, HEI strategic missions, human resources strategies and research missions. It needs to identify the critical issues and how best to measure progress in this area. The project will be important in highlighting the main challenges facing institutions in terms of embedding and enhancing good practice in career development for researchers and identifying ideas and initiatives that may offer solutions for addressing these challenges.

22. Reviewing the use of fixed term contracts: This project is being undertaken by Vitae with the European Law and Policy Group at the University of Liverpool. It will look specifically at how the sector has responded to the Fixed Term Employees Regulations Act, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches in terms of research staff contracts. It will be based on a case study approach.
23. Views and perceptions of principal investigators: It is clear from feedback from the sector that many see the engagement of principal investigators as key to the successful implementation of the Concordat principles. This project will seek to explore the views and perceptions of principal investigators and identify a benchmark against which to measure the extent of the cultural change that needs to happen within the sector to truly achieve the aim of the Concordat. It is proposed that this project will be best achieved through in-depth focus groups/interviews with a representative sample of principal investigators.
24. Funders responses to the Concordat: It is critical also to review the response of funders in terms of implementing the Concordat. There is a perception in HEIs, particularly from principal investigators, that irrespective of funders' terms and conditions, in practice grant applications that include provision for the career development of researchers are seen as not competitive by review panels. This project will focus on the signatories of the Concordat: reviewing their policies, terms and conditions of grant, career development schemes and practice relevant to the Concordat.

European Charter and Code

25. The European Commission have identified a five-step approach for institutions to gain its formal recognition that they are implementing the Charter and Code. through completion of a 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers':
 - An **internal analysis** by the research institution, involving all key institutional players, to compare institutional practices against the Charter and Code principles;
 - The **publication** of planned actions for improvements in compliance (what, by when, by whom) through a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code;
 - The **acknowledgement** of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers by the European Commission;
 - The implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers by the institution, which through its internal quality assurance mechanism also carries out a **self-assessment** at least every second year on the basis of which it may update its Human Resources Strategy as necessary;
 - An **external evaluation**, which takes place periodically, but no later than every 4th year.
26. In the UK, our intention is to achieve this through the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Our aim is to align the process through which we measure progress of the implementation of the Concordat principles with the recognition process for implementing the European Charter and Code. Alongside this, those aspects of the Charter and Code that relate to provision for postgraduate researchers (as distinct from employed research staff) will be met through the QAA Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.
27. The intention is for the UK to have a collective process and response to the Commission by using the outcomes of the HEI strategy survey which will enable recognition by the European Commission of all UK HEIs collectively during 2010.
28. As part of the European Research Area Initiative the European Council adopted its Communication entitled "Better careers and more mobility: A European partnership for researchers". This communication states that Member States should adopt a national action plan setting out specific objectives and actions to achieve the aims of the partnership.
29. The UK has drafted a National Action Plan covering: open recruitment and portability of grants; meeting the social security and supplementary pensions needs of mobile researchers; attractive employment and working conditions; and enhancing the training, skills and experience of European researchers. The National Action Plan was drafted for ministerial approval by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, with members of the Research Concordat Executive Group.

Action

30. The Funders Forum is invited to note:

- The progress by the sector in taking forward the implementation of the Concordat
- The benchmarking projects and the CROS 2009 results
- The development of a process by which the measurement of progress against the implementation of the Concordat is aligned with the recognition process for implementing the European Charter and Code.

Annex 1

Summary of Implementation Plan

The Research Concordat Strategy Group (RCSG) agreed an outline Implementation Plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (the Concordat) at their first meeting which has been built on and now has a clear framework for the future.

Communications Plan

The Communications plan aims to promote awareness of the Concordat and to provide an information resource for those responsible for implementation.

Website

The Concordat website will be developed with the long term aim that it will

- The latest news of relevance to the sector
- Press releases and articles related to the Concordat
- Provide a gateway to other relevant resources, steering visitors to other sites (e.g. Vitae; Euraxess)
- Provide tailored information to constituent groups (e.g. staff; leaders; developers)
- Outline the relationship with the European Charter & Code
- Relevant articles and opinion pieces.

Media campaign

Awareness and understanding of the Concordat will be promoted through

- Press releases highlighting particular issues/events
- Articles in relevant journals and publications
- Guest pieces from leading figures

Events

The Chair and Members of the Strategy Group may be asked to speak at relevant conferences, seminars and other events to promote the Concordat. This programme will be led by, but not limited to, the Chair of the Strategy Group and the Concordat Coordinator and will complement ongoing work by RCUK and Vitae's national and regional teams.

Programme of HEI visits

A programme of activity will be developed that will aim to maximise the impact of visits to HEIs. Factors that will influence decisions about visits will include, but not be limited to, the number of researchers affected, the current level of progress toward implementing the concordat and the potential for knowledge building and sharing.

Practice Sharing

The key to improving the career development of researchers is through the sharing of good practice. The Research Councils have established Vitae with a specific remit to help promote good practice by facilitating the sharing of practice between institutions. Vitae will be the lead organisation delivering the practice sharing agenda.

Specific actions will include

- Activities around dissemination of the results of the Careers in Research Online Survey
- Vitae Hub events across the country will enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to share practice and learn from one another
- Vitae will promote their database of practice as a mechanism for sharing examples of institutional practice, and will provide access to relevant resources and trainers
- Vitae have produced a series of briefing sheets explaining the Concordat to specific stakeholder groups. These will be used to target specific audiences, eg human resources specialists, careers advisors
- Vitae and the Coordinator will work with partner organisations to make sure that the Concordat is embedded in their work, in particular through conferences and publications.

Knowledge building

To effectively promote the Concordat it will be necessary to build knowledge of the sector through pooling existing knowledge and working with partner organisations to identify and fill gaps.

Benchmarking process

RCSG agreed six benchmarking projects in January 2009. The aim of the projects is to establish the state of research staff career development. This will inform future implementation activity and also enable the measurement of progress over time.

As well as providing a picture of the sector and setting the base line against which future progress will be measured, it is hoped that the benchmarking projects will produce outputs that add to the general knowledge of the sector.

General knowledge building activity

In addition to the six benchmarking projects, there is a need to build general knowledge about the sector. It will therefore be necessary to

- Expand knowledge about research careers including career pathways, reasons for entry and exit etc.
- Monitor workforce trends
- Build a database of key contacts in every HEI
- Monitor and highlight Concordat-promoting events and activity in HEIs, Funders and among other signatories and supporters
- Conduct an analysis of gaps in knowledge
- Investigate European examples including the Charter & Code process, ensuring that the overlap with the Concordat is constantly monitored

This is an area where a variety of organisations are taking initiatives from across the sector. The Concordat website should aim to act as a hub for this information and knowledge.

Consolidation

Activity is required to broaden support for the Concordat and embed good practice in institutions. To maintain momentum and ensure that practice becomes permanent, it is important to

- Increase the number of signatories and supporters of the Concordat
- Build tools that enable institutions to measure the impact of implementation individually and across the sector, for example through providing sector- and mission-group averages against which individual HEIs can measure their own implementation
- Build strategic partnerships with organisations with common/overlapping agendas
- Ensure all stakeholders, partners, signatories, supporters and members of the Strategy Group to refer to the Concordat and highlight the role of research staff where relevant (including especially in their responses to the Research Evaluation Framework consultation)
- Adopt the Vitae researcher development framework
- Develop a list of champions, resources and sources of help
- Agree the process for using the Concordat to demonstrate delivery of the European Charter and Code

The Concordat should become part of the mainstream activity and thinking of leaders.

Publication schedule

The Strategy Group will aim to produce and publish regular progress reports. The frequency of these reports should reflect the cycle of information gathering and reporting resulting from other Concordat activity.

The following reports are planned for the period to end 2011:

- Annual Reports to the Funders Forum
- Understanding the Research Staff Cohort – initial recommendations
- Report on the Fixed Term Contracts project
- HEI Strategies – report on initial survey
- Mapping exercise: Concordat/C&C/CROS
- CROS Analyses
- Concordat Implementation: Three Years On

Executive summary

This summary provides:

- an introduction to CROS
- key findings
- recommendations

An introduction to CROS

The supply of highly skilled researchers has been recognised as critical to supporting the UK research base and the economic and cultural success of the UK. This publication reports findings from the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), conducted by higher education institutions (HEIs) in spring 2009. CROS is designed to gather the anonymous views of research staff in UK HEIs about their experiences, employment, career aspirations and career development.

Of the 51 institutions participating in CROS 2009, Russell Group and 94 Group institutions were strongly represented. Collectively, the institutions represented 74% of an estimated UK research staff population of approximately 38,000. The 5,908 responses equate to a 21% response rate for the target sample, or 16% of the total UK research staff population.

Comparison of the demographic information with known information about the UK research staff population confirms that the respondents are representative. The high response rate, and strong statistical confidence afforded by the large sample size, suggests that responses will be representative of the UK research staff population.

Thus CROS 2009 offers a valuable snapshot of the experiences and attributes of the UK's current research staff in higher education. The results will be invaluable to those looking at the national picture, particularly in relation to implementation of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. It also offers individual institutions the opportunity to compare their institutional results with the UK aggregate.

Key findings

Overall the messages from CROS are positive. Most researchers feel valued, are satisfied with their work-life balance and believe their institutions are committed to equality and diversity. Institutions appear to recognise the importance of supporting career development and there is clear improvement in the uptake of induction, appraisal, and training and development opportunities by research staff compared to previous CROS results.

Most research staff are integrated within their departmental research community, and stimulated by their institution's research culture.

However, there is still much that could be done, particularly in institutions recognising the wider contributions of research staff, encouraging research staff to be more realistic in their career aspirations and to be more active in their career development planning.

There are groups of researchers, such as those who have had multiple, short-term contracts and/or long service through fixed-term contracts, who do not feel integrated within the institution, and report less positive feelings about their employer, job and career.

Findings related to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers include:

Recruitment and selection

Generally, recruitment and selection of research staff within higher education appears to be an open and transparent process. However, there appears to be a strong dependence on word of mouth in recruitment and interviewing procedures could be improved.

Recognition and value

Most respondents appear to enjoy their jobs, have a satisfactory work-life balance, and feel valued by their institution in most respects, particularly for their research-related activities. However, up to a third do not feel that their wider contributions are recognised, and some research staff do not feel they are valued equally with lecturing staff at an equivalent level.

Support and career development

Most respondents believe that they are being encouraged to consider their career development and feel able to talk to their manager about this. The availability and take-up of training and development activities appears to be rising.

More than half of respondents have long-term career aspirations in HE. Just over a third have aspirations of a career outside HE. Few currently visit their careers service or seek advice from development staff.

Researchers' responsibilities

Most respondents appear to be well informed about issues closely related to their own role and research, but less well-informed about wider issues such as progression opportunities and the operations of their departments and institutions.

Taking ownership of one's own career appears to be a significant motivating factor.

Many report enthusiasm for training in research and personal development skills, but have not yet taken advantage of such opportunities.

Diversity and equality

Almost all respondents believe that their institution is committed to diversity and equality and a large majority believe staff are treated fairly by the HEI.

However, a tenth believe that they have experienced unfair discrimination in their current post.

Implementation and review

CROS 2009 has emerged as a valuable tool in gathering the views and experiences of research staff. The results should be used to inform both national and institutional activities to support the implementation of the Concordat's principles.

Institutions are encouraged to compare their data with the aggregate results. Providing feedback to both respondents and non-respondents of the findings and subsequent actions will further demonstrate institutions' commitment to research staff.

Although comparison with the CROS aggregate results is valuable, the real benefit to institutions will come from longitudinal comparison of institutional data. Future participation in CROS will provide HEIs with valuable comparative data to assess progress against implementation of the Concordat principles.

The CROS Steering Group will continue to develop CROS, asking institutions to feed back their experiences of participating in CROS 2009, encouraging the sharing of practice and future participation. CROS 2009 also provides a rich data set worthy of further analysis, particularly to explore sub-populations.

Recommendations

These are presented under the six principles of the Concordat.

Recruitment and selection

- Institutions should ensure that all recruitment policies are open and transparent, for example all vacancies should be promoted and advertised externally
- Ensure that departments and principal investigators are aware of and follow institutional recruitment policies and procedures, including providing job descriptions to all postholders
- Wherever possible, all short-listed applicants should be interviewed by their prospective principal investigator/line manager, people from outside the immediate department should sit upon interview panels and opportunities for informal discussion with other researchers should be made available
- All institutions should ensure that new appointees are offered induction to their role and department/institution, and provided with copies of relevant documentation, such as the HEI's research strategy, code of practice, probationary requirements and information about career development opportunities

Recognition and value

- All eligible researchers should undertake regular reviews and appraisal; most research staff report these to be useful
- Appraisal processes should also address work practices and problem-solving
- Institutions should consider how they can recognise more fully the contribution of researchers, beyond their research activities
- Institutions should identify any sub-populations of researchers who do not feel integrated into their departmental or institutional communities and help them to explore career development strategies

Support and career development

- Research staff should be encouraged to engage more actively in career development planning, using the experience of their managers, staff developers and careers advisors
- Institutions should increase and promote the provision of information and advice about careers, career progression and application processes within and outside academia
- Careers services should explore ways to improve their engagement with researchers
- Institutions should recognise and build upon the desire for training/support for career management and personal development planning, through increased availability of and/or promotion of existing support in this area
- HEIs should further promote the value of transferable skills (such as team-working) for future employability in order to increase the level of take-up of development activities
- Institutions should explore how to provide more placement and secondment opportunities to broaden experiences of researchers and widen their career aspirations

Researchers' responsibilities

- Managers and staff developers should stress that researchers need pro-actively to take responsibility for their own development and career planning, including being informed about their employment and progression and how to participate in a range of wider activities
- Researchers need to be proactive in seeking out sources of information and advice in relation to career progression and employment, many of which exist already within institutions. There may be scope for career specialists and staff developers to promote the opportunities they offer more widely
- Institutions should find mechanisms to assist researchers in recording and articulating their personal contributions to facilitate full recognition of researchers' contributions, particularly outside their direct research activities

Diversity and equality

- Review institutional policies for unjustified inequalities between research staff and lecturers, particularly in promotion and progression and in participation in departmental and institutional decision-making processes
- Ensure the institution's commitment to valuing researchers is communicated effectively to researchers and their managers and implemented in practice
- HEIs should review the free text responses provided by respondents in order to explore in more detail issues around discrimination

Implementation and review

- Institutions are encouraged to compare their own response data with the aggregate responses presented here, taking into account local conditions and cohorts
- Institutions are encouraged to provide feedback to their research staff, both respondents and non-respondents, about their CROS results and subsequent actions
- HEIs should engage in benchmarking groups and other activities to share knowledge and practice, enabling comparison between institutional populations
- Institutions should be encouraged to take part in future CROS surveys and those that have run surveys both feed back their experiences to the Steering Group and also promote the benefits to colleagues in non-participating institutions
- The aggregate responses should be used to inform national activities to support the implementation of the Concordat's principles
- The CROS Steering Group should commission further analysis of sub-populations of the aggregate results, eg by broad subject areas, employment status
- Institutions should identify areas of good practice and share these with the rest of the sector through the CROS and Vitae networks