



Hard Times? Building and Sustaining Research Capacity in UK Universities

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Introduction: Hard Times? Building and Sustaining Research Capacity in UK Universities

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“The prime function of leading-edge research is to develop new understanding and the creative people who will carry it into society.”

Boulton, G. (2010). Harvesting talent: strengthening research careers in Europe. LERU, January 2010, Executive Summary, p.2.

In 2005 the Association of Research Managers and Administrators published an edition of *'Issues in Research Management and Administration'* which focused on the development and management of research staff in UK universities (Kent & Hazlehurst, 2005). Many of the papers in that publication introduced the reader to new or anticipated developments in the sector, such as the introduction of full economic costing and the framework agreement on fixed-term employment. These papers speculated about the impact that such developments would have on the experiences of research staff, and on the higher education sector more broadly. Five years have now elapsed since this initial publication and it therefore seems opportune to revisit some of these issues and to reflect on the development of researchers in UK universities. This review is particularly timely given that the economic and political landscape has changed considerably in recent years, largely as a consequence of the global economic crisis, but also as we anticipate potential developments resulting from a change in UK government. This fifth edition of *'Issues in Research Management and Administration'* considers some of these developments and the impact that they have had on the sustainability and enhancement of the UK's research capacity.

The run-up to the May 2010 General Election generated a plethora of science and research policy documents, such as the government's *'Higher Ambitions'* (November 2009) and The Royal Society's *'The Scientific Century'* (March 2010). These and other reports consider the

future of higher education in the UK, and the nature of the scientific and technical workforce that is required to deliver the best possible outcomes for an economy and society emerging from recession. Each of these publications identifies a steady supply of university-trained, highly skilled people as the key to short-term recovery from recession and the means by which, in the longer term, the UK will be able to produce new products and processes that enable it to flourish in the 'knowledge economy'. This emphasis on 'excellent people' is not new, but has become more prominent in UK higher education policy since the 1990s (see for example, Dearing, 1997; Roberts, 2002). This focus on the development of high quality people has taken place within an environment of growth in the higher education sector arising, in part, from the *'Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004–2014'* (HM Treasury et al., 2004). This framework has ensured that universities have received substantial investment from government through year-on-year increases in the Science and Research budget. The new money has enabled higher education in the UK to expand through the recruitment of new staff, both academic and those in professional and support roles (e.g. HEFCE, 2010), and to repair or replace a decaying research infrastructure.

Recent years have also seen an increase in funds spent on the professional development of researchers. Since 2003, a portion of Government investment in science has been channelled through the UK Research Councils (RCUK) towards universities with Research Council funded research staff and postgraduate researchers. This money, referred to colloquially as 'Roberts funding', is significant (£22.4m in 2007-08) and is ring-fenced within institutions. Funds must be used to implement Recommendations 4.2 and 5.3 of Sir Gareth Roberts' 'SET for Success' report (2002) on the supply of science and engineering skills in the UK; specifically, to support research career development and transferable skills training for researchers.

This increased attention to the development of researchers' skills may be seen as an extension of the 'supply-side' focus that has characterised UK education and employment policy since the 1980's (cf. Grubb and Lazerson, 2006; Ball 2008). Broadly speaking, this approach is built on the premise that the way to build a high skills economy and, in this case the research capacity of the UK, is to develop people and their skills. The question of how the UK might improve its performance in research and development is conceived as a problem of 'not having enough people with the right skills'. Thus for Sir Gareth Roberts, "the success of R&D is critically dependent upon the availability and talent of scientists and engineers" (Roberts, 2002. p.1). The

emphasis here is clearly on the *supply* of individuals and their 'skills' rather than the way that research activity, including research-related employment, is structured. To illustrate this point further, although the report recognised that the way in which research employment is structured in the UK plays a crucial part in making research careers attractive and sustainable, its principal recommendation with respect to improving career opportunities for postdoctoral researchers focused on their development as *individuals* – or more specifically, that researchers should have a clear career development plan and access to transferable skills training.

The 'Roberts Funding' arrived at a time when other significant changes were occurring in the UK's higher education landscape. These include the introduction of role analysis in higher education following Sir Michael Bett's independent review of pay and conditions (Bett, 1999), the associated implementation of a framework agreement for the modernisation of pay structures in universities (from 2004), and a three-year national pay settlement to address a decline in salary levels compared with other professions (2006-2009). Other developments include: the introduction of full economic costing (from 2005); new legislation designed to limit the use of successive fixed-term employment contracts (2002, and fully effective from 2006); and a move to promote best practice in the employment of researchers within the European Union (from 2005 but reinforced in the UK by the adoption of a 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' in 2008). All of these have led to changes in the way that research activity and research employment is structured in the UK and, in combination, have affected the ways in which researchers are employed, managed, and rewarded within universities, albeit in ways not always discernible to the individuals concerned (cf. Kent, 2005; Oliver & Ackers, 2005).

The notion that excellent people are a resource to be treasured – "it is talent more than technology that society or business needs from universities" (Boulton, 2010) – has led to increased attention being paid to how to attract, support and retain them, thereby building research capacity (e.g. CST, 2010; The Russell Group, 2010). The success of the UK's universities depends very substantially upon their having a staff that is motivated, committed and supportive of the institutions' mission to conduct internationally-leading research and teaching; without 'buy-in' from staff at all levels, our universities will not be competitive on the international stage. Many recent developments in institutions, such as the implementation of the principles of the Concordat and the provision of continuing professional development opportunities for research staff and postgraduate

researchers, have arisen in part from an aspiration for the UK to become the 'destination of choice' for excellent early career researchers from all nations (cf. Bekhradnia & Sastry, 2004; UUK, 2008, 2009). However, these changes are also designed to address issues of staff retention and succession planning at both an institutional and UK level (see for example, Sheridan, 1992). At the institutional level, the retention of staff has the potential to support productivity increases and reduce recruitment costs (Williams & Livingstone, 1994; Ramlall, 2003). At a UK level, the drive to make higher education an appealing place in which to pursue a career supports wider goals around the development of the knowledge economy, particularly in light of a reported increasing difficulty in the recruitment of academic staff (e.g. Metcalf *et al.*, 2005).

The development of strategies that emphasise investment in the human capital of higher education has therefore been a key feature of UK science and research policy over the past ten years or more. However, in the current public spending climate, and in view of recent Government announcements of reduced funding for higher education in England and Wales over the next few years, investment in human capital is potentially vulnerable at all levels in the sector. The sector faces increasing demands to demonstrate the value of its contribution to wider society, whether through the impact of research, the employability of its graduates, or the return on investment in human capital.

While Government, the European Union and others seek to develop an environment within which human capital investment is emphasised, it is down to individuals within universities to interpret this and implement it 'on the ground'. In larger institutions, the expertise that underpins the research capacity-building effort is typically spread across several support units, including central and/or faculty-based Research Offices and Graduate Schools, Staff Development Units, Careers Services, Human Resources departments, and Libraries (cf. The 1994 Group, 2009). It follows that the level of co-operation and co-ordination between these units dictates, to a large extent, how effective they will be in achieving the desired goal of building an effective scientific work-force. While some scoping work has been done in this area, notably at the interface between researchers and human resources managers (e.g. Adams *et al.*, 2005), there are few studies that have investigated whether UK universities have been effective in developing research capacity.

This edition of '*Issues in Research Management and Administration*' focuses on some of the most pressing issues for researchers and universities, in the context of

building and sustaining research capacity. In particular, we aim to focus attention on the structural and management factors that underpin research capacity, and to broaden the debate beyond the career behaviours and skills of individuals.

The first article, by **Chris Hale** (Universities UK) sets the context by examining the overall sustainability of the UK research base following the introduction of full economic costing (fEC) of research grants in 2005. He observes that fEC has brought multiple benefits to the sector, and not simply additional monies in support of research. Nevertheless, a continuing deficit of £2bn in publicly funded research may lead some to query whether the sustainability of current levels of research is possible – with attendant concerns that government may simply turn its attention (and money) elsewhere. If research volume declines nationally, this will inevitably lead to fewer job opportunities for researchers. Of course, the way in which UK research is funded – and not just the *volume* of funding – has implications for the way that employment for researchers is structured. Hale points to the potential of fEC in providing opportunities for retaining staff between externally funded research grants which, in conjunction with changes in employment legislation, could lead to greater sustainability of the research workforce.

Liz Oliver's (University of Liverpool) article considers the current state of play in the implementation of European legislation on fixed-term work as it relates to researchers employed in UK universities. Although there has been a decrease in the proportion of researchers employed on fixed-term contracts in recent years Oliver finds no evidence for this legislation having led to greater stability of employment for researchers. She argues that the fixed-term legislation, which was not designed with the higher education sector in mind, is a blunt instrument and is not, in itself, sufficient for effecting the culture shift which may be required. Improving the sustainability of research employment requires changes in universities' management strategies, and not simply changes to the type of employment contract used for researchers.

This point is picked up by **Jane Thompson** (University and College Union). She offers a frank assessment of the continuing job insecurities experienced by many researchers, and the way in which the structure of employment for research staff limits opportunities for career progression. A further concern is that initiatives such as the 'Roberts funding' for transferable skills, and HEFCE's 'Rewarding and Developing Staff' agenda have not resulted in the movement of experienced research staff from Grade 6 to Grades 7 and 8 on the national pay

spine; when compared to staff on teaching and research contracts, only a minority of researchers are employed at these grades. This reinforces the notion of a 'two tier' system of academics, in which staff on research contracts form the lower tier.

The fourth paper, by **Robin Mellors-Bourne** (The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Ltd.), examines how some of these larger systemic and policy developments affect the lives of the research staff population. Using aggregated data from the 2009 Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS), Mellors-Bourne presents a summary of researchers' perceptions of their treatment in comparison with lecturing staff, their understanding of the environment in which they are working, and their views and experiences of continuing professional development. In addition to providing useful benchmark data which may inform future policy regarding the employment, management and development of research staff, these findings will be useful to practitioners working to support researchers in higher education institutions.

The final paper, by **Rob Daley** (Heriot-Watt University), advocates a partnership approach to supporting the career development of researchers, involving experienced academics working alongside research managers, staff developers and other colleagues in support services. This integrated approach to researcher development locates development activity as part of broader institutional capacity building and personnel management. Daley argues that the '*Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*' (RCUK, 2008) has the potential to become a key document that supports the building of bridges between different professional groups, each of which shares a commitment to the development of research capacity and human capital.

We trust that each of these papers will stimulate debate and encourage practitioners to consider the development of research staff within a wider structural context. Hard times may lie ahead, but as Dickens (1854) himself might have concluded (after Psalm 126:5), "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy".

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Full Economic Costing and the Sustainability of the UK Research Base

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Introduction

The financial sustainability of the UK research base, and indeed higher education in general, has become a key policy concern over the past ten years. In 2004 the Government's 10-year *Science and Innovation Investment Framework* (HM Treasury, 2004; BIS, 2009a) clearly stated the importance of university-based research and the need for this to be funded and managed on a more sustainable basis. More recently, the sector-wide Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG)¹ was established to examine the key issues and challenges relating to the sustainability of research activity. To date there has been significant commitment and effort on the part of funders and institutions to take this agenda forward (e.g. Research Base Funders' Forum, 2006, 2008; Davidson, 2008; BIS, 2009a; Wakeham, 2010). Driving these developments is the need to secure the UK's longer term success through ensuring adequate investment in the physical and intellectual sustainability of institutions.

Under the dual-support system the Higher Education Funding Councils provide block grant funding to support the UK's research infrastructure and enable institutions to undertake research of their choosing. In parallel, the Research Councils provide grants for specific research projects and programmes. While this system has many advantages, there is a danger that if project funding is inadequate, institutions that undertake substantial amounts of project work may do so at the expense of their infrastructure. The introduction of the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) in 2001, followed by the Research Councils' decision to fund projects at full economic cost (defined as 'a price, which, if recovered across an organisation's full programme, would recover the total cost of the work, including an adequate investment in the organisation's infrastructure') from 2005, were designed first to understand the nature of this issue and then to provide a mechanism to ensure that in future, research is undertaken on a sustainable basis (cf. JM Consulting, 2009).

In spite of the significant efforts made to date, the sustainability agenda is very much a 'work in progress'. This paper examines the current state-of-play and explores some of the issues and future challenges for the higher education sector and research funders, particularly within a difficult public spending environment. The focus will be on the sustainability of research, and

the introduction of full economic costing (fEC) which has underpinned this, because this is the area where, arguably, most progress has been made. However the discussion will be placed within the wider context of university funding and the need for sustainability across the breadth of activity within institutions.

Pressures on the system

Concern about the sustainability of research arose from a clear recognition, shared by government and the sector, that there was significant pressure on institutions' research activity and infrastructure. This was due to a faster growth in project-related funding (including significant growth in income from charities, the EU and industry) than in 'block grant' research funds. Combined with this, the absence of a clear and robust way for understanding costs had led to much research being undertaken at below cost.

It is worth noting that changes in the wider higher education environment have also contributed to this expansion of research activity. During a period of student number expansion over the past ten years, the number of academic staff also increased (e.g. HEFCE, 2010). Driven by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and promotion criteria that emphasise research performance, many of the extra staff in the system will have been encouraged to undertake research. These pressures have compounded the sustainability problems outlined above.

Working towards a solution

In response to these concerns, the Transparency Review² was established by the Government in order to develop a better understanding of funding across all activities, and to ensure a greater level of accountability for public funds. Indeed, as part of this the first Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC)³ process was introduced. The annual reporting of costs at institutional level under TRAC provided evidence that research activity was in deficit. This evidence was supported by national studies of infrastructure looking at the remedial investment needs for the UK's higher education science infrastructure which showed a £2.7bn shortfall (e.g. HEFCE, 2002).

The Government accepted these findings and provided additional public funding for research (i.e., capital funds to redress the shortfall and recurrent funds to stop it happening again); it also developed associated policies on sustainability. A second phase emerging out of this work, therefore, extended to cover fEC at research project level. From July 2005 all institutions have been using TRAC to calculate the fEC of projects, in order to set the price for research grants made by the Research Councils and other Government departments, and to inform the price on projects for other sponsors. The core principle

¹ The Financial Sustainability Strategy Group (FSSG) is a high-level forum that considers the strategic, policy, cultural and technical issues around the use and development of the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC). For further information see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/finance/fundinghe/trac/fssg/>

² The Transparency Review was initiated following the Government's 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review. The aim of it is to provide information on the income and expenditure carried out by HEIs.

³ TRAC is an Activity-Based Costing (ABC) system. It is essentially a process of taking institutional expenditure information from published financial statements, and applying cost drivers (such as academic time allocation and space usage) to allocate these costs to academic departments and to activities. This explanation is taken from and expanded in 'Policy overview of the financial management information needs of higher education, and the role of TRAC' and can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/finance/fundinghe/trac/tdg/FSSGJuly2009.doc>

underpinning the provision of this additional public investment was to increase investment in research *but without building volume*, so as to secure sustainability. Additional funding was also provided for 'quality related' (QR) funding provided as a block grant to institutions through the Funding Councils, and a new element introduced to support the sustainability of charity funded research. It is worth noting that on the teaching side costing information is not so closely tied to funding but does now play a greater role, notably in informing price groups in the teaching funding model.

These developments went hand-in-hand with strengthened requirements at institutional level for managing sustainability. For example, all of the Financial Memorandums between the Funding Councils and institutions in the UK now outline an expectation that institutions should be financially sustainable. In England, monitoring institutions' financial sustainability is also integrated with HEFCE's review of financial returns and the 'single conversation' accountability process.

For research, these developments represented a significant shift in the economics of research funding in universities. For the first time institutions' real costs were informing pricing; they had better information to help them make strategic choices and inform management decisions about where to focus their research efforts. Publicly funded research through the Research Councils was provided for at a higher rate, at a fixed price of 80% of fEC, while the potential for securing better cost recovery from other sources increased (although this has been realised to varying degrees and it could be argued that the shift is still in a transitional phase).

Work in progress?

In 2009 a review of fEC was set up by Universities UK (UUK) and Research Councils UK (RCUK). The review was chaired by Professor Alan Alexander, and had the task of examining the progress that had been made toward achieving the original objectives set when fEC was introduced. In reporting its findings, the review recognised that fEC is still in its early days and it has proved difficult to quantify the exact contribution it has made toward achieving a more sustainable research base in HEIs, but broadly the message was a positive one⁴.

The Alexander Review found that the financial situation for UK universities has improved markedly over the current decade. The imbalance between project-research and core funding has been stabilised, and the contribution to the full costs of project-research funding has significantly increased. This is particularly true for Research Council grants, but it is also the case for

funding from Government and business, and to a lesser extent, charities and the EU.

In terms of intellectual sustainability it was noted that the 'Roberts funding', increases in QR funding, developments in employment law and the *Concordat (RCUK, 2008)*, and in England, the HEFCE 'Rewarding and Developing Staff' initiative, have all made significant contributions to the sustainability of human resources committed to research. Universities indicated that fEC is also contributing to this, particularly in providing greater flexibility to departments to provide support for development activities and 'bridging' funds to retain staff between externally supported research contracts.

These were important findings which came at a crucial time. Prior to the Alexander Review, fEC had developed something of a tarnished reputation within and outside of the sector. For university administrators, perhaps this arose from understandable fatigue associated with the significant efforts put in to implementing the new approach, adapting to the new requirements and ironing out all of the problems. For the academic community, there was a perception in many quarters that substantial investment had been made by Government in the research base, but they were not seeing the money at the 'bench'. Furthermore, from the funders' perspective, it was unclear how they could reassure HM Treasury that all of this new investment⁵ was achieving what it was intended to, and difficult questions were starting to be asked.

These were legitimate concerns. However, in response to the first of these, the sector should be congratulated on the substantial efforts put into implementing TRAC and fEC. This agenda has led to significant additional investment which is making a real difference. The second of these concerns stems largely from a misunderstanding of what sustainability and fEC was actually about in the first place. It was about sustaining reinvestment in the physical and intellectual future of the institution, rather than providing cash to do new things; but perhaps there is a valuable point to be taken from this about how the policy was communicated across all parts of the sector, particularly the academic community. On the last of the points above, it is absolutely right that Government, and in particular HM Treasury, should ask whether the money it invests on behalf of the public is being used as intended. Indeed, in many ways the Government of the day made a brave decision to support sustainability. There is not much political gain to be made from paying for broadly the same amount of research, but in a more sustainable way (as opposed to investing new money in further growth in volume). The Alexander Review and the evidence it gathered went part of the way toward providing the

⁴ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/review/fec/>

⁵ The total annual funding for research and postgraduate training from the Science Budget and Funding Councils has increased by over £1 billion since 2005-06, much of which was provided to support additional fEC investment.

reassurance Government and funders required, but indicated the need for more detailed work to be done on explaining how the money is being used and ensuring transparency. This is a question that has not gone away. Notably, it was flagged in the Review that UK-level TRAC data revealed a continued research deficit of c.£2bn, despite all of the additional investment, which justified the need for further investigation and possible action.

The review also raised questions about whether appropriate mechanisms could be developed to help ensure a downward pressure on the costs of research undertaken in universities. Prior to this, efficiency had not been a major consideration within the TRAC fEC process. At the time of publishing the Alexander Review, the implications of the recession for public funding were not as stark as they are now, but knowing what we do now the question of efficiency becomes all the more important. Indeed exploring options for efficiency and ensuring we can be more transparent and robust in explaining the impact of this additional funding and the vital role it plays will be crucial in an era of uncertainty and cuts. Quite simply, if Government cannot see the benefit of this investment the likelihood of it being scaled-back or cut is very high. This is not scaremongering; before moving on it is worth reminding ourselves of the current public funding environment, which is significantly different to the one which many within the sector have previously experienced.

The recent (June 2010) Budget made clear the new Government's commitment to eliminating the current structural deficit by 2015. To achieve that, Government cash borrowing has to fall from £149 bn to £20 bn by 2015/16. Government has also committed itself to achieving 80% of the consolidation through spending cuts, with just 20% coming from tax increases. The consolidation plan envisages six years of spending cuts. The Government has stuck by its commitment, set out in the coalition agreement, to protect spending on the Department of Health and the Department for International Development. Due to this, as George Osborne acknowledged in the Budget, spending on other Departments will have to fall by 25% by 2015. This figure is unlikely to exclude the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and education budgets in the devolved administrations.

Securing the sustainability agenda in difficult times

Recognising the importance of the issues raised in the Alexander Review, and indeed the 'gathering storm' of the public investment outlined above, a task group was set up by Universities UK and Research Councils UK, under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Bill

Wakeham (former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton). This group examined how the sector and funders might need to respond and make further progress in this area. The main objectives of the task group were to reflect on whether the higher education sector is using the additional funding it has been provided to ensure sustainability; to examine how the use of this funding can be made more transparent; and ascertain whether there is scope for increased efficiency in the use of public funding in this area.

The work of the Wakeham group has now been published (Wakeham, 2010) and includes some findings that will reassure the sector, as well as some more challenging findings and recommendations. In the 'reassuring' column are the findings on growth in research volume. As the report of the group notes, an underpinning principle behind the introduction of fEC-based funding was that although more should be paid for research in order to ensure it was funded sustainably, there should be no growth in research volume *unless this was sustainably funded*. However, to date, there has been no way of monitoring this. Without this information, and in the context of a continued TRAC deficit, the assumption could be that the additional money provided for fEC has been used to build new volume. Interrogating TRAC and other data, the Wakeham group sought to answer this question and found that the enhanced income from the Research Councils and other sponsors of research does seem to have been spent on enhancing and maintaining the infrastructure, just as was intended, as evidenced by an increase in estates costs attributable to research; and that volume growth is not at present a significant cause for concern.

Notwithstanding these findings, the Wakeham Report does make proposals that may provide further reassurance that the management of sustainability is being strengthened. This will include greater engagement and oversight of sustainability from governing bodies; greater ownership and strengthening of TRAC to ensure that institutions' sustainability and decision-making is informed by accurate data (work in this area is already well advanced through the TRAC Development Group); and further strengthening of the monitoring and reporting processes relating to sustainability, and linking these to the Research Councils to ensure that they have the reassurance they need. Some may see this as 'overkill', but much of this is about tightening and strengthening things already underway so as to give the degree of transparency needed. The alternative of not acting on this could be far more damaging.

The question of efficiency probably fits in the 'more challenging' column. It is of course possible to say that the higher education sector is already very efficient. BIS data show that in terms of inputs and outputs, the UK is highly productive and 'punching well above its weight' (cf. BIS, 2009b). We are producing nearly 14% of the world's most highly-cited research papers, second only to the USA. This is despite our size and relatively lower levels of public and private funding for research. The UK invests 1.3% of GDP in higher education, compared to an OECD average of 1.5% and a figure of 2.9% in the USA. There are also pressures on higher education institutions to constrain the costs of research, particularly when accepting grants from funders that are not covering 100% of fEC. The problem is that a perception remains that further efficiencies could, and should, be found. In the current financial climate it is also unrealistic to assume that additional public funding will be provided in the way it has been over the past ten years – which, in funding terms is likely to become regarded as what Sir Alan Langlands, Chief Executive of HEFCE, has termed a 'golden age' (Hurst, 2009). Furthermore, the sector needs to remain competitive to potential customers of research in a global environment where private investors in R&D are highly mobile.

If UK higher education is to sustain its position in the current climate there is little alternative but to ensure that the use of current resources and assets is maximised. The way in which this is done will be crucially important, however, and this was a key challenge for the Wakeham group. Research activity is not like industrial production, so understanding efficiency in a university context will be important; the desire for efficiency may not sit comfortably with the need for sustainability. Note also that the group was asked to look at only efficiencies relating to one element on university funding, i.e. Research Council funding, whereas the question of efficiency relates to the whole university system.

The Wakeham group did consider a proposal flagged in the Alexander Review, for publishing each institution's rates for Indirect Costs and Estates Costs. The idea behind this was that it would help improve efficiency by 'naming and shaming'. However, it was agreed that this approach would be just as likely to inflate the 'lower cost' institutions as it is to reduce those with higher costs. The Wakeham group did, however, focus on Indirect Cost rates when looking for solutions, recommending proposals for introducing efficiency savings that would put a downward pressure on these costs over time. Tough as the measures will be to manage, it would seem the right approach because it will allow institutions to find the savings themselves, thus respecting the fact that they are autonomous institutions. It would also

complement other initiatives to promote efficiency in the higher education sector, such as the University Modernisation Fund. Of course, many universities will already be conscious of the need to reduce costs and will be implementing these through, for example, shared services.

The Wakeham Report recognises the potential damage that could be caused by an alternative solution – a straight reduction to the proportion of fEC currently paid by the Research Councils. This would hit all costs and, where real reductions in costs are not being achieved, this shortfall would have to be found elsewhere, with a risk that this would undermine the policy for research to be funded sustainably. Wakeham also contended that an across-the-board reduction would fail to target inefficient areas or institutions where significant savings could be achievable, and would result in a 'double hit' on those HEIs where Indirect Cost rates are being successfully managed downwards.

The Wakeham proposals are tough measures, but many will reluctantly accept them as the least damaging way of facing up to the challenges presented by the current public funding environment. However, by actively engaging with these issues it does show that the higher education sector, rather than being a passive recipient of cuts dealt out by Government, can demonstrate it is willing to lead on finding savings in a way that will protect its future sustainability.

Conclusions

It is crucial not to underestimate how important the move toward a more sustainable research base, and the associated investment and policies, has been. These developments will ensure that the higher education sector is not only able to compete in the current climate, but can continue to do so in ten or twenty years time. The research sustainability agenda is at a critical junction, however, and it is essential that the sector and research funders work together to take greater ownership of it. The Wakeham Report provides some solutions, albeit challenging ones. If the sector is not able to lead on this, the alternative is that despite significant efforts and commitments made to date, current political and economic pressures may lead to the sustainability of university research falling by the wayside.

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The Legislation on Fixed-term Employees and the Employment of Researchers

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Legal developments in fixed-term employment form just one piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the management of researchers within universities. Many researchers hoped that recent legal changes would force a radical overhaul of an approach to the employment of researchers that was previously characterised by the use of fixed-term contracts. However, developments have been more subtle and incremental. That is not to say that progress has not been made; indeed there has been a fairly significant reduction in the use of fixed-term contracts to employ researchers. This paper looks at some of the key provisions of the Fixed-term Employees Regulations, to ascertain what we can expect from the law as it develops. It draws from background research conducted as a part of a Vitae-funded project 'Researchers, Fixed-term Contracts and Universities: Understanding Law in Context' (Oliver & Hooley, 2010).

The Fixed-term Employees Regulations are a general employment measure. They were not designed with the context of higher education (HE) in mind, but they have implications for how higher education institutions (HEIs) employ and manage fixed-term staff, including research-only staff. The Regulations, introduced in England, Wales and Scotland¹ and in Northern Ireland², transpose a European Directive (Council Directive 99/70/EC Concerning the Framework Agreement on Fixed-Term Work Concluded by ETUC, UNICE and CEEP).

The March 2005 edition of *'Issues in Research Management and Administration'* focused on managing and developing contract research staff. The contributions suggested that this legislation, alongside other sector-wide policy initiatives, was poised to promote change in the management and development of researchers within HEIs. Hazlehurst (2005, p.23), for example, suggested that "significant change is on the horizon for many members of the research workforce". The introduction of several policy measures had made it a good time to promote this agenda (Carter, 2005). The measures included: moves to support the recovery by HEIs of the full economic cost (fEC) of research; the introduction of funding allocated to HEIs by the Research Councils for the career development and transferable skills training of researchers; and the introduction and implementation of a Framework Agreement for the modernisation of pay structures in HE.

It was clear from the 2005 commentary, that HEI responses to the legislation should be considered in the context of the broader policy agenda. Kent (2005) highlighted the significance of the synergistic, rather than individual, consequences of key legal and policy initiatives. In addition, Carter (2005) provided an overview of policies and practices developed at the University of Bristol. These encompassed a range of activities which sat alongside efforts to reduce the use of fixed-term employment. Such activities included: strategic policy making; the development of communication and information infrastructures; the provision of training and development for both researchers and the managers of researchers. Carter suggested that:

"The advent of new fixed-term contract legislation will go some way to encouraging HEIs to look more broadly at the manner in which they use the skills and knowledge of their RS [research staff] workforce. However, legal compliance is not normally the best way for an organisation to change its practice in a meaningful way." (Carter, 2005, p.11)

At the time of the 2005 publication *'a clear picture'* of the contribution that the legislation would make to developments in the management of researchers was *'yet to emerge'* (Kent, 2005, p.7). The first cohort of research staff employed on successive fixed-term contracts would not accrue the requisite four years of continuous service in order to engage the measures to prevent abuse of successive fixed-term contracts until July 2006 (see below). Hazelhurst's (2005, p.21) small-scale survey of the use of open-ended contracts to employ researchers revealed *'mixed progress'*, whilst several commentators highlighted uncertainty in the interpretation of key legal terms such as *'objective justification'*.

A further message on the anticipated impact of the legislation on the management of researchers was that tackling the issue of fixed-term employment was complex and challenging and would require the commitment and support of key actors across the sector, including employers, funders and researchers themselves. Kynch (2005, p.19) underlined the importance of addressing the issue of job security and *'the dysfunctional effect of fixed-term contracts'* and noted that improvements had been difficult to deliver. It is a good time to look again at the implementation of the legislation and to keep these messages in mind.

Where are we now?

The first thing to note is that the use of fixed-term contracts to employ researchers has decreased. A report published by the UK Research Base Funders' Forum found a significant reduction in the use of fixed-term contracts to employ researchers (Research Base Funders' Forum, 2007). A later report set out a useful and detailed analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. It showed a reduction in the proportion of researchers in the UK employed on fixed-term contracts; from 88% in 2004/05 to 79% in 2007/08 (Research Base Funders' Forum, 2009). The use of fixed-term contracts to employ researchers has decreased in the UK as a whole and in each individual country except Northern Ireland. Analysis by the University and College Union (UCU) also highlighted a continuing reduction in the proportion of research-only academics being employed on fixed-term contracts (UCU, 2007).

The reduction in the use of fixed-term contracts to employ researchers and the increase in the use of open-ended employment differs between HEIs (see for example, UCU, 2009). Moreover, researchers are unevenly distributed between institutions. The research-intensive, 'pre-92' institutions, employ the majority of researchers in the UK. Within the period 2004/05 to 2007/08 around 90% of all researchers were employed by pre-92 institutions (Research Base Funders' Forum, 2009). The proportion of researchers employed on open-ended contracts increased within both pre- and post-'92 institutions during the period. However lower proportions of researchers on open-ended contracts could be found within pre-'92 institutions than within post-'92 institutions. For example, in 2007/08, 20% of researchers within pre-'92 institutions were employed on open-ended contracts, whereas 34% of researchers in post-'92 institutions were employed on open-ended contracts (Research Base Funders' Forum, 2009).

Reception to the legislation by human resources (HR) managers has been described as 'mixed'. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned an evaluation of the impact of public policy and investment in human resource management in HE since 2001 (Oakleigh Consulting, 2009). As part of this review a survey of HR professionals was conducted. Responses were received from fifty-nine, predominantly English, institutions. The survey asked about a range of relevant policy initiatives, legislative changes and other developments, and invited respondents to comment on the extent to which these had influenced their institution's approach to HR management. The majority reported a positive influence. However it is significant to note that 8% reported no influence; 19% reported some negative influence and 4% reported a significant

negative influence. In response to open questions, some respondents mentioned the benefit of the Regulations in forcing the institution to address the use of fixed-term employment whilst others suggested that the Regulations were a '*mixed blessing*' and that they '*sit awkwardly with Research Council funding and the reality of research careers in the UK*' (Oakleigh Consulting, 2009).

The following sections look at key features of this legislation, although not all aspects of the legislation are covered in depth. The emphasis here is on areas that appear relevant to the employment of researchers within universities. The following sections should be considered an overview of the general approach of the legislation and should not be regarded as a comprehensive or authoritative statement of the law.

Striking a balance between flexibility and security?

Expectations of the extent to which legislation in the area of fixed-term employment can enhance the job security of researchers have been high and emphasis has been placed on universities as employers implementing the spirit, as well as the letter of the law. A key question to ask, therefore, is what we can expect of this piece of legislation? The Directive on fixed-term work gives effect to a Framework Agreement concluded by representatives of management and labour at European Union level. The Framework Agreement is annexed to the Directive and considered an integral component of it. The Agreement sets out the general principles and minimum requirements for fixed-term employment contracts and employment relationships. The Agreement contributes to the achievement of a '*better balance between flexibility in working time and security for workers*' (para. 1 of the preamble to the Agreement).

It is important to be aware that the Agreement itself does not aim to abolish or prevent fixed-term employment, nor does it aim to promote fixed-term employment. Rather it arguably seeks to reconcile the (potentially conflicting) needs of employers and employees. The preamble to the Agreement states:

"The parties to this agreement recognise that contracts of an indefinite duration are, and will continue to be, the general form of employment relationship between employers and workers. They also recognise that fixed-term employment contracts respond, in certain circumstances, to the needs of both employers and workers." (para. 2)

The provisions of the Agreement itself, however, offer a fairly narrow and mechanistic approach to protecting fixed-term workers. The purpose of the Agreement³

is set out in clause 1. It is designed to do two main things: firstly to improve the quality of fixed-term work by ensuring the application of the principle of non-discrimination, and secondly to establish a framework to prevent abuse arising from the use of successive fixed-term employment contracts or relationships. The Agreement does not stipulate therefore how a balance between flexibility and security should be struck, nor how to ensure that fixed-term employment responds to the needs of both employers and workers. Rather, the focus of the measures to prevent abuse is on the use of successive fixed-term contracts.

The Directive has been transposed into law in England, Wales and Scotland through The Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 ('the Regulations'). The following sections introduce two key features of the Regulations: the right not to be treated less favourably, and measures on successive fixed-term contracts.

The right not to be treated less favourably

The Regulations set out the right of fixed-term employees⁴ not to be treated, by their employer, less favourably than the employer treats a comparable permanent employee⁵. Exercising the right thus hinges on the capacity for the fixed-term employee to identify a permanent employee who is '*engaged in the same or broadly similar work*' (Reg 2(a)). An employee is considered by Reg. 2 to be a comparable employee if, at the time when the treatment that is alleged to be less favourable takes place, both employees are employed by the same employer; they are engaged in the same or broadly similar work (having regard, where relevant, to whether they have a similar level of qualification and skills) and the permanent employee works, or is based, at the same establishment as the fixed-term employee⁶.

The meaning of the term '*the same or broadly similar work*' has been considered within the House of Lords. The case, *Mathews v Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authority*⁷, concerned the interpretation of the Regulations on Part-time work. Although this ruling does not relate directly to the interpretation of the Regulations on Fixed-term work, there are similarities in the wording of the two instruments and this ruling may provide a flavour of the court's approach. The case concerned access to the Firemans' Pension Scheme by a group of 'retained' fire fighters who were employed part-time. The retained fire fighters argued that this

was discrimination when compared to 'whole-time' fire fighters who worked full-time. In the House of Lords, the judges considered the approach of the original employment tribunal in assessing whether retained fire fighters and whole-time fire fighters were '*engaged in the same or broadly similar work*'. It was held that, in deciding that the fire fighters were not engaged in the same or broadly similar work, the tribunal had placed too much weight on the differences between the type of work conducted by the part-time and full-time workers. The emphasis, it was held, should be on similarities.

The identification of a comparator will depend on the facts of a particular case and will require an understanding of the employment of different staff groups within an institution. Researchers employed on fixed-term contracts are likely to be able to identify a comparator amongst researchers employed on open-ended contracts. However, a question remains as to how far it might be possible to claim that permanent academic staff, who perform a teaching and research function, could serve as a comparator. This would depend on the facts of the case.

The right not to be treated less favourably applies to both the terms of the contract and to any other detriment by any act, or deliberate failure to act, of the employer.⁸ An employment tribunal⁹ considered the right in an HE context in *Biggart v. University of Ulster*¹⁰. This case involved the dismissal of a fixed-term lecturer where the university had taken a decision not to renew fixed-term contracts in order to reduce staffing costs. It was found that the selection of fixed-term employees as a staff group for dismissal constituted less favourable treatment compared to permanent staff employed at the university in similar posts.

The right only applies if the treatment is on the grounds that the employee is fixed-term. So permanent employees do not have the right to be treated as favourably as fixed-term employees and the link between the treatment and the fixed-term status is important. This could be an important issue if institutions have opted to move researchers onto open-ended contracts without taking steps to improve the treatment of this staff group.

Less favourable treatment may be allowed, where it is justified on objective grounds. To be justified on objective grounds the treatment must: respond to a genuine need; be appropriate for achieving that need;

³ The substance of the Directive is found within the framework agreement that is Annexed to the Directive. So in exploring the content of the legislation, the following sections refer to 'the Agreement'.

⁴ Note that the Regulations apply only to employees and not to the broader category of workers, establishing employee status is therefore a key hurdle to accessing these rights

⁵ Within the Regulations a permanent employee is defined as "employee who is not employed under a fixed-term contract" (Reg. 1 (2)). An employee is a comparable employee if, at the time when the treatment that is alleged to be less favourable takes place both employees are employed by the same employer, they are engaged in the same or broadly similar work (having regard, where relevant, to whether they have a similar level of qualification and skills) and the permanent employee works or is based at the same establishment as the fixed-term employee (Reg. 2).

⁶ Where there is no comparable permanent employee working or based at that establishment may be identified. If the comparator is based in a different establishment they must still be employed by the same employer and engaged in the same or broadly similar work. If an employee's employment has ceased they are not considered comparable (Reg.2 (2)).

⁷ *Mathews v Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authority* [2006] IRLR 367

⁸ This includes, in particular any period of service qualification relating to any particular condition of service; the opportunity to receive training; the opportunity to secure any permanent position in the establishment (para. 2).

⁹ Note that the decisions of Employment Tribunals are not binding on other Employment Tribunals. In England, Wales and Scotland appeals on a point of law can be made to the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT). The decisions of the EAT are binding on Employment Tribunals. Appeals from EAT decisions on a point of law can be made to the Court of Appeal and then to the UK Supreme Court.

¹⁰ *Biggart v University of Ulster* Unreported February 19, 2007, (IT) (Northern Ireland)

¹¹ Case C-307/05 Yolanda Del Cerro Alonso v Osakidetza-Servicio Vasco de Salud [2007] ECR 7109

and be necessary for that purpose¹¹. Additionally, less favourable treatment relating to the terms of the contract may be objectively justified if, taken as a whole, the terms are at least as favourable as those of a comparable permanent employee's contract (Reg. 4). This provides the employer with a choice as to whether they take a 'term-by-term' or a 'package' approach to equal treatment.

These provisions prompt employers to think about how they treat different staff groups and reduce the extent to which contractual status can inform the treatment of employees. Thinking about the impact of these measures on the management of researchers raises the question of whether their treatment is informed by their fixed-term status alone. It could be argued that a complex interplay between short-term employment, research-only function and the nature of academic career paths determines the treatment of researchers within HEIs. Some of these issues are dealt in more depth in the article by Jane Thompson elsewhere in this publication.

Successive fixed-term contracts

The Regulations introduce a measure to prevent abuse of successive fixed-term contracts (Reg. 8). The effect is that an employee employed on successive fixed-term contracts for four years or more is considered by law to be a permanent employee¹², unless there are objective grounds for using a fixed-term contract¹³. Objective justification must be established at the time when the current contract was last renewed or at the time when the current contract was entered into. The test for objective grounds is as above¹⁴.

In the case of researchers within universities, a key question is whether short-term grant funding can constitute objective justification. This has been explored at tribunal level within *Ball v. University of Aberdeen*¹⁵. Here a researcher had been employed continuously for six years and had had three fixed-term contracts. He had written to his employer requesting a written statement that his contract was no longer fixed-term. The university stated that the employee would continue to be employed on a fixed-term contract because there was no guarantee of further funding beyond the length of the appointment. The issue for the tribunal was to consider whether the use of a fixed-term contract was justified on objective grounds when the third fixed-term contract commenced. The tribunal identified a genuine business need - *'that of coping with the fact that the research funding from grant-giving institutions was short term'* (para.110). It then considered whether the fixed-term contract was an appropriate and necessary means to meet that need. The specificities of this particular case were taken into account and the advantages and

disadvantages to the employer and employee of using an indefinite contract weighed up. It was found that *'the [university's] legitimate business objective could be met just as easily by the adoption of an indefinite contract for the [researcher]'* (para. 120).

These provisions challenged the link between the employment of researchers and the use of fixed-term contracts. HEIs were prompted to define what they saw as an appropriate use of successive fixed-term employment and to put in place systems to facilitate and oversee the transition of at least some researchers to open-ended status. Universities also needed to think about complying with the law at the end of a fixed-term contract if it is not renewed and when ending an open-ended contract, both of which are dismissals. This issue was key as many institutions (particularly chartered universities) have rigorous redundancy procedures, the modification of which requires specific procedures and processes.

Discussion and conclusions

Developments in the legislation highlight the importance of understanding and determining the fit between the legitimate business needs of HEIs and the nature of employment contracts. The impact of the legislation may thus appear diffuse as HEIs devise different, institutionally specific approaches. Nevertheless the guidance published by the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) asserted that the impact of the Regulations would be to reduce the number of new and existing fixed-term contracts. It was acknowledged that institutions would need to maintain flexibility, but suggested that this would require greater management effort. *'The aim must be to achieve a proper balance between flexible working and organisational efficiency, on the one hand, and security of employment and fair treatment of employees on the other.'* (JNCHES, 2002, p.3)

The importance of integrating responses to the legislation with other measures designed specifically to address challenges faced by researchers, continues to be an important message. In 2007 RCUK solicited the view of staff development experts on the UK HERD (Higher Education Researcher Development) task force on the issue of fixed-term contracts. In terms of the legislation, they stressed that:

"In theory it is relatively simple to 'comply' and move many research staff from 'fixed term' to 'permanent' in terms of words on a contract of employment. However real change will only take place when a fundamental shift occurs in

¹¹ Case C-307/05 Yolanda Del Cerro Alonso v Osakidetza-Servicio Vasco de Salud [2007] ECR 7109

¹² "permanent employee" means an employee who is not employed under a fixed-term contract (Reg. 1(2))

¹³ Reg. 8(5) makes provision for local variation in the measures on successive fixed-term employment. Collective or workforce agreements can be used to modify the provisions on successive fixed-term contracts (Reg. 8 para 2 and 3) by substituting one or either of them for one or more different provisions which are set out within Reg 8(5).

¹⁴ Case C-212/04 Adeneler and Others v Ellinikos Organismos Galaktos (ELOG) [2006] ECR 6057

¹⁵ Ball v University of Aberdeen Unreported May 23, 2008 (ET) (Scotland)

the manner in which the skills of research staff are deployed across a University". (quoted in Research Base Funders Forum, 2007, p.9)

The extent to which the risk of redundancy associated with the end of short-term funding is addressed is therefore a growing concern. The end of short-term funding continues to give rise to the potential for a dismissal. This was acknowledged within the JNHCES guidance 'The ending of short-term funding will continue to raise the possibility of termination of these indefinite contracts'. The tribunal in *Ball v. University of Aberdeen*¹⁶ also made a similar point. It identified a choice between employing researchers on either a fixed-term contract, or on an indefinite contract, but with the possibility of redundancy, should the university be unable to find sufficient funding to continue the employment, once the initial funding has run out. This underlines the point that broader management strategies and approaches are key to ensuring the stability of both fixed-term and open-ended employment in the context of short-term research funding.

HEIs have begun to develop and hone their responses to legal changes in the area of fixed-term employment. However, it is clear that the journey towards balancing the flexibility that universities require with the needs and expectations of researchers is just beginning.

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Career Progression for Researchers in UK HEIs

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Introduction

This paper examines the reality of career progression for research staff in higher education institutions. It looks at the evidence that is currently available on how, and if, research staff are afforded career progression and examines any difference that the implementation of the higher education pay Framework Agreement¹ has made. It also identifies potential barriers to progression, the impact of various researcher development initiatives, and throughout highlights ways in which the University and College Union² (UCU) believes the situation could be improved.

Searching for empirical evidence on career progression for research staff is increasingly challenging, but anecdotal evidence is abundant. Every year motions come to the UCU's annual sector conference calling on the Union to tackle the problem of an absence of structured career paths for university researchers. These motions are overwhelmingly supported by all groups of members who fully understand the frustration felt by the Union's research members. The Union's networks of researchers inform the Union that they are treated like second-class academics with little chance of career progression. Through the Union's internal research networks, UCU has heard of cases whereby research staff claim they are being denied first authorship on research papers, support for fellowships and support in applying for lecturing posts because of the perceived negative impact such advancements would have on the principal investigator's research rating. All too often the sector sees good, dedicated research staff leave academia because they can no longer face the insecurity associated with a research 'career' in higher education.

The UCU does, of course, try to make improvements in various ways, for example by developing our Researchers' Survival Guide (UCU, 2008), but against the funding regime and a fairly entrenched culture, progress is slow. UCU's main focus in supporting research staff has been in challenging casualisation in the sector but the Union is also involved in various professional research activities (including work with Vitae and the Concordat Strategy Group) and continues to lobby relevant bodies wherever and whenever it can.

Looking at the evidence

Having said that empirical data are difficult to come by, it is worth looking at what can be gleaned from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data on research careers. HESA data are collated across the UK from information provided by individual institutions. Prior to the introduction of the Framework Agreement, HESA collated data on the numbers of academic staff on each nationally agreed academic grade. Thus it was possible to ascertain the percentage of academic staff on Research Grade 1A, Grade II³, etc. As the Framework Agreement started to be implemented, these grades were no longer used in a significant number of institutions; consequently HESA has now stopped collating these data.

What HESA now collects are data on the number of staff on each scale point on the 51 point national pay spine (see below). HESA does not collect data on grades as there are now differences in grading structures from institution to institution. This means that it is possible to get a rough idea of where research staff are sitting in the grading structure, but not to definitively state on what grades researchers are employed.

Looking at the spread of research staff across grades/pay points does not give a detailed analysis of career opportunities available to research staff, but it does give us an indication of the pattern of employment of research-only staff in the UK. Firstly, looking at the HESA data from 2004/5, prior to the implementation of the Framework Agreement in most institutions, of the research-only staff 21775.1⁴ were returned as being on the national 'pre-1992' research scales, broken down as shown in Table 1.

Grade	Numbers <i>Taken from HESA data 2004/5</i>	% <i>Calculated by UCU</i>
Research Grade 1B	3008.6	13.8
Research Grade 1A	14119.1	64.8
Research Grade II	3664.8	16.8
Research Grade III	866.1	4.0
Research Grade IV	116.5	0.5
Total	21775.1	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of research staff on national 'pre-1992' research grades, 2004/5

¹ The Framework Agreement was a joint agreement, made in 2004, between higher education employers and trade unions for the modernisation of higher education pay structures.

² The University and College union is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK with over 120,000 members.

³ Prior to the introduction of the Framework Agreement there were nationally negotiated researcher grades. RA1B was the first grade, then RA1A (generally the first post-doctoral grade), followed by Grades II, III and IV.

⁴ HESA data are calculated using FTEs and are provided to one decimal place.

In these data the RA1A grade represents the first post-doctoral grade in most institutions. Research Grade II and above are 'promoted' posts. Only 21.3% of research staff were employed in grades which were higher than the post-doctoral entry level grade – little more than one in five.

Comparing this with teaching and research (lecturing) staff from the same set of HESA data, we find that although the 'non-promoted' lecturing grades are well populated (Lecturer A and Lecturer B with 1987.5 and 11700.2 members of staff respectively), 61.5% of teaching and research staff are on 'promoted' grades (10025.3 on the Senior Lecturer grade and 8665.5 on the Professorial grade).

From these two snapshots we can clearly see that staff in teaching and research roles are more evenly distributed across grades than staff in research roles. Furthermore, Grade RA1A was the equivalent of Lecturer A (lecturers have the expectation to progress to Lecturer B), so that even within non-promoted grades, lecturing staff would have been earning considerably more.

In 2004 the employers and joint trade unions signed up to a new framework for pay and grading. This moved the sector to a single pay spine for all staff, including research staff. Underpinning the introduction of the new pay spine was the concept of role analysis and job evaluation and a set of academic role profiles were developed and recommended to the sector (JNCHES, 2005). These profiles were split into three job families: teaching and scholarship, teaching and research, and research. Most importantly, they were developed to ensure that for each level there is a comparison between the different profiles – meaning that individuals matching the same level of profile, in whatever job family, would be on the same pay grade. They also clearly set out the types of activities which staff would be expected to undertake in each of the job families.

The principle behind the use of role profiles was that staff would be matched to the appropriate profile – comparing what they were doing with the profiles – and placed within a grade accordingly. Perhaps most significantly, the introduction of the role profiles for the first time formally recognised the concept of a 'research career' and presented that career path as being on a par with the career path of someone engaged in teaching and research. They also firmly placed research staff as part of the academic family – something UCU had argued for, for a number of years.

Most institutions made use of the academic role profiles in implementing the Framework Agreement, either using the profiles as they were, or negotiating local variants thereof. Many adopted profiles for 5 grades of research staff – from a research assistant type role to professorial level⁵.

The sector now had a method in place whereby research staff could more easily understand what was expected in their role (by reference to their role profile) and identify if they were working over and above that level. So, have these changes improved the career progression of research staff?

HESA data for 2007/8 show that there were a total of 20459 research-only staff on the 51 point national pay spine. Points 26 – 36 were well populated with a clustering of 2100 staff on spine point 36 (Table 2). This would broadly correspond to the Academic level 2 (Ac2) grade that replaced the old RA1A grade, and implies there are a large number of research staff at the top of that grade (the maximum pay point of grade Ac2 will be at least point 36 in all pre-92 institutions).

National pay spine point	Number of research-only staff at that pay point
37	474 (typically first point of Ac3)
36	2100 (typically top of Ac2 (pre-92))
35	732
34	1203
33	1386
32	1515
31	1548
30	1797 (typically entry point of Ac2 (pre-92))

Table 2: Distribution of research staff across points 30-37 on the national pay spine (HESA data 2007/8)

There is also a marked clustering at spine point 43, the minimum pay point for the top of the Academic level 3 (Ac3) grade (equivalent to the old Research Grade II). There are 910 research-only staff on this pay point. Although clustering at the top of a pay point is expected to an extent, when coupled with very few staff in the next grade it can signify a lack of career progression opportunities for experienced staff.

Making the assumption that spine point 37 is the first of the 'promoted' points for research-only staff (although this will not be the case in every institution and for every

individual), there are still only 22% of research staff on 'promoted' grades – little improvement from the figures in 2004/5. The figure for Professorial-grade research staff remains stubbornly low at 0.8%.

Whilst the HESA data provide a snapshot, to fully understand how researchers progress in their careers, and to understand any barriers to career progression, a number of things are needed:

- data that enable us to determine the actual grades of research-only staff with a UK-wide reference point;
- data that allow us to see how researchers move through academia (if at all) including:
 - whether there are career progression opportunities for research-only staff,
 - whether different groups of researchers, e.g. men and women, different disciplines, etc., have different career paths;
 - how many research staff move into teaching and research (lecturing) careers; and
 - how many research staff leave academia (and why);
- The security of employment of research staff (the simple open-ended or fixed-term categorisation is probably too blunt a distinction these days).

It is worth noting that these data requirements have also been picked up by a working party looking at the UK research cohort, as part of the Concordat Strategy Group's benchmarking activity.

In the absence of these data we still have a snapshot from the HESA data about the lack of progression for research-only staff, both before and since the implementation of the Framework Agreement. Is it now possible to identify barriers to progression?

Barriers to progression

When discussing this with UCU members the same themes emerge consistently. The reason most commonly cited by UCU members for lack of career progression is insecurity of employment. This can manifest itself in a number of ways. Many research staff remain on fixed-term contracts even beyond the four years envisaged by the Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002. Others are offered open-ended contracts but are notified at the start of their contract of an 'at risk'

date, when funding for a particular project is due to end. Some may be offered open-ended contracts with no such warning, but in the majority of cases there is an implicit threat of dismissal at the end of a particular project. Liz Oliver discusses in more detail the way that legislation around fixed-term employment has been implemented in her paper in this volume.

Whilst employers have limited input into the way that research is funded, the way in which they employ their staff is under their control. At the heart of the problem is the way in which employers tend to link individual members of research staff to individual projects which are funded on a fixed-term basis. They do not have to do so and there are examples of good practice in the sector where a more holistic approach to pooling research funding and use of research resources (including staff) is taken (see Oliver & Hooley, 2010, p.22-25). However, these examples are not typical across the sector. It is very difficult for UCU members to understand why long-serving researchers remain in this precarious position year after year.

This level of insecurity and moves from contract to contract on a regular basis has a profound and detrimental impact on the careers of research staff. Even where staff are working at a level higher than the grade on which they are being paid, they are less likely to challenge their grade if their security of employment is constantly under threat. Academia is a profession in which building social and professional ties is key to career success (Hitchcock *et al.*, 1995; Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Martin, 2009) and this can make it difficult for research staff to assert their rights if by doing so they may cause problems for more senior staff. In some cases this social pressure can lead to a culture of exploitation. Even incremental progression within a grade can be threatened when staff move from one contract to another and any breaks in employment are likely to see them starting at the bottom of the grade again.

UCU has also been told by its members that despite Research Council messages to the contrary, the process of competitive bidding for research grants leads to principal investigators trying to keep the costs of their bid as low as possible. This often means putting in a bid for the lowest possible salary grade, sometimes at the lowest pay point, even when there is clear evidence that the project would benefit from someone experienced, working at a higher level. This 'race to the bottom' perpetuates itself with the result that research staff are kept on the lowest grades to keep them within the real (or perceived) ceiling of the grant. It is against this background of insecurity over jobs and grants that the issue of promotion procedures should be considered.

Promotion procedures

Promotion procedures for academic staff vary from institution to institution and are subject to local negotiation. In many 'pre-1992' institutions there is a promotions round on an annual basis where academic staff can be nominated or nominate themselves for promotion, and these applications are considered by a panel. These promotion rounds rarely, if ever, extend to research staff.

Before the introduction of the framework agreement and role analysis in the sector, academic promotion was usually based on evidence of individual performance. It had therefore been possible, in principle, to secure a promotion on the basis of past research performance. In some instances promotion was based on number of publications achieved over a given period, or grant money secured.

The introduction of the Framework Agreement has forced the higher education sector to examine how they award promotions and many institutions are now looking to align promotion with the need for posts at a higher level and evidence of the ability to work at that higher level. Past research does of course form part of the evidence to demonstrate such ability but is now often, in and of itself, not sufficient to secure it. The underlying reason for this shift is the need to be able to demonstrate equal pay for work of equal value. So, if the institution is going to promote a researcher they need to demonstrate that the work that the researcher will be undertaking in the future is of higher 'value' than the work they are currently undertaking.

There is, of course, another side to the use of role profiles and role analysis. The introduction of such schemes has provided staff with the ability to easily demonstrate that they are working at a level above that for which they are being paid. The principles of equal pay apply equally here. So, if an institution expects staff to work at a certain level it will have to be prepared to pay for work at that level. There cannot be an expectation that staff will 'grow' their jobs with no reward.

UCU has developed guidance for its branches on promotions for academic staff that links promotion to the national role profiles (UCU circular UCUHE/7). The union believes that promotion criteria should be linked to the requirements of the relevant role profiles, i.e. promotion criteria should be the way in which a member of staff can demonstrate their ability to work at the level of the higher profile. However, the extent to which these changes will benefit research staff, in the context of insecure contracts and funding, has yet to be seen.

Researcher development initiatives

In addition to the Framework Agreement and the legislation on fixed-term employees, there have been two further recent initiatives that had the potential to improve research careers.

The first initiative was the introduction of ring-fenced income ('Roberts funding') to support researchers in higher education institutions. Whilst a number of initiatives funded under this scheme have been positively received by research staff and have no doubt supported individuals to develop their careers, it has not been possible thus far to identify a clear UK-wide trend in career progression for research staff arising from this funding. However there is evidence to indicate that researcher training and development activity enhances employability and improves grant writing success (cf. Bromley, 2009).

The second initiative was the huge investment in the English higher education sector in human resource management under the auspices of the 'Rewarding and Developing Staff (RDS)' agenda. In its evaluation report in 2009, Higher Education Funding Council for England identified a number of developments in the sector since 2001, including the establishment of more transparent pay and reward mechanisms. However, the report also recognised that there remained a number of human resources management challenges, including developing coherent career progression routes/ pathways for staff which take into account the needs of groups such as contract researchers. The report also identified that 30% of surveyed institutions reported having undertaken RDS activity specifically targeted at researchers. However, there was a variable response as to how influential RDS has been on staff training and development overall. Again, the investment in this area does not seem to be directly translating to career progression for research staff.

The current work being undertaken by Vitae to establish a Research Development Framework (Vitae, 2010) may also provide research staff with support in planning and progressing in their careers. It will be interesting to look at the data again in a couple of years to see what impact this has had on the numbers of research staff who have progressed in terms of pay and grade.

Conclusions

It may not be possible, with the current data, to determine why research careers remain elusive for so many and to determine why so many well-meaning initiatives are failing to have an impact in the sector. However, UCU believes that the endemic use of fixed-

term contracts (or their close relation, open-ended contracts with an identified 'at risk' date), the insistence on linking individual research staff to individual projects and the current research funding processes are the main obstacles to establishing rewarding research careers. Whilst UCU will encourage activities aimed at supporting research staff in their professional development there needs to be a fundamental culture shift in the way researchers are viewed as part of the academic community, for real progress on research careers to be made. The experience of the author suggests that while positive change is happening, the rate of change remains far too slow.

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Views from the research front-line: the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2009

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Introduction

This paper reports a number of results from the 2009 Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS). CROS is a web-based survey scheme designed to gather the anonymous views of research staff in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) about their experiences, career aspirations and career development opportunities. The results provide a snapshot of the views of UK research staff but are also useful in considering the progress that has been made in supporting the career development of researchers as a consequence of the increased policy focus on this area. They also summarise the national context against which individual institutions are able to compare and evaluate the data collected about their own staff.

This paper draws heavily from a report of the aggregated results from CROS 2009 (Vitae, 2009) published on behalf of the CROS Steering Group. The reader is referred to that report for details of survey methodology, the questions posed within the survey and aggregated results for all questions.

Target participants, methodology and sample

CROS is targeted at research staff employed in UK HEIs, who are broadly defined as individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed for that purpose. The emphasis on 'primary' responsibility intentionally excludes those who are in research support roles and lecturers who undertake research (Universities UK, 2008).

CROS surveys were run by 51 UK HEIs between 2 March and 8 June 2009, using a common core question set to which institutions were able to add their own local questions if desired, on a single online research platform. Similar surveys have been run on several occasions since 2002 but a new core question set was developed for the 2009 survey, to reflect the principles of the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' (RCUK, 2008). Aggregate results were generated by combining the quantitative data from the individual surveys prior to analysis.

Participation and response rates

Of the 51 HEIs that participated in CROS 2009, 16 (of the 20) Russell Group institutions took part and 12 (out of 18) 1994 Group institutions. The balance of 23

institutions was from a range of other, mainly small and specialist institutions. Individual HEIs were responsible for identifying their research staff populations. The total target population was 28,165 research staff, which represented 74% of the total UK research staff population (HESA, 2009).

The apparent bias towards Russell Group institutions (71% of responses received) and 1994 Group institutions (15% of responses), reflects the spread of research staff in UK higher education; HESA data suggest that Russell Group institutions employ 64% of all research-only staff in the UK, while 1994 Group institutions employ 14%. As such the sampling provided a reasonable representation of those institutions that employ the largest numbers of research staff.

A total of 5908 completed questionnaires were received, representing an overall response rate of 21%. Although aggregate analyses were not published for all previous CROS surveys, from the comparative data available, the response rate achieved and the higher institutional participation combine to result in CROS 2009 sampling a greater proportion of UK HE research staff that is greater than in any previous CROS survey.

Demographics of the response sample

Within the CROS survey, questions were posed to obtain information about the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This enabled cross-tabulations of results from different sub-populations, but could also indicate the 'representativeness' of the respondents in relation to known data about the entire UK research staff population as collected by HESA (HESA, 2009). Table 1 summarises the demographic information collected about respondents, and comparisons with known HESA data.

	CROS 2009	HESA 2009
Age	Under 30: 23% 30-44: 61% 45 and over: 16%	30 and under: 34% 31-45: 51% Over 45: 14%
Gender	Male: 45% Female: 55%	Male: 54% Female: 46%
Status	Full-time: 87% Part-time: 13%	Full-time: 84% Part-time: 16%
Nationality	UK: 65% Non-UK: 35%	n/a

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of CROS 2009 respondents, compared with known parameters of the UK research staff population (HESA, 2009).

¹ The Framework Agreement was a joint agreement, made in 2004, between higher education employers and trade unions for the modernisation of higher education pay structures.

² The University and College union is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK with over 120,000 members.

³ Prior to the introduction of the Framework Agreement there were nationally negotiated researcher grades. RA1B was the first grade, then RA1A (generally the first post-doctoral grade), followed by Grades II, III and IV.

⁴ HESA data are calculated using FTEs and are provided to one decimal place.

In purely statistical terms (which assume a random sample) the 5,908 CROS responses from a target population of 28,165 researchers produce a confidence interval of 1.2% at a 95% confidence level. Such a low confidence interval suggests that the responses should be strongly representative of the population sampled. However, the population sampled is unlikely to be random as there is likely to be non-response bias, i.e. those who responded may be different in some way from those who did not. Furthermore the sample is also heterogeneous as the responses reflect an extremely wide range of institutional environments. Caution needs therefore to be exercised in considering the aggregated results, and also when comparing them to any single institution's results. Nonetheless, given the relatively sparse information available about the research staff population within UK higher education, some of the observations summarised in Table 2 are likely to be of interest as an indicative snapshot of current research staff and their work.

- 82% have fixed-term contracts, mostly of 2-3 years duration, but 19% have contracts of one year or less duration
- 8% have been with their HEI for over 10 years, and 12% have had five or more contracts with their HEI
- 63% have conducted their research career solely in their current institution
- 15% have worked in Europe and 17% elsewhere internationally
- 62% have collaborated internationally and 35% have collaborated with industry
- 5% have undertaken a placement outside higher education
- 35% come from outside the UK
- 43% supervise doctoral researchers and masters students
- 50% undertake teaching/lecturing

Table 2: Summary of key information about CROS 2009 respondents

Results

Employment with current institution

As shown in Figure 1, the majority (58%) of respondents had been employed by their current HEI for between 1 and 5 years, while 24% had over six years' of employment, and almost 8% had been with their current HEI for over 10 years.

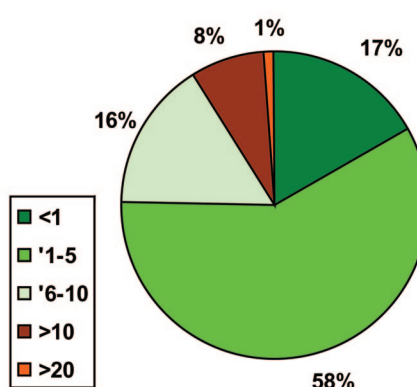


Figure 1a: Length of service in years, CROS 2009 respondents (N = 5808)

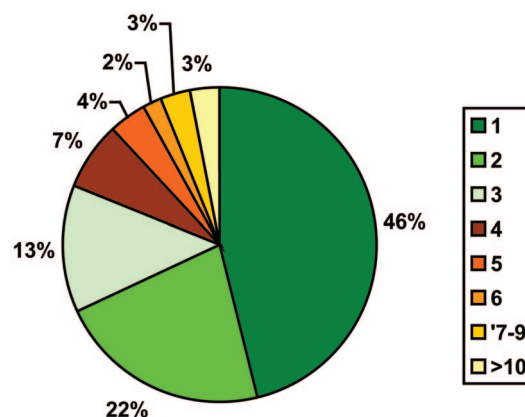


Figure 1b: Number of employment contracts with current institution, CROS respondents (N = 5673)

Almost half (46%) were employed on their first contract with their current HEI. While the majority (78%) had had three contracts or fewer, 12% had had five or more contracts at their current HEI. Overall, 63% of respondents appeared to have conducted their research career, thus far, solely in one institution.

In order to explore terms of employment, researchers were asked to state whether their current contract was fixed-term or open-ended. 82% reported that they were employed on a fixed-term contract and 18% on an open-ended contract. This correlated well with the figure of 84% of researchers on fixed-term contracts reported in the Research Base Funders' Forum First Annual Report (DIUS, 2007), which is based on HESA data from 2006/2007.

Analysis suggests that 96% of respondents aged under 30 years were employed on fixed-term contracts. The equivalent figure for those aged 30-45 was 83%, while the percentage of those over 45 years of age on fixed-term contracts was 58%. Separate analysis shows that the majority (63%) of those respondents who had worked at their HEI for over 10 years had open-ended contracts. There appeared to be a stronger correlation between employment on an open-ended contract and length of service at the HEI, as opposed to the age of respondent.

A preliminary investigation of responses by subject studied suggests that fixed-term contracts were most prevalent in the biological sciences (90%) and somewhat less prevalent in social sciences (71%).

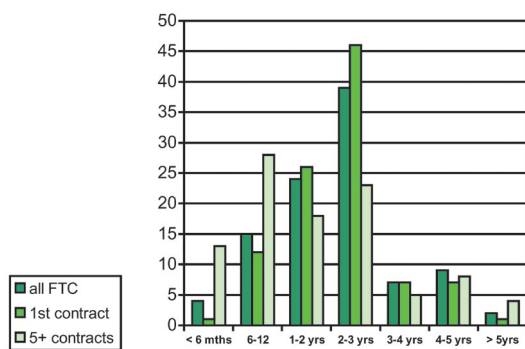


Figure 2: Length of current contract for those CROS 2009 respondents currently employed on fixed-term contracts.

For those respondents employed on fixed-term contracts, the most widespread length of contract was 2-3 years (39%), with 19% being employed on a contract of one year or less (Figure 2). Deeper analysis revealed that as many as 41% of respondents with five or more contracts with their current HEI were currently on contracts of 12 months or less. Of those who had been with their HEI for 10 years or more, about a quarter had a current contract of 12 months or less. These findings reinforce the recognition that there is a significant group of researchers with long service but who are employed on very short contracts. However, the practice of using fixed-term contracts is undergoing a significant shift as is discussed by Liz Oliver elsewhere in this publication. It will be interesting to see how these changes are reflected in future CROS results.

Just over 12% of respondents were working part-time (18% of female respondents, but only 6% of males). This was slightly higher (16%) for those on open-ended contracts.

Considering their overall experience, 6% were in their first year as a researcher, 49% had 1-5 years' total experience, 27% had 6-10 years and 18% had over 10 years' experience as research staff. Some 37% of respondents had worked in more than one HEI in the UK, while 15% had worked in research in Europe and 18% outside Europe.

Appointment of research staff

During application to their current post, 68% of respondents said that they had been provided with a job description and 64% a specification of the qualifications required. Less than one third (32%) said that they had been given details of the personal or management skills required, while 15% claimed not to have either a job description or role requirements.

Most respondents reported that they had received information on appointment relating to their employment contract (92%), institutional procedures (78%), about training/development (77%) and health and safety (78%). These were generally reported to have been useful, especially those directly relating to conditions of employment (Table 3).

One of the key processes recognised in professional management is the job induction process. No fewer than 65% of respondents reported that they had received an induction to their role, which the majority had found useful. However, 53% did not receive, or at least did not remember being offered, an induction to their department; in contrast, 40% remembered being offered a cross-institutional induction. Over half claimed not to have received a copy of their HEI's research strategy.

	Useful or very useful %	Not useful %	Not taken %	Not offered %	N
Information about contract	74	18	1	8	5759
Training & development info	57	17	4	23	5681
HEI research strategy	28	23	1	48	5656
Induction to role	38	20	3	35	5695
Departmental induction	35	19	4	47	5686
Cross-institutional induction	20	17	6	60	5642

Table 3: Provision of information on appointment and its perceived usefulness, CROS 2009 respondents.

It is worth noting that these results are reliant on respondents' memory of the processes on appointment to their current roles, which for some was several years ago. Perhaps more significant, the results can only reflect respondents' recollections, rather than the actual information or processes that were offered by the employing institution.

One purpose of the relaunch of CROS in 2009 was to enable assessment of progress in terms of embedding within employment practices in HEIs, the key principles of the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' (RCUK, 2008). Although the samples are different, comparison with previous CROS survey results suggests that there has an increase in the use of induction in recent years. The figure of 65% of respondents receiving an induction was higher than that reported in the 2006 survey (58%) and the 2002 survey (45%). The perceived usefulness of that induction had also risen from 53% in 2002 to 68% in 2009.

Processes and policies for employment and progression

Over 30% of respondents reported a good understanding in relation to appraisal/review, terms and conditions of employment, fixed-term contracts and research codes of practice. Across all the issues addressed, over half (and often three-quarters) of respondents reported that they had a good or partial understanding, or at least knew that policies existed. Some 20% or fewer respondents reported that they had never heard of such policies (Table 4).

	Good %	Partial %	Know exists %	Never heard of %	N
Employment terms & conditions	37	49	13	1	5800
Fixed term contracts					
Appraisal/ performance review	37	32	22	7	5810
Promotion criteria	8	29	46	15	5801
Redundancy and redeployment					
Institutional career pathways	11	35	32	21	5798
Research codes of practice	31	34	25	9	5801
Departmental decision-making process	10	31	44	15	5806

Table 4: Respondents' level and knowledge and understanding of selected policies, procedures and initiatives.

Respondents appeared to understand best the issues that affected them most directly in their current employment and research activity. Thus they appeared to have good knowledge and understanding of current employment conditions, and research strategy, but a lower level of knowledge about progression/promotion processes, decision-making structures and career pathways.

Respondents with open-ended contracts tended to display a somewhat better understanding than those on fixed-term contracts for most of these progression-related issues, although this could also be related to age and experience. Analysis of the responses by number of contracts held with the HEI, or the length of the current contract, did not reveal such a correlation.

Perceptions of recognition, value and fairness

Anecdotally at least, some research staff feel that they are not treated as well by their employer as lecturing staff. Responses to questions on perceived equality of treatment with lecturing staff of a similar grade varied strongly depending on the issue considered. For example, three quarters of respondents believed that they were treated equally in relation to access to training/development and opportunities to attend conferences, and 65% in relation to visibility on websites and staff directories. However, half of respondents believed that they were not treated equally in relation to opportunities for promotion and progression, or participation in department- or HEI-based decision-making processes (see Jane Thompson's article in this volume for further discussion of the available evidence about promotion and progression for research staff).

Those with a career plan reported higher levels of fairness than those without (57% vs. 43%), in relation to progression. More of the respondents on open-ended contracts agreed that they were treated on an equal footing with lecturing staff in relation to promotion and progression, than those on fixed-term contracts; this was also the case for participation in departmental and institutional decision-making (Table 5 - overleaf).

	% Agree/ strongly	% Disagree/ strongly	Don't know	N
Institution treats staff fairly irrespective of gender	86	14	n/a	5660
Institution treats staff fairly irrespective of age	87	13	n/a	5621
Institution treats staff fairly with regard to career progression/promotion	81	20	n/a	5650
Institution treats you equally with lecturing staff in relation to visibility on websites/directories	64	25	12	5796
Institution treats you equally with lecturing staff in relation to access to training/development opportunities	76	11	14	5763
Institution treats you equally with lecturing staff in relation to opportunities for promotion and progression	23	51	27	5802

Table 5: Perceptions of fairness of institution's treatment of staff in relation to selected issues.

As to whether their HEIs recognised and valued their contributions, more than half of respondents felt recognised for their contributions to research strategy, research culture and published outputs (Table 6). Significantly fewer, and less than a third in some areas, felt that there was recognition of their management of staff and resources, teaching and supervising of Doctoral and Masters researchers. Additional information about the wider activities undertaken by research staff is provided in a later section.

	%Agree/ strongly	%Disagree/ strongly	Don't know	N
Achieving the institution's research strategy	53	26	19	5782
Research culture within the department	56	26	16	5764
Publications	69	18	10	5769
Managing staff	28	31	16	5779
Managing resources	34	31	42	5780
Supervising doctoral and masters researchers	42	28	10	5778
Teaching and lecturing	33	26	11	5768

Table 6: Respondents' perceptions of whether their institution recognises and values their contributions in relation to certain activities.

Professional development and training

A measure of whether an employee feels part of an organisation and shares its aims is their perception of their access to and participation in training and development (Bartlett, 2001; Georgellis & Lange, 2007; Brewer *et al.*, 2008). Engaging researchers in training and career development is endorsed as part of the Concordat.

Within the previous 12 months, 75% of respondents had discussed training needs and/or career development opportunities with their principal investigator or line manager. This was significantly higher than the 50% reported in the CROS 2006 survey. 23% had discussed these matters with someone responsible for developing researchers (such as a staff developer). Nearly three-quarters (72%) had actually participated in training activities or courses in the past year within their HEI, again significantly up from 36% in 2006. Some 47% of respondents had undertaken external training activities/courses. Whilst only 19% had formalised their development through a personal development plan or record, over 50% wished to do so.

Developing other experience and expertise

The majority of respondents reported that they had collaborated with other researchers, 62% internationally and 50% in cross-disciplinary teams, and many more would like to do so. 35% had collaborated with industry and as many more wished to. Although only 5% had undertaken a placement outside HE, and 7% a secondment to another HEI, up to half of respondents reported that they would like that experience.

In terms of management experience, over half had planned and managed projects, and 35% had managed a budget. Only around 20% had participated in wider departmental or institutional decision-making structures, although up to half would like to. Some 43% had supervised a Doctoral or Masters student and 50% had undertaken teaching or lecturing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the desire for development in specialist research skills and techniques appeared to be stronger than for other (personal or transferable) skills. Although over 80% had developed their communication skills by presenting work at a conference or written

for publication, only 59% had explained their work to people outside their field. Some 40% had participated in public engagement work and 34% in knowledge transfer activity; over 75% had either developed or wanted to develop skills in all of these areas.

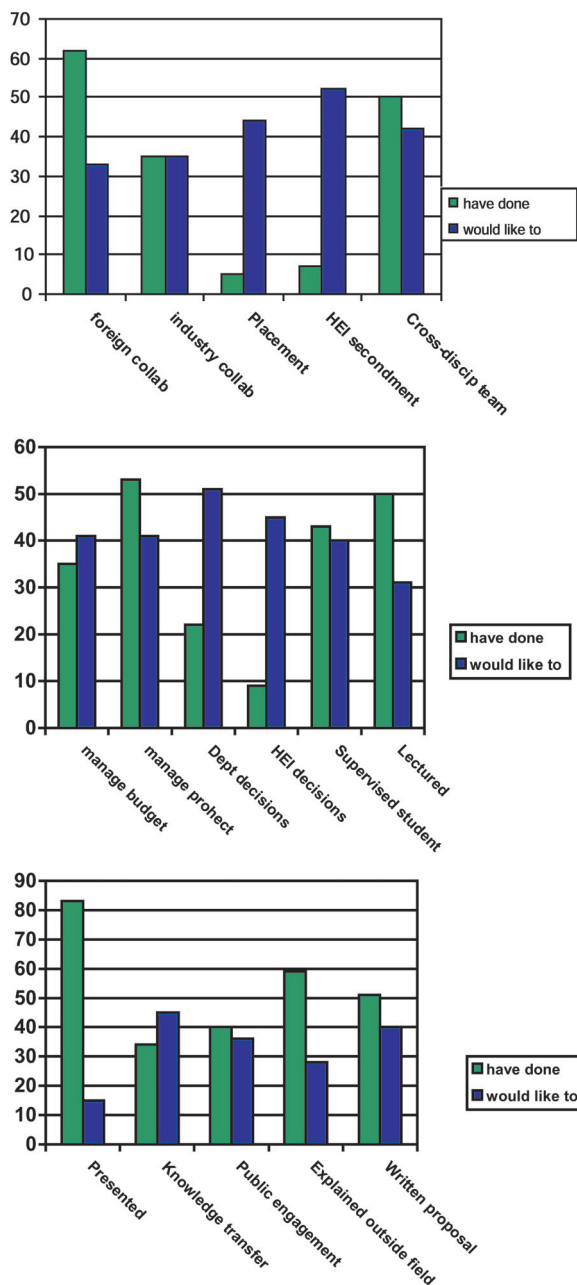


Figure 3: Percentage of CROS 2009 respondents who have or would like to develop experience in selected activities.

Researcher career aspirations

Respondents were asked to identify their career intentions both immediately and also in five years' time. The latter is considered to present a good indication of their career aspirations (Figure 4) and can be summarised as:

- 51% sought a career in HE which combined research and teaching
- 38% wished to continue primarily in HE research
- 34% aspired to a research career outside HE
- 25% wished to undertake a career outside research
- 13% indicated that they aspired to self-employment

Career aspirations now and in 5 yrs
(N=5908)

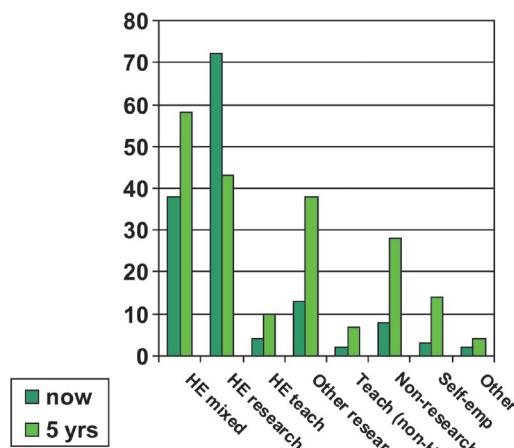


Figure 4: Current career aspirations and in five years (multiple responses allowed), CROS 2009 respondents.

The majority (87%) had reflected on their career development needs and nearly two-thirds (64%) felt that they had been encouraged to engage in personal and career development, while 50% claimed that they had a clear career development plan.

Higher proportions of those under 30 years of age, in their first contract, or from outside the UK, reported encouragement to engage in career development (around 70%) than the 64% overall. On the other hand, somewhat fewer of those with five or more contracts at their HEI or of over 45 years of age (57%) reported that they were encouraged in this way.

More non-UK researchers claimed to have a career plan (59%) than UK respondents (50% overall). The lowest proportions (around 40%) with a career plan were those working part-time or who had been with their HEI for

over 10 years, or who had been employed on multiple contracts. There was little variation between those with open-ended or fixed-term contracts, or length of current contract.

To obtain career discussions or support, 40% reported that they had consulted their line manager, and 45% more reported that they would do so (Table 7). Less than 5% had consulted a staff developer or human resources specialist about their career development, and only around one quarter might do so. On the other hand, many respondents were using informal channels such as colleagues and family/friends (used by 40% of respondents and likely to be used by a further 40-50%).

	%Have consulted	%Would consult	%Would not	N
Principal investigator/line manager	40	45	12	5654
Careers adviser	13	38	45	5592
Colleagues	36	54	9	5635
Family/friends	43	45	10	5627
Staff developer	4	36	50	5478
HR specialist	2	23	68	5471

Table 7: Respondents' sources of advice for their career development.

Conclusions and recommendations for action

There is little doubt that the aggregated (mean) results of a national survey of a population as diverse as research staff in higher education need to be treated with caution. There is diversity of working environment and also of employment and management practices across the 51 individual institutions that participated. However, the results give an overall indication of the manner in which research staff view their employment and career, and their perceptions of the support and management they are receiving. In this respect there should be value in the results as a broad indication of the impact of recent policy and initiatives to support the career and personal development of researchers. For this reason, certain results from CROS are considered benchmarks as a measure of the impact of, for example, the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*. Study of the relevant results from CROS within a single institution offer a potential benchmark for that institution and a more focused picture of practice and perceptions within it.

The degree to which these results relate to the work of individual principal investigators and other research managers will vary locally, and across institutions.

Nonetheless, the results give an overall indication of progress towards the embedding and 'mainstreaming' of processes such as job induction, appraisal, career planning and professional development, all of which might be considered as key elements in the effective management of employees. In areas such as these, there should be concordance between the principal investigator's practical role as manager of the employee, and the national drive to support researcher development.

It is hoped that sight of these results from CROS in a variety of areas – such as perceptions of whether different contributions are valued, and the varied career experiences of researchers – will prompt principal investigators and other research managers to consider how they can best encourage the professional and career development of their researchers. There is a two-way benefit to be had for principal investigators, in terms of supporting colleagues (and letting them know they are valued), while increasing their own effectiveness as managers.

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Building bridges on shifting sands: the challenges facing research managers and administrators in supporting researchers

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The importance of research within UK universities has grown considerably over the past twenty years, and today research is seen as a key indicator of the status of an institution (Lucas, 2006). This growth has resulted in increased pressure on universities to deliver high quality and high-impact research and has resulted in major changes to the way that university research is conducted. These include a move towards larger grants and projects, larger research teams and an increase in interdisciplinary research (see for example, Corbyn, 2008). Further changes in approaches to research have been driven by developments in the law relating to fixed-term employees¹ and by the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' (RCUK, 2008).

In parallel with these developments, there has been a significant change in the role of higher education research managers and administrators (RMA)². The past decade has seen a significant rise in the number of RMA positions and the relative importance of such posts within institutions has increased. This is reflected in high salaries for senior RMAs and an increase in the proportion of such positions requiring a Ph.D. or similar qualification (Shelley, 2010). Whereas RMAs were once seen primarily as part of the university administration, they now occupy a new professional space, somewhere between the academic and administrative domains (Allen-Collinson, 2007, 2009; Whitchurch, 2008). Furthermore, Marlin (2009) has noted a growing use of research facilitators in supporting academics with their research.

The manner in which UK universities organise their research support is varied, with no single model predominating. Green and Langley (2009) identified three models that are prevalent within UK HEIs but noted that even within these models much variety exists. Whether the RMA is located in a central unit or in a faculty/department appears to have a significant effect on the responsibilities of the role. RMAs located in faculty/departmental positions are generally more involved in directly supporting academics while those in central offices tend to have a more strategic institutional role (Shelley, 2010). Irrespective of where in the organisation the RMA is situated, the role may be characterised as evolving from one of providing

a service to academic staff to one of working in partnership with academic staff and other professional support staff. The challenge for these partnerships is to maximise the return on the institutional research effort and to provide an environment in which individual researchers can develop rewarding careers. To meet these challenges, all those involved need to have common aims and objectives. These objectives need to be formed from a range of institutional requirements and bring together concerns about research policy, income generation, human resources (HR) and staff development among others.

It is the contention of the author that the *Concordat* can be used as a key element in building shared objectives around the development of research capacity. The *Concordat* is essentially an agreement between all those involved in UK university research to uphold an agreed set of principles which aim to increase the "attractiveness and sustainability" of UK research careers and to improve the "quantity, quality and impact of research" for the benefit of the UK. The seven principles of the *Concordat* are given in Figure 1. These principles provide a common focus for all those involved in supporting university research. Better implementation of these principles should lead to an improvement in the overall research environment as well as increasing the research capacity of any institution. However, to do this successfully will require a joined-up approach from the various staff groups within our universities. Research managers and administrators have a crucial role to play in building and sustaining these partnerships.

¹ The Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 available at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20022034.htm>.

² The term 'RMA' is taken from Shelley (2010) and is used here to cover the wide range of posts whose occupants are represented by the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA UK).

1. Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.
2. 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 excellent research.
3. Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.
4. The importance of researchers’ personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.
5. Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.
6. Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.
7. 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.

A framework for supporting researchers

The issues highlighted by the *Concordat* can be broadly grouped under three headings:

- direct support for research staff
- direct support for those who manage research staff (Principal Investigators).
- wider environmental issues and provision within an institution that impact on research staff.

Similarly, the professional activities of RMAs can be broken down into three broad categories, activities relating to policy, procedures and practice. These two categorisations can be combined to form a framework to underpin partnership working to support researchers. This framework is depicted in Table 1 and will be discussed further in the subsequent sections.

Figure 1: Principles of the 2008 Concordat (after RCUK, 2008).

	Direct Support	Support for Principal Investigators	Wider institutional issues
Policy	Helping researchers understand policy and its implications	Helping managers understand and operate within policy	Advising the institution on the implications of external policies and the impact of its own policies on research and researchers
Procedures	Helping researchers understand and follow procedures	Managing many of the procedures for principal investigators	Working with other stakeholders to develop procedures that meet the needs of all
Practice	Offering informal advice to researchers Commenting on draft proposals Acting as a broker to put researchers in touch with appropriate colleagues Writing guides for researchers and managing web portals Delivering workshops to researchers	Offering informal advice to managers Keeping managers aware of good practice developments elsewhere Contributing to the training of research leaders	Encouraging the institution to support the enhancement of the practice of researchers by arguing for: induction, training for researchers, mentoring schemes, etc. Engaging in programme design work with staff development units.

Table 1: Framework for partnership role of RMAs

Managing and supporting research staff

There is a perception that research staff positions are only useful as a 'stepping stone' to permanent academic posts (e.g. Daley, 2007, p.6). This has meant that this staff group could sometimes be neglected in terms of training and support. In 2002 respondents to the Contract Research Online Survey (CROS) reported that access to 'off the job training' was not widespread (Carter, 2002, p.1). While the introduction of 'Roberts funding' in 2004 has increased the provision of development opportunities for research staff in many institutions, CROS 2009 suggests that a minority of researchers still feel that they are not valued equally with lecturers and that their wider contributions to their institutions are not recognised (Vitae, 2009, p.17-18 and p.32-33; Mellors-Bourne, this volume).

The recent changes in legislation regarding the treatment of fixed-term employees puts an onus on universities to treat fixed-term employees equally when compared to those on open-ended or permanent contracts. The *Concordat* indicates that these researchers should be considered an "essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key part of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research" (RCUK 2008). These developments in UK policy are leading to alterations in the contractual arrangements for research staff and to changes in how research staff, and the research they contribute to, need to be managed. For instance, many institutions are moving research staff from fixed-term contracts onto open-ended contracts and introducing internal redeployment mechanisms for researchers whose funding is coming to an end (Goodfellow, 2007; Oliver & Hooley, 2010). In some instances, the response to the legal changes results in a move away from having individual researchers linked to a single, fixed-term funding stream, to a system where various fixed-term funding streams are used to fund a team of researchers working on a number of projects (Oliver & Hooley, 2010, p.22-25). The issue of changes to researchers' contractual status is discussed in more detail in Liz Oliver's paper in this volume.

All of these examples require new approaches to managing the finances of a research group, and will require more careful strategic planning when submitting research grants and managing research portfolios. This will require RMAs to work closely with HR professionals in developing appropriate policies to support these changes, and working with finance offices to ensure that the financial aspects of these changes can be managed effectively. The academic staff involved will also need support from the RMAs in the costing of research grant applications, and in managing existing grants. There is

also a role for the RMAs to act as facilitators between other professional services (e.g. HR) and academics, to ensure greater understanding of the challenges involved and the merits of the various solutions. However, at present the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders are not always aligned and there may be a need for institutions to review aspects of their approaches, to ensure that these partnerships are given the necessary support to ensure that they are effective.

In some areas of activity there are clear tensions between supporting the institution's research effort and supporting the career development of individuals. One example of this is with providing support for research fellowship applications. It is well recognised within the sector that an independent research fellowship is a valuable addition to the CV of any researcher aspiring to an academic career. It is also recognised that to be successful in obtaining these fellowships and to gain the most learning and development from such a fellowship, the researcher is often advised to move to a different institution from their current one. This may create dilemmas for those who are well-placed to support the researcher in making their application. Generally, the academic mentor is supportive of the researcher as they recognise the value of the career development such a fellowship would offer the researcher. While the RMA might share this view, often they are only recognised and rewarded for supporting effort that brings direct financial reward to their institution. Hence while they would probably see it falling within their duties to support a researcher in another institution who was applying for a fellowship to work in the institution of the RMA, giving time to supporting someone who is applying for funding to take to another (or even rival) institution would not necessarily be supported by their managers. This is probably as much an issue for the managers of RMAs as for the RMAs themselves, but is mentioned here as it provides an example of where tensions may exist between the needs of the individual and the needs of the institution.

Supporting the managers of research staff

In addition to their role as managers of researchers, academic staff face a number of different challenges in their professional activities. They are required to balance their time and energies between teaching, administration and research and many work much longer hours than their contracts stipulate (Gill, 2008). The list of research challenges faced by academics is long and varied, and many of these were recently identified in a guide to management for scientific researchers and academics (Bonetta, 2006). The issues that are pertinent to RMAs are presented in Figure 2. One of the roles of the RMA is to provide support and guidance to academics in the

areas identified, as well as working with these staff to improve the overall research environment³. In order to build sustainable partnerships with academic staff and to be able to provide appropriate support, it is important that RMAs have a good understanding of the views and support needs of academics.

- Understanding the university structure and external structures
- Recruitment of research staff
- Time and project management
- Data management and record keeping
- Understanding and obtaining research funding
- Understanding Technology Transfer
- Setting up collaborations

Figure 2: Issues faced by academic staff that RMAs can help resolve

Unfortunately, there has been very little research conducted which identifies the views of academic staff on research support. One study that did touch on this area was the 'Research Leaders Survey' in 2005/06 (Wellens, 2006). The survey collected the views of 1644 staff across 15 UK universities, with most of these institutions belonging to either the Russell Group or the 1994 Group. As part of that study, the views of academics were sought on the training and support provided by their institution in a number of research-related areas. The provision of various forms of research-related training and support reported by the survey participants was high, with 84% or more (depending on the subject focus) reporting that they were offered such training. The engagement of these academics was also high with between 50% and 84% taking up such training and support. However, when participants were asked about the quality of the training/support they received, only one topic, 'writing proposals', gained considerably more positive responses than negative ones. Overall, the number of negative responses was considerably higher than the number of positive ones (Figure 3).

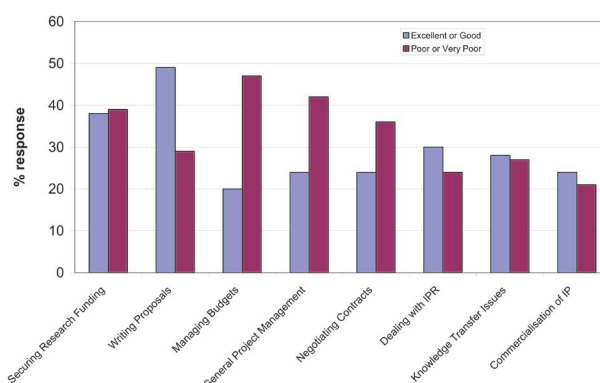


Figure 3: Comparison of Principal Investigators' views of research training/ support (adapted from Wellens, 2006).

The responses to the Research Leaders Survey raise questions regarding the quality of the training/support that is provided, and as to what academics' expectations of such training are. At the least, it highlights a mismatch between the academics' expectations and the level of the training/support provided and identifies a lack of understanding between the training providers and the academics. This is one area where RMAs can play an important role in facilitating greater understanding between these two groups; this will be explored further in the next section. However, it should be noted that since 2006, the development of the 'Roberts' provision for research staff has led to a growth in the provision of this type of training. It is to be expected that the quality of this training has also improved. The Research Leaders Survey will be repeated in 2011 (see Papworth, 2010) and should provide a more up-to-date picture.

Since 2006, there has been a growth in the leadership development provision for principal investigators with a number of national initiatives contributing to this. One such project (University of Leicester, 2008) has provided a range of on-line development materials, which can be accessed by individual academics or can be used by others to support academic development.

Creating an environment in which researchers can flourish

As well as providing direct support for researchers and their managers, RMAs have a role in working with other professional support staff to provide a university environment in which research, and researcher, can flourish. This includes having appropriate systems and processes in place which are easy for researchers to engage with, and a wide variety of support initiatives that cover all aspects of research. While there is not sufficient space within this article to cover all of these aspects, some of the more important issues will be briefly explored.

³ Depending on the institutional structure, elements of this responsibility may be shared with this work other professional service units.

Induction

One of the most difficult times for any academic or researcher is when they start work in a new institution. The provision of high quality induction support is crucial to getting their research off to a good start. However, the CROS 2009 results suggest that many researchers are not receiving any induction at all. These results indicate that 60% of respondents were not offered any institutional induction, 47% were not offered any departmental induction and 35% were not offered any induction into their role (Vitae, 2009). The survey results also report that the vast majority of researchers who were offered such induction opportunities attended these events, indicating a strong demand for such provision.

Regular induction events should provide new staff with an opportunity to gain an understanding of the way that research is managed within the institution, as well as to meet RMAs and other new staff. Ensuring that new academics have a clear understanding of the institutional approach to research management, and being able to identify the key individuals within the research support function, should allow them to get their research started as soon as possible. However, as not all new staff can attend these events and only very large institutions can hold these on a frequent basis, it is important that this information is made available to new staff by other means. One useful approach is to have a comprehensive induction pack that is given to all new staff on arrival. This pack should include all relevant information as to the processes within the institution, a list of key research support contacts (with photos), and details of where further information and the appropriate forms are located. It is also advisable that new staff meet with a member of the research administration team early in their post to ensure that they fully understand how things work in their new institution. This induction period should be the starting point for building a successful partnership between the academic and the RMAs.

Staff development

Most institutions offer staff development opportunities on a variety of personal and professional development topics. The importance of these opportunities being of high quality and ensuring that they meet the needs of academic staff has already been noted. It is important that RMAs work closely with the staff development function to ensure that research-related continuing professional development provision meets the needs of the staff involved in research, and that all the areas indicated in Figure 2 are covered. If sufficient effort is invested by both groups at the design stage, this should lead to a more tailored and beneficial experience for all.

Key to ensuring a successful staff development programme is finding appropriate trainers and facilitators. This is another area in which RMAs can forge partnerships to develop institutional provision. For example, where there are gaps in facilitator expertise within an institution, the RMA's wider network should be able to identify and source appropriate individuals to fill them. Furthermore, the RMA's internal network of academics will allow them to identify academic staff who would be suitable to contribute to such programmes. One area where academic experience is valuable is in helping inexperienced staff to understand how academic papers and research grant proposals are reviewed. RMAs are likely to be able to identify a number of academics in their institution with experience of refereeing papers and research proposals, and of participating in grant-awarding panels.

Another way to improve the understanding of these processes is to invite the funding bodies to run workshops covering these topics at your institution⁴. If you are at an institution with a large number of researchers working in an area relevant to a particular funder, that funder may be willing to run such an event. If not, then it may be possible to host such an event for a regional audience.

High quality research support will need to go beyond the provision of workshops and information. There is a wide variety of initiatives and schemes that can provide further support and development for researchers and their academic managers. The facilitation of action learning sets for academics has recently been piloted to good effect (Wilson, 2009). There are also a number of industry placement or secondment schemes (e.g. those offered to scientists and engineers by The Royal Society) which provide researchers with valuable career development opportunities. Research managers and administrators have a pivotal role to play ensuring that staff at their institution can avail themselves of these opportunities.

Conclusions

Research managers and administrators have an important role to play in ensuring that researchers and their academic managers are sufficiently supported in their research. A key aspect of this role is in bringing academics and other professional support staff together to work in partnership, to create an excellent research environment in which both the research and the researchers will flourish. This complex series of partnerships needs to be built around a range of individual and organisational goals. This paper has argued that the *Concordat* provides a key foundation on which these partnerships can be built, and that it is only by building and sustaining such partnerships that institutions will meet the challenging expectations of funders and government.

⁴ Examples of such events include EPSRC Regional Meetings (see: <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2010/Pages/regionalmeetings.aspxReferences>) and Study Days (see: <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/about/partner/universities/Pages/studydays.aspx>)

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