

UK Research Staff Association



supported by Vitae

# Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact

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Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact is a joint publication by UKRSA and Vitae and published by The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Ltd

Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact has been written by **Dr Chris Thomson**, UKRSA Co-chair and **Philippa Storer**, Senior Programme Manager: researchers and employers, Vitae

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The UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA), supported by Vitae, provides a collective voice for research staff in the UK, working with local research staff associations and informing policy. It continues and extends the work of the National Research Staff Association. Vitae provides resources, courses and events for research staff, including a research staff blog and annual research staff conference. Vitae works closely with the UKRSA to deliver projects, and provides administrative support and continuity.

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# Foreword

I am delighted to introduce 'Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact', a joint publication by UKRSA and Vitae. This report provides the first comprehensive national picture of research staff associations (RSAs). It gives us an insight into where RSAs exist, how they are structured and engage with institutional processes. Crucially, it explores how RSAs are having an impact on their institutions, their constituencies and on the individuals who are actively working to embed the principles of the Concordat into the research environment and experiences of research staff.

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers places the ownership for the personal and professional development of research staff in their own hands. The activities and outcomes in this report provide a wealth of evidence demonstrating how research staff are taking this forward. At the same time, there are recommendations suggesting ways that HEIs and RSAs can work together to improve the working environment and professional and career development opportunities for research staff.

This publication is valuable reading to those of us working directly with research staff and researchers who are running or considering setting up RSAs. During these times of financial pressures, it is a useful reminder to consider how through effectively engaging research staff in their own development, we can harness and target the resources we have available to us. This report demonstrates how RSAs and the individuals involved in them have the potential to successfully drive and lead the engagement of research staff communities, and in doing so create opportunities for their own career development too.

## Dr Odette Dewhurst

Chair, Research Staff Development Advisory Group (ReSDAG) and Senior Research Training and Development Officer, University of Leeds



# Executive summary

This joint report by UKRSA and Vitae is an initial investigation into Research Staff Associations (RSAs), identifying where they exist and how they are structured and funded. It also explores the impact RSAs are having within their host institutions, on their research staff communities and on the researchers that run them in relation to the principles of 'The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'<sup>1</sup>.

An RSA is an organisation or group of individuals where research staff (those employed primarily to do research in higher education) represent the interests of their constituency in a range of activities, such as interactions with institutional management and administration, informing institutional policy, facilitating the organisation of training activities or career development sessions for other researchers and providing support for researchers. In practice these groups are often called committees, forums, societies, networks and staff representatives, but all undertake similar activities.

We identified and surveyed over 50 RSAs and received 25 responses on behalf of individual RSAs. Additionally, 55 researchers from 20 RSAs responded to our survey on the experiences of being an RSA committee member.

The majority of RSAs had been established for 3.5 years or less, although a small number had existed for up to nine years. They were predominantly based in research intensive HEIs and financed through Roberts funding. They could be broadly classified by the staff members they represented. The most common RSA model was based at department or faculty level. A quarter operated at an institutional level and often had close ties to university management teams. A few RSAs operated across multiple institutions or research institutes. Two examples of RSAs are presented in Appendix 1.

The evidence gathered here and articulated throughout this report, clearly demonstrates the level of impact and influence existing RSAs are achieving within their institutions, and how being actively involved in an RSA can influence an individual's personal and career development.

RSAs committee members are motivated by a drive to influence the research staff experience, have their voices heard on research staff issues, expand their networks and develop new skills. The activities of the RSAs tend to reflect these motivations. They are predominantly active around the Concordat career development principles 3 and 4. Few are involved in the recruitment, retention and recognition challenges relating to principles 1 and 2, or equality and diversity challenges in principle 6.

RSA activities clearly demonstrate the value of research staff taking ownership of their own career development (Concordat principle 5). Particularly, research staff who are committee members reported benefits for their research and own careers as a result of their involvement in their RSA. Committee members reported they had developed new skills, frequently acted with more confidence as a researcher, had built their networks and enjoyed their research more. There is evidence also that being involved in running RSAs can have a beneficial impact on individuals' research activity and outputs. The majority were more informed about career opportunities and now engage in professional development opportunities.

RSAs can and should have a leading role in implementing the principles of the Concordat at a local level. Acting as a conduit between the research staff they represent and senior managers, RSAs can inform, shape and innovate institutional practice and policy to meet the needs of research staff and engage them in embedding the Concordat principles into daily working practice. Indeed, the embedding of the Concordat principles into the practices of HEIs cannot reach its full potential without research staff taking an active role in managing their careers.

RSAs are well placed to engage research staff in their career development and many are involved in providing or facilitating training in a wide range of topics. Most have been consulted on the training needs of research staff, Concordat implementation and fixed term contract policy. Three quarters reported that they have increased the profile of research staff at their HEI and half believe they have improved the working conditions of research staff in their HEI.

However, RSAs could have greater linkages into institutional and departmental structures, both by having formal representation on relevant HEI committees and structures, and by inviting HEI representatives to join RSA committees, particularly from HE and staff development. The greatest challenges facing RSAs are a lack of engagement, even apathy, from fellow research staff and committee members: widening membership and succession planning for RSAs is critical if they are to survive.

This report adds to the growing portfolio of evidence about how stakeholder groups are engaging with and responding to the Concordat and its principles. It provides initial evidence to funders, senior HE managers, PIs and research managers, and research staff of the role of RSAs in implementing the Concordat principles. In addition, we identify where gaps in provision and support exist, which will inform future work and activities of RSAs, HEIs, the UKRSA and other key stakeholders.

Recommendations are made to HEIs, RSAs, UKRSA and researchers with regard to how we can build upon what has already been achieved, overcome any barriers to greater success and impact, and fill gaps in knowledge and provision through further investigation and development.

<sup>1</sup> The Concordat to Support the Careers Development of Researchers (2008), [www.researchconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk)

# Recommendations

## RSAs

- Review the measures you have in place to ensure your RSA has a sustainable future. Consider access to future sources of funding, particularly beyond March 2011; review succession planning of committee members; explore all avenues of practical support available to you from your institution and ensure the resources available to you are effectively targeted to reap the maximum benefit for your RSA and the research staff constituency.
- Invite a range of HEI staff on your committee to provide effective linkages with key departments, such as HR and staff development, and help ensure the continuity and sustainability of your RSA.
- Consider how actively you wish to engage in improving the employment conditions of research staff, including contributing your views and informing research staff on institutional policies on the recruitment, retention and recognition of research staff.
- Survey your constituency to understand what types of activities will interest and engage them. Work with your HEI to ensure that the range of development activities reflects the interests and needs of research staff. Consider how your programme of activities can be used to widen your membership base.
- Provide robust evidence of the impact of the activities of your RSA to senior managers, PIs and research managers to encourage them to actively support your activities. In particular, identify how your RSA has helped to raise the profile of research staff and impacted on the research environment.
- Review existing institutional structures and provision and identify how you can engage with these to achieve the aims of your RSA.
- Explore equality and diversity challenges with your constituency and discuss as a committee how you can work with the HEI to ensure that all research staff are treated fairly.
- Develop strategies to ensure your HEI participates in CROS, or similar surveys of research staff experiences. Persuade research staff of the value of participating.

## HEIs

- Consider how the HEI will support RSAs beyond the end of Roberts ring-fenced funding in March 2011.
- Agree with the RSA what additional support the HEI will provide, including regular updates on relevant institutional policy developments and news.
- Ensure that RSAs are represented on relevant institutional committees and working groups. Engage research staff with institutional policy decisions.
- Encourage PIs and other academic staff to support the work of RSAs and the individuals who are involved with them.
- HR departments should consider inviting representatives from RSAs to sit on HR committees or equivalent structures to contribute the views of research staff.
- Encourage and support RSAs as an effective means of understanding the needs of and engaging with research staff, including the planning and delivery of training sessions. Work with RSAs to ensure that the resources available for the personal and professional development of research staff are effectively targeted.

## Research staff

- Consider becoming a committee member of an RSA to give you the opportunity to make your voice heard and enhance your skills, research and career opportunities.
- Take responsibility for your own career development, including taking advantage of events and activities provided by your HEI or RSA and participating in any surveys to increase understanding of the research environment and needs of research staff.

## UKRSA

- Establish mechanisms for capturing, maintaining and sharing contact details for RSAs to support the UKRSA community.
- Develop a communications system to inform and help RSAs understand how national policy developments will impact on research staff.
- Provide mechanisms to enable RSA to share practice and ideas about engaging research staff in RSA committees and activities. In particular, gather evidence to understand what it is about the involvement in an RSA that can directly benefit an individual's research experience for the better.
- Investigate further the training and/or workshop resources that are most successful in engaging research staff.
- Investigate why RSAs have been unable to raise the profile of the Concordat. Develop a 'packaged' resource for RSAs to promote the value of the Concordat to research staff effectively, perhaps building on the the Vitae Concordat stakeholder briefing for research staff.
- Develop relationships with other UK organisations, such as the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), UHR and Vitae to raise the profile and inform RSAs on the issues relating to equality and diversity for research staff.

# Introduction and context

There are currently over 43,000 research staff employed by higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK<sup>2</sup>, a figure which has been fairly stable for the past four years. However within this time frame the number of research staff on open contracts has been steadily increasing from 5,394 in 2004/5 to 9,321 in 2007/8<sup>3</sup>.

## SET for success

Sir Gareth Roberts' report<sup>4</sup> into the supply of science, engineering and mathematical skills in the UK (2002) was instrumental in changing the landscape of skills training for research staff in the UK, and it is within this context that RSAs have formed in recent years. The UK government's response to the report included additional funding to UK HEIs which, in relation to research staff, was provided for appropriate career development training.

## Fixed term contracts

The introduction of legislation on the use of short-term contracts in 2002<sup>5</sup> has been a key driver for changes in institutional policy and practice, raising matters relating to researchers' contracts up the institutional agenda. The nature of academic employment, and specifically the employment of researchers, has changed over the past decade. Whilst there are many different approaches to research employment across the HE sector due to the autonomy and complexity of institutions, there is a commitment from senior managers to deliver HR systems that better respond to the needs of the researchers as well as the institution<sup>6</sup>.

## The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers<sup>7</sup> (the Concordat) launched in June 2008 sets out the expectations and responsibilities of researchers, their managers, employers and funders. The Concordat is defined by a set of principles for the support and management of researchers' careers. In this report we explore the evidence of the impact that RSAs are having on the implementation of the Concordat's key principles presented above right.

### The Concordat principles

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 world-class 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 proactively 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 reviews of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.

## Changes to Roberts funding: an uncertain future

The committed period of funding for the ring-fenced Roberts funds ends in March 2011<sup>8</sup>. All Research Council funded research staff currently attract a payment to their host institution. In turn, institutions have been able to use these funds to enhance the provision of career development guidance and training for the benefit of all research staff. Research Councils UK has announced that the funding will not continue as before. Whilst it has yet to be finalised, the revised funding level is likely to be reduced, although other funders of research may help to redress the balance. This change also comes at a time of great uncertainty following the UK government's Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, the outcomes of which are likely to impact on funding of research grants and fellowships.

<sup>2</sup> Second Annual Report on Research Staff, Funders Forum (2009), <http://www.dti.gov.uk/policies/science/science-funding/funders-forum/reports>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/set\\_for\\_success.htm](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/set_for_success.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of less Favourable Treatment Regulations (2002) and Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) guidance on fixed term contracts [http://www.ucea.ac.uk/ucea/filemanager/root/site\\_assets/jnches/JNCHES\\_Fixed-Term\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.ucea.ac.uk/ucea/filemanager/root/site_assets/jnches/JNCHES_Fixed-Term_Guidance.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Researchers, fixed-term contracts and universities: understanding law in context, Vitae (2010), <http://vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1272-266531/Researchers-fixed-term-contracts-and-universities-understanding-law-in-context.html>

<sup>7</sup> The Concordat to Support the Careers Development of Researchers (2008), [www.researchconcordat.ac.uk](http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk)

<sup>8</sup> RCUK Statement of Expectations Regarding Researcher Development (2010) <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/training.htm>

## Research Staff Associations (RSAs)

An RSA is an organisation or group of individuals where research staff (those employed primarily to do research in higher education) represent the interests of their constituency in a range of activities, such as interactions with institutional management and administration, informing institutional policy, facilitating the organisation of training activities or career development sessions for other researchers, and providing support for researchers as necessary.

Research staff are well placed to inform and develop the skills and knowledge base of colleagues in the areas that matter most to them. Once RSAs are established, they are in a unique position to coordinate the responses of research staff to policy changes that affect their working conditions, professional development and career opportunities. RSAs can also ensure that the provision HEI employers introduce and deliver is both tailored to their needs and that research staff participate.

RSAs also have a role to play in sharing good practice and experiences between members of research staff, and enabling the serendipitous networking opportunities that lead to new research opportunities.

With the pressures on current funding, this report is timely in demonstrating the utility that RSAs can deliver to funders, higher education institutions and researchers at this time.

## Survey aims

UKRSA with the support of Vitae is seeking to support diverse groupings of research staff, particularly through local RSAs, across the sector, in developing their careers, both within and outside the academic sector. The overall vision for UKRSA is to create a sustainable research staff association with support across the UK and international reach; informing institutions, funders, and governments, and providing a national voice for research staff about the most effective ways to support them in achieving their career aspirations.

To enable UKRSA to achieve these goals and effectively support research staff, it was important to understand the picture of RSAs across the UK and identify the types of impact they are already having. This was achieved through surveying known RSAs as to their structure and activities, and individual members of RSAs on their experiences.

## Methodology

This report is based on the findings from two surveys. 'Tell us about your RSA: Representative' (Appendix 2) invited a response by the current RSA chairperson (or nominated person) to respond on behalf of their RSA. 'Tell us about your RSA: Committee member' (Appendix 3) invited responses from all those involved as committee members of RSA (past and present) and/or those taking an active role in their RSA, for example, organising events or representing the voice of research staff on institutional committees or working groups.

### Survey design

The structure of the surveys and questions were designed to reflect the principles of the Concordat and followed the methodology of the Impact Framework<sup>9</sup>.

As little was known about the structure and organisation of RSAs in UK HEIs, we consulted committee members of UKRSA, who in many cases are in active RSAs themselves. They identified key areas where they felt their RSAs had impacted on the different Concordat principles. These focused strongly on researchers' responsibilities identified in principle 5: 'Individual researchers share the responsibility for, and need to proactively engage in their own personal development and lifelong learning' but also in aspects of career development as identified in principles 3 and 4. This provided the basis for the construction of questions on the survey.

In addition, we designed the survey to ensure that responses could be mapped on to the Impact Framework. The Impact Framework has been designed to 'provide a meaningful and workable way of evaluating the effectiveness of skills development in early career researchers'<sup>10</sup>. It has been widely used in assessing and comparing training and development activities across institutions<sup>11</sup>, and explores the potential benefits of investment in training and development activity for the many different stakeholder groups of researcher development. Whilst RSAs are not typically involved in the formal training of research staff, using the Impact Framework was relevant in many ways, including:

- understanding the impact of the types of infrastructures and activities that have been put in place to support RSA activities
- understanding at what level examples of activity or practice by RSAs are having an impact within their institutions
- understanding the level of impact involvement in an RSA has on individual research staff members

The framework consists of 5 levels, which are described above right. We have enhanced the definitions to include the types of evidence we were looking out for.

<sup>9</sup> Impact Framework (2008), Impact and Evaluation Group (IEG, formerly the Rugby Team) [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Rugby%20Impact%20Framework\\_33.pdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/1.Rugby%20Impact%20Framework_33.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The impact of researcher training and development: two years on, IEG (2010), [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/IEG\\_Development%20Report2010\\_soft%20copy.pdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/IEG_Development%20Report2010_soft%20copy.pdf)

## The IEG Impact Framework

### Impact Level 0: Foundations

This describes the structure of RSAs, their activities and attendance levels. It also explores the level of support from the HEI, including funding.

### Impact Level 1: Reaction

This describes the reflections of RSA committee members on the reactions to their activities from the research staff constituency, and actions from the HEI such as inviting participation to formal committees.

### Impact Level 2: Learning

This explores changes in understanding and perception of RSA committee members and the perceived changes to their constituency in relation to policy initiatives and their career and professional development.

### Impact Level 3 Behaviour

This explores the ways committee members have changed their behaviour, and the perceived changes of behaviour of research staff as a result of their involvement with, and participation in RSA activities.

### Impact Level 4: Outcomes

This covers how the environment for research staff has changed, for example, the HEI has introduced additional career development training for research staff, or changes in institutional policy or departmental processes as a result of input from the RSA. It also includes any direct outcomes on individual RSA members.

The first survey: 'Tell us about your RSA: Representative' was designed to collect data and improve our understanding of the structure, aims and activities of the RSA, as well as capturing examples of ways RSA have had an impact on institutional policy and resources relating to research staff.

The second survey: 'Tell us about your RSA: Committee member' was designed to collect data to understand the level of impact involvement in a RSA and its activities had on individual RSA members. We also attempted to gain some insight into the perceived impact of the RSA and its activities on constituencies of research staff through the eyes of RSA committee members.

It should be noted that at this stage we have not set out to gather empirical evidence of the impact local RSAs are having on their research staff constituencies. This is evidence that can only be gathered by a far wider survey of all research staff represented by RSAs. Therefore, the examples of impact on research staff constituencies within this report should only be considered as illustrative.

Both surveys were reviewed and piloted by UKRSA committee members, including a representative from the Research Staff Development Advisory Group (ReSDAG), who gave input from a research staff developer perspective.

We should also note that alongside this project, the UKRSA is undertaking a third survey of staff developers and those within HEIs who are involved in supporting the activities of RSA. The report from this survey will also add to our understanding of the impact of RSAs from an institutional perspective.

## Sample

The surveys were issued via the UKRSA committee network to 430 research staff contacts involved with over 50 known RSAs, committees, societies, forums, and peer support groups based in UK HEIs. This list of RSAs was initially drawn from existing data held by Vitae, the UKRSA committee and supplemented by information for the Vitae regional Hubs, the Research Staff Development Advisory Group (ReSDAG) and their respective networks. Contact details were confirmed and updated by checking HEI websites and web searches to identify members of each RSA of committee.

We attempted to contact all known RSAs in the UK and their committee members directly by email. In addition, phone calls were made to many of the chair people to encourage participation. In some instances we had contact details for all committee members relating to an RSA so were able to email them the survey directly. In other instances we only had one named contact so had to rely on them to disseminate the survey to the wider committee. We also took the opportunity to promote the survey on the Vitae website via the news section and research staff blog, and also posted details on other research staff forums.

We were unable to reach 13% of listed members of RSAs on first attempt. Further investigations revealed that many members had changed contracts and HEI and were no longer active in their RSA. On this basis, we cannot be entirely confident that the survey reached all active members of RSAs. One of UKRSA's aims is to develop a UK network of RSAs and in doing so to set up the means to keep a database of contacts updated and current. This should address the issue of the quality of contact data in the future.

## Responses

We received 25 individual responses on behalf of 25 RSAs (42%) to the first survey 'Tell us about your RSA: Representative'. These 25 RSAs were based at 15 HEIs.

55 researchers (13%) representing 20 RSAs (34%) responded to the second survey 'Tell us about your RSA: Committee member'. Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses to both surveys by region

In terms of responses from individual members about their RSA experiences, there was an uneven response, with a mean of 2.7 responses per RSA but a mode of 1. This suggests that the overall picture, and thereby analysis presented by individual committee members of their experiences and involvement in an RSA, may be skewed to the highly responding RSAs.

The following chapter presents the findings, key messages and resultant recommendations from the two surveys. It provides an overview of the current RSA landscape in the UK, how they are structured, funded and their activities mapped against the principles of the Concordat. It demonstrates their impact on host HEIs and the research staff community, as well as evidencing the impact on committee members themselves. Examples of practice are mapped with the levels set out in the Impact Framework.

Vitae Hub Region	Survey 1		Survey 2		
	Responses on behalf of RSA	Number of HEIs represented	Number of responses by individual committee members	Number of RSAs represented	Number of HEIs represented
UKRSA	-	-	1	1	-
East of England	2	1	4	1	1
London	2	2	5	2	1
Midlands	3	3	3	3	3
North West	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland and Northern Ireland	10	4	29	9	4
South East	0	0	0	0	0
South West and Wales	1	1	8	1	1
Yorkshire and North East	7	4	5	3	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>

Figure 1: Survey response demographics

# About RSAs

This section provides a picture of the current landscape with regards where RSAs are established and active, and how they are structured, managed and funded.

## RSA representation

Our initial desk-based research identified 53 active RSAs in 26 institutions (Appendix 4). Figure 2, provides an overview of how these are distributed across the regions of the UK. As might be expected, the number of RSAs is continually changing and evolving as new ones become established and others become temporarily or permanently inactive.

Vitae Hub Region	HEI with RSA	RSAs
East of England	1	2
London	4	6
Midlands	4	7
North West	2	2
Scotland and Northern Ireland	5	18
South East	3	4
South West and Wales	3	3
Yorkshire and North East	4	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>53</b>

Figure 2: Distribution of known RSAs by region

RSAs appear to be most common in Scotland and Northern Ireland, particularly at the University of Edinburgh, which has 11 RSAs. Whilst we believe this distribution to be representative, the UKRSA has better contacts with research staff in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which may have generated more responses.

16 of 20 Russell Group HEIs and 5 of 19 1994 Group HEIs have one or more RSAs based within their institution and 65% of all academic researchers in the UK are accounted for in 'research-intensive' institutions<sup>12</sup>.

## Structure and composition

Figure 3 reveals four levels that existing RSA models operate on. We have grouped these into three distinct types:

**Department and faculty level:** The most common RSA model, particularly at faculty level. These RSAs organise meetings and other events for research staff employed exclusively within these structures, and represent the views of their constituencies on various departmental and faculty committees. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of these RSAs are based in biological and physical sciences; disciplines that attract the most research funding and thereby the largest number of research staff.

**Institutional and multi-institutional level:** These RSAs involve research staff committee members drawn from across the institution or beyond. The institutional RSA often has close ties with university management teams. Two responses were from RSAs whose members work at independent research institutes located in the same geographical area, and a group of research institutes within a single university. As might be expected these are rare, but we believe they operate in a similar way to university RSAs. UKRSA will be making further contact with these RSAs to define their role more specifically as we build the evidence base further.

**Regional or UK level:** The UKRSA is an example of this model, whereby networks of research staff (who may or may not be associated to a local RSA) provide a collective voice for all researchers working in their region or in the UK.

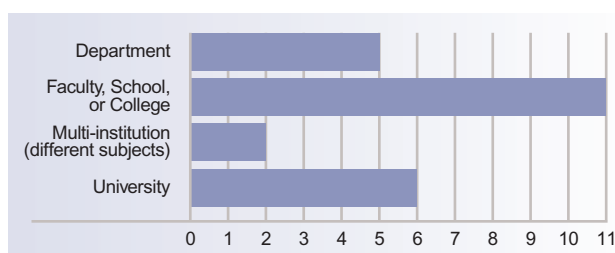


Figure 3: Summary of where RSAs are based within an institution (N=25)

A committee was at the heart of each RSA, normally ranging from 4 to 10 people, with some exceptions. Committees varied in terms of a formal structure of assigning roles and responsibilities to their different officers, to those committees who function more informally as peer support groups.

Departmental RSAs have relatively low numbers of constituents, typically of 10 to 20, whilst faculty and university RSAs have larger constituencies: the latter can exceed 1,000 members.

The mean age of an RSA was 2.8 years, with some having existed for nine years, and others had only recently been formed. The median and mode of length of existence was 2.5 years. Whilst we cannot tie their establishment specifically as a response to the launch of the Concordat, we can speculate that in the context of changing UK policy and heightened awareness of the professional development of research staff, the emergence of an RSA has been a timely response to these drivers.

<sup>12</sup> First annual report of Research Staff covering the period 2003/04 to 2006/07. Research Base Funders Forum (2008). HEFCE provided analyses of 37 research intensive institutions (a group wider than the Russell Group of universities).

As CROS 2009<sup>13</sup> showed, career development is a significant concern for research staff. RSAs in particular support researchers in developing their own careers, as summarised by this quote:

“ [The] biggest thing is to increase career development awareness and discourage the 'head in the sand' attitude. We do not see ourselves as a society to provide career development, more as a conduit to empower researchers with the information and tools to take control of their own career development ”

An example of the aims of one RSA which was characteristic of the majority is given below.

**The aims of our RSA are:**

- to facilitate the development and maintenance of a well supported community of researchers
- to promote the exchange and dissemination of information relating to matters affecting researchers
- to facilitate communication, collaboration and sharing of ideas within the research community
- to promote the research and interests of researchers
- to facilitate the training and career development of researchers

As shown in figure 4, all the RSA committees had research staff representatives. Just under half also had a representative member of academic staff. Only 30% of responding RSAs have a representative from staff development or HR. Considering the role that RSAs can play in the engagement of fellow research staff in their personal professional development, RSA committees could consider including HR and staff developer representatives if they are not already doing so. Two RSAs also included union representatives as members.

Follow up telephone interviews revealed that it was not only useful to have a range of interests represented on RSA committees, but also the involvement of other staff, such as principal investigators or staff developers. This helped ensure that there was a level of continuity to the RSA if turnover of research staff committee members was high, due to the nature of their contracts.

RSAs focus almost exclusively on research staff members: postgraduate researchers were infrequently included and technicians never mentioned. We speculate that this is because a key aim of many of the RSAs is the career development of their members, which would be less relevant to the other types of researchers based in HEIs. However, there may be value in RSAs considering how they link into other communities within the research environment, or extend their membership to include other researchers.

	Total
Research staff	25
Academic staff	9
Staff developer or HR representatives	8
Union representative	2
Postgraduate researchers	2
Public engagement representative	1
Library representative	1
Careers service representative	1
Local business network representative	1
Administrative staff	1
PVC Research	1

Figure 4: Staff representatives on committees (n=25, respondents could select all options that were applicable)

## Funding

The most common source of funding of RSAs originates from Roberts funds, with many RSAs obtaining support from multiple sources (figure 5). Four of the RSAs responding to our survey had received no funding, and two further RSAs only received funding occasionally from external sources.

Roberts funds	11
Department	6
External funds/Donations/Fund raising events	5
University/Graduate School	5
Charge for events	4
Not funded	4
Faculty	3

Figure 5: RSA Funding sources (N=25, respondents could select all options that were applicable)

Figure 6 summarises the other types of support HEIs provided to RSAs. All forms of support include investment of time or physical resources, the costs of which are not passed on to RSAs.

Type of support	Frequency
Promoting your activities to research staff through email alerts	17
Promoting your RSA in institutional handbooks, newsletters, induction events etc	15
Printing materials and handouts on your behalf	10
Administrative support eg booking rooms, taking meeting minutes, etc	12
Other	5

Figure 6: Types of support provided to RSAs by their department or institution (N=23, respondents could select all options that were applicable)

<sup>13</sup> Careers in Research Online Survey, Analysis of aggregated UK results (2009), [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/CROS\\_2009\\_October.pdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/CROS_2009_October.pdf)

Others examples included:

- 'the College assists us when engagement becomes a problem by encouraging researchers to participate'
- 'catering'
- 'dedicated website or page on the institute website'

We were interested to explore what other types of support would be helpful to RSAs from both their institution and organisations such as the UKRSA (figure 7).

Type of support	Frequency
Regular updates on institutional policy changes, strategy or news	12
More opportunities to contribute on related committees	12
More funding	11
Faculty advisors (RSA champions)	11
Administrative support	10
Time away from research to attend related regional and national events	8
Dedicated staff members to support research staff	7
I don't feel we need any additional support from our institution	1
Academics encouraging other research staff to be involved	1

Figure 7: Types of support RSAs would find helpful from their department or institution to help them have greater impact (N=22 respondents could select all options that were applicable)

It is clear from the responses that any kind of additional support provided by the institution would be highly valued by RSA committees. In the current climate of austerity, we would suggest it is helpful for both RSAs and HEIs to consider what types of support and intervention could be made which could increase the impact of RSA activities on research staff communities, without necessarily relying on financial input.

The most popular of the interventions 'receiving regular updates on institutional policy changes, strategy and news' and 'more opportunities to contribute on related committees' for example, are about HEIs helping to create opportunities, rather than making a significant investment of money or time. Additionally, 'Faculty advisors' and 'time away from research to attend related events' are about harnessing positive support for research staff involved in RSA activities.

However, the issue of funding of RSAs should not be sidelined and arguably some direct costs are needed in order to run the small programmes of activities needed to bring research staff communities together. With the majority response from RSAs indicating that they receive funding from Roberts money, some planning needs to be undertaken by both RSA committees and HEIs to ensure access to funding is sustained beyond the end of ring-fenced funding in March 2011. Funding cuts for some have already started to have an impact:

“ We are fairly new so are just finding our feet. We have held a grant writing workshop, which got positive feedback, and planned to hold a public relations course but the funding to our Staff Training and Development Unit for [research staff] development has been cut and there is nowhere to apply to for this course now ”

## Key messages

- There has been a significant growth in RSAs over the last three years; only four had been in existence for longer
- The most common type of RSA is based at a faculty level; three quarters of Russell Group and a quarter of 1994 Group HEIs have one or more RSAs based within their institution
- The majority of RSAs receive some funding from within their institution, primarily accessing Roberts funding streams
- HEIs provide a range of 'in kind' support to RSAs; most would appreciate additional support
- A range of other HEI staff sit on RSA committees; just under half have at least one academic staff representative from their HEI; 30% of RSA committees have a representative from staff development or HR.

## Recommendations

### RSAs

- Review the measures you have in place to ensure your RSA is sustainable. Consider access to future sources of funding, particularly beyond March 2011; review succession planning of committee members; explore all avenues of practical support available to you from your institution and ensure the resources you have available to you are effectively targeted to reap the maximum benefit for your RSA and the research staff constituency
- Invite a range of HEI staff on your committee to provide effective linkages with key departments, such as HR and staff development and help ensure the continuity and sustainability of your RSA.

### HEIs

- Consider how the HEI will support RSAs beyond the end of Roberts ring-fenced funding in March 2011
- Agree with the RSA what additional support the HEI will provide, including regular updates on relevant institutional policy developments and news
- Ensure that RSAs are represented on relevant institutional committees and working groups. Engage research staff with institutional policy decisions
- Encourage PIs and other academic staff to support the work of RSAs and the individuals who are involved with them.

### UKRSA

- Establish mechanisms for capturing, maintaining and sharing contact details for RSAs to support the UKRSA community
- Develop a communications system to inform and help RSAs understand how national policy developments will impact on research staff.

# RSA impact on the implementation of the Concordat principles

In this section, we develop a picture of what RSAs are currently doing in relation to supporting the implementation of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. We demonstrate the impact on the host HEIs and the research staff community, as well as evidencing the impact on RSA committee members themselves. We explore how existing practice might be enhanced, identify barriers to greater levels of impact and recommend how these might be overcome.

Additionally, we demonstrate the impact involvement in an RSA has on individual committee members. We conclude each section with key messages and recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

## Principles 1 and 2

**Principle 1: Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.**

**Principle 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 world-class research.**

These two principles relate to the recruitment, retention and recognition of research staff. The majority of RSA members were motivated to join their RSA to influence the research staff experience within their institution and to have a voice on research staff issues (see figure 24). However, the survey uncovered little evidence of RSAs being involved in activities directly relating to the employment conditions of research staff, recruitment or appraisal processes.

Only three RSAs (see figure 17) indicated that they had representation on human resources (HR) committees, providing opportunity to represent the views and experiences of research staff (impact level 1).

However, 72% of committee members agreed that as a result of being involved in the RSA committee and its activities, they were more aware of institutional promotion and progression and understood career structures (figure 8) (impact level 2).

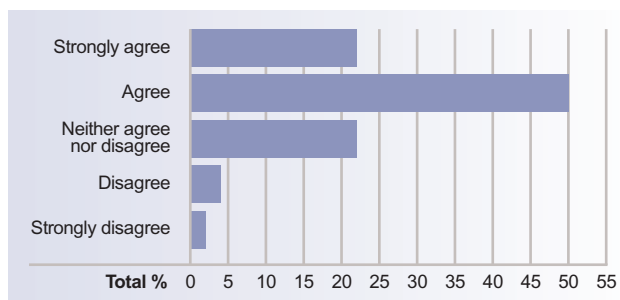


Figure 8: Response from committee members to the statement: I am more aware of institutional promotion and progression and understand career structures (N=54)

Through their activities committee members of RSAs are also becoming more aware of their employment rights. 69% of committee members' respondents said that their involvement with their RSA had made them more informed about their employment rights (figure 9) (impact level 2).

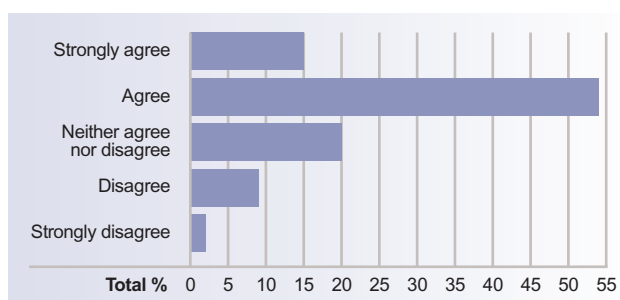


Figure 9: Extent to which RSA committee members feel more informed about employment rights as a result of being involved in their RSA and its activities (N=54)

There is evidence of engagement between RSAs and HR. Eight RSAs had staff development or HR representation on their committees (see figure 4). Establishing relationships with HR and inviting HR representatives to speak at events organised by RSA were given as examples of ways they were ensuring they understood the process of progression within their institution. Specific examples included:

“ We were involved in [a] consultation on fixed term contracts and redundancy review ”

“ Specific meetings with ‘guest appearances’ from other departments have been popular (eg ... HR discussing fixed-term contract issues with us) ”

“ Meeting with HR representative regarding contracts and policy – open discussion ”

On a personal level, one committee member stated:

“ My involvement with the university research staff forum has allowed me to meet and interact with research staff from many departments. This has allowed me to gain insights into the world of research staff in an academic environment. It has shown me that without exception they are in insecure positions i.e. at risk of losing their positions due to lack of funding continuity, with statutory minimum redundancy at best. ”

## Key messages

- As a result of being involved in their RSA, committee members are becoming more aware of the employment conditions and institutional promotion and progression processes for research staff. However, few RSAs are yet actively engaged with HR influencing the experience of research staff relating to recruitment, retention and recognition.

## Recommendations

### RSAs

- Consider how actively you wish to engage in improving the employment conditions of research staff, including contributing your views and informing research staff on institutional policies on the recruitment, retention and recognition of research staff.

### HEIs

- HR departments should consider inviting representatives from RSAs to sit on HR committees or equivalent structures to contribute the views of research staff.

## Principles 3 and 4

**Principle 3: Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment**

**Principle 4: The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their careers.**

Principles 3 and 4 fall under the overarching description in the Concordat of 'Support and Career Development'. These principles, together with 'Researchers' Responsibilities' (principle 5), are at the very heart of the role and activities of RSAs, and therefore we find that much of the evidence is overlapping.

## Provision of career development opportunities

Career development is clearly an important issue for research staff. In the 2009 CROS survey<sup>14</sup>, career management was the most requested type of training: 54% of respondents wanted to undertake such training, and of those that had completed it, 73% had found it useful.

Furthermore, CROS reported that research staff are likely to turn to colleagues, next to friends and line managers, in consulting on career development. RSAs are ideally placed to facilitate the engagement of research staff in their career development, by promoting the importance, providing access to networks, and improving the quality and availability of career development opportunities.

68% of RSAs reported improving the range of professional development activities available to research staff (Figure 10) (impact level 0). The case studies presented at the end of this report illustrate how two RSAs worked with their HEIs to deliver appropriate training for research staff

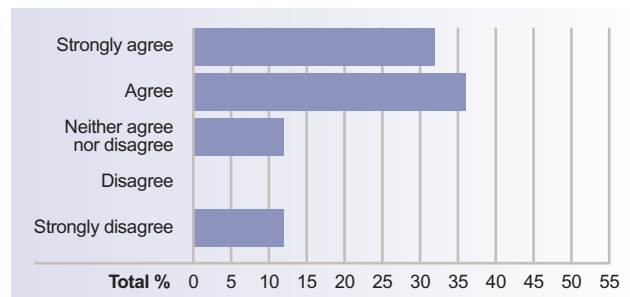


Figure 10: Extent to which RSAs felt they had improved the range of professional development activities available to research staff (N=23)

Twenty four RSAs also reported organising specific events for research staff, 38% of respondents reported engaging over 40% of their constituency in at least one event in the past year (figure 11): two RSAs, more than 60% of their constituency. The most common level of engagement was between 21%-40%.

Scale	Number of responses
0-20%	6
21-40%	9
41-60%	7
61-70%	2
71-100%	0

Figure 11: Perceived percentage of total RSA constituency engaged in at least 1 RSA activity in the past 12 months (N=24)

<sup>14</sup> Careers in Research Online Survey, Analysis of aggregated UK results (2009), [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/CROS\\_2009\\_October.pdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/CROS_2009_October.pdf)

Events and activities	N	Number of RSA offering events and activities	Level of attendance (mean; 4 maximum)	Level of positive feedback (mean; 4 maximum)
Career development	21	17	3.6	3.6
Transferable skills training	19	11	3.5	3.5
Specific on the job training	19	4	3.5	3.3
Research specific activities	19	11	3.1	3.4
Policy updates on employment rights	19	6	3.0	3.0
Employer events	19	6	2.7	3.3
Workplace/equipment inductions	18	5	2.6	3.0
Public engagement	19	8	2.3	3.0
About the Concordat	19	6	1.8	2.3

Figure 12: Number and popularity (attendance and feedback) of events and activities provided or requested by RSAs. (N=24)

Nineteen RSAs reported providing or facilitating training in a wide range of topics (figure 12), although provision is not consistent across RSAs. Committee members were asked to indicate what levels of attendance were achieved at different types of training sessions and their perception of how well received these were by their research staff constituencies. Career development sessions were the most popular, being frequently requested by research staff (figure 13). Seventeen RSAs provided events or activities, these receiving the highest level of attendance and most positive feedback (figure 12).

Training sessions in both generic and specific skills were also popular, although the feedback was slightly less positive than career development activities (3.5/3.3). However of most concern is the poor feedback from events about the Concordat. Concordat sessions, offered by six RSAs, were the least well attended and received the poorest feedback suggesting that RSAs are currently not communicating the Concordat's purpose to research staff in a sufficiently engaging way.

Specific feedback highlighted the targeted help that RSAs have delivered to their constituencies (impact level 3).

“ We also ran two highly successful scientific writing workshops; the first one being specifically for post docs whose first language is not English. These will now be continued on an annual basis. ”

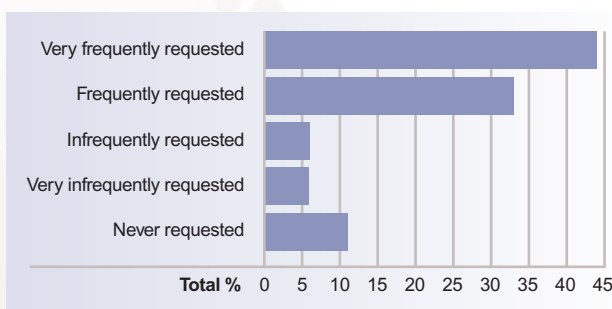


Figure 13: How frequently career development activities are requested by RSA constituencies (N=18)

“ Specific meetings with ‘guest appearances’ from other departments have been popular, eg Careers Service rep talking about researcher training workshops, HR discussing fixed-term contract issues with us. ”

“ Away days for training purposes ”

Two particular examples submitted by RSA representatives illustrate how an RSA can achieve significant impact through their activities (impact level 4):

“ [The] range of career development support has helped members to achieve postdoctoral fellowships, PI status and promotions ”

“ With our representation on the School committee, we have also seen teaching by postdocs recognised as an important contribution and formal records of these teaching hours are now being kept ”

## Engagement

73% of RSAs felt that they had increased the numbers attending RSA activities (figure 14) with 13 reporting they typically got 16 or more attendees at their event (figure 15). 65% of RSAs also reported that they had increased the level of engagement of their constituency in researcher-led activities (impact level 3) (figure 16).

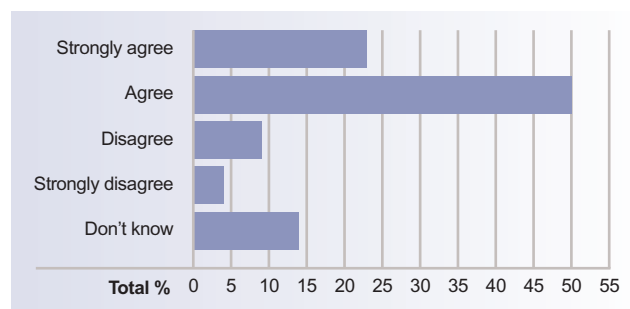


Figure 14: The extent to which RSAs felt they had increased the numbers attending RSA activities (N=22)

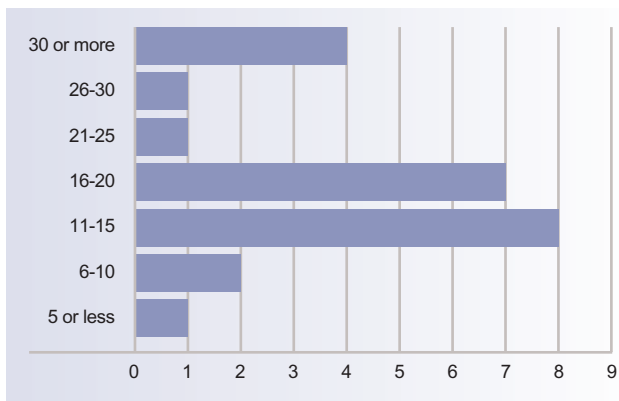


Figure 15: Number of attendees RSAs typically achieve at events they have organised (N=24)

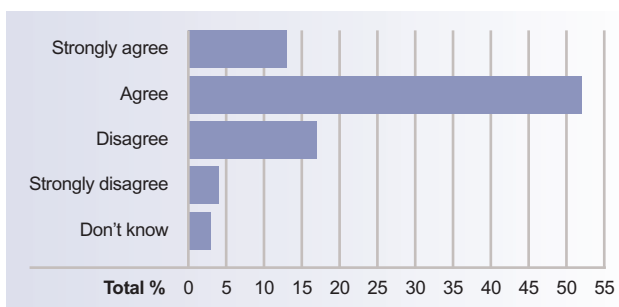


Figure 16: Extent to which RSAs felt they had increased the engagement of research staff in researcher-led activities (N=23)

However, when asked 'What challenges have you faced in establishing and sustaining your RSA?', apathy and lack of engagement of research staff colleagues were quoted most frequently in terms of engaging research staff in activities. The recruitment of new committee members in order to sustain the RSA was also highlighted. The dominance of research staff employed on short term contracts increases the vulnerability of the future of RSAs and demonstrates the importance of succession planning.

“ Getting people interested in activities outside of their research is often a futile exercise! They are more interested in workshops and policy discussions that directly affect their research job ”

“ Low numbers, nobody is interested in coming. We have a general feeling that we're only here for three years, so what's the point in trying to change anything? ”

“ Members do not prioritise attendance to meetings over their work and so attendance sometimes dwindles ”

“ Research staff turnover makes it difficult to maintain links with every part of the university employing research staff, especially as we have no one whose role it is to make these links. This is now on our agenda though ”

“ Trying to create a sustainable organisation and finding the time within an already busy schedule to do this ”

“ Maintaining reps enthusiasm. Ensuring that ideas get turned into reality ”

## Input into policy

The guidance on principle 4 of the Concordat highlights the value of enabling research staff to 'have an input into policy and practice through appropriate representation at staff meetings and on organisation or management committees.'

RSAs reported that they were able to feed into university structures as shown in figure 17. Seventeen RSAs had representation on at least one committee or working group. Six RSAs reported they had representation on three or more committees (figure 18).

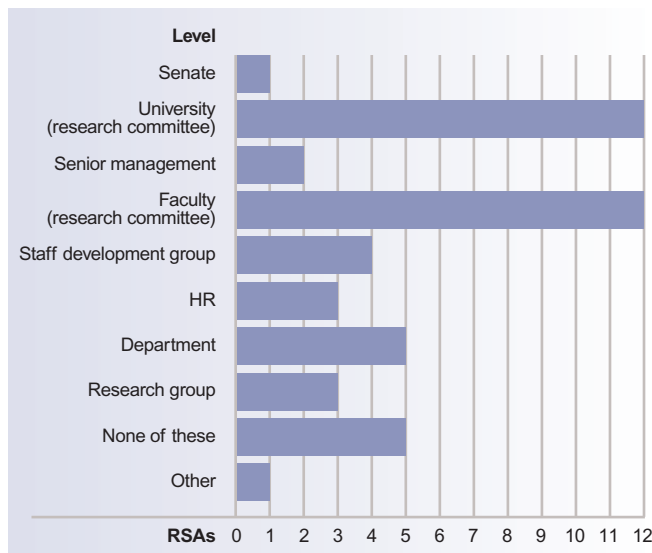


Figure 17: Levels at which RSA feed into institutional management structures through residing on committees or working groups (N=22)

Number of committees RSAs have representation on	Number of RSAs
5	2
4	2
3	2
2	3
1	6
0	7

Figure 18: Number of committees where RSAs have representation (N=22)

The maximum number of committees RSAs were engaged with was five. Whilst seven RSAs indicated that they were not formally involved in representing the views of research staff on any of the committees or working groups suggested, one reported informal links with a 'research staff working party and research staff support'. Another said 'the VC has been invited to a network meeting and the institute director receives a copy of the minutes, which he often responds to' (impact level 3).

An individual committee member, articulates how they have personally benefited from being involved in a university committee (impact level 2):

“ I have taken part in University committees and understand better how the University is run ”

There is convincing evidence that RSAs are causing behaviour to change at institutions. RSAs are frequently consulted by senior managers on a range of subjects that are of interest to researchers as shown in figure 19. In particular 55% of RSA respondents had been consulted explicitly on Concordat implementation and fixed term contract policy, and 95% had been consulted on training needs; an important aspect of the Concordat.

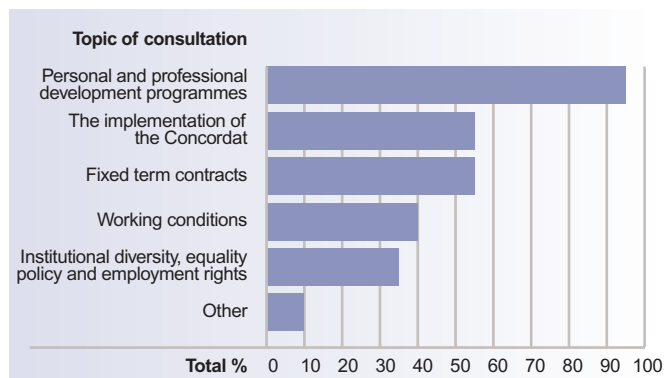


Figure 19: Range of topics where RSA have formerly represented the views of research staff (N=20, respondents could select all that applied)

Furthermore, 48% of RSA representatives felt that the activities of their association had increased the engagement of research staff in institutional policy (figure 20). Whilst there was some indication that RSAs were engaging research staff in matters of UK policy relating to research staff, this was on a much smaller scale (figure 21).

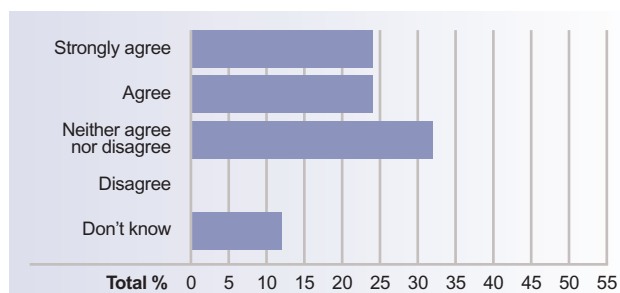


Figure 20: Extent to which RSAs felt they had increased the engagement of their research staff constituency in institutional policy (N=23)

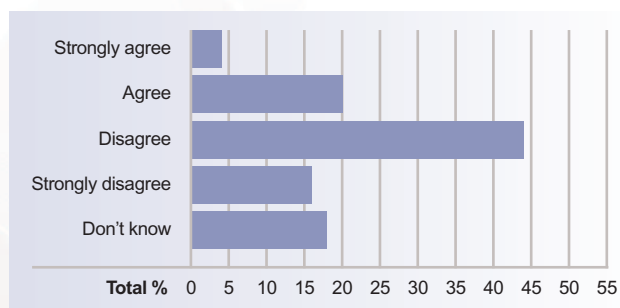


Figure 21: Extent to which RSAs felt they had increased the engagement of their research staff constituency in national policy (N=23)

As a result of the level of engagement of RSAs in policy and practice within their institution, 73% of respondents reported that they have been able to increase the profile of research staff issues at their host HEI (figure 23). Over half of RSAs (52%) felt they had been able to improve the working conditions of research staff in their institution (figure 22). Individual responses indicate that links to senior management have been important in achieving this improvement (impact level 4).

“ With our representation on the School committee, we have also seen teaching by postdocs recognised as an important contribution and formal records of these teaching hours are now being kept. ”

“ [The] formal link to senior management committee has been particularly valuable in changing [the research] climate ”

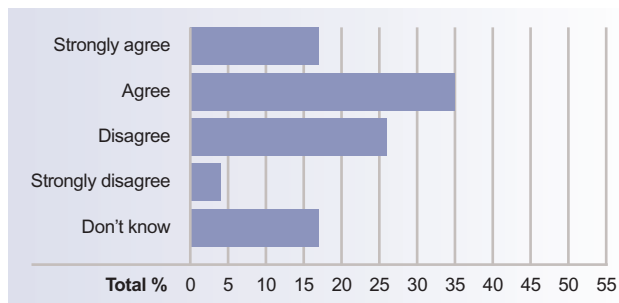


Figure 22: Extent to which RSAs felt they had improved working conditions for their constituency research staff (N=23)

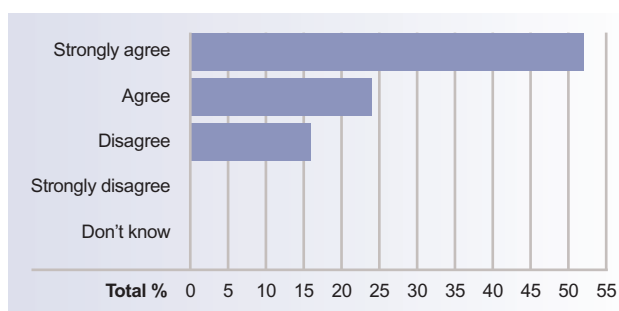


Figure 23: Extent to which RSAs felt they had increased the profile of research staff issues within their institution (N=23)

## Key Messages

- RSAs are well placed to engage research staff in their career development and many are involved in providing or facilitating training in a wide range of topics; RSAs report that they can achieve high levels of engagement from their research staff constituencies in RSA events.
- Sessions on career development, transferable skills and specific on the job training are the best attended and most positively received; sessions on the Concordat were the least attended and least well received.
- 95% of RSAs had been consulted on the training needs of research staff; half of RSAs explicitly on Concordat implementation and fixed term contract policy.
- Three quarters reported that they have increased the profile of research staff at their HEI and half of RSAs believe they have improved the working conditions of research staff in their HEI.
- Although RSA representatives reside on committees across all levels of their institutions, this is not so for all RSAs.
- The greatest challenges facing RSAs are a lack of engagement, even apathy, from fellow research staff and committee members; succession planning for RSAs is critical if they are to survive.

## Recommendations

### RSAs

- Survey your constituency to understand what types of activities will interest and engage them. Work with your HEI to ensure that the range of development activities reflects the interests and needs of research staff. Consider how your programme of activities can be used to widen your membership base.
- Provide robust evidence of the impact of the activities of your RSA to senior managers, PIs and research managers to encourage them to actively support your activities. In particular, identify how your RSA has helped to raise the profile of research staff and impacted on the research environment.
- Review existing institutional structures and provision and identify how you can engage with these to achieve the aims of your RSA.

### HEIs

- Encourage and support RSAs as an effective means of understanding the needs of and engaging with research staff, including the planning and delivery of training sessions. Work with RSAs to ensure that the resources available for the personal and professional development of research staff are effectively targeted.

### UKRSA

- Provide mechanisms to enable RSA to share practice and ideas about engaging research staff in RSA committees and activities. Help RSAs to incorporate succession planning into their practices to ensure their sustainability. In particular, gather evidence to understand what it is about the involvement in an RSA that can directly benefit an individual's research experience for the better.
- Investigate further the training and/or workshop resources that are most successful in engaging research staff.
- Investigate why RSAs have been unable to raise the profile of the Concordat. Develop a 'packaged' resource for RSAs to promote the value of the Concordat to research staff effectively, perhaps building on the the Vitae Concordat stakeholder briefing for research staff.

## Principle 5

**Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to proactively engage in their own career development, and lifelong learning**

The impact on individual committee members through their involvement in RSAs and their activities presents one of the strongest messages in this report. The very existence of RSAs is a powerful example in terms of how individual members of research staff are sharing the responsibility for and need to proactively engage not only in their own career development, but that of their colleagues, examples of which are evidenced throughout this report.

The findings not only demonstrate how RSAs are helping to achieve this Concordat principle through the impact on the individuals who get involved, but provide a strong message to research staff in terms of demonstrating the potential benefits to individuals of committing time to help run or support an RSA.

Many more researchers could benefit from becoming actively involved in their research or institutional community. CROS 2009 found that 45% of researchers wanted to participate in HEI decision making, and 51% wanted to participate at departmental level. Indeed, in our survey, the top motivations for research staff becoming involved in an RSA are: to influence change in relation to the experience of research staff (80%), and in making the research staff voice heard (69%) (figure 24).

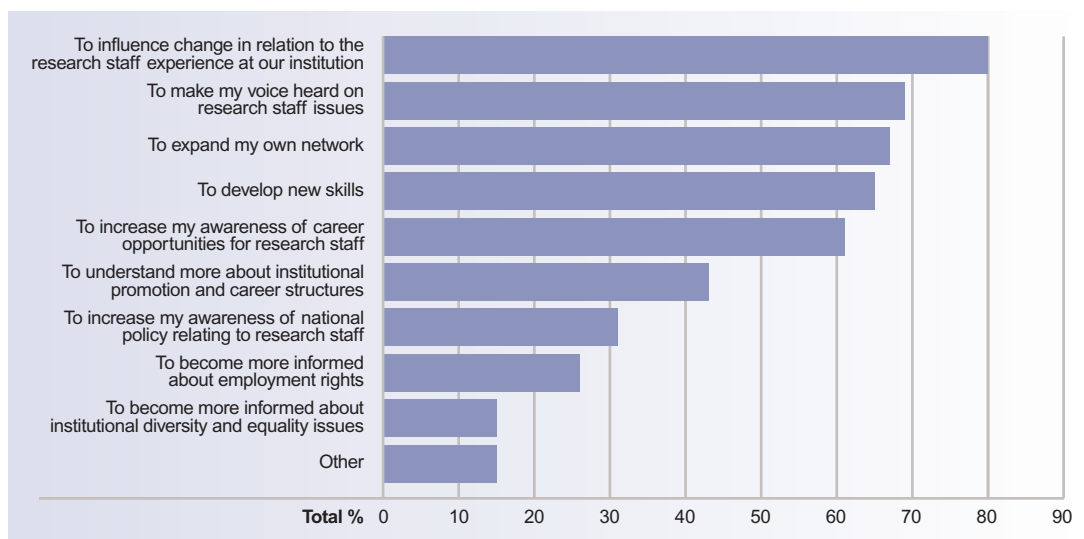


Figure 24: Reasons why research staff were motivated to get involved in their RSA? (N=54)

The survey explored how far these personal aims and motivations had been realised and found that 83% of committee members believed that through their involvement in their RSA they had made their voice heard on staff issues (figure 25) and 52% felt that they had achieved some level of change to the research staff experience in their institution (figure 26).

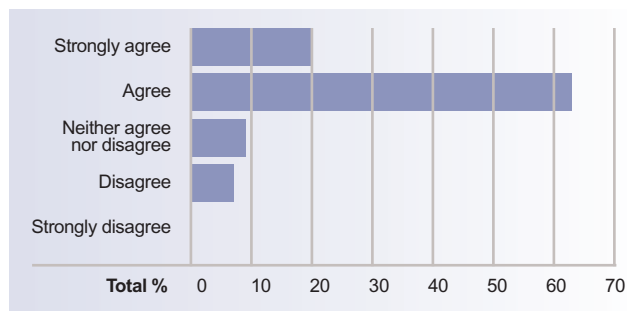


Figure 25: Committee members' reaction to the statement: I have made my voice heard on research staff issues (N=54)

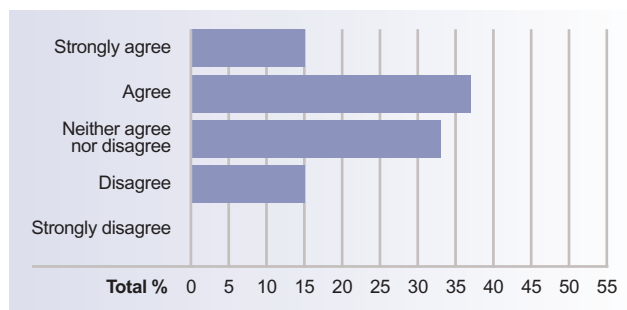


Figure 26: Committee members' reaction to the statement: I have influenced change in relation to the research staff experience at our institution (N=54)

There is a range of evidence to show how research staff committee members have changed their behaviour as a result of engaging with their RSA (impact level 3). 74% of committee members reported they had started to proactively engage with HEI processes relating to research staff after joining; 28% on a frequent basis (compared to 13% who did so before) (figure 27). 54% of respondents started to engage with national fora; 11% on a frequent basis (compared to 4% did so before) (figure 28).

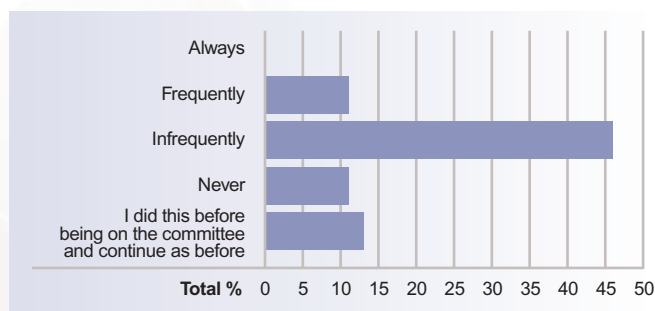


Figure 27: Extent to which committee members felt they proactively engaged with and benefited from institutional processes and consultations relating to research staff (N=53)

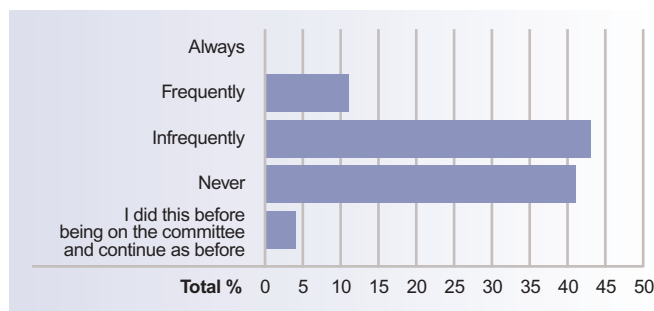


Figure 28: Extent to which committee members felt they proactively engaged in national online fora about research staff issues to the benefit of themselves and others (N=53)

“ As a result [I] became involved in IRSA – Irish Research Staff Association. [This led to an] increased awareness of national issues and methods of lobbying government, interacting with government bodies etc ”

Changes in behaviour not only impact the individual but have a wider benefit for the research staff community. For example, 86% of respondents felt that they had acted to create a better work environment for themselves and their colleagues as a result of their involvement in their RSA (figure 29). Examples include new types of provision to specifically benefit research staff (impact level 4).

“ One project that I spearheaded when I was co-chair of our postdoc association...is a career development review that postdocs can carry out twice a year with their supervisor to discuss where their career is going, what generic skills training they should or could take, what conferences they should be going to and what their goals are both short term and long term. Although this scheme is not compulsory (yet) many postdocs have carried it out and found it useful to give them some direction ”

“ Establishment of statistics and science writing course for university researchers. ”

“ [A] colleague and I instituted a research fellow seminar series in our department. ”

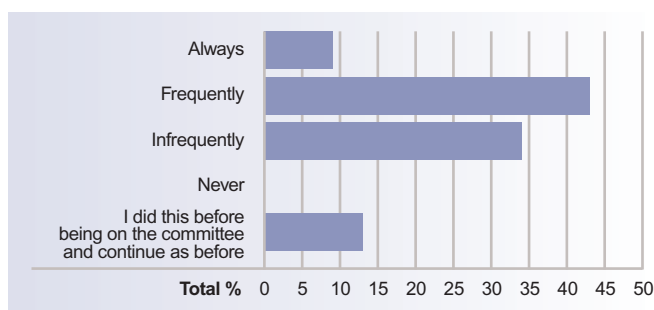


Figure 29: Extent to which committee members felt they proactively help to create a better work environment for themselves and their colleagues (N=53)

## Benefits to researchers

Many of the individual respondents also gave examples of how their research had directly benefited from their involvement in the RSA, demonstrating how the RSA had created opportunities to develop their own careers and contribute to the delivery of research.

Involvement in an RSA has increased opportunities for committee members to network and raise their professional profile. 93% felt they had expanded their personal network (figure 30) and 71% felt that to a varying extent they now proactively built their network within and outside their institution (figure 31). Such actions have resulted in new collaborations, and the establishment of good research practice, for example through setting up research seminars (impact level 4).

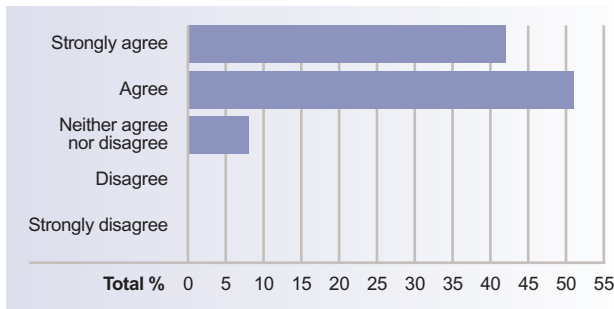


Figure 30: Committee members' reaction to the statement: I have expanded my personal network (N=53)

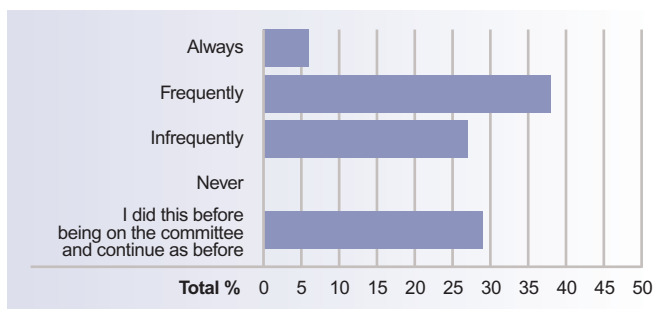


Figure 31: Extent to which committee members felt they proactively built their network within and outside their institution (N=53)

“ I got an opportunity to meet new researchers in [the] biological field, which may further increase my research collaborations. ”

“ It basically helped [me] to get to know the institution and meet people in my research area. The RSA helps to build up an internal network, especially if you have people frequently changing in the institution such as PG [students] and research fellows. ”

“ I actually started a new research collaboration with someone I met at one [of] the [RSA] socials... ”

“ [I established] collaborations with researchers in same/other institutions, RSAs or other organisations. ”

“ Participation in setting up the mentoring scheme and then as a mentee on it has been directly beneficial to future employment prospects by enabling me to participate effectively in the university research culture beyond my own department. ”

## Impact on research profile and outcomes

46% of committee members who responded to our survey indicated that their involvement in the RSA led them frequently acting with more confidence as a researcher (figure 32) and 28% indicated that they frequently enjoyed research more (figure 33).

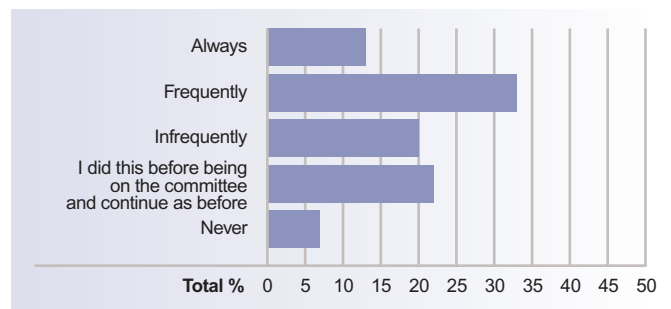


Figure 32: Frequency with which committee members feel more confident as a researcher as a result of being involved in the RSA committee and its activities (N=52)

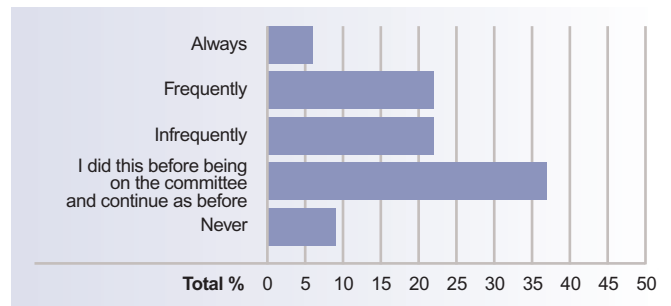


Figure 33: Frequency with which committee members feel they enjoy their research more as a result of being involved in the RSA committee and its activities (N=52)

One respondent indicated that as a direct result of being involved in his/her RSA and its activities had submitted a number of articles to journals, others that it had raised their profile within the institution.

“ [I] increased [my] profile and exposure within the university. ”

“ [I am] now more widely known among senior staff in [my] institute. ”

## Impact on career development

Interest in their career development is a strong motivating factor for 61% of respondents becoming involved in an RSA. 70% of respondents reported that they were more informed about career opportunities (figure 34) and 65% felt that to varying levels they now engaged in professional development activities (figure 35).

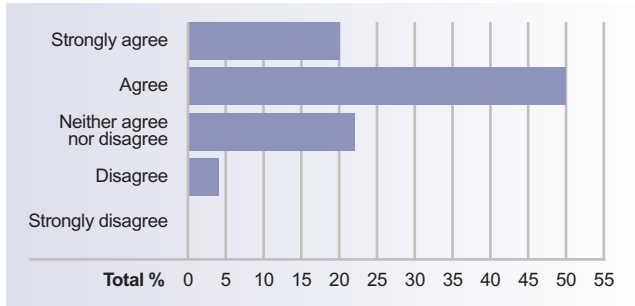


Figure 34: Extent to which RSA committee members feel more informed about career opportunities for research staff as a result of being involved in their RSA and its activities (N=52)

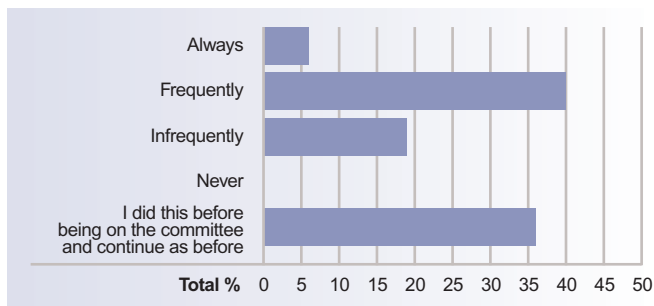


Figure 35: Extent to which committee members felt they now engaged in professional development activities (N=53)

76% of respondents indicated they had developed new skills (impact level 2) (figure 36) and over 50% felt they frequently or always put these new skills into practice (impact level 3) (figure 37).

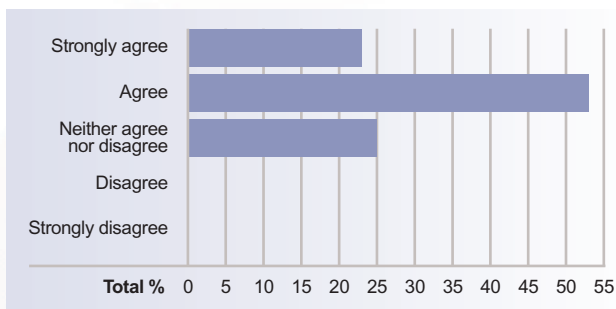


Figure 36: Committee members' reaction to the statement: I have developed new skills (N=53)

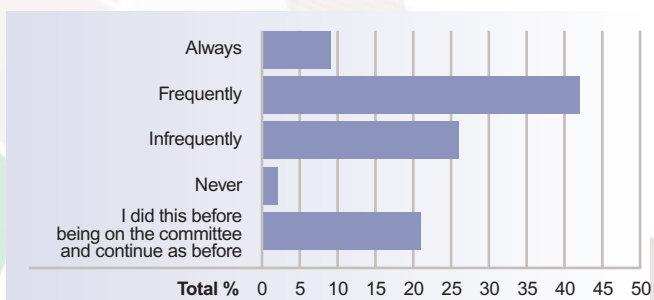


Figure 37: Extent to which committee members felt they put into practice the new skills they had developed (N=53)

In the context of an individual's own professional career development, responses included how RSA activities had broadened their horizons and enabled them to gain specific insights into the career opportunities within and outside academia:

“ Involvement in our RSA and some of the career development talks – as well as progression in academia, also opened my mind to jobs outside of the Ivory Towers. As I am now applying for a next postdoc, I am now also looking at these alternative science careers, where I may not have done so before, even though I knew they existed. ”

“ Made me think more strategically about career planning, opened up more opportunities to gain teaching experience ”

“ Change in career – provided skills to help identify career strategies for moving from scientific career to business ”

“ Being involved in my RSA facilitated a major change in career outlook and options. I was already proactively increasing my range of experiences to move on from a more traditional research career but RSA activities confirmed my interest in moving on from my current post, increased my confidence, honed skills and made a contribution to changing my career direction and finding a new career outside of academic research ”

Additional evidence shows how the changes in behaviour of individuals have resulted in specific outcomes in relation to career opportunities (impact level 4)

“ It helped me secure my next job in public engagement as I had gained skills in budget management and website development ”

## Key messages

- Research staff are primarily motivated to become involved in an RSA to influence change relating to research staff (80%), make the voice of research staff heard (69%) and to increase their understanding of career opportunities (61%).
- 83% of committee members believed that through their involvement in their RSA they had made their voice heard on staff issues and half felt that they had achieved some level of change to the research staff experience in their institution.
- 76% of respondents indicated they had developed new skills and 77% of these felt they had put these new skills into practice.
- Almost half of committee members indicated that their involvement in the RSA led to them frequently acting with more confidence as researchers and 28% indicated that they frequently enjoyed research more: there is evidence that being involved in running RSAs can have a beneficial impact on individuals' research activity and outputs.

- 86% of respondents felt that they had acted to create a better work environment for themselves and their colleagues, while 93% felt they had expanded their personal network.
- Two thirds of respondents reported that their involvement with an RSA had helped them to become more informed about career opportunities; they also proactively engaged in a range of professional development activities available to them.

## Recommendations

### Research staff:

- Consider becoming a committee member of an RSA to give you the opportunity to make your voice heard and enhance your skills, research and career opportunities.
- Take responsibility for your own career development, including taking advantage of events and activities provided by your HEI or RSA and participating in any surveys to increase understanding of the research environment and needs of research staff.

## Principle 6

**Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and management of researchers.**

CROS 2009 identified very positive reactions in terms of how well research staff are treated within their HEI in terms of equality and diversity. Over 90% felt that their HEI was committed to equality and diversity. However, 10% of all respondents to CROS felt that they had been discriminated against at a personal level: females and older respondents were more likely to feel that they had suffered personal discrimination.

RSAs do not yet appear to be actively including equality and diversity issues within their activities. None of the respondents specifically reported equality and diversity in the aims of their RSA. Only 15% of committee members reported equality and diversity as one of their personal motivations for engaging with their RSA.

However, there is evidence that it has been on the agenda of RSA activities: 59% of committee members reported that they were more informed about institutional diversity and equality policies (figure 38).

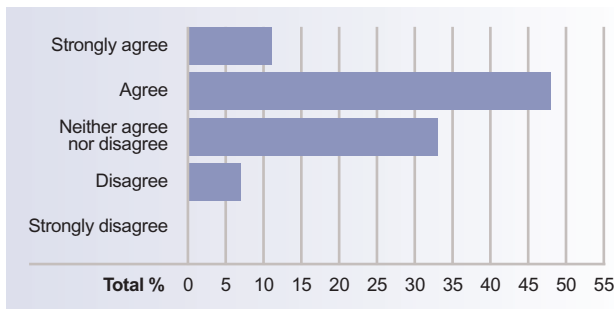


Figure 38: Committee members' reaction to the statement: I am more informed about institutional diversity and equality policies (N=54)

## Key messages

- As a result of being involved in their RSA, committee members are more aware of institutional diversity and equality policies. However, RSAs do not appear to be actively engaged diversity and equality issues for research staff.

## Recommendations

### RSAs

- Explore equality and diversity challenges with your constituency and discuss as a committee how you can work with the HEI to ensure that all research staff are treated fairly.

### UKRSA

- Develop relationships with other UK organisations, such as the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), UHR and Vitae to raise the profile and inform RSAs on the issues relating to equality and diversity for research staff.

## Principle 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.**

The motivation behind this project was to understand the UK picture relating to RSAs and identify the types of impact they are having, particularly in respect to the implementation of the Concordat principles and improving the career development of research staff. The findings of this report provide an initial evidence base to demonstrate how current RSAs influence senior managers and motivate research staff to improve the working conditions and career development of researchers.

The recommendations within this report aim to enable existing RSAs to be more effective and encourage the establishment of new associations. In addition, it identifies gaps in provision and support, which we hope will usefully inform the future work and activities of RSAs, HEIs and the UKRSA.

There is evidence to show that RSAs are working with HEIs to implement and raise awareness of the Concordat with research staff. 76% of RSA representatives said the Concordat informed the aims and activities of their RSA (figure 39), suggesting a strong link between the aims of the Concordat and the purpose of RSAs (impact level 1).

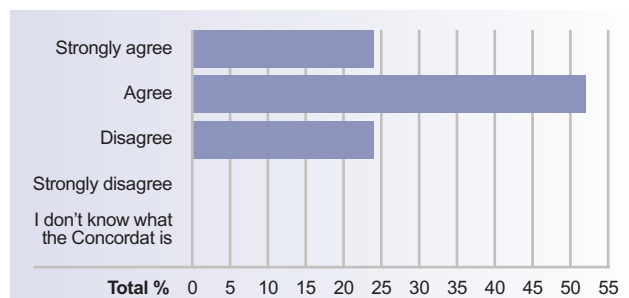


Figure 39: RSA representatives' reaction to the statement: the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers informs the aims and activities of our RSA (N=25)

79% of committee members said they were more aware of national policy and the Concordat as a result of their involvement in their RSA (figure 40). However, only 34% of RSAs surveyed felt they have raised the profile of the Concordat (figure 41) within their institution. This suggests that, whilst RSAs are having an impact on committee members in terms of their awareness of the Concordat, there is still some way for RSAs to go in communicating the aims of the Concordat to their colleagues. This chimes with the earlier finding that Concordat events were least well attended and valued by research staff.

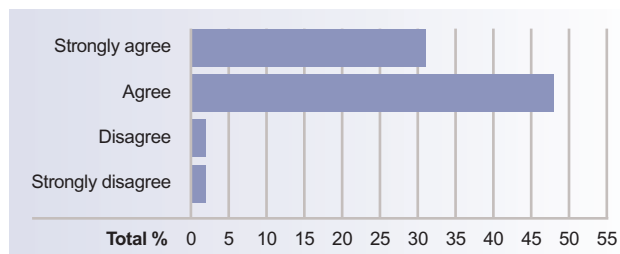


Figure 40: Committee members' reaction to the statement: I am more aware of national policy and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (N=54)

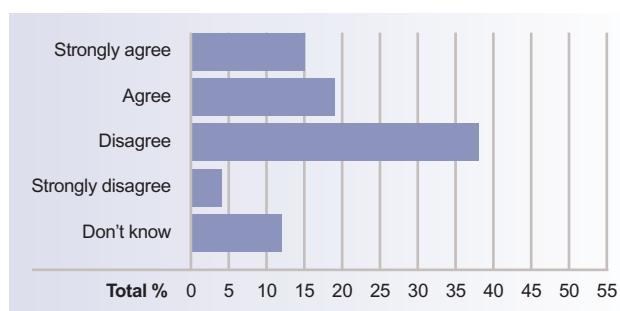


Figure 41: RSA representatives' reaction to how their RSA has raised the profile of the Concordat amongst their research staff constituency (N=23)

Individual responses show that some RSAs have taken the initiative to drive the Concordat agenda forward within their institutions by working with senior management (impact level 3):

“ Over the last two years, we have supported and pushed implementation of the Concordat and succeeded in getting it on to the agenda of senior staff at the university ”

One of the key mechanisms in reviewing the progress in implementing the principles of the Concordat is 'Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS)'. As a UK-wide survey tool, conducted at the institutional level, it provides research staff an opportunity to have their voices heard at both the UK and local level. The next CROS will run between March and May 2011.

Whilst RSAs are aware of opportunities, they have not yet influenced the wider population of researchers on important issues such as the value of participating in the 'Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) 2009 Analysis of aggregated UK results'. Only 23% of RSAs felt they had been able to increase the response rate (figure 42). Given the age of most RSAs, this may be dependent on whether their institution has run CROS since the formation of the RSA. However, RSAs are in the ideal position to encourage research staff to participate in CROS and to record their experiences and career aspirations as a research staff member.

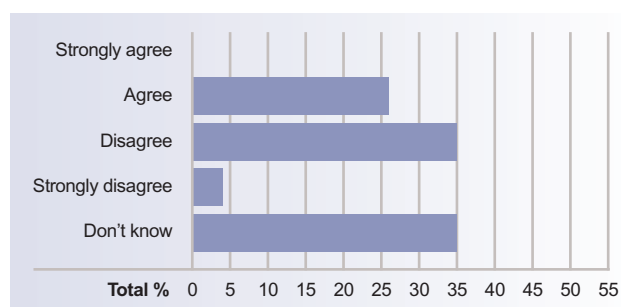


Figure 42: Extent to which RSA committee members felt their RSA had increased the response rate to CROS survey (N=23)

Our intention is to repeat these surveys, for example in 2012, to review progress in terms of the numbers and effectiveness of local RSAs. We will additionally explore the effectiveness of the UKRSA as an overarching RSA in providing a UK voice for research staff and strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and supporting local RSAs.

## Key messages

- 76% of RSA representatives said the Concordat informed the aims and activities of their RSA suggesting a strong link between the aims of the Concordat and the purpose of RSAs.
- 79% of committee members said they were more aware of national policy and the Concordat as a result of their involvement in their RSA.
- Only 34% of RSAs surveyed felt they have raised the profile of the Concordat to their constituency.

## Recommendations

### RSAs

- Develop strategies to ensure your HEI participates in CROS, or similar surveys of research staff experiences. Persuade research staff of the value of participating.

### HEIs

- Participate in CROS, or similar surveys, to understand the working environment and experiences of research staff within your HEI, measure progress in improving the research environment and provide feedback to research staff to encourage future engagement.

# Conclusions

The last three years have seen a significant growth in the number of RSAs in the UK. Although they vary in structure, purpose and constituencies, they are generally consistent in their aims: to raise the profile of research staff; give them a voice and improve their experiences and career development.

However, there is still a long way to go before all research staff have access to a local or regional RSA that is tailored to their interests and needs. Furthermore, many RSAs are newly formed and dependent on a few enthusiastic committee members to drive them forward. Given the high turnover of research staff contracts and the reported difficulty of engaging research staff both as committee members and with RSA activities, their future is always precarious.

The continued existence of RSAs is further threatened by the ending of the Roberts ring-fenced funding, as most of the respondents are funded through Roberts. RSAs are at risk of becoming casualties of HEIs reducing spending as a result of current financial constraints.

It is important for HEIs to consider how they can continue to support RSAs. They have the capacity to contribute significantly to sustaining the research staff workforce and building the UK research base within HEIs. The achievements of the RSAs demonstrate the value behind principle 5 of the Concordat, which states that 'individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to proactively engage in their own career development, and lifelong learning.'

In these difficult economic times, engaging with and involving research staff can help HEIs ensure the resources that are available are well targeted, helping to achieve the implementation of the Concordat principles in a more cost effective and sustainable way. RSAs have demonstrated their potential to successfully drive and lead the engagement of research staff communities. Encouraging researcher-led activities is an effective way for HEIs to provide career development opportunities for research staff.

A critical finding is the impact of being an RSA committee member has had on their abilities as a researcher and their career awareness. As a direct result they have developed their skills, built new research collaborations and increased their research outputs.

Despite their short existence, there is evidence that RSAs are working well with HEIs to influence the environment for research staff and impacting on research and employment outcomes. HEIs are consulting with RSA committee members about implementing the Concordat principles. In particular RSAs are facilitating improvement and targeting existing provision in HEIs to make it more relevant for research staff. Through RSAs research staff have the opportunity to have their voice heard by their HEI and receive better targeted events and training sessions.

## Supporting, developing and sustaining RSAs

The survey revealed several key issues that need to be tackled to support, develop and sustain RSAs in the future:

- further research to assess the costs and benefits of RSAs and identify more evidence of the impact on the research staff population
- investigate how to support the sustainability of RSAs. This may include encouraging regional networks, the provision of packaged resources for RSAs to help induct new members and run events
- investigate the link between being a RSA committee member and the impact on their research outputs to identify what factors are most important
- develop the case for the Concordat from a researcher perspective so as to promote its aims more effectively to the research community
- explore opportunities to support RSAs as research communities, as well as development communities, through regional and national networking opportunities

Vitae's Research Staff Conference on 4 November 2010 brought together 90 members of research staff actively involved or interested in establishing RSAs. As part of the conference programme, we ran a workshop based on the findings and recommendations in this report. As part of the workshop activity we asked participants (approximately 20) to consider the recommendations made to each of the stakeholder groups and rank them in order of priority. These results are summarised in Appendix 5.

One of the outputs of this report has been the development of a 'Guide to Research Staff Associations'. This is intended to serve as a resource for anyone with an interest in establishing and sustaining a successful research staff association and will be available at [www.ukrsa.org.uk](http://www.ukrsa.org.uk)

# Appendix 1

## Case study 1

**Early Career Academics Network,  
Leeds Institute of Health Sciences**

**Vicky Ward, Lecturer,  
Academic Unit of Primary Care**

**Established:** 2008

### Aims:

- to provide opportunity for discussions and learning focused on career development
- to provide a direct link between early career academics and senior management

**Committee size:** 1-2 people with no formal committee.

**Representing:** 43 researchers

The Early Career Academics Network (ECAN) accommodates those researchers employed as research fellows and lecturers. Our peer network gives support for career progression through shared experience to build up the confidence of members. This has resulted in some members obtaining promotions and academic positions. For instance the previous network lead is now a senior lecturer, and I now have gained principal investigator status having been involved from the start of the group (2 years ago).

The network's representation is very informal, due to the nature of the Institute. It is most appropriate for us to send a document to the Director who will read it and comment where appropriate. This link is also used in reverse and we have been consulted on issues and asked to supply input. For example when the Director was being re-appointed we were asked for input and wrote a statement as a group, in another instance we provided feedback on a proposed writing course. In this way we feel we are being consulted on things that are relevant to us and we feel it is valuable that we can respond and speak as a group.

In our recent meetings we have invited staff from human resources to talk about policy and focused on topics such as redeployment, the Concordat and promotions. We are also discussing issues to do with pending organisational changes. We have also organised some sessions on topics about career development skills, for example how to be a mentor, confidence building, promotion and redeployment. Skills based sessions tend to focus on identifying the skills and how they relate to improving a CV or presenting them at interview. Lastly for some of our meetings we don't have planned topics, so we get together to discuss current career-related issues within the group. The networking at group meetings has also led to members forming new collaborations that exchange knowledge and skills. As a result of attending meetings regular members are moving forward in their careers.

In our institute most staff are on permanent contracts, although some of those are linked to fixed term grant funded projects so there is not necessarily any security in these positions. For example some staff don't currently have a research portfolio. When there are staff who come to the end of a period of employment we often have a discussion where we share group experiences of the process, and refer them to other staff in the Institute that maybe able to help. This can lead to an enhanced sense of security for the members of the group as they know that others have been through the same process.

The Institute has a strong ethos around applied health research. The focus for us is on producing high quality research which can make a difference to society by being applied in the real world. For our department/discipline, building a career depends on this aim, so career progression, high quality research and recognition for our institute are inextricably linked.

## Case study 2

**Little France Postdoc Society,  
University of Edinburgh**

**Dr Mark R. Miller, Senior Postdoctoral Scientist**

**Established:** 2007

### Aims:

- to catalyse interactions between post-docs in different departments and subject areas
- to be a voice for post-docs in interactions with Centre and Institute committees
- to raise awareness of career challenges facing junior research staff
- to improve career development by both Institute/University support and encouraging proactivity by the researcher themselves
- to encourage and assist in the career development of post-docs and the enhancement of generic skills.

**Committee size:** 6-12 people.

**Representing:** 50-80 researchers

The Institute we work in comprises of three separate departments. While they are all based within the same building, mixing with other departments is not as common as it should be. The Institute widely advertises its few "core facilities", however, there are many departmental facilities that are available for shared use, but are not widely known about. Through the society we have promoted these facilities, and as a result made them more widely used and also at the same time brought together individuals from different departments and backgrounds with like-minded goals.

The Society is represented on a variety of committees for different grades and groups of staff in the institution. We also have representatives that attend meetings hosted by Vitae, skills and staff development committees. As a result there is an exchange of information from the society to these committees and back down again. We also have representatives that attend the meetings of Career Services and Researcher Development Units, as well as outside meetings such as Vitae events, Nexxus, Gradskills and Nature Source meetings. Summaries of important points are always distributed back to Society Members.

I have made numerous contacts with researchers from different Departments, School and Universities who face the same obstacles maintaining a research career long-term. Many colleagues attending our events have taken advantage of transferable skills courses being run within the university and I am aware of specific occasions when the Society's own talks have led to collaborations, developing new techniques and on one occasion the writing of a grant proposal that was subsequently funded.

While the society cannot offer direct funding support, it can offer much in the way of useful advice, providing a forum for the exchange of advice between researchers and raising the profile of research staff. For example, we put people in contact with appropriate contacts/organisations, share the experiences of research of our own Society members, direct people to relevant university departments for advice on policy or training (e.g. HR or Researcher Development Units) and make enquires by proxy (e.g. with awarding bodies for grant eligibility issues and research innovation/knowledge transfer organisations). For example we work with the University mentoring programme that we regularly promote, as well as giving anonymous feedback to the organisers of the programme. Importantly we help to encourage a realistic understanding of the potential hurdles ahead and opportunities available, to empower researchers to look after their own careers.

Improving awareness early on in a career is key to this, making sure doctoral researchers understand the pros and cons on taking on a postdoc project, and emphasising that alternative careers such as industry have their own unique advantages and disadvantages. In this regard it is useful to have a range of members from different backgrounds and who have followed different career paths to share their ideas.

The success of the Society is very dependent on the people involved: it requires both time and enthusiasm, and those that take a more proactive role get the most out of it. It is helpful to have someone who is interested in the wider issues facing early career researchers; being keen to address the policies that hinder career development and push talented researchers out of academic science.

## Appendix 2

### Tell us about your Research Staff Association: Representative

#### 1. What is the name of your Research Staff Association (RSA)? \*

#### 1b. What is the name of your institution \*

#### 2. Where is your RSA based within your institution?

	Total
Multi-institution (different subjects)	2
Multi-institution (same subject)	0
University	6
Faculty, School, or College	11
Department	6
Other	0

(N=25)

#### 2a. If other, please state where your RSA is based:

#### 3. How long has the RSA existed?

Please enter length of time in months (if less than a year) or in years if longer eg 3.5 years.

Approximate number of years	Total
0	1
0.5	2
1	1
1.5	2
1.75	1
2	4
2.5	4
3	3
3.5	1
4	2
5	1
8	1
9	1

(N=24)

#### 4. Why does your RSA exist? What are its aims?

#### 5. How far do you agree with the following statement about the 'Concordat to support the career development of researchers'? \*

'The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers informs the aims and activities of our RSA'

	Total
I don't know what the Concordat is	0
Strongly agree	5
Agree	15
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	0

(N=25)

#### 6. How many individuals form the RSA committee?

Include anybody or any representatives you consider to be formerly part of your committee eg who attend meetings either regularly or on an ad hoc basis

Number of committee members	Total
1-2	1
3	3
4	4
5	1
6	2
9	2
10	2
18	1
20	2
30	2
40+	2
Varied/unconfirmed	2

(N=24)

#### 7. What types of people constitute your membership?

Please select all that apply

	Total
Research staff	25
Academic staff	9
Union representative	2
Staff developer or HR representatives	5
Postgraduate researchers	2
Public engagement representative	1
Library representative	1
Careers service representative	1
Local business network representative	1
Administrative staff	1
PVC Research	1

(N=25)

#### 8. How many researchers does the RSA represent within its constituency?

(if there is no formal representation the number (approximately!) of researchers in your department/school/institution)

Range	Total
>50	8
50-150	7
150-250	3
250-350	1
350-450	1
700+	3

(N=23)

**9. How does the RSA engage with research staff?**

Research staff are automatically members of the RSA	14
Research staff are invited to join the RSA	11
Research staff are represented by the RSA	11
Research staff are invited to attend events	15
We don't make any efforts to contact researchers	0
Other:	1 (Facebook and mailing list)

(N=25)

**10. How is your RSA funded?**

Select all that apply.

	Total
Research group	0
Department	6
Faculty	3
University/Graduate School	5
Roberts funds	11
Human resources	0
External funds/ Donations/Fund raising events	5
Charge for events	4
Not funded	4

(N=25)

**11. What other types of support are provided by your department or institution?**

Select all that apply

Type of support	Total
Promoting your activities to research staff through email alerts	17
Promoting your RSA in institutional handbooks, newsletters, induction events etc	15
Printing materials and handouts on your behalf	10
Administrative support e.g. booking rooms, taking meeting minutes, etc	12
Other	5

(N=23)

**12. Does the RSA feed into institutional management structures by residing on committees or working groups at any of the following levels?**

Select all that apply

Level	Total
Research group	3
Department	5
Faculty (research committee)	12
University (research committee)	12
Senate	1
Staff development group	4
HR	3
None of these	5
Other	3

(N=22)

**13. Has your RSA been consulted by senior managers or represented the opinions of research staff on any of the following?**

Select all that apply

	Total
Personal and professional development programmes	19
The implementation of the Concordat	11
Fixed term contracts	11
Working conditions	8
Institutional diversity, equality policy and employment rights	7
Other	2

(N=20)

**14. Does your RSA have links with any of the following organisations?**

Select all that apply

	Total
Other RSAs within your institution	15
Other RSAs at other universities	5
Other universities	1
UCU	4
Professional bodies	2
Employers	2
Other:	4

(N=19)

**15. How many events (including meetings) has your RSA organised in the past 12 months?**

5 or fewer	10
6-10	8
11-15	6
16 or more	2

(N=26)

**16. How many attendees do you typically get at an event you have organised?**

5 or fewer	1
6-10	2
11-15	8
16-20	7
21-25	1
26-30	1
30 or more	4

(N=24)

**17. If the RSA organises events, what percentage of your constituency (approximately) have engaged in at least one event in the past 12 months?**

0-20%	6
21-40%	9
41-60%	7
61-70%	2
71-100%	0

(N=24)

**18. What type of event has the highest level of attendance?**

If your RSA does not organise its own events but requests them from the Institution please still answer, describing the events you request. Select all that apply.

Select from: [Not used, 1. Least attendance, 2., 3., 4. Highest attendance]

Type of event	Not used	1 Least attendance	2	3	4 Highest attendance
Lectures	16	1	2	3	0
Seminars	9	1	2	3	7
Question and answer sessions	9	3	3	3	3
Drop-in sessions	17	1	1	0	0
Inductions	13	0	4	3	0
Social events	7	0	6	5	5
Mentoring	14	2	2	1	0
Discussion forums	6	4	3	5	4

(N=23)

**18a. Other activities you have tried?**

**19. What topics get the highest level of attendance?**

If your RSA does not organise its own events but requests them from the Institution please still answer, describing the events you request. Select all that apply.

Select from: [Not used, 1. Least attendance, 2., 3., 4. Highest attendance]

Events and activities	N	Level of attendance (mean; 4 maximum)
Specific on the job training	19	3.5
Transferable skills training	19	3.5
Workplace/equipment inductions	18	2.6
Career development	21	3.6
Research specific activities	19	3.1
Public engagement	19	2.3
Policy updates on employment rights	19	3.0
About the Concordat	19	1.8
Employer events	19	2.7

(N=24)

**19a. Other topics that you have covered:**

**20. What topics get the most positive feedback?**

If your RSA does not organise its own events but requests them from the Institution please still answer, describing the events you request. Select all that apply.

Select from: [Not used/feedback not gathered, 1. Very negative feedback, 2. Negative feedback, 3. Positive feedback, 4. Very positive feedback]

Events and activities	N	Level of attendance (mean; 4 maximum)
Specific on the job training	19	3.3
Transferable skills training	19	3.5
Workplace/equipment inductions	18	3.0
Career development	21	3.6
Research specific activities	19	3.4
Public engagement	19	3.0
Policy updates on employment rights	19	3.0
About the Concordat	19	2.3
Employer events	19	3.3

(N=24)

**21. What topics are the most requested?**

If your RSA does not organise its own events but requests them from the Institution please still answer, describing the events you request. Please select all that apply

Select from: [1. Never requested, 2. Very infrequently requested, 3. Infrequently requested, 4. Frequently requested, 5. Very frequently requested]

Events and activities	N	Mean; 5 maximum
Specific on the job training	16	2.1
Transferable skills training	17	3.2
Workplace/equipment inductions	16	1.7
Career development	18	3.9
Research specific activities	17	2.6
Public engagement	17	2.6
Policy updates on employment rights	19	2.5
About the Concordat	16	1.3
Employer events	18	2.3

(N=???)

**22. To what extent do you agree with the following statements of your RSA?**

Select all that apply.

Select from: [Don't know, 1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly agree]

**The RSA has had direct influence on:  
Increased numbers attending RSA activities**

Don't Know	3
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Agree	11
Strongly agree	5

(N=22)

**Improved the range of professional development activities available to research staff**

Don't Know	3
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	3
Agree	9
Strongly agree	8

(N=23)

**Improved working conditions for research staff**

Strongly agree	4
Agree	8
Disagree	6
Strongly disagree	1
Don't know	4

(N=23)

**Increased response rate to CROS survey**

Don't Know	8
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	8
Agree	6
Strongly agree	0

(N=23)

**Increased the profile of research staff issues within your institution**

Don't Know	0
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	4
Agree	6
Strongly agree	13

(N=23)

**Raised the profile of the Concordat amongst research staff within our constituency**

Don't Know	3
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	10
Agree	5
Strongly agree	4

(N=23)

**Increased the engagement of researchers in researcher-led activities**

Don't Know	3
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	4
Agree	12
Strongly agree	3

(N=23)

**Increased the engagement of researchers in institutional policy**

Don't Know	3
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	7
Agree	6
Strongly agree	6

(N=23)

**Increased the engagement of researchers in national policy**

Don't Know	2
Strongly disagree	4
Disagree	11
Agree	5
Strongly agree	11

(N=23)

**22a. If 'other' please specify**

**23. Has the RSA evaluated its effectiveness?**

Yes	4
No	12
We plan to in the future	7

(N=23)

**23a. If 'yes' what kind of evaluation was carried out?**

If published please provide a reference or link otherwise describe below:

**24. Briefly describe any key positive outcomes from the activities your RSA has undertaken. What has gone especially well?**

**25. What challenges have you faced in establishing and sustaining your RSA?**

**26. How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?**

**27. What types of support from your department or institution would help our RSA have greater impact?**

Select all that apply

Type of support	Total
Regular updates on institutional policy changes, strategy or news	12
More funding	11
Time away from research to attend related regional and national events	8
More opportunities to contribute on related committees	12
Administrative support	10
Faculty advisors (RSA champions)	11
Dedicated staff members to support research staff	7
I don't feel we need any additional support from our institution	1
Other	1

(N=22)

**28. How could the UKRSA help you and your RSA to be more effective?**

Select all that apply

Information on funding sources	16
Guidance on establishing and sustaining RSAs	16
Providing a portal of information on related policy	11
Facilitating regional and national networks of RSAs	19
Training for committee members	6
Ideas for engagement	9
Pre-written workshops	4
UKRSA could not help us in any way	0
Other	0

(N=??)

**29. Do you have any final thoughts/comments/ key piece of advice to others for setting up an RSA?**

**30. Contact details**

If you are happy to be contacted again in the future please leave your email address, phone number and address below, we will keep you up to date with all UKRSA and Vitae Research Staff activities and any future research we carry out

**31. Telephone interview**

Would be willing to take part in a telephone interview? We will select participants to form representative case studies, the interviews will be carried out between late August and early September 2010.

## Appendix 3

### Tell us about your Research Staff Association: Committee members

#### 1. Which Research Staff Association are you a committee member of?

#### 2. How many hours per week (on average) do you spend on RSA-related activities?

2. How many hours per week (on average) do you spend on RSA-related activities?	Total
0.5	13
1	14
1.5	8
2	6
2.5	4
3	4
4	2
4.5	1
5	1
10	1

(N=54)

Note average values taken where a range was given.  
Less than 1 hour shown as 0.5.

#### 3. What motivated you to get involved with your RSA? (Select all that apply)

To become more informed about institutional diversity and equality issues	8
To become more informed about employment rights	14
To understand more about institutional promotion and career structures	23
To increase my awareness of career opportunities for research staff	33
To increase my awareness of national policy relating to research staff	17
To develop new skills	35
To make my voice heard on research staff issues	37
To influence change in relation to the research staff experience at our institution	43
To expand my own network	36
Other	8

(N=54)

#### 4. As a result of being involved in the RSA committee and its activities, how would you rate the following statements?

I am more informed about institutional diversity and equality policies	Total
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	4
Neither agree or disagree	18
Agree	27
Strongly agree	6

(N=55)

I am more informed about employment rights	Total
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	5
Neither agree or disagree	12
Agree	29
Strongly agree	8

(N=55)

I am more aware of institutional promotion and progression and understand career structures	Total
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neither agree or disagree	12
Agree	28
Strongly agree	12

(N=55)

I am more aware of career opportunities for research staff	Total
Agree	28
Disagree	2
Neither agree or disagree	12
Strongly agree	11

(N=53)

I am more aware of national policy and the Concordat to support the career development of researchers	Total
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	1
Neither agree or disagree	9
Agree	27
Strongly agree	17

(N=55)

I have developed new skills	Total
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	1
Neither agree or disagree	13
Agree	28
Strongly agree	12

(N=54)

I have made my voice heard on research staff issues	Total
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	4
Neither agree or disagree	6
Agree	34
Strongly agree	11

(N=55)

I have influenced change in relation to the research staff experience at our institution	Total
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	9
Neither agree or disagree	18
Agree	20
Strongly agree	8

(N=55)

I have expanded my personal network	Total
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	1
Neither agree or disagree	4
Agree	28
Strongly agree	22

(N=55)

**4a. Please list any other skills or knowledge you have developed through your involvement with the RSA or participating in its activities**

**5. As a result of being involved in the RSA committee and its activities, how often would you do the following?**

I proactively engage with institutional processes and consultations relating to research staff which is of benefit to myself and others	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	7
Never	7
Infrequently	25
Frequently	15
Always	0

(N=54)

I proactively engage in national online fora about research staff issues which is of benefit to myself and others	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	2
Never	23
Infrequently	23
Frequently	6
Always	0

(N=54)

I proactively build my network within and outside my institution	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	15
Never	3
Infrequently	14
Frequently	20
Always	3

(N=55)

I engage in professional development activities	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	19
Never	1
Infrequently	10
Frequently	21
Always	3

(N=54)

I help to create a better work environment for myself and colleagues	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	7
Never	0
Infrequently	18
Frequently	23
Always	5

(N=53)

I put into practice new skills I have developed	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	11
Never	1
Infrequently	14
Frequently	22
Always	5

(N=53)

I am more confident as a researcher	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	12
Never	5
Infrequently	11
Frequently	18
Always	7

(N=53)

I enjoy my research more	Total
I did this before being on the committee and continue as before	20
Never	6
Infrequently	12
Frequently	12
Always	3

(N=53)

**6. Please list any outcomes resulting from your involvement in your RSA and its activities?**

For example, it opened up a job opportunity, a new research collaboration, change in career direction etc

**7. List any challenges or obstacles to your involvement in your RSA**

**8. How have you overcome these challenges or obstacles?**

**9. In your experience, what do research staff find most useful about what the RSA does?**

Representing the voice of research staff to senior management and other institutional committees	47
Organising specific on the job training	16
Organising transferable skills training	23
Organising workplace/equipment inductions	5
Providing information or training on career development	27
Organising research lectures	10
Organising training on public engagement	11
Raising the profile of the Concordat	7
Organising opportunities to network with other research staff	32
Facilitating research collaborations	9
Influencing research outputs	1
Organising events with local/national employers	9
Other:	2

(N=51)

**10. Thinking about researcher colleagues that you know well: as a result of RSA events/activities which of the following areas have they taken action in?**

Contribute their opinion on research staff issues	Total
Not covered	2
1. No colleagues taken action	6
2. Some colleagues taken action	36
3. Most colleagues taken action	6
4. All colleagues taken action	2

(N=52)

Specific on the job training	Total
Not covered	16
1. No colleagues taken action	6
2. Some colleagues taken action	22
3. Most colleagues taken action	6
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=50)

Transferable skills training	Total
Not covered	8
1. No colleagues taken action	3
2. Some colleagues taken action	31
3. Most colleagues taken action	10
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=52)

Workplace/equipment inductions	Total
Not covered	26
1. No colleagues taken action	11
2. Some colleagues taken action	12
3. Most colleagues taken action	2
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=51)

Career development	Total
Not covered	2
1. No colleagues taken action	2
2. Some colleagues taken action	33
3. Most colleagues taken action	14
4. All colleagues taken action	1

(N=52)

Research lectures	Total
Not covered	13
1. No colleagues taken action	8
2. Some colleagues taken action	21
3. Most colleagues taken action	6
4. All colleagues taken action	3

(N=51)

Public engagement	Total
Not covered	14
1. No colleagues taken action	9
2. Some colleagues taken action	26
3. Most colleagues taken action	2

(N=51)

The Concordat	Total
Not covered	12
1. No colleagues taken action	13
2. Some colleagues taken action	24
3. Most colleagues taken action	1
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=50)

Networking	Total
Not covered	2
1. No colleagues taken action	3
2. Some colleagues taken action	31
3. Most colleagues taken action	13
4. All colleagues taken action	3

(N=52)

Research collaborations	Total
Not covered	13
1. No colleagues taken action	10
2. Some colleagues taken action	29
3. Most colleagues taken action	0
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=52)

Research outputs (publications, grant applications, conference presentations, etc)	Total
Not covered	14
1. No colleagues taken action	13
2. Some colleagues taken action	19
3. Most colleagues taken action	4
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=50)

Employer events	Total
Not covered	16
1. No colleagues taken action	11
2. Some colleagues taken action	17
3. Most colleagues taken action	6
4. All colleagues taken action	0

(N=50)

**11. Have there been any unexpected outcomes as a result of the existence or activities of the RSA?**

e.g. new research collaborations, new relations with local employers

**12. What could the RSA do more of in the future to support research staff?**

**13. What are the key issues for research staff where the RSA can make a difference?**

**14. Telephone interview**

If you would be willing to take part in a telephone interview please provide your name, email address and telephone number below (along with any preferred contact times). We will select participants to form representative case studies, the interviews will be carried out between late August and early September 2010

## Appendix 4

### Known Research Staff Associations by region and institution

Region	Institution	Research Staff Association
East of England	University of Cambridge	Postdocs Of Cambridge (PdOC)
		MRC, LMB and CPE Postdoc Association
London	Cancer Research UK	The London Research Institute Postdoc Programme
	King's College London	Guy's Researchers Society
		Social, Genetic, Developmental Psychiatry Centre Postdoc Forum
		James Black Centre Postdoc Forum
	Imperial College London	Departmental Postdoc Representatives
University of London	Institute of Cancer Research Postdoc Association	
Midlands	University of Birmingham	Postdoctoral Training and Career Development Committee
	University of Leicester	Genetics Postdoc Group
	University of Nottingham	Research-Only Staff Group
		Life Sciences Researchers' Network
		Engineering Research Staff Group
	University of Warwick	Research Staff Forum
Biological Sciences Postdoc Forum		
North West	Lancaster University	Researcher Career Development Group
	University of Manchester	School of Physics & Astronomy Post-doc Forum
Scotland and Northern Ireland	University of Aberdeen	Early-Career Biology Researchers Association
	Queen's University Belfast	SMDB Postdoc Society
		EEEC Postdoc Society
		The Society for Contract Researchers & Postdoctoral Staff
	University of Dundee	College of Life Sciences Postdoc Association
		College of Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing Postdoc and Research Staff Association
	University of Edinburgh	PODS
		Social & Political Studies Research Staff Society
		Little France Post-Doc Society
		School of Engineering Research Staff
		School of Geosciences Research Staff Organisation
		Central Area Postdoctoral Society
		School of Chemistry Research Staff Society
		Physics Research Staff Society
		School of Biological Sciences – BioDocSoc
Informatics Research Staff Society		
Easter Bush Research Consortium Post Doc Society		
University of Strathclyde	Strathclyde Energy Researchers' Network	
South East	University of Oxford	Oxford University Research Staff Association
	University of Reading	Research Staff Committee
	University of Southampton	School of Medicine Postdoc Association
		School of Biological Sciences Postdoc Society
South West and Wales	University of Bath	Research Staff Working Group
	University of Bristol	Research Staff Representatives
	University of the West of England	The UWE Researchers' Forum
Yorkshire and North East	Newcastle University	Newcastle Researchers' Network
	University of Leeds	LIHS Early Career Network
		Faculty of Biological Sciences Continuing Professional Development for Postdocs
		Postdoc Committee For Training
	University of Sheffield	Molecular Biology and Biotechnology Postdoctoral Society
		Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health
		Medical School Post-Doctoral Society
		Biomedical Science Postdoctoral Society
	University of York	Physics And Astronomy Postdoc Society
Postdoctoral Biology		
RASoc		

## Appendix 5

Recommendations ranked in priority order by participants in the 'Understanding Research Staff Associations and their impact' workshop at Vitae's Research Staff Conference on 4 November 2010.

### Top 4 recommendations to RSAs

Ranking	Recommendation
1	4. Survey your constituency to understand what types of activities will interest and engage them. Work with your HEI to ensure that the range of development activities reflects the interests and needs of research staff. Consider how your programme of activities can be used to widen your membership base.
2	2. Invite a range of HEI staff on your committee to provide effective linkages with key departments, such as HR and staff development and help ensure the continuity and sustainability of your RSA.
3	1. Review the measures you have in place to ensure your RSA has a sustainable future. Consider access to future sources of funding, particularly beyond March 2011; review succession planning of committee members; explore all avenues of practical support available to you from your institution and ensure the resources you have available to you are effectively targeted to reap the maximum benefit for your RSA and the research staff constituency.
4	5. Provide robust evidence of the impact of the activities of your RSA to senior managers, PIs and research managers to encourage them to actively support your activities. In particular, identify how your RSA has helped to raise the profile of research staff and impacted on the research environment.

### Recommendations to HEIs

Ranking	Recommendation
1	6. Encourage and support RSAs as an effective means of understanding the needs of and engaging with research staff, including the planning and delivery of training sessions. Work with RSAs to ensure that what resources are available for the personal and professional development of research staff are effectively targeted.
2	3. Ensure that RSAs are represented on relevant institutional committees and working groups. Engage research staff with institutional policy decisions.
3	4. Encourage PIs and other academic staff to support the work of RSAs and the individuals who are involved with them.
4	2. Agree with the RSA what additional support the HEI will provide, including regular updates on relevant institutional policy developments and news.
5	1. Consider how the HEI will support RSAs beyond the end of Roberts ring-fenced funding in March 2011.
6	5. HR departments should consider inviting representatives from RSAs to sit on HR committees or equivalent structures to contribute the views of research staff.

### Recommendations to research staff

Ranking	Recommendation
1	2. Take responsibility for your own career development, including taking advantage of events and activities provided by your HEI or RSA and participating in any surveys to increase understanding of the research environment and needs of research staff.
2	1. Consider becoming a committee member of an RSA to give you the opportunity to make your voice heard and enhance your skills, research and career opportunities.

### Top 5 recommendations to UKRSA

Ranking	Recommendation
1	3. Provide mechanisms to enable RSA to share practice and ideas about engaging research staff in RSA committees and activities. In particular, gather evidence to understand what it is about the involvement in an RSA that can directly benefit an individual's research experience for the better.
2	2. Develop a communications system to inform and help RSAs understand how national policy developments will impact on research staff.
3	5. Investigate why RSAs have been unable to raise the profile of the Concordat. Develop a 'packaged' resource for RSAs to promote the value of the Concordat to research staff effectively, perhaps building on the the Vitae Concordat stakeholder briefing for research staff.
4	4. Investigate further the training and/or workshop resources that are most successful in engaging research staff.
5	1. Establish mechanisms for capturing, maintaining and sharing contact details for RSAs to support the UKRSA community.

UK Research Staff Association



supported by Vitae

## About UKRSA

The UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA), supported by Vitae, provides a collective voice for research staff in the UK, working with local research staff associations and informing policy. It continues and extends the work of the National Research Staff Association. Vitae provides resources, courses and events for research staff, including a research staff blog and annual research staff conference. Vitae works closely with the UKRSA to deliver projects, and provides administrative support and continuity.

UKRSA activities are divided into two categories, communities and policy, which include the following components:

### Communities

#### The UKRSA

- supports the development of local and regional research staff associations
- develops and maintains online social networking resources for research staff
- represents the interests and views of research staff in interactions with relevant national bodies
- maintains a collaborative committee comprised of members of research staff and representatives of stakeholder organisations

### Policy

#### The UKRSA

- provides input on policy affecting research staff at UK institutions
- informs research staff of relevant policy issues

For further information about the UKRSA go to [www.ukrsa.org.uk](http://www.ukrsa.org.uk) or contact [ukrsavitae@gmail.com](mailto:ukrsavitae@gmail.com)



## About Vitae

Vitae is supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK), managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation and delivered in partnership with regional Hub host universities.

Vitae works with UK higher education institutions (HEIs) to embed professional and career development in the research environment. Vitae plays a major role in innovating, sharing practice and enhancing the capability of the higher education sector to provide professional development and training for researchers.

Our vision is for the UK to be world-class in supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers.

### Our aims:

- Building human capital by influencing the development and implementation of effective policy relating to researcher development
- Enhancing higher education provision to train and develop researchers
- Empowering researchers to make an impact in their careers
- Evidencing the impact of professional and career development support for researchers

For further information about the range of activities go to [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk) or contact [enquiries@vitae.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@vitae.ac.uk)

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