

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Vitae briefing for human resources specialists

About this series...

This is one of several briefing documents, developed by Vitae, for stakeholders with a role to play in implementation of the Concordat's principles. It should be read in conjunction with the Concordat itself:

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk. The series explores emerging themes and highlights practical examples which we hope will prove useful as your institution works to implement the principles.

Vitae is a national organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in UK higher education institutions and research institutes. We play a major role in the drive for high-level skills and innovation and in meeting the UK's goal to produce world class researchers.

Vitae is working with UK institutions and other stakeholders to implement the Concordat's principles by providing information, raising awareness, and facilitating the sharing of strategies and practice.

For further information about Vitae and about UK and European policy visit

www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice.

To view other briefings available in this series go to **www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat**.

'The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' is an agreement between the funders and employers of researchers in the UK. Sitting alongside a range of local, UK and European initiatives, this agreement represents a significant development in national policy to support good management of researchers and their careers. Through the implementation of its principles it aims to enhance the researcher workforce and thereby sustain research excellence bringing benefits to the health, economy and well-being of the UK.

For human resources (HR) specialists the Concordat offers a useful focus to consider how they can further develop and maximise the effectiveness of the institution's research workforce. The Concordat highlights the importance of transparent and open recruitment, supportive management and investing in continuing professional development as part of an effective human resources strategy. It acknowledges the work that is already being done to support research staff, but encourages you and other colleagues across your institution to reassess or extend policy and practice related to research staff. This briefing takes each of the Concordat principles in turn, suggesting practical responses for human resources specialists and offering examples of practice from UK institutions.

Concordat principles

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

Support and career development

Professional development for research staff should be supported from the outset of an employment relationship and regardless of contractual status. The Concordat urges institutions to develop staff to their full potential, maximising effectiveness within their current roles and being prepared for promotion within the institution, to move to positions in other institutions or outside the academic sphere. Motivated and employable staff means a more flexible and productive workforce.

The Concordat stresses that responsibility for this is shared across an institution, including HR and careers specialists, staff developers and managers of researchers. It makes clear the value of input from research staff into development of relevant strategies and decisions.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing HR and related institutional strategies, with staff developers, careers specialists and other relevant stakeholders, to look at new opportunities for supporting the career development of research staff
- working with staff developers and careers specialists to review how principle investigators are trained and supported to meet their responsibilities as line managers of research staff
- reviewing whether induction processes are tailored to and appropriate for research staff.

Early intervention in the recruitment cycle of new researchers (University of Wales, Swansea)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/310.html

The University of Wales, Swansea, is working to embed professional development from recruitment. By intervening early the institution can ensure that researchers are engaged as they join the institution and that research managers and other institutional stakeholders are committed to delivering development activity. Starting at the point of initial specification (job description and selection criteria) for research posts, it extends through a supported and refined recruitment process to employment and subsequent engagement with professional development.

Recognition and value

This principle requires that the institution manages and rewards research staff fairly and transparently and takes an active role in their development, recognising their contribution and providing them with appropriate development opportunities. It encourages the institution to improve the stability and continuity of researchers' employment.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing your HR strategy in relation to research staff, ensuring they are acknowledged and valued and have equal access to facilities, appraisal and development opportunities, irrespective of contractual status
- reviewing the institutional career progression framework for research staff, ensuring transparency in progression and reward, pay and conditions
- exploring how institutional funding systems can be used to support continuity of employment research staff, such as bridge funding between grants
- reviewing how well your appraisal system meets the needs of research staff in practice
- looking at effectiveness of your communications with research staff.

Code of Practice for the Management of Research Staff (University of Edinburgh)

www.researcherdevelopment.ed.ac.uk/CoP/Contents.html

The University of Edinburgh has introduced a Code of Practice to encourage the timely and effective provision of support to research staff in their chosen career paths. The Code sets out key responsibilities for the department, research manager and the researcher directing them to relevant resources. The Code of Practice is not intended to be a prescriptive 'one size fits all' approach, but rather an impetus and encouragement to departments to consider career development in active discussions. Staff are encouraged to adapt it for local use and to the specific needs of groups of researchers.

Recruitment and Selection

Many of the Concordat's recommendations simply represent good human resources practice but there is an opportunity to re-examine your practices and in particular to scrutinise how these impact research staff. The Concordat encourages employers to examine the way in which they recruit and retain research staff, focussing on transparency, fairness and consistency. Institutions are also asked to think about their use fixed-term contracts and changes that may be needed to implement the Concordat's principles.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing your institution's existing HR policies and strategies to see how well they meet the principles of the Concordat
- reviewing institutional policy and practice on the use of fixed-term contracts to ensure that their use is minimised in line with the Concordat's principles and the Fixed Term Employees Regulations (2002)
- reviewing recruitment and selection policy and guidelines for research staff posts including the advertising of new posts, the composition and diversity of recruitment panels
- working with staff development colleagues to ensure that recruitment and selection training and guidance is appropriate and promoted to research managers.

Redeployment list (University of Wales, Swansea)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/736

The University of Wales, Swansea are trialling a process for the redeployment of research staff. This development allows staff with less than three months left on their contract's to be informed of and have the opportunity to apply for vacancies across the University before they are advertised more widely. The system has a managed e-mail circulation list which notifies all staff with less than three months remaining on their contracts, of vacancies prior to external advertisement. If staff on the list wish to apply for a vacancy, provided they meet the minimum criteria, they will be interviewed before the job is advertised. The effectiveness of the list was reviewed recently and there was overwhelming support from staff. Since establishing the scheme the University has developed a track record in the successful redeployment of research staff.

Researchers' responsibilities

Responsibility for professional development of research staff is recognised by the Concordat as shared between the institution and research staff. Research staff are encouraged to be proactive in creating and taking advantage of development opportunities. You may find that one of the most important actions that you can take in implementing the Concordat is to make researchers aware of its principles and vision for their professional development.

Areas to consider include:

- raising awareness amongst research staff of the institution's commitment to their development and to the principles set out in the Concordat and its vision for professional development
- encouraging and supporting initiatives in your institution that engage research staff in institutional policy and decision making, both related to their career development and as personal development opportunity
- ensuring that managers of researchers and research staff are informed about local HR strategies, policies, roles and responsibilities.

Research staff departmental representatives network (University of Bristol)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/312.html

The University of Bristol has developed a network of departmental research staff representatives. This network exists to enhance grass roots dissemination of information and broaden the views fed back to University management to shape the research staff development agenda at Bristol. Representatives meet each term; meetings are facilitated centrally but are chaired by a member of research staff. Three representatives are members of the Research Staff Working Party responsible for steering the Roberts agenda for the institution. This consultation process has led to real change in policy developments around topics such as the 'Fixed Term Contract Agreement' at Bristol and the reward agenda.

Diversity and equality

The Concordat encourages the recruitment and retention of researchers from the widest pool of available talent with the expectation that the research base will be enhanced by diversity. A commitment to a diverse and non-discriminatory workforce is supported by UK law and builds on good practice in research institutions across the UK. Nonetheless the demanding nature of research work can often have a detrimental and disproportionate effect on certain groups.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing your diversity and equality policies and practices, with senior managers and managers of researchers, to ensure that these reflect models of best practice in creating an inclusive research environment
- regularly reviewing the demographic profile of the institution's research staff workforce and taking positive action as appropriate
- ensuring that all staff, especially line managers are informed of institutional requirements and policies relating to diversity and equality and national resources such as Premia (www.premia.ac.uk) and Athena Swan (www.athenaswan.org.uk).

Athena Swan Gold Award (University of York)

www.york.ac.uk/research/athena/athena_submission.html

The Department of Chemistry at the University of York is the only department in the UK to have won an Athena Swan Gold Award. The department supports junior female academic staff by establishing collaborations with more senior colleagues on joint research grants and studentships. For external academic appointments, potential female candidates are identified and encouraged to apply. Advertisements emphasise family friendly policies and opportunities for part-time working or job-share. Interview panels always contain at least one female academic.

Implementation and review

The Concordat highlights the value of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat principles both at institutional level and across the UK. Sharing of good practice between institutions is strongly encouraged. A high level Strategy Group will oversee UK progress and will undertake an initial benchmark process and subsequent review. The Concordat advocates the use of existing sources of data and information, including a revised version of the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS).

As an HR specialist you are likely to be gathering data about researchers' experience of work and management as well as information around their length of service and next destinations. Consider how this knowledge can best be captured and communicated within your institution to inform policy development, and to other institutions as part of sector-wide sharing of practice.

Areas to consider include:

- ensuring that research staff are clearly identified as a staff cohort in institutional data systems and HESA staff record returns
- reviewing institutional data collection mechanisms relating to research staff and how this data can best be collated, analysed and reported to help inform policy development and practice, including the use of exit interviews or surveys to provide feedback
- championing the use of CROS throughout the institution and using the results to inform policy development, create action plans and provide feedback to research staff.

Alumni career tracking project (University of Aberdeen)

www.abdn.ac.uk/rsd/career_tracking.php

The University of Aberdeen undertook a research project to track the career histories of research staff employed at the university between 2000 and 2007. The project assembled a database of research staff and drew on departmental knowledge about their destinations as well as sending out a questionnaire. It uncovered rich data which allowed the University to assess the experience of former staff including key issues around skills training, professional development and career pathways.

Other Vitae resources

Vitae works alongside policy makers and staff supporting the development of researchers. We support a growing network and offer a range of tools and events to help with the sharing of practice and expertise. Find out more by visiting our website at www.vitae.ac.uk, in particular:

- Policy (www.vitae.ac.uk/policy) provides an overview of the key organisations and policies relating to both postgraduate researchers and research staff
- Resources (www.vitae.ac.uk/resources) provides tools and support to promote collaboration, sharing of practice and resources relating to researcher careers and their professional development.

Other useful links:

- Athena Swan (www.athenaswan.org.uk)
- Concordat website (www.researchconcordat.ac.uk)
- European Charter and Code (http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm?I1=0&I2=3)
- CROS (www.survey.bris.ac.uk/support/news/cros2008-09)
- Research Councils UK (www.rcuk.ac.uk)
- UPA (www.upa.ac.uk)
- Universities UK (www.universitiesuk.ac.uk)

Vitae database of practice

Most of the examples of practice given in this briefing are drawn from institutional entries in the Vitae database of practice (www.vitae.ac.uk/dop). The examples are intended as a starting point and you are encouraged to explore the database of practice further as you consider your institution's response to the Concordat. The database can be searched by the Concordat principles making it easy to find relevant examples. Please engage in sector-wide practice sharing by entering your own practices onto the database.



The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was launched in June 2008. It aims to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and to improve the quantity, quality and impact of research for the benefit of UK society and the economy.

The Concordat provides a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders and institutions with respect to the management of researchers. The Concordat also aims to demonstrate internationally – including to researchers considering coming to work in the UK – the high standards of management and support that can be expected by UK researchers. By adopting its principles the UK also adopts the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk