

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Vitae briefing for research staff

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.

'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.

As a researcher the Concordat should have a direct impact on your life and working conditions. It aims to ensure that researchers are nurtured and supported in managing and planning their careers. By developing your understanding of the intent behind the principles and engaging with institutional processes related to your career development you will help to maximise its impact. This briefing takes each of the Concordat principles in turn, suggesting areas for consideration and providing illustrative 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

The Concordat places personal and professional development at the heart of the experience of research staff and as key to realising the potential of the research workforce and achieving institutions' research strategies. The vision in the Concordat is of open-ended and progressive professional development, where research staff moving through their careers are continuously challenged and discovering new opportunities for development.

Professional development for research staff should be supported from the outset of an employment relationship and regardless of contractual status. The Concordat stresses that responsibility for this is shared by many stakeholders across the institution. Also, it makes clear the value of input from research staff themselves into relevant institutional strategies and decisions.

The Concordat encourages institutions to provide advice, guidance and opportunities that will help you to consider all of the opportunities that are available to you and develop your career in the way that works best for you. The experience that you gain as a researcher can be invaluable in pursuing a range of career paths.

Areas to consider include:

- reflecting on your skills and competencies, identifying skills gaps and examining how your current skills could be translated to other careers
- considering how you can gain useful feedback from your manager, peers and other colleagues. For example you may wish to use your next appraisal or review meeting with your line manager to discuss your career development
- devoting some time to your professional development, perhaps by attending skills training courses, undertaking work shadowing or voluntary work, or undertaking something new within your existing role. It may be that your development could include taking on new responsibilities such as managing people or budgets
- investigating the wide range of career options that are available to you. You may find it helpful to talk to friends and colleagues with different experience or book a consultation with a careers adviser
- finding a personal mentor or joining local, regional or national mentoring schemes.

Researcher development

“ The fact that Cambridge PdocSoc exists is brilliant. It feels supportive to get their email newsletters which also gives practical advice on things like deadlines for fellowship applications.”

Christine, postdoctoral researcher in chemistry

“ My mentor is making me think about me, my future and has given me the self confidence to apply for promotion.”

A MentorSET mentee

“ There is a mailing list for staff development for contract researchers. These include courses on writing grant applications, managing your time etc. Research managers have encouraged me to develop my career by paying for attendance at international conferences and making sure I'm involved in writing up the research for publication.”

Sharon, historical researcher

Researchers' responsibilities

The Concordat is clear that primary responsibility for your career development rests with you. Awareness of wider issues such as national and institutional policy and a commitment to lifelong professional development are key aspects of your professionalism as a researcher. Although the Concordat suggests that your institution should put in place a range of training, support and development opportunities it is up to you to make the most of opportunities provided.

Areas for researchers to consider include:

- making a commitment to your continued professional development (CPD), for example, keeping a personal development log or participating in a programme of development activities
- thinking about the knowledge, experience, skills and attributes required for both a non-academic and an academic path, and how you can evidence them. Find out about, and make the most of, courses and schemes offered by your institution to develop these further
- broadening your experience base through involvement in activities around knowledge transfer, outreach and teaching and by being an active member of your research community
- taking the lead on an activity or campaign. Consider whether you can use your skills to organise a group, activity or service to meet an institutional or community need
- making sure that you are represented and can input into institutional policy and practice. Join a committee in your institution, your union or a postdoctoral society.

Research staff societies (University of Edinburgh)

www.researcherdevelopment.ed.ac.uk/Societies.html

Research staff at Edinburgh have set up a number of school or research institute-based research staff societies. These societies are run by and for research staff. They provide opportunities for networking and mutual support as well as a focus for University training programmes and other support services. In turn, societies are helping the University to engage researchers more directly in the tailoring of institutional support to local needs, and to embed key initiatives.

Recruitment and selection

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 the way in which they use fixed-term contracts.

As a researcher you are likely to find that this has direct implications for job searching and recruitment and selection processes. For example:

- research positions are more likely to formally advertised
- job descriptions more structured and having clear relationships to pay and progression
- more formal interview processes, often involving human resources specialists.

Areas to consider include:

- investigating the recruitment and selection procedures used by your institution and other organisations for whom you may be interested in working
- taking a more pro-active approach to job searching by reviewing job descriptions and person specifications for the types of positions you are interested in and identifying skills or areas of experience you want to develop
- making an appointment with a careers advisor to explore your options. Many institutions now have specialist careers resources for research staff
- understanding how best to market yourself when applying for academic and non-academic positions. Use both your institutional and national resources such as the Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk/marketingself) to build your knowledge.

Science careers forums

<http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/>

Produced by the journal 'Science', this website is a comprehensive, if US-centric, resource for science careers. Job adverts, interesting career related articles and advice sit side by side with lively user forums. The forums are a particularly good place to share experience and ask advice about academic (and non-academic) recruitment from others who have been through the experience.

Recognition and value

transparently; your contribution should be recognised and you should be provided with opportunities for development. It encourages your institution to take an active role in your development and to work to increase the stability and continuity of researcher's employment.

Areas to consider include:

- investigating your institution's human resources (HR) strategy and how this relates to research staff, particularly your access to facilities, appraisal, pay and progression processes and development opportunities, irrespective of your contractual status
- arranging an appraisal with your line manager or principal investigator (PI). This should give you an opportunity to consider your own skills, career progression and opportunities for recognition, as well as reviewing progress on your project
- finding out what the higher education unions have to say on issues around recognition and value
- understanding how you can provide feedback or input on your institution's approach to valuing and rewarding research staff.

Researchers Survival Guide (UCU)

www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/5/0/ucuresurvivalguide_apr08.pdf

The UCU have produced this booklet to help researchers to understand their rights. The guide provides advice on law, regulation and standards and illustrates the advice with irreverent cartoons. The guide goes on to suggest ways to have an impact on how your institution treats you.

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.

As institutions review their policies to support a diverse research workforce this may open up opportunities for research staff to benefit more from practices such as flexible working, career breaks, and increased support with issues such as working with a disability and working in a second language.

Areas to consider include:

- exploring how your institution currently supports a diverse research workforce and how this applies to your own circumstances
- whether you could benefit from additional flexibility or support. For example you have the right to have your request for flexible working considered by your employer although this can be refused on the grounds that your role does not suit flexible working; consider any mutual benefits for you and your employer
- making positive suggestions about how things could be improved to your research manager or HR specialists, for example encouraging your department to apply for an Athena Swan award (www.athenaswan.org.uk) or using resources from the Premia website (www.premia.ac.uk)
- participating in any surveys that explore staff well-being. Policies are likely to develop in response to staff needs and feedback.

Flexible working

"I currently work four days a week, and have found the University's flexibility, in allowing me to work part time for a while, invaluable in combining my career with family life. In the long-term I expect to return to full-time employment."

Ruth Cameron, joint director of the Cambridge Centre for Medical Materials

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 a researcher your views on its impact are likely to be sought in a number of ways. You may be asked to comment on your experiences by your institution or your funder as well as through national schemes like CROS. By engaging positively in research and evaluation around the implementation of the Concordat you will be able to have an impact on the way in which support for research staff develops in the future.

Areas to consider include:

- engaging pro-actively in institutional or national surveys, focus groups and other research projects such as CROS. Your involvement will help your institution to judge how it is doing and improve conditions for research staff
- giving feedback following any formal development courses or activities. This enables your institution to tailor them to research staff needs in the future
- getting involved in research staff representative organisations and in responding to consultations
- asking for copies of the results of any research that you take part in and how the results will be used. It may also be useful to feedback the findings of research to relevant people in your institution.

Researcher representation on the Research Staff Sub-Committee (University College London)

www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/rs/index.php

Researcher staff are represented on the University College London Research Staff Sub-Committee. This senior university committee is chaired by the Vice-Provost (Research) and considers all matters concerning the appointment, training and career development of research staff. It feeds into both the Appointments and Promotions Committee and the Human Resources Policy Committee. Researcher representation at this level ensures that issues of importance to research staff inform policy and practice within the institution.

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 the following sections:

- Research staff (www.vitae.ac.uk/researchstaff) offers professional development support, advice and resources for research staff
- Careers (www.vitae.ac.uk/careers) provides career development resources and information for researchers
- Policy and practice (www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice) is designed for institutions provide policy and practical information and resources around issues relating to researcher careers and personal development.

Other useful links:

- Athena Swan award (www.athenaswan.org.uk)
- Concordat website (www.researchconcordat.ac.uk)
- European Charter and Code (http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm?l1=0&l2=3)
- CROS (www.survey.bris.ac.uk/support/news/cros2008-09)
- Jobs.ac.uk (www.jobs.ac.uk)
- Premia (www.premia.ac.uk)
- Prospects (www.prospects.ac.uk)
- Science Careers (sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/)
- Times Higher (www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/)
- UK Resource Centre for Women in SET (www.ukrc4setwomen.org/)
- University and Colleges Union (UCU) (www.ucu.org.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 and your institution's response to the Concordat. The database can be searched by the Concordat principles making it easy to find relevant examples.



The Concordat

to Support the Career Development of Researchers

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