The Concordat has had an important role in improving the culture of support for researchers" 

"The focus of the Concordat must be to help strengthen the talent pipeline and development of skilled researchers to encourage research and innovation"

Ten years on the Concordat Strategy Group (CSG) commissioned an independent review of the Concordat and the resultant report will be published at the Vitae conference. The CSG has welcomed the report, which acknowledges the journey that the HE sector has made over the last ten years in implementing the principles of the Concordat. However, it also recognises that more needs to be done in providing a healthy and supportive environment for the professional and career development of researchers and the Concordat needs to be updated to help drive these changes.

As part of our submission to the review Vitae published ‘Five Steps Forward’ in 2017, which used the results of the five Careers in Research Online Surveys (CROS) and four Principal Investigators & Research Leaders Surveys (PIRLS) that have run since 2008 to identify the progress that has been made. We have seen a substantial increase in research staff participating in induction processes, appraisal and performance review, with many finding these helpful. The large majority of research staff feel encouraged to engage in personal and career development, with some increase in their participation in these activities – although much less than we would have hoped.

Although there has been some reduction in the use of fixed-term contracts from 82% to 77%, they are still the predominant contract for research staff, with 20% of research staff being employed on contracts of a year or less. Consistently over the last ten years 80% of research staff have aspired to an academic career, but more worryingly 60% have expected to achieve this. The sector has made little progress in encouraging research staff to consider and value a career beyond academia.

Next year looks as if it will be the most important year for the Concordat since its launch in 2008
The Concordat Review report, draws out these challenges and makes a strong case for how a revised Concordat can make a real difference in improving the environment and career development for researchers. Its key messages are that:

- The Concordat can play a role in creating a healthy and vital research base and supply highly-talented researchers for all employment sectors.

- The primary focus of the Concordat is to support research staff, but its applicability should be widened to include all staff who are engaged in research. It also has resonances for the support of postgraduate researchers.

- The principles of the Concordat should be aimed at the key audiences: institutions; principal investigators; researchers and funders. This includes a new principle for principal investigators and one for funders.

- The Concordat should be owned by the sector and be a live ‘document’ reflecting the changing nature of research and legislation. The governance of the Concordat should reflect this broad ownership.

- The career development of research staff should include opportunities to develop their research leadership capabilities and invest in their professional development.

- Research staff should be treated fairly compared with other staff with respect to opportunities for promotion and progression and the use of fixed term contracts.

- Better longitudinal data is needed on the career paths of researchers within and beyond academia and which researcher competencies are valued by employers.

- Monitoring and reviewing progress, and sharing good practice drives progress.

Vitae strongly welcomes the review of the Concordat and we are looking forward to working with the sector to create a revised Concordat as a framework to drive forward improvements in the professional and career development support for research staff. We particularly support the inclusion of the additional principles for the Concordat, having highlighted in our submission1 to the Review Panel the importance of engaging principal investigators and funders.

The relevant institutional policies and procedures relating to the Concordat are now mostly in place and many institutions have specific researcher development programmes for research staff. To make a real difference over the next ten years to the day-to-day experiences of research staff we need to tackle the systemic issues within academia. We need to create a healthier working environment, broaden the recognition and reward structures for researchers and improve how researcher occupations beyond academia are valued by researchers and more generally the academic community.

1. see consultation submission: www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat review
Next steps

**VITAE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE**

The Vitae conference, will see the start of a programme of activity relating to the Concordat. Professor David Bogle, Chair of the Concordat Review Panel and Head of Graduate School, University College London (UCL) will present the findings and recommendations from the Review Panel. Professor Julia Buckingham, CBE, Chair of the Concordat Strategy Group and Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University will provide a response to the report. The CSG will also launch a sector consultation to inform the revision of the Concordat in light of the review recommendations. We will be running workshops at the conference that will explore how a revised Concordat can help drive cultural change in the research environment for researchers and the implications for implementation of the principles for institutions and other stakeholders.

The CSG is developing a communication strategy to increase awareness of the revised Concordat by institutional senior management, principal investigators, research staff, funders and others engaged in research. It will also be reviewing its membership and terms of reference to ensure that it reflects all stakeholders.

**HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD**

Once we have the revised Concordat the CSG will reflect on the implications for the UK process for the HR Excellence in Research Award, which uses the Concordat as its underpinning framework and has been a very positive driver of progress. This will also need to take into account that the European process for the HR Excellence in Research Award has recently been enhanced. Initial discussions with the European Commission have been positive; however, ultimately the future of the HR Excellence in Research Award in the UK will depend on the outcome of the Brexit negotiations and the UK’s continued participation in the next framework programme ‘Horizon Europe’.

Vitae will also work with the CROS/PIRLS Sector Steering Group to explore how CROS\(^2\) and PIRLS\(^3\) can better reflect the principles of the revised Concordat and the changes in the research environment. We will be asking institutions for their views on how the surveys should be developed further.

“The Concordat is necessary . . . to propel the UK training environment to be the best in the world”
There will be three Vitae Working Groups and the revised Concordat principles will have relevance to all of them:

- Researcher Careers and Professional Development Working Group
- Wellbeing and Mental Health Working Group
- CPD for Researcher Developers Working Group

Vitae Working Group activities will include forums dedicated to the working group interest areas; publications reporting sector intelligence and progress in addressing the trends and challenges of the interest areas; formal and informal practice sharing and networking opportunities; as well as digital activities to engage the wider research community.

Take a look at the Vitae Working Groups/Annual Programme 2018/19 for more details.

**ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY**

Throughout the year we will be seeking views and feedback from our members on how best we can support the implementation of the revised Concordat principles.

Our new Vitae Working Groups will aim to provide all members who have a stake in the policy and practice of researcher development with excellent networking and practice sharing opportunities and in turn, will help support the implementation of the revised Concordat principles.

“Increased value must be placed on the skills and experiences of researchers who move to roles beyond academia”

**VITAE RESOURCES**

Member resources and more information on the Concordat including links to the following policy documents can be found at: www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-review

- The UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, 2008
- Review of Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, 2018
- Five Steps Forward, Vitae 2017
- Are you supporting all your staff engaged in research? Vitae 2016
- Every Researcher Counts: equality and diversity in researcher careers, Vitae 2016
- Equality and diversity actions for all, Vitae 2015
- Women in research, Vitae 2016
- One size does not fit all: Arts and Humanities doctoral and early career researchers’ professional development survey, Vitae 2017
- Preparing Researchers for an Unknown Future: Cultures, Behaviours and Mindsets, Vitae 2018