

1 Executive summary

The almost 600 responses to the consultation by the Concordat Strategy Group (CSG) on the recommendations of the independent review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers came from a range of stakeholders: 20% from organisations, primarily universities; 80% from individuals, primarily research staff, lecturers and professors. The thoroughness and richness of responses revealed a high level of commitment to the Concordat and improving the career development of research staff. Many saw the revision of the Concordat as an opportunity to provide fresh impetus to this agenda and link into the wider UK strategy for research and innovation.

Overwhelmingly, respondents welcomed the opportunity to revitalise the Concordat, and supported the recommendations and proposed focus on clearly defining the responsibilities and interdependencies of the key stakeholder groups: funders, employers, principal investigators/managers of researchers and researchers. There was less agreement on expressing the Principles as obligations, with many organisations preferring these as expectations. Conversely, many individual respondents expressed scepticism about whether anything would change and supported specific obligations with associated consequences for not achieving them.

There were some key areas where strong concerns were raised about the detail and implementation of some of the recommendations. A theme that fed through the responses to

The definition of a researcher should be explicitly broadened to include all research staff



all the recommendations highlighted the importance of recognising the diversity between and within institutions and providing the flexibility for institutions to implement the Principles of the Concordat to best suit their institutional contexts and research environments. This was most apparent in relation to defining the beneficiaries for the Concordat and any future requirements for professional development. There was a clear distinction of views between research-intensive institutions with large populations of research staff, and less research-intensive institutions with correspondingly smaller numbers of research staff, who often have strategies to increase the research capacity of their academic staff.

The importance of professional development for research staff was well supported, particularly by individual respondents. However, there were institutional concerns about who an obligation to allow 20% of time would apply to and how it would be resourced; with many expecting this to be funded through grants. Several respondents highlighted the risks of creating a two-tier system for research staff and lack of parity with other staff. Many of the concerns centred around identifying who this recommendation applied to, the definition of professional development activities and the unintended message that focusing on research independence would send.

Increase support for researchers to develop their career and research identity



There was overwhelming support for highlighting equality, diversity and inclusion; integrating this throughout the Concordat and for extending it beyond protected characteristics. The

overlap with Athena Swan was regularly mentioned, with many noting the importance of linking into existing legislation and frameworks to avoid duplication. The importance of highlighting wellbeing and mental health within the Concordat emerged as a strong theme, with several respondents noting the need to include associated support for managers of researchers and consideration of their needs.

Precarity of employment was recognised as a significant challenge, with many individual responses highlighting this as the single most important problem to solve. Organisation

Address the use of fixed term contracts for researchers



responses identified this as a systemic issue and cited funders' roles in reducing the use of fixed term contracts through more flexibility in grant conditions. Forced mobility and lack of progression were both linked to the use of fixed term contracts. However, the risk of the Concordat providing unintended messages was also highlighted, particularly increasing expectations of long-term careers in academia, and undervaluing careers beyond academia and the benefits of mobility. Equality of opportunity and articulating the respective responsibilities for all stakeholder groups came through as important considerations. The value of sharing examples of existing practice was commonly noted in this area.

Everyone agreed that the Concordat should be concise, written in plain language and accessible to different stakeholders through 'lenses' and interactive technology. Practice sharing through a dedicated UK repository and local and UK events were generally welcomed, together with regular updating of the Concordat to keep it current. A majority commented on the significant challenge of and need to raise awareness with research staff and managers of researchers.

There was strong agreement that the Concordat should be owned by the sector and the membership of the CSG should better reflect the four stakeholder groups, particularly in greater research staff representation. There was strong support for senior institutional management championing the Concordat as well as significant, but not universal, support for individual organisations signing up to the Concordat Principles.

Organisation respondents valued reviewing progress at UK and organisational level, although there were mixed views with some stating concern about the administrative burden and the need for collectively agreed, responsible metrics that recognise institutional and disciplinary context. Embedding progress review into existing mechanisms, such as REF and grant reporting processes, was suggested by some. Contextualised benchmarking and sharing practice were seen as helpful with CROS, PIRLS and the HR Excellence in Research Award all being mentioned. Some respondents raised concerns about the potential use of league tables, preferring a qualitative case study approach which could take into account context and facilitate practice sharing. There was overwhelming support for having comprehensive data on research staff career paths at institutional and UK level.

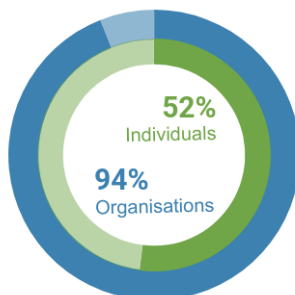
Benchmarking progress against others is helpful



Institutions should be signatories of the revised Concordat



HR Excellence in Research Award is useful in supporting implementation of the Concordat principles



Collection of researcher career data is important at an organisational and national level



Following the consultation, a Concordat Writing Group was set up by the CSG to take these outcomes and reflect them in the revision of the Concordat Principles, responsibilities and supporting explanations. It is expected that the draft revised Concordat will be shared with the sector in May/June and finalised at the end of June. The CSG is currently reviewing its governance structures, membership and terms of reference.

“The Concordat can play a role in changing the course of employment and the entire research and innovation ecosystem by focusing and rewarding the creation of stable employment conditions and genuine career paths through the structuring of grants and the oversight of institutions as employers. Ten years on from the original Concordat, when so much that is fundamental to the employment of researchers has NOT changed, it would be a disgrace for the sector to miss this opportunity to create a document that can help drive real change.”

Extract from

Consultation on the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

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