Introduction to the Researcher Development Concordat

October 2019

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, also known as the Researcher Development Concordat, is an agreement between employers of researchers and research funders on the expectations for the professional development and employment conditions of researchers in the UK.

Organisations sign up to the Concordat to show their commitment to achieving its Principles

It is one of a series of ‘Concordats’, which together set out the expectations for the academic research environment in the UK.

The original agreement made in 1996, called A Concordat to Provide a Framework for the Career Management of Contract Research Staff in Universities and Colleges, was between funding bodies and universities. It aimed to improve the support for contract research staff (now more usually termed research staff) in their career development.

Since 1996, UK researchers' expectations regarding career development and working conditions have grown. The interests and responsibilities of research funders and institutions have also changed in response to new employment legislation, amendments to terms and conditions of grants and the publication of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in 2005, which was broadly based on the earlier UK Concordat.

The 2008 Concordat aimed to provide a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders and institutions with respect to the management of researchers. It has since been updated in 2019 following an Independent Review of the 2008 Concordat, and a subsequent sector Consultation on the recommendations of that review. The Researcher Development Concordat was published in September 2019.
Back in 1996, there was very limited career and professional development available to research staff at all, and even paid maternity leave and sick leave were not necessarily provided.

Since 2002, it has been illegal to treat fixed-term contract researchers less favourably than other employees.

However, not all the challenges have been addressed and resolved. The very nature of fixed term contracts can pose significant challenges, especially when combined with, for example, raising a family, disability or caring responsibilities.

Through each iteration of the Concordat, progress has been on reducing the proportion of research staff employed on fixed term contracts, but there is collective agreement that more needs to be done, and so there was a decision to revise the agreement to keep pace with changing research environment and progress the overall ambitions of the sector.

These are some of the challenges surrounding the employment and development of researchers that we, as a sector, have agreed we need to do better on:

- Providing careers support and development opportunities
- Improving job security
- And addressing progression and promotion opportunities for research staff

This data is from the consultation report published in May 2019, showing responses from organisations and individuals on what challenges the Concordat should address.

https://www.vitae.ac.uk/news/concordat_to_support_the_career_development_of_researchers_update_on_consultation
The Researcher Development Concordat contains three overarching principles of:
1. Environment and culture
2. Employment
3. Professional and Career Development

Within each of those four principles, there are obligations for each of the four main stakeholder groups:
- Researchers
- Managers of researchers
- Institutions
- Funders

As an example of those obligations, within the Principle for Environment and Culture, each stakeholder group has an obligation to address the mental health and wellbeing of researchers.

These complementary expectations acknowledge that any one stakeholder group is not likely to make progress in isolation, particularly against some of the more systemic and persistent challenges.
In the case of job security, employers and funders, as the signatories, have the main actions in seeking opportunities to support more sustainable employment for researchers. This includes having an action plan and reporting on progress each year, both internally to their governing body, but also through public reports.

In roughly a year’s time, you will be able to view these reports and check what your funder or your institution has committed to do, and what (if any) progress has been made against that.

Under Professional and Career Development, one of the biggest changes is that researchers will be able to spend at least 10 days a year on their professional development, which can include a range of activities exploring or preparing for future careers, including and beyond academia.
A collection of resources have been provided to help the research community engage with the Researcher Development Concordat – see https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/supporting-resources

To become a signatory, please email: Concordat@vitae.ac.uk
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