

Comments on UK position statement from UK HEIs

Vitae recently invited comments from colleagues in UK HEIs and stakeholder organisations, via a survey, to inform the UK position statement in response to the European Commission 'Feasibility study for the development of an accreditation mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe'.

Responses were given both on behalf of organisations and individually. 30 responses were provided in total, 14 of which were formally on behalf of organisations. All respondents broadly supported the UK position statement.

The survey asked respondents to provide free text response to the following:

- highlight any areas where you strongly agree or disagree with the statement
- outline any opportunities and/or concerns that you have identified in relation to the proposed certification.

The main themes that are noted from the comments provided were based around:

- **Overall approach**

"Concern that the rationale and evidence of need for an accreditation mechanism have not been fully articulated – what problem would accreditation actually solve?"

"Concern that the spotlight is firmly trained on HEIs; it is equally important that some of the onus rests with funding bodies so that funding arrangements are not set out in a way to potentially disadvantage researcher careers in any way."

- **The importance of institutional autonomy**

"I agree with all concerns raised in the UK position statement, and also with all of its suggestions for ensuring that the desired outcomes can be achieved in less regulated ways, utilising existing arrangements."

"[I] strongly agree with support for autonomy of universities for not adding additional layer of box ticking."

- **Culture change and embedding change on the ground**

"My main concern is that it becomes a paper exercise which consumes time without driving up standards. To be truly transformative one needs to change culture, and that is not done by getting everyone to concentrate on minimum threshold standards"

"Those set out in 1.3.3 are key. Kitemarking usually becomes an arms race based on form filling and presentation, whereas at the moment the individualised and flexible nature of the HR Excellence [in Research Award] means real changes are taking place on the ground"

"Danger of further extension of a tick-box approach rather than focus on improving conditions on the ground - which surely must be the overall goal."

"Key concern is creating a tick box environment in order to comply. We need to ensure that good HR practice is embedded in day to day activity not something you do to get a certificate."

- **Building on the progress already made through the HR Excellence in Research Award process**

“My concern is that the proposed certification in some senses bypasses all the work that Institutions have put into the HR Excellence Award. In my opinion that system does the job it's designed for so any competing system devalues it, and causes confusion. The proposed certification should ideally build on the HR Excellence scheme, like an HR Excellence +, for those Institutions who wish to put themselves forward for it.”

“I strongly agree with the statement regarding the need to build on the existing HR Excellence in Research badge and to only introduce a certification where genuine benefit can be achieved.”

- **Mixed messaging – moving from ‘excellent’ to ‘good’**

“Concerns are that 'genuinely good HR management' appears to be a level below and therefore not as aspirational than the current HR Excellence in Research Award - it gives a very mixed message to organisations. Why would you want to work towards being 'good' when you may already be recognised as 'excellent'? Organisations have worked hard to achieve HR Excellence in Research.”

“The HR Excellence Award is about being 'excellent' and this new benchmark is about being 'good'. The University feels that there has to be consistency of language, or the whole purpose and message will be diluted. We also have reservations in to point 1.3.7: We do not disagree with the principle of the need to examine both the breadth and depth of policies and their impact, but are to be convinced that this can be evaluated and evidenced effectively through the 'opinions' of researchers.”

- **The potential link between a certification and access to European funding**

“We share the concerns outlined in the UK position statement, particularly those in paragraphs 1.3.3 and 1.3.4. Should funding be conditional on achieving accreditation, it is more likely to become a 'tick box' exercise completed by a research administrator, rather than an opportunity to get institutional buy-in. Rather than introducing another new system, it would be more effective to build on the existing HR Excellence in Research process which has had time to develop and become embedded.”

“We do not believe that extra accreditation will add value. We agree that there is a danger that, should funding be conditional on the award, institutions may feel they are being presented with a 'tick-box' process. The UK already has several initiatives in place which support this work (e.g. the Concordat, Athena Swan, Vitae and the HR Excellence in Research Award). We are strongly in agreement with 1.3.6 and 1.3.7.”

“In light of the concerns expressed in 1.3.3 of the UK position statement, there is an opportunity to ensure that all types and size of research organisation are fully supported to participate in eventual accreditation (if indeed this be a justified way forward), so that they are not prevented from bidding for funding

The final version of the UK statement can be found [here](#).

If you would like to contribute to the Technopolis survey you can do so [here](#). The deadline is 31 August 2013.