



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



The Concordat
to Support the Career Development of Researchers



realising
the potential
of researchers

Note for UK institutions February 2014

The UK process for the HR Excellence in Research Award external review: note for the UK institutions

1. Background

1.1 In 2010, Vitae agreed with the European Commission a UK-wide process which enables UK higher education institutions (HEIs) to gain the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award. This acknowledges institutions' alignment with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment (C&C). The UK process incorporates both the QAA Quality Code for Research Degree Programmes and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers to enable institutions that have published Concordat implementation plans to gain the HR Excellence in Research Award. The UK approach includes on-going national evaluation and benchmarking.

1.2 The fifth step of the five step process set out for institutions with the Award is an external review process to be undertaken four years after receiving the Award. The first non-UK institutions are due their external evaluation in spring 2014. The first set of UK institutions is due for external review in September 2014.

1.3 The Information Note from the Commission on the Institutional Human Resources Strategy¹ specifies that "*at least every four years, the institution prepares a short (e.g. four pages) report, showing the progress made towards the objectives of its HR Strategy for Researchers and its compliance with the C&C principles. The report is evaluated either by a panel of external reviewers or through national Quality Assessment (QA) mechanisms, such as National Evaluation Agencies or peer reviews*". The external review will confirm whether the institution should retain the Award.

At European level, peer reviewers have been appointed and will visit institutions being reviewed. They will review that actions have been taken by institutions consistent with their stated plans. The level to which the principles of the C&C are embedded within institutional practice will not be the main criteria for retaining the Award although it will be explored as part of the peer review process.

1.4 On 15 July 2013, after wide consultation at the Vitae conferences and Policy Fora, and with UHR and other stakeholders², the Concordat Executive Group confirmed that there was an opportunity to leverage the external review process for the benefit of the UK, particularly in the context of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat. The Concordat Executive Group felt that an emphasis on enhancement, measuring implementation and benchmarking at UK level was important, as well as retaining the international comparability of the Award.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

² Workshops at the Vitae Policy Forum (April 2012), Annual Conference (Sept 2012) and Policy Forum (Jan 2013) explored the issues, and the Research Staff Development Advisory Group and the Impact and Evaluation Group also input. There were two workshops at the Universities HR conference in May 2013. The recommendations from these various discussions have not always been consistent; the subsequent meeting on 1 August aimed to deepen the thinking about the review process with a view to making concrete recommendations for further consultation. The following 15 institutions were represented at the meeting: Anglia Ruskin, Bangor, Brunel and Durham Universities, Institute of Education, King's College London, Newcastle University, Queen's University of Belfast, Universities of Edinburgh, Hertfordshire, Kent, Leeds, Nottingham, Portsmouth and Surrey. These universities had a range of experience with regards to the Award, from those who have already undertaken their two year review, to those who have recently achieved the Award



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1.5 As a result, Vitae invited all UK institutions with the HR Excellence in Research Award to a meeting on 1 August to make recommendations about the external evaluation process for the HR Excellence in Research Award. The recommendations were circulated to all Award holders in the UK for comment in August 2013 and a workshop at the Vitae conference also provided opportunity for input on the recommendations. Following this, Vitae also circulated the recommendations from that meeting for further comment from UK institutions via an online survey. The results of the survey strongly supported the proposals set out and are included as an Annex for information. The survey results were also discussed at the October meeting of the Concordat Executive Group meeting and then subsequently at the Concordat Strategy Group meeting in November which also endorsed the proposed process.

2. UK process for the HR Excellence in Research Award external review

There has been strong support for the HR Excellence in Research process to continue to be managed at a UK level (96% agreement from survey respondents and recommended by the Concordat Executive and Strategy Groups). This is to continue to link the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the HR Excellence Award and to ensure that:

- the unique context of the UK researcher development environment is taken into account whilst ensuring comparability with the European process
- there are efficiencies for individual institutions through having national level coordination
- the process is light touch but robust, in order not to create vast administrative overload
- the process is not more complicated/challenging than the initial process to gain the award
- institutions are incentivised to strive for continuous development
- there are ways of recognising good or excellent practice.

For institutions, the external review process will be as follows:

- institutions will publish a short, four page report against an outline template to summarise progress against their published Concordat implementation plan
- there will be an option to provide additional information, such as internal documents which the institution feels would usefully be shared with reviewers but which the institution has not published
- institutions can provide draft submissions to Vitae for comment and feedback in advance of final submission to the reviewers
- each institution's report and progress will be reviewed by three reviewers
- final submissions along with any confidential documentation will be sent by Vitae to the external review panel who will review the documentation
- reviewers may undertake telephone interviews to clarify aspects of the report (if required)
- peer reviewers will not undertake site visits, but reserve the right to do so if major concerns arise
- the external reviewers will meet after the reviews to discuss and moderate the reviews.

For the UK external review process, we will therefore appoint a **panel of UK peer reviewers** who will work alongside a selected number of international reviewers to undertake the external reviews in the UK. Therefore the panel of UK external reviewers will:

- be comprised of those who have taken a leading role in getting the HR Excellence in Research Award in their own institution, or have equivalent experience
- be from a range of roles within the institutions
- include non-UK European reviewers to ensure comparability with the European process



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- have the backing of their institution/organisation and thus will not be paid to undertake this work.

Clear criteria for appointing peer reviewers will be circulated, and applications will be reviewed by the existing UK HR Excellence in Research panel.

On appointment, training and guidance will be available for the peer reviewers.

In response to requests we will seek to identify and publish examples of excellent practice, with appropriate institutional permissions, through the external review process.

The current UK panel will continue to oversee the whole HR Excellence in Research Award process through its mandate from the Concordat Strategy Group.

The HR Excellence in Research Award process will continue to be managed by Vitae and will be included as part of the institutional membership subscription fees effective from 2015.

Timeframe for next steps

Activity	Date
Announce call for peer reviewers	End Jan/early Feb
Call closes for peer reviewers	End Feb/early March
Peer reviewer selection	End March
Peer reviewer training	May
4 year review paperwork deadline – 1 st tranche	September
4 year review telephone interviews/correspondence with institutions	October
Reviewer panel meeting	November
Final results	December

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Annex 1

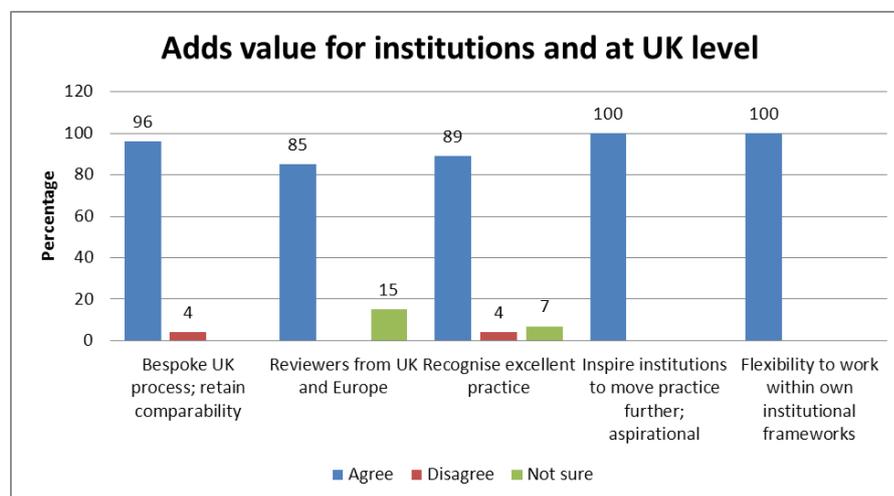
Consultation Results

27 responses were given to the consultation survey

17 responses are formally on behalf of institutions (including 10 Russell Group or then 1994 Group (not all specified the HEI))

10 are individual responses but include 4 responses from staff at Russell Group or then 1994 Group institutions

Section A: Key features to ensure that the external review process for the HR Excellence in Research Award adds value for institutions and at UK level



1. Do you agree with the recommendations that the review process should:

1a. be a bespoke UK process but retain comparability with the European process:
96% agree (26 of 27)

1b. include representation from the EC and European reviewers:
85% agree (23/27), 15% not sure (4/27)

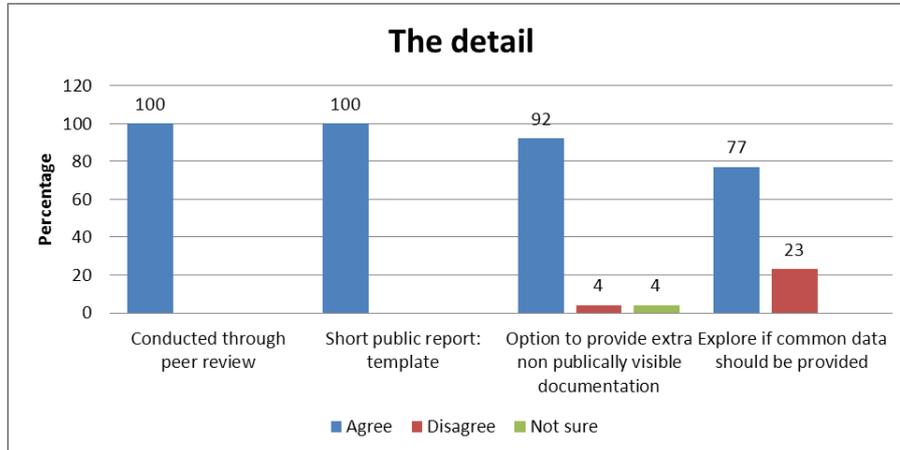
1c. recognise excellent practice in some way:
89% agree (24/27), 4% disagree (1/27), 7% not sure (2/27)

1d. aim to inspire institutions to improve their practice further and be truly aspirational, and not be a tick box process:
100% agree

1e. have flexibility for institutions to work within their own institutional framework:
100% agree

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Section B: The detail of the external review process



2. Do you agree with the recommendations that:

2a. The external evaluation will be conducted through a peer review process:

100% agree

2b. Institutions should provide a short public report on progress within a template (similar to the UK two-year review process):

100% agree

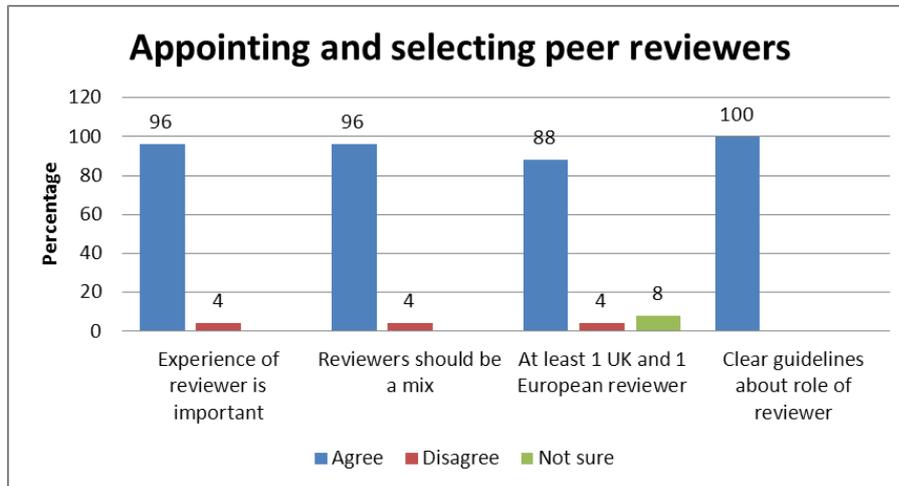
2c. Institutions should also have the option to provide internal 'not publicly visible' documentation to the peer reviewers in support of review:

92% agree (25/27), 4% didn't respond, 4% disagree

2d. Vitae should explore whether there is a sensible set of common data that should be provided by institutions as part of the process:

77% agree (21/27), 23% disagree or have concerns (6/27)

C: Appointing and selecting peer reviewers



3. Do you agree with the recommendations that:

3a. The experience of peer reviewers is important. Peer reviewers should have taken a leading role in getting the HR Excellence Award in their own institution, or have equivalent experience:

96% agree (26/27), 4% disagree (1/27)

3b. Peer reviewers should be a mix of researcher developers, research staff and research staff association representatives, academic staff, research office staff and HR colleagues:

96% agree (26/27), 4% disagree (1/27)

3c. The peer review panel should have at least one UK reviewer and one European reviewer to maintain UK/international balance:

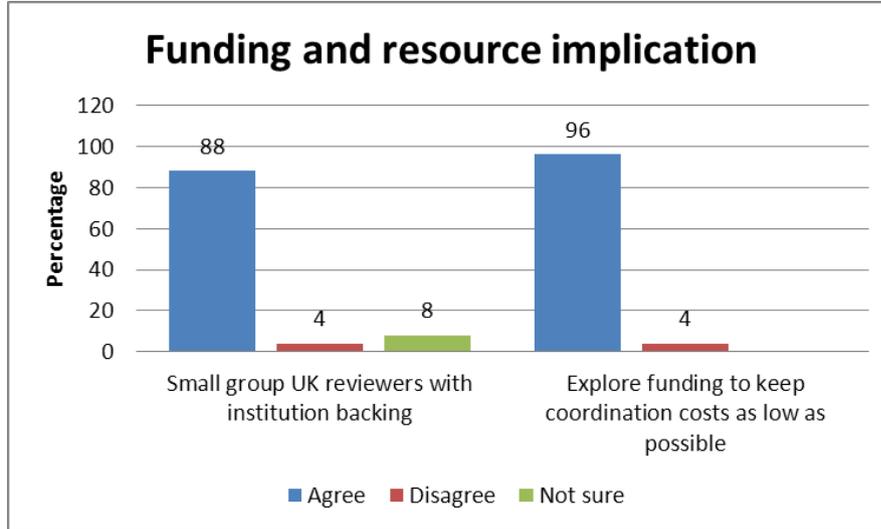
88% agree (24/27), 4% disagree (1/27), 8% not sure (2/27)

3d. There will need to be clear guidelines about the role of peer reviewers:

100% agree

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Section D: Funding and resource implications



4. Do you agree with the recommendations that:

4a. A small group of UK peer reviewers should be appointed with the backing of their institutions:

88% agree (24/27), 4% disagree (1/27), 8% not sure (2/27)

4b. Vitae should explore funding arrangements for the external review process in order to keep any coordination costs as low as possible for institutions:

96% agree (26/27) 4% disagree (1/27)