

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Vitae briefing for career specialists

About this series...

This is one of several briefing documents, developed by Vitae, for stakeholders with a role to play in implementation of the Concordat's principles. It should be read in conjunction with the Concordat itself:

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk. The series explores emerging themes and highlights practical examples which we hope will prove useful as your institution works to implement the principles.

Vitae is a national organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in UK higher education institutions and research institutes. We play a major role in the drive for high-level skills and innovation and in meeting the UK's goal to produce world class researchers.

Vitae is working with UK institutions and other stakeholders to implement the Concordat's principles by providing information, raising awareness, and facilitating the sharing of strategies and practice.

For further information about Vitae and about UK and European policy visit **www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice**.

To view other briefings available in this series go to **www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat**.

'The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' is an agreement between the funders and employers of researchers in the UK. Sitting alongside a range of local, UK and European initiatives, this agreement represents a significant development in national policy to support good management of researchers and their careers. Through the implementation of its principles it aims to enhance the researcher workforce and thereby sustain research excellence bringing benefits to the health, economy and well-being of the UK.

As a careers professional you should find the Concordat to be a supportive document which raises the profile and status of career development activity amongst research staff. This briefing takes each of the Concordat principles in turn, suggesting areas for consideration and providing illustrative examples of practice from UK institutions.

Concordat principles

- Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research
- Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research
- Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment
- The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career
- Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning
- Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers
- The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.

Support and career development

The Concordat emphasises that the professional development of research staff should be supported from the outset of an employment relationship and regardless of contractual status. Provision, including career development, support and advice begins at induction, and is supported by systems to encourage research staff in planning their careers. The vision is for open-ended and progressive professional development, where research staff are continuously challenged and discovering new development opportunities.

Research staff follow a wide range of career paths and the Concordat recommends that careers guidance should recognise and support this diversity. Research can make use of existing academic staff as mentors and advisors but it is also important to give them access to independent careers advice and development opportunities that expose them to the wide range of career opportunities for research staff.

Areas to consider include:

- creating or taking opportunities to influence career development resourcing in your institution and contributing to the development of relevant systems, eg appraisal
- developing careers guidance to support research staff to understand the range of career opportunities open to them, both within and beyond academia
- developing targeted resources for research staff e.g. specific labour market information; dedicated research staff and using alumni and mentoring schemes to support career development activities for research staff
- creating links with non-HE employers of researchers
- linking with colleagues who also have a role in the career development of research staff, including managers of researchers and staff developers, to share expertise about career development.

Mentoring for research staff (Newcastle University)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/207.html

Newcastle University has a mentoring scheme aimed at developing research staff and helping them to progress beyond their immediate role. The programme is run by a coordinator who interviews and matches participants and supports the process with training and documentation. The scheme is able to provide highly responsive careers advice drawing on local expertise. Participants benefit in different ways from the scheme but typically enjoy clarified career goals, increased insight into more senior roles and responsibilities and access to a wider network of researchers.

Recognition and value

This principle requires employers to manage and reward researchers fairly and transparently and to provide them with recognition and opportunities for development. It encourages institutions to work towards consistency and managers of researchers to take an active role in the career development of their staff. As a careers specialist, understanding how individuals progress in research careers will be of particular interest to you.

Areas for careers specialists to consider include:

- ensuring that research staff in your institution are both informed about recognition and reward structures internally and aware of wider career paths for researchers
- supporting managers of researchers in their role as providers of informal careers advice to their staff.

Using positive role models at careers events for research staff (University of Cambridge)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/644.html

The University of Cambridge invites former research staff to careers events to provide guidance and to act as role models for current staff. Former staff have usually held one or two positions since leaving, for example a permanent academic position, a position in industry or have made the transition to a non-research career. Former staff present positive and encouraging case studies, helping to broaden researchers' horizons, and give positive messages about the diversity of career destinations that researchers successfully move to.

Recruitment and Selection

The Concordat encourages employers to examine the way in which they recruit and retain research staff. As a careers specialist you will need to be able to advise research staff about the recruitment and selection procedures they will encounter. Implementation of the Concordat's principles should make this task easier as it focuses on increasing transparency, fairness and consistency in this area.

Areas to consider include:

- Feeding into reviews of recruitment procedures and associated training, taking a cross-departmental approach by working with colleagues including human resources specialists and staff developers
- Producing tailored resources, advice and training for research staff on succeeding in recruitment and selection processes.

Podcast case studies (University of Sussex)

www.sussex.ac.uk/cdec/jobs_funding_arts.php

The Career Development and Employability Centre at the University of Sussex have created a podcast that features interviews with current researchers and lecturers talking about their experience of dealing with academic recruitment processes. Those interviews offer a mix of advice on what to do and their experiences of what not to do. These case studies offer a powerful way to learn about the process of academic recruitment, and the wider career management process, from those who have actually been through the experience.

Researchers' responsibilities

The Concordat sees research staff as sharing responsibility for their own professional development and it encourages them to be proactive in creating and taking advantage of opportunities. An important role for careers specialists is in raising research staff awareness of the principles behind the Concordat.

This principle encourages researchers to become more demanding and active in their career development which is likely to lead to raised expectations of support from institutions and from careers specialists in particular. You will need to continue to develop ways to serve this group of staff, providing new and tailored services to meet this demand.

Areas to consider include:

- informing research staff of relevant institutional and national policies and resources relating to career development
- encouraging research staff to take responsibility for their own career development and providing opportunities that inspire them to achieve their career goals.
- providing access to targeted reference resources for research staff e.g. specific labour market information, guidance in applications and interviews.

Postdoctoral careers initiative (The Institute of Cancer Research)

www.grad.ac.uk/practice/407

The Institute of Cancer Research have encouraged research staff to establish a 'Post Doc' association. Learning development and careers staff at the Institute have then been able to work with the association to deliver an annual careers conference and related career development activities. The careers conference features speakers from industry, academia and The Institute and has been attended by over 80% of The Institute's postdoctoral research staff.

Diversity and equality

The Concordat encourages the recruitment and retention of researchers from the widest pool of available talent with the expectation that the research base will be enhanced by diversity. It also recognises that institutions need to be aware of issues associated with a more diverse workforce and to take account of these in the way in which research staff are managed and supported. An understanding of related issues in a research context is important for careers specialists offering guidance to research staff.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing your own knowledge and understanding of institutional policy and UK Law relating to diversity and equality issues
- investigating the diversity of your institution's research workforce and considering how provision might best be developed in light of findings
- providing careers advice that addresses a range of circumstances and aspirations, e.g. offering guidance about flexible working opportunities.

GetSET women network (UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology)

www.ukrc4setwomen.org

The GetSETWomen network is a database of women from all sectors of science, engineering, technology and the built environment. It is run by UK Resource Centre (UKRC) for Women in Science Engineering and Technology. For the women who join, it is an opportunity to raise their profile and network with others. Members receive information about all sorts of professional development opportunities, including training, public speaking, media interviews, public appointments and more.

Implementation and review

The Concordat highlights the value of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat principles both at institutional level and across the UK. Sharing of good practice between institutions is strongly encouraged. A high level Strategy Group will oversee UK progress and will undertake an initial benchmark process and subsequent review. The Concordat advocates the use of existing sources of data and information, including a revised version of the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS).

As a careers specialist you are likely to be gathering a range of information relating to research staff skills, career aspirations and experience of work which could be extremely valuable in informing the way the Concordat's principles are implemented within your institution. The Concordat all strongly encourages the sharing of good practice between institutions. Local knowledge about the implementation of the Concordat principles can be useful input in compiling a UK view of progress and case studies of good practice.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing the effectiveness of careers support for research staff using surveys, focus groups and other evaluation tools
- finding out about your institution's use of CROS and considering whether results can be enhanced by including institutional specific career related questions
- championing the systematic collection of longitudinal destination data and career profiles of research staff alumni to support careers advice for research staff
- working with human resources specialists to investigate whether exit information collected by your institution can be analysed for destinations of research staff.

Survey of research staff career development needs (University of Oxford)

www.careers.ox.ac.uk/

The Careers Service has undertaken an on-line survey of Research Staff, aimed at gaining further information on their career development needs as well as feedback about the accessibility of current services. Preliminary analysis of responses has suggested that areas that could be developed are marketing and outreach. While further analysis is required, the Careers Service is addressing these areas by adjusting some of its core programmes and running more off-site events.

Other Vitae resources

Vitae works alongside policy makers and staff supporting the development of researchers. We support a growing network and offer a range of tools and events to help with the sharing of practice and expertise. Find out more by visiting our website at www.vitae.ac.uk, in particular the following sections:

- Policy (www.vitae.ac.uk/policy) provides an overview of the key organisations and policies relating to both postgraduate researchers and research staff
- Resources (www.vitae.ac.uk/resources) provides tools and support to promote collaboration, sharing of practice and resources relating to researcher careers and their professional development
- Careers (www.vitae.ac.uk/careers) provides career development resources and information for researchers.

Other useful links:

- Concordat website (www.researchconcordat.ac.uk)
- European Charter and Code (http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm?I1=0&I2=3)
- CROS (www.survey.bris.ac.uk/support/news/cros2008-09)
- AGCAS (www.agcas.org.uk)
- Researchers in Residence (www.researchersinresidence.ac.uk/rir/)
- Prospects (www.prospects.ac.uk)

Vitae database of practice

Most of the examples of practice given in this briefing are drawn from institutional entries in the Vitae database of practice (www.vitae.ac.uk/dop). The examples are intended as a starting point and you are encouraged to explore the database of practice further as you consider your institution's response to the Concordat. The database can be searched by the Concordat principles making it easy to find relevant examples. Please engage in sector-wide practice sharing by entering your own practices onto the database.



The Concordat

to Support the Career Development of Researchers

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was launched in June 2008. It aims to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and to improve the quantity, quality and impact of research for the benefit of UK society and the economy.

The Concordat provides a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders and institutions with respect to the management of researchers. The Concordat also aims to demonstrate internationally – including to researchers considering coming to work in the UK – the high standards of management and support that can be expected by UK researchers. By adopting its principles the UK also adopts the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk