

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Vitae briefing for senior managers

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.

Successful implementation of the Concordat's principles will require senior managers (vice-chancellors, pro-vice chancellors, heads of faculties, support departments, schools, departments, research groups, etc) across the institution to work together to achieve the institution's strategic goals. Much is to be gained by using the agreed principles as a framework to re-consider institutional policies and practice and develop an institution-wide response. This briefing takes each of the Concordat principles in turn, suggesting areas for consideration and providing illustrative examples of practice from UK institutions.

Areas to consider include:

- commissioning an individual or a small working group to assess how the institution's current policy and practice maps against the Concordat's principles
- bringing together relevant stakeholders and functions (eg other senior managers, human resources (HR), staff development, careers, principle investigators (PIs) and researchers) to develop a holistic response
- reviewing how funding is allocated to functions within your institution in order to achieve strategic aims for research staff development
- communicating the strategic importance of the Concordat's principles to all relevant stakeholders within your institution.

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 places personal and professional development at the heart of the experience of research staff and as key to realising the potential of the research workforce and achieving institutions' research strategies. The vision in the Concordat is of open-ended and progressive professional development, where research staff moving through their careers are continuously challenged and discovering new opportunities for development. The Concordat urges institutions to consider whether research staff are well placed to move on to positions in other institutions or outside the academic sphere. Motivated and employable staff means a more flexible and productive workforce.

Professional development for research staff should be supported from the outset of an employment relationship and regardless of contractual status. The Concordat stresses that many stakeholders share responsibility for this across the institution. It makes clear the value of input from research staff themselves into developing relevant institutional strategies and decision-making processes.

Areas to consider include:

- bringing together key stakeholders to discuss the institutional framework within which research staff development takes place
- asking HR specialists, staff developers, careers specialists and other relevant stakeholders to review, collectively, their support for research staff
- how research staff views are fed into decision-making processes in the area of career development support.

Dedicated careers adviser (Kings College, University of London)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/558.html

Kings College have appointed a careers adviser to work with research staff and postgraduate researchers. The careers adviser provides one-to-one advice sessions and leads researcher focused career skills workshops. This provision has encouraged research staff to engage with the careers service and has been greatly valued by stakeholders. The dedicated careers adviser is also working to engage potential employers and bring them together with researchers.

Recognition and value

This principle requires employers to manage and reward research staff fairly and transparently and to take an active role in their development, recognising their contribution to the institution and providing them with appropriate development opportunities. It encourages the institution to increase the stability and continuity of researchers' employment.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing institutional strategy for research staff, ensuring they are valued and have equal access to facilities, appraisal and development opportunities, irrespective of contractual status
- reviewing the effectiveness of institutional communications with research staff and their managers, particularly relating to achieving the Concordat principles
- reviewing the institution's career progression framework for research staff, ensuring transparency in progression and reward, pay and conditions
- exploring the use of institutional funding systems to underpin continuity of support for researchers, such as bridge funding between grants.

Research staff policies and procedures (University of Bristol)

www.bris.ac.uk/researchstaff

The University of Bristol works to ensure that research staff are recognised and valued by the institution. A key area in which their mission to 'Make the University of Bristol the place to work for the very best research staff from across the world' has been realised is in placing research staff at the centre of the institution's 'People Strategy'. This change has been driven by a high level committee which includes representatives of the research workforce as well as senior academic staff and policy makers. Research staff are able to influence policy through a network of representatives and can access policy and other information relevant to them via a dedicated research staff portal.

Recruitment and Selection

The Concordat encourages employers to examine the way in which they recruit and retain research staff, focussing on transparency, fairness and consistency. A re-examination of the way in which your institution recruits research staff offers the opportunity to enhance your recruitment and selection processes and ensure that you are recruiting the best research workforce available.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing, with HR specialists, your institutional recruitment policy for research staff to ensure that it meets the principles of the Concordat and is in line with the Fixed Term Employees Regulations (2002)
- exploring how funding mechanisms can be used to recruit and retain research staff, particularly within the full economic costing model (FEC)
- working with HR specialists to examine how well current recruitment and selection processes and practice align with the Concordat's principles.

Policy and guidance on the use of fixed-term contracts (Robert Gordon University and University College London)

www.rgu.ac.uk/hr/staffinfo/page.cfm?pge=36671#

Robert Gordon University seeks to employ research staff on indefinite contracts unless there is an exceptional reason not to do so. Where the end of funding raises the possibility of termination the University applies procedures to examine alternative funding, redeployment or, ultimately, managed redundancy.

www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/

Research staff at UCL on grants longer than nine months are given 'open-ended contracts with grant/project end dates', which recognises the risk of redundancy if renewed funding or redeployment is not possible. UCL is committed to avoiding making staff redundant and, wherever possible, seeks to redeploy staff into suitable positions, thereby retaining valuable skills, knowledge and experience, and reducing recruitment costs.

Researchers' responsibilities

Responsibility for professional development of research staff is recognised by the Concordat as shared between the institution and research staff. Research staff are encouraged to be proactive in creating and taking advantage of development opportunities. Institutions can maximise the benefit of this by providing appropriate institutional structures to support researchers' development and inviting research staff to influence and to take responsibility for their own professional environment.

Areas to consider include:

- raising awareness amongst research staff of the principles set out in the Concordat and its vision for professional development
- creating an environment to encourage and support research staff in being both pro-active in their personal development and engagement with the institution
- reviewing the way in which the institution communicates both with research staff and managers of researchers to engage them in consultations and opportunities for professional and career development.

Research staff support website (Newcastle University)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/624.html

Newcastle University's 'Research Staff Support' website (<http://researchstaff.ncl.ac.uk>) is a one-stop-shop for research staff to access information and support. The site also enables researchers to book training online. Effective communication has been seen as an essential component in encouraging knowledge exchange and engagement with researchers. A key development in the University's provision of support for research staff has been a superior communication system established through the amalgamation of the three faculty-based research staff websites into this new central website. This integrated approach has increased the visibility of the services and made them more accessible.

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. A commitment to a diverse and non-discriminatory workforce is supported by UK law and builds on good practice in research institutions across the UK. Nonetheless the demanding nature of research work can often have a detrimental and disproportionate effect on certain groups.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing institutional diversity and equality policies and practices to ensure that these reflect models of good practice in creating an inclusive research environment
- regularly reviewing the demographic profile of the institution's research staff workforce and taking positive action as appropriate.

Women in Science, Engineering and Technology initiative: recruitment project (University of Cambridge)

www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/equality/wiseti/

Cambridge University established 'Women in Science, Engineering and Technology' (SET) to consider strategies for increasing the representation of women in science in the University. The initiative works at a variety of levels across the University to address gender diversity issues. One project undertaken as part of this initiative used two recruitment officers as head-hunters to identify potential women candidates in SET and ensure they receive appropriate information about positions that may interest them. The recruitment officers then tracked the progress of women candidates and provided advice and support to appointments committees in evaluating women's CVs. They also ran workshops on gender bias and gender equality issues for senior academics.

Implementation and review

The Concordat highlights the value of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat principles both at institutional level and across the UK. 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).

You may find it useful to analyse all data related to research staff experience that is now being gathered across your institution. Knowledge thus gained can inform the development of institutional practice and policy and be used to promote the institution as a positive working environment for research staff. The Concordat strongly encourages the sharing of practice between institutions. Local knowledge about the implementation of the Concordat principles can be useful input in compiling a UK view of progress and practice.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing the way that data relating to research staff is collected, analysed and acted upon across the institution
- undertaking an evaluation of institutional policies relating to research staff, including how effectively they are being implemented
- championing the use of CROS and using the results to inform policy development and create action plans
- engaging research staff in evaluation mechanisms and institutional decision making processes
- ensuring that examples of good practice within your institution are highlighted and celebrated.

Mapping of institutional policy and practice against the Concordat (Newcastle University)

<http://researchstaff.ncl.ac.uk/rss/library>

Newcastle University has undertaken a systematic review of its policy and practice relating to research staff against the Concordat principles. The review has documented how existing provision is already meeting many of the expectations within the Concordat and has created a draft implementation plan to further improve working practices. This has gone out to consultation with research staff and managers asking for feedback on actions and identification of priorities.

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 enable colleagues to share 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)
- Research Councils UK (www.rcuk.ac.uk)
- Universities UK (www.universitiesuk.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 to be illustrative and you are encouraged to explore the database of practice further as you consider your institution's response to the Concordat. You can search for practices relating to each principle of the Concordat making it easy to find relevant examples. Please support a collective sector-wide effort to implement the Concordat's principles by entering your own practices onto the database so that others can benefit from your experiences.



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