A brief guide to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

For research directors and principal investigators

If you line manage research staff in the UK you are likely to have responsibility, on behalf of your institution, to meet the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers¹.

Signed by all major UK funders of research and by Universities UK, the Concordat has become an important driver in improving career and working conditions for research staff and contributes to the vitality and sustainability of the research environment in the Research Excellence Framework. Your role may include ensuring excellence in recruitment of research staff and supporting all to be excellent researchers and to make informed decisions about their careers. Specialist support staff in your institution who share responsibility to support research staff such as careers advisors, human resource managers and staff developers may be available to advise you.

Taking each of the Concordat’s principles in turn, this briefing highlights the expectations and responsibilities placed on researchers and on yourself as a research director or principal investigator. It suggests areas you might want to consider and provides examples of practice from UK institutions.

HR Excellence in Research

Vitae member organisations have access to a UK-specific process to attain the European Commission’s HR Excellence in Research Award by demonstrating ongoing implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Institutional action plans for this award are a great place to start if you want to see what is being done to support researcher employment and careers. At March 2015, 91 UK organisations were holders of the Award.

Areas to consider

- Your knowledge of your institution’s strategies and policies relating to research staff
- Whether you are sufficiently supported by the institution in managing researchers
- Pro-actively engaging with senior managers and colleagues from across the institution to suggest improvements
- Sharing practice with peers within and outside the institution to promote excellence in support for research staff to develop as professionals.

Vitae is led and managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation. Between 2013 and 2015 we were supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK) and UK HE funding bodies.

¹ www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat
Principle 1: Recruitment and Selection

The Concordat encourages institutions to examine the way in which they recruit and retain researchers, focusing on transparency, fairness and consistency. It also asks institutions to think about the way in which they use fixed-term contracts.

There is evidence that UK institutions are increasingly operating open and transparent recruitment processes for research staff. Although there is an overall trend towards open contracts in the UK, there is currently no evidence of whether the increased use of open contracts for research staff is providing increased security of employment.

If principal investigators and research directors are not always fully familiar with institutional employment policies, these may not be applied consistently across the institution.

Institutional examples

**St Andrews University** has completed a number of measures to attract the best researchers to the institution. Researcher posts are graded using the HERA job evaluation scheme to ensure that they offer competitive salaries to attract the best staff.

**The University of Manchester** recruitment procedure is discussed annually as part of the Faculties and Professional Support Services performance review and at the Equality and Diversity Forum, of which the trade unions are members. Measures of success include changes in the make-up of the University population, including increases in the numbers of women and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups.

Institutional examples are taken from HR Excellence in Research action plans: [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs)

Areas to consider

- Working with human resources specialists to ensure that job advertising, descriptions, grading, contracts and interview and selection processes for research staff are in line with institutional policy
- Working with staff development or human resources colleagues to ensure that you and your recruitment panels have appropriate training in interview and selection.

Principle 2: Recognition and Value

This principle requires employers to manage and reward research staff fairly and transparently and to take an active role in the development of their staff, providing them with recognition and appropriate opportunities. It encourages the institution to increase the stability and continuity of research staff employment. It asks institutions to look at how they employ research staff on fixed term contracts and argues that they should be treated equally to those on open contracts.

Principle 2

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.
Principles 3 & 4: Support and Career Development

The Concordat places 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. Its vision is of progressive professional development from the outset of an employment relationship and as research staff move through their careers, regardless of contractual status. It stresses that responsibility for professional development is shared by many stakeholders across the institution.

The Concordat recognises and values the fact that researchers’ careers take a variety of paths. While many stay in academic research, experience of undertaking research is also highly valued in a range of other contexts. Providing opportunities that enable researchers to develop their employability skills will motivate and encourage them in their current roles.

Institutional examples

The University of Central Lancashire uses the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) to support all researchers and to provide a framework for appraisers. Training is also provided for all appraisers and annual appraisals and regular performance review meetings are compulsory for all staff.

The HR department of Edinburgh Napier University offers annual role re-grading opportunities for all staff including research staff.

Institutional examples are taken from HR Excellence in Research action plans: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs

Areas to consider

- Ensuring appraisals are used as constructive opportunities to review the professional development of your research staff
- Being aware of opportunities for accessing bridging funds between grants and any redeployment initiatives for your research staff
- Budgeting for appropriate salaries relative to experience, salary increases and training and development costs when applying for grants. Funders award grants on the merit of the proposal and generally encourage this practice. For example the UK Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust incorporate the Concordat in their regulations for research funding.

The University of St Andrews and Dundee University run a successful cross-institutional Early Career Academic Mentoring Scheme, which ensures that researchers are supported in developing their careers through a variety of possible career paths.

Kings College, University of London requires academics responsible for line managing research staff to undergo regular training to ensure that they are familiar with current developments in policy, procedure and best practice.

Institutional examples are taken from HR Excellence in Research action plans: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs

Principles 3 & 4

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.
Areas to consider

- Encouraging research staff to identify their skills, passions and development needs and consider what they will need to do to make progress in their career
- Being aware of the range of possible careers that your staff may wish to pursue
- Exploring how you can contribute to the professional development of your research staff. For example in increasing their experience of academic practice, delegating responsibilities for managing part of a research project and by giving clear and honest information about their career development and prospects
- Providing appropriate information on and encouragement to take up both formal and informal professional development opportunities.

Principle 5: Researchers’ Responsibilities

The Concordat recognises that responsibility for the professional development of research staff is shared between the institution and research staff. Research staff are encouraged to be proactive in creating and taking advantage of development opportunities. As a manager of researchers you can maximise the benefit of this by encouraging them to proactively engage with their career development. The Vitae website has a wealth of material to encourage and support research staff in making career decisions and to help you in your role as a mentor. (www.vitae.ac.uk/pi).

Principle 5

Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.

Institutional examples

At the UCL Institute of Education, all research staff are eligible to participate in all committees with many having places reserved for research staff. The Research Careers Advisory Committee (RCAC) focuses on research staff concerns.

Goldsmiths University has a dedicated member of the Enterprise Team who specialises in helping researchers to develop Knowledge Exchange (KE) schemes in collaboration with business, charities and local government agencies. There is dedicated online guidance available for researchers to help with planning KE funding applications.

Institutional examples are taken from HR Excellence in Research action plans: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs

Areas to consider

- Encouraging your research staff to become aware of the possible career opportunities inside and outside academia that suit their strengths, values and priorities
- Facilitating opportunities for your research staff to develop their networks, for example, through attending relevant conferences and meetings, introducing them to your own networks and former members of your team who have gone on to pursue a variety of careers
- Holding regular line-management meetings or appraisals and encouraging researchers to use these meetings as an opportunity to explore skills development and career aspirations.
Principle 6: 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. The Concordat suggests ways for institutions to address the disincentives and indirect obstacles to retention and progression in research careers. The Vitae ‘Every researcher Counts’ project has produced valuable online resources to support both researchers and their managers in addressing issues related to diversity and equality (www.vitae.ac.uk/everyresearchercounts).

Areas to consider

- Refreshing your knowledge of institutional policies aimed at retention of researchers from diverse groups. For example, the use of flexible working, career breaks, and support with issues such as working with a disability or in a second language
- Reflecting on the diversity of your existing research group and whether there are any factors in the nature of the work, your management style or recruitment practices that may be having an impact on this diversity.

Principle 7: 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. The Concordat advocates the use of existing sources of data and information. As a manager of researchers your views on measures to support the career development of researchers are likely to be sought in a number of ways. You may be asked to comment on your experiences by your institution and funders as well as through national surveys such as the Careers in Research Online Survey (www.vitae.ac.uk/cros) and the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders’ Survey (www.vitae.ac.uk/pirls) or by participation in action planning for awards such as the European HR Excellence in Research Award (www.vitae.ac.uk/hrxcellence) or ECU’s Athena Swan Charter (http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charter-marks/athena-swan). By engaging positively in research and evaluation around the implementation of the Concordat’s principles you will be able to impact the way in which the situation for research staff develops in the future.
Institutional examples
The University of Cambridge engages with many external organisations which support researchers, including Vitae, the League of European Research Universities and the European Commission’s HR Strategy Group, as well as with employers. The University aims to support their own researchers and also to help influence the wider national, EU and international environments.

The University of Huddersfield is committed to becoming a research intensive institution by 2020 and aims to use the Concordat to demonstrate exemplary levels of support for researchers well before then. To achieve this they have been implementing the principles of the Concordat as a framework of good practice for the management of all researchers and their careers, including research-only employees on short contracts, part-time staff and all other research active academic staff.

Institutional examples are taken from HR Excellence in Research action plans: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs

Areas to consider
■ Proactively engaging in and providing feedback on your institutional plans to implement the Concordat’s principles, including associated programmes to support research staff careers
■ Encouraging research staff to contribute their views on institutional support for research staff development via research staff forums, by participating in institutional feedback mechanisms including CROS and by involving themselves in institutional committees and structures.

Find out more
For information about research staff in the UK and an overview of the UK-wide response to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, find our 2014 report ‘Progress in implementing the Concordat principles’ at www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat.

Vitae
Vitae, is an international programme led and managed by CRAC, a not-for-profit registered UK charity dedicated to active career learning and development. Working in the UK since 1968, when we ran our first project to support transitions of doctoral researchers to industry, Vitae has great expertise at enhancing the skills and career impact of researchers locally, within a global context.

We work in partnership with UK and international higher education institutions, research organisations, funders, and national bodies to meet society’s need for high-level skills and innovation.

Vitae aims:
■ Influence effective policy development and implementation relating to researcher development to build human capital
■ Enhance higher education provision to train and develop researchers
■ Empower researchers to make an impact in their careers
■ Evidence the impact of professional and career development for researchers.

Vitae and its membership programme is managed by CRAC: The Career Development Organisation.

Further information on our activities with HEIs, researchers and employers may be found on this website, www.vitae.ac.uk