

Update on the Executive Group meetings in 2009

The following provides a summary of the Executive Group meetings in March and September. The minutes of the meetings are attached as annexes.

The March meeting agreed the lead for the six benchmarking projects. Provisional timescales were set out at the September meeting.

Project name	Priority	Lead	Timescale
Careers in Research Online Survey	Y	Vitae	First report Sept 09
HEI Strategies	Y	Coordinator	Survey sent by Dec 09
Understanding the Research Staff Cohort	Y	Coordinator	Report Spring 2010
The views of Principle Investigators	N	Coordinator	SG to agree TORs
Fixed Term Contracts	N	Vitae	Report Winter 2010
Funders strategies	N	Sir Ivor	Letters sent Sept 2009

At the March meeting members agreed

- to update a standard presentation for use at promotional events
- that the Coordinator would revisit the mapping exercise
Update: This will be taken forward in the light of the publication of CROS with the aim of mapping the Concordat, CROS and the EU Charter & Code to one another
- to postpone creation of a badging system/charter mark
Update: The European Commission has agreed to the Concordat being the delivery mechanism for the European Charter & Code in the UK. Institutions meeting the standards of the Concordat will be allowed to use the Concordat and Charter & Code logos and promote their institutions through the Euraxess website

At the September meeting, members received updates on

- implementation activity to date (updated copy available as agenda item 6)
- the six benchmarking projects (updated copy available as agenda item 7)
- the relationship between the Concordat and the European Charter & Code

The September meeting agreed

- to produce implementation plan (agenda item 6)
- to propose a publication schedule for outputs over the next few years (agenda item 6)
- to produce Annual Reports to coincide with the Funders' Forum

Annex 1: Minutes of the Executive Group meeting 25 March 2009

1. Present

Alyson Thomas	HEFCW
Candy Hassall	Wellcome Trust
Chris Hale	UUK
Davina Foord	UUK
Iain Cameron	RCUK
Janet Metcalfe	Vitae
Murray McVicar	SFC
Rosie Beales	RCUK
Suzanne Wilson	HEFCE
Paul Marshall	1994 Group
Nicola Dandridge	Equality Challenge Unit

2. Benchmarking Projects

2.1. CROS HEIs are in the process of signing up to the CROS survey, 22 out of the top 30 Research Council funded had already signed. The Executive group would ask the CROS Steering group that they could consider the specification for the analysis of the survey data and cross reference the question set to the requirements of the executive group. Nicola Dandridge and Suzanne Wilson volunteered to help with this action.

Action: Janet Metcalfe to circulate specification to the Executive Group for comment

2.2. Understanding the Research Staff Cohort It was noted that the HEFCW paper for the Funders Forum – First Annual Report on Research Staff was being updated for November. The project should initially determine the information available and where there are particular gaps for instance the CST report Pathways to the future highlighted the mobility, placements etc for researchers but there is little or no information available about this aspect of researcher's development. The group agreed to start scoping this project working with HEFCW and HEFCE statisticians who produce the Funders Forum paper and with Jane Thompson from UCU. Volunteers to contact Chris Hale, prior to the start date of the Concordat Coordinator.

Action: Chris Hale to lead the development of the specification for the understanding the research staff project

2.3. HEI Strategies This was considered with the Badging proposal. It was agreed that it would be useful to know how HEIs are responding to the Concordat, their stated goals in terms of supporting researchers and what their practices are against the Concordat principles

Action: Janet Metcalfe to draft an approach to gathering this information from HEIs and circulate to the EG for comment.

2.4. Reviewing the use of Fixed term contracts Vitae was taking this project forward. Initial results will be presented in September at the Vitae conference

2.5. Views of PIs. This is the most difficult part of the benchmarking process. It was suggested it formed part of the Coordinator's workplan.

Action: Coordinator to develop a strategy for benchmarking PIs' views.

2.6. Funders Response It was noted that the Charities were concerned about this and it was suggested that a letter be sent from Ivor Crewe to the CEOs of signatories and supporters explaining about the benchmarking projects, providing information on implementation with examples if possible and asking how they were taking forward the implementation for their organisation, particularly those who are research funders. It would be cc'd to the members of the RCSG.

Action: Rosie Beales to do initial draft and circulate.

Action: the Concordat implementation plan to be updated with funders' actions for the November SG meeting (Coordinator/Rosie?)

3. Promotion Activities

3.1. Power point presentation The presentation should be amended taking out the first two slides and adding a slide to cover 'Why'; and the notes should be expanded. The presentation should be available on the web site and should be flagged with the Vitae Hubs. This would be part of the Work plan for the Concordat Coordinator.

Action: Members to send any comments on the presentation to Rosie

4. Mapping

4.1. The Coordinator should be tasked with revisiting the mapping document and ensuring it is checked against the revised CROS survey questions. Details of promotional events should be sent to RB.

5. Badging

5.1. The paper described initial thoughts about having a badging process to show compliance with the Concordat. This would help push forward the implementation, raise the profile and celebrate success.

5.2. It was noted that the Athena Swan process was intensive, focussed, peer reviewed etc so was therefore costly.

5.3. The badging needs to be enhancement led and focus on each principle and departmental level as well as HEI level. It should also help to identify best practice.

5.4. It was thought too early for this at present but how to recognise and celebrate success could be raised as a fringe session at the Vitae Conference or Policy Forum.

Action: Coordinator to consider submitting a proposal for a fringe session [closing date for applications 22 June]

6. Coordinator Work Plan

6.1. The work plan should be agreed by the group but should cover:

- Promotion – Web site, News items for newsletters journals etc, powerpoint presentation etc
- Managing the meetings of the RCSG and the Executive group eg meeting dates and venues, agendas papers etc.
- Implementations – through structured visits, targeting mission groups and other groups and networks etc
- Interaction with Vitae especially with the benchmarking projects.
- Increasing the signatories and supporters
- Management of resources
- Research activities

7. AOB

7.1. Vitae will be asking HEIs to enter details of implementation on their Database of Practice.

7.2. The next meeting would be arranged for September.

7.3. Sir Ivor Crewe had been invited to the Funders Forum meeting in December to report on the RCSG activities.

Action Points summary:

- Janet Metcalfe to circulate specification to the Executive Group for comment
- Janet Metcalfe to draft an approach to gathering this information from HEIs and circulate to the EG for comment
- Chris Hale to lead the development of the specification for the understanding the research staff project
- Coordinator to consider submitting a proposal for a fringe session [closing date for applications 22 June]
- Coordinator/Rosie Beales to update Concordat implementation plan with funders' actions for the November SG meeting to develop a strategy for benchmarking PIs' views
- Rosie Beales to do initial draft and circulate
- Members to send any comments on the presentation to Rosie

Annex 2: Minutes of the Executive Group meeting 14 September 2009

1. Present

Sir Ivor Crewe, Chair
Rosie Beales, RCUK
Iain Cameron, RCUK
Davina Foord, UUK
Chris Hall, ECU
Candy Hassall, Wellcome Trust
Peter Main, Institute of Physics
Paul Marshall, 1994 Group
Janet Metcalfe, Vitae
Thomas Papworth, Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator
Alyson Thomas, HEFCW
Suzanne Wilson, HEFCE

Chris Hale of Universities UK sent his apologies.

2. Three items of business were raised for discussion at the end of the meeting.
3. **Minutes of the last meeting** had been agreed in advance.
4. **Summary of implementation activity:** The group received the report on implementation activity.

Action: TP to produce implementation plan for the Strategy Group in October

Action: RB to liaise with TP about the use of the Concordat contacts in HEIs

Action: TP to augment existing summary of implementation activity with information from Concordat contacts within HEIs and professional academies/learned societies.

5. Benchmarking paper

EG decided to stick with the use of the term "Benchmarking" but to clarify early on their use of the term. The importance of sharing practice was emphasised, as was the need to avoid comparisons between institutions. A clear statement should be produced early on stressing that the aim of the benchmarking projects were to establish the current state of the sector so that future progress could be measured.

EG expressed interest in the following future research projects:

- Comparison between research staff development in academia and clinical research staff development in the health sector; between research staff development in academia and research staff development in other research institutes;
- Encouraging other employers of researchers to participate in existing projects (e.g. CROS)
- Comparisons with other parts of the public sector
- Comparisons between the public and private sectors

- The use of CROS to compare practice in disciplines.

EG discussed reporting by HEIs. It was agreed that annual reporting was unnecessary. Biannual reporting would align with both EU Charter & Code reporting proposals for self-assessment and with the proposed cycle for undertaking CROS.

Action: TP to propose a publication schedule for outputs over the next few years

Action: EG to prepare Annual Reports for the RCSG to agree for the December Funders' Forum meeting.

5.1 Report on CROS

JM referred to the launch of the CROS report on 8 September and gave EG a summary of its findings. She also outlined Vitae's plans to get non-participants to take part in 2010. Vitae were considering a possible future report on how the results might be used and also how they might analyse by discipline. Paul M stressed the importance for HEIs of having the widest access to benchmarking groups.

5.2 Proposed approach to HEI strategies

EG considered the proposed survey on HEI strategies. The debate polarised around whether the survey should seek to capture strategic approaches or operational practice. This also translated to a discussion over whether more frequent, closed questions were preferable to fewer, open questions. It was agreed that the current survey design fell between the two poles.

EG agreed that the survey should focus on strategy and

- State the 7 Principles
- Ask how strategy embeds the principles
- Ask what policies have changed
- Ask some closed questions
- Require HEI's to provide evidence in support of their answers.

The covering letter from Sir Ivor should emphasise that the survey seeks to measure the sector's compliance with the EU Charter & Code and how HEIs have adapted their strategies in light of the Concordat.

Note also action in item 6.

5.3 Proposed approach to Principal Investigators' study

EG emphasised the importance of

- Support and supervision to research success
- Capturing in any study the development, training and skill of the PIs themselves
- Exploring how PIs see their role

EG was concerned that the proposal was unclear as to whether the aim was to better understand PIs or to work with them to improve their contribution.

EG suggested that the learned societies might be a route into accessing PIs. Selection of participants was key and they must feel that they have some stake in the project and some common ground with fellow participants. The project should focus on how they can use their experience to help their staff and also their own developmental needs.

EG recommended that the current proposal be revised to

- Identify specific terms of reference and desired outcomes
- Better form the topics into a semi-structured discussion
- Make sure PIs are seen as partners (and so review the way the questions are phrased)
- Engage with PIs as an opportunity to recruit advocates for Concordat implementation.

5.4 Fixed Term Contracts study – next steps

JM outlined progress with the project to review the use of fixed term contracts and informed EG that a final report would be available in new year.

5.5 Update on response to letters to funders and supporters

TP informed EG that two responses from funders had been received so far and that he hoped to be able to report to the Strategy Group on 22 October that all funders had responded. Supporters had also begun to respond.

6. Report on European Charter & Code / IHRSG

JM fed back on the 7 September meeting of the International Human Resources Strategy Group.

EG then discussed the need to align Concordat and EU reporting. It was agreed that bi-annual reporting would be preferable. The HEI strategies benchmarking project would be the main tool for delivering a report that demonstrated that the UK was compliant with the Charter & Code. CROS would also contribute to this strand. Universities would only be allowed to use the Charter & Code logo and put their details on Euraxess if they completed the HEI strategies survey satisfactorily. This should be emphasised in the letter supporting that survey.

It was noted that not all aspects of the Charter & Code overlap with the Concordat and the QAA code of conduct but that the Strategy Group was charged with reporting on all aspects of the Charter & Code and so would also take on responsibility for reporting on matters relating to intellectual property and co-authorship.

Universities that complete the HEI strategies survey and publish the results on their websites would then conform with the EU Charter & Code. This would be a necessary condition for using the EU Charter & Code logo and putting the HEI's details on the Euraxess website. This should be emphasised in the letter supporting that survey.

Action: To add section to HEI strategies paper to cover intellectual property and co-authorship.

The timetable proposed was:

- 2010: HEI strategies survey
- 2012: follow-up survey
- Surveys every two years from 2014.

7. Agenda for Research Concordat Strategy Group was discussed and revisions proposed.

8. Any other business

HEFCE informed EG of two recent reports.

It was proposed that the Strategy Group respond formally to the consultation on the Research Evaluation Framework.

JM reported on the Researcher Development Framework and agreed to circulate to the Strategy Group.

IC emphasised the need to maintain momentum and welcomed the decision to set specific dates for projects and for reporting (both by HEIs and by the Strategy Group).

The role of the Concordat website as a portal for information was emphasised, for example to publicise:

- The number of research staff
- Funders' strategies
- The number of staff from outside the UK.

It was recommended that statistics of useful information be published on the website regarding research staff on the website. This would be an outcome of the project Understanding the Research Staff Cohort.

9. Future meetings

The Research Concordat Strategy Group was due to meet on 22 October 2009

Action: TP agreed to schedule meetings up to one year in advance.

Action Point summary:

Action: TP to produce implementation plan for the Strategy Group in October

Action: RB to send TP list of Concordat contacts in HEIs

Action: TP to augment existing summary of implementation activity with information from Concordat contacts within HEIs and professional academies/learned societies.

Action: TP to propose a publication schedule for outputs over the next few years

Action: EG to produce Annual Reports to coincide with the Funders' Forum

Action: TP to add section to HEI strategies paper to cover intellectual property and co-authorship.

Action: TP agreed to schedule meetings up to one year in advance.

TP 1/10/09