

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Implementation Strategy

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The Research Concordat Strategy Group (RCSG) considered an outline Implementation Plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (the Concordat) at their meeting on 22 January 2009. RCSG represents the signatories of the supporters and has overall responsibility for delivering the Concordat. It is chaired by Sir Ivor Crewe. The Concordat Executive Group built upon this and provided further details at their March and September 2009 meetings. Over the same period a lot of work has been undertaken to promote the Concordat and to take forward the benchmarking projects agreed at the RCSG meeting.

The following paper seeks to bring the Implementation Plan up to date and provide a clearer framework for the future. Implementation strategy is divided into four key areas: knowledge building; practice sharing; consolidation; communications. The Plan also considers the publication schedule for key Concordat-related outputs.

Knowledge building

To effectively promote the Concordat it will be necessary to build knowledge of the sector through pooling existing knowledge and working with partner organisations to identify and fill gaps.

Benchmarking process

RCSG agreed six benchmarking projects in January 2009. The aim of the projects is to establish the state of research staff career development. This will inform future implementation activity and also enable the measurement of progress over time.

The six projects are outlined below. Further information is available in the Report to the Strategy Group, 22 October 2009.

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 Spring 2010
Funders strategies	N	Coordinator	Initial summary 2009

As well as providing a picture of the sector and setting the base line against which future progress will be measured, it is hoped that the benchmarking projects will produce outputs that add to the general knowledge of the sector.

General knowledge building activity

In addition to the six benchmarking projects, there is a need to build general knowledge about the sector. It will therefore be necessary to

- Expand knowledge about research careers including career pathways, reasons for entry and exit etc.
- Monitor workforce trends
- Build a database of key contacts in every HEI
- Monitor and highlight Concordat-promoting events and activity in HEIs, Funders and among other signatories and supporters
- Conduct an analysis of gaps in knowledge
- Investigate European examples including the Charter & Code process, ensuring that the overlap with the Concordat is constantly monitored

This is an area where a variety of organisations from across the sector are taking initiatives. The Concordat website should aim to act as a hub for this information and knowledge.

Practice Sharing

The key to improving the career development of researchers is through the sharing of good practice. The Research Councils have established Vitae with a specific remit to help promote good practice by facilitating the sharing of practice between institutions. Vitae will be the lead organisation delivering the practice sharing agenda.

Specific actions will include

- Activities around dissemination of the results of the Careers in Research Online Survey
- Vitae Hub events across the country will enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to share practice and learn from one another
- Vitae will promote their database of practice as a mechanism for sharing examples of institutional practice, and will provide access to relevant resources and trainers
- Vitae have produced a series of briefing sheets explaining the Concordat to specific stakeholder groups. These will be used to target specific audiences, eg human resources specialists, careers advisors

- Vitae and the Coordinator will work with partner organisations to make sure that the Concordat is embedded in the partners' work, in particular through conferences and publications.

All signatories and supporters should look to maximise, and cooperate upon, practice sharing opportunities. The Coordinator will seek to align the Concordat implementation strategy with the work of partner organisations. For example, HEFCE's Leadership, Governance and Management programme has funded work on the leadership and development needs of principal investigators; UCEA run events through which the Concordat could be promoted.

Consolidation

Activity is required to broaden support for the Concordat and embed good practice in institutions. To maintain momentum and ensure that practice becomes permanent, it is important to

- Increase the number of signatories and supporters of the Concordat
- Build tools that enable institutions to measure the impact of implementation individually and across the sector, for example through providing sector- and mission-group averages against which individual HEIs can measure their own implementation
- Build strategic partnerships with organisations with common/overlapping agendas
- Ensure all stakeholders, partners, signatories, supporters and members of the Strategy Group to refer to the Concordat and highlight the role of research staff where relevant (including especially in their responses to the Research Evaluation Framework consultation)
- Adopt the Vitae researcher development framework
- Develop a list of champions, resources and sources of help
- Agree the process for using the Concordat to demonstrate delivery of the European Charter and Code

The Concordat should become part of the mainstream activity and thinking of leaders.

Communications Plan

The Communications plan aims to promote awareness of the Concordat and to provide an information resource for those responsible for implementation.

Website

The Concordat website will be developed with the long term aim that it will highlight:

- The latest news of relevance to the sector
- Press releases and articles related to the Concordat
- Provide a gateway to other relevant resources, steering visitors to other sites (e.g. Vitae; Euraxess)
- Provide tailored information to constituent groups (e.g. staff; leaders; developers)
- Outline the relationship with the European Charter & Code
- Relevant articles and opinion pieces.

Media campaign

Awareness and understanding of the Concordat will be promoted through:

- Press releases highlighting particular issues/events
- Articles in relevant journals and publications
- Guest pieces from leading figures

Relevant articles will be highlighted on the Concordat website. These will be tailored to different constituencies and will include existing publications and articles on the Concordat and other websites.

A coordinated approach with strategic partners (signatories and supporters) will seek to utilise their resources to promote the Concordat. For example, HEFCE will refer to the Concordat in their HE Workforce report due to be published in October 2009.

There is no immediate plan to produce a Concordat newsletter as this aspect of communications will be achieved through existing journals and newsletters. The Executive Group will continue to monitor the communications strategy with a view to whether a dedicated newsletter would be beneficial in the future.

Events

The Chair and Members of the Strategy Group may be asked to speak at relevant conferences, seminars and other events to promote the Concordat. This programme will be led by, but not limited to, the Chair of the Strategy Group and the Concordat Coordinator and will complement ongoing work by RCUK and Vitae's national and regional teams.

The Coordinator will seek to build a list of willing participants in seminars, workshops and conferences to act as ambassadors for the Concordat.

Programme of HEI visits

Resources do not exist to carry out systematic visits to HEIs across the sector and the UK. Consequently, a needs-based strategy is proposed. The aim will be to maximise the impact of a limited number of visits.

A programme of activity will be developed that will aim to maximise the impact of visits to HEIs. Factors that will influence decisions about visits will include, but not be limited to, the number of researchers affected, the current level of progress toward implementing the concordat and the potential for knowledge building and sharing.

Publication schedule

The Strategy Group will aim to produce and publish regular progress reports. The frequency of these reports should reflect the cycle of information gathering and reporting resulting from other Concordat activity.

The Terms of Reference of the Strategy Group (agreed at their meeting in January 2009) commit the Strategy Group “To report annually to the UK Research Base Funders Forum on the implementation to date”. The Funders’ Forum meet annually.

On 14 September the Executive Group recommended that HEIs be requested to report biennially on progress implementing the Concordat and promoting the 7 principles. Every four years the Strategy Group will produce a major report progress report. This will align with the reporting cycles envisaged for the European Charter and Code, as expressed in the European Partnership for Researchers and reinforced by the Institutional Human Resources Strategy Group.

The following sets out some of the reports that are already planned for the period to end 2011:

Report	Lead	Deadline
Annual Report to the Funders Forum	Strategy Group	December 2009
Understanding the Research Staff Cohort – initial recommendations	Coordinator	December 2009
Report on the Fixed Term Contracts project		January 2010
HEI Strategies – report on initial survey	Coordinator	April 2010
Mapping exercise: Concordat/C&C/CROS	Coordinator	December 2010
CROS Report 2010 [See note 1]	Vitae	September 2010
Annual Report to the Funders Forum	Strategy Group	
Concordat Implementation: Three Years On		July 2011
CROS Report 2011	Vitae	September 2011
Annual Report to the Funders Forum	Strategy Group	December 2011

Note 1: The CROS Steering Group agreed that analysis and publication of CROS reports will depend on the level of uptake by HEIs. A decision is yet to be made on a 2010 report.