

Research Concordat Strategy Group

Wellcome Trust, London

22 October 2009

Minutes of the meeting

1. Present

Sir Ivor Crewe, Chair of the Research Concordat Strategy Group
Thomas Papworth, Research Concordat Implementation Coordinator

Robert Barrett, Royal Academy of Engineering
Rosie Beales Research Councils UK
Sarah Brant, Universities Personnel Association
Iain Cameron, Research Councils UK
Paul Curran, Bournemouth University
Ann Deehan, National Institute for Health Research
Ken Emond, British Academy
David Gani, Scottish Funding Council
Christopher Hale, Universities UK
Chris Hall, Equality Challenge Unit
Candace Hassall, Wellcome Trust
Paul Hubbard, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Paul Marshall, 1994 Group
Paul McDonald, Royal Society
Ellen Pearce, Vitae
Jeremy Pearson, British Heart Foundation
Liz Philpots, Association of Medical Research Charities
Paula Shelley, UCEA
Alison Spaul, Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Government
Alyson Thomas, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Jane Thompson, University and College Union

Apologies for absence

David Cox, National Institute for Health Research
Fergus Devitt, Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
Caroline Gipps, University of Wolverhampton
Peter Main, Institute of Physics
Ella Richie, Newcastle University
Nigel Thrift, University of Warwick
Janet Metcalfe, Vitae

2. **Minutes of the last meeting** had been agreed and published in advance.
3. **Report on the Executive Group meetings of March and September 2009:** The Strategy Group received and noted the reports.
4. **Implementation Plan and update of activity:** The Strategy Group received the update of implementation activity. The Chair noted the level of activity and commended the momentum that it demonstrated. Members were keen to ensure that good practice was captured and shared and that the Group and the Coordinator should ensure that resources were available to ensure that institutions learn from good practice across the sector. Members agreed to forward any examples of practice to the Coordinator.

The committee agreed the proposed Implementation Plan. It was noted that the main challenge was embedding the principles into practice. The example of the University of Edinburgh, where Senate presides over all research career development, was cited. It was noted that the involvement of HR directors was vital.

HEFCE is working with a Higher Education Workforce Steering Group to produce a revised HE Workforce Framework (due for publication in early 2010) which will acknowledge good practice and help promote practice sharing to ensure implementation of the Concordat.

Vitae are encouraging practice sharing, both through their Database of Practice and through the dissemination of CROS 2009. It is also leading the Fixed Term Contracts project. UCEA and UHR suggested that these would be opportunities to work together.

It was noted that it would be important to communicate with all involved in institutions (e.g. finance and research offices) and that Vitae was in an ideal position to aid this communication.

With reference to the Knowledge Building section of the Implementation Plan, the Chair noted the desire of the Executive Group to benchmark the higher education and health research sectors. Iain Cameron noted that the Research Council institutes and other research institutes might provide an instructive contrast with higher education.

It was noted that confidentiality prohibited the CROS Steering Group from sharing information about which institutions did not participate in CROS with other bodies. However, the Funding Councils could encourage HEIs to participate. The Chair proposed that the next Strategy Group meeting assess the numbers of participants in CROS and the HEI Strategies survey and consider how to encourage those who had not previously participated to do so. One suggestion was that this be a role for university courts. Another was that union branches could be encouraged to urge their institutions to participate. The fact that responding to the HEI Strategies survey would obviate the need to respond independently to the European Commission to outline compliance with the Charter & Code was also emphasised.

The coordinator also updated the Strategy Group on the responses by funders to the letter Sir Ivor sent to them in the Summer, requesting a summary of their actions so far to implement the Concordat. A summary of these responses will be published on the Concordat website. It was suggested that funders build on their activity by communicating their work to the sector and publishing their implementation plans.

5. **Update on European Charter & Code:** Ellen Pearce informed the Strategy Group of the discussions that the Institutional Human Resources Strategy Group held on 7 September.

Recognition by the European Commission would follow a five stage process:

- 1) HEI conducts an internal analysis;
- 2) HEI publishes gap analysis;
- 3) Commission acknowledges HEI (which can then use C&C badge and Euraxess);
- 4) Internal quality assurance mechanism conducted by HEI biennially;
- 5) Four-yearly external evaluation by Commission.

The Commission has agreed that the HEI strategies project being organised by the Coordinator as part of the Concordat benchmarking projects will provide a means for UK HEIs to demonstrate their commitment to the C&C without going through the above process. This model is generating interest across the EU.

6. **Reporting and Benchmarking processes:** The Strategy Group received the benchmarking paper.

Funders explained that HEIs were accountable to funders for expenditure of public funds. However, the primary contribution that funders could make would be to work with the sector to encourage engagement with the agenda. In particular, it was suggested that the funders should help demonstrate the link between promoting the career development of research staff and successful research.

UUK proposed that the Coordinator should meet with the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) [to raise awareness of the concordat and explore opportunities for future activities](#).

7. **Reporting and publication schedule:** The Coordinator proposed that the HEI Strategies survey form the basis for HEIs to assess their progress embedding the principles of the Concordat. HEIs would be asked to repeat the survey biennially. This would satisfy the internal quality assurance mechanism that the European Commission had proposed (see section 5) and, by aligning with other cycles such as CROS, would also enable the Strategy Board to measure progress on a 2-yearly cycle. In addition, it was hoped that it would produce examples of practice that might be shared with others.

The group expressed some concerns regarding the wording: HEIs should be encouraged to complete the survey. There were issues over who would have the authority to monitor the responses. It was suggested that the survey 'will provide opportunity to share good practice'.

Concern was also expressed that the proposals for future projects suggested 'comparison' between HEIs instead of sharing of practice.

The Chair emphasised the importance of ensuring that as many institutions as possible responded. Funders agreed to use their good offices to encourage institutions to do so.

The Strategy Group agreed to produce a major report every two years on progress delivering the Concordat. This would align with the cycles set out in sections 5 and 7. This would not prejudice the annual report to the Funders Forum.

- 8. Considering research careers in response to the REF consultation:** The Strategy Group considered the recommendation of the Executive Group that they formally respond to the Research Excellence Framework consultation. The Strategy Group felt that a formal response was unnecessary but that a high level statement should be sent from the Chair to the Funding Councils to protect the interests of career researchers.
- 9. Researcher Development Framework:** Ellen Pearce briefed the Strategy Group on the Researcher Development Framework. The RDF is a national framework that will update the Joint Skills Statement. A formal consultation would take place during November and December 2009.
- 10. European Research Area - National Action Plan:** Iain Cameron briefed the Strategy Group on the National Action Plan, which was being drafted by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills but had not yet received ministerial approval. The UK (along with other Member States) is obliged to produce a National Action Plan covering: open recruitment and portability of grants; meeting the social security and supplementary pensions needs of mobile researchers; attractive employment and working conditions; and enhancing the training, skills and experience of European researchers.

The Group agreed that this gave a good picture of activity across the sector on a range of initiatives.

Action Point summary:

Action: Members to forward any examples of practice to the Coordinator.

Action: UCEA and UHR to work with Vitae on projects including Fixed Term Contracts.

Action: Funding Councils to encourage HEIs to participate in CROS.

Action: Funders publish their implementation plans and communicate activity to the sector.

Action: Funders to encourage institutions to respond to HEI Strategies survey.

Action: Chair to write to Funding Councils to ensure REF reflects the principles of the Concordat following approval by the Strategy Group.

Action: Members to consider responding to the RDF consultation.

The next meeting will be held on 19 October 2010.