

RCUK Concordat Implementation

The RCUK Executive Group (RCUKEG) has discussed the Concordat Implementation (see the Executive Group paper at Annex A), and agreed that this was a very important agenda and that the RCUK Strategy Unit and the Research Careers and Diversity Group (RCDG) should take this forward.

Subsequent discussions by RCDG have identified three areas for attention:

- People - Who are the audiences?
- Signalling - What are the messages?
- Tangible Changes - What can we do?

The clearly identified messages are:

1. RCUK has a key role to maintain the momentum of the Concordat.
2. Changes to peer review were possible but the timescale for change was too long for a quick impact.
3. Research Councils RCs had a unique level of interaction with PIs across the sector and our staff are in a position, if properly briefed, to assist the implementation of the Concordat by promoting it to PIs - RC programme Managers therefore are a key audience with whom RCUK should communicate.
4. A plan to develop and communicate key messages to PIs on the expectations of the Councils should be implemented by autumn 2009. This should be informed by intelligence compiled by the Concordat Co-ordinator on the implementation plans of top funded Universities.

RCDG is now taking forward this agenda and further information is available from Rosie Beales

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RESEARCH COUNCILS UK EXECUTIVE GROUP

24 JUNE 2009

RESEARCH COUNCILS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2009 FOR THE CONCORDAT FOR THE CAREER MANAGEMENT OF RESEARCHERS

Issue

1. As a signatory to the Concordat for the Career Management of Researchers (The Concordat) the Research Councils need to prepare an Implementation plan at RCUK level and/or as individual Research Councils. These will need to ensure that our roles as research funders and individual RC roles as employers of researchers are covered.
2. The Research Councils should ensure that priority is given to this activity in order that the Councils are an exemplar for the sector.

Action

3. The RCUK Executive Group is invited to:
 - i. **RECOMMEND** That a cross-council project, reporting to RCDG, with specific inputs from all RCs, be initiated and that the RCUK Strategy Unit ensures that priority is given to this activity in order that RCs are recognised as an exemplar for the sector.

Further information

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Context

Background

3. The Concordat was approved for signature by the Chair of RCUKEG on behalf of the Research Councils at the RCUKEG meeting on 19 March 2008.
4. Implementing the Concordat is central to the objectives of the Research Councils because of the central role of highly skilled researchers in academic research and the contribution that those trained in research make to the economy both within and outwith academe.
5. The Concordat supports the Research Councils aim to deliver a world class research base and through this create a higher level of economic impact and a better quality of life for the UK. One of the three key outputs of the RCUK delivery plan is vital to achieving this namely:

Skilled People

6. Discovery and innovation in research happen through the creativity of people. The Research Councils support the current and next generation of world class researchers so that the UK can increase its research output and global research impact.
7. The Concordat agenda builds on the Roberts – SET for Success agenda in particular the “Vision for Postdoctoral Researchers” which is supported by the ‘Roberts Money’ allocated by RCUK to support the career development of researchers.
8. The Concordat sets out a vision of working practices, roles and responsibilities that the signatories believe will further the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK, and thus ensure the continued provision of well-trained, talented and motivated researchers that is essential to the continuation of our research excellence.

9. The Concordat agenda also supports the 'Excellence with Impact' agenda in particular by emphasising in Principle 3 that Researchers should be "...equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment." This should support researchers who move out of academia and enable to be confident about their competencies and careers.
10. The Research Councils are collectively committed to the implementation of the Concordat and RCUK has publicly stated that it will have a high level of involvement in all implementation activities across the sector particularly through membership of the Research Concordat Strategy Group.
11. The RCUK supported Vitae[®] skills development programme was launched alongside the Concordat. Through Vitae[®] RCUK aims to play a major role in the drive for high-level skills and innovation and in the UK's goal to produce world class researchers. The Vitae[®] vision is for the UK to be world-class in supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers. Vitae[®] builds on the previous UKGRAD programme supporting transferable and career skills for postgraduate researchers.
12. Individual Research Councils may also need to have a specific implementation plan for their own areas of responsibility and activity. For example in relation to their role as employers of researchers in research institutes.

Overall Sector Implementation

13. The Research Councils (through the RCUK Research Careers and Diversity team) are involved with the following areas of activity:
 - Participation in the Research Concordat Strategy Group
 - Jointly funding the Concordat co-ordinator (with the HE Funding bodies)
 - Funding the Vitae[®] programme which is central to the implementation of the Concordat
 - Supporting specific benchmarking projects
 - Working with the sector on the development of a Framework of Researcher Attributes
 - Communication and Awareness raising
 - Facilitating practice sharing

RCUK Implementation

14. The Research Concordat Strategy Group held its first meeting on 22 January 2009 and its Executive Subgroup has agreed that a letter be sent, during the summer, from the Chair of the Strategy Group, Sir 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.
15. At the Concordat Launch, in subsequent presentations to HEIs and at the Concordat Strategy Group, RCUK has clearly stated its intention to maintain a leading role in the implementation of the Concordat and to develop its own implementation plan.
16. The RCUK/UUK Review of the Impact of Full Economic Costing notes the Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers, and as part of its implementation it recommends that the possibility of developing metrics to better understand and monitor the sustainability of human resources be explored.

17. The implementation should also note the outcomes or actions from the Consultation on the Governance of Good Research Conduct.

Implementation by the Research Councils as Employers

18. Implementation by the RCs as employers may involve reviewing HR policies and procedures, for example recruitment and selection, promotion, staff development and equality. This may be at head office or at institute level and will need to involve the Human Resources Management Group, the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group and possibly the pay harmonisation project group. Implementation as employers could provide an exemplar to other Research Institutes and HEIs.

Implementation by the Research Councils as Funders

19. Implementation as funders of research has much wider potential impact on RCUK and all Research Councils. All policies, guidance and communications in respect of grant funding and the peer review process may require amendment or updating. For example the Concordat expects funders to make it a priority to consider how their policies, guidance and funding can be enhanced to help the sector in supporting the continuity of employment of researchers.

20. The Research Councils have already amended their grant Terms and Conditions through the RCUK Research Administration Convergence Group and this group will need to ensure that any development and maintenance of common, harmonised policies, processes and administrative arrangements associated with grants, studentships and fellowships take account of the principles of the Concordat.

21. The Research Concordat Strategy Group noted that the main obstacles to effective implementation were ensuring engagement of researchers and PIs. In the past the Research Councils have been asked whether they have plans to collect information on the career development of researchers employed on their grants but typically they have declined this option. There have been two possible reasons for this: that the final report is too late a stage to do this and that the career development of the individual is not directly linked to a single grant. The Outputs and Outcomes Collection System Project also impacts on the future of final reports in favour of establishing an ongoing dialogue with the research community which allows outputs to be reported at any point within the funding agreement and beyond – some of these outputs may relate to career development.

22. One means of achieving greater visibility by PIs of career development issues for researchers is to address it within research grant proposals. This has been implemented by several Councils in ‘First Grant’ schemes for new appointees; or in guidance to referees and panels for example:

- i. EPSRC’s First Grant scheme requests that the host organisation “Describe the commitment the university is making to the development of the applicant’s research career”. The host organisation statement forms an important part of the assessment of the proposal. Proposals without a supporting statement, or with a statement that does not give enough evidence of support from the host university, will be rejected.¹
- ii. ESRC’s First Grant Scheme states that: “The application must include a training and development programme for the PI, and details of a senior experienced colleague who will support the PI in a mentoring role. The

¹ <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/ResearchFunding/Opportunities/NewAcademics/FirstGrant/HostStatement.htm>

- training programme should clearly identify the PI's training and development needs and indicate how these will be addressed.”
- iii. BBSRC requires grant awarding committees to comment on the ‘Staff training potential of the project’ and asks referees “comment on the extent to which the proposed project will provide research training and development opportunities of benefit both to the individual(s) employed, and to the wider science base beyond the completion of the specific project. ...”
23. The Councils fellowship schemes are also specifically aimed at the development of an individual researcher’s career. Different aspects of which may be addressed in the various schemes.
24. It is proposed that the Research councils whether career development of researchers can be implemented in a more systematic way within the grants process. For example the applicants for all Research Council grants could be asked to address the career development of research staff involved with the grant and to ask referees to comment on this as part of the assessment process. There may be examples of this in the funding schemes of the Councils or other funders but these have not been identified at this point. At present this aspect is covered by the grant terms and conditions (GC 8) but is not requested at application (it is not covered in the Beneficiaries, Academic Beneficiaries or the Impact summary).
25. Discussions with the RCUK Financial Assurance Programme about any areas where this programme can assist with the implementation of the Concordat are planned. HEI visits already look at procedures for ensuring that grant terms and conditions are made available to Principal Investigators. This could be extended to cover implementation of the Concordat.

Implementation through Communications

26. A communication plan will be developed which will cover both internal communication to ensure awareness of the Concordat as well as external communication about the Research Council implementation and any changes in policy or guidance.
27. All Research Council staff that interact with the sector need to be made aware of the principles and aims of the Concordat. This will prepare them to both champion the aims of the concordat and to act as a source of intelligence on its implementation.
28. RCUK will also need to consider how best to use its range of publications and communications to maintain the visibility of the Concordat and the momentum of its implementation. This will supplement the activity of the Concordat Co-ordinator. This will be taken forward through the RCUK Communications Strategy Advisory Group and individual RC communications groups.

Responsibility

29. The prime responsibility for implementation of the Concordat by the Councils sits with the Research Careers and Diversity Group of RCUK. However other cross-council groups have responsibilities or interests including RACG and the HR Directors Group. These of these groups report to OSG and therefore it should have sight of and share the ownership of aspects of the RCUK Concordat Implementation Plan. The communications strategy and plan will rely heavily on programme managers which will require involvement with the RCUK Communications Strategy Group and RDG.

30. In order to ensure that the Implementation Plan is developed and implemented robustly it is proposed that a project be established led by the Research Careers and Diversity Team of RCUK. The project will take account of the suggestions in this paper, the actions and plans of the concordat co-ordinator and other funders and the other research careers activities of RCUK (including the Vitae skills development programme).

Summary

31. The key elements of the RCUK implementation plan are:

- i. Make a public statement re-iterating RCUK support for the Concordat: making reference to the support available through the 'Roberts Money', the role of the Vitae® programme and the link to Excellence with Impact.
- ii. Ensure that systematic attention is given to the career development of researchers within the research Councils' grants assessment process.
- iii. Implement a Communications strategy to support RCUK staff in their interactions with the HE sector and external awareness of the Concordat and any Concordat-related changes to Research Council systems and processes.
- iv. Determine whether the Institutes of the Research Councils provide examples of good practice in the management of researchers and publicise these as exemplars for the HE sector.

Action

32. The RCUK Executive Group is invited to:

- i. **RECOMMEND** That a cross-council project, reporting to RCDG, with specific inputs from all RCs, be initiated and that the RCUK Strategy Unit ensures that priority is given to this activity in order that RCs are recognised as an exemplar for the sector.