The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Are you supporting all your staff engaged in research?
The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is an agreement between the funders and employers of researchers in the UK. Sitting alongside a range of local, UK and European initiatives, this agreement represents a significant development in national policy to support good management of researchers and their careers. Through the implementation of its principles it aims to enhance the researcher workforce and thereby sustain research excellence bringing benefits to the health, economy and well-being of the UK.

The Concordat Strategy Group has affirmed that the Principles of the Concordat should extend to all those who are engaged in research, not just those employed on research contracts.

This briefing is intended to prompt institutions and research institutes to consider how they are supporting all staff engaged in research, particularly early career staff. There could be a wide range of staff who are research active in some way, but are not employed on research contracts. These could be employed in academic, technical or other professional roles. They may be individuals who aspire to follow a research career, but who are employed on a series of fixed-term and/or part-time contracts without an explicit research focus, such as teaching, particularly in the period following their doctorate. This constitutes a more typical career phase in the arts and humanities and common in the social sciences, in contrast to the sciences where individuals are more routinely employed on a series of research posts after their doctorate. Equally there may be technical or other professional services staff, such as researcher developers and librarians, who would benefit from the opportunities for researcher development available to research staff.

One of the main challenges in supporting individuals in this position is identifying them, given the range of employment arrangements and different types of institutions. For example, in the arts and humanities it can be known for individuals to be working on fixed-term hourly-paid contracts for several institutions and this may also mean that they are not provided with the help and support which is routinely available to early career researchers who are on research staff contracts. Equally, many technicians make a significant contribution to research in many disciplines, but their development needs as contributors to research may be overlooked. This briefing considers each of the Concordat principles and how institutions and research institutes could support all staff who are engaged in or aspiring to engage in research.

Concordat principles

- Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research
- 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
- 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
- Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning
- Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers
- The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.
Support and career development

The Concordat places personal and professional development at the heart of the experience of researchers, and as key to realising the potential of the research workforce and achieving institutions’ research strategies.

Institutions benefit from having access to a large pool of dedicated and highly skilled staff engaged in research some of whom may be employed on fixed-term teaching roles or in technical or other professional roles.

Principles

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

- Ensure that communication mechanisms are in place to provide relevant information on the development opportunities to all staff engaged in research.
- Consider providing researcher development activities to the wider pool of staff who are contributing to institutional research activity.
- Consider the provision of a ‘peer mentoring’ programme for colleagues pursuing research alongside their teaching or other contracts, to provide support and guidance for personal and professional development of individuals in this position.
- Ensure there is someone senior at departmental or school level responsible for engaging this group of staff with wider career development issues.
- Consider providing equality of access to university services, such as library access, as provided to research staff.

Institutional example

Researcher training and development, University of Leeds

Within the social sciences, arts and humanities at Leeds a significant number of those still on the academic early career path are teaching fellows. In order to progress they also need to develop a research profile, even though this may not be part of their formal role. To support the career development of these individuals the university offers the same access to training and development programmes in the social sciences, arts and humanities, to all postdoctoral contract staff, teaching-only colleagues included. Since 2015 CROS has also been promoted to both groups within the institution, encouraging them to self-select to participate if they are engaged in research on either a formal or informal basis.

www.leeds.ac.uk/rtd
Recognition and value

This principle encourages institutions and research institutes, in particular heads of school and department, to consider ways of recognising, and valuing, the research efforts being undertaken by the wider group of staff to build a research track record.

Areas to consider

- Look for ways to recognise the wealth of talent and potential in this wider group of research-engaged staff
- Ensure that institutional strategies for supporting early career researchers recognise the specific post-doctorate career phases prevalent in different disciplines, particularly in disciplines where early career teaching contracts are more common, such as in the arts and humanities, and social sciences
- Consider how individuals undertaking teaching and other roles can be integrated into the department’s wider research environment, if appropriate, for example by including them in staff research seminars
- Develop clear guidelines for individuals to use their university affiliation when giving conference papers, for example, where the research was undertaken as part of their doctorate at the university, and went through appropriate ethical review
- Consider ways in which they can participate in performance review or appraisal processes, recognising their research activity
- Allow research-engaged staff to post their academic profile on institutional web pages and through broader institutional marketing or impact strategies
- Promote access to externally recognised professional recognition schemes.

Institutional example

Technicians at the University of Nottingham
The University of Nottingham is providing the opportunity for technical staff to gain professional recognition through the Science Council’s Professional Registers. Individuals demonstrate their skills and experience against a nationally recognised framework and can achieve Registered Science Technician (RsciTech), Registered Scientist (RSci) or Chartered Scientist (CSci) status.

The Science Council’s Professional Registers demonstrate the transferability of researchers’ skills across academia and industry and provide a framework to support career development.

http://sciencecouncil.org/scientists-science-technicians/benefits-of-professional-registration/what-is-professional-registration/
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 progression in academic careers can often have a detrimental and disproportionate effect on certain groups.

Areas to consider

- Review institutional diversity and equality policies and practices to ensure that these reflect models of good practice in creating an inclusive research environment for all staff engaged or seeking to engage in research.
- Regularly review the demographic profile of the institution’s wider academic workforce, including those of ‘atypical staff’ (in HESA terms) and casual staff, taking positive steps to address issues of representation as appropriate.
- Regularly review the demographic profile of technical and other professional services staff, and their equality of opportunity to be engaged in and recognised for their research activity.

Institutional example

Athena SWAN Charter and Race Equality Charter, Equality Challenge Unit

The Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005 to recognise institutions’ commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM). In 2015 it was extended to include the arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL). There are three levels of the Award and it can be achieved at both institutional and departmental level.

ECU recently launched a Race Equality Charter at institutional level to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education.

Both these Charters now include professional and support roles. At institutional level this covers all staff not classified as academic staff. At departmental level this covers non-academic staff working in the department, including administrators and technical support staff.

www.ecu.ac.uk
Researchers’ responsibilities

Responsibility for professional development is recognised by the Concordat as shared between the institution and individuals. All staff engaged in research are encouraged to be proactive in creating, and taking advantage of, development opportunities. Institutions can maximise the benefit of this by providing appropriate institutional structures to support researchers’ development, and inviting wider staff engaged in research to influence and to take responsibility for their own professional environment.

Areas to consider

- Review how the institution communicates with the wide community of its research-engaged staff and encourages them to look for opportunities to broaden their skills and experience, emphasising the importance of wider skills development.
- Ensure that these research-engaged staff do not have unrealistic expectations of securing an academic position.
- Encourage these individuals to look for opportunities for broader engagement with research, for example through identifying project opportunities with collaborative partners, knowledge exchange or public engagement activities relating to their research.
- Encourage institutional and departmental research staff associations to broaden their remit and to welcome individuals who are seeking to sustain their research activity.

Institutional example

**Scientific officer training and development, The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR)**

Scientific officers (SO) make up approximately 45% of the scientific staff employed at the Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) and have traditionally been viewed as support or lab management roles rather than being on an academic career track. In 2011 in response to feedback from SOs that they were a ‘forgotten group’, the ICR supported the creation of a Scientific Officers Association (SOA) to raise the profile of scientific officers within the organisation and improve the range of training available to them. The SOA now has SO reps on a number of ICR-wide committees, including the CEO advisory forum. They host welcome events for new starters, run a promotions mentoring scheme and deliver an annual technical conference. They offer travel bursaries to help SOs attend courses, training and conferences. The SOA also provides end-user input on the training and support offered and have provided technical training to others at the ICR including a “train the technical trainer” one day workshop.

[www.icr.ac.uk](http://www.icr.ac.uk)

Institutional example

**Staff engaged in research, University of Reading**

The University of Reading actively encourages staff on teaching intensive, technical or other professional contracts who are engaged in research, to self-identify as active researchers and, for example, take advantage of the research staff development programme and apply to become members of research divisions.

[www.leeds.ac.uk/rtd](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/rtd)

Principle

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

The Concordat encourages employers to examine the way in which they recruit and retain researchers. Recruitment and selection procedures should be transparent and merit-based, and provide equality of opportunity for applicants with diverse research expertise and experiences, including non-traditional routes into research.

Areas to consider

- Consider how the institution can recognise through their terms and conditions of employment the desire of individuals employed in roles without an explicit research focus to sustain their scholarship.
- Ensure that the recruitment process for fixed-term teaching and other roles is open and transparent, and does not raise unrealistic expectations of the opportunities for an academic career path.
- Ensure that employment opportunities for fixed-term teaching and other roles in academic departments are promoted widely.

Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) Toolkit, European Commission

The ‘OTM-R Package’ is a set of practical and useful tools for implementing open, transparent and merit-based recruitment practices to ensure equal opportunities and access for all. It describes what a good OTM-R system should look like and provides examples of good practice. It includes a self-assessment checklist for institutions and a step-by-step ‘toolkit’ to improve OTM-R practices.


Implementation and review

The Concordat highlights the value of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat principles both at institutional level and across the UK. In 2015 the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) for the first time sought to extend its reach to the wider group of staff who are engaged in research, in order to capture the issues and views of this wider group.

Areas to consider

- Identify the extent and profile of the population within the institution who are or have the potential to be engaged in research, but not employed on research-focused contracts.
- Agree an institutional strategy to address research-engaged staff employed in academic, technical and other professional roles.
- Consider how these groups are integrated into the institutional action plan for the HR Excellence in Research Award.
- Promote CROS to the wider pool of research-engaged staff who would not normally think of themselves as ‘research staff’.
- Take account of the varied career patterns of early career staff in different disciplines in career tracking studies, recognising that research-only posts do not play the same role in all disciplines.

Institutional example

Centre for Genomic Regulation, Barcelona, Spain

The Centre for Genomic Regulation recognises the important contribution that technicians make to the research endeavour, but they rarely had access to training opportunities. Technicians have now been included in their HR Excellence in Research Award action plan with specific actions to ensure that they have access to career development opportunities.

www.crg.eu/en/content/about-us-general-information/hr-excellence-research
Research Councils UK (RCUK) are responsible for investing public money in research in the UK to advance knowledge and generate new ideas which lead to a productive economy, healthy society and contribute to a sustainable world. To maintain the UK’s global research position RCUK offers a diverse range of funding opportunities, fosters international collaborations and provides access to the best facilities and infrastructure around the world. RCUK also supports the training and career development of researchers and works with them to inspire young people and engage the wider public with research.

As a Concordat signatory, RCUK supports the implementation of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. RCUK is committed to the development of skills essential for a growing economy by supporting excellent researchers, developing capability through fellowships and investing in doctoral training programmes, and enhancing the flow of talent to all sectors of the economy. [http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/](http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/)

The Science Council sets the standards for practising scientists and science technicians, through professional registration.

At the core of The Science Council’s ethos is the belief that every scientist has a responsibility to society, and themselves, to work with integrity, keep their skills and knowledge up to date and consider how their efforts affect the world around them.

The Science Council works with organisations who commit to promoting and embedding professional standards among their staff, providing an environment in which registrants can meet this responsibility. [http://sciencecouncil.org/](http://sciencecouncil.org/)

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**Vitae resources relating to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

- A brief guide to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers for research directors and principal investigators, 2015 [www.vitae.ac.uk/PI-concordat-briefing](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/PI-concordat-briefing)
- Progress in implementing the Concordat principles, 2014 [www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-progress-2014](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-progress-2014)
- Concordat briefings for stakeholders [www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat)
- Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, 2008 [www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-text](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-text)
- Careers in Research Online Survey [www.vitae.ac.uk/cros](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/cros)
- Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey [www.vitae.ac.uk/pirls](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/pirls)
- Every Researcher Counts resources [www.vitae.ac.uk/erc](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/erc)

**Vitae leads on the management and implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** [www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat)

The high level Concordat Strategy Group oversees strategy and progress in the UK. Its membership consists of Concordat signatories, key stakeholders and representative bodies. [www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-terms](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat-terms)

**Vitae manages the UK process for the HR Excellence in Research Award, which recognises an institution’s commitment to implementing the principles of the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.** [www.vitae.ac.uk/hrexcellence](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/hrexcellence)


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Vitae, 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. [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk)

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