

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

Vitae briefing for managers of researchers

About this series...

This is one of several briefing documents, developed by Vitae, for stakeholders with a role to play in implementation of the Concordat's principles. It should be read in conjunction with the Concordat itself:

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk. The series explores emerging themes and highlights practical examples which we hope will prove useful as your institution works to implement the principles.

Vitae is a national organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in UK higher education institutions and research institutes. We play a major role in the drive for high-level skills and innovation and in meeting the UK's goal to produce world class researchers.

Vitae is working with UK institutions and other stakeholders to implement the Concordat's principles by providing information, raising awareness, and facilitating the sharing of strategies and practice.

For further information about Vitae and about UK and European policy visit:

www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice.

To view other briefings available in this series go to: **www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat**

'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.

Implementation is likely to mean that, as a principal investigator, research group leader or other manager of researchers, your responsibility for supporting your research staff to be excellent researchers, and to make informed decisions about their career steps is made more explicit. Human resources specialists and staff developers in your institution also have responsibility to support research staff and should be available to advise you on how to best support the development of research staff. This briefing takes each of the Concordat principles in turn, suggesting areas for consideration and providing illustrative examples of practice from UK institutions.

Areas to consider include:

- reviewing your knowledge of your institution's strategies and policies relating to research staff
- whether you are sufficiently supported by the institution as a manager of researchers; pro-actively engaging with senior managers and colleagues from across the institution to suggest improvements
- sharing practice with peers both within and outside the institution to promote excellence in support for research staff in developing as professionals.

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 professional development at the heart of the experience of research staff and as key to realising the potential of the research workforce and achieving institutions' research strategies. Its vision is of progressive professional development from the outset of an employment relationship and as research staff move through their careers, regardless of contractual status. It stresses that responsibility for the responsibility for professional development is shared by many stakeholders across the institution.

The Concordat recognises and values the fact that researchers' careers take a variety of paths. While many stay in academic research, the experience of undertaking research is also highly valued in a range of other contexts. Providing opportunities that enable researchers to develop their employability will motivate and encourage them in their current roles.

Areas to consider include:

- encouraging research staff to identify their skills, passions and development needs and consider what they will need to do to make progress in their career
- being aware of the range of possible careers that your staff may wish to pursue
- exploring how you can contribute to the professional development of your research staff. For example in increasing their experience of academic practice, delegating responsibilities for managing part of a research project and by giving clear and honest information about their career development and prospects
- providing appropriate information on and encouragement to take up both formal and informal professional development opportunities.

MentorSET

www.mentorset.org.uk

“ I had a great sense of achievement seeing my mentee survive problems where I had stumbled.”

A MentorSET mentor.

MentorSET is a successful mentoring scheme to help women working in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET). It provides independent mentors who understand the challenges faced and who can provide support and advice. MentorSET aims to increase the number of women who can maintain their SET careers, and realise their full potential.

Recognition and value

This principle requires employers to manage and reward research staff fairly and transparently and to take an active role in the development of their staff, providing them with recognition and appropriate opportunities. It encourages the institution to increase the stability and continuity of research staff employment. It asks institutions to look at how they employ research staff on fixed term contracts and argues that they should be treated equally to those on open contracts.

Areas to consider include:

- ensuring appraisals are used as constructive opportunities to review the professional development of your research staff
- being aware of opportunities for accessing bridging funds between grants and any redeployment initiatives for your research staff
- budgeting for appropriate salaries relative to experience, salary increases and training and development costs when applying for grants. Funders award grants on the merit of the proposal and generally encourage this practice. For example the research councils and Wellcome Trust incorporate the Concordat in their regulations for research funding.

A development programme for new and up and coming principal investigators (University of Aberdeen)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/606.html

This programme promotes excellence in leadership and management for up and coming principal investigators. It is designed to support new and aspiring research managers in developing their understanding of the University environment: outlining their roles and responsibilities and developing their people management, leadership, and project and resource management skills to ensure they are equipped to reach their full potential in the role. It covers how to develop the researchers in your team, using appraisal and the value of developing your team's generic and employability skills.

Recruitment and selection

The Concordat encourages institutions to examine the way in which they recruit and retain researchers, focussing on transparency, fairness and consistency. It also asks institutions to think about the way in which they use fixed-term contracts. For managers of researchers this is likely to have an impact on the way in which you recruit and manage staff. Depending on your existing practice it may mean that you have to formalise procedures and involve human resources specialists to a greater extent in your recruitment.

Areas to consider include:

- working with human resources specialists to ensure that job advertising, descriptions, grading and interview and selection processes for your research staff are in line with institutional policy
- working with staff development or human resources colleagues to ensure that you and your recruitment panels have appropriate training in interview and selection.

Recruitment and selection for principal investigators (University College London)

www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/osd/timetable/programme/sdrspi/index.php

University College London has developed a workshop to equip principal investigators with key skills to be able to recruit an effective team. The workshop examines, in detail, the process of selecting staff with particular emphasis on equal opportunities legislation and practices. Participants are asked to think about recruitment as part of the effective management of a research team.

Researchers' responsibilities

The Concordat recognises that responsibility for the professional development of research staff is shared between the institution and research staff. Research staff are encouraged to be proactive in creating and taking advantage of development opportunities. As a manager of researchers you can maximise the benefit of this by encouraging them to proactively engage with their career development.

Areas to consider include:

- encouraging your research staff to become aware of the possible career opportunities inside and outside academia that suit their strengths, values and priorities
- facilitating opportunities for your research staff to develop their networks, for example, through attending relevant conferences and meetings, introducing them to your own networks and former members of your team who have gone on to pursue a variety of careers
- holding regular line-management meetings or appraisals and encouraging researchers to use these meetings as an opportunity to explore skills development and career aspirations.

The Researcher (University of Leeds)

www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/543.html

'The Researcher' is a quarterly magazine which asks academics to talk about their career and the skills they need to develop that career. Early career researchers have responded well to the articles as the academics' stories are very credible and relevant. The project also publicly demonstrates that the academics it features are committed to professional development, which leads to increased interest in the University's continued professional development programme.

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 research work can often have a detrimental and disproportionate effect on certain groups. The Concordat suggests ways for institutions to address the disincentives and indirect obstacles to retention and progression in research careers.

Areas to consider include:

- refreshing your knowledge of institutional policies aimed at retention of researchers from diverse groups. For example, the use of flexible working, career breaks, and support with issues such as working with a disability or in a second language
- reflecting on the diversity of your existing research group and whether there are any factors in the nature of the work, your management style or recruitment practices that may be having an impact on this diversity.

Flexible working (University of Cambridge)

"I currently work four days a week, and have found the University's flexibility in allowing me to work part time for a while, invaluable in combining my career with family life. In the long-term I expect to return to full-time employment."

Ruth Cameron, PI and joint director of the Cambridge Centre for Medical Materials.

Implementation and review

The Concordat highlights the value of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat principles both at institutional level and across the UK. Sharing of good practice between institutions is strongly encouraged. A high level Strategy Group will oversee UK progress and will undertake an initial benchmark process and subsequent review. The Concordat advocates the use of existing sources of data and information, including a revised version of the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS).

As a manager of researchers your views on the impact of the Concordat are likely to be sought in a number of ways. You may be asked to comment on your experiences by your institution and funders as well as through national schemes like CROS. By engaging positively in research and evaluation around the implementation of the Concordat you will be able to have an impact on the way in which the situation for research staff develops in the future.

Areas to consider include:

- proactively engaging in and providing feedback on your institutional plans to implement the Concordat and associated programmes developed to support research staff
- encouraging research staff to contribute their views on institutional support for research staff development, via research staff forums, participating in institutional feedback mechanisms, including CROS and by involving themselves in institutional committees and structures.

Management development for principal investigators (PIs) (University of Leicester)

www.le.ac.uk/researchleader/

An online training resource provides information for new and inexperienced PIs. The content was informed by the 2006 Research Leaders' Survey hosted by the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) (www.survey.bris.ac.uk), which explored the training needs of PIs and research managers at 15 UK universities. At Leicester the questionnaire was followed up with focus groups which deepened the project's understanding of the issues.

Other Vitae resources

Vitae works alongside policy makers and staff supporting the development of researchers. We support a growing network and offer a range of tools and events to help with the sharing of practice and expertise. Find out more by visiting our website at www.vitae.ac.uk, in particular the following sections:

- Supervisors and research managers (www.vitae.ac.uk/supervisorsmanager) offers online support and tools for managers of researchers
- Policy and practice (www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice) designed for managers and other HE professionals who wish to develop their understanding and practice around issues relating to researcher careers and development
- Careers (www.vitae.ac.uk/careers) provides career development resources and information for researchers.

Other useful links:

- Concordat website (www.researchconcordat.ac.uk)
- European Charter and Code (http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm?l1=0&l2=3)
- Leadership Development for Principal Investigators (www.le.ac.uk/researchleader)
- Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk)

Vitae database of practice

Most of the examples of practice given in this briefing are drawn from institutional entries in the Vitae database of practice (www.vitae.ac.uk/dop). The examples are intended as a starting point and you are encouraged to explore the database of practice further as you consider your institution's response to the Concordat. The database can be searched by the Concordat principles making it easy to find relevant examples. Please engage in sector-wide practice sharing by entering your own practices onto the database.



The Concordat

to Support the Career Development of Researchers

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was launched in June 2008. It aims to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK and to improve the quantity, quality and impact of research for the benefit of UK society and the economy.

The Concordat provides a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders and institutions with respect to the management of researchers. The Concordat also aims to demonstrate internationally – including to researchers considering coming to work in the UK – the high standards of management and support that can be expected by UK researchers. By adopting its principles the UK also adopts the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

www.researchconcordat.ac.uk