

Executive Summary

1. This review aims to evaluate the impact of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers since its publication in 2008 and review the progress in implementing its Principles. It reviews existing evidence as well as that commissioned by an Expert Review Panel through a community consultation and contextual analysis of the research environment in the UK. The future of the Concordat is considered and recommendations are made in relation to its governance and implementation.
2. The Expert Review Panel concluded that the Concordat has had a significant impact on the support for career development of researchers. However, progress in implementing the Concordat is variable across the Principles and inconsistent across employing institutions; therefore, it should continue to have a role going forward. Although the implementation of the Concordat is overseen by a Concordat Strategy Group, additional drivers will enable further cultural change, with closer links to research funding and sharing of examples of good practice being required.
3. A suggested revised version of the Concordat is provided. There is a need to update language, improve accessibility and communications, and to emphasise the specific roles of different groups in supporting researchers. In addition to researchers themselves and their employing organisations, Principal Investigators and Funders have specific responsibilities and this is reflected through a revised structure of 'Principles and Obligations' which address the responsibilities of different stakeholder groups.
4. A consultation provided the Expert Review Panel with a wide range of views from across the community, including whole institution responses as well as views from researchers, Principal Investigators and researcher developers, both in academia and industry. A range of positive impacts were identified from this consultation, including considerable improvement in researcher access to training resources, and increased visibility and representation of researchers within Higher Education Institutions. However, areas of concern remain, particularly around a lack of awareness of the Concordat especially amongst research staff and outside academia; the clear need for improvements in the use of time-limited contracts; and lack of appropriate recognition of the vital role that researchers play within their institutions.
5. The Concordat should support the career development of all individuals who have a role in carrying out research, be they postdoctoral researchers, research assistants, fellows, technicians or others who pursue research outside research contracts. However, most progress is required in the support of early career researchers in academia. An increased understanding is needed of the UK researcher community through better data gathering and in the tracking of researcher careers.
6. Researchers should be supported to develop independence, and equal value and support should be provided to all researchers, no matter what their career aspirations are. With a continuing trend of global and sectoral researcher mobility, increased value must be placed on the skills and experiences of researchers who move to roles outside academia.
7. There have been notable improvements in the equality, diversity and inclusion of researchers; however, more needs to be done particularly relating to non-gender issues. Therefore, a Principle in this area is still required and specific Obligations relating to inclusivity should also be included within the Principles for different stakeholder groups. Improvements are also required in supporting the health and wellbeing of researchers.

8. Although this review did not assess specific programmes or activities, the Expert Review Panel acknowledged the intrinsic link between the Concordat and the HR Excellence in Research Award. On reviewing evidence relating to this programme, variability in the culture changes associated with the HR Excellence in Research Award were noted. The programme should therefore be reviewed to ensure that it continues to deliver a driver for change in relation to the Concordat.

9. The recommendations of the Expert Review Panel are:

Recommendation 1: The Concordat should continue to be used in order to maintain the UK's standing as a world leader in its support for researchers, and to continue to improve the culture of researcher support. However, some revisions are required to ensure it is effective in driving culture change.

Recommendation 2: The focus and primary aim of the Concordat is for the support of research staff. The definition of 'researchers' used in the Concordat should be explicitly broadened to include staff not primarily hired as researchers, but who are research active. Any reporting relating to the implementation of the Concordat should be clear about the groups of researchers to which it refers.

Recommendation 3: A revised Concordat should focus on researchers in academia but with recognition that the issues in industry and other sectors are similar, although the challenges may be different. It must also emphasise that the Principles and Obligations apply equally to all research staff, regardless of contract type.

Recommendation 4: There should be increased support for researcher independence, including autonomy in their own career development, and the freedom to innovate.

- A revised Concordat should address the tension between PIs and postdoctoral independence, setting out clearly the obligations for both groups.
- There should be increased emphasis and support, by both funders and employers, for uptake of researchers' 10 days training allowance.
- Development of researcher independence should be supported through allocated time within grants.
- 20% of a researcher's time should be allowed for developing independent research and skills.

Recommendation 5: A revised Concordat should promote finding solutions to the problems of mobility, time-limited contracts and promotion that many researchers face.

Recommendation 6: The language, formatting and structure of the Concordat should be updated. A revised Concordat should be:

- Updated to reflect modern policies and practices. It is essential that the Concordat is informed by and linked to any relevant new or revised legislation or policy frameworks.
- More succinct but link to specific examples of good practice.
- Accessible to all stakeholder groups. Consideration should be made to the format of the Concordat to ensure it remains relevant and up to date. Different formats may be required for different stakeholder groups.
- Restructured to articulate the responsibility of different stakeholder groups, including research staff, PIs, employers and funders. A structure of Principles and Obligations would clearly set out the responsibilities of the different groups in driving and implementing change.

Recommendation 7: Equality, diversity and inclusion should be integrated throughout a revised Concordat, outlining specific responsibilities of stakeholder groups in supporting this area. Whilst avoiding repetition, the retention of an updated Principle is also required so that it remains a priority.

Recommendation 8: A communications plan should be developed which ensures that the Concordat remains relevant to new and updated legislation/policy, and which ensures that all relevant stakeholder groups have appropriate access to the Concordat.

- The list of signatories should be reviewed and, if required, updated.
- Funders should require all PIs to be aware of the Concordat and ask them to communicate it to their research staff.
- Employers should ensure that the communications plan is implemented throughout their organisation, and should monitor researcher engagement with the Concordat, for example through participation in annual surveys.

Recommendation 9: Concordat signatories should prioritise a more comprehensive collection of researcher and research careers information, and the Concordat Strategy Group should investigate options to achieve this.

- The UK should aspire to support data collection exercises that are comparable with international models.
- Funders should support research into the most appropriate methods required to obtain such data.
- Existing surveys, including CROS and PIRLS, should be updated to ensure that broad comparability can be made about researcher aspirations and career paths across the sector. Such surveys should aspire to be as representative of the sector as possible.
- Best practice should be shared on ways to engage with researcher alumni communities.
- The Higher Education Statistics Agency should be invited to join the Concordat Strategy Group as a delivery partner.

Recommendation 10: The Concordat must continue to be owned by the sector, with implementation overseen by a representative steering group.

- The Terms of Reference of the Concordat Strategy Group should be reviewed.
- The membership of the Concordat Strategy Group should be reviewed, ensuring that all relevant stakeholder groups (including researchers, PIs, employers and funders) are represented, and/or in working groups which report to the CSG. To represent employers of researchers beyond academia, the involvement of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) is welcomed.

Recommendation 11: The sector should take a strategic approach in considering the skills needs of the UK through commitment to activities which develop the skills of research staff regardless of contract length and in preparation for diverse career paths.

Recommendation 12: There should be a coordinated approach between the development of UK Research and Innovation and the Concordat going forward. UKRI should use its sectoral influence to ensure appropriate consistency across different research domains.

Recommendation 13: A revised Concordat should include a new Principle for funders. Funders should ensure that the Principles of the Concordat are adopted through changes to funding processes.

Recommendation 14: The UK operation of the HR Excellence in Research Award, or any other relevant awards, should be reviewed to ensure it remains relevant as a driver for change.

- A meta-analysis of data for best practice (from published action plans) would give a composite picture of the 'ideal', along with case studies for implementation.
- Evaluation of applications for the award must be evidence-based and institutions may require more guidance on requirements.

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- Strong consideration should be given to the use of a graded assessment (e.g. bronze/silver/gold).
 - There must be a quality assurance of reviewers and of the reviewing process, to ensure that assessment panels are representative of the sector.
 - Views should be sought from organisations outside academia (such as businesses, charities and others) in order to produce guidance for HEIs on the requirements of the award.

Recommendation 15: The UK operation of the HR Excellence in Research Award should be reviewed to ensure that all UK HEIs have access to the UK application process and are not constrained in applying for any associated EU funding beyond Brexit.

- A revised membership model for Vitae should be considered, which separates services associated with the HR Excellence Award and other Vitae activities, and which operates in an open and transparent way.
- The Concordat Strategy Group must ensure that processes are in place to maintain UK standards for researcher development which are at least comparable to those set by the EU.
- Guidelines should be developed to outline any funding implications for UK HEIs who are not in receipt of an HR Excellence Award.