

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

The History of the Concordat

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, commonly known as the **Researcher Development Concordat**, is an agreement between stakeholders to improve the employment and support for researchers and researcher careers in higher education in the UK.

It sets out three clear principles of **environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development**. The principles are underpinned by obligations for the four key stakeholder groups, **funders, institutions, researchers and managers of researchers**, to realise the aims of the concordat. The secretariat responsibility for the concordat is held by Universities UK.

1. Background

The original agreement made in 1996, called A Concordat to Provide a Framework for the Career Management of Contract Research Staff in Universities and Colleges, was between funding bodies and universities. It aimed to improve the support for contract research staff (now more usually termed research staff) in their career development.

Since 1996, UK researchers' expectations regarding career development and working conditions have grown. The interests and responsibilities of research funders and institutions have also changed in response to new employment legislation, amendments to terms and conditions of grants and the publication of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in 2005, which was broadly based on the earlier UK concordat.

The 2008 concordat aimed to provide a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders and institutions with respect to the management of researchers. The Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group (RDCSG) was established along with the publication of the 2008 concordat.

European Charter and Code

Seven principles were written with specific reference to the UK context, encompassing the majority of the 40 principles of the European Charter and Code. The European Commission therefore agreed that for UK institutions, endorsing the principles of the Concordat, along with meeting the requirements of the QAA Quality Code for research degrees, is equivalent to adopting the European Charter and Code. The 2008 concordat has been the primary mechanism for UK institutions to participate in the European **HR Excellence in Research Award**. The secretariat for this award is held by Vitae.

10-year Independent Review

A decade on from publication of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the RDCSG decided it was timely to carry out a 10-year Independent Review, aimed to evaluate the impact of the Concordat since its publication and review progress with implementing its Principles. The future of the Concordat was considered, and recommendations were made in relation to its governance and implementation.

Following the Independent Review, the RDCSG carried out an open community Consultation to establish the views of the broad range of stakeholders, including (but not limited to) institutional senior management, principal investigators, researchers, funders and employers, in relation to the recommendations of the Independent Review.

The responses were overwhelmingly in favour of revising the Concordat, making it shorter, clearer, and more accessible and in particular outlining the specific responsibilities of funders, employers, principal investigators/managers of researchers and researchers themselves.

"As chair of the Concordat Writing Group, I'm fortunate to have a team...who come with a diverse range of skills and experiences, as active post-docs, senior researchers, research development managers, HR professionals, E&D leads, and senior managers" - Dianne Berry, Chair of the Concordat Writing Group

Concordat Writing Group

A Concordat Writing Group chaired by Dianne Berry OBE, was formed from sector volunteers, with representatives from the key stakeholder groups. They were tasked with drafting a new concordat based on the independent review recommendations and the outcomes from the subsequent sector consultation.

A draft of the revised concordat was reviewed by the RDCSG at the beginning of May 2019, at which point it was shared more broadly with specific sector groups, including funders, researcher associations, university representative bodies and other affiliated sector groups. The feedback from this period of reflection was considered by the RDCSG who subsequently guided the direction of the Writing Group in finalising the new concordat throughout the summer of 2019.

Launch of the Researcher Development Concordat 2019

The new Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, known as the Researcher Development Concordat, was launched on 12th September 2019 at the Universities UK Annual Conference. The secretariat responsibility was taken on by Universities UK in 2021.