

## **Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Expert Review Panel for the Review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

**14<sup>th</sup> December 2017, Imperial College, London**

### **Attendance**

#### Expert Review Panel Members:

David Bogle, UCL (Chair)  
Emma Compton-Daw, University of Strathclyde  
Liz Elvidge, Imperial College London / Researchers14  
David Gavaghan, University of Oxford  
James Henstock, University of Liverpool  
Dave Jones, NIHR  
Katie Normington, Royal Holloway  
Ciara Rooney, Queen's University Belfast  
Rebekah Smith McGloin, Coventry University  
Matt Wenham, Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering

#### Secretariat:

Clare Bhunnoo (BBSRC, Secretariat lead)  
Joanna Dunster (AHRC)  
Daisy Youlden (BBSRC)  
Cameron Fenwick (BBSRC)

#### Apologies:

Dave Watson, IBM (retired)

### **Item 1 – Introduction and Matters arising**

1. David Bogle (DB) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.
2. The minutes of the meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017 were agreed.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to upload September meeting minutes to RCUK website

3. Clare Bhunnoo (CB) went through the actions from the September meeting.
4. DB provided an update from the CEG meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017:
  - Janet Metcalfe (Vitae) had agreed to help reach researchers in industry
  - Any future version of the Concordat needs to support incentives / drivers for change, but without a complex regulatory framework
  - There was general agreement that the community should have ownership of the Concordat
  - Concordat Strategy Group membership needs to be broadened to include researchers, Universities and industry.

### **Item 2 – Emerging issues**

5. There was a plenary discussion about issues that had arisen since the last meeting. These are summarised below:

- Motivations: Funding is a key driver; Athena SWAN is an example of the effectiveness of linking culture change to funding. There may need to be a separate Principle for funders.
- Definition of researchers: Care is needed to retain support for postdocs, i.e. not to broaden the definition too much and risk taking support away from this vulnerable group. There was an unresolved discussion about whether or not to explicitly broaden scope to PGRs.
- Implementation: Specifically in relation to HR Excellence in Research awards – there was concern that HR Action plans do not always have senior ownership in HEIs (this is not the case for Athena SWAN); the change to subscription membership of Vitae means that they have a potential conflict as managers of the HR Excellence in Research Award. However, the panel acknowledged that services need to be paid for and struggled to suggest a viable alternative; options included:
  - BEIS ownership – this was not considered appropriate
  - UKRI ownership – but this represents only one constituency
  - Review panel type model with secretariat (this is similar to the current model)
  - It was noted that Vitae are ‘gatekeepers’ to HR Excellence in Research awards, and that UUK is a trade body of which most HEIs are members.
  - Athena SWAN is owned by ECU – how does membership work here?
  - Other Concordats – these are managed by a variety of models; what works? The House of Lords Science & Technology Committee recently wrote to HEI Vice-Chancellors regarding the Concordat for Research Integrity; this was seen to have significant impact.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to look into ownership / governance of the other Concordats

- Promotion of non-academic careers: The Panel liked reference to ‘braided careers’ in the Royal Society response to the consultation.
- Living document: The future Concordat needs to be in a format that can be updated / changed when appropriate, and in line with a changing research environment.
- Resourcing researcher development: There is a difference in culture between industry and academia. The main reason for this was seen to be the mobile nature of researchers within academia, driven by the way that research is funded (which is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future) and a lack of driver for long-term investment. It was suggested that, as a generalisation, training is not done for the benefit of the HE sector. The Panel suggested allocating PDRA time to development of independence; a panel member had an example of where this has worked.

**ACTION: Panel members** to provide examples where new postdocs are given the opportunity to develop independence.

### **Item 3 – Outputs from the community consultation**

6. The secretariat presented a summary of the outputs from the community consultation, which had received over 350 responses from researchers in academia and industry, research managers, senior academics, funders, policy makers and representative groups.
7. The panel were pleased with the response to the consultation and considered this to be an important evidence base. The summary / analysis of the consultation should be included in the Review report.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to include the consultation summary paper in the Review report.

8. Following the presentation of the findings, the Panel had a plenary discussion about the issues raised. Comments included the following:
- There is a lack of researcher recognition of the broad set of skills that they have / develop. PIs have a responsibility to support this.
  - There was further discussion about inclusion or not of PGRs.
  - Funders have a key role in developing drivers for change – REF was given as an example of a motivator.
  - Brexit could result in a decrease in researcher mobility, which will increase the need to place appropriate value on UK researchers.
  - There is a lack of engagement of researchers with the Concordat:
    - The consultation indicates that researcher engagement is low; there was agreement that researchers should be aware of it, even if the main purpose is to drive institutional behaviour; the [RCUK Statement of Expectations for Postgraduate Training](#) was given as an example of a powerful policy driver.
    - There was general consensus that the terminology “Concordat” is a barrier to researcher engagement. Suggestions for alternatives included:
      - National Agreement
      - Statement of Expectations
      - Principles and Obligations
  - It was suggested that a structure of Principles and Obligations could be useful, such as that used by the Biomedical Sciences Funders Forum.
  - There was a discussion about raising the profile of researcher careers. The panel considered that career development is not rated highly enough during the peer review process, except during assessment of fellowships (an example of good practice was given where BBSRC follow-up with HEIs when fellow support is inadequate).
  - There was concern about institutional ‘box-ticking’ and the relative ease in HEIs having their HR Excellence in Research status renewed.
9. A number of recommendations were made for inclusion in the Review report:
- HEIs should where possible employ researchers on open ended contracts – UCL and Newcastle are examples of good practice here.
  - The REF Environment statement should be more explicit about metrics for career development of researchers.
  - The term “Concordat” should be replaced with a word or phrase which better enables researcher engagement.
  - Engagement of researchers with the Concordat / policy should be integrated into the Principle on Researchers’ Responsibilities.
  - Levels of career awareness should be increased during the PhD stage.
  - Language in the Concordat should be more succinct but with specific examples of good practice.
  - Funders should ensure that adequate training is given to Chairs of research review committees regarding the importance of researcher career development during grants.

#### **Item 4 – Review of Individual Principles**

10. The Panel split into three groups to discuss individual Principles in detail, focussing on recommendations for how a future version of the Concordat should be re-worded. It was

agreed that Principles 3 and 4 (relating to Career Development) should be merged, and that a new Principle for PIs should be discussed.

11. Each group discussed how the principles should be revised, using the Researchers14 Concordat review as a starting point. The outputs from these discussions will feed directly into the Review report.

### **Item 5 – The Future of the Concordat**

12. This item was discussed earlier in the agenda under items 3 and 4.

### **Item 6 – Communications and general discussion**

13. It was agreed that the Concordat needs to be communicated effectively to the researcher community, and that the review report will need to include a section on this. The Concordat should be presented using different media / mechanisms, depending on the audience. It was suggested that all researchers should be made aware of the Concordat at point of employment, although it was noted that induction packs are not always read in detail.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to include a section on Concordat communications in the draft report.

14. It was suggested that the website be updated to provide information on how individuals, organisations or groups can provide further feedback to the review if desired.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to update website.

15. The Concordat is of relevance to all researchers, but its use is likely to be predominantly within the academic sector.

16. There was a discussion about how the Concordat should be structured, with the following stakeholder groups being identified: researcher, PI, institution, funder, and policymaker. Different options include:
- The whole concordat being broadly applicable to all interested groups.
  - Different sections actively addressing different user groups (e.g. principle for researchers, principle for funders, etc.): this would increase the likelihood of the different groups engaging with the principle of relevance to them, but was also regarded as less impactful than all principles being applicable to multiple groups.
  - Highlighting the relevance of each principle / section to the different stakeholder groups.
  - It was agreed that the structure should be finalised upon drafting of the report.

17. It was noted that the 10 days p.a. of training allowed for each researcher is now embedded as part of fEC and has the most tangible benefit for researchers, but is not well taken up by all researchers.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to seek advice from the CSG on the take-up of 10 days of non-technical development by researchers.

18. Recommendations made during this item included the following:

- The implementation of the Concordat should include a communications plan.
- Employers should regularly monitor researcher engagement with the Concordat, e.g. through participation in annual surveys.
- Funders should support Chairs of peer review committees to ensure that researcher development is appropriately considered during peer review of grants.

- There should be increased emphasis and support for uptake of researchers' 10 days training allowance.
- Development of researcher independence should be supported through allocated funding on grants.

### **Item 7 – Report structure and editing (*moved from earlier in agenda*)**

19. The panel recommended that the Review report needs to be structured to ensure the key messages are up-front, with background information annexed. The report should include specifics on how sections of the Concordat should be re-worded, with a summary of evidence provided. The suggested section on the Future of the Concordat is not needed as this is integrated into the revised Principles.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to investigate possible options for document sharing to enhance panel interaction during the drafting of the report.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to draft sections using edits provided by discussion groups, by end of first week of January; **panel members** to respond promptly (within 7-10 days), to include case studies for inclusion in relevant sections.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to ensure consistency of style / format.

20. It was agreed that communication of the review report needs to be planned so that it reaches beyond the CSG and as widely as possible.

**ACTION: Secretariat to investigate the future of the RCUK website beyond April 2018.**  
*[Update: all content from the RCUK website will be transferred to the UKRI website, it will not be lost]*

21. Principle 7 was not discussed.

**ACTION: Secretariat** to collate notes relating to Principle 7 and circulate for discussion.

### **Item 8 – Close**

22. DB thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting. The next meeting is on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2018 (venue to follow).

**ACTION: Secretariat** to circulate venue information for third panel meeting.