

Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Expert Review Panel for the Review of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

19th February 2018, Imperial College, London

Attendance

Expert Review Panel Members

David Bogle, UCL (Chair)
Emma Compton-Daw, University of Strathclyde
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 (for items 1 to 7)
Liz Elvidge, Imperial College London / Researchers14 (for items 4 to 11)

Secretariat

Clare Bhunnoo, BBSRC (Secretariat lead)
Joanna Dunster, AHRC

Apologies

Dave Watson, IBM (retired)
Matt Wenham, Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering

Item 1 – Matters Arising

1. David Bogle (DB) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and thanked them for their work so far on the report. The report will be reviewed before publication by the Concordat Executive Group at their May meeting, before being submitted to the Concordat Strategy Group in June 2018. It is on schedule to launch at the Vitae conference in September, and will then be taken forward by a Concordat Implementation Group. The panel was reminded that their role is to review the Concordat itself and recommend changes, based on the evidence.
2. The minutes of the second meeting were agreed; actions have been completed, details may be found in the minutes.

Item 2 – Report Structure

3. The panel considered whether the proposed rewritten Concordat should be structured by recipient or by theme, and agreed that a structured approach of Principles and Obligations by stakeholder group was appropriate, including:
 - a. Research staff
 - b. Principal Investigators
 - c. Employers
 - d. Funders
4. The panel agreed that the recommendations must be prominent in the report, and widely publicised to ensure that stakeholders are aware.

Item 3 – Review of the Concordat as a Whole

5. The panel considered the draft review document, and addressed outstanding questions.

6. Prior to implementation, the panel recommend that the proposed rewritten Concordat should be considered from a range of points of view of different stakeholders, including researchers at different career stages and disciplines, to ensure that the Principles and Obligations are applicable.
7. The panel wishes to emphasise researcher independence throughout, including the requirement for at least ten days per year for development activities, and formal recognition of supervisory duties by postdoctoral researchers.
8. The language of the Concordat as a whole was considered. Care must be taken over the use of terms, such as “mobility” and “retention”, which may set expectations for researchers, especially in the early career stage, which cannot be supported by research organisations. The language must also be selected to emphasise the benefit of non-academic career paths for researchers and for wider society.
9. It was agreed that the Concordat should apply to research staff in the broadest sense (i.e. including researchers employed in non-academic sectors, researchers employed on non-research contracts, and research technical staff), but that it should primarily focus on staff, rather than postgraduate research students. The panel acknowledged that many good practices are taking place within the postgraduate research student communities and that, in time, these will influence other researcher groups.

Item 4 – Review of Principle 7, including recommendations around implementation and governance

10. The panel considered ownership of the Concordat and agreed that it was appropriate for it to be owned by the community and overseen by a steering group. Drivers for change should come from closer links to research funding (such as a greater role in peer review and the Research Environment element of REF) rather than enforcement by the steering group.
11. The report must be pragmatic, embedding actions that can be taken by stakeholders, and illustrated with case studies of best practice. At the same time, it must refer to the concerns raised by the community consultation, such as fixed-term contracts.
12. The panel recommended that researchers and industry should be better represented on the CSG and CEG.

Item 5 – Review of Principle 6 (Equality and Diversity)

13. The panel agreed that Equality and Diversity must be embedded in the other Principles. They discussed whether, therefore, there is a need for a separate Principle on this point. Some responses to the Community Consultation identified elements of the current Principle as redundant, due to employment law. Input from the Equality Challenge Unit strongly recommends that a separate Principle on Equality and Diversity should be retained, and this was ultimately agreed by the panel.
14. The panel reviewed the wording of the redrafted Principles, to ensure that Equality and Diversity is embedded, without substantially repeating the overarching Principle. Where appropriate, suggestions for specific obligations for different stakeholder groups were included in the revised principles.

Item 6 – Consideration of new and revised Principles

15. The redrafted Principles and Obligations were considered individually, to ensure that they encompass the recommendations emerging from the evidence, and that they are practical.
16. The redrafted Concordat as a whole was considered, to ensure internal consistency, and avoid overlap.

Item 7 – Review of report annexes (introduction, background and evidence)

17. The panel reviewed the report annexes, to ensure that these are accurate and complete.
18. The panel recommended that the Secretariat should be acknowledged by name in the report annexes, alongside the Expert Review Panel.

Item 8 – Summary of recommendations

19. The recommendations as a whole were considered, to ensure that these are supported by the evidence presented, and that they are practical.

Item 9 – Terms of reference of the review panel

20. The terms of reference of the review panel were considered, to ensure that these have been, or are on schedule to be, fulfilled.

Item 10 – Review outputs and communications plan

21. The Secretariat clarified that the outputs of the review will be a report, with suggested redraft of the Concordat as an annex, and briefings to the signatories via the Concordat Strategy Group.
22. The timetable for the review going forward was agreed, including the communications plan. A draft should be signed off by the panel at the end of April, with a half-day virtual meeting, ahead of the presentation to the Concordat Executive Group in May. The final version of the review report will be complete by the end of June for publication, and launch at the Vitae conference in September.

Item 11 – Any other business

23. The Secretariat acknowledged the proposed UCU strike action between 22nd February to 16th March, and that this may affect the time that panellists are able to contribute to the review, if they are involved in strike action.
24. Panellists were reminded to claim their fees for the time spent on the review, as well as travel and subsistence expenses associated with the meetings.
25. It was agreed that a fourth meeting, possibly by teleconference, would be useful to agree the final report and recommendations.
26. DB thanked all for their contributions to the report, and closed the meeting.

Actions:

- Panel members to provide input into wording for the final report and recommendations.
- Secretariat to upload minutes of the second meeting to the UKRI website.

- Secretariat to organise a fourth meeting as a half-day teleconference.