



Response to the Revised Research Careers Concordat and RCUK's Research Career and Diversity Strategy

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The following is a response from the 1994 Group to this consultation, endorsed by the Research and Enterprise Policy Group and the 1994 Group Board. In addition to this response individual 1994 Group members will present their own responses elaborating on the issues raised below.

The new Concordat has a set of seven key principles:

1. *The importance of recruiting and selecting researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research is clearly recognised.*
2. *Researchers are recognised and valued as an essential part of their employing organisation's human resource.*
3. *Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.*
4. *The importance of researchers' personal and career development, and life long learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.*
5. *Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and life long learning.*
6. *Diversity and equality are promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.*
7. *The sector and all stakeholders should undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.*

RCUK has encouraged comments from sector groups, institutions, and individuals, on the overall framework of the draft concordat, its intentions and the details in each section and in particular welcomed comments on the following issues:

1. *Are all the elements in the 1996 Concordat covered?*

The 1994 Group believes the new Concordat provides a greater insight and covers a wider range of issues in greater depth than the original Concordat. However, the Group is concerned that:

- a) The new Concordat fails to address one fundamental problem the original Concordat attempted to tackle; that is, to demonstrate how the funding bodies themselves might promote career progression. Indeed there is often a tension between meeting the specific needs and expectations of the funding body, within the time-frame of a project, and adhering to the spirit of the Concordat in terms of developing researchers' careers.
- b) The focus of researcher career prospects in the new Concordat is too narrow. By placing too much emphasis on researchers going on to pursue academic careers, the Concordat fails to recognise sufficiently that many researchers do not follow an academic career. As a result the document may create unrealistic career expectations for many researchers. As it stands, the Concordat tends to give the impression that providing permanent academic positions for most, if not all, research staff is the ideal to which we are all striving. However, there are good reasons why some posts should only ever be short term training positions.
- c) Finally, we are concerned that the Concordat does not give sufficient recognition to the 'inhomogeneous nature of research staff'. This broad category of staffing covers a wide range of staff, with different disciplinary backgrounds, levels of training, experience and responsibility, types of contract, and different career expectations and intentions.

2. *Will it provide a framework for future progress?*

The 1994 Group agrees the Concordat will provide a framework for future progress; however it will require substantial buy-in from all stakeholders to be effective.

3. *Will it be fit for purpose in 2014?*

The 1994 Group is uncertain whether the Concordat will be fit for purpose in 2014 due to the long time frame. However we recognise that its successful implementation will be dependent upon the future of UK research funding. If major changes are implemented in the way Research Council funding is awarded, for example, with funding being allocated on an increasingly selective basis to fewer institutions, then some HEIs may find it difficult to implement the Concordat in line with aspirations. Thus, some may find that they are no longer able to provide stable research career paths in future years or have sufficient critical mass in certain areas in order to provide economically viable training and development programmes.

4. *Does it address the measures of success in the revised Concordat: the quantity, quality and impact of researchers and their research?*

A key measure of success for a career researcher is being able to set their own research agenda and gain funding accordingly. To do this, a career researcher must be able to apply for funding directly. This approach varies between Research

Councils and other funding bodies; some will allow contract researchers to apply for grants as Principal Investigators, others will allow them to be recognised as Research Co-Investigators, whilst others will only allow them to be named as a Research Fellow if they are to receive Directly Incurred salary costs.

When difficulties arise with asking for direct costs for the contract researcher as Principal Investigator, a common practice is to use an established academic at the institution to act as a figure head Principal Investigator. This practice can undermine the position of the career researcher, and can place the academic taking on the role of figure Principal Investigator in an uneasy position.

5. *What will it change?*

The climate has and continues to change. The 1994 Group expects that the Concordat will promote institutional researcher development schemes which have been previously neglected in some HEIs. However, to do this, the Concordat will require significant buy-in from many sectors. Importantly, it will also require continued provision of Roberts funding so that institutions are able to plan on a longer term basis to provide effective development and training programmes for, and other means of supporting the careers of, their research staff.

6. *Will it improve the quality of researchers for the UK?*

Currently we feel that there is no conclusive evidence that inadequate external motivational and rewards systems do deter those with talent and ideas from entering research or staying within the sector. However, these factors can cause leakage of particular expertise from individual institutions. The 1994 Group believes this could be an area in which to market the ideals of the new Concordat to research managers.

A more general point that relates to this question concerns the underlying aims and scope of the Concordat. Is the aim to improve the quality of researchers or quality of research? Furthermore, how UK focused are the aims of the Concordat? We note that it does not explicitly address the needs of international research staff or international research students who wish to remain in the UK to take up research posts.

7. *Does it address all the relevant issues of researchers, research managers, research supporters, employers and funders?*

The 1994 Group believes the Concordat should include a reference to the importance of training academic staff in the skills of good research management. Currently the term 'research manager' is misleading as in most cases the term refers to the Principal Investigator who may not have had much training or experience in managing research staff.

In addition, we believe that there needs to be some reconsideration of the responsibilities of the various stake-holders. As noted above, there needs to be a greater recognition of the responsibilities of funding bodies. We also note that the section that deals with responsibilities of researchers only contains four items and we feel that thought should be given to how this section could be strengthened.

8. *Does it ensure that researchers' expectations and experience will be broadly the same in any institution?*

The Group, whilst questioning whether researchers' expectations and experience should be the same in all institutions, believes this is largely dependent upon levels of funding within institutions and the corresponding resources which can be used to support research staff. Without strong financial incentives, and widespread and effective implementation of codes of practice, the seven key principles outlined in the new Concordat may not be fully implemented within all individual institutions.

9. *Will the Concordat fit with HEI guidance?*

The 1994 Group believes that to fit with HEI guidance, either the existing codes of practice will have to be modified or new codes developed in order to reflect to requirements of the new Concordat.

10. *Are the relationships between stakeholders clear?*

The relationships between stakeholders are generally clear, but the Group believes a mechanism for the active monitoring of career progression needs to be established to ensure each group takes full advantage of opportunities provided.

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