
HE Update

UUK Concordat on Research Integrity

January 2016



Background

Research activity is one of the key purposes of Universities, leading to public outcomes and subject to peer review. While extensive statutory and regulatory standards exist to govern research practice where it is deemed necessary (e.g. Clinical Trials, Data Protection), more generally research is governed by institutional policies based on established practices, methodologies and principles. Some sets of principles are also grouped into “Concordats”, official agreements, which might be either voluntary or a requirement to gain access to funding.

In the UK there are a number of voluntary Concordats establishing guiding principles in disparate areas of research activity (see Appendix, detailing other Research Concordats). However, since 2013/14, compliance with the UUK Concordat on Research Integrity (the Concordat) has become a compulsory requirement to obtain research funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Compliance with the Concordat has also become one of the conditions of funding from a variety of funding bodies, including the UK Research Councils (UKRC), the Wellcome Trust and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

The Concordat

After dialogue with the sector, in 2012, Universities UK (UUK) and HEFCE produced the “UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity”. The document sets expectations of how the UK research community will continue to ground its work in the highest standards of rigour and integrity, through compliance with five commitments and related responsibilities of all parties involved: researchers, employers of researchers and funders of research.

The concordat applies to all fields of research and is relevant to all disciplines in which research is undertaken. It emphasises responsibilities and accountabilities and identifies the different roles that key participants and stakeholders play in supporting research integrity.

The five commitments of the Concordat reflect, in many cases, activities already in practice in the sector and the Concordat does not supersede or replace these, but sets them within a broader national framework. They are:

- 1) We are committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
- 2) We are committed to ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards;



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- 3) We are committed to supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers;
- 4) We are committed to using transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise;
- 5) We are committed to working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

The Concordat complements existing frameworks, including the RCUK “*Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct*”¹.

Reporting Requirements

HEFCE

The 2014/15 HEFCE Annual Accountability Returns (Annex E) asked HEIs to indicate whether the institution has been able to comply with the Concordat to support Research Integrity, requiring an auditable “yes” or “no” answer.

RCUK

Institutions that receive funding from RCUK are subject to an Assurance Programme managed by RCUK staff through Funding Assurance Questionnaires. Funding Assurance scrutiny is focussed on compliance with the RCUK terms and conditions. A component seeks confirmation that institutions have policies and procedures in place that meet RCUK’s Research Integrity and Ethics requirements, including processes for dealing with allegations of research misconduct. As a signatory to the Concordat, RCUK produces an annual narrative statement on research integrity, including statistics and trends on cases of misconduct in research reported in the annual questionnaires by HEIs.

Internal Reporting Requirements for HEIs

Commitment five of the Concordat requires Universities to prepare a short publicly available annual statement to their own governing body that provides:

- a) a summary of actions and activities that have been undertaken to support and strengthen understanding and application of research integrity issues (for example postgraduate and researcher training, or process reviews);
- b) assurances that the processes they have in place for dealing with allegations of misconduct are transparent, robust and fair, and that they continue to be appropriate to the needs of the organisation;
- c) a high-level statement on any formal investigations of research misconduct that have been undertaken.

¹ Provides guidance on the promotion of good research conduct, including good conduct in peer review, the need for appropriate training and development, what constitutes unacceptable research conduct and the investigation and reporting of unacceptable research conduct



How we can help you

Many Universities have initially mapped the Concordat requirements against their internal research governance framework and then undertaken a gap analysis to identify any actions required to ensure demonstrable compliance against the five commitments. Progress on the implementation of these action plans has been monitored and reported to the appropriate institutional governing bodies.

As internal auditors we have undertaken a number of compliance audits and follow-ups at HEIs to provide independent assurance on compliance with the requirements of the Concordat and on the effectiveness and efficiency of the system of internal controls. We have also carried out consultancy work to support internal implementation of action plans designed to achieve demonstrable compliance.

For further information on how we can help or on any other aspect of Uniac's internal audit and assurance service, please do get in touch.



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APPENDIX – Other Research Concordats

There are a number of other “Concordats” relating to specific aspects of Research activity in the UK Higher Education sector:

1. **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**
2. **Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research**
3. **Concordat on Openness on Animal Research**
4. **Draft Concordat on Open Research Data**

A brief overview of each is provided below.

1) **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers is a voluntary commitment and was launched in June 2008. It sets out the expectations and responsibilities of researchers, their managers, employers and funders. The provisions of this Concordat encompass recruitment and selection, recognition and value, career development, researcher responsibilities, equality and diversity, and monitoring and review requiring institutions to respond across a broad agenda.

Two benchmarking surveys, CROS and PIRLS, run by Vitae², are being used by UK institutions to identify and drive improvements under this Concordat on research culture and environment and have become well established within the sector.

- the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) is a biennial survey that explores the views of research staff on their experiences, career aspirations and professional development opportunities against the Concordat principles. Overall 84 institutions have participated in CROS to date.
- the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS), which explores their views on the leadership and management of researchers, 49 institutions have participated in PIRLS.

Vitae have agreed with the European Commission that commitment to implementation of the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers - alongside meeting the requirements for research degrees set out in the UK QAA Quality Code - is considered as equivalent to implementing the principles of the European Charter and Code which includes the EU Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (also known as HRS4R). The European Commission recognition of good practice in this area is the 'HR Excellence in Research' Award. In the UK institutions that comply with the QAA Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that have published Concordat implementation plans can receive the 'HR Excellence in Research' award.

² Vitae is a membership programme supported and funded by the Research Councils UK (RCUK), managed by The Career Development Organisation (CRAC) and delivered in partnership with regional Hub host universities



2) The Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research

The Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research was published in 2010 by the UKRC and outlines the expectations and responsibilities of research funders with respect to public engagement, to help embed public engagement in universities and research institutes. The aim of the Concordat is to enhance the profile of research and benefit the UK society and economy.

The Concordat consists of four key principles drawn up by the Funders of Research in the UK and under each principle, an explanation of how it may be embedded into institutional practice. The principles are:

- UK research organisations have a strategic commitment to Public Engagement.
- Researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement with Public Engagement activities.
- Researchers are enabled to participate in Public Engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities.
- The signatories and supporters will undertake regular reviews of their and the wider research sector's progress in fostering Public Engagement across the UK.

The Concordat provides a mandate for research organisations, research managers and researchers to build on the wealth of existing good practice and foster public engagement so that research activity is better publicised, valued, recognised and supported.

Research impact – which is one of the measures of public engagement - has been embedded within Research Council grant applications and the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014).

3) The Concordat on Openness on Animal Research

In October 2012, over 40 organisations involved with bioscience in the UK signed a **Declaration on Openness on Animal Research**. They committed to developing a Concordat setting out how they would be more open about the ways in which animals are used in scientific, medical and veterinary research in the UK. The Concordat is a voluntary code of practice, sitting alongside legislative requirements, and committing signatory organisations to develop more transparent communications practices around the use of animals in research.

Signatories to the Concordat have agreed to be more open about their use of animals in research, and to abide by the following four commitments.

- 1) We will be clear about when, how and why we use animals in research
- 2) We will enhance our communications with the media and the public about our research using animals
- 3) We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research using animals
- 4) We will report on progress annually and share our experiences



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To date 97 UK organisations have signed this voluntary Concordat, including Universities, charities, commercial companies, research councils, umbrella bodies and learned societies.

In September 2015 the first Concordat on Openness Annual Report was published by the Understanding Animal Research, an Industrial and Provident Society. The report details how signatories to the Concordat have fulfilled their commitments to improve openness and transparency, summarising information provided by the signatory organisations at the end of the Concordat's first year.

4) Draft Concordat on Open Research Data

This draft concordat has been developed under the auspices of the UK Open Research Data Forum by a multi-stakeholder working group, which includes RCUK, JISC, the Wellcome Trust and Universities UK. The concordat aims to help to ensure that the research data gathered and generated by members of the UK research community is made openly available for use by others wherever possible in a manner consistent with relevant legal, ethical and regulatory frameworks and norms.

The concordat aims to establish a set of expectations of good practice with the intention of establishing open research data as the desired position for publicly-funded research over the long-term. It recognises the different responsibilities of researchers, their employers, and funders of research, however, it is not the intention of the concordat to mandate, codify or require specific activities.

On behalf of the working group, RCUK is now seeking views and comments on the draft of the concordat, which contains 10 principles. Feedback and comments on the current draft were closed on 28/09/2015.



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