



RSA Concordat Event Notes

The Research Staff Association held a Concordat related event on Monday 3rd February 2020 to discuss the latest [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#), and what impact it might have on researchers, managers, and the institution.

We held round table discussions on the three principles of the Concordat: environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development. Notes taken by the RSA during the discussions are given below.

Environment and Culture

Maternity and paternal/parental leave/support - Support for maternity and parental leave/gaps can be ambiguous or inconsistent depending on funding source for research (e.g. UKRI, Trusts, charities)

- When you come back do you have a job?
- Standardisation of practice between funders
- RSO advice/help on this isn't useful and mixed messages between different university stakeholders
- End of grants impacts rights
- PI might pay for someone to do the research in your absence, meaning you return to no job, or a much shorter contract
- No Cost extensions of projects can happen, but this isn't always the case for charity and trust funders
- Reset of statutory workers' rights is common due to forced mobility of researchers moving between institutions
 - o Transfer of tenure/time in job between academic institutions to guarantee these rights "Maternity cover transfer"
- Who can do better:
 - o Funders, RSO
- What can Lancaster do:
 - o Map out funder policies/practices – who does it, who doesn't do it
 - o Develop an internal policy – what is the uni going to do about it
 - o Have a fund to support those who are in contracts that don't protect them/their employment
 - o Lobby funders to fix this

Collaborating with other researchers at your institution - Concordat mentions Collaboration between researchers and teams – the reality is that you are competing with people in your dept (or

your PI is), that you don't know who is in the dept., and there's not really money/time built into grants to foster collaboration

- Is it practical to embed yourself in a team if you're only around for short amount of time?

Embedding self in environment and culture when on fixed term funding

- It's not practical currently given the temporal nature of fixed term funding, particularly when you don't know about events, or the RSA, or the concordat
- Easy to slip through the cracks
- How is this actively done at Lancaster? What is the practice?
- Solution: RSA to send out monthly emails – targeted or not?
 - o Support for the RSA to do this?

Funders won't allow FTCs to be Principle Investigator

- Limited mechanism or structure for career progression as full time, research led researcher
- This is a barrier to having a sustainable career

Recognising and progressing teaching

- Difficult to accrue teaching experience when you aren't allowed to teach classes
- Associate Teaching Programme (ATP) requires N teaching hours during the semester you are doing ATP – this course leads to a national accreditation that all new lecturers have to complete
- Doing it for free/in your own time is not a welcome reality

Mental health and workload

- Non-existent support for MH
- When working across projects there's no consideration for the researchers' time, all projects demand fulltime commitments even when only part time on the project
- Managers are failing
- People who have multiple PIs or No PIs don't get support and have increased cognitive burden
 - o Departments either know or aren't aware, but there's no support
 - o If a PI moves on from Lancaster, the researcher can end up with no line manager – there's no optics on this from HoDs, and therefore support is limited/non-existent

Promoting the Concordat

- Concordat should be raised at the induction and at the annual reviews/PDR
- Monthly emails to new staff – we should be able to get a list of new starters and explicitly email them

- Idea: Also we could do a monthly email to all researchers, plugging the RSA and concordat, a news blast of sorts – targeting new starters, but also reminding everyone that the RSA exists for them

PDR

- PDR is for academic staff – it doesn't fit the career model/trajectory of research staff
- PDR specific boxes and criteria should feature to hold PIs/managers to account

Including casual contract researchers

- Whilst they're a minority of contracted research staff, they are handled within departments and aren't added to University mailing lists for researchers
- Their contracts are for N hours/days of work – so how do you build in the Concordat (e.g. training) on these contracts?

Limited Faculty, Post Awards, RSO awareness of concordat and policies

- Variation between faculties and throughout the institution
- Leads to mixed reactions when writing grant proposals, etc – depends who you ask

Embracing and acknowledging the finite nature of the contract

- Hard to embed yourself in the positive side of culture and environment because of short term contracts and slow rates of change and infrequent events
- This section of the concordat doesn't make any attempted to reconcile the finite nature of the researcher's contract, and whilst culture and environment is on the institutions, funders and government, it's mostly ignored that a researcher is full gas for the length of their contract in order to prove themselves/get the most out of the funding before the apply for the next role

Being included in the department

- When research staff are the minority, they don't get invited to dept. events or have to sit through long meetings that focus on teaching and other areas that do not concern the researcher
- One researcher, one rep – difficult to have a voice, find resources and make a space for cultural and environmental change or involvement

Long term cultural change

- This requires lobbying and commitment from the funders and government as universities don't have the tools

Employment

Promotion

- Only 50% of attendees knew that researchers could be promoted. Likely to be less for those who don't attend these sorts of meetings.
- Many have been told promotion is dependent upon funding, which is inconsistent with the Concordat.
- Promotion process is not clear.
- Some felt that the APC aren't suitable for research staff.
- How do promotions work for staff on different pay grades for fractions of FTE?
- Strong support for decoupling promotion from funding – but who pays?

Bridging Funding

- Keen to hear an update on Bridging Funding
- What was the outcome of FHM's trial, is this being trialled more widely?

Redundancy Policy

- Unclear on payment entitlement (is it just statutory)?
- Unclear on timescales, when do these processes kick in when an end date in funding is known in advance?

Researcher as Co-Is or line managers

- Recognition that Co-I eligibility may be dependent on funder/grant.
 - o Doesn't seem to match with principles of the Concordat
 - o Guidance from RSO is needed.
- What happens when a researcher secures funding to manage another researcher or student, but this is not included in the job description?

General

- Inconsistent use of terminology across institution: "postdoc", "RAs", "researcher", "academic", "academic-related"
- Internal policies should be equitable to researchers, not treating researchers as second-class staff.
- Use of 23-month contracts – is this really due to the funding on a project or solely to get around indefinite and/or relocation allowances?

Professional and Career Development

Mentors and PI support

- Departments should allocate mentors to all researchers (not just new academics) – there are already some pockets of good practice.

- Very few researchers had mentors or someone to go to outside of PI/line manager
- Who might be best placed to advise on what is the best development activity to take your career forward?
- ARCAD in FHM is a good example of extra support for researchers.
- Do PIs have the tools to support researchers?
- Managers need to understand their obligations
- Potential conflict – think one thing as a researcher, another if you are a PI trying to get research completed on time.
 - o Shouldn't PIs (as researchers themselves) be getting the same development support?

Balancing development with PI expectations

- Perceived differences between faculties approach, both to researcher and development.
- Could the 10 days be built into the contract? How might this fit with flexible working arrangements?
- Workload already too high, no time to write fellowship applications
- Clear process for accountability of managers if not allowing, encouraging etc
- If a researcher has “used up” their 10 days career development this does not mean their development is no longer important
- Balance between current contract completion and next steps. (Carry forward work until completed.)
- Can be difficult for researchers to take control of their own work/development

Faculty support

- Not clear who is responsible for researchers in each faculty e.g. New Deans?
- Need clarity as to where Dept or Faculty development funding is held and how to access this.
- Make it clear to Departments and PIs that these are now researchers rights: Entitlement not “nice to have”.
- Clear process for accountability of PIs/managers if not allowing, encouraging etc specific development activities.

Funder support

- Need the 10 days added to the grant – otherwise just squeezing more into less.
- Reporting of researcher development should be part of future grants.

PDRs

- PDR on-line difficult to use – hard to find time to get up to speed with it. Some PIs refuse to use it, so not bothering to do PDRs.
- Researcher specific PDR
- Include record of 10 days development in PDR.
 - o What have you done/will you (specific examples with dates)