

Ethics and open science in mix for researcher development rethink

Changing academic environment prompts rethink of globally influential employment support guidelines

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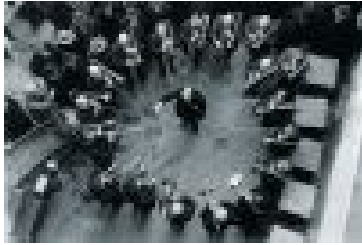


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Research integrity, open science and impact are principles likely to be included when an agreement between research funders and universities, which has set global standards for the treatment of junior academics, is updated.

The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers has been widely credited with improving conditions for staff in UK higher education since it was issued in 1992, and updated in 2008. In 2005 the European Commission issued a similar document, called the European Charter for Research and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, based on the original document.

Researcher development agency Vitae, which issues the concordat, is now working to update the document's seven principles on recruitment, recognition and support. Janet Metcalfe, Vitae's head, said that changes to the research environment in the 10 years since the latest version of



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the agreement was issued mean that the priorities for career development have shifted.

“The recent drive to do much more 'open' research - engaging with research users and society and demonstrating the impact of research - is not particularly well reflected in the concordat,” Dr Metcalfe said. Research integrity, ethics and reproducibility are also likely to take a more prominent place in any update.

“There is concern that we need to make the language much more current and future-looking to help institutions think about some of these issues,” she said, adding that another area that will be reviewed is who exactly the document applies to.

The current and previous versions of the concordat, which is voluntary, explicitly state that the principles apply to research staff. However, more teaching staff have found themselves doing research in recent years.

Pressures from the research excellence framework have meant that some teaching staff at smaller institutions have been encouraged to develop a research portfolio, Dr Metcalfe said. On top of this many university staff working in teaching positions, particularly in the arts and humanities, are trying to sustain their research endeavours so that they can get a full academic position. “Currently they are not articulated [for] in the concordat language,” she said.

In addition, some parts of the agreement have now become routine practice for universities and funders, Dr Metcalfe added. One example of this is the provision of additional funding for the maternity, paternity and adoptive leave of research staff. Meanwhile, the language in the equality and diversity section is “dated”.

Vitae is currently recruiting an expert panel to help shape a new version of the agreement.

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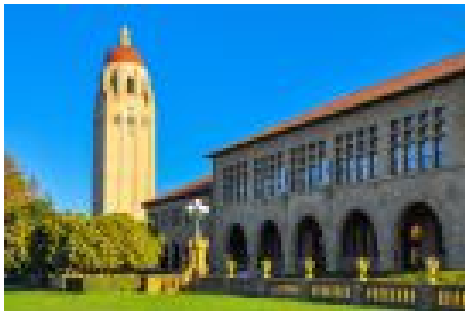
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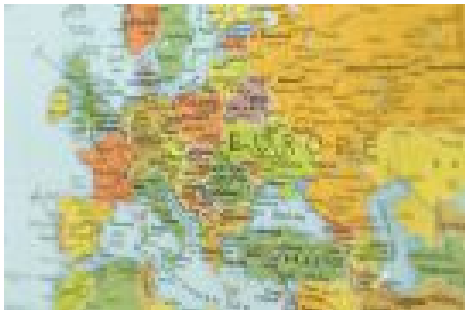
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