


National Postdoc Meeting

Postdocs, Policy and the Future

National Postdoc Meeting 2017 Report

Summary of Recommendations

The first National Postdoc Meeting in the UK attracted more than 50 participants from 18 higher education institutions and research organisations. With the theme “Postdocs, Policy and the Future”, the meeting generated important evidence and suggestions for the current review of the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*.

Since its introduction, the *Concordat* has provided a positive framework for the improvement of researchers’ career development. However, awareness and implementation of this has been inconsistent and there are areas that clearly need updating in light of further experience.

Although they are vitally concerned with the *Concordat*, which in its current form also places certain expectations and obligations on them, researchers themselves are not formally a party to it as an agreement between employers and funders. The Organising Committee therefore welcomes the opportunity to disseminate the outcomes of this first National Postdoc Meeting generally and for the attention of the *Concordat* Expert Review Panel in particular.

The recommendations of the Organising Committee, generated from the evidence and suggestions of the participants, in summary are:

1. Funders and employers should communicate the existence of the *Concordat* and its contents to researchers more directly and clearly so they are empowered to seek support and make informed choices about their career development;
2. Researchers should be included in the formulation as well as the on-going revision and evaluation of the *Concordat* at both institutional and national level in order to guarantee full ownership of their career development responsibilities;
3. While researchers have a clear responsibility for their own career development, this should be balanced with more emphasis on the role and responsibilities of line managers (supervisors, principal investigators); funders and employers should ensure clear expectations and appropriate support for both researchers and line managers alike to enhance researchers' career development;
4. Appraisals for researchers and line managers should take account respectively of career development activity and how career development is being managed and supported as one important mechanism of embedding and evaluating the aims of a revised *Concordat*;
5. Career development opportunities should be clearly linked to the strategic needs of current and future employers, for researchers' own benefit and so that the investment in their skills and training will support innovation and expertise that benefits the economy and society generally;
6. Stronger incentives for and clearer monitoring of the implementation of the *Concordat* would support better outcomes for researchers, employers and funders.

National Postdoc Meeting 2017 Organising Committee

Cambridge, 1 December 2017

Purpose and goals

The first National Postdoc Meeting took place in Cambridge on 19th-20th September 2017, themed “Postdocs, Policy and the Future”. Over 50 participants from 18 higher education institutions and research organisations gathered at the University of Cambridge’s new Postdoc Centre in Eddington. The programme included two days of talks, workshops and discussion focused primarily on the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, specifically its current content and the experience of its implementation in relation to the current review of this document initiated by Research Councils UK.

The aim of the Organising Committee, led by the Postdocs of Cambridge (PdOC) Society, was to provide input to the review from the postdoctoral researcher community, raise awareness among early career researchers and provide a forum for exchange and support between postdocs from different universities and other research institutions. The organisation of the first National Postdoc Meeting was greatly supported by the University of Cambridge and the UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA) and would not have been possible without generous financial support from the University of Cambridge Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Research Councils UK, the Babraham Institute and the exclusive media sponsors, *Science* and *Science Careers*.

Format and content

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr. Adina Feldman, chair of the Organising Committee, who introduced the origins and main purpose of this first nationwide conference of postdoctoral researchers in the UK. This was followed by an opening address by Dr. Matias Acosta on behalf of the PdOC Society. Participants were welcomed to the new Postdoc Centre at Eddington by Dr. Rob Wallach. The keynote opening address was given by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz.

The first session proper included talks by Dr. Katie Wheat from Vitae and Dr. Miguel Jorge from the University of Strathclyde who presented respectively the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* and the *Bratislava Declaration of Young Researchers* as a starting point for the main discussion to follow.

The second session was a workshop to focus on participants' experience of the *Concordat* and its implementation, impact and evaluation at their host institutions. Each of seven groups discussed one of the current principles of the *Concordat*, including: i) their experiences of the principle; ii) ideas for the development, adaptation and revision of the principle; and iii) ideas for evaluation of the principle. The groups were also asked to reflect on any additional aspect that should be covered by a given principle or by the *Concordat* overall. Workshop facilitators assisted the discussion and collected opinions and suggestions from each group so that the outcomes could be presented to the whole group on the second day of the meeting.

The first day of the National Postdoc Meeting culminated at the oldest of Cambridge Colleges, Peterhouse. A drinks reception and an official welcome by the Master of Peterhouse, Ms Bridget Kendall, was followed by a formal dinner. Speeches were delivered by Dr. Alice Hutchings from the PdOC Society Committee and the only postdoctoral member of the University of Cambridge Council, and Prof. Chris Abell, University of Cambridge Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and the first director of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. This was also an occasion for informal networking between National Postdoc Meeting participants, guests, speakers and organisers.

Proceedings on the second day of the meeting began with a session led by Dr. Louise Stephen from UKRSA who presented a talk entitled *The Impact of Research Excellence Framework on Postdocs* followed by a workshop on the same subject. The fourth session was chaired jointly by Dr. Adina Feldman and Dr. Louise Stephen and included presentations of the findings and reflections from the previous day's workshop on the *Concordat*, participants' feedback and potential future directions of the National Postdoc Meeting initiative.

The final session was a panel discussion related to *Institutional Perspectives*, chaired by Prof. Eilís Ferran, University of Cambridge Pro-Vice-Chancellor for

Institutional and International Relations. Panellists representing funding bodies and other higher education institutions were: Candace Hassall, Head of Researcher Affairs at the Wellcome Trust; Liz Elvidge, Head of Postdoc Development at Imperial College London; Linda Holliday, Director of Capacity and Skills Development at MRC; David McAllister, Head of Skills and Careers at BBSRC; and Jo Dally, Head of Research Landscape Policy at the Royal Society.

Outcomes

The workshop and the following plenary discussion of the group work outcomes provided an invaluable insight into postdocs' perceptions and experience of the *Concordat*. Participants shared their experiences of career development from various institutions across the UK and presented valuable thoughts on how the *Concordat* could be revised to ensure these experiences continue to improve. In the following sections, we have summarised the outcomes of the discussion regarding each particular section of the *Concordat*.

Recruitment and Selection

Principle 1: Recognition of the importance of recruiting, selecting and retaining researchers with the highest potential to achieve excellence in research.

The detailed descriptions for the first principle seem to address its content only partially and do not always correspond to the everyday challenges faced by researchers. Modern research and career progression in the research sector is no longer dependent purely on research and its classical outputs. This principle should reflect on the importance of other skills developed by researchers such as industrial experience, cross-disciplinary networks, teaching and public engagement experience, managerial and leadership skills, intellectual property outputs other than research publications, and the like. Although the *Concordat* in general stresses their importance, these skills are rarely considered as criteria for recruitment by academic institutions.

The pledge to "respect diversity" mentioned in point number 2 seems very neutral or even passive. A suggestion was to rephrase this to "encourage" or even "promote diversity". This could support the more active role which higher education institutions have to play in the development of research environments and their adaptation to meet the changing needs and expectations of the modern world. Transparency during recruitment processes, mentioned in point number 4, was also highlighted as a very important aspect which is often overlooked, underlining the importance of more transparent and professional human resources (HR) procedures within academic institutions.

One of the most highly contested topics was the wording of point number 3. Although an increase in the number of open contracts for research posts is evident, the practice of employing postdocs on fixed-term contracts remains predominant and often negatively affects their everyday life. Examples include causing difficulties in securing loans or mortgages, placing strain on family and partner relationships, as well as international visa issues. It has been suggested to rewrite this point in the following way: "Research posts should be advertised as permanent / open-ended contracts unless there is a recorded and justifiable reason to do otherwise". In the opinion of many postdocs, universities should be more aware of and try to find additional ways to mitigate the risk associated with fixed-term contracts.

Additionally, it was noted that there is no specific recommendation about the retention of researchers. Although retention is listed as one of the elements in the principle headline, it is not addressed directly by any of the points. Participants also raised the problem of inadequate pay structures for researchers that do not take the actual cost of living into account. This issue should be reflected in point number 5. Wage adjustments to the local costs of living could be one of the mechanisms to improve the recruitment and retention of researchers, who might otherwise seek alternative employment opportunities that can offer more economic security and stability but may not allow the full impact of their expertise and skills. Additionally, academic institutions potentially run the risk of losing high quality and established employees, whilst also having to repeat lengthy, and possibly costly, recruitment procedures.

Recognition and value

Principle 2: Researchers are recognised and valued by their employing organisation as an essential part of their organisation's human resources and a key component of their overall strategy to develop and deliver world-class research.

The growing number of postdoctoral researchers make them one of the largest employee bodies within universities. Although they represent an essential staff group, it was felt that their role is inadequately valued. Unlike for students or established academics, it is hard to give a comprehensive definition of who is "a postdoc". Their employment may be related to researchers' personal grants or their principal investigators' funding, which may be sourced internally or externally, they may be referred to as fellows, associates or assistants. The heterogeneity of employment status and character within the organisation, taken together with temporary nature of postdoc contracts and rather scarce opportunities of career progression within academia, result in many misconceptions and inadequate recognition of postdocs.

Implementation of measures to mitigate these issues is necessary for a proper recognition and appreciation of contract research staff in academia. This includes financial incentives and awards linked with researcher development as well as increasing level of responsibilities and academic tasks undertaken by postdocs throughout their time in a research post. Furthermore, postdocs' visibility and their involvement in management and decision-making processes is vital and, if well incentivised and supported, can be highly beneficial for the success of a research institution. Improved postdoc representation will also greatly improve their own career development. In our view, integration of postdocs within the academic bodies of universities needs to be pushed forward.

The financial remuneration of postdoctoral staff, apart from reflecting their commitment and dedication, also needs to address the economic environment and living expectations in line with specific local and personal circumstances. Funders and universities must assure that research posts are an attractive and

competitive career option that offer reasonable financial stability and support for employees. Postdocs make significant personal commitments, such as relocation to another city or country, greatly affecting their personal lives and that of their families – a level of mobility that is very important for research as a whole – but this is not always reflected in remuneration within the sector. A separate, but directly linked, aspect is the costs of the immigration process, particularly visa fees and NHS charges. This may become even a greater issue in the current political situation in the UK. As already highlighted for Principle 1, the uncertainty caused by employing postdocs on short fixed-term contracts makes it very difficult to appropriately plan for home and family. It was noted that many funding schemes do not appropriately support the costs linked with parenthood leave or other caregiving responsibilities, which may discourage many young and enthusiastic researchers to pursue their career in academia.

Support and Career Development

Principle 3: Researchers are equipped and supported to be adaptable and flexible in an increasingly diverse, mobile, global research environment.

Principle 4: The importance of researcher's personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.

Principles 3 and 4 of the *Concordat* concerning support and career development are closely related and this was reflected in the workshop outcomes of both groups analysing these principles. Hence, we present the conclusions for these two principles jointly. Throughout the discussion, it was suggested to merge these principles in the revised version of the *Concordat*.

Continuous professional development is undoubtedly fundamental for postdoctoral researchers. However, many participants pointed out that in their institutional experience this is not always meaningful and can even be just a box ticking exercise. Given that postdocs are often evaluated solely based on their performance measured through research outputs, there is no clear incentive for postdocs or their line managers (principal investigators, supervisors) or institutions as a whole to engage in development activities. Meaningful development training should be clearly emphasised and promoted from the very beginning of the postdocs' career, during induction processes or even prior to commencement of the employment. Obviously, selection of training opportunities varies depending on career stage as well as personal and professional requirements. Regardless of these circumstances, postdocs strongly advocated that the revised *Concordat* should assure a degree of autonomy for individual postdocs in shaping their career development.

The transitional and specific demands of being a postdoctoral researcher as a specific career stage reinforces the need for effective support and clear opportunities to undertake meaningful professional development. Participants

highlighted the need for clearer and preferably standardised specifications about the proportion of time available and recommended for career development training and that this be included in employment contracts. They also pointed out that the need for adequate access to career development opportunities should be recognized and embedded in research funding schemes. This reflects a desire for a more universal description of the postdoctoral career path and clarity in terms of professional progression criteria through different career paths “post-postdoc” both within and outside academia.

One of the emerging issues discussed was that postdocs’ career development is rarely linked with the needs of either individuals or employers, both current and future. Although many postdoctoral researchers aim for careers in academia, the reality is that only small fraction would be able to reach that goal. Universities’ engagement with potential future employers of postdocs in designing and delivering career development opportunities could help in establishing meaningful career pathways and ensure that training focuses on the most appropriate skills. Broadening postdoc skillsets in a tailored manner should be in the best interest and strategic vision not only of the postdocs themselves and the higher education sector, but also for the UK public and private sectors overall. Development of highly skilled professionals should be seen as a strategic investment for the economy, and therefore, funding and organisational support purposely dedicated towards these activities should be in place to assure growth and development. In addition, it was pointed out that the quality and content of training opportunities varies greatly between institutions, and that the quality of outputs is not always high.

Academic culture greatly affects individual postdoc experience. Participants reported that while some line managers (principal investigators, supervisors) do support their postdocs’ career development, many do not encourage postdocs’ participation in professional development training, whether because they think it is not important or relevant or are not fully aware of what is available. It was suggested therefore that adequate training of and support for principal investigators in undertaking this element of their role as managers should be a prerequisite in the new version of *Concordat*. It is very important that the impact of the attitudes of principal investigators is in some way monitored and regulated by both research institutions and funders.

Another important means of assuring career development is more effective staff review mechanisms. In many participants’ experience, there is neither reward for good performance, nor consequences for bad performances. Thus, appraisal becomes a formal exercise for which neither action plan is drawn up nor follow up action taken. It was suggested that appraisal frameworks should include some kind of external control mechanism. Having a third party that could monitor potential issues in a postdoc – principal investigator relationship would provide reassurance of objectivity. In industry, such standardisation measures in various aspects of HR activities are well established and there is a clear need for

more professionalised HR practices within academia. Related to this was the importance of clear designation and communication of responsibilities. The revised *Concordat* should stress the employer's responsibility for training of both principal investigators and postdocs and principal investigator's responsibility for integrating career development in line management of postdoc. Additionally, participants suggested that appraisals should not only focus on postdoc performance but should also reflect on supervisors' participation in researcher development. This envisaged a two-way postdoc-principal investigator review system that would include, next to a postdoc performance review, a parallel evaluation of a supervisor. If postdocs' constructive feedback regarding their principal investigators was sought, it could instigate a healthy relation within a research group and enhance sense of understanding of inter-relationship between those managing and those carrying out the research. Such assessment could be an integral component of other, existing evaluation mechanisms, both internal (i.e. an individual academic evaluation and/or promotion mechanisms) and external (i.e. Research Excellence Framework, Athena SWAN Charter and others).

A separate, but strongly related subject discussed by participants was mentoring. The experience of mentoring schemes in different institutions varies greatly. However, there was a consensus regarding a general need for mentoring schemes for postdocs, who should be offered such opportunities from the very beginning of their employment or prior to its commencement. It should be considered to include "pre-postdoc" mentoring schemes as part of doctoral training. This could help researchers prepare for future research positions as well as could increase their maturity. Mentoring should be a continuous process and evolve as the postdoc career progresses.

The final aspect discussed in relation to Principles 3 and 4 of the *Concordat* related to postdoctoral positions as a transitional stage of career from academic training towards established senior positions, whether in or outside academia. Given the restrictions of short-term contracts, regardless whether these are fixed-term or permanent but limited by availability of specific research funding, postdocs focussing primarily on research outcomes might not have sufficient time to devote to their development training. It would be highly beneficial if researchers could seek access to professional development opportunities even if currently not employed. Research Councils, together with other funders, could and should engage with potential employers, especially non-academic research organisations, which are the greatest beneficiaries of skills acquired by postdoc throughout their lengthy and resource-intensive training whilst in academia. Involvement of external organisations and their contribution to researchers' professional development could aid integration between academia and industry, with obvious benefits for the society and economy. In addition, this would make postdocs more aware of available career opportunities that fully utilise their skills and experience.

Researchers' Responsibilities

Principle 5: Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.

Although the individual researcher's responsibility for his or her own career development in general is undeniable, participants found the specific wording and overall message of the points for Principle 5 somewhat patronising. Many postdocs participating in the National Postdocs Meeting acknowledged a lack of awareness about the *Concordat* prior to the meeting and suggested that if the agreement between funders and employers imposes certain obligations and expectations on them, these should be very clearly communicated but this is not generally the case. Going further, some argued that any agreement should not demand actions from postdocs as a third party not included in the agreement directly without their knowledge and consent. Some representation of postdoctoral researchers, who are most concerned by the *Concordat*, should be actively engaged in the establishment of this agreement and even be its co-signatories.

We would also seek proportionality in sharing the responsibility for career development. As outlined in discussion of the previous principles, postdocs are limited by their individual research environment outlined by particulars of their contracts, sources of funding, expectations of their principal investigator and institution, non-research obligations and other circumstances. The current version of *Concordat* does not emphasise strongly enough the responsibilities lying with research group leaders, management and funding bodies. We would seek the current Principle 5 is expanded to delineate responsibilities of other parties in providing effective means of and resources for researcher career development. Alternatively, the revised *Concordat* could include a new principle defining the responsibilities of principal investigators, as well as managers and funders.

A specific comment regarding point 3 was raised. It was noticed that this point does not relate directly to the matter of principle 5, and suggested that it could be moved to another principle or even constitute a separate one concerning research integrity. Some noticed that responsible and ethical conduct of research is a subject of the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* and that this document could be linked to or embedded in the revised version of the *Concordat*.

Diversity and Equality

Principle 6: Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.

The subject of Principle 6 seems unquestionable and the majority of participants were very much aware of this topic thanks to the British Equality Challenge Unit's Athena SWAN Charter and, to a lesser extent, the Race Equality Charter. As shown by implementation of Athena SWAN agenda, the accreditation process is a very strong incentive to improve institution's practices in this area. However, participants felt that promotion of equality and diversity values should remain an important focus of attention.

The participants brought up various examples of practices which require improvement or show poor understanding of the issues. These included the underrepresentation of females and ethnic minorities within particular employee groups, especially among principal investigators / group leaders, gender imbalance in various committees' membership, practices of using unnecessarily strict, often counterproductive, criteria during recruitment, e.g. a necessity to have a declared disabled person among shortlisted candidates.

The role of funding bodies in promoting and incentivising the equality and diversity agenda is unquestionable. It has been suggested that this is presented in the revised version of *Concordat* as a clear expectation of funders that they will monitor the promotion of equality by funding recipients.

A matter that currently is not covered in the points explaining this principle is potential discrimination on the grounds of nationality, and participants felt this should be addressed. Costs associated with the immigration process might actively discourage candidates from applying for jobs. Likewise, if it was for the institution to cover for visa and related costs, it may prompt an institutional bias towards hiring employees of nationalities for which there is no immigration-associated costs. Funders should consider mitigating this potential source of inequality. This issue has been discussed also in relation to Principle 2.

Implementation and Review

Principle 7: The sector and all stakeholders will undertake regular and collective review of their progress in strengthening the attractiveness and sustainability of research careers in the UK.

Firstly, it was clear from the discussion that the awareness of the *Concordat* among postdocs, who should be the most concerned, is very low. Although we could not assess this matter with specific data here, it seems evident that universities and other research institutions do not sufficiently inform about and promote implementation of the *Concordat*. One simple suggestion was to include an information about an institution being a signatory of the *Concordat* in job

advertisement of every postdoctoral position and to encourage employers to disseminate the *Concordat* together with job offer letters.

Even if postdocs are familiar with the *Concordat*, they are often not sure how the implementation and evaluation of the *Concordat* works in their institution. Many pointed out the need for more specific data on postdoc experience, as the current response rates to the surveys are relatively low, data is not coherent (i.e. it is hard to extract data concerning specifically postdocs from the cross-employee groups surveys) and hard to access and review. Postdocs would like to take active part in implementation and evaluation process but often this is obstructed by their lack of integration into governance structures, leaving them unable to contribute easily. As discussed in relation to Principle 5, postdoc representation should be actively engaged in shaping, implementing and reviewing the *Concordat* at national, institutional and departmental level.

The success of *Concordat* depends greatly on people who are put in charge of its implementation. It emerged quite clearly from our discussions that a cultural shift in academia is necessary to achieve what is envisaged by the *Concordat*. Professionalization, understood at various levels, was a key element discussed in respect to this matter. Academia relies heavily on “teacher - student” or even “master - disciple” models of relationship when it comes to managing postdoctoral researchers. Although “postdoc” is often referred to as a training post, postdoctoral researchers should be regarded more as professionals, associates in the research project, rather than trainees or “prolonged students”. Being employees with full rights and obligations, postdocs are seeking stronger engagement with human resources in various aspects of their day-to-day work and career development, as is commonly practiced in any other sector. The importance of the HR role was discussed further in respect to previous principles, i.e. more effective appraisals, guaranteed access to training opportunities etc.

Another aspect of cultural change is the professionalization of the status of postdoc itself, in the sense of it being a distinct and important career stage rather than a temporary staging post between being a student and being an academic, as it was historically regarded. Many postdocs do not feel their skills are recognised or appreciated and their development requirements are not addressed. In part, this is because there is no way of documenting and certifying skills they possess already and a clear definition of the kinds of skills they should acquire while in research post is lacking. Regulatory mechanisms used in medical and legal professions were brought up as examples, which could be followed when thinking of standardisation of postdoc experience and expectations. Although this idea seems very ambitious, it is worth considering how academia could learn from the professional training and recognition mechanisms used by other professions to strengthen the role and assure adequate development of researchers to address the needs of academic and non-academic research organisations in particular and broader society in general.

Subsequently there is the matter of institutional evaluation of all processes related to managing career development. Evaluation through existing frameworks relating to equality and diversity as well as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) are all very good examples of mechanisms that profoundly impact practices at universities across the UK. All of these rely on systematic review and classification of an institution's performance in specific subject area. The competitive nature of these assessment mechanisms, whether it leads to prestigious awards as in case of Athena SWAN accreditation or financial remuneration as in case of REF and TEF, is a true stimulus for far-reaching actions, which incentivise cultural change in academic institutions. It would be worth considering if practices impacting postdoctoral staff line management and career progression could become a subject of an analogous evaluation and accreditation mechanism. Comparing practices between organisations or even between specific units within an organisation, promoting the best practices and awarding leading institutions would certainly be a trigger incentivising better support for researcher development.

Reflections and recommendations

The *Concordat* is a very important declaration and postdocs gathered in Cambridge at the National Postdoc Meeting welcomed its review by Research Councils UK. The outcomes of the meeting clearly show that this review is much anticipated by the postdoctoral researchers who have great hopes that a revised version of the *Concordat* will further support their career development and overall strengthen their position to contribute within academia and as researchers generally. Several aspects outlined below require thoughtful consideration in order to assure that the revised *Concordat* serves its purpose.

Awareness of the *Concordat*

Postdoctoral researchers need to know about the *Concordat* as it empowers them to seek better support in career development. As outlined in the discussion about *Implementation and review* (Principle 7), the emphasis must be on making postdocs aware of what employers and funders have committed to in respect of supporting their career development. Measures like dissemination of the *Concordat* (or a comprehensive summary/executive version) during recruitment would support this.

Researchers' engagement

While postdocs are at the centre of the *Concordat*, they are not involved in its formulation and implementation. Engaging with researchers in these processes through appropriate representation – possibly to the extent of making researcher staff a formal third party to the agreement – would be empowering for our staff group and provide us with increased “ownership” of career development. See also the section regarding *Researchers' Responsibilities* (Principle 5) for further comments on that matter.

Outlining and sharing responsibilities

Although no one would question a researcher's own responsibility for career development that it stressed in the *Concordat*, in our opinion the revised version should emphasize more the responsibilities of other parties involved to achieve proportion balance between all of them. In particular, the responsibilities of researchers' line managers (principal investigators, supervisors) should be specified to assure postdocs have adequate support in their development. Equally, obligations of institutions and research funders towards postdocs' development must be recognised and addressed with adequate commitments and provisions, including support and recognition for line managers to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

The role of appraisals

Appraisals can play an important role in embedding the importance of career development activity for researchers, but participants generally observed that this is often a missed opportunity and that appraisals are not used as effectively

as they could be. Establishing clearly how researchers' career development training and activity is evaluated as part of their overall appraisal, and equally how line managers are to be appraised for and supported by employers in supporting researcher development would be a valuable mechanism for embedding and evaluating progress for all stakeholders. This is further discussed in relation to Principles 4, 5 and 7.

Linking skills to needs

The historical role of the postdoc position as a gateway primarily to an academic position has obviously changed and researchers have a valuable role to play across many different sectors. The career development opportunities available to them therefore need to be strongly linked to the needs and expectations of employers, and by extension of society and the economy as a whole. This does not seem currently to be the case in many institutions, and the *Concordat* can play a stronger role in establishing a clearer link between the strategic needs of future employers and the training and opportunities available for postdocs. This will improve access for postdocs' to a wider set of career options, as well as enhance the impact of their skills and expertise across all sectors.

Active evaluation

The current *Concordat* includes many recommendations and expectations that are clearly positive and relevant. However, it does lack executive power because there is limited incentive for institutions and individuals to implement it. Clearer means of monitoring and acknowledging good practice would be very useful to assure that the revised version is as effective as possible.

The first National Postdoc Meeting was a unique opportunity for the representatives of the researchers' community to exchange their opinions and ideas. We found this experience extremely valuable and we would like to continue this initiative in the future. We are hoping that suggestions presented in this report will be considered by the Concordat Expert Review Panel. We are looking forward to engaging further in constructive dialogue with academic institutions, other research organisations, funding bodies and policymakers to assure the prosperous future of postdoctoral researchers for the benefit of the research ecosystem and our society.

Acknowledgments

Organising Committee

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Editorial

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Participants

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