

Minutes from the Concordat Implementation Group Meeting

9 November 2016, 10.00–11.30, H/G19 Heslington Hall

Chair: Deborah Smith (DS)

Present: Nick Barraclough (NB), Karen Clegg (KC), Anna Grey (AG), Rasha Ibrahim (RI), Alex Medcalf (AM), Stephanie Prady (SP), Anna Reader (AR), Liz Rylott (LR), Helen Selvidge (HS), Helen Weatherly (HW)

Apologies: John Clark, Paul Walton

Minutes: Helen Goodwill

1. Minutes

(Enc1.Minutes August 2016)

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 August 2016 were **approved**.

2. Research Staff Conference in June/July 2017

- **Stephanie Prady (Health Sciences) to feed back on September conference for early career researchers and pass on any learning**
(Enc3.SSM ECR_learning points and Enc4.SSM ECR_programme)

SP was on the organising committee for a pre-conference workshop held for early career researchers within Health Sciences. The organisers wanted to focus on personal stories in grant writing and applying for fellowships. It was agreed that, as there was such a range of funding bodies, the information given could not be too specific, so speakers were chosen from a range of backgrounds. The feedback received from attendees suggests that this was well received.

Towards the end of the workshop, an activity was held which was created to be somewhat challenging by taking people out of their comfort zones. The attendees were not given advance warning of the activity and were divided into small groups and given an abstract of a funded research proposal – they then had to sell that proposal to another group and then provide and receive feedback. The feedback from this activity was decidedly mixed and being thrown into an activity appeared to be particularly challenging for some people. The organisers reflected that they were pleased they had included the activity and felt it was a useful reflection on how difficult life as an academic can be. KC suggested that perhaps people could be warned in advance or offered parallel sessions so that delegates could choose whether to participate or not. With regards to the mixed feedback, it was suggested that obtaining some reflections further down the line could be

valuable - attendees may indeed have found the session particularly challenging at the time, but in hindsight, they may have been able to put the learning gained into practice.

Action: KC to circulate ideas for parallel sessions (possibly involving communication skills and working collaboratively) in order to gain feedback from CIG members.

SP recommended a social activity or event at the end of the workshop.

- **Karen Clegg to report back on discussions with the Research Champions about running a Falling Walls public engagement event as part of the staff conference.**

The Falling Walls Conference is held every year in Berlin on 9 November – the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. As with 3 Minute Thesis, each speaker gets 3 minutes to present their research in an engaging and compelling way to a non-specialist audience.

It was **agreed** at the recent meeting with the Research Champions that a Falling Walls event would be held at the University of York. Eligibility criteria stipulate that all Falling Walls 'labs' (as they are called) are open to all current students and alumni and staff within five years of completion of their PhD. This should allow most postdocs to take part. As York already runs the '3 Minute Thesis' (3MT) competition, it is proposed to give the top three 3MT students immediate automatic entry into the Falling Walls lab. The proposal is to run seven heats under the Research Champion themes, with RETT providing training on areas such as pitching and feedback. The agreed date is **23 June 2017** and the event will take place in the lecture theatre in the new Spring Lane building. KC queried whether it could be run as part of a day-long research staff conference with sessions for research staff in the morning and the Falling Walls event in the afternoon and this suggestion was **approved** by CIG.

There was some concern raised about the date from the meeting with Research Champions although acknowledgement that there is never going to be an ideal time.

Action: KC to ensure that there are no clashes with anything else taking place on 23 June which could prove problematic.

Action: HG to advertise via EventBrite and other means (Research Staff newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, etc) from 1 January 2017 in order to ensure people have the date in their diaries in good time. Update: Now 23 June 2017 has been agreed, this has been circulated via the Staff Digest and the Research Staff Newsletter along with a web presence and EventBrite booking form which will go live in February.

3. Review the CIG membership (Enc5. Membership and ToR) in relation to the new RET governance structure (Enc6. RET Steering Group and Enc7. RET Operations Group).

As part of the recent Learning Needs Analysis review, the Research Excellence Training Team (RETT) moved from HR to R&E and broadened their remit to provide support for all those active in research **and** those who support it – this expanded remit directly supports the Research Strategy. As such a new research excellence training and support governance structure was agreed and will include a new RET Operations Group (RETOG) and a RET Steering Group.

The RET Operations Group will report and supply papers to the Steering Group and the membership will consist of a representative from each of the main professional support services and a couple of members of research staff. The RET Steering Group will be small, agile and proactive and will identify

contacts, initiatives from funders and highlight any drives or initiatives which may impact on the training that the University provides.

In light of the above, it was queried whether the Concordat Implementation Group should continue. The group concluded that while the Concordat will change over time, this will not happen immediately, while it will take a year or so for the new structure to embed itself and settle down. It was **agreed** that the CIG still serves a purpose and should continue. DS raised the issue of Concordat activities being aligned with Athena Swan and Equality and Diversity.

Action: HG to set up a meeting for KC, AR, HS and AG, to discuss how the groups can fit together to inform the issues without having too much overlap or repetition.

With regards to refreshing the CIG membership, DS stressed that membership should be based on position (and who is represented) rather than on an individual. As PIs and researchers are most affected by the Concordat, the CIG really serves to represent them and the group is currently low on PI representation (although notably they are also hard to recruit). KC mentioned that she would like to include a couple of Chairs of Departmental Research Committees although the group is aware that DRC workloads might make this difficult. After some discussion, it was agreed that there should be a rep from each of the departmental [Research Staff Associations/Postdoc Fora](#) who are, as a minimum, to be made aware of the CIG meetings and the discussions that take place and the opportunity should be available to each of them to feed into the meeting should they wish.

Action: KC to ensure each of the Research Staff Associations has a CIG representative (although they will not become part of the core membership group)

Action: KC to contact one Research Staff Association rep along with a GSA rep and invite them to join the CIG

4. Mentoring for Researchers Working Group

At the last Researchers14 meeting, a number of Russell Group institutions expressed a desire to develop a mentoring practice for Early Career Researchers with an agreement that these institutions would collectively support each other. A first meeting was held in September to discuss this idea and look at how to take it forward and included representatives from the Universities of Cambridge and Sheffield who already have existing schemes. Sheffield outlined their scheme which has been running for three years and currently has around 150 pairings. Cambridge launched their first pilot in June and currently have around 30 pairings. It was stressed that the mentor does not and should not replace the PI and that the mentoring relationship should not be from within the same department (but should be from a cognate discipline).

As a result of the above meeting, KC now has a further meeting scheduled with Environment, Physics, Chemistry and Health Sciences on 16 November to see if we can start a small, low-key pilot within those departments and feedback by October 2017. The scheme will be run in partnership with Susan Kane from Learning & Development; how the matching will be carried out will be a major point of discussion as there are a number of options, all of which have resource implications. Training for both mentors and mentees will be provided, although DS raised a concern with regards to having resource for this training which has not been prioritised for support in 16/17.

5. Outcome of the 6 year submission to the HR Excellence in Research Award

Vitae confirmed that York has been successful in retaining the HR Excellence in Research Award. In their feedback about the University of York, the UK judging panel said: *“This is a strong submission showing significant progress over the previous two years, with much exceptional practice taking place.”* The panel encouraged York to develop case studies around support for PIs and mentoring. A formal announcement will be made on 5 December.

Action: KC to draft a press release for 5 December 2016. Completed. See:
<https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2016/quality/hr-excellence-research/>

6. AOB

- KC confirmed that York is currently taking part in an initiative with a number of other universities around funding for post-docs and will feed back on this once further information is available.
- Every two years, Biology runs a post-doc careers event and one will be taking place this coming Spring. There will be a workshop in the morning, with alumni speaking in the afternoon. If anyone is interested in running a similar event within their own department, the Biology Post-Doc Society is happy to be contacted for information via Liz Rylott.
- EPSRC – a meeting with a few ECRs is due to take place with regards to the research support package they provide and how this supports their funded researchers. A submission is being put forward by the University. KC has a meeting to discuss this and will feed back should anything arise.

Dates for remaining 2016/17 meetings

8 March 2017, 10.00–12.00pm, H/G09 Heslington Hall

29 June 2017, 1.30–3.30pm, H/G17 Heslington Hall