

## United Kingdom – Country report

### Objectives of the project

The aim of our project is to improve expertise in industrial relations in the higher education sector and to promote the exchange of information and experience among EFEE and ETUCE members. More specifically, the project aims to:

- Reach a shared understanding, and possibly a ESSDE outcome, about the specific challenges facing early career researchers in Europe incorporating the perspectives and roles of trade unions and employers and the available options for responding to these challenges.
- Provide insight to the European Social Partners in Education on what we can do to improve social dialogue on industrial relations and employment relations issues pertaining to early career researchers.
- Explore where dialogue between national social partners improves support for early career researchers.
- Improve awareness of the existing work in the area of early career researchers (among others European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (2005), the HR Strategy on Researchers (2008) and the “HR Excellence in Research logo of the EC”, The UNESCO Recommendation (1997), the ETUCE report (2011)) their implementation and benefits in improving research quality through the provision of high quality support for early career researchers.
- To understand the trends in the career progression of female researchers, including areas of progress, and identify initiatives that have been successful in improving equality in career progression, particularly those initiatives that provide support to early career researchers.
- To produce a set of resources including case studies and practitioner-oriented research and policy guidance to complement the existing international work in this area.
- To facilitate peer learning between national social partners in the education sector, especially in the higher education sector; to exchange best practices and learning experiences.
- To contribute to the European social dialogue between employers’ organisations and trade unions in the education sector, more specifically to continue the current work of the Working Group 3 on Higher Education & Research and to improve the coordination, functioning and effectiveness of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue for Education.

This case study is one of six case study reports from this research project. The case study countries are Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom. The final project report, due to be published in December 2014, will draw on the findings from each country. The in-depth case studies will be published as appendices to the main report.

### Project partners

Leading applicant is: Universities and Colleges’ Employers Association (UCEA) of the UK.

Co-applicants are: European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) and European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE).

Affiliated entities are: Association of Finnish Independent Education Employers, Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus.



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## 1 Country Context

With a population of over 64 million, the United Kingdom (UK) is the third largest country in the EU by population after Germany and France and the third largest economy by GDP. The UK constitutes four separate jurisdictions – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (but not England) each have their own national legislatures and each of the four jurisdictions has control of specific functions, notably health and education policy. Each of the four countries has its own higher education system. In recent times this devolution of higher education policy has led to some significant differences in higher education funding arrangements between the four nations.

The economy of the UK is highly dependent on private services, especially financial services and retail, while its manufacturing industry has been in decline as a proportion of total economic output since the 1970s. Despite this decline, the UK has been successful in maintaining a highly-competitive advanced manufacturing sector with strengths in aerospace, pharmaceuticals and automobiles. The UK economy was badly affected by the economic recession in 2008-09, especially in financial services, and recovery has been slower than any of the previous recessions on record. However, the UK economy is now out-performing the rest of Europe in terms of growth as the economy recovers. Despite positive economic growth in 2013 and 2014, the UK's public sector net debt is still high and will peak at 78.7% of GDP in 2015-16 according to the Office for Budgetary Responsibility. The Government's programme of austerity, which has included two years of pay freezes for public sector workers followed by three years of a 1% cap on pay awards, will therefore continue through to the end of the current parliament.

## 2 Research and innovation

The UK has a well-developed research and innovation system which has been a focus of significant government attention in the wake of the recession.<sup>1</sup> While the UK represents just 0.9% of the global population, 3.2% of R&D expenditure, and 4.1% of researchers, it accounts for 9.5% of article downloads, 11.6% of citations and 15.9% of the world's most highly cited articles. UK innovation policy and the research system are largely centralised, although there is regional and national autonomy in some areas. The Innovation and Research Strategy for Growth was published in 2011 and sets out the long-term policy strategy for research and innovation in the UK.<sup>2</sup> The main research funders are the research councils and the higher education funding councils which distribute quality-related research block grants to universities. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the lead department on science, innovation and research while the Council for Science and Technology (CST) is the principle high-level national policy making and coordination body. Private sector R&D is incentivised through tax credits and is supported by the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) and recently established Catapult centres.

While some areas of public spending have been cut considerably, science and research spending has been protected, at least in nominal terms. The UK's gross domestic expenditure on research and

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills produces an annual report on innovation and research which provides more comprehensive coverage than can be detailed here:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/293635/bis-14-p188-innovation-report-2014-revised.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293635/bis-14-p188-innovation-report-2014-revised.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011), *Innovation and Research Strategy for Growth*.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32450/11-1387-innovation-and-research-strategy-for-growth.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32450/11-1387-innovation-and-research-strategy-for-growth.pdf)

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

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development (R&D) activities in 2012 was £27.0 billion (€34.4 billion) of which the higher education sector was responsible for £7.2 billion (€9.19 billion), representing 26.7% of total R&D performed – almost seven percentage points higher than in 2000 (20.6%).<sup>3</sup> Research funding in HE is concentrated, with 75 per cent of quality-related research funding going to the top quintile of recipients by funding. Business enterprise finances 46% of R&D and performs around 63.3% of R&D in the UK (2012) while government finances 21%.<sup>4</sup>

A significant feature of the UK research system is the significant amount of R&D investment financed from abroad (20% compared to the EU average of 8%) and by the non-profit sector (5%). UK institutions also had €3.9 billion in funding from the European FP7 fund (14.9% of the total, which is the second highest share among EU Member states). The success rate of UK applicants to FP7 at 23.6% is also well above the average EU rate of 21.5%.<sup>5</sup>

Despite significant public investment and above average performance on a range of R&D indicators, the UK's overall R&D intensity was 1.72% of GDP, lower than the EU average of 2%, the Lisbon target of 3% and its own target of 2.5% set in 2004. As part of the UK Government's 2010 fiscal consolidation strategy the budget for science was frozen in cash terms at £4.6 billion (€5.4 billion) until 2014 (amounting to a cut of around 10% in real terms over the four year period). The capital expenditure budget for science was not protected and is expected to be cut over the period up to 2014 by 44%. Despite this cut, the UK government did not set a national R&D intensity target regarding Europe 2020 headline targets although the level of R&D investment is being monitored on an annual basis. In the decade up to 2014 UK R&D intensity averaged 1.8%.

The UK maintains a highly-skilled workforce by OECD standards<sup>6</sup> and the stock of researchers in the UK by head count was 13.57 per 1,000 active labour force in 2011, compared to an EU average of 10.55. The UK government has adopted a number of measures aimed at providing a stable supply of researchers to meet its R&D targets and at promoting attractive employment conditions in public research institutions. These include the 2011 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) 'Innovation and Research Strategy for Growth', the 2010 Research Councils UK 'Strategic Vision', Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and the BIS 2009 UK 'National Action Plan on researcher mobility and careers within the European Research Area'. There has also been an independent review by Sir Andrew Witty on 'Encouraging a British Innovation Revolution' in 2013 and the BIS report on 'Growing the best and brightest: The drivers of research excellence' in 2014 which emphasised the importance of developing and maintaining human resources in R&D. There was also a report commissioned by BIS in 2013 on the 'International Comparative Performance of the UK Research Base' and the 2010 report, 'One Step Beyond: Making the most of Postgraduate Education' reviewed the provision of post-graduate education, including doctoral studies.

There are many examples of partnerships between universities/research institutes and business, from co-design and co-delivery of post-graduate courses to co-funding and joint supervision of doctoral

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<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics (2014). UK Gross Domestic Expenditure on Research and Development 2012. [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_355583.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_355583.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Deloitte (2014). Researchers' Report 2014. Country Profile: United Kingdom

<sup>6</sup> OECD (2013). Education at a Glance. [http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20\(eng\)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20(eng)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf)

students. Many of these interactions are supported by the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)<sup>7</sup> which provides funding for knowledge exchange programmes across 99 HEIs, including the Early Career Research Scheme at the University of Sheffield<sup>8</sup> and Knowledge Exchange Fellowships in the field of humanities at the University of Oxford<sup>9</sup>. The UK Research Councils delivery Plan has set a national target for the exchange of skills in the research base and movement of researchers between the research base and user communities at all career stages. Following the Wilson report in 2012<sup>10</sup> the UK government announced new plans to strengthen collaboration between higher education and business with a view to driving economic recovery. RCUK has also developed a Joint Vision for Collaborative Training.<sup>11</sup>

### 3 The UK higher education system

Higher education in the UK has evolved over a long period and the oldest institutions date back to the medieval period. A University Grants Commission was established in 1919 and state funding for universities has continued to be an essential feature of the UK system over the last century, albeit in different ways. In 1992 separate funding councils were established for each of the four jurisdictions of the UK and in the same year a number of polytechnics (technical colleges previously funded by local government) were given university status. Today, unlike some other European countries, there is a single system of HE in place in the UK which covers all types of HE institutions (universities and HE colleges), notwithstanding the differences in funding arrangements between the four jurisdictions. The main variations are therefore between the four countries of the UK, rather than different types of institution. There was a dramatic expansion of UK HE in the 1960s and again in the late 1990s through to the present and the number of 18 year-olds entering HE reached 38 per cent in 2013<sup>12</sup>. According to the sector's statistical agency HESA, there are currently 2.3 million students at undergraduate and postgraduate level in the UK and 382,500 staff employed, including 185,585 academic staff.

There have been significant changes in the UK higher education landscape since the 2008-09 economic recession, particularly as a consequence of the changes to student funding in England in 2012-13, with annual undergraduate student fees of up to £9,000 being introduced as central government funding for teaching was reduced. However, student funding in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is largely unchanged with free undergraduate tuition for Scottish residents studying in Scotland and undergraduate fees in Wales and Northern Ireland just over £3,000 per annum.

The majority of research income for HEIs comes from the UK research councils and quality-related research grants which are allocated by the four funding councils according to research excellence. A recent policy paper by the academic union UCU<sup>13</sup> points out that, unlike funding for teaching, research funding remains highly centralised and, while the block research grants are allocated at jurisdiction level, devolution has had little effect on the allocation of research council funding.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/kes/heif/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/rpe/ecrs>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/knowledge-exchange-placement-fellowships>

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, T. (2012). A Review of University-Business Collaboration. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32383/12-610-wilson-review-business-university-collaboration.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32383/12-610-wilson-review-business-university-collaboration.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/skills/rcdvision.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Trends in young participation in higher education. HEFCE. Issues paper 2013/28. October 2013

<sup>13</sup> UCU (2014), Seeing the bigger picture – The future of research and development – a UCU policy statement. [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/h/m/ucu\\_seeingthebiggerpicture\\_dec14.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/h/m/ucu_seeingthebiggerpicture_dec14.pdf)

Research funding to the sector has remained static in nominal terms which has meant a significant real-terms decline in funding for institutions. Furthermore, the Wakeham Review in 2011 concluded that income which HEIs receive for research does not fully cover the costs of undertaking that research.<sup>14</sup> The funding councils in all four nations have emphasised the need to gain efficiencies in order to reduce indirect costs and maintain existing levels of research output. The Wakeham Review recommended introducing efficiency targets and enhancing the sharing of research equipment while the Efficiencies and Modernisation Task Group led by Professor Sir Ian Diamond focused on space utilisation, procurement and the use of shared services.<sup>15</sup>

## 4 Social dialogue and HE employment relations

The concept of social dialogue is not well developed in UK employment relations and the history of British employment relations has been marked, in contrast to many European countries, by both relatively little legal control over collective employment relationships and a relatively high degree of workplace conflict. While accession to the EU led to some changes in the employment relationship, and government legal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s introduced more state regulation of trade unions, the British employment relations system remains essentially voluntary in nature and collective agreements normally have no force of law on either party. There has been a single national confederation for trade unions in the UK (the Trades Union Congress – the TUC) since 1868 and almost all registered trade unions are affiliated to that body. On the employers' side there is also a central employers' confederation (the Confederation of British Industry – the CBI) – and a body for the public employers, CEEP UK - but neither the TUC nor the CBI engage in collective bargaining at national level. It is also highly unusual for the UK Government to become directly involved in the collective bargaining process, except in the case of central Government where it is the employer. In the UK, unlike some parts of Europe, there is no legal distinction between employment contracts in the private and public sectors.

In higher education, collective bargaining with trade unions has existed since the 1960s and an employers' body for the whole HE sector, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), was established in 1994. It is noteworthy that in the UK HE employees are not defined in the national statistics as public servants but as private not-for-profit sector employees.

### 4.1 Trade Unions

Historically trade unions have been very strong in the UK. There has, however, been a substantial reduction in the number of trade unions in the UK since the 1980s, largely through mergers and amalgamations. Today the strongest areas of union membership density and collective bargaining coverage are in the public sector (56% membership density compared to 14% in the private sector) although union density in large private manufacturing firms is also still strong. Today most union members belong to a small number of very large unions but there remain a number of smaller, largely white-collar professional unions. There are several unions representing teaching staff at primary and secondary level. In Higher Education there are five main trade unions – two representing academic staff (the University and College Union and the Educational Institute of Scotland) and three

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/efficiency/efficiency2011/>

<sup>15</sup> Universities UK (2011). Efficiency and effectiveness in higher education: A report by the Universities UK Efficiency and Modernisation Task Group.  
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/EfficiencyinHigherEducation.aspx>

representing support staff (Unison, Unite and the GMB). The vast majority of academic staff who are union members are members of the UCU (which also has membership in other parts of tertiary education). Because most bargaining matters are determined at the level of the individual institution, each institution will generally recognise one or more of these unions and have its own local agreement.

#### **4.2 Employers' associations**

Like the trade unions, in recent decades there has been a significant reduction in the number of employers' associations in the UK but there remain some important bodies in particular sectors where multi-employer bargaining continues (e.g. construction, local government, the NHS, higher education). In higher education the employers' association is the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) which has represented the c. 160 UK higher education institutions since 1994. The UCEA coordinates and represents the employers' side within the National Joint Committee for Higher Education Staffs (JNCHES) where those issues that may lie at national level are determined. UCEA also provides guidance and advice, research, training and events and communications support to all its member organisations. Its Board membership consists of a number of both Vice-Chancellors/Principals and Chairs of university and college governing councils or boards. Representation on the UCEA Board is ensured from all the various types of UK HEIs and the separate jurisdictions of the UK.

#### **4.3 Collective Agreement for Higher Education Staff**

There is a single national agreement reached within the JNCHES machinery which covers national pay increases (and some other limited matters) at multi-employer level. In 2004 the employers and all unions reached agreement on a Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Higher Education Pay Structures. This was a single enabling agreement (replacing ten previous agreements) covering all staff (although around a quarter of HE staff were not covered by the agreement – largely professors and senior managers). As part of this agreement it was agreed that, while negotiations on a national increase to a national pay spine would take place at multi-employer level, other matters such as grading, pay progression systems and conditions of service would be determined at the level of the individual HEI. Under the 2004 agreement each institution negotiated its own local pay and conditions arrangements, based on job evaluation exercises, with its own trade unions and these matters remain locally determined.

The pay and conditions of early career researchers are therefore determined at institutional level but normally (as long as they are deemed to be employees) they would be covered by the same collective agreements as other academic staff. Differentiation of researchers' salaries depends on which level their roles are placed in the local grading structure. Recruitment and retention supplements can be paid for any role if the case for one is objectively justified. As noted in section 5, a PhD programme is either self-funded or stipend funded and there is no employment relationship with the university unless the individual has a contract to perform duties in addition to their PhD study, such as work on a research project, tutoring / teaching or administration. There are also existing academic staff who are registered for a doctoral degree.

Where contractual arrangements are defined as employed status, institutions provide researchers with paid sick leave and other benefits, including maternity leave, paternity leave and holidays in line with the local institutional agreement. Researchers would also have the option of joining a relevant

pension scheme and new UK legislation requires all employees to be automatically enrolled into a pension scheme (and for the employer to make contributions to that scheme).

## 5 Research careers in the UK

The UK government has policies in place to encourage students to become researchers, especially in science. For example, in line with Government strategy, Research Councils UK (RCUK), the major provider of competitive funding for research in the UK, encourages links between schools and the UK research community to secure and sustain a supply of future UK researchers. RCUK have a suite of vignettes on their website providing examples of life as a researcher and the different career paths that researchers can take. The case studies are aimed at young people and highlight the opportunities that research skills can provide in academic institutions, business, industry and commerce. The RCUK also supports the Nuffield Research Placement Scheme which offers 1,000 bursaries a year for students to work alongside professional researchers on their own research projects. Many institutions run their own placement schemes to attract students into research.

A large proportion of the UK's doctoral candidates are from outside the UK. In 2011 the proportion of doctoral candidates in the UK who were from another EU member state was 16.2%, compared with an EU average of 7.7%. In the same year, the proportion of non-EU doctoral candidates as a percentage of all doctoral candidates was 30.6% in the UK compared with an EU average of 24.2%. The UK National Action Plan on researcher mobility and careers within the ERA (2009) indicates that the UK research base is already one of the most open in the world in terms of both recruitment of researchers (40% of research-only staff are from outside the UK) and scientific collaborations (over 40% of UK scientific papers now have one or more non-UK co-authors)<sup>16</sup>. Institutions such as the British Academy and the Royal Society also fund a number of fellowship schemes to attract the best ECRs from around the world (e.g. Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowships<sup>17</sup>, Newton International Fellowships<sup>18</sup>) and research-intensive HEIs have their own fellowship schemes. RCUK indicates that between 20% and 50% of all Research Council fellows are from outside the UK, depending on discipline. However, recent UK Government policy to reduce overall net migration into the UK has begun to have an effect on this phenomenon.

In terms of outward mobility, many Research Councils actively encourage international collaboration as part of the grant awarding process. Many awards include an option of undertaking research training outside the UK. There are a number of specific measures aimed at encouraging UK researchers to spend some time abroad. Researchers of all nationalities, whether EU citizens or not, who have been appointed to an eligible research post at a UK HEI can apply for a Research Council grant in the UK.

### 5.1 Research Councils UK

RCUK provides the major strategic direction for R&D in the UK and provides the collective voice for the seven separate UK research councils (Arts and Humanities, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences, Economic and Social Research, Engineering and Physical Sciences, Medical Research, Natural Environment, and Science and Technology Facilities). The collective vision of RCUK is to provide leadership, shape the research landscape, incentivise collaboration and knowledge exchange, ensure

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<sup>16</sup> Deloitte, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> <https://royalsociety.org/grants/schemes/dorothy-hodgkin/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.newtonfellowships.org/>

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

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that the UK gets maximum benefit from the global research endeavour, promote high level skills and develop and run the national research infrastructure. The RCUK vision statement for 2011-2015 states that:

*'We will consolidate and focus support for people giving greater attention to establishing the careers of the best early career researchers through PhD funding; people exchange opportunities; and leadership development... RCUK will continue to develop highly skilled researchers to achieve impact across the whole economy, as well as developing the next generation of researchers to maintain national capability'<sup>19</sup>.*

The RCUK vision also states that it will 1) ensure effective and attractive routes to support researchers moving between research and other sectors including business, government and civil society, and 2) ensure that funding develops the right balance of specialist research enterprise, and wider business and management skills for high-technology employers as well as for the academic base.

The UK research councils together support a quarter of the research done in the UK and a quarter of the full-time doctoral candidates (17,000). They also provide grants for 10,000 post-doctoral staff. All UK research councils concentrate their funding for doctoral training in designated centres of excellence. This is 'a result of funding constraints and the policy objective of improving the quality of doctoral training in the UK and striving for excellence'<sup>20</sup>. In the past, before the 2004 Framework Agreement, there were minimum pay levels and conditions for research staff which the research councils enforced through their grants but this is no longer the case. The guidance to grant applicants states that they must indicate what level of researcher is required for the project but there is some flexibility in how institutions use their research grants. The view of RCUK is that in the past they needed to be more explicit about the HR requirements but the development of HR expertise in HE has meant that this is no longer necessary. RCUK continues to set annual doctoral stipend and fee levels for those doctoral candidates funded by research council grants – the most recent national minimum doctoral stipend was £13,726 in 2013/14 and the indicative fee level £3,900.

RCUK was closely involved in the drafting of the EU Charter and Code and created the main body for researcher support in the UK, Vitae (see below). RCUK indicated that there are some problems with the EU definition of early career researchers within the Charter and Code, with clear differences in UK law, as in many other member states, between doctoral candidates registered as students and researchers on employment contracts. There are also issues about when a researcher ceases to be early career. In its view it is not possible to stipulate this as circumstances vary between countries. The UK Research Excellence Framework (the periodic national assessment of institutions' research output and impact) introduced a definition of an ECR<sup>21</sup> but, in RCUK's view, this is perhaps too specific.

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<sup>19</sup> Research Councils UK Strategic Vision. 2011-15.

<sup>20</sup> Deloitte, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> According to the Research Excellence Framework, an individual is deemed to have started their research career as independent researchers on or after 1 August 2009 (with respect to assessment in 2014). Starting the research career refers to 'the point at which they held a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or greater, which included a primary employment function of undertaking 'research' or 'teaching and research', with any HE or other organisation, whether in the UK or overseas, and they undertook independent research, leading or acting as principal investigator or equivalent on a research grant or significant piece of research work'.

RCUK has developed a Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training<sup>22</sup> which lays down common principles for the support of all research council funded doctoral researchers. These are aligned with the EU seven principles for Innovative Doctoral Training. RCUK's view is that development as a researcher is a continuum and there are several break points when future career trajectories have to be considered. The main issue is that over half of doctoral candidates will go to work outside HE when they graduate and institutions need to make candidates aware of the alternative research careers outside academia. There is a problem of managing expectations – according to the CROS survey by Vitae, around 50% want a career in HE<sup>23</sup> but there are limited vacancies. Once they have a research job in HE there are yet other options to consider – few will follow a research-only career, some will become teaching and research academics and some will move into other occupations within HE, such as knowledge exchange or research management, or to employment outside HE.

In 2014 RCUK also published a 'Statement of Expectations for Research Fellowships and Future Research Leaders'<sup>24</sup>. The aim of this document was 'to attract excellent researchers into excellent UK research environments, develop research leaders for the future UK national capability and drive forward innovative areas of research'. The statement lays down expectations of both research organisations and research fellows and future research leaders.

## 6 The EU Code and Charter for Researchers in the UK

In the UK the EU Charter and Code for Researchers is being implemented through the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers'<sup>25</sup> for research staff and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code for Higher Education: research degrees. The Concordat is an agreement between funders and employers of research staff to 'improve the employment and support for researchers and research careers in UK higher education'. It sets out 'clear standards that research staff can expect from the institution that employs them, as well as their responsibilities as researchers'. All the main UK funders of researchers and employers of researchers are signatories of the Concordat and members of the Concordat Strategy Group.

The European Charter and Code for Researchers was informed by the principles set out in an earlier version of the Concordat and the European Commission has agreed that UK institutions that endorse the Concordat and meet the requirements of the QAA Quality Code for research degrees will be regarded as having adopted the Charter and Code. The Concordat is also the primary mechanism for UK institutions to participate in the European HR Excellence in Research Award.<sup>26</sup>

While the seven principles of the Concordat cover most of the 40 principles contained within the European Charter and Code, they are specific to the UK context:

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

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/skills/statementofexpectation.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/cros>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/skills/FellowshipStatement.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat)

<sup>26</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/hrexcellenceaward](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/hrexcellenceaward)

- 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.
- 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 researchers' personal and career development, and lifelong learning, is clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career.
- Principle 5: Individual researchers share the responsibility for and need to pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development, and lifelong learning.
- Principle 6: Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers.
- 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.

Vitae, the body established by RCUK to oversee this policy (see below), leads on the management and implementation of the Concordat while the Concordat Strategy Group oversees strategy and implementation. The UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was updated in 2008. It was based on an original agreement made in 1996 between funding bodies and universities, which aimed to improve the support for contract research staff (now termed research staff to include all early career researchers) in their career development. The academic trade union, the UCU, was also involved in the re-drafting of the Concordat although the union is not currently a signatory, as it does not adequately reflect its position on the use of fixed-term contracts in institutions.

In 2012 a three-year review of the Concordat by Vitae found that, despite its voluntary nature, it had had a significant impact. The review found that the principles of the Concordat were now firmly embedded in UK HEIs and the corresponding infrastructure had increasingly been put in place. The areas of most impact were in recruitment and selection processes, recognition and value, and equality and diversity.

### 6.1 HR Excellence in Research

In 2010 Vitae agreed with the European Commission a UK-wide process which enables UK HEIs to gain the HR Excellence in Research Award. This acknowledges institutions' alignment with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment. Institutions with the HR Excellence in Research award have to undertake an internal review every two years and an external review every four years. The UK currently has the highest number of institutions with the HR Excellence in Research award in the EU.<sup>27</sup>

## 7 Challenges for early career researchers

A number of challenges for ECRs have been identified in the UK. A survey by the University and College Union (UCU) in April 2009 found that the primary challenge for early career academics was the difficulty in obtaining full-time permanent contracts, the job insecurity of short-term and hourly-paid contracts and the 'lottery' of research funding. The UCU argues that a relatively high number of

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<sup>27</sup> For the full list visit: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs>

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

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PhD qualified staff are working outside HE. It cites Government research in 2014 that, three and half years after completion of a doctorate, some 60% of these are working outside HE<sup>28</sup> and that the Royal Society estimates that only 3.5% of science PhDs stay in academia for the rest of their careers<sup>29</sup>. It goes on to argue that this loss of PhD qualified staff to the HE sector is due to the lack of a proper career pathway and job security. The UCU points out that, according to HESA data for 2012/13, 67% of all full-time research-only staff are on fixed-term contracts.

It also identified issues of support – some staff said that there was no effective induction process, lack of information, lack of supervision and poor communications. The third area of challenge was workload and its impact upon work/life balance, especially for staff with young families. A lack of a balanced workload between teaching, research and administration was also identified and the absence of support with time management. There were also issues about problems with line managers and a lack of career development and training. Finally there were concerns about salary levels, lack of a clear salary structure and the handling of personal finance, especially where ECRs were starting their careers with large student loan debts.

It is of note that geographical and inter-sectoral mobility does not appear in this list of UCU issues. According to the UCU, geographical mobility has not really been an issue because the UK has tended to be a net gainer from European mobility and the inflow is much greater than the outflow. In terms of inter-sectoral mobility, the union said that UK R&D is highly concentrated in some key areas but weak overall in the private sector, making the option of an alternative career route for ECRs limited. Although there is some inward mobility, in general, once researchers leave the HE sector they do not return to HE. The UCU argues that research experience outside the HE sector is generally not valued within the HE sector, especially since the Research Excellence Framework has placed greater emphasis on academic publications and success in winning research grants, rather than practical research experience.

Vitae conducts a two-yearly on-line survey of careers in research (CROS), which documents the views of research staff on their experiences, career aspirations and development opportunities.<sup>30</sup> In the latest 2013 survey report of over 8,000 respondents, Vitae notes that there has been some improvement in the openness and transparency of recruitment, but that there has been no significant change since 2011 to the proportion of research staff employed on fixed-term contracts or the proportion employed on very short contracts. There are still perceptions among respondents that they are not treated fairly in comparison with other higher education staff. Research staff who have had multiple, short-term contracts and/or long service through fixed-term contracts feel less valued and have less positive feelings about their employer, job and career. Vitae adds that this group is a relatively small minority of the overall respondents but that it remains an area of concern. On a more positive note, most respondents hold positive views about their work-life balance, integration and recognition by their institution. The survey also found that, while a strong majority feel encouraged to engage in personal and career development, the availability and take-up of training and development

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<sup>28</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014), Insights from international benchmarking of the UK science and innovation system.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/277090/bis-14-544-insights-from-international-benchmarking-of-the-UK-science-and-innovation-system-bis-analysis-paper-03.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277090/bis-14-544-insights-from-international-benchmarking-of-the-UK-science-and-innovation-system-bis-analysis-paper-03.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> UCU, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/cros>

remains broadly static and relatively low. A small minority of respondents had experienced work placements or internships.

The overwhelming majority of respondents to the CROS survey claim that they take personal responsibility for their career development and have a career development plan. Vitae comments, however, that

*‘there is significant credibility gap between respondents’ career aspirations, expectations and likelihood, with over three-quarters of research staff respondents aspiring to a career in higher education and around two-thirds expecting to achieve this’<sup>31</sup>.*

The CROS survey also reveals that higher and increasing proportions of respondents feel that they are not treated fairly in comparison to other staff. Slightly more female respondents, and those who have had a series of fixed-term contracts with their institution, feel this way. The summary conclusion from the CROS survey is that, while there is clear evidence of progress with the Concordat principles, in many areas the rate of progress has slowed. Vitae suggest that a step change may be necessary to reinvigorate progress but that this may be ‘more challenging and require deeper cultural shifts, as opposed to more provision of information and implementation of human resources development policies and practice’. The report recommended that institutions should explore their use of short-term contracts and whether they are being used judiciously. Institutions should also explore how to provide more placement and secondment opportunities to broaden the experience of researchers and widen career aspirations.

Interviewees for this study confirmed many of the challenges identified in the UCU and Vitae surveys but also added additional challenges and detail.

- The quality of line managers (research leaders) can vary significantly and have a considerable impact on the experience of the ECR in terms of the level of support and mentoring they are given (help with applying for posts, networking and getting involved in teaching)
- Inconsistency in policies / management of fixed-term contracts and maternity between departments, funders and institutions – good practices are not necessarily replicated<sup>32</sup>
- The lack of certainty in fixed-term contracts can create stress particularly when these are of shorter duration
- Research staff do not always receive recognition for the supervision and marking work that they do which can be problematic for job applications
- Fixed-term contracts require ECRs to be highly proactive in writing grants and supporting other applications which can be difficult to do in parallel with a demanding research project
- Development opportunities, particularly teaching, are dependent on institution and school and may not be awarded through formal processes
- There can be a lack of opportunities to connect and network, particularly internationally, at the ECR stage which is important for career progression

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<sup>31</sup> Vitae (2013). Careers in Research Online survey (CROS). 2013 aggregate results.

<sup>32</sup> The Vitae publication ‘Researchers, fixed-term contracts and universities: Understanding law in context’, based on case studies also revealed a difference between institutional policies on fixed term contracts and the consistency of practice on the ground.

- Difficulties with additional management responsibilities faced by ECRs that move into PI positions
- Lack of awareness about alternative career options
- Perception that ECRs on fixed-term contracts are seen as temporary staff and therefore support needs are not attended to
- The need to be a mobile researcher at the early stage is difficult particularly when you have caring responsibilities.
- Lack of awareness among research staff about what support is available at institutional and national level
- Pay progression is important but some researchers perceive that they can 'price themselves out of the market' by the third contract as grants are based on a specific resource budget.

## 8 Supporting early career researchers

It should be noted that in the UK HEIs and Public Sector Research Establishments have a high level of autonomy in managing research careers, remuneration and mobility issues. Support from central Government on these issues is therefore quite limited. Public funding for research in UK higher education is administered under a 'dual support' system. The funding councils in each of the four separate jurisdictions of the UK provide both block grant and competitive funding for institutions to support infrastructure investment and research funding. The Research Councils, charities, the EU and government departments provide grants for specific research and innovation programmes.

The first GRAD school, a residential course supporting the employability of postgraduate researchers, was run in 1968 by CRAC: the Career Development Organisation<sup>33</sup>, who now manage the Vitae programme. The 1996 Harris Review of Research recommended the introduction of a UK code of practice for postgraduate research which set minimum standards and resulted in the development of the original Concordat in 1996. The Quality Assurance Agency first published guidance on the provision of skills training, including 'general and employment-related skills' in 1999 and in 2001 the Research Councils published skills training requirements for doctoral candidates. In 2002 the UK GRAD programme (now Vitae), funded by RCUK, was launched to support the professional and career development of postgraduate researchers and in 2003 the universities and RCUK received Government funding to implement the recommendations of the Roberts report<sup>34</sup> relating to postgraduate researchers and research staff (this funding lasted until 2011) and institutional funding was ring-fenced for researcher development activities. In 2006 the Warry Report<sup>35</sup> recommended that RCUK should expand incentives for researchers to participate in knowledge transfer, increase two-way secondments between the research base and business and make enterprise training widely available for researchers in all disciplines.

### 8.1 Vitae

Vitae is an international programme led and managed by CRAC, a not-for-profit registered UK charity dedicated to active career learning and development. Much of Vitae's work to date has been funded

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<sup>33</sup> [www.crac.org.uk](http://www.crac.org.uk)

<sup>34</sup> Roberts, G. (2002), SET for Success – The supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills.

<sup>35</sup> ESRC (2009). Taking stock: A summary of ESRC's work to evaluate the impact of research on policy & practice. ESRC, February 2009. [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Taking%20Stock\\_tcm8-4545.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Taking%20Stock_tcm8-4545.pdf)

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

EU DGV Project VS/2013/0399 financed under budget heading Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue by the UK Research Councils and UK HE funding bodies and it has played a key role in the UK drives for high-level skills, innovation and world-class researchers.

Vitae increasingly works internationally in partnership with researchers, higher education institutions, research organisations, research funders and other organisations with a stake in realising the potential of researchers. Vitae's aims are as follows:

- To build human capital by influencing the development and implementation of effective policy relating to researcher development
- To enhance higher education provision to train and develop researchers
- To empower researchers to make an impact in their careers
- To evidence the impact of professional and career development support for researchers

In 2009 Vitae created the Researcher Development Framework (RDF)<sup>36</sup>, which describes the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of researchers in higher education. The aims of the RDF are to provide researchers from all disciplines with a framework for self-reflection and personal development and to raise the profile of researchers as professionals. It encompasses the range of activities that researchers may engage in, including teaching, knowledge exchange, public engagement, enterprise. Institutions are using the RDF to review and map their professional development provision for researchers. There are examples of institutions using the competencies within the RDF to inform job descriptions of their researchers.

Vitae produces publications and guidance on researcher careers, through its series of publications 'What do researchers do?'<sup>37</sup> It is currently undertaking a project on the career paths of former research staff who leave higher education, to understand the motivations and challenges in making this transition and to develop career guidance resources for current researchers<sup>38</sup>. Vitae also conducts evaluation of the impact of work to develop researcher, including regular review of the implementation of the Concordat and development of an impact framework for evaluating the impact of professional development activities<sup>39</sup>. Alongside the Careers in Research Online Survey (CROS) (Section 7), Vitae also runs the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey (PIRLS), which gathers anonymous views and experiences from principal investigators in relation to their role as managers and leaders of researchers and research groups. Vitae has developed a suite of resources to support research staff transitions to an independent researcher or grant holder.

### 8.2 Institutional-level support

There are also good examples of support for researchers at institutional level. Most universities have included career provisions in their study schemes (e.g. specialist careers advice, courses, networking events, recruitment fairs etc) and Vitae has a dedicated web portal on researchers' career prospects and employment destinations. It is common for HEIs to offer specific programmes and training modules for researchers – the Institute for Academic Development at the University of Edinburgh is one example<sup>40</sup>. Our research included interviews with two contrasting institutional environments –

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<sup>36</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf)

<sup>37</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/impact-and-evaluation/what-do-researchers-do/WDRSDN>

<sup>39</sup> [www.vitae.ac.uk/ieg](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/ieg)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/institute-academic-development/research-roles>

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

EU DGV Project VS/2013/0399 financed under budget heading Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue

Imperial College London (a globally recognised centre for high quality research) and the University of Greenwich in London (an ex-polytechnic with a strong vocational emphasis).

### *Case study: Imperial College London*

Imperial College London was placed second in the 2014-15 QS World University Rankings and was ninth in the 2013-14 Times Higher Education World University Rankings (third in Europe). The science-based institution was founded in 1907 and has 16,000 students including 7,195 postgraduates. It employs over 7,000 staff of which 1,135 are academics with teaching and research duties and 2,315 are on research contracts (2012-13).

With the help of funding which followed from the Roberts Review, and recognising that it had a high number of postdocs and research fellows, the College set up a dedicated Postdoc Development Centre (PDC) in 2009.<sup>41</sup> The PDC aims to provide development opportunities and career support to postdocs and fellows at Imperial. It operates with around 4 full-time equivalent staff and operates as a standalone centre. The head of the PDC meets regularly the Provost with responsibility for postdocs. There has not been any trade union involvement in the centre to date but this may reflect membership at the College.

The PDC supports researchers on a lifecycle basis ensuring that postdocs are aware of the reality of their situation in the first two years and making it clear that career progression is their own responsibility but will be supported by the institution. The challenge is to move the individual out of the student mindset where a lot of support is provided directly to where they understand their position as an employee and the nature of the contract. It was noted that this message should be delivered at PhD stage as well. Research fellows receive very specialist support as they are the 'high-flyers' with potential to continue their career at Imperial.

Unlike research fellows, very few postdocs move into academic careers at the College, because of the level of competition rather than ability, but some of these researchers do go on to academic jobs elsewhere. Internal research found that after four years of being in the postdoc stage the chances of becoming an academic drop significantly. Tracking careers is one area where the PDC feels more can be done as bringing in previous postdocs in alternative careers is valuable. One of the main challenges of the PDC is that roughly 95% of the postdocs want to be academics and so it is important to manage expectations from the very beginning but also support these individuals to gain employment when their contract comes to an end.

Postdocs at Imperial College have 10 days training per year written into their contract which was a recommendation of the Roberts Review, but it was remarked that this is rarely achieved in formal terms. All postdocs have annual appraisals but the quality of these conversations can depend on the PI. Imperial runs a residential programme called 'managing your first research group' aimed at fellows and includes leadership and management of a research group.

The PDC offers a range of support to postdocs including mock interviews, 1-2-1 coaching sessions, and courses on a range of research-related and transferrable skills. The mock interviews are particularly intensive (1.5 hours) but are reported to be a very valuable part of the PDC's offer. Transferrable skills development is viewed as vital, particularly for accessing careers outside of

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/postdocs1>

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

EU DGV Project VS/2013/0399 financed under budget heading Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue

academia, and the PDC offers training on presentation skills, commercial project management, networking and science communication. Career planning is another focus and there are tailored courses for those in life sciences & medicine and those in physical sciences & engineering. In line with the ambitions of most postdocs, one of the most popular courses is on preparing successful research fellowship applications.

Imperial has a specific course for female researchers but this is focused on confidence building and values rather than career guidance. The Springboard programme<sup>42</sup> covers topics such as qualities, strengths, networking, goals, assertiveness, dealing with pressure and managing image and visibility. The head of the PDC notes that for many women the postdoc comes at time of the ‘perfect storm’ where they are at the age where they are expected to launch their career but also consider having children. A common question asked by female postdocs is about when they should start a family with many thinking that a baby will ‘kill their career’. Confidence is another identifiable difference between female and male researchers. On average male researchers move on to other employment more quickly than women and have the confidence to conclude their research post and ‘see what happens’.

Imperial is signed up to the Concordat and has the HR Excellence in Research award. While these are acknowledged to be useful to demonstrate the College’s standards in this area the approach taken by Imperial is very much focused on the unique needs of the institution and its staff.

### *Case study: University of Greenwich*

In contrast to Imperial College London, the University of Greenwich is a ‘new’ post-1992 university and was previously a polytechnic. Nonetheless it has grown research activity and income considerably since 1992 and employs a number of researchers across a range of disciplines. The university currently has some 140 ECRs. The University is signed up to the Concordat and also has achieved the HR Excellence in Research award. It has worked closely with Vitae to develop its support framework for researchers. While the number of traditional post-doc researchers at Greenwich is much smaller than Imperial College, the university operates a broad definition of ECR that includes academics during the first stages of their careers.

The university has identified three types of ECR – traditional research assistants on fixed-term contracts (not necessarily with a PhD); early career academics on permanent contracts and traditional post-docs. The university does not define doctoral candidates as ECRs as they are considered to be students, rather than employees. The support put in place includes a dedicated specialist support officer, training courses, information on training and research costing, an on-line resource and networking sessions. The networking sessions are important because ECRs can be quite dispersed through various Faculties and Departments and often feel quite isolated. A series of workshops provide training in impact planning, critical thinking, academic publishing, bid and proposal development, planning and managing budgets, research survey design, entrepreneurial skills, media training, career management, research networks and collaborations and postgraduate supervision. The university has also introduced a number of nominated awards for ECRs.

Since the 2014 REF definition of an ECR, Greenwich has tightened its own definition and its new one is that ECRs must be independent researchers capable of conducting their own research. This definition

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/postdocs1/workshops/springboard>

rules out the research assistant roles. One important observation about ECRs in a post-1992 institution, with a strong vocational focus, is that many of the university's staff enter the academic world (and often doctoral study) mid-career from business or the professions. This means that ECR does not necessarily equate with young researcher. The major issue identified for ECRs by the university is the short-term nature of research funding and hence the fixed-term contracts given to ECRs. The University notes that it could move more of these staff on to permanent contracts but the result would be fewer of them and fewer opportunities for upcoming ECRs.

### 8.3 Union Support for ECRs

The UCU has campaigned about the terms and conditions of early career researchers for some years and has both conducted research on their needs and published guidance. UCU has been involved in the Concordat as well as other aspects of Vitae's work including its External Advisory Board. The union has negotiated a number of institutional agreements to improve the contractual arrangements for researchers and worked with the other trade unions and the employers collectively as UCEA on guidance on the use of fixed-term contracts for all staff in HE (in 2002).

For the UCU there is a problem with the ECR term because of both the research career trajectory and because it is often assumed that it relates to age, rather than the career stage. Its view is that ECRs are not a coherent group of people – some will want to stay as purely research staff while others will wish to have academic careers – and some may not define themselves as one or the other. The union uses a generous definition of researcher to include those who are engaging in research but don't necessarily see themselves as on a research career. In general the union recruits doctoral candidates if they have employed status (on a reduced fee) but they also offer free membership to all doctoral candidates who are registered as students and who wish to join. ECRs are not within the limited range of issues negotiated as part of the national collective bargaining machinery but the union does raise the issues at local level. In some cases there are branch sub-committees for these staff and in some cases there have been successful local negotiations to improve the employment status of these staff. However, the UCU emphasise that despite some examples of best practice in the management of researcher contracts, there has been very little change overall and the union remains concerned about the contract insecurity.

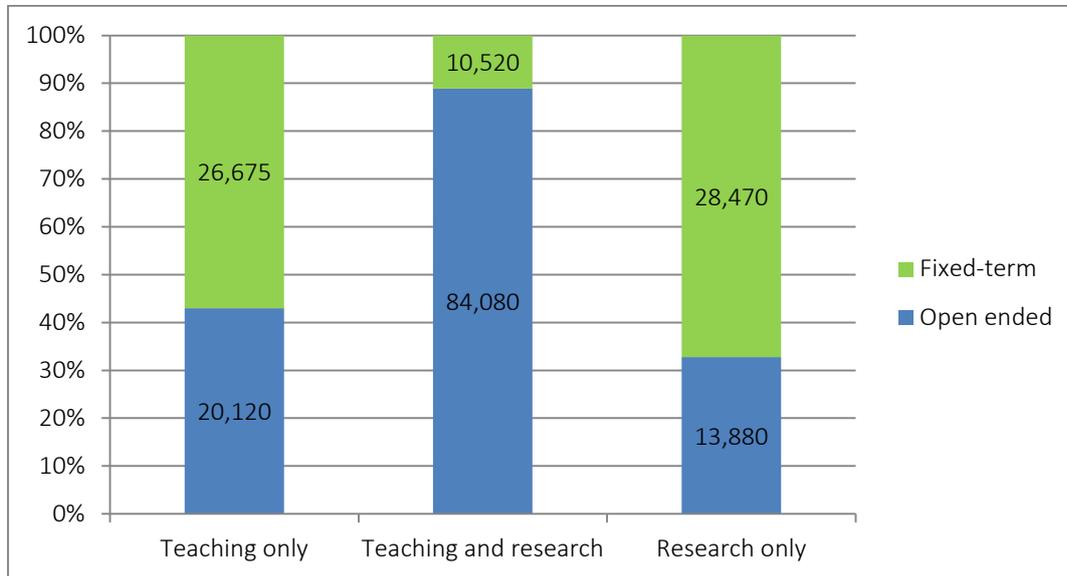
The union sees the fundamental issue for ECRs as the prevalence of fixed-term contracts and attributes this primarily to the problem of short-term strategies for research funding in the UK.<sup>43</sup> In 2009 the union conducted a survey of early career academics (not simply researchers) which found a number of issues concerning these staff. While recognising that the proportion of fixed-term contracts has declined in recent years, largely because of the requirements of the Fixed-term Employees Regulations 2002, the union considers the proportion to still be unacceptable – see Figure 1 showing the current distribution of open-ended and fixed-term contracts for academic staff. UCU has always held that fixed-term funding should not be used as a 'blanket' objective justification for keeping staff, especially researchers, on such contracts. The union points to some institutions that have managed to move most researchers on to open-ended contracts as evidence that short-termism is not inevitable but says that others have not learned from these 'good practice' examples. The UCU emphasises that the employers' support for the Government's reform (in 2013) to the collective redundancy consultation regulations, which removed the obligation to consult on the conclusion of

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<sup>43</sup> UCU, 2014.

multiple fixed-term contracts, treated in law as redundancies, and made it easier for universities to dismiss those on short-term contracts, did not indicate that the employers are serious about improving job security for ECRs.

Figure 1: Academic staff profile - by academic function and contract type, UK, 2012-13



Source: HESA.

The prevalence of fixed-term contracts in higher education was noted in the Report of the Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions (1999). With new UK regulations on fixed-term employees entering force in 2002, the employers and trade unions, under the auspices of the JNCHES Modernisation Working Group, drew up guidance on the use and management of fixed-term contracts to help HE institutions ‘achieve reductions effectively’.<sup>44</sup> It was recommended that any review was conducted in partnership with local trade unions and set out the following principles with regard to fair and flexible employment arrangements:

- equality of opportunity is reflected in all aspects of employment
- indefinite contracts are the general form of employment relationship between employers and employees
- where the use of fixed-term and casual contracts is justifiable by objective reasons staff on these contracts should be given:
  - (i) the same opportunity as other staff to use services to assist better performance, such as staff development, training, appraisal, careers advice for research staff
  - (ii) similar terms and conditions of employment to those in comparable jobs with indefinite employment in the institution unless the difference can be justified, in accordance with the legislation, for necessary and appropriate objective reasons
  - (iii) information on, and the opportunity to apply for, more secure positions

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.ucea.ac.uk/en/empres/paynegs/jnches-agree/index.cfm>

- (iv) a regular review to consider, as appropriate, indefinite employment on full-time, fractional or hourly-paid contracts.

With specific reference to contract research staff, the guidance notes:

*The ending of short-term funding will continue to raise the possibility of termination of these indefinite contracts. Where the research can be continued, all other appropriate sources of funding, both internal and external, need to be considered to replace the ending of the specific funding stream. Where this is not available, redeployment or other measures should be considered in order to render the redundancy procedures fair in accordance with the legislation.*

While the UCU's main contractual issue is with the fixed-term nature of research contracts, it provides information and guidance on a range of topics specifically for researchers including rights and responsibilities. In 2008 it published 'The Researchers' Survival Guide'<sup>45</sup>, which sets out the employer's duties and the researcher's legal rights but also contains a section on the desired relationship between the researcher and the research manager. The latter section includes statements that the researcher:

- should be treated as an equal in the scholarly community;
- should have access to an independent mentor;
- should have support with managing the researcher's project and workload;
- should receive recognition for all the researcher's work, including authorship/co-authorship of journal articles etc;
- should have time to undertake their own work;
- should be properly remunerated for any teaching undertaken;
- should have access to career development activities; and
- should have support in preparing for the next contract.

The UCU has published a ten-item Researchers' Charter. This includes some of the points listed above but also argues that research staff should be kept up to date with decisions about funding that may affect their post. It also argues that redundancy avoidance procedures should be in place so that when one project ends the employer should make every effort to find alternative work, recognising that their skills are not confined to individual projects. It also argues that research staff should have opportunities to contribute to the preparation of or to prepare research funding bids. It adds that all researchers should have a full induction soon after starting work and should be provided with opportunities to attend conferences and join internal and external networks.

The union also publishes advice for research managers (who are often UCU members) employing fixed-term research staff, setting out the legal requirements and arguing the case against such contracts. The guidance<sup>46</sup> states that:

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<sup>45</sup> UCU (2011). The Researchers' Survival Guide. Getting a better deal for research staff. UCU Campaigns Unit. [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/i/l/Res\\_survival\\_guide\\_Oct11.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/i/l/Res_survival_guide_Oct11.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> UCU (n.d). Research Managers. Employing fixed-term staff. Advice for research managers employing fixed-term research staff. [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/3/5/ACC\\_res\\_managers\\_briefing.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/3/5/ACC_res_managers_briefing.pdf)

*'The current funding arrangements for UK research will inevitably result in research projects ending as funding comes to an end. In the first instance, if the research continues to be viable, then alternative funding – either from alternative external sources or from internal sources – should be made available. If no further funding is available, and whether or not research working on the project are on permanent or fixed-term contracts, the institution is under a duty to avoid redundancies for affected staff'.*

In 2014 the UCU published a new guide for early career academics (not just researchers)<sup>47</sup>. This covers staff in both the further and higher education sectors and covers areas such as 'starting your career', 'getting the most from your career' and 'what to do if things go wrong'.

#### 8.4 Research Staff Associations

One interesting development in the UK has been the growth of Research Staff Associations at institutional and faculty level. The UK Research Staff Association acts as an umbrella organisation for these local associations. These associations have been formed for various reasons and UKRSA both provides support for these associations and has a voice at national level (for example it sits on the Concordat Strategy Group, HR Excellence in Research and Vitae's CROS/PIRLS Steering Group). UKRSA also acts as an advisory body to Vitae.

The UKRSA national committee has representatives of regional staff associations from different universities. One interviewee from the UKRSA said that they did not have a definition of an ECR but that in their view it represents post-docs through to new PIs. Their needs are seen as very different to doctoral candidates. Only around 15% of post-docs will end up as PIs and not making it to PI is seen as a failure by some. The UKSRA sees the big problem for post-docs as the rapid increase in PhD places creating an even more competitive environment but that most cannot envisage a research career outside HE.

UKRSA hold a national meeting twice a year, supported by Vitae. This enables the association to provide suggestions to Vitae on what support they should be providing. The Association emphasised the need for more transferable skills training, specific careers advice for postdocs and good mentoring schemes that include non-academic mentors.

Relationships between RSAs and trade unions are generally good and they understand that they have common but also different interests. UKRSA is primarily about creating a voice for post-docs on research career issues but it does not see its role as acting as a representative organisation on employment issues. UKRSA recommends local RSAs establish links with their local union.

## 9 Equality Issues

There have been a number of active initiatives in the UK to support female researchers, especially at the senior level. The Equality Act 2010 introduced positive action provisions for nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation), including voluntary positive action measures in recruitment and promotion on the basis of gender. HEIs are also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty which places requirement on public bodies to have due regard to the need to

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<sup>47</sup> UCU (2010). Early Careers. A UCU Guide for New Staff in Further and Higher Education. UCU. [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/4/ucu\\_earlycareersguide.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/4/ucu_earlycareersguide.pdf)

## Supporting Early Career Researchers in Higher Education in Europe

EU DGV Project VS/2013/0399 financed under budget heading Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue

eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. It is therefore the responsibility of individual HE institutions whether to take measures to improve the representation of female researchers in top level positions and on decision making bodies. In 2010 the percentage of women at Professor level in the UK was 17.5%, compared to an EU average of 19.8%.

There is a dedicated body to deal with equality issues in HE in the UK, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), and this body works closely with HEIs to develop good diversity and equal opportunities practice. The UK's Research Excellence Framework 2014 also required HEIs to consider gender issues in their selection of staff for inclusion in the exercise. In 2011, at the request of the Department for Business, innovation and Skills (the Government department which covers the HE sector), the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering developed a new diversity strategy in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). In addition RCUK has published a Statement of Expectations for Equality and Diversity which sets out its expectations of those receiving research funding in terms of promoting and leading on equality and diversity and engaging all staff in the pursuit of these objectives. The statement also proposes that all members of the research workforce are trained and supported to address disincentives and indirect obstacles to good research careers. HEIs are required to provide evidence of ways in which equality and diversity issues are being addressed.

Research Council-funded students have the right to six months maternity leave on a full stipend and a further six months unpaid maternity leave. Research Council grants can be extended for up to 12 months to cover periods of maternity and the institution is compensated at the end of the grant to cover any additional net costs of paid maternity leave that cannot be met from the budget. Research Council fellowships also cover maternity leave for a research fellow in line with the fellow's employment contract.

The most prominent initiative to improve women's research careers at all levels in the UK is the Athena SWAN Charter which is run by the ECU.<sup>48</sup> The Charter recognises those HEIs that demonstrate a commitment to advancing women's careers in STEM subjects in higher education and research. The Charter's principles are:

- To address gender inequalities requires commitment and action from everyone, at all levels of the organisation
- To tackle the unequal representation of women in science requires changing cultures and attitudes across the organisation
- The absence of diversity at management and policy-making levels has broad implications which the organisation will examine
- The high loss rate of women in science is an urgent concern which the organisation will address
- The system of short-term contracts has particularly negative consequences for the retention and progression of women in science, which the organisation recognises

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charter-marks/athena-swan/>

- There are both personal and structural obstacles to women making the transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career in science, which require the active consideration of the organisation

There are currently 100 HEIs with Athena SWAN awards which are awarded on the basis of institutional action and achievement from bronze to gold. Interviewees commented positively on the impact of Athena SWAN as it formally recognises the issues and keeps them on the agenda while providing more opportunities for networking and development. One interviewee noted that even the small practical changes it had brought about, such as family friendly meeting scheduling (i.e. not after 4pm), were as important as the central message.

Vitae also has the Every Researcher Counts programme, which provides resources and case studies to encourage principal investigators and researchers generally to recognise the personal characteristics of individual researchers in the way they are supported and managed.<sup>49</sup>

Joint work between trade unions and the employers through the joint negotiating body New JCHES has also sought to address equality issues such as the gender pay gap. While not focusing on ECRs or research staff specifically, the work has monitored the sector's progress in undertaking equal pay audits through surveys and case studies<sup>50</sup> and published a literature review on the gender pay gap and the reasons for its perpetuation.

## 10 Issues and actions identified

The UK is relatively fortunate in having fairly, well-established support systems in place for ECRs, both at the national level through Vitae and at institutional levels. The proportion of institutions signed up to both the Charter and Code and HR Excellence in Research award is much higher than in most other EU member states. Nonetheless, there appears still to be scope for more support and there remain issues concerning employment security, recognition for their contribution and issues relating to gender discrimination. This is a view held strongly by the UCU. While UCU acknowledges that Vitae, in particular, has done much to improve some features of research careers, the union points to the marked lack of progress in reducing the use of fixed-term contracts and the persistent wider issues of insecure employment in research. UCU considers that this is in part a reflection of the lack of developed institutions and practices of social dialogue in the UK. For the union, this helps to explain employer reluctance to negotiate binding national collective agreements as well as their active support for measures that, in UCU's view, make it easier to dismiss those on fixed-term contracts. Unlike other countries, geographical mobility is not a major issue for ECRs in the UK, but the issue of inter-sectoral mobility remains a challenge. As the UKRSA told us, the increased supply of doctoral candidates in some disciplines, most of whom only wish to consider a career in HE, is creating increasing competition for jobs and making the use of short-term contracts easier for the employers to pursue. Changing the perceptions and expectations of ECRs to consider alternative, but equally rewarding, careers outside HE remains a priority.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/every-researcher-counts-equality-and-diversity-in-researcher-careers>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.ucea.ac.uk/en/empres/paynegs/new-jchcs/jw-reports/index.cfm>