

# Draft **GUIDELINES**

to the implementation  
of the  
'strengthened' Human Resources Strategy for  
Researchers  
(HRS4R)

February 2016



**PART 1**  
**(draft) GUIDELINES** for submission of applications

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# INTRODUCTION

These draft guidelines outline the 'strengthened' procedure for the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), taking up the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (C&C). Full information on the 'strengthened' HRS4R implementation process can be found at: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>.

This document is complementary to the experts' report of September 2015 and includes information on the role of all actors involved in the process, outlining the expectations and responsibilities placed on them. These guidelines also cover application, assessment of the various phases and management of the procedure.

*[These draft guidelines will be updated on a regular basis by the contractor once selected and are currently annexed to the tender specification on outsourcing the implementation of the full process].*

The necessary templates which are of mandatory use during the strengthened implementation procedure when undergoing the subsequent phases, can be found on the EURAXESS website at: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>.

*[The templates which are not subject to revision/update by the contractor are also attached to the tender specifications].*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which will be regularly updated in close cooperation with all actors involved in the process and under the responsibilities of the relevant Commission services, are also available at the EURAXESS website, together with the key policy documents framing the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers' as well as the 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers.

Check the FAQs to see if your particular question has already been answered, if not, please contact the EURAXESS team at: [RTD-CHARTER@ec.europa.eu](mailto:RTD-CHARTER@ec.europa.eu)

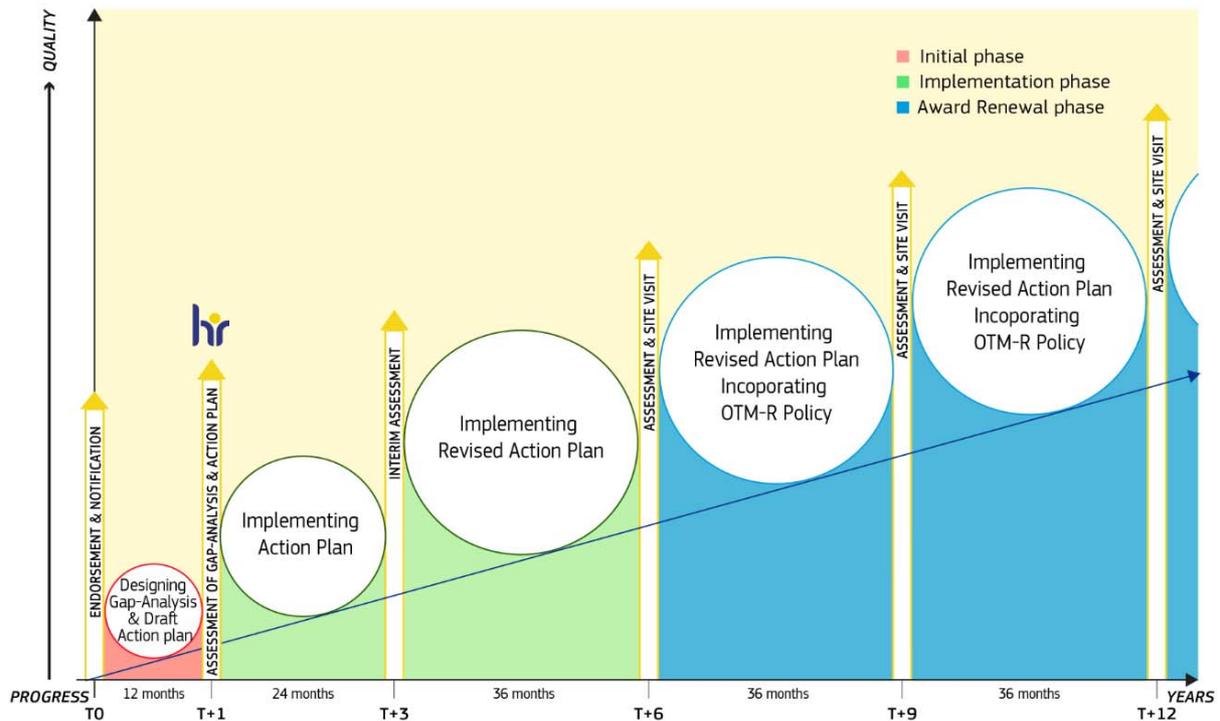
*[In the next future, this address will be replaced by the address of the contractor's helpdesk/contact point].*

Newcomers to the implementation procedure start at the very beginning of the process while institutions already involved at various stages in the implementation of the HRS4R enter at any point into the strengthened procedure.

These institutions should pay attention to the request of the upcoming monitoring requirements (i.e. requirements related to indicators for progress/quality, recruitment policy, embedding etc.) that might have been strengthened in the revised process.

# IN SHORT

The graphic representation below indicates the timeline according to which interested institutions, be it Research Performing or Research Funding institutions, are to undergo the subsequent cycles while moving from progress to quality in Human Resources Management for Researchers.



This resumes in short the scope under which the HRS4R implementation procedure has been revised and wherein certain elements have been strengthened. All details; can be found in the experts' report available on the EURAXESS website.

The main elements that have been strengthened are the following:

## 1. introduction of a timeline/timeframe with fixed periods

The strengthened procedure has introduced a mandatory timeframe for all steps, starting by a period of maximum 12 months between endorsement/notification and submission of the application (fixed timeline of 12, 24 or 36 months for the different phases).

## 2. incorporation of the OTM-R recommendations

Recommendations issued by the OTM-R working group in text and form of the established checklist are included in the whole process from the initial phase progressing towards the renewal phase. It is now mandatory for institutions starting the renewal cycle to have a fully compliant OTM-R policy in place.

## 3. shorter procedure with less steps, now called phases

The implementation procedure has been shortened so that now institutions enter into the renewal phase after having undergone the initial cycle and the implementation cycle.

The implementation phase has now, as a new element the requirement of 'embedding' the HR strategy into the institution's HR policy. This mandatory requirement is introduced to make sure the HR strategy is not an alone standing process in the institution, prepared to be granted the award without any uptake of the institutions highest hierarchy or integration/embedding into the institutions approach to HR management at large.

**4. earlier internationalisation (from the beginning)**

Internationalisation in the sense that external international independent experts from other countries than the applicant institution assess the applications from the beginning is a novelty. This early stage internationalisation gives institutions the possibility for dialogue with experts in the field who have already undergone the process and might help further to bring the file local forward.

**5. withdrawal of the award based on clear criteria setting**

Awards can be withdrawn (or put on hold) based on recommendations from the experts in follow-up of the site visits; until now, this has in general been avoided since there were neither a fixed timeline nor clear criteria to act on the award.

**6. continuity element introduced based on enhancement of quality, not only on progress**

The previous process was based exclusively on progress, now elements of quality have been introduced when entering the award renewal phase in particular. Such elements of quality, meaning quality of progress and quality of achievements within the criteria setting for the site visits where the experts are requested to judge these elements are a novelty on which a further strengthening is envisaged and is therefore considered to be crucial.

The strengthened process installs for the first time continuity by setting up the renewal phases as 3-year cycles of monitoring continuous improvement and assessment, accompanying the move towards enhanced quality.

Institutions are now monitored continuously every 3 years (renewal of the HR award) on criteria related to progress and quality.

**7. introduction of elements of 'quality' (achievements or progress)**

Quality starts being assessed already in the implementation phase where progress and quality of the actions and accompanying measures such as 'embedding' the HRS4R process are assessed. At this stage, experts provide an appraisal of this quality improvement.

The scheme of site visits has been structured and strengthened to make sure all key representatives in the institution can be interviewed in confidential separate meetings. Individual desk-based assessment by each expert is requested in view of the preparation of the site visit. Most importantly, a section on quality assessment is included in the desk-based assessment and the assessment on the spot.

**8. strengthened assessment throughout the different phases**

With the help of 6 NEW templates the strengthened process has been structured and harmonised while being strengthened. This structuring allows now comparative data extraction from gap-analysis, action plans etc. in view of monitoring the HR and OTM-R policies put in place in the various institutions in the different countries.

With regard to the gap-analysis, it is now no longer allowed to address some or a few selected principles of C&C, but all 40 principles have to be addressed (not all need to have the subsequent action immediately in the action plan though).

Coherence between gap-analysis and action plan had always been an issue previously, now under the strengthened procedure, the external experts analyse the coherence between the gaps identified in an institutions and the proposed action(s) to remedy to this situation.

Furthermore, the gap-analysis table which is of mandatory use has been completed by an annex dedicated to OTM-R issues so that these issues will be tackled right from the start of the procedure.

**9. Setting of indicators and targets for success**

From the start-up institutions are required to set their appropriate indicators and targets for success. These requirements are now mandatory and have a dedicated assessment in particular when coming to the renewal phase of the award.

**10. Consultation as a MUST**

Previously, institutions were rather free to undertake their gap-analysis; the new procedure makes it mandatory to consult a certain number of key actors and to setup certain internal structures (working groups, committees or else) and associate certain target groups. Request for evidence is now included formally.

## 1. INITIAL PHASE – Getting started

### 1.1. Endorsement of the 40 principles of Charter and Code and notification of the institutions' commitment

To start with, the institution should analyse and endorse the 40 principles of C&C. When and if the institution is ready to get involved in the proposed voluntary process, it should send a notification letter issued from the Rector/President or other senior level position such as the Vice-President for Research, or other person representing the legal authority to make a commitment on behalf of the institution.

The letter should clearly express that the institution is committed to start the procedure and will undergo all subsequent cycles/phases:

*Ex. "...we the university of ..., having endorsed the 40 principles of Charter and Code, notify you about our commitment to get involved into the process of implementing a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) in our institution..."*

The notification is not binding, and there is no penalty for not submitting. However, the notification expires after 12 months when no intention to get involved in the implementation has been stated.

Notifications should be sent electronically to the relevant authority.

### 1.2. Application and granting the 'HR award'

Within 12 months of this notification letter, the institution has to submit an application composed of:

- A gap analysis<sup>1</sup> using template 1<sup>2</sup>
- An action plan<sup>3</sup> for 2 years using template 2<sup>2</sup>

*Applicants are required to confirm in their accompanying letter that the information presented in the application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the institution.*

At the time of submission, the action plan must be published, in English, in a prominent part of the institution's website such as the institution's homepage, recruitment portal and/or research office page. The action plan should be clearly visible to researchers inside and outside the institution.

Both documents will be assessed by international external experts seeking to gauge the appropriateness, coherence and quality of the actions proposed.

*Detailed information on this assessment, such as the assessment criteria, individual assessment, consensus report/feed-back etc. can be found in the 'guidelines for assessment of applications' (PART 2 of this guide).*

Upon recommendations by the experts, institutions are granted the 'HR award' by the Commission services and immediately enter into the implementation phase.

<sup>1</sup> See annex 1 on how to complete a gap analysis and fill the template

<sup>2</sup> All templates are downloadable from the EURAXESS website at: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/#>

<sup>3</sup> See annex 2 on how to establish an action plan and fill the template

## 2. **IMPLEMENTATION PHASE** – implementing the action plan/HR strategy and preparing for the interim assessment

### 2.1. **The INTERIM assessment**

As soon as having been granted the 'HR award', institutions start implementing the actions foreseen in their action plan according to the proposed timeline throughout the next 24 months at the end of which the interim assessment is coming up.

The interim assessment is based on an internal review conducted by the institution and assessed by external experts.

Justifications should be given for altered actions and revised timelines, taking into account external circumstances that were not known at the time of establishing the initial action plan.

At this point of the interim assessment, the participating institution does not jeopardise maintaining the 'HR award', but receives detailed feed-back such as:

1. The institution receives an encouragement to continue along the path it has undertaken.
2. The institution is encouraged to undertake some 'corrective actions' to improve an already sufficient performance.
3. The institution is warned that, unless it takes strong corrective actions, it seriously risks not progressing through the subsequent assessment and losing the right to use the 'HR award'.

### 2.2. **The ASSESSMENT and SITE VISITS**

Within the next 3 years, institutions implement and monitor their proposed actions according to the revised action plan incorporating feed-back from the INTERIM assessment.

After 3 years, the upcoming assessment then is conducted in 2 subsequent stages which are closely linked and timed:

- an internal review conducted by the institution and assessed by external experts , followed by
- a site visit to the institution.

The purpose of this two-stage assessment is double:

1. it allows the participating institution to reflect and document progress and alter actions or timing of actions if necessary and it allows the institution the opportunity to create new actions for the upcoming time horizon.
2. it gives the opportunity to the institution and the experts to engage on aspects of their work.

When preparing for the two-stage assessment, initially proposed actions can be altered and the timeline be revised in the light of the feasibility of implementation and taking into account external circumstances that were not known at the time of revising the action plan.

Such alterations are to be included together with their justification when establishing the necessary documentation to be submitted for the institution's internal review which will be assessed by external experts as a preparation for the site visits.

At this stage, progress and quality of the actions and accompanying measures (such as embedding the HRS4R process for example) are assessed by the experts. In preparation for this assessment, the institution must submit to the relevant authority an internal review of how its action plan has been implemented; this review must include a revised action plan including proposed actions for the next 3 years.

*Detailed information on this assessment, such as the assessment criteria, individual assessment, consensus report/feed-back etc. can be found in the 'guidelines for assessment of applications' (part 2 of this guide).*

A successful internal review and experts' assessment during the site visits allow the participating institution to retain the 'HR award'.

Once the institution receives positive feed-back, it enters immediately into the award renewal phase occurring 36 months later (i.e. five years after the granting of the initial 'HR award').

### **3. AWARD RENEWAL PHASE(S) – desk based assessment and site visits**

Three years after the successful assessment and site visits by the external experts, institutions must submit to the relevant authority an internal review of how their Action Plan has progressed and gained in quality.

At this stage the internal review must be comprehensive in its scope and must show that a broad range of stakeholders within the institution, including researchers, has participated in its preparation.

This review must address:

- progress against and quality of proposed actions, indicators and targets for success;
- an overview of progress against the Charter & Code Themes, evidence of how the HRS4R process has been embedded into the institutional policy.

The publication of this review in form of an updated HR strategy on the institution's website must include a dedicated section on the evolution of the institution's recruitment policy (OTM-R meaning 'open, transparent and merit-based recruitment'). A toolkit for the implementation is available on the EURAXESS website: <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>.

This internal review documentation is assessed by a panel of independent external experts through a desk based assessment, followed again by a site visit to the institution.

*Detailed information on this assessment, such as the assessment criteria, individual assessment, consensus report/feed-back etc. can be found in the 'guidelines for assessment of applications' (PART 2 of this guide).*

A successful internal review and experts' assessment allows the participating institution to retain the 'HR award'.

In cases where the quality and appropriateness of the actions are deemed to be less than satisfactory, and/or where the implementation of the HRS4R is deemed not to be broad, deep and well integrated into the institution, continued use of the 'HR award' will not be permitted.

As such, the use of the 'HR award' icon will no longer be activated on the EURAXESS job portal, the institution can re-apply for a desk-based assessment and site visit after a minimum of 3 years based on a revised Gap Analysis and Action Plan.

Institutions having successfully undergone the HR award renewal phase now enter into 3-year cycles of monitoring continuous improvement and assessment wherein the move from progress to quality needs to be evidenced.

At the end of each cycle, the HR award can be renewed or not, subject to a process of internal organisational review accompanied by experts' assessment and site visit. Once the award is renewed, institutions update their website and implement and monitor proposed actions.

This cyclic HR award renewal should bring out continued progress in the actions as well as a move towards enhanced quality of the actions.

At this stage, the institutions should have a well-running and fully compliant OTM-R policy in place and make full use of it.

# ANNEX 1 – THE GAP ANALYSIS

## 1. HOW to complete a gap analysis

A gap analysis is defined as '*the comparison of actual performance with potential or desired performance*' (here related to HR management of an institution with regard to the 40 principles of Charter and Code).

While the manner in which the **gap-analysis** is completed is flexible (and should be designed in the most appropriate fashion for the individual institution), it must include the following

- The institution *must* set up a committee or working group to oversee the Gap Analysis
- The committee or working group *must* be sponsored by the Rector/ President or other senior level position such as the Vice President for Research, Director of Human Resources, etc.
- The institution *must* take into consideration the views and needs of a wide range of stakeholders within the institution including, but not limited to, a variety of management departments, and *must* include researchers: i.e. the group can be led by a single unit but must have a representation from a number of units and include researchers at each stage of the research career (R1 to R4<sup>4</sup>). Furthermore, researchers at large *must* be consulted regardless to the means (by way of survey, workshops, for example)
- Institutions may choose to include external stakeholders to enhance the process. The range of stakeholders should be indicated in the document (i.e. a description of the range of stakeholders that contributed to the process)
- Institutions must explain the internal process and methodology used to carry out the Gap Analysis
- Where a national or regional Gap Analysis exists (e.g. identifying the impact of certain legislation), institutions can draw on this analysis. This analysis can be carried out periodically and collectively for all institutions in a given region or country.

Institutions must address each of the 40 principles of the Charter and Code under 4 thematic headings (Ethical and Professional aspects; Recruitment and Selection; Working Conditions and Social Security; Training and Development) stating:

- Whether they are already fulfilling some of/all the principles and, if so, provide evidence of how this is the case (e.g. links to policies, examples of programmes, examples of supports in place)
- Whether aspects of the national or local legislative environment support or constrain the implementation of a principle

The gap analysis should clearly underline the **existing gaps in relation to the 40 principles** otherwise it is not possible to see the coherence with the subsequent action plan. Most importantly, the existing gaps should be described and how they will be filled. There must be a coherent link between the Gap Analysis and the Action Plan.

A specific section of the Gap Analysis needs to be dedicated to the institution's policies and practices in relation to **Open Transparent and Merit Based Recruitment**.

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<sup>4</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/Towards\\_a\\_European\\_Framework\\_for\\_Research\\_Careers\\_final.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Towards_a_European_Framework_for_Research_Careers_final.pdf)

## **2. How to fill the template for the gap analysis**

The use of template 1 (gap analysis) is mandatory for the submission of the institution's gap analysis.

The Template consists of 2 parts, a generic part where institutions are requested to indicate contact details, the date of submission of the application and of endorsement of the C&C principles and notification to the relevant authority.

Then, the process having led to complete the gap analysis has to be evidenced:

*The HRS4R process must engage all management departments directly or indirectly responsible for researchers' HR-issues.<sup>5</sup> These will typically include the Vice-Rector for Research, the Head of Personnel, and other administrative staff members. In addition, the HRS4R strategy must consult its stakeholders and involve a representative community of researchers ranging from R1 to R4<sup>6</sup>, as well as appoint a Committee overseeing the process and a Working Group responsible for implementing the process.*

*Please provide evidence of how the above groups were involved in the GAP-analysis: e.g. names, meeting dates, or consultation format. In addition, indicate how the Committee and Working Group are composed.*

Then, the gap analysis of the institution should be detailed; a specific section on the institution's recruitment strategy has been added to the gap-analysis template in form of a self-assessment checklist.

*The Charter & Code provides the basis for the gap analysis. In order to help cohesion, the 40 articles have been renumbered under the following headings.*

*Please provide the outcome of your institution's gap analysis. If your institution currently does not fully meet the criteria, please list whether national or organisational legislation may be limiting the Charter's implementation, initiatives that have already been taken to improve the situation or new proposals that could remedy the current situation.*

*In order to help the institution's recruitment strategy, a specific self-assessment checklist is provided for Open, Transparent and Merit-Based recruitment.*

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'human resources' is used in the largest possible sense, to include all researchers (Frascati definition) disregarding the profile, career ,level', type of contract etc. etc.

<sup>6</sup> For a description of R1-R4, please see

[http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/Towards\\_a\\_European\\_Framework\\_for\\_Research\\_Careers\\_fin al.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Towards_a_European_Framework_for_Research_Careers_fin al.pdf)

# ANNEX 2 - THE ACTION PLAN

## **1. HOW to establish an action plan**

An action plan is defined as: *'A sequence of steps that must be taken, or activities that must be performed well, for a strategy to succeed. An action plan has three major elements (1) Specific tasks: what will be done and by whom; (2) Time horizon: when will it be done; (3) Resource allocation: what and who is available for specific activities.'*<sup>7</sup>

The institution's action plan stems directly from the Gap Analysis and is comprised of a number of component parts:

1. Overview
2. Charter & Code Themes
3. Actions
4. Embedding the HRS4R process.

### **1. Overview**

The Action Plan must contain a (1 page) overview of the institution including data on staff/ research numbers, remit/ function, scale, structure.

### **2. Charter & Code Themes**

The 40 principles assessed in the Gap Analysis span 4 areas of the C&C (Ethical and Professional aspects; Recruitment and Selection; Working Conditions and Social Security; Training and Development). Institutions must describe the 'state of play' under these headings. In addition, institutions must include information on current practices related to Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) at their institutions<sup>8</sup>. Institutions must make a statement on their view of how they are performing in terms of the broader headings (as outlined above) i.e. the quality of their delivery on these topics. This narrative, which must be included in the Action Plan, is required to highlight the strategic priorities and emerging themes from the gap analysis.

### **3. Actions where feasible**

The Action Plan should specify actions that overcome existing/emerging gaps, indicate ownership and responsibility of these and a timeframe for implementation i.e. actions must be time-bound and assigned to a specific department and specific person/role within the institution. The timeline should cover at least 2 years up to the first internal review. Timing should be indicated by quarters of a year.

- Action Plans must reflect a balance between short-term interventions (such as putting on a workshop) and long-term systemic actions that bring about culture change;
- Actions must include indicators and/or targets for success that underpin the quality of the outputs and outcomes;
- Quantitative targets must also be included in the Action Plan where appropriate and relevant (a quantitative report about the present position and planned improvements).

### **4. Embedding the HRS4R process**

This section must provide evidence of how the thrust of the Charter and Code and the implementation of the HRS4R are being embedded into the institution. That is, the Action Plan must include information on how the HRS4R will be coordinated and embedded in the institution through working groups, alignment with internal mechanisms such as Quality Assurance processes, and/or HR policies, inclusion in TORs of committees, boards, etc. (this list is suggestive and not exhaustive).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/action-plan.html#ixzz3iWFgJ5HD>

<sup>8</sup> ERA PRIORITY 3 - AN OPEN LABOUR MARKET FOR RESEARCHERS includes "Using open, transparent and merit based recruitment practices with regard to research positions" as the top action priority identified through Member State consultations within the ERA Roadmap. ERA Roadmap, 2015: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1208-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

## **2. How to fill the template for a sound action plan**

The use of template 2 (action plan) is mandatory for the submission of the institution's action plan, it consists of 4 parts:

### **1. organisation information**

With regard to the requested data on the institution, only a limited number of key figures should be provided.

### **2. a narrative**

When drafting the narrative of maximum 2 pages, institutions should provide a general overview of the organisation; the existing strengths and weaknesses of their current policy and practice under the 4 thematic headings of the C&C.

### **3. action list**

In this part, a list of strategic HR action to be undertaken should be provided; the list should be accompanied an extended version in which the actions are described in more detail. The overview must contain at least the following headings:

- Title action
- Timing
- Responsible Unit
- Indicator(s) / Target(s).

As the establishment of an Open Recruitment Policy is a key element in the HRS4R strategy, institutions should also indicate how their institution will use the Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Toolkit and how they intend to implement/are implementing the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment.

Although there may be some overlap with a range of actions listed above, please provide a short comment demonstrating this implementation.

If your institution already has a recruitment strategy which implements the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment, the web link where this strategy can be found should be provided.

### **4. implementation**

Institutions should provide an overview of the expected implementation process along the following lines:

- Does your institution have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress?
- How will your institution involve the research community, its main stakeholders, in the implementation process?
- How will your institution ensure that the proposed actions will also be implemented?
- Is there evidence of any alignment of the HRS4R with organisational policies? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the institution's research strategy, overarching HR policy?
- How will your institution monitor progress?
- How do you expect to prepare the internal and external review?

# ANNEX 3 - THE INTERNAL REVIEW

## **1. How to conduct the internal review**

The purpose of an internal review, be it during the implementation phase or the award renewal phase, is to allow the participating institutions to reflect and document progress and alter actions or timing of actions if necessary and to offer the opportunity to create new actions for the upcoming years.

The internal review is conducted by the institutions at the following stages:

- 24 months after the granting of the 'HR award' (interim assessment)
- every 3 years when having reached the award renewal phase(s) (1<sup>st</sup> part of the award renewal phase(s))

### **1.1. the internal review in view of the interim assessment**

When preparing the internal review in view of the interim assessment, the institutions should indicate how its Action Plan has been implemented. The institution must include a revised Action Plan including proposed actions for the next 3 years.

The interim assessment reflects the quality of the institution's implementation of the C&C and associated developments and progress, such as fully integrating the HRS4R process within the institution.

Recommendations from the interim assessment fall under one of the 3 categories:

- a) The institution is progressing with appropriate and improved quality actions as described in its Action Plan. There is evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, routines and organisational structures. Therefore, the institution receives an encouragement to continue along the path it has undertaken.
- b) The institution is, for the most part, progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan, but could benefit from alterations as advised through the Assessment process. There is some evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, routines and organisational structures. Therefore, the institution is encouraged to undertake some 'corrective actions' to improve an already sufficient performance.
- c) The institution is not deemed to be implementing appropriate and quality actions and this raises some concern for the future efforts to implement actions closely aligned to the Charter and Code. There is a lack of evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, routines and organisational structures. Therefore, the institution is warned that, unless it takes strong corrective actions, it seriously risks not progressing through the subsequent assessment and losing the right to use the 'HR award'.

***At the Interim Assessment, the participating institution does not jeopardise maintaining the 'HR award', but a sound feed-back from the assessment will be issued with recommendations for the next future.***

### **1.2. the internal review in view of the award renewal**

When preparing the internal review documents in view of the award renewal phase(s), the institutions should elaborate on how their revised action plan(s) were implemented and propose new actions which are to fill the still existing gaps as well as the timing of such actions.

Progress and quality of the actions and accompanying measures (such as embedding the HRS4R process for example) should be highlighted since these will be explicitly assessed.

The underlying quality processes must be supported by evidence of better quality outcomes. The assessment (2<sup>nd</sup> part of the award renewal phase) is intended to provide an appraisal of this quality improvement.

## **2. How to fill the template for the internal review**

The use of template 3 (internal review) is mandatory for the submission of the institution's documentation for either the interim assessment (during implementation phase) or the internal review every 3 years when having reached the award renewal phase(s).

This template is structured in a similar way as the action plan initially requested/proposed and consists of 4 parts:

### **1. organisation information**

Institutions should then provide an update of the key figures for their institution.

***Particular attention should be paid to issues related to OTM-R by institutions already advanced in the HRS4R implementation process. These institutions may not yet have prioritised actions implementing the principles of OTM-R yet, but should take immediate action to comply with the new requirements.***

### **2. a narrative**

Based on the initial narrative on the strengths and weaknesses under the 4 thematic areas of C&C, an updated version covering the following questions should be delivered:

- Have any of the priorities for the short- and medium term changed?
- Have any of the circumstances in which your organisation operates, changed and as such have had an impact on your HR strategy?
- Are any strategic decisions under way that may influence the action plan?

A brief comment should be provided – not only looking back, but also looking forward.

### **3. action list**

In the institutions' previously provided list of strategic HR actions' overview part, the current status of the initially proposed actions as well as the status of the indicators should be introduced.

If actions have been altered, omitted or added, a comment for each of these actions is needed.

As the establishment of an Open Recruitment Policy is a key element in the HRS4R strategy, institutions should also indicate how the organisation is working towards / has developed an Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Policy.

Although there may be some overlap with a range of actions listed above, a short commentary demonstrating this implementation should be provided.

***In case the institution has already entered the HRS4R process prior to the publication of the OTM-R toolkit and recommendations by the European Commission (2015), please fill out the OTM-R checklist<sup>9</sup>, attach it to this self-evaluation form, and provide a commentary on how you will (continue to) address these principles in the years to come.***

### **4. implementation**

Institutions should provide an overview of the expected implementation process along the following lines:

- How has your institution prepared the internal review?
- Do you have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress?
- Is there any alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the organisation's research strategy, overarching HR policy?
- How have you involved the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?
- How is your organisation ensuring that the proposed actions are also being implemented?
- How are you monitoring progress?
- How do you expect to prepare for the external review?

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<sup>9</sup> The OTM-R checklist can be downloaded from the EURAXESS website : <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>



# **PART 2**

**(draft) GUIDELINES** for assessment of applications

## **1. The ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The 'HR award' applications received from the institutions on the mandatory templates and in English are assessed 'remotely' by international independent experts.

Application from institutions in a given country will not be assessed by an expert from the same country to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

Each application, irrespective to the phase wherein the institutions undergoes an assessment, is assessed by 3 experts in form of an individual assessment report.

One of the 3 experts takes the lead in the preparation of a commonly agreed consensus report based upon the 3 individual assessments. Should major discrepancies arise from the individual assessment reports, the lead expert will take action accordingly with the other experts to come up with a sound consensus. This consensus report will be given as feed-back to the applicant institution.

## **2. The international independent EXPERTS**

International independent experts have been/will be selected by the relevant authority in a transparent process on the basis of the following criteria:

- Personal competence and experience in the HRS4R field or any similar HR strategy development/implementation
- Geographic distribution over EU-28 (if appropriate also experts from Western Balkan Countries and/or Neighbourhood countries)
- Institutional spread (i.e. research institutions, universities, research funders etc.)

Prior to the involvement of the experts in the assessment, they will receive appropriate training on all issues and requirements.

Prior to any assessment, the experts sign a declaration of confidentiality covering issues such as performance, obligation of impartiality and confidentiality.

These confidentiality obligations are binding on the expert unless the confidential information becomes public through disclosure of the confidential information by the institution or the Commission services.

## **3. ASSESSING the different phases**

### **3.1. Assessing the INITIAL PHASE**

The initial assessment by external experts is based on the exercise carried out by the applicant institution to identify gaps between their current policies and practices versus the 40 principles of the Charter and Code. It seeks to gauge the appropriateness, coherence and quality of the actions proposed in the Action Plan.

The criteria for the assessment of the initial phase stem directly from the requirements of the Gap Analysis and Action Plan and are:

1. Sufficient and clear overview of the institution
2. Clear, detailed and comprehensive explanatory text (i.e. narrative) on the state of play of the four thematic areas of the Charter and Code at the institution
3. Actions for the implementation of the principles of the Charter and Code
4. Examples of how the implementation of the HRS4R Action Plan and the Charter and Code are being further embedded in the institution.

The assessment at this stage consists of a detailed assessment and a general assessment.

The detailed assessment is subdivided as follows:

**1. an eligibility assessment**

Here they check formal criteria such as endorsement of C&C, publication and completeness of documentation, but also if the institution's proposed HR strategy has been endorsed by the highest hierarchy.

**2. a quality assessment and**

This quality assessment weighs the level of ambition and the quality of progress intended to be reached by implementing the proposed action.

**3. recommendations**

If any of the statements under the previous headers have been assessed negatively, experts will provide suggestions for (minor) alterations or (major) revisions in order to qualify for the 'HR award'.

In case an institution deserves a comment on its ambition, the evidence of good practice, its proposed actions and/or its implementation process, a recommendation will also be provided.

The general assessment simply indicates whether the institution is granted the 'HR award' according to the options below:

• **Accepted**

The institution meets the criteria and the 'HR Award' is granted by the Commission services. The experts may comment on the submission asking for future focus on a particular aspect/criterion, if appropriate. For example, they may say that they would like to see something addressed in the longer term, but acknowledge that the submission meets the criteria for the Award.

• **Accepted pending minor alteration**

The institution broadly meets the criteria but the external Assessment Panel has some concerns/questions about specific areas/criteria, in which case the institution should reflect on the feedback, update the documentation and revert to the relevant authority, ideally, within 1 month.

• **Declined pending (major) revisions**

The institution does not meet the criteria and the HR award is put on hold until the next submission deadline, so the institution can make the appropriate

changes. When these are implemented and positively assessed under a new assessment the HR award is granted.

Applicant institutions will receive these comments from the experts as a structured feed-back together with the recommendation whether they should/should not receive the 'HR award' or be given the opportunity to undertake minor changes and be encouraged for re-submission. Institutions should seriously take into account the comments of the experts for all future steps and actions.

*The group of experts will decide to recommend to the Commission services whether an 'HR award' is conferred or not. The Commission services will react upon the recommendation as to grant the 'HR award' by sending out the 'HR award' icon to be used officially on the institution's website.*

### **3.2. Assessing the IMPLEMENTATION PHASE**

#### **a) The interim assessment after 24 months**

The interim assessment of the implementation phase is based on the internal review of the applicant institution, 24 months after the granting of the HR award.

At this stage, progress and quality of the actions and accompanying measures (such as embedding the HRS4R process for example) are assessed by the experts.

Assessment criteria for this phase are similar to those of the initial phase:

1. Sufficient and clear overview of the institution
2. Clear, detailed and comprehensive explanatory text (i.e. narrative) on the state of play of the four thematic areas of the Charter and Code at the institution
3. Actions for the implementation of the principles of the Charter and Code within the next three years (i.e. in view of the site visits)
4. Examples of how the implementation of the HRS4R Action Plan and the Charter and Code are being further integrated into the institution's policies.

The assessment at this stage consists of a detailed assessment followed by recommendations.

The detailed assessment is subdivided as follows:

#### **1. Quality** (of progress)

Here the experts assess the level of ambition and the **quality of progress** intended and obtained by the institution.

#### **2. strengths and weaknesses** of the HR strategy

On the basis of the information submitted and taking into account the institution's national research context experts will weigh/judge the HR strategy's strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendations will be issued by the experts referring to the state of the art of institution's OTM-R policy, with regard to progress and quality of actions and their evidence etc.

At this stage they might also issue a warning in case the institution is not deemed to sufficiently progress or if there is a lack of evidence.

The outcome of this assessment will fall under 1 of 3 headings:

1. The institution is progressing with appropriate and improved quality actions as described in its Action Plan.  
There is evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, routines and organisational structures. Therefore, the institution receives an encouragement to continue along the path it has undertaken.
2. The institution is, for the most part, progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan, but could benefit from alterations as advised through the Assessment process.  
There is some evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, routines and organisational structures. Therefore, the institution is encouraged to undertake some 'corrective actions' to improve an already sufficient performance.
3. The institution is not deemed to be implementing appropriate and quality actions and this raises some concern for the future efforts to implement actions closely aligned to the Charter and Code.  
There is a lack of evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, routines and organisational structures. Therefore, the institution is warned that, unless it takes strong corrective actions, it seriously risks not progressing through the subsequent assessment and losing the right to use the 'HR award'.

*At this point, the participating institution does not jeopardise maintaining the 'HR award'.*

**b) The internal review (after 36 months)**

Another internal review is to be undertaken and assessed as described above (see point a)).

The assessment of the internal review will be followed in a timely manner by the organisation of a site visit to the applicant institution.

Experts undertake a quality assessment, assessing the level of ambition and the quality of progress intended and obtained by the institution.

This assessment leads to 3 individual preliminary assessment reports which will be shared among the experts at least one month in advance of the site visit. Experts meet to discuss and plan the approach to and target of the discussions during the site visit the day before the visit (if practicable) or by conference call/ Skype a few days before the 1 day-site visit.

**c) The site visit**

During the site visit, the group of experts must meet key stakeholders including researchers, management and practitioners to discuss confidentially the issues and questions they might have after analysis of the internal review documents submitted by the institution.

During the site visits experts need to:

- be able to **confirm the impression** they gained during their desk-based assessment;
- evidence **benefits of implementing the HR strategy** in the institution;
- judge the **level of ambition** with regard to the HR strategy for researchers, taking into account the initial state of play;
- judge the institution's efforts to ensure the C&C principles regarding **ethical & professional aspects**;
- evidence the institution's effort to put an **OTM-R policy** in place;
- check if the C&C principles regarding researcher's **working conditions and social security** are implemented
- judge the efforts regarding the C&C principles on **researcher's development and training**.

After the discussions on the site, the panel organises its debriefing session either in person (if practicable) or by conference call/ Skype to reflect on and to discuss the site visit in order to come up with a commonly agreed consensus report.

This report will also contain:

- **elements of good practice** the experts would recommend to other institutions and
- **examples of difficulties** the institution had to deal with during set-up or implementation.

Finally, on the basis of the information submitted and the site visit, and taking into account the institution's national research context, the experts will assess the **HR strategy's strengths and weaknesses**. If relevant, they will provide suggestions for alteration or revisions to the (updated) strategy.

Feed-back to the institution is given via the commonly agreed consensus report wherein one of the 3 possible options is recommended:

1. **ACCEPTED**

The institution is progressing with appropriate and improved good quality actions as described in its Action Plan.

There is evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, practices and organisational structures.

2. **ACCEPTED pending minor alterations**

The institution is, for the most part, progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan, but could benefit from alterations as advised through the assessment process.

There is some evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, practices and organisational structures.

3. **NO FURTHER USE PERMITTED pending (major) revisions**

The institution is not deemed to be implementing appropriate and quality actions and this raises some concern for the future efforts to implement actions closely aligned to the Charter and Code.

There is a lack of evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded into the institution's policies, practices and organisational structures.

*Maintaining or not the 'HR award' relies on the judgement of the experts who inform the Commission services on their decision.*

### **3.3. Assessing the AWARD RENEWAL PHASE(S)**

Under this header, progress against proposed actions, indicators and targets for success are assessed. An overview of progress and quality against the Charter and Code themes need to evidence how the HRS4R process has been embedded into the institutional policies.

The assessment is based on the submitted internal review of the institution followed by a site visit to the institution as described above.

*Maintaining or not the 'HR award' relies on the judgement of the experts who inform the Commission services on their recommendation.*

# TEMPLATES

**The use of the templates is MANDATORY!**

**All templates are available in 'word format' for easy use  
and can be downloaded from the EURAXESS website:**

**<http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/>**