Developing a sustainable and attractive research environment

EURAXESS Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Developing a sustainable and attractive research environment

The University of Vaasa is a multidisciplinary, business-oriented university located on the west coast of Finland. The university has a wide-ranging tradition of societal interaction, and a strong connection to the economic and social structures in our region.

We have a beautiful seaside campus, which offers a modern study environment for our 5000 students and some 500 members of staff. Our teaching and research activities are organized into three faculties: technology, business studies and philosophy. The Faculty of Business Studies focuses on research and teaching within the fields of economics and business administration. Its Master's Degree Programme in International Business and Master's Degree Programme in Finance are awarded the international EPAS-accreditation. The Faculty of Philosophy brings together the academic fields of Administrative Sciences, Languages and Communication. Moreover, it is internationally recognized within the field of Multilingualism and Language Immersion. The Faculty of Technology supports the region's business sector by generating proficient workforce and high-quality research in two major fields: Industrial Management Studies and Engineering Studies, and is an important player in the energy cluster in Vaasa region by contributing to the research of sustainable energy solutions.

The University of Vaasa is a very international community: 11 % of the whole student population is international students, (20 % of our Doctoral students), 20 % of the teaching and research staff is non-Finnish. International mobility of students and teachers is actively promoted and our education and internationalization outcomes are above national averages. About 30 % of the annual intake of students completes a part of their studies abroad. As a multidisciplinary, increasingly international community and we welcome people from a wide variety of different backgrounds – different scientific fields, different talents and different cultures and nationalities.

For us, working with the HRS4R process has been very rewarding. The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment is a solid foundation for organizational development and has helped us to identify our strengths as well as development areas. In addition to being an excellent tool for organizational development, the HRS4R development process will further enable us to create a working environment that is conducive to research, embraces diversity and promotes equal opportunities for our researchers. Based on these aims, we have chosen to call our HRS4R process Developing a sustainable and attractive research environment.

Matti Jakobsson,
Rector of the University of Vaasa

EURAXESS Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

European Commission: EURAXESS Rights aims at better employment and working conditions for researchers throughout Europe. One of the main tools in achieving this goal is the implementation *of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*. The *Human Resources Strategy for Researchers* (HRS4R) supports the implementation of the "Charter & Code" principles and the path towards HR Excellence recognition.

▸ *The European Charter for Researchers* addresses the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers and their employers. The goal is to ensure that everyone contributes to the production and sharing of knowledge – and to the career development of researchers.

▸ *The Code of Conduct for Recruitment* seeks to improve recruitment practices by making selection processes as transparent and as fair as possible.

We sent our Expression of Interest to the European Commission in September 2012 and were accepted to join the 4th Cohort of the EURAXESS Human Resources Strategy for Researchers. We have endorsed the Charter and Code principles in March 2013. We are committed to implementing the Charter and Code principles as part of the HRS4R process: conducting an internal gap analysis where the guidelines and practices of our university are set against those in the Charter and Code.

Based on the findings of the internal analysis we have created an action plan to further develop our internal processes and practices in accordance with the Charter and Code. As recognition of the HRS4R process and the implementation of the Charter and Code principles at the University of Vaasa, we were awarded the HR Excellence in Research logo in 9.12.2014.

Read more about EURAXESS Rights and the HRS4R-process: ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/index.

1 – 2 – 3 completing the three first steps of the HRS4R-process

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers process is carried out through five steps:

1. **Conducting an internal analysis** to compare the practices with the principles of Charter and Code.
2. Developing and Publishing **an action plan to illustrate how the strategy is adopted**.
3. Acknowledgement by the European Commission: the right to use **the HR Excellence in Research logo**.
4. **Implementation of the human resources strategy and a progress report based on a self-assessment**. Publication of an updated action plan (at least every two years).
5. **External assessment** of progress (at least every four years).

At the University of Vaasa, the HR services has been the main responsible department for coordinating the HRS4R process. After the kick-off seminar in Brussels (Dec 2012), we outlined our project plan and set up an Advisory Group for the project to conduct the internal gap analysis.

HRS4R project organization

University of Vaasa's steering group members are the Rector, Faculty Deans and Directors of the University Services. The university steering group also functions as **the Steering Group for the HRS4R Project**. The Steering Group has approved the project work plan as well as our Action plan and project time-frame. It has also validated the responsible actors within the university that will be implementing the Actions accordingly.

The Advisory Group was formed to represent the different functions, expertise and diversity of the University of Vaasa. The work was led by the HR Services, the HR Director carrying the main responsibility of the project progress.

Members of the Advisory Group:

> **HR, Research and Innovation Services and Quality group:**
> Ms Auli Kinnunen, HR Director

Ms Hanna Turpeinen, HR Specialist, International Affairs and Mobility
Ms Charlotta Paschinsky, HR Specialist, Personnel Development and Recruitment
Mr Kari Rossi, Quality Manager
Ms Marita Niemelä, Research Manager

Teaching and research staff members:
Mr Tobias Glocker, University Teacher, Doctoral student at the Faculty of Technology
Ms Maria Järlström, University Lecturer / Faculty of Business Studies
Ms Niina Nissilä, Assistant Professor / Faculty of Philosophy

Being a very diverse organization, we wanted to build our Advisory group so that it would represent the whole organization in the best possible way. Therefore the three research and teaching staff members in our Advisory group represent our three Faculties. They are also representing researchers at somewhat different stages in their research career. Also, one of the researchers is non-Finnish representing the non-Finnish staff members of the university.

The first Advisory group meeting was in January 2013 in the form of a half-day workshop where we pre-screened the Charter and Code principles and University of Vaasa current practices and guidelines. Based on the findings of the workshop, we outlined the form for the specialist interviews and also the framework for the HRS4R survey that would be conducted for the whole research community. Since the first meeting, the Advisory group has gathered regularly to comment on the progress and the current work phases.

Data collection and gap analysis

The data collected for the internal analysis is from many different sources to make sure that the material is both concise and relevant. The internal analysis was conducted based on:

▸ **HRS4R survey:** Developing a sustainable and attractive research environment. The survey consisted of 31 questions and related open comments. The questions were based on the Charter and Code and grouped into its four main categories: I ethical and professional aspects, II recruitment, III working conditions and social security and IV training. The HRS4R survey was open 5.11.2013–20.11.2013 and targeted to all research and teaching staff members, including scholarship researchers. All in all 28 people responded to the survey and they covered all the various stages of a researcher's career (Doctoral student, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor). The gender division was 50/50. The survey result mean value was 3,9 / 5. We have taken into consideration 3 lowest scoring questions as well as open comments in the internal analysis.

▸ **Expert interviews**. We conducted 9 extensive expert interviews (1–2 hrs each) – the Faculty Deans and the Director of Graduate School as well as professors. Also specialists in study administration were interviewed. The timeframe of the interviews was 05/2013–11/2014. The questionnaire was based on the Charter and Code principles, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

▸ **University well-being at work survey**. The bi-annual well-being at work survey was conducted 30.9.–11.10.2013. The survey is conducted in all universities in Finland, which also enables comparison between the different universities. In 2013 altogether 11700 university staff members from 10 universities answered the survey. The mean score of the University of Vaasa in work well-being was 2nd highest among the universities. The themes in the survey are: I communality and team spirit, II content of own work and professional development, III working conditions, IV management and V strategic leadership. In total 262 members of the university community answered the survey, of which 51 % are classed as teaching and research staff. We have filtered the survey answers of the research and teaching staff and included them in the internal analysis to the extent they were relevant to the Charter and Code.

▸ **Graduate school survey**. The Graduate school of the University of Vaasa conducted a survey for internal development purposes in spring term 2013. The survey was targeted at all Doctoral students of the university. The number of respondents was 58, i.e. some 20 % of all the Doctoral students of the university. The survey questions were related to training needs (Doctoral courses), current needs for support in Doctoral studies and other development ideas that the Doctoral students might have concerning the Graduate school operations and content of studies. The open comments relevant to the Charter and Code have been included in the internal analysis.

▸ **Mapping of relevant legislation, university guidelines and internal practices**. Along with the data collection, we have mapped the relevant national legislation that influences the operations of the university and the research environment, as well as our university guidelines and internal practices. They

have been incorporated in the internal analysis framework, in many parts confirming that the university practices already are in line with the Charter and Code principles.

▸ **HR Policy 2013–2016**. At the same time as the HRS4R process has been on-going, the University of Vaasa confirmed its' HR Policy for the period 2013–2016. The policy is based on the strategy of our university and provides a foundation for our human resources management. It also clarifies development principles in this context and defines areas of responsibility. The sub-areas of our human resources policy are:

– Human resources planning and personnel recruitment
– Management and the well-being of the work community
– Orientation to work and development of know-how
– Internal communication and the university community

Internationality is a cross-cutting theme within all sub-areas. The human resources policy has been created together with the university's personnel organisations. The development of the HR Policy and the HRS4R process in our university have gone hand in hand: on one hand the HR Policy was created bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and Code and on the other hand the HR Policy has been the backbone of our internal analysis in the HRS4R process.

Communicating the HRS4R process

Communication and participation creates ownership, and therefore from the very beginning we have communicated openly on the HRS4R process and the Charter and Code principles. The activities have been presented and taken into consideration in various contexts and development projects, such as:
– HR Newsletter
– Intranet
– Ajankohtaista yliopistolla – staff info events
– University Steering Group
– Meeting with Trade Union representatives
– Manager's meeting
– Professor's forum
– International HR seminar
– Regular meetings with the Rector of the University of Vaasa
– University Quality Group

The Action plan

During the internal analysis we gathered a substantial amount of material which gives a good insight into the operations of the university. The project team has organized several workshops in order to make the material compact enough and to find the most essential development areas for the action plan. The project Advisory Group has actively participated in prioritizing and grouping findings of the data collection.

The University of Vaasa practices are in line with the majority of the principles stipulated in the Charter and Code. In the Finnish university context in general, the long tradition of research freedom, ethical and professional approach when conducting research and good practice in research have always been the cornerstones of research communities. The Universities' Act, The Employment Contracts Act, General collective agreement for universities, Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity guidelines, University of Vaasa ethical principles, Act on University Inventions (396/2006), Copyright Act (404/1961) to name but a few, create a basis for fair working conditions.

Also, after the university reform in Finland in 2010, we have constantly developed and streamlined our operations. Therefore, when comparing our practices with the principles of the Charter and Code, we did not identify any major development needs.

One of the greatest challenges, possible even the biggest, in a researcher's career is instability of employment. As the University of Vaasa, researchers, universities and research institutes across Europe are faced with this same challenge. The current financial model of the universities, at least in Finland (partly funded by the state and partly by external sources, no tuition fees), complicate long-term personnel planning. Thus, our main focus currently lies on developing and analyzing models that could add stability (e.g. tenure mindset) and ensuring that work contracts are made for the longest duration possible.

In line with the strategic action plan of the University of Vaasa, many identified actions relate to researchers at the start of their careers. Nevertheless, these actions will also to a big extent benefit researchers at all stages of their research careers. When the action plan was at the final stages, the draft plan was reviewed by the University Steering Group. After that, the project team in cooperation with all of

the Faculty Deans and the Director of graduate school had a final workshop where the key development areas were finalized and the objectives, actions, timeframe and the operations responsible of the actions were concluded. In our action plan, the main tools for development are enhancing internal communication, personnel training and streamlining and standardizing internal guidelines.

Developing a sustainable and attractive research environment – 2 final stages of the HRS4R process

The University of Vaasa is a relatively small organization in terms of number of staff and students. This is an advantage when working with an internal development project. Our staff members are committed to their work and feel ownership and responsibility of their work processes. It has been a pleasure to note that many of the identified development areas and actions have already taken off.

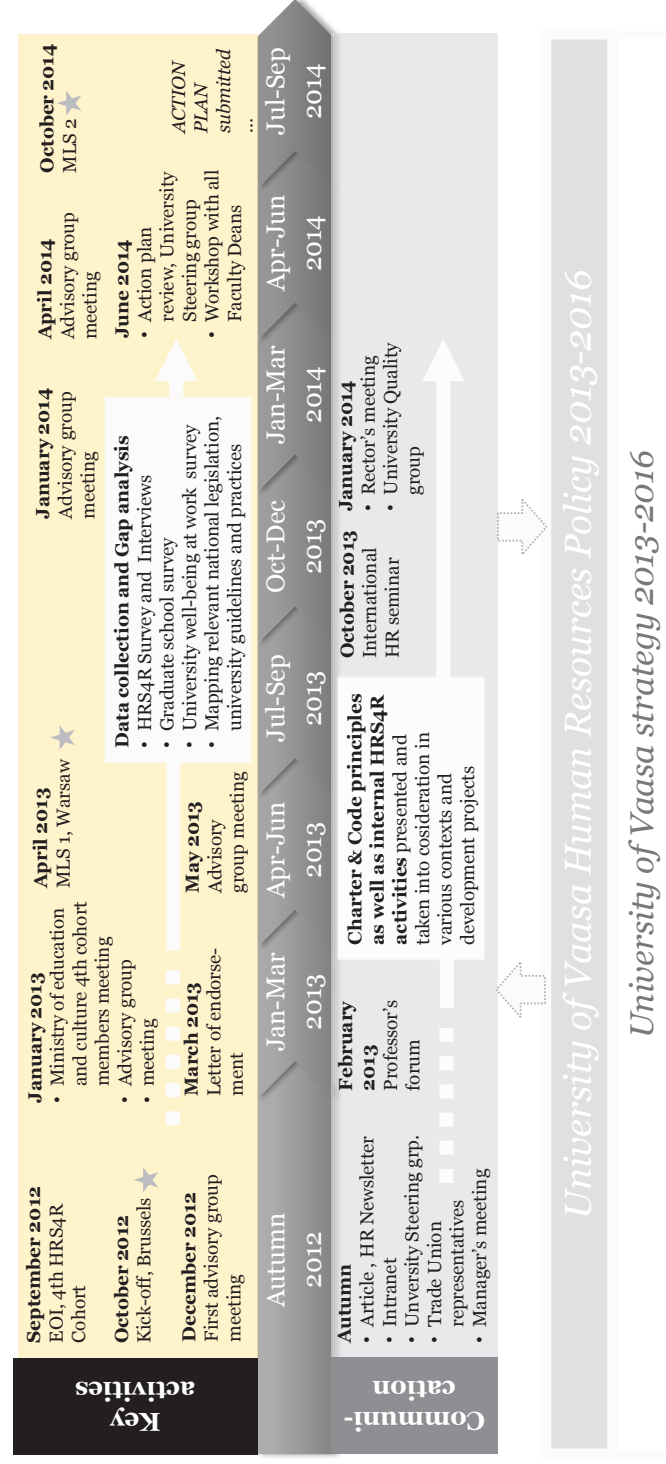We feel confident that we will achieve the objectives that we set in the HRS4R Action Plan. Two years from now we will conduct an internal evaluation and see how we have managed to carry out our planned actions. Every four years an external evaluation will be carried out. We believe that the HRS4R development project will help us further in developing a sustainable and attractive research environment.

HRS4R

ACTION PLAN

The path towards HR Excellence recognition...

Key activities / **Communi-cation**

September 2012
EOI, 4th HRS4R Cohort

October 2012
Kick-off, Brussels ★

December 2012
First advisory group meeting

Autumn 2012

January 2013
• Ministry of education and culture 4th cohort members meeting
• Advisory group meeting

March 2013
Letter of endorsement

April 2013
MLS 1, Warsaw ★

May 2013
Advisory group meeting

Data collection and Gap analysis
• HRS4R Survey and Interviews
• Graduate school survey
• University well-being at work survey
• Mapping relevant national legislation, university guidelines and practices

January 2014
Advisory group meeting

April 2014
Advisory group meeting

June 2014
• Action plan review, University Steering group
• Workshop with all Faculty Deans

October 2014
MLS 2 ★

ACTION PLAN submitted
...

Jan-Mar 2013 | Apr-Jun 2013 | Jul-Sep 2013 | Oct-Dec 2013 | Jan-Mar 2014 | Apr-Jun 2014 | Jul-Sep 2014

Autumn
• Article , HR Newsletter
• Intranet
• Unversity Steering grp.
• Trade Union representatives
• Manager's meeting

February 2013
Professor's forum

Charter & Code principles as well as internal HRS4R activities presented and taken into cosideration in various contexts and development projects

October 2013
International HR seminar

January 2014
• Rector's meeting
• University Quality group

University of Vaasa Human Resources Policy 2013-2016

University of Vaasa strategy 2013-2016

★ *4th HRS4R cohort activities arranged by EC*

Timeframe key

(as used in the action plan next)

1=will be implemented immediately or is already ongoing, without additional resources or development

2=will be implemented but requires specific resources eg. by including in the annual action and financial planning of the university (TTS)

3=long-term (up to 3 years), requires a separate development project, may be dependent on external funding or resources

4=not currently possible to implement, why?

I Ethical and professional aspects

Key development area	*Objective and action*	Time frame	Resp.
Charter & Code 2, Ethical principles: **Research ethics and good practice in research**	**Raising awareness of research ethics and good practice in research by:** • Providing regular training in Finnish and English on research ethics, data protection and confidentiality protection • Induction module Work safety and IT security for all early stage researchers as a part of graduate school orientation days.	1	**Deans,** *Graduate School, Professors, Research group Managers*
Charter & Code 4, Professional attitude: **Project management**	**Strengthening systematic project management and methodology in research:** • in-depth knowledge of funding mechanisms in own area of research • budget follow-up skills	1	**TIP,** *Research groups*
	• Training in marketing your own research and -writing competitive applications	**2** Q3/2014 will be arranged 1 yearly	
Charter & Code 10, Non discrimination: **Intercultural communication and multicultural working environments**	**Achieving a shared understanding of the University as a multicultural and internationally networked organization and implementing practices and processes accordingly. Supporting the personnel in working in a multicultural and internationally networked organization.** • Updating the language policy and language strategy • Internal communication: usability and accessibility of intranet materials and information in English	1	**Steering group,** *Communications dept., HR, Managers*
	• A) Training in intercultural communication for different target groups • B) Continuous language training in Finnish and English	**2** A: Q4/2014 B: Q1/2015 - Will be organised continuously	

TIP = Research and Innovation Services

II Recruitment

Key development area	Objective and action	Time frame	Resp.
Charter & Code 13, Recruitment: **Efficient recruitment process**	**Creating realistic expectations for job applicants Improving awareness of and communication about our four-stage career model and its implications for researchers.** • Developing www-pages: career prospects as well as information, model for assessment for job seekers outside the EU. • Inform new and existing researchers of the university's four stage career model and other career opportunities. • Clarifying level of teaching responsibility at different stages of career • Clarifying doctoral students' status (student, employee, scholarship) and its implications • Explaining the ins and outs of the doctoral thesis support and research environment (special attention to international students: the Finnish model of doctoral studies)	1	**HR,** *Deans, Graduate school, Managers Communications dept.*
Charter & Code 18, Recognition of mobility experience : **International research mobility**	**Increase research mobility at all levels (incoming and outgoing researchers)** • Strengthening support services for international incoming researchers • Conducting an annual survey on research mobility. Support mechanisms will be developed based on survey feedback	1	**Deans,** *Research group → Managers TIP, HR*
	• Increased level of support and information on (eg. Information seminars) research mobility, funding mechanisms and opportunities.	**2** Q1/2014	

III Working conditions and social security

Key development area	Objective and action	Time frame	Resp.
Charter & Code 23, Research environment: **Internal communication**	**Raising awareness of existing guidelines (eg. Doctoral school guidelines, HR Policies) and enhancing communication within the university community (eg. updates and information)** • Development of Intranet Portaali	**1** Q1 / 2014 - Q3/2015	**Communications dept,** *study programmes, research groups*
Charter & Code 23, Research environment: **Sharing of Know-how and information, networking**	**Increased sense of community and team spirit. Active knowledge transfer and support from more experienced colleagues Ensuring early stage researchers' integration into the work community** • Regular cross-functional forums and activities for researchers, supervisors and other members of staff eg Professor forums, • Informal and more formal research circles • Means of sharing knowledge and experience to be introduced • „Research Café" -settings	**2** Developing different methods and activities Q2/2014 - ongoing (e.g. Activities organised by contact students of Doctoral programmes starting Q2/2014)	**Steering Committee, Rector, Deans, Institutes Graduate school, HR,** *Study programmes, research groups*

III Working conditions and social security

Key development area	Objective and action	Time frame	Resp.
Charter & Code 25 Stability and permanence of employment: **Complex funding mechanisms** (eg. length of work contracts for early stage researchers)	**Raising internal awareness of funding structures (incl internal and external sources)** **Developing project budgeting and budget follow-up (project researchers)** **Speeding up the university budgeting process (timing of making job contracts)**	1	**Rector, Deans,** *Financial department, TIP, HR*
Charter & Code 28 Career development: **Job orientation**	**Efficient and regular induction for all new employees and doctoral students (providing sufficient information concerning studies, expectations, integration, norms, guidelines and funding)** • Graduate school orientation days • A concise information package for new Doctoral students • Clarifying the tasks and areas of responsibility in the job orientation process.	1	**Supervisors** Graduate school, *HR, TIP*
Charter & Code 30 Access to career advice: **Career advice**	**Enabling researchers to plan their career: opportunities, limitations and required competences** • A) Development discussions tool for career discussions • B) Workshops (eg. PBL) on career development and career advice, incl career opportunities outside the university	A) **1** B) **2** Q2/2015	***Supervisors*** *Career Services, TIP, HR*

IV Training

Key development area	Objective and action	Time frame	Resp.
Charter & Code 37 Supervision and managerial duties: **Complex organisation**	**Clarifying and simplifying university organizational structures**	4	**Rector, Board**
Charter & Code 39, Access to research training and continuous development: **Training opportunities**	**Systematic, long-term approach to a researcher's competence development** • Increased training opportunities eg. Graduate school • Strengthening competence development opportunities at post doctoral stage	1 2 Q1/2015	**Graduate school, Research groups,** HR
Charter & Code 39, Access to research training and continuous development: **Role of graduate school**	**Clarifying and strengthening the role of graduate school**	2 Q1/2015	**Rector, University steering group**

IV Training

Key development area	Objective and action	Time frame	Resp.
Charter & Code 39, Access to research training and continuous development: **Development of Researcher training/national and international networks**	**Policies for participation in national and international graduate schools to guarantee equal opportunities for all doctoral students** • Clarifying principles for participation in national and international graduate school activities (incl participation and travel costs)	**2** Starting Q1/2015	**Rector, Steering group, graduate school**
	Clarifying rules and responsibilities concerning supervision. • Implementing a standardized and mandatory process for planning and follow-up relating to doctoral studies (eg. every 6 months min). • Responsibilities of supervisor and student • Goals and objectives should be clearly set incl defined consequences if goals are not met • Analysing whether meetings could be part of the studies with study credits • Strengthening supervision by nominating two supervisors/doctoral student	**1**	**Research groups, Graduate school, doctoral programmes,** *academic affairs, HR*
Charter & Code 40, Supervision: **Supervision process**	**Development of supervision methods and provision of more support for supervisors** • Training/workshops for supervisors related to different types of issues concerning supervision (eg. doctoral students as a heterogeneous group: part-time, full-time and international) • New supervision models and activities could be taken into use through research groups.	**3** Starting Q1/2015	