

Information Note from the European Commission

THE "*HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS INCORPORATING THE CHARTER & CODE*"¹

Better job opportunities and more rewarding careers for researchers is at the heart of establishing a well functioning and borderless European Research Area. Creating the Fifth Freedom - the free movement of knowledge - is a top priority and Europe's political leaders have prioritised modernising labour markets and investing in knowledge and innovation to deliver on the EU's Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

The "*European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*"² provides a means to achieving a transparent and open labour market for researchers. While 900 institutions in 24 participating countries have signed up to the Charter and the Code, a new support measure would encourage more institutions to take better ownership of the Charter and the Code in their own human resources policy.

Built on an extensive consultation and preparatory work with the Member States and stakeholders, European Research Commissioner Potočnik is therefore launching a new support tool to provide recognition of the systematic uptake of the Charter and the Code and hence increase the transparency of employment conditions and the attractiveness of a research entity. The new support tool is called the "**Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Incorporating the Charter & Code**".³

It is a concrete step forward in implementing the recently agreed partnership for researchers, which provides a comprehensive policy agenda in order to make by the end of 2010 rapid and measurable progress to:

- systematically open recruitment;
- meet the social security and supplementary pensions needs of mobile researchers;
- provide attractive employment and working conditions;
- enhance the training, skills and experience of researchers.

At the French Presidency conference on young researchers in November 2008 in Rennes, several organisations will pay testimony as to how they intend to apply this new mechanism.

¹ This note provides background information to support the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers as launched by European Research Commissioner Potočnik at the French Presidency Conference on "Young researchers in Europe" in Rennes on 20 November 2008.

² Published on 11 March 2005 – C(2005) 576 final

³ The need for specific actions to promote and provide information on the actual implementation of the C&C principles is recognised by the stakeholders, national authorities and the Commission, see: the outcomes of the consultation of stakeholders on the ERA Green Paper http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/consultation-era_en.html#greenpaper ; the ERA Expert group "Realizing a single labour market for researchers" report: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/progress-on-debate/expert-groups-analyses_en.html ; The Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Better Careers and More Mobility: A European Partnership For Researchers COM(2008)317 final http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2008/pdf/com_2008_31_1_en.pdf and the Council Conclusions of 26 September 2008 point 11): "*INVITES Member States to continue and step up efforts to encourage the effective implementation, on a voluntary basis, of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers...*"

Key features

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers is a mechanism to support research institutions' implementation of the Charter & Code. It should help to overcome the lack of public information on the actual compliance with the principles and consequently increase the objective information on the attractiveness of the research institution concerned and thus give them the international visibility they merit.

This mechanism is a support tool. It is thus voluntary. It is also light to apply and flexible in its validation and verification approach. The result should be reliable information which is easily made available to the public at large. The underlying characteristics of this mechanism therefore are:

- Implementation by individual institutions on a voluntary basis;
- Based on institutional self-assessment with full respect for the autonomy of the institutions
- Simple and light, non-bureaucratic and flexible, recognizing the variety of situations across institutions
- Transparency, providing easy, publicly accessible information on the actions by undersigning institutions to implement the Charter and Code principles

Implementation steps:

- An internal analysis by the research institution, involving all key institutional players, to compare institutional practices against the Charter and Code principles;
- The publication of planned actions for improvements in compliance (what, by when, by whom) through a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code;
- The acknowledgement of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers by the European Commission;
- The implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers" by the institution, which through its internal quality assurance mechanism also carries out a self-assessment at least every second year on the basis of which it may update its Human Resources Strategy as necessary;
- An external evaluation, which takes place periodically, but no later than every 4th year.

All initiatives which comply with the key features and the institutional requirements in the implementation steps mentioned above may be considered as equivalent to the "HR Strategy for Researchers", provided that they serve the same purposes with respect to the Charter & Code. Such measures can therefore also be acknowledged as a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers by the European Commission.

For further information on the "European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers" and the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Incorporating the Charter & Code": <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/rights>.

Technical annex: The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

A) The Charter & Code undersigning Research Institution (R.I.) makes an internal analysis, according for instance to a standard template ‘grouping’ all the 40 C&C principles in 4 areas (Ethical and professional aspects", "Recruitment", "Working conditions & social security", and "Training").

The internal analysis is an assessment of rules and practices of the institution vis-à-vis the Charter & Code principles. For sake of transparency, the analysis has to involve all R.I. key players (i.e. Rector, HR Managers, researchers, etc.).

If other HR initiatives of a similar nature are already in place within the institution, the "HR Strategy for Researchers" could be easily embedded in them. Thus, other tools than the suggested standard template for the internal analysis may be used, provided that the same type of information as the internal analysis is collected (relevant legislation, current practices, actions required, when/by whom).

The use of indicators' systems and Staff Opinion Surveys is recommended, as they are helpful to implement the HR strategy according to institutional and national rules and practices. Some illustrative examples are provided⁴.

B) The institution publishes on its website its "Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, incorporating the Charter & Code principles". This is expected to summarise the main results of the internal analysis and to present the actions the institution intends to carry out to implement the C&C principles.

A clear commitment to carry out internal (within the institution) and external awareness raising actions on the Charter & Code principles should be included in the HR Strategy.

This step concretely corresponds to filling in and publishing the columns reserved to items *Actions required*" and *When/Who*" of the recommended template referred to under item A (or a similar approach if the institution uses another template). Only the main results of the internal analysis should be published, while internal/confidential information is obviously not included.

C) Provided that the above steps are formally respected, the European Commission "acknowledges" that the undersigning institution has adopted a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code".

The acknowledgment by the European Commission would be based on a rapid (via IT tools) formal check of the respect of the procedure. This check focuses on whether the publication of the HR Strategy is based on an internal analysis and the involvement of relevant actors. Publishing the institution's Human Resources Strategy on the **European EURAXESS Rights Webpage**⁵ marks the acknowledgement by the European Commission.

⁴ For instance: the University of Camerino internal analysis template http://www.unicam.it/sgq/Round_table/Template_internal_analysis.pdf and the University of Bristol survey <http://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/support/news/services-to-help-with-your-workforce-surveys>

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index_en.cfm?l1=0&l2=3

D) The research institution implements its HR Strategy and conducts a self-assessment within the context of its internal, existing Quality Assurance mechanisms. Based on the self-assessment, the HR Strategy for Researchers is up-dated as necessary and published on the institution's website and the European EURAXESS Rights Webpage.

In order to avoid cumbersome procedures, the self-assessment should be simple; this means to e.g. update the recommended template, when used or any equivalent one. No additional reports are required. The self-assessment is made with regular periodicity and in any case at least every 2nd year.

E) External evaluation: at least every 4 years, the institution prepares a short (e.g. 4 pages) report, showing the progress made towards the objectives of its HR Strategy for Researchers and its compliance with the C&C principles. The report is evaluated either by a panel of external reviewers or through national Quality Assessment (QA) mechanisms, such as National Evaluation Agencies or peer reviews.

The choice between the national QA mechanisms, external reviewers or any other appropriate mechanism is made either at institutional or national/regional level. The evaluation should at least focus on the coherence between the HR Strategy and the actions carried out. The following minimum evaluation criteria should apply: impartiality, independence; confidentiality.

If the evaluation is positive, the European Commission's acknowledgment is confirmed. If there are reservations from the evaluators regarding actual progress, recommendations for improvements within a reasonable timeframe are given to the Research institution.

If, it emerges that no adequate actions to implement the recommendations are undertaken, the acknowledgment by the European Commission will be withdrawn.

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This supporting tool is voluntary and flexible. It does not change the eligibility or selection criteria for participation in FP7. Where similar initiatives are undertaken at national or other level (as for example, the "*UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*"⁶), these mechanisms may be considered as equivalent to the "HR Strategy for Researchers", provided that they serve the same purposes with respect to the Charter & Code and some key requirements are met. In particular, in addition to the formal endorsement of the C&C principles, these initiatives should include an institutional internal analysis vis-à-vis the C&C, the results of which (including the planned actions) should be made public; the implementation of the planned actions is self-assessed and then every 4th year an external evaluation should take place.

⁶ <http://www.researchconcordat.ac.uk/> . In the UK Concordat there is explicit endorsement of the C&C principles.