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Report HRS4R 2023

In May 2023, the university received the HR Excellence in Research (HRS4R) award. Work is now underway to implement the Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers with an associated action plan.

Purpose

A report is produced before each steering group meeting to summarize recent work with HRS4R and its implementation. The goal is to provide an overall overview of the work and plans for future work.

Terminology

Since there is some confusion about the concepts, here is a brief description of the different terms used in this report:

The Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (hereinafter the Charter and Code)
A document adopted by the European Commission in 2005 that consists of 40 principles for what characterises a higher education institution with good conditions for researchers in terms of conditions for research, work environment, career opportunities, skills development, and open, transparent and merit-based recruitment.

HR Excellence in Research
An award that is granted to the higher education institutions that have undertaken to comply with the Charter and Code as a governing document for the university's activities, that the university actually complies with it and actively works to improve the parts where we do not fully meet the requirements. Audits for this work take place regularly every two (remotely) and every five years (site visits).

HRS4R - Human Resources Strategy for Researchers
The tool and process for the implementation of the Charter and Code provided by Euraxess, part of the European Commission.

Summary of work in 2023

Since the university received the award, the focus has been on stabilizing an organization and accelerating the work with the activities decided in the university's action plan for the implement of the Charter and Code. The work of setting the forms for the organization decided by the steering group for the implementation phase has been in focus. The project leader for the work has changed and a member from HR is missing as the previous member is on leave of absence. A reference group has been appointed with representatives from all research groups *(within HRS4R called R1-R4 based on career stage in their research, from junior to senior),* director of PhD studies and chair of the employment board.

We would like to draw attention to the fact that the journey so far has not been and is not straightforward. For the implementation of the action plan to work well, we need to ensure that we do not duplicate work and that new initiatives, guidelines, policies, and other work do not collide with the 40 principles. HRS4R must be given the conditions and resources required for the work to succeed. Of course, there is room to discuss internally the extent to which this should be addressed.

Implementation team

The implementation group has met every other week for a longer working meeting and every Friday for a shorter reconciliation meeting. The idea has been that the reference group participates in every fourth working meeting, i.e. every eight weeks. Evaluation of the working method will take place before 2024.

During the autumn, the implementation group has organized an introduction to the work with HRS4R to the members of the steering group and reference group who are new to the context. The implementation group has also met with some of the departments that have designated responsibility for activities in the action plan. The focus of the work has been to inform about what the award means and what the work around HRS4R looks like at the university, as well as to discuss the activities that each department is responsible for. Here, the emphasis has also been on providing a broader understanding of what gaps the activities aim to fill based on the charter and code, as well as which gaps are identified at the university.

The reference group

In addition to an introductory session to HRS4R, the reference group has had a regular meeting. There, the project's activity plan was discussed, and a review of all identified gaps was presented. A message from the reference group was to focus the meetings on one or two issues rather than going through discussions that were too

appropriate in the future during the project's ongoing progress. According to the plan, the reference group will participate in the implementation group's meetings every 8 weeks to be able to follow the progress of the project. Regarding the project's current progress, we are now in an intensive start-up phase, so at present no specific areas have been identified where input from the reference group has been deemed necessary. The next reference group meeting is scheduled for 8 December. In the meantime, the members are tasked with, among other things, reviewing the EURAXESS competence framework (so-called Research Comp) discusses if and how such a tool could be useful at the university.

Activities from action plan

Completed activities from the action plan with comment.

- **A 9:1 - Review equal treatment activities in recruitment and subsequent career stages, including assessment of changes in process and documentation**

Comment:
New Appointment Procedure (HV 2022/736) and Guidelines on the Application of Appointment Procedure (HV 2022/737) describe the university's position on equal opportunities and gender equality in relation to recruitment and promotion. The governing documents also describe: *"Action should therefore always be taken when recruiting and promoting to ensure an equal gender distribution. The university's guidelines for the application of the Appointments Procedure provide details of the processes and procedures that support this. Furthermore, analysis, goals and plans for such action should be prepared by the respective unit based on the circumstances and challenges specific to the unit. This is done within the remit of annual work on the units' skills provision planning."*

- **A 9:2 - Routines for continuous introduction and competence development in gender equality for all staff categories**

Comment:
The development of a new university-wide systematic approach to sustainability has been carried out and discussed with the university's management during a strategic discussion on sustainable development. The systematic approach includes gender equality and equal opportunities work, where a guideline for work with equal opportunities (HV 2023/352) together with the follow-up schedule equal

opportunities (HV/585) was decided in October 2023. Implementation has begun, which includes establishing circular calendars and routines. The follow-up schedule ensures that professional development in gender equality and equal opportunities takes place regularly for newly employed employees, managers, doctoral students, research leaders and supervisors of doctoral students, as well as members of the employment board.

- **A 15:1 - Review and revise procedures and practices to promote open, transparent and merit-based recruitment (OTM-R)**
- **A 16:1 - Systematize the recruitment process to promote open, transparent and merit-based recruitment (OTM-R) and introduce more/better formal decision-making steps in the process**

Comment:

New employment Procedure (HV 2022/736) and guidelines on application of employment procedure (HV 2022/737) were finalised on 1 January 2023. Advertising guidelines ready. New approval flows in the Varbi recruitment system partially completed. What remains is to put the new rules, guidelines and procedures into practice to ensure that they work well and are used properly.

Ongoing activities in the action plan with status update

- A 1:1 - Effective dissemination of information on ethics to researchers
- A 1:2 - Report on the duties of the Research Ethics Committee

Status:

In the spring of 2023, an investigation into the assignment of the *Committee for Good Research Practice and Ethics was completed.* The investigation and associated recommendations were presented to the university's management group (HLG) on 31 October. The recommendations were as follows:

- Appoint a working group with the task of coordinating information on support for researchers on the web.
- DAU (Data Access Unit) is tasked with developing a strategy for the implementation of data management plans.
- Conduct a review of the Vice-Chancellor's delegation of authority to clarify the responsibilities of different roles.
- Establish a position as an ethics advisor, divided between one or two people.
- Instruct the Committee for Good Research Practice and Ethics to provide advice on applications for ethical review.

- Delegate to FUN (the Research and Education Board) to issue an ethical statement for research that is not covered by the Ethical Review Act, with the possibility of sub-delegating to the committee.
- Maintain the current arrangement with a special committee for investigation of deviations from good research practice.

HLG supports all recommendations, and the work is expected to be completed by the turn of the year 2023/24.

- A 5:5 - List of where recruitments should be advertised (incl. use of Euraxess)

Status:

In the Varbi recruitment system there is a list for publishing advertisements on different platforms. The Staff Portal has also been updated before the summer with information about possible platforms for external recruitment. Work remains to be done to ensure that the Euraxess platform is used more widely and for all recruitments of researchers (teaching positions).

Activities that do not follow the schedule and/or have not been started

- A 2:5 - Checklist for handling agreements/legal aspects and Open Data when teachers who conduct research leave their employment

Status:

Work not started. Judged to be a huge job and linked to a major effort to achieve good management of lifecycle management of user accounts, intellectual property rights, etc. HR together with AoL and GIO need to work together on the issue and benchmark with other universities. The issue is also considered to be of a larger nature where management needs to make decisions about ownership of research data. May not be ready by Q1/2024.

- A 5:2 - Informative links in advertisements aimed at international staff

Status:

Work not started. HR has requested a working meeting with the implementation group for more information about the purpose of the activity and the connection to both gap analysis and statute points. The work is expected to start and be formed at HR during Q4 2023 or Q1 2024.

Future planned work

Activities spring 2024:

- A 2:3 - Review contracts that include third-party doctoral students (R1) and investigate how improvement can be made if necessary

Comment: The work on the activity will start shortly. AoL together with GIO is responsible for implementation.

- A 5:4 - Identify relevant activities where HR needs to increase visibility within the university

Comment: HR is working on the issue and identifying what is meant by increased visibility. Will probably not be ready by the spring of 2024 but needs to be investigated further.

- A 9:3 - Review gender balance in selection and review committees and ensure that external recruitment consultants and external experts are informed about HV's gender equality requirements

Comment: There is a job description for the Employment Board. New employment regulations, guidelines and approval chain in Varbi ensure that recruitment takes place in the recruitment group. In the instructions for experts, there is a text that highlights gender equality and equal opportunities.

- A 12:1 - Repeat gap mapping regarding statute item 33 if perceived teaching overload is real or was a short-term pandemic bias

Comment: According to the activity plan, the Pro Vice-Chancellor has been appointed as responsible. The activity will need to be discussed in the steering group and at management level for further approach and division of responsibilities.

- A 13:1 - Ensure the dissemination of information regarding complaint and appeals handling, including reviewing systems and

Comment: The university's director of PhD studies with a focus on doctoral student support is a measure to create an entry channel for doctoral students. The director of PhD studies had not been appointed when the gap analysis was conducted. Examination of shortcomings takes place through a doctoral student barometer that is carried out every two years. The PhD students are also represented in different councils where there is an opportunity to raise views.

Guidelines for handling appeals (HV 2022/259) have clarified the handling and what is appealable.

The whistleblowing function is a channel for suspected irregularities (e.g. corruption) where the whistleblower is guaranteed protection and is thus not intended for individual complaints about an employee or doctoral student's situation but for more systematic errors.

Reflections on future work

Initially, the implementation team sees an intense workload in the project due to the start-up with the implementation phase. The assessment is that the peak of work will probably slow down and become more integrated into regular processes at the university over time. A basis for discussion is about the level of ambition that the university wants in future work with HRS4R. A large part of the certification is about communication dissemination, where there are many examples from other universities of successful work: *Workshops and focus groups within various themes linked to the action plan and the charter and guidelines, discussions at management groups and information at department and subject meetings.*

Some other reflections:

- A vulnerability has been identified in the form of a few people having a deeper knowledge of HRS4R's content, meaning and the demands placed on us. If more of these people leave, someone goes on sick leave or changes tasks, there is a risk of a major loss of skills. More people should familiarise themselves more and, above all, in the management ranks to reduce vulnerability.
- Much of the focus of HRS4R work today is on the day-to-day work and what is closest at hand, i.e. activities in the action plan. More time would need to be spent on how we can disseminate information in the organisation through participation in various forums. Discussions should also take place about how we implement the Charter and Code in the long term and incorporate the work so that it becomes a natural part of other business development.
- Key persons in the research management who are not necessarily managers lack a deeper knowledge and awareness of the meaning of the Charter and Code and are probably not familiar with how to use HRS4R as a tool for the development of terms and conditions for researchers.
- Anyone who works with the development of or decides on policies and guidelines that affect researchers or the recruitment of researchers needs a

deeper knowledge of the content of the Charter and Code than they have today. A minimum level should be that the implementation team for HRS4R is asked for input.

Other

Here you can read more; find the action plan, the statute for researchers and guidelines for the recruitment of researchers: www.hv.se/hrs4r

Short facts

To date, 710 organisations in the EU have been awarded the award. In Sweden there are 17 of us, these are:

- Södertörn University
- Karlstad University
- Karolinska Institutet
- Halmstad University
- Linnaeus University
- KTH Royal Institute of Technology
- Umeå University
- Lund University
- Örebro University
- Luleå University of Technology
- University of Borås
- University of Skövde
- Jönköping University
- Uppsala University
- Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Malmö University
- University West

A certain amount of collaboration on HRS4R has been established through the Euraxess network, and some collaboration with the exchange of experience with universities in western Sweden, among others, is ongoing.