

1. Summary of HR Excellence in Research Strategy and Action plan

Europe should remain attractive to researchers from all over the world. Open recruitment, an attractive work environment, mobility and career opportunities are important elements in this. The European Commission has introduced the HR Excellence in Research logo, which it awards to institutions that demonstrate that they endorse the principles of *The European Charter for Researchers and The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* and pay continuous attention to improving and implementing them.

HR Excellence in Research logo

The University of Groningen has therefore initiated the application procedure for the HR Excellence in Research logo. The plan will be submitted to the European Commission (1-15 May 2015).

The HR Excellence in Research action plan of the University of Groningen focuses on the following four areas:

- a) Recruitment
- b) Evaluation and appraisal
- c) Career development, training
- d) Infrastructure (communication & support)

The University of Groningen will take the following action with regard to recruitment:

1. Draw up Faculty Staff Strategic Plans
2. Improve implementation of the recruitment and selection procedure, particularly with regard to international staff, and with specific attention to PhD candidates
3. Review the introduction programme and in particular the provision of information to new staff
4. Introduce a clearly structured partner-support programme.

With regard to evaluation and appraisal, efforts will be directed at:

1. Improving the conducting of promotion interviews in terms of decision-making and time involved
2. Gear the annual Result & Development (R&O) report for PhD candidates more clearly towards core tasks for the coming year in terms of research, teaching and career preparation
3. Give career development a more prominent role in the R&O interview.

For career development and training, the University of Groningen will focus on:

1. Diversification in the careers of academic staff, with a stronger emphasis on teaching
2. Improving career planning for PhD candidates and postdocs
3. Formulate up-to-date criteria for mobility, and promote mobility
4. Concentrating the training package for academic staff and updating it or setting it up for each target group
5. Further reinforcing the measures relating to gender balance.

With regard to infrastructure, the emphasis will be on improving/reinforcing:

1. The availability of information and communication on a range of subjects that are relevant for researchers, such as integrity, contractual obligations and support units
2. The supporting organization.

2. Context of HR Excellence in Research

In 2005, the European Commission published *The European Charter for Researchers and The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*.¹ The Charter and the Code contain 40 principles that

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/brochure_rights/eur_21620_en-nl.pdf

define the responsibilities, rights and obligations of employers, funding bodies and researchers themselves. The Charter and Code comprise the following sections:

- **Ethical and professional aspects** such as research freedom, accountability, data management, intellectual property rights
- **Recruitment**: transparency of the process, recognizing the value of mobility
- **Working conditions and social security**: research environment, gender balance, stability/permanence of employment, participation in decision-making bodies.
- **Training**.

It is the intention of the EC that all research institutions and universities in Europe align their HR policy and practice with the 40 principles, with a view to ensuring that Europe remains an attractive work environment for researchers from all over the world. Important elements in this include open recruitment, an attractive work environment, the portability of research grants, and career opportunities.

The European Commission has introduced the HR Excellence in Research logo, which it awards to institutions that demonstrate that they endorse the principles and pay continuous attention to improving and implementing them.

Given its international context, the University of Groningen also wishes to adhere to these principles. The University has therefore initiated the application procedure for the HR Excellence in Research logo. In order to qualify for the logo, the University must show that it is working to align its policy with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (hereafter 'the Charter and Code'). Applying for the logo is a voluntary process that also brings a number of benefits, for example:

- a) an improvement in HR strategy for researchers and
- b) simplified procedure for individual researchers applying for European research funding.

There are five steps in the application procedure for the HR Excellence in Research logo:

1. The institution conducts an internal analysis of its policy and practices, including consultations with a random sample of researchers and managers
2. The institution draws up and publishes an HR strategy for researchers (i.e. HR objectives and a related action plan), based on the conclusions of the internal analysis
3. The EC acknowledges that the institution fulfils the requirements and grants permission for the use of the HR Excellence in Research logo
4. After two years, the institution carries out a self-assessment of its implementation of the HR strategy for researchers
5. External evaluation four years after the logo has been awarded.

When considering an application, the EC does not assess the details of the proposed HR strategy or the current situation; instead, it assesses the process and the approach to the process. The EC assesses the extent to which the HR strategy aligns with the University strategy, and the extent to which the Board of the University and the Faculty Boards approve the HR strategy.

3. University of Groningen work method for application

Although the University of Groningen and the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG) will submit separate applications to the European Commission for the HR Excellence in Research logo, they prepared the application together.

For this purpose, the Board of the University of Groningen and the Board of Directors of the UMCG set up a steering group in July 2013. Led by the University's HR Director, the group comprised the Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, the Deputy Dean of Research at the UMCG, and the Treasurer of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences.

The University's HR Director then set up a University/UMCG working group to prepare the internal analysis and development of the HR strategy for researchers. The group comprised an HR policy advisor (Chair), a research policy advisor, a policy advisor on administrative and legal affairs, the secretary to the Board of the University and two HR policy advisors from the UMCG.

The working group drafted a project plan with a general step-by-step plan and time path for preparing the application to the European Commission. The project plan was approved by the Board of the University at the beginning of July 2013.

Analysis on paper

The first step in the project plan was to conduct an analysis, on paper, of the current situation regarding the 40 principles. All universities in the Netherlands have agreed amongst themselves to support the initiative for the HR Excellence in Research logo, and will submit applications. This involved making a national inventory of Dutch legislation and regulations, and of the precepts anchored in the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities, in relation to the 40 principles. The University used the inventory as a basis for the analysis, together with the local regulations. The UMCG also used the inventory as a basis.

The general view of the steering group was that the 40 principles are properly safeguarded within the institution. The steering group selected 21 principles to be used in the consultation phase. The selection was based on the overview of national legislation and regulations, and of all local regulations and policy documents. The considerations were as follows:

- Close alignment with HR processes: recruitment, promotion, mobility, evaluation and appraisal, supervision, training and development, and therefore important for existing and prospective researchers at the University of Groningen.
- A connection to recent policy discussions within the academic world: academic freedom, academic/scientific integrity, accountability, intellectual property rights, data management and gender issues.
- The other principles are properly safeguarded and less essential to the strategy of the University.

Consultation phase

The second step in the plan involved consulting relevant available sources of information and some of the researchers.

The University of Groningen has a range of current sources from which it can distil information about staff perceptions and the situation regarding the 21 selected principles. These sources include the University-wide PhD survey, the annual strategic staff survey, a satisfaction survey among international staff, and a recent evaluation of the new R&O interviews.

In addition, in order to gather sufficient information, various individual and group meetings were held with academic staff and experts in the relevant areas.

In three focus groups (PhD student/postdoc, Assistant Prof./Tenure Track Assistant Prof., and Associate Prof./Professor), academic staff provided information in response to questions based on the selected principles.

The principles and the outcomes of the focus-group discussions were then discussed at two meetings with University staff who have expertise in staff policy, research policy and communication. During these expert meetings, necessary and/or desirable actions were identified.

HR Excellence in Research application and plan of action

On the basis of all the information obtained, the working group compiled a draft version of the HR strategy for researchers and discussed it with the steering group. Once the action plan had been discussed and amended in the steering group, it was submitted, together with the application, to the Committee of Deans and the University Council for further recommendations. The application was then approved by the Board of the University, on the recommendation of the University Council.

4. Short introduction to the University of Groningen

The University of Groningen has a rich academic tradition dating back to 1614. This tradition brought forth the first female university student and the first female lector in the Netherlands, as well as the first Dutch astronaut and the first president of the European Central Bank.

... where teaching and research are integrally connected

The University of Groningen provides integrated top-level teaching and research in a wide range of disciplines. Teaching and research are organized in the following Faculties: Economics and Business, Behavioural and Social Sciences, Theology and Religious Studies, Arts, Medical Sciences,² Law, Spatial

² Medical Sciences staff are employees of the UMCG. The University transfers the funding for teaching and research in Medical Sciences to the UMCG. The University is accountable for the expenditure and for performance in Medical Sciences teaching and research.

Sciences, Philosophy, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Very recently, in September 2014, the University opened a 10th faculty: University College Groningen (UCG), which offers a Bachelor's degree programme in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The University's profile is based on three societal research priorities: Energy, Healthy Ageing and Sustainable Society. The University's researchers collaborate extensively with partners from the academic world, the business world, public organizations and the government. The University also promotes the current debate on scientific, social and cultural issues, and contributes compelling perspectives and refreshing ideas, based on the latest scientific advances.

... as an international player

The University has an international orientation, in its teaching as well as its research. Students and academics from all parts of the world can come to Groningen to develop their knowledge and skills, and prepare for an international career. The University of Groningen has a strong international reputation and is well placed in international ranking lists.

The University of Groningen: Facts & Figures

- 30,041 Bachelor's and Master's students (1 September 2014)
- 2,229 FTE (University) and 1,015 FTE (UMCG) academic staff (end 2014)
- 265 FTE (University) and 83 FTE (UMCG) professors (end 2014)
- 1,950 active PhD students, including salaried PhD candidates (at 31-12-2014)
- 1,665 FTE (University) and 557 FTE (UMCG) support staff (at 31-12-2014)
- 45 Bachelor's degree programmes, 118 Master's degree programmes
- 15 Research Master's degree programmes
- 9 graduate schools
- € 40 M turnover (2013)

Key figures - Teaching

- 3,975 Bachelor's degrees awarded (2012-2013)
- 3,796 Master's degrees awarded (2012-2013)

Key figures - Research

- 443 dissertations (2014)
- 7,250 academic/scientific publications (2013)
- € 167.5 M in contract research

HR Excellence in Research – overview of action points for 2015-2019

The action points are categorized below under the following headings: Recruitment, Evaluation/Appraisal, Career Development, Training and Development, Communication and Information Provision and, finally, Support. The department, board or committee with primary responsibility is given for each action point. The deadline for each action point is also given. A number of the action points apply throughout the period of the plan. In addition, a number of the action points are expected to be completed when the self-assessment is carried out in the summer of 2017.

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| Pilot study/preparation | |
| Organize and implement action | |

Abbreviations

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| ABJZ (<i>Algemeen Bestuurlijke en Juridische Zaken</i>) = General Administrative and Legal Affairs department | GS = (dean of) Graduate Schools |
| CvB (<i>College van Bestuur</i>)= Board of the University | HR = Human Resources Department |
| Comm = Communication Department | R&V = Research & Valorisation Department |
| DTD = Dean of Talent Development | UB = University Library |
| FB = Faculty Board(s) | |

| Action | Who | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
|---|-----|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Recruitment | | | | | |
| 1. Improve implementation aspects of recruitment and selection procedures: schedule, documents in two languages, staff in ambassador role, emphasize two-way nature of the process. | HR | | | | |
| 2. Amend and improve partner support | | | | | |
| 3. Draw up a strategic staff plan for each faculty. | FB | | | | |
| 4. Include expectations/obligations for researchers in the introductory programme for new staff. | | | | | |
| 5. Specifically for PhD students: add an assessment or introduction period. | GS | | | | |
| Evaluation/appraisal | | | | | |
| 6. Implement the recommendations from the evaluation of Results & Development (R&O) interviews (September 2014). | HR | | | | |
| 7. Improve aspects of Tenure Track implementation: composition and training of | | | | | |

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| promotion committees, communication about time required for procedures, information on how appraisal decisions are reached. | | | | | |
| 8. Improve aspects of PhD programme implementation: independent person present at Go/No-Go interview, ensure that expectations for research, teaching and career development are clearly set out in the annual R&O report. | GS | | | | |
| Career development | | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
| 9. Continue to cover this in R&O interviews and train managers in career development. ³ | HR | | | | |
| 10. Set up a University-wide system of differentiated career paths for academic staff. For each faculty, analyse the problems with career development for academic staff and develop specific strategies to deal with the problems. | | | | | |
| 11. Review the criteria for mobility experience in terms of their relevance for academic positions (i.e. not only time spent abroad). | | | | | |
| 12. In the context of gender balance, further investigate obstacles in the career step from Assistant Professor (UD) to Associate Professor (UHD) or Tenure Track Professor. | | | | | |
| 13. To improve the gender balance: look into how promotion criteria can be applied to academic staff with young children, without impeding their career progress. | | | | | |
| 14. Update the postdoc policy (rules). | | | | | |
| 15. Mobility: in terms of creating mobility opportunities, efforts are being made to introduce teaching-free periods for staff, as well as incentives for gaining short periods of mobility experience. | FB | | | | |
| 16. In terms of implementation, ensure that the expectations of postdocs and the process after the postdoc period are discussed during the appointment procedure. | | | | | |
| 17. Initiate a Postdoc Career Initiative that actively prepares postdocs for their future careers through courses and mentoring. | DTD | | | | |

³ Also one of the recommendations from the evaluation of R&O interviews, September 2014.

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| 18. Implement development for PhD students in years 1 to 4, based on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. ⁴ | GS | | | | |
| 19. Engage mentors from the business world/professional field to assist in career preparation for PhD students. | | | | | |
| Training and development | | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
| 20. Include the acquisition of teaching skills in the training programme for PhD students (UTQ-mini). | GS | | | | |
| 21. Screen the form and content of the current range of courses to see whether they align with the needs of the target groups, in view of possible required developments (e.g. internationalization, digitization). | HR | | | | |
| 22. Bring together the courses offered by in-house providers to form a 'Corporate Academy' (e.g. using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework) and categorize them by target group. | | | | | |
| 23. Regarding implementation: emphasize that Tenure Track staff should take the course on supervising PhD students. | | | | | |
| 24. Ensure that the importance of teaching is reflected in HR strategy and policy. | CvB | | | | |
| 25. Ask the Teaching Strategy Committee to share faculty principles and best practices for teaching-load models. | | | | | |
| 26. Monitor compliance with guideline stipulating that 2% of each unit's wage costs should be reserved for training and continued development. | | | | | |
| 27. Include personal development budget in Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities (CAO NU) via the VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands). | | | | | |
| 28. Promote empowerment, giving feedback to supervisors, self-direction and self-management in the first year through compulsory elements in | GS | | | | |

⁴<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>

Domain A: Knowledge and intellectual abilities: The knowledge, intellectual abilities and techniques to do research

Domain B: Personal effectiveness: The personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher

Domain C: Research governance and organisation:

Knowledge of the professional standards and requirements to do research

Domain D: Engagement, influence and impact: The knowledge and skills to work with others to ensure the wider impact of research

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| the training programme. | | | | | |
| 29. Clarification of roles and professionalization of GS/PhD-student coordinators in the research institutes. | | | | | |
| 30. Meetings for professors/supervisors on how to conduct discussions and on peer-to-peer coaching in difficult supervision situations, possibly on an individual basis. | | | | | |
| Communication and information provision | | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
| 31. Ethical and professional aspects Draw up a plan to ensure effective communication relating to ethical principles and academic integrity. The plan must cover the following: the facilitating of discussions at department level, an internet dossier with examples relating to top academics/scientists, a summarized Code of Conduct (2x A4). | ABJZ | | | | |
| 32. Organize University-wide coordination with faculty contact persons and adopt a cross-faculty approach (e.g. meetings of funding officers) in order to improve the provision of information about contractual and legal obligations. | | | | | |
| 33. Ensure that additional interests and additional positions are properly reported on the staff profile pages. | | | | | |
| 34. Ensure that all information on a specific subject is brought together in one place on the website. | COM | | | | |
| 35. Communicate University-wide policy on data storage and working with data and systems, ensuring that communication is effective and that further bureaucratization is prevented. | UB | | | | |
| 36. Provide more information on existing University structures (SBGG, R&V, ABJZ) to which researchers can address their questions about the dissemination and exploitation (e.g. commercial) of research results. This can also be realized through newsletters and by involving staff who work in positions closer to the researchers (e.g. funding officers). | R&V | | | | |
| 37. Designate contact persons in the workplace who can refer staff to the relevant experts if this has not yet been done. | FB | | | | |

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| <p>38. Mobility Improve information provision on opportunities and support for staff mobility (in conjunction with mobility criteria, action 11).</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Support</p> | | <p>2015-16</p> | <p>2016-17</p> | <p>2017-18</p> | <p>2018-19</p> |
| <p>39. Clearly communicate financial regulations, frameworks and reports through financial departments and business coordinators.</p> | <p>FB</p> | | | | |
| <p>40. Further professionalization for support staff by offering English-language courses.</p> | | | | | |