

# EURAXESS

Renewal Phase Assessment With Site Visit - EC Consensus Report

**Case number:** 2019NL414149

**Name Organisation under assessment:** Utrecht University/ Universiteit Utrecht

This report was drafted by the Lead-Assessor in consensus with the members of the assessment team

**Submission date:** 02/12/2020

## Detailed assessment

### a. Quality assessment

The quality assessment evaluates the level of ambition and the quality of progress intended by the organisation. If any statements have prompted a "no" or "partly" in the evaluation, please provide recommendations:

Has the organisational information been sufficiently updated to understand the context in which the HR Strategy is implemented?	Yes
Does the narrative provided list goals and objectives which clearly indicate the organisation's priorities in HR-management for researchers?	Yes
Has the organisation published an updated HR Strategy and Action Plan been updated with the actions' current status, additions and/or modifications?	Yes
Is the implementation of the HR strategy and Action Plan sufficiently embedded within the organisation's management structure (e.g. steering committee, operational responsibilities) so as to guarantee a solid implementation?	Yes
Is the OTM-R policy in place and publicly available?	Yes

**During the transition period special conditions apply:**

*Institutions having started the HRS4R implementation prior to the publication of the OTM-R toolkit and recommendations by the European Commission (2015) may not have prioritised actions implementing the OTM-R principles yet. In this case, they should not be penalised but strong recommendations should be made to address these principles appropriately.*

**Does the internal assessment of the institution give rise to any issues you wish to explore in more detail during the site visit?**

The internal assessment is clearly described, strengths and weaknesses are properly analysed, new Actions are coherent with the identified gaps and there is a genuine willingness to continuous improvement.

The general impression, on the basis of the provided documents, is that a very professional HR team is taking care of the HRS4R at the UU.

Nevertheless, there are a few issues which we would like to explore in more detail during the site visits.

1. The composition of the HR Department and of the 'teams of advisers' per faculty
  2. The process through which the HR Departmental Plan was designed
  3. The mechanism(s) of consultation of the research community to design the UU Strategic Plan
- In summary, we could not get sufficient evidence of participation to the process by the research community, and this is the main issue we would try clarifying during the site visit. Furthermore, we would like to discuss the 'indicators' chosen for each of the 'new' Actions, in view of the recognised difficulty of monitoring their implementation.

Further topics we would like to get more insight during the visit are:

- 1) Non-research duties in addition to research and teaching responsibilities. Workload.
- 2) Open Science professional support offered to the researchers.
- 3) Recruitment and selection & evaluation - performance criteria. The institution vision and strategy to solve this issue, taking in account that it was identified that "academic positions consist of more than just research alone; academics also teach, provide social impact and regularly perform management duties. These tasks should also be taken into account during evaluations and when assessing career opportunities. One problem in this regard is that people often find it easier to assess research results than teaching results or leadership skills".
- 4) Working conditions: workload and development prospects & employment opportunities for postdoc. The institution vision and strategy to solve these issues.
- 5) Training opportunities for all researchers in different stages of professional development. How does the training system work?

**Which elements of the HR strategy and Action Plan would you like to focus upon during the site visits?**

- Details about the success of the Public Engagement (PE) Revolving Fund
- The % participation of academics to PE activities
- Pro-active initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion
- The % of female professors (assistant, associate, full)
- Details about the Westerdijk Talent Impulse Programme
- Details about the "Insufficient integral collaboration within UU on a joint, university-wide vision of social impact
- The state of the implementation of the 'new instrument' to improve the assessment of 'soft skills' (ACTION 5)
- Four actions (10-11-12-13) are on the 'judging merit' principle: give a score (1 to 5 scale) on satisfaction for current procedure
- Details on ACTION 14 'advice to faculties on international recruitment and selection
- Details on ACTION 18, which is very complex (wouldn't it be better to split in more than one action?)
- Details on ACTION 20, 0.7 FTE of teaching load for temporary staff
- % of academics (distinct by profile R2 to R4) participating to 'training on leadership' activities
- Role and composition of the Appointment Advisory Committee ("at least 1 female")
- Webpages on Diversity & Inclusion and on Under-represented groups only in Dutch?

## **b. SITE-VISIT BASED Assessment (completed during site visit)**

Please provide a brief answer to the following questions:

1. Does the site visit confirm the impression made by the written self-evaluation report?  
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2. What have been the benefits of implementing an HR Strategy in the organisation under review? How do you judge its overall impact and achievements?  
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3. How do you judge the organisation's level of ambition with regard to its HR strategy for researchers, taking into account the initial state of play?  
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4. How do you judge the organisation's efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding the Ethical and Professional Aspects of Researchers?  
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5. How do you judge the organisation's efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding the Recruitment of Researchers? Is an OTM-R policy in place?  
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6. How do you judge the organisation's efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding the Researchers' Working conditions and Social Security?  
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7. How do you judge the organisation's efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding Researchers' Development and Training?  
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**Please list one or more elements of good practice that you would recommend to other organisations – either in terms of action or in terms of coordination/process. (max 500 words)**

Here are some elements of good practice in place at the UU that could be recommended to other organisations across Europe (and even beyond!):

- Recognising and rewarding staff project introducing MERIT as an indicator (referring to Management, Education, Research, Impact, Team spirit. MERIT)
- A recruitment and selection toolkit that gives HR advisers and supervisors useful information about how to attract a more diverse and international range of candidates and to ensure a transparent application process and an improved candidate experience
- 'Equal treatment and inclusion' staff training courses to raise awareness of unconscious bias with specific attention paid to 'inclusive leadership' on assessment and development interviews and the prevention of unconscious bias during recruitment and selection activities.
- All documentation and web site information is bilingual (English & Dutch/ official national language)
- The reduced distinction between academic and support staff
- The principle "co-operation instead of competition"
- The Institution's web site, in addition to the pleasant aesthetics, is an example in terms of user-friendliness and clarity; all information can be reached easily in a few steps
- The UU has adopted a Strategic Plan for the years 2020-2025 which is an example of long term vision, especially in terms of attention to human resources
- The UU is attributing crucial importance to the issues of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, up to appointing a Dean for these issues; well done!
- The UU is actively participating to the initiative taken by Dutch universities on changing mechanisms and criteria for researchers' rewards and recognition - the initiative, called "Room for everyone's talent", should be actively recommended to other research-performing organisations across Europe
- Tightly linked to the above is the Utrecht University Open Science Programme, which is at the basis and informs the whole UU strategy, including of course the HRS4R and the OTM-R approach

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## Strengths and weaknesses

**On the basis of the information submitted and taking into account the organisation's national research context, how would you as an assessor judge the HR Strategy's strengths and weaknesses?**

The strengths largely override the weaknesses, which are nevertheless considered, accurately mapped and addressed by the newly foreseen actions. As already stated, the only major issue which required to be discussed during the site visit refers to the mechanisms to consult and involve the research community in monitoring the whole process and assessing the results.

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**If relevant, please provide suggestions for modifications or revisions to the (updated) HR strategy:**

The Actions foreseen in the updated HR strategy seem totally appropriate to fill the gaps or improve the results. The same does not apply to the indicators, most (if not all) of which should be revised in order to develop 'true' indicators (and respective targets) to effectively monitor the Actions.

We recommend to officially recognise and formalize (in the HRS4R documentation) the work done by the University Council and Utrecht Young Academy in the researcher's consultation process for HRS4R and to include a Working group composed by UU researchers at all levels (mostly R2 and R1) using the synergies UU already has with these existing bodies or other informal ways of consultation as the mentioned "poldermodel".

More quantitative feedback is recommended to demonstrate and detail the achievement and implementation of some actions (see actions: 7, 9,10,11,15,16, 17,18,19, 20) as this would facilitate the assessment over the years (see above comment on indicators and targets).

We suggest to make references to HRS4R award each time you make internal and external actions and documents (e.g. the Strategic Plan) related to this purpose in order to spread the commitment of UU among all university staff and externals. UU is aligned with HRS4R, however it is important to show it in all your communication activities.

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# General Assessment

Which of the below situations describes the organisation's progress most accurately? Tick the right situation regarding the award renewal application:

## Accepted:

The organisation is progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan. There is evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded. The next assessment will take place in 36 months.

## Pending minor modifications:

The organisation 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. The institution is requested to submit within 2 months a revised file taking into account the recommendations of the assessors.

## Pending major revisions:

The organisation 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. The institution is requested to submit within 12 months a revised file taking into account the recommendations of the assessors. Until then, the HR Award will be put as "pending".

## General Recommendations

If any of the above statements have prompted a "no" in the evaluation, please provide suggestions of modifications in the form below.

If the general assessment is "pending minor modifications" the recommendations are split into:

- Immediate mandatory recommendations (to be implemented for award renewal, resubmission within 2 months)
- Other recommendations (to be carried out during the award renewal phase).

If the general assessment is "pending major revisions" the recommendations are split into:

- Mandatory recommendations (to be implemented for award renewal, resubmission within 12 months)
- Other recommendations

## Recommendations

The assessors' team wishes only to recommend the UU to continue along the road undertaken, that already allowed excellent results to be obtained. Maybe, the way the researchers' community is involved in the strategic decisions, currently entrusted mainly to informal channels, could be institutionalised and structured in some form, always carefully avoiding the drift towards box checking exercises that nobody wants, being completely useless. Rather than running this risk, is better to stay on the informal side, but, if possible, some form of 'light' structure could help stabilising these processes, whatever might happen in terms of externalities.

Another very small recommendation is to quote the HRS4R in the Strategic Plan (a few words could be sufficient, stating that the SP is fully compliant with the HRS4R, as it really is!)

**If the organisation deserves to be commented on their ambition, their actions, evidence of good practice and/or their implementation process, please provide a commentary supporting this. (max. 2000 words)**

Here are some elements of good practice in place at the UU that could be recommended to other organisations across Europe (and even beyond!):

a) the Institution's web site, in addition to the pleasant aesthetics, is an example in terms of user-friendliness and clarity; all information can be reached easily in a few steps;

b) the UU has adopted a Strategic Plan for the years 2020-2025 which is an example of long term vision, especially in terms of attention to human resources;

c) the UU is attributing crucial importance to the issues of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, up to appointing a Dean for these issues; well done!

d) the UU is actively participating to the initiative taken by Dutch universities on changing mechanisms and criteria for researchers' rewards and recognition - the initiative, called "Room for everyone's talent", should be actively recommended to other research-performing organisations across Europe;

e) tightly linked to the above is the Utrecht University Open Science Programme, which is at the basis and informs the whole UU strategy, including of course the HRS4R and the OTM-R approach.