
State of affairs implementation plan of action HRS4R

August 2015

Context

In August 2013, Utrecht University was acknowledged by the European Commission as an institution having achieved 'HR Excellence in Research' and awarded the HR logo. The university gained this recognition for meeting most of the principles laid down in the 'European Charter for Researchers' as well as in the 'Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers'.

The European Commission has approved the Charter to further an attractive, open and sustainable European job market for researchers. Utrecht University endorses the 40 principles laid down in the Charter and, therefore, participates in the HR Strategy for Researchers project (HRS4R). Furthermore, the HR logo is important to Utrecht University in view of the recruitment of international staff and may also become significant when obtaining European research funding.

For the purpose of the HRS4R project, an internal analysis was carried out of the HR policy at Utrecht University. It was proved that our HR policy meets most of the principles in the Charter. In order to fully meet all the principles, the university launched an action plan and submitted it to the European Commission. The European Commission rated both the internal analysis and the action plan as 'Excellent' and consequently awarded Utrecht University the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo in August 2013.

Presently, we have completed the first two years of the HRS4R project and assessed, in this document, the current state of affairs with respect to each individual action laid down in the plan of action.

Assessment of the progress of the actions

Action 1: Communication about research activities and results

a. *Extend the range of courses in science communication*

The Communications & Marketing Office provides media training for scientific staff members. The aim of the training is to teach scientists how to confer their message to the media and make their research more accessible. The training is aimed at learning how to deal with the press and the camera.

The training options have been announced via the intranet and the researchers have also been approached individually. In 2014 and 2015, this resulted in approximately 12 trainings a year, of 5 or 6 participants each time. In total, some 130 employees now have taken part in the media training.

b. *Extend the UU Publicity Prize: also consider other factors in the outreach (e.g. activities in the new media and lobbying activities), in addition to the measuring of press performance alone.*

Each year, Utrecht University awards the UU Publicity Prize to the scientist who was most prominently covered by the media and actively contributed to this achievement. In this way, Utrecht University stimulates scientists to generate publicity for their research and take part in the public debate. In order to determine the winner, a shortlist is drawn up of the three scientists with the largest press presence, based on a weighed count of the number of media performances in the past academic year. A panel of judges then selects the winner. Aspects that are taken into account include: the topicality and significance of the subject covered by the media, the extent of the positive raising of the university's profile and the way the subject ties in with the four strategic themes.

The Communications & Marketing Office has considered whether including further outreach factors than press performance alone when deciding on the shortlist, e.g. activities in the new media, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, and lobbying activities, would be feasible. It has been concluded that extending the outreach activities with these factors is currently not opportune. There are no methods available yet to quantitatively measure such activities and determining the weighing factor is rather difficult too. The UU Publicity Prize, therefore, will be continued in its present form.

In consultation with the Utrecht University 'Wetenschapsknooppunt' (Science Node), we are currently investigating whether it is possible to award an additional prize for the scientist who demonstrates extraordinary merits in the field of the transfer of scientific insights to primary school and lower secondary school children. It is expected that such an award could be realised by the end of 2016.

c. *Publicise those professionals who are actively engaged at the faculty level in science communication.*

The Communications & Marketing Office coordinates all the communication concerning Utrecht University's strategic themes. Each strategic theme has a programme director/managing director as well as a communications advisor. In addition, each faculty has assigned one researcher, generally a professor, to act as the driving force in the field of valorisation. This person receives support from the faculty communication officers.

With the help of the university department of Press Communications and the Centre for Science Communication and Culture (specifically Studium Generale, <http://www.sg.uu.nl/english?ln=en>), researchers are supported in finding platforms to execute their valorisation/communication activities. Apart from the publications in daily and weekly magazines and scientific journals, these include lectures (often also presented on the Internet, e.g. during the Week of Science), performances during events (such as the DeBeschaving festival, <http://www.debeschaving.nl/english>), contributions to museum exhibitions (University Museum) and digital or TV performances (e.g. the University of the Netherlands, <http://www.universiteitvannederland.nl/college/waarom-was-amsterdam-in-de-gouden-eeuw-eeen-stad-van-alloctonen/>).

d. *Raise awareness among young scientists of the importance of science communication and of translating their research into something applicable to society at large (valorisation)*

The government sees valorisation as one of the core tasks of our scientific staff, in addition to research and education. Under the leadership of their faculty valorisation professor, each faculty

pays attention to the societal impact of science communication. Centred on the faculty research themes, communication activities are being organised, such as the valorisation theme days. In the annual Assessment and Development interviews between researchers and supervisors, valorisation is also expected to be explicitly discussed.

Action 2: Guidelines to improve the assessment of 'soft skills' and ensure they are taken into consideration in the recruitment and selection process

In practice, the researcher's number of publications is certainly not the only aspect to which consideration is paid in selection interviews. However, at present, neither policy nor guidelines provide evidence of this fact. To introduce some consistency, the following action has been established:

- *Compile a checklist or guideline for selection interviews and ensure attention is paid to a wide range of competences*

The guideline is added as an appendix to this document and available to HR advisors to hand out to researchers when they hold the selection interviews. The guideline will be improved later on.

Action 3: Sabbatical Leave

In the area of working conditions, much has been stipulated in the CAO for Dutch Universities and Utrecht University's own schemes. It seems that the staff are insufficiently familiar with the facility for sabbatical leave or rather it can be said that managers and their staff have the impression that insufficient use is made of this opportunity. Utrecht University greatly values sabbatical leave in the context of employee mobility and is, therefore, keen to see an increase in the use of this working condition. In order to achieve this, the following action has been established:

- *Publicise widely the opportunity for sabbatical leave*

In the past few years, additional support has been given to the option of taking sabbatical leave by way of a grant from the terms of employment fund. Via the intranet, wide attention has been paid to the facility for sabbatical leave and the financial contribution to this leave. Furthermore, information has been made available via the faculty intranet pages and newsletters. In a few instances, the process to come to an arrangement with regard to sabbatical leave appeared unclear and, therefore, either a separate document with the specific process arrangements or a faculty brochure was drawn up. Broad awareness has thus been raised about the option to make use of sabbatical leave.

The number of people actually making use of sabbatical leave remains relatively limited. One of the reasons for this is that the researchers have teaching obligations and, therefore, are not flexible enough to be absent for a longer period of time. Moreover, they experience a high level of work pressure and the options they have for someone else to do their work in their absence are limited. The faculties are taking action to reduce the level of perceived work pressure.

Appendix:

Selection interviews guideline

During the recruitment and selection of researchers, a wide range of competences, in addition to the substantive expertise (i.e. the research profile and a list of publications), is required to succeed in the position.

This guideline helps to make it easier to discuss these additional competences. Two lines in particular are emphasised:

1. An overview of competences for researchers (associate and assistant professors) used within the UFO system (university system for classifying jobs), including corresponding sample questions.
2. A further elaboration on the STAR methodology.

1. Model questions about competences

The university system for classifying jobs (UFO) assigns four competences to each position that are essential to the execution of that position. For each competence, this guideline recommends a number of sample questions to be used during the selection interviews.

Situational awareness (Associate professor/Assistant professor)

"To be able to provide evidence of being well-informed about the societal, political and discipline-specific developments. To be able to effectively use this knowledge in your position or organisation."

Sample questions:

- What changes in society have had a major impact on your work in the past few years?
- What important developments have recently occurred within the organisation? What have you done in recent months to keep up-to-date with what is happening within the organisation?
- What were the main objectives of your organisation last year?

Conceptual capacity (Assistant professor)

"To be able formulate concepts, thoughts and notions based on complex information and to create conceptual frameworks or models."

Sample questions:

- What constitutes complex information to you?
- Use an example to explain how you come to formulate a concept?
- Have you recently gained new insights based on any complex information you analysed? How did these insights come about?

Presentation skills (Assistant professor)

"To be able to present notions and information in a solid manner, considering the target group."

Sample questions:

- How do you transfer knowledge in a lecture? Do you make use of specific techniques?
- When do you consider a lecture or presentation successful?
- Was presenting part of your position assessments? How were you rated?
- Can you provide us with a 2 to 3 minute presentation about your motivation for this position?

Focus on results (Assistant professor)

"To be able to focus on achieving objectives and qualitative and quantitative results."

Sample questions:

- When are you satisfied with your work?
- In what situation have you been unable to meet your own requirements? What did you do as a result?
- Did you recently assess someone's performance? According to you, what in that case made the distinction between a good and an average performance?
- What recommendation to improve the product quality did you give in the last period?

Vision (Associate professor)

"To be able to distance yourself from the daily practice. To be able to concentrate on the main issues and the long-term policy."

Sample questions:

- Can you provide an example of a decision you had to take that directly affected the policy of your department or organisational unit? Do you think it was a good decision?
- What issues or developments outside of your department or organisational unit will have an impact on your organisation in the coming year? And in the coming five years? In what way do you prepare for such changes?

Control results (Associate professor)

"To be able to provide direction and guidance to staff members or a project group in order to achieve objectives and results."

Sample questions:

- How do you as a supervisor ensure that the set objectives are being achieved?
- Did it ever happen that you, as a result of unforeseen circumstances, had to adjust your planning? What did you do?
- How do you decide on the priorities in your work and can you give some concrete examples?
- Did one of your staff ever have a clearly deviating view from your own on either the tasks of your department or his or her tasks? If so, describe the situation. What approach did you choose to convince the staff member?

Persuasiveness (Associate professor)

"To be able to succeed in winning others over to your ideas and plans."

Sample questions:

- According to you, what was your best proposal that was adopted by others? How did you manage to interest them?
- During discussions, everyone wants to be right. How do you succeed in winning others over to your point of view?
- What qualities are required to convince others? And why?
- According to you, what is the best approach to selling an unpopular argument? Can you provide an example of a situation when you had to deal with this?

2. Explanation of the STAR methodology

When discussing the 'softer' subjects in a selection interview, it helps to use as many concrete situations as possible. It is important to discuss what the candidates themselves did in this concrete situation. The STAR methodology can be useful in this:

STAR is an acronym for: **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction and **R**esult.

The candidate provides examples of actual (work) behaviour that refer to the job profile and explain his or her role in the concrete situation.

Situation	What happened?
Task	What was your task or responsibility?
Action	What did you concretely say or do?
Result	What happened as a result?

You made add "Reflection": what did the candidate learn from the concrete situation?