



**HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS INCORPORATING THE
CHARTER AND THE CODE**

EVALUATION OF THE REYKJAVIK UNIVERSITY



1. REPORTING TEMPLATE

Name of the institution	Reykjavik University
Country	Iceland
Type of organisation	Private University
Interviewees (as per the schedule)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ari Kristinn Jónsson (AKJ), Rector of RU2. Kristján Kristjánsson (KK), Executive Director of Research and Information at RU and Contact 1 in HRS4R programme3. Sigríður Elín Guðlaugsdóttir (SEG), Human Resource Manager at RU4. Andrei Manolescu (AM), Professor SSE5. Gunnar Þór Pétursson (GPP), Associate Professor at SL6. Marina Candi (MC), Associate Professor at SB7. Kristinn R. Þórisson (KRÞ), Associate Professor at SCS8. Marjan Sirjani (MS), Professor at SCS9. Luca Aceto (LA), Professor at SCS10. Marina Candi (MC), Associate Professor at SB11. Þröstur Olaf Sigurjónsson (ÞOS), Associate Professor at SB12. Guðmundur Sigurðsson (GS), Professor at SL13. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir (RH), Dean at SL14. Karl Ægir Karlsson (KÆK), Associate Professor at SSE15. Brynjar Karlsson (BK), Professor at SSE16. Már Mixa, Ph.D. student at SB17. Birna Dröfn Birgisdóttir, Ph.D. student at SB18. Marijke Bodlaender, Ph.D. student at SCS19. Tigran Tononyan, postdoc at SCS20. Yonatan Afework Tesfahunegn, postdoc at SSE21. Stephan Schiffl, postdoc at SCS22. Christian Konrad, postdoc at SCS23. Stanislav Ogurtsov, postdoc at SSE24. Birna Björnsdóttir (BB), International Programme Coordinator, RU International Exchange Office25. Sigrún María Ammendrup (SMA), Administrative Director at SCS26. Jóna Kristjánsdóttir (JK), Administrative Director at SL27. Guðrún Ragna Hreinsdóttir (GRH), Administrative Director at SB28. Guðrún Arnbjörg Sævarsdóttir (GAS), Dean at School of Science and Engineering (SSE)29. Ragnhildur Helgadóttir (RH), Dean at School of Law (SL)30. Þórána Jónsdóttir (ÞJ), Dean at School of Business (SB)

Date of the visit	26 September 2014
Background information	<p>Reykjavik University (RU) is a private university-level institution dedicated to higher education and research, with connections to industry and society.</p> <p>RU consists of four academic Schools: the School of Law (SL), the School of Business (SB), the School of Computer Science (SCS), and the School of Science and Engineering (SSE).</p> <p>The Open University (OU) is RU's continuing education unit, and RU offers preliminary study course as a preparation for university education. RU has a community of around 3500 students (24 Ph.D. students), 230 full-time employees (thereof around 110 academics engaged in research and 8 postdocs) and over 100 part-time employees.</p> <p>2007: signed Charter and Code</p> <p>2009: Working group established to for HRS4R</p> <p>Oct 2009 – Feb 2010: Working group met to draw up Gap Analysis and Action Plan</p>

2. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the results of the Reykjavik University (RU) evaluation conducted by three peer reviewers on 26 September 2014. This evaluation constitutes the fifth step of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) process¹ aiming to support the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers (C&C)².

In order to produce their conclusions on the continuous improvement process resulting from the implementation of the C&C, the reviewers have analysed background documents at their disposal (e.g. action plans, self-assessment reports, monitoring data...) and have visited the institution. During this one-day visit, they have met different institutional stakeholders and beneficiaries (i.e. researchers).

Deloitte has merged the peer reviewers' individual reports into one single report. This report is divided in four sections:

1. Comparison between the action plan validated by the Commission for the acknowledgement of the institution as “HR Excellence in Research”, and the concrete actions implemented;
2. The existence and implementation of monitoring and actual follow-up of the action plan;
3. The identification of tangible results stemming from the implementation of the action plan;
4. The conclusion of the evaluation.

3. EXTENT TO WHICH THERE IS COHERENCE BETWEEN THE INSTITUTIONAL HR STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN AND THE CONCRETE ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED

It is clear that research is an important and growing area for Reykjavik University; and that the development of a key set of underpinning policies to support the research function was a clear part of the strategic plan. Many of the actions identified initially in the HR Excellence in Research plan and at the two-year review stage are in line with this overall objective. Building the research community became an explicit objective of the University in 2007. Putting in place policies, procedures and guidance has been the focus as there was no research tradition in place.

It was clear from the documentation provided to the peer reviewers and from the visit that given this focus, many of the actions identified in the plan four years ago had been achieved.

¹ For more information see : <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

² For more information see : <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/whatIsAResearcher>

There was clearly a robust and external quality review mechanism, and the University welcomes transparency and review. A clear policy on promotion criteria is in place, a code of ethics has been developed and a new overall HR strategy is in place.

A number of key areas remain priorities for future action, including mentoring, trainings and better guidance for Principal Investigators. Although the gaps and actions are recognised with regard to these areas, there is no apparent agreement on how to progress them or when and how actions might be taken which was of some concern to the reviewers.

The peer reviewers also highlighted the friendly and collegial environment within RU due to the small scale and the youth of the University. This approach influences the culture in terms of management and relationship among stakeholders (students, staff, researchers, etc.) who act like a family, in an informal way. According to the peer reviewers, this culture could present a risk of deviation from the HRS4R, which exists to introduce structure and clearly defined processes where processes and supports otherwise occur informally or develop organically.

Therefore, actions, deeply rooted in the development of regulation or policy making, have not been implemented in a practical or in a systematic manner and the deadlines outlined in the original action plan are not adhered to or indeed recorded in subsequent documentation.

In terms of barriers to implementing the institutional strategy, funding (generally, and research funding specifically) was consistently cited. The youth and smallness of the institution could also be deemed as constraints impeding the implementation of actions.

4. EXTENT TO WHICH THERE IS A FOLLOW-UP/MONITORING MECHANISM PUT IN PLACE

It was clear from the presentation by Kristján Kristjánsson, Executive Director of Research and Information at RU and the key contact for the HRS4R programme that the implementation plan had been reviewed by an appropriate group of internal stakeholders after two and four years.

RU has indeed monitored actions included in their action plan in a strategic and comprehensive manner and the documentation is clear and concise. In May 2012, a new working group was established to conduct a self-assessment and review the HRS4R. The working group consisted of researchers at all levels, including one dean, two professors, one associate professor, one assistant professor, one postdoctoral researcher, two doctoral students, as well as the Senior Executive Director and the Director of Research Services who administered the group. This praiseworthy approach demonstrates a high level of commitment and includes researchers in the process review.

The working group had four meetings between June and October 2012, reviewing the gap analysis from 2010 and recent developments related to the Charter and the Code. It went through the gap analysis gradually and produced a new summary of suggested actions, based on the summary from 2010, plus an overview of new actions and recent developments, which

support the implementing of the principles of the Charter and Code. This document records actions as ‘Action done’, ‘Action on going’ or ‘Action still required’.

As the majority of the actions are proposals to look in to develop processes or to create guidelines in order to support research support activity, it is challenging to include specific metrics or key performance indicators. These are therefore not included in the 2-year review document of November 2012, or 2014 update report.

Moreover, some senior, well-functioning, groups met regularly in order to oversee many of the developments taking place. For example, the Deans group met weekly and was well informed about the background of the HRS4R action plan and strategy.

The HR manager was also a key player in the implementation process and was useful to understand the overall HR strategy for the institution, although the links between the HRS4R and the wider HR strategy were not explicit.

However, there was a low visibility of the plan among the other groups, including the members of the Research Council. For the next internal review (2016) and external review (2018), it might be useful to be more explicit about the contents of the action plan, especially with the key decision making groups within the university.

5. EXTENT TO WHICH THERE ARE TANGIBLE RESULTS STEMMING FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL HR STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

Given the focus on the development of robust policies, procedures and guidelines, the peer reviewers wanted to explore the extent to which the on-the-ground experience of researchers at Reykjavik University were impacted by such policies.

Three significant strands of tangible results stood out:

1. The increase in research output and publications

Although this was not highlighted as a key aspect of the reporting, data related to the academic performance were presented. RU has the highest international co-publications record of any Nordic higher education institution. While it was difficult to link directly this significant change to the action plan, the focus on developing a competitive research environment following the creation of the University in 2005 was clearly a strategy driver (including in the action plan) and as such, major progress had been made.

2. The researcher experience

The experiences of the small number of doctoral candidates (approx. 24) and post-doctoral researchers (10) at RU appeared to be outstanding. Setting aside some frustration about visa and entry issues, the clearly open nature of the University (and Icelandic) environment was welcomed and praised by researchers. While many commented on their surprise at the informality of the institutional culture, they clearly felt taken care of and enjoyed the collegial atmosphere. What strongly came across was the general willingness of staff to answer questions, support and help early career researchers, as well as the accessibility of the Deans who hold real power within the structure

3. The role of the Administrative Directors in ensuring that local processes were smooth and harmonised across the four academic schools

The peer reviewers suggested a strong coherence between the Administrative Directors and their role in terms of implementing processes and procedures for doctoral candidates. In addition, the level of pastoral care provided in terms of ensuring that new researchers had desks/phones/bank accounts was outstanding.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The University of Reykjavik should retain the HR Excellence in Research Award subject to implementing the priority recommendations (see Section 7). The strategy to build policies and procedures to better manage and develop the research structure is appropriate given the context of the institution which was newly created in 2005 and then with an explicit focus on building the research environment from around 2007.

There was a distinction between the key messages of the paperwork received in advance, and the experiences shared during the interviews and day at the University. The report and action plan focused on the structures and guidance needed, but the on-the-ground experience provided a rich picture of close and open relationships and a genuinely collegial culture, which appeared to underpin the good experiences reported by early career researchers. It might be useful to reflect more of this culture in the paperwork and in any promotion of the strengths of the institution.

The strength of the management structures, in particular the Deans group and the Administrative Directors groups were evident. They clearly have the authority and processes in place to drive through change and should engage further in the action plan, priority setting and implementation of the HR Excellence in Research Award plans.

The outstanding actions, which we assume, will be integrated into the new two-year plan felt useful and achievable as next steps. However, they need to be given priority and resources to be taken forward.

The key themes for the future appear to be getting the balance right between retaining a very personal, welcoming experience and ensuring that there are sufficient underpinning processes

to ensure a scalability of the research environment. It would be appropriate to expect the next review to explore some of these issues.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The peer reviewers would recommend:

Priority recommendations:

- Retain the HR Excellence in Research Award, pending putting in place a robust plan for the next two year period
- Approach the HRS4R process anew and set targets that are appropriate to the scale and scope of RU, are pragmatic, achievable, can be monitored and most importantly move beyond actions centred on the development of regulation and guidelines. In others words, should go further into the concrete implementation of actions.
- Review the frameworks, support, responsibilities and expectations of different types of funded doctoral candidates, including the self-funded who appeared to operate somewhat outside the otherwise evident structures. Consider the balance between the clearly excellent informal support and the checks and balances needed to ensure that all researchers are able to access help and feel comfortable raising concerns or issues in an appropriate way.
- Consider whether formal structures of representation of early career researchers should feature within the decision-making structures, including whether to extent the department rep model to all four academic schools. Should explore whether a dedicated forum for early career researchers to meet and exchange views would also be helpful
- Share the task of promoting and implementing the HRS4R within the three specific units within RU and to work more closely to embed HRS4R:
 1. The Research Support Service (now with an additional staff member)
 2. The staff members broadly named Support units (International Programme Coordinator, International Exchange Office, and the Administrative Director at SCS, SL, and SB)
 3. The HR Department.

Other recommendations:

- Consider whether it might promote more explicitly the HR Excellence in Research Award and the culture and support available to early career researchers which was highly praised
- Make a more explicit link between the HR Excellence in Research Award strategy and action plan and the overall HR strategy. It might also be useful to articulate more boldly the research ambitions of the institution, and be clear about which parts of the HR strategy will support their achievements
- Continue to review the 'status' of early career researchers within the institution and ensure that they are treated appropriately (e.g. counted as staff members if appropriate)
- Consider whether the Administrative Directors team could take a greater role in implementing and owning the HR Excellence in Research Award plans
- Explore at strategic level whether there are the resources and inclination to provide more support from research services to help progress academic careers, develop proactive funding strategies (e.g. for H2020) and identify good practice, celebrate and share successes and learning (e.g. winning an MCFA fellowship).