



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ

HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
UNIVERSITY OF CRETE

## Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

### Background

The 'European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers' (2005) set out general principles affecting the role, responsibilities and rights of researchers as well as their employers/funders. The Charter and Code (C&C) were developed by the European Commission (DG Research) as manifestos geared to achieving a transparent and open labour market for researchers in the European Research Area (ERA). The objectives are essentially to increase the attractiveness of a research career in Europe and thereby attract &/or retain the best research talent in Europe. This is particularly important in Greece in the current situation *ie to train, attract and keep a critical mass of research talent in the country.*

The need for specific actions to promote the actual implementation of the Charter and Code (C&C) principles in research institutions led to the creation (by the EC) of the Human Resources Strategy Group, which links in with the EURAXESS European Network for Researchers, and to the development of the support tool 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Incorporating the Charter & Code' (HRS4R). The HRS4R addresses a range of practical issues including recruitment policies; social security and supplementary pension needs; employment and working conditions; and measures to enhance the training, skills and experience of researchers. The Charter & Code apply to *all researchers*, independent of the nature of their contract, starting from early stage researchers (including postgraduates).

For further information see <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/rights>

The University of Crete (UoC) was the first Greek University to sign the Charter & Code (271<sup>st</sup> Senate Assembly 17/12/2009) and has acted as a multiplier in successfully proposing adoption of the C&C by the Greek University Rectors Council (June 2010). The UoC forms part of the EURAXESS European Network for Researchers and participates in the HRS4R Network (second cohort).

The HRS4R requires the following **5 steps**:

- 1) An internal analysis assessing the rules and practices of the UoC in relation to the C&C principles
- 2) Publication on the UoC website of the results of the internal analysis and action plan for implementation of the C&C principles
- 3) Acknowledgement by the European Commission
- 4) Implementation of the UoC HR Strategy and internal self-assessment (via existing Quality Assurance mechanisms)
- 5) External evaluation at least every 4 years.

The 'HR Excellence in Research' logo is awarded to research institutions and funding organizations that have been acknowledged by the EC as having made significant progress in implementing the Charter and Code.

## Internal (Gap) Analyses – the Process

The HRS4R process was initiated in September 2011 by the Rector, Professor E Stephanou, with the formation of an *ad hoc* HRS4R working group of leading and senior researchers and policy support staff.<sup>1</sup> The process comprised the following:

- (1) A detailed baseline analyses of legal and institutional rulings/structures and practices of the UoC *vis-à-vis* the 40 principles of the C&C, as set out in template form provided by the EC
- (2) Consultation with key players within the University community drawing on their experiences and perceptions of the extent to which regulations and practices in the UoC currently meet the principles of the Charter & Code, with the aim of identifying strengths and weaknesses and priorities for action
- (3) Proposal of an HRS4R Action Plan for review, approval and adoption by the University Senate (the highest decision making body, representing all sectors of the UoC community).

Once adopted, periodic assessment of the progress made in implementing the action plan (internally at 2-year intervals and externally at 4-year intervals) is to be embedded in the existing QA procedures (MODIP-ADIP).

### Baseline Analysis

Detailed mapping of the laws, regulations, internal rules and practices which have a bearing on the C&C principles was undertaken by members of the University's Special Research Committee<sup>2</sup> and the Planning and Development Directorate.

Note 1: Analysis insofar as it relates to legal framework is relevant to all HEIs in Greece;

Note 2: The new legal framework for HEIs (N.4009/2011) and the UoC's own internal regulations support/enable many of the principles of the Charter & Code;

Note 3: The HRS4R internal analysis provided an opportunity to draw under one umbrella the various initiatives and developments which have been made/are in progress to bring practices and procedures within the University in line with principles of the C&C (either explicitly or intuitively as best practice).

### Consultation Process a “reality check”

The primary value of the consultation was seen as being a 'reality check' – ascertaining the experiences and perceptions of researchers across the academic community. Key stakeholders identified and involved in the consultation included senior and junior faculty, post-docs, fixed-term contract researchers, international researchers (e.g. Marie Curie), research support staff, post-graduate students, and other academic and administrative staff with responsibilities relevant to the C&C. The process was multifaceted. First, Deans of the Schools were invited by the Rector to nominate representatives from the identified stakeholders to form focus groups. Discussion documents using a questionnaire format were drafted in Greek and in English and circulated. Meetings with faculty members (ΔΕΠ) and other researchers as nominated by the Deans, together with ELKE and other relevant staff

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<sup>1</sup> The *ad hoc* HRS4R group comprised the Rector Prof E Stephanou (Chair), a member of the QA Evaluation Committee, Prof S. Anastasiadis, leading faculty researchers (Prof A. Eliopoulos and Ass Prof G. Vassilikogiannakis), and staff of the policy support Planning & Development Directorate (E. Michelidaki, Director, and C. Codrington).

<sup>2</sup> Y.Spetsidi, ELKE staffer, and Prof I Athanasaki, Vice Chair of the Special Research Committee.

were held for (a) the School of Philosophy, Rethymnon and (b) the School of Sciences and Technology, Heraklion. The consultation process in the Medical School, involving faculty and post docs, was completed under the direction of Prof A. Eliopoulos, in consultation with the Faculty Dean. To complement input from the focus groups, individual interviews with faculty, staff, and students were held. Further, an open call inviting comment was issued through the University e-news medium, and direct mailing to small sample frames of post-graduate students and post-doc researchers specifically inviting comment also resulted in written submissions. In parallel, staff members of the HRS4R *ad hoc* group held a number of interviews and meetings on specific issues (e.g. regulations affecting employment contracts) and participated in the working group meetings of developments already underway which have a direct bearing on the C&C (e.g. the University's Code of Ethics; a 'Roadmap' on restructuring the administrative services; etc).

This approach generated a great deal of qualitative input indicative of the experiences of researchers at all levels and from all disciplines across the University's Faculties, (Medical, Science & Technology, Social Sciences & Humanities) and also produced a great many suggestions and proposals for appropriate actions.

Strong points of the HRS4R consultation are that it has (a) publicized the C&C within the University; (b) engaged key people across the academic community in the challenge of addressing the strengths and weaknesses in the University's research environment and in developing an appropriate action plan; (c) provided an opportunity to reassess particularly the situation of young researchers. The process has also been valuable in dovetailing with ongoing efforts for quality assurance and developing a quality culture.

The outcomes of the institutional analysis are presented in three parts:

1. A **summary** of the results of the baseline analysis and the consultation process;
2. The detailed **framework analysis** of the regulatory framework affecting implementation of the C&C together with the main observations and proposals for action which arose through the consultation process (pdf);
3. The University's first **Action Plan** (pdf)

The Action Plan was finalized following a review by the *ad hoc* HRS4R Committee<sup>3</sup> and was adopted unanimously by the University Senate in June 2012 (Senate Assembly 303/21.06.2012).

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<sup>3</sup> With Prof I Athanasaki, Vice Chair of the Research Committee, also participating.

## HRS4R Part 1: Summary

### The UoC Institutional Analysis in Context

The European Commission has noted several general problems in realizing the ERA objective to ensure 'an adequate supply of first-class human resources for research and an open, attractive and competitive single European labour market' for researchers<sup>4</sup>. The problems stem from:

- **poor employment conditions and careers prospects** (e.g. research profession not clearly recognized in all Member States, low wages, lack of funding, uncertain career evolution, inadequate HR policies in public research organizations, gender imbalance, especially in senior positions);
- **cross-border and inter-sectoral mobility is hampered** (e.g. insufficient social protection and uncertainty about researchers' social rights, lack of clarity, openness and transparency in recruitment procedures, insufficient grant portability, difficult immigration rules for third country researchers).

This appears to be a good description of the situation in Greek HEIs at the best of times. As it stands now, we are working in arguably the most severely strained economic and political environment in Europe wherein we are experiencing negation of efforts to reverse the brain drain and severe cuts in state educational and research budgets. Simultaneously, a new law on HEIs enacted in September 2011 (N.4009/2011) entails systemic reforms in the governance, structure and functioning of Universities. We are therefore looking at the challenges and efforts involved in developing an HR 'culture' in a highly pressurized crisis context.

Specifically, the UoC is a research active/intensive University with a good reputation and high scientific output. Even before recent cutbacks, state funding for research in Greece was low by most national standards (OECD). The result is a reliance on competitive grant contracts (won primarily from the EC and national sources) which, together with restrictive/complex legislation affecting public sector hiring, has given rise to a two-track system for researchers with significant differences in status, terms and conditions for faculty members compared with (typically young) researchers on fixed-term contracts where the norm is insecurity of employment and associated career opportunities. In parallel, scholarship and grant funding for graduate students /young researchers is inadequate. The situation has been compounded by the shrinkage of national sources and budget cutbacks, which result in *increasing insecurity of research funding*, and which means there is *severely limited scope for significant redress*. To this is added the irritant of cuts in academic salaries. This current combination of policies threatens the University's ability to keep a critical mass of research talent. In this uncertain environment, the University's commitment to the HRS4R action plan offers counterpoints to the prevailing (negative) ethos and feasible practical measures to assist researchers and the research environment at all levels in the University community.

The results of the internal (gap) analysis are presented here in summary according to the 4 main thematic groups of principles: ethical and professional; recruitment; working conditions and social security; and training.

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<sup>4</sup> EC Innovation Union: Delivering the European Research Area  
<http://i3s.ec.europa.eu/commitment/5.html>

## 1. Ethical & Professional Aspects

The framework: principles are either explicitly enshrined in legislative framework (e.g. research freedom) or not inhibited. Within the University, the newly adopted **Code of Ethics** (Senate 229/22-3-12) specifies principles of conduct and good practice with reference also to general codes and specific codes relevant to research in particular disciplines. This complements existing legal provisions and internal regulations governing academic ethics (professional behavior).

The Code of Ethics provides for the establishment of a University-wide Research Ethics Committee (s12) with responsibilities for the review/approval of research protocols.<sup>5</sup> This will incorporate &/or supersede existing bodies and ad hoc procedures for the approval of research protocols. Professional ethics - and appropriate procedures in the event of breaches – remain the province of a University Ethics Committee (convened on request).

Reality Check: The ethical and professional rights and responsibilities of researchers are considered to be well understood by Faculty (i.e. established and leading researchers), but not necessarily understood either by early/first stage researchers (up to the point of PhD) or even recognized researchers (post docs and equivalent). Observance of these principles/responsibilities is seen as the product of academic C&P and reliant on individuals' experiences and initiatives which, in the case of PhD students and post-docs, is highly specific to their respective supervisor/ Principal Investigator (PI) and associated research group. University-wide policy, procedures, guidance and information services were seen/experienced as lacking.

This lack of support /gap in provision was considered to be acute in the areas of IPR and joint data ownership, the exploitation of research results, and the adoption of safe working practices. Further, there was overwhelming support for evaluation of researchers at all levels and criticism as to the current lack of a mechanism for periodic evaluation of senior faculty (pending implementation of the provisions for this in the new law N.4009/2011).

Action Points and Priorities are based on the tenets that the University has a responsibility (a) to inform researchers about their rights and responsibilities and (b) to take all reasonably practicable measures to ensure that the mechanism and procedures exist and function so as to enable the observance of these principles

## 2. Recruitment

Recruitment and selection procedures for all public sector institutions are subject to detailed regulations. Rules and procedures differ between those governing faculty and staff positions and those governing the employment of researchers through specific research grants either on fixed-term employment contracts or as self-employed professionals. Efforts are being made (new internal regulations) to bring the latter closer to the principles of the C&C (e.g. the publication of all fixed-term positions through the EURAXESS Job Portal)

Despite all the regulations and initiatives taken to ensure open, transparent and fair recruitment and selection procedures, opaque practices are thought to persist. *This is a case of exceptions testing the rule*. Thus, transparent recruitment procedures and selection based largely on clear academic criteria were considered the norm for faculty positions, but with notable exceptions. Similarly, application and selection procedures for prospective post-

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<sup>5</sup> Note: the UoC is one of the few HEIs in Europe with a Masters in Bioethics i.e. dedicated expertise exists as resource.

graduate students were generally considered to be open and transparent, with selection criteria based on largely academic criteria, but again with some notable exceptions. Selection procedures for fixed-term contracts are still considered by many to be opaque, with efforts to eliminate discretionary hiring by PIs still seen as falling short of the C&C principles. A sense of prejudice against researchers who operate long-term at the post-doc level was also noted.

On the issue of feedback: senior researchers (in capacity as PIs advertising fixed-term positions) considered that feedback to all candidates was not reasonably practicable for some positions due to the large numbers of applications.

Action Points and Priorities are based on the tenet that the University needs to demonstrate its continuing commitment to open and transparent recruitment and selection procedures for all research positions.

### **3. Working Conditions & Social Security**

Terms and conditions of employment, including eligible social security provisions, are subject to detailed laws and regulations governing all procedures. Similarly, many research grants are subject to program-specific requirements, which mean that the Research Committee cannot make general rules. This legal formalism, coupled with cutbacks in educational and research resources, means there are limited options for reform at the institutional level.

As noted, Greek Universities have a two-track system where the employment conditions of faculty differ radically from the insecurity and limited social security provisions which characterize researchers hired on fixed-term contracts. In particular, researchers hired as 'self-employed professionals' have comparably limited health and social security coverage. Obstacles to transferring pension rights affect researchers at all levels (particularly from outside the EC). Recent cutbacks in public sector salaries have also impacted negatively on academic pay scales, and are a source of discontent. Added to current prohibitions affecting hiring, the possibilities for offering researchers serious career prospects are shrinking.

Recognition of the research profession within Greek Universities does not correspond to the EC descriptors for researchers<sup>6</sup>. In part this is due to legal descriptors (e.g. affecting post-graduate students and research support staff). Irrespective of whether a post-graduate student is treated as a young professional/researcher in training' by his/her supervisor, terms and conditions of any scholarship or grant contract are dictated by his/her formal status as a student. Funding options to attract &/or retain talented young researchers are limited and mobility services for researchers (incoming and outgoing) are under-developed. [As regards gender balance, it is worth noting that although there is an evident imbalance among senior academic staff, gender prejudice *per se* is generally not considered to be an issue. There is nonetheless scope for developing an equal opportunity policy.]

For IPR: Internal regulations cover some of the issues on academic conduct, and contract clauses cover certain issues related to Intellectual Property Rights in a general manner (IPR). Supervised and joint research within the University currently relies predominantly on good faith for IPR and joint data ownership issues, and there is no mechanism currently operating for safeguarding parties' rights or impartially resolving conflicts in the event of 'bad faith' by one party.

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<sup>6</sup> EC European Framework for Research Careers

Provision of a stimulating research environment is critically dependent on funding. Shortcomings in national R&D funding for HEIs and the associated reliance on EC and national competitive calls for grant contracts (increasingly insecure in crisis conditions) create particular problems. Lack of familiarity with funding sources/mechanisms was highlighted as an issue. However, a **recurring theme** among researchers at all levels (faculty, post-docs, post-grads) is that they feel unsupported by the University: that the University lacks the appropriate strategy, policies and services particularly in the context of research funding, intellectual property rights, safety, and long-term strategy for the establishment of a scientific environment which will foster excellence in research and education.

Action Points and Priorities are based on the tenets that

1. The University's commitment to research and the research profession needs to be brought into focus;
2. Allocation of internal resources need to be reviewed with the aim of supporting talented researchers and developing core research facilities;
3. Issues of equity in social security provisions need to be addressed
4. Current ad hoc practices concerning professional conduct, with particular reference to IPR, need to be addressed systematically.

#### 4. Training

Legal provisions and internal regulations cover some aspects of training including the entitlements of faculty members to sabbaticals and other forms of educational leave. The supervisory relationship is subject to relevant departmental codes. Custom and practice varies between supervisors/research groups in terms of young researchers' access to research training and career development opportunities (e.g. workshops, conferences). There is no mechanism for monitoring/evaluating the accessibility, take-up and effectiveness of existing training and career development opportunities, nor for reviewing progress in research training.

Action Points and Priorities are based on the tenets that research training and continuous professional development are central elements of the University's educational mission. These need to be monitored and equitable access by researchers at all levels promoted.

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### Part 3: University of Crete Action Plan

Based on the institutional (gap) analysis and the associated agreed tenets for action, together with a realistic appraisal of the types of initiatives required, the resources available and what can feasibly be achieved, the priorities for action together with the timelines for these actions are set out in summary form in Part 3: the University of Crete **Action Plan** (pdf).

**Evaluation:** Follow up-evaluation of this first Action Plan is seen as involving a number of tasks, including the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) and embedding these as far as possible within the existing QA procedures. Coordination in monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan will be undertaken by the Directorate of Planning & Development in consultation with all relevant services.

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