

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS INCORPORATING THE CHARTER AND THE CODE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(updated 10 August 2012)

1. What kind of organisations can endorse the Charter & Code?

Employers and funders of researchers from any country are invited to endorse the Charter & Code, either individually or through relevant umbrella organisations. Endorsements from organisations representing researchers (such as researcher associations and professional associations) as well as trade unions are equally welcome.

2. If an organisation wants to endorse the Charter & Code, what are the steps to follow?

To endorse the Charter & Code organisations should draw up a letter expressing their agreement with the key principles underlying the Charter & Code. This letter should be signed by the highest institutional authority (e.g. CEO, Rector, or President). A scanned version should be sent to the European Commission at rtd-charter@ec.europa.eu. The organisation will then be listed on the EURAXESS Rights website together with a copy of the letter.

Declarations of endorsements by employers and funders should ideally be followed by a concrete action plan for the implementation of the Charter & Code principles within the framework of the “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code”. However, this is not mandatory.

3. What is the benefit of sending an endorsement letter to the Commission? Is it not enough if our management decides to implement the Charter & Code within our organisation?

Endorsement letters are published on the EURAXESS Rights website, providing added visibility to the organisations that have endorsed the Charter & Code and recognition in the research community.

4. How can we find out which other organisations in our country have already endorsed the Charter & Code?

The list of organisations (by country) that have endorsed the Charter & Code, together with copies of their endorsement letters, can be found on the EURAXESS Rights website at <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/charterAndCode>.

5. In a nutshell, what is the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers?

The “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code” is a tool that helps employers and funders to put into practice the principles of the Charter & Code. It has the following features:

- It is implemented by individual research institutions and funding organisations on a voluntary basis;
- It is based on an internal self-assessment and respects the autonomy of the institutions;
- It is as simple and light as possible in terms of administrative requirements, avoiding cumbersome procedures and recognising the diversity of institutions and national research systems;
- It is not a prerequisite for participation in the EU Research Framework Programme;
- It is a transparent procedure that provides easily accessible public information on the actions of participating institutions and organisations to implement the Charter & Code principles.

6. To participate in the HR Strategy process, is it mandatory to endorse the Charter & Code first?

Organisations that want to participate in the HR Strategy process are normally expected to already have endorsed the Charter & Code. However, this is not absolutely mandatory - the endorsement letter can also be provided at a later stage.

7. How does the HR Strategy for Researchers work more concretely? What are the different steps?

The “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers” is articulated in five main steps:

1. An internal analysis by the participating organisation, involving all key institutional stakeholders, to compare policies and practices against the Charter & Code principles.
2. On the basis of the results of this analysis, the participating organisation develops its own HR strategy for researchers which should include a concrete action plan. This document is made public.
3. The analysis and action plan are then reviewed and acknowledged by the European Commission. The acknowledgement implies the right to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo.
4. Progress in the implementation of the strategy and action plan is subject to a self-assessment after at most 2 years.
5. An external evaluation is carried out at least every 4 years.

More precisely, the five steps can be summarised as follows:

Step 1 - The organisation carries out an internal analysis, for which the Commission provides a standard template grouping all the 40 Charter & Code principles in 4 areas ('Ethical and professional aspects', 'Recruitment', 'Working conditions & social security' and 'Training'). However, use of this template is not mandatory.

Step 2 - The research institution or funding organisation publishes its “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers” on its website and provides the link to the European Commission for posting on the EURAXESS Rights website. The document(s) published should summarise the main results of the internal analysis and present the actions proposed to ensure and/or improve alignment with the Charter & Code principles. The Action Plan must include clearly assigned

responsibilities for the different actions as well as a reasonably concrete timeline for their completion.

Step 3 - Provided that the above steps are formally respected, the European Commission “acknowledges” that the participating organisation has adopted a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers. This acknowledgement gives the organisation the right to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo.

Step 4 - The organisation implements its HR strategy and conducts a self-assessment within the framework of its existing internal quality assurance mechanisms. This self-assessment should be undertaken regularly, at least every second year.

Step 5 - External evaluation: at least every 4 years, the organisation drafts a short report, showing the progress made towards the objectives of its HR Strategy for Researchers and its compliance with the principles of the Charter & Code.

More details can be found in the “Information Note from the European Commission” available on the EURAXESS Rights website.

8. What kind of organisations can implement the 5 steps of the HR Strategy for Researchers?

The “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code” can be implemented by individual organisations employing or funding researchers, such as universities, research institutions, or research funding organisations. Relevant umbrella organisations cannot implement the HR Strategy for Researchers on behalf of their member organisations, but can play an important role by facilitating the coordination of institutional efforts at national or regional level (e.g. analysis of legal framework for all institutions governed by it, etc.).

9. What does the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo have to do with the HR Strategy for Researchers? What does an organisation have to do to obtain the right to use the logo?

Participating organisations are awarded with the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo once they have passed Step 3 of the HR Strategy process and have received the acknowledgement by the European Commission.

Once an organisation has been granted the right to use the 'HR Excellence in Research' logo, it can be placed on the organisation’s website, on PR and information material, job advertisements etc. With this logo, participating research institutions will benefit from increased visibility as employers committed to the principles of the Charter & Code. This will help them to attract the best researchers from around the globe. Participating research funders will be able to use the logo to promote their respective national research system and the European Research Area as a whole as an attractive place for researchers from all over the world to develop their careers.

10. What does the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo stand for, and why is it not called a label?

Research institutions can use the logo to promote themselves to prospective research talent as providers of a stimulating and favourable work environment. The logo also conveys to researchers the institution’s commitment to fair and transparent recruitment and appraisal

procedures. Funding organisations can use the logo to increase their visibility as organisations actively promoting their national research system and/or the European Research Area more generally as an attractive destination for researchers from all over the world.

The right to use the logo is awarded to organisations that have made a demonstrated effort to align their policies and practices with the principles underlying the Charter & Code, and that are thus striving to move towards HR excellence in research. It is thus not a label of excellence already achieved.

11. What is the benefit for an organisation of taking part in the HR Strategy process?

The “Human Resource Strategy for Researcher incorporating the Charter and Code” process is a tool. It should help participating organisations to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the actions that they should ideally already be undertaking to provide an attractive and supportive environment to researchers.

In addition, organisations taking part in the process will become part of a network of like-minded organisations from across Europe, providing opportunities for the exchange of experiences and the sharing of good practice with other organisations also implementing the “Human Resource Strategy for Researcher incorporating the Charter and Code”.

12. Does the participation in the HR Strategy process create a lot of extra work or extra costs for the organisation?

The “Human Resource Strategy for Researcher incorporating the Charter and Code” is an implementation process put into action on a voluntary basis, and is as simple as possible, avoiding cumbersome procedures and respecting the variety of situations across institutions. It should be integrated into already existing institutional strategies and activities, exploiting synergies and improving already existing processes. Although a certain amount of extra work will be required at the start, this should be compensated by efficiency gains once the process has been implemented.

13. What are the key success factors for the implementation of the HR Strategy by an organisation?

There are several key success factors for the implementation of the HR Strategy. The most important ones can be listed as follows:

- full support by the institutional leadership;
- allocation of dedicated resources, especially during the initial phases;
- communication with all the actors involved;
- securing the buy-in from all departments involved (e.g. by setting up an institutional cross-cutting working group);
- ensuring the integration of the views of the researchers employed, hosted or funded by the organisation (e.g. by using appropriate tools such as staff surveys, workshops, or focus groups);
- exchanges with other organisations also involved in the HR Strategy processes to learn from their experiences.

14. What is the “internal gap analysis” in the context of the HR Strategy process?

The internal analysis is an assessment of rules and practices in place vis-à-vis the Charter & Code principles. In order to be transparent, the analysis must involve all key institutional stakeholders concerned (e.g. Rector/CEO, HR managers, researchers, etc.).

Where other HR initiatives of a similar nature are already in place, the “HR Strategy for Researchers” could be easily embedded in them. Thus, tools other than the suggested standard template for the internal analysis may be used, provided that the same type of information is gathered (relevant legislation, current practices, actions required by when and by whom etc.).

The use of indicator systems and staff opinion surveys is recommended, as they are important supporting tools to implement the HR strategy according to institutional and national rules and practices.

15. There is a template for the gap analysis on the EURAXESS Rights website. Is it mandatory to use that template, and do we have to fill in everything? Do we have to provide all the details about the national legislation related to the different items of the Charter & Code?

It is not mandatory to use the template provided on the EURAXESS Rights website. Tools other than the suggested standard template for the internal analysis may be used, provided that the same type of information is gathered (relevant legislation, current practices, actions required by when and by whom etc.).

There is no need to provide all the details about the national legislation related to the different items of the Charter & Code. It is important to point out the relevant national legislation where it impacts the organisation’s ability to align its policies and practices with the Charter & Code. In particular, any limitations/barriers that it may bring to the implementation of the “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code” should be highlighted.

16. What are the most important points to keep in mind when carrying out the gap analysis?

The most important points when carrying out the gap analysis are (non-exhaustively):

- All institutional stakeholders should be involved (in particular the group of researchers employed/funded);
- The focus should be put on institutional practices and policies;
- The analysis should focus on both importance (how serious is the issue?) and groups affected (how many people are affected?), keeping in mind significant minorities). This should help to prioritise the issues at stake;
- A template is available for internal use but it is not mandatory;
- The analysis of the legal framework should focus on issues for which the national legislation could impede the implementation of the Charter & Code principles or already fully covers some aspects;
- Some principles may not apply to an organisation; sometimes it may be necessary to reinterpret some aspects in view of the specificities of the organisation concerned;

- Regrouping may be useful.

17. What are the most important points when developing the Institutional HR Strategy and Action Plan?

The Institutional HR Strategy and Action Plan should entail the following:

- A summary of the key outcomes of the gap analysis (strengths & weaknesses);
- A short explanation of the approach and methodology applied (who was involved, how have stakeholders been consulted?);
- An elaboration of the responsibilities (lead department/function) and target dates for the actions proposed (where applicable);
- Both short term items (“low hanging fruit”) and longer term strategic items (timeframe 4-5 years) should be covered;
- The approach to the monitoring should be described (setting up of a Steering Group / a Monitoring Group, internal reporting requirements, etc.);
- Specific indicators (both for implementation of the actions put forward and for achievement of desired results).

18. Does the organisation applying for the Commission “acknowledgement” and the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo have to publish the full gap analysis? Or what exactly does it have to publish?

Only the main results of the internal analysis have to be published, while internal/confidential information does obviously not have to be disclosed.

Apart from a summary of the main outcomes of the internal analysis and a description of the approach to the gap analysis taken by the organisation (methodology for the analysis, stakeholders consulted etc.) as well as the Action Plan detailing the actions proposed, the HR Strategy document(s) published should also include the clear commitment to carry out internal (within the institution/organisation) and external (at regional or national level) awareness-raising actions on the Charter & Code principles.

19. Where can we see examples of the documents produced by other organisations that have already received the Commission “acknowledgement”?

The list of institutions and organisations that have already been acknowledged can be found on <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4ResearcherOrgs>. The names of the organisations listed are linked to the section of their website where the Action Plan is published.

20. How long does it normally (on average) take before an organisation has carried out the first three steps of the HR Strategy process and can receive the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo?

It should normally not take more than one year for an organisation to carry out the first three steps of the HR Strategy process. The third step – the acknowledgement by the EC – is based on a rapid check that the key requirements of the process have been respected. This check focuses on

whether the publication of the HR Strategy is based on an internal analysis and the involvement of relevant actors, whether the Action Plan is clearly linked to the outcomes of the gap analysis, whether responsibilities for the different actions have been assigned and a reasonably concrete timeline has been provided. This step is thus carried out quickly by the EC.

21. If the application for the acknowledgement and the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo is rejected, can we resubmit our documents? Do the applicants receive any feedback on strengths and weaknesses of their submission?

Yes, organisations can resubmit their request for acknowledgement to the EC once they have improved the documents produced based on the feedback received from the EC. Requests for acknowledgement are normally considered by a panel of three assessors who provide comments to the applicant organisation. These are transmitted by the Policy Officer within DG Research and Innovation in charge of the “HR Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code”.

22. Who actually decides whether an organisation receives the Commission “acknowledgement” and the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ logo?

Once the institutional HR Strategy and Action Plan have been published and/or sent to the EC, a panel of three assessors checks the compliance of the documents provided with the requirements of the HR Strategy process. The EC awards the logo if the assessment is positive.

23. Where can we get help if we have concrete, perhaps technical, questions?

A lot of useful information can be found on the EURAXESS portal, section “Rights”, at <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/rights> as well as on many of the national EURAXESS portals. The members of the national EURAXESS network (see <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/services/networks>) should also be able to help. If this does not provide the required clarification, organisations can directly contact the European Commission at RTD-CHARTER@ec.europa.eu.

24. What are the differences in the HR Strategy process for funding organisations, as compared to universities or research organisations?

The HR Strategy process for funding bodies requires a slight reinterpretation as funders are usually not directly acting as employers. The aim is to integrate the Charter & Code principles in their own funding criteria, requiring host institutions to apply them. Funding bodies should carry out the internal analysis in this light.

Funding bodies often play an active role in national policy processes and should also consider this dimension when carrying out their gap analysis and drawing up their action plan.

25. What is the “Institutional HR Strategy group”, and what does it do? How can an organisation join the group?

The “Institutional Human Resources Strategy Group” was launched by the European Commission in 2009 with a view to supporting the take-up of the Charter & Code principles by employers and funders of researchers in Europe. The aim of the group is to provide a framework

and platform for the exchange of experiences and mutual support in the implementation of the “HR Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code”.

The group currently has about 150 organisations as members, organised in three cohorts of about 50 organisations each (the members of the first cohort started their work on the implementation of the HR Strategy process in 2009, the second cohort was launched in autumn 2010 and the third at the end of 2011). A call for expressions of interest to join the fourth (and last) cohort has been launched (deadline 28 September 2012). The call text and the form for the submission of expressions of interest can be found on the EURAXESS Rights website at <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>.