



## **Enhancing HR strategies for researchers: the European strategy**

### **Introduction**

This information note summarizes the policy background to the **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)** and introduces the action as outlined in the Commission Communication<sup>1</sup> on the ERA Framework of July 2012 setting up of a **European Accreditation Mechanism** for Charter & Code based human resources management in universities and publicly-funded research institutions. The aim is to enable key stakeholders to provide timely input to the recently launched feasibility study on an accreditation mechanism.

This study is being run on behalf of the Commission by the Technopolis Group and will report by the end of 2013. The conclusions of this study will form the basis for the establishment of an accreditation/certification mechanism with the objective of further encouraging and incentivising the take-up of the ERA principles related to HR management.

### **Background**

#### *Charter & Code*

In March 2005 the European Commission adopted its "Recommendation on the European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers"<sup>2</sup> as one of the activities announced in the "Career Communication"<sup>3</sup>, which had analysed different aspects characterising the profession of researchers and had defined the various factors conditioning such careers at European level. The Communication had identified these as being "the role and nature of research training, the differences in recruitment methods, the contractual and budgetary dimension, and, finally, the evaluation mechanisms and the progress perspectives within the career".

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 17 July 2012: A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth (COM(2012) 392 final)

<sup>2</sup> Commission Recommendation of 11 March 2005 on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (C(2005) 576 final)

<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 18 July 2003: Researchers in the European research area: one profession, multiple careers (COM(2003) 436 final)

The European Charter for Researchers addresses the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers, their employers and their funders. It aims at ensuring that the relationship between these parties contributes to successful performance in the generation, transfer and sharing of knowledge, and to the career development of researchers. The Charter stresses the fact that researchers are professionals, including those at the very early stages of their research career, such as doctoral candidates. The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers aims to improve recruitment, to make selection procedures fairer and more transparent and proposes appropriate means of judging merit, which should not be based just on traditional academic criteria, e.g. the number of publications, but on a wider range of evaluation criteria, including teaching, supervision, patents, spin-offs, other teamwork, knowledge transfer, research management and public awareness activities.

All fields of research are covered in both public and private sectors, irrespective of the nature of the appointment or employment, the legal status of the employer or the type of organisation or establishment in which the work is carried out.

The Recommendation on the Charter & Code, which was the fruit of a broad consultation process among stakeholders throughout Europe, is a key element in the EU's policy to make research an attractive career and improve employment and working conditions for researchers. As such, it is a vital feature of EU strategy to stimulate employment and economic growth. The adoption of the Recommendation was followed by a broad range of activities focusing on the implementation of the principles underlying the Charter & Code, including dedicated EU Presidency Conferences in London (2005) and Vienna (2006), and, in a broader context, the Presidency Conferences on Researchers and Mobility in Rennes (2008), Brussels (2010), and Budapest (2011).

### ***Endorsement by the Competitiveness Council and by stakeholders***

The Competitiveness Council in its conclusions of 18 April 2005<sup>4</sup> welcomed the Recommendation, stressing that it provides Member States "with an instrument to undertake, on a voluntary basis, further initiatives for the improvement and consolidation of researchers' career prospects in Europe and for the creation of an open labour market for researchers". It invited Member States to "take into account as appropriate, in accordance with their judicial system, the principles laid down in the Charter and the Code when formulating their Human Resources and Mobility strategies and funding programmes, such as institutional quality assurance mechanisms, funding criteria as well as auditing, monitoring and evaluation processes" and to "raise awareness of the Charter and the Code within their own country, on a voluntary basis, engage actively with employers, funding organisations and researchers and other relevant parties on their application and where appropriate put in place monitoring mechanisms to accompany the different measures".

A large number of research institutions, research funders, researcher associations and other multipliers have expressed their explicit support to the Charter & Code principles by sending endorsement letters to the European Commission. By now the Commission has received some 475 individual endorsements. Taking into account the fact that many of these came from umbrella organisations such as national Rectors' Conferences, they represent the support by some 1200 organisations from 37 Member States and countries associated to the Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/05/st08/st08194.en05.pdf>

### ***Expert group recommendations***

The European Commission's Green Paper on "The European Research Area: New Perspectives" published in April 2007 launched a broad debate. One of the questions raised in this document was that of realising a single labour market for researchers, followed in March 2008 with recommendations<sup>5</sup> by the Expert group that had been set up for this purpose. Amongst others, the Expert group recommended that "any organisation in receipt of public funds for research which signed the Charter & Code" should be required "to promote knowledge and awareness of C&C" and "to define and advertise a Human Resources Mission Statement, in line with the C&C spirit, focusing on the recruitment, career development and retirement procedures of their respective researchers". In particular, the Expert group also recommended the design and promotion of an "ERA – Researchers' Human Resources Label".

### ***European Partnership for Researchers (EPR)***

Taking into account many of the recommendations of the Expert group, the Commission communication on a "European partnership for researchers"<sup>6</sup> put forward a partnership between the stakeholders of the labour market of researchers in four key areas of action, and proposed to:

- systematically publish vacant research positions, ensure open, transparent, competition-based recruitment of researchers and facilitate the portability of individual grants;
- improve work and employment conditions (for instance, by improving contractual terms and conditions, compensation and career opportunities) to make scientific careers more attractive;
- meet the needs of mobile researchers with regard to social security and supplementary pension schemes;
- make it possible for researchers to acquire the skills needed to transform knowledge into concrete results, especially by strengthening the links between the university and the corporate world.

The Communication also stressed that "coordinated action in these areas, alongside renewed efforts on existing initiatives such as increasing the take-up of the principles of the Charter and Code, would provide better job opportunities and more rewarding careers for researchers and allow greater movement between institutions, between the public and private sectors and across borders".

### ***Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code***

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2008) - Realising a Single Labour Market for Researchers: Report of the ERA Expert Group. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, EUR 23321. Available at

[http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/era\\_green\\_paper\\_eg1\\_lowres.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/era_green_paper_eg1_lowres.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 23 May 2008: Better careers and more mobility: a European partnership for researchers (COM(2008) 317 final)

The Council Conclusions on the European Partnership for Researchers of 26 September 2008<sup>7</sup> invited Member States "to continue and step up efforts to encourage the effective implementation, on a voluntary basis, of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers". In order to support Member States' actions in this field, the Commission in 2008 launched the initiative "Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code"<sup>8</sup>. It provides support to employers and funders of researchers in the practical implementation of the Charter & Code principles, providing guidance in the effective integration of these principles in their HR policies and practices, and more generally in their institutional strategies.

The HR Strategy for Researchers is implemented through the following five-step approach:

- 1) an internal analysis in order to assess in how far the organisation already operates in alignment with the Charter & Code principles;
- 2) the publication of an institutional HR Strategy and Action Plan addressing the most important gaps identified, through concrete actions;
- 3) the award of the "HR Excellence in Research" logo by the European Commission, provided that certain requirements are fulfilled;
- 4) a self-assessment of the implementation of the Action Plan after two years;
- 5) an external evaluation after four years which could lead either to the renewal or the withdrawal of the right to use the logo.

So far (May 2013) 135 organisations have received the "**HR Excellence in Research**" logo<sup>9</sup>.

Through the "Institutional HR Strategy Group" (bringing together more than 230 research employers and funders from all over Europe) the Commission supports mutual learning and the exchange of experiences between institutions engaged in the HR Strategy process.

The HR Strategy for Researchers is based on institutional self-assessment and commitment to continuous improvement. Participating institutions earn the right to use the "HR Excellence in Research" logo by carrying out an internal analysis and then drawing up an action plan in response to the result of that analysis. The logo thus provides recognition of the organisation's commitment to HR excellence, but it is not a (quality) label as such.

### ***Innovation Union***

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<sup>7</sup> <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st13/st13671.en08.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/hrs4r/Paper\\_on\\_the\\_HR\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Researchers.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/hrs4r/Paper_on_the_HR_Strategy_for_Researchers.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See the EURAXESS Rights website (<http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/rights>) for further details on the "HR Strategy for Researchers" initiative and the full list of organisations that have been awarded the right to use the logo.

Following the adoption of the Commission's "Europe 2020 Strategy"<sup>10</sup> with its seven flagship initiatives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the Innovation Union Communication<sup>11</sup> put forward more than 30 action points to improve framework conditions and access to finance for research and innovation so as to ensure that innovative ideas can be turned into products and services that create growth and jobs. A number of these so-called commitments addressed topics related to researchers, the conditions under which they perform their research and the attractiveness of Europe for researchers to develop their careers. In particular, Innovation Union Commitment #4 announced that in 2012 the Commission would "propose a European Research Area framework and supporting measures to remove obstacles to mobility and cross-border co-operation, aiming for them to be in force by end 2014", addressing in particular the areas of

- quality of doctoral training, attractive employment conditions and gender balance in research careers;
- mobility of researchers across countries and sectors, including through open recruitment in public research institutions and comparable research career structures and by facilitating the creation of European supplementary pension funds;
- cross-border operation of research performing organisations, funding agencies and foundations, including by ensuring simplicity and mutual coherence of funding rules and procedures, building on the work of stakeholders, funding agencies and their representative organisations;
- dissemination, transfer and use of research results, including through open access to publications and data from publicly funded research.

### ***European Research Area Framework***

Following European Council Conclusions<sup>12</sup> of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2011, the Commission Communication<sup>13</sup> on the ERA Framework of July 2012 makes concrete proposals on these topics and is accompanied by Memoranda of Understanding with major stakeholder organisations representing universities, research organisations and research funders. The Communication provides strong support to the Charter & Code and the HR Strategy for Researchers. Among others, research stakeholder organisations are invited to advertise all vacancies on the EURAXESS Jobs portal using the common profiles established in the European Framework for Research Careers and to fill research positions according to open, transparent and merit based recruitment procedures proportionate to the level of the

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<sup>10</sup> Communication from the Commission of 3 March 2010: Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (COM(2010) 2020)

<sup>11</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 6 October 2010: Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative – European Union (COM(2010) 546 final)

<sup>12</sup> Conclusions of the European Council (4 February 2011) – (EUCO 2/1/11)

<sup>13</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 17 July 2012: A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth (COM(2012) 392 final)

position in line with the basic principles of the Charter & Code, including for non-EU nationals. They are further invited to develop strategies to support the career development of researchers in line with the HR Strategy for Researchers, provide structured doctoral training based on the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training<sup>14</sup>, and to define and implement principles for accessibility to and portability of national grants.

Member States are invited to support the setting up and running of structured innovative doctoral training programmes applying the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training and to create an enabling framework<sup>15</sup> for the implementation of the HR Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code.

The ERA Communication also states that the Commission will "support the setting up of a European Accreditation Mechanism for Charter & Code-based human resources management in universities and publicly-funded research institutions". In the Memoranda of Understanding, stakeholder organisations commit to encouraging their member organisations to promote the "HR Excellence in Research" logo and engage in the development of HR Strategies for Researchers at institutional level.

## **Feasibility Study**

### ***Development of a certification mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe***

The Commission considers it important to complement the existing Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, which focuses on the improvement process within participating organisations rather than the objective measurement of the outcome of the institutional efforts, by a mechanism that allows the assessment of the actual quality of the Human Resources management structures in place. Institutions that have successfully participated in the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers initiative should be well placed to obtain the quality label that will be awarded through the new certification mechanism.

The Commission is therefore investigating different options for setting up a transparent, internationally recognised certification mechanism for good human resources management, based on a set of clearly defined and broadly applicable assessment criteria linked to the key principles of the Charter & Code. It has therefore launched a feasibility study. Annex 1 contains more detail for the timing of this study.

## **Objectives of the study**

The specific objectives of this study are the following:

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<sup>14</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/Principles\\_for\\_Innovative\\_Doctoral\\_Training.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Principles_for_Innovative_Doctoral_Training.pdf)  
- These have been endorsed by the Council conclusions on the modernisation of higher education of 29 November 2011  
([http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126375.pdf))

<sup>15</sup> Following the recommendation by the ERA Steering group on Human Resources and Mobility in the report by its Working group on Human Resources issues of May 2012 ([http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/SGHRM-WG1-on-HR-Issues-Final-report-May-2012.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/SGHRM-WG1-on-HR-Issues-Final-report-May-2012.pdf))

- 1) To develop a certification process for good human resources management in the public research sector, including the clarification of the concept of "good human resources management", the identification of suitable assessment criteria and data to be used, a methodology for the necessary data collection and analysis and the identification of possible synergies with other relevant certification processes.
- 2) To design architecture for the body/group of bodies that will carry out the certification, including questions related to the accreditation of the certification body/bodies, and to carry out a cost-benefit analysis.
- 3) To develop scenarios for the practical setting up of the certification structure and the associated accreditation mechanism.
- 4) To assess the feasibility of the initiative taking into account the existing national legislative frameworks and to point out (potential) synergies with on-going EU and national policy initiatives.

### **Next Steps**

#### ***Genuinely 'Good HR Management'***

The first task for the study will be to fully define the concept of good human resources management, taking into account the four dimensions of the Charter and Code (ethical and professional aspects, recruitment, working conditions and social security, training). Good HR management must be defined not only for public researcher performers (HEIs and RIs) but also for research funding organisations (RFOs) whose rules and activities impact or influence HR practices within organisations that employ researchers.

The study will seek input from key stakeholders from across Europe in order to design an accreditation/certification mechanism which can operate under existing national legislation.

#### ***Certification Structure***

It will be necessary to identify, describe and assess different options for the architecture of the certification structure. Five possible options will be considered:

- A newly created European Certification Body operating in a centralised way (CB)
- A formal consortium of newly created CBs at national/regional level
- A formal consortium of existing CBs at national/regional level
- Existing CBs working independently, but according to common rules and guidelines
- A combination of the above approaches, or alternative approach(es)

#### ***Accreditation of the certification body / bodies***

The identification and assessment of suitable approaches (including assessment criteria) for the accreditation of certification bodies by the Commission or another supra-national body will be studied. This part of the study will be carried out with a view to ensuring

international recognition of the overall certification process. Experiences with accreditation mechanisms in other EU policy areas should be exploited, where possible.

### ***Scenarios for setting up the certification structure***

The implementation scenarios will need to be developed during the study based on identified practicable ways forward. At this stage two different types of launch strategies have been conceived:

- Single step approach. Here the certification mechanism would be launched in a single step for all three types of organisations (HEIs, RIs and RFOs) and in all countries in Europe
- Multistep approach. Here the certification mechanism would initially only be rolled-out to certain types of organisations, or in certain countries, and would then be gradually extended to other groups and/or countries

### ***Stakeholder input***

The study will draw upon the knowledge and expertise of key stakeholders in Member States and Associated Countries in order to design the most appropriate and cost-effective system.

Contact details for the Technopolis Group and the Commission can be found in Annex 2.



## **Annex 1**

### **Feasibility study for the development of an accreditation mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe**

#### **Overall Methodology**

The study objectives and tasks focus around the appraisal of different options concerning the future development of an accreditation mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe. Wide consultation among the various groups of stakeholders that would be involved in the design and implementation of the mechanism, and the identification and assessment of prior experiences in setting up similar mechanisms elsewhere, are important in ensuring that the most feasible options are identified, described and assessed.

The study will proceed in the following seven main phases, with each phase addressing, in whole or in part, various tasks and sub tasks:

**Phase 1** – Inception planning – encompasses the kick-off meeting held in March 2013, the preparation and delivery of this inception report, and the organisation and attendance at an inception meeting in Brussels

**Phase 2** - Identification - will involve the identification of relevant actors expected to be involved in the new mechanism. There are seven key groups that we expect to consult with during the course of the study, as follows:

1. Researchers as a specific group. We might best address this very large group of individuals by targeting their representative bodies, for example, European-level researcher associations, such as EURODOC or the European Young Academy, and trades unions, such as EUROCADRES.
2. Research performing bodies and their representatives – This group comprises all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), public research institutes (RIs) and their representative bodies in each of the 41 countries in scope for the study. Key targets within this very large group will include representative bodies such as the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the League of European research Universities (LERU), Science Europe (Association of RPOs function) and the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (EARTO).
3. Research Funding Organisations and their representatives – This group comprises all Research Funding organisations at national and EU level, including the

European Commission, Science Europe (Association of RFOs function), Nordforsk and other regional funding bodies. At national level, all public RFOs within the 41 countries in scope will be included in this group, along with their representative bodies (such as Research Councils UK) where they exist.

4. European Commission officials (RTD and EAC) – This group comprises relevant units and officials from DG RTD and DG EAC connected to the planned HR certification mechanism and to the communities that will be most closely involved in the initiative.
5. Member State / Associated Country Officials – This group comprise representatives of the Member States (MSs) and Associated Countries (ACs) in scope for the study. It is expected that one or other or both of two key bodies will be the principal point of contact with Member MS/AC officials, namely the European Research Area Committee (ERAC) which has representatives from 27 Member States and 12 observer countries, and the ERA Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility (SGHRM), which includes national representatives as well as members of the Commission
6. Certification / QA bodies and their representatives – This group comprises all of the major certification bodies and quality assurance bodies active in the field of human resources / personnel quality assurance and certification, particularly those operating at international level, those who have a dominant role at national level, and those with experience of related HR certification mechanisms. Key representative bodies are the European Federation of Associations of Certification Bodies (EFAC), the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD Europe), the European Organisation for Quality (EOQ), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
7. Accreditation bodies and their representatives – This group comprises existing accreditation bodies and their representatives, including the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), the European Cooperation for Accreditation (EA), the national Accreditation Bodies (NABs) in the Member states and Associated Countries, and the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD)
8. Other – A final group of organisations that do not readily fit within the above categories but which can provide valuable input and insight to the study. These include, for example, Vitae (a UK organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes), and may also include standardisation bodies such as CEN – the European Committee for Standardisation, which has considerable experience in developing quality standards that form the basis for related certification schemes

**Phase 3** – Initial consultation - will involve multiple parallel consultations targeted and tailored to the identified actors within each of the groups listed above, and which will be aimed at fulfilling a number of purposes. It will alert relevant actors to the study, collect an initial body of factual information and opinion relevant to several of the tasks, and enable us to identify the most knowledgeable (and willing) actors to be targeted for further inputs at subsequent points in the study. The initial consultation will also seek to identify relevant similar initiatives of various types (similar certification / quality schemes, similar accreditation architectures and accreditation processes, etc.) that can

provide potential models for the new mechanism or which may provide key lessons as to the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches and options.

**Phase 4** – Preliminary analysis and interim reporting (August 2013) - will involve a full but necessarily preliminary analysis of the data, information and opinion collected through the initial round of consultations. This phase will culminate in the preparation and delivery of the Interim Report, which will provide an initial set of perspectives on most of the main tasks and sub-tasks, and the organisation of the second progress meeting with the IAG

**Phase 5** – Follow-up interviews and desk research - is a further round of more detailed and targeted consultations and interviews, based on and building on the findings from the preliminary analysis conducted in Phase 3. It will be targeted on those actors with the most relevant experiences and who have indicated their willingness to be consulted further and provide additional inputs. Extensive use will be made of those with prior experience of the design and implementation of similar initiatives and who can attest to the practical issues and options for overcoming them in order to ensure the most suitable design and implementation of the new HR mechanism. Also in this phase we will review related initiatives and ‘prior examples’ of new accreditation and certification mechanisms introduced at EU-level and will carry out further research into relevant legislation and initiatives at Member State level

**Phase 6** – Detailed design - is a further phase of desk research involving the detailed design and description of all of the elements required in the terms of reference, including (i) a definition of the concept of ‘good HR management’ with associated assessment criteria and methodologies for data collection and assessment; (ii) ‘preferred’ options for the certification structure and accreditation architecture, along with an assessment of their advantages and disadvantages; (iii) scenarios for the practical implementation of the certification and accreditation systems; (iv) strategies for the successful promotion of the new mechanism, and so on. In these phase we will prepare our full findings, conclusions and recommendations in relation to each task and sub-task, and will seek to address as fully as possible all of the study requirements as set out in the technical specification

**Phase 7** – Deliberative workshop (optional) – is an optional element where we would bring representatives of each key stakeholder group to a workshop in Brussels where the study findings and conclusions will be presented and discussed, with a view to debating the proposals and implementation strategies.

**Phase 8** – Final reporting and presentation of results – preparation and submission of the draft final and final reports and the associated meetings and presentation of results in November 2013.

## **Annex 2**

Contact details for the feasibility study:

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