

March 2016

HR Excellence in Research Award Call for expressions of interest for peer reviewers

Vitae are opening a call for expressions of interest for additional peer reviewers to undertake the external reviews associated with the HR Excellence in Research Award, UK process.

This paper sets out an introduction, background to the UK external review process and detail about the peer reviewer role and call.

If you would like to submit an expression of interest to be a peer reviewer please do so via email to jen.reynolds@vitae.ac.uk, using the form provided, by 31 March.

Please note: Vitae is happy to receive new submissions from previous applicants.

1. Introduction

The European Commission launched the European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in 2005¹. Together, the Charter and Code set out the roles, responsibilities, and entitlements of researchers and their employers or funding organisations.

In order to incentivise organisations employing or funding researchers to align with the principles of the European Charter and Code, the European Commission developed the HR Excellence in Research Award (HRS4R). This is given to organisations that follow the five step process below and set out robust plans for improving working conditions and career development opportunities for researchers.

The HRS4R five steps in more detail²:

‘Step 1 - The research institution or funding organisation carries out an internal analysis (i.e. Gap Analysis) according to a standard template grouping all the 40 Charter & Code principles in 4 areas ('Ethical and professional aspects', 'Recruitment', 'Working conditions & social security' and 'Training').

Step 2 - The research institution or funding organisation publishes its "Human Resources Strategy for Researchers" on its website in an easily-accessible place and in English also. It 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.

Step 3 - Provided that the above steps are formally respected and both Gap Analysis and Action Plan sent within set cut-off dates¹ (see Vitae website for UK dates)³, the European Commission "acknowledges" that the participating research institution or funding organisation has adopted a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/brochure_rights/am509774CEE_EN_E4.pdf

² <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

³ <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/hr-excellence-in-research>



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



March 2016

Step 4 - The research institution or funding 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 a minimum every second year after the HR award.

Step 5 - External evaluation: at least every four years after the HR award, the research institution or funding 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.’

<http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

In 2010, Vitae agreed with the European Commission a **UK-wide process** which enables UK higher education institutions (HEIs) to gain the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award. This acknowledges institutions' alignment with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment (C&C). The UK process incorporates both the QAA Quality Code – Chapter B11: Research Degrees and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers to enable institutions that have published Concordat implementation plans to gain the HR Excellence in Research Award. The UK approach includes on-going national evaluation and benchmarking.

More information about the UK process can be found on the Vitae [website](#).

2. Background to the UK external review process

2.1 The fifth step of the five step process set out for institutions with the Award is an external review process to be undertaken four years after receiving the Award. Four cohorts of UK institutions have now undergone external review. A further five cohorts are due in 2016 and 2017.

2.2 The Information Note from the Commission on the Institutional Human Resources Strategy⁴ specifies that “*at least every four years, the institution prepares a short (e.g. four pages) report, showing the progress made towards the objectives of its HR Strategy for Researchers and its compliance with the C&C principles. The report is evaluated either by a panel of external reviewers or through national Quality Assessment (QA) mechanisms, such as National Evaluation Agencies or peer reviews*”. The external review confirms whether the institution should retain the Award. It considers whether actions have been taken by institutions consistent with their stated plans. The level to which the principles of the C&C are embedded within institutional practice is not the main criteria for retaining the Award although it is explored as part of the peer review process.

2.3 In 2013, after wide consultation, the Concordat Strategy Group confirmed that there was an opportunity to leverage the external review process for the benefit of the UK, particularly in the context of reviewing progress in implementing the Concordat. The Concordat Strategy Group felt that an emphasis on enhancement, measuring implementation and benchmarking at UK level was important, as well as retaining the international comparability of the Award.

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



March 2016

3. UK process for the HR Excellence in Research Award external review

There is continued strong support for the HR Excellence in Research Award to continue to be managed at a UK level and linked to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers to ensure that:

- the unique context of the UK researcher development environment is taken into account whilst ensuring comparability with the European process
- there are efficiencies for individual institutions through having national level coordination
- the process is light touch but robust, in order not to make it administratively burdensome
- institutions are incentivised to strive for continuous development and measure progress
- there are ways of recognising good or excellent practice.

For UK institutions, the external review process is as follows:

- institutions publish a short, four page report against an outline template, to summarise progress against their published Concordat action/implementation plans
- institutions publish an updated action plan, with actions for at least a further two years, aligned to the four year strategy set out in the four year report
- in exceptional circumstances institutions may provide additional information, where a confidential briefing to the panel is appropriate to understand the context of their progress or review
- institutions may provide optional short case studies in any media to showcase particular examples of effective practice
- institutions can provide draft submissions to Vitae for comment and feedback in advance of final submission to the reviewers, preferably at least one month before the submission date
- Vitae allocates each institution to a peer reviewer team (comprising two UK and one non UK reviewers) and elects a Lead reviewer for the team
- each institution's report and progress is reviewed by the peer reviewer team
- peer reviewer teams undertake telephone interviews with the institution to clarify aspects of the submission and to provide expertise and input
- peer reviewers do not undertake site visits, but reserve the right to do so if major concerns arise
- final submissions along with any confidential documentation is sent by Vitae to the peer review team who review the documentation
- reviewers will expect to have access to:
 - the original action plan
 - the two-year review report and updated action plan
 - the four-year review report and updated action plan
- the peer reviewer team meet after the institutional calls to discuss and moderate the reviews
- the Lead reviewer in the peer review team provides recommendations to the UK panel, via a report to Vitae.

The UK panel will continue to oversee the whole HR Excellence in Research Award process through its mandate from the Concordat Strategy Group and is responsible for:



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



March 2016

- ensuring the peer reviewer teams have effectively followed the correct process for evaluating institutional four year reviews
- reviewing the reports and recommendations made by the peer reviewer teams
- deciding whether an institution should retain the Award or whether the Award should be suspended subject to conditions being achieved, or removed, based on the report and recommendations of the peer reviewer teams.

Vitae will shortly be expanding the membership of the UK panel.

The HR Excellence in Research Award process will continue to be managed by Vitae and is included as part of Vitae institutional membership.

In response to requests we will seek to identify and publish examples of excellent practice, with appropriate institutional permissions, through the external review process.

4. Peer reviewers

For the UK external review process, we have appointed a pool of peer reviewers. Each review is undertaken by a peer reviewer team of three, comprising two UK and one non UK peer reviewers. The pool of UK external reviewers:

- are comprised of those who have taken a leading role in getting the HR Excellence in Research Award in their own institution, or have equivalent experience
- are from a range of roles within the institutions
- include non-UK European reviewers to ensure comparability with the European process
- have the backing of their institution/organisation and thus will not be paid to undertake this work.

Clear criteria for appointing peer reviewers are set out below, and applications will be reviewed by the existing UK HR Excellence in Research Award panel.

On appointment, training and guidance will be available for new peer reviewers before they begin to undertake reviews. The training is expected to take place in April/May via Webinar (dates to be agreed). Current peer reviewers will be available on the Webinar to share their experiences and practice. The purpose is to ensure that all new reviewers understand the aims and objectives of the external review process, understand their own role and tasks, and support provided.

5. Call for peer reviewers

We are now inviting applications for additional peer reviewers for the UK process. We are seeking to appoint a larger pool of peer reviewers (of which two-thirds will be from the UK and one-third from outside the UK).

Peer reviewers will gain:

- an exceptional opportunity to participate in a key European and UK policy initiative
- the chance to review the HR strategies for researchers in universities and other research performing institutions in the UK
- a chance to share expertise and experience.



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



March 2016

In selecting the peer reviewers will, we will seek those with demonstrable experience and expertise in the following areas:

- good knowledge of the European Charter and Code, HR strategies for researchers, the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and researcher development within the UK context
- experience in designing, managing and/or implementing HR strategies for researchers including career development and leadership programmes for researchers
- willingness to share their own expertise of HR strategies for researchers as part of an enhancement-led peer review process
- experience of participating as a peer reviewer, panel member or equivalent in similar review processes
- able to work effectively with the other members of the review team and with Vitae, at a distance
- able work to agreed procedures, deadlines and protocols, particularly with reference to confidentiality
- able to write succinctly and coherently, and to summarise findings.

The role of peer reviewer will be supported by your institution. Institutional support will need to be confirmed on application, using the below form.

The peer reviewers are expected to:

- attend an online peer reviewer training Webinar in April 2016
- act as external reviewer for approximately three institutions per year
- review paperwork provided by the institution undergoing their external review. This will include the initial action plan, the two year review documentation (three page report and updated action plan) and the four year review documentation (four page report and updated action plan, and optional case studies)
- make judgements as to the extent to which the institution meets the criteria for the four year review
- participate in up to two conference calls per institution being reviewed
- provide written feedback on each institution being reviewed and highlight interesting or exemplary practice
- act as lead reviewer, where required, collating comments from the panel and providing a short summary narrative for the participating institution (there will be three reviewers for each institution, of which one will be from outside the UK)
- undertake a site visit only in exceptional circumstances.

Reviewers will initially be appointed for two years. There are, up to three review cohorts per year, totalling a maximum of 30 reviews per year.

Review activities for 2016 will take place as follows:

Cohort	Documentation Review	Institutional calls
4	February	March/April
5	June	July/Aug
6	September	October/November



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



March 2016

Review activities for 2017 will take place as follows:

Cohort	Documentation Review	Institutional calls
7	February	March/April
8	June	July/Aug
9	December/January	February 2018

We anticipate that review takes a maximum of two days per institution as follows:

- 1 day to review documentation
- ½ day to undertake institutional call activities
- ½ day for follow up report and recommendations (for Lead reviewers)

Reviewers need to be able to undertake approximately three reviews per year (dependent on schedule).

If you would like to be considered as a peer reviewer, please complete an expression of interest form, by 31 March 2016.