



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

**EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR RESEARCHERS AND  
CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF  
RESEARCHERS**

**UPDATED HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY  
FOR RESEARCHERS  
(HRS4R)**

*Udine, February 2022*

## Introduction

Over the years the implementation process of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) of the University of Udine and its related Action Plan has been organised in different ways, probably due to the changes occurred in the University leadership.

At the beginning (i.e. immediately after the conferment of the "HR-Excellence in Research" Award), the management of the implementation of the Action Plan was entrusted to the Quality Control Panel of the University of Udine, which was also operating as Steering Committee (see the Application of the University of Udine for the "HR-Excellence in Research" Award, May 2016, p. 28).

A Working Group (improperly indicated as a 'new' working group to distinguish it from the working group involved in the application phase, which had been entrusted with the task of drafting the initial Action Plan) was then appointed by Rector's Decree at the end of 2018 and entrusted with the task of analysing the application status of the Charter & Code within the University; of defining the suitable interventions to guarantee the concrete implementation of the principles set out by the Charter & Code by improving or reviewing (where necessary) the actions indicated in the initial Action Plan; of developing the Human Resources Strategy and the Action Plan of the University and monitoring the status of progress of the actions therein indicated; of identifying the self-assessment criteria in order to implement the Action Plan.

After the Interim Assessment held at the end of 2018 (please note that the Consensus Report of the assessors is dated 14 January 2019), this Working Group, with the support of the *Human Resources and General Affairs Department* and the *Research Services Area*, has reviewed the first Action Plan in order to reflect the recommendations made by the assessors. In particular, more specific schedules (quarters) have been introduced into the timeline and new timelines have been provided for the actions not yet implemented (except for those actions described in the Internal Review submitted at the end of 2018 as already completed, as well as for the actions that need to be reassessed, both by verifying the progress of their implementation process and by dropping them if they do not seem to be feasible and/or useful). At the same time the Action Plan has been integrated with new actions (please, see the Action Plan 2019/2021).

Considering that shortly after the appointment of the Working Group at the end of 2018 the new Rector was elected, such group could only begin to become aware of some critical issues, e.g. of the lack of communication and the delay in adopting the guidelines for PhD supervisors, regarding which specific actions have been implemented at a later stage.

The monitoring and analysis of the level of implementation of the principles set out by the Charter & Code is currently carried out by a new Working Group, i.e. the *Working Group for the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* (hereinafter *Charter & Code Working Group*), chaired by the *Rector's Representative for the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*. Both the new *Charter & Code Working Group* and the *Rector's Representative* were appointed by Rector's Decree at the end of 2021.

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The analysis of the level of implementation of the principles set out by the *Charter & Code* (accomplished by the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group*) highlighted a variety of actions carried out across all sectors and areas of the University.

However, the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group*, with the support of the *Human Resources and General Affairs Department* and the *Research Services Area*, have first verified whether the University of Udine had given due consideration to all the comments and recommendations made by the assessors after the *Interim assessment* held at the end of 2018 (please note that the *Consensus Report* is dated 14 January 2019). Where necessary, some specific actions have been carried with the aim of meeting all assessment criteria: more specifically, communication has been improved, also by creating a new web page dedicated to the *Charter & Code* with more information and details; the OTM-R checklist has been filled in; the University of Udine has been prompted to adopt the "*Policy of the University of Udine for an Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers – Summary Document*"; the University of Udine has been encouraged to publish in its website all the relevant documents regarding the implementation process of the Action Plan and to make available more web pages in English, etc.

Secondly, considering the need to renew the Action Plan also by conceiving new actions, the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group* have also tried to better identify the actions that have not been so effective as expected and the issues that are top priority. To this aim, two *Focus Groups* on the *Charter & Code* were organised, the first held on 26-27 January 2022 and the second on 2-3 February 2022. The *Focus Group* meetings were voluntarily attended by 100 researchers, of which 48 males and 52 females, representative of all categories of researchers and, also, although to a very limited extent, of the administrative staff. The participants were divided into seven subgroups and at the end of the first *Focus Group* meeting they were asked to fill in an anonymous survey, which has provided extremely useful feedback to the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group*. The results of the anonymous survey were discussed both during the meeting of the *Charter & Code Working Group* on 1 February 2022 and during the second *Focus Group* meetings on 2-3 February 2022. Given the results of the *Focus Group* meetings, it seems appropriate to update the HR Strategy drafted in 2016, identifying new actions to be included in the Action Plan 2022/2024.

### **Ethical and professional aspects**

The meetings of the Focus Groups on the *Charter & Code* held on 26-27 January and 2-3 February 2022 highlighted the need to further improve the communication and dissemination of the principles of the *Charter & Code*.

Even though the researchers involved in the *Focus Groups* seem to be quite satisfied with the actions carried out by the University, only a small part of them is aware that

some actions have been carried out to implement the HR Strategy.

The dissemination of the knowledge of the principles and values of the *Charter & Code* shall be further strengthened, first of all by improving communication, that is:

- by organising a cycle of informative and training meetings/conferences aimed both at analysing in depth the contents of the *Charter & Code* and at highlighting the practical effects of their implementation (Action 12 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by continuously updating and improving the web page devoted to the Charter & Code (Action 13 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by continuously updating and distributing the handbook for PhD students (Action 15 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by continuing to submit a form to all newly hired researchers stating their commitment to the ethical principles and to insert a specific reference to the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the University of Udine in the PhD handbooks (Action 19 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by spreading the use of the "HR Award" logo (e.g. by inserting it in letterhead, posters, e-mail messages, etc.) (Action 22 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);

It might also be useful to adopt and implement a specific communication plan regarding the Charter & Code: in order to achieve a successful diffusion of the cultural change suggested by the *Charter & Code* it is essential that all researchers immediately recognize which actions and policies are the result of the choice made by the University of Udine to comply with the principles and values which inspired the European Commission in 2005 (Action 21 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

All these actions will contribute to spread the knowledge of the contents of the *Charter & Code* and also of the practical effects that the implementation of the principles set out by the Charter & Code can have in terms of improving training and development. At the same time, these actions will make possible to overcome the lack of awareness of the fact that many actions carried out by the University of Udine are related to the implementation of the principles set out by the *Charter & Code*.

It deserves to be emphasized that thanks to the extensive work done by the *Rector's Delegate for Equal Opportunities* and the *Committee for Equal Opportunities, Wellbeing at Work and against Discrimination and Mobbing*, the actions to increase equal opportunities and prevent discrimination have been expanded. The University of Udine shall continue to support them, in order to further spread the culture of inclusion and respect for human dignity and equality not only within the academic community, but also outside it.

### **Recruitment and selection (OTM-R Policy)**

On January 2022 the University of Udine has adopted the "*Policy for an Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers – Summary Document*", which formalizes the principles underlying its open, transparent and merit-based recruitment system of researchers (OTM-R System).

The *"Policy for an Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers – Summary Document"* also provides an internal guide for the possible definition of new OTM-R procedures and practices, as well as for updating and improving the existing ones.

The Summary Document has been adopted after the last *Charter & Code Working Group* pointed out the need for a specific document summarizing the principles that inspire the OTM-R System of the University of Udine, in particular by using the self-evaluation tool of the "OTM-R checklist".

Through the *"Policy for an Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers – Summary Document"*, the University of Udine has undertaken to overcome some still existing critical issues such as:

- the need to translate and publish in English all the internal regulations relating to the procedures for the recruitment and career progression of researchers (Action 1 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- the need to translate and publish all competition notices also in English in the University website (Action 9 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- to create and make available to researchers, administrative staff and potential candidates a tutorial (in Italian and in English) aimed at illustrating the most important features of the various steps in the procedures for the recruitment and career progression of researchers (Action 2 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- to issue specific Guidelines (in Italian and English) aimed at clarifying for each step of the academic career the following details: requirements to be met with in order to apply for a position; sources where competition notices are published; knowledge and skills required for a specific position; and sources providing the relevant rules on the specific selection procedure (Action 3 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

Through the *"Policy for an Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers – Summary Document"*, the University of Udine has also undertaken

- to establish a system that simplifies the submission of any complaints by devoting a special section of its website to such purpose (Action 7 of the Action Plan 2022/2024) and
- to set up a system of analysis and self-evaluation that will allow to further verify the degree of application and effectiveness of the OTM-R principles in its procedures for the recruitment and career progression of researchers (Action 8 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

For the same reasons, two new actions shall also be undertaken to improve the training of the academic staff in the area of OTM-R:

- the creation of an outline document that could be entitled "OTM-R in a nutshell", aimed at clarifying what an OTM-R System is (Action 4 of the Action Plan 2022-2024) and
- the organisation of specific information meetings aimed at clarifying how the whole academic staff can contribute to its OTM-R system (Action 5 of the Action Plan 2022-2024).

At the same time, in order to give researchers, especially the younger ones, the opportunity to learn more about potential professional development options and career

prospects, both in general and more specifically at the University of Udine, it will be useful

- to organise informative meetings/conferences aimed at describing professional development opportunities and career prospects (Action 6 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

### **Working conditions**

The sample of researchers involved in the *Focus Groups* meetings on the *Charter & Code* held on 26-27 January and 2-3 February 2022 seems to be quite satisfied with the level of research freedom and protection of intellectual property rights, personal data and safety ensured by the University of Udine, as well as with the actions carried out to improve the wellbeing of the entire academic community.

A variety of actions have also been carried out in terms of fighting discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities. In this field it must be highlighted that the University of Udine has adopted the first *Gender Balance* document and the first *Gender Equality Plan*. Various courses aimed at fostering the dissemination of a culture of equal opportunities and inclusion (e.g. the Course on Equal Opportunities and Inclusion, the Course on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion, the Course on Personalized Medicine, etc.) have also been organised.

Nevertheless, there is an evident lack of awareness of the fact that many actions carried out by the University of Udine are related to the implementation of the HR Strategy. The improvement of communication is both a necessity and a priority: e.g. it is important to spread the use of the "HR Award" logo as well as provide brief explanations to make the entire academic community aware of the link between the actions taken to improve its wellbeing and the HR Strategies adopted by the University of Udine.

Another priority is the need to periodically verify that all Departments ensure equal employment conditions and that all information is available also in English.

However, top priority is the improvement of the working conditions of young research fellows and of women with young children. The *Focus Groups* meetings on the *Charter & Code* held on 26-27 January and 2-3 February 2022 have revealed that a sample of these categories of researchers, although a minority, is facing issues due, for example, to lack of attention by supervisors, penalizing working hours, a hostile attitude by some colleagues, etc.

Some of these issues can only be solved by stimulating a cultural change, which undoubtedly takes time; others, however, can be easily addressed, for example, by preparing guidelines for supervisors of young research fellows, by entering into agreements with local kindergartens, by making changing tables available in the bathrooms, by providing indications to department directors and course coordinators so that meetings and lessons may be organised at more congenial times for researchers with small children, etc.

For this reason, in this field the University of Udine shall increase its efforts, first of all

- by adopting guidelines for mentors and supervisors of research fellows and post-docs

in accordance with the Charter & Code principles (Action 14 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);

- by organising “gathering occasions” between senior and less experienced researchers (Action 26 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by implementing the actions provided for by the Gender Equality Plan, especially of the following:
  - the setup of “Wellness Rooms”, in order to meet temporary, unforeseen health needs, and ensure the wellbeing and privacy of external staff who do not have their own office, as well as undergraduates, graduate, PhD students and research fellows;
  - the provision of a fund of at least 10,000 euros to support female research fellows during motherhood;
  - the improvement of the communication and dissemination of results achieved by female researchers in research projects, focusing on STEM areas, especially through interviews and the description of ‘top stories’ regarding the university’s female researchers as well as the organisation of at least one event on the occasion of the “International Day of Women and Girls in Science” (ONU-UNESCO).

Noteworthy is that the *Rector’s Delegate for Equal Opportunities* has recently accepted the proposal of the *Rector’s Representative for the Charter & Code* to also place changing tables in the “Wellness Room” (Action 16 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

In order to improve the research environment, the University of Udine shall also pay high attention to the working conditions of all researchers, especially

- by organising periodical Focus Groups in order to monitor the perception of wellbeing, safety and quality by the researchers and to plan the actions necessary to achieve improvement (Action 25 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by verifying that adequate spaces and equipment are made available to all researchers and that all Departments have at least a common area/coffee room (Action 27 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by updating the census of the remaining architectural barriers and implementation of a feasibility study for their elimination (Action 28 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by organising a psychological support desk for researchers (the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to pay more attention to the psychological wellbeing of the entire academic community; at the moment the University of Udine is offering this service only to students and PhD students, the latter being recognized the status of students in Italy) (Action 30 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- by improving the training activities and the dissemination of the results of the results of the research performed at the University of Udine as described below.

### **Training and development**

A variety of actions have been carried out across all sectors and areas of the University with the aim of improving training and development. In most cases, transversal courses have been organised that may be useful for all researchers, such as courses on the use of databases, public speaking, awareness of equal opportunities, sustainable development, etc. Occasionally tutorials were also used (for example, when the Covid-

19 pandemic imposed the use of multimedia platforms, the University of Udine released several tutorials to help researchers who were less familiar with such media). Training meetings related to specific scientific fields were often recorded and made available on the youtube channel of the University of Udine "PlayUniud". This channel was created both for dissemination purposes and for training researchers who, although interested, could not attend the meetings.

The University of Udine shall continue to carry out these actions.

In order to further improve training and development activities, the University of Udine must also

- organise a cycle of informative and training meetings/conferences on all the relevant topics for research (e.g. the importance of participating in the international, European and national calls related to research projects; the importance of being involved in industrial research; the importance of the policy of the University of Udine for open access; the importance of using anti-plagiarism software such as Turnitin; the importance of respecting the principles set out by the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the University of Udine; etc.) (Action 20 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- further enhance public engagement activities and any activities aimed at disseminating the results of the research performed at the University of Udine (Action 24 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

### **PhD Policy**

It is undeniable that in the first phase of the implementation of the HR Strategy the greatest results have been achieved in training PhD students. PhD students are currently asked to attend a variety of courses aimed at acquiring transversal skills (e.g. organisational, linguistic and IT skills, public speaking, etc.); they receive a *vademecum* at the beginning of their training; they can count on clear guidelines governing their relationship with supervisors; they draw up an annual register of activities and, once a year, they fill in a satisfaction questionnaire which is very useful for the constant improvement of the University's performances.

The University of Udine shall also continue to pay a very high attention to PhD students, by further improving its PhD Policy. For this purpose, the University of Udine shall also

- continue to confer a PhD Award for the best PhD theses in order to reward high-quality research and encourage new PhD students to carry out their activities according to high and innovative standards; the competition notice shall be also published in English (Action 17 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- continue to organise every year the PhD Expo, i.e. the exhibition of posters related to the doctoral theses discussed in the reference year (Action 18 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

### **Attractiveness of the University of Udine**

The University of Udine must continue to invest in its attractiveness for both Italian and foreign researchers. For this reason, the following actions must be implemented:

- the organisation of a specific reception office for foreign researchers: the action can help to overcome the critical issue of the challenges often faced by foreign researchers

in integrating into social and academic life as well as in identifying the office they may contact in case of need. As far as foreign researchers are concerned, the communication gap should obviously be overcome also by increasing the use of the English language and by organising Italian courses (Action 10 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);

- the organisation of a reception office for new researchers: the action can help to overcome the critical issue of the challenges often faced by new researchers in integrating into social and academic life as well as in identifying the office they may contact in case of need (please, note that the action is to be carried in conjunction with the organisation of a specific reception service for foreign researchers) (Action 11 of the Action Plan 2022/2024);
- the increase of the extent of the University website translated into English (Action 23 of the Action Plan 2022/2024).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The implementation process of the Action Plan 2022/2024 will be organised by the new *Charter & Code Working Group* and the *Rector's Representative* by taking into account the critical issues emerged in the past and the mistakes made during the previous experience.

In this respect, the implementation process will have to be carried out in a different way from the past with regard to the following five profiles: the timeliness of the actions, their continuity, their coordination, the involvement of the entire academic community and the self-assessment system.

As regards the timeliness of the actions, in order to avoid excessive delays in their implementation a specific timeline will be prepared for each single action. The Action Plan 2022/2024, as a rule, gives indications about the initial timeline of the action implementation or, in some cases, its deadline.

To ensure the respect of these terms, the implementation of each single action will be organised in consecutive steps, clearly indicated in the timeline.

Such approach will make it possible to immediately verify whether the implementation of an action is likely to be delayed and to intervene to speed it up by identifying and overcoming any criticalities occurred during the process.

Continuity will be ensured, on the one hand, by evaluating the effectiveness of the actions and making the most successful ones become routine and, on the other, by enhancing the role of the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group* in verifying the reoccurrence of the actions which have become routine.

Considering that a variety of actions will be carried out across all sectors and areas of the University, it is important to ensure the coordination of such actions, also in order to make the entire academic community aware of which actions are related to the HR Strategy and its related Action Plan. The coordination of the various actions will be ensured by enhancing the role of the *Rector's Representative*, making the full picture of the actions in progress available to the *Rector's Representative* and putting the persons in charge of the actions in contact with each other, in order to guarantee a more organic and coherent implementation.



Furthermore, the entire academic community will be given a more active role in the implementation process. Researchers will not only continue to be the target of the activities, especially those aimed at disseminating knowledge of the principles of the Charter & Code, but they will also be involved in a continuous exchange with the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group*. The researchers' opinions and suggestions will be systematically gathered not only through anonymous questionnaires administered to the participants after the informative or training meetings, but also by organising periodical *Focus Groups* and by ensuring a more extensive involvement of Full and Associate Professors in the implementation process.

It is extremely important to make the entire academic community aware of the fact that the successful implementation process of the HR Strategy and its related Action Plan depends also on the extent of the application of the principles of the Charter & Code by every single researcher in their academic life.

A more effective self-assessment system will also be organised: indicators-related data will be systematically collected by the administrative offices and periodically examined by the *Rector's Representative* and the *Charter & Code Working Group* in order to improve the implementation process not only in view of the external evaluation, but also during its own realization.

Every time an action is implemented, it has to be clear whether or not it was done successfully. Critical issues shall promptly be identified and solved without postponing corrective actions.

To this aim a key function can be fulfilled by the report that the *Rector's Representative* shall present to the Rector at the end of every academic year: such report shall clearly outline the work that has been performed, what critical issues have occurred and what solutions have been adopted.