



## **EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR RESEARCHERS AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCHERS INTERNAL GAP ANALYSIS *Udine, 2013***

### ***Premises***

In July 2005 the universities of our country, gathered together at the conference of Italian University Chancellors (CRUI), agreed to adopt the values and general principles recommended by the European Commission of 11 March 2005.

In a ground breaking document they established general, responsible and transparent guidelines within a European framework, for the regulation of relationships between researchers and employers.

The relevant concepts were subsequently summarised and translated into prescriptions in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Employment (C&C).

Following initial action by a number of associations, the University of Udine, together with other similar institutions (Camerino, Padua, Palermo, Foggia, Urbino, Verona and the upper school Sant'Anna of Pisa) signed, in November 2008, "*a commitment to embrace human resource management strategies based on the C&C*". They subsequently notified the European Commission of this decision in June 2009.

A few of the institutions mentioned above set up a pilot scheme to determine how this aim could be achieved, which finally organised the process into five stages:

1. Internal analysis to assess the extent to which C&C principles are applied
2. Definition of a subsequent strategy for human resource management (HRS)
3. Attainment of recognition and the title "HR excellence in Research" from the European Commission
4. Implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy every two years
5. External monitoring by international experts every four years

### ***The University of Udine Approach***

In October 2009, on the basis of the general indications provided by the pilot scheme, our University created its own work group (WG), with the specific aim of verifying the level of knowledge of C&C in the institution and of defining the measures required to guarantee the diffusion and sharing of such knowledge among the various members of the university community involved in research activity.

The analysis, which was primarily theoretical with some sample checks, looked at the compatibility between the principles contained in the C&C and national regulations, University regulations and actual practice; in addition, the recommendations for HRS, in terms of the implementation of C&C, sought to improve not only researchers' work conditions but also the organisation and procedures in current use.

The University Senate, in September 2011, approved the document entitled "Strategy for human resource management in line with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Employment of Researchers" of the University.



Subsequently, in consideration of the observations made by the European Commission evaluators concerning the strategies prepared by Udine University – primarily in their reference to the lack of involvement on the part of the main beneficiaries, that is the researchers, especially young doctorate or post doctorate researchers – it was decided to take another look at the whole process.

Given the above and in line with procedures already applied by other institutions, a specially designed questionnaire (the internal analysis) was administered to both permanent and temporary employees who conduct research for whatever reason in the University.

This was particularly necessary, not only because of the European Commission, but also to respect the directives of the MIUR (of 8/11/2011) for 2012 especially as regards the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations contained in the already mentioned documents at a national and European level.

The main objectives were to:

- Carry out the necessary modernisation of national regulations, to make our country more welcoming and stimulating for researchers of any background or nationality, thus laying the basis for a substantial reassessment of national and international research
- Apply the Charter and Code in a concrete manner to better attract highly qualified applicants
- Gain recognition so as to be able to use the title “HR excellence in Research”, which will enable individual institutions to add to their international visibility and will constitute a decisive element in any future request for funding from the European Union

### ***The study on researchers in the University of Udine***

The study was carried out in the months of March, April and May 2012.

The main aims were to build up a reliable picture of the level of awareness and individual and collective perception of the principles and general rules contained in the C&C and to upgrade HRS in such a way as to make it normal practice in the politics and processes of the University.

The questionnaire was divided into four main sections, reminiscent of the main themes in the C&C, with a final open ended consultative part: on the one hand the University asked for a response to the good practice already adopted or to be adopted in the University, while, on the other, it asked respondents for their own suggestions so as to involve those most directly interested in the choices to be implemented.

Basically the questionnaire was divided in the following way:

- SECTION 1 *Recruitment* - the procedures, transparency and methods for the selection and evaluation of candidates
- SECTION 2 *Work conditions and social security* - issues connected with the quality and conditions of the work, the suitability of the research environment and social security provision
- SECTION 3 *Professional and ethical perspectives* - safeguards in terms of researchers' professionalism, autonomy, participation and the value of their role and specific tasks in all stages of their career



SECTION 4 *Training* - activities designed to develop individuals professionally either through specific training programmes and/or incentives for mobility and mentoring and supervision activities

GOOD PRACTICE IN THE UNIVERSITY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT - action the University of Udine has undertaken or intends to take to apply C&C recommendations and respondents' comments on such action.

The analysis of the data was carried out in Autumn 2012.

1.433 questionnaires were administered, of which 838 to teachers and full time researchers and 555 to research fellows of various kinds.

There were 462 replies - 32,24% of the total.

In detail:

<b>JOB</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>%</b>
Research fellow, grant recipient, associate researcher	52	11,26
PhD student	128	27,71
University researcher	41	8,87
Tenured researcher	94	20,35
Research laboratory technician	5	1,08
Professor (full/visiting/associated)	139	30,08
Unspecified	3	0,65
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Other general information about the respondents is as follows

- Sex: male 59.96%, female 40,04%
- Age group: 47,84% from 25 to 40, 26,62% over 40, 25,54% over 50
- type: permanent 66,45%, temporary 33,55%
- family: 54,76% of respondents have children

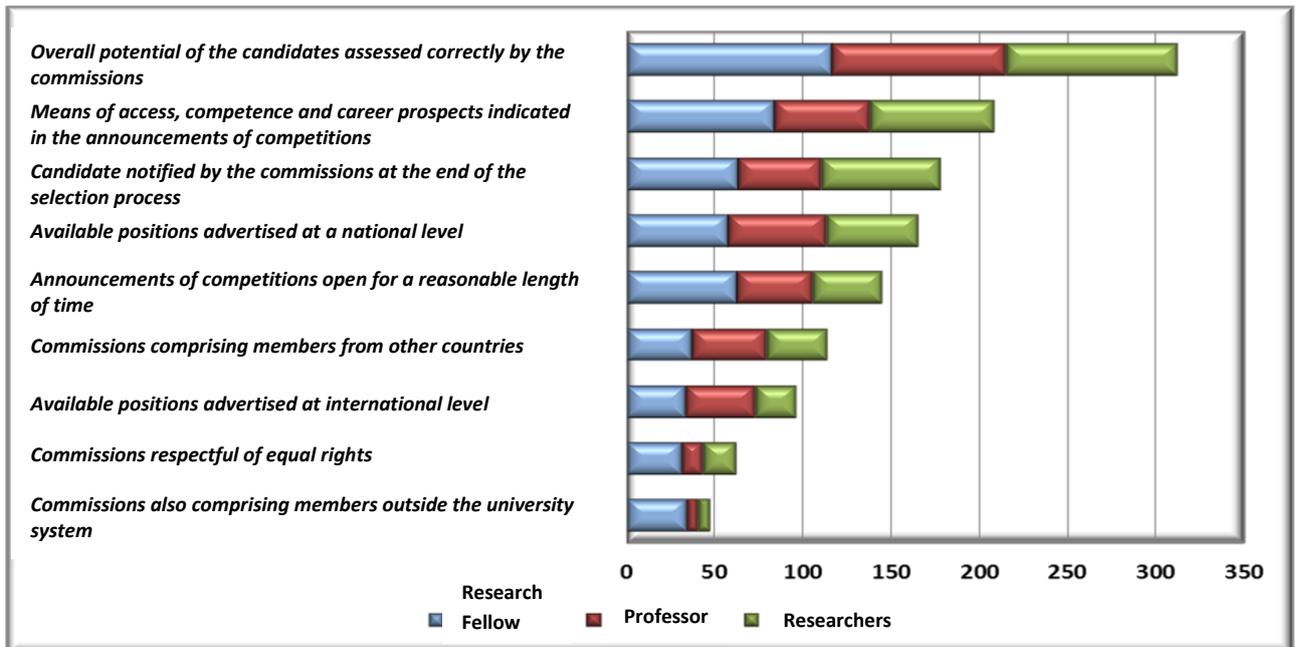
28.79 % of the permanent researchers (including teachers) have institutional roles in the university.

The points which the interviewees felt were of major significance in the areas they were asked about are listed below. It is significant that there was substantial agreement among all the categories involved (research fellows/PhD students, teachers and researchers).



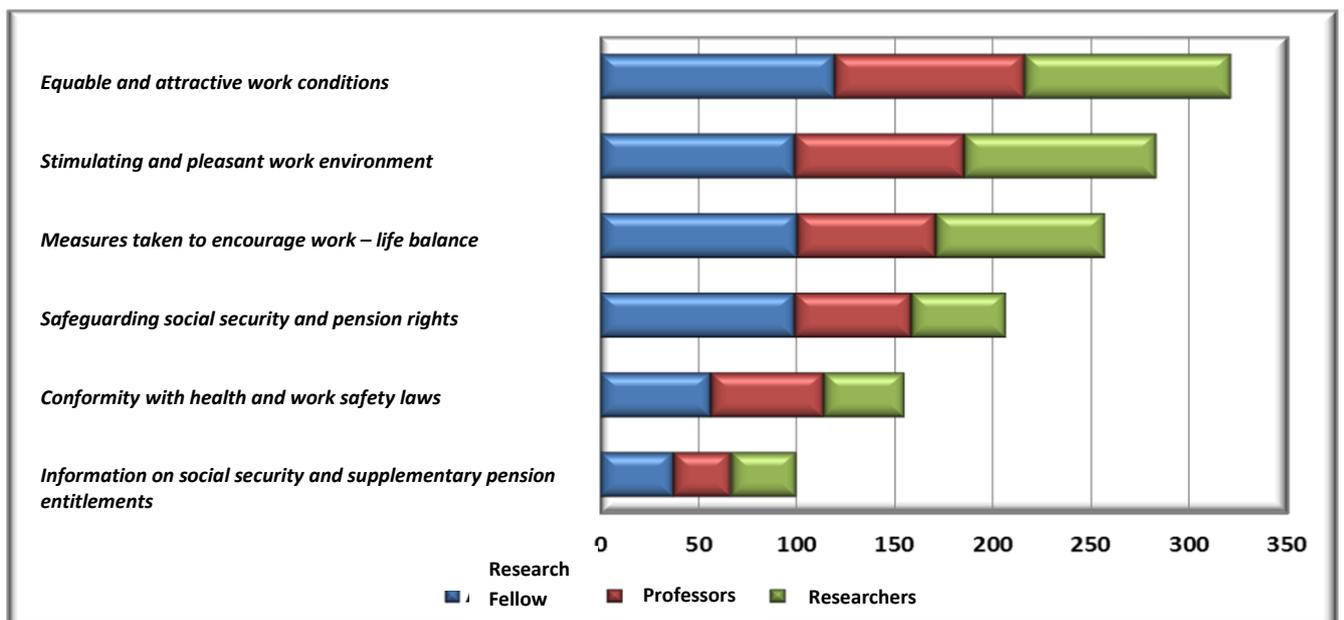
## **RECRUITMENT – PROCEDURES, TRANSPARENCY AND METHODS OF SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF CANDIDATES**

- Maximum probity on the part of the commissions in the assessment of the overall potential of the single candidates, transparency in the design of the announcements of public competitions and greater information – at the end of the selection process – about the weak and strong points of each candidate.



## **WORK CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY – QUALITY AND CONDITIONS OF WORK, DEGREE OF SUITABILITY OF THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY PROVISION**

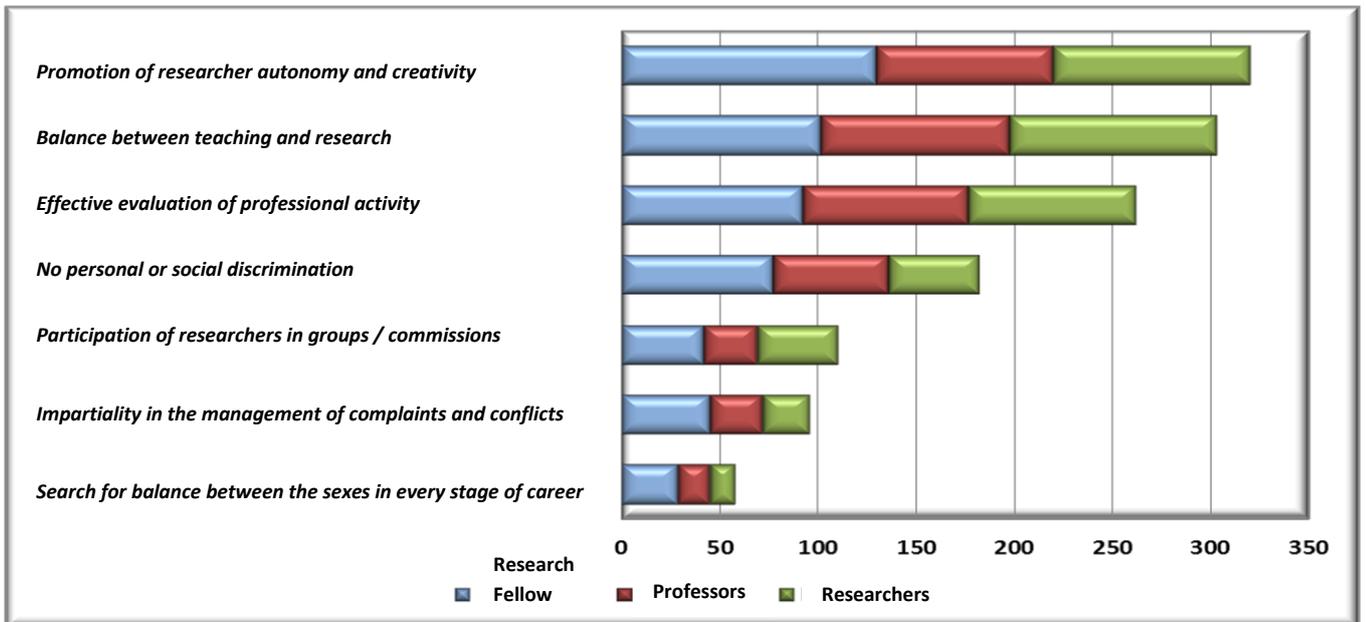
- Guarantee of equable and attractive work conditions in terms of funding and/or income in a stimulating and pleasant context in which appropriate support is given to research activities and life – work balance is taken into account.





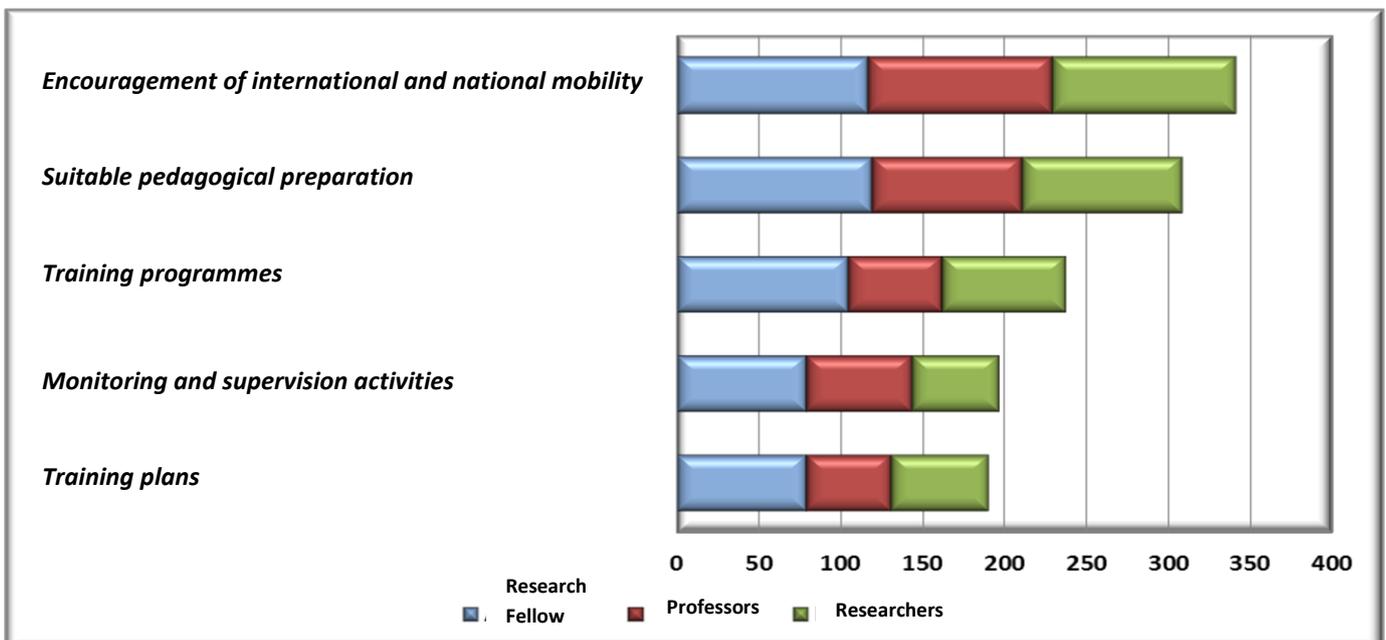
**PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES – SAFEGUARDING PROFESSIONALISM, AUTONOMY, PARTICIPATION AND VALUE OF THE ROLE AND THE SPECIFIC TASKS OR RESEARCHERS IN EVERY PHASE OF THEIR CAREER**

- Promotion of the autonomy and creativity of the researchers – including a just balance between teaching and research – and the use of suitable parameters for effectively evaluating the professional activity undertaken at any stage of their career.



**TRAINING – ACTIVITIES AIMED AT FOSTERING INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, VIA SPECIFIC TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND / OR ENCOURAGEMENT TO MOVE AROUND AND CARRY OUT MENTORING AND SUPERVISION ACTIVITIES**

- maximum encouragement of international / national, interdisciplinary and public / private interaction and mobility; targeted preparation of teaching, suitable training programmes to enhance abilities and necessary competencies, and facilitate individual career paths.





In general, no particular interest was shown in the need to respect the principle of equality in the composition of the commissions and/or the possible presence of external members; in basic and hoped for impartiality in complaint and conflict management nor in sexual equality. However, defining measures to encourage a simpler work – life time management - in line with career requirements – was felt to be very important.

As for the areas of greater professional, social and/or ethical impact there were more responses from PhD students and young researchers at the beginning of their career, undoubtedly because they feel they have fewer safeguards and are less informed about/aware of the issues involved.

The most interesting indications which provided important information on the strategies to adopt so as to apply the C&C in our university came from the last part of the questionnaire.

The proposals regarding the action and good practice that the University of Udine is implementing or intends to implement in the near future were particularly popular, as follows:

- **RECRUITMENT:** definition in the recruitment advertisements of how candidates are to present themselves on-line, adoption of a guide for the evaluating commissions on internal / external evaluative procedures, identification of comparative evaluation of candidates in line with international practice (qualifications and interview). Recognition of the experience of, especially transnational, mobility
- **WORK CONDITIONS:** definition of the award giving process for young researchers based on merit and results; clear guidelines concerning minimum requirements in terms of space and instrumental support to guarantee flexibility in time tabling and conciliating work – life balance; identification of ways to safeguard researchers' social security (basic and supplementary pension rights etc...)
- **PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES:** harmonisation of the C&C with the University's ethical code, compilation of a guide concerning researchers' rights and duties, realization of initiatives to publicize activities undertaken in any research field by the University of Udine, encouragement of young researcher participation in meetings of consultative or decisional bodies in the University
- **TRAINING:** definition of a plan for training and specific, continuous updating also of mentoring and supervision activities in every career stage; organization of training programmes on research and teaching methodology; enhancement of support services for national/ international mobility (collaborations with foreign or external institutions via study grants or exchanges to learn about other ways of doing research and teaching); encouragement of ways to prepare young researchers for the job market making use of the experience gained at University in the beginning of their careers

In summary, the suggestions/observations made by the respondents call strongly for more ethical behaviour, closer evaluation of competencies and greater respect for the professionalism of individual researchers whatever their career stage.

Specifically and with reference to the four aspects identified, the interviewees on the basis of their own experience, in an entirely subjective way and at times with conflicting opinions, report mainly as follows:

#### RECRUITMENT

- assessment must be impartial, serious and based on a clear assumption of responsibility by the evaluating commission



- a candidate's capacity must be appraised in a correct and transparent manner and on the basis of merit
- there must be verification of the suitability of the candidate's specific research competencies for the themes developed by the research group in which they are to be placed
- contrasting ideas for scientific disciplines: retain or eliminate their specialised nature?

*Some suggestions:*

- public exams open also to candidates from other countries
- commissions with only external members, and no family connection with internal personnel or with the other components of the commission
- a clearer and wider publication of the announcements of competitions
- inclusion of a teaching test (oral or written)
- transparency and verification of procedures used
- streamlining of the procedures, assessment criteria decided beforehand, introduction of assessment procedures for research in the departments
- greater importance given to interdisciplinarity/placement in research groups and publications/ international experience

#### WORK CONDITIONS

- respect for the person and their professional role is fundamental
- the sites and facilities must be suitable and easily accessible for trainee researchers as well
- there should be sufficient funding for the research and technical personnel for the laboratories

*Some suggestions:*

- centralised management with free, across the board access to research facilities and/or laboratories present in the various parts of the University
- creation of spaces for informal internal discussion (common rooms)
- compulsory courses concerning safety with an environmentally friendly emphasis in the work place
- preparation of a guide outlining the rights and duties (relevant regulations, definition of individual professional standards, teaching activities and/or research, holidays, teleworking, safeguards, social welfare and pensions etc...)
- encouragement of the formation of interdisciplinary networks and/or research groups
- the setting of a social safety net for temporary researchers

#### PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

- research activity especially by young researchers must not become secondary to teaching duties, autonomy and training must be given precedence as far as possible and suitable professional facilities assured for the research
- in clear or even not so clear cases, it is important to monitor situations of obvious discomfort (e.g. researchers who experience frustration and vexation because of the professors they collaborate with) and, if necessary, punish episodes of clear and repeated mobbing
- participation of researchers and PhD students in collegial bodies and / or groups or commissions should be assured
- merit should also be rewarded for motivational leadership of research groups involving young researchers.

*Some suggestions:*

- introduction of procedures to gauge the work of every researcher at any career stage (research and teaching activities; institutional duties; international mobility etc...)



- respect for all the prescriptions of the ethical code
- systematic evaluation of the level of student satisfaction in individual teaching situations and the online publication of their outcomes on the University website
- clear ruling on the relationship between internal employees who also work for external companies and the spin offs from the University in such external situations (conflicts of interest);
- a fair balance between external consulting and scientific work
- enhancement of facilities that support research especially the management of projects and funding
- greater involvement of deserving young researchers in the activities of the permanent teaching staff

#### TRAINING

- it is necessary to set up courses for research and teaching as well as courses to diffuse knowledge of the regulations, the ways of evaluating research projects and the manner in which the University and the relevant ministry is organised
- the training of the researcher must be continuous and in any case primarily concerned with research

#### *Some suggestions:*

- definition of a complete training programme for young researchers
- training abroad with the possibility of a mobility grant
- development of research collaborations
- acquisition of new teaching methodologies
- promotion of work experiences in public or private industries / companies
- valorization of the doctorate to teach in secondary schools
- programmes for life-long learning of an interdisciplinary nature