

Maynooth University
Research Development
Office & Human
Resources Office



HRS4R

Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Action Plan

Date: 07/07/2020

Introduction

In 2005, the European Commission adopted a European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers¹. These two documents, addressed to researchers as well as research employers and funders in both the public and private sectors, are key elements in the EU's policy to boost researchers' careers. The Charter and Code ensures researchers can enjoy the same rights and obligations in any European country.

The European Charter for Researchers is a set of general principles and requirements which specifies the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers as well as of employers and/or funders of researchers. It constitutes a framework for researchers, employers and funders which invites them to act responsibly and as professionals within their working environment, and to recognise each other as such.

The Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers consists of a set of general principles and requirements that should be followed by employers and/or funders when appointing or recruiting researchers. These principles and requirements are complementary to those outlined in the European Charter for Researchers. Institutions and employers adhering to the Code of Conduct will openly demonstrate their commitment to act in a responsible and respectable way and to provide fair framework conditions to researchers, with a clear intention to contribute to the advancement of the European Research Area.

The 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers'² assists organisations in the implementation of the Charter and Code by taking a set of steps outlining a Gap Analysis and creating an Action Plan. Following a successful review, Institutions are awarded the HR excellence logo for a period of 3 years during which the implementation plan is reviewed and assessed. Assessment continues every subsequent 3 years in order to renew the award.

Maynooth University (MU) adopted the IUA Co-operation Accord (Appendix 1), along with 7 other Irish universities, in September 2006. The universities recognised the value of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers and endorsed the principles with a view to build on them.

Maynooth University

Maynooth University is an internationally recognised institution located 25 kilometres outside of Dublin, Ireland, and is the nation's fastest growing university. On 16 June 2017, Maynooth University celebrated its 20th birthday, having been formally established as an autonomous university in 1997. Yet, it traces its origins to the foundation of the Royal College of St. Patrick in 1795, drawing inspiration from a heritage that includes over 200 years of education and scholarship. With 13,000 students from more than 90 countries, Maynooth offers a range of programmes at undergraduate, Master's and PhD level in the

¹ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter>

² <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r>

humanities, science and engineering, and social sciences, including business, law, and education. The University also offers a range of international programmes and partnerships.

The University Strategic Plan 2018-22³ sets out 13 strategic goals of which Research and Innovation is key. We aim to further strengthen MU's reputation as a research intensive university of international significance and secure the University's future standing by focused investment, through our research institutes, in a small number of niche areas to create centres of critical mass with strong international networks. This includes a commitment to both fundamental and engaged research and by empowering staff and students to bring their collective creativity to bear on major societal challenges.

We are aiming to double our numbers of postdoctoral researchers via external funding and we will enhance our career development supports and structures. We aim to establish a formal professional development programme and set clear expectations for early-career academic in building an international profile. We will also ensure strong leadership by supporting and developing on existing and emergent leaders within the Institution and by targeted external recruitment.

In addition we will significantly increase the number of doctoral students at MU and include a central activity of graduate training with elements that will broaden the skills and support the future employability of graduates. The structural doctorate will be refined ensuring the effective provision of the taught elements in developing a specific arrays of skills. We will also support an expansion of interdisciplinary, engaged, industry, practitioner and professional doctorates.

MU has also a deep commitment of equality, diversity and inclusion and has appointed a Vice-President for Equality and Diversity who will oversee the establishment of an oversight structure and cross-functional implementation team to advance equality, diversity, inclusion and interculturalism across the entire University community. We will develop comprehensive equality action plans first in the areas of gender (Athena Swan⁴), disability and ethnicity.

Definition of a Researcher

The Charter and Code outlines principles that are aimed at employers of researchers which in the Irish context would not include postgraduate researchers. Unlike Europe Irish postgraduates are not usually employees of the institution but are registered students receiving a stipend. However for the purpose of the MU HRS4R strategy postgraduate students and researchers at all levels are included as part of the gap analysis and action plan. For the purpose of the plan postdoctoral researchers are those who are employed on a specific research project under the supervision of an academic Principal Investigator. Postgraduate research students who are carrying out research to complete a doctoral degree and are registered as students at MU. MU considered researchers at all levels, including academic staff who carry out research, in the preparation of the gap analysis and action plan.

³https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Maynooth_University_Strategic_Plan_2018-22_0.pdf

⁴ <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/athena-swan>

Methodology

A HRS4R Task Force was established to lead the Maynooth University submission for a European Commission Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Award. The MU HRS4R Task Force consisted of 2 main working groups:

1. HRS4R Working Group: a subcommittee of Research Committee with additional representatives across all research levels (R1 – R4) and units.
 - Chair: Dr Carol Barrett, Director of Research Development
 - Mr Peter Miller, Senior HR Manager
 - Dr Eilish Lynch, Research Development Officer
 - Ms Frances Kiely, HR Research Officer
 - Dr Valerie Heffernan, Faculty of Arts, Celtic Studies and Philosophy
 - Dr Majella Dempsey, Faculty of Social Sciences
 - Dr Andy Hogan, Faculty of Science & Engineering
 - Dr Sarah Culhane, Postdoctoral Researcher & Research Committee
 - Mr Jamie McGowan, PhD Student
 - Ms Marie Murphy, Graduate Studies Officer
 - Dr Stephen O’Neill, Research Committee
 - Dr Patricia Kennon, Research Committee

2. HRS4R Implementation Group: (Sub group of working group) members of HR, Research Development Office
 - Chair: Dr Carol Barrett, Director of Research Development
 - Mr Peter Miller, Senior HR Manager
 - Dr Eilish Lynch, Research Development Officer
 - Ms Frances Kiely, HR Research Officer

The Terms of reference for the working group were as follows:

- Oversee the submission to the EC for Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Award
- Table full submission documents for consideration by Research Committee prior to full submission

The Terms of Reference for the Implementation Group were as follows:

- Carry-out the actions required for an Initial Phase submission to the European Commission’s HRS4R Award:
 - Complete comprehensive Gap Analysis to ascertain alignment to human resources policies to the 40 principles of the EC’s Charter & Code. This will require broad

stakeholder consultation via researcher survey and focus groups. An external expert may be engaged to facilitate focus groups and it is necessary that all levels of researchers (as defined by the EC as R1 (early-stage researcher), R2 (Recognised Researcher), R3 (Established Researchers) and R4 (Leading Researchers)) are represented.

- Complete Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) checklist (as per HRS4R guidelines)
- Compile an Action Plan for submission to EC. The action plan is a sequence of activities that must be carried out in order to help MU pass from the current state to the target state, with regard to the implementation of the 40 principles of the C&C. They will address the improvement needs identified in the Gap Analysis and the OTM-R checklist.
- Report to HRS4R WG

The stakeholder engagement phase is an integral step in informing the Action Plan required for the initial submission to the HR Excellence in Research award. The stakeholder engagement phase consisted of a survey and focus groups and took place from June to October 2019, which fed in to the development of the Gap Analysis and Action Plan. The Focus Groups were structured according to career stage and in line with the required [EC categorisation](#); PhD students; Postdoctoral Researchers; researchers on temporary contracts (including temporary academic staff); researchers on permanent contracts (including academic staff) and were facilitated by an independent expert. Members of the working group acted as rapporteurs for individual focus groups. The aim of the focus groups were to provide an in-depth examination of the topics highlighted in the survey. In addition to the stakeholder engagement phase input was also given from the MU Human Resources recent Quality review and [MU Gender Equality Action Plan](#).

Summary of Findings

MU is committed to the implementation of the Charter and Code and adopted the [Charter on Postdoctoral Research](#) in 2011. The Charter recognised the profession and outlined the various levels for research, recognised the value of mobility, training and mentorship. Standard recruitment processes and guidelines are designed to support objective, transparent and merit based recruitment and selection processes. The emphasis is on implementing good practice to ensure that the most suitable staff are recruited and selected on the basis of their demonstrable competencies, and, that selection decisions are made following fair, consistent and equitable processes which reflect the University's values and satisfy all applicable legislative requirements. The University holds the Athena SWAN Bronze Institution award and recently appointed the Vice-President for Equality and Diversity to implement the MU Gender Equality Action Plan. A Research Skills Development Programme is also in operation aimed at postgraduate students, post-doctoral and senior post-doctoral researchers. In addition, the HR Learning and Development Programme supports more senior research leaders and academic staff.

The stakeholder engagement process and the preparation of Gap Analysis and Action Plan highlighted key areas for further development.

- Research Ethics and Professional Aspect: The University operates all the necessary policies although greater awareness of them among the research community needs to be developed.

Research integrity and ethical training is available for all researchers we concluded that further oversight is necessary to ensure awareness of training opportunities, the importance of them and ensuring completion by researchers. This was also the case for many of the training opportunities in the Research Skills Development Programme. Although MU operates the Charter for Postdoctoral Research it was recognised that this should now be further developed to align with the new National Career Framework that is due to be implemented in Ireland.

- **Recruitment and Selection:** MU operates standard recruitment and selection procedures it was recognised that a review should be carried out to ensure guidelines will align with the National Career Framework. In addition it was agreed that the HR website would be further enhanced in the areas for new employees and Learning and Development.
- **Working Conditions and Social Security:** It was evident from the stakeholder engagement process that researchers were aware of many of the working condition policies related to promotions, pensions, recognition awards, wellbeing and equality. However there was lack of awareness in many cases for policies related to Maternity, Parental, Sick, Carers and Compassionate leave, therefore one of the recommendations was to develop enhanced awareness of the various working condition policies in operation at MU through development of the HR website.
- **Training and Development:** Although the Research Skills Development Programme has been in operation at MU and the postgraduate community were fully engaged with the transferable skills credited modules, there was evidence from the stakeholder engagement that there is a lack of awareness among postdoctoral researchers of the opportunities for training in addition to training gaps for senior researchers. Recommendations included development of leadership and mentorship programmes as well as increased awareness of the existing training opportunities.

Action Plan Timelines

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