



**Body:** The University  
Board  
**Matter for  
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## HR in Research (HREiR) – Interim Assessment/Revised Action Plan

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### Reference to background documents

- The European Charter on Researchers and the Rules of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers
- Matter for the Board 46/19, [HR in Research – Endorsement of the EU principles in Charter & Code](#)
- Matter for the Board 39/17 [HR in Research - Endorsement of the EU principles in Charter & Code](#)
- [“HR in Research” – Report](#)
- [UiB’s information page on HR in Research](#)
- Review of the status of the priority areas

### The case concerns:

The matter relates to the internal review and continuous assessment of the work on the follow-up of the “HR Excellence in Research” (HREiR) status awarded to UiB in 2019. The process follows the European Commission’s “enhanced” HRS4R procedure (HR Strategy for Researchers). The HREiR status itself has been awarded for the period up to 2024 and is not subject to reassessment at the current time. Continuous assessment provides the opportunity to revise the action plan based on a review of and updates to the assessments and analyses that formed the basis for the application in 2019.

### Background

In December 2019, the European Commission awarded “HR Excellence in Research” status to the University of Bergen. The basis for the award was an application in which UiB assessed its own practices in accordance with the principles of the European Charter & Code for Research and implemented actions to offer better HR in research. The actions have been collated in an action plan containing 15 items and are aimed at the following five areas: career development, recruitment, the role of the supervisor, equal opportunities and diversity and administrative support for R&D employees.

Being awarded the “HR Excellence in Research” status demonstrates internationally that UiB fulfils the principles of EU’s Charter&Code and has committed to developing quality in “HR in Research”. This will have an impact on the University’s ability to compete to recruit the best researchers and in its work on applications to Horizon Europe.

The European Commission’s HRS4R procedure is based on continuous improvement work, with ongoing updates to the action plan. The first milestone is after 24 months. By December 2021, UiB must report on the status of its work on the action plan. Any new priorities, strategic decisions, etc. that may affect the continuing work on the action plan must also be addressed.

## **Assessment**

An important step in the work on the HREiR application in 2019 was to connect with ongoing processes within the organisation and establish an action plan that could help ensure coherence. The actions have been closely integrated into UiB's ordinary operations and this approach has also formed the basis for the revision of the action plan. Emphasis has been placed on ensuring the follow-up and further development of actions to provide continued pace and direction in the work.

UiB is two years into a five-year action plan and five of the fifteen actions are considered to have been implemented in accordance with the plan. Some adjustments to the deadlines and indicators for the actions are expected and it is proposed that the plan be supplemented to include one new action linked to the establishment of a new action plan for gender equality and diversity. UiB's effort to safeguard the working conditions of researchers during and after the pandemic is one of the new development initiatives and knowledge platforms that will be addressed specifically, as well as the extensive work undertaken in connection with UiB FRAM. It is also important to highlight the [ARQUS collaboration](#) and the preparations for Horizon Europe, together with other key plans and actions.

The revised action plan involves continuous reporting and UiB will receive feedback from the European Commission, including assessments and recommendations. After a further 36 months, in 2024, UiB will undergo a more in-depth assessment with a visit from the European Commission before the HREiR status can be renewed for a further action period<sup>1</sup>. During this phase, it will be important both to follow up on the current action plan and to accommodate a broad process within the organisation in connection with the development of the new action plan.

## **Comments from the University Director**

The University Director notes that HR Excellence in Research status constitutes recognition that UiB works in a targeted fashion to further improve the working conditions of academic staff and provides strong support to individuals in their careers. This is of practical importance to international application efforts, as well as when it comes to ensuring that research groups have appropriate frameworks in place for their work.

The University Director is also committed to ensuring that employees at UiB are aware that the University is working in a targeted fashion to improve HR in Research. Prior to the application in 2019, extensive work was conducted to collect feedback from our different groups of employees at various stages of their careers. It is important to secure continued anchoring in the stakeholders (researchers and the university community) when implementing actions and when preparing for a new planning period.

On the basis of the feedback from the European Commission on the revised action plan, the University Director will present a new matter for the Board relating to the further follow-up on the HR Excellence in Research status, to ensure the best possible basis for the preparation of the next phase.

### **Proposed resolution:**

The University Board requests that the revised action plan be completed in line with the assessments of the case document.

Robert Rastad  
University Director

29/10/2021 /Even Sørland/Sonja Irene Dyrkorn (Head of Department)

Attachment:

1. Basis for the revised action plan

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<sup>1</sup> [Overview of the process and milestones with Euraxess](#)

# HR in Research – basis for the revised action plan

*Appendix to the matter for the Board*

## 1 Introduction

This document is aimed at the work on reporting to the European Commission in connection with the implemented actions and outstanding work for the three-year period up to 2024. The work with the revised action plan is based on a review and an update to the plan from 2019, as well as the assessments and analyses that formed the basis for the 2019 plan.

The following elements are included in the European Commission's stipulated process for the revised action plan:

- Status reporting for each of the 15 actions
- Information about implementation
- Updated assessment of "strengths and weaknesses"
- Overview of the actions scheduled for the next 36 months

Item 2 provides a review of the assessments linked to the description of strengths and weaknesses that formed the basis for the application in 2019. In addition to describing the developments in the various areas, an overview of new knowledge platforms and initiatives that should be included in an updated description is also provided.

Item 3 summarises the status of the five established priority areas, including brief information about the main focus and proposed adjustments. The summary builds on a more detailed review of the status of each action that has been considered by the steering group. This document is available on the web page of the HR in Research project.

## 2 About the implementation and development of actions

One important and successful step in the work on the HREiR application in 2019 was to connect with ongoing processes within the organisation and establish an action plan that could help ensure coherence and direction. When actions are so closely integrated into UiB's ordinary operations, this approach must also form the basis for the revision of the action plan. Based on this, the preparations have placed emphasis on ensuring follow-up and further development of actions that provide continued pace and direction in the work, as well as identifying new actions within the organisation. It is also important to exploit the opportunity to make necessary adjustments and, not least, highlight the work and escalate necessary discussions within the university community.

The comments from the panel that assessed the application also include a number of recommendations/input on points for improvement with regard to the design of the actions, especially in relation to indicators and milestones that will make it possible for progress to be monitored throughout. In the revised action plan, UiB is expected to highlight that it has considered these recommendations.

### *2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice*

The current action plan is based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses associated with UiB's practices in the four subject areas in Charter & Code "Ethical and Professional Aspects," "Recruitment and Selection," "Working Conditions and Social Security" and "Training and Development". The interim assessment provides the opportunity to take another look at the

analysis. One factor is developments since last time, but assessing new priorities, strategic decisions, etc. that may influence the continuation of the action plan is also important. Major changes in relation to the original plan must be commented on in particular.

The commission also requests comments on three general questions:

2.1.1 Have any of the institution's priorities for the short and medium term changed? The actions in the HRS4R plan are closely integrated with the objectives and actions in the [University's overall strategy applicable to the 2019-2022 period](#). A new rectorate was elected during the spring of 2021 and took up office in the autumn of 2021. The new rectorate has announced a continued commitment to quality and strong academic environments for students and employees by consolidating core activities, supporting research groups and accommodating existing initiatives.

The coronavirus pandemic has characterised 2020 and 2021 and has influenced the University's activities in a number of areas. The consequences this has had on the implementation of the action plan have been addressed under each action. The entire UiB organisation has put a lot of effort into managing this highly unusual situation and management have been committed to safeguarding the working conditions of researchers both during and after the pandemic.

Survey of PhD candidates/postdoctoral fellows on the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. In the follow-up on the survey, several possible actions will be worked on. The Rector has discussed the orientation of and follow-up on actions in meetings with representatives of group B and the work is also endorsed by employee representatives and in university policy forums. The implemented actions include:

- Extensions of PhD candidate and postdoctoral fellowship periods based on individual assessment of need (started 2020, ongoing)
- Additional period extension of one month for **all** PhD candidates in 2021
- Mental health services

2.1.2 Have any of the conditions/prerequisites the institution works under changed in such a way as to affect the HR strategy?

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has announced a new [strategy for the recruitment and career development of researchers](#), with national actions. The draft strategy states that the "Ministry and the Research Council of Norway encourages all research and educational institutions and companies that employ researchers to implement EU actions to improve the conditions for researchers, particularly Charter&Code and HRS4R and to make use of the Euraxess portal." The draft strategy announces continued support for the institution's independent work to position itself in relation to international competition and to develop the working conditions of researchers based on the institution's needs/priorities.

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research will conduct a comprehensive review and revision of the three national regulations relating to appointments. The objective will be to ensure updated regulations that view recruitment positions in the context of expertise requirements and meriting systems for permanent research and teaching positions. The revision of the regulations will ensure that expertise requirements are logically linked and the Ministry has also announced that work will be undertaken to clarify legal interpretations and communication of best practices with regard to temporary appointments. This review/revision will influence the rules UiB adheres to and must be taken into account in local work.

2.1.3 Are any new strategic decisions that could affect the action plan

expected?

UiB is in the early stages of working on the revision of its overall strategy. The preparations for the new HRS4R action plan period will be coordinated with this work.

In order to follow up on the ambitions in the current strategy to develop more outstanding research groups and further develop quality across all research environments at UiB, UiB has used UiB FRAM to obtain systematic knowledge of and insight into how each academic employee and the research environments perceive their own frameworks for achieving academic goals. This will form an important basis for the continued work on the strategy and the design of actions.

## 2.2 *New initiatives and knowledge platforms*

UiB works extensively to ensure good working conditions for researchers. The 15 actions are linked to a number of new and ongoing initiatives. Several new knowledge platforms have also been obtained to ensure support within the university community, particularly within the groups of researchers to which the actions are targeted.

The UiB FRAM report has examined the framework conditions designed to promote quality in research across UiB as a whole. The aim has been to provide the University, as well as faculties and research communities at UiB, with an important knowledge platform to strengthen research at UiB. A survey was conducted by the analysis firm Ideas2evidence to identify frameworks for conducting research, to which 46% of academic staff responded. In addition to the survey, the company has also obtained empirical data from interviews and SWOT analyses. This largely constitutes the knowledge platform that this report is based on. A self-evaluation of this kind is unprecedented in Norway.

Other ongoing work that will be briefly addressed includes:

### 2.2.1 National

- The Ministry of Education and Research's strategy for recruitment and career development of researchers
- The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions' appointment structure committee

### 2.2.2 At UiB

- Parent: Horizon Europe, ARQUS
- Plans
  - Careers Policy for Younger Researchers
  - Action plan for PhD Programmes
  - Action plan for equal opportunities and diversity
  - ARQUS Action Plan– special diversity actions
- Specific actions
  - Mental health services for PhD candidates.
  - UiB Ferd Career Centre
  - UiB FRAM (time for research)
  - Merit scheme for outstanding teachers and teaching environments at UiB – faculty schemes continue (matter for the Board 75/21)
  - SEAS COFUND – inter-faculty programme with a focus on transferable skills
  - Onboarding: Survey with findings and proposals. A new survey is being planned.

### 3 Assessment of priority areas

A review has been conducted, which highlights which of the 15 actions are considered to have been implemented and which require deadline or content adjustments. For some areas, the recommendation is to adjust the action to secure input from the target group and the assessments performed in connection with the implementation of the action. The status of the five priority areas is summarised as follows:

#### 3.1 *Recruitment*

The priority area includes the following actions:

- Action 1: Revision to establish a collective OTM-R policy
- Action 2: Review of templates, procedures and training measures used in recruitment
- Action 3: Recruitment training
- Action 4: Recruitment management data

Action 2 has been implemented before the revision of the action plan. The other actions will be continued subject to some clarifications relating to targets/indicators and correlation with other actions. On a general level, awareness of transparency and strengthened common practices within the field of recruitment are important common denominators for these actions.

#### 3.2 *Career development/counselling*

The priority area includes the following actions:

- Action 5: Career development for younger researchers
- Action 6: Counselling on career opportunities outside academia
- Action 7: Trial of career development tools
- Action 8: Modernisation of appraisal interviews
- Action 9: Pilot project for R&D work related to own teaching

Action 5 has been implemented by the University establishing a careers policy for younger researchers (matter for the Board 4/20). The careers policy focuses on associate professors, postdoctoral fellows and researchers. The action plan for PhD programmes (matter for the Board 63/20) escalates similar career development actions for the PhD group. The follow-up on the careers policy is closely linked to the other actions.

Common templates for performance assessment interviews have been established in accordance with Action 8, but work remains to be done to achieve the desired modernisation of the performance assessment interview as a tool adapted for R&D positions. A separate matter for the Board has been announced on this subject.

Other actions relating to career development/counselling will be continued subject to adjustments to deadlines/indicators to support ongoing activities.

#### 3.3 *The role of the supervisor*

This priority area includes one action:

- Action 10: Arena for development of the supervisor role

It is recommended that the action be continued, with an emphasis on creating meeting places and ensuring that younger researchers get practical support to develop supervisor experience as the two central follow-up items. It will also be important to support the development of initiatives

aimed at supervisors at faculties that currently do not have such initiatives in place.

### **3.4 *Equal opportunities/diversity***

The priority area includes the following actions:

- Action 11: Make a pilot project for promotion courses to scientific top positions into a permanent scheme for women
- Action 12: Academic CV and career interruption
- Action 13: Platform of knowledge regarding discrimination and diversity

Action no. 11 has been implemented. Work on the other two actions will be continued. Further follow-up on Action 12 to ensure that applicants that experience interruptions in their academic careers (work in another sector, leave of absence, etc.) are assessed in the same way as others will take place in connection with the announced review of the regulations to the Norwegian University and University Colleges Act. Action 13 will be further developed in connection with other work on governance data and actions in the new action plan for equal opportunities and diversity.

A new action is proposed for this area:

- Action 16: New action plan for equal opportunities and diversity

The action plan for equal opportunities and diversity is being developed and will constitute a key document in UiB's continued work in a field that the University has long prioritised. It is proposed that the action be linked to the entire new action plan, including the actions the plan proposes that the faculties will develop, rather than escalating a few individual actions into the action plan for HR in research. In this way, the action will also highlight that UiB is prepared for the EU to set out requirements for Gender Equality Plans in Horizon Europe applications from 2022.

### **3.5 *Administrative support for researchers.***

This priority area includes two actions:

- Action 14: Guidelines and employment agreements for international positions and externally funded projects
- Action 15: Develop pay mechanisms to stimulate quality of research and education and active dissemination of scientific activities

Action 15 is considered to have been implemented. The wage policy has been reviewed and revised in line with the action and in collaboration with employees trade unions. The criteria and instruments relating to research and teaching positions have been specially considered. The wage policy has been translated into English and has been published so that it can be communicated/made available to applicants.

Action 14 is to be continued. The action consists of two elements. Guidelines have been established to provide guidance on UiB's international employment relationships, appointments in international joint projects and employment contracts for international employment relationships. These guidelines form the basis for the second element of the action, which is the specific design of templates for employment contracts (supplements to employment contracts). The work on the agreement templates is ongoing and agreements will be developed on a group-by-group basis.

The agreements will be important in ensuring good employer practices in relation to international employees, in connection with visits abroad, and when employees participate in international projects.