Roadmap towards HRS4R label

DELIVERABLE 3.1

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1. Initial note

This European project consists of Universities that are Certified with the HRS4R (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers) label. The certified Universities are University of Poitiers, Salamanca, Turku and Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

The aim of this document is to give non-certified partners an overview of the HRS4R certification process, from application planning to team building, as well as useful tips about the submission process to the European Commission.

Non-certified universities, namely the University of Coimbra, the University of Pavia and the Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, can learn from the experience of certified partners and ideally encourage them to start the application process.

2. What is HRS4R Certification and what are the advantages of this type of certification for Universities?

After the launch in 2005 of the first edition of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (C&C), the European Commission has created a tool to support the implementation of the C&C principles in Universities, research institutions and organisations - the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) certification.

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (C&C) consists of 40 principles that are organised into four main groups:

- Ethical and Professional Aspects;

- Recruitment and Selection;

- Social Security and Working Conditions;

- Training and Development;

The C&C principles are designed for and by researchers, aiming to optimise their careers, as well as the relationship between work activities and personal and family life.

Applying for this label of excellence is a completely voluntary process and requires a long-term commitment from the institutions applying for the HRS4R. After applying for the label of excellence, following several implementation steps, the European Commission evaluates the Institution and may or may not grant it the right to use the logo shown below.

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Figure 1. Human Resources Excellence in Research Logo (available at The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers)

This logo represents the guarantee for Researchers that the institution they belong to, or the one they want to join, is recognised by the European Commission as an employer that complies with the C&C principles. Therefore, before starting the HRS4R application process, the institution should have a deep understanding of the C&C. These represent a set of general principles and requirements that specify the roles, responsibilities and rights of researchers as well as employers and/or funding institutions of Research activities.

Institutions and employers that voluntarily adhere to C&C before starting the certification process openly demonstrate their commitment to acting responsibly and respectfully, and to providing fair working conditions for researchers. Researchers that have their professional status recognised and their work valued can focus on producing high quality research outputs.

The adoption of the C&C and the HRS4R certification are tools that contribute to the progress of the European Research Area and have concrete results in the transformation of institutions. It stands out the greater attractiveness to hire new researchers, the facility in internationalisation activities and a greater capacity to integrate new human resources. In addition, there is a greater capacity to attract competitive funding for Research and Development activities, such as funding from European Programmes.

3. HRS4R - The starting point & initial Team

From the year 2018 on, the whole certification process is now managed through the online platform *Euraxess*, so before starting the application the Institutions must ensure that they have a properly updated *EURAXESS PROFILE*.

It is essential to designate a person responsible for the administration of the online profile. This person will be the contact point between the European Commission and the Institution for the whole HRS4R process. And, it is also necessary to define the team responsible for the entire process. According to the experience of the certified partners, it is recommended that the team be composed of three parts: a **Working and Implementation group**, a **Council group** and a **Leader**.

The **Working and Implementation group** should include 1 to 3 people, the EURAXESS PROFILE manager/administrator.

The **Council group** should be composed by representatives with some institutional knowledge and power in the following groups: Researchers and Faculties/Professors, PhD candidates, Human Resources, Quality Management and Technicians, among others. According to the European Commission, all levels and profiles of researchers should be heard. More information about the researchers classification can be found here.

For the role of the **Leader,** the certified partners recommend someone who is part of the Rectoral team, ideally the Vice-Rector for Research.

Communication of certification goals is essential and makes the difference when it comes to involving the Researchers. It is important to share the message that certification is for Researchers, their careers and well-being, whether they have a contract with the Institution or not.

Table 1 summarises the initial steps for implementing HRS4R Certification.

HRS4R Implementation	
Initial Steps	**i.** Creating/Updating the Institution EURAXESS PROFILE and define it´s manager/administrator
	ii. Team definition: Working and Implementation group, Council group and Leader
	iii. Ensuring institutional commitment to the entire certification process
	iv. Communicate the certification goals to maximise the participation of the Research community

Table 1 - Organisation Initial steps to start the implementation of HRS4R

The HRS4R application submission process is divided into three phases, detailed in the next session: **Initial Phase (I); Implementation Phase (II)** and **Renewal Phase (III).**

4. Initial Phase and the essential documents

The Initial Phase begins with the submission of a "Letter of Commitment" in which the Rectoral Team or other organism responsible for Research activities commits to initiate the process and to proceed to the following phases. Furthermore, this letter must be clear in regard to the Institution's intentions to adhere to the principles of the C&C. The letter should not be older than 12 months at the application time and all the instructions for writing it are published on the following [webpage.](#)

Once the "Letter of Commitment" is validated by the European Commission, the Institution has 12 months to plan and draft the essential documents for the application. These documents are:

- **GAP Analysis;**

- **Open, Transparent and Merit based Recruitment (OTM-R);**

- **Action Plan;**

note: When the European Commission does not validate the Letter of Commitment, the institution can re-submit the application after one month.

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4.1. GAP Analysis

The **GAP Analysis** allows each institution to understand "where they are" and "where they are going" in terms of compliance and implementation of the C&C 40 principles.

To make this assessment, institutions should consult all available information with their services and research community before running new questionnaires and/or data collection that may delay the process.

The institution should go through the 40 principles and evaluate their implementation according to the following scale:

++	Fully implemented
+/-	Not fully implemented, but almost
-/+	Partially implemented
--	Insufficiently implemented

This classification should be accompanied by the respective justification, whether the implementation of the principle is full or not, as well as whether there are local and/or national laws that prevent full compliance with the principles.

The templates for the GAP analysis can be found in the following link.

The GAP Analysis of the Certified partners can be found in the following **table 2**.

	University of Poitiers
GAP Analysis	University of Salamanca
	University of Turku
	University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza

Table 2- Examples of GAP- Analysis of the EC2U certified partners

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4.2. Open, Transparent and Merit based Recruitment (OTM-R);

The OTM-R (Open, Transparent and Merit based Recruitment) consists of a list of 23 questions that concern the Institutions' recruitment policies and practices that should be based on the principle of "Open, Transparent, and Merit-based".

Measuring the implementation of these policies in the Institutions allows the European Commission to assess whether the recruitment of researchers considers equal opportunities between candidates.

The rating of the policies and practices of each Institution is done according to the following scale:

++	Yes, completely
+/-	Yes, substantially
-/+	Yes, partly
--	No

The templates for the characterization of the recruitment method of the Institutions can be found here.

The OTM-R of each certified partner can be found in the following **table 3.**

	University of Poitiers
OTM-R	University of Salamanca
	University of Turku
	University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza

Table 3- Examples of OTM-R of the EC2U certified partners.

note: If the institution already has a recruitment strategy where these principles are applied, it should make it public on the website. The link should be indicated in the Action Plan.

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4.3. Action Plan

Through the weaknesses identified in the GAP Analysis and the OTM-R, the action plan should describe a set of measures to be adopted by the institutions to address those weaknesses. The action plan should also reflect the strategic vision of the institution and the priority areas of action for the first 24 months of implementation following the initial phase.

The action plan consists of three parts:

1) **The organisation's administrative characterisation**: data on human resources, total funding and budget, among other information.

2) **Strengths and weaknesses of existing practices**: institutions should describe their current practices taking into consideration the four C&C thematic groups, as well as the characterisation resulting from the OTM-R.

3) **Actions to implement**: On the one hand, the experience of certified partners indicates that the definition of actions should be based on specificity, measurability, relevance, implementation time and feasibility. On the other hand, it is not recommended to propose more than 25 actions at the beginning. The reason is twofold: (1) by the time of the first evaluation, most of the actions should have been implemented and it is not useful to create an action plan too ambitious to be realised; and (2) further rounds of inclusion of additional actions are always possible and provide opportunities to improve the design and relevance of the next actions relative to the performance and achievement of the most crucial ones. Therefore, indicating between 20 and 25 actions is ideal.

The templates for drafting the Action Plan are available at this link.The certified partners' action plans can be found in the **table 4.**

Action Plans	University of Poitiers
	University of Salamanca
	University of Turku
	University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza

Table 4- Action plans of EC2U certified partners

The submission of the application can only be executed when the three mandatory documents, namely the Gap Analysis, the OTM-R checklist and the Action Plan are uploaded in the EURAXESS online platform.

5. Assessment by the European Commission

After the submission of the application, the next phase is the assessment by the European Commission. This is divided into two stages: the administrative and an external assessment.

5.1 Administrative assessment

In the first phase, the European Commission verifies whether documents comply with the requirements of the templates provided, if they are all written in English and if they are complete. At this stage, the European Commission does not assess the quality of the data provided, but only their form. In case the documents do not comply with the necessary requirements, the applicant institution has up to 8 weeks to make the changes needed.

5.1 External assessment

The external assessment is a second moment of the evaluation phase and only happens if the administrative validation of the application is correct. The external evaluators use the same criteria and templates for all the institutions. Their main objective is to find clear information about the Human Resources strategy of the Institution and its strengths and weaknesses. They will analyse the coherence between the GAP Analysis and the Action Plan, assess the implementation of the C&C principles associated with indicators and timelines. They also analyse how the institution has consulted the various stakeholders, Researchers at different levels, Professors, PhD candidates and Technicians, among others.

One of the fundamental points for a positive evaluation is the publication of the HRS4R strategy in English easily accessible on the official website of the candidate institution.

The result of the external evaluation is communicated three months after the administrative validation. This result can be "Accepted", "Accepted but pending minor modifications" or "Denied".

In case the application is "Accepted but pending minor modifications", the Institution has up to 2 months to modify the documents according to the instructions of the external evaluators. Institutions should take special caution, as only one re-submission of the application is allowed.

When an application is denied, the institution has 12 months to revise its documents according to the specific recommendations of the external evaluators before resubmitting.

The final result is sent by email. From the moment that the Institution receives the official notification of acceptance, it can use the "HR Excellence in Research" logo on its official channels, such as the website, social media, marketing materials, official documents, among others.

When the Institution publishes a job opportunity on the EURAXESS platform, the Excellence logo will be automatically associated.

Finally, the Institution will be part of the official list of HRS4R certified Institutions in the following EURAXESS webpage.

6. Implementation and Renewal Phase an Overview

With the conclusion of the Initial Phase (Application Process), the new certified Institution has 24 months to implement the actions defined in the Action Plan. After the implementation period of the actions, the external evaluators will assess the progress, with respect to the indicators and timelines defined, and they will evaluate the quality of the adopted measures and report recommendations to be implemented in the following 36 months. During this period, the Institution will receive an in-site visit by the external evaluators.

The renewal phase of the quality label is repeated every 36 months in a cyclical way and always with a formal assessment by the evaluators.

7. Advices and tips from certified partners

- To start this process, it is essential to understand and collect information that already exists in each one of the Institution's services instead of doing new surveys and/or wasting time and resources on (new) ways of collecting information (e.g., satisfaction and well-being surveys from the quality assurance units of each University);

- Certification is also a process of "self-knowledge" and should allow the Institution to make itself known to its Researchers, which means to inform them about the existing services and resources and how they could use them;

- Certification and its purpose should be an objective of the Rectoral team action plan and an institutional objective;

- Between the start of the work and the submission of the application it takes about one year, and the working group should meet two to three times to prepare the documents for the submission process;

- Communication of certification goals is essential and makes the difference when it comes to involving the Researchers and Professors. It is important to transmit the message that certification is for Researchers, to improve their careers and well-being, whether they have a contract with the Institution or not yet. This is a key aspect to build the GAP Analyses and the Action Plan documents. One strategy to raise everybody's awareness is to organise specific Days at the University to broadly disseminate it. Another one is to create an identifiable name associated to the HRS4R (e.g. "Appreciation and Support for Researchers") in order to better communicate to the community what the excellence seal practically means;

- Involving a broad range of actors in the consultation of the actions that must be given priority makes a proposal much stronger. Beware of including everyone, but keeping a strategy to make all the feedback converge into a concise action plan;

- It is recommended to create a dedicated e-mail address for communication related to the HRS4R process. This account can be open to receive suggestions from the community during the phase of collecting the input to the submission;

- Some of the recommendations of the European Charter for Researchers are already fulfilled/established by European legislation or National one and this should be highlighted in the documentation that each University will create;

- After the submission, the team dedicated to HRS4R Certification start the monitoring and implementation tasks and the whole working group should meet at each 3-4 months;

- The documents submitted should be shared with the Directors of Bodies of Governance of the University, such as School Directors and Coordinators of R&D Centres, depending on the specific structure of Governance of each University;

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Annex

ENROLLING INSTITUTIONS IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

Scenario for institutions in the Award Renewal Phase

REGISTER EURAXESS ORG. ACCOUNT

The institution registers an organisational account on EURAXESS if there isn't any. It must be an account of the top organisation (not a department/lab account of the top organisation).

GET HRS4R ADMIN ROLE

Once the registration of the EURAXESS organisation account is approved, you can ask for the HRS4R Admin role to secure access to the HRS4R E-tool. The domain of the email must be in the URL of the organisation.
Only one person per organisation is granted this role.

CREATE A CASE IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

The institution uploads the endorsement letter of the Charter & Code in the HRS4R E-tool, as if it were a newcomer to the process. The old version of the endorsement letter must be used, not a new one.

CONFIRMATION LETTER BY EC

The EC checks the endorsement letter and sends back to the institution the confirmation within 10 working days.

BUILD APPLICATION HISTORY IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL.

The EC uploads in the E-Tool all the application, reporting and assessment files which ensured the institution's progress from one phase to another. The files will be uploaded as pdfs.

INITIAL PHASE

The EC will upload:
- Gap –Analysis,
- OTM-R Checklist,
- Initial Action Plan,
- Consensus Report with the outcome of the Initial Assessment.
- Resubmissions, if any, will be also marked in the system.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The EC will upload:
- Internal Review,
- OTM-R checklist if filled in at this stage, not initially.
- Consensus Report with the outcome of the Interim Assessment.
- Resubmissions, if any, will be also marked in the system.

PLACE THE INSTITUTION AT THE CORRESPONDING TASK IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

The EC informs the institution via email that the institution has been placed at the corresponding phase and task in the HRS4R E-tool, together with the history of the application, reporting and assessment process.

AWARD RENEWAL PHASE

The Institution can fill in the Internal Review for the Award Renewal Assessment in the HRS4R E-Tool. From this moment on the reporting and assessment process will be handled online.

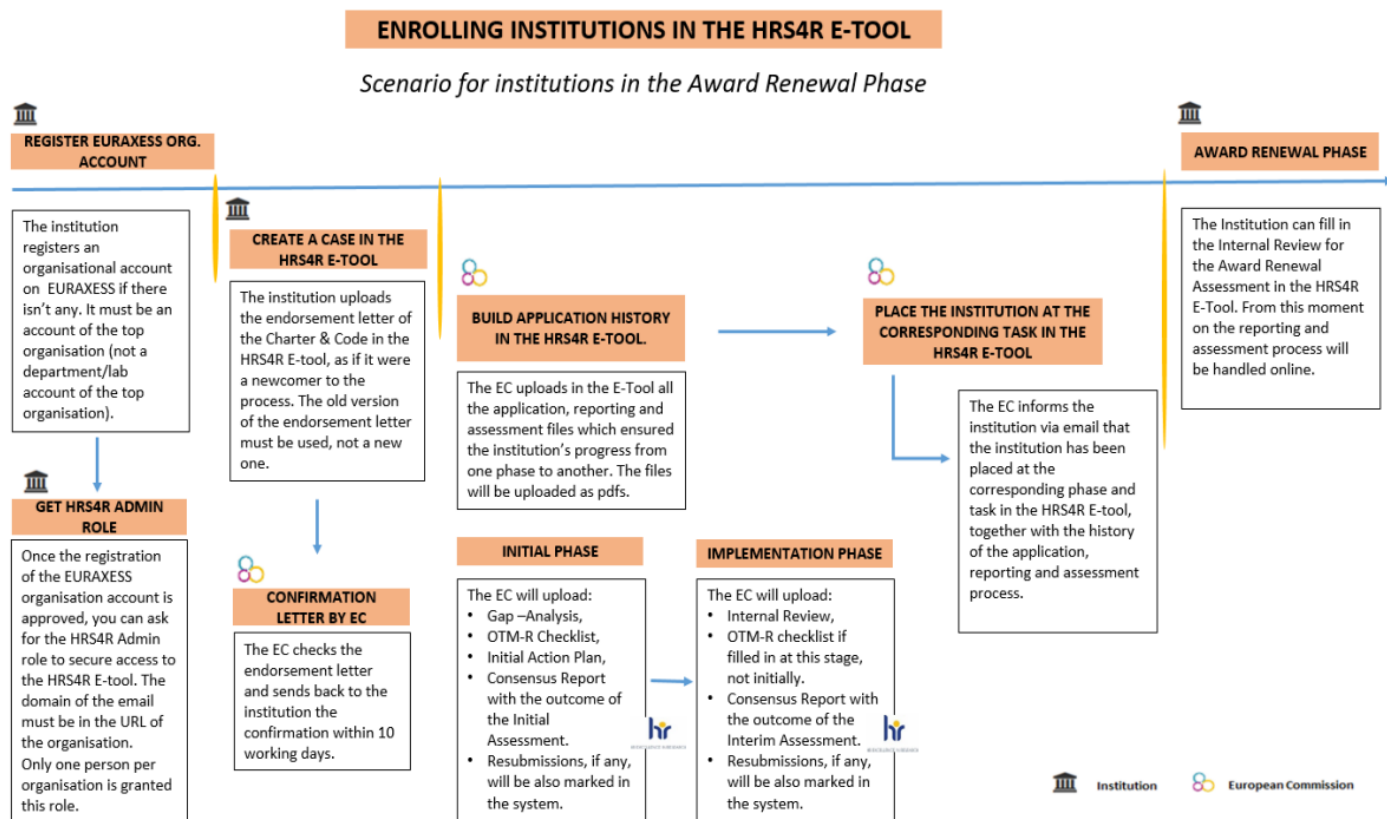Institution   European Commission

Figure 2. Concept map for the HRS4R Certification Application Process (available at The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers: Technical Guidelines, page 38)