



## EURAXESS RIGHTS

### Midterm self-assessment report (2011-2013)

#### Introduction

On January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the University of Liege was acknowledged "HR Excellence in Research" while publishing its Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code principles ([http://www.ulg.ac.be/upload/docs/application/pdf/2011-02/hsr4r\\_ulg\\_en.pdf](http://www.ulg.ac.be/upload/docs/application/pdf/2011-02/hsr4r_ulg_en.pdf))

The ULg action plan includes 3 areas in which actions are to be developed:

- (1) Policy and Strategy Actions (institutional positioning),
- (2) Actions for researchers as individuals and
- (3) Actions for the development on priorities (by the administration).

A Steering Committee was created in order to classify, prioritise and deal with the 32 identified actions. The Steering Committee includes different stakeholders representing the Board of the University, the academic staff (professors and researchers), the PhD students and the administrative departments (Research, Human Resources, Academic and Educational Affairs, Quality). It met in October 2011, October 2012 and March 2013 to assess the actions. All the action results as well as the work in progress are evaluated; actions are then reviewed, amended and priorities are confirmed or new priorities are defined for the near future.

ULg is using a structured "action template" for the follow-up of each action. It allows keeping track of the aims, the evolution of what is achieved and what still has to be done, of the link between the action and the context of the common implementation of actions, of dissemination, etc. This tool is really interesting as the common memory of actions undertaken.

A set of colour codes has been established to demonstrate the level of achievement of the action plan (Fig. 1). Green signifies that all main goals have so far been realized. Blue indicates that the work is still in progress, but does not yet fulfil the expectation in terms of results. Grey represents the actions that have not yet started. Orange means actions that are suspended.



The context for the implementation of the charter and code seems to be favourable: in Belgium, new laws are written and new decisions are taken with regard to the researchers' career development in the universities.

In this report, it seems interesting to point out 3 efforts made by the University of Liège in the context of the HRS4R for the improvement of

- (1) the recruitment of researchers,
- (2) the working conditions and
- (3) the career development through training.

## 1. Recruitment

4 actions are planned for the improvement of the recruitment of researchers by informing and publishing more widely the calls for positions: 2 are strategic (P2-P3), 2 are operational (M2-M11). M10 is strongly related to the other ones.

The strategic plan of the Rector focalises on the development of research and of excellence in research. Amongst other things, this means that the recruitments are open to the best researchers in the world. Through the implementation of the charter and code, the Rector also wants to develop transparency in recruitment and evaluation of researchers and professors. New procedures enter in force for considering the research results and the career of researcher at each stage of his/her development (recruitment, promotion, internal funding).

### 1.1. About the publication of positions

It seems crucial to ULg that besides the legal calls and the job offers on the ULg website, the Euraxess Jobs portal is promoted as a new standard and reference for the new generations of researchers. Therefore, we will proceed to the promotion of it as a new e-wall for the offer for researcher positions.

Professors and heads of research units are still using Euraxess jobs for their job offers on research contracts. This is done on a voluntary basis and it is more and more used (6 offers published in 2010, 20 in 2011, 8 in 2012, 25 in 2013). Institutional calls (PhD grants, post-doc grants) are also released on Euraxess jobs.



The Board of the Rector ("Commission Académique"), the Deans and their administrative staffs were informed about the interest to publish the positions for professors on Euraxess Jobs by means of an opening-up to the international community, improvement of excellence, etc. There are national rules for state universities which have to be respected for the publication of their permanent academic staff offer. That is why ULg decided to proceed to a test phase. From September 2012 on, the positions for professors were published on Euraxess Jobs and this measure will be evaluated after a year: does it increase the number of applications, does it bring new international profiles, and how can we legitimate this procedure?

The next step will be the publication of assistant positions (graduates who are partly assisting the professors for education and partly doing research). This category of employees is special in the sense that their working contracts have some characteristics implying a deeper analysis. Which are the positions that are really open yearly? How do the faculties deal with the recruitment, etc. This will be an important next step for the recruitment proceedings we expect to develop in the coming few years.

ULg recently signed a COFUND contract that fully applies the Charter & Code rules for the recruitment of researchers. Offers are published more widely on professional websites. The effect of this widespread publication of applications will be also analysed.

## 1.2. About the procedures

Significant efforts have been made on the information about procedures concerning job offers, selection and recruitment at all levels (M11) as well as on the development and the increase of access to information on individual funding for researchers (M10). The R&D Office enhanced its web pages with new menus, guidelines, vademecum, and so on and multiplied the announcements to the academic community regarding the offers and procedures.

Even if the procedures were still rigorous and well-defined, some efforts had to be made regarding the non permanent offers. This was especially done in the framework of the institutional calls for positions that led to the COFUND project. This one becomes an example of one of the "best practices" to share and spread.

## 1.3. About the feedback

Another significant improvement since 2 years is the ULg feedback given regarding funding and recruitment for each of the institutional calls. Written feedback is given to the



researchers on their application, projects, etc. This operation is running and evolving into more comprehensive feedbacks.

## 2. Working conditions

Many actions are planned with regard to the improvement of the working conditions of the researchers. This reflects the importance of this theme for the ULg Board. Important progress was accomplished in this area. This section presents the most significant results:

- Permanent contracts are mandatory for researchers working for more than 6 years at ULg (Board decision). Rules are defined for the provision for social liabilities by the research units. The university requires the pooling of the research units and provides a financial support in case of dismissal. This support is proportional to the number of researchers in the pool.
- For all the PhD graduated at ULg, the use of the "116S doctor pay-scale" is mandatory (Board decision). The only exceptions are: if the funds provider disagrees, or if the budget of the project is insufficient.
- Assimilation of the 2nd cycle students graduated before the Bologna process and after Bologna for their salaries at ULg - a difference was remaining due to the 4 years or 5 years length of the studies (Board decision).
- Extension of the advantage of restaurant tickets to all the employees of the university. For the researchers who are employed on a temporary basis, it depends on the agreement or the funding agency.
- Creation of a pension group insurance for all the employees who do not have a status as statutory state employees
- It has also to be pointed out that since 24 January 2013<sup>1</sup>, a new government decree defines a new research function: "*logisticien de recherche*" (research logistician) and fixes its career evolution. This allows for the creation of a new researcher status (as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pfwb.be/le-travail-du-parlement/doc-et-pub/documents-parlementaires-et-decrets/documents/001395810>



statutory state employee) for those who work in research as project manager, librarian, IP (intellectual property) manager. The actual discussion is about the extension of the researcher definition given by ULg for the application of the charter and code (M1).

Regarding ongoing actions, it can be said that new actions were created for helping the foreign researcher to benefit from ULg support and integration: revision of the call for the incoming mobility for PhD students, meetings of foreign researchers, etc.

Finally, the M7 action (annex to the work contact) has been prioritized for 2013. Some efforts were done to establish an annex to the contract for researchers. It will be available before June but is however not really devoted to grantees.

### 3. Training

6 actions are related to the training of researchers. 5 were initiated during the last few years and run well. The training offer considerably increased but the visibility and coordination of actions still is insufficient: no training offers catalogue, similar proposals emanating from different departments without coordination, non coherent cost requirements, lack of an annual agenda, etc. This is a priority for the coming 2 years.

Below you find a list of the significant trainings that have been developed since 2011:

- soft skills for PhD students (Programme developed by the Doctorate Council in collaboration with RED, the network of PhD Students);
- Soft skills for post-docs (through the ImpactE EU projects and the PSRL development group of Epigeum);
- Promotion and opening of the HR training to researchers and PhD students;
- Thesis supervisor training<sup>2</sup> ;
- CUPPD (University Certificate in PhD thesis preparation), in 3 months, including a 3-week training on project management, tools for PhD students, Charter and Code;

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<sup>2</sup> « Accompagner des étudiants doctorants : cadre ULg, témoignages et réflexions »  
réf. IFRE 0068/1;



- One-week residential Young Researchers Seminar on project management (organised by ULg for the Greater Region PhDs in 2013 – to be continued in collaboration with the other Belgian universities)

The ULg devotes a budget to the professional training of researchers: international training for PhDs, mobility grants for research for all the researchers and PhDs.

#### 4. Frozen actions

4 actions were frozen due to the context or a lack of interest in the near future:

P12 : Enhancement of the national and international participation of research-specific working groups. What is important is the report and participation return from the working group. The actual structure is not actually organised for doing so in an efficient way and it seems that there is no consensus for prioritising this development.

M1 : See below, chapter 'News'

M13 : The training of the new members of the research council is postponed as the next election and council composition will take place at the end of 2014.

M14 : Due to budget restrictions, the ULg today is not able to develop the logistical support expected for the organisation of manifestations. It however devotes limited funding for the congress through the research unit financial support.

#### 5. News

The Minister in charge of the "Partenariat pour les chercheurs"<sup>3</sup> decided to support the promotion of PhD careers. A project was written by the 3 academies (Wallonie Europe, Louvain, Wallonie-Bruxelles) and would give the University of Liege the possibility to create a dedicated service for the orientation and the development of researchers' careers (M1). We are waiting for the funding decision.

The Minister moreover rewarded a budget of 40.000 EUR to the ULg (150.000 EUR for the 3

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<sup>3</sup> Partnership for Researchers



academies) to develop and provide with a follow-up of gender related questions. This has to be developed soon with the collaboration of the HRS4R operators.

Regarding the HRS4R process at ULg, it seems that the stakeholders are not yet really aware of the progress. It has been decided to create a focus group meeting for discussing and for raising awareness to the topic, as well as for spreading the word.

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