



EURAXESS RIGHTS

4-years evaluation report (2011-2015)

1. Introduction

On January 11th, 2011, the University of Liege was acknowledged "HR Excellence in Research" by the European Commission for 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)

The ULg Action Plan defined 3 areas in which actions had to be developed, according to the gap analysis performed with the stakeholders:

- (1) Policy and Strategy Actions (institutional positioning),
- (2) Actions for researchers on an individual level and
- (3) Actions for the development of priorities (by the administration).

2. Implementation of the Action Plan

A Steering Committee was created in order to manage the process: priorities, implementation of the actions and self-assessment. Members are representatives of the Board of the university, the academic Staff (professors and researchers), the early stage Researchers (PhDs) and the administrative departments (Research, Human Resources, Academic and Student Affairs, Quality Assurance). The Committee met in October 2011, October 2012, March 2013, June 2014, and January 2015. The executive board comprises the administrative staff who liaised with the actions managers.

ULg developed a database for the follow-up of the Action Plan (see Case Study 1). It allows keeping track of the actions' aims and priorities, their step by step evolution, the indicators, milestones and achievements as well as the dissemination activities and all pertinent information linked to the actions. This tool is shared as the "gatekeeper" of the process implementation.

The SMAQ, QA Office of the University guarantees the quality of the HRS4R process by participating in the Steering committee and reviewing the self-assessment reports.

Progress was mainly recorded in the (1) Recruitment of researchers, (2) Training and Career development support, (3) Diversity and non-discrimination. From the 31 planned actions:

- 14 actions were successfully implemented;
- 15 actions are ongoing and will be continued during the next action plan;
- 2 actions were postponed due to the actual context :
 - M13: The training of the new members of the research councils cannot be organised before 2016, because of a revision of the research structures and boards



- M14: Limited budget is available for new operational developments and priority is not given to the development of a congress office. However, the University extended its support the funding through internal budget allocated to research units.

A new rector was elected in May 2014, with a strategic development plan. This did not affect the implementation of the 2011-2015 Action Plan, but more emphasis will be put on some actions that will impact the new action plan (see § 5). Action P12, on participation to research-specific groups, is reconducted since fall 2014. Moreover, the administrations were evaluated at the beginning of 2014 and they developed their self-evaluation and action plan, considering the HRS4R and the efficiency of their support to researchers, individually or collectively.

3. Key Achievements

3.1. Recruitment of researchers

The BeIPD-COFUND project (2013-2019) was a real opportunity to clarify and write OTM-R (Open, Transparent and Merit based) procedures for the recruitment of researchers and to disseminate them more widely. See Case Study 2.

3.1.1. Publication of positions (Actions P2 and M2)

Besides the classical offer on the ULg website and professional journals, the Euraxess Jobs portal was promoted as a new standard and reference for publishing researcher positions:

- On a voluntary basis for temporary contracts offered by professors and heads of research units : 9 offers published in 2010, 20 in 2011, 9 in 2012, 39 in 2013, 40 in 2014
- Systematically for institutional calls and permanent academic positions. The national rules for state universities were overstepped in order to first develop the process, and then to improve the accuracy of the job descriptions (i.e. translation in English, working hours, etc.).

3.1.2. Procedures (Actions P3, M10, M11, M12)

Even if the procedures were already clear and well-defined for the permanent positions, efforts remained to be made regarding non permanent researchers (with fixed-term contracts). Improvements were focalised from 2013 onwards on providing information to applicants and evaluators, on management of the conflicts of interest, on independence of the evaluation and selection processes, and on appeal - and feedback procedures. Guides for applicants and evaluators were written and versions are available in both French and English.

The Sectorial Research Councils, composed of experts of scientific disciplines from the different bodies, evaluate all the applications to institutional calls (positions, promotions, projects). Written feedbacks are given on the strengths and weaknesses, which helps non-successful applicants improving their application and/or matters related to their career development.

The University Research Council proceeds to the final selection. In the selection process for promotions, mobility is taken into account. The Faculty committees now take into account the assessment of merit, together with the evaluation of teaching and engagement of the researcher.



The R&D Office improved the web pages devoted to researchers with new menus, guides and databases. It developed its process for a more efficient announcement to the academic community regarding the offers and procedures (M11), and provides info-sessions about funding possibilities that are adapted to the specific needs of the various faculties and stakeholders (M10, M12).

3.1.3. Working conditions (Actions P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8)

Many actions are planned with regard to the improvement of the working conditions of the researchers and important progress was registered in this area:

- Permanent contracts are now mandatory for researchers working for more than 6 years at ULg and rules are defined for the provision for social liabilities by the research units. The pooling of researchers benefits from an institutional financial support in case of dismissal.
- All PhD graduated benefit from recognition and the application of the "116S doctor pay-scale" is mandatory (Board decision).
- All the Master graduates who obtained their diploma before the Bologna process (in 4 years) benefit from the same salaries than those graduated after the Bologna Process (in 5 years)
- Restaurant tickets are given to the permanent employees of the university.
- A pension group insurance is offered to all non-state employees (Board decision).
- From 24 January 2013 onwards, a new government decree decided for the creation of a new researcher status ("*logisticien de recherche*") that allows for the extension of the application of the Charter and Code Principles to new categories: project managers, librarians, IP managers.
- All the relevant documents and annexes to the work contract have been translated in English.

For the researchers whose contract is financed by an external source, the application of these improvements has unfortunately to be agreed upon by the funding agency. Heads of research units do their best to offer the same conditions to their staff members, using their own budget when possible. This is however a thorn in the side of "discrimination" and has to be put on the table.

New initiatives were taken to support the researchers, and especially international researchers to be informed about and to ULg assistance: Euraxess services on the different campuses, appointment of a person of trust, "Welcome at ULg"¹ and "Working at ULg"² guides in FR and EN, annual welcome meeting and info sessions.

3.2. Training and Career Development

3.2.1. Training (Actions M3, C2, C3, C4)

The aim of institutional trainings is to provide researchers with tools they need to become effective/independent researchers and to find a position after their PHD/post-doc. This offer is complementary to the thematic doctoral schools or professional seminaries that provide disciplinary trainings. The University devotes a half-million budget to this international training of the researchers: international doctoral schools and research stays abroad.

¹ <http://www.ulg.ac.be/books/guideAccueil> and <http://www.ulg.ac.be/books/welcomeGuide>

² The "Working at ULg" guide for the academic staff and the IP regulation are to be approved by the Board in Nov. 2015



The transferable skills training offer considerably increased since 2011³. The programme is considering the needs of the researchers (expressed by the PhD & Researchers associations or following the requests in the training evaluation forms), the VITAE RDF as a model, and the involvement of ULg in European projects⁴. Several trainings are provided in English; this offer has to be increased in order to include more non-French speakers.

3.2.2. Career Development (Actions P7, M1, M5, M6)

Simultaneously to the training offer and the enhancement of its communication, the university extended and specialised its administrative services for the individual support to researchers by appointing two new persons for the support to PhDs and to researchers for the submission of grant applications. Special actions were developed in order to inform them and to help them to set up projects. Review of CVs, projects and interviews coaching for were also organised, mainly for ERC and PhD grants applications.

ULg is organising or participating in events focusing on researchers' employment, in partnership with companies or public authorities. The Project Linkin' Wallonia⁵ is an example of good practice.

3.3. Diversity and Non-discrimination (actions P9, M9 and M8)

3.3.1 Fight against discrimination

Pluralism and non-discrimination are core values at the ULg. The authorities consider that diversity in all its possible forms is an asset. Since February 2012, through conferences, exhibitions, theatre play and a contest for the ULg staff⁶, ULg put a special focus on the theme: "Cultivating our differences".

ULg has also set up tailor-made status for several categories of students⁷: artists, sportsmen and women, entrepreneurs, the disabled,...

3.3.2 Gender and diversity

In February 2013, the Minister rewarded a budget of 40.000 EUR to the ULg (150.000 EUR for the 3 academies) to develop and provide with a follow-up of gender related questions. As a result of this project, in November 2014, a state of play on gender studies and the status of women in Université de Liège was published⁸. The scheme of this report was similar for the 5 French-speaking universities.

It included very detailed gendered statistical data, the result of a survey targeting the scientific and academic staff, and proposals for an action plan. This has to be developed soon into a gender and diversity action plan, with the collaboration of the HRS4R operators. A follow-up budget was voted

³ The presentation of the catalogue2015-2016 is available online http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_6552111/en/training-offer-for-researchers-presentation. For the catalogue : <http://www.ulg.ac.be/books/formations-transversales/>

⁴ See, for instance, the ImpactE project : <http://www.impacte.eu>

⁵ http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_3934223/en/linkin-wallonia

⁶ http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_1105840/la-diversite-a-l-ulg

⁷ http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_13755/qualite-de-vie-etudiante

⁸ Etat des lieux des études sur le genre et la réalité des femmes à l'Université de Liège, Rapport réalisé pour la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Ministère de la Recherche (2003-2014), Annie Cornet et al., Novembre 2014, 164p.



by the new minister in October 2015, with 20.000 Euros for ULg.

ImpactE⁹ is a EURAXESS 7FP project that is focused on the successful professional and social integration of the researchers into a new environment. Universities and research institutions from 8 European countries united their efforts to empower researchers enrolled in mobility programs with new professional capacities and 'soft skills'. During the closing conference that was held 18th of September 2014, Prof. Doris Klee, Vice Rector, RWTH Aachen, Germany, was invited to present the Gender and diversity management at her university.

In 2014, the newly elected rector appointed a counselor in Gender and Diversity.

4. Dissemination

Dissemination about the C&C, its implementation and achievements is absolutely necessary in order to evolve and keep the stakeholders as partners in the process. ULg decided to promote the HRS4R internally whenever possible and also to participate and communicate about international initiatives.

Many activities took place, including dedicated events, reporting to different boards, information to hundreds researchers, hosting of the Euraxess Roadshow bus. ULg published articles or researchers interviews in journals (local, international) and realised promotion videos¹⁰. ULg engaged in providing advices and exchanging good practices with institutions willing to develop the HRS4R (Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Erasmus Staff training week 2015), international training and HRS4R peer reviewing.

The communication could probably be more effective to faculties and research units that do not really report on the C&C implementation as such in their internal review or self-assessment.

⁹ <http://www.impacte.eu/about-impacte>

¹⁰ f.i. http://www.ulg.ac.be/cms/c_2559829/fr/welcome-to-liege



5. New action Plan (2015-2018)

The new action plan will be the continuity of the previous one and intends to be more rooted in the institutional strategy and priorities. From the first 4 years, it appears that the structure has to evolve in order to facilitate the work on project or progress mode, in order to be more proactive. Communication on the Charter & Code has to be more "culturally integrated" in the academic community.

Improvement is expected in the following 5 areas:

1. **Ethics** (Ethical Commission, Ethical committee in Human and Social Sciences, procedures, sensitisation and training actions)
 - Promoting research integrity
 - Preventing misconduct,
 - Increasing transparency when investigating cases of questionable conduct
2. **Gender** (beyond diversity)
3. **PhD supervision** (with a focus on increasing the success rate in 4 years)
4. **Researcher Development** (mainly training, with the Researcher Development Framework as a reference)
5. **Support to the researchers** (search for funding, research correspondent network, extension of the offer of the career services)

This will lead to the definition of the new Action Plan to be submitted to the EU for the renewal of the logo. It will present detailed actions with Key Progress Indicators and links with the items of the first Action Plan for clarity.

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