

HRS4R process of the University of Oulu

1 University of Oulu

Founded in 1958, the University of Oulu is a strong research and education community, one of the biggest and most multidisciplinary universities in Finland. Nine faculties (ten from autumn 2014), the many departments and the specialised research units of the University of Oulu create the foundations for scientific research, innovation and the training of experts for demanding professional tasks.



Figure 1. Organisation chart of the University of Oulu

In 2013, the total number of students was around 15 600. Some 2618 degrees were awarded, included 1067 Bachelor´s degrees, 1324 Master´s degrees, 142 Doctoral degrees and 85 other degrees. The number of scientific publications was 2251.

Key figures concerning Oulu University personnel: total staff 3014, of which 242 are professors and 1598 researchers and teachers. The number of support staff for teaching and research totalled 511 and other staff 663.

Total funding in 2013 amounted to €226 million, from which the share of supplementary funding was €64 million.

The University of Oulu's mission is to further advance the level of internationally high-ranking research, education and culture, to strengthen skills that increase well-being, and to secure the availability of highly educated labour and research personnel in the region.

Focus areas:

- Biosciences and health
- Information technology
- Cultural identity and interaction
- Environment, natural resources and materials, including development areas such as steel research and mining

Other areas with their research profiles to be developed

- Business and economy
- Research-based teacher education



Figure 2. Profile of the University of Oulu

The University of Oulu aims to be an attractive and successful science university and a pioneer of innovations. The goal will be achieved through its strategic objectives, which are:

- an internationally strong scientific profile
- an active partnership and influence
- a creative community and strong economy.

The strategy will be implemented through education, research, international activities, entrepreneurship and a development programme for support functions.

The University of Oulu's Human Resources Programme is based on the university's strategy. According to the strategy, the objective of the university is firstly to be an internationally attractive employer, and secondly, a research and training community, where the competent personnel creates a leading top-level university.

The three main strands in the Human Resources Programme are:

- human resources planning and personnel recruitment
- leadership and well-being of the work community and
- developing competence.

Each of the areas has an outlined goal, along with objectives and development targets.

2 The University of Oulu as an employer for researchers

The human resources programme is based on the University of Oulu's strategy and is thus the starting point for the aims of the university to improve itself as an employer of researchers. A survey of foreign members of staff that was carried out by human resources in 2012 was the impetus for the development work. The survey mapped out experiences in recruitment processes, working conditions and services of the University of Oulu. Development needs were identified in orientation practices, the availability of materials in English, and the quality of services provided by different units, among other things.

The University of Oulu decided to work towards the status of a good employer for researchers (HR Excellence in Research) by sending a Letter of Endorsement to the EU Commission, dated 23 October 2012.

The HRS4R Steering Group was nominated by the Rector in December 2012 and it started its work on 30 January 2013. The group's task was to draft an HR strategy for researchers to improve their recognition and career development by committing to the principles of the *European Charter for Researchers* and *the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*.

Members of the steering group:

Rossi, Liisa	Human Resources Director (chair)
Aaltonen, Mailis	Development Manager, University Services
Eskelinen, Sinikka	Director, Research Services
Komminaho, Elina	Planning Officer, Human Resources Services (secretary)
Kontio, Kimmo	Postdoctoral Researcher, Chief Shop Steward, Negotiation Organization for Public Sector Professionals (JUKO)
Mikkonen, Tanja	HR Specialist, Human Resources Services
Pääkkönen, Tiina	Head of Administration, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine

3 Selection of targets for improvement

The HRS4 project was presented at different forums in order to increase the awareness of the *European Charter for Researchers* and *the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* within the university community and to get feedback and proposals for development from the researchers.



During early autumn 2013, the HRS4R project was discussed and presented as follows:

- in Hermes, the university's online newsletter directed at the whole staff
- to foreign research staff members
- to the trade union organisations representing different researcher groups
- to the doctoral students of the University of Oulu Graduate School (UniOGS)

University of Oulu staff, and especially research staff, was encouraged to answer the *Questionnaire on Well-being at Work*, as the HRS4R steering group decided to exploit the questionnaire to identify the needs for improvement. The questionnaire was targeted at all staff members. The University of Oulu takes part in this survey, which is carried out every two years at all Finnish universities. The results are comparable across all participating universities.

The questionnaire on well-being at work includes six sections: *Social interaction in our unit*, *Content of own work and competence*, *Working conditions*, *Working with immediate supervisors*, *Strategic leadership at the university level (rectors, deans, administrative management)*, and *Strategic leadership at a faculty/department/unit level*. The survey consists of 38 statements which the individual responds to using the scale of 1 (totally disagree) – 5 (fully agree). Additionally, there are six open questions.

In order to discover researchers' views as widely as possible, the steering group included one extra task in the well-being survey that was directed only at researchers:

Please describe the best ways the University of Oulu can enhance

- a) the international mobility of researchers, and
- b) your own research career path

The questionnaire was carried out in September-October 2013. Some 57% of the respondents represented the teaching and research staff. The question directed only at researchers resulted in around 380 answers.

In order to identify the problems, the steering group selected the issues relevant to Finnish universities and especially to the University of Oulu from the *European Charter for Researchers* and *the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*. The issues were combined with the three main areas of the Human Resources Programme and the results of the *well-being survey*. The open answers were used to coordinate the issues provided in the *Charter and Code* and in the selection of targets, objectives and actions.

According to the analysis, the strengths of the University of Oulu as an employer and recruiter of researchers are as follows. In parenthesis, you can find the related principles of the *Charter and Code*.



- The tasks of researchers are interesting and challenging. Researchers are able to take advantage of their competence and use their inventiveness and creativeness. They feel they can influence their own roles and develop their competence. (*Research freedom, Working conditions, Research environment, Access to research training, Contractual and legal obligations, Dissemination, exploitation of results*)
- The research supervisors are impartial and fair. They take the fact that people are different into consideration. They trust their employees and encourage them to make suggestions, take responsibility and develop their work. (*Supervision, Relation with supervisors, Non-discrimination, Gender balance, Funding and salaries, Evaluation /appraisal systems, Accountability, Public engagement, Professional responsibility, Co-authorship, Complaints /appeals*)
- Researchers feel their own unit has a positive attitude towards development and they regard it as an attractive research community. Researchers encourage and support each other. (*Professional responsibility, Ethical principles, Co-authorship*)

In the analysis, the following weaknesses were discovered. In parenthesis, you can find the corresponding principles of the *Charter and Code*.

- Researchers are not satisfied with the career advancement opportunities and the system of short, fixed-term employments. (*Transparency, Stability and permanence of employment, Career development, Recognition of the profession, Continuing professional development*)
- Researchers want to have an influence on decision-making at the University. They look forward to a more open process of planning and decision-making. (*Participation in the decision-making bodies*)
- The functionality of the community is weakened by inadequate orientation processes and competition for resources between individuals. The ability to discuss difficult subjects needs to be improved, too. (*Professional attitude, Good practice in research, Supervision and managerial duties*)
- Unit research strategies are not always in line with the strategy of the University. (*Professional attitude, Supervision and managerial duties*)
- There are not enough vacancies at the university at different steps of the tenure track from doctoral students to senior researchers. Researchers at the beginning of their research career are not taught sufficiently to understand the tenure track system and its requirements. (*Transparency, Stability and permanence of employment, Recruitment, Selection*)
- The mobility experience is not sufficiently recognised in the recruitment process. Additionally, researchers would like to have more financial support for mobility and for costs incurred by family members abroad. Language and cultural know-how need to be improved, too. (*Value of Mobility, Recognition of mobility experience, Recognition of qualifications*)

- Doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers need peer and senior support, particularly for career planning. (*Supervision and managerial duties, Postdoctoral appointments*)
- Researchers require better support services for research projects and the development of research group work. (*Professional attitude, Supervision and managerial duties*)

4 Action Plan

As soon as the development targets of the University of Oulu had been identified, the steering group set up an action plan with the chosen elements of the *Charter and Code* and the related objectives, actions and the unit or people in charge. The action plan can be found in [here](#).

According to the main areas of the Human Resources Programme, the most important actions of the HR Strategy for Researchers are as follows:

Leadership and well-being of the work community

- The strategy process for research activities must be developed and researchers should get involved in strategic planning
- The research activities of every faculty must be profiled boldly and clearly
- The interactive use of the intranet in the preparation of decision-making will be promoted
- Support services of research activities will be developed as a whole
- Financial support and the related rules for working abroad will be developed (particularly family issues)
- Mentoring and tutoring systems will be created
- A language policy for the university will be established
- Regular meeting practices will be developed

Human resources planning and personnel recruitment

- Balanced research group structures will be supported by personnel planning and financing
- The number of postdoctoral vacancies will be increased
- Grant researchers will be employed for researcher positions
- The tenure track programme will be widened
- The selection criteria for the tenure track system and personal research careers must be defined in advance
- A section on career planning must be included in the development discussion schema
- Electronic recruitment systems will be implemented widely
- International mobility will be recognised as an important recruitment criteria
- Selection processes have to be open and validated in every phase
- The duration of fixed-term employment contracts should be in accordance with the university guidelines

Development of competence

- Researchers must be instructed to work according to the general rules and objectives of the university
- Researchers will be thoroughly oriented to the tenure track system and its criteria



- Researchers will be guided in good research practices
- The role of research work in work plans will be strengthened
- International work experience in career and work planning will be taken into account (development discussions) systematically
- Peer and senior support for career planning (post-docs, doctoral students at UniOGS) will be promoted
- Management of research work will be developed
- Language and cultural training and know-how will be increased
- International staff members will be encouraged to participate in the university administration

The steering group of the HRS4R project also decided to exploit the results of [the international RAE evaluation \(RAE 2013\)](#) in the finalisation of the action plan. At the University of Oulu, a total of 49 research communities and 2000 researchers and support staff members were involved in this research-based evaluation. [The report](#) was published on 28 January 2014. The expert evaluators recommended strengthening research at the university by further increasing the recruitment of top foreign researchers, promoting researcher mobility internationally, managing research funding, and supporting the acquisition of funding more efficiently. The recommendations are clearly aligned with the steering group's HRS4R action plan.

The action plan was discussed and approved by

- the University Management Group (rector, vice-rectors, directors of university services)
- the Extended University Management Group (members of the Management Group, deans, HR director)
- the HR Steering Group (HR director, heads of faculty administration)
- the Cooperation Council (university management, trade union representatives) and
- the Research Council (vice-rector for research, key research staff)

The action plan will also be implemented through the profit centre strategy and financing for 2015, and in leadership training and development discussions during 2014-2015.

The evaluation of the project will be carried out according to the principles of the enterprise resource planning of the University. The self-assessment will be performed in connection with the international audit of the quality assurance system of the University in 2016. External evaluation in 2018 will be complemented according to the instructions provided by the EU Commission.

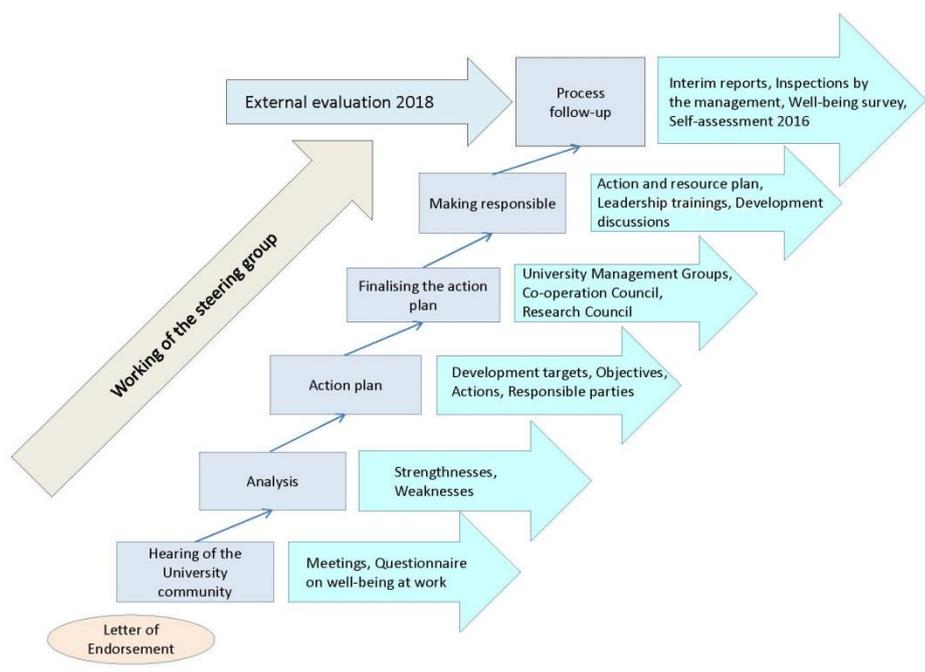


Figure 3. HRS4R process of the University of Oulu