



## Self-assessment report 2016

### I Essential matters regarding the implementation and reformation of HRS4R action plan at the University of Oulu and its operational environment

- The university's success requires that the university makes favourable strategic choices. The competition over students, staff and funding between universities intensifies while political decision making is dictated by the challenging economic situation. In the future, national funding will be granted increasingly **based on strategy** to support the university administration's key projects, higher education institutions' effect on society and the renewal of procedures and structures. In addition, a part of the universities' basic funding will be gradually transferred via the Academy of Finland to come from highly **competed over budgeted research funding** during 2015-2019. This funding is allocated to support the profiling of universities.
- The University of Oulu know-how-based **strategy** was drawn up during 2015. All of the ten faculties were re-organised into a **new structure** at the beginning of 2016. The previous faculty substructures were replaced by research units that are responsible for profit and productivity and are essential to the implementation of the strategy. At the same time, development on **services** was started. A new unit with a Director of Research Services and five Research Service Managers was formed for the support services of research. Their job is to help researchers secure funding.
- Finland has several on-going university **structural reformation projects** which are aimed to further the profiling, collaboration and division of work as per the goals set by The Ministry of Education and Culture. The University of Oulu is one of the so called Quintet (U5) in which, together with four other multidisciplinary universities, it looks for possibilities for collaboration and division

of work. This collaboration might also result in mutual HRS4R interests and procedures.

- The Academy of Finland wishes to further **research mobility** in their funding decisions in autumn 2016 already: The applicants for postdoctoral researcher and Academy of Finland researcher's positions are required to have or gain a minimum of six months' research experience in a place different to where they have done their PhD.
- The Ministry of Education and Culture has recently produced reports which are of importance to the HRS4R project.
  - In the research concerning **research training and researcher's career**, the universities are recommended to develop the doctoral training, quality of tutoring and guarantee of quality further so that the employee in the doctoral role will gravitate towards and be capable of even more varied tasks than before.
  - The group evaluating the **four-stage research career model** proposes a broader research career model that would take all the university's basic tasks into consideration. Because universities have different strategies, profiles and emphasis of action, it should be a part of their autonomy to create their own unique HRM and related research career system. The group also proposes that the Tenure Track system should be separated more clearly from the four-stage research career system, because the two concepts still get mixed up at the university. The report recommends that unified framework for utilising the Tenure Track should be created in Finland.
  - The number of doctoral students has increased noticeably in the last 25 years. Unemployment amongst employees with a Doctoral degree has clearly risen faster than amongst any other educational level in the 2000s and 2010s, but those with Doctoral degrees are still the most employed group amongst employees who have received a higher education. The inquiry concerning **employment of Doctors** suggests the following developmental steps:
    - career mentoring should be linked to doctoral training
    - gaining a broad understanding of the field should be reinforced during the training
    - two-way mobility of employees between companies, organisations, foundations and universities should be fortified
    - a doctoral student should be guaranteed two tutor
- A report (<http://jultika.oulu.fi/Record/isbn978-952-62-1084-1>) on **how doctoral students** experience, amongst other things, the PhD process, tutoring, support of the research community and



international collaboration, was done at the University of Oulu in 2015. The doctoral students were somewhat/fairly satisfied with their doctoral studies but suggested, for instance, the following improvements:

- specifying the goals and content of doctoral training
- decreasing the bureaucracy of the doctoral school and clarifying procedures
- securing funding
- organising studies to support the doctoral studies (e.g. scientific writing, applying for funding)
- reinforcing relevance to work life and supporting career planning
- developing tutoring

- The **Human Resources Programme** of the University of Oulu will be updated according to the strategy in autumn, 2016. One of the leading ideas of the **recruiting policy**, which is interlinked with the Human Resources Programme, is to create variety to research career options without compromising the level of standards. The OTM-R principles guide the reformation of the recruiting policy. The applicable parts of the aforementioned reports will be utilised in drawing up the Human Resources Programme and recruiting policy.
- According to the university's new **research data policy** the university will comply with the requirements of open science and national and international requirements of research whilst considering the requirements of privacy and innovation activities. The research data policy will be implemented as part of the HRS4R action plan.
- The university is preparing for a **quality system audit** (autumn 2017); the HRS4R action plan included in the evaluation.

## ***II Self-assessment***

The HRS4R self-assessment consists of:

- pre-evaluation of the action plan by the HRS4R steering group
  - questionnaire concerning well-being at work to all staff members
  - interviews of research unit leaders
  - questionnaire to all foreign employees
  - evaluation of the action plan
1. The HRS4R steering group evaluated the realisation of the University of Oulu **action plan** in the autumn of 2015. The current state of all planned action was reviewed. The actions were solidified whilst the timetable and the responsible persons for each action implementation were specified further.

2. The national **well-being at work questionnaire** is one of the most important tools in monitoring the realisation of the HRS4R action plan, as it gives extensive information on the development of the university. The results given by the teaching and research staff at the University of Oulu from autumn 2015 were compared with the 2013 results.

According to the questionnaire, the university's results improved in nearly all areas. Significant improvements (at least 0,2 on a scale of 1-5) were seen in questions concerning the action of supervisors and managers as well as communities. These areas are related to C&C principals 7 (Good Practice in Research), 15 (Transparency) and 37 (Supervision and Managerial Duties). For example, more than before, supervisors made sure the goals for work were clear and they acted in an impartial and fair manner. Encouragement, internal support in the unit and positivity towards development were mentioned as examples of how things had improved within the units. No development but no setbacks either were experienced in how the research staff viewed their opportunities to develop and progress in their careers. Different strain brought on by changes had also remained the same. Work tasks had been evaluated very interesting and challenging in the previous questionnaire already and there was no significant change in answers concerning them.

3. As per the new structure, new **unit leaders** with the responsibility of productivity are also in a key role when it comes to HRS4R. We asked one leader from each faculty to evaluate the realisation of the action plan and to suggest corrective actions.

Below are issues that were brought up most often. They are divided into pros, cons and development propositions.

#### Pros:

- particularly the research service managers, but also controllers and lawyers as support personnel for the unit leaders
- electric personnel recruitment system SAIMA
- services for international researchers
- RUL-coaching and especially possibilities for peer support discussions
- simplification of development discussion form; career planning section
- encouraging mobility and networking in, among other things, development discussions

#### Cons:

- lack of support personnel located near the researcher
- orientation and welcoming a new employee need developing; it's important to improve integration and help the employee get into the

work quickly: foreign researchers can be quite alone if they do not become a natural part of the work community

- the international staff cannot really take part in administrative tasks because of the language, which in turn means accumulation of administrative responsibilities for the Finnish staff
- researchers participate in administrative work by, for example, answering queries and questionnaires. It can be frustrating for them if they do not get feedback on the queries and questionnaires.
- Contracts that are too short strain both the individual and the community: they are usually due to uncertainty in funding, which can also materialise in the policies of the faculty (TATU directs continuing the contracts)
- the Tenure Track system was seen as too stiff by most of the respondents and as such it makes recruiting difficult for the university
- the strategy system awoke great expectations in possibilities to participate in the making of the strategy, however, the disappointment was also great: the community wished to participate much more in creating the strategy's content
- the university community does not have a clear picture of the developmental direction of the university: there is a demand for the university management to participate and make more appearances

Development propositions:

- two-way interaction is needed to implement the university's strategy
- networking and preparing for conferences could be strengthened by well-timed training tailored for the precise needs of the unit
- the university must take responsibility of temporary work contracts and their duration; especially those in the postdoc stage should have more stability in contracts
- the university could utilise a braver employment policy by adding ongoing work contracts (cf. companies and their co-operation negotiation procedures)
- the university must demand that the faculties lengthen temporary contracts
- the faculties must be rewarded for lengthening temporary contracts
- assistant Professor's title must be returned to the personnel structure (cf. renewing the Human Resources Programme)
- research services can be further developed in co-operation with the unit leaders (for example the orientation of foreign employees)

4. Human Resources sent a **questionnaire** to all **foreign employees** in 2012. One of the aims of the questionnaire was to find out how the services offered to them corresponded to their needs. **The questionnaire was repeated in 2016**. Slight changes were made to the questionnaire and two open questions were added to find out about staff training needs and possible discrimination experiences.

Below are findings that are critical to the action plan and suggestions for development:

- unclear structure of the service organisation with regards to receiving information
- short contracts and uncertainty of funding put a strain on the international employees
- differences in, for example, recruiting procedures and receiving information and support between faculties
- the large quantity of computer software and their lack of user-friendly qualities
- changing traditional supportive tasks into tasks that each researcher must take care of themselves
- sufficient information given to the researcher prior to arriving in Oulu
- sufficient English information to the international employees
- there are not enough Finnish language courses and not enough skill levels in the existing courses
- the university should shift towards using both English and Finnish in their emails and important meetings so that the international employees have an equal chance to get information and have their say in decision-making
- information on financial administration and more competence in finances are needed



## 5. Evaluating the 2014 action plan

Next, the HRS4R action plan's realisation is briefly described.

On the basis of feedback described above, **we have succeeded** in the following matters related to the C&C principles included in our action plan 2014:

4. Professional attitude (International projects and research groups function professionally)

- implementing the new organisational structure (research units) to clarify managerial responsibilities
- management trainings (RUL- coaching, project leader training, doctoral students' supervisor training, University Management Group's coaching)
- simplifying the development discussion forms and improving them to support, for example, concentrating on research as part of the working plan
- career mentoring for doctoral students
- founding a research service managers' network

7. Good practice in research (Researchers adopt good ethical research and copyright practices, research data and confidentiality protection methods and follow safe working practices)

- Courses offered by University of Oulu Graduate School and University Library

15. Transparency (Recruitment processes are open, international and versatile)

- starting the use of electronic recruiting program SAIMA
- notifying of all open research positions on EURAXESS
- functioning as an authorised EURAXESS Service Center and starting national EURAXESS collaboration
- selection memorandums in professor and researcher recruitments

18. & 29. Recognition of mobility experience (Researchers develop their own career and expertise by international mobility)

- increasing financial support for the families of employees going abroad
- simplifying the development discussion forms and improving them to support career planning required by national and international mobility

25. Stability and permanence of employment (The structure of tasks at different phases of research careers is balanced)

- increasing post doc vacancies

35. Participation in decision-making bodies

37. Supervision and managerial duties (The management and supervision of researchers are target-oriented and responsible)

- management trainings (RUL- coaching, project leader training, doctoral students' supervisor training, University Management Group's coaching)
- mentoring of doctoral students

Actions that still **demand** strong **effort**, concerning the most of the C&C principles included in the action plan:

- dialogue in drawing up and implementing the strategy
- strategic personnel planning in faculties
- academic management and leadership trainings and their effectiveness
- lengthening employment contracts
- hiring grant researchers to employment relationships
- career guidance for doctoral students and post doc researchers
- developing new research support services with the research unit leaders
- funding application procedures and competence
- possibility for foreign employees to participate in the university administration
- teaching Finnish language

- language policy; having services and meetings in both English and Finnish
- orientation procedures

Based on the self-assessment, *the principle of non-discrimination and equality* was added to the action plan. Otherwise, in this action plan, we want to concentrate on previously chosen and important principles, realising the actions they require.

This report and the revised action plan were drafted under the guidance of the Human Resources Director. The next revision of the action plan 2016 will take place after the approval of the Human Resources Programme and the Recruitment Policy.

