

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) incorporating the

**European Charter for Researchers
Code of Conduct for the
Recruitment of Researchers**

Report on internal analysis
and action plan

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

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1 Introduction

The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU) was founded in 1872 as a university of agriculture and forestry. It started with a small number of teachers and only 70 students. Today, 140 years later, BOKU is a modern university specialising in the life sciences, with

- approximately 11,000 students and more than 2,000 members of staff
- three major campuses, and approximately 130,000 m² of teaching, laboratory and office space
- nine Bachelor's and 25 Master's programmes (ten of which are conducted in English)
- more than 1,500 students graduating each year
- around 500 SCI-listed publications per year, and approximately 1,350 academic presentations
- around one third of its budget coming from third-party funded project contracts

As a "University of Life", BOKU has important social and political responsibilities: from agricultural issues to biotechnological research, possibilities for sustainable use and thus the long-term protection of natural resources are investigated and conveyed. This allows BOKU to provide answers which are of socio-political relevance and of direct relevance to us all.

As one of the universities with the highest level of third-party funding in Austria, BOKU places particular importance on the successful acquisition of research projects with national and international financing. BOKU seeks to support and promote the development and practise of outstanding science by means of improved service in the human resources field.

The motivation to participate in the "Human Resources Strategy for Researchers" (HRS4R) is to use an internal analysis to highlight areas of strengths and development and to continuously develop further and improve. BOKU is using this report to subject itself to an international comparison.

2 Procedure for internal analysis

The structural basis for the internal analysis was provided by the “European Charter for Researchers. The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers”, which is divided into four areas, contains 40 principles:

- I. Ethical and professional aspects**
- II. Recruitment**
- III. Working Conditions & social security**
- IV. Training**

Beginning in March 2011, more than 20 people in key positions (department and process leaders, leaders of committees and organisational units, and researchers from various departments and fields) were asked in semi-structured individual interviews about the current situation at BOKU in relation to the 40 charter principles. The answers, divided into applicable and relevant legislation, internal regulations and processes, and individual and general descriptions of the situation, have been summarised in a tabularised report (EU template for gap analysis).

The positive finding of the internal analysis is that BOKU is already using numerous tools in all four areas to comply with the principles of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. However, potential improvements and developments could of course be identified. In consultation with the university management, the key issues and action areas were identified and in consideration of resource implications and timescale the next relevant steps for BOKU have been set out.

3 Results in individual areas

A brief description is given below for each of the four dimensions, in which a sample list is given of existing internal regulations, processes and structures, providing insight into the strategies and activities that have already been implemented and the potential for further development.

I. Ethical and professional aspects

BOKU is a member of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity and has set up its own ombudsman responsible for good academic practice and developed guidelines to ensure good academic practice. In addition, an ethics committee has been established to address ethical issues in relation to study and teaching, research and recommendations for interaction among staff. Teaching staff has access to software to check for plagiarism, and academic projects and publications are entered into a research database. Transparent guidelines and processes have been introduced for the registration of academic projects, an electronic announcement will be launched soon.

The requirements for habilitation, the fulfilment of qualification targets and the evaluation of organisational units and academic staff have been developed in numerous working groups

and precisely defined in internal guidelines and processes. There are multiple doctoral programmes and further expansion is planned. The exploitation of intellectual property is regulated and the patent guidelines, which have been in existence since 2004, are currently being reviewed and adapted.

Accountability for academic projects is given strong central support. Accounting is transparent to researchers and academic projects are regularly audited as regards financial and scientific aspects. Support for researchers for the financial planning of planned projects is to be further expanded, e.g. with comparisons of target and actual figures within the framework of quarterly reviews.

BOKU regularly takes part in various initiatives which are intended to make research available to the public, such as lectures series in community colleges ("University goes Public"), open evenings ("Lange Nacht der Forschung") and the Vienna "girl's day" event. In addition, BOKU has an office for environmental and sustainability management and is EMAS certified.

II. Recruiting

Recruitment is carried out in accordance with a clear standardised process which is shown transparently on the homepage. Chairs are specified in the Development Plan and academic career paths are set out in the Personnel Structural Plan. A professional development advisory committee has been established for recruitment to and development of career-path positions, which has recently reviewed the forms detailing professional development. There are precise regulations for appointment procedures, which are regularly adapted in light of experience. It was recently decided that it would be useful to standardise the information provided to reviewers and committee members. All open academic positions are advertised internationally (Nature Jobs and Euraxess Jobs).

BOKU is represented each year at a careers fair (Career Calling). A special web site has been set up for new employees to provide better orientation, and a welcome folder has been produced. There are guidelines for new and returning employees, and guidelines for job advertisements and staff selection. The career possibilities for academic staff are shown graphically and promotions within academic departments are discussed regularly.

The collective agreement for employees of universities governs pay conditions. BOKU has recently started showing remuneration in job advertisements in a transparent way; professional seniority is recognised. BOKU is in addition obliged to produce an annual report on male and female pay scales (gender pay gap). The report produced last year suffered from some technical defects and is therefore currently being revised.

III. Working conditions and social security

The collective agreement for university employees was first implemented in 2009 and sets out regulations pertaining to working conditions. As a result of the separation of universities and transitional regulations, career prospects have been unclear for academic staff since 2004. The collective agreement created, in the form of the career path model, new possibilities for academic careers. BOKU discussed and developed its most important qualification targets for the career path model within a task force and specified these 2010

within internal regulations. For researchers who were already largely qualified by 2009, transitional regulations were set out and many were able to transfer into the career path model. The human resources strategy must now ensure that the possibility of a career path position continues to be available to outstanding young academics.

BOKU places particular importance on internationality and mobility. Researchers are supported above all by the numerous activities of the Center for International Relations. Regular information events are held about international programme options and there is specific funding available to support the international mobility of researchers and teaching staff. It should be noted that BOKU set up in 2010 an occupational pension fund which is paid into on an ongoing basis in addition to the state pension scheme. In the long term, this will make a key contribution to the promotion of international mobility.

Decentralised radiation and safety experts are responsible for laboratory safety. The central organisation of employee protection is currently being restructured. To ensure non-discrimination of staff and students, a working group for equal opportunities, an arbitration commission and an office for supporting people with special needs have been set up, and a plan to promote women has been included in the university by-laws.

There are various activities to improve work-life-balance, such as regular continuing education programmes and an annual health day organised by the works council. These initiatives will be expanded in line with the available funding. BOKU is making efforts to be a family-friendly university. Flexible working hours were introduced in 2010 to make it easier to combine family and work. At present, the university kindergarten still presents a problem; it is currently housed in temporary premises and does not have its own garden. An outdoor playground some distance away is available, but requires a long walk. These premises do not provide optimal conditions for childcare. A new kindergarten is therefore urgently required in order to provide adequate facilities and meet the ever-increasing demand for childcare places and time.

IV. Training

A centrally-organised continuing education programme is offered each semester, comprising various courses and workshops to improve key skills in academic work and teaching, methods as well as social skills and management skills. All BOKU employees have equal access to the training programme.

Internal curriculums to professionalise teaching skills, in project management and in leadership training for professors have been developed and are regularly available. An e-learning centre provides support to all teachers. In line with the “blended learning” concept, the virtual learning environment complements the traditional teaching and learning methods.

BOKU places particular importance on structured discussions between researchers and their supervisors. For this reason, at the start of 2012 a works agreement on the implementation of appraisal interviews was concluded. As appraisal interviews have not yet been introduced in all areas, it is now important to carry out another process to promote and support the implementation.

Appraisal interviews are important to improve the working relationship and also for professional development. Feedback has however shown that further support for young

scientists is required. Possibilities for mentoring, the sharing of experience and internal knowledge management will therefore be newly created and reactivated.

Furthermore, heads of organisational units have access to a coaching pool which allows them to reflect professionally on management issues. Specific issues can often be dealt with better by means of individual coaching than in group training. The many requests have confirmed the demand for a coaching pool for other groups within BOKU. Coaching would support not only heads of working groups and project teams but also young scientists, in the form of writing and career coaching. The coaching offer will be correspondingly expanded in accordance with budgetary possibilities.

4 Conclusion and action plan

In all four areas, in addition to statutory regulations, also internal guidelines, functioning processes and practical experience are of importance. Challenges exist and measures are required in several areas. The first action plan in the continual improvement process focuses above all on supporting young scientists (First Stage and Recognised Researchers regarding European Framework for Research Careers). The individual measures planned are listed in the following action plan:

Principle	Action	Responsible	Deadline	Possible Key Performance Indicators
Career development	Creation of additional career path positions for young scientists	Rectorate	By 2015	- Increase total number of posts to at least 30
Recruitment and Selection	Redefinition of process for appointments (transparency of decision-making)	Senate, rectorate	By 2013	- Working group meetings held - Guidelines for process leaders - Uniform instructions for reviewers and committee members
Supervision and managerial duties	Support for process to implement appraisal interviews	Staff development	By 2015	- Training on offer - Increase in number (evaluation of reports) - Evaluation of appraisal interviews
Access to research training and continuous development	Creation of venues for mentoring, exchange of experience and knowledge management	Staff development	By 2015	- Number of events - Design of new and reactivation of old formats - Internal and external cooperation
Continuing professional development	Expansion of coaching offered	Staff development	By 2016	- Expansion of coaching pool and opening up to additional target groups - Initiative for writing and career coaching - Promotion of coaching possibilities
Working conditions	Provide new premises and possibilities for kindergarten	Rectorate	By 2016	- Own garden / outdoor playground - Increase in number of childcare places - Extension of opening hours (daily, plus shorter summer break) - Catering options for children