University of Cassino and Southern Lazio

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers

Internal Analysis

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Acknowledgment
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1. Introduction

The European Charter for Researchers (shortly, the Charter) and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (shortly, the Code), which are part of the Recommendation 2005/251/EC of the European Union published on March 11, 2005, provide member states with a set of guidelines to improve the working conditions of the researchers, make more transparent their selection and recruitment, consolidate their career prospects, and spur their mobility across research institutions of different countries (see Annex 1).

The Charter is a set of general principles and requirements that define the roles, responsibilities, and entitlements of the researchers and of their employers and funders. In this context, the researcher is described as a professional engaged in the conception and creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods, and systems, and in the management of the projects related to these activities. The Charter addresses all researchers of the European Union, regardless of their career stage, the legal status of their employers, and the type of organization or establishment in which the work is performed. The aim of the Charter is to create favorable conditions for a fruitful collaboration among researchers, employers and funders, which can bring to the advancement and the dissemination of the scientific and technological knowledge. The Charter also recognizes the importance of the mobility across European institutions as a means to improve the professional skills of the researchers. Overall, the Charter constitutes a framework for researchers, employers, and funders which invites them to act responsibly and professionally.

The Code is a set of general principles and requirements, complementary to those outlined by the Charter, which should be followed by the employers and by the funders of the research activities when appointing or recruiting researchers. These principles and requirements aim at ensuring transparency in the selection process and equal treatment of all candidates, with the clear and ambitious goal of creating an attractive, open, and sustainable European labor market for researchers. Institutions and employers adhering to the Code openly demonstrate their commitment to act in a responsible and respectable way so as to provide a fair framework conditions to researchers, with a clear intention to contribute to the advancement of the European research area.

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) is an initiative promoted by the European Commission in order to support research institutions and funding organization in the implementation of the Charter and Code in their policies and practices. In particular, HRS4R has established a roadmap articulated in five main steps, which are:

1. **Internal Analysis** – The internal analysis is performed by the research institution or funding organization to compare the adopted policies and practices against the principles of the Charter and Code. In order to be transparent, the analysis must involve all key players. The use of indicators and staff opinion surveys is recommended, as they are important supporting tools to design the human resource strategy according to the institutional and national rules and practices.

2. **Human Resource Strategy for Researchers** – The research institution or funding organization publishes its own Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, which summarizes the main results of the internal analysis and presents a concrete action plan to close any existing gap with respect to the principles outlined in the Charter and Code. The document is written in English and made public on the website of the research institution or funding organization and on the European EURAXESS web-site.
3. **“Human Resource Excellence in Research” award** – The internal analysis and action plan are reviewed and acknowledged by the European Commission. The acknowledgment implies the use of the “Human Resource Excellence in Research” award, which can be placed on the website of the research institution or funding organization and is displayed next to all job adverts published on the EURAXESS web-site.

4. **Internal self-assessment** – The research institution or funding organization implements its Human Resources Strategy for Researchers and conducts a self-assessment within the framework of its internal quality assurance mechanisms. This self-assessment should be undertaken every second year after the award is released (step 3) or confirmed (step 5). Based on the self-assessment, the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers is updated as necessary and published on the website of the research institution or funding organization and on the European EURAXESS web-site.

5. **External evaluation** - Every four years after the award is released (step 3) or confirmed (step 5), the research institution or funding organization drafts a report showing the progress made towards the objectives of its Human Resource Strategy for Researchers and its compliance with the principles of the Charter and Code. The report is evaluated either by a panel of external reviewers or through national quality assurance mechanisms, such as National Evaluation Agencies, peer reviews, etc. If the evaluation is positive, the European Commission's award is confirmed. If there are reservations from the evaluators regarding actual progress, recommendations for improvements within a reasonable timeframe are made. If adequate actions to implement the recommendations have not been undertaken at the end of the period granted for improvements, the award is withdrawn.

The concrete implementation of the Charter and Code by research institutions will render them more attractive to researchers looking for a new employer or a host for their research project. Funding organizations implementing the Charter and Code principles will contribute to the attractiveness of their national research system and, more generally, of the whole European research area. The award “HR Excellence in Research” will identify the institutions and organizations as providers and supporters of a stimulating and favorable working environment. Since now, more than 250 European research institutions and funding organizations (of which 10 are located in Italy) have received this award.

On July 7, 2005, the University of Cassino and Southern Lazio (shortly, UNICAS), together with other Italian Universities, signed a joint declaration of intent on the adoption of the principles contained in Recommendation 2005/251/EC. On December 18, 2015, UNICAS embraced the principles outlined in the Charter and Code and committed itself to their implementation within its organization. On May 17, 2016, the Academic Senate decided to join the HRS4R initiative; consequently, a working group, formed by Giuseppe Biondi (administrative officer), Carlo Russo (associate professor), and Luca Venturino (associate professor), was nominated by a Rector Decree with the task of carrying out the internal analysis.
2. Description of the University

UNICAS is a state university established in 1979, whose institutional mission includes higher education, dissemination of the culture, and research. Education is offered at bachelor, master, and PhD level in the fields of economics, law, engineering, humanities, and sport sciences. Currently, about 300 permanent professors and researchers are employed at UNICAS, organized in 5 Departments, while about 8000 students are enrolled. Also, there are about 300 permanent administrative employees.

2.1. Main bodies

The **Academic Senate** (Senato Accademico) directs and defines the policy of development and growth of the University, with special regards to teaching and research, and supervises the overall operations of the institution.

The **Board of Directors** (Consiglio di Amministrazione) operates according to the guidelines established by the Academic Senate. It has the function of guidance and control of the administrative and economic management of the university.

The **Board of Auditors** (Collegio dei Revisori dei Conti) is an independent body of consultancy that supervises the correctness of administrative management. It is composed of three effective members and two deputies. One of the effective members, acting as President, is chosen by the Board of Directors among administrative and accounting magistrates and state lawyers; an effective member and one deputy are appointed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance; an effective member and one deputy are appointed by the Ministry of Education and University. At least two effective members must be registered auditors.

The **Assessment Commission** (Nucleo di Valutazione) supports the Rector by supervising the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities carried out by the university and by controlling the correct use of the public resources, the productivity of the researchers, and the quality of the offered study programs.

The **General Director** (Direttore Generale) is responsible for the administration of the university and is involved in the planning, management, coordination, and supervision of the technical and administrative staff.

The **Departments** are the institutional places where research and teaching activities are conducted; they are autonomous in the management of their budget. Professors and researchers are hosted by the Department where their research and teaching activities are most relevant.
2.2. Structure
3. Survey

Following the example of other universities that have already obtained the “HR Excellence in Research” award, UNICAS launched an internal survey to assess the degree of knowledge and perception of the researchers with respect to the Charter and Code, and to identify the area of intervention. To this end, an anonymous questionnaire was distributed in June 2016 to PhD students, PostDocs (Ricercatori titolari di Borsa di Studio), Graduate Students with Fellowship (Ricercatori titolari di Assegno di Ricerca), fixed-term researchers (Ricercatori tipo-A, Ricercatori tipo-B), permanent researchers, associate professors, and full professors.

The questionnaire (see Annex 2) complies with the template recommended by the European Commission (INTERNAL ANALYSIS TOOLKIT, published on April 26, 2011) and adopted by other research institutions; it contains 29 statements, grouped in the following 4 dimensions:

1. open recruitment and portability of grants (9 statements);
2. meeting the social security and supplementary pension needs of mobile researchers (6 statements);
3. attractive employment and working conditions (9 statements);
4. enhancing training, skills, and experience of European researchers (5 statements).

For each statement, there are four possible answers: 1 = disagree, 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = moderately agree, 4 = fully agree. Furthermore, for each dimension, it is asked to identify the three statements with highest priority.

The survey was accompanied by an informative campaign, which included a communication of the Rector to the Academic Senate, a communication of the Rector to the Board of Directors, the preparation of a web page dedicated to the HRS4R initiative, the presentation of the questionnaire in all Department Councils, an informative notice sent by the Research Office at the beginning of the survey, and a reminder sent by the Research Office before the end of the survey.

The results of the survey are discussed in the remaining part of this section, while Section 4 presents the gap analysis with respect to the principles of the Charter and Code.

3.1. Survey design and sample

Table 1: Sample survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>N. Employees</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Coverage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Professors</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Prof.</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Prof. (permanent)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Prof. (temporary)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-doc/ Fellows</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Students</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey targeted permanent and temporary research employees of the University. Table 1 reports the details of the survey coverage. We collected 157 questionnaires and the overall coverage was
35.8%. The coverage is comparable to or higher than the ones from similar surveys launched by other Italian Universities. The high coverage supports the reliability of the analysis.

3.2. Results

We asked researchers to assess a set of statements giving a score to each one on a 4 point scale (1 = fully disagree; 2 = partially disagree; 3 = partially agree; 4 = fully agree). We chose the mean of the scores as the synthetic statistics summarizing the researchers’ sentiment about the statement. The middle value 2.5 is the ‘indifference threshold’: an average score lower than 2.5 is associated to a sentiment of dissatisfaction, while an average higher than 2.5 indicates an overall satisfaction about the issue.

Figure 1 reports a summary of the researchers’ assessment about the four key areas of the questionnaire: (1) Recruitment, (2) Incentives and security, (3) Professional recognition, non-discrimination and research environment, and (4) Professional growth, mobility, tutoring and teaching. ¹ The graph reports the average, the minimum and the maximum of the average scores of each statement in the key area. On average, researchers provided a positive assessment of statements in area (3), they were in disagreement with the statements in area (2), and were indifferent to the issues in areas (1) and (4).

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¹ It is important to point out that the 4 areas concern the HRS4R issues only. Important issues for Italian Universities (and UniCLAM in particular) are not necessarily considered in the European questionnaire. For example, area (3) does not address infrastructure quality or research funding. A complete list of the statements is in the attached questionnaire.
The segregation by type of position (short-term or permanent) in Figure 2 indicates that short-term researchers, on average, provided more favorable marks than permanent researchers with the remarkable exception of area (2).

**Figure 2: Researchers opinion about HRS4R issues by position**

![Bar chart showing average scores for recruitment, incentives and security, working environment, and professional growth for permanent and fixed-term researchers.]

Figure 3 reports the average assessment for each statement in the questionnaire. In area (1), concerning recruitment, the main issues are the dissatisfaction about the advertising of new positions in the EURAXESS portal, the lack of international members in the recruitment committee and gender balance. Researchers’ sentiment about national advertising is satisfactory. Position requirements are not always considered well-described and general enough to foster participation.

Area (2) is critical in the opinion of the majority of researchers. Dissatisfaction focuses on the salary level and the adoption of integrative pension schemes. The only positive evaluation concerns the respect of current national social security regulation. In this regard, it must be noted that most of the statements in this area cover issues that are regulated by national laws and out of the University control. The area of professional recognition, non-discrimination, and research environment in general received favorable comments, with the partial exception of conciliation of family and work.

With respect to area (4) (professional growth, mobility, tutoring and teaching), researchers expressed satisfaction about mobility and tutoring (i.e., they have a clear tutor to refer to). A negative assessment emerges about teaching training and career planning.
Additional results of the survey, segregated by Department and gender, are attached in Annex 3.

3.3. Discussion

Figure 4 reports the degree of satisfaction and the normalized priority ranking for each statement in the questionnaire. The chart allows us to test the relative importance that researchers attach to each

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2 The normalized priority ranking was calculated for each of the four areas giving a 100-point score to the statement indicated as ‘priority’ by the majority of respondents and zero points to the one considered a priority by lowest number of respondent. The statements of intermediate priority have been assigned a ranking value based on an uniform distribution. The median value is assigned a value of 50 points. Normalization implies a loss of information, but it was
statement and correlate it with the degree of satisfaction. A critical area is the simultaneous combination of high dissatisfaction and high priority (the top-left area in the chart).

Figure 4: Assessment of satisfaction and priority for each statement

Five statements are in the critical area: salary level (2.1), career plans (4.3), teaching training (4.1), consideration of creativity and independence in recruitment (1.5), explicit explanation of negative judgments in recruitment (1.4). It must be noted that statement 1.4 and 1.5 barely fall within the critical area (the satisfaction score is above 2.4).

Few statements lay close to the (arbitrary) critical zone. In particular statements:
1.3 Requirement for recruitment are considered too narrow
1.6 Competencies and working conditions are not detailed in the opening calls
2.2 Social security treatment in case of disease, parenthood, retirement
3.2 Promotion of independence and creativity of researchers
3.3 Working environment provided by departments
3.5 Access to governance
3.7 Quality of research and teaching evaluation

necessary due to the changing number of statements in each area. Like any other ranking criterion, the normalized priority ranking is not comparable across areas.
have high priority and a satisfaction level slightly above the arbitrary threshold level. The most relevant issues are social security (2.2), working environment (3.4), and participation to governance (3.5). In the above list, few items are beyond University’s control, while other issues can be evaluated in the strategic plan.

Box 1: Summary of the survey findings

By looking at the statements with low agreement and large priority the following critical aspects have emerged.

- Salary and incentives provided by the university are perceived as not adequate (statement 2.1); also, they should be related to an effective and regular evaluation of the professional activities (statement 3.7).
- Social security provisions and pension rights are perceived as not adequate (statement 2.2).
- The working environment does not always support the research activity (statement 3.2) and does not encourages the autonomy and creativity of the researchers adequately (statement 3.4).
- It is required a larger participation of the researchers to bodies/boards involved in decision-making and communication activities should be facilitated and encouraged (statement 3.5).
- The selection procedures are perceived as not adequate, as selection criteria, working conditions, rights, competencies, and skills required by candidates are not adequately described in the call (statement 1.6), the required skills are not sufficiently general to encourage the widest participation of potential candidates (statement 1.3), creativeness and independence are not properly accounted for (statement 1.5), and candidates are not always adequately informed by the selection committees on weaknesses and strengths of their candidature at the end of the selection process (statement 1.4).
- It is required additional training for increasing the skills and competences needed by the researchers for their carrier progression (statement 4.3), and for their teaching duties (statement 4.1).
4. Gap analysis

The gap analysis aims at comparing the internal policies and practices at UNICAS against the principles of the Charter and Code and at identifying the points of major weakness. The analysis is based on the priorities highlighted by the internal survey and on the national laws currently in force.

The committee considered each principle of the Charter and Code, describing the state of the regulation, identifying current practices, and suggesting possible actions. A detailed report, specifically addressing each principle of the Charter and Code, is attached in the Annex 4.

According to the template recommended by the European commission, the principles of the Charter and Code can be grouped in the following four areas.

I. *Ethical and professional aspects*, covering issues such as research freedom, ethical principles, professional responsibility, professional attitude, contractual and legal obligations, accountability, good practices in research, dissemination and exploitation of results, public engagement, non-discrimination, evaluation and appraisal systems.

II. *Recruitment*, concerning recruitment procedures and code, selection, transparency, judging merit, CV analysis, recognition of mobility experience, recognition of qualifications, seniority, postdoctoral appointments.

III. *Working conditions and social security*, assessing recognition of the profession, research environment, working conditions, stability and permanence of the employment, funding and salaries, gender balance, career development, value of mobility, access to career advice, intellectual property rights, co-authorship, teaching, complains and appeals, participation in decision making bodies.

IV. *Training*, concerning relation with supervisors, supervision and managerial duties, continuing professional development, access to training

While complying with the national legislation\(^3\), the main actions that are foreseen at this stage to close the gaps with the Charter and Code are summarized in the four following boxes (one for each area). The boldface items correspond to the critical aspects arisen from the internal survey.

**Box 2: Main suggested actions about Area I (Ethical and Professional Aspects)**

- The University should support initiatives aimed at guiding researchers in seeking funds for curiosity-driven research; the application to grants should be promoted by providing administrative and legal support in the preparation of the proposal and in the management of the project.
- The admission procedure for the recruitment of researchers (including PhDs, PostDocs, and Fellowships) should be made available in English.
- The main internal regulations should be translated in English, at least those concerning the research and recruitment aspects.
- An anti-plagiarism software should be used for the assessment of theses.
- It should be activated an open archive that collects all thesis in digital format.
- A training course on safety rules should be provided to all staff, researchers, and students.

\(^3\) We remark here that salary, social security, pensions, and selection procedures are mainly determined by national laws and regulations; whereby, they cannot be fully controlled by the university.
• Best researchers should receive concrete incentives in the form, for example, of prizes and additional research funds. The professional activities (research, teaching, services, etc.), scientific merit, creativeness, and independence should be evaluated.

Box 3: Main suggested actions about Area II (Recruitment)

• The researchers should be better informed on their pension schemes and should receive adequate information on the available options to integrate the basic plan provided by the national legislation.
• It should be explored the possibility of providing additional sickness and parental benefits to PhD students, PostDocs, and Graduate Students with Fellowship, so as to overcome the limited assistance granted by the national welfare.
• Internal selection procedures should be improved by:
  - better describing the selection criteria, working conditions, rights, competencies, and skills required by candidates in the call for competition;
  - requesting a more general profile so as to encourage the wider participation of potential candidates;
  - requesting that creativeness and independence are properly accounted for by the selection committees;
  - requesting that the selection committees adequately inform the candidates on their weaknesses and strengths at the end of the evaluation process.
  - ensuring international advertising of open positions.
• The mobility of researchers within Italian and European universities should be promoted and facilitated by introducing incentives for Departments recruiting researchers who have not studied or previously worked at or collaborated with this university.
• Researchers may face difficulties in preserving their pension benefits when moving across different countries. To overcome this problem, the European Commission is supporting a consortium of employers, through Horizon 2020, in creating a single European pension arrangement (RESAVER) that will offer a defined contribution plan, tailor-made for research organizations and their employees. UNICAS may explore this consortium or adhering to other similar initiatives.
• Researchers should receive adequate and clear information on the internal recruitment policies and on the carrier opportunities which are likely to be foreseen in the near future according to the development plan envisioned by the university.
• Researcher should be supported in their professional activities with internal training courses aimed at increasing the skills and competences needed for their carrier progression.
• Post-doc programs (borse di studio) and research fellowships (assegni di ricerca) should consider specific actions for career development (including access to Job Placement services)

Box 4: Main suggested actions about Area III (Working Conditions and Social Security)
- The University should include researchers (and employees) well-being among the general principles of the Statute.
- New researchers should be informed about well-being, safety, and family-work conciliation.
- **Training early stage researchers about publication strategies/placement and IPR protection/exploitation.**
- Researchers should be better informed about national and international job opportunities.
- The University should assign more resources to the Research Office and International Center.
- Early stage researchers should receive formal recognition for their teaching activities (CV building).
- The University should introduce reasonable caps to teaching duties.
- Early stage researchers should participate in department meetings and have voting rights.
- The participation of the researchers to bodies/boards and committees involved in decision-making and communication activities should be encouraged with specific incentives.
- The Statute and the General Rules of the University should be amended to increase participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 5: Main suggested actions about Area IV (Training)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A formal teaching training should be provided to early stage researchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication, information, and promotion of existing training activities (including the development of e-learning platforms for researchers) should be improved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **Next steps toward the EU award**

The feasibility and efficacy of any action to be included in Human Resource Strategy for Researchers must be carefully reviewed and verified by the competent parts which will be responsible of its implementation. To this end, it is recommended that the working group that will be responsible of the definition of the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers at UNICAS and of the corresponding action plan, while being representative of all research areas and roles of this university as recommend by the European Commission, also include key figures which are involved in or lead decision-making bodies/boards.

6. **Annexes**

ANNEX 1. Charter and Code

ANNEX 2. Questionnaire

ANNEX 3. Detailed results of the internal survey

ANNEX 4. Gap analysis