

**HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR (UM) FOR RESEARCHERS,  
Incorporating the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for  
the Recruitment of Researchers  
2010-2014**

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The University of Maribor is aware of the importance of human resources for scientific research as one of the main activities of universities. In June 2009, UM has acceded to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, among which both documents have been promoted for the past five years. UM would thus like to contribute to the efforts of the European Commission for a common research area, a common labour market for researchers increased mobility, attractiveness of careers, more favourable working conditions, the development of various skills and know-how of researchers and more stable social security. But above all, UM would like to become recognized as an employer that is aware of the importance of human resources, strongly supports its researchers and offers attractive working conditions.

For this purpose and on the basis of a previous internal analysis, the following human resources strategy and an action plan, its integral part, were formulated with regard to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The following documents constitute the basis:

- Commission Communication "A Mobility Strategy for the European Research Area" (2001)
- Communication "Researchers in the ERA: One profession, multiple careers" (2003)
- C&C Recommendation from Commission to MS – based on broad stakeholder consultation process (2005)
- Follow-up activities focusing on implementation: EU Presidency Conferences London (2005), Vienna (2006), Rennes (2008)
- ERA Green paper – Expert Group report on "Realising a single labour market for researchers" (2008)
- Commission Communication "Better careers and more mobility: a European partnership for researchers" (2008) proposing to develop a partnership with Member States to ensure the availability of the necessary researchers

The internal analysis of the present situation was conducted between September 2009 and January 2010 in order to define obstacles in the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of

Researchers. The internal analysis form drawn following the template of the European Commission and forwarded to vice deans for scientific research of the University of Maribor and their administrative staff. The content of the strategy for overcoming obstacles, published in Slovene and English on the university's website, is thus the result of collaborative work between researchers and administrative staff at various hierarchical levels of the university. Its implementation is subject to internal and external evaluations conducted every two (at least) and four years respectively. In addition, external factors presenting either obstacles or opportunities for the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers are being monitored.

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers consists of four key areas:

1. Ethical and professional aspects
2. Recruitment
3. Working conditions and social security
4. Training

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (hereinafter referred to as Charter and Code) are to a large extent already an established practice enacted with the following legal framework, which serves as the basis for procedures at the University of Maribor and other Slovene universities:

Employment Related Industrial Property Rights Act, Copyright and Related Rights Act, Research and Development Act, Employment Relationship Act, Civil Servants Act, Higher Education Act, Act on the Access to Information of Public Character, Public Sector Salary System Act, Code of Conduct for Civil Servants, Collective agreement for the non-economic sector of the Republic of Slovenia, Collective agreement for public sector, Collective agreement for research activity, Rules on the training and financing of young researchers in research organisations, Rules on the Procedure and Method of Calculation of Reimbursements for Labour and Other Personal Remuneration Costs to Public Research Organisations, Decree on the promotion of civil servants to salary grades, Decree laying down share of salary for work performance to be paid for the increased work load to civil servants in the public sector, Decree on the criteria for determining the amount of grade-related allowances for civil servants,

Decree on position classification into salary grades for public agencies, public trust funds and public institutes, Decree concerning performance at work related to selling goods and services in the market, Decree on the uniform methodology and forms for the calculation and payment of salaries in the public sector, Decree on criteria and standards for allocating resources for the implementation of the National Research and Development Programme.

The internal analysis has revealed obstacles in all four areas, which are described hereinafter, along with measures for the implementation of the European Charter for

Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in the field of human resources management. By introducing these measures, we want to overcome the aforementioned obstacles with regard to the level of influence of the University of Maribor.

## **I. ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS**

Ethical and professional aspects are governed by national legislation, which is publicly available to all researchers. It offers favourable conditions for the implementation of principles within the context of ethical and professional aspects. The analysis revealed that the legal framework supports these aspects and that the existing practice follows the principles of research freedom, the recognized ethical practice, professional responsibility, professional attitude, responsibility and non-discrimination. The existing practice is to a large extent consistent with the recommendations/principles of both the Charter and the Code in terms of ethical and professional aspects.

The analysis revealed a poor implementation of **good practice in research** referring to the inconsistent observation of regulations governing safe working practices. Therefore, the University of Maribor is introducing measures for the reinforcement of internal scrutiny concerning the implementation of safe working practices in line with national legislation, including the necessary precautions for health and safety as well as recovery from information technology disasters. The current national legal requirements regarding data protection and confidentiality protection requirements are available on the website of the University of Maribor and in other online resources.

The internal analysis also showed obstacles for a more comprehensible implementation of the principle of **disseminating and exploiting research results**. In 2010, the University of Maribor will ensure additional intellectual property protection with the Rules on Managing Intellectual Property Rights at the University of Maribor in line with national legislation. All researchers should ensure, in compliance with their contractual arrangements, that the results of their research are disseminated and exploited, e.g. communicated, transferred into other research settings or, if appropriate, commercialised provided that the necessary conditions have also been established within the university. Senior researchers, in particular, are expected to take a lead in ensuring that research is fruitful and that results are either exploited commercially or made accessible to the public (or both) whenever the opportunity arises. In order to enhance the transfer of know-how into other research settings and the industry, the University of Maribor has already set up an office for technology transfer providing researchers with the necessary support. In compliance with their contractual arrangements, researchers are disseminating results and making them accessible to the public with the exception of those research outputs that the contracting authority does not allow to publish (competition).

**Public engagement** is to a large extent already facilitated through the dissemination of research results, which is usually the subject of contractual obligations of the contracting authority. Despite this fact, researchers should undergo adequate training in order to ensure a more comprehensible implementation of this principle. Communication with the general public and presentation of research results and their applicability requires specific skills. In order to enable researchers to ensure that the broader public is familiar with their research results and that even non-specialists are able to understand them, thereby improving the public's understanding of science, the University of Maribor will propose, during the public debate about the new National Research and Development Programme, initiatives for research training to the relevant ministry, in particular for researchers within the programme Young Researchers financed by both the Slovenian Research Agency and the Slovenian Technology Agency. Thus, the University of Maribor will ensure a high quality implementation of these principles and the satisfaction of additional demands of universities as employers. We agree that direct engagement with the public will help researchers to better understand public interest in priorities for science and also the public's concern.

**Evaluation/appraisal systems** have been introduced, but they only coincide with the recommendations of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers to a certain extent. We have introduced evaluation/appraisal systems for all researchers, including senior researchers, for assessing their professional performance on a regular basis and in a transparent manner by an independent committee. The analyzed inconsistency refers to the subject of evaluation and appraisal. Such evaluation and appraisal systems must consider the whole range of research creativity and outputs, e.g. publications, patents, leading role in research activities, teaching, lecturing, supervision, mentorship, cooperation at the national or international level, administrative obligations, raising public awareness and mobility. Evaluation/appraisal procedures must also be considered within the context of promotion. The existing procedures will be revised in line with the recommendations of the Code and the Charter, which means that a greater emphasis will be placed on the whole range of research activity when considering promotions, e.g. also in the field of mobility – international and inter-sectoral or administrative duties. We will also revise appointment procedures both for teaching staff engaged in research and for researchers without teaching duties.

In order to assess the professional performance of senior researchers on a regular basis and in a transparent manner by an independent (and preferably international) committee in line with the recommendations, we will be examining the possibility of introducing such changes during the first four years.

## **II. RECRUITMENT**

The Slovene national legislation already ensures clearly specified **entry and admission standards** for researchers, particularly those at the beginning of their careers; researchers who are returning to a research career, including teachers (of any level), encounter no significant obstacles. All available instruments, especially

international or global online resources mentioned in the recommendation on **recruitment (Code)**, such as the European Researcher's mobility portal (<http://europa.eu.int/eracareers>), are in use, but some of them are not being exploited to the fullest. Job advertisements do not include a description of working conditions and requirements, including information on promotion and career development prospects.

Extremely long and complex procedures for the recruitment of foreigners present a major obstacle for a more comprehensible implementation of recruitment recommendations concerning the use of international human resources. During the first four years, we will therefore be calling attention to system deficiencies concerning the recruitment of foreigners, especially during the preparation of the National Research and Development Programme. Internal instructions for the recruitment of researchers will be supplemented with a description of the uniform selection procedure, which means that information on working conditions and entitlements, including career development prospects, will be included in advertisements published in Slovene and English. In accordance with these instructions, candidates will have to be informed about the selection procedure and the recruitment process prior to the selection and on the advantages and disadvantages of the position after the selection. Thus, the **transparency** principle will be implemented more comprehensibly.

Although the recommendations for the **selection** principle have no legal or other restrictions, the selection procedure is not implemented in the recommended manner since that is extremely problematic for a university of this size. In addition, it is indirectly linked to the regulation of scientific disciplines, which is the preparation phase. In order to regulate the selection procedure, which is currently conducted at faculty level, we will explore the possibility of adapting selection procedures in line with the recommendations.

The internal analysis of the judging merit also revealed that there is still room for improvements. According to the recommendations of the Code and the Charter, the selection process should take into consideration the whole range of experience of the candidates. While focusing on their overall potential as researchers, their creativity and level of independence should also be considered. This means that merit should be judged qualitatively as well as quantitatively, focusing on outstanding results within a diversified career path and not only on the number of publications. Consequently, the importance of bibliometric indices should be properly balanced within a wider range of evaluation criteria, such as teaching, supervision, teamwork, knowledge transfer, management of research and innovation and public awareness activities. For candidates from an industrial background, particular attention should be paid to any contributions to patents, development or inventions. Although there is no such practice, neither the legislation nor the institutional rules mention this. This principle will be included into the revised selection procedure, including the appointment of qualified and competent faculty staff that will be in charge of this procedure, which means that necessary knowledge and skills will have to be defined in advance. The UM selection procedure will also be revised in terms of how to assess the career breaks or **variations in the chronological order of CVs**. Although the recommended practice is already present to some

extent, this matter should not be left to chance. Therefore, the instructions on the selection procedure will also include the recommendation of the Code and the Charter, which states that career breaks or variations in the chronological order of CVs should not be penalised, but regarded as an evolution of a career, and consequently, as a potentially valuable contribution to the professional development of researchers towards a multidimensional career track. Candidates should therefore be allowed to submit evidence-based CVs, reflecting a representative array of achievements and qualifications appropriate to the post for which application is being made.

With regard to **the recognition of mobility experience, the recognition of qualification and seniority**, as recommended by the Charter and the Code, there are no obstacles for the implementation of this recommendation neither in the promotion procedure nor in internal instructions on the selection procedure, although it is certainly already a valuable contribution in the minds of the assessors. Any mobility experience, e.g. a stay in another country/region or in another research setting (public or private) or a change from one discipline or sector to another, whether as part of the initial research training or at a later stage of the research career, or virtual mobility experience, should be considered as a valuable contribution to the professional development of a researcher, and therefore mobility should be recognized in the selection procedure as well as in promotions. The University of Maribor will also ensure that academic and professional qualifications of researchers, including non-formal qualifications, will be appropriately assessed, especially within the context of international and professional mobility. Everyone involved in the selection and promotion procedure must be informed and gain a full understanding of rules, procedures and standards governing the recognition of such qualifications and, consequently, explore existing national law, conventions and specific rules on the recognition of these qualifications through all available channels. The levels of qualifications required should be in line with the needs of the position and not set as a barrier to entry. Recognition and evaluation of qualifications should focus on judging the achievements of the person rather than his/her circumstances or the reputation of the institution where the qualifications were gained. As professional qualifications may be gained at an early stage of a long career, the pattern of lifelong professional development should also be recognised.

**Postdoctoral appointments** are another novelty in the human resource strategy of UM. We will endeavour to set clear rules and explicit guidelines for the recruitment and appointment of postdoctoral researchers, including the maximum duration and the objectives of such appointments. Such guidelines shall take into account time spent in prior postdoctoral appointments at other institutions and take into consideration that the postdoctoral status should be transitional, with the primary purpose of providing additional professional development opportunities for a research career in the context of long-term career prospects.

In case of gaining a position abroad, postdoctoral researchers have to abandon their home university completely as required by the existing regulations. For this reason, researchers who wish to maintain contact with their home university must obtain a fellowship instead of a real postdoctoral position. Another obstacle is the tax legislation, which imposes taxes on fellowships. Since fellowships are strictly

intended as travel and subsistence allowance, researchers might not be able to cover travel and living expenses after paying the tax. We will be calling attention to this issue during the preparation of the new National Research and Development Programme.

### **III. WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

**EXPECTATIONS of researchers in terms of human resources will be analyzed (stimulating working conditions), and the strategy will be tailored to their expectations to the extent possible.**

There are no legal restrictions for implementing most of the recommendations within the context of working conditions and social security.

The University of Maribor strives to contribute to the recognition of researchers as professionals, who can have multiple careers (Researcher's Night 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010). All researchers building a career in research are recognized by the University of Maribor as professionals and treated accordingly from the beginning of their careers, namely at postgraduate level, considering all levels, regardless of their classification at national level (e.g. employee, postgraduate student, doctoral candidate, postdoctoral fellow, civil servants).

Recommendations on **research environment, working conditions and stability and permanence of employment** are to a great extent linked to the financial capacity of the employer. With regard to the available funds of UM as a public institution, we strive to ensure a stimulating research environment, adequate training for researchers, appropriate equipment, facilities and opportunities, including for remote collaboration over research networks, as well as compliance with national and sectoral regulations concerning health and safety in research.

**Working conditions** covered by the legislation are to a large extent brought in line with the recommendations. In accordance with its financial capacity and existing legislative provisions, the University of Maribor will strive to ensure that the working conditions for researchers, including for disabled researchers, provide where appropriate the flexibility deemed essential for successful research performance.

We will aim to provide working conditions which allow both women and men researchers to combine family and work, children and career. Particular attention will be paid to flexible working hours, part-time working, tele-working and sabbatical leave, as well as to the necessary financial and administrative provisions governing such arrangements. For this purpose, we will examine the possibility for both organizing day care during the work process under the auspices of UM and adjusting the teaching load to the needs of motherhood.

In accordance with its financial capacity and the existing legislative provision, UM strives to ensure the **stability and permanence of employment as well as stability of employment conditions for researchers**, thus implementing and abiding by the principles and terms laid down in the *EU Directive on Fixed-Term Work*. During the preparation of the National Research and Development Programme, we will be

calling attention to the need for changes in research funding for universities, which is too fragmented and not adjusted to the nature of scientific research conducted at universities, which also has a pedagogical component.

### **Funding and salaries**

The University of Maribor ensures conditions of funding and salaries with adequate and equitable social security provisions (including sickness and parental benefits, pension rights and unemployment benefits) in accordance with existing national legislation and with national or sectoral collective bargaining agreements. This includes researchers at all career stages including early-stage researchers, commensurate with their legal status, performance and level of qualifications and/or responsibilities. During the preparation of the National Research and Development Programme, UM will be calling attention to the funding method established in rules of the Slovenian Research Agency since it does not receive adequate funding as compensation for all the benefits it pays as the employer in accordance with the sectoral collective bargaining agreement. Funding is provided on the basis of an average hourly fee of researchers, and therefore universities do not receive adequate funding from the Slovenian Research Agency that would cover the actual expenses incurred. During the preparation of the National Research and Development Programme, we will propose the removal of researchers from the salary system of civil servants or a change in the salary system for researchers in the context of civil servants with a fundamental change in research funding.

The recommendation on **gender balance** is already being partly implemented as an unwritten rule. UM aims for a representative gender balance at all levels of staff, including at supervisory and managerial level. To ensure equal treatment, selection and evaluation committees should have an adequate gender balance. This should be achieved on the basis of an equal opportunity policy at recruitment and at the subsequent career stages without, however, taking precedence over quality and competence criteria. This recommendation will be included in the university's rules on recruitment and composition of university bodies.

During the development of the new National Research and Development Programme, the University of Maribor will be calling attention to career development as a recommendation of the Code and the Charter, which should be implemented more comprehensively. For this purpose, national programme funds enabling **career development, preferably within the framework of human resources, specific career development strategies for researchers at all stages of their career, regardless of their contractual situation, including for researchers on fixed-term contracts**, must be provided. This strategy will have to include the **availability of mentors** involved in providing support and guidance for the personal and professional development of researchers, thus motivating them and contributing to reducing any insecurity in their professional future. The existing human resources manual will also be supplemented in this respect. With regard to its capacities, the University of Maribor strives to create favourable conditions for career development, which includes the management board's decision on free staff training.

As already mentioned, UM's internal instructions, manuals and rules will also include the **recognition of the value** of geographical, inter-sectoral, inter- and trans-



disciplinary and virtual **mobility** as well as mobility between the public and private sector as an important means of enhancing scientific knowledge and professional development at any stage of a researcher's career. This also requires that the necessary administrative instruments be put in place to allow the portability of both grants and social security provisions, to which we will be calling attention during the preparation of the new National Research and Development Programme.

**Access to career advice** is being implemented in form of individual consultations of early-stage researchers with their mentors. Ensuring that career advice is offered to researchers at all career stages, regardless of their contractual situation, requires additional financial and (adequately trained) human resources. For a comprehensible implementation of this recommendation, we will therefore submit a proposal during the preparation of the new National Research and Development Programme.

Researchers at all career stages reap the benefits of the exploitation of their R&D results through legal protection and, in particular, through appropriate protection of **Intellectual Property Rights**, including copyrights. Rules on Intellectual Property Rights at the University of Maribor, along with the existing legislation, will specify what rights belong to researchers and/or, where applicable, to their employers or other parties, including external commercial or industrial organisations, as possibly provided for under specific collaboration agreements or other types of agreement. In order to enhance the transfer of know-how from the university into the industry and to enable a more efficient management of intellectual property, the University of Maribor has set up an office for technology transfer, as a support mechanism for researchers, within the framework of the UM Technocenter d.o.o.

**Co-authorship** is viewed positively by UM. Although the recommendations of this principle are to a large extent already implemented in practice, the general act will be supplemented with their content. Co-authorship is and will be viewed positively when evaluating staff, as evidence of a constructive approach to the conduct of research, regardless of career stage, or as a means of publishing research results independently from supervisor(s).

**Teaching** is an essential means for the structuring and dissemination of knowledge and should therefore be considered a valuable option within the researchers' career paths. Teaching responsibilities are defined by national legislation and regulations. Researchers at the beginning of their careers have no teaching responsibilities. Teaching duties are remunerated and taken into account in the evaluation/appraisal systems in accordance with the legislation as well as the time devoted by senior members of staff to the training of early stage researchers that is counted as part of the teaching commitment. In order to teach at UM, researchers must undergo suitable training for teaching and coaching activities as part of their professional development.

**Complaints and appeals** of researchers are addressed in compliance with national rules and regulations. There is no specific commission or officer dealing with complaints/appeals of researchers. National rules and regulations do not provide for

other appropriate procedures or the possibility of an impartial (ombudsman-type) person to deal with complaints/appeals of researchers, including those concerning conflicts between supervisor(s) and early-stage researchers. Legal frameworks do not provide research staff with confidential and informal assistance in resolving work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, with the aim of promoting fair and equitable treatment within the institution and improving the overall quality of the working environment. For this reason, the existing procedures will not be modified until legislative changes are introduced. We will be calling attention to this issue during preparation of the new National Research and Development Programme since a comprehensible implementation would require adequately trained staff and additional financial resources.

By supplementing the Statute of University of Maribor, we will ensure the **participation of researchers** in relevant information, consultation and decision-making **bodies** of the institutions for which they work, so as to protect and promote their individual and collective interests as professionals and to actively contribute to the workings of the institution.

#### **IV. TRAINING**

Researchers in their training phase have established a structured and regular relationship **with their supervisor(s)** and faculty/departmental representative(s) as provided for by the Rules on the training and financing of young researchers in research organisations as well as other applicable statutory regulations and legal acts. This includes keeping records of all work progress and research findings, obtaining feedback by means of reports and seminars, applying such feedback and working in accordance with agreed schedules, milestones, deliverables and/or research outputs.

Although **supervision and managerial duties** are expected from researchers, too little emphasis is being placed on training for performing such duties. Senior researchers should devote particular attention to their multi-faceted role as supervisors, mentors, career advisors, leaders, project coordinators, managers or science communicators. **Continuing professional development** is also expected but limited by financial resources. Researchers at all career stages should seek to continually improve themselves by regularly updating and expanding their skills and competencies. This may be achieved by a variety of means including, but not restricted to, formal training, workshops, conferences and e-learning. **Access to research training and continuous development** for all researchers at any stage of their career is not regulated by law. Such measures should be regularly assessed for their accessibility, take up and effectiveness in improving competencies, skills and employability.

In order to enable researchers to perform their **multi-faceted role** as supervisors, mentors, career advisors, leaders, project coordinators, managers or science communicators to the highest professional standards and to build up a more constructive and positive relationship with the early-stage researchers, in order to set the conditions for efficient transfer of knowledge and for the further successful development of the researchers' careers, while ensuring their continuous **career development, research training and ongoing development**, we will propose, during the preparation of the new National Research and Development Programme, the

## **European Partnership for Researchers**

European Charter for Researchers/Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers  
Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code



examination and preparation of suitable training curricula for researchers at various career stages for gaining additional knowledge and skills as well as necessary steps to ensure sufficient financial and in particular adequate human resources.

**Supervising** the performance of professional duties is clearly defined; early-stage researchers can refer to their supervisor. Researchers, especially early-stage researchers, are informed accordingly. The training of supervisors is provided in accordance with applicable statutory regulations and other legal acts. Supervisors proposed by the Slovenian Research Agency are sufficiently expert in supervising research, have the time, knowledge, experience, expertise and commitment to be able to offer the research trainee appropriate support and provide for the necessary progress and review procedures, as well as the necessary feedback mechanisms.