

The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) incorporating the

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

Report on Self-assessment  
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna  
July 2014

## **The institution at a glance**<sup>1</sup>

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 specializing in the life sciences, with

- approximately 12,000 students and more than 2,000 members of staff
- three major campuses, and approximately 130,000 m<sup>2</sup> of teaching, laboratory and office space
- eight Bachelor's and 28 Master's programs (11 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.

## **HRS4R background**

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.

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 practice of outstanding science by means of improved service in the human resources field.

BOKU already signed the declaration of endorsement of the principles and requirements to strengthen the European Research Area (ERA) already in 2006 (European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers).

Since 2011, BOKU has enforced its efforts to elaborate a "Human Resources Strategy for Researchers". By means of a continuous improvement process, further implementation of the Charter & Code is facilitated. After an elaborated internal gap analysis, BOKU started with its first action plan in 2012. With these efforts BOKU was acknowledged by the European Commission and achieved the right to use the logo "HR Excellence in Research".

2014 BOKU conducted its first self-assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.boku.ac.at/en/>

## **The approach and methodology applied**

<b>Main activities</b>
Internal analysis following HRS4R Action Plan 2012
Internal analysis following feedback and comments of young scientists
HRS4R Implementation (self-assessment) Report

The internal self-evaluation was initiated in May 2014. Similar to the internal analysis, the self-evaluation was based on the Carter and Code principles and first of all on the agreed Action Plan. An informal working group was established. Its members were directly related to the HRS4R Action Plan and partly responsible for the tasks assigned. Authorities responsible for other tasks were asked to comment on the achievements and the progress. The working group cooperated with the relevant Vice Rector for Human Resource Management and Organizational Development.

The first action plan in the continual improvement process focuses above all on supporting young scientists (First Stage and Recognized Researchers regarding European Framework for Research Careers). Therefore single measures and events were evaluated to aggregate feedback and comments from these key stakeholder group.

The working group checked each item of the existing Action Plan regarding progress of the actions and achievements of Key Performance Indicators. The activities conducted so far were thoroughly listed together with their documented evidence in figures, flow charts, designing files and reports. For each action output, effectiveness and possible next steps were discussed. Finally the general progress for the action was stated. The table at the end of this report shows an overview of activities, evidence and progress.

## **Review of the Action Plan**

### **1. Career development**

The plan's goal is to create more position vacancies for young scientists and to support their career development. Career opportunities have been continuously expanded over the last two years. According to a performance report from 2013, BOKU created 34 positions during the year thanks to more vacancies being advertised and filled. This expansion of career opportunities has proved successful and this action plan will therefore be further implemented during the upcoming years.

Additionally, an individual women's empowerment program (Inge Dirmhirn Career Positions Program) was developed to close gaps in the promotion of young researchers. Thus, in the future, the proportion of qualified female professors should be increased in disciplines which currently show a low number of qualified female professors. The advertised positions are directed exclusively towards women who are appropriately qualified. Two such positions were issued during 2013.

<http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/wissenschaftliche-karriere/inge-dirmhirn-laufbahnstellen-programm/>

Austrian Universities have greatly developed in the last few years. A collective contract for all staff members at the University was implemented. BOKU produced a 32 page brochure in 2013 in order to present a clear overview of the University's employment strategies over the previous years. This document contains a description of the new career step system, from student helpers to professors. This new material serves as both a national and international guide when considering how the next generation of scientists fit into the future workplace. [http://www.boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/H05000/H17100/Personalentwicklung/Broschuere\\_Karriere\\_BOKU.pdf](http://www.boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/H05000/H17100/Personalentwicklung/Broschuere_Karriere_BOKU.pdf)

## **2. Recruitment and Selection**

The appointment of new professors consists of a complicated, multiple stage process involving a variety of panels. In Austria, there are three different appointment proceedings according to law (§ 98, § 99 Abs. 1 and § 99 Abs. 3 Universitätsgesetz 2002). The different processes can be confusing and overwhelming.

In order to make the process and the rationale behind certain decisions clearer, different flowcharts support the available information. Team meetings were held with the aim to collect and update instructions for experts and members of commissions. Written information and flowcharts were adapted accordingly.

## **3. Supervision and managerial duties**

The aim is to promote and support professionalism in appraisal interviews at BOKU. These conversations are important in personnel management and offer more junior staff members the chance to ask for feedback on their work and information in regards to career opportunities.

In spring 2014, an online survey about satisfaction with the management of these meetings was conducted. A large number of colleagues were interested in and took part in the online survey. Over one third of those affected colleagues (620 people) were able to be used for the sample and therefore contributed to the results. A predominant majority is very satisfied or satisfied with the appraisal-system and considers them to be very important or important in clarifying the focus of work, work-related difficulties and career prospects. The few criticisms that were received are being constructively viewed and will help BOKU to develop the current practices. The detailed evaluation report is available through the following link: <http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/mag/evaluierung/>

Online training relating to carrying out appraisal interviews has been available over the last few years. Following the training, more opinions on this topic have been voiced and the training available will therefore be a focus during winter semester 2014/15. A further possible improvement could be the automated recording and central administration of the interviews conducted in order to simplify the monitoring process.

## **4. Access to research training and continuous development**

Further training in research is a key element in achieving an excellent scientific career. BOKU is committed to the ongoing development of training in research and the University has continued to pursue these targets by including further training in qualification agreements. Being in contact with experienced scientists and benefitting from their knowledge has proved successful in aiding the development of less-experienced academics. Personal and professional development massively benefits from and relies on mentoring, sharing experiences and knowledge being widely available.

An example of this thinking is evident in BOKU's reactivation of 'Club Habil'. 'Club Habil' regularly meets young researchers who are interested in writing habilitation treatise. After some initial comments on the subject (e.g. by the Vice Chancellor for Research), there is ample opportunity to exchange experiences, peer mentoring and networking.

<http://www.boku.ac.at/pers/personalentwicklung/themen/wissenschaftliche-karriere/club-habil/>

As part of the internal training program, training sessions, which have previously proved successful, are being continued and new events relating to knowledge management have been created with the help of both internal and external partners. Topic examples include introduction to research projects, teaching systems, media training and good scientific practice. The internal training program is equally available to all BOKU employees. In order to simplify the application process, it was automated in spring 2014. As a second step, in autumn 2014 BOKU aims to obtain as many Green Meeting Certificates as possible for its training events. This demonstrates BOKU's commitment to sustainability.

<http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/>

A further step could be the introduction of BOKU-wide training pass. The training pass was designed in spring 2014 within a working group representing all referring University Committees. It answers specifically to the needs of BOKU and could be introduced into and work alongside existing resources that are in place for the necessary system changes with the beginning of the summer semester 2015. The idea includes both tools which would improve colleagues' arrival and orientation at BOKU and also help with current development presented as 'Life Long Learning Programs'.

## **5. Continuing professional development**

BOKU wants to support the career development which it has been providing for years by expanding the Coaching pool for scientific managers into new target groups, offering more writing and career coaching and better advertising internal coaching opportunities.

Currently, sufficient financial means are unfortunately unavailable to offer the support to new target groups such as project and team leaders. Only conflict and mediation coaching are additionally available if required. The career development group coaching sessions which were offered could only take place once during the time of the report due to an insufficient number of applications. But a new format was successfully introduced for writing coaching: The two-week long dissertation writing workshop started in 2013 and will now be offered on a semester basis. Furthermore, workshops entitled 'Scientific Writing in English' and 'How to write a scientific publication' are regularly available.

Due to the fact that the expansion of the coaching offered cannot go ahead as planned, ideas to strengthen the internal mentoring possibilities are currently being developed. An information flyer aimed at those interested in being involved in mentoring will be produced.

## **6. Working conditions**

The need to expand the children's day care center has become increasingly pressing over recent years as the current facilities are too small and lack outdoor space.

A plan for a new building which would provide sufficient outdoor and indoor space including a kitchen for a day care center was drawn-up in consultation with future users from BOKU, contracting body (Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft) and relevant authorities (Amt für Jugend und Familie). It is currently thought that the approved project will be finished in 2016.

The daily opening hours already could be extended so that the day care center would open at 7.45 and close at 17.00. During holidays, the center will offer a four week long all day child care service.

### **Conclusion**

Supporting the principles laid out in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers is an active process. The schemes and measures mentioned in the Action Plan 2012 are now well underway some of which have already been completed whilst others are still in process. Four of the projects relate to the expansion and professionalization of ongoing projects and processes. In one case, goals and expectations have been adapted due to budgetary reasons. In the majority of cases, however, the expected aims have been met and sometimes even exceeded.

## Action Plan 2012

	<b>Principle</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Possible Key Performance Indicators</b>
1	<b>Career development</b>	Creation of additional career path positions for young scientists	Rectorate	By 2015	- Increase total number of posts to at least 30
2	<b>Recruitment and Selection</b>	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
3	<b>Supervision and managerial duties</b>	Support for process to implement appraisal interviews	Staff development	By 2015	- Training on offer - Increase in number (evaluation of reports) - Evaluation of appraisal interviews
4	<b>Access to research training and continuous development</b>	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
5	<b>Continuing professional development</b>	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
6	<b>Working conditions</b>	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

## Self-assessment 2014

	Pro- gress	Activities	Evidence
1	Success fully ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job vacancies were advertised and filled on an ongoing basis</li> <li>- Inge Dirmhirn vacancies were created</li> <li>- New information resources relating to scientific careers were created and printed: brochure entitled „Zukunft Universität – Karriere an der BOKU“</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intellectual Capital Report, Performance Report 2013 <a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/wissenschaftliche-karriere/inge-dirmhirn-laufbahnstellen-programm/">http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/wissenschaftliche-karriere/inge-dirmhirn-laufbahnstellen-programm/</a></li> <li><a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/H05000/H17100/Personalentwicklung/Broschuere_Karriere_BOKU.pdf">http://www.boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/H05000/H17100/Personalentwicklung/Broschuere_Karriere_BOKU.pdf</a></li> </ul>
2	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monitored and updated procedures for selecting professors</li> </ul>	Three flow charts (§ 98, § 99 Abs. 1 und § 99 Abs. 3 UG 2002)
3	Success fully ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A university-wide evaluation of appraisal interview was carried out in 2014 and the report was published</li> <li>- According to the report, the number of appraisals carried out increased</li> <li>- Appraisal training was carried out on an ongoing basis and is a key focus in the internal training program during autumn 2014</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/H05000/H17100/MAG_Mitarbeitergespräch/Evaluierungsbericht_MitarbeiterInnengespräche_2014.pdf">http://www.boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/H05000/H17100/MAG_Mitarbeitergespräch/Evaluierungsbericht_MitarbeiterInnengespräche_2014.pdf</a></li> <li>- Report sheets, analysis in evaluation report <a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/">http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/</a></li> </ul>
4	Success fully ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Club Habil was reactivated</li> <li>- Ongoing and new workshops with internal and external trainers (Introduction to research projects, teaching system, media training, good scientific practice etc.)</li> <li>- ‚Fit für BOKU‘ training pass designed since February 2014</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/pers/personalentwicklung/themen/wissenschaftliche-karriere/club-habil/">http://www.boku.ac.at/pers/personalentwicklung/themen/wissenschaftliche-karriere/club-habil/</a>, List of participants and evaluations</li> <li><a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/">http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/</a>, List of participants and evaluations</li> <li>- Minutes from working group und presentation of the concept</li> </ul>
5	Adapted ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ‚Boot Camp‘: First dissertation writing workshop in 2013</li> <li>- career development group coaching sessions ongoing</li> <li>- conflict coaching and mediation are additionally available if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/">http://www.boku.ac.at/personalentwicklung/themen/personalentwicklung/fortbildung14-15/</a>, List of participants and evaluations</li> <li>- application forms and sign-ups</li> </ul>
6	Success fully ongoing	The architect's plans combine a day care center and garden center. The designs were developed in consultation with contracting body (Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft), the future user (BOKU) and relevant authorities (Magistratsabteilung 11 – Amt für Jugend und Familie). The new construction has been approved and the building is currently expected to be finished in 2016.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intellectual Capital Report, Performance Report 2013</li> <li>- Designing files for day care center and garden center</li> </ul>

✓ = action fulfilled, process implemented