A Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code

University of Niš
Serbia

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to align the vision of the development of human resources on University of Niš, with European Union's policy for human resources in science and research, by taking into account the 40 principles of the European Charter and Code for Researchers (C&C), related to ethical and professional aspects, employment, working conditions and social security and training.

The Strategy presents the analysis of the relevant current features and issues, in context of the above mentioned principles (so called, internal analysis), as well as a list of actions required to resolve or to contribute to the resolution of the identified issues (so called, action plan).

The document presents the general background for the implemented process, a methodology, a structured presentation of the actions from the action plan and some implementation notes and guidelines.

The following documents are attached for this strategy:

1. Impact/Difficulty analysis of the action plan,

2. Schedule and responsibilities for executing the action plan,

3. The table "A Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code",

4. Report on the Survey on the rights and responsibilities of the researchers employed at University of Niš,

5. Minutes from the meetings of the workgroup (in Serbian),

6. The decision by the rectorate on establishment of the workgroup (in Serbian)

About the University of Niš[1]

The University of Niš is a state-governed educational and research institution. At present, the University comprises 13 faculties: Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Faculty of Economy, Faculty of Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics, Faculty of Technology, Faculty of Teacher-training, Faculty of Occupational Safety, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Sport and Physical Education and Faculty of Philosophy.

In the academic 2012/2013 year, the University of Niš numbered 27884 students at all study levels. There were 22531 students at the basic professional, the basic academic and the integrated studies level, 60 of them are foreign students (mostly

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[1] HRS4R process in the University of Niš is implemented vis-a-vis the fact that the University of Niš is not integrated. All faculties are autonomous legal units, while the University, namely the rectorate, has only some coordinative role, as prescribed by the Law of higher education. Some, but very important centralized functions are related to the process of PhD thesis confirmation and elections into positions. Still, most of the problems, related to this HRS4R strategy, come from the fact that the employers of the researchers are the faculties, and not the University. Hence, the scope of the action plan is restricted because it is not possible to impose certain decisions and regulations onto the faculties.

from Greece: 23, Montenegro: 7, Macedonia: 5, Jordan: 5, Germany 2, and 1 from each of the following countries: Bulgaria, Slovenia, Turkey, USA, Australia).

1719 students attended master academic studies, 52 specialist professional studies, 10 specialist academic studies and 1377 doctoral academic studies. The teaching process at the University was implemented by 1594 teaching staff members.

From the foundation (since 1965) until the academic 2012/2013 year, 58557 students have graduated, with 1347 of them foreign students. Of all postgraduates, 2528 acquired their master's degree and 1492 candidates defended their doctoral dissertations.

Though funded in 1965, the University of Niš was accredited as an independent public higher-education institution on January 31th, 2009. All its constituent Faculties were also duly accredited in line with the Law on Higher Education. In compliance with the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Serbia, by the Decision of the Commission of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Republic of Serbia, the faculties of the University of Niš were accredited, as well.

Methodology

A centralized approach to internal analysis and definition of the action plan has been used. Namely, full responsibility for implementing the internal analyis and definition of the action plan is assigned to a dedicated workgroup.

A workgroup (WG) has been established, with the following participation and roles:

- Management representative (vice-rector for international cooperation, Dr. Vesna Lopičić) with roles to supervise the process of internal analysis, to ensure the approval of the university management, to decide on the feasibility of the proposed actions.

- Legal expert (Kristina Anđelić) with roles to provide the access to relevant regulations, to provide their clear legal interpretation, to propose possible and feasible improvements of the existing regulations.

- Member of the C&C cohort (Dr. Dragana Cvetković-Ilić), with roles to ensure that the HRS4R process is aligned with the current state-of-the-art, to provide information, relevant to her experience in working with researchers.

- IT Expert (MSc zar ne? Željko Džunić), with roles to provide relevant data and information from the central information centre of the University (JUNIS) and to provide opinion on the feasibility of the proposed actions.

- EURAXESS BH (Dr. Miroslav Trajanović), with roles to ensure that the HRS4R process is aligned with the current state-of-the-art, to provide information, relevant to his experience in working with researchers.

- C&C Expert (Dr. Milan Zdravković), with roles to coordinate the activities of the working group, to prepare the initial drafts and proposals, to implement the survey.

The methodology for implementing HRS4R process at the University of Niš is based on the following steps:

1. Establishment of the workgroup with the most relevant composition. The workgroup will be coordinated externally, by the C&C expert from EURAXESS BHO office.

2. C&C expert will be in charge of writing different versions of the internal analysis and action plan. The Workgroup will provide data, information, suggestions and any other feedback needed to update the current versions.

3. The internal analysis will also take into account the results of the special survey which will be carried out among researchers at the University of Niš. C&C expert will be in charge of designing the survey. The Workgroup will approve the contents of the survey. A management representative and IT expert in the workgroup will be in charge of distributing invitations for the survey.

4. C&C expert will be responsible for making the report on the survey and for updating the internal analysis accordingly.

5. Once the internal analysis is approved by the workgroup, a management representative will ensure the approval of the internal analysis by the rector of the University.

6. Once the internal analysis is approved by the rector, the workgroup will jointly define and approve the final action plan.

7. Prioritization and respective scheduling of the activities from the action plan is carried out by the workgroup, as a result of the executed impact-difficulty analysis.

8. The action plan is approved by the Rector of the University (and Senate, if deemed neccessary), published on the University website (with other associated documents, including all neccessary information about the Charter and Code) and submitted to EC.

The workgroup had 6 meetings:

- First meeting on 11th May 2013. Presentation of HRS4R process by the coordinator. Initial discussion

- Second meeting on 31st May 2013. Discussion on the possible activities, related to the methodology for HRS4R process and decision on the selected activities (decision on the methodology). Presentation of the initial draft of the internal analysis.

- Third meeting on 28th June 2013. Working on the initial draft of the internal analysis.

- Fourth meeting on 10th December 2013. Discussion about the current, ongoing and future initiatives of the University, that may be related to the action plan. Presentation of the results of the HRS4R survey and updated internal analysis.

- Fifth meeting on 17th January 2014. Discussion on the content and timeframes of the action plan – Impact/Difficulty analysis.
- Sixth meeting on 24th January 2014. Discussion on the content and timeframes of the action plan – Impact/Difficulty analysis.

Actions

Whereas the „Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code" table lists the actions in correlation with the issues, identified during the internal analysis process, in this section, the list of actions is grouped into generic activities, so-called action packages (AP), with provided details: highlighted relevance and/or specific scope, relevant for the issue which is being addressed by the specific actions.

Figure 1 presents the illustration of the action packages and all stakeholders, involved in the implementation of the listed actions. The arrows incoming to AP boxes illustrate the executive roles – the responsibilities for implementing the actual AP. The outgoing arrows from AP boxes illustrate the beneficiary roles.
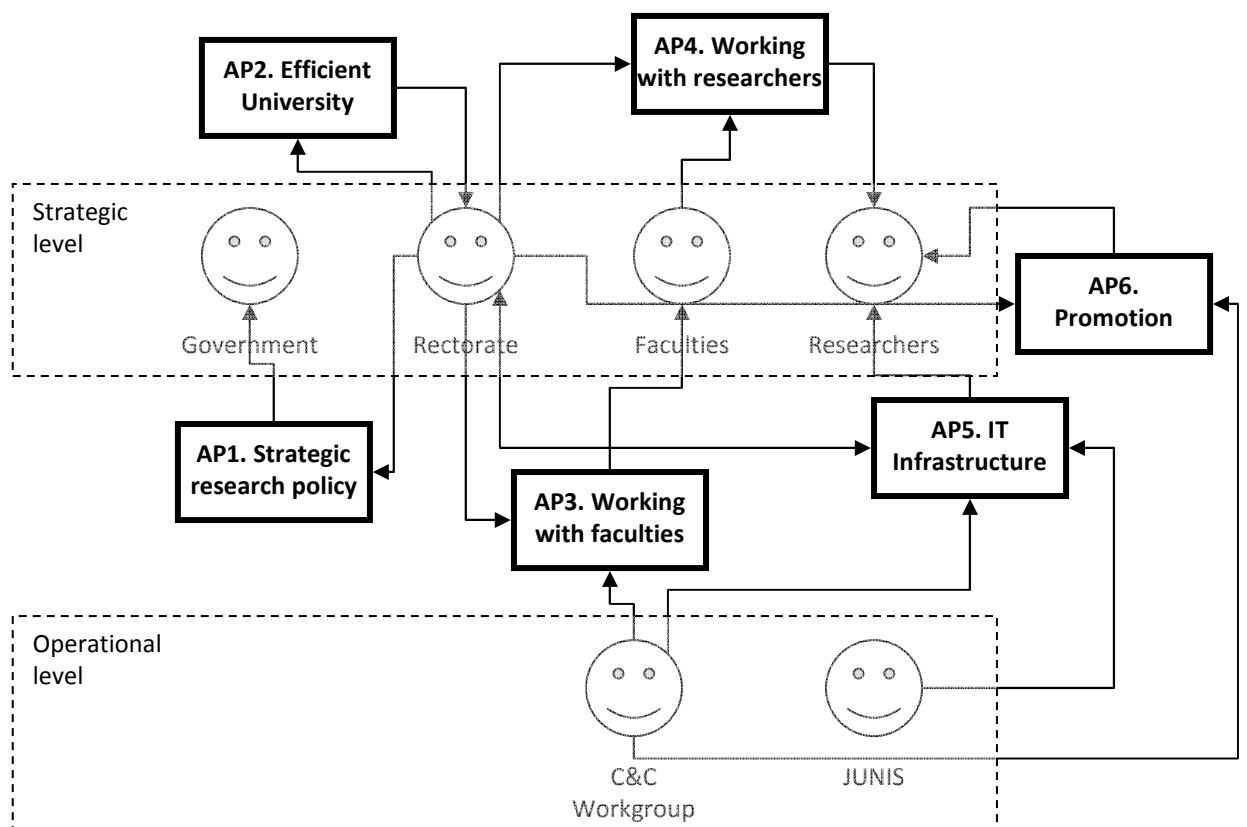
Figure 1 Relationships between the action packages and stakeholders of the implementation process with executive and beneficiary roles

In the remainder of this section, the action packages are described in more detail. All actions, listed in the document „Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code" are also listed here, in the respective package.

AP.1. Strategic research policy

Develop the strategic research policy statement, which includes the proposals for improving and enhancing the national research system laws and bylaws. The strategic research policy statement should be disseminated by:

- Lobbying through the participation of the University representatives in the inter-university and other high level bodies (such as: KONUS, CAQA, HERE team, NCHE, conferences, national research committees). Following issues are identified as relevant:

    o relaxing the career-stage conditions for national projects management

    o allowing the participation of industry representatives in external evaluation committees

    o making the national host institutions PhD grants transferable

    o establishing the national post-doc grants system

    o establishing the shareable, accessible, nation-wide research infrastructures, by networking

    o recognizing the social security rights for PhD students

    o distinguishing between teaching and research affiliations of the individual researchers

    o implementing of the National strategy for scientific and technological development

- Draft a Strategic Research Agenda of the University of Niš, addressing strategic social challenges at local, regional and national levels. Establish a process by which this agenda will be tracked and updated automatically.

AP.2. Efficient and effective University

- Define the standards and procedures for revoking the teaching, scientific and PhD titles.

- Improve and enhance the efficiency of the work of the Ethical committee. Consider the possible effects of the existing sanctions and their extension.

- Further develop University Alumni.

- Make the procedures for diploma recognition shorter and more efficient. Introduce the penalties system.

- Facilitate a scientific mobility by reformulating the condition of election into a title, at present related to preserving the scientific area of the PhD thesis.

- Extend the scope of work of Career Development Centre at the University of Niš to early-stage researchers.

- Implement a position of ombudsman for researchers or teaching staff, at the level of University.

AP.3. Working with faculties

- There are many cases that demonstrate that different regulations at the levels of University and Faculty are not harmonised. There is a clear need to organize seminars and workshops on different levels of participation (for legal departments, student offices and management) of the faculties in order to achieve this harmonisation.

- Implement a system of communication with the faculties which will ensure a better awareness of the faculties of the existing regulations and decisions made at the University level.

  o Setup a system of public discussion (with the faculties and researchers) related to the process of improvement of the existing regulations, at the level of University.

- Improving the process of reporting by the faculties to the University. Following reports are foreseen as potentially useful:

  o national technological projects and innovation results (for publishing on the University website).

- Develop and disseminate a common template for evaluation reports for all faculties in the university, with a possibility to extend it, by considering the specific needs and requirements of the individual faculties. Besides the traditional data requirements (such as published papers, teaching experience, etc.), the common template should include as mandatory other currently not evaluated aspects, such as:

  o Highlighted strengths and weaknesses of the candidates

  o Co-authorship issues

  o Mobility experiences

  o Professional skills

  o Industry and enterpreneurial experiences

  o Creativity and independence

  o Public impact and engagement

- Submit the recommendation to the faculties including guidelines/ methodology

  o to track research working hours and define internal reporting procedures.

  o to design a common survey for PhD students for evaluation of the doctoral studies.

  o to extend the deadlines for applications to at least 30 days.

- o to implement the common process and the standard outputs of the student evaluation of the teaching activities at the faculties. Focus on the possible outcomes of negative evaluation results.

- o to provide incentives for PhD students, involved in the teaching activities.

- o to define internal reporting procedures, related to executing PhD programmes.

- o to establish legally non-binding "agreement" between the supervisor and supervisee.

- o to implement a course in English or any other foreign language, with the focus on the methodology

AP.4. Working with researchers

- Design and implement a programme for stimulating and motivating young researchers, including PhDs, through promotional events, prizes, travel grants, honorary event participations, etc.

- Design and implement a professional skills development programme at both the faculty and university levels. The following programmes are identified as needed and potentially useful:

  - o Project management

  - o IPR (including patent registration and related issues)

  - o Responsibilities of the selection committees

  - o Writing research project proposals. Focus on:

    - Generic Horizon 2020

    - Marie-Curie mobility-related projects

    - Infrastructure-based projects

  - o Inter-cultural communication

  - o Research ethics

  - o Enterpreneurship

- Start an initiative, in cooperation with the faculties, to organize the series of PhD symposiums or progress seminars, on the regular basis.

AP.5. Promotion and dissemination

- Design and implement a research promotion plan of the University of Niš. The following aspects of this plan are identified as needed and potentially useful:

  - o Raising awareness about the professional ethics at the University

- o Implementing an official mailing list for regular dissemination of the newsletters, important information, invitations, web TV portal updates, etc.

- o Develop a strategy and procedures (including responsibilities) for participating in public scientific events, festivals, etc.

- o Promote offer of master courses and PhD studies in foreign languages (English, primarily) at the University.

- o Promote project opportunities, especially those related to the strategic research agenda of the University of Niš

- o Define the procedures for media promotion services, requested by the faculties.

- Design and publish the procedures for employment of the foreign citizens, on the University website.

- Update the University website with highlighted detailed information about foreign diploma recognition.

AP.6. IT Infrastructure

- Improving the IT infrastructure of the University of Niš. Following systems are identifed as potentially useful for resolving the issues of the internal analysis:

  - o Develop the university system with researchers' records

    - ▪ for self-archiving (open-access repository) - maintaining public database of papers, patents and other results

    - ▪ for searching possible mentors

  - o Develop the system for maintaining public online database of PhD dissertations defended at the University

  - o Develop and maintain the database of PhD students in University of Niš

  - o Develop and maintain the database of master and PhD studies in English in University of Niš

  - o Collect and publish faculty position ads online, in RS and EN languages

    - ▪ Develop a tool which automatically submits position ads to EURAXESS portal in case that a position is advertised in English

    - ▪ Develop a web page with searchable listings of positions advertised by the faculties

  - o Develop and maintain the database of the research infrastructures at the University of Niš

  - o Develop and implement a system which tracks teaching engagement of the individual researchers, at the University level.

  - o Based on the data in self-archiving public database of papers, implement a tool for automatic monitoring of plagiarism.

Implementation

To implement each of the actions, listed within the descriptions of action groups, the following process is foreseen for each of the actions (unless it is possible to implement the action in fewer steps):

[1] Receiving the endorsement of the top-management of the University;

[2] Discussion in the relevant bodies, if needed;

[3] Reaching the decision, which, besides the content of the action encompasses persons and/or bodies for implementation and a timeframe;

[4] Implementing the action, by the responsible persons and/or bodies within the current timeframe;

[5] Evaluation of the C&C Workgroup in the regular periods (every 3 months)

Workgroup agrees that the defined actions should receive a top priority when the participation of the University of Nis in the future capacity-building project proposals is considered. Also, WG agrees that a special effort by the WG should be made to formulate proposals, according to the future opportunities, such as H2020 and/or Erasmus Plus.

A special workgroup will be formed for the purpose of coordination of the execution of the action plan. This workgroup will be composed of the members of the workgroup who performed the internal analysis and developed the action plan, as well as of the heads of the departments and centres who are designated as responsible for the implementation of the individual actions.