

Survey on the rights and responsibilities of the researchers employed at University of Niš

The survey was prepared and implemented by the Working Group for HRS4R process at the University of Niš, with the motivation to complement the initial results of the internal analysis activity.

The survey was implemented by sending out the invitations to participate to the representatives of the faculties who then circulated the invitations by using their mailing lists. The invitation to the faculties' representatives was sent on 30th October 2013. By 15th November 2013, the total of 82 responses were received.

Respondents

A total of 82 responses from 11 faculties were received. The respondents were researchers from the following faculties: Medicine, Electronics, Law, Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Economy, Philosophy, Sciences, Sport and Physical Education, Occupational Safety, Arts.

24% of the respondents were research assistants, while 28% were assistant professors; hence, the majority of the respondents can be classified as early-stage researchers. 12% of the respondents were associate professors, while 28% were full professors.

71% of the respondents were not aware of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

Results of the survey

In the following sections, the findings of the survey are presented.

The majority of the questions (statements) were followed by a scale (5 grades, from "totally incorrect" to "totally correct" options). In the analysis below, the lowest two grades (1-2) are grouped as negative opinion; third grade (3) as neutral, and the highest two grades (4-5) as positive opinion.

Ethical and professional aspects of the careers of the researchers

- It is difficult to assess if the *researchers are free to choose the topics and areas of their research*, independently. Most of the respondents (39%) were neutral with regard to this issue, with more positive (48%) than negative (14%) opinions.
- It is clear that *researchers with positions below assistant professor cannot manage research projects* (85% confirm, 6% neutral, 9% deny).
- It seems that researchers are not fully aware of the principles of the research ethics. This is argued by the fact that the respondents' answers were, to a great extent, inconclusive. When asked to confirm that the *research activities in their organizations are carried out in line with basic principles of the professional ethics*, 24% of the respondents had a negative opinion, 24% were neutral and 52% were positive (with 29% of the answers graded 4).
 - o 60% of respondents were familiar with the cases of breaching the principles of the professional ethics at their faculties. It seems that these cases were not handled in a satisfactory way, or their solutions were not disseminated (61%

were not aware of the outcome, while 29% were not satisfied with the solution).

- 44% of the respondents were familiar with the cases of breaching the principles of the professional ethics at other faculties of UNI. 83% declared that they did not know if these cases were resolved at all.
- It is difficult to assess if there exists *a process of reporting about the research activities of the individual researchers*. 34% of the respondents expressed negative opinions, 29% neutral and 37% positive.
- It seems that there is no *process of evaluation of the research activities of the individual researchers* in place. 54% of the respondents confirmed this, while 22% were neutral.
- Researchers are, to a large extent aware of the contractual and legal obligations, related to their work contracts and other acts that they have signed (51% agree, 29% neutral, 20% deny).
- The fact that most of the respondents were neutral (35%) regarding the *practices for ensuring intellectual property protection and confidentiality, as well as personal data*, all related to the research activities, implies that the corresponding processes do not exist or they are not implemented.
- 63% of the respondents were not previously informed of the initiative of the UNI to establish the Innovation centre, which will gather the researchers from 7 faculties. Related to this, the majority were neutral (40%) when asked if this initiative would contribute to the visibility of the research, increase of the demonstration and industry collaboration opportunities.
- When the visibility of the research, performed by the researchers of UNI, in a wider, social context is considered, again, the majority of the researchers were neutral (34%), with a higher ratio of the negative opinions (40%), urging for action to better disseminate the research results, particularly those of potentially higher impact on the general community.

Employment

- The respondents were of general opinion (52%, with 29% neutral) that the researchers, employed at the faculties were among *the best students* of the respective faculties.
- Only 12% of the respondents declared that there are *foreign researchers* employed at their faculties. 26% of respondents declared that there are *returning researchers* employed at their faculties.
- When *transparency of the criteria for career advancing* (election to teaching positions) is considered, 55% of respondents expressed a positive opinion, 22% were neutral, while 23% had a negative opinion.
- On the average, 1-3 applications are received related to the posted vacancy for election to a teaching position (by the opinion of 63% respondents). 29% of the respondents highlighted that the common number of applications is 1, while 7% said that regularly there are more than 3 applicants.
- In most of the cases, there are no *interviews with the candidates for the advertised positions* in place (opinion of 48% of the respondents).

- *Reports of the committees, related to selection process during employment are standardized (54%), according to a relative majority of the respondents.*
- According to the respondents, the *most valued characteristics of the successful applicants* were: published papers (97%), teaching publications (92%) and teaching experience (84%). In some of the cases, other factors are valued, such as: mobility (37%), professional skills (35%), foreign languages (30%) and professional certificates (28%). Very few respondents highlighted the importance of industry (4%) and entrepreneurship (2%) experience.

Working conditions and social security

- The average opinion regarding the *existence of the adequate research infrastructure* at the faculties is inconclusive (37% neutral, 33% negative and 30% positive), probably due to the diverse needs of the faculties where respondents work.
- In general, the researchers are *overloaded with teaching activities* and that is considered as an obstacle for research (55% confirm, 28% neutral, 17% deny).
- The *remuneration for the research work is not adequate*, due to the low salaries (51% confirm, 35% neutral, 14% deny).
- 44% of the respondents declared that, in their organizations, *PhD students are participating in teaching activities*. 18% declared that they do not know if this is the case.
- On the average, the *performance of the researchers in the teaching process is not continuously tracked and evaluated*, as confirmed by 40% of the respondents (29% neutral and 31% denied). Even greater consensus of the respondents was demonstrated regarding the *lack of tracking and evaluation of the performance in mentoring and supervision processes* (50% confirmed the lack, 27% were neutral). Consequently, the opinions regarding the question whether the above evaluations are taken into account for career advancing were inconclusive.
- Regarding the *participation of the younger researchers in the work of teaching-scientific councils*, the responses differ from one faculty to another.

Professional development

- When the respondents were asked if the *mentorship and supervision activities were implemented in a superficial way* at the faculties, most of them were neutral (40%), with slightly more opinions that confirmed such a statement (36% confirmed, 24% denied). They highlighted that the most probable reasons for the problems in these processes are: lack of motivation for the mentors (56%), lack of procedure for assessing these activities (56%) and lack of planning (46%). 27% of respondents indicated overloading as a source of this problem.
- In general, the *researchers are not interested (or have a low interest) in the professional development* (49% confirm, 27% neutral, 25% deny). The most relevant reason, as highlighted by the respondents was a lack of general organizational plans for professional development of researchers, or lack of offers of the relevant courses and trainings (as indicated by 55%). Overloading of the researchers (45%) and lack of appreciation of the professional skills in career advancing (34%) are also notable reasons.

