European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers

Human Resources Strategy for Researchers 2011-2014

Introduction

On January 23, 2006, the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), member of the Board of Rectors of the French-speaking Universities of Belgium (CRef), signed the 'European Charter for Researchers' (the 'Charter') and the 'Code of Conduct for the recruitment of researchers' (the 'Code'). On July 6, 2010, the UCL formally reiterated its commitment, emphasising its determination to support the European Commission initiative with a view to promoting and furthering the mobility of researchers in Europe (Euraxess). In addition, the UCL wishes to state very clearly that it sees the European initiative as an opportunity to intensify the efforts made over a number of years in order to improve the recruitment, the working conditions and the careers of researchers.

In accordance with the recommendations of the European Commission, and in order to define its 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers' ('HRS4R'), the UCL has conducted an internal analysis aimed at evaluating its current institutional procedures in light of the 40 articles of the 'Charter' and the 'Code'. Upon completion of this analysis, it appeared that most of the principles laid down in the 'Charter' and the 'Code' have already been largely put into practice within the UCL. However, the UCL has identified a number of aspects for which there is room for improvement.

Euraxess at UCL

Since 2006, UCL has played an active role in the Euraxess initiative, which was launched by the European Commission in order to promote and facilitate the mobility of researchers.

The UCL has made a commitment to promote the use of the Euraxess jobs portal to post job offers for researchers. The UCL has also signed the 'Quality Charter' for posting job offers online. In due course, job offers posted on Euraxess jobs will be visible on the UCL portal.

The Louvain International Desk (LID) was set up in February 2010 and plays the role of 'Euraxess Services Centre' for the whole of the 'Académie Louvain'. It aims to provide international students and researchers with the best advice and support.

Finally, the UCL has signed the 'Charter' and the 'Code' on January 23, 2006 and on July 6, 2010 reiterated its commitment, so expressing its determination to support the European initiative and to put into practice a human resources strategy aimed at improving the recruitment, working conditions and careers of researchers.

Steps taken towards implementing the Charter and the Code

In order to examine how current practices compare to the 'Charter' and the 'Code', the UCL conducted, as recommended, a comprehensive gap analysis. A qualitative analysis of the UCL environment in light of the 40 principles was conducted, which was finalized during Spring 2010.

In May 2010, the University's Rector launched two working groups, assigning them the mission to identify the discrepancies between the standards of good practice described in the Charter and Code on one hand and the UCL's policies, procedures, and activities on the other hand. These two groups comprised a series of key players in terms of research areas and career levels within the UCL. The first group was composed of seven expert researchers (professor, full professors, FNRS senior research associate, FNRS research director, head of the research institute, chairman of doctoral committee). The second group was composed of seven young researchers (assistants, postdoctoral researchers, doctoral candidates, FNRS postdoctoral researchers).

The two groups conducted the internal analysis with an eye on 4 specific areas: Ethical and professional aspects, Recruitment, Working conditions & social security, and Training. On top of these two groups, the following members of the senior management level also took part in the process: Professor Bruno Delvaux (Rector), Professor Jacques Grégoire (Vice-Rector for Human Resources), and Professor Vincent Yzerbyt (Vice-Rector for Research).

In light of this gap analysis, the UCL concluded that current practices in the institution are in global agreement with the overall principles of the 'Charter' and the 'Code'. At the same time, and in full recognition of the voluntary nature of the recommendations, the UCL also highlighted areas where there is room for improvement and defined its institutional human resources strategy for researchers (HRS⁴R). This is the outcome of methodical and in-depth analysis and this strategy reflects the expectations formulated by the researchers and, more broadly, by all the actors involved in the construction of a more open and attractive European research space.

This HRS4R, summarised below, now forms the basis of a four-year plan for 2011-2014 presented in relation to the four axes laid down by the European Commission. It was approved by the Executive Board (*Conseil Rectoral)* on September 22, 2010 and by the Academic Council (*Conseil Académique*) on October 4, 2010.

Priority actions

Dimension 1: Ethical and professional aspects

At the UCL, whether in terms of academic and research freedom, of ethics or of professional responsibility, the current principles and practices conform to those outlined in the 'Charter' and in the 'Code'. The existing rules and procedures provide researchers with a high-quality framework for their research. The necessary structures and instruments are in place for all researchers, allowing them to manage all aspects related to intellectual property, to respect financing methods, to the dissemination and exploitation of their results, etc. However, it would be desirable to give stronger visibility to the Research Ethics Committee (Commission de déontologie de la recherche) and to expand local initiatives dealing with the 'Guide to Good Practice for Researchers' to the entire university.

Objective: Increasing the visibility of existing mechanisms related to ethics and code of practice.

To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions:

1. Inform all its researchers about currently existing best practices and promote their adoption by the largest possible number.	- Implement widespread use of the 'Guide to Good Practice' for researchers	Human Resources Department/Faculties	Continuously
	- Organisation of regular workshops for exchange of good practice	Human Resources Department	Continuously
2. Define and, wherever necessary, expand the field of action of the Code of Practice Committee; especially in its role of co-ordinating with local committees	Revision of the Internal Regulations (ROI) and definition of the scope of the commission + coordination with local commissions	Ethics Commission + Staff Office of the Rector	To be Finished by end 2012
3. Establish a process allowing regular dissemination of information regarding the mechanisms and the tools available to researchers	Definition and implementation of a communications plan aimed at informing each researcher	Communication Department + Research Administration	Start in 2013 then Yearly

Dimension II: Recruitment

The recruitment policy of the UCL strives to be of the highest possible quality. Recruitment procedures are open, effective, and transparent. Selection committees are chosen with the greatest care and bring together the necessary expertise and skills. Candidates receive the necessary information in order to apply in the most advantageous manner. In terms of academic recruitment, the UCL has a policy that is particularly open to outside control. The same also applies to the recruitment of research personnel. At the same time, the UCL is well aware that when researchers are recruited on the basis of funding coming from outside the university or the national science foundation, the posting of research positions is not systematic and international awareness of these positions could be improved. Finally, even though the University attracts a large number of international researchers, the institution would benefit from making its assets as an employer better known outside the borders of the country.

Objective: Improving the recruitment of all researchers in order to make it more open, transparent, and fair.

To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions:

1. Professionalise the recruitment of researchers. The UCL will examine its current recruitment procedures for all research positions to improve them, should this be necessary. Whatever the funding source, and whatever the position level, the following features must be systematically present and must be totally explicit: - The specifications of the required qualifications - The selection criteria - The recruitment criteria - The recruitment procedure and/or selection procedure - The rights and duties attached to the position	Examination of procedures and recommendations Approval of a HR policy with a view to implementing the recommendations	Human Resources Department + Staff Office of the Rector Academic Council	To be Finished by end 2012 03. 2013
2. Increase openness to internal, external and international recruitment - by ensuring the visibility of all open positions by improving the use of the existing communication channels and, most importantly, by promoting the use of the Euraxess Jobs portal - by enforcing the systematic publication of positions – especially at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels	Definition and implementation of a communications plan aimed at the continuous promotion of Euraxess Communications plan targeted especially at supervisors	Louvain International Desk + Communication Department + Research Administration Communication Department + Research Administration + Staff Office of the Rector	Starting 2011 Continuously
3. Promote internationally the UCL as an employer by relying on the Louvain International Desk (LID). The LID is an administrative structure established recently with a view to co-ordinating initiatives relating to the reception of information for international researchers and students.	Definition and implementation of a plan for the promotion of UCL (conditions of reception and of work, advantages, etc.)	Communication Department + Louvain International Desk + Research Administration + Human Resources Department	To be finished by end 2012

Dimension III: Working conditions and social security

For many years, the UCL has been investing energy in order to offer its researchers attractive working conditions, good salaries, and a rewarding and pleasant work environment. Through the implementation of a separate management structure for teaching and for research, the UCL's recently adopted organisational structure, which should contribute very significantly to a further increase of the quality of the research environment, making it more stimulating, more visible, and more effective. At the social level, the UCL has always been a proactive institution. As a case in point, as early as 2003, the UCL has been able to offer the extension of social security coverage to post-doctoral researchers. In its implementation of legislation, the UCL adopts the rules that are the most favourable to researchers by making the best possible use of the legal framework. In addition, the UCL plays an active role in all initiatives aimed at improving researchers' professional situation and attempts to remove the shackles from scientific mobility. The UCL is deeply involved in the development of the Scientific Visa. Last but not least, the UCL is also committed to the promotion of equal opportunity. Unfortunately, in spite of its efforts, the UCL observes the persisting inequality in the proportion of women in the highest research positions.

Promotion of equal opportunity between men and women

Objective: Promoting equal opportunity between male and female researchers and working for a better gender balance in all aspects of research.

To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions:

1. Pursue the analysis of existing initiatives and practices in order to promote their development	Inventory of existing practices and initiatives & recommendations for wider use	Human Resources Department	By end 2012
2. Encourage examination of the steps that might be undertaken in order to correct the disparities affecting the opportunities of female researchers in their professional life (recruitment, working conditions, work-life balance, etc.)	'Affirmative action' group	Human Resources Department + Vice-Rector for Human Resources	By end 2012
3. Adopt, in due time, an affirmative action programme	Define an affirmative action programme	Vice-Rector for Human Resources	By end 2013

Complaints and appeals

Objective: Clarifying complaint and appeal procedures. To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions:

To this end, the UCL intends to:

1. Analyse the situation by including the identification of - all possible channels for registering a complaint - all the actors and/or competent authorities - all existing appeal procedures	Analysis of existing procedures, identification of possible failings & recommendations for rectifying these failings	Human Resources Department + 'Legal Group'	By end 2011
2. Increase the visibility of the channels and clarify the role of the actors and of the appeal procedures	Definition and implementation of a communications plan aimed at informing researchers of all existing procedures and actors	Communication Department + Human Resources Department	By end 2011
3. Promote an approach that prevents conflict through the creation of workshops for the exchange of best practices	Creation and then regular organisation of workshops for the exchange of best practice for researchers	Human Resources Department	Starting 2012, then continuously

Dimension IV: Training and career

With respect to the academic career, the UCL relies on specific career development tools, namely the so-called DVP (Dossier de Valorisation Pédagogique – 'pedagogical development record') and the so-called PAI (Projet Académique Individuel – 'individual academic project'). Regarding the scientific career, the doctoral training offered in the doctoral schools meets the highest quality standards. The requirements of young researchers lie above all in career coaching and management, especially in the transitional period at the end of the doctorate or the beginning of the post-doctorate.

Training

Objective: Increasing the quality of supervision, especially for young researchers.

To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions:

1. Support the training of young academics	Development of an offer of specific training (particularly mentoring and coaching)	Staff Office of the Rector + Human Resources Department	By end 2012
	Evaluation of this training	Human Resources Department	By end 2013
2. Guarantee the genuine observance of assistants' research time (the 50/50 rule)	Definition of 'scientific and teaching responsibilities'	Staff Office of the Rector + Human Resources Department	By end 2012
3. Promote improved coaching of doctoral candidates by			
- informing doctoral candidates about the demands of the career and of the issues at stake in a doctorate (training for research through research allowing the acquisition of transversal skills)	Definition of an awareness programme aiming to inform final-year students of the demands of the thesis	Research Administration + Centre for Information and Guidance for Students + Communication Department	By end 2012
- suggesting to doctoral candidates that they prepare themselves for professional life from the very beginning of their doctoral training - disseminating the reliance on the 'thesis charter' as a tool that fosters the acquisition of transversal skills	Dissemination of the thesis charter & use of tools (skills reference frameworks, skills appraisals, …)	Human Resources Department + Institutes	2012
- pursuing the efforts that have been made to aid entry into professional life - developing those specific services that already exist for career orientation on completion of a doctoral dissertation	Continuation of Pro-doc & other initiatives Specific orientation service for future and young PhDs	Research Administration + Centre for Information and Guidance for Students Centre for Information and Guidance for Students + Research Administration	Ongoing 2013
- supplying the UCL with an analytical tool monitoring the production of a doctoral dissertation (length, interruption, finance, attrition, etc.)	Development of a software to cover the thesis period	IT + Research Administration	By end 2013

Career

Objective: Better career management

To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions:

1. Increase the quality of reception for young researchers and of their integration into the work environment	Map of the reception process, identification of failings and/or possibilities for improvement of the process & recommendations	Human Resources Department + Louvain International Desk + Research Administration	By end 2011
2. Guarantee a better distribution of tasks for assistants	Analysis of the management of tasks & recommendations aimed at improving the process	Staff Office of the Rector	By end 2013
3. Pursue efforts to promote the value of a doctorate outside of academia	Pursue and develop communication aimed at the world of business so as to promote doctoral training and its graduates	Research Administration + Centre for Information and Guidance for Students	Ongoing
4. Promote the standing and reputation of the profession of researcher	More intensive communication on research and the profession via the UCL portal	Research Administration + Communication Department	Ongoing, then continuously
5. Develop the use of the PAI ('Individual Academic Project') in order to monitor and orientate the academic career	Definition and implementation of a process aiming at systematising the use of the PAI (Individual Academic Project)	Staff Office of the Rector + Human Resources Department	By end 2013

Implementation of the 'Charter' and of the 'Code'

UCL has given responsibility for the implementation of its 'HRS4R 2011-2012' to the 'Comité Stratégique EURAXESS' (EURAXESS Strategic Committee), which is in charge of the various initiatives taken in the context of EURAXESS (Euraxess Jobs, Euraxess Services, Euraxess Rights, Euraxess Links).

This Strategic Committee is composed of: the Vice Rector for Personnel Policy; the Pro-Rector for Research; a member of CORSI ('Corps scientifique' – Junior Academic Staff); a member of CORA ('Corps académique' – Academic Staff); and a member of the CNE (Centre Nationale des Employés – National Centre of the Employed). Its mission is to make a regular examination of progress, to take note of the recommendations of the working groups and to define the priorities for implementation of these recommendations. In particular, it oversees the coordination of initiatives and their relation to institutional policies.

The Euraxess Strategic Committee relies on a Steering Committee whose mission is the effective implementation of strategy. It is chaired by the Vice Rector for Personnel Policy and is composed of two members of the Rector's Office and four members of the general services directly involved in the operational implementation of strategy, namely research administration, the human resources service, the Louvain International Desk and the management of institutional and cultural development (communications).

At the end of 2012, the Committee will evaluate the effective implementation of the university's 'HRS4R' and will draft further recommendations with a view to pursuing, in 2013 and 2014, the implementation of the 'Charter' and the 'Code' within the institution.

The UCL is convinced that recognition of the quality of its 'HRS4R' by the European Commission will constitute an additional attractive factor for European researchers and will contribute to increasing the mobility of its researchers.