

HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

Action Plan Q3-2024 to Q2-2027

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1. Foreword

Vall d’Hebron Institute of Research (hereinafter VHIR) is a public-sector institution that promotes, develops and transfers research of the Vall d’Hebron University Hospital (hereinafter HUVH). Through international leadership and excellence in our research, we improve people’s health and quality of life.

Vision in VHIR’s Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is described as follows:

We want the research of Vall d’Hebron to transform: creating an impact on both health and quality of life of patients and society, generating social and economic wealth in a responsible and sustainable way, and becoming a global benchmark for new health ecosystems.

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025 includes the following 12 strategic themes that covered different areas from innovation, internationalisation, clinical research or relations with the different actors of the Vall d’Hebron Campus, among others.



Regarding the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers, VHIR endorsed the principles of the **European Charter and Code for Researchers (C&C)** in 2014. In 2015 VHIR received the HR Excellence in Research logo from the European Commission and in 2021, after the Virtual Visit from the European Commission auditors, the HR Excellence seal was renewed.

The HR Excellence seal means our commitment to aligning our policies, procedures and good practices with the principles of the **C&C**, since 2014. Our focus is on fostering an environment that promotes **ethics, integrity, gender equality, and open science**; while ensuring fair **researchers' assessment, recruitment, progression; promoting research careers and talent development**; along with providing optimal working conditions and practices.

Since VHIR's endorsed to the **C&C**, three Action Plans have been executed.

For the next 36-months period of the HR Strategy within the institution, the process of diagnosis and feedback gathering has been completed, incorporating the "**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe**" which encompasses the new C&C classification".

Following with the guidelines of the European Commission the corresponding Gap Analysis has been carried out. The result of this collaborative and participative Gap Analysis has resulted in a proposal of concrete actions, that after all respective validations, has been documented in the final version of the **New Action Plan (Q3 2024 – Q2 2027)**.

2. Methodology

2.1. STEERING COMMITTEE CONSTITUTION

The HRS4R Steering Committee was formed by staff from all the representative's groups. Periodically, voluntary and open invitations were sent to research staff trying to have representation from all stages of the research career. As a result, overtime, more members from multiple units and functional areas have been added to the Committee. This was essential to ensure that an inclusive and relevant approach was given to the actions.

The main agreed responsibilities of the Committee are the following:

- Provide advice and direction.
- Propose initiatives to enrich the plan and to improve workflows.
- Oversee the advancement of the Action Plan.

The Committee members are:

- Olalla Bagüés (Human Resources Director)
- Anna Santamaría (Internal Strategy Director)
- Joaquim Calbó (Competitive Research Director)
- Monica Anglada (Quality, Documentation & Processes Coordinator)
- Immaculada Hernández (Head of Communication)
- Dr. José Raúl Herance (Senior Researcher – Molecular Medical Imaging)
- Dr. Javier Santos (Senior Researcher – Physiology and Digestive Physiopathology of the Digestive Trac)
- Dra. Mar Hernández (Senior Researcher – Neurovascular Diseases)
- Dr. Sunny Malhotra Sareen (Post-doctoral Researcher – Clinical Neuro-immunology)
- Dra. Laura Batlle (Postdoctoral Researcher - Translational Immunology)
- Laura Donadeu (Predoctoral Researcher – Nephrology and kidney transplantation)

In addition, the Committee has the direct collaboration and support from the Learning and Development Unit including Miriam Álvarez (Head of Unit), Afra Pinatella (HR Project Manager), and Karla Palma (HR Programme Manager) from the HR Directorate.

2.2. ACTION PLAN DESIGN

The design of the Action Plan followed different phases:

2.2.1. Gap Analysis

The methodology used for gathering data for the gap analysis involved various methods, with a particular emphasis on direct communication, as it aligns with the preferred communication style of VHIR personnel.

Through the combined use **of surveys, focus groups, and face-to-face meetings**, we ensured the involvement of the entire workforce, aiming to encourage inclusivity and transparency throughout the process. This fostered an environment where every employee felt valued and had the opportunity to contribute.

The analysis of this data was carried out by Human Resources and further reviewed among the Steering Committee members.

2.2.2. Survey

It was conducted an anonymous survey consisting of two sections:

1. **Demographic Information:** The first section aimed to gather basic information about the respondents, including gender, nationality, duration of employment at VHIR, level of dedication, and educational background.
2. **Principle Evaluation:** The second section included statements representing each principle of the C&C. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each principle on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 signifies "strongly disagree" and 5 signifies "strongly agree".

The survey was distributed to all personnel at VHIR, it was open for one month, with reminders sent on a weekly basis. The survey was segmented into the following groups for analysis:

- Predoctoral researchers
- Postdoctoral researchers
- Lead researchers
- Support staff in research and administrative roles

This segmentation was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context in which respondents were providing their feedback.

2.2.3. Focus Groups

To facilitate more focused discussions, focus groups were organised according to the roles of participants:

- Predoctoral researchers
- Postdoctoral researchers
- Lead researchers
- Support staff in research and administrative roles

It was communicated the opportunity to participate in these focus groups to all personnel at VHIR through recurrent emails and in-person announcements. Each focus group comprised a range of participants, from 5 to 7 members. Throughout the focus groups, robust engagement was observed from all participants, fostering open dialogues and contributions from each individual. Contributions were anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

Each focus group was facilitated by at least one moderator and supported by two note-takers. One note-taker documented the proceedings, while the other recorded the main

topics of discussion on a board. The facilitator guided the discussion by introducing the HRS4R certification, defining roles, facilitating open discussions about the pillars, and posing specific questions about relevant principles. Emphasis was placed on creating an inclusive environment where all participants felt comfortable sharing their perspectives and insights.

2.2.4. Face-to-Face (F2F) Meetings

Face-to-face meetings were arranged with key stakeholders to ensure representation from various units of the organisation. During these individual meetings, principles and pillars were discussed linked to their unit's main or related objectives, and/or their area of expertise, the collaborators shared their opinions and proposed improvement actions. These meetings were utilised to delve deeper into specific issues, clarify doubts, and gather additional insights that may not have been captured through surveys or focus groups.

2.2.5. Writing

Narrative Process

1. Write (narrative) the final Action Plan

Validation/Approval Process

2. Validation/Approval process
 - a. General Management
 - b. Direction Committee
 - c. Works Council
 - d. Internal Scientific Committee
 - e. Board of Trustees

Dissemination

3. Internal dissemination of the approved Action Plan in collaboration with the Communications area
4. Make available the new Action Plan in a public platform (institutional website)




2.2.6. Follow-up methodology

The follow-up methodology is based on a four-measure system:

- **Excel monitoring tool**
It includes action, area, principles of the C&C, owner, status, progress, deadline, deviation (if any), report file status, last meeting date, among other fields. The tool allows to track the progress of each action and provides an overview regarding the percentage completed of the whole plan.
- **Follow-up-Assessing meetings with owners**
The assessing meetings are aimed at providing advice and support regarding the implementation of activities. Additionally, and in case of any deviation, corrective actions are discussed and agreed, as well as, new resources if needed.
- **Steering Committee sessions**
Quarterly sessions are organised among the members of the committee in order to evaluate the progress of the plan, propose new initiatives and present results of actions, among others.
- **Reporting**
Using the tracking tool and files/material provided from each actions' owner, an annual internal report is developed to summarise the Action Plan's progress.

3. Action Plan

Integrating the guiding principles of the Charter and Code and synergising with the strategic framework of VHIR, a comprehensive examination of the Gap Analysis was undertaken. This meticulous review served as the foundation for formulating the fourth action plan. Within this plan, we delineated key strategic objectives and devised 22 specific actions across 4 strategic lines: Talent Attraction & Mobility, Career Progression & Development, Well-being, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

-  **Talent Attraction & Mobility:** build talent attraction strategies focused on fostering researchers' free circulation, innovation, alliances to boost knowledge transfer as well as national and international collaborations.
-  **Career Progression & Development:** enhance professional advancement and the training offer tailored to each researcher level in order to provide a career path that facilitates growth and engages talent.
-  **Well-being:** establish a working culture founded by policies and practices that support physical and emotional well-being covering the entire employee life cycle.
-  **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):** integrate EDI across the institute from a strategic and comprehensive approach and including the gender dimension in research.

PILLAR I: Ethics, Integrity, Gender & Open Science					
Action #	Action Title	C&C Principle	In charge	Timeframe	Indicator
1	Develop an Open Science framework rooted on the current Open Science Policy, and promote actions related to the framework	1, 3	Internal Strategy External Strategy Competitive Research	Q1 25 – Q2 27	- Framework developed - Number of actions
2	Engage researchers in involving citizens and patients to their research proposals and research project activities (designing, drafting and monitoring work plans)	3	Internal Strategy Competitive Research	Q1 25 – Q2 27	- Assisted proposals
3	Develop an action plan by the Research Integrity Committee in order to increase its visibility and impact in the organisation	1, 6	Legal Research Integrity Committee	Q1 25 – Q4 25	- Action Plan - Number of trainings - Number of requests and solved issues
4	Develop a holistic <i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan</i> from a whole organisation and strategic approach	4, 5	HR Equality Commission	Q3 25 – Q2 26	- Number of initiatives, - Type of initiative and corresponding indicator - Impact based on EDI progression
5	Support researchers in integrating sex, gender, and diversity dimensions into research proposals through the development of guidelines, checklists, and offering direct assistance	4, 5	Internal Strategy Competitive Research	Q1 25 – Q2 27	- Number of assisted proposals
6	Boost mobility programmes aimed at broadening career development prospects, research collaborations and internationalisation	7	Internal Strategy HR Competitive Research	Q4 24 – Q2 27	- Programmes designed - Number of incoming stays - Number of outgoing stays

PILLAR II: Researchers' Assessment, Recruitment & Progression

Action #	Action Title	C&C Principle	In charge	Timeframe	Indicator
7	Elaborate the CoARA Action Plan policy at VHIR both for researchers and research groups' assessment	1, 4	Internal Strategy HR Competitive Research	Q1 25 – Q2 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action Plan defined - Feedback from researchers
8	Define reward mechanisms linked to innovation in research proposals in order to incentivise, motivate and publicise innovative capacity	1	Innovation	Q3 25 – Q3 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reward mechanism system - Number of proposals evaluated and rewarded - Impact on innovative capacity
9	Design and implement a new innovation process focused on innovation assets impact, evaluating and supporting proactively multidimensional aspects	1	Innovation	Q3 25 – Q3 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges identification - New innovation process design - New innovation process implementation
10	Design and implement a new Business Development Unit to boost and support public private collaborations, maximizing innovation market and patients' impact	1	Innovation	Q3 25 – Q3 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define unit goals - Implement New Business Development Structure
11	Provide training, guidance, and support to Selection Committees on fair recruitment and unconscious bias	2, 3	HR	Q3 24 – Q2 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of training initiatives - Training contents and tools provided
12	Implant a new Applicant Tracking System -ATS- (SaaS) to enhance candidate experience and streamline the whole recruitment process	2, 3	HR	Q4 24 – Q4 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implantation of the ATS - Survey results on OTM variables

13	Conceptualise new talent attraction programmes in order to enhance the recruitment of researchers	2, 3	Internal Strategy HR External Strategy Competitive Research	Q1 25 – Q4 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talent Programmes - Hiring
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PILLAR III: Working Conditions & Practices

Action #	Action Title	C&C Principle	In charge	Timeframe	Indicator
14	Establish a comprehensive well-being framework focused in working conditions, interpersonal relations, work-life balance and well-being skills	1	HR	Q1 25 – Q4 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Framework and its associated dissemination activities - Number of trainings, workshops, seminars and/or initiatives - Satisfaction survey results
15	Enhance the protocol for the prevention and action against harassment in order to promote and ensure a safe work environment free from any discrimination	1	HR Equality Commission	Q3 24 – Q3 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of dissemination actions - Number of training actions
16	Reinforce professional stability through new scientific permanent roles and institutional calls	2	HR Internal Strategy Competitive Research	Q1 25 – Q4 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New roles defined - Number of stabilised positions - Calls launched
17	Enrich the communication, access and support in research funding	1, 3	Competitive Research Internal Strategy	Q1 25 – Q2 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of implemented actions - Number of researchers in actions - Number of researchers applying for funding

PILLAR IV: Researchers' Career & Talent Development

Action #	Action Title	C&C Principle	In charge	Timeframe	Indicator
18	Provide guidelines and resources to supervisors to ensure clear understanding of roles and adequate people management	1, 4	HR Internal Strategy	Q1 26 – Q4 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of trainings, workshops, seminars and/or initiatives - Satisfaction survey results
19	Consolidate the on-boarding process (induction tools, buddy programme...)	4	HR Digital Transformation	Q4 24 – Q3 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Onboarding satisfaction survey results - Buddy Programme survey results - New Practices implemented
20	Update and enrich the Professional Research Career in order to promote career development	1, 2, 3	HR Internal Strategy	Q3 24 – Q4 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Added improvements - Research Career Policy
21	Enhance the training offer specifically in career development for each research stage level	3	HR	Q1 25 – Q4 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number and Type of Trainings - Satisfaction survey results
22	Design and implement follow-up/guidance and mentoring plans for researchers	4	Internal Strategy HR	Q1 25 – Q4 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow-up system - Feedback from participants

