



University of Vaasa
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HR EXCELLENCE
IN RESEARCH

Advancing HR Excellence in Research: Internal Review and Revised Action Plan 2026–2029



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Foreword

The University of Vaasa has been committed to the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research process since 2013. Throughout this period, the Charter has provided a valuable framework for the continuous development of our research environment, helping us strengthen practices relating to researcher careers, recruitment, working conditions, research integrity and professional development. Equally important, the process has encouraged dialogue with our research community.

Today, the principles of HR Excellence in Research are closely connected to the implementation of the University's Strategy 2030 and our ambition to be an internationally recognised high-impact research university. The Charter principles are reflected in many of our strategic priorities, including researcher wellbeing, career development, internationalisation, responsible assessment, open science and research excellence. Through our strategic development programmes, particularly those focusing on Employee Experience, Research Excellence and Impact & Engagement, HR Excellence in Research forms an integral part of the University's broader organisational development.

The review presented in this document demonstrates the substantial progress achieved across all four pillars of the Charter. While many actions from previous implementation cycles have become established institutional practices, continuous development remains necessary to respond to the evolving research landscape and the changing needs of researchers.

The revised Action Plan for 2026-2029 builds on the strong foundations established through previous implementation cycles. It supports our commitment to providing an attractive, supportive, and high-quality research environment in line with the principles of the Charter for Researchers and the future needs of our research community.

We would like to thank all members of the university community for their contribution to this review process and to the continuous development of our research environment. Their engagement and commitment are essential to ensuring that the University of Vaasa remains an attractive, inclusive and inspiring place to conduct research and build a research career.

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Implementation of HR Excellence in Research at the University of Vaasa

The HR Excellence in Research (HRS4R) process is integrated into the University's governance, quality management, and strategic development structures. As a result, HRS4R activities are implemented through established institutional policies, support services, development programmes and continuous improvement processes.

The University's Research Council serves as the primary steering and follow-up body for HR Excellence in Research activities and includes representation from different parts of the research community. Operational coordination is carried out by the HR Excellence in Research Working Group.

Each action is assigned to a designated owner and monitored through the University's established reporting and monitoring processes, including regular follow-up of agreed indicators and supporting evidence. Progress is reviewed by the Working Group, the Research Council, and other relevant governance structures. As many actions are embedded within normal university operations and strategic development programmes, responsibility for their delivery is shared across the relevant units and experts throughout the University.

The preparation of the 2026 Internal Review was evidence-based and participatory and was undertaken with consideration given to both the 2005 Charter and Code and the revised Charter for Researchers. The most important source of researcher feedback was the 2026 Researcher Survey, conducted as part of the University's ongoing Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). In addition, a dedicated HR Excellence Workshop brought together researchers from different career stages and academic units to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and future priorities. The review also drew on annual HR reporting, workplace wellbeing surveys, accreditation and evaluation results, and evidence gathered through previous HRS4R implementation cycles.

Researcher engagement remains a central principle of the University's HR Excellence in Research process.

HR Excellence in Research development journey and revised action plan 2026–2029



Pillar 1. Ethical and Professional Aspects

Compared with the initial assessment, the University's implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers relating to ethical and professional aspects has become increasingly systematic and embedded within institutional structures and processes. This long-term development is reflected in successive HR Excellence in Research action plans, through which many themes originally identified as development areas have evolved into established policies, governance structures and support services. During the current review period, particular progress has been made in areas such as research integrity, open science and researcher support services, and responsible research assessment practices.

Responsible research assessment has gained increased visibility during the review period. Since the previous assessment, the University has committed to DORA and CoARA principles and has continued to develop its practices in line with these frameworks, building on existing assessment practices and institutional policies.

Research ethics, integrity, responsible science and open-science support structures have also continued to develop. Governance arrangements, researcher-support services, training opportunities and guidance have been strengthened, while responsible research practices are increasingly

integrated into researcher-development activities. In addition, procedures relating to inappropriate behaviour, workplace conduct and the reporting of concerns have been further clarified and integrated into institutional policies and guidance, including the Equality Plan. At the same time, researcher feedback highlights a continuing need for systematic onboarding and practical guidance related to research-data management, open-science practices and the application of research-integrity principles throughout the research lifecycle. These findings have informed the development of proposed actions relating to researcher onboarding, research integrity, open science and research data management in the next implementation period.

The weakness identified in the earlier assessment concerning the integration and participation of international staff remains relevant but has evolved considerably. During the review period, the University has strengthened international recruitment, onboarding, relocation support, spouse-support services, bilingual communication practices and initiatives promoting participation in the university community. While these developments have improved inclusion and accessibility, increasing the participation of international researchers in governance and decision-making structures remains an area for continued development.

In addition, researcher feedback and the 2026 gap analysis have highlighted the importance of further broadening diversity and inclusion efforts beyond the areas emphasised in earlier assessments. Current priorities include addressing barriers related to language and other dimensions of diversity, while continuing to build an inclusive and supportive research environment for researchers at different career stages and from different backgrounds. Attention will also be given to further strengthening coordination and coherence between equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives and the implementation of the Charter for Researchers. Accordingly, the proposed actions for the next implementation period focus less on establishing structures and more on strengthening awareness, onboarding, practical implementation and consistency across the organisation, particularly in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, responsible assessment, research integrity, open science and research data management.

The development priorities identified through the review process have been translated into the following objectives and actions for the period 2026–2029.

Main Objective 4

Further strengthen researcher onboarding and early employee experience by embedding Research Excellence, research ethics, research integrity and open science into induction and early-career development.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Ethical Principles, Professional Responsibility, Professional Attitude, Good Practice in Research, Access to Research Training and Continuous Development
- Charter for Researchers (2023); Ethics and Research Integrity, Open Science

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School in collaboration with the Ethics Committee.

Action point 4.1

Review and update researcher onboarding to ensure consistent coverage of Research Excellence, research ethics, research integrity and open science principles.

INDICATORS

- Onboarding content and delivery reviewed and updated by Q4/2027
- Participation in onboarding activities monitored annually
- Increased awareness of Research Excellence, research integrity and open science in researcher surveys

Main Objective 6

Researchers conduct research in accordance with good data management and compliance practices, including secure data handling, data protection, confidentiality and appropriate risk management.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Professional Responsibility, Good Practice in Research, Accountability
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Ethics and Research Integrity, Open Science, Responsible Management of Research Data

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School in collaboration with the Development Manager, IT Services, Tritonia Academic Library, and Legal Services.

Action point 6.1

Further develop the institutional research data management infrastructure and support environment to enable secure, compliant, and efficient management of research data throughout the research lifecycle.

INDICATORS

- Number of research data management services, tools or processes developed or improved
- Number of guidance documents, templates or support materials produced or updated
- Researchers' satisfaction with research data management services and infrastructure
- Number of openly published articles

Action point 6.2

Strengthen researchers' competencies in research data management, information security and data protection through training, guidance and support services.

INDICATORS:

- Number of training sessions organised annually
- Number of participants attending training
- Number of guidance materials produced or updated



Pillar 2. Recruitment and selection

Since the launch of the HR Excellence in Research process in 2014, the Recruitment and Selection pillar has evolved significantly. Early development activities focused on establishing transparent recruitment procedures, strengthening career structures, and increasing awareness of academic career opportunities. Several major milestones have contributed to this development, including the introduction of electronic recruitment processes in 2016, the implementation of the University's Tenure Track system in 2018, and the launch of the renewed faculty career model in 2021. Together, these developments have strengthened transparency and consistency in recruitment while establishing a clear career model, promotion criteria and progression opportunities across the Academic Tenure Track, Teaching Excellence Track, and Research, Development and Innovation career tracks. The University's recruitment practices, career structures and related guidance are continuously reviewed and refined to ensure their continued relevance and alignment with evolving institutional and external requirements, most recently through the 2025 update of the career model.

More recently, the University has continued to develop recruitment, assessment and career-progression practices in response to evolving expectations related to responsible assessment, transparency, and applicant experience. Recruitment and promotion processes are supported by structured governance mechanisms and informed by DORA and CoARA principles. At the same time, recruitment quality monitoring, applicant communication and awareness of career-development opportunities have become increasingly important areas of development. These themes are also reflected in the University's strategic Employee Experience Development Programme.

While many earlier actions are embedded in normal operations, ongoing development focuses on maintaining and further advancing these practices, strengthening applicant communication and increasing awareness of the University's career model.

The development priorities identified through the review process have been translated into the following objectives and actions for the period 2026–2029.

Main Objective 1

Further strengthen responsible and transparent recruitment, assessment and career progression practices that support research excellence and a positive employee experience.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Recruitment, Recruitment (Code of Conduct), Transparency, Judging Merit, Selection (Code of Conduct)
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Researchers' Assessment, Recruitment, Selection, Recognition of Diverse Contributions and Career Paths

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School and HR in collaboration with Faculty Services, Appointment Committee, Recruiting Managers, Deans, Tritonia Academic Library and the Research Council.

Action point 1.1

Ensure that responsible assessment principles remain consistently reflected in recruitment, evaluation and career progression processes through regular review, updated guidance, and continuous training.

INDICATORS

- Recruitment and relevant assessment guidelines reviewed and updated by Q3/2027
- Updated training and guidance on OTM-R and responsible assessment available by Q4/2027

Action point 1.2

Further strengthen transparency and applicant experience through active, clear, and timely communication throughout the recruitment process.

INDICATORS:

- Recruitment communication practices reviewed and updated by Q2/2027
- Recruitment stages and indicative timelines incorporated into recruitment communication practices and communicated to applicants whenever feasible
- Applicant experience survey piloted within the recruitment system by Q1/2028

Pillar 3. Working Conditions and Social Security

Compared with the initial assessment, the University's implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers relating to working conditions has become increasingly systematic and embedded within institutional structures and processes. This long-term development is reflected in successive HR Excellence in Research action plans, through which many themes that were originally identified as development areas have evolved into established institutional practices. During the current review period, particular progress has been made in areas such as researcher support services, career development, research infrastructure, flexible working arrangements, and the development of the research environment.

One of the most visible developments during the review period has been the enhancement of the research and working environment. Major campus-development projects have been completed; research infrastructure and support services have been strengthened, and updated policies related to hybrid work, remote work abroad, and international assignments have been introduced. Together, these developments have modernised the working environment and supported more flexible and collaborative ways of working.

Career development has become a more prominent theme during the review period. The University has continued to develop its academic career model, mentoring opportunities, researcher-development activities, and career-support services. The focus has gradually evolved from providing individual development opportunities towards strengthening structured support across different career stages and increasing awareness of career opportunities both within and beyond academia.

Internationalisation has continued to shape the University's operating environment. The proportion of researchers with an international background has increased further and now represents approximately 40% of teaching and research staff. As a result, increasing attention has been placed on ensuring that researcher services, onboarding processes, communication practices, participation opportunities and career-support structures effectively support an increasingly diverse and international research community. Significant progress has been made in areas such as onboarding, relocation support, spouse-support services, and multilingual communication.

At the same time, the gap analysis highlighted the need for continued attention to workload management, the balance between research and other responsibilities, career navigation, and awareness of career opportunities across sectors. Ensuring broad and inclusive participation in institutional development and decision-making processes also remains an important priority. Accordingly, the proposed actions for the next implementation period focus on researcher wellbeing, equality and inclusion, international researcher integration, and sustainable research careers.

The development priorities identified through the review process have been translated into the following objectives and actions for the period 2026–2029.



Main Objective 5

Further strengthen the integration, participation and long-term retention of international researchers by supporting language learning, community engagement and equitable opportunities for career development and participation in university life.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Career Development, Transparency, Non-discrimination
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Gender Equality, Embracing Diversity, Career Development and Advice

Owner: HR in collaboration with Language centre Linginno, Legal Services and the Deans.

Action point 5.1

Review and further develop practices and support structures that facilitate the integration and long-term career development of international researchers, including language-learning opportunities, participation in the university community, and implementation of language-related expectations outlined in university policies.

INDICATORS

- Expanded Finnish language training pathway (Finnish 1–6; 30 ECTS) implemented
- Number of international researchers completing Finnish language studies annually
- Participation rates of international researchers in university governance bodies, working groups, elections and other community-development activities monitored annually
- Review completed of how language-related expectations and available support measures are communicated, supported and monitored during the employment relationship

Main Objective 7

Researchers have access to high-quality support for external funding success and research project management, enabling research excellence and impact as well as successful project delivery.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005) Research Environment, Working Conditions, Career Development, Access to research training and continuous development
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Working Environment and Working Conditions, Working Conditions, Funding and Salaries, Career Development and Advice, Continuous Professional Development

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School in collaboration with Finance Services.

Action point 7.1

Further develop the support model for external funding success and research project management, including training, peer-support opportunities, guidance and the development of monitoring indicators to assess the effectiveness of support services, project implementation and achievement of project objectives.

INDICATORS

- Number of initiatives and training sessions
- Number of successful funding applications
- Researcher survey feedback on services for researchers
- Project monitoring framework and related indicators developed and implemented

Main Objective 8

Strengthen researcher wellbeing and sustainable careers and an inclusive work community by fostering a balanced and supportive research working environment.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Working Conditions, Gender Balance, Career Development, Non-discrimination
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Working Environment and Working Conditions, Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance

Owner: HR in collaboration with the Equality Group and the Deans.

Action point 8.1

Contributing to the Employee Experience Programme and based on the autumn 2026 pilot, a team-level wellbeing support concept will be prepared and further developed. The concept aims to enable voluntary wellbeing promoters within teams who support workplace wellbeing in cooperation with HR and supervisors. In addition, the utilisation and experiences of the exercise-break benefit will be monitored.

INDICATORS

- Team-level wellbeing support concept planned and documented
- Number of teams participating in the wellbeing support concept
- Supervisor feedback on the contribution of wellbeing promoters
- Monitoring mechanism for the exercise-break benefit developed and implemented
- Long-term monitoring of sickness absence trends and other relevant wellbeing indicators

Action point 8.2

Systematically assess researchers' working conditions and wellbeing from a DEI perspective and address identified disparities through targeted actions that promote equitable, inclusive and sustainable research careers.

INDICATORS

- Equality survey implemented and response rate monitored
- Survey results analysed by career stage, international status and other relevant researcher groups
- Number of development actions implemented to address identified disparities
- Reduction in identified disparities between researcher groups over time

Action point 8.3

Strengthen the integration and coordination between the Equality Group's work and the HR Excellence in Research programme by ensuring that the updated Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan is aligned with the Charter for Researchers and OTM-R principles.

INDICATORS

- Updated Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan aligned with Charter and OTM-R principles
- Completed mapping of Equality Plan measures against relevant HR Excellence in Research principles
- Increased visibility of links between equality, inclusion and researcher career development in HR policies, communications and development initiatives

Main Objective 10

Strengthen employment stability and sustainable research careers.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Stability and Permanence of Employment, Career Development, Working Conditions
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Stability of Employment, Career Development and Advice

Owner: HR in collaboration with Faculty Services and the Deans.

Action point 10.1

Continue strengthening employment stability through permanent employment where feasible.

INDICATORS

- Share of permanent employment relationships
- Number of conversions from fixed term to permanent employment



Pillar 4. Training and Development

Since the launch of the HR Excellence in Research process in 2014, the Training and Development pillar has evolved significantly. Initial actions focused primarily on establishing core training and support structures, including research ethics and integrity training, research funding support, project-management competencies, graduate-school orientation, and supervisor support. Over time, the focus has shifted beyond individual training activities towards building a more integrated researcher development ecosystem.

Major developments include the harmonisation of doctoral education through the unified University of Vaasa Doctoral Programme, the strengthening of project lifecycle services, and the expansion of mentoring and career-development support. The continued focus on doctoral researchers and early-stage researchers reflects a long-standing strategic priority as well as growing expectations for transparent career pathways, early career planning and awareness of opportunities both within and beyond academia. The strengthened faculty career model has further supported this development by providing clear career pathways and a framework for competence development across different career tracks and career stages.

The evolution of this pillar further reflects changes in the broader research environment. While topics such as research integrity, researcher development and holistic assessment have long formed part of university practices, several themes have evolved considerably and gained significantly greater prominence and visibility during the HR Excellence in Research period. These include developments related to open science, research data management, AI and digitalisation, research impact, career-stage-specific development pathways, and responsible assessment (through initiatives such as DORA and CoARA). While many actions introduced through earlier Action Plans have become established practices and part of normal operations, continuous development remains necessary to respond to the changing needs of researchers and the evolving research landscape.

The development priorities identified through the review process have been translated into the following objectives and actions for the period 2026–2029.

Main Objective 2

Further improve researchers' awareness of academic career pathways and mobility opportunities by promoting the academic career model (Teaching Excellence, Tenure Track and RDI tracks) and increasing visibility of international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility opportunities.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Transparency, Value of Mobility, Career Development, Access to Career Advice, Supervision, Continuing professional development
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Valuing Mobility Experience, Career Development and Advice

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School and HR in collaboration with Communications, Brand and Marketing, Deans and Faculty Services.

Action point 2.1

Develop and implement a communication plan that promotes awareness of academic career pathways, promotion criteria, mobility opportunities and career-development support through multiple communication channels and touchpoints.

INDICATORS

- Dedicated communication plan developed and implemented by Q2/2027
- Researchers perceive career-related information as transparent and clearly communicated
- Average score in researcher survey above 3.5

Action point 2.2

Enhance communication and support related to international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility opportunities, including researcher exchanges, visiting periods and collaboration opportunities.

INDICATORS

- Minimum two mobility-focused information sessions organised annually
- Clarified ownership and further developed internal processes

Action point 2.3

Further strengthen and communicate mentoring opportunities supporting researchers' professional development; build on existing mentoring concepts and identify additional mentoring solutions and best practices.

INDICATORS

- Increased awareness and transparency of available mentoring opportunities
- Mentoring concepts described in Messi Intranet by Q2/2027

Main Objective 3

Further strengthen career development support for doctoral researchers by providing high-quality supervision and career guidance earlier in the doctoral journey, increasing awareness of diverse career opportunities within and beyond academia, and supporting informed career planning throughout doctoral studies.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Supervision, Career Development, Access to Career Advice, Access to Research training and continuous development, Supervision and managerial duties
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Supervision and Mentoring, Career Development and Advice

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School in collaboration with Communications, Brand and Marketing.

Action point 3.1

Develop a structured approach to career discussions and career planning for doctoral researchers, beginning during the first year of doctoral studies.

INDICATORS

- Career-planning guidance integrated into doctoral researcher onboarding

Action point 3.2

Continue offering targeted information, training and events highlighting academic, public-sector and industry career opportunities for doctoral researchers.

INDICATORS

- At least three career events annually featuring both academic and non-academic career paths
- Availability of career resource materials further developed
- Increased number of alumni career stories
- 50% of doctoral researchers participate annually in career-related events

Action point 3.3

Develop a doctoral progress monitoring system to support timely completion of doctoral studies, facilitate early identification of support needs, and provide supervisors, doctoral researchers and the Graduate School with systematic information on study progress.

INDICATORS

- Monitoring system implemented
- Annual monitoring reports produced and utilised in doctoral programme development
- Number of doctoral researchers covered by the monitoring system

Main Objective 9

Review, develop and implement career-stage-specific professional development pathways that support knowledge and skills development for future success, continuous learning and research excellence.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Access to Research Training and Continuous Development, Career Development, Research Environment, Working Conditions
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Career Development and Advice, Continuous Professional Development

Owner: Research Services and Graduate School and HR in collaboration with Communications, Brand and Marketing, InnoEco, Tritonia Academic Library, IT Services, Research Platform Coordinators and the Deans.

Action point 9.1

Review current offerings and develop opportunities for competence development in research methods, publication and popularisation, societal impact, collaboration with external stakeholders, open science and leveraging AI in research.

INDICATORS

- Career-stage-specific competence-development offering reviewed and updated
- At least 50 % annual researcher participation
- Average satisfaction score for professional-development opportunities above 3.5

Action point 9.2

Strengthen the role of the University's Research Platforms in supporting interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration, knowledge sharing, peer learning, and the development of competitive joint research initiatives and funding applications.

INDICATORS

- Regular meetings with Research Platform Coordinators
- Number of externally funded proposals involving multiple academic units
- Number of externally funded projects involving multiple academic units
- EU-funding sparring network established and operational

Main Objective 11

Strengthen career and professional development support for researchers throughout their careers, thereby supporting a positive employee experience.

RELEVANT CHARTER PRINCIPLES

- Charter for Researchers (2005): Career Development, Access to Career Advice, Supervision and Managerial Duties, Access to research training and continuous development
- Charter for Researchers (2023): Valuing Diverse Research Careers, Career Development and Advice, Continuous Professional Development

Owner: HR in collaboration with Faculty Services and the Deans.

Action point 11.1

Facilitate career and professional development discussions within the existing development discussion process through updated materials and supervisor guidance.

INDICATORS

- Career and professional development guidance for supervisors and employees developed and communicated
- Guidance integrated into development discussion materials and related training
- Relevant wellbeing survey indicators related to career development and development discussions monitored and reviewed as part of continuous improvement

