

## Working Group on Reforming Academic Career Assessment

### Case study “2023 European Charter for Researchers”

Authors: Sanja Terlević, Policy Officer, Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN)

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| <b>Country</b>       | <b>Country/Region/International</b><br>Region: Europe  |
| <b>Name</b>          | <b>Official name of the initiative</b><br>2023 European Charter for Researchers (replacing the 2005 European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers)   |
| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Name of the institution(s) responsible for the initiative</b><br>European Union   |
| <b>Stakeholders</b>  | <b>Names of other organisations/communities involved</b><br>729 organisations have endorsed the Charter principles (Source: Euraxess.<br><a href="https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward/hr-excellence/das_hboard">https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward/hr-excellence/das_hboard</a> ; Accessed: 2 December 2024)  |
| <b>Year</b>          | <b>When the initiative was launched</b><br>2005 / Updated 2023   |
| <b>Documentation</b> | <b>Link to the main document describing the initiative</b><br><a href="#">EUR-Lex - 52023DC0436 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)</a> (Annex 2, 2023)<br><a href="https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/am509774cee_en_e4.pdf">https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/am509774cee_en_e4.pdf</a> (2005)   |
| <b>Website</b>       | <b>Link to the website of the initiative (if available)</b><br><a href="https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter">https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter</a><br><a href="https://ec.europa.eu/era-talent-platform/">https://ec.europa.eu/era-talent-platform/</a><br><a href="https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward">https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/hrexcellenceaward</a> |

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| <b>Summary</b>                  | <p><b>Brief description of the initiative</b></p> <p>The “European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers” was adopted in 2005 by the European Commission. The purpose of this initiative was to ensure the same policy standards for research careers are applicable across Europe.</p> <p>This was updated in December 2023 with the Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, where the initial Charter and Code were replaced with a new unified “European Charter for Researchers” and adopted by European Member States as an annex to the Council Recommendation. The new Charter effectively replaces the earlier Charter and Code, providing a unified framework as a basis of effective organisational human resource strategies promoting attractive and sustainable research careers across Europe.</p> |
| <b>Target audience</b>          | <p><b>Description of the main target audience of the initiative</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Researchers in public and private sectors</li> <li>2. Research employers in public and private sectors</li> <li>3. Public and private sector research funding organisations.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Geographical Scope</b>       | <p><b>Description of the primary geographical scope of application</b></p> <p>Europe</p>   |
| <b>International potential:</b> | <p><b>Description of the international potential for adaptation</b></p> <p>High – it targets European countries and has the potential to be applied in other geographical contexts.</p>  |
| <b>Goal</b>                     | <p><b>Description of the intended change</b></p> <p>The objective of the original initiative was to ensure the same policy standards for research careers are ensured across Europe, levelling the playing field and by tackling the fragmentation at local, regional, national and sectoral level, boosting the European scientific impact.</p> <p>The new Charter builds on this with an updated set of principles and a streamlined structure. It aims to be a key instrument of EU's policy to</p>   |

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|                    | boost attractive researchers' careers and facilitate its implementation.  |
| <b>Relevance</b>   | <p><b>Description of the key elements that are relevant for reforming career assessment</b></p> <p>The key elements of the updated 2023 European Charter for Researchers relevant for reforming career assessment are state within Pillar 2 – Researchers Assessment, Recruitment and Progression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Research assessment should enable evaluating the performance of researchers and research to achieve the highest quality and impact. This requires recognition of increasingly diverse research outputs, activities and practices, including collaboration, open sharing of outputs, and ensuring high research integrity standards. Consequently, assessment should be based primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by the responsible use of quantitative indicators. Assessment should also include a wider range of evaluation criteria, such as teaching, management and leadership, supervision, mentoring, knowledge valorisation, entrepreneurship and collaboration with industry, teamwork, services to society, science communication and interaction with society, and methodological rigour and Open Science practices. Contributions to innovation through inventions or development should also be recognised, particularly for candidates from an industrial background.”</li> </ul> |
| <b>Qualitative</b> | <p><b>Description of recommendations regarding qualitative assessment</b></p> <p>The 2023 European Charter for Researchers provides relevant recommendations regarding qualitative assessment within Pillar 2 – Researchers Assessment, Recruitment and Progression:</p> <p>“Employers and funders should support a system for the assessment and reward of researchers that considers the overall quality of impact of researchers on society, science and innovation, the diversity of activities performed, Open Science practices, and the</p>  |

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|  | <p>value of geographical, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility. Such a system should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) be based on qualitative judgement provided by peers, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators;</li> <li>(b) reward quality and the various potential impacts of research on society, science and innovation;</li> <li>(c) recognise a diversity of outputs (inter alia publications, datasets, software, methodologies, protocols, patents), activities (inter alia mentoring, research supervision, leadership roles, entrepreneurship, data management, peer review, teaching, knowledge valorisation, industry-academia cooperation, support for evidence-informed policy-making, interaction with society) and practices (inter alia early knowledge and data sharing, open collaboration), as well as all mobility experiences;</li> <li>(d) ensure that the researcher's professional activity meets high standards of ethics and integrity, rewards appropriate conduct of research, and values good practices, in particular open practices for sharing research results and methodologies, whenever possible;</li> <li>(e) use assessment criteria and processes that respect the variety of research disciplines and national contexts;</li> <li>(f) support a diversity of researcher profiles and career paths, and value individual contributions, but also the role of teams, collaborative work, and cross-disciplinarity;</li> <li>(g) ensure gender equality, equal opportunities and inclusiveness.</li> </ul> <p>To ensure coherence in the implementation of these principles, employers and funders should foster continuous training for the actors involved in the assessment and reward process."</p> |
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| <b>Quantitative</b>  | <p><b>Description of recommendations regarding quantitative assessment</b></p> <p>The 2023 Charter for Researchers points to the responsible use of quantitative indicators as a complement to qualitative assessment.</p>   |
| <b>Diversity</b>     | <p><b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of diversity contributions, outputs and impacts</b></p> <p>The 2023 Charter for Researchers recognises importance of diverse contributions in the following recommendations.</p> <p>Within Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development of the 2023 Charter, the recommendations on Valuing Diverse Research Careers entails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “This requires more talent-based and diversity-sensitive quality assessment, fostering responsible use of metrics, considering diverse contributions and their potential impacts, diverse activities and practices like teaching and skills, peer review, research management and leadership, supervision, mentoring, knowledge valorisation, entrepreneurship and collaboration with industry, services to society, science communication and interaction with society, methodological rigour and Open Science practices, team science, among others as well as mobility.”</li> </ul> <p>Continuous Professional Development recommendation of Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development entails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “As part of broadening researchers’ skills sets, employers and/or funders should provide for the appropriate assessment and evaluation of formal and informal training including on-the-job skills and training, particularly within the context of international and professional mobility. The assessment should be done on harmonised criteria, in a fair and transparent manner within a reasonable timeframe.”</li> </ul> |
| <b>Intersectoral</b> | <p><b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of intersectorality</b></p> <p>The 2023 Charter for Researchers recognises importance of intersectorality in the following recommendations.</p>  |

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|                     | <p>Valuing Diverse Research Careers recommendation of Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development entails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Employers and/or funders should recognise that researchers may have highly diverse careers both in research and in other functions. Diversification typically includes mobility in all its forms: inter/intra-national, inter-sectoral, inter-institutional, inter- and trans-disciplinary and virtual mobility. ... Employers and/or funders should put measures in place to make researchers, in particular early-career ones, aware of opportunities available in all relevant sectors and to promote a culture of diversification of careers for better personal and professional development. This will require career advisory and support services to stimulate inter-sectoral, inter-disciplinary and geographical mobility, as well as the creation and development of entrepreneurial activities.”</li> </ul> <p>Continuous Professional Development recommendation of Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development entails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Employers and funders should take steps to ensure that doctoral training is adapted for interoperable careers in all relevant sectors and for the practice of Open Science, including by making use of the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) and of any other future initiatives taken by the Commission for the purpose of strengthening transversal skills of researchers.”</li> </ul> |
| <b>Career-stage</b> | <p><b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of career-stage</b></p> <p>The initiative tackles all career stages, focusing on continuous professional development on the basis of the R1 – R4 definition of researcher stages.</p>  |
| <b>Career-path</b>  | <p><b>Description of how initiative recognizes and supports consideration of career-paths</b></p> <p>Within Pillar 1 of the 2023 Charter, the consideration of career-paths entails:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Employers and funders should encourage and support non-linear and multi-career paths, to be intended as paths</li> </ul>  |



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|                       | <p>characterised by geographical, disciplinary, sectoral, and inter-organisational mobility (secondments). They should also encourage hybrid paths combining simultaneously different sectors, which should be considered on a par with linear career paths.”</p> <p>In the scope of the Career progression within Pillar 2 of the Charter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Employers and/or funders should introduce for all researchers, including senior researchers, evaluation/appraisal systems for assessing their professional performance on a regular basis and in a transparent manner by an independent (and, in the case of senior researchers, preferably international) committee. A multiple career path, characterised by geographical, sectoral, and inter-organisational mobility (secondments), or hybrid paths characterised by the simultaneous combination of sectors, deserves full recognition and consideration on a par with a linear career path.”</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Toolbox</b>        | <p><b>Description of related practical guides and toolkits</b></p> <p>Brochures:<br/><a href="https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/useful-information/brochures">https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/useful-information/brochures</a>.</p> <p>The "HR Excellence in Research" award gives public recognition to research institutions that have made commitments and progress in aligning their human resource policies with the principles set out in the Charter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HRS4R Technical guidelines for institutions:<br/><a href="https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r">https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r</a>.</li> </ul> <p>The EU Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) is promoting transversal skills development for researchers and careers in all sectors of the society, including academia, businesses and industry, public administration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ResearchComp:<br/><a href="https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/ec_rtd_research-competence-presentation.pdf">https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/ec_rtd_research-competence-presentation.pdf</a></li> </ul> |
| <b>Implementation</b> | <b>Description of implementation process</b>  |

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|                   | <p>The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers is implemented and supported by the Human Resources (HR) Strategy for Researchers, while the 'HR Excellence in Research Award' (HRS4R) recognised by the European Commission, promotes research institutions and funding organisations in embedding the Charter and Code in their organisational policies and practices; based on a customised action plan. In November 2024, a redesigned HR Excellence in Research award platform and a new e-Tool were launched, with the aim of aligning the award process to the 20 principles of the updated 2023 Charter.</p>  |
| <b>Uptake</b>     | <p><b>Description of implementation uptake</b></p> <p>The uptake of the initiative has been ongoing but slow, due to a lack of motivational and incentivising factors. HRS4R award has improved uptake but is hindered by excessive bureaucracy and administrative issues.</p>   |
| <b>Challenges</b> | <p><b>Description of identified implementation challenges/obstacles.</b></p> <p>The Charter for Researchers faced numerous hurdles in its implementation journey. Initially, though endorsed, its broad and vague nature made it challenging to translate into concrete actions. To address this, the concept of HRS4R awards emerged, aiming to facilitate implementation and showcase institutional commitment. Initially, the main focus was put on building awareness and advocating consideration of principles. Over time, the format evolved, demanding stricter criteria and indicators, emphasising quality over mere endorsement.</p> <p>One of the main impediments encountered was the absence of benchmarks or standards for full Charter (and Code) implementation. Flexibility in implementation modes compounded this issue, exacerbated by national barriers. The European Commission's ambiguity regarding the initiative's goal—progress or setting joint minimal standards—added to the confusion.</p> <p>The initiative encountered varying levels of engagement among universities, with some not prioritising HR strategy. Administrative burdens led many institutions to disengage. The tension between aspirational goals and compliance with common standards persisted, highlighting the need for more clarity in action plans.</p> <p>The Charter set broad principles and lacked specific implementation guidelines, resulting in divergent interpretations of adequacy.</p> |



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|                 | <p>Furthermore, certain aspects targeted different stakeholders without clarity on roles, leading to a fragmentation of responsibilities and a lack of shared recognition.</p> <p>Important to note that since the updated Charter was adopted in December 2023, there has been no action from the side of the European Commission to revise the HRS4R accreditation process (e-tool, template, etc) to align it with the updated principles. The overall communication and operational efficacy of the European Commission on the HRS4R process has also been found lacking by the beneficiaries.</p> <p>Moreover, a clear missed opportunity to increase engagement has been the absence of any kind of community-building, peer or mutual learning system, neither between the involved institutions nor for cross-fertilisation purposes with related initiatives such as gender and inclusion, open science, or research assessment (CoARA). These kind of engagement opportunities, alongside training, could greatly reduce the aforementioned divergent interpretations of adequacy.</p> <p>A final point to stress is that the Charter places focus on diversity, various impacts, and quality—a notoriously difficult and slow concept to define in practice as delays in understanding may occur—which may promulgate higher fragmentation. Therefore, considerations should be made to the need for more strategic direction, cohesion and synergies of the Charter to the overall quality and impact of the research system, aided by recruitment, funding, and support.</p> |
| <b>Benefits</b> | <p><b>Description of identified implementation benefits.</b></p> <p>Despite these challenges, the initiative had success in promoting positive changes and incentivising improvements in HR practices through the HRS4R and funding conditions (albeit with concerns about superficial compliance). The former Charter and Code as well as the HRS4R process have helped many organisations to reflect on opportunities for change and to steer direction. By acknowledging common challenges across countries and recognising PhD researchers as professionals, the updated Charter promotes a more inclusive and unified research community.</p> <p>Looking ahead, clarity regarding implementation strategies and goals is key. Balancing aspirational objectives with practical compliance measures is crucial for sustained progress. Moreover, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and streamlining administrative</p>   |

processes can enhance effectiveness.

While the European Charter for Researchers has encountered obstacles in its implementation journey, it has laid a foundation for improving research careers across Europe. With continued refinement and collaboration, it holds the potential to drive meaningful change in the research landscape.