HR Excellence in Research

Renewal Assessment: EC Consensus Report

Renewal Phase Assessment With Site Visit - EC Consensus Report

Case number

2020SE572661

Name Organisation under assessment

Uppsala University

Organisation’s contact details

751 05 Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden

Submission date of the Internal Review

28/10/2024

Submission date to the European Commission

09/04/2025

Detailed assessment

a. Quality assessment

The quality assessment evaluates the level of ambition and the quality of progress intended by the organisation.
If any statements have prompted a "no" or "partly" in the evaluation, please provide recommendations:

	YES / NO / PARTLY	Recommendations
Has the organisational information been sufficiently updated to understand the context in which the HR Strategy is implemented?	Yes	
Does the narrative provided list goals and objectives which clearly indicate the organisation’s priorities in HR-management for researchers?	Yes	
Has the organisation published an updated HR Strategy and Action Plan been updated with the actions’ current status, additions and/or modifications?	Yes	There is a link available on the webpage; however, it requires a username and password to access and is not publicly visible. Those documents must be made fully visible and accessible to the general public
Is the implementation of the HR strategy and Action Plan sufficiently embedded within the organisation’s management structure (e.g. steering committee, operational responsibilities) so as to guarantee a solid implementation?	Yes	The University provides documentation and online information outlining its mission, goals, and strategies. This includes details on the research environment and other elements relevant to the HRS4R framework.

	YES / NO / PARTLY	Recommendations
Is the OTM-R policy in place and publicly available?	Yes	There is no standalone OTM-R policy currently in place. The University has developed an OTM-R checklist; however, it is not publicly accessible. Additionally, the University has an "Appointment Regulations" document that highlights key aspects aligned with OTM-R principles. While elements of an OTM-R policy exist and are publicly available, further efforts are needed to enhance both its visibility and practical implementation. Including the HR Excellence in Research logo on the university's homepage would be a valuable step in reinforcing our commitment to open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment practices.

During the transition period special conditions apply:
Institutions having started the HR Excellence in Research implementation prior to the publication of the OTM-R toolkit and recommendations by the European Commission (2015) may not have prioritised actions implementing the OTM-R principles yet. In this case, they should not be penalised but strong recommendations should be made to address these principles appropriately.

Does the internal assessment of the institution give rise to any issues you wish to explore in more detail during the site visit? (max 1000 words)

A number of issues require further exploration and discussion with the HRS4R Coordinator and/or the relevant stakeholders:

1. Is there an intention to issue a specific OTM-R policy that includes examples of conflicts of interest and ethical behavior?
2. It appears that there is no formal implementation committee. Instead, the strategy seems to be embedded within the university's overall strategy, with line and senior managers assuming responsibility for certain actions.
3. What kind of follow-up activities are carried out by the HRS4R Coordinator? Are there regular meetings, such as quarterly check-ins?
4. Will links to the action plans and other key documents remain accessible only to university staff?

In addition, one of the stated objectives is to strengthen the University's capacity to attract excellence funding in international competition by more clearly encouraging and supporting competitive researchers of underrepresented genders to apply for such funding. What specific actions have been taken to achieve this goal, and are there any measurable outcomes?

Since the University has joined CoARA, how does it plan to change the assessment of researchers and research achievements? What is currently the most significant challenge in this area? How does the University intend to implement qualitative evaluation methods? Are the same criteria currently applied across promotions, recruitment for new positions, and performance appraisals?

he internal assessment shows a clear institutional commitment to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. However, there are several areas where further exploration during the site visit is warranted—particularly around how the HRS4R is operationalized to support attraction and retention of researchers funded through own or external funding such as ERC and MSCA.

A key issue I would like to examine further is how well integrated externally funded researchers are into the university's broader HR development framework.

- Equal access to mentoring, training, and career progression opportunities.

- Mechanisms in place to convert time-limited funding into long-term academic roles, and how transparent are those pathways

- Onboarding / offboarding procedures in place

- open, merit-based recruitment (OTM-R) practices are implemented in practice, especially when it comes to international researchers.

Finally, I would like to understand how the university evaluates the impact of its HR strategy specifically in relation to attracting and retaining externally funded researchers, and whether lessons from successful researchers are feeding back into institutional HR policies.

Which elements of the HR strategy and Action Plan would you like to focus upon during the site visits? (max 1000 words)

It would be both beneficial and insightful to further explore the actions being taken to raise awareness of the University's research and development initiatives within the wider community. It would be valuable to understand the specific methods being employed to achieve this outreach.

Additionally, it is important to gain clarity on the measures being implemented to counter bias in recruitment and assessment processes.

b. SITE-VISIT BASED Assessment

Please provide a brief answer to the following questions:

Note: Click on each question to open the editor.

1. Does the site visit confirm the impression made by the written self-evaluation report?

- (●) **Yes**
- ( ) **No**
- ( ) **Partly**

2. What have been the benefits of implementing an HR Strategy in the organisation under review? How do you judge its overall impact and achievements?

Uppsala University has made significant progress in implementing the HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) under the HR Excellence in Research Award. This strategic focus has had a tangible and positive impact across all levels of the organization—from recruitment to retention—contributing to the university's strong position in the global academic landscape.

One of the major benefits of the strategy's implementation has been the establishment of a Career and Leadership Development Centre in 2018. The need for such a centre was identified through feedback provided by researchers during the initial gap analysis phase. The concept of HRS4R was a key driving force behind its creation, reflecting the university's commitment to fostering professional development and leadership among researchers.

In terms of recruitment, the adoption of Open, Transparent, and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) principles has led to more effective and inclusive processes. A notable example is the recent decision to eliminate the requirement for motivation/cover letters, aimed at reducing bias in recruitment. A pilot study was conducted, and the updated process is expected to be implemented in the coming months. These changes have increased the visibility and accessibility of open positions, helping to attract a broader and more diverse pool of international talent.

The implementation of HRS4R has not only helped Uppsala University attract top talent but has also positioned the university to better compete for international research funding. Highly qualified staff are seen as a key asset in achieving strategic objectives. The Action Plan focuses on long-term development, prioritizing career support, improved working conditions, and inclusive policies. One significant advantage of the HRS4R process has been the opportunity to gain a comprehensive view of the entire institution and to adapt policies and procedures at all relevant levels.

Nevertheless, while the University is doing an excellent job in implementing the HRS4R strategy, greater impact could be achieved by strengthening communication and visibility around the initiative. For instance, promoting the HR Excellence in Research logo—currently not displayed on the homepage—would send a clear message about Uppsala University commitment to research career development. Increased internal communication would also help embed the strategy more deeply within the academic community.

Overall, the HRS4R strategy at Uppsala University has played a crucial role in aligning institutional practices with international standards, enhancing the research environment, and reinforcing the University's reputation as a desirable and forward-thinking employer.

3. How do you judge the organisation’s **level of ambition** with regard to its HR strategy for researchers, taking into account the initial state of play?

Uppsala University is a highly ambitious institution, yet the actions implemented—and those planned—remain realistic and well-aligned with institutional capacity. Notably, the University has chosen not to establish a dedicated HRS4R implementation committee, in order to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens. Instead, actions are integrated into the operational plans of the relevant departments, ensuring decentralised yet coherent implementation. This approach has been confirmed in discussions with the HRS4R coordinators, who noted that the Vice-Chancellor holds the final authority in approving actions for inclusion in the Action Plan.

The HRS4R initiative supports the achievement of Uppsala University’s broader strategic objectives, which have been shaped through extensive engagement with the academic community. The University's implementation approach has evolved from a project-based model to one centred on operational planning and process realisation. The goals set within this framework are ambitious and future-focused.

It is worth highlighting that, although Sweden’s national research system already offers inclusive and supportive conditions for researchers—emphasising well-being and safeguarding employee interests—Uppsala University has gone further by introducing additional measures to strengthen working conditions and support career development. The updated Action Plan reflects this proactive stance, incorporating new initiatives aligned with strategic priorities and addressing emerging challenges and opportunities, including those linked to the University’s participation in the ENLIGHT European University Alliance. This reflects a long-term strategic commitment to institutional improvement.

To this end, greater integration of key institutional functions—particularly the Communications Office and the Grants Office—would be beneficial. Involving the Communications Office could support a more systematic and visible internal and external dissemination of the award and its underlying principles, thereby enhancing institutional recognition and engagement. Simultaneously, closer collaboration with the Grants Office would facilitate the identification and communication of concrete impacts stemming from the HR strategy, including its contribution to research funding success and improved researcher support.

In summary, while the HR strategy is well-established, there remains untapped potential to elevate its ambition and impact through a more cross-functional and outcome-oriented approach.

4. How do you judge the organisation’s efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding the **Ethical and Professional Aspects of Researchers?**

During the site visit, it was highlighted that Uppsala University has a central division overseeing research ethics, with annual risk analyses and follow-up measures. A robust review process ensures compliance with ethical standards, especially in animal research. Information on ethics is actively disseminated through departmental visits and an upcoming Research Handbook, which will be shared through newsletters.

The University offers a wide range of online training on research ethics, covering topics such as misconduct, data privacy, authorship, and ethical research involving children. Uppsala University leads the national expert group on ethics, demonstrating a strong commitment to the principles of the Charter and Code.

Uppsala University emphasizes collaboration with other Swedish universities and internal departments to maintain ethical standards. It also prioritizes occupational health and psychological well-being, offering confidential, anonymous support through safety officers and an internal network of trusted persons. Additionally, the University has established processes for managing ethical breaches or public controversies, ensuring transparency and learning outcomes.

These efforts reflect Uppsala University’s proactive and human-centred approach to research ethics, aligned with the Charter and Code principles.

5. How do you judge the organisation’s efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding the **Recruitment of Researchers?** Is an **OTM-R policy** in place?

Uppsala University has a solid recruitment process in place, with ongoing improvements to further enhance it. As mentioned in Section 2, the requirement for covering letters in applications will be abolished to prevent biased recruitment. A pilot study has been conducted, and the new process will be implemented in the coming months for all job openings at the University. Additionally, a comprehensive onboarding process is available for newcomers, including a welcome letter, preboarding steps, an onboarding process, and a checklist for the assigned manager, all accessible online.

However, one drawback is that unsuccessful candidates in research positions do not receive feedback on their rejection, unlike teaching staff, who receive evaluations from external assessors following interviews.

Regarding the OTM-R policy, the University does not have a specific document titled 'OTM-R Policy' and does not intend to issue one. Instead, it has the "Appointment Regulations for Uppsala University," which aligns with the OTM-R checklist in terms of transparency and recruitment processes.

Uppsala University prioritizes the recruitment of qualified employees through open, transparent, and merit-based processes, as well as clear career paths. These efforts require long-term, organized initiatives. The Appointment Regulations, based on the Higher Education Ordinance, define various teaching positions and set the framework for recruiting and promoting staff. The regulations are designed to ensure quality and facilitate the recruitment, retention, and development of academic staff. They align with many principles of HRS4R and are supported by practical solutions such as separate recruitment groups for teaching and research positions.

Improving the recruitment process at the operational level and fostering the exchange of good practices between recruitment groups is an ongoing priority. Additionally, the University has a comprehensive onboarding system, including welcome letters and manuals, while offboarding (exit interviews) is also conducted.

As a result, the University consistently attracts a high number of international researchers at all career stages, demonstrating the effectiveness of the recruitment framework and reinforcing its strong international reputation as an employer of choice within the academic community.

6. How do you judge the organisation’s efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding the **Researchers’ Working conditions and Social Security?**

Uppsala University offers excellent working conditions, emphasizing work-life balance and collegiality. Key benefits include: (i) PhD students being treated as employees with full social security coverage, (ii) career events and spouse support, and (iii) safety officers in each department for harassment and bullying concerns. These initiatives align with Sweden’s well-known high standards for working conditions.

The University’s revised work environment policy includes an equal opportunities perspective to create a safe, supportive research and learning environment. It also supports work-life balance with flexible working hours, parental leave, and additional leave for staff. Young researchers note that these conditions are a significant attraction.

Uppsala University is implementing the Charter and Code principles, offering equitable, stable working conditions from the start of a research career. Its comprehensive benefits package supports work-life balance and includes remote working, part-time options, and extended holidays.

7. How do you judge the organisation’s efforts to ensure the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding **Researchers’ Development and Training?**

During the site visit, it was highlighted that 'coaching' is the most effective way at Uppsala University to gather feedback from researchers. Since many of the researchers are non-Swedish, training sessions are conducted in English. The Centre is currently exploring the use of "AI coaches" for future courses, though the concept is still under development. However, one area for improvement is the long-term evaluation of these training sessions, for example, conducting follow-ups six months after the session. The directors mentioned that they currently lack the resources to implement such evaluations.

In response to previous evaluations, Uppsala University has worked extensively to improve internal communication and access to professional support. This has been addressed through a comprehensive redesign of the intranet and the launch of a new website, the Staff Gateway. This new platform allows different target groups to easily find support tailored to their needs, with much of the content now available in English. The Staff Gateway includes a new course catalogue, which presents all available training, seminars, and workshops in an intuitive, easy-to-use format. Courses can be filtered by location or topic, and some are automatically selected while others can be manually chosen.

Uppsala University also boasts a Career and Leadership Development Centre, where four staff members provide career support, individual coaching, and formal internal audits. The courses offered are thoroughly evaluated to ensure their quality, as confirmed by meetings with researchers who have benefited from these training opportunities.

Uppsala University demonstrates a strong commitment to the implementation of the Charter and Code principles regarding Researchers’ Development and Training. The institution has developed a well-structured, comprehensive approach to supporting researchers at all career stages, from R1 (doctoral candidates) to R4 (leading researchers).

The university offers diverse and inclusive training and development opportunities, addressing both academic and non-academic career paths. It actively encourages entrepreneurial thinking, providing support for patenting, spin-off companies, and participation in EU-funded research programmes. This multidimensional approach ensures that researchers are equipped with the skills and resources needed to pursue a variety of career trajectories.

A particularly noteworthy initiative is the PhD Exit Course, which helps doctoral candidates prepare for life after graduation, whether within or outside academia.

Please list one or more elements of good practice that you would recommend to other organisations – either in terms of action or in terms of coordination/process. (max 500 words)

The research handbook is an excellent initiative, and it would be beneficial for other universities to consider implementing a similar resource.

The 'coaching' concept used to gather feedback is also a commendable initiative, and other universities might find it valuable as well.

Additionally, the engagement of safety officers across various departments, providing a platform for employees to discuss issues related to harassment and bullying, is another example of good practice.

"Ekonomispelet," the internal game designed to teach participants about the institution's financial operations, is an introductory course (in Swedish) targeted at department heads and other managerial roles at Uppsala University. This course offers participants a general understanding of the organization from a financial perspective.

Uppsala University demonstrates a strong commitment to implementing the Charter and Code principles, particularly in relation to the ethical and professional aspects of researchers. This area is well-developed, with state-of-the-art practices in place, not only for preventing misconduct but also for addressing the underlying factors that may lead to it.

Regarding Researchers' Development and Training, one particularly noteworthy initiative is the PhD Exit Course, which helps doctoral candidates prepare for life after graduation, whether within or outside academia.

Strengths and weaknesses

On the basis of the information submitted and taking into account the organisation's national research context, how would you as an assessor judge the HR Strategy's **strengths and weaknesses?** (maximum 1000 words)

Strenghts

The internal assessment indicates a number of positive outcomes following work that has taken place in the past couple of years, especially in the area of training and development. The University offers a number of courses and workshops concerned with soft skills that are relevant to researchers in a leadership position, other researchers working in a team, as well as doctoral students.

A lot of work is also done in areas concerned with the working conditions, more specifically for the gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities aspects. Both aspects are also very relevant for the recruitment process. It is also a major plus that the Swedish employment protection act has now included that researchers in employment beyond 12 months, will have a permanent position.

University is strongly committed to ethics. Uppsala University has state-of-the-art practices in place for ethical and professional conduct, going beyond just preventing misconduct to understanding the factors that may lead to it. The university actively engages with other Swedish higher education institutions to share best practices and ensure consistency in ethical standards. Additionally, researchers are supported by regular ethics training and access to a comprehensive range of online resources addressing various ethical issues, including research misconduct, data privacy, and intellectual property

Another important element of HRS4R is the great care for the PhD candidates and young scientists, providing them with access to career development advice, training, workshops and basic information necessary to exciting in the academy. The availability of research support services, career development tools, and funding guidance—especially for international and early-stage researchers—is evident. These are strong assets in attracting and retaining talent, and they reflect positively on the strategic value placed on human capital within the university.

Weaknesses:

A notable weakness lies in the lack of visibility and awareness of the HR Excellence in Research Award as an asset for researchers themselves. While the institution has implemented a wide range of supportive measures, many researchers—particularly those new to the system or from international backgrounds—do not appear to fully understand the purpose or benefits of the HR Award or how it connects to their own career development opportunities.

If relevant, please provide suggestions for modifications or revisions to the (updated) HR strategy: (maximum 2000 words)

A gap in internal communication and engagement has been identified. More could be done to ensure that the university's efforts are effectively communicated to the research community and that researchers are made aware of the strategic framework supporting their environment and development. Without this visibility, the impact of the HR Strategy may be underappreciated and underutilized. To enhance this, it is recommended that the Communication Office and the Grants Office be more involved in promoting the HR Excellence in Research Award, which is a valuable asset that the university should be proud of and make better use of. The HR Award logo should be prominently displayed on the website and all HR-related materials, and full access to all HRS4R-related documents should be provided to ensure greater awareness and engagement.

General Assessment

Which of the below situations describes the organisation's progress most accurately? Tick the right situation regarding the award renewal application:.

- **Accepted** (●)
- Pending modifications (○)
- Pending modifications - **extended deadline** (○)

Explanation

- **Accepted**: The organisation is progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan. **There is evidence that the HR Excellence in Research is further embedded. The next assessment will take place in 36 months.**
- Pending modifications: The organisation is, for the most part, progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan, but could benefit from alterations as advised through the Assessment process. **There is some evidence that the HR Excellence in Research is further embedded.**

The institution is requested to submit within 2 months a revised file taking into account the recommendations of the assessors.

- Pending modifications - **extended deadline**: The organisation is not deemed to be implementing appropriate and quality actions and this raises some concern for the future efforts to implement actions closely aligned to the Charter and Code. **There is a lack of evidence that the HR Excellence in Research is further embedded.**
  The institution is requested to submit within 12 months a revised file taking into account the recommendations of the assessors.
  Until then, the HR Award will be put as "pending".

General Recommendations

If any of the above statements have prompted a "no" in the evaluation, please provide suggestions of modifications in the form below.

- If the general assessment is "pending modifications" the recommendations are split into:
  - Immediate mandatory recommendations (to be implemented for award renewal, resubmission within 2 months)
  - Other recommendations (to be carried out during the award renewal phase).
- If the general assessment is "pending modifications - extended deadline" the recommendations are split into:
  - Mandatory recommendations (to be implemented for award renewal, resubmission within 12 months)
  - Other recommendations

Recommendations *

Uppsala University must engage more strategically with internal stakeholders—particularly the Communications Office and the Grants Office.

Involving the Communications Office could greatly enhance the visibility and internal awareness of the HR Excellence in Research award, ensuring it is not only recognized but actively used as a tool to promote the university's commitment to research career development. Similarly, a closer collaboration with the Grants Office would help highlight and measure the concrete impacts of the HR strategy, particularly in terms of funding success, researcher support, and institutional competitiveness.

By leveraging these internal resources more effectively, Uppsala University could reinforce its ambition and take a more proactive approach in aligning its HR practices with long-term institutional goals and international best practices.

Additionally, the HR Excellence in Research logo should be prominently featured in all recruitment and HR-related materials, as well as on the university's homepage, in both the Swedish and English versions. **Making all HRS4R documents publicly accessible on the website, rather than only available after login, is required** to significantly improve transparency and showcase the university's commitment to excellence in research practices.

If the organisation deserves to be commended on their ambition, their actions, evidence of good practice and/or their implementation process, please provide a commentary supporting this. (max. 2000 words)

Uppsala University has shown commendable ambition in its approach to the HRS4R process. The actions taken so far, along with evidence of good practices and successful implementation, reflect a strong commitment to enhancing research careers and aligning with international standards.

The evidence provided regarding working conditions, such as the emphasis on work-life balance, support for spouses when necessary, and offering salaries to PhD students, highlights the university’s commitment to creating a supportive environment. Additionally, the university’s ethical practices, including the assignment of "safety officers" in all departments, and its training and development initiatives, such as coaching to gather information and feedback from researchers, demonstrate good practices that could benefit other universities.

The next phase for the HRS4R logo should transition from being primarily driven by the HR Office to becoming a broader, fully institutional commitment. This would involve engaging all relevant stakeholders across the university, ensuring that the values and practices associated with the HR Excellence in Research award are embedded at every level of the institution. Such a shift would reinforce the university’s dedication to a long-term, comprehensive approach to researcher development, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and supporting researchers throughout all phases of their careers