HRS4R Action Plan University of Vaasa 2022-2024

Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

We at the University of Vaasa recognize that our strength and success almost exclusively depend on the work contribution of our staff. All our results are directly based on the input of our skilled and committed researchers and teachers and the experts working in the university support functions. Therefore, we focus on the well-being of our staff and developing the working environment.

For us, working with the HRS4R process has been very rewarding. The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment is a solid foundation for organizational development and has helped us to identify our strengths as well as development areas. In addition to being an excellent tool for organizational development, the HRS4R development process will further enable us to create a working environment that is conducive to research, embraces diversity and supports the career development of all staff members.

Minna Martikainen
Vice-Rector for Research

Elina Kaunismäki
HR Director

Vaasan yliopisto
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1 Ethical and Professional Aspects

Strengths

In terms of ethical and professional aspects and in addition to the principles of European Charter and Code for Researchers, the operations of the University of Vaasa (later referred to as "UVA") are governed by Finnish and European legislation as well as specific internally developed guidelines and decisions.

UVA's Equality Plan implements two Finnish acts: The Government Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) and Non Discrimination Act (1325/2014). The first obligates the employer to ensure that women and men have equal opportunities in terms of work, pay and professional development and the latter includes all prohibitions of discrimination apart from gender-based discrimination.

An updated organizational Code of Conduct policy aims to clarify what it means to act in accordance with UVA's core values (Community, Courage, and Responsibility), to nurture the university as a responsible and ethical community and to ensure an internationally high level of research, education and teaching in accordance with ethical principles and good scientific practice. The Code of Conduct applies to all members of the university community.

UVA has also committed to abide by the ethical guidelines established by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. Good Scientific Practice is an essential part of both teaching and research at the university. Information about what is considered as a violation of Good Scientific Practice as well as the relevant procedures are detailed in the publication "Abiding by Good Scientific Practice". The topic is also a part of the course offering to Doctoral students (good scientific conduct). UVA appointed an Ethics Committee in 2021, which gives statements on the ethical and other risks research projects may have (implementing the guidelines on ethical principles based on Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK). The Research Council and University's Ethics Committee will draft a Code of Conduct for Research in 2022. Furthermore, services and guidelines for researchers on good scientific conduct have been developed. Since November 2020 UVA also employs a dedicated Director of Sustainability and Ethics who heads up a team tasked with advancing and coordinating activities related to sustainable development and social responsibility, both in research and education.

Considerable investments have been made to support the dissemination of research results and public engagement of researchers. In 2020, UVA formed a new Innovation and Commercialization team. The team helps researchers to exploit and commercialize innovations and research results as well as gives support in finding funding, advise on patent applications and creates opportunities for collaboration between researchers and companies. UVA's Communications, Brand and Marketing department plays a key role in supporting researchers in communicating their work to a wider audience by eg. offering training and guidelines in using social media, support for presenting in media interviews and writing press releases. They also help researchers in adding visibility through their profile page on UVA's website.

Weaknesses

Although UVA has established a unified language policy, in order to support the internationalization strategy, we need to find even more solutions for truly integrating our international staff, especially taking into consideration the participation in organizational working groups and decision-making bodies.

Information on the principles of DORA – Declaration of the Responsible Assessment of Research – has been shared on the UVA website and in meetings of the UVA Research Council. Acceptance of the declaration lacks final approval, but its principles have been incorporated into the ongoing Research Assessment Exercise 2021 – University of Vaasa.

2 Recruitment and Selection

Strengths

A four-stage career model for teachers and researchers in academia is a common practice in Finland. The four-stage career model is also in line with the researcher career stages (R1-R4) as described in the European Framework for Research Careers (EU Commission, 2011).

UVA considers a clear career model, including the tenure track model, as a key factor in promoting the stability as well as predictability of research careers. A clear career model also ensures a transparent approach to recruitment criteria. As a result of a thorough development process, updated recruitment guidelines with a modified career model structure were published in October 2021.

The University law and The General Collective Agreement and UVA's regulations form the foundation of our career model guidelines. The guidelines define the eligibility requirements and criteria for all career stages. The evaluation of research takes into account the content of the researcher's published production (e.g. research topics, methodologies and the significance of the results) and the quality as a whole. In addition to research, the eligibility criteria take into account merits in teaching, supervision, collaboration, societal impact, international activities as well as activities within the academic community as required according to career stage.

The principles of open, transparent and merit-based recruitment are an integral part of UVA's recruitment process. In the application stage, the applicants are recommended to use the templates found on the UVA website. In order to ensure equal and fair evaluation of the applicant's merits, the CV should be prepared in line with the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) template. The practices used in the selection process are connected to the position to be filled. Practices such as interviews, teaching demonstrations, selection committees and expert assessments are commonly used.

A key factor in maintaining and developing a thriving university sector in Finland, is to succeed in attracting and retaining international talents. In early 2020, during the previous HRS4R action plan period we conducted an extensive International HR Service design project, collecting and analysing data from our international employees and other key actors who are involved at various stages of the recruitment process. The project highlighted the most well-functioning recruitment services as well as those in need of further development. According to the survey, the vast majority of respondents stated that they are satisfied with the recruitment, relocation and onboarding related services.

Weaknesses

One of the main strategic aims of the UVA is to strengthen the profile as an internationally recognized research and innovation university. We want to attract the best international talent, which the university as well as the surrounding ecosystem so badly needs. Therefore, we will continue the employer branding work by further promoting research and teaching careers and the working environment, including the OTM-R Policy.

This also corresponds well with the national Ministry led initiative "Talent Boost". There is a strategic roadmap, which outlines the steps to be taken in order to achieve this goal. However, some parts have been adversely affected by the current pandemic, e.g. the mobility of researchers. We have strong ambitions to attract international research talent to our university and area. For this purpose, we recognize the need for further developing the cooperation with regional partners, such as the City of Vaasa. Although we can attract top talent to the UVA and the surrounding region, we want to ensure that we can also retain them by offering services as a region that also support the integration of not only the researchers but also their families. This is an essential part of our new action plan.

3 Working Conditions

Strengths

Developing work, working conditions and communality as well as well-being at work as a whole is important to UVA as an employer. UVA invests in the well-being of its personnel in many ways, for instance by offering preventive occupational health care as well as extensive medical care, activities supporting physical and mental well-being as well as flexible working time arrangements contributing to work-life balance.

A workplace well-being survey is conducted every two years. The results from the survey are widely used in planning and implementing unit-specific and university-level well-being actions. The last workplace well-being survey was carried out in autumn 2021. The results show that workplace well-being at UVA is at a good level. Especially supervisory / managerial work and opportunities to utilize one's own competence are strengths in our university. Further, the work tasks are considered motivating and interesting. Overall, the university level results show that especially early-stage researchers feel satisfied in their work.

As part of an extensive campus development project, UVA is modernising workspaces to accommodate new ways of working (e.g. crossboundary team working, use of technology). The development work has been carried out together with the whole university personnel, and views of the academic community have been collected e.g. by organising workshops and surveys.

In Spring 2021, UVA initiated a project to organize information about its research infrastructure. The project aims to compile a complete data set about the existing laboratories, software, databases, networks and services including the financial resources needed in supporting the research infrastructure in the future.

As to the career development of our researchers, a systematic, internally-delivered late-career faculty development programme (Unilead) was established in 2020. In 2022 UVA aims to launch an additional programme to support junior scholars in 'navigating' their way through academia and to develop the needed competences for next research career stage.

UVA values mobility experience. It is not only valued in conjunction with recruitments, but is also a recognized comptence development method. Researcher mobility is also a step in the roadmap to strengthening the university's international operations. Members of our university community visit, develop and work in scientific communities and companies around the world during different phases of their careers. Besides international mobility, promoting intersectoral mobility and cooperation between private and public sector will be further strengthened in the next action plan period. In addition to the Innovation and Ecosystems Team, a dedicated External Relations Director has been hired to assist in creating strategic partnerships, supporting university-industry collaboration as well as the innovation and entrepreneurship activities of faculty and students.

Weaknesses

UVA has already early on recognized the importance of supporting the work-life balance of its employees. This has been achieved by e.g. enabling flexible working hours and hybrid/remote working possibilities. Nevertheless, further development of structures that support worklife balance and combining family and work is one of the key focus areas in the HR strategic programme for 2021 – 2024. Also, the current Covid-pandemic has fronted us to further review our remote working policies and guidelines.

According to the workplace well-being survey, work-time management and the ability to concentrate without excessive disturbances and changes in the working environment are areas to follow-up on, especially when it comes to researchers on a more senior level. Also, further opportunities to influence the university's decision making are called for. From an HRS4R perspective, we want to promote researchers' awareness of the decision-making processes and participation in the decision-making bodies in the next Action Plan. This will be on focus especially for the part of our international research staff.

4 Training and Development

Strengths

The Research Services and Graduate school organizes events and training, as well as provides services for the whole university community. The areas of expertise include e.g. research ethics, good scientific practice, research permits, ethical review process, open science, applying for research funding as well as contracts and agreements. They also support supervisors by providing relevant information and organizing events and training.

UVA is a member of several national and international doctoral education networks, which offer high-quality courses for doctoral students. On an international level, UVA is a member of the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management EIASM. In addition, UVA and its Doctoral Programmes are members of EDAMBA – 'European Doctoral programs Association in Management & Business Administration', which involves an external evaluation of our curricula and quality assurance processes.

In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on doctoral graduates' working life competencies in order to facilitate their placement in industry as well as in academia. UVA has participated in the national, EU funded TOHTOS project that aimed to develop connections between doctoral education and work life networks.

Through the services of CSC–IT Center for Science *, UVA researchers get regular information about training and courses that help them enhance their digital skills e.g. in data management, sharing and publishing data, and computing. The recently appointed Data Manager also helps the researchers to use the open data archives and helps to make their data openly available.

Development discussions concerning the employee's work, work situation, competence and career development are held annually. In conjunction with the development discussion, the supervisor and employee also prepare a long-term plan, which includes target setting and staff training.

As per the previous HRS4R action plan, UVA has now adopted a unified language policy, in order to support its internationalization strategy. According to law, the administrative language of UVA remains Finnish. However, all internal communication is carried out both in Finnish and English. Professional language courses in Finnish for international staff as well as English language courses for Finnish staff are regularly provided.

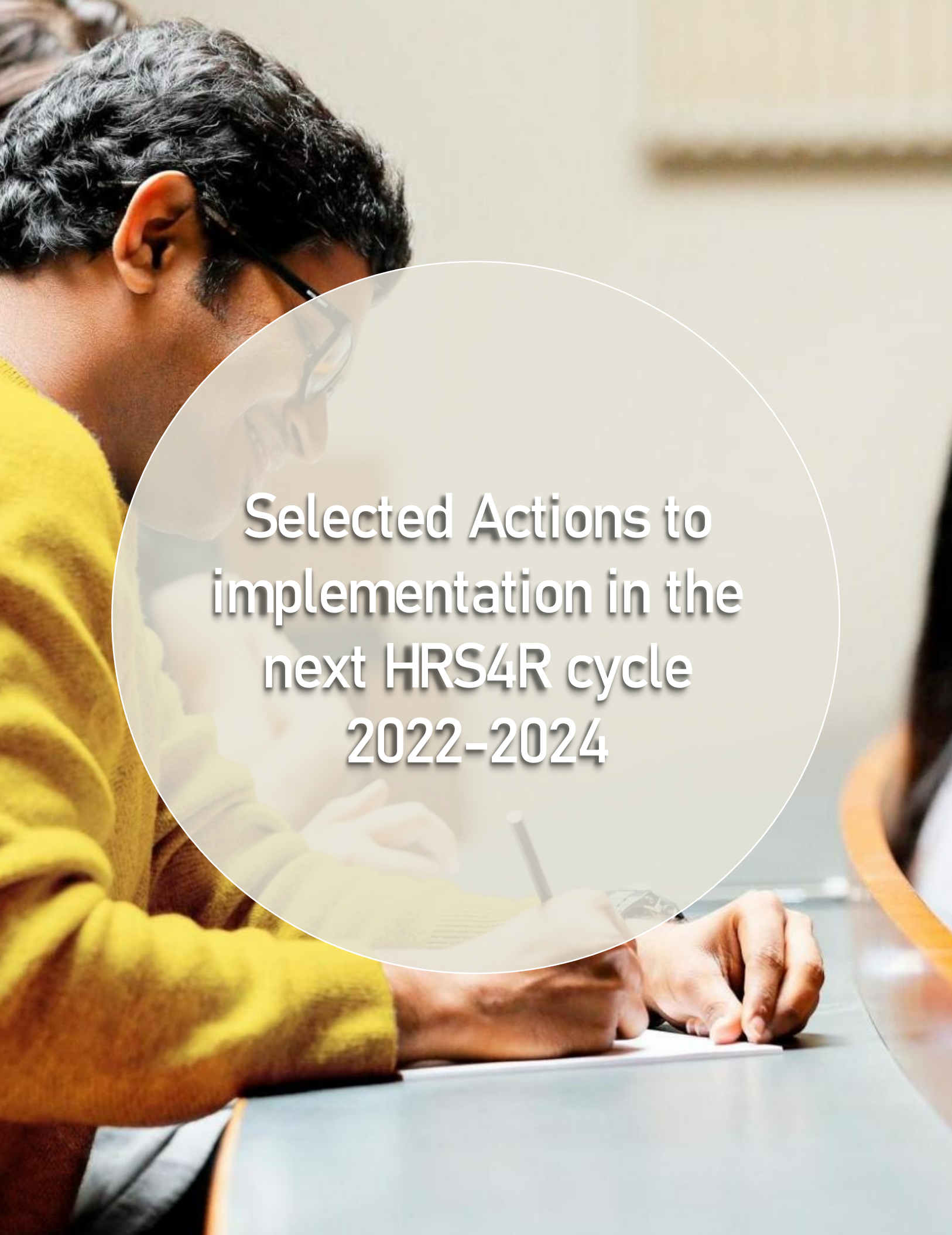
In addition to in-house training and events, staff are involved in a wide variety of national and international training and development events incl conferences and seminars.

Weaknesses

The recent pandemic has had a major impact on the way we deliver our competence development activities. We have identified a need for a wider and more systematic offering of e-learning and hybrid learning opportunities. This also raises the need for a learning platform as well as learning management system for staff training, which would support e-learning and enable more systematic follow-up of the quantity and quality of the training.

One of the development areas in the next action plan period is to further develop support structures for supervisors for the Doctoral students. Other development needs include harmonizing and strengthening the core doctoral programme curricula as well as closer integration of Graduate School training modules with industry and working life to improve impact, engagement and employability.

Pedagogical education of the teaching faculty has already increased significantly. Nevertheless, UVA is responding to changing educational needs through a comprehensive renewal of our learning environment (campus development project). In addition, the development of the pedagogical, and especially digi-pedagogical competences will be one of the main key strategic development areas for the coming years.



Selected Actions to implementation in the next HRS4R cycle 2022-2024

Actions

1. Developing the research infrastructure
2. Improvements to commercialization of institutional partnerships and research funding services
3. Developing evaluation practices in research
4. Developing doctoral student and researcher education and training opportunities
5. Support for doctoral thesis supervisors and strengthening the support structure for supervisors
6. Developing project management services and support
7. Creating and supporting internal (professional, academic) networking and information-sharing within the research community
8. Campus renewal and renovation to create a modern working environment and facilities conducive to research
9. Flexible working arrangements and hybrid work
10. Integration of international staff
11. E-learning and hybrid learning opportunities
12. OTM-R: Quality control system
13. OTM-R: Raising internal awareness of UVA career structure and development opportunities

Action	**1. Developing the research infrastructure** • Mapping out the research infrastructure, reporting and follow-up practices, utilization and marketing it to external partners • To have a clear vision of the infrastructure and the investments as well as inputs/outputs
GAP Principle(s)	23. Research environment 24. Working conditions
Timing	Q4/2020 - an ongoing development theme
Responsible Unit	Research Services, ongoing development Finance and Project Management unit, responsible for statistics and reporting Responsible persons of the laboratories, academic units and research platforms
Indicators	A complete data set about the existing laboratories, software, databases, networks and services including the financial resources needed in supporting the research infrastructure in the future.
Current Status	In progress
Remarks	UVA initiated a project in spring 2021 for organizing information about its research infrastructure. The project aims to compile a complete data set about the existing laboratories, software, databases, networks and services including the financial resources needed in supporting the research infrastructure in the future.

Action	**2. Improvements to commercialization of institutional partnerships and research funding services** A. Raise external funds via state-backed fundraising campaign 2020-2022 B. Strengthen strategic partnerships with key stakeholders that contribute to external funding of university's activities. C. Continuously improve quality of research service provision across research project lifecycle via process improvement and 1-2 new hires specializing in EU funding.
GAP Principle(s)	8. Dissemination, exploitation of results 9. Public engagement 23. Research environment 26. Funding and salaries
Timing	Q4/2020 - Q4/2022
Responsible Unit	A. Working group for the fundraising campaign B. Innovations and Ecosystems -team with the academic units C. Partly Research Services with the academic units
Indicators	A. Success of the fundraising campaign B. Number and quality of external partnerships C. Customer/researcher feedback concerning research project lifecycle management Success in EU funded project applications
Current Status	In progress
Remarks	

Action	**3. Developing evaluation practices in research** A. Executing the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE): providing data on the quality of the research and research environment; developing practices and tools for regular monitoring and assessment. B. Developing evaluation and indicators of societal impacts of research and practices of reporting
GAP Principle(s)	6. Accountability 7. Good practice in research 11. Evaluation/appraisal systems 23. Research environment
Timing	Q2/2021 - Q4/2022 – an ongoing development theme
Responsible Unit	A. Research Evaluation project: Research Services, ongoing development also Finance and Project Management unit, responsible for statistics and reporting B. Internal accreditation actors in collaboration with (Innolab) researchers
Indicators	• RAE reports and drafting a plan for ongoing development • Annual Researcher Survey on research environment results
Current Status	In progress
Remarks	Evaluation practices in research: continuous self-reflection and availability of data. In following good evaluation practices in research, the ongoing third research evaluation outlines a way towards a model for regular monitoring and assessment of the research activities and environment. This will increase availability and validity of evaluation data and foster continuous self-reflection on research activities and implementation of research strategy. The ELVIS project of the InnoLab research platform is developing comprehensive approaches and indicators for impact evaluation that will support accountability of research practice and validity in assessing societal impacts of research.

Action	**4. Developing doctoral student and researcher education and training opportunities** A. Harmonizing and strengthening the doctoral programmes and the internal management practices B. Developing e.g. the university-industry collaboration model C. Training modules with industry and working life. D. Designing and implementing the Accelerate -training programme for early- and mid-career faculty (R2-R3 stage researchers) E. Developing the digital competences of researchers: Dissemination of research data, communication skills, pedagogical skills
GAP Principle(s)	1. Research freedom 2. Ethical principles 3. Professional responsibility 7. Good practice in research 8. Dissemination, exploitation of results 38. Continuing Professional Development 39. Access to research training and continuous development
Timing	Q1/2022 – Q4/2024
Responsible Unit	A. Graduate School in cooperation with the Academic units B. Innovations and Ecosystems team C. Innovations and Ecosystem team D. Accelerate working group: process management HR, programme content Academic Units E. Coordinated by Research Services, input from various internal service providers
Indicators	• Number of courses, trainings and events, participants and participant feedback Regularly gathered feedback from researchers (Researcher Survey) • Number and quality of partnerships and collaborative training modules to improve societal impact, engagement and employability
Current Status	In progress
Remarks	Graduate school courses are open to all personnel. Research Services on their services and expert areas: Providing services, support, information and training on research ethics, good scientific practice, research permits, ethical review process, open science, applying research funding, drafting an award-winning research funding application, budgeting of the research process, contracts and agreements, reporting the scientific publications and actions

Action	**5. Support for doctoral thesis supervisors and strengthening the support structure for supervisors** • Providing supervisors with required information, organizing training events and discussion forums for knowledge/experience sharing. • Updating and streamlining the guidelines and recommendations on the supervision processes.
GAP Principle(s)	40. Supervision
Timing	Started 2021, ongoing until Q4/2023
Responsible Unit	Graduate School with the academic units
Indicators	• Number of trainings and events, number of participants, training feedback • Completed revised guidelines and recommendations
Current Status	In progress
Remarks	

Action	**6. Developing project management services and support** To continuously improve quality of research service provision across research project lifecycle via process improvement by: A. Developing the services and support for project management on all areas of services: service organization, work division, processes, roles and responsibilities B. New project management tool
GAP Principle(s)	23. Research environment 24. Working conditions
Timing	Q4/2019 - Q4/2023 as an ongoing development theme
Responsible Unit	A. All University services (within their own expertise areas) with the academic units B. Finance and project administration services
Indicators	• Regularly gathered feedback from researchers (Researcher Survey) • New project management tool in use
Current Status	In progress
Remarks	

Action	**7. Creating and supporting internal (professional, academic) networking and information-sharing within the research community** • Maintaining and developing the Research Café -concept, which brings together cross-disciplinary teams • Increase communality, enhance information sharing and co-creation within the research community
GAP Principle(s)	8. Dissemination, exploitation of results 23. Research environment 24. Working conditions 28. Career development
Timing	Q1/2022 – Q/4/2024
Responsible Unit	Innovations and Ecosystems team, Research services
Indicators	• Number of Research Café events organized, number of participants • Regularly gathered feedback from researchers (Researcher Survey)
Current Status	Extented
Remarks	

Action	**8. Campus renewal and renovation to create a modern working environment and facilities conducive to research** • Modernizing workspaces to accommodate new ways of working (e.g. cross-boundary team working), creation of a thriving campus community for faculty, students and partners • Modernizing teaching and learning spaces to further support the use of technology in teaching, improve energy efficiency as part of a greener and carbon neutral campus
GAP Principle(s)	23. Research environment 24. Working conditions 32. Co-authorship
Timing	Ongoing, envisioned completion Q4/2024
Responsible Unit	Campus Development Group and the Director of Finance
Indicators	Completion of the several sub-projects according to schedule
Current Status	Extended
Remarks	The way of organizing the Campus Development and the major milestones of the project are described in detail in the document “Campus Development Organization”.

Action	**9. Flexible working arrangements and hybrid work** Revising guidelines for different personnel groups regarding: A. hybrid work (incl remote work) B. international assignments (research exchanges, secondments abroad) The guidelines will be further developed allowing more flexibility and taking int o account the nature of work. The guidelines will be clearly instructed within the university community.
GAP Principle(s)	18. Recognition of mobility experience (Code) 23. Research environment 24. Working conditions 29. Value of mobility
Timing	Q1/2022 - Q4/2022
Responsible Unit	Guidelines are approved by the Rector. Preparatory work: A. HR, Legal counsel B. HR, Financial, travel and project coordination services
Indicators	• renewed guidelines exist • number of staff information/training sessions • existing instructions within the internal community (intranet)
Current Status	New
Remarks	The revised guidelines will be prepared in cooperation with various personnel groups and stakeholders. In parts, the work has started. Special attention will be paid to internal communication of the revised policies. Concerning remote work abroad, the University is mapping the possibility to enable flexible remote work also abroad to the extent that it is legally possible and considering safety guidelines and insurance requirements.

Action	**10. Integration of international staff** A. Re-evaluating the University's language policy B. Increasing awareness of the organizational structure, working groups and decision making bodies of the university. Enabling participation and developing way-of-working. C. Developing the recruitment process further with particular attention to international recruitment and required support services (eg. Spouse programme)
GAP Principle(s)	12. Recruitment 13. Recruitment (Code) 23. Research environment 24. Working conditions 35. Participation in decision-making bodies
Timing	
Responsible Unit	
Indicators	A. Updated language policy exists B. Diversity in decision making bodies (how many non-Finnish staff members compared t o current situation) C. Survey (follow-up of the 2020 international service design project), number of events promoting integration to the university community/Finnish society, existing spouse support programme
Current Status	New
Remarks	

Action	**11. E-learning and hybrid learning opportunities** A. *Digitalisation of the induction process.* In the following action plan period, the digital induction material and related on-line sessions will be further elaborated. The focus will first be on digital induction for those who are new in their managerial position and the international staff community. The development work will partly be a joint effort with other Finnish higher education institutions. B. *Offering wider and more systematic e-learning and hybrid learning opportunities.* Adopting a learning management system for personnel training, which would enable more systematic follow-up of the quantity and quality of the training.
GAP Principle(s)	12. Recruitment 37. Supervision and managerial duties 38. Continuing professional development 39. Access to research training and continuous development
Timing	Q2/2022 - Q2/2023
Responsible Unit	A. HR in cooperation with selected internal process owners B. HR
Indicators	A. The introductory learning paths for the international staff community and those who are new in their managerial position exists and is openly available B. The digital platform is adopted and accessible, feedback from end users
Current Status	New
Remarks	The Induction Programme of the University of Vaasa consists of 5 different modules. Previously, the programme has been held on-campus only. The past two induction programme rounds (during the pandemic) were held on-line and recorded. The recordings have been saved to the intranet and are freely available for staff members.

Action	**12. OTM-R: Quality control system** Further development of clear indicators of various stages of the recruitment process.
GAP Principle(s)	13. Recruitment (Code) 19. Recognition of qualifications (Code) 20. Seniority (Code) 21. Postdoctoral appointments (Code)
Timing	Q2/2022 - Q4/2022
Responsible Unit	HR in cooperation with selected internal process owners
Indicators	Simple, regular follow-up mechanism exists
Current Status	New
Remarks	Quantitative KPIs already in use. The development work will focus on qualitative indicators as part of the wider University Services Service Design project.

Action	**13. OTM-R: Raising internal awareness of UVA career structure and development opportunities** Sharing information about the UVA career structure and development opportunities. The updated career structure and development opportunities have been developed in cooperation with and communicated to the personnel. However, further training and support in the implementation of the guidelines has been planned for 2022.
GAP Principle(s)	12. Recruitment 13. Recruitment (Code) 14. Selection (Code) 15. Transparency (Code) 16. Judging merit (Code) 19. Recognition of qualifications (Code) 21. Postdoctoral appointments (Code) 25. Stability and permanence of employment 28. Career development
Timing	Q2/2022 – Q4/2022
Responsible Unit	HR in cooperation with selected internal process owners
Indicators	• Number of information/training sessions • List of various ways of promoting the guidelines internally and externally
Current Status	New
Remarks	