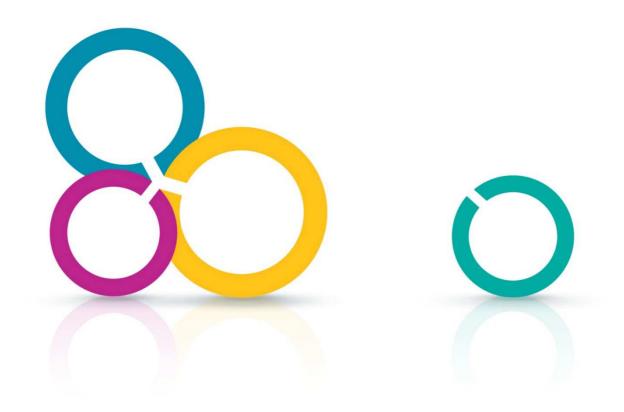# HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS INCORPORATING THE CHARTER AND THE CODE

EVALUATION OF THE UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO

1. REPORTING TEMPLATE

Name of the institution	University of Palermo - Università Degli Studi Di Palermo
Country	Palermo, Italy
Type of organisation	Research institution (public University)
Interviewee(s)	Professor Eleonora Riva Sanseverino (Coordinator C&C team) and Professor Livan Fratini (Rector´s Delegate for Research) were present the whole day. Among those who were present in shorter or longer periods where: (See also the agenda) - Professor Roberto Lagalla (Rector) - Professor Gianfranco Marrone (Delegate for the communication policies) - Dottore Daniela Cataldo C&C group - Gianluca Buffa LTR (Researcher) - Paolo Magro (Representative of Phd students) - Dottore Maria Stella Castiglia (Responsible for coaching, bibliometric and open access policy) - Professor Marina Bartolotta (Open access policies) - Professor Livan Fratini and Professor Giovanni Scala – coaching) - Dottore Luca Conigliaro (Technical support for bibliometric evaluations) - Professor Valeria Militello (Administrative board of the University) - Professor Umberto La Commare (UNIPA Technological Transfer Office) - Professor Aldo Schiavello (Rector's delegate for PhD students) Agenda: see Annex
Date of the visit	16, June, 2014 Reviewers: Ragnar Lie, Juan Manuel Garcia Camus, Sandra Speer
Background information	- 46.853 students - 1.672 researchers/professors

	- 2.400 technical-administrative personnel (number very high because half of them works at the University hospital) - 406 post doctorates - 117 grants - 43 patents in 5 years - 13 spin off - 73 international agreements - 3.800 industrial and public/private institution agreements The HRS4R was launched in February 2010 Acknowledged April 12, 2010

2. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the results of the University of Palermo (UNIPA) evaluation conducted by three peer reviewers on 16 June 2014. This evaluation constitutes the fifth step of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) process[1] aiming to support the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers (C&C)[2].

In order to produce their conclusions on the continuous improvement process resulting from the implementation of the C&C, the reviewers have analysed background documents at their disposal (e.g. action plans, self-assessment reports, monitoring data…) and have visited the institution. During this one-day visit, they have met different institutional stakeholders and beneficiaries (i.e. researchers).

Deloitte has merged the peer reviewers' individual reports into one single report. This report is divided in four sections:

1. Comparison between the action plan validated by the Commission for the acknowledgement of the institution as "HR Excellence in Research", and the concrete actions implemented;
2. The existence and implementation of monitoring and actual follow-up of the action plan;
3. The identification of tangible results stemming from the implementation of the action plan;
4. The conclusion of the evaluation.

3. EXTENT TO WHICH THERE IS COHERENCE BETWEEN THE INSTITUTIONAL HR STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN AND THE CONCRETE ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED

The institution made an important effort to analyse gaps, design and implement the action plan and to keep measures on track, following the principles described in the Human Research Strategy that follows those of the C&C.

The University of Palermo seems to be in a phase of transition. Because of external pressure and expectations, the University's leadership, headed by the rector, seems to have taken on a mission to modernise and professionalise the institution. The University is challenged by an increasing competition for funds, students and staff. The European universities are expected to increase their research output, deliver more scientific excellence, and play a greater role in the innovation system. At the same time Italian universities have had to meet the last years

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[1] For more information see : http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher
[2] For more information see : http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/whatIsAResearcher

austerity programme with a budgetary reduction, - in UNIPA's case a 20% fall in public income over the last five years.

As a regional University in an area with an even steeper fall in the general economy than the EU-average, UNIPA have to meet these challenges with an even stronger determination. On the other hand, having to perform necessary cuts, the whole institution has had to rethink its portfolio, from student courses, PhD programs, subject range and research investments.

To improve actions and policies in relation to Charter & Code such a project must be based on real involvement from the institutional leadership. At UNIPA, this seems to be well in place. The rector has deliberately used the Charter & Code-programme (as one of several tools) to develop the University in a new direction. The different Charter & Code topics and processes may therefore be seen as a semi-structured vehicle for tasks and actions in many areas within the University, such as recruitment, career development, assessments and evaluation, dissemination, involvement with society, excellence policies, mobility, internationalisation, working environment and conditions, PhD-policies, gender questions, etc.

According to the peer reviewers, most of the actions have been /are being implemented in a proper way. However, there are some important C&C principles that cannot be tackled adequately due to external factors such as the Italian legislation. For instance, bureaucratic issues may hinder research career.

The communication plan is quite well implemented in the University. The communication policy is adequate and efficient. The HRS4R is updated and well known.

However, the Intellectual Property Rights policy is not well addressed. For now, patents equally belong to the University, to the researchers, and in some cases to external companies. It makes IPR difficult to manage. Furthermore, in most of the cases, UNIPA gives up the ownership of the results. Irrespective whether the patent is very marketable or not, UNIPA cannot hand it out when other mechanism exists (such as licensing). This intangible asset cannot be sold, especially when the University does not have a specialized department in valuing technologies.

In this way, University should participate in technology-based companies. The best way to achieve it is providing intangible assets like knowledge and expertise. The University has a business incubator adequately managed. The purpose is to give an outlet to negotiate small ideas and help them to grow. Spin off companies can stay in the incubator up to 5 years. A mismatch occurs because the University also helps independent spin off as well. Some actions should be implemented to extend the incubation period. Moreover, entrepreneurship or being part of a spin off is not valued in a researcher's CV. This is a challenge not unknown well beyond Palermo and Italian universities.

Overall, there seem to be coherence between the overall strategy of the institution and the Charter and Code project. The C&C -project has indeed been used strategically to improve the functioning of the University and to align its policies with European and international standards.

4. EXTENT TO WHICH THERE IS A FOLLOW-UP/MONITORING MECHANISM PUT IN PLACE

As mentioned above, the University has adequately implanted most of the actions to accomplish the principles described in the Human Research Strategy. However, there is not a "standard" (normalized) follow up / monitoring mechanism accordingly put in place to supervise, follow up, update and establish a continuous improvement of the HR strategy. The monitoring is monitored by the C&C group itself, but there should be a mechanism or procedure integrated in the University to define the steps to be followed, track the implemented actions, set indicators and so on.

Moreover, the items that help institutions in this monitoring process are not specified (timing, milestones, management procedures, roles and responsibilities, and SMART indicators). Furthermore, the monitoring results have not been appropriately documented.

In 2009, the newly elected rector invited representatives for 14 academic subject fields to establish a Charter & Code group. After a start-up period, 8 of these has since functioned as a task force for promoting policies and actions in line with Charter & Code across levels and subjects fields at UNIPA. They are all born in the early seventies and this means that they all belong to a new generation of adults, aware, global intellectuals, linked to their own roots but also enthusiastic about the change and the development towards a more European model of academia.

The C&C-group has been a very effective tool for the rector to promote C&C, to keep up the momentum over time, and to follow up on the action plan. The group seem to function well as a team, with clearly defined roles and complementary responsibilities. The fact that the group consist of academic staff representing different disciplines and subject fields seems to give extra legitimacy among the target groups for the policies. On the other hand, improved collaboration with professional administrative staff might give extra capacity in implementation and further development of C&C policies.

Regarding internal dissemination of the C&C-process, it seems quite good. All PhDs attend introduction courses learning about C&C. There is also a resource page on the web (although not in English), and according to the peers reviewers, this has been performed satisfactory.

The follow up of the action plan was based on a survey among the staff. A new survey seems to be planned in the near future as a tool for further work on the C&C. The updated action plan and the related changes are adequately documented.

Regarding best practices, there is a lack of interaction with other institutions, except those from Sicilia, or a few Italian. The University should participate in workshops, implement benchmarking and share best practices with other European institutions.

5. EXTENT TO WHICH THERE ARE TANGIBLE RESULTS STEMMING FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL HR STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

Recruitment and mobility

The University's ambition is to be more competitive, not least regarding being preferred place to embark on or continue an academic career. Being a regional institution in Southern Italy, UNIPA has some challenges in this respect, both nationally and internationally.

On the one hand, recruiting top talents locally is difficult because young and bright Sicilians tend to look for careers beyond Sicily as well as outside Italy. For instance, there are more and more lectures at UNIPA given in English, intended to foreigners as well as to train local Italian speaking students for an academic and non-academic career in a global environment. The flipside of this policy is that the most talented continue their studies outside. On the other hand attracting talents for PhD, postdoc and permanent positions internationally is a challenge for a regional Italian University.

UNIPA has very few international staff. Only 1,5% of the researchers and 1,8% of the professors are non-Italians. The figures have been stable in recent years. The ratio of internationals among the PhD-candidates is somewhat higher, about 11 % in 2014 and is increasing. The majority of the international staff and PhD-candidates come from the Mediterranean area and the Maghreb countries.

At least three obstacles must be trespassed to recruit students, PhD-candidates and staff from abroad:

1. International visibility. To attract international applicants, the University as well as the subunits should be known by possible applicants. This must be done by advertising internationally. Using Euraxess is necessary, but this is seldom sufficient. More targeted recruitment strategies are recommended.
2. A certain level of acknowledged academic quality must be in place. Research quality gives visibility. As a comprehensive University in a region, one might have to choose between a broad spectrum of subject fields and fewer focus areas where international excellence could be accomplished
3. Language. For a temporary position, such as PhD or postdoc, knowing Italian might not be decisive, but for a position as permanent staff the daily use of Italian, parallel to English is probably required. This might be an obstacle for hiring non-Italians in permanent positions. To promote English as a parallel working and administrative language should be considered.

UNIPA seems determined to improve its visibility and academic quality. In order to improve the positive spiral of research accomplishments, international staff, international funding, UNIPA may have to embark on an even stronger prioritisation process towards a more focussed profile.

Regarding international participation among UNIPA's own staff there is a mobility programme in place in order to travel and stay longer in collaborating institutions. Unfortunately, due to recent budget cuts from the state, these programmes have been reduced.

Career development

An important principle in the Charter and the Code and in UNIPAs action plan is that the institution should provide a framework for researchers' career development. This seems to be partly in place at the level of PhD and to some degree at the postdoc level. Nevertheless, a more systematic framework for career development for the permanent academic staff does not exist. Leaders involvement on the department level in using career policy tools, such as appraisal meetings, mentoring, systematic course offerings, etc. seem to be lacking. A better policy in these areas should be considered.

Assessments, evaluation and excellence policies

A transparent evaluation system, preferably with international participation should be in place for all researchers, including senior staff. The present rector has introduced a new assessment system for identifying "active researchers". This implies that the staff is evaluated individually each year in a 'passive' way, based on their scientific production (publications in international peer review publications). Those who meet the threshold set by the leadership is characterised 'active researchers'. To overview this assessment procedure, 14 persons from UNIPA's main subject fields are appointed as a central commission.

First year, the threshold was set at a low level. Hence, some 93% of the staff met the requirement. Later, the threshold has been heightened, and will be further heightened in the future. At first, this system was met by some scepticism. But the procedure seem now to have been accepted.

Moreover, rector's office has started to evaluate departments based on accumulated performance in the staff. These policies have now started to pay off. Last year, two applicants at UNIPA were awarded an ERC-project. Bringing these policies one or two steps further might be a good advice.

Involvement with society

The University has also set out an ambition to play a greater role in the region regarding the young generations and their ability to take part in the economy through jobs and innovation. UniverCitta' is both about involvement with the (local) society (City and Region) and a disseminating tool. This is an annual festival with a lot of cultural performances, seminars and other events.

Dissemination

A central part of the dissemination strategy has been to communicate the core ideas of the University. Previously, UNIPA was functioning too much as a disunited set of departments and faculties spread around the city. Much effort has been laid down on integrating all parts of the University into one organisation; physically (e.g. buildings and signs), academically and culturally. Linked to this, also great effort in the last two years has been a total remake of the UNIPA's website. Although a great part of the website is not yet in English and that the navigation for non-Italians is not very intuitive, the progress here must be regarded as very good. Many different types of data has been connected and made available automatically through the website. All subunits are now having the same visual profile and are interconnected through common databases, etc. and all staff has their own, interconnected personal website.

However, the evaluators still find it somewhat difficult to see a sharp academic focus. A more concrete profile would be easier to communicate, as well as being easier for the staff to contribute to the overall goals of the institution.

Working environment and conditions

Regarding balance between teaching and research, it seems that this is not a big problem for UNIPA. Permanent staff has indeed to teach 350 hours per year (out of 1500 hours a year).

PhD and young researchers' policies

PhDs are considered as students, and this practice (which is standard in Italy) was also defended during the interview, based on the view that a PhD is still under supervision in a process of learning to be a researcher, - as the last of the three cycles under Bologna. In addition, they are not employed with a salary, but receive a stipend. This might be in conflict with the Charter and Code principle of treating all researchers (including PhD) as professionals. In many other European countries, PhDs are seen as employees and are covered by pension's schemes, social security programs, etc.

Furthermore the way the PhD candidates are selected, - through an inflexible procedure set by national authorities, and with an uptake only once a year, makes it quite difficult to attract the best and brightest, both locally, nationally and internationally.

Hence, the number of PhD candidates at UNIPA is not very high in comparison with the national level, and there is an important goal to increase the number.

Having said this, UNIPA has gone through an important turnaround regarding the role of the PhDs. From being under the domain of individual professors, PhDs at UNIPA are no longer selected locally but based on structured nationally meritocratic criteria. In this way, the traditional "professor-regime" seems now to be outdated. This also gives the PhD candidate a far more independent position than before, combined with higher expectations regarding

research output, such as publications. This change is probably an example where national requirements have triggered a cultural change to the better.

Due to the financial crisis and the modernisation of the doctoral training, the number of training programs for PhDs has been radically reduced at UNIPA. This is seen as positive. However, the present 20+ programs are now quite wide and less specialised. This means that more job has to be done inside each program to prepare for a wider spectrum of careers.

Gender questions

The ratio females/males is quite low (around 30%) for professors, while for researchers and PhD candidates, the ratio is much higher and close to parity. However, within some subject fields such as engineering, there were very few women, because "the recruiting base is dominated by men". The overall gender balance for UNIPA on the PhD and researcher-levels might form a good basis to build a strategy for a better gender balance on the professor-level.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The institution made an important effort to analyse causes, design action and implement the action plan, following the principles described in the HR Strategy that follows those of the C&C. In most of the action proposed, it can be verified from both interviewees and data that actions have been /are being implemented in a proper way. Moreover, the communication plan is quite well implemented in UNIPA, which has an adequate and efficient communication policy.

The C&C -project has been used strategically to improve the functioning of the University and to align its policies with European and international standards.

The peer reviewers also put forward the commitment from the governance's bodies of the University. The Rector is moreover well aware of the main activities involving this process. The delegate of the rector for Research has actively participated in the process and works closely with the C&C team headed by Eleonora Riva Sanseverino.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The peer reviewers would recommend to:

➢ Implement a more systematic procedure for self-assessment, using criteria accepted in most institutions for independent evaluations.
➢ Put in place a standard (normalized) follow up / monitoring mechanism to supervise, follow up, update and develop a continuous improvement of the HR strategy.
➢ Recruitment:
   o More targeted recruitment strategies to attract international staff;

- o Consider further promotion of English as a parallel academic and administrative language;
  - o Stronger prioritisation process towards a more focussed profile where international excellence could be accomplished in selected fields.
- ➢ Dissemination: Develop a more concrete profile/story line to communicate in an easier way.
- ➢ Establish mechanisms to encourage bright students to apply for third level studies, regardless the Italian bureaucracy.
- ➢ Address better Intellectual Property Right policy. UNIPA should manage its knowledge and intangible assets such as patents in order to get more benefits from its researches.
- ➢ Career Development:
  - o Involve more leaders at department level, by using career policy tools, such as appraisal meetings, mentoring, systematic course offerings, etc.
  - o Provide a more systematic framework for career development for the permanent academic. This could be linked to the on-going "active staff"-evaluations of research output initiated by the rector in recent years.
- ➢ Gender Balance. The gender balance is quite good on PhD and researcher-levels, but not on professor-level (30% female professors).
  - o UNIP should develop a strategy for a better gender balance at top level.
- ➢ On implementing Charter and Code: Improve collaboration between professional administrative staff and the academic staff that might give extra capacity in implementation and further development of C&C policies.

Annex I: Agenda

- 9:30-9:45 – Arrival and greetings. The delegate for the Charter and Code, prof. Eleonora Riva Sanseverino will be there with the rector's Delegate for Research, Prof. Livan Fratini
- 9:45-10:30 – Meeting with the Rector, Prof. Roberto Lagalla
- 10:30-11:00 Meeting with comunication staff. In this meeting you will meet Prof. Gianfranco Marrone who is the delegate for the communication of the university of Palermo. You will also meet the administrative responsible for the actions carried out directly by the C&C group, Dott. Daniela Cataldo. She is in charge of communicating the initiatives of the C&C group to the University (Internal communication).
- 11:00-12:00 Meeting with Researches and Young researches (Gianluca Buffa LTR and Paolo Magro), Paolo Magro is Phd student and representative of Phd students
- 12:00-12:30 Meeting with the responsibles of coaching, bibliometric and open access policy (Dott. Maria Stella Castiglia – open access policies; Prof. Marina Bartolotta, Prof. Livan Fratini and Prof. Giovanni Scala – coaching; Dott. Luca Conigliaro – technical support for bibliometric evaluations)
- 12:30-13:00 Meeting with Prof. Valeria Militello, in the administrative board of the university.
- 13:00-14:30 Lunch and coffee
- 14:30-15:00•Meeting with prof. Umberto La Commare and Dott. Silvana Di Bono who manage the technological transfer at UNIPA.
- 15:00-16:00 Meeting with Rector's delegate for PhD students: prof. Aldo Schiavello
- 16:00-17:00 Meeting with C&C group. In this meeting you will be able to discuss all the process with C&C group composed of 8 people. These are all academics but very well connected to the administration and now fully integrated into the decision process of the University.