



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

HRS4R Internal Review 2023/2024 & Action Plan 2023-2026



Contents

Internal Review 2023/2024: Strengths and weakness of the current practice
Ethical and professional aspects.....3
Recruitment and Selection.....5
Working Conditions.....6
Training and Development.....8

Action Plan 2023-2026.....13

Editor’s note

At the time of this report, uia.no was undergoing a welcome change to a new website. Some of the links found in this document will direct you to the updated site pages, while others will direct you to the older versions.

Ethical and Professional aspects:

Strengths and Weaknesses:

UiA's strategy, as adopted by the university board, holds high ethical standards for all our activities, including those which relate to academic freedom in that "we have a culture of academic quality, creativity, boldness, critical thinking and ethical reflection". Furthermore, ethical strengths are found in UiA's guidelines; "the university tradition presupposes a high degree of trust that the employees are involved in building the institution, teaching and developing the teaching offers, conducting their research in an honest manner, and managing and developing the university internally and in interaction with the surrounding society."

With motivation from the inherent ethical duty built on trust in our employees, the weaknesses that were identified in the initial phase were linked to principles 1, 6, 7, and 8: participation in decision-making processes, training in project management and funding, familiarity with good practices for handling research data, and policy and practices concerning the commercialisation of research results.

The action steps of the original action plan, then, corresponded to the identified weaknesses and included: strengthening representation in the budget process, improving administrative support for external funding activities, training in project management and funding, a survey of the handling of sensitive data, establishing a TTO at the university, and training of staff in commercialisation and innovation.

By the time of the interim assessment, it was found that the measures implemented regarding action step 2, external funding activities, had been both adequate and productive and that communications and workflow concerning applications for external funding had improved. Regarding action step 4, a survey of the handling of sensitive data, the conclusion was that the measure had been both relevant and productive. The situation was also that upcoming national legislation would give the institution an opportunity to re-examine local regulations in this field. The comments on action step 5, commercialisation of research results, emphasised that it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of the measures implemented under action step 5 and that development in this field was an ongoing process.

The action step concerning participation in decision-making processes was not commented on in the interim assessment because nothing had happened regarding this action step.

Much has been achieved in the years since the initial phase, but that there are ongoing processes to further improve the policy and practices relating to several of the issues in 'Ethical and Professional aspects'. However, these are no longer part of HRS4R.

The action step relating to participation in decision-making processes has been discontinued. The main reason was that this comprehensive and serious action step was perceived to be too much of a top-down intervention in faculty and department practices. In other words, it had not been sufficiently anchored in the institution's governing plans and processes.

The action plan that is presented in this award renewal document does not include any action steps based on weaknesses identified in relation to 'Ethical and professional aspects'. This does not mean that the present situation is completely satisfactory, but rather that:

- Many of the objectives of the initial phase have been achieved
- further work in this field will be in the manner of gradual improvements initiated and controlled by the responsible units themselves.

Remarks:

The University of Agder's work to ensure ethical and professional work

In addition to applicable law, UiA is also obliged to comply with both national and internal ethical guidelines that in many ways supplement current legal rules. At UiA, we have several guidelines to ensure ethical and professional practice in recruitment, research studies and Open Science:

- Ethical guidelines for the civil service
- Ethical guidelines at UiA
- The Research Ethics Act
- National and international guidelines for research ethics
- Research ethics guidelines at UiA
- Ethical guidelines for supervision
- Ethical guidelines for the arts
- Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics

The internal guidelines have been prepared in multipartite working groups, are easily accessible to all employees on UiA's website, and form part of the training of new employees.

Recruitment

To ensure professional recruitment processes, it is crucial that they are impartial, open, and professionally rooted. We have national legal rules, including the Freedom of Information Act (<https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2006-05-19-16>), and the Public Administration Act (<https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1967-02-10>) with regulations and legislation that ensure this. In the training of managers and HR employees at UiA, there are separate modules related to recruitment work, where the focus is on how to ensure professional recruitment processes. The topic is also regularly on the agenda in the professional forum for our HR employees. Appointment decisions are made by separate independent employment bodies, where employee representatives are present, ensuring professional and correct appointments.

Research Ethics

As a Norwegian research institution, UiA is obliged, pursuant to the national Research Ethics Act (<https://hkdir.no/en/guidelines-and-tools-for-responsible-international-knowledge-cooperation/academic-values-and-research-ethics/research-ethics>), to ensure that research at the institution is conducted in accordance with recognised norms of research ethics. The institution is responsible for:

"a) necessary training of candidates and employees in recognised norms of research ethics and

b) that everyone who conducts or participates in the research is familiar with recognised norms of research ethics."

The institution worked actively to fulfil these legal requirements, as well as to build knowledge of national and international guidelines for research ethics across its academic communities. UiA has a particular focus on research ethics training in its PhD training, and on research ethics in the education of the institution's PhD supervisors. It is also emphasised that UiA sets requirements for research ethics for its research fellows through the institution's PhD agreements, and that UiA has developed its own institutional research ethics guidelines. UiA has included concrete measures to build research competence in its strategic action plan for 2021-

2024, with a particular focus on methodology courses and research ethics seminars. One example is the holding of research ethics seminars at faculty level, research ethics programme elements in faculties' academic days, and specific training of academic staff in the use and handling of research data.

Recruitment and Selection:

Strengths and Weaknesses:

An immediate strength of Norwegian universities is that well-vetted legislation and regulations cover most of the recruitment process in detail, and the University of Agder, like all the other higher education institutions in Norway, follows this legislation to the letter. However, there are weaknesses linked to career development and assessment which need to be addressed. One of the most significant of these is a result of the institution's signing of the DORA declaration. There is a need to clarify the consequences of the university's assessment practices; especially at the faculty- and department levels. The current absence of an action plan to implement DORA may be seen as a weakness, albeit one that is now being addressed.

Our HRS4R action plan, therefore, includes an action step anchored in the university's new *action plan for research, artistic development work, and innovation*, which concerns the implementation of the principles of the DORA declaration. Guiding principles have been developed for the assessment and evaluation of academic qualifications. The guiding principles are intended to support the principles of open science and the DORA declaration. Thus, the university's commitment to DORA and revising career assessment is seen as a strength.

In the initial phase, in relation to the second group of principles relating to recruitment, the main weakness identified in the gap analysis were that of gender and the recruitment of women to top academic positions, Professor positions in particular. The corresponding action step was the implementation of the university's action plan for gender and equality. The gap analysis also pointed to the lack of guidelines relating to the position of post doctor, and, consequently, the action plan included an action step which called for the development of local guidelines for postdoctoral positions.

The interim assessment recognised the importance of the work done in connection with the implementation of the gender plan, but it was also clear that it would be necessary to strengthen the organisation's efforts in this field. The result was that a new project was established, Balance, which included a tool termed 'search and find' committees, in addition to the existing gender and equality plan. It should be noted that in the original plan, gender issues were wrongly placed in relation to the principles. The gender issues of the award renewal phase will, therefore, be discussed in the next section.

Action step 8, relating to guidelines for postdoctoral positions, was discontinued because the conclusion of the original gap analysis was no longer considered as valid and national legislation was seen as a sufficient tool for handling postdoctoral recruitment processes.

Remarks:

In terms of the principles for open science and the DORA declaration, Norway has a relatively good starting point when working to expand the assessment basis for appointment and promotion, and to make these more predictable and flexible. Therefore, the proposed guiding principles do not represent a radical change in how professional assessment takes place in

Norway. Rather, it is a further development of current practice, with a focus on establishing a broader and more flexible basis for assessment.

UiA has now started work on establishing this broader and more flexible assessment framework based on *the Norwegian Career Assessment Matrix* (NOR-CAM) <https://www.uhr.no/en/f/p3/i86e9ec84-3b3d-48ce-8167-bbae0f507ce8/nor-cam-a-tool-box-for-assessment-and-rewards.pdf> . A working group composed of both scientific and administrative staff has been established for this work, which is scheduled for completion by the end of 2024.

Central to this work will be to establish a competence assessment matrix that will form the basis for several of the phases of a recruitment process. The competence assessment matrix will be known to everyone who applies for positions at UiA, and to current employees who apply for promotion. It will also form the basis for the assessments of the academic qualifications of the expert committees.

In addition, the competence assessment matrix will be used as a basis for the preparation of announcement texts for academic positions. In addition, it will help to establish a better balance between quantitative and qualitative goals. It is recognised that assessments carried out in connection with appointments and promotions have had an overemphasis on quantifiable indicators of research results. This is a practice which must change.

The competence assessment matrix will also contribute to making the recruitment process even more transparent and predictable. Applicants will be aware of what is emphasised in the assessment, and they will be informed of the value attributed to each element of their application.

At UiA, the following competence areas are included in the competence assessment matrix: Scientific qualifications (research results and research process), educational qualifications, knowledge in use (dissemination, innovation, interaction with society), qualifications in academic leadership and administration and personal qualifications.

As already mentioned, we at UiA have started this work through a broad/representative working group. In this work, a workshop will also be held that will involve employees in teaching and research positions and scientific leadership positions at all levels. This is to ensure broad involvement, quality assurance and implementation of process and results.

Working Conditions

Strengths and Weaknesses:

At UiA we have several strengths resulting from actions that are aimed at aiding the career development of the underrepresented gender within our scientific units.

1. The last two years UiA has given 12 scientific employees a stipend of 15.000 euro to each, based upon application and being employed in a gender-unbalanced unit. The stipend must be used for research purposes, with the aim of improving their career development.

2. UiA arranges yearly a professor program, offering career advice and support to associate professors. Through meetings, group work and individual work over a two-year period, the participants receive support to work in a structured manner with own career development. The

interest is great and most participants are women. This has supported the promotion of equal number of women and men to professor in 2023.

3. FEMPROF is a feminist research and development project which aims to contribute to increased equality and diversity at UiA, and in academia more generally. The project is financed by the Research Council of Norway. It is based on an understanding that gender equality is about far more than numbers. In total there are five research projects in FEMPROF that explore and challenge the ways of thinking and doing which are institutionalized at UiA, which create injustice that is gendered and characterized by dimensions of difference. FEMPROF also involves the design, testing and research of a programme for professor qualification as a collective and critically reflective work. By the end of 2023, five participants in the qualification programme had been promoted to professor, while several others were in the process of writing applications for promotion.

4. UiA produces a yearly overview of balance between genders (men and women only) in total and in each unit. These results are used as a basis for insight, dialogue and actions.

There are some weaknesses regarding working conditions and social security, and the initial action plan reflects the gap analysis' identification of weaknesses relating to gender balance, career development, intellectual property rights, and participation in decision-making bodies.

The corresponding action step relating to gender inequality and developments in the following period has already been described above. In the action plan of the award renewal phase, gender issues have a central place. The goal is that faculties, departments and administrative units should have a 40/60 gender balance. Units with less than 20% of either gender should set their own target for the period 2022 - 2024.

The action step relating to career development in the initial phase was ambitious: to provide a set of career development services and integrate these services into a career development office. As it turned out, the action step was too ambitious, but some progress was made in that courses were planned in cooperation with the university's career centre (which was mainly directed toward MA -students). The new action plan includes several steps which are intended to improve the university's career development services, reflecting the increased national and international emphasis on this issue.

Remarks:

Regarding IPR (Intellectual Property Rights), the gap analysis found that the institution's IPR policy was in need of revision and that the staff needed information on IPR. In the interim assessment, the IPR action step was not discussed, but this field was considered highly important by the institution and development efforts were ongoing. In the aftermath of adopting a policy for commercialisation, the work has started on revising the IPR guidelines, hopefully concluding this work by the end of 2024. Also, two experts on the legal aspects of IPR are now part of the staff of the Division of Research and Innovation. Accordingly, the new action plan includes no action steps relating to IPR.

In the initial action plan, the action step relating to 'participation in decision-making bodies' envisioned an intranet that functioned as an active tool by and for researchers'. At the time of the interim assessment, the action step had yet to be implemented, but now the situation is that thanks to the HRS4R initiative, an entirely new intranet that addresses and involves its different

user groups in a more direct and satisfying manner is coming into place. Both the action steps relating to IPR and the development of the intranet, then, are completed and no further action is required at present.

Training and Development

Strengths and weaknesses:

UiA has numerous strengths in its provision of career workshops, its Professor Programme, and in its implementation of the new Action Plan for Research, Artistic Research and Innovation 2023-2025 (<https://www.uia.no/en/about-uia/key-documents/action-plan-for-research-artistic-research-and-innovation>) .

The gap analysis, however, found that the institution had a considerable weakness in its PhD completion rate and that measures had to be implemented. These measures can be seen as somewhat successful as more people completed their doctoral degrees in 2023 than in previous years. One element of implementation, and a notable strength, has been an increased emphasis on the support services available from the library and research specialists. Through highlighting opportunities for assistance, researchers more comfortably access support on a more consistent basis.

The other gap that was identified, was the need for professional development of the researchers/teachers' ability to integrate state-of-the-art ICT tools in their teaching. The first action plan, therefore, included two broadly formulated action steps relating to the completion of PhD degrees, and a step concerning the ITC competence of researchers and teachers.

The self-assessment report included a fairly detailed presentation of the development of action step 13, PhD development. A number of measures had been implemented during the period, especially concerning supervisor training and administrative support for the PhD education. However, the completion rate had not gone up significantly by the time of the interim assessment, so it was realised that the organisation would have to have a continuous and long-term focus on the issue.

On the issue of ICT competence, it was clear that by the time of the interim assessment the Digital university project had been a success, and that the action step could be considered as completed.

In the new action plan, the emphasis regarding the principles in group 4 will no longer be on issues related to the PhD programmes, but rather on the professional development of Heads of Department and the career of scientific employees who wish to be promoted to Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer and Professor.

Although the completion rate may not still be at the level it should, the PhD policy and practices at the university have developed considerably in recent years and there is no need for programme related action steps. The focus now is rather on the career services related to the PhDs and other categories of the university's scientific employees.

Remarks:

Career workshops are offered to PhD candidates and postdocs at UiA annually. By connecting with qualified speakers, we offer career strategy courses for researchers on postdoctoral level.

In this workshop we focus on career strategy, strategic thinking and learn how to use some strategic tools when crafting our career path. PhD fellows and Postdoctoral researchers receive hands-on advice as well as an opportunity to reflect on decision-making and the direction of their future careers – as a researcher or in another career.

In addition to qualified speakers, former PhD candidates and postdocs participate in the programme to share their experiences.

The Professor Programme is offered to associate professors at UiA, taking place over two years, if they wish to apply for promotion to the level of professor. It covers themes including: The role of professor, formal requirements for professorial promotion, academic culture, research profile – depth and breadth, how to make an academic impact, and how to exercise academic leadership.

Professors and docents are invited to gatherings with topics that relate in particular to their role as academic leaders. It is a new initiative and follows up the Action Plan for Research, Artistic Research and Innovation.

Indicators which signal a successful implementation of these steps include:

- More people completing their doctoral degrees in 2023 than in previous years.
- More professors who have been promoted (10 in 2023, with plans to increase the number to 15 in the years to come).

Regarding career development frameworks for early-career researchers, this spring, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Competence will launch a framework for career development for researchers in the early career phase. The framework refers to the Charter for Researchers, The European Research Area (ERA) and distinguishes between **career guidance**, **career competence** and **career learning**, and is based on some principles:

- All researchers in the early career phase must have access to relevant career guidance services.
- The service must be of good quality and should be designed on the basis of defined quality criteria. The offer must be known and available and should be offered at times and in formats the target group wants and requests.
- Career development is a process, and the individual must have access to career guidance in all phases of the employment relationship.
- Researchers early in their careers are a diverse group and career guidance services should be designed to meet different needs.
- Career guidance should consist of career information, career learning activities and individual career guidance.
- The offer should be anchored in an overall strategy and be linked to other strategies and offers aimed at researchers.
- It should be clarified which agencies and persons are responsible for facilitating, developing, and delivering the offer.
- Those who are to carry out career guidance must have relevant career guidance skills.

In addition, there is **a new ethics survey among PhD candidates** intending to target measures in relation to training.

"Have any of the priorities for the short- and medium term changed?"

The new action plan reflects a narrowing of priorities rather than a change. Gender and career development were elements also in the initial plan but are now the focus of the new plan.

UiA has its own action plan for equality, inclusion, and diversity. This plan contains several measures aimed at both short- and long-term perspectives. As a main goal, UiA aims to ensure equal pay for equal work, which also applies to academic staff. Over time, we see the results of this work, and in the latest report we find that associate professors and professors overall at UiA have relatively equal salaries. Locally, there is an annual assessment of equal pay, and biases that do not have good arguments are corrected in the salary negotiations. This is an important and ongoing both short- and long-term activity at UiA.

There has been an increased focus and more activity on giving the underrepresented gender an increased opportunity to build their careers over time, with grants, programmes and research that explores obstacles and opportunities for the career development of academic staff. All measures aim to create a balance between genders in the units locally. In addition, there is also a clear emphasis on diversity as a resource, both in UiA's strategy and in the development of the scientific environments. Development of diversity management as a competence is one of the measures implemented to support this.

The activities at UiA have long-term perspectives and goals but are evaluated both in the short term and as trends over time.

"Have any of the circumstances in which your organisation operates, changed and as such have had an impact on your HR strategy?"

Perhaps the most important circumstance impacting the university's HR strategy is the emergence of new national and international strategies and guidelines. UiA and the other Norwegian institutions of higher education will now have to develop their local strategies within the framework and priorities of the Ministry of Education's Strategy for Researcher Recruitment and Career Development

(<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/f14b4981c2f549489941bc607cf9bc5f/strategy-for-the-recruitment-and-career-development-of-young-researchers.pdf>), which focuses on central themes like the situation of young researchers, the need for career guidance, and assessment.

Another significant part of the new context of the HR Strategy will be NOR-CAM, UHR Universities Norway's 'toolbox for recognition and rewards in academic careers' (https://www.uhr.no/en/_f/p3/i86e9ec84-3b3d-48ce-8167-bbae0f507ce8/nor-cam-a-tool-box-for-assessment-and-rewards.pdf). This Norwegian Career Assessment Matrix – as it will be adapted and implemented at each individual institution – will be a vital tool for not only the assessment of potential employees, but also as a broadly accepted tool for measuring achievement when employees apply for promotions. In many ways, it takes into account numerous points from the DORA declaration on research assessment.

Notably, the majority of Norwegian HR tools and guidelines have come into existence as a result of a wider, international focus on HR where the DORA declaration and the EU's OS-CAM, Open Science Career Assessment Matrix, have been highly influential.

Because of the changing environment of research assessment, new ways of evaluating scholarly output and scholarly work on campus are being vetted at both the local and national levels in Norway. This has led UiA to join CoARA (Coalition Advancing Research Assessment) and we have administrative personnel participating in an expert panel discussing its implementation through the FORTHEM university alliance.

With that said, our HR strategy does not necessarily need to undergo severe changes due to this new climate of assessment. As Norway's national requirements have always been relatively in line with a value system focused on equality and transparency, the changes that will be introduced upon completion of our own UiA Career Assessment Matrix will likely include a focus on associating more importance to open access research and the introduction of new ways in which to increase the value attributed to teaching work – not just rating potential employees on the basis of their publications alone. One side effect of this turn is that the HRS4R goals which emphasize mobility and advancement will benefit from a broader acceptance of different types of academic work outside of traditional publishing.

“Are any strategic decisions under way that may influence the action plan?”

In the development of UiA's strategy 2025-2028, management has received input through a broad, transparent, and inclusive strategy process from December 2023 through March 2024.

Implementation of HRS4R at UiA will thus receive a boost as the proposal currently circulating for consultation has the vision of "Co-creation of knowledge for a sustainable future", and, although the values of professionalism, openness, trust, and respect are the same, the strategy is even clearer concerning academic freedom and international research cooperation.

- In January 2024, all information about the strategy process was gathered on an open website. There it was possible to sign up for workshops, give input on a message wall (anonymously or by name) and to send input by email. Information about the website and workshops was also posted on Innaskjærs (our internal website for employees) and sent out via newsletters to all employees.
- In January and February, **29 internal dialogue meetings were held on a new strategy.** The meetings had a similar structure and began with a short introduction that referred to changed framework conditions, our social mission and the process of drawing up a new strategy. The head of department/head of unit then spoke before the following agenda was discussed: Experiences with the existing strategy, what is important for the coming period in education, - within research and artistic development work, - in public relations and innovation and - within the working and learning environment.
- 23 of the dialogue meetings were with each of UiA's 23 departments, and three were dialogue meetings with teacher education programmes. In addition, three digital dialogue meetings were held with administrative units.
- A total of 368 attended the 26 physical meetings, giving an average of 14 participants per meeting. A total of 251 attended the 3 digital meetings, which gives an average of 84 participants per meeting.
- On 31 January, a **workshop was held with the University Board and a workshop with students.**
- During February, **five more workshops were held:** 4 in Norwegian, 1 in English. The topics reflected the core activities at UiA: working environment, flexible education, research and artistic development work and visibility. Registration was open to anyone interested. A total of 120 people participated (excluding facilitators and management).

- On Thursday 7 March, the strategy was again up **in the University Board**, then as an interim assessment organised as a briefing matter. The board provided input and endorsed the process and assessments so far.
- On 18 March, the strategy will be discussed with RSA – University of Agder’s Council for Cooperation with Working Life.

A final draft strategy will be presented to the board in June 2024. In the autumn of 2024, the faculties will prepare their strategic plans based on UiA's strategy and own initiatives. The development of UiA's strategy moving forward is not expected to conflict with any of our HRS4R actions or goals. On the contrary, we expect that the new strategy will help to elevate the HRS4R process as it continues to evolve at UiA.

HRS4R Action plan 2023-2026

Action 1: Implementing the principles of the DORA declaration for assessments of research and career development for researchers

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Research and Innovation/ Faculties

GAP Principles(s): 19. Recognition of qualifications

Connection to UiA strategy: Action contributes to UiA's Action Plan for Research, Artistic Development and Innovation 2023-2025

<https://www.uia.no/en/about-uia/key-documents/action-plan-for-research-artistic-research-and-innovation>

Indicators/Targets: Implemented DORA in UiA-CAM, our own competence assessment matrix by the end of 2024. Training of expert committees during spring 2025.

The board of UiA decided to sign the DORA declaration on 14.10.2020, and UiA has since worked to implement the principles in the organisation. The Action Plan for Research, Artistic Development and Innovation 2023-2025, section 1.1 states:

1.1 Implement principles for good, sound and broad evaluation of research quality, assessments of research, researchers' research contributions and scientific career development.

This is followed up continuously at the faculties and in the formulation/change of internal support schemes and principles at institutional level. The area has been strengthened by the appointment of a person in a temporary position to follow up this measure.

Principles for good, sound, and broad evaluation is a topic that UiA, together with all universities and university colleges in Norway, has had a strong focus on. The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions has taken the initiative to follow up the DORA declaration by preparing a guide for assessing academic careers, the Norwegian Career Assessment Matrix (NOR-CAM) (https://www.uhr.no/en/_f/p3/i86e9ec84-3b3d-48ce-8167-bbae0f507ce8/nor-cam-a-tool-box-for-assessment-and-rewards.pdf).

A more flexible and comprehensive framework for assessment in academic career paths is proposed. The ambition has been to develop a guide in which more transparency, greater breadth of assessments, and with comprehensive assessments as opposed to the unilateral use of indicators are central.

UiA follows up the guidelines and works to establish a comprehensive framework for the assessment of academic careers which:

- balances quantitative and qualitative goals and forms of documentation for academic quality and competence
- enables diverse career paths and promotes high quality in the three key areas: education, research and interaction with society
- recognises the independence and individual competences of the academic staff and their achievements in groups and through cooperation
- valuing open research practices (including open assessment systems)
- encourages high-quality academic leadership

UiA has established its own working group to prepare the local competence assessment model. The working group consists of a Dean, Professor, Head of Department, PhD candidate, employee representative and an HR employee. The work is led by Pro-Rector Hans Kjetil Lysgård.

At the same time as work is being done to develop a competence assessment model at UiA, we are working together with other institutions in the NOR-CAM network. Here, experiences are shared and the work is compared against each other. Changes to the assessment criteria cannot be made by one country alone, and UiA considers it absolutely necessary to develop assessment criteria in cooperation across the board and has therefore joined CoARA – the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (<https://coara.eu/>). CoARA's vision is "that the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations recognises the diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. This requires basing assessment primarily on qualitative judgement, for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators". By signing the CoARA agreement, UiA is obliged to share with the others in the network and with society how the organisation has started the process of reviewing or developing criteria, tools and processes in line with the core commitments and according to an action plan with defined milestones, by the end of 2023 or within one year of signing the agreement.

Furthermore, we have agreed to regularly demonstrate developments and to review, develop and evaluate criteria, tools and processes that meet core commitments, with a touchpoint at the end of 2027 or within five years of signing the agreement.

Two recent measures which align with our implementation of DORA are:

- The guidelines for research and teaching time allocated to our researchers have been altered to reflect a broader set of activities beyond academic publishing. Put simply, more activities count as research than merely publishing.
- UiA has discontinued monetary publication support which rewarded researchers solely based on publication points. This is in accordance with the intention in DORA that bibliometric data – by itself – should not be used for individual evaluation and reward schemes.

Action 2: Preparing individual development plans for all postdoctoral researchers

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Division of Research and Innovation

GAP Principles(s): 21. Postdoctoral appointments

Connection to UiA strategy: Action follows the Ministry of Education's Strategy for Researcher Recruitment and Career Development by which UiA abides

<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/f14b4981c2f549489941bc607cf9bc5f/strategy-for-the-recruitment-and-career-development-of-young-researchers.pdf>

Indicators/Targets: Each postdoctoral research fellow has their own development plan

The University of Agder follows up the expectations set by the Ministry of Education and Research from 2022. Section 4.2 states that postdoctoral fellows must *have a written development plan with the employer at start-up that ensures individual follow-up throughout the employment period. The plan shall include information about the academic supervisor and appraisals during the employment period. The follow-up of the development plan should also include an assessment of relevant career paths both within and possibly outside of academia.*

UiA is following up this plan, which contains several measures that affect postdoctoral fellows, which are also considered strategically important in the plan to ensure recruitment to academic positions.

The strategy for researcher recruitment and career development asks the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) to develop a framework for career development for researchers in the early career phase. In spring 2024, the framework has been presented, and the proposal will be followed up. The University of Agder has started work on preparing a template that a researcher's immediate supervisor/leader can use as a starting point for the conversation. The framework will be a useful tool to make our leaders aware of what the conversation should contain. Here, the opportunities for career support will be presented, mapping of other wishes and needs, opportunities for teaching experience and exchange. The postdocs will also be offered the opportunity to attend career workshops that the university will arrange. At these workshops they will meet former postdocs who share their experiences, as well as representatives from different parts of working life. In this way, the postdocs gain access to good and relevant expertise that enables them to make sound, reflective career choices.

The leaders/supervisors receive training in the use of development plans as part of the employee development interview course. The courses are held annually by UiA.

Action 3: Training in research management for Heads of Departments

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Division of Research and Innovation

GAP Principles(s): 40. Supervision

Connection to UiA strategy: Action Plan for Research, Artistic Development and Innovation (2023-2025) <https://www.uia.no/en/about-uia/key-documents/action-plan-for-research-artistic-research-and-innovation>

Indicators/Targets: All heads of departments will increase their competence in research management.

The action plan for Research, Artistic Development and Innovation for the University of Agder applies to the period 2023-2025. Here, one of the main goals is that *UiA has high competence in research and innovation management at all levels of the organisation*. Measures to achieve this goal include *strengthening competence measures for research and innovation management throughout the organisation* and establishing an arena for experience sharing and competence development in research and innovation management for department heads, professors, and docents respectively.

Research management is a regular topic in several of our arenas, including at our management meetings. Leaders at all levels gather here, and the heads of departments are among those invited. Current topics are put on the agenda, such as academic freedom, freedom of expression and responsibility for expression in academia. Management of research, the role of the institutes in strategy work, leadership and motivation, and the role of the head of department in the academic and working environment are relevant topics. Here, the managers receive professional input, and participate in the exchange of experience in interaction with other leaders at UiA.

As part of management training at UiA, the heads of department receive training in the responsibilities and roles of the head of department, and an introduction to the support systems

that have been developed. This entails both strategic inquiry and more administrative routines and systems. The rectorate and the Research and Innovation Division are responsible for the academic content of the training. HR is responsible for initial onboarding and introduction to UiA.

Furthermore, as a follow-up to the training, we have put a development programme in place. The training is given during the initial period as head of department, and the development programme (with research management as the main focus) is carried out during the first year. Topics addressed are role and responsibility, what is research management, how to motivate employees and what support schemes exist. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on sharing experience at these gatherings. Experienced department heads are invited to contribute, and work in smaller groups is planned. The topics follow up the goal of establishing *an arena for experience sharing and competence development in research and innovation management for department heads, professors and docents respectively*. The seminars are part of a comprehensive programme where the topics addressed touch on all parts of the role of head of department, including teaching, supervision, finances and personnel follow-up. After the training has been completed and the heads of department have been through a management development programme, the plan is to establish an arena for the heads of department to meet regularly and discuss relevant issues together.

All of the above is in agreement with the goals set out in the development agreement with the Ministry of Education and Research. Goal 1 notes that in order to contribute to solving upcoming societal challenges, all research communities should participate in and lead several research and innovation activities at a high international level. The parameters which UiA has abided by therefore include the following: 1) position UiA in international and national R&D projects, 2) promote opportunities and support for researchers who wish to participate in national and international programmes, committees and arenas, 3) work actively with foundations and other funding schemes that can contribute to increased research funding, 4) further develop interdisciplinary focus areas, and, 5) highlight the breadth of innovation activities to build a culture of innovation and innovation.

What are the indicators that the measures/initiatives have an effect? Assessment of the steps taken towards better research management may be seen through increases in research applications, elevated research processes, less absence due to illness, and, last but not least, more people will apply for department head positions when they know that they will receive solid training and become part of a professional network across the organisation.

Action 4: Establishing a more extensive offer of career sessions to PhDs

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Division of Research and Innovation

GAP Principles(s): 28. Career Development

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: All PhDs receive guidance and information on career development.

In addition to the offerings listed below, the development of a career portal is continuing at UiA – with the aim of completion in 2024. Notably, everything stated in this action point is also a part of the ongoing work to create UiA-CAM – UiA’s career assessment matrix – as a response to the NORCAM process mentioned in the Recruitment and Selection section above.

Career development for PhD candidates takes place in a number of arenas at UiA, including supervision and guidance in a wide range of areas:

- Courses organised by the library (<https://www.uia.no/en/library/forskning-og-publisering2/research-support-from-the-university-library>) allow for discussions of best practice in research and how to publish in scientific journals.
- Lunches organised by the individual faculties encourage discussion surrounding one's own field of expertise in collaboration with others in similar situations.
- Courses organised by the joint administration allow for interdisciplinary discussions.

There is also a student association for all PhD and post docs, *UiA doc*. They arrange a number of meeting places and events where researchers can exchange experiences and observations on life at UiA and onward. Recent initiatives include a collaborative forum for young researchers which involves UiA administration and regional industry, the goal of which is increased career development locally and regionally.

To ensure quality career guidance for our researchers, there is an organised supervisor training for PhD supervisors. This training consists of 3 modules of two days. This is carried out annually.

Courses in academic dissemination are now being considered as one way in which to help our PhD candidates reach a broader audience with their work – both inside and outside of academia.

Action 5: Offer programs in English and Norwegian to employees who wish to apply for promotion to professor

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Division of research and Innovation

GAP Principles(s): 38. Continuing Professional Development

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: Increased number of academic employees applying for professorships.

Associate professors are offered a separate programme that lasts four semesters for those who wish to apply for promotion as professor. The programme is developed by professors at their own institute, and the topics are designed so that there is time and space to reflect individually and in groups.

In spring 2024, the fourth programme will start, of which three programmes have been in Norwegian and one in English. The plan is to continue to offer programmes in both Norwegian and English.

The participants are invited into the programme individually, and it is the dean who decides who can participate. Those who participate must have a clarification conversation with their immediate superior before they start the programme. Here they can agree on what expectations the department has, and the participants can address any need for support and follow-up. The participants must have at least 30% research time, they must have a mentor and they will be reimbursed for the expenses of participating. It is recommended that those who participate have conducted research for a while, preferably that it has been at least 5 years since they defended their dissertation.

There are about 60 people who have participated in the first professorial programmes, and 39 people applied and were admitted to the programme starting in spring 2024. The programme is now more well-known. This has also resulted in several promotions in recent years.

The proportion of women applying for admission to the programme is steadily increasing, and for the programme starting in spring 2024, more than half of the group consists of female participants.

The programme has an academic basis in a steering group consisting of a representative from each faculty and headed by the pro-rector.

At UiA there is also a research project, **FEMPROF**, which researches institutional exploration for a more gender equal and diverse academia. The project will develop new and important knowledge about gender and diversity in academia and contribute to increased gender equality and diversity in the sector. The idea is to explore institutional relationships in order to contribute to change in academia. The project is fundamentally innovative and original in its approach, and the project is owned by the Faculty of Social Sciences at UiA and is part of the research group Mobility, Culture and Gender. The project is funded by the Research Council of Norway via the Balanse programme. The project started in 2019 and is now in a second round with participants.

Action 6: Use researcher mobility actively as a career development measure

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR /UA

GAP Principles(s): 29. Value of mobility

Connection to UiA strategy: UiA's Action Plan for Internationalisation 2022-2026

<https://www.uia.no/english/about-uia/key-documents/action-plan-for-internationalisation.html>

Indicators/Targets: Strengthened networks and international relations.

UiA takes researcher mobility seriously through the implementation of numerous initiatives. Beginning with our involvement in the EURAXESS programme, UiA actively promotes exchange and co-creation amongst our staff. The promotion of these opportunities for movement and funding is found both on UiA's website and via individual faculties' mobility webpages. Furthermore, UiA's Action Plan for Internationalisation 2022-2026 emphasises the importance and necessity of a fluid exchange of both knowledge and practical abilities between researchers from within and outside the Nordic countries.

The Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027 is another document which guides practices at UiA, particularly in its vision to as to how our participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of our institutional strategy through Mobility activities:

- The University of Agder (UiA) has increased the number of mobilities every year during the current Erasmus+ programme, to and from Europe and also Global Mobility, and we will continue our strategic effort to further increase the number of outgoing and incoming students and staff, both within the EU and outside.
- We have had an increase in mobilities for traineeship and will continue to promote this area, increasing the opportunities for traineeship placements during the studies, as well as after graduation. This is in line with UiA's strategy of more internships and closer cooperation with external partners.
- We will endorse and implement new online tools.
- The University of Agder will promote student and staff mobility to our students and staff/ teachers through different channels, including informative and user-friendly webpages, in newsletters and in various forms of face-to-face meetings.

- We will strive to increase incoming mobility both for students and staff by providing up-to-date information online, meeting partners face-to-face at international conferences and keeping a close dialogue with new and existing partners.
- The new possibility of blended mobility should also help to increase the number of students experiencing mobility and increase the possibilities for international learning for an increased student body.

Finally, UiA is a member of the FORTHEM alliance. The FORTHEM Alliance brings together a new generation of creative minds able to cooperate across languages, borders and disciplines to address the societal challenges and skills shortages Europe faces. FORTHEM is a network of nine multidisciplinary public research universities with a strong regional anchoring in Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Romania and Spain. Currently, staff exchanges are taking place and continued cooperation is planned until 2026 and (hopefully) beyond.

Action 7: Map existing use and funding of international guest researchers

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Research and Innovation

GAP Principles(s): 29. Value of mobility

Connection to UiA strategy: Horizon Europe Action Plan 2022-2026

<https://www.uia.no/english/about-uia/key-documents/horizon-europe-action-plan%2B2022-2026.pdf>

Indicators/Targets: More efficient and targeted use of this scheme.

UiA actively applies for funding from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) programmes in Horizon Europe. For example, we strategically prioritise the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships programme. This includes special attention to mobilising potential supervisors in our organisation, recruiting promising candidates and providing administrative support to applicants, including proposal writing workshops and proof-reading of applications. Funded candidates (2 as of 2024) are supported by the Division of Human Resources. By doing so, we facilitate the career development and increase the employability of candidates, in line with the expected impact of the MSCA programme. In addition to the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships, we actively apply for funding from the MSCA Doctoral Networks, MSCA Staff Exchanges and MSCA COFUND. As of 2024, the university participates in 3, 3, and 2 projects in each of these programmes, respectively. In sum, the MSCA represents a unique opportunity for us to strengthen our research capacity, improve human resources practices and procedures and building international, intersectoral and interdisciplinary collaborations and networks.

Action 8: Preparing a knowledge-based plan for recruiting the underrepresented gender (Faculties and departments)

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Faculties

GAP Principles(s): 27. Gender balance

Connection to UiA strategy: Follows UiA's guidelines for equality and diversity.

<https://www.uia.no/english/about-uia/equality-inclusion-and-diversity/index.html>

Indicators/Targets: Gender balance in faculties and departments.

The action plan for equality, inclusion and diversity has been implemented as an overarching 4-year plan, adopted by the university board. The action plan contains 53 different actions, all of which have a clear division of responsibility locally in the organisation. For the scientific units,

the faculty director and dean are responsible for overall activities and the local department heads are responsible for developing and improving the departments' status. Every year, the status at UiA in relation to the action plan is reported, and a dialogue is initiated with all faculties and departments to look at needs and challenges. This mapping gives the units a starting point for looking at and assessing whether work needs to be done with special needs and/or challenges locally. This also applies to recruitment strategies used.

In the upcoming year, work will also be done to create a staffing plan for all units, so that the units can be at the forefront of recruiting new academic staff, which both gives the unit the opportunity for increased diverse competence and knowledge base, and which ensures that teaching and research have continuity over time.

Action 9: Offer leave of absence with pay for the underrepresented gender when participating in career development programmes

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ LiU

GAP Principles(s): 27. Gender balance

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: Increased participation in career development programmes by the underrepresented gender.

All employees in current associate professor positions have the opportunity to apply for admission to the professorship programme. They are given free time in their work schedules to participate, as part of the admission. This is financed locally at the faculties. In other programmes, central funds are used, directly linked to units with gender imbalance. In the applications the underrepresented gender is a central assessment criterion. There are also activities that are directly aimed at women in academia, which give them the opportunity to build their own careers by using each other in networks.

Action 10: Implement 'search and find' committees in units which have less than 20% of the underrepresented gender

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: Individual faculties and departments

GAP Principles(s): 27. Gender balance

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: More than 20% of the underrepresented gender in all units.

Search and find committees have been used at UiA as a tool for a long time. At the start of this use, several years ago, they were actively used in the units to find candidates who could be relevant for new scientific positions. Experiences with these committees over time have proven to be mixed. It requires a lot of capacity/resources to find relevant candidates, and the time spent in relation to results has been less than satisfactory. There has therefore been a decreasing use of search-and-find committees in recent years at UiA. There are exceptions, where great success has been experienced with the scheme, but where the initiative and activity were anchored much more clearly among the unit's academic staff and not as a more external committee.

The unit's and the scientific staff's awareness of the need to recruit individuals from underrepresented genders can foster dialogue and provide valuable insights into the areas where the unit lacks expertise and diverse professional perspectives related to research and thematic areas that are focused on by the underrepresented gender. By understanding these

gaps, it becomes possible to create job advertisements that align with the candidates the unit aims to attract. It is worth noting that this initiative should extend beyond gender and also consider other aspects of diversity that UiA needs to address, as gender imbalance is not the sole concern.

An addition to search-and-find committees would be the mapping of UiA's own diversity and professional gaps which can help build a more forward-looking methodology for creating more diverse professional environments.

Action 11: Prepare information about the university's guidelines concerning equality and diversity for use in the recruitment process (assessment committees, appointment committee)

Timing: 2022-2026

Responsible Unit: HR

GAP Principles(s): 27. Gender balance

Connection to UiA strategy: Follows UiA's guidelines for equality and diversity.

<https://www.uia.no/english/about-uia/equality-inclusion-and-diversity/index.html>

Indicators/Targets: Information completed and disseminated.

UiA's action plan for equality, inclusion and diversity (2021-2024) states that UiA shall be an open, diverse workplace where employees with different origins, backgrounds or functional abilities feel that they belong, are a significant person in the community and have the opportunity to participate in the workplace.

At the end of 2023, UiA had 300 employees from other countries, representing 19% of our employees. Arrangements have been established to welcome new employees from other countries to ensure a good start in Agder, including cooperation with [Relocation Agder](#).

According to Norwegian legislation, universities are also obliged to work systematically to ensure that employees are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, functional ability, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation or anything else. The same duty will apply to the expert committees. No practice has been established for direct dialogue with members regarding UiA's action plan for equality, inclusion and diversity, nor is this communicated to the various committees.

On the other hand, there is a requirement for gender balance in the committees that are appointed. It is also important to emphasise that the committees shall only assess the academic qualifications of the candidates, and that these only relate to submitted documentation from the applicants, and assess the individual's candidacy on the basis of this documentation. A prerequisite for ensuring equality, inclusion and diversity is transparency in the processes. This is ensured by sending the committee's professional assessment of the candidates to all applicants, and they are given the opportunity to comment on the assessment.

It is also a requirement for us to invite candidates with an immigrant background and/or reduced functional capacity if there are qualified candidates in the applicant pool, and this is stated on the part of the applicant when applying for the position.

Action 12: Review HRS4R webpages and update information

Timing: Autumn 2022- ongoing

Responsible Unit: HR / Communications Division

GAP Principles(s): 12. Recruitment

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: Updated webpages and increased accessibility/information for potential employees during the application process.

This action is continuous in nature and, significantly, is undergoing vast change at the current time. UiA launched new websites end of April 2024. Thus, during the preparation of this report, UiA has changed the entire website/intranet to a new platform, rendering many of the sites tagged here as 'old' sites. At the current time of submission (May 2024), the IT division is moving each of the 'old' webpages with the information we are attempting to update, onto the new website. While this process will certainly result in an even better user experience for students and staff, it has made it somewhat difficult to illustrate the gains we have made in accessibility and clarity surrounding our HRS4R information online.

As the new webpages are launched, we will update the action plan online to include the most current links to information pertinent to our current and potential researchers.

UiA considers the internet as the channel through which information about the Charter & Code and the HRS4R strategy is best made available to our researchers.

Useful documents for our researchers will include the gap analysis, OTM-R and the action plan, along with a description of the organisation of the work with HRS4R at UiA, the personnel policy and an overview of the opportunities for the career development offers. Furthermore, it is important to note that *Working at UiA* is part of UiA's website where relevant resources are presented.

Reference is also made to action point 13, development of a career portal. When the career portal is fully developed, it will be a fantastic addition to the website with a comprehensive overview of offers, tools and resources for the individual researcher and/or academic groups.

Action 13: Develop a website for career services (EURAXESS basic level)

Timing: 2023-2025

Responsible Unit: HR/ Communications

GAP Principles(s): 30. Access to career advice

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: Career portal developed

The University of Agder has a number of career development activities that are being systematized and further developed. The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) is developing a [framework for researchers in the early career phase](#), and UiA will during 2024 implement the most central parts of the framework in the organisation. The "Regulations relating to teaching and research positions and recruitment positions" from HK-dir also reinforce the focus on career guidance, and in sections 4.3 and 4.4 it is stated: *The institution is responsible for (...) ensuring that the PhD candidate/postdoctoral fellow has access to career guidance through the doctoral education/postdoctoral programme.*

How career guidance should be offered, to whom and when in the doctoral programme it should be given are questions that are being developed. The framework will be a good starting point for finding the answers.

New regulations obligate the university to offer career guidance, as well as the preparation of career plans for postdoctoral fellows. It is the immediate manager of each researcher who takes

the initiative and is responsible for drawing up the plan. The plan will be evaluated and adjusted along the way if needed. The postdoctoral fellow shall, as far as possible, be offered the opportunity to acquire educational competence in order to be best equipped to teach.

UiA plans to develop a career portal that will give researchers better access to career activities, better information about assessment criteria and support in the process if they wish.

The career portal is being developed at the same time as new websites are being developed at UiA, and the career portal may be fully developed during 2024. The content of the portal has no end date, it must be in continuous development – in collaboration with researchers in all phases of the research career.

Preliminary elements will include, among other relevant information:

Activities: Workshops, Career fairs

Counselling sessions: What is a counselling session? Preparing for a job interview

Resources:

- Career plan objectives
- How to apply for a position
- How to apply for promotion
- Academic resume templates
- International networks
- External funding
- Professional social networks
- Career development tools

The proposed new framework for career development states that *The goal of career guidance is that people are better able to handle transitions, and to make meaningful choices related to education, learning and work throughout life. Career guidance provides the opportunity for exploration of the individual's situation, wishes and opportunities, and support for action, choice and civic participation..... Career guidance is offered by competent actors and carried out with a high degree of ethical awareness. One can adopt both a broad and a narrow perspective on career guidance. The broad perspective encompasses all types of programmes, activities and initiatives that help individuals become better able to handle their situation related to work and career. The narrow perspective on career guidance is the individual career guidance. Ideally, a good career guidance service should accommodate both the broad and the narrow perspective.*

UiA's career portal will offer various activities and initiatives that make it easier to manoeuvre on your own, and if you want to talk to someone and discuss different options or other issues with a supervisor, it will also be offered. By the end of 2024, it will be necessary to clarify who will provide counselling sessions, whether it will be an offer at the faculty, academic supervisor, a further development of the alternatives offered to the students, or an offer at institutional level that is linked directly to researchers in all phases of their research careers.

UiA has applied for and appointed a Project Owner to help follow up the work.

Action 14: Produce a video for information purposes and for stimulating network development

Timing: Autumn 2022

Responsible Unit: HR/ Communication Division

GAP Principles(s): 30. Access to career advice

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: Video completed and published on UiA's website

UiA has the goal of stimulating network development and thus increasing our position as an institution in which co-creation is not only possible, but exceptional. The production of a video was a natural step towards encouraging our researchers to look outward for opportunities via the EURAXESS network. The video, produced in English in order to reach both the Norwegian and International staff at UiA, was a cooperative effort between our HR department, the Research and Innovation Division, and the Communications Division. With an emphasis on mobility, the video begins with the questions, where do you want to go, who do you want to meet, and how do you want to pay for it? It is now published on the UiA website's HRS4R page: <https://www.uia.no/english/about-uia/working-at-uia/hr-strategy-for-researchers.html>

NEW Action 15: Research community involvement in HRS4R action plan design and implementation

Timing: 2024-2026

Responsible Unit: HR/ Division of Research and Innovation

GAP Principles(s): 23. Research Environment, 35. Participation in decision-making bodies.

Connection to UiA strategy:

Indicators/Targets: Working group with researchers established, survey distributed with 65% response rate, faculty visits undertaken.

Evaluation and involvement of researchers at all levels will be ensured by establishing a resource/expert group consisting of researchers at all levels, PhD candidates, postdoctoral fellows, associate professors, and professors. This group is given the task of evaluating action points on an ongoing basis, and when the period is coming to an end, making suggestions for changes to existing action points or the creation of new ones.

In addition, there will be representatives from various research levels involved in the steering group, and a list of substitute researchers to fill in when the initial researchers are unable to attend. This will ensure continuous oversight and a culture of involvement which will hopefully become ingrained in all future HRS4R processes at UiA.

UiA recognizes that previous HRS4R evaluations have not benefitted from feedback from each level of the research community. This action is here to ensure that a range of R1 to R4 researchers will be consulted on a regular basis – and perhaps even asked to make their own list of suggested action points – and will also be in charge of creating a survey to be distributed among all researchers at UiA. Their involvement will add a level of validity to what UiA hopes to accomplish through the HRS4R process, as well as ensure that the right questions are asked.

Research community involvement is vital to the process of HRS4R implementation at UiA.

Deliverables:

1. Results from a survey, with the goal of minimum 65% response rate, which will give us performance indicators speaking to the effectiveness of our implementation so far as well as indicators which will become the focus of new action points in future HRS4R cycles.

2. Quality assurance through the development of a rating scale to be used annually to measure the progress and the achievement rates of the working group (through self-assessment).
3. Presentation twice a semester at a faculty-wide gathering, with the goal of explaining and unfolding the (previously somewhat mysterious) HRS4R process to each faculty. This will take time to implement but over the course of two years, each faculty will receive this special visit and learn more about how HRS4R works and what they need to understand about the action plan and its implementation in their specific departments with their specific researcher needs.

To ensure implementation of this point, the working group will follow up the work on the action plans that form the basis for the proposals:

- Action plan for gender equality, inclusion and diversity
- Action plan for internationalisation
- Action plan for research, artistic research and innovation

The plans contain specific goals, deadlines and responsible departments/personnel, and follow-up will consist of obtaining relevant information about the activity's progress and results.

The administrative working group responsible for the follow-up of activities consists of representatives from the Human Resources and Organisation Department, as well as the Research and Innovation Division. They connect with the faculties' resource persons when necessary and have a comprehensive understanding of plans and relevant activities. The group is accountable for updating the website regularly and developing the career portal that is currently in the planning phase.

The university's research and innovation committee, consisting of, among others, deans and/or vice deans of the university, has an annual review of its work, evaluates its processes and adopts the new goals that will constitute a new action plan. The committee is chaired by Pro-Rector Hans Kjetil Lysegård with Vice-Rector for External Relations and Innovation, Gøril Hannås as deputy chair.

Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles

The University of Agder signed the Charter & Code as early as 2011, and this work has been followed up by reviewing the goals from the action plans and revising the new, updated action plan. UiA has followed the development of HRS4R and implemented the goals that form the basis for the mapping of OTM-R at UiA.

It follows from Norwegian law and regulation of the relationship between employer and employee that the recruitment process must be open and transparent. In that way, UiA's OTM-R policy is and always has been embedded in the HR strategy. What UiA can improve upon is the framing and presentation of our OTM-R policy in terms that are better understood by those coming from outside of the Nordics, and who may not understand the implicit transparency of employment in Norway. In this way, implementation of OTM-R at UiA now (versus the initial phase) is focused on making practices better understood and more accessible to those seeking employment.

The entire recruitment process is open and transparent to those who apply. The job advertisement is approved by a multipartite committee, and all positions are advertised through our systems on our own websites, Jobbnorge.no, nav.no, EURAXESS and Academic Positions. Applicants can ask to know who has applied when the deadline for applying for the position has passed. When the application deadline has expired, an expert committee is established to rank the applicants according to qualifications. Applicants are informed of who constitutes the expert committee. When the expert committee has submitted its recommendation, it is made known to the applicants and they have a 12-day deadline to comment on whether something is not correct or has not been adequately addressed. Then the most relevant are invited to an interview and a trial lecture. For applicants who are nominated for the positions, reference verification will also be carried out. An overall assessment of the applicants, based on expert assessment, interview, trial lecture and references, is prepared, and the case is referred to the appointment committee, which consists of representatives from the employer and the employee. All applicants receive feedback that the position has been filled. The person who is nominated for the position will receive an offer describing the terms and conditions of the position, including salary.

The applicants' assessment criteria are also known to the applicants, as well as the text of the call for proposals.

In the course of 2024, new regulations will be introduced for use in these employment processes. The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) has circulated a proposal for a new regulation for consultation. UiA has submitted its response to the proposed amendments.

The supplementary assessment criteria are under evaluation, and UiA is following up an initiative from the Universities Norway (UHR), which together with a group from different institutions has prepared a guide for assessing academic careers, NOR-CAM. The initiative follows up on the Dora Declaration, and aims to ensure more open, transparent research and assessments on a broader basis. UiA has established a working group composed of researchers, managers and administrative resource personnel who will implement NOR-CAM at UiA. The work will lead up to a decision by the University Board by the end of 2024.

The principles of openness, transparency and merit-based assessment of researchers are firmly rooted in Norwegian legislation, in the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges (2024). UiA has also developed a personnel policy that forms the basis for practice in daily life at the university. Managers at all levels of the organisation are well acquainted with this.

General overview of the implementation process:

The implementation of the HRS4R Action Plan at UiA is – and has always been – difficult to describe given the interwoven nature of the actions described in this document, and the legislation and regulation which is already in place and in practice at UiA. Put simply, measures of implementation have not previously been described in detail as they have been part of other processes already underway. With that said, here is a little background and hopefully a bit of clarity in regard to the way implementation measures will be moving forward at UiA.

The University of Agder UiA endorsed the European Commission's Charter & Code for the recruitment of researchers in 2011 and was awarded the status "HR Excellence in Research" in 2016. The European Charter & Code's principles and requirements that specify the roles,

responsibilities and rights of researchers have always corresponded well with UiA's ambitions and the desire to be in a continuous improvement process in a European context. UiA wants to recruit the best researchers and to provide opportunities for them to compete for research funding from Horizon Europe, among other sources.

The vision *Co-creation for future knowledge* is realised, not only regionally and nationally, but also internationally. The University's values of trust, respect, openness, and professionalism characterize our attitude towards international employees, students, and partners. Beginning already in the autumn of 2017, the University of Agder (UiA) launched an action plan for research and academic and artistic development. Here, elements from HRS4R laid the foundation for an increased focus on recruitment and career development. The plan contained measures for six different areas of the university's activities: development of research groups, recruitment and career development, education and research in various contexts, interdisciplinary cooperation, administrative support for research, research infrastructure.

The R&D plan was developed by conducting dialogue meetings at all faculties. Researchers at all levels were represented and everyone could provide input. From these meetings, areas emerged that were particularly important to work on. In this way, those who teach, those who conduct research, lead research groups, seek external funding, and who are affected by the issues daily participate. The vast majority of researchers at UiA are employed in bilateral positions, both teaching and researching.

Work on recruitment and career development were priority areas, and, given that people are the most important resource our organisation has, this was especially important as many of our employees will retire in the coming years.

Current topics from the plan:

- Career guidance aimed at PhD candidates/postdoctoral fellows is being developed, where candidates receive guidance for a career in academia, as well as guidance in working towards a career in other parts of working life or as an entrepreneur.
- PhD candidates are given the opportunity to qualify for different career paths through the development and practice of teaching, project development, cooperation with industry and the public sector.
- PhD candidates and postdoctoral fellows are given the opportunity to build networks within the academic and private sectors through the inclusion of relevant representatives in the research group, when possible.
- UiA clearly communicates what competence people with doctoral degrees have and how they can contribute to business and the public sector.

National authorities have also had a strong focus on recruitment and career development in recent years, and the **Strategy for Researcher Recruitment and Career Development** was launched by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2021. The strategy's ambition is to contribute to clearer and more predictable career paths for researchers early in their careers and follows up the objectives of the Long-term Plan for Research and Higher Education, which points out that *if we are to increase competitiveness and innovation capacity, meet major societal challenges and develop academic environments of outstanding quality, we are completely dependent on recruiting talents into our higher education and research institutions.*

At UiA, the R&D plan from 2017, and the Strategy for researcher recruitment and career development are followed up by an Action Plan for Research, Artistic Development and

Innovation (2023-2025). While UiA's strategy and the R&D plan will be followed up by several measures in the organisation, the HRS4R Action Plan will be implemented along with and through the numerous action plans already at work in the various divisions in our university. **These action plans are implemented at each level of the organisation – which allows the HRS4R working group to visit and explore each faculty to assess the implementation of action points, and to both qualitatively and quantitatively assess their impact on our broader HRS4R goals. Surveys, workshops, and formal/informal gatherings will be conducted to increase dialogue across faculties and between the individual HRS4R group members.**

Implementation of HRS4R at UiA will also receive a boost in the form of a proposal for a new strategy (2025-2028), with the proposal currently circulating for consultation. Here, the vision is **"Co-creation of knowledge for a sustainable future"**, and although the values of professionalism, openness, trust, and respect are the same, the strategy is even clearer concerning academic freedom and international research cooperation. New strategic measures include *strengthening research and innovation management, systematic research support and quality development, strengthening PhD education, developing research talents and applying new technologies in research, artistic research and research dissemination.*

In this way, UiA uses strategic measures to implement the obligations from the Charter & Code, which, in turn, are well-aligned with the guidelines contained in national documents.

The new action plan also in a sense represents a new beginning for the HRS4R process at UiA. The period since the self-evaluation has been marked by organisational changes and discontinuation of processes/plans. The position of Director of HR has been vacant twice, there is a new Research Director, and a major university plan - the Plan for Research and Development 2017-2027 - has been abandoned and replaced by a recently adopted Plan for Research, Artistic development work and Innovation.

The new action plan is, apart from the action steps that concern communication, wholly composed of actions that are included in new or recently revised major university plans like the abovementioned Plan for Research, Artistic Development and Innovation (2022), the new Internationalisation plan (2022) and the recently revised version of Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Diversity (2021-2024). Actions concerning career development meet the institution's obligations in relation to national policy as formulated in the Ministry of Education's Strategy for Researcher Recruitment and Career Development.

The institutional plans have been stipulated by the University Board and will as such be included in the university's annual quality assurance report and the annual report to the Board on research and education. The action steps, therefore, are part of ordinary and well-rehearsed university processes and decision-making processes, something which also will facilitate the implementation of the HRS4R action plan. In addition, implementation will be a special responsibility for the HRS4R workgroup and steering group, and an annual report on the status of Charter and Code/HRS4R will be prepared.

"How have you prepared the internal review?"

The desk report as submitted last year was prepared by the working group in place at that time. As noted during the site visit, because of turnover and an influx of new employees, it was difficult to explain the exact process which was followed for that review.

We have now taken steps to work more broadly across different sectors of the university in reporting, as may be seen in this revised report. In preparation for re-submission, we have increased the number of contributors from a group of 3 to a cooperative of 12 employees spanning 5 sectors in our administration (Human Resources, Research and Innovation, Gender and Equality Assessment, Recruitment, and External Funding). The increase of contributors has allowed an in-depth look at the procedures which are implemented and planned here at UiA which affect our researchers. In addition, we have been able to collectively agree on the necessary future steps which will be taken to assess and report in a more detailed and verifiable way going forward.

The process of revising this report (post site visit, in the first quarter of 2024) has been a necessary learning experience in which all participants have been informed of the necessity for detailed reporting which provides accurate information, and which allows us to see our gaps more clearly from an external viewpoint. Most importantly, UiA sees HRS4R as a process and not a project now – as a tool which will help us to enable a better research environment for our employees, as well as help us to evolve more holistically towards our goal of co-creation with both national and international academics. We have begun to locate researchers for further collaboration and future reporting. Given the time constraints of this revised report, it was neither possible nor responsible to involve researchers for the revision process.

From a practical standpoint, this review – as submitted now in May of 2024 – was the result of a detailed analysis of what was initially reported, what was missing, and what UiA needs to have stated more clearly in both this report and in our internal/external documentation for our current and future employees. This analysis was carried out via a charting of the specific questions, requirements, and actions in our action plan, and then the holding of meetings involving collaborators with expert knowledge. In that way, collaboration and discussion was at the forefront of this process. Not only did this broaden the knowledge of the original working group which was present at the site visit, but it also drew in new interest and cooperation which will now remain in place for the next round of reporting when it is called for.

Finally, through a staff exchange (made possible via UiA's participation in the FORTHEM Alliance) with the University of Jyväskylä, Finland in February 2024, knowledge of HRS4R implementation and reporting was greatly broadened and there has been the introduction of new working methods (collaborative instead of isolated) as well as better understanding of the reporting requirements.

"How have you involved the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?"

HRS4R has been a useful tool for drawing attention to the quality of recruitment, mobility and career development for our researchers. UiA could have had a closer involvement of researchers in the design of HRS4R's action plan, but it is important to note that researchers in all phases have been involved in the various plans on which this action plan is based. Participation is an important principle in academia, and regular meetings have been established between employee representatives, employees and management at faculty and institutional level.

Special interest organisations have been established for PhD candidates and postdoctoral fellows. These have regular meetings with representatives of the management and of the specialist departments. Here, researchers are informed in advance about cases that may affect them. In addition, departments and faculties have their own meetings where important issues

are presented and discussed. In these meetings, everyone can participate, and any opposing views are welcome to be aired as well.

As an example, the University's Research and Innovation Committee consists of deans and student representatives. The Pro-Rector chairs the committee, and the Vice-Rector for Public Affairs and Innovation is the Deputy Chair. The Director of Research and Innovation is the secretary of the committee. Here, strategic research issues are discussed, and the committee gives its recommendations to the University Board on larger, fundamental matters. HRS4R has been considered by the committee, and the committee has asked to be kept informed of the implementation of the measures in the action plan.

There is a long tradition of broad involvement at the University of Agder, and the employee representatives express confidence in the processes and participate actively in working groups and various meetings.

In order to formalise the collaboration with researchers at all levels of the HRS4R process, a resource group will be established that will specifically be tasked with following up the measures in the action plan more closely along the way. In particular, they will be responsible for submitting proposals for new measures when the action plan's period is nearing its end. The resource group must be represented by participants from all faculties, and both genders must be represented. Based on experience from the previous preparation of the action plan, the plan would have had a stronger basis if the researchers were more directly involved in the process.

"Do you have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress?"

We have an implementation group/work group comprised of representatives from the HR and Research divisions. So far, the steering group has been comprised of the HR Director and the Director of Research, but we are now in the process of establishing a new steering group involving of the faculties' Vice-Deans for Research. The University's Research and Innovation Committee will also as described above oversee the progress and development of implementing the HRS4R actions at UiA.

One point of feedback from the site visit last year was the need for a broader group of representatives from across all parts of the university in the composition of both the working group and the implementation committee. We have taken this point very seriously and will work to ensure that from 2024 and onwards that the implementation committee will have specific representatives which understand the importance and the practical duties of HRS4R actions in each faculty and institute at UiA. Some of these participants will have the responsibility of following up the annual assessments in each faculty, as well as reporting the success and failures of any HRS4R actions which are implemented.

Importantly, there will be an attempt to include PhD candidates and Postdoctoral Researchers in the implementation group in order to receive feedback from our early career employees. This is vital as they understand and experience the effects of our HRS4R work more tangibly than those who may have come further on their career paths. In the creation of the implementation group – as a branch of the working group – UiA hopes to not only ensure a more complete integration of HRS4R into the everyday practices at UiA, but also focuses on boosting the profile of HRS4R and the Charter and Code at our university. In this way, when UiA reports on implementation in the future, and feedback is required from our researchers at all levels, little or no explanation of HRS4R should be necessary when conducting surveys and addressing gaps in

our processes and practices. Our researchers should already be aware of and cognisant of the work being done.

"Is there any alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the organisation's research strategy, overarching HR policy?"

HRS4R is explicitly mentioned in the university's overarching HR policy, and both EURAXESS and HRS4R are included in the university's new Action Plan for Internationalisation (2022-2026).

The personnel policy at the University of Agder (UiA) is subordinate to Norwegian law and regulations with supplementary UiA guidelines. Already on the second page of the policy document, it is possible to read about the intersection of HRS4R and the principles and requirements laid out in the personnel policy.

The personnel policy itself has been drawn up jointly by management and parties from the trade unions representing the employees. In addition, the personnel policy is applicable to all employees of the university with the purpose of motivating cooperation and stimulating outstanding individual and collective performance.

UiA's personnel policy is based on, among other things, the [state's personnel policy](#) and [the state's employer policy](#). The University has endorsed the European Declaration on Researchers and the Recruitment of Researchers, the Charter and Code and the associated development process, [HRS4R, \(Human Resources Strategy for Researchers\)](#). The declaration contains general principles and quality requirements that ensure employment and working conditions for researchers and their employers.

Additionally, UiA's core values are elaborated in [the Ethical Guidelines for the University of Agder](#). The core values are the basis for co-creation, interaction and leadership at the university. The core values must be emphasised when difficult cases are to be resolved. All employees should know these values. As good role models, leaders are expected to practice their core values.

When recruiting employees, UiA aims to be an attractive and inclusive workplace that attracts skilled employees from all over the world. Two examples from the policy of recruitment;

- that the academic communities, through their national and international networks, contribute to locating good candidates for vacant positions
- that the recruitment process is carried out professionally, orderly and efficiently with the primary goal of hiring the best qualified person

Examples from the policy of employee development;

- facilitating and expecting employees, research groups and academic communities to reach a high international academic level;
- that the employee development interview is used, among other things, to plan the employee's competence development
- that specific competence-raising measures are offered for all employee groups, and that provision is made for employees to make use of this

Examples from the policy regarding wages

- UiA has an [agreed salary policy](#), which reflects the basic view of personnel policy; all employees are important for achieving strategic goals. Local pay increases shall be based on job performance and competition in the labour market.

Examples from the policy of employee retention;

- Favourable working conditions such as stability, good infrastructure and significant influence on one's own work situation
- Individually adapted work, adjusted for leave of absence and longer absence
- that time is emphasized in the work planning for coherent research
- good welfare schemes that safeguard all employees

The personnel policy is translated into English in its entirety and is available on the university's website. New employees must be made familiar with the personnel policy in onboarding.

"How has your organisation ensured that the proposed actions would be also implemented?"

The University of Agder has worked systematically to follow up measures, particularly related to career development, gender equality and diversity. The European Commission's HRS4R procedure is based on continuous improvement, with constant updating of the action plan. UiA has prepared self-evaluations and new action plans where new and updated priorities have been added. The last HRS4R action plan was developed in 2022, and an important step in the development of a new plan was to connect with ongoing processes in the organisation and establish an action plan that could help ensure coherence. Specifically, measures from the Action Plan for Gender Equality, Inclusion and Diversity, the Action Plan for Internationalisation and the Action Plan for Research, Artistic Research and Innovation have been included in the plan. As an example, the Action Plan for Research and Artistic Research is regularly followed up by the University's Research and Innovation Committee (UFI). Here the various points are reported on. The action plan's **Action 1 Implementing the principles of the DORA declaration for assessments of research and career development for researchers**, and **Action 3 Training in research management for Heads of Departments** are examples of points that are then reviewed and given a status.

The long-term plan for research and higher education 2023 – 2032 (Ministry of Education and Research) presented its overall goals, which are strengthened competitiveness and innovation capacity, environmental, social and economic sustainability, and high quality and accessibility in research and higher education. Although the plan is for a period of 10 years, it will be evaluated and revised every four years. Open research is a key element in this plan, cf. Action 1. Section 8.1 and 8.2. This obliges UiA as an institution and is an example of national authorities also following up the intention of DORA – the declaration on openness and accessibility in research. The Ministry of Education and Research follows up through letters of allocation, and UiA must report to the superior authorities on how this has been followed up.

The reporting is followed closely, and the University's Research and Innovation Committee consists of the deans at each faculty, as well as a representative of student representatives and a student representative. They have a good overview of the status of their work and can both report back and follow up cases.

UiA has received feedback that the commission wants researchers to be more strongly involved in the development and follow-up of the action plan. This is followed up by establishing a group consisting of researchers at all levels, PhD candidates, postdoctoral fellows, associate professors and professors. They will have a particular responsibility for evaluating and preparing new measures for work on the next action plan.

As mentioned above, UiA implements measures at all levels. Our plans are based on national guidelines and are continuously followed up in multipartite committees. In this way, support and broad participation are ensured.

"How are you monitoring progress (timeline)?"

UiA plans to integrate monitoring of action progress in our internal governance system. This will ensure that faculties and other relevant units will be asked to give an annual update on the progress of relevant actions in the faculties' annual reports (called "quality reports"). The university management will now ensure that relevant **questions concerning monitoring of action progress related to HRS4R are included in the template for the faculties' annual reports**. All faculties' annual reports will be submitted to the university management and may be summarized and assessed in a separate annual report at the university level (annual report on education and research at UiA). Furthermore, **we plan to include a separate section concerning monitoring of HRS4R action progress in the annual report at the university level**. The annual report at the university level is considered both by the university's research committee as well as the university board on an annual basis. This will ensure annual assessments of the progress on relevant actions related to HRS4R.

The combination of the above monitoring steps will set in place an annual, cyclical assessment practice to allow us to monitor our progress.

"How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?"

Given the feedback from the site visit in autumn 2023, UiA is now working to develop both quantitative and qualitative indicators and measurements which will allow for a fuller reporting of our actions and their implementation in the future. Most notably, the aforementioned (see section above) monitoring of progress related to HRS4R as included in the faculties' annual reports will help us get closer to indicators and specific examples of implementation – something which has previously been a challenge. The inclusion of this data in the annual university report will also allow the working group to present more in-depth assessment practices to the faculties.

Measuring progress qualitatively via discussion and workshops with researchers is also one of the elements UiA intends to implement in order to compile future reports. This will be part and parcel of the new action point 15 **Research community involvement in action plan design and implementation**.

It is important to note that UiA does a yearly review of status and progress over time regarding equality, inclusion, and diversity. This evaluation has several indicators regarding gender equality and balance, where one of the key indicators are salary. UiA measures if equal work is paid in equal manner. Such indicators and goals will be continuous, as a regular review is necessary to ensure proper balance is achieved and kept over time.

UiA has other indicators in relation to the activities in the action plan.

1. Number of professors in each unit across gender.
2. Number of associate professors in each unit across gender.
3. Number of doctorate students at each faculty across gender.
4. Number of cases reported on harassment, bullying and sexual harassment.
5. Student numbers regarding gender and nationality

As one may notice, this is the recruitment and career path, where each step has its own dynamics and issues that UiA works to overcome. HRS4R as a process has proven to be a tool which, while previously underutilised, is now spurring the integration of yearly reviews, working groups and documentation which will build in a cyclical fashion to shape future changes in our university. The measurements we already have in place pertaining to the career path of researchers will be strengthened by this continuous process.

"How do you expect to prepare for the external review?"

We used the period before the coming site visit to inform all levels of the organisation about the new action plan and the upcoming site visit. As mentioned in relation to the action plan, we were especially concerned with familiarising our 'main stakeholders', the researchers, with the overall EURAXESS system and the benefits it may offer in relation to networks and research contacts etc. It has always been our belief that knowledge of EURAXESS will also contribute to giving the researchers a stronger sense of the meaning and importance of Charter and Code and the HRS4R process.

The process of preparation for the external review was one characterized by careful consideration of our guests, and who they would wish to speak with during the site visit, combined with a certain level of uncertainty in regard to what was necessary to present. Initially, the small HRS4R working group was under the impression that in the year which a site visit occurs, much of the discussion and presentation of UiA takes place on the day of the site visit. This led to an underreporting of our work in the online portal, and a more difficult day of review than necessary.

What we have gained from an extremely valuable visit is hopefully now reflected in the documentation submitted here. In the future, UiA intends to work in a cyclical fashion, using yearly assessments, a new working group with a better understanding of what is necessary to submit when reporting, and a broader outreach into the individual faculties to both involve researchers and assess the impact of HRS4R on their day-to-day activities.

Future external review preparation will thus involve multiple levels of researchers and more time spent in the various faculties to better understand the role which HRS4R plays in shaping the work environment and career possibilities at UiA. In addition, we will draw from a new system of annual assessments at the faculty level which will specifically address HRS4R implementation, giving us qualitative and quantitative indicators to learn from and to submit in future reports.