

Briefing note - Leticia Martinez Garcia - May 2023

BRIEFING NOTE MODULE 4 - BUILDING COMMON STANDARDS FOR HR POLICIES

BUILDING COMMON STANDARDS FOR HR POLICIES IN THE AREAS OF TRAINING, CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS FOR RESEARCHERS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People are a key driver to help transform the research environment of the European Higher Education system, as such presenting a challenging objective for all universities of the CIVIS Alliance in the form of a common Human Resources strategy for researchers (HRS4R) with a focus on diversity, working conditions, new research evaluation systems, transferable skills training, intersectoral mobility and talent circulation. The task has proven difficult to attain in many aspects, mainly due to the differences in priorities, development, availability of human resources and legal restrictions in the partner universities. While a common strategy still needs to be developed on Alliance-level, it is clear that the member universities are succeeding in creating an ecosystem based on institutional collaboration and a dynamic research community that supports the improvement of the HRS4R on individual level.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of RIS4CIVIS Module 4 is to set up high-quality and sustainable standards across the CIVIS Alliance on recruitment, mobility, training and working conditions. A first step towards this objective was the collection of information and analysis regarding the current situation and the best practices of the CIVIS members that already have the HR Excellence in Research award or are in the process of obtaining the HRS4S label.

The data mainly showed differences between the universities, with some common points especially concerning obstacles in recruitment and working conditions. As these challenges could not be solved on the short-term at Alliance-level due to legal barriers, as a second step

the Module 4 focused on defining common goals and setting up case studies in the timeframe of the RIS4CIVIS project.

The case studies included:

- Career development through the creation of a RIS-4CAREERS program;
- Transferable skills training with programs on Science Communication, Open Science, Career development and Entrepreneurship;
- Exchange of good practises during thematic meetings.

The main output of all these activities and case studies was to reinforce the HRS4R of all universities whether they had obtained the HR Excellence Award or not.

KEY FINDINGS FROM CASE STUDIES

The main lesson learned is that standardising practises and building strategies requires time and resources. If the long-term strategy is for the European University Initiative to remain a part of the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme, research aspects should be better included within the initiative.

Regarding career development, researchers face common challenges related to funding, stability of contracts, lack of knowledge of possibilities outside academia and the ways to reach the private sector. Most CIVIS universities have in place some initiatives for career development under different formats, e.g. mentorship programs for newly arrived staff, career support for PhD candidates, and soft skills development for outside of academia. However, these initiatives usually lack stability and are not regarded as a priority in Higher Education as indicated by the relatively low number of initiatives identified among the universities.

Thanks to the lack of legal barriers, transferable skill training comes across as one of the least complicated fields in which to develop collaboration. On Alliance-level, there is a need for a clear framework, a shared com-

munication strategy and a focus on programs rather than individual training courses. While Erasmus+ funds could be used to provide courses to PhD candidates, on EU-level there is a lack of funding to organise similar training programs for post-doctoral researchers. If the evaluation of research is going to change as per the latest EU reports, then skills framework should be updated and reviewed accordingly in the training received

by researchers at the beginning of the PhD.

During the thematic meetings organised for the exchange of good practises, it was challenging to identify topics for discussion as some services offered in the universities find themselves at different stages of development, e.g. International Welcome Desks.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programs. The European University Initiative should consider Higher Education as a whole and not as a sum of its parts. A strategy for education should go hand-in-hand with a strategy for research. Funding instruments for training and education should not distinguish between Bachelor and Master students and researchers, whether PhDs or post-docs. The diversification of research careers and the difficulties to access academic job positions call for an education adapted to a continuously changing job market. If the goal at EU-level is to continue reinforcing research and cooperation with the private sector, then researchers should not be left out of further educational possibilities.

- Competence and skills framework for researchers at EU-level. A coherent framework to promote employability and intersectoral mobility is necessary to support career development initiatives within Higher Education. This should include guidelines on what works and what is necessary in a career program to support researchers who face challenges within and outside academia. This kind of soft skills curriculum should aim to improve the changes of upskilling and reskilling researchers. Furthermore, this should be accompanied by other strategies such as coaching or mentorship for outside academia to address the need of informed decisions when researchers face the labour market.
- Instability of researchers contracts. This is not a novel finding as the EU is already aware of this issue, however, RIS4CAREERS made this evident for CIVIS universities.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Research and Innovation Strategy for CIVIS (RIS4CIVIS) is 3-year project co-financed by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 «Science with and for Society» programme. RIS4CIVIS will define a common Research & Innovation strategy for the CIVIS European University Alliance and transpose the strategy into an Institutional Transformation Model to serve as a source of inspiration for other European Alliances and universities.

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Target audiences: policymakers, other Alliances, Erasmus+ coordinators, HEUR coordinators, EACEA, DG EAC, DG RTD and REA.



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