



Specific contract No RTD/B2/2012 30-CE-0526932/00-15

Final report for:

Feasibility study for the development of
a certification mechanism for genuinely
good HR management in the public research
sector in Europe

**By the Technopolis Group
On behalf of the ERAWATCH NETWORK ASBL**

07 February 2014





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1. Summary

1.1 This report

This document is the final report for the “*Feasibility study for the development of a certification mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe*”.

As part of the European Research Area (ERA) agenda, the European Commission is committed to increasing the attractiveness of research careers in Europe, and to improving employment and working conditions for researchers. It has therefore developed a number of policy initiatives over the past decade that have sought to encourage and support voluntary actions within the Member States in order to make progress in this area. The European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (hereafter referred to as the ‘Charter and Code’) encompass four broad aspects of human resource management, including working conditions and professional development, as well as professional conduct and recruitment. The Charter and Code’s four first-level dimensions expand into 40 second-level dimensions, and this hierarchy and taxonomy has served as the basis for the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), a pan-EU process that has been running for five years and has generated substantial political and institutional support for translating the principles set out in the Charter & Code into institutional policies and practices.

The Commission is investigating its options for setting up a transparent, internationally recognised certification mechanism for good HR management in the European Research Area, based on a set of clearly defined and broadly applicable assessment criteria that are linked to the key principles of the Charter and Code. The objective of this study was to support the Commission in this endeavour

- To develop a certification process for good HR management, based on the concept of genuinely good HR management, and including the basis for assessment, criteria, and methodologies
- To design an architecture for the certification bodies and their accreditation
- To develop scenarios for setting up the certification and accreditation mechanisms, and options for the practical implementation of the new scheme
- To assess the feasibility of the initiative as a whole, taking into account existing mechanisms, legislation, and ongoing and planned initiatives at EU and national level

The study process has entailed a combination of primary and secondary data collection, but at heart it was run as a community-wide consultation to test both the level of demand for a certification system and to explore the preferred options for a future system as well as critical success factors.

1.2 A certification process for good HR management

The idea of certification implies confirmation of certain characteristics of a person or organisation by an independent body, and as a matter of course requires those characteristics to be specified such that the reviewer can determine whether they hold in practice.

For the purpose of the feasibility study, the study team agreed with the Commission that it would use the four dimensions of the Charter and Code to define the boundaries of our enquiry and the accompanying 40 principles as an indication of what is meant by the concept of genuinely good HR management. We tested this assumption through out interviews and consultation, and the great majority of contributors considered this to be a reasonable way forward.

There is growing momentum around implementation of the principles of the Charter and Code, which underlines its correctness and practical utility, and as such we concluded that it is the best available working definition of good HR management in public research and that it embodies the right concept and principles on which to base a certification system.

The proposal to create a new EU scheme to encourage good practice in HR management across the public research systems of member states, requires consideration of how such a scheme might best



complement national efforts, current or planned. The EU's legal authority in this policy area is discussed in a little more detail below, however, in simple terms, it is allowed to launch specific actions however those interventions need to be designed, if not implement, in concert with member states.

The consultation found that around a third of all respondents (employers / researchers) are already participating in a HR-related certification or quality assurance scheme of some kind. Based on this extensive feedback, we elected to do further desk research on 10 of the existing schemes cited in the consultation in order to find out more about their respective review processes, assessment criteria and delivery arrangements.

Our analysis of the degree of alignment confirms the impression given by our interviews and consultation, which is that while there are several notable schemes in widespread use, very few encompass the same issues and criteria as HRS4R. The small number of relevant schemes and limited points of substantive overlap is a positive finding in the sense that HRS4R is not obviously duplicating or crowding out other existing schemes, and will therefore have to work less hard than might have been expected to deal with issues of interoperability. Synergies may still need to be considered at a more fundamental level of course, as the assessment burden and associated data requirements will fall on the same people in part as for example established national quality assurance procedures.

The discovery of the very limited overlap among these selected existing schemes is less helpful from the perspective of developing assessment criteria; we found very little in the way of defined standards, metrics or tests that a new EU HRM certification system might adopt from among this group of established assessment schemes.

Our interviews and consultation were not particularly illuminating as regards specific assessment criteria, beyond pointing to possible reference schemes with relevant tests. For most people, the question proved to be too open to tackle within the context of a one-hour discussion or 30-minute online survey. Various contributors were sceptical about the feasibility of specifying assessment criteria in detail and across all 40 of performance dimensions of the HRS4R. Several other contributors noted that the HRS4R process had proved successful so far in part because it had taken a very much more bottom-up or organic approach to assessment as compared with the more mechanistic arrangements one can find in other sectors. Indeed, we heard from one auditing specialist that 21st century auditing was moving towards an emphasis on behaviour and outcomes, rather than endless key performance indicators and supporting statistics and procedures.

Looking more closely at the assessment and data collection strategies for each of the selected schemes, one can see that the basis for assessment is reasonably consistent across the various schemes we have looked at, at least in terms of their broad parameters:

- Most of the initiatives work with open assessment criteria, and invite candidates to decide for themselves how they wish to present / explain their performance
- The assessment criteria encompass forward-looking strategies and action plans along with progress reports – qualitative and quantitative data – supported by baseline and trend statistics
- The institutions present their current performance and future plans using a standard form or template, which comprises a narrative statement supported by facts and figures and accompanying copies of institutional strategies or policy documents describing standard operating procedures
- The assessment is almost always carried out by a group of external experts, emphasising HR expertise rather than science specifically
- Most of the selected schemes include a pass / fail arrangement
- The Athena Swan Charter is the only scheme that uses defined gradations of performance

The three features that stand out most strongly are:

- The bottom-up nature of the schemes, and the flexibility around what an institution is allowed to present in terms of both statements and supporting evidence
- The central importance of professional judgement in the assessment process (peer review)
- There is also a general sense that schemes are most concerned about continuous improvement and institutional development



Given the limited overlap between existing schemes and the 40 dimensions of the Charter and Code, we elected to mock up several assessment criteria, from first principles, as a means by which to illustrate the process by which one might design a more complete set of assessment criteria. In modelling the assessment criteria, we took on board several principles evident in existing schemes:

- Accept the overarching definition of the HR principle set out in the Charter and Code
- Conceive of criteria that would encompass inputs, outputs and outcomes
- Assume the deployment of both objective and subjective data
- Assume implementation by institutions of different types in different systems / settings and with differing levels of performance

As a point of principle, we assume data collection should be as light touch as possible, minimising the burden on institutions by linking the assessment requirements with other management information systems. This is good practice wherever one looks, however, it is critical to the success of any proposed new information systems where participation is voluntary and the resultant benefits may take several years to reveal themselves. It is doubly important where existing schemes may overlap with the proposed new scheme.

In some cases, the performance measures will use existing data, and will not require any additional data to be collected or gathered from more places and more frequently. It is likely however that even standard data will need to be presented in a non-standard report, or at least a non-standard report for a majority of institutions. The evidence base does not have to be entirely quantitative of course, and so for example, institutional staff and student satisfaction surveys can be used to demonstrate progress and or performance on a range of HR dimensions.

While we may need to be content with using existing input and output statistics as the basis for the assessment criteria within any early certification scheme, one should not lose sight of the overall objective: which is changed behaviour and improved outcomes. That may be greater mobility, or a reduction in complaints or ethical challenges. Other types of data will be needed too, with the most straightforward (least intrusive) being the employer's existing documents: its strategies and policies on the one hand and standard operating procedures on the other. We understand that the HRS4R external peer review process will make extensive use of this kind of documentary evidence. Ultimately, however, there will be information gaps that even a peer review process will not be able to cope with in any robust sense, and the certification system will need to confront this and ensure people understand that there will be a requirement for a certain amount of additional data collection.

1.3 The architecture of a certification process

We went on to consider the advantages and disadvantages of several different options for the architecture of the proposed new certification system. We developed a two by two matrix to help frame our options. The key parameters relate to the:

- Centralised or distributed pan-EU architecture. Whether the certification system should be implemented by a single, EU body (centralised model) or a multiplicity of implementation bodies (distributed model) located throughout the EU at national / federal or state levels
- Single or multiple function operation. The degree to which the certification body or bodies should focus exclusively on the HR certification process or whether the implementation of the certification process could sit alongside other existing (or future) audit functions

Looking more broadly at the consultation feedback there is a general plea for any new certification scheme to take full account of national context and complement existing initiatives. Given this argument, we consider a distributed system to be more suitable (Options 2 and 4) than a centralised model (Options 1 and 3). Looking at the strengths and weaknesses of Options 2 and 4, we judge Option 4 to be the best option, inasmuch as it will be most likely to secure early buy-in from policy makers and employers, lowers costs to the EU and ought to be able to be implemented reasonably quickly and efficiently by commissioning the new function from existing service providers / audit



agencies (public or private). On the downside, Option 4 will require very much greater care in order to promote consistency and minimise the risk of employers / policy people in one member state accusing other national systems of operating less exacting procedures (unfair) in the award of certificates.

Our consultation asked the research community for their views about the most suitable arrangements for the accreditation of the certification bodies. The feedback was more clear-cut on this question as compared with the views about the certification bodies. A majority favour a EU solution, with the most popular choice for the accreditation to be carried out by the European Commission.

Overall, we take the view that the accreditation process should be organised at the EU level, with a single implementation body applying a consistent / pan-EU process to reinforce consistency across a distributed certification system. A distributed accreditation and certification system appears unnecessarily complex and would greatly increase the risk of fragmentation and inconsistency.

In the first instance, we concluded it would be best if the accreditation process was carried out by the Commission services in order to ensure the tests, criteria and assessment process are entirely robust and implemented fairly and consistently. The closer involvement of the Commission services – the progenitor and architect of the system – makes especial sense in the early phases – first and second generation – while lessons are learned and the system is developed and evolves to a reasonable level of maturity, at which point it can be contracted out to a European institution, intermediary or service company, possibly still part-financed by the Commission and the European research community.

1.4 Practical implementation scenarios

There is also a question about the best approach to rolling out the certification system across the EU, and to that end, we developed two contrasting implementation scenarios, or idealised models, to draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the different options we foresee:

- Scenario 2 – Targeted phased implementation
 - Targeted inasmuch as it will focus on one sector rather than all sectors, perhaps universities rather than research institutes
 - Targeted inasmuch as it will address itself to a sub-set of (volunteer) EU member states and institutions (e.g. the member states where the existing HRS4R cohort is located)
 - Phased inasmuch as the new system will address itself to this voluntary audience in the first years, and open up to universities in all member states in its second phase and all research employers in all member states in a third phase
- Scenario 2 – Universal implementation at a single point in time
 - Design a certification system that will cover all employers in all member states and will be implemented fully in its first incarnation, across the EU

On balance, based on our interviews and consultations, we judge the targeted, phased approach (Scenario 1) to be the preferred option. It has many positive attributes, and crucially far fewer weaknesses, than Scenario 2. Clearly, Scenario 2 done well would immediately encourage far more widespread improvement in HR management practice than the selective, phased approach, and would fit better with the concerns and ambitions of the European Commission (to expedite progress). However it is a very much more costly and uncertain strategy, and has several critical flaws that may be sufficient to produce a legal objection by member states or an equally calamitous withdrawal of support for existing initiatives.

The two scenarios are conceptual devices, rather than concrete proposals for implementation, however, and one or both scenarios could very easily be recast to produce hybrids that deliver a better solution in principle than either the two ‘extremes’ presented here. In practice, we favour an implementation strategy that is a variant of Scenario 1 and would comprise the following elements:

- Cover all four of the core HRS4R dimensions
- Integrate the new scheme with the existing HRS4R process



- Consider the possibility of using the External Review process to insist that participating institutions do a very much better job of filling in the original HRS4R templates
- Focus on promoting the new certification process to the existing HRS4R cohorts
- Use national agencies to work with the Commission Services to implement the certification process, based on a similar model of peer review implemented for the External Review process
- Define a certification award that encompasses gradations of excellence, with the lowest level being an ‘improving’ award rather than a fail
- Calibrate the assessment process through institutional visits by peer reviewers. Consider using the peers from the current External Review process as part of the new assessment panels

To manage the weakness or risks envisaged with Scenario 1, we recommend the Commission make a virtue out of the idea of a targeted approach and move forward with the development of a large-scale pilot exercise. That is to say, Phase 1 of a targeted, phased approach would be a pilot demonstration that would robustly test the certification system’s basic principles, processes and outcomes with the early cohorts, in order to determine how best to continue. The choice of design for subsequent phases would be a question to explore within and around the pilot.

1.5 Compatibility with EU and national legal frameworks

The EU has the right to develop legislation in this area, in principle, although it has yet to do so in practice. The EU and Member States have *shared competence* in the field of research, technological development and space, which requires close collaboration between EU and national levels in order to arrive at a universally acceptable EU-level programme of activities to promote, in this case, the harmonisation of national policies on HRM across all EU member states. It is not clear that legislation relating to the HR management of researchers in public research organisations (PROs) would deliver sufficiently widespread or significant improvements to amount to a sufficient argument for legislative action. On balance, while we consider there is a strong case for more determined EU action to promote the further take up of good practice in HR management, we see no reasonable prospect for moving forward with legislative proposals for the foreseeable future.

1.6 Synergies with existing initiatives

The feasibility study struggled to test the compatibility of the proposed new certification scheme with national legislative frameworks, in any definitive sense at least. The general view among the academic community however is that there will be very many legal (and institutional) compatibility issues and that a performance-based system implemented through a distributed peer review process is the pragmatic solution, and will avoid the challenge of prescribing specific standards across the EU.

We did identify three or four schemes that overlap in some degree and where it may be helpful to seek to ensure compatibility with a new certification scheme through specific empirical tests. We have not been able to determine these points of overlap in any definitive sense, and recommend that the issue of synergy should be retained as a key question in the next stage in the development of the proposed certification scheme. This should also feature as one of the core evaluation questions for the pilot, and be part of the lessons learned, in order to feed that empirical experience into the design of the second-generation scheme.

The likely level of take-up of the proposed new scheme is hard to determine precisely, however, and contingent on several factors, including the basic design and its compatibility with other existing measures and the extent to which it is mandated or voluntary.

The consultation found widespread support for the further promotion of good practice in HR management at the European level, with a majority of respondents in favour of the introduction of a new certification scheme. The level of acceptance was lower among research organisations, the primary target, with around one quarter unsure about the idea. We take this as a strongly positive response, given the limited information provided about the possible shape of a new scheme.



We know from past experience that take-up is likely to be gradual, where it is based on a voluntary approach (rather than legislative). The protracted rates of diffusion of these new codes and voluntary principles has quite reasonably caused the European Commission to reflect upon the good sense of adopting a legislative approach for the new certification system. Crucially, a legal approach holds out the promise of overcoming the Achilles Heel of any de facto standard, which is that certain segments of a given community will ignore the groundswell of change and will be left behind. Notwithstanding these concerns, the consultation and interviews make clear there would be strong resistance to a legislative approach here and the as yet uncertain benefits (scale) of such an approach (ex ante) mean it is unlikely to pass the required proportionality and subsidiarity tests. In short, this will need to be a voluntary scheme, at least in its early generations, and take-up will be best facilitated by a focus on delivering value to early adopters and active promotion of the benefits of the scheme to wider audiences. Linking the new scheme to the HRS4R process is the single most powerful tactic to adopt.

Funding conditionality is a frequently discussed topic and is widely seen in some quarters as a way to quickly bring about widespread behavioural change across the public research community and thereby improve the quality and uniformity of the resultant activities and outputs. This logic is contested however and our consultation revealed widespread hostility towards the notion. Certification is already a challenging next step, and the suggestion that the outcome of that proposed new process might also be linked to EU funding was almost universally dismissed as both inappropriate (excellence should be the primary basis for the selective allocation of research funding, and not compliance with good practice in scientific administration) and unfair inasmuch as the current substantial performance differentials among employers are believed to reflect external factors to a very much greater extent than institutional behaviour. Based on this evidence and our reflections, we recommend the Commission does not seek to develop a certification system that is linked to EU research funding, as that will generate widespread opposition and may cause the whole project to fail. In the medium term, perhaps the ambition should be to develop a certification system that is sufficiently robust and well-regarded that it comes into more general use and may be adopted voluntarily and selectively by various funders and used to help reinforce positive behaviour.

1.7 Our preferred option

The feasibility study has explored various system architectures and implementation strategies in order to come forward with a preferred option for moving forward, which is a pilot certification scheme that builds on the existing HRS4R External Review process and works with the existing cohorts.

We considered a range of policy options, which begin with a baseline scenario (Policy Option 1) and extend through to the idea of a pan-EU certification system anchored in EU legislation (Policy Option 4). In simple terms, we conclude that PO1 (continue as we are) is unacceptable as it does not address the slow and uneven implementation of C&C principles among employers and may frustrate rather than advance the political commitment to ERA. At the other end of the spectrum, a legally-based pan-EU certification system would be controversial and probably disproportionate. PO2 (Strengthen the HRS4R External Review Process) and PO3 (implement a pilot certification scheme as the next level in the HRS4R process) are both feasible and would provide a useful improvement over the current arrangements. Ultimately, we prefer PO3 because a pilot brings with it (i) an explicit commitment to developing a comprehensive system, subject to the lessons learned from the pilot, and an opportunity to engage the full ERA community in that learning exercise from the outset. PO2 by contrast, will be a rather more economical strengthening measure but with very much less political symbolism or community-wide spillovers.

1.8 Promotion of the proposed scheme

The study specification invited the review team to come forward with suggestions for the promotion of the proposed new certification scheme, however while we have developed a strong concept for a new scheme, our proposal is not yet at a stage of development suitable for a conventional marketing and communication campaign. Rather we suggest a stepwise approach that will begin with fine-tuning the outline proposal in discussion with the Commission Services and members of the SGHRM before moving on to share the ideas with a selection of stakeholders and experts through a deliberative workshop and subsequently moving to a more wide-ranging consultation to build awareness among



employers and researchers across the EU while generating feedback on the detail design of the proposed scheme and also promoting further interest in the HRS4R process itself.

The current feasibility study will reach its conclusion following our presentation of the outline proposal to the Commission Services and the SGHRM. The suggestion to move forward with an expert workshop and stakeholder consultation are interim steps, which we believe should ultimately allow the Commission to launch a large-scale pilot to develop and test the detail design through a real process rather than the modelling we have done here.

We are not in a position to specify exactly what the pilot would look like, and so it is difficult to write about timeframes or estimate costs, however, the exercise would need to be tackled seriously and as such we imagine a two or three year term for the pilot overall (9-12 months for detailed planning, 12-18 months for implementation, 3-6 months for updating the design based on lessons learned) and a EU budget of €3M-€5M. We would hope the Commission could generate support from at least 50 institutions in 10 member states, so the pilot can be run at scale. Based on these reflections, the pilot will need to be designed / planned in detail during the course of 2014, ideally, as the HRS4R external review process will have been in operation for several months and more substantive experience of that process would be hugely informative. The ambition would be to launch the pilot proper in 2015 with certificates being awarded from end 2015 early 2016.

If our recommendations are judged to be appropriate and affordable, the first next step will be to develop a more detailed specification for a pilot exercise. In particular, there will need to be further work to define the specific tests and assessment criteria that will be used, and how those tests can work with some minimum standard of performance. The next step would be to test the detail design through an expert workshop before taking the final proposal for a new scheme and the associated pilot exercise to the community for a more formal consultation, to generate awareness about the pilot, gather feedback on aspects of the detail design and invite expressions of interest to participate.



2. Introduction

2.1 This report

This document is the final report of the “*Feasibility study for the development of a certification mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe*”. Technopolis Group has prepared the report on behalf of the ERAWATCH Network ABSL, with contributions from our partners ARC Consulting and NIFU.

2.2 Background to the study

The European Commission's 2012 Communication on the European Research Area (ERA) describes it as “a unified research area open to the world based on the Internal market, in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely”.

With the explicit objective of opening up and connecting EU research systems, the ERA reform agenda focuses on five key priorities: (i) More effective national research systems; (ii) Optimal transnational co-operation and competition; (iii) An open labour market for researchers; (iv) Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research; (v) Optimal circulation and transfer of scientific knowledge.

As part of the ERA agenda, the Commission is committed to increasing the attractiveness of research careers in Europe, and to improving employment and working conditions for researchers. It has therefore developed a number of policy initiatives over the past decade that have sought to encourage and support voluntary actions within the Member States in order to make progress in this area. There has been very substantial work undertaken in this arena in the past decade by governments, research funders and employers, alike, which has resulted in the agreement of core values and principles, the creation of various pan-EU working groups and coordination mechanisms and a growing commitment amongst employers to deal with HR issues more creatively and progressively, in line with ERA principles. The initiatives of most immediate relevance to this study are:

- The **European Charter for Researchers**, which addresses the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers, their employers and funders
- The **Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers**, which aims to improve recruitment practices, make selection processes fairer and more transparent, and proposes appropriate means of judging merit that go beyond narrowly defined academic criteria
- The **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)** incorporating the Charter & Code, which supports research institutions and funding organisations in the implementation of the Charter & Code in their policies and practices

The European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (the Charter & Code) encompass four broad aspects of human resource management, including working conditions and professional development, as well as professional conduct and recruitment. The Charter & Code's four first-level dimensions expand into 40 second-level dimensions, and this hierarchy and taxonomy has served as the basis for the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), a pan-EU process that has been running for five years and has generated substantial political and institutional support for translating the principles set out in the Charter & Code into institutional policies and practices. The Commission considers it important to complement the existing HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) with a mechanism that allows the assessment of the actual quality of the HR management structures in place (i.e. objective measurement of the outcome of the institutional efforts), and which would help to stretch the community and encourage further improvements in performance.

As part of the proposed basket of actions set out in the ERA Communication 2012, the Commission also announced that it would support the set-up of a European Accreditation Mechanism for Charter & Code-based HR management in universities and publicly funded research institutions. The policy rationale behind the creation of such a mechanism is to further encourage and incentivise the take-up



of the ERA principles related to HR management, both broadening commitment to the HRS4R process throughout Europe and deepening the commitment within individual employers to continuous improvement around each of the 40 principles listed in the Charter & Code. Those institutions that have successfully participated in the HRS4R initiative should be well placed to obtain the new quality label that will be awarded through the certification scheme.

2.3 Aims and objectives of the study

The Commission is investigating its options for setting up a transparent, internationally recognised certification mechanism for good HR management in the European Research Area, which should be based on a set of clearly defined and broadly applicable assessment criteria that are linked to the key principles of the Charter & Code. The objective of this study is to support the Commission in this endeavour, and more specifically:

- To develop a certification process for good HR management, based on the concept of genuinely good HR management, and including the basis for assessment, criteria, and methodologies
- To design an architecture for the certification bodies and their accreditation
- To develop scenarios for setting up the certification and accreditation mechanisms, and options for the practical implementation of the new scheme
- To assess the feasibility of the initiative as a whole, taking into account existing mechanisms, legislation, and ongoing and planned initiatives at EU and national level

2.4 Methodological approach

The study objectives focus on the development and assessment of different options for a future certification mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe.

The study process has entailed a combination of primary and secondary data collection, but at heart it was run as a community-wide consultation to test both the level of demand for a certification system and to explore the preferred options for a future system as well as critical success factors. Because of the need to identify prior experience with similar mechanisms and a desire to ensure that the communities to be involved in the new initiative can input to the approach and are ultimately supportive of it, we adopted a highly consultative approach.

Throughout this feasibility study, the team has used the term ‘certification’ to mean the assessment of an individual institution’s HR performance and the subsequent award of an HR certificate where the evaluators judge the institution to have met or surpassed the minimum requirements set out in the HR standard in question. The term ‘accreditation’ is used to refer to the process by which the certification bodies are tested in turn on their competence to carry out assessments and issue certificates in line with the agreed requirements or performance standards.

2.5 Structure of the report

The report is organised around the five principal dimensions of the study specification

- Development of the certification process
- Development of the architecture for certification bodies and accreditation
- Development of scenarios for the implementation of the certification and accreditation systems
- Investigation of the compatibility with EU and national legal frameworks
- Investigation of the synergies with existing initiatives, links to EU funding, and the promotion of the new mechanism



3. A certification process

3.1 The concept of ‘good human resources management’

The idea of certification implies confirmation of certain characteristics of a person or organisation by an independent body, and as a matter of course requires those characteristics to be specified such that the reviewer can determine whether they hold in practice.¹ By extension, applying the idea of certification to human resource management (HR management) in public research organisations in Europe, implies a need to define what HR management includes (scope) and what amounts to good HR performance such that one can test employers against these requirements.

For the purpose of the feasibility study, the study team agreed with the Commission that it would use the four dimensions of the Charter and Code to define the boundaries of our enquiry and the accompanying 40 principles as an indication of what is meant by the concept of genuinely good HR management. We tested this assumption through out interviews and consultation, and the great majority of contributors considered this to be a reasonable way forward.

There is growing momentum around implementation of the Charter and Code, which underlines its correctness and practical utility, and as such we concluded that it is the best available working definition of good HR management in public research and it embodies the right concept and principles on which to base this feasibility study.

While it is clear from the feedback to our consultation that the precise definition of good HR management remains a matter for debate, none of the 400+ people and institutions contributing to the consultation took the view that the Charter and Code was wrong in some way, either by omission of key aspects (scope) or inappropriateness of core concepts (principles). There were several contributors that remarked on the practical challenge of using the Charter and Code as the basis for a certification system, with one representative body stating that the “plethora of criteria that can be derived from the Charter and Code will not be an adequate basis for any certification process.” The study team acknowledge this critical challenge, and have sought to keep the proposed tests and audit arrangements as simple as possible to increase the feasibility / attractiveness of certification. Notwithstanding our current efforts, the next stage in the development and promotion of the proposed new scheme may have to revisit the issue of scope in order to maximise interest and support for the implementation of what we judge will be a voluntary rather than legally binding process.

Figure 1 – The 40 dimensions of the Charter and Code

1. Ethical and professional aspects 1.1. Research freedom 1.2. Ethical principles 1.3. Professional responsibility 1.4. Professional attitude 1.5. Contractual and legal obligations 1.6. Accountability 1.7. Good practice in research 1.8. Dissemination and exploitation of results 1.9. Public engagement 1.10. Non-discrimination 1.11. Evaluation and appraisal of performance	2. Working conditions 2.1. Recognition of the profession 2.2. Research environment 2.3. Working conditions 2.4. Stability and permanence of employment 2.5. Funding and salaries 2.6. Gender balance 2.7. Career development 2.8. Value of mobility (within appraisal, career development and admin procedures) 2.9. Access to career advice 2.10. Intellectual property rights 2.11. Co-authorship 2.12. Teaching 2.13. Complaints and appeals 2.14. Participation in decision-making bodies
3. Recruitment 3.1. Recruitment 3.2. Recruitment	4. Training and development 4.1. Relationships with supervisors 4.2. Supervision and managerial duties

¹ The concepts and terminology around certification, conformance assessment and accreditation are discussed in a little more detail in the appendices.



3.3. Selection 3.4. Transparency 3.5. Judging merit 3.6. Chronological order 3.7. Recognition of mobility experience 3.8. Recognition of qualifications 3.9. Seniority 3.10. Postdoctoral appointments	4.3. Continuing professional development 4.4. Access to research training and continuous development 4.5. Supervision
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Figure 1 lists the broad areas and associated principles set out in the Charter and Code, which together comprise four broad areas and 40 principles related to HR management.

The 40 dimensions are not entirely uniform in scope or indeed in their centrality to HR management. For example, on the first point, we judge that the issue of non-discrimination (1.10) is more far-reaching in scope than is the issue of seniority (3.9) and the presumption that employers will specify levels of competence and qualifications appropriate to a given role or grade. On the second point, the issue of research freedom (1.1) is a less obvious ‘primary aspect’ of HR management than are the issues of recruitment (3.1) or continuing professional development (4.3). Academic freedom clearly does impinge on employers’ relationships with their research staff, inasmuch as their employment contract may explicitly acknowledge the central importance of ‘academic freedom’ to good science and allow staff to express their opinions without fear of institutional censorship or discipline. Those terms and conditions of employment may also include provisions that would define certain limits to that freedom in practice, for example, requiring staff to conduct their research and profess their views within the confines of extant legislation and ethical principles. In other cases, one may imagine employment contracts will require staff to be sensitive to the implications for their employer or colleagues, and perhaps to remember to preface their remarks with a statement noting that the view are based on the work of the research group and may not align with the views of either their employer or funder.

Figure 2 presents examples of four of the 40 principles listed in the Charter and Code, with one principle taken from each of the four strands (e.g. Recruitment). Each of the tables includes a label and a definition for one of the 40 HRS4R principles (standards), which is taken verbatim from the Charter and Code, along with additional questions about relevant legislation, current practice, actions required (based on a gap analysis) and when / who, are taken from the HRS4R institutional template (Annex 1), and provide an indication of the assessment process in use within the Cohort. Figure 3 takes another of these 40 principles and answers each of the questions (applicable legislation, current practice, etc) for a university in the UK, by way of illustration.

Figure 2 – Selected examples of the 40 principles of good HR management

5. Contractual and legal obligations			
Researchers at all levels must be familiar with the national, sectoral or institutional regulations governing training and/or working conditions. This includes Intellectual Property Rights regulations, and the requirements and conditions of any sponsor or funders, independently of the nature of their contract. Researchers should adhere to such regulations by delivering the required results (e.g. thesis, publications, patents, reports, new products development, etc) as set out in the terms and conditions of the contract or equivalent document.			
Relevant legislation (permitting or impeding the implementation of this principle)	Existing Institutional rules and/or practices	Actions required	When/Who

20. Seniority			
The levels of qualifications required should be in line with the needs of the position and not be set as a barrier to entry. Recognition and evaluation of qualifications should focus on judging the achievements of the person rather than his/her circumstances or the reputation of the institution where the qualifications were gained. As professional qualifications may be gained at an early stage of a long career, the pattern of lifelong professional development should also be recognised.			
Relevant legislation (permitting or impeding the implementation of this principle)	Existing Institutional rules and/or practices	Actions required	When/Who



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26. Funding and salaries
Employers and/or funders of researchers should ensure that researchers enjoy fair and attractive conditions of funding and/or salaries with adequate and equitable social security provisions (including sickness and parental benefits, pension rights and unemployment benefits) in accordance with existing national legislation and with national or sectoral collective bargaining agreements. This must include researchers at all career stages including early-stage researchers, commensurate with their legal status, performance and level of qualifications and/or responsibilities.

Relevant legislation (permitting or impeding the implementation of this principle)	Existing Institutional rules and/or practices	Actions required	When/Who

39. Access to research training and continuous development
Employers and/or funders should ensure that all researchers at any stage of their career, regardless of their contractual situation, are given the opportunity for professional development and for improving their employability through access to measures for the continuing development of skills and competencies. Such measures should be regularly assessed for their accessibility, take up and effectiveness in improving competencies, skills and employability.

Relevant legislation (permitting or impeding the implementation of this principle)	Existing Institutional rules and/or practices	Actions required	When/Who

Figure 3 – Example of a generic treatment of one of the 40 principles of good HR management

Issue	Description
25. Stability and permanence of employment	Employers and/or funders should ensure that the performance of researchers is not undermined by instability of employment contracts, and should therefore commit themselves as far as possible to improving the stability of employment conditions for researchers, thus implementing and abiding by the principles and terms laid down in the EU Directive on Fixed-Term Work.
Applicable legislation or soft law	Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 (UK enactment of 1999/70/EC) 1996 Concordat for the Career Management of Contract Research Staff Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) Guidance on Casual and Fixed Term Employment (2002) 2008 Concordat for Researcher Careers
Current practice	100% of our academic staff are on open contracts 15% of our research staff (post-doctoral) are appointed on open contracts 25% of our research staff (post-doctoral) have had three or more FT contracts The proportion of all research-active staff (academic and post-doc combined) that is on fixed term contracts is improving across the UK HE system, according to the latest Vitae Careers in Research Online Survey (82% in 2009 has become 77% in 2011, CROS2012) The university has also devoted substantial HR effort into ensuring equivalent conditions for staff on FT contracts and improving support for staff coming up to the end of a fixed-term contract and the development of redeployment procedures to facilitate new appointments and reduce anxiety among those staff on FT contracts
Gap analysis and action planning	The use of fixed-term contracts remains high overall throughout the UK HE system, in large part because of the way in which the grants system works, however, several employers are stepping away from the rest and offering better terms and conditions. Several HEIs have introduced rules whereby any new staff appointment – including those linked with a specific, fixed term grant – will be made on the basis of an open contract where the preferred candidate has already been employed previously – at this or different institutions – on



	<p>two or more fixed-term contracts.</p> <p>The university’s PVC Research, Director of HR and Staff Committee have agreed to gather further information on how these arrangements work in practice at other institutions with a view to coming forward with a proposal and detailed implementation plan for this university. The ambition is to have the new system in place by the start of the next academic year.</p>
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3.2 Synergies with other certification and audit mechanisms

The proposal to create a new EU scheme to encourage good practice in HR management across the public research systems of member states, requires consideration of how such a scheme might best complement national efforts, current or planned. The EU’s legal authority in this policy area is discussed in a little more detail below, however, in simple terms, it is allowed to launch specific actions however those interventions need to be designed, if not implement, in concert with member states.

We explored the question through our interviews and consultation, which revealed a consistent view as regards the importance of ensuring synergies with other certification and audit mechanisms:

- All contributors noted the existence of other certification and audit mechanisms in use at the member state level, national and European. Quality assurance of higher education provision is most prominent, there is more variety in the research institute sector
- All contributors were adamant that any new certification system must build on and be compatible with existing quality assurance mechanisms
- Around 90% of respondents to the consultation stated that it was important (or essential) for the proposed new certification system to be integrated with the existing HR Strategy for Researchers
- No one made a case for the creation of a wholly new certification scheme, compatible with but independent of existing measures

The consultation found that around a third of all respondents (employers / researchers) are already participating in a HR-related certification or quality assurance scheme of some kind. However, we also asked contributors to go on to specify the scheme in question, and when we compiled the full list it was clear that the majority had only very limited relevance to HR management of researchers. There were for example, numerous instances of national quality assurance mechanisms that carry out institutional reviews in order to safeguard the quality and standards of the student learning experience within the higher education sector nationally. There were several other examples of schemes that were interesting in some respects, but which were a little more tangential, including for example, the ISO9001 international standard for quality management and the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS); both of these schemes comprise institutional audits, provide certificates and include an HR component within their review process. Lastly, around 20% of contributors cited the HR Strategy for Researchers as the specific scheme.

In addition to the various assessment and certification schemes cited, we were also told about the importance of national support structures, including for example, the EURAXESS Service Centres. In the UK, Vitae, formerly the national careers advisory service, has evolved into a dedicated national organisation promoting researcher skills and careers.²

The initiatives cited are too many and varied to describe in full, however several respondents took care to elaborate on the various initiatives that are encouraging RPOs and RFOs to adopt good HR management practices. Selected examples are outlined in the boxed section.

² Vitae’s support for research employers and researchers (advice, guidelines) is complemented by a range of development activities involving community-wide working groups, commissioned studies and periodical surveys and other data collection (monitoring) all of which are used to influence national policy and encourage employers to take researcher skills and careers very seriously. Policy makers and employers use Vitae’s national surveys to inform the development of their policies and practice: the Career in Research Online Survey (CROS), the Principal Investigator and Research Leader Survey (PIRLS) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)] are important sources of information and RPOs use the data to improve their practices and policies.



Figure 4 – Cited examples of schemes that encourage good practice in HR management

<p>Austria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance agreements are one way in which national authorities can incentivise the effective implementation of the HRS4R (or its national adaptation). Austria has implemented performance agreements within the public university sector that make explicit reference to the Charter & Code. Other initiatives and programmes include: the ‘Talente Programme; FemTechCareer; FWF Programme; Doc programme (ÖAW); and Laura Bassi Centres of Expertise <p>Belgium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wallonia-Brussels Partnership for Researchers, which follows the EU Partnership for Researchers and was adopted by the Governments of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Wallonia in 2011. It follows the Charter and Code, and has six chapters: Open recruitment and portability of grants; Social security, tax system, visas and other matters falling under federal authority; Employment and working conditions; Training of researchers; Gender equality; and Access to Job Market for PhD Holders• The Flemish government is actively stimulating universities to participate in the "HR strategy for researchers" initiative <p>Croatia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The EURAXESS Service Centre in Zagreb encourages and helps institutions regarding endorsement and implementation of the recommendations of the EU in the field of HR (the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers). EURAXESS also participates in projects aimed at promoting these issues at a regional level (e.g. the Web-InUnion project). Also, the EURAXESS Service Centre (under the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes) is active in promoting mobility among researchers and facilitating legislative changes to enable mobility <p>France</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In France, a new law on The Freedom and Responsibilities of Universities (LRU) came into effect in 2007, which granted universities much greater autonomy from the ministry, and set out various new responsibilities in line with the ambitions of the Bologna process. This reform had many dimensions, however, within the context of HR management, it required universities to develop a strategy to manage HR and also gave universities greater control over the salaries of academic staff including those on civil service contracts• Several national research institutes have adopted the Charter and Code. The research institution INRA (French National Institute of Agriculture Research), for example, developed its own Charter for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral fellows, and set up an advisory committee for complaints by PhD students. <p>Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The German Universities Excellence Initiative is an initiative (2007) of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Research Foundation (DFG) designed to target additional funds on the country's leading universities in order to strengthen those institutions and their research. It includes one budget line concerned to improve the training and working conditions for young scientists as well as another (larger) budget line comprising 5-year awards for a small elite (Universities of Excellence). The award of that title and the associated funding is based on an assessment of the competing institutions' strategies for promoting research excellence. The process includes assessment of several HR aspects, including: attractive conditions for excellent researchers at all career levels; evaluation of recruitment processes; gender equality; promotion of young researchers; international visibility; and infrastructure. 11 Universities of Excellence secured funding for the period 2012-17• The German Rectors Conference (HRK) has signed the Charter and Code, its General Assembly has recommended all its member organisations join the HRS4R process and it has set up a working group to provide assistance to German universities engaging in the process <p>UK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Athena Swan Charter is a national award scheme that recognises UK universities' (science and engineering departments) commitment to advancing women's academic careers within the STEM disciplines• The National Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of HE Pay Structures. Most UK HEIs have implemented the Agreement, following its 12 principles, including: equal pay for work of equal value, based on job evaluation, common grading structures across all staff groups at institution level, relevant to institutional objectives, career and salary progressions must have regard to available resources, etc. The Agreement is supported by UCEA• QAA institutional audit process for doctoral programmes, which ensures that all RPOs adhere to the codes of practice agreed therein• The Roberts Agenda (launched following a report by Sir Gareth Roberts' about the supply of people with STEM skills, 2002) has encourage and financed improved financing and training of PhDs on the one hand but has also been influential in ensuring that early career researchers have career plans, access to ongoing training and development and opportunities to work in other sectors. The funding is associated with a process of institutional annual reports, which have provided the basis for tracking progress and understanding the effects on HR issues ranging from salaries to staff retention• Research Councils UK (RCUK) Statement of Expectations is a one-page statement issued on behalf of all grant-awarding research councils, which states that grantholders (researchers and research employers) are expected to observe the principles of the Charter and Code as regards research conduct and continuing professional development• REF Environment section which references the Concordat. This has driven discussions of policies and practices

Based on this extensive feedback, we elected to do further desk research on 10 of the existing schemes cited in the consultation in order to find out more about their respective review processes, assessment criteria and delivery arrangements, covering each of following types of measure:



- HR certification schemes developed for PROs (Athena Swan)
- HR assessment schemes developed uniquely for PROs (HRS4R)
- Certification schemes developed for PROs that include aspects relevant to HR management (Family Friendly Universities, ERASMUS Charter, the European Foundation for Management Development [EFMD] Quality Improvement System [EQUIS], Total E-Quality Award)
- Assessment schemes developed for PROs that include aspects relevant to HR management (EUA IEP, Research Excellence Framework [REF], German Universities Excellence Initiative)
- HR certification schemes developed for other sectors (Investors in People [IIP])

We present a one-page descriptive overview of each of these 10 selected schemes, and several others, in the appendices to this report.

Figure 5 presents our analysis of the degree of alignment of a selection of the most relevant schemes cited with the four HR dimensions of the HRS4R. This tabulation confirms the impression given by our interviews and consultation, which is that while there are several notable schemes in widespread use, very few encompass the same issues and criteria as HRS4R. We found just two dedicated HR management schemes that are awarding quality labels to public research organisations, both of which are national and relate to a single theme, gender balance. The Athena Swan Charter is highly particular, targeting gender balance in STEM subjects in British higher education institutions, at a departmental and institutional level. The Total E-Quality Award (TEQA) in Germany is also concerned to bring about gender equality but is broader in application covering professional occupations in both the public and private sectors, including universities and research institutes that employ 15 or more people. The UK Investors in People (IIP) programme is another certification scheme concerned with HR issues, albeit it is not targeting research-performing organisations. It also differs somewhat from HRS4R inasmuch as it defines itself as a business performance standard, and focuses on business related outcomes in 10 areas from leadership to empowerment. The assessment process is open to any sector, any size, however it is not widely used within the academic community although it is widely used in the public sector and indeed the non-academic / non-research elements of universities. The two research excellence initiatives were cited as relevant assessment schemes by several contributors to our consultation, and when we looked more closely it is clear that both look at several HR aspects as part of a much broader assessment of the quality of the research environment in a given department or institution. The HR elements of the assessment appear quite open, in comparison with the other schemes mentioned above, and the institutional statement and associated peer review process are invited to consider issues like support for early career researchers.

Figure 5 –Alignment of selected existing assessment schemes with the HR dimensions of HRS4R

	Research conduct	Recruitment	Working Conditions	Training & development
HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) [EU]	H	H	H	H
Athena Swan Charter [UK]	-	H	H	-
EQUIS [Int.]	L	-	-	M
ERASMUS University Charter (EUC) [EU]	-	-	L	L
EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA IEP) [EU]	L	-	L	L
Family-Friendly University Certificate (FFU) [DE]	-	-	M	-
German Universities Excellence Initiative (GUEI) [DE]	M	L	L	M
Investors in People (IIP) [UK]	-	M	M	M
Research Excellence Framework (REF) [UK]	M	L	L	M
Total E-Quality Award (TEQA) [DE]	H	H	H	H



The small number of relevant schemes and limited points of substantive overlap is a positive finding in the sense that HRS4R is not obviously duplicating or crowding out other existing schemes, and will therefore have to work less hard than might have been expected to deal with issues of interoperability.

Synergies and incompatibilities may still need to be considered at a more fundamental level of course, as the assessment burden and associated data requirements will fall on the same people in part as for example established national quality assurance procedures. This is evident when one looks into the requirements of the two remaining institutional assessment programmes, the ERASMUS University Charter and the European University Alliance's Institutional Evaluation Programme. The same also holds for the widely used EQUIS Award for management education. In practical terms, many of these existing HR schemes cope with the multiplicity of other applicable audits by adopting a more open approach to assessment than one might find in a QA system or a technical certification system used in industry. By this, we mean the schemes tend to allow candidates substantial latitude in respect to the evidence provided and rely to a great extent on a peer review process to judge that evidence base against a series of really quite broad principles (the assessment framework).

The discovery of the limited overlap among these selected existing schemes is less helpful from the perspective of developing assessment criteria; we found very little in the way of defined standards, metrics or tests that a new EU HRM certification system might adopt from among this group of established assessment schemes.

3.3 Assessment criteria to support certification

The act of testing and certifying the various aspects of HR performance will require the development of a set of assessment criteria, which we have explored in three ways:

- We asked the community for its advice on potential assessment criteria, through our consultation and in-depth interviews with stakeholders
- We examined the approach taken by existing certification and assessment schemes with a strong HR component, as a source of 'ready-made' assessment criteria that we could adopt and adapt
- We developed a selection of assessment criteria from first principles, using the HR Strategy for Researchers' principles and the study team's a priori knowledge

Our interviews and consultation were not particularly illuminating as regards specific assessment criteria, beyond pointing to possible reference schemes with relevant tests. For most people, the question proved to be too open to tackle within the context of a one-hour discussion or 30-minute online survey. As noted already, various contributors were sceptical about the feasibility of specifying assessment criteria in detail and across all 40 of performance dimensions of the HRS4R. Several other contributors noted that the HRS4R process had proved successful so far in part because it had taken a very much more bottom-up or organic approach to assessment as compared with the more mechanistic arrangements one can find in other sectors. Indeed, we heard from one auditing specialist that 21st century auditing was moving towards an emphasis on behaviour and outcomes, rather than endless key performance indicators and supporting statistics and procedures.³

In light of this high-level feedback, we chose to focus our development work on the other two sources: the recommended reference schemes and design from first principles.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 present a tabular overview of, respectively, the assessment and data collection strategies for each of the selected schemes. From these two tables, one can see that the basis for assessment is reasonably consistent across the various schemes we have looked at, at least in terms of their broad parameters:

³ "Mechanistic vs Organic Management Systems" - HPO White Paper - this outlines why there is a need to change from the management, quality and auditing practices of the past - not throwing them out, but building on them in recognition of the way the World now is. "21c auditing for 21c Auditing Failures" - CQI Quality World Article - This HPO article was published in the Quality World journal in October 2011, outlining why auditing needs to change and the direction it needs to take to address the shortcomings of the past. <http://www.the-hpo.com/index.php>

- Most of the initiatives work with open or directional assessment criteria, and invite candidates to decide for themselves how they wish to present / explain their performance and what information / metrics they believe may be helpful. The ambition is to be flexible and light touch
- The assessment criteria encompass forward-looking strategies and action plans along with progress reports – qualitative and quantitative data – supported by baseline and trend statistics
- There is a high degree of openness to a range of types of evidentiary material and data
- The institutions or departments almost always present their current performance and future plans using a standard form or template, which comprises a narrative statement supported by facts and figures about the organisation and accompanying copies of institutional strategies or policy documents describing standard operating procedures
- The assessment is almost always carried out by a group of external experts, emphasising HR expertise rather than science specifically
- A majority of reviews is carried out remotely, paper-based
- Each audit or review will typically involve people assessing / scoring a self-assessment report individually, before coming together in person or virtually to form a consensus on the award and on any performance improvement opportunities
- The Investors in People (IIP) scheme is an exception, where an individual assessor from an approved certifier will work with a candidate over a period of time, with performance described orally – with supporting papers / data as necessary – through interviews in order to minimise the amount of ‘homework’
- Most of the selected schemes include a pass / fail arrangement, with the exception of the institutional assessments. The GEUI does after a fashion inasmuch as it awards the University Excellence title to only a small minority of all applicants (and HR issues are not especially central) and the REF environment assessment does produce an institutional score or rating that is converted through a formula into future income (again, HR is only one aspect of several that the peer review panel will consider)
- The Athena Swan Charter is the only scheme that uses defined gradations of performance, gold, silver, bronze, to encourage award holders to continue to strive for higher levels of performance around gender balance over time

The three features that stand out most strongly are:

- The bottom-up nature of the schemes, and the flexibility around what an institution is allowed to present in terms of both statements and supporting evidence
- The central importance of professional judgement in the assessment process (peer review)
- There is also a general sense that schemes are most concerned about continuous improvement and institutional development

Figure 6 – The basis for assessment used in selected existing schemes

	Assessment Process	Pass / Fail	Attainment level	Period of validity
HRS4R	External peer review Site visit	Yes, the outcome of the peer review will determine whether the Commission will renew or withdraw its acknowledgement of an institution's excellence in HR management	One class of award Evaluation report provided to institutions, to support continuous improvement Renewal may be contingent on remedial action to be completed within a pre-defined period	4 years
Athena Swan	Paper-based review	Yes gives award, scheme operates a pass / fail system	Gold (gender balance) Silver (activity and achievement) Bronze (commitment and planning)	3 years
EQUIS	Paper-based review	Yes, system awards a quality mark and some management schools have been	Conditional, with annual progress reports required	5 years



	Assessment Process	Pass / Fail	Attainment level	Period of validity
		unsuccessful in their application	Unconditional	
ERASMUS	Paper-based review	Yes give award, scheme operates a pass / fail system	One class of certificate (Charter Status)	Remainder of the Life Long Learning programme
EUA IEP	Paper-based review 2 site visits	Yes, award an IEP logo	One class of certificate Evaluation report and action plan	5 years
FFU	Paper-based review Institutional visit Interviews with staff and managers	Yes give award, scheme operates a pass / fail system	One class of certificate	3 years
GUEI	External peer review Site visit	Yes, inasmuch as the competition selects a small number of universities that are called Universities of Excellence	One category of award	Life of the programme (5 years)
IIP	Interview-based	Yes, gives award	One class of certificate Can be tackled in blocks for larger organisations	3 years
REF	Paper-based peer review	No, the assessment scheme does not operate a pass / fail system	HR aspects contribute to a departmental score for 'research environment.' Scored on a 5-point scale Environment score determines future institutional income (15% of weighting overall)	The next REF (c 5 years)
TEQA	Paper-based review	Yes, the system operates a pass/fail arrangement with renewal or non-renewal	One class of certificate (Special honorary award for institutions that achieve 5 or more consecutive renewals)	3 years

Figure 7 – Data collection strategies used by existing schemes

	Reporting	Who tests	Information	Types of Data
HRS4R	Institutional gap analysis Institutional HR strategy Institutional HR action plan and progress reports	Self-assessment 2 years after entering the process External experts after 4 years and every 4-years thereafter	Financial, management, staffing information	Narrative statement supported by quantitative and qualitative data Policies and other documents
Athena Swan	Departmental or institutional self-assessment form and action plan	Certification body convenes independent panels from database of panellists (open calls) Panel of 5 people including chair, plus moderator and	Financial, management, staffing information Other ad hoc material 6 principles, 8 criteria	Narrative statement supported by quantitative and qualitative data Policies and other documents
EQUIS	Departmental / School self-assessment form	International peers	Financial, management, staffing information Focus on quality, internationalisation and student experience	Narrative statement supported by quantitative and qualitative data Policies and other documents

	Reporting	Who tests	Information	Types of Data
ERASMUS	Institutional self-assessment form	Panel of EC and Executive Agency officials	Financial, management, staffing information	Quantitative and qualitative data Policies and other documents Narrative statement
EUA IEP	Institutions host visits Prepare documentary evidence Complete institutional self assessment form	An evaluation panel of university rectors / vice-rectors	Four general headline questions (e.g. what, why, how, how improving)	Narrative statement Institutions decide how to answer and what data / evidence / metrics to provide
FFU	Institutions host visit Prepare documentary evidence	Various contractors approved by certification body	Financial, management, staffing information	Overtly qualitative process, which can nonetheless draw on data covering 8 categories and 140 measures
GUEI	Institutions submit a future concepts strategy to advance international research standing Host visits of peers	Panel of domain experts	Financial, management, staffing information	Quantitative and qualitative data Policies and other documents Narrative statement
IIP	Planning meeting On site assessment Assessment report Development recommendations Annual visit to support continuous improvement	9 nationally accredited IIP centres (certifiers) A national body, publicly funded, business led, maintains the standard and oversees its implementation	3 core principles and 10 broad outcome indicators Each indicator is linked with 15-30 specific types of evidence	Review prepares assessment report, referring to quantitative and qualitative data where helpful as well as any specific policies and other documents of relevance
REF	Departmental self-assessment form	Panel of domain experts	Financial, management, staffing information	Narrative statement
TEQA	Institutional self-assessment	Independent jury	Financial, management, staffing information	Quantitative and qualitative data Policies and other documents Narrative statement

Figure 8, Figure 9 present extracts from two reference schemes that show the kinds of assessment framework and tests in use. Figure 10 presents an extract from the University of Louvain’s HR strategy for researchers (2011-2014), showing how the university is responding to the HRS4R principles around professional practice.

Figure 8 – Extracts from the Athena SWAN application form⁴

<p>3. Description of the institution – maximum 1000 words</p> <p>Provide a summary of your institution, including information such as whether it is research or teaching focussed, the number of students and staff (academic and support staff separately), association with university mission groups (e.g. 1994 group, Russell Group, Million+), the size of the SET departments and any other relevant contextual information such as recent restructuring.</p> <p>Provide data and a short analysis for at least the last three years (including clearly labelled graphical illustrations where possible) on the Female:male ratio of FTE academic staff and research staff– researcher, lecturer, senior lecturer, reader, professor (or equivalent) – across the whole institution and in SET departments, commenting on changes and progress made against the original action plan and Bronze university application.</p> <p>5. Career development</p>
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⁴ This material is taken directly from the Athena SWAN bronze award form, which is available online at www.athenaswan.org.uk



(i)	Comment on the effectiveness of policies and activities in your institution that are supportive to women’s career development in your SET departments.
a)	Researcher career support and training – describe any additional support provided for researchers at the early stages of their careers, such as networks and training, staff appraisal scheme, and whether the institution is signed up to the Concordat.
b)	Mentoring and networking – describe any mentoring programmes, including any SET-specific mentoring programmes, and opportunities for networking.
(ii)	Comment on the effectiveness of activities in your institution that raise the profile of women in SET generally and also help female staff to raise their own profile such as:
a)	Conferences, seminars, lectures, exhibitions and other events.
b)	Providing spokeswomen for internal and external media opportunities.
c)	Nominations to public bodies, professional bodies and for external prizes.

Figure 9 – Standard Number 8 (of 10) from the Investors in People (IIP) framework⁵

Standard Number 8	LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT People learn and develop effectively		
	Evidence Requirements		
	Top managers	Managers (includes top managers)	People (includes top managers and managers)
THE STANDARD		1. Managers can describe how they make sure people’s learning and development needs are met	2. People can describe how their learning and development needs have been met, what they have learnt and how they have applied this in their role. 3. People who are new to the organisation, and those new to a role, can describe how their induction has helped them to perform effectively
YOUR CHOICE	4. Top managers make sure the organisation makes effective use of internal and external resources for learning and development. 5. Top managers can describe how the organisation is flexible in the way it develops people, using innovative and cost-effective solutions that meet learning and development needs. 6. Top managers can describe how they have created a culture where all learning is valued. 7. Top managers can describe how they make sure mentoring opportunities are available.	8. Managers can describe how they make sure knowledge and learning is shared across the organisation. 9. Managers can describe how they provide learning and development opportunities for people to achieve their full potential for mutual benefit. 10. Managers can describe how they recognise and celebrate learning and development achievements. 11. Managers can describe how they make sure learning and development is an everyday activity. 12. Managers can describe how they support people in their personal development activities and encourage them to broaden their knowledge and skills through learning.	13. People can confirm that knowledge and learning is shared across the organisation. 14. People can describe how they are encouraged to try new approaches and learn from their efforts, mistakes and successes. 15. People can confirm that they are motivated to learn and enjoy putting their learning into practice. 16. People can confirm that they are well supported after learning and development activities, and have clear objectives for putting the new skills and knowledge into practice. 17. People can describe how learning and development achievements are recognised and celebrated. 18. People can confirm that learning and development is an everyday activity. 19. People can describe how they are supported in their personal development activities. 20. People confirm that mentoring opportunities are available.

⁵ This material is taken directly from IIP assessment framework, www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/Facts/Framework/



Do: Take action to improve performance

Figure 10 – Extract from the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL), Human Resources Strategy for Researchers 2011-2014

Dimension 1 (of the HRS4R): Ethical and professional aspects			
At the UCL, whether in terms of academic and research freedom, of ethics or of professional responsibility, the current principles and practices conform to those outlined in the 'Charter' and in the 'Code'. The existing rules and procedures provide researchers with a high-quality framework for their research. The necessary structures and instruments are in place for all researchers, allowing them to manage all aspects related to intellectual property, to respect financing methods, to the dissemination and exploitation of their results, etc. However, it would be desirable to give stronger visibility to the Research Ethics Committee (Commission de déontologie de la recherche) and to expand local initiatives dealing with the 'Guide to Good Practice for Researchers' to the entire university.			
Objective: Increasing the visibility of existing mechanisms related to ethics and code of practice			
To this end, UCL will carry out the following actions			
Objective	Action	Who	When
1. Inform all its researchers about currently existing best practices and promote their adoption by the largest possible number.	Implement widespread use of the 'Guide to Good Practice' for researchers	HR Department / Faculties	Continuously
	Organisation of regular workshops for exchange of good practice	HR Department	Continuously
2. Define and, wherever necessary, expand the field of action of the Code of Practice Committee; especially in its role of co-ordinating with local committees	Revision of the Internal Regulations (ROI) and definition of the scope of the commission + coordination with local commissions	Ethics Commission + Staff Office of the Rector	To be Finished by end 2012
3. Establish a process allowing regular dissemination of information regarding the mechanisms and the tools available to researchers	Definition and implementation of a communications plan aimed at informing each researcher	Communication Department + Research Administration	Start in 2013 then Yearly

3.3.1 Working from first principles

Given the limited overlap between existing schemes and the 40 dimensions of the Charter and Code, we elected to mock up several assessment criteria, from first principles, as a means by which to illustrate the process by which one might design a more complete set of assessment criteria. It was however beyond the scope of the current exercise to make such a fundamental review for all 40 of the C&C principles. In modelling the assessment criteria, we have taken on board several principles that are evident in the existing schemes:

- Accept the overarching definition of the HR principle set out in the Charter and Code
- Conceive of criteria that would encompass inputs, outputs and outcomes
- Assume the deployment of both objective and subjective data
- Assume implementation by institutions of different types in different systems / settings and with differing levels of performance

With those points in mind, Figure 11, Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14 develop some preliminary ideas for four of the HRS4R principles, to provide an indication of the kinds of assessment framework and dimensions one might consider using. These have not been validated by any research organisations and are presented here simply as an indication of what might be done. This kind of provisional treatment may also provide the basis for more formal consultation with research organisations and researchers. What have not sought to outline the spectrum of possible performance levels, from stronger to weaker, believing that is something that would need to be done empirically and possibly relying on expert panels in order to accommodate any national or structural differences (externalities) among groups of employers. That kind of calibration is already done in several existing certification systems, so it ought to be possible here. Notwithstanding those remarks, the HRS4R principles embody current thinking on what constitutes good practice, and the unpacking of those



ideas in terms of policies, behaviour and outcomes ought to provide a robust platform for the independent expert reviewers.

Figure 11 – Mock up of possible tests for Ethical Principles (HRS4R Principle number 2)

<p>2. Ethical principles</p> <p>Researchers should adhere to the recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their discipline(s) as well as to ethical standards as documented in the different national, sectoral or institutional Codes of Ethics.</p>
<p>Policy</p> <p>The institution has a published ethics policy</p> <p>General obligations set out in staff terms and conditions</p> <p>Staff handbook includes ethics code of practice with accompanying documentation detailing applicable legislation, institutional procedures, oversight and complaints procedures</p>
<p>Oversight</p> <p>A research governance committee has responsibility for overseeing research ethics and conduct in general, with a subsidiary structure of ethical review committees</p> <p>Committee has an independent chair and other lay members and reports annually or as necessary to the university council</p>
<p>Outputs</p> <p>Staff records / HR system shows that all research-active staff have been on an appropriate ethics course within the last three years or otherwise demonstrated their knowledge</p> <p>Staff satisfaction survey confirms that the majority of staff believe the research-active staff always observe the fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their discipline, in line with professional and other codes of practice and legislation</p> <p>All complaints / allegations of misconduct are dealt with promptly and fairly, and decisions / actions recorded centrally for monitoring and archival purposes</p>
<p>Outcomes</p> <p>The number of ethics related complaints or challenges (per researcher FTE) is within +/-10% of the norm for the sector overall</p> <p>The institution has passed all independent audits made by regulators in the previous three years</p>

Figure 12 – Mock up of possible tests for Public Engagement (HRS4R Principle number 9)

<p>9. Public engagement</p> <p>Researchers should ensure that their research activities are made known to society at large in such a way that they can be understood by non-specialists, thereby improving the public's understanding of science. Direct engagement with the public will help researchers to better understand public interest in priorities for science and technology and also the public's concerns.</p>
<p>Policy and inputs</p> <p>Duty: Is public engagement defined as a specific duty within a researcher's job description and or contract of employment</p> <p>Induction: Is public engagement a component of the induction training programme for new research or academic appointments?</p> <p>Training: Are academic staff required to attend a public engagement training course or otherwise demonstrate their awareness and command of the issue</p> <p>Appraisal: Are academic staff required to report back on their public engagement activities and achievements within the context of their annual appraisal process</p> <p>Does the employer support staff with the promotion of forthcoming public events, and maintain a register of past events</p>
<p>Outputs</p> <p>The % of all research staff that state their research focus is shaped in part through public engagement around specific study designs and results</p> <p>The % of all research staff that state their current research engages various public constituencies directly</p> <p>What the public take away from the interaction / experience (e.g. influence, understanding, reassurance, etc)</p>
<p>Outcomes</p> <p>The public is involved directly in a substantial proportion of all of the institutions research studies</p> <p>The institutions governing bodies all have lay members</p>

Figure 13 – Mock up of possible tests for Recruitment (HRS4R Principle number 13)

<p>13. Recruitment (Code)</p>



Employers and/or funders should establish recruitment procedures which are open, efficient, transparent, supportive and internationally comparable, as well as tailored to the type of positions advertised. Advertisements should give a broad description of knowledge and competencies required, and should not be so specialised as to discourage suitable applicants. Employers should include a description of the working conditions and entitlements, including career development prospects. Moreover, the time allowed between the advertisement of the vacancy or the call for applications and the deadline for reply should be realistic.
<p>Policy</p> <p>The institution has a published HR policy, which includes a section on recruitment policy and commits the employer to open, transparent and merit based recruitment (OTM recruitment)</p> <p>The institution has standard operating procedures and tools that assume / support OTM recruitment</p> <p>The standard employment contracts explain duties / requirements of staff as regards their likely involvement in appointment processes</p> <p>The staff handbook includes a section on recruitment, which describes the process in general for the institution (and department) and any requirements as regards other members of staff around making requests for new posts, making nominations for new appointments or their involvement in selection committees</p>
<p>Oversight</p> <p>A Staff Committee has responsibility for overseeing recruitment policy and activities in general</p> <p>Committee has an independent chair and other lay members and reports annually or as necessary to the university council</p>
<p>Outputs</p> <p>Staff records / HR system shows that all new appointments in the past year / three years were made through an OTM recruitment procedure or were otherwise approved formally for direct appointment</p> <p>Staff satisfaction survey confirms that the majority of staff believe new appointments are made in line with OTM recruitment principles</p> <p>All complaints / allegations of unfair treatment are dealt with promptly and fairly, and decisions / actions recorded centrally for monitoring and archival purposes</p>
<p>Outcomes</p> <p>The number of externally appointed staff (per researcher FTE) is within +/-10% of the norm for the sector overall</p>

Figure 14 – Mock up of possible tests for Staff Complaints procedures (HRS4R Principle number 34)

<p>34. Complaints/ appeals</p> <p>Employers and/or funders of researchers should establish, in compliance with national rules and regulations, appropriate procedures, possibly in the form of an impartial (ombudsman-type) person to deal with complaints/appeals of researchers, including those concerning conflicts between supervisor(s) and early-stage researchers.</p>
<p>Policy</p> <p>The institution has a published complaints policy, which includes a section specifically for staff and is designed to allow academics and other staff to obtain confidential and informal assistance in resolving work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, with the aim of promoting fair and equitable treatment within the institution and improving the overall quality of the working environment</p> <p>The complaints policy encompasses third parties who may have a need to register a complaint about some aspect of the institution's research activities (e.g. an allegation of ethical misconduct or a complaint by an unsuccessful job applicant about unfair treatment)</p> <p>The institution has standard operating procedures and tools that document how this procedure should work – and be escalated – for both the complainant and the employer</p> <p>The standard employment contract refers to these basic procedures and cross-references the relevant people and SOPs to use in the event of a problem</p> <p>The staff handbook includes a section on complaints, which describes the process in general for the institution</p>
<p>Oversight</p> <p>A Staff Committee has responsibility for overseeing complaints</p> <p>Committee has an independent chair and other lay members and reports annually or as necessary to the university council</p>
<p>Outputs</p> <p>All complaints / allegations are dealt with promptly and fairly, and decisions / actions recorded centrally for monitoring and archival purposes</p>
<p>Outcomes</p>



The number of staff complaints (per researcher FTE) is within +/-10% of the norm for the sector overall

3.4 The basis of assessment for certification

As a point of principle, we assume data collection should be as light touch as possible, minimising the burden on institutions by linking the assessment requirements with other management information systems. This is good practice wherever one looks, however, it is critical to the success of any proposed new information systems where participation is voluntary and the resultant benefits may take several years to reveal themselves. It is doubly important where existing schemes may overlap with the proposed new scheme.

In some cases, the performance measures will use existing data, and will not require any additional data to be collected or gathered from more places and more frequently. It is likely however that even standard data will need to be presented in a non-standard report, or at least a non-standard report for a majority of institutions. For example, with the issue of gender balance (No. 27 of 40 within the HRS4R principles), existing staffing statistics might be compiled in such a way as to present a table of new performance indicators showing the gender balance at all staff levels. That might be done for research, professional and other staff, covering all forms of contract. The statistics might also be presented for the current and previous years alongside a figure for the change in the balance over the previous 3 years. These ratios could be based on the proportion of all research-active staff at a given grade that are women, calculated based on full-time equivalents rather than headcount and including permanent and contract staff. A similar approach could be envisaged for recruitment, looking at the gender balance of selection committees. This is an aspect that may be less well documented presently in many institutions, and as such would require additional development / investment in data collection by institutions.

In the fullness of time, perhaps in a second-generation certification scheme, using the longish list of gender balance indicators may reveal one or two metrics that are particularly powerful and the reporting process could be rationalised (fewer KPIs). Having simplified things in one direction, that would leave space to strengthen it in another, through for example the indexing of the narrower set of gender balance KPIs against the average for the university and or institute sector, for the given country and for the EU.

The evidence base does not have to be entirely quantitative of course, and so for example, institutional staff and student satisfaction surveys can be used to demonstrate progress and or performance on a range of HR dimensions from career development (No. 28) to relationships with supervisors (No. 36). Done well, staff surveys provide a powerful tool, delivering semi-quantitative, subjective data on precisely the issue of interest. They can be highly relevant in a way that standard reports or national statistics may not be. However they are not free: we presume most smaller employers make do with national, sample based surveys or simply do without.

While we may need to be content with using existing input and output statistics as the basis for the assessment criteria within any early certification scheme, one should not lose sight of the overall objective: which is changed behaviour and improved outcomes. That may be greater mobility, or a reduction in attrition and losses of people to other sectors or a reduction in complaints or ethical challenges. Other types of data will be needed too, with the most straightforward (least intrusive) being the employer's existing documents: its strategies and policies on the one hand and standard operating procedures on the other. We understand that the HRS4R external peer review process will make extensive use of this kind of documentary evidence.

Given the feedback from our interviews and consultation, we have assumed that there is a need for the certification system to tread lightly, for its data collection requirements to be a model of economy and flexibility. Using what you have doesn't make for the most robust assessment process, however, but the research community has a well-developed and widely-regarded solution for dealing with partial, variable and uncertain data: peer review. Groups of people can generally make good, safe judgements based on really quite messy and variable evidence. Ultimately, however, there will be information gaps



that even a peer review process will not be able to cope with in any robust sense, and the certification system will need to confront this and ensure people understand that there will be a requirement for a certain amount of additional data collection. The recent review of the Athena Swan Charter found that the single biggest for most institutions had been gathering the data for their submission, both in terms of its relevance and granularity and ensuring it had the necessary time series.⁶

From this perspective, the data collection strategy reinforces the idea of a distributed certification system and centralised accreditation to strike a balance between local sensitivities and general principles and standards. This is not peer review in the sense of a scientific review, but rather a bringing together of people with different and relevant experiences and expertise to individually and then collectively judge the evidence that has been assembled. Those experts may include senior scientists, but they must also include senior HR specialists and senior officers of universities and research institutes.

There may also need to be some hybridisation, mixing national experts with experts from the EU-level, with the latter having a very much more immediate and clearly defined view of the EU-defined criteria and indicators. There is also an issue about fairness and transparency. Any panel or college of experts will inevitably include strong personalities and defined opinions (its almost prerequisite) and as such the recruitment process, panel terms of reference and decision making criteria / process will need to be more rather than less transparent in order to minimise the risk of a challenge. This issue would become rather more urgent, should certification be linked to funding in some way.

⁶ Page 33 of the impact assessment discusses some of the key challenges faced by the Athena Swan awards process. Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science, Measuring success 2011, written by Sarah Hawkes, at the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU).

4. The architecture for certification and accreditation

4.1 The architecture of the certification structure

In this section of the report, we consider the advantages and disadvantages of several different options for the architecture of the proposed new certification system.

We developed a two by two matrix to help frame our options (Figure 15), and to test the strengths and weaknesses of these idealised architectures. The key parameters relate to the

- Centralised or distributed pan-EU architecture. Whether the certification system should be implemented by a single, EU body (centralised model) or a multiplicity of implementation bodies (distributed model) located throughout the EU at national / federal or state levels
- Single or multiple function operation. The degree to which the certification body or bodies should focus exclusively on the HR certification process or whether the implementation of the certification process could sit alongside other existing (or future) audit functions

Figure 15 – A two by two matrix of options for the certification system architecture

		Type of Structure	
		Centralised	Networked
Type of certification body	New	1	2
	Existing	3	4

Source: Technopolis

We have attempted to tease out the advantages and disadvantages for each of the resulting four options, and these are shown in Figure 16.

The options were also developed in part through consideration of the arrangements in use in various existing comparable schemes and have then been assessed based on our stakeholder interviews and consultation with the wider research community.

The feedback from our interviews and consultations was not clear-cut, with significant numbers of people voting for each of the four idealised options. This suggests that each of the four options has both advantages and disadvantages, and that the final judgement is finely balanced. It no doubt also reflects national context, however, we have not been able to cross-tabulate the feedback with any more formal taxonomy of national profiles. One can imagine however that certain member states will tend to favour more centralised approaches, where others will instinctively support a distributed system. Elsewhere, contributors located in countries that have been less closely involved with the HRS4R



process express a preference for a distributed approach that would be more readily adapted to national legislation and current performance levels. Contrarily, several other contributors suggested that a distributed approach would be very slow to launch, and that a flexible, EU process would be much more likely to move things forward.

Figure 16 – Advantages and disadvantages of four options for certification architecture

	Central certification body covering all EU	Distributed network of certification bodies
Wholly new body with single function	<p><u>Option 1 – Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency of approach across countries Less risk of bias Stronger incentives for improvement among employers Drive convergence in quality / practice Accelerated learning to support evolution of system design <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncertainty around authority / permission to create new structure Slow and costly to launch Costs likely to need to be borne mostly by EU A standardised pan-EU approach will be challenged by some or all member states A substantial proportion of all institutions may choose to ignore the scheme May struggle to cope with workload, without measures to smooth out peaks and troughs 	<p><u>Option 2 – Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process can be designed to cope with different legislative frameworks and institutional settings A more flexible design will be more attractive to member states Employers more likely to sign up Costs to EU would be lower Cope more easily with the workload overall <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less consistent approach may produce variable performance standards Less transparent for employees and less encouragement of free circulation of researchers Increased risk of accusation of bias in process Very slow to get off ground, with implementation moving forward at the speed of the slowest Costs for member states would be higher
Existing body with additional function	<p><u>Option 3 – Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency of approach across countries Less risk of bias Stronger incentives for improvement among employers Drive convergence in quality / practice Accelerated learning to support evolution of system design Faster start-up Easier management of workload <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs likely to need to be borne mostly by EU A standardised pan-EU approach will be challenged by some or all member states A substantial proportion of all institutions may choose to ignore the scheme Risk that existing functions / commitments would overrule new process, producing delays 	<p><u>Option 4 – Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process can be designed to cope with different legislative frameworks and institutional settings A more flexible design will be more attractive to member states Employers more likely to sign up Costs to EU would be lower Costs to member states would be lower as compared with a new body Existing bodies are available immediately, so faster launch Existing bodies would be able to launch the new processes quickly and more robustly Existing bodies could manage variability in workload more efficiently <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less consistent approach across borders may produce variable performance standards Less transparent Increased risk of accusation of bias in process Risk that existing functions / commitments would overrule new process, producing delays

The small number of ‘other’ options put forward involved either a ‘rejection’ of the whole idea of introducing a certification mechanism or a statement that ‘peer review’ is the established system for assessment within the research sector and should also be used to decide on the award of certificates. Indeed, one of Europe’s largest associations of scientific organisations wrote to us formally, stating: “the members of the Alliance believe that any certification mechanism has to be in the hands of the research sector. They therefore dismiss the idea of an external non-scientific body carrying out the evaluation.” The use of ‘peers’ for assessment within the existing HRS4R process was also cited as a reason for applying this type of assessment within the proposed new certification scheme.



Comments were received to support respondents' choices as to the form of certification system they would prefer, which can be summarised as follows:

- Those in favour of a single certification / QA body pointed to the increased consistency, unified approach, efficiency and speed of implementation that can be brought by operating through a single, dedicated organisation. However, a single body carries certain disadvantages, including the creation of a de-facto monopoly for the supplier, which may lead to increased costs and reduced ability to cope with peaks and troughs in workload. In addition, a single body is considered to be less able to cope with the peculiarities of the national contexts, which most respondents feel should be fully taken into account within any EU-wide certification process
- Those in favour of a new body or bodies highlight the 'clean start' that this would bring, avoiding problems associated with 'old' or 'embedded' working practices, and allowing the aims and principles of the certification scheme to be fully adopted by the new operator(s). The disadvantages of a new body or bodies include the additional costs of setting them up, their lack of any track record or competency in certification, and the risk that the scheme would not provide a large enough or sustainable 'market' for the organisation or organisations.

The lack of any strong consensus on this preferred certification option poses a potential problem for the next stage of the development process, however looking more broadly at the feedback there is a general plea for any new certification scheme to take full account of national context and complement existing initiatives. Given this argument, we consider a distributed system to be more suitable (Options 2 and 4) than a centralised model (Options 1 and 3). Looking at the strengths and weaknesses of Options 2 and 4, we judge Option 4 to be the best option, inasmuch as it will be most likely to secure early buy in from policy makers and employers, lowers costs to the EU and ought to be able to be implemented reasonably quickly and efficiently by commissioning the new function from existing service providers / audit agencies (public or private). On the downside, Option 4 will require very much greater care in order to promote consistency and minimise the risk of employers / policy people in one member state accusing other national systems of operating less exacting procedures (unfair) in the award of certificates. The EU could usefully be closely involved in the process of specifying and commissioning the new services from new or existing (national) operators, which would then be required to work according to agreed EU rules and principles. This would appear to be the most 'acceptable' way forward. Correspondingly, we believe that a central EU process would be marginally less welcome to the wider research community because of the practicalities of addressing national contexts and the likelihood of a very much slower roll out. That said, the table makes clear that the arguments remain finely balanced and the experience of running the forthcoming HRS4R peer review process may yet cause the balance of opinion to swing in favour of an EU system. For the remainder of this report however, we have assumed that Option 4 is the preferred option.

4.2 Accreditation of the certification body or bodies

In most certification systems, the certification bodies and their certification processes will be checked in turn by an accreditation body, at the point when they are first approved as certifiers or when there are major revisions to the certification system. It is typical for certifiers to be required to file annual reports detailing their activities in the period and with signed statements by their senior officers attesting to their compliance with the system requirements. Typically, the accreditation body will scrutinise every one of those self-assessment reports, requesting additional information or clarification as necessary, and looking more closely at a sample of the reports. In most systems, certifiers will be audited periodically too, whether routinely every two or three years or more unpredictably through a rolling programme of random visits by teams of experts organised by the accrediting body. The ERASMUS Charter is a good example of an HE award system with distributed national certification and centralised EU accreditation, and which follows a tiered approach to accreditation.

Our consultation asked the research community for their views about the most suitable arrangements for the accreditation of the certification bodies. The feedback was more clear-cut on this question as compared with the views about the certification bodies. A majority favour an EU solution, with the most popular choice, selected by 44% of respondents, for the accreditation to be carried out by the European Commission. A third of respondents do however prefer accreditation to be carried out by national bodies, such as representative organisations for RPOs or HE agencies / departments. A small



number of ‘other’ arrangements were put forward, however, few of these additional remarks referred to real alternatives. Most of this minority of respondents simply rejected the whole idea behind the scheme, others suggested it should be a peer-review based system. Several people did however suggest that this was a matter for their national ministries or agencies.

When asked to explain their choice, those recommending accreditation by the European Commission pointed to the additional weight that this would bring to the scheme or indicated that this would be the most appropriate choice given the Commission’s central role in devising and championing the scheme.

Those recommending accreditation by another EU body tended to suggest scientific bodies, like the European Research Council or the European Science Foundation as being the most suitable as they are closer to the scientific community and more distant from EU politics. Several respondents also mentioned that Euraxess might be a suitable vehicle for undertaking or coordinating the accreditation process, as they have a well-aligned mission and strong operational capabilities as well as being overseen by member state senior officials through the SGHRM. We also received suggestions that the European Universities Association (EUA) may be appropriate, as it is already active in this space through its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP).

Those recommending accreditation by national bodies suggested that national ministries, RPO representative organisations or existing national QA accreditation bodies could be handed responsibility. The arguments put forward in support of this approach echoed the sentiments expressed about the certification process, suggesting that national bodies would be better able to ensure that national context was taken into account. There is also expected to be less ‘reinvention of the wheel,’ by using existing actors at national level.

Overall, the study team take the view that the accreditation process should be organised at the EU level, with a single implementation body applying a consistent / pan-EU process to reinforce consistency across a distributed certification system. A distributed accreditation and certification system appears unnecessarily complex and would greatly increase the risk of fragmentation and inconsistency.

In the first instance, we concluded it would be best if the accreditation process was carried out by the Commission services (possibly with some additional capacity contracted in) in order to ensure the tests, criteria and assessment process are entirely robust and implemented fairly and consistently. The closer involvement of the Commission services – the progenitor and architect of the system – makes especial sense in the early phases – first and second generation – while lessons are learned and the system is developed and evolves to a reasonably level of maturity, at which point it can be contracted out to a European institution, intermediary or service company, possibly still part-financed by the Commission and the European research community, in a manner similar to CEN.

5. Practical implementation

5.1 Scenarios for setting up the certification and accreditation structure

The previous section has discussed several aspects about the implementation of the certification and accreditation structure, which has led us to conclude that

- A distributed approach is the best option for the certification system and that member states might reasonably be allowed to choose for themselves whether they assign responsibility to an existing public agency with an HR or QA remit or run a procurement exercise to identify the best service provider. Our advice to national authorities / ministries however would be to work closely with a single agency that has an existing audit capability and is well placed to ensure the system works from the outset when the service specification is new and inevitably underdeveloped. In the early period, there will need to be a higher level of trust in the service provider around learning, as well as delivery, in order to feel confident in capturing relevant feedback that can be shared with other national providers and the EU coordinators
- A centralised approach is best option for the accreditation structure, to provide the necessary coordination and consistency of approach to certification delivered through a distributed system.



We also concluded that the accreditation process ought to be delivered by the Commission Services in the first instance, to capitalise on its perceived independence and integrity while also making good use of the experience and expertise built up around the Charter and Code. We anticipate that this work may need to involve the support of one or other third parties, from the outset, to provide the necessary capacity. In the fullness of time, such a role could quite reasonably transfer to an executive agency or independent contractor

There is also a question about the best approach to rolling out the certification system across the EU, and to that end, we have conceived several implementation design parameters for the certification and accreditation structures together. Given these two elements must operate as an integrated system, we took the view that the development and testing of implementation options should be done jointly rather than separately. We have devised the following parameters:

- Comprehensive or partial geographical implementation: implement a certification system throughout the EU28 or within a sub-set of member states that choose to sign up to the system
- Cross-sectoral or targeted implementation: implement a certification system that would work across all public sector organisations that employ researchers (universities, research institutes, research councils, academies of science, etc) or focus on the one or two sectors that are most enthusiastic about the added value of such a scheme
- All aspects of HR management or a sub-set of HR management issues: implement a certification system that would test participating institutions on all aspects of HR management encompassed by the Charter and Code or implement a system based on that sub-set of HR management issues where a majority of employers believe they would derive most value and where those issues are within their gift
- Phased implementation or universal implementation at a single point in time: implement a system that is introduced on a comprehensive basis at a single point in time or follow a phased-approach implementing the system more narrowly in the first instance with the enthusiasts / early adopters and extending the system over one or two successive phases (geographically, sectorally, etc)

Working with these four design parameters, we developed two contrasting implementation scenarios, or idealised models, to draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the different options we foresee:

- Scenario 2 – Targeted phased implementation
 - Targeted inasmuch as it will focus on one sector rather than all sectors, perhaps universities rather than research institutes or research funders as there is already a substantial cohort involved with the HRS4R process with various national and pan-EU support groups and peer-learning mechanisms
 - Targeted inasmuch as it will address itself to a sub-set of (volunteer) EU member states and institutions (e.g. the member states where the existing HRS4R cohort is located)
 - Phased inasmuch as the new system will address itself to these voluntary / targeted audience in the first one or two years, and open up to universities in all member states in its second phase and all research employers in all member states in its third phase
- Scenario 2 – Universal implementation at a single point in time
 - Design a certification system that will cover all employers in all member states and will be implemented fully in its first incarnation, across the EU

Figure 17 – Advantages and disadvantages of the implementation scenarios

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Scenario 1 – Targeted phased implementation	A targeted approach would allow the EU to launch a certification system that links with and deepens the existing HRS4R process Focusing the new certification system on the HRS4R process would address a ready-made	A targeted approach may increase the variability in the approach to HR management between those employers and member states that participate in the early phase and the majority that do not, possibly worsening tensions between



	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<p>audience of employers (the HRS4R Cohort) and intermediaries, that are already committed to the principles of good practice in HR management and would be very much more likely to take-up the scheme than all other employers (on average)</p> <p>Capitalising on the gathering momentum and support networks of the HRS4R process would allow the EU to get a new system up and running very much more quickly and cheaply than a wholly new system</p> <p>Working through the existing HRS4R process would shorten feedback loops and accelerate learning and facilitate evolution of the system through its subsequent phases as it identifies empirically the common ground among varying views as to what constitutes good practice in HR management and the differing approaches to this seen in one member state or another</p> <p>A targeted approach would reduce risk of the launch being frustrated or hindered by various member states / institutions that are yet to be persuaded about the feasibility or added value of a pan-EU approach to HR</p>	<p>employers and possibly national research systems</p> <p>A targeted approach that works from the HRS4R scheme and focuses on HEIs may exclude some employers (e.g. in other sectors) that would wish to run through the certification process immediately, and frustrate their improvement ambitions</p> <p>There is a small risk that an early system design optimised around a collection of institutions and settings that are possibly too homogeneous, may lead to the inclusion of system parameters or principles that mean the system will struggle to adapt to work well with a more heterogeneous community in later phases</p> <p>The use of multiple, expanding phases run over an extended period of time may leave the new certification system vulnerable to changing political priorities and new initiatives</p>
Scenario 2 – universal implementation	<p>Universal implementation – done well – of the new certification system would accelerate the rate at which all researcher employers in all sectors and member states move to adopt international norms around good practice in HR management.</p> <p>A universal implementation – done well – should accelerate the rate at which Europe sees a closing of the gap between the better and less good performers, with convergence around those norms</p>	<p>Given the widely different HRM settings across sectors and member states, a comprehensive system design implemented all at once would be hugely demanding on the detailed design process and the roll out. The risk of categorical errors in the system design will be far greater than with a phased approach designed to evolve through empirical evidence and learning (heuristic)</p> <p>The scale of the implementation challenge may be so great as to produce a timetable measured in years rather than months (and with very high initial costs too), which may cause some existing advocates in policy circles or specific employers to decide to move forward with an alternative strategy in the interim or possibly even switch attention to other priorities</p> <p>The scale / scope may be so great as to increase the likelihood of major system problems, which may cause employers to leave or stay away and precipitate failure</p> <p>The universal system may need to adopt a different focus or subsidiary set of HR management principles in order for it to work at the EU level, which would generate complaints from the HRS4R cohort and possibly cause confusion / loss of momentum within the Cohort and or among those institutions considering joining the Cohort</p> <p>A universal system may need to adopt performance standards (thresholds) that fall somewhat below the existing requirements of many employers, thereby reducing rather than increasing the incentive for institutions to strive to improve performance</p>

On balance, based on our interviews and consultations, we judge the targeted, phased approach (Scenario 1) to be the preferred option. It has many positive attributes, and crucially far fewer weaknesses, than Scenario 2. Clearly, Scenario 2 done well would immediately encourage far more widespread improvement in HR management practice than the selective, phased approach, and would fit better with the concerns and ambitions of the European Commission (to expedite progress). However it is a very much more costly and uncertain strategy, and has several critical flaws that may be



sufficient to produce a legal objection by member states or an equally calamitous withdrawal of support for existing initiatives.

The two scenarios are conceptual devices, rather than concrete proposals for implementation, however, and one or both scenarios could very easily be recast in several details in order to produce hybrids that deliver a better solution in principle than either the two ‘extremes’ presented here. In practice, we favour an implementation strategy that is a variant of Scenario 1 and would comprise the following elements:

- Cover all four of the core HRS4R dimensions, and develop a small number of metrics / assessment criteria for each of the 40 principles
- Integrate the new scheme with the existing HRS4R process, adding a new level of testing based on more objective / structured tests of an institutions policies, practice and outcomes, and possibly substituting the current External Review process with this more robust appraisal process in the fullness of time
- Consider the possibility of using the External Review process that is just beginning to insist that participating institutions do a very much better job of filling in the original HRS4R templates, with a careful and complete presentation of applicable hard / soft law and institutional policies, proper baseline assessments (and statistics) describing current practice (behaviour / outcomes) and supporting the gap analysis with the HRS4R principles. Institutions may be more likely to comply with this request as they prepare for the final stage in the HRS4R process, and that data gathering would help them manage the process better going forward and would also provide a rather better reference point for considering issues of synergy and compatibility with national context
- Focus on promoting the new certification process to the existing HRS4R cohorts, requiring HEIs outside the current process that wish to go through the new certification to go through the earlier HRS4R steps, possibly fast-tracked / accelerated through the other HRS4R levels
- Use national agencies to work with the Commission Services to implement the certification process, based on a similar model of peer review being implemented for the current External Review process. Consider the merits of the approach being taken in the UK (to the External Review process), wherein a national coordination group (mirror group) is supporting institutions with the assessment process through the provision of ad hoc advice and simulated reviews
- Define a certification award that encompasses gradations of excellence, with the lowest level being an ‘improving’ award rather than a fail, and generating a commitment to support the institution in question with its action plan and continuous improvement journey. The EQUIS quality mark for business schools has an interesting approach here, whereby the best performers get the award unconditionally for five years while the schools that are generally good but with certain specific issues that need addressing, get a conditional award supported by annual monitoring
- Calibrate the assessment process through institutional visits by peer reviewers, with most if not all of the early adopters being visited and subsequently switching to a more paper-based approach with visits triggered by concerns revealed through the review process. Consider using the peers from the current External Review process as part of the new assessment panels in order to broaden the basis of comparison
- The Commission Services would publish the system principles and operational guidelines, including specifying the accreditation arrangements (e.g. audit criteria, review process and periodicity, compliance requirements and any sanctions or support, etc)

To manage the weakness or risks envisaged with Scenario 1, we recommend the Commission make a virtue out of the idea of a targeted approach and move forward with the development of a large-scale pilot exercise. That is to say, Phase 1 of a targeted, phased approach would be a pilot demonstration that would robustly test the certification system’s basic principles, processes and outcomes with the early cohorts, in order to determine how best to continue. The choice of design for subsequent phases would be a question to explore within and around the pilot.



6. Compatibility with EU and national legal frameworks

6.1 Competency of the European Union

The EU has the right to develop legislation in this area, in principle, although it has yet to do so in practice.⁷ With no precedent, however, the situation is not straightforward: HR management of researchers encompasses matters to do with both research and employment, and the EU has distinct competences in these two arenas.

The EU and Member States have *shared competence* in the field of research, technological development and space, according to Article 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). However, contrary to the general rule on shared competence, paragraph 3 of article 4 states that the exercise of the EU's competence in this area *does not limit the competence of the Member States*, which may take action on their own account, jointly or severally, regardless of whether the EU has acted in the same field. EU action should not act as a limit on Member State competence. In addition, the Union is committed to “strengthening its scientific and technological bases by achieving a European research area in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely (...)”. This is an overall objective of Article 179, which is relevant inasmuch as it foresees all RTD activities of the Union encouraging and supporting the aims of free circulation of researchers.

In practical terms, this version of ‘shared competence’ would appear to require very much closer collaboration between EU and national levels in order to arrive at a universally acceptable EU-level programme of activities to promote, in this case, the harmonisation of national policies on HRM across all EU member states.

The unevenness of engagement with the HRS4R process suggests that HR management procedures vary widely across EU MS (and employers), and while new cohorts are being added and the process is continuing to gather momentum, take-up is limited and suggests that the desired end game will not be achieved quickly with action only at the MS level. In that sense, there is a *prima facie* case (necessity) for further EU level action. The Charter and Code have had a positive impact already, with the adoption of these voluntary codes being followed up with national initiatives to support and monitor the move to more progressive HR management, among other things. In that sense, EU level actions hold out the promise of contributing to an improvement in the rate of change in this particular area.

Turning to the issue of employment, the EU has a somewhat different remit: Article 5 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) is more straightforward than Article 4 and states that the EU “shall take measures to ensure coordination of the employment policies of the Member States, in particular by defining guidelines for these policies.” In that sense, the EU is expected to devise legislation that will ensure MS policies are aligned with the overarching goals of free movement of workers within the EU, non-discrimination, improved working conditions and several other important features. As a result, the EU developed various employment-related directives, which a majority of EU-MS has transposed into national law. We know from our programme of interviews that EU legislation has led to quite profound changes in employment practice whether that is the equivalency of treatment of researchers appointed on fixed-term contracts or the provisions for parental leave.

For the most part, employment legislation is sector-neutral and the employers of researchers are required to observe laws on for example, equal pay or equal treatment of the self-employer, in much the same way as any other sector. Past EU legislation has focused on widespread and iniquitous employment practices that have disadvantaged or harmed entire social groups, and have improved employment for many tens of millions of people. It is not clear that legislation relating to the HR management of researchers (in PROs) would deliver sufficiently widespread or significant improvements to amount to a sufficient argument for action.

⁷ The principle of proportionality is defined in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, and refers to the mechanism by which EU and MS institutions determine the boundaries of their authority in respect to a specific aim.



On balance, while we consider there is a strong case for more determined EU action to promote the further take up of good practice in HR management, we see no reasonable prospect for moving forward with legislative proposals, under either Article 4 or Article 5, for the foreseeable future.

6.2 Compatibility with national legislative frameworks

The feasibility study struggled to test the compatibility of the proposed new certification scheme with national legislative frameworks, in any definitive sense at least. The general view among the academic community however is that there will be very many legal (and institutional) compatibility issues and that a performance-based system implemented through peer review is the pragmatic solution, and will avoid the challenge of prescribing specific standards that will work across the EU.

There is substantial hard and soft law governing national public research systems and these highly variable legislative frameworks will affect the scope of any pan-EU initiative that seeks to influence HR management practice through institution-level assessments. We know public research organisations have widely different levels of institutional autonomy (EUA report 2013) across the EU member states, and in several cases, key aspects of the HR function, as defined by the HRS4R are either wholly or partially outside the gift of the employer. Our interviews and consultation confirm this understanding and suggest that a generic, pan-EU certification system will inevitably run into difficulties as a result of national specificities. Contributors argued that those difficulties will be more extensive and more acute if the new certification system embodies a wide-ranging and closely prescribed set of tests.

We had hoped to provide an overview of the compatibility with national legislative frameworks, using the HRS4R institutional gap analyses to identify the existence of applicable legislation, and its implications for institutional behaviour on each of the 40 principles. In the event, having sampled the available institutional analyses (HRS4R strategies and action plans), we concluded they were too discursive and varied to support such an analysis and we had to put aside our ambition to develop a traffic light system to indicate varying degree of compatibility / obstacles with national legislation across the EU and across the four broad areas of HR management.

It is clear from the HRS4R process, and our consideration of existing international or cross-sectoral assessment schemes, that compatibility with national legislation is taken as axiomatic and tackled through the combination of performance-based objectives, rather than closely prescribed and specific standards, with peer review. Experts are selected in part because of their familiarity with national or sectoral particularities and specific legal requirements, and those panels are then able to exercise their collective judgement as regards the sufficiency or level of performance demonstrated based on scoring / debating the merits of each application and its supporting evidence. In most cases, we see that this judgement is made all the more robust by reviewers assessing multiple applications (calibration) rather than just one or a few and that those individual reviews are made in isolation first and then in plenary through a moderated process. Where there are concerns or unresolved differences of opinion, most of the existing schemes peer review procedures have the ability to ask applicants for further information, arrange exceptional visits or make conditional awards.

Many contributors were sceptical about the feasibility of developing a pan-EU system that would have very much added value, in terms of encouraging the great majority of employers to do better around researcher skills and careers. Several commentators foresee a risk that a EU-wide system would need to set performance standards at a very low level, which may weaken incentives for continuous improvement among the institutions already engaged with HRS4R and reduce the momentum that is being built up presently.

The HRS4R arrangements ensure compatibility with national legislation (and other framework conditions) by deploying broad principles, which institutions can respond to in line with their local and national requirements and where the peer review process is nationally calibrated. This means the scheme tests German universities on the same dimensions as Greek universities, however, the nature and intensity of the test is nationally determined in some degree.



7. Synergies with existing initiatives

7.1 Synergies with national and EU initiatives

We discussed synergies in an earlier section of this report, where we looked at series of existing national and EU assessment schemes and concluded there were few directly comparable national initiatives, which encompass the full extent of HR practice envisaged here. However we did identify three or four schemes that overlap in some degree and where it may be helpful to seek to ensure compatibility with a new certification scheme through specific empirical tests.

We have not been able to determine these points of overlap in any definitive sense, and will recommend that the issue of synergy should be retained as a key question in the next stage in the development of the proposed certification scheme. In essence, the detailed design of a forthcoming pilot should work very much more closely with the pilot institutions to find solutions that minimise any incompatibilities and maximise complementarities. This should also feature as one of the core evaluation questions for the pilot, and be part of the lessons learned, in order to feed that empirical experience into the design of the second-generation scheme.

- Define principles and assessment criteria that are not incompatible
- Define data requirements that will build on and extend existing monitoring and reporting systems
- Define an assessment process that complements rather than conflicts with existing national arrangements or institutional expectations

7.2 The likely level of acceptance

7.2.1 Likely level of take-up of the proposed new scheme

The consultation found widespread support for the further promotion of good practice in HR management at the European level, with a majority (56%) of respondents in favour of the introduction of a new certification scheme. The level of acceptance was lower among research organisations (46%), the primary target, with around one quarter unsure about the idea. We take this as a strongly positive response, given the limited information provided about the possible shape of a new scheme.

The likely level of take-up of the proposed new scheme is hard to determine precisely, however, and contingent on several factors, including the basic design and its compatibility with other existing measures and the extent to which it is mandated or voluntary.

We know from past experience that take-up is likely to be gradual, where it is based on a voluntary approach (rather than legislative). Since its adoption in 2005, the Commission has promoted the Charter & Code through a multitude of activities including various high-level conferences and workshops. As at 2013, around 450 organisations representing more than 1200 individual institutions from across 35 Member States and Associated Countries have endorsed the Charter & Code principles by sending a written statement to the European Commission, which is then published on the EURAXESS website. The take-up of the HRS4R process is arguably the best point of reference by which to judge likely take-up of the proposed new scheme, the experience around which amounts to a slow and rather uneven start from its launch in 2008 that is still gathering momentum in policy circles and employers several years after its launch. We believe its growing success reflects the Commission's continuing commitment to the process, and the political support of the senior officials within the SGHRM, but also to the increasing amount of positive feedback arising from the cohort and indeed the various national agencies and representative bodies that are providing the platform for sharing experiences and general promotion. The Athena Swan Charter reveals a similar story, originally launched in 2005, awareness of what is an entirely voluntary process has built steadily over the intervening eight years and there are currently around 260 award-holding departments and



institutions across the UK university system, which is around 45% of the total population of university departments in the STEM disciplines nationally.

The protracted rates of diffusion of these new codes and voluntary principles has quite reasonably caused the European Commission to reflect upon the good sense of adopting a legislative approach for the new certification system, in order to accelerate the rate at which good practice in HR management becomes the norm for all public research organisations. Crucially, a legal approach holds out the promise of overcoming the Achilles Heel of any de facto standard, which is that certain segments of a given community will ignore the groundswell of change and will be left behind. In a private market, this may result in the late adopters or non-adopters being marginalised or even replaced by the more progressive businesses. The potential loss of service or unevenness in the quality of provision is generally considered to be unacceptable in areas like higher education and science, which exhibit strong public good qualities and where markets work only imperfectly. Notwithstanding these concerns about slow and uneven take up, the consultation and interviews make clear there would be strong resistance to a legislative approach here and the as yet uncertain benefits of such an approach (ex ante) mean it is unlikely to pass the required proportionality and subsidiarity tests.

In short, this will need to be a voluntary scheme, at least in its early generations, and take-up will be best facilitated by a focus on delivering value to early adopters and active promotion of the benefits of the scheme to wider audiences. Linking the new scheme to the HRS4R process is the single most powerful tactic to adopt, in order to capture the attention of the community and build a small core of demand amongst the more active and ambitious employers.

The consultation suggests the HRS4R process is well-regarded and considered to be of very real importance to research funders and research organisations across the EU. No one is arguing that a different solution or implementation strategy would have made a material difference to the speed at which the scheme was adopted. These are important issues that are more or less of a priority for action in various member states, with the geographical uneven rate of progress reflecting national context to some degree and the challenge of institutional reform more generally with many universities and research institutes struggling with a finite management capacity and very many competing priorities. As such, harmonising their approach to the management of academic / research staff with the best performers in Europe is desirable but not critical in the short term.

In addition to polling people's opinions and support for efforts to improve in HR management in general, the consultation asked contributors explicitly whether they would expect to take-up a new certification scheme. RPOs, RFOs, their representatives and individual researchers were asked whether they expected their organisation (or some of their member organisations in the case of representative bodies) to seek certification through the new scheme, once it has been set up. Just more than half of the respondents (52%) said yes, 10% said no and the remainder (38%) were unsure at this time. This is a fairly high affirmative response, driven in large part by the large number of HRS4R participants in the responding group. It should not be expected that this proportion of RPOs and RFOs within the general population would seek certification under the new scheme.

Among existing participants in the HRS4R initiative, 65% indicated that they expect to seek certification under the new scheme, 29% are unsure and 6% do not expect to participate. Among the organisations that are not currently participating, 41% expect to seek certification, 41% are unsure, and 18% do not expect to participate.

Those organisations that do not expect to participate in the new scheme were asked to give the reasons why not. The responses received suggested that the main factors that would prevent participation are the anticipated level of bureaucracy, a lack of time and resources and a rejection of the expected 'one size fits all' approach. Several contributors stated that they had said no in part because of the absence of any concrete information about the proposed new scheme, which is possible the same reason that 40% of respondents were 'unsure' whether their institution would take-up such a scheme or not.

A phased-approach, extending the HRS4R process, will allow lessons-learned and benefits realised by early adopters to shape successive generations of the scheme in order to improve the scheme's added value and compatibility while gradually building an evidence base that may be used to promote the scheme more generally.



7.2.2 Key features that would need to be in place to ensure take-up

All respondents groups were asked about the key features of the proposed HR certification mechanism that would need to be in place in order to make it more attractive to RPOs and RFOs.

The majority of respondents think that the benefits of its adoption should be visible and clear to the organisations, in order to create commitment. This is guaranteed by transparency of the system, wide adoption, credibility and recognition by the national government and by the RFOs. Ideally the certification mechanism should involve collaboration between national research ministries and their communities, with appropriate support structures in place in order to encourage and facilitate take-up. Commitment can also be created by setting up some formal incentives, with a minority of the respondents suggesting that use of the certification system would need to be linked with research funding mechanisms if it is to achieve widespread take-up.

Another feature that was often cited as critical for take-up is that the new scheme is linked with existing initiatives for HRM in the research sector, and in particular that it builds upon the HRS4R. The certification mechanism should be a further step in the same direction, or part of the same process, rather than a parallel initiative.

With regards to the detailed design, several respondents argued that users should have a say in defining the features of the system. The mechanism should also consider users' heterogeneity, in terms of size of RPOs, existing state of HRM practices and research sector. There also seems to be fairly widespread support for different "levels of certification", depending on their level of compliance with the standards / performance benchmarks.

Other key requirements are that the mechanism is easy to use and with a low bureaucratic / administrative burden in terms of time and resources needed to implement it. Respondents suggest that it would be useful to have some support from the EC and/or from national ministries or funding bodies, both financial and in terms of training and consultancy.

A flexible and bottom-up approach should ensure compatibility with national arrangements automatically, albeit certain tensions and challenges will arise on the ground. On the assumption it can be made to work and offers a suitable platform for a higher-level certification process, the flexible strategy will inevitably reduce the extent to which the resulting system might be thought of as an objective and universal standard of excellence in HR management. It may be possible to address this challenge, however, through the combination of several tactical design features

- The definition of a minimum performance standard for each of the 40 HRM dimensions, which is based on the median performance of the whole population (the current HRS4R cohorts working their way through the External Review process during the course of 2014) or possibly set at a lower level still (e.g. based on the average for the third quartile) to ensure the great majority will 'pass' even where there is an evaluation report setting out desirable improvement actions. The threshold can be increased with each major cycle, to ensure organisations stretch themselves
- The definition of gradations of performance, for example, Bronze, Silver, Gold, with Bronze being tied to the minimum performance. These three titles may be problematic inasmuch as the rectors, vice-chancellors and principals of the existing HRS4R acknowledged institutions will almost certainly not accept the possibility that their good practice in HR management could be graded bronze (3rd class) in a more objective and stringent test. Some other nomenclature may need to be devised, wherein the individual names are chosen for their intrinsic neutrality (e.g. major rivers: Danube, Rhine, Seine) or more prosaically, unconditional, conditional, improving and no certificate awarded
- The ability for an entire group of employers to elect to miss out or disregard one or more of the 40 HRM performance dimensions (up to a maximum of say 10 dimensions) on the grounds of a documented / approved national exception
- The use of a composite indicator, whereby the award of a performance grade would be based on performance across all HRM dimensions, perhaps with some further limitations (e.g. an award will only be made where an institution has been rated as performing at or above the minimum performance standard on at 80% of all of the performance dimensions assessed) and possibly differential weightings to reflect the community's wider judgement on the relative importance of



each of the different performance criteria (e.g. employers may argue they have very much less control over working conditions than they do with education and training and may as a result argue for the latter to be double weighted as compared with the former)

- Accept that this is an evolutionary process and that the early version of the system may need to be less extensive in its coverage than a second or third generation system, perhaps focusing in the first instance on three out of the four broad HRM areas and 25-30 of the 40 HRM dimensions

7.3 Certification and future EU research funding

Funding conditionality is a frequently discussed topic and is widely seen in some quarters as a way to quickly bring about widespread behavioural change across the public research community and thereby improve the quality and uniformity of the resultant activities and outputs.

This logic is contested however and our consultation revealed widespread hostility towards the notion. Certification is already a challenging next step, and the suggestion that the outcome of that proposed new process might also be linked to EU funding was almost universally dismissed as both inappropriate (excellence should be the primary basis for the selective allocation of research funding, and not compliance with good practice in scientific administration) and unfair inasmuch as the current substantial performance differentials among employers are believed to reflect external factors to a very much greater extent than institutional behaviour. There is also concern that funding conditionality would favour the Anglo-Saxon model of autonomous and competing institutions, and inadvertently increase tension among universities and research institutes in various EU member states and possibly cause Europe to take a backward step in comparison with the ambitions of ERA.

One can appreciate the risks. The great majority of public research organisations is dependent upon a relatively small number of major sources of research income, and there are far fewer opportunities for public institutions to diversify within those major funding blocks than would be the case for many in the private sector. Consequently, those major funders have the power if not the authority to change the behaviour of grantholders and their employers in a quite dramatic fashion. Hence, legal mandates and constitutions invariably oblige research funders to take responsibility for the health of the research base they fund and that stewardship role generally reveals itself in a precautionary approach over introducing new system-wide rules, in order to minimise the risk of any unintended negative consequences. The gradual and often contested development of institutional responses to European governments' growing insistence on increasing the evident social and economic impact of public research is a case in point. Public procurement is far more atomistic and individual commissioners will experiment with new rules and requirements with more frequency, and many public bodies use standards / certification as a condition of funding for various purchases (e.g. ISO9000 or NAMAS) of technical or scientific services.⁸

Notwithstanding these cautionary remarks, there are existing HE certification schemes that make funding a condition of conformity with a specified standard. The ERASMUS University Charter is perhaps the best example of a EU scheme that requires HE institutions to demonstrate a minimum standard (as regards policies, procedures and practice around the support for international mobility of students and staff) in order to be awarded charter status and be allowed to bid into the forthcoming programme. The system is not applied at the level of individual programme or mobility proposals, and institutions may apply for charter status through any call and can reapply at the next call if they are unsuccessful; there is also support available to institutions to help them with the development of those systems and capacities. All institutions are required to apply for charter status with each multi-annual programme. ERASMUS has been operating for very many years and the performance requirements are reasonably clear-cut and relate back to the financial and administrative processes that almost any institutional audit would require. So, conditionality is arguably less demanding and less of a risk for institutions and crucially there is a general acceptance of the need to link educational provision with

⁸ A recent economic impact assessment carried out for the British government suggests that accreditation of various technical services is delivering substantial benefits to the national economy, on the order of £600M a year. The Economics of Accreditation (March 2013), by Marion Frenz and Ray Lambert, Birkbeck, University of London. Project funding by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Intellectual Property Office. The full report is available to download at www.ukas.com



these more formulaic tests of administrative capacity, where there is quite the opposite view among the academic community when it comes to the allocation of funding for research.

In another example, the UK National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) has stated that from 2017 it will begin to require applicants for funding to have obtained the Athena Swan Charter in order for their proposal to be considered. This example is instructive on two counts. First, the NIHR has come to this decision independently without any exhortations by national policy makers or by the Athena Swan Charter itself; no other UK research funders have yet indicated they will follow suit. Second, the NIHR has judged the Charter to be sufficiently established and sustainable to be suitable for use as a measure of good practice around gender balance, albeit it has then given notice of its intentions to the whole community several years ahead of the planned implementation date.

Based on this evidence and our reflections, we recommend the Commission does not seek to develop a certification system that is linked to EU research funding, as that will generate widespread opposition and may cause the whole project to fail. In the medium term, perhaps the ambition should be to develop a certification system that is sufficiently robust and well-regarded that it comes into more general use and may be adopted voluntarily and selectively by various funders and used to help reinforce positive behaviour. We can imagine a second or third generation system having a ‘package’ for research funders, which would help them to judge whether to make use of the certificate as a funding requirement and how to move forward with a safe / fair implementation of such an approach.

7.4 Our preferred option

The feasibility study has explored various system architectures and implementation strategies in order to come forward with a preferred option for moving forward, which is a pilot certification scheme that builds on the existing HRS4R External Review process and works with the existing cohorts. To recap on why we recommend this option, we have essentially considered a range of policy options, which begin with a baseline scenario (carry on with the current EU-level activities) and extend through to the idea of a pan-EU certification system anchored in EU legislation. Figure 18 presents four policy options from across this spectrum, along with a brief description of each and an overview of their respective strengths and weaknesses. Policy Option 3 (PO3) outlines the pilot certification scheme, which is our preferred option. In very simple terms, we conclude that PO1 (continue as we are) is unacceptable as it does not address the uneven implementation of C&C principles among employers and may frustrate rather than advance the political commitment to ERA. At the other end of the policy spectrum, a legally-based pan-EU certification system would be controversial and likely to be resisted widely by the community as being misdirected and unhelpful. Moreover, given the uncertainty as regards the extent of the benefits likely to follow implementation of a robust approach to HR management, it seems likely the research community and individual MS would be able to argue that a legislative approach is unwarranted and probably disproportionate.

PO2 and PO3 are both feasible and would provide a useful improvement over the current arrangements. Ultimately, we prefer PO3 because a pilot brings with it (i) an explicit commitment to developing a comprehensive system, subject to the lessons learned from the pilot, and an opportunity to engage the full ERA community in that learning exercise from the outset. PO2 by contrast, will be a rather more economical strengthening measure but with very much less political symbolism or community-wide spillovers.

Figure 18 – Competing policy options

Policy Option	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Option 1 Do not implement a EU HR Certification System	Under this scenario, the EU will continue with the current HRS4R process unchanged	Leaves the HRS4R initiative unchanged No additional costs for Commission or institutions No risk of confusion or disruption amongst the HRS4R	No additional impetus to accelerate the rate of improvement in HRM across institutions or MS Relies solely on the gathering momentum of the existing



		cohorts or wider ERA research base	HRS4R process Goes back on published commitments to strengthen EU-level action in this area
Option 2 Strengthen the current HRS4R External Review process	Under this scenario, the EU will continue with the HRS4R process but strengthen the External Review process. Institutions will submit self-assessment reports that cover every aspect of the Charter and Code, detailing policies and achievements, as well as development activities. The Peer Review panels will be invited to judge progress and performance across the full extent of the C&C principles, and not just those areas where institutions have identified a particular improvement need	An obvious refinement to the existing and well-regarded HRS4R External Review process Builds on existing commitment of the HRS4R cohorts Will raise the performance threshold of the External Review, and inject greater consistency into process Will require institutions to improve performance, across the spectrum of HR operations	Only addresses those institutions already inside the HRS4R process Provides no additional incentive to encourage those institutions outside the process to join the HRS4R initiative May risk widening the performance gap between those inside and those outside the current scheme
Option 3 Pilot a certification scheme with the HRS4R cohorts	Under this scenario, the Commission will launch a pilot certification scheme for the HRS4R cohorts, taking on board the more systematic application of the C&C's principles (Option 2) and complementing this with guidance on evidentiary requirements (metrics) and assessment criteria and aggregation. The pilot will make supplementary awards and would be carried out in full sight of the wider ERA community, with a view to moving to a much larger second phase within a period of 2-3 years	Builds on current HRS4R arrangements Builds on goodwill of existing HRS4R cohorts Provides a learning platform, to test the feasibility of working with the full range of C&C principles in different institutional settings and EU MS Provides a learning opportunity for the wider ERA community, and a marketing platform for the HRS4R process more generally, to widen participation	Does not address the full extent of the public research community in ERA Primary focus in the first phase will be the HRS4R cohort and not those employers outside the current process are either unaware of the initiative or sceptical about its relevance or value
Option 4 Implement a new pan-EU HR certification scheme	Under this scenario, the Commission will move forward with soft law (as a precursor to hard law) that will require employers across EU MS to participate in a certification process	Builds on current HRS4R arrangements Addresses all EU MS and all public researchers Will accelerate the rate of implementation of good practice in HRM across the EU	Slow, costly and politically challenging to implement an all encompassing certification system Widespread concern about feasibility of a pan-EU certification scheme covering all C&C principles May have a negative impact on commitment to and momentum within the current HRS4R process

7.5 Promotion of the certification mechanism

The study specification invited the review team to come forward with suggestions for the promotion of the proposed new certification scheme, however while we have developed a strong concept for a new scheme, our proposal is not yet at a stage of development suitable for a conventional marketing and communication campaign. Rather we suggest a stepwise approach that will begin with fine-tuning the outline proposal in discussion with the Commission Services and members of the SGHRM before moving on to share the ideas with a selection of stakeholders and experts through a deliberative workshop and subsequently moving to a more wide-ranging consultation to build awareness among



employers and researchers across the EU while generating feedback on the detail design of the proposed scheme and also promoting further interest in the HRS4R process itself.

The current feasibility study will reach its conclusion following our presentation of the outline proposal to the Commission Services and the SGHRM. The suggestion to move forward with an expert workshop and stakeholder consultation are interim steps, which we believe should ultimately allow the Commission to launch a large-scale pilot to develop and test the detail design through a real process rather than the modelling we have done here.

Before discussing the pilot, it is perhaps helpful to outline our proposal, as the ideas have been presented in a somewhat piecemeal manner through each of the preceding sections of the report.

We recommend that the new certification mechanism is linked directly with the HRS4R process and would amount to a new level of attainment, which promises a more robust and fine-grained assessment of an institution's strengths and weaknesses. Success will result in the issuing of a European HRS4R certificate and evaluation report, which may be published by the institutions through their websites, social media and other communication channels as well as being available for ad hoc use in institutional submissions and proposals to research funders and other quality assurance organisations (supporting evidence). It would be all the more powerful if the external review were to produce an advisory note about things that the institution might usefully try to strengthen and whereby the scheme overall might provide mentorship, peer learning platforms and possibly even cost-shared competitive grants to launch / commission organisational development projects. In terms of the system architecture, as noted above, we recommend a distributed certification system implemented nationally by appropriate competent authorities. National assessment and certification should be anchored through a central, European accreditation system, which would be the guardian of the HRM principles, improving consistency across member states and generally overseeing compliance with the assessment framework and performance standards. The centralised accreditation body would also play a role in providing ongoing support to the national nodes and implementation process, through the development of tools, information days and other peer learning activities and possibly ad hoc advice and troubleshooting. There may also be merit in constructing panels of expert reviewers through EU calls for expressions of interests rather than national, and possibly linking back to the peer review database that has been constructed for the current External Review of the HRS4R cohorts.

In essence, we have in mind a pilot whereby the Commission will develop the HRS4R external review process into a more objective series of tests that would include a EU-wide minimum performance threshold. All of the early HRS4R cohorts would run through the external review process as defined today, with an expectation that a subset of the earliest adopters would go on to participate in a pilot exercise to define HRS4R V2.0. This would have the ambition of awarding a certificate to complement the Commission's acknowledgement, with its own name, HRM2016, for example, which would be a strap line or sub-title to the current HR Excellence Logo. The idea would be for the pilot to be run in such a way that it would go on to become 'the' HRS4R external review process and all of the remaining participating institutions would run through this more robust version of the process in line with their existing HRS4R planning cycle. The next round of 4-yearly reviews – renewals – would be awarded the title HTM2020, whether those reviews are carried out in 2019 or 2022. The award might be graded too, with an unconditional award for those institutions judged to be performing at or close to international best practice in a majority of areas. For those institutions that are judged to be performing at a high level in most aspects but with more work to do in selected areas, the award could be conditional with an annual update on progress with a view to conversion to unconditional. Those institutions judged to have substantial additional work to do, could be given a defined period of time (up to 2 years) in which to demonstrate improvements in specific areas or otherwise risk losing the HR Excellence logo they hold already. The system would need to set the bar for minimum acceptable performance at a reasonable level in the first iteration, however that performance threshold should be raised gradually through successive 4-yearly renewals.

From this perspective, one might envisage inviting members of the HRS4R Cohort to volunteer to participate in the pilot. We would also recommend the pilot focus on working with universities (rather than research councils or research institutes) in the first instance, in order to be confident in obtaining



a large enough number of volunteer institutions to encompass the diversity of institutional types and national settings. The sample frame may include some or all of the following aspects:

- A selection of universities of different sizes (larger and smaller)
- A selection of universities with different degrees of research intensity (more and less research intensive universities)
- A selection of universities with different approaches to HR management (more and less centralised / professionalised approach to HR management)
- A selection of universities from member states with different degrees of institutional autonomy (more or less autonomous)

In broad terms, we would suggest any pilot would need to include institutions from a minimum of five member states and preferably 10, to ensure a good mix of institutional and legal settings. And that the pilot should include a minimum of three institutions from each of those 10 member states and preferably five, with an upper limit of 10 institutions, to avoid one group of pilot institutions or member states being too prominent.

In other policy settings, pilots are quite ambitious in scope and rigorously monitored by operational researchers and other specialists, and are designed to test exhaustively the advantages and disadvantages of alternative architectures, financial strategies or operational models. In this case, there are arguably too many variants to test thoroughly and a singular design seems most appropriate. The one idea we do have relates to the HR dimensions in scope, and the possibility of one part of the pilot working with all four of the broad areas covered by the HRS4R process and a second group of pilot institutions working with the two or three areas judged to be more widely applicable across all institutions and member states. This kind of dual strategy would complicate the process considerably and add cost and time, and, so on balance, we prefer a singular or holistic pilot.

Pilots need to operate at scale and with sufficient diversity to be credible, however they also need to be tackled in a manner that is open and transparent and engages with the wider community. An exclusive and insular design will inevitably limit insight and learning and produce few spillovers among the wider community of European employers. Ideally, the pilot and the pilot institutions will be on show to some degree throughout the process, with open events (e.g. EU conferences) to promote and explain to the exercise to all employers.

These community events should be run at different stages across the lifecycle of the pilot, with an inception mid-term and final conference. They might usefully be tackled through both physical and online media, with plenary sessions available to watch online and breakout sessions run in person and virtually through webinars, to maximise audiences and minimise the costs of observing / contributing. The outreach programme should be designed as an integral part of the pilot, informing audiences on the one hand about progress, issues arising and challenges overcome, but also allowing the wider community to ask tough questions. There may need to be some ground rules, so that the conference programme / information exchanges are not paralysed by the many sceptical voices who may believe the pilot should not be running at all. Tough questions are necessary however and in many cases they may not be answerable from the podium and will need to be included within the questions and tests for the pilot, and so may need to be added to the brief of the people responsible for the monitoring and evaluation. The pilot will need to have a continuous evaluation in order for the EU to learn lessons and confidently and robustly determine what the subsequent roll-out phase should look like.

The outreach programme might also be linked with a parallel programme to support the pilot institutions specifically, through various group sessions and progress meetings as well as ad hoc bilateral support.

The pilot would also need to develop accompanying information and support services of one kind or another. Information packages, describing the pilot's objectives, listing its participants, detailing the certification and accreditation structures and processes and explaining how third parties may feed in comments or raise queries. The pilot should not pass up the opportunity to showcase successful outcomes, and this may entail the development of a portfolio of success stories or institutional presentations at other community events or high-level committee meetings. It could also include a



visits programme whereby pilot institutions might volunteer to host occasional visits (e.g. one or two a year) by groups of research leaders / HR professionals from non-pilot institutions, with the process coordinated and possibly partly financed by the EU.

We are not in a position to specify exactly what the pilot would look like, and so it is difficult to write about timeframes or estimate costs, however, the exercise would need to be tackled seriously and as such we imagine a two or three year term for the pilot overall (9-12 months for detailed planning, 12-18 months for implementation, 3-6 months for updating the design based on lessons learned) and a EU budget of €3M-€5M. There may be an equivalent cost for the participating institutions, looked at in the round, as they will need to work harder at data collection and preparation of supporting evidence (baselines, time series data, outcome data, etc) than has been the case up to now. The actual cost is contingent on the level of demand and the scope of the assessment. We would hope the Commission could generate support from at least 50 institutions in 10 member states, so the pilot can be run in anger. 100 institutions would be better (robust) but we judge that to be unlikely given the size of the cohorts approaching the External Review process, it would also make the pilot tougher to control and very much more costly. Based on these reflections, the pilot will need to be designed / planned in detail during the course of 2014, ideally, as the HRS4R external review process will have been in operation for several months and more substantive experience of that process would be hugely informative. The ambition would be to launch the pilot proper in 2015 with certificates being awarded from end 2015 early 2016.

If our recommendations are judged to be appropriate and affordable, the first next step will be to develop a more detailed specification for a pilot exercise. In particular, there will need to be further work to define the specific tests and assessment criteria that will be used, and how those tests can work with some minimum standard of performance. The next step would be to test the detail design through an expert workshop before taking the final proposal for a new scheme and the associated pilot exercise to the community for a more formal consultation, to generate awareness about the pilot, gather feedback on aspects of the detail design and invite expressions of interest to participate.



APPENDICES

8. Study terms of reference

8.1 Aims and objectives of the study

The Commission is investigating options for setting up a transparent, internationally recognised certification mechanism for good HR management in the European Research Area, which should be based on a set of clearly defined and broadly applicable assessment criteria that are linked to the key principles of the Charter & Code. The objective of this study is to support the Commission in this endeavour, and more specifically:

- To develop a certification process for good HR management, based on the concept of genuinely good HR management, and including the basis for assessment, criteria, and methodologies
- To design an architecture for the certification bodies and their accreditation
- To develop scenarios for setting up the certification and accreditation mechanisms, and options for the practical implementation of the new scheme
- To assess the feasibility of the initiative as a whole, taking into account existing mechanisms, legislation, and ongoing and planned initiatives at EU and national level

8.2 Tasks to be performed

The objectives are to be achieved through the completion of ten main tasks (and a series of sub-tasks under these) that were set out in the request for services, and which relate closely to the objectives set out above. These are as follows:

Task 1 – Preparation of an **inception report** and presentation to the advisory group

Task 2 – Development of the **certification process**. This task has five sub-elements:

- To define the concept of ‘good human resources management’
- Based on these definitions, provide a set of assessment criteria for the certification
- For each criteria, specify the basis for assessment for certification
- Develop a methodology for data collection and analysis
- Investigate synergies with other certification and audit mechanisms

Task 3 – Development of the **architecture for certification bodies and accreditation**. This task has two sub-elements:

- (i) To identify, describe and assess the advantages and disadvantages of different options for the architecture of the certification structure
- (ii) To investigate suitable approaches (and assessment criteria) for the accreditation of the certification bodies by the Commission (or other body)

Task 4 – Development of scenarios for the **practical implementation** of the certification and accreditation systems. This task has two sub-elements:

- (i) Present scenarios for setting up the certification structure
- (ii) Present scenarios for setting up the accreditation of the certification bodies

Task 5 – Investigation of the **compatibility with EU and national legal frameworks**. Focusing on the different accreditation scenarios, this task has two sub-elements:

- (i) To provide an assessment of the compatibility with the principle of subsidiarity and the competency of the European Union



- (ii) To provide an overview of the compatibility with national legislative frameworks, using a traffic light system to indicate compatibility / obstacles

Task 6 – Investigation of the **synergies with existing initiatives, links to EU funding, and the promotion of the new mechanism**. This task has five sub-elements:

- (i) To assess synergies with national initiatives
- (ii) To assess the likely level of acceptance of the new certification system
- (iii) Similarly, to assess synergies with EU initiatives
- (iv) To assess the feasibility of linking the new certification to future EU research funding
- (v) To present a strategy for the successful promotion of the certification mechanism

Task 7 – Preparation of an **interim report** and presentation to the advisory group

Task 8 – Preparation of a **draft final** and presentation to the advisory group

Task 9 – Preparation of the **final report**

Task 10 – **Presentation of the results** to the SGHRM or CDRP Programme Committee

8.3 Methodological approach

The study objectives and tasks summarised above focus around the appraisal of different options for the future development of a certification mechanism for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector in Europe. Wide consultation among the various groups of stakeholders that would be involved in the design and implementation of the mechanism, and the identification and assessment of prior experiences in setting up similar mechanisms elsewhere, are key to ensuring that the most feasible options are identified, described and assessed. Because of the need to identify prior experience of similar mechanisms and because of the need to ensure that the communities to be involved in the new initiative can input to the approach adopted and are ultimately supportive of it, we have adopted a highly consultative approach to the study. Seven main phases were planned, with each phase addressing, in whole or in part, various tasks and sub tasks:

- **Phase 1 – Inception planning** – encompasses the kick-off meeting held in March 2013, the preparation and delivery of this inception report, and the organisation and attendance at an inception meeting in Brussels. This element of the study is complete
- **Phase 2 - Identification** – involves the identification of relevant actors expected to be involved in the new mechanism (in a variety of roles), and other actors that are known or expected to have experience of similar or related initiatives and can advise on options for the design and implementation of the new mechanism. There are seven key stakeholder groups that we are seeking to consult during the course of the study. Progress in identifying and contacting members of each group is presented in Section 3 of this report
- **Phase 3 – Initial consultation** - involves multiple parallel consultations targeted and tailored to the identified actors within each of the groups listed above. The aims of the consultation are to alert relevant actors to the study, collect an initial body of factual information and opinion relevant to several of the tasks, and identify the most knowledgeable (and willing) actors to be targeted for further inputs at subsequent points in the study. The results of the consultation to date are presented in Section 4 of this report
- **Phase 4 – Preliminary analysis and interim reporting** - involves a full but necessarily preliminary analysis of the data, information and opinion collected through the consultation. This phase culminates in the preparation and delivery of this Interim Report
- **Phase 5 – Follow-up interviews and desk research** is a further round of more detailed and targeted consultations and interviews, based on and building on the findings from the preliminary analysis conducted in Phase 3
- **Phase 6 – Detailed design** is a further phase of desk research involving the detailed design and description of all of the elements required in the terms of reference



- **Phase 7 – Deliberative workshop (optional)** is an optional element where we would support the Commission in bringing representatives of each key stakeholder group to a workshop in Brussels where the study findings and conclusions will be presented and discussed, with a view to debating the proposals and implementation strategies
- **Phase 8 – Final reporting and presentation of results**

9. Certification terminology

The following paragraphs provide a few terminological clarifications and introduce the concept of the conformity assessment system. They will be useful for a very systematic development of different options for the certification and accreditation structure further below.

- Certification can be considered as an outcome of conformity assessment (CA). A conformity assessment is a demonstration that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled. (DIN EN ISO/IEC 17000: 2005). A certificate is a document that formally states, after some form of assessment such as testing, inspecting, verifying, evaluating etc., that a product, process, system, person or body conforms to the specified requirements.⁹ Hence, a certification can be divided into two phases: in a first phase the object of CA will be inspected, audited and evaluated etc. leading to a test report. In a second phase this report will be reviewed against the requirements and, if they are met, a certificate will be awarded.
- National governments and international organisations mandated by national governments can lay down mandatory requirements. Alternatively, requirements can also be established 'de-facto' by the action of market actors. Finally, market actors and stakeholders who have an interest in the matter can agree on some sort of standard voluntarily. Conformity assessment can be carried out by the manufacturer or provider of a service (then it is called 'first party' CA), the customer ('second party' CA) or an independent conformity assessment body or CAB ('third party' CA).
- To ensure consistency of assessment the CABs are in turn examined by an independent third party as to their technical competence and capability to carry out a CA in a particular area. This second-order conformity assessment of CABs by a third party is called 'accreditation'. An accreditation can be carried out either by a dedicated accreditation body (AB) or other conformity assessment bodies in what is called a 'peer-review'. Such an approach is common across industries.
- Conformity assessment is a widespread practice in industry, originating from the need to ensure quality and the comparability of qualities in international trade. It originated as a voluntary practice among private actors. A sophisticated international system consisting of international standards, conformity assessment bodies and accreditation bodies has developed over the past decades. Since the 1990s the CA-system that been increasingly used by EU governments to ensure that legal requirements are implemented in line with national legislation. In these cases the conformity assessment is not voluntary but mandatory. In 2008 Regulation (EC) 765/2008 and Decision 768/2008 established the New Legislative Framework (NLF) for conformity assessment in Europe. This legislation requires member states to set up accreditation and market surveillance systems in order to ensure the compliance of products and services with legislative European requirements across all member states. This 'new approach' to conformity assessment makes ample use of the resources, expertise and flexibility of private conformity assessment bodies and other non-state actors.

Against this background, the European Commission (and governments) have principally three levels at which they may shape the conformity assessment system for HR management in public research:

- First, the European Commission can look to reshape / develop existing certification and accreditation structures by influencing the requirements to which the HR management of RPOs and RFOs have to conform (Level 1).
- Second, the European Commission can influence the conformity assessment system by regulating the conformity assessment, i.e. the certification mechanism (Level 2). Such a regulation is always based in one way or another on the regulation at Level 1.

⁹ In other words, assessing the quality to a set of requirements and certifying that the requirements are met are two different activities, possibly being carried out by different bodies: a quality assessment body (QAB) and a certification body (CB).



- Finally, the European Commission can determine, whether and in what way the competences, authority of the certification bodies will be assessed. One way to assess the competence of CABs is by making them subject to an accreditation (Level 3).

On all three levels the European Commission has various options. However, these options have to be attuned to the specific requirements in public HEI and research institutions, which has undergone significant changes in past years in the so-called ‘Bologna’-process. These adjustments by the Bologna process have a strong impact also on quality assurance. The following quality assurance measures have been established for the public research and HEI sector:

- Traditionally, governments or governmental agencies carried out the conformity assessment of HEIs. Frequently HEIs were assessed when they first started their operations.¹⁰ Various forms of conformity assessment (on programme, system and institutional levels) have been introduced along with the establishment of the Bologna declaration by member states. In many member states so called ‘accreditation bodies’¹¹ were established to conduct conformity assessments.
- We find two types of accreditation bodies (CAs) in Europe:
 - We have accreditation bodies (CAs) that gain their legitimacy from government, such as the “Foundation of International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA)” in Germany or the “Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)” in the Flemish speaking regions.
 - On the other hand there are accreditation bodies (CAs) that gain their legitimacy and reputation from the HEI sector itself. Examples are the EQUIS and AMBA certification bodies that assess the quality of international business schools and management programmes.
- Conformity assessments in the HEI sector are conducted in the peer review form. Experts from HEIs are nominated by the CABs and usually represent the various stakeholders in the HEI sector such as academics, students, employer and trade unions.
- Accreditation bodies (CAs) in many member states are subject to accreditation by national accreditation bodies (AB). Examples are the German Foundation for Accreditation of Academic Programmes. The AB will monitor and evaluate the conformity in their CABs assessments with the national or international standards.
- Research in public non-HEI institutions is also subject to conformity assessments. For example, the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft or The Laboratoire d’electronique des technologies de l’information (CEA-Leti) are also assessed by national organisations. In Germany, it is the Wissenschaftsrat (German Council of Science and Humanities), which conducts the conformity assessment.

¹⁰ Conformity assessment schemes have been quite diverse in European member states. Some countries (e.g. the UK) established even ahead of the Bologna declaration regular conformity assessments of their HEIs. Other member states (e.g. Germany) did a conformity assessment only when the HEI was established.

¹¹ According to the terminology presented above these accreditation bodies have the function of conformity assessment bodies (CAB). In order to avoid confusion we will add ‘(CAB)’ when speaking of an ‘accreditation body’ or ‘accreditation’ in the research sector, which is actually certifying HEI and ROs and ‘(AC)’ when an accreditation body is accrediting a conformity assessment body.

10. Consultation responses

This section sets out the profile of 517 responses received as part of the consultation exercise, including through the online questionnaires, via email or through interviews. Figure 19 presents the profile of responses by organisation type, while Figure 20 shows responses by country.

Figure 19 – Number of consultation responses, by type of organisation

Organisation type	n
RPO - Research Performing Organisation (Higher Education Institutions, Research Institute)	341
RFO - Research Funding Organisation (Ministry, Council, Academy etc.)	51
Scientific academy, foundation, think tank, advisory group, etc.	33
Certification or quality assurance body	29
Other	27
Representative body or association for RPOs	26
SGHRM	15
Individual researcher	14
Representative body or association for researchers, including trade unions or work councils	11
Body that accredits organisations to carry out certification / quality assurance	10
Representative association for certification or quality assurance bodies	8
Representative body or association for RFOs	6
Total	571

Figure 20 – Number of consultation responses, by country

Country	n	Country	n
Austria	23	Slovenia	11
Belgium	20	Spain	26
Bulgaria	8	Sweden	13
Cyprus	2	United Kingdom	53
Czech Republic	12	Albania	11
Denmark	9	Bosnia & Herzegovina	5
Estonia	6	Croatia	18
Finland	9	Faroe Islands	2
France	10	FYR of Macedonia	7
Greece	11	Iceland	2
Germany	17	Israel	3
Hungary	5	Lichtenstein	3
Ireland	12	Moldova	6
Italy	24	Montenegro	6
Latvia	4	Norway	16
Lithuania	3	Serbia	7
Luxembourg	11	Switzerland	24
Malta	2	Turkey	0
Netherlands	13	Other	9
Poland	9	<i>European</i>	8
Portugal	7	<i>International</i>	7
Romania	8	<i>Not specified</i>	106
Slovak Republic	3	Total	517



11. Consultation results

11.1 Existing HR quality schemes in the public research sector in Europe

Does your own organisation currently participate in the European Commission's 'Human Resources Strategy for Researchers' initiative?

This questions was directed to (i) RPOs, (ii) RFOs, (iii) Individual researchers, and (iv) Academies, foundations, etc. (who might conduct research or fund research)

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 338

Response	n	%
Yes	180	53%
No	119	35%
Unsure	39	12%
Total	338	100%

If your organisation does not participate, please indicate the reason(s) why not (please tick all that apply)

This questions was directed to (i) RPOs, (ii) RFOs, (iii) Individual researchers, and (iv) Academies, foundations, etc. (who might conduct research or fund research)

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 119

Response	n	%
We are not aware of this particular initiative	49	41%
We do not have the time or resources to participate	25	21%
We are already involved in a different initiative aimed at improving HR practices	12	10%
We already consider our HR practices to be good or excellent	11	9%
We do not fund or perform research so are not eligible to participate (Academies only)	2	2%
Other (please specify)	25	21%

Has your own organisation previously been made aware of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) initiative?

This question was directed to (i) RPO reps, (ii) RFO reps, and (iii) Researcher reps

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 28

Response	n	%
Yes	23	82%
No	4	14%
Unsure	1	4%
Total	28	100%



If yes, has your organisation encouraged its members to become involved?

This question was directed to (i) RPO reps, and (ii) RFO reps

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 15

Response	n	%
Yes	13	87%
No	2	13%
Unsure	0	0%
Total	15	100%

How important is it that the proposed new HR certification scheme under discussion is integrated with (i.e. linked to or part of) the existing HR Strategy for Researchers initiative?

This question was directed to (i) RPOs, (ii) RPO reps, (iii) RFOs, (iv) RFO reps, (v) Academies, foundations, etc. (who might conduct research or fund research), and (vi) researcher reps

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 366

Response	n	%
Essential	184	50%
Quite important	135	37%
Not very important	34	9%
Not at all important	13	4%
Total	366	100%

Does your own organisation currently participate in any other Human Resources or personnel management Quality schemes?

This question was directed to (i) RPOs, (ii) RFOs, (iii) Academies, foundations, etc. (who might conduct research or fund research), and (iv) individual researchers

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 295

Response	n	%
Yes	84	28%
No	160	54%
Unsure	51	17%
Total	295	100%



If yes, does the scheme involve assessments or audits carried out by another organisation (e.g. by a certification body or quality assurance body)?

This question was directed to (i) RPOs, (ii) RFOs, and (iii) Academies, foundations, etc. (who might conduct research or fund research)

Number of eligible respondents answering this question – 79

Response	n	%
Yes	61	77%
No	12	15%
Unsure	6	8%
Total	79	100%

If yes, does the HR quality scheme relate specifically to researchers or to other types of personnel?

This question was directed to (i) RPOs, (ii) RFOs, and (iii) Academies, foundations, etc. (who might conduct research or fund research)

Number of eligible respondents answering this question – 64

Response	n	%
Research personnel only	11	17%
Non-research personnel only	0	0%
All types of personnel	52	81%
Unsure	1	2%
Total	64	100%

Are there what you might call ‘dominant’ or ‘widely used’ HR quality schemes in the research sector in your country / region?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 368

Response	n	%
Yes	71	19%
No	173	47%
Unsure	124	34%
Total	368	100%



In your opinion, how important would it be for the proposed new certification scheme to be integrated in some way with existing HR quality schemes?

This question was directed to all groups apart from researchers and researcher reps

Number of respondents answering this question - 304

Response	n	%
Essential	102	34%
Quite important	151	50%
Not very important	39	13%
Not at all important	12	4%
Total	304	100%

11.2 Existing legislation or policies that would influence take-up or implementation of the new scheme

Are you aware of any national legislation, policies, rules or other factors that limit or restrict RPOs and RFOs from implementing their own (good) HR practices and policies (e.g. with regard to recruitment, pay and conditions, mobility, etc.)?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 339

Response	n	%
Yes	125	37%
No	155	46%
Unsure	59	17%
Total	339	100%

Are you aware of any national initiatives or support measures that assist or encourage RPOs and RFOs to develop and implement good HR practices and policies (e.g. with regard to recruitment, pay and conditions, mobility, etc.)?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 335

Response	n	%
Yes	121	36%
No	136	41%
Unsure	78	23%
Total	335	100%



Are there any other features of the national research system that the European Commission should take into account when developing the new HR certification scheme?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 328

Response	n	%
Yes	112	34%
No	74	23%
Unsure	142	43%
Total	328	100%

In your view, to what extent would each of the following factors influence the likelihood that RPOs and RFOs would participate in the proposed HR certification scheme?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 317

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a large extent	n
Financial resources / availability of funding to help participation	5%	29%	66%	324
Level of support / encouragement by national government	7%	38%	55%	325
Level of support / encouragement by national funding bodies	7%	29%	64%	305
Level of support / encouragement by senior management	10%	32%	58%	223
Making EU research funding contingent on participation	7%	26%	67%	308
Other (please specify)	3%	3%	94%	60

11.3 Good practice in the development of pan-European quality schemes

Are you aware of any EU-wide or national quality schemes that represent good practice examples of how certification or quality schemes should be set up and implemented?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 318

Response	n	%
Yes	76	24%
No	164	52%
Unsure	78	25%
Total	318	100%



In developing the proposed new certification scheme for genuinely good HR management, the Commission wishes to explore different options for setting up the system of bodies that would carry out the testing and award the certificates. Which of the following options do you consider to be most appropriate?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 283

Response	n	%
A new, dedicated EU-level certification / QA body set up for this new mechanism	69	24%
An existing dedicated EU-level certification / QA body (pre-existing)	69	24%
A network of new certification / QA bodies operating at national level	35	12%
A network of existing certification / QA bodies operating at national level	80	28%
Other (please specify)	30	11%
Total	283	100%

The Commission also wishes to explore different options for the accreditation of the certification / QA body or bodies. Which of the following options do you consider to be most appropriate and why?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 285

Response	n	%
Accreditation to be carried out by the European Commission	156	55%
Accreditation to be carried out by another EU body (specify)	17	6%
Accreditation to be carried out by national bodies (specify)	77	27%
Other (specify)	35	12%
Total	285	101%

11.4 Relevance and likely take-up of the new scheme

Do you support the introduction of this new certification mechanism?

This question was directed to all groups

Number of respondents answering this question - 313

Response	n	%
Yes	173	55%
No	51	16%
Unsure	89	28%
Total	313	100%



Do you expect your organisation (or some of your member organisations) to seek certification once the new mechanism has been set up?

This question was directed to RPOs, RPO reps, RFOs, RFO reps, researchers

Number of eligible respondents answering this question – 275

Response	n	%
Yes	150	55%
No	31	11%
Unsure	94	34%
Total	275	100%

How important is it that RPOs provide favourable employment conditions for researchers and employ genuinely good HR practices?

Asked of (i) researchers, (ii) researcher reps and (iii) SGHRM members

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 29

Response	n	%
Essential	25	86%
Quite important	1	3%
Not very important	1	3%
Not at all important	2	7%
Total	29	100%

How important is it that RFOs adopt policies that help encourage RPOs to employ genuinely good HR practices and create favourable employment conditions for researchers?

Asked of (i) researchers, (ii) researcher reps and, (iii) SGHRM members

Number of eligible respondents answering this question – 29

Response	n	%
Essential	23	79%
Quite important	2	7%
Not very important	2	7%
Not at all important	2	7%
Total	29	100%



To what extent did your own organisation's employment conditions and HR practices influence your decision to work there?

Asked of researchers only

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 8

Response	n	%
Not at all	6	75%
To a small extent	1	13%
To a large extent	1	13%
Total	8	100%

In your opinion, would a recognised EU-wide quality mark for genuinely good HR management in the public research sector be beneficial for individual researchers when considering which organisation to join?

Asked of (i) researchers and, (ii) SGHRM members

Number of eligible respondents answering this question - 19

Response	n	%
Not at all	3	16%
To a small extent	8	42%
To a large extent	8	42%
Total	19	100%