

Charter and Code at the University of Agder

1 Background

The decision to work towards an application for the *HR-Excellence in Research* logo came as part of a major process of assessing and developing the international dimension of UiA's teaching – and research activities in the first decade of the new Millennium. In 2004, the University was awarded the ECTS and DS labels. In 2008 a working group was established with the mandate to assess all international activity at the university and to propose relevant measures for developing a new strategy of internationalization. As part of this work, a comprehensive survey was conducted, charting researchers' attitudes to, and experiences with, internationalization. The results of the survey showed among other things that teachers and researchers were clearly in favor of an ambitious policy in this field.

One of the working group's proposals, submitted to the University Board in October 2009, was that the University of Agder should declare its commitment to the European Charter and Code. The proposal was accepted and the University of Agder Research Committee gave the green light for planning UiA's commitment to the Euraxess *European Charter for Researchers* and *The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment for Researchers*. In the *Strategic Plan for the University of Agder 2010 - 2015* 'strong international connections' was included as one of its five main pillars. Finally in 2011, at the initiative of Rector Torun Lauvdal, a work-group consisting of representatives from the Research Administration and the HR and International Education offices was established, and the University of Agder signed the Declaration of Commitment.

2 University of Agder assessment: analyses and summary

The main aim of the assessment process conducted by the work group in the autumn and winter of 2011-12 was to examine UiA rules, regulations and practices concerning researchers and recruitment of researchers in the light of the 40 Charter and Code principles. UiA is a relatively small university in terms of researchers with a total of about 650 academic employees, facilitating short lines of communication and informal processes. The work group collected existing UiA documents and presented a systematic overview of existing practices while possible areas of improvement were identified in a series of dialogue meetings with relevant players, mainly faculty managers and union representatives. In these meetings, the group interviewed among others the Deans, who have overall responsibility for research at their respective faculties and UiA representatives from the Norwegian Association for Researchers.

In the autumn of 2013 the work group decided to strengthen the dialogue with the PhD candidates and, in view of the fact that a period of time had passed since PhD candidates were involved in the Charter and Code process, to renew the assessment of the situation for this group at the University of Agder. In their comments, the PhD candidates came up with interesting and relevant proposals for issues that should be addressed in the action plan and some of these have been included in the present version of the plan.

In the course of the group's work, the Charter and Code-process has twice been an item on the agenda of the University of Agder's Central Research Committee where also the PhD candidates are represented.

All through the process, the work group has used the standard template introduced in the Euraxess website materials, i.e. four main groups (Ethical and professional aspects, Recruitment, Intellectual property rights, Training and career development) containing 40 principles. In the analyses and action plan sections below the original numbering of the principles has largely been retained.

Group 1 Ethical and professional aspects

Ethics in general and research ethics in particular have been a focus area for UiA. In addition to ethical guidelines which must be adhered to by all state employees, the University's policy on ethics is communicated through:

- Ethical guidelines for UiA employees
- Procedures for dealing with cases involving academic fraud/dishonesty
- Webpage for good research practice
- Webpage with information about confidentiality

In this group, then, there are 4 principles where the assessment suggests a need for further development/measures:

Research freedom (1) is limited by available funding and it is paramount that researchers have insight into and confidence in budgetary processes and financial decisions. Today, there are differences in the way the faculties practice significant aspects of the budgetary process like information and participation in decision-making processes.

Accountability (6) and competence are interlinked qualities. Managing the financial dimension of projects requires general competence in project management and the institution should in the future be able to offer training in project management and project funding to researchers at all levels.

In order to be able to handle research data in a responsible way and in accordance with **good practice in research** (7) it is essential that all researchers, including PhD candidates, are familiar with regulations governing confidentiality and the protection of sensitive data. The situation today is that we know too little about how data is actually handled by researchers at UiA.

For the researchers to be able to **disseminate and exploit their results** (8) the University needs to revise its internal practices and to establish support functions for the commercialization of results and ideas.

Action plan elements group 1:

In what follows we introduce the first of a set of processes and measures intended to strengthen and further develop a number of aspects of the working conditions for researchers at the University of Agder. Most of these activities should be seen as a response to the results of our investigation and analyses. However, the action plan also includes the implementation of internal measures and

development processes which are already in place, but nevertheless are highly relevant to charter and code principles.

The implementation of the action steps involves cooperation between a number of stakeholders, but in order to simplify the presentation we have in the table below just included the administrative - or management unit responsible for each measure. The measures will be subject to an internal evaluation after two years in accordance with the charter and code process template.

Area of improvement and action steps	Responsibilities	Status 2012/13	Deadline (in parenthesis) and desired indicators
<p><i>Research Freedom (1)</i> <u>Action step 1:</u> Strengthen representation of academic staff in the budget process by communicating economic considerations and planning in plenary meetings at the university campus</p>	<p>Finance Department/UiA</p> <p>Faculty Management and unions</p>	<p>Budget planning process too closed, No forum for direct involvement of researchers (apart from union representatives)</p>	<p>(End 2014)</p> <p>Plenary meeting at the faculties concerning the effects of next year's budget for researchers</p>
<p><i>Accountability (6)</i> <u>Action step 2:</u> Strengthen and improve the administrative support for external funding activities.</p> <p><u>Action step 3:</u> Design and disseminate training in project funding and management.</p>	<p>(2) The Administrative R&D Forum</p> <p>(3)The Research Secretariat</p>	<p>There is a huge difference between the administrative supports for researchers at each faculty. The training activities are limited both for researchers and research administration. The challenge has been given focus in the new strategic plan for the university.</p>	<p>(Mid-2014) Streamlining and professionalization of the administrative support.</p> <p>Increase external funding to the university (ongoing)</p> <p>(2015) Start a training program for administration and researchers.</p>
<p><i>Good practice in research (7)</i> <u>Action step 4:</u> Survey of how sensitive data is handled at UiA by staff and PhD candidates and implementation of necessary measures</p>	<p>The IT department</p>	<p>Insufficient knowledge of how sensitive data is handled at UiA by researchers at all levels</p>	<p>(mid-2014) Results of survey known.</p> <p>(2015) Necessary corrective regulations and actions implemented</p>

<p><i>Disseminate and exploit results (8)</i> <u>Action step 5:</u> Establish Technology Transfer Office (TTO) at the university <u>Action Step 6:</u> Training of (academic) staff in IPR, commercialization, innovation and related issues.</p>	<p>(6)The Innovation Management group (TTO)</p>	<p>The TTO office is established as a pilot project at the university. IMA will be responsible for assisting researchers to develop results into innovation and bringing innovations closer to the market.</p>	<p>(mid-2014) The TTO office is an integrated part of the university's R&D system (2014) A significant number of ideas have moved closer to the market (end 2014) Training of academic staff is up and running.</p>
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Group 2 Recruitment

One of UiA's strategic goals is that the percentage of academic employees with associate – or full Professor positions should increase to 70 by 2015. The University of Agder is facing a major generational shift. In the next few years many employees will reach pension age and a number of hires are expected. UiA will have to compete with both industry and other Norwegian universities for highly qualified academics, and in some cases UiA unfortunately cannot offer the same salary level and working conditions as other, better financed universities. The consequence is that the University's ability to show efficiency and professionalism in the recruitment process will be of the utmost importance as success factors.

Non-discrimination (14) and selection is a time-consuming process and increasing the degree of efficiency in the recruitment process is therefore a major concern for UiA as well as for other institutions of higher education.

Post-doctoral appointments (21) constitute a category of positions where there is a need for clarification concerning both duration of fellowship and target group.

Action plan elements group 2:

<p><i>Non-discrimination (14)</i> <u>Action step 7:</u> implement the University Action Plan for Gender Equality and Integration</p>	<p>The <i>Action Plan for Gender Equality and Integration</i> includes a specific focus on the recruitment phase and the HR department will be responsible for this action and report to the Equality and Integration Committee at UiA.</p>	<p>Action plan for gender equality and integration developed, but not implemented</p>	<p>(end 2013) Plan implemented, i.e. known to and used as a tool by the whole organization.</p>
<p><i>Post-doctoral positions (21)</i> <u>Action Step 8:</u> Create and</p>	<p>HR department</p>	<p>No guidelines for recruitment to post-doctoral positions</p>	<p>(early 2014) Guidelines for post-doctoral positions</p>

implement guidelines for post-doctoral positions at UiA.		at UiA	developed and implemented
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Group 3 Working conditions and social security

UiA is, like other Norwegian institutions of higher education, bound by a comprehensive set of working life laws and regulations. Examples include *The Working Environment Act*, *Act relating to Universities and University Colleges*, and the *Act relating to Copyright in Literary, Scientific and Artistic Work*. In addition to the protection and support provided by these acts, researchers also benefit from the university's wish to build and maintain strong research environments. The recently revised version of the Strategy Plan 2010-2015 states that 'Research competence will be strengthened by developing more efficient research groups, advertising researcher positions internationally and by providing more time for research' and 'research environments with a potential must be given the necessary time and resources to develop'.

The situation is that UiA is still facing gender equality challenges linked to **gender balance** (27) in academic top positions in particular and teaching-and research positions in general within some academic subjects. In addition there are challenges with unequal gender distribution in certain study programmes.

Career development (28) for PhD candidates has traditionally been focused on providing high-level academic supervision with little or no emphasis on the candidates' progress beyond the doctoral degree. The competence of future PhD candidates should be extended to include elements like entrepreneurship, marketing and the ability to secure external funding.

Concerning **intellectual property rights** (31), UiA needs to clarify and develop policy and practices.

Researchers at UiA **participate in decision-making bodies** (35), but administrative officers need tools for ensuring that researcher representation is carried out according to rules and regulations.

Action plan elements group 3:

<i>Gender Balance</i> (27) <u>Action step 9</u> : implement the UiA Action Plan for Equality and Integration which has a special focus on gender equality.	The HR department is responsible and will report to the Equality and Integration Committee . Gender equality is closely linked to the recruitment issues.	Same as action p.7	Same as action p.7
<i>Career Development</i> (28) <u>Action Step 10</u> : General: Improve today's career development services at UiA from a	Survey will be carried out by the Research Secretariat .	The support for career development is limited to students at the university.	(2015) The research career development support has been integrated in the Career

<p>traditional focus on MSc and BSc students to include PhDs and Post-doctoral positions. Specific measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A survey of the need for additional service functions • Implementing new service functions and training opportunities in marketing, entrepreneurship and external funding 	<p>Implementation of new service functions and training opportunities: Career Development Office.</p>	<p>Insufficient training offers to PhDs.</p>	<p>Development Office. (mid-2014) A training program for PhDs and young researchers has been designed.</p>
<p><i>Intellectual Property Rights (31)</i> <u>Action Step 11:</u> A new and improved institutional policy for IPR will be submitted in 2012.</p>	<p>The implementation of the new IPR policy is closely related to the IMA (TTO) and HR issues. The HR department will be responsible for implementation.</p>	<p>The newly submitted IPR policy is under implementation.</p>	<p>(early 2014) The IPR policy will undergo an evaluation and be updated if necessary.</p>
<p><i>Participation in decision-making bodies (35)</i> <u>Action step 12:</u> Improve participation by developing new and improved tools for information and communication (web-based).</p>	<p>The new intranet at the university is an important channel for information within the organization. Needs to be developed further by the Project Board</p>	<p>Intranet mainly a tool for administrative staff. Faculties/researchers not very involved.</p>	<p>Intranet functions as an active communication tool by and for researchers (<i>ongoing</i>)</p>

Group 4 Training and career development

As an institution of higher education which only fairly recently has become a university (2007), UiA does not benefit from the same level of state funding of PhD positions as the older and more established universities. In the 2011 University Research Report's risk assessment, this fact is linked to the issue of the completion rate of PhD candidates and the conclusion being that the low completion rate in fact constitutes a risk.

In spite of a comprehensive system for the supervision and administration of PhD candidates, then, the completion rate is still below expectations (the number of candidates who finish their thesis within the three-year scholarship period). We need to know more about the **candidates' relationship to their supervisors** (36) and also to reassess the efficiency of present administrative procedures.

It is the responsibility of the university to promote **continuing professional development** (38/39) for its researchers. Some relevant measures are already in place, but there is a need for systematic planning and development for continuing professional development. An important aspect of professional development for researchers is to have the necessary competence to integrate state of the art IT-tools in their teaching.

Action plan elements group 4:

<p><i>Completion of PhD degrees</i> (36) <u>Action step 13:</u> <u>General:</u> Improve completion percentage of PhDs within the designated scholarship period.</p> <p><u>Specific measures:</u> a)optimize recruitment procedures b)provide relevant, clear and coordinated library resources c)develop language services and language training d)develop existing training offers for supervisors e)increase focus on deadline</p>	<p>Survey to be conducted by the Research Secretariat on the role of the supervisor and other support functions for PhD candidates. The PhD candidate organization will be included in the process.</p> <p>The new training course for supervisors will be arranged in cooperation with the HR department and the Research Secretariat.</p> <p>The University Library is responsible for developing library resources</p>	<p>Completion percentage for PhD candidates too low.</p> <p>Uncertainty about relevant measures.</p> <p>The University has no organized language service for researchers</p>	<p>(2014) Results of survey known. New training offers for supervisors in place. <i>(end 2014)</i></p> <p>(2015)Language services for researchers included in the new strategy plan for UiA</p> <p>(2016) A higher percentage of candidates completes within the 3-year period.</p>
<p><i>Professional Development</i> (38-39) <u>Action Step 14:</u> Upgrade teachers' and researchers' ICT-competency and use of ICT-tools</p>	<p>The Management department is responsible for the intranet and the IT department is implementing new ICT-tool forth-running. All departments at the university have responsibility to develop their service to improve the university.</p>	<p>It is clearly stated in the strategy for the university that we wish to use the newest ICT solutions to improve the R&D, education and administrative services. The Digital University project was launched in 2012.</p>	<p>(2014/15) Evaluation of The Digital University.</p>

