HRS4R

Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

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HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Technical Guidelines for Institutions

Update 27/7/2022

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since 15 May 2018, the HRS4R e-tool is the sole European Commission's official platform to for the management of the HRS4R process. The e-tool is an instrument developed and managed by EC/RTD, Unit A3 (R&I Actors and Research Careers).

These guidelines are an instrument in support to the Institutions enrolled in the HRS4R process, or interested to apply and enter the process. The guidelines provide additional information to institutions on the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (C&C), its policies and practices, and outline the practical steps to apply for and maintain the "HR Excellence in Research Award" (hereafter "the HR Award").

The [Policy Library](#) of the EURAXESS Portal lists examples of the documents used in each stage of the process. It is important to note that these documents are for inspiration only and shall be customised to match the specific case of your institution, which may be at an earlier or a more advanced stage of implementation of the C&C policies and practices, or which may be more creative and more ambitious in setting targets. The only official and updated documents to be used for the HRS4R process are the on-line forms in the e-tool.

Should you consider that these guidelines do not address your questions, or in case you need further advice please contact

- for technical issues: the Help Desk at support@euraxess.org
- for details about the HRS4R procedure: the RTD-CHARTER team at RTD-CHARTER@ec.europa.eu.

  Please, always include in all correspondence the case number assigned to your file in the e-tool (if already available)

2 General description of the HRS4R process

Enrolment into the HRS4R is a voluntary process. Institutions should be aware that the HRS4R is a long-term commitment involving joint efforts and coordination with various internal and external stakeholder groups.

Before deciding to start the application process for the HR Award, interested institutions should first analyse the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (C&C), as published on the EURAXESS portal: [https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter.](https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter)

The 40 principles of the C&C constitute the base for the development of the Institution's further development and implementation of the Action Plan of its customised HRS4R.

The HRS4R process comprises three distinct phases:
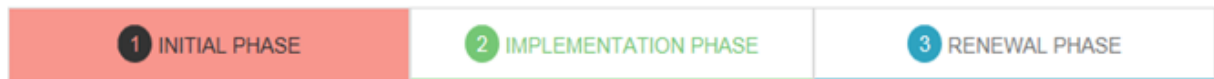
1. **Initial phase:**
   - Registration in the e-tool and submission of the **application** for the "HR Excellence in Research Award";
   - Endorsement Letter;
   - Within a year from the of the endorsement letter, submission of Gap Analysis and Action Plan. OTM-R can be submitted already at this phase;
   - Initial granting of the HR Award.

2. **Implementation phase:**
   - **Initial Action Plan** (24 months after the initial granting of the HR Award, followed by an Interim Assessment).

   - **the Revised Action Plan** (36 months after the Interim assessment).

3. **Renewal phase**s
   - **Implementation of the improved Action Plan** that will culminate in the Renewal with Site Visit (36 months from the interim assessment or, in other words, five years after the initial granting of the HR Award).
   - **Implementation of the further improved Action Plan** that will culminate in the Renewal without Site Visit (36 months after the first Renewal with Site Visit).

After this, the subsequent renewal phases will keep implementing improved action plans alternating Renewals with site visit and Renewals without site visit.

N.B.: In light of the Covid-19 pandemics, site visits are currently being scheduled remotely on a voluntary base.

The following is a graphic representation of the advancement from progress to quality in Human Resources Management via the HRS4R and summarises the timeline and the different phases of the HRS4R process. .

INITIAL PHASE | IMPLEMENTATION PHASE | AWARD RENEWAL PHASE

Endorsement of the C&C

Application for the HR Award:
- Gap Analysis
- OTM-R Checklist
- Initial Action Plan Design

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

12 months

HR AWARD GRANTING

Implementation of the Action Plan

24 months

INTERIM ASSESSMENT

Implementation of the Revised Action Plan

36 months

RENEWAL WITH SITE VISIT

HR AWARD GRANTING

Implementation of the Improved Action Plan

36 months

RENEWAL WITHOUT SITE VISIT

Implementation of the Further Improved Action Plan

36 months

RENEWAL WITH SITE VISIT

HRS4R – from PROGRESS to QUALITY

🏛 Institution   European Commission   External Experts

Independently from the phase, the European Commission (EC) will screen each application, to assess its administrative eligibility. This check verifies that the application is complete in all its parts and compliant with all the requirements. In case the administrative eligibility check is negative, the institution will be requested to make the necessary corrections and resubmit the application.

Once an application passes the administrative eligibility check, it is sent for assessment. The assessment is performed by three peer reviewers, normally from a different country to that of the applicant institution (the only exception is the interim assessment, which is performed by a single assessor). The experts must have no conflict of interest with the assigned case.

The assessors use standard assessment forms for each cycle to ensure equal treatment to all applicant institutions. Similar templates to the ones used are available in the Policy Library.

One of the three experts is assigned the role of lead-assessor and will be responsible for the production of the final report, in consensus with the other two assessors. The final consensus report will contain the official outcome of the assessment including, if needed, a set of recommendations.

The applicant institution shall take into account the recommendations provided by the experts in the consensus report and address them via tailored actions. This will ensure the completion of a cycle and the transition to the next stage in the implementation process.

3 HRS4R e-tool: Before you get started: Administration Elements

Once the institution makes a decision to endorse the C&C and apply for the HR Award, it must secure access to the HRS4R e-tool.

3.1 Your accounts on the EURAXESS portal

To access the HRS4R e-tool, you need to have an **individual EURAXESS member account**. Registration and membership are free of charge. See below how to create an account:

- Your institution must have an organisation profile on EURAXESS. If not done already, you can create one from your individual EURAXESS member account as described in section 3.2.
  - ➢ Having an organisation account on EURAXESS offers also the benefit of publishing jobs, funding or hosting opportunities free of charges on the EURAXESS portal, as well as the opportunity to search for top talent researchers in our database, including researchers from more than 40 European countries.
- You must request the role of HRS4R Organisation Administrator (HRS4R Admin) for your registered organisation. Only you will have access to the HRS4R e-tool to upload data and to be the interface with the European Commission, on behalf of the institution, regarding the HRS4R process.

3.2 Registration process

3.2.1 Individual EURAXESS member account

If you do not already have a EURAXESS account, you can:

1. Navigate to https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/
2. Click on the "LOGIN/REGISTER" menu item
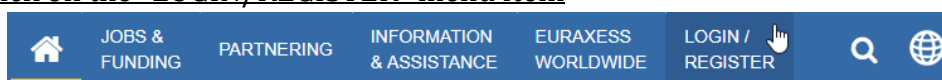
3. Perform the steps under the "Create new account" section

Manage your application process.

Registration at EURAXESS is free and comes with a lot benefits for researchers and entrepreneurs. Once you have registered you will be welcomed to your My EURAXESS private area, which is where, a part from many others, you will fill out and manage your profile, CV data, collaboration preferences.

It's quick and simple. Register now and you will have your own EURAXESS account in no time!

Manage your recruiting process

As a research institution, university or business, My EURAXESS area let's you manage your profile, collaboration preferences, post job, funding and hosting offers, search for the best candidates and many more!

Register an account with us and join EURAXESS' large research community today!

Create new account

E-mail *

☐ I agree with the Privacy Statement and Specific Conditions. *

☐ I'm not a robot   reCAPTCHA
               Privacy - Terms

CREATE NEW ACCOUNT

After performing these steps, you will receive an email with a link to the EURAXESS portal where you have to complete a form and set a password.

3.2.2 Organisation Profile

Join an existing organisation profile

If the URL of an existing organisation profile matches the domain of the email address you have used to register on the EURAXESS portal, you will be automatically invited to join as a member.

Navigate to your dashboard, located on MY EURAXESS in the main menu. The system will notify you about the organisation profile(s) that matches your e-mail domain. Select the organisation you represent by clicking on the "Join" button and confirm your selection.

Search for an organisation profile

If you are not notified about potential organisations you may belong to, you can search for an organisation by selecting "Search/Register" option on the right of the page.

Join an organisation

Based on your email (ext.ec.europa.eu) you cannot auto join any existing organisation.

Search/Register

Please search for an existing organisation.You can also register a new organisation if you cannot find the organisation you are looking for.

SEARCH/REGISTER

Provide the "Organisation name" and the website URL starting with "http://" or "https://" and click "Search". Note that you should not enter a Department or Laboratory Name since the procedure should include the whole organisation applying

for the Award and not a subsidiary entity (referred to as unit). For more information on this topic, you may see section 3.3.

If a match is identified, you can ask the administrator to add you as a member, by selecting the "Contact the Organisation Admin" option.

Register an organisation profile
If no match is found, you can proceed to register the new organisation profile by clicking on the "Register Organisation" button.

The information entered in the previous step will be transferred into the registration form.

At this point, please provide the "Organisation Type", "Country", "Street", "City" and optionally the "State/Province" and the "Postal Code".

Click the "Save the organisation" button to send the form to the Help Desk for validation. The Help Desk will check if the newly registered organisation's domain of activity is related to research and if there are duplicate registrations of the same organisation. Once the organisation account passes the administrative check performed by the Help Desk, you will be informed accordingly in a dedicated email (normally registration requests are treated within the same working day).

3.2.3 HRS4R Admin role

Once you have become a member of an existing organisation profile, or have created a new organisation profile for your institution, you need to become an HRS4R Admin by following the next steps:

1. Login to the EURAXESS portal
2. From The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers page click on "Willing to apply for the HR Award?" button, then open the collapsible menus as shown

below to expose the "HRS4R organisation Admin" button or click [here](#) to jump directly.

3. Click the "HRS4R organisation admin" button as shown below

Choose the organisation for which you wish to become the HRS4R Admin. You will be presented only with umbrella organisation(s) (i.e. without department), if the URL of the organisation profile matches the domain of your email address. For example, if your email is user@organisation.com, the URL of the registered organisation must be https://organisation.com.

You can choose only one umbrella organisation, even if multiple profiles are displayed in the form.

If none of the displayed organisations matches your institution, you can proceed with registering a new profile, or contact the Help Desk (support@euraxess.org) using the email link presented under the form.

As a rule, this role cannot be granted to a member that belongs to a unit profile (i.e. laboratory). Please refer to the following section for more details.

Granting the 'HRS4R Organisation Administrator' role to hr_admin@umed.wroc.pl

The following rules apply for granting the role to a user for a specific organisation:

- The domain of your email (umed.wroc.pl) must be in the URL of the organisation.
- The organisation must be a top level one without department.
- Only one user per organisation can be granted the role.

Please choose the organisation for which you will be granted the HRS4R Organisation Administrator role. *

○ Uniwersytet Medyczny we Wrocławiu, Dziekanat Wydziału Lekarsko-Stomatologicznego (http://www.stomatologia.umed.wroc.pl)

○ Wroclaw Medical University (http://www.umed.wroc.pl/)

If none of the above suits you, please register your own top level organisation and come back to be granted the role. Alternatively, you can also contact the support team to grant you the role.

Please check the above before confirming.

CONFIRM   Cancel

For any assistance please contact the support team

N.B.: You may change the contact person appointed as HRS4R Admin at any time during the application process. Send an email to the Help Desk (support@euraxess.org) indicating the name, email address (as registered in the portal), function and contact details of the person that should be granted the HRS4R Admin role. **Note that this role is granted only to one person per institution and it is the institution's responsibility to ensure a HRS4R Admin with a valid email at all times.**

3.3   Potential application scenarios

Since the core of the HRS4R process is to help an organisation in its strife to align to the 40 principles of the Charter & Code, the presence of an HR department and an HR policy is a central requisite. In addition, institutions can only submit their application when they represent all the other units within its hierarchical composition. Should your institutions consider to be a particular case and wish to request an exception to these rules according to its specific context, the EC Services will consider the following:

3.3.1   The unit has independent rules

If the unit provides sufficient justification to demonstrate that its individual HR and institutional rules are different from those of the main organisation there are part of, the EC Services will decide whether to accept the application on a case-by-case basis. If accepted, the field for the organisation profile name in the e-tool will include the name

of the main organisation in addition to the unit's name. (i.e. Name: Department of Sciences Organisation XZY)

3.3.2   Merger of organisations

In case of a merger of two or more organisations, there are several possible scenarios, depending on the enrolment status in the HRS4R process of the merged organisations. Possible scenarios are described below.

None of the merged organisations is awarded
If none of the merged organisations has been granted the award yet, the EC services will close all the existing individual applications and will clearly indicate the re-application under a merged organisation profile.

One of the merged organisation is awarded
The organisation that holds the HR Award should be encouraged to retain it, even in case the merger involves one or more organisations not implementing the C&C principles in their HR practices. In this case, the EC Services will extend the deadline for the next Internal Review of the newly merged organisation up to three years. This is to allow the awarded organisation to align with the merged organisation(s) in the HRS4R process.

At the next assessment cycle, the newly formed organisation will be assessed on the base of the updated Action Plan, which will include all the relevant information on how the new institution has embedded the HRS4R process. The team of experts assessing the merged organisation will then determine whether the application has a positive outcome or the organisation needs to reinitiate the process.

Two or more of the merged organisation are awarded
If two or more organisations participating in the merger have been already awarded individually, only one case will remain open in the HRS4R e-tool while the others will be closed. The HRS4R Admin of the merged organisation will be asked to decide which case should be kept open in the HRS4R e-tool. In the three years following the merger, the newly formed institution should combine the existing Action Plans of the merged organisations. The Internal Review that will be produced for the assessment of the new organisations shall include the relevant information about the merger process and on how the HR policies were reorganised. The team of experts assessing the merged organisation will decide whether their application can proceed further, or if the process needs to be reinitiated.

3.3.3   Organisations belonging to a group, alliance or conglomerate

Individual application
Organisations can apply for the HR Award individually when they are part of a bigger group, provided they represent a separate entity and have separate HR and institutional set of practices, distinct and differentiated from the group or the larger institution to which they belong.

Common application

Multiple organisations can apply for the HRS4R at group level when they have harmonised or worked towards the harmonisation of their HR and institutional set of practices. In this case, their application can be treated as per the scenarios described in section 3.2.2.

N.B.: Depending on the size of the larger group, EC Services may consider useful to engage the same team of experts for consistency purposes.

3.4   Management of MY EURAXESS dashboard of HRS4R Admin

Once you have been granted the HRS4R Admin role, you will gain access to the HRS4R dedicated section from the MY EURAXESS dashboard.

Important: Go to EURAXESS and log in using the credentials of your individual member account.
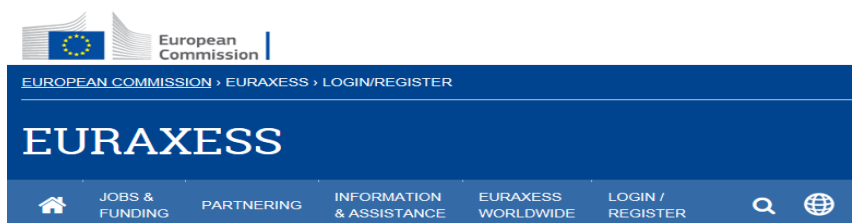
After log in, the main menu of the EURAXESS website will include a dedicated tab for MY EURAXESS, as below:

Have a look at the different sections of MY EURAXESS dashboard and learn about their usage and scope.

Dashboard
 	
Content
 	
User Profile
 	
HRS4R
 	
Organisation
 	
Job Offers
 	
Funding Offers
 	
Hosting Offers
 	
Favorites
 	
Saved searches
 	
Account settings
 	
Notifications
 	
Need Help?
 	
Logout
	User profile:
	This section includes the general identification details of each user, such as name, living country, organisation, position, etc. Each user can choose if they want their profile displayed in search results. There are two check boxes which can be ticked if intended:
	  • to hide public profile from search,
	  • to hide first, last name and email from the public profile
	
	HRS4R: This is the section you need to access in order to manage the HRS4R process.
	
	Organisation: If you want to update the profile details of your organisation, you need to access this section. The name of the organisation can be changed only through the Help Desk.
	
	Job offers, funding offers, hosting offers: These sections are available for members to manage and publish vacancies on behalf of their organisation.
	
	Favourites: *In this section you can review the jobs, hosting, funding offers and events which you have "SAVE TO FAVORITES".*
	
	Saved searches: In this section there will be the list of all saved searches such as job, funding, hosting offers, members, organisations.
	
	Account settings: If you want to change the email or the password of your EURAXESS account, or you would like to upload a new profile picture, you can easily do it here.
	
	Notifications: In this section you can find the list of all the content updates included in the pages to which you have subscribed on EURAXESS, and you can also set the frequency of notifications (daily, every three days, and every seven days).
	
	Need help? In this section you will find <u>detailed explanations</u> on how to manage your EURAXESS profile and account.

NB: The European Commission is committed to personal data protection. Any personal data is processed in line with the Regulation (EC) 2018/1725. All personal information processed by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation is treated accordingly.

User data is retained as long as the user continues to use EURAXESS. Accounts are removed after five (5) years of inactivity. After one year, an email is sent to the data subject to offer the possibility to delete or update his/her account.

You can easily have access to your personal data and even export it for analysis. You can also delete your account any time, without having to contact the Help Desk. In order to do that you should access your MY EURAXESS dashboard, the "User profile" section.

Please note that when an account is deleted, all related data are deleted with it.

You can read our [Privacy Statement](#) on the EURAXESS portal, for more details on how we protect and respect your privacy.

3.5 Update the organisation profile on EURAXESS

From your MY EURAXESS dashboard, access the section called "Organisation" by clicking on the dedicated icon and make sure all the mandatory fields are duly filled in.

The organisation name cannot be changed by the Organisation Admin or the HRS4R Admin. Such requests should be addressed to the Help Desk (support@euraxess.org).

If there are different people covering the two above-mentioned roles within the institution, we recommend collaborating on this section, as there are elements which should be taken care of in terms of employer branding (i.e. essential when publishing jobs on EURAXESS).

The institution's logo can be uploaded, as well as the Horizon 2020 "Seal of Excellence" (SoE) certificates, for example. If the SoE is uploaded as part of the institution EURAXESS profile the institution in question will be labelled, for increased visibility, as below:

4   Initial Phase

Once the access details for the HRS4R e-tool are set, the HRS4R Admin can initiate the application process for the HR Award.

The whole process will be managed through MY EURAXESS dashboard, via the HRS4R section.

4.1   General overview: tasks, responsibilities and timelines:

The graph below details the flow of the main activities performed during the Initial Phase by both Institutions 🏛 and the European Commission (EC) 🎨, based on a best case scenario:
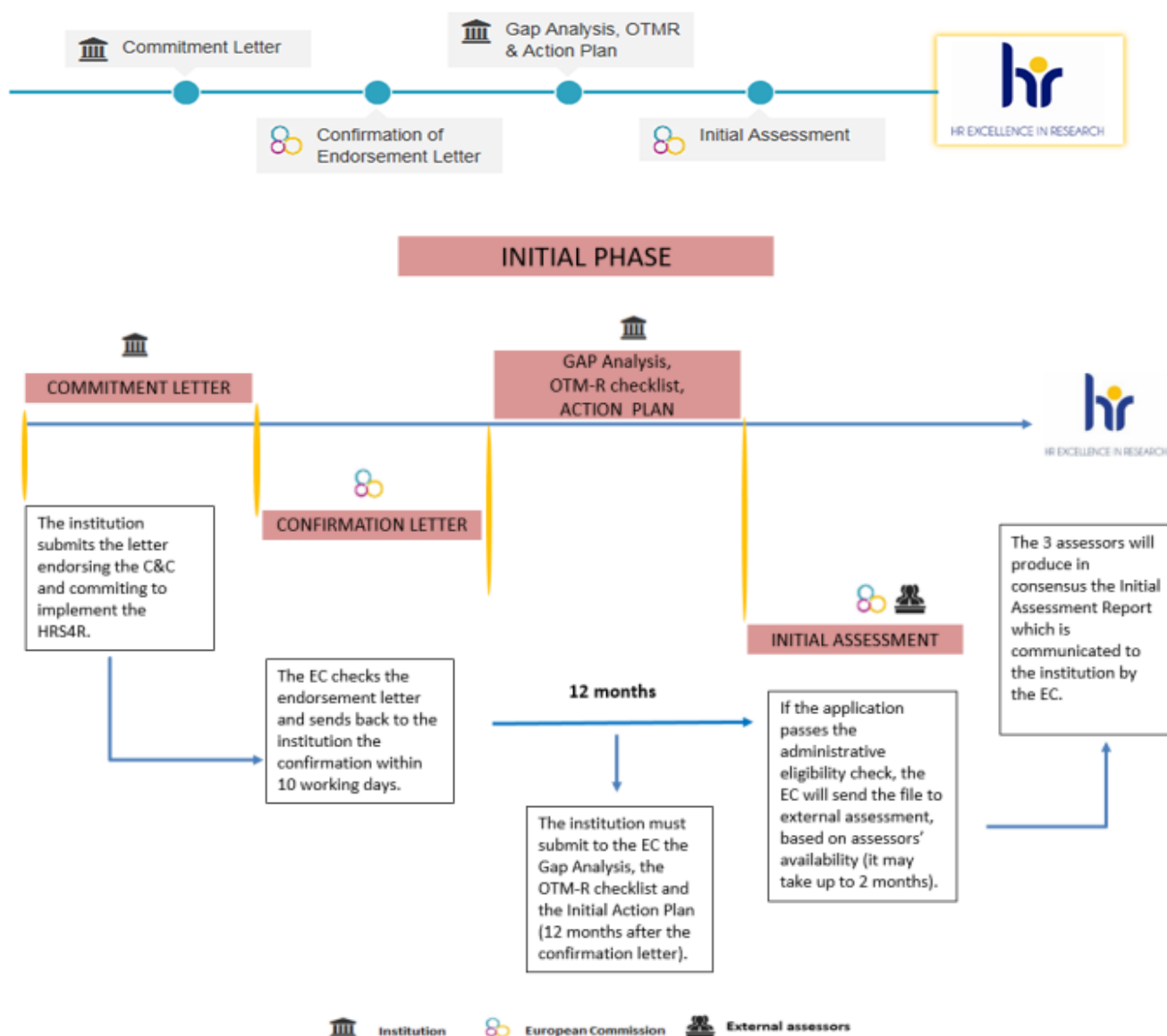
N.B.: The institution will have access to the consensus report within approximately three months after the confirmation of the administrative eligibility check.

4.2 Creation of an application case in the HRS4R e-tool

The HRS4R Admin will access the HRS4R section via MY EURAXESS dashboard. By clicking on the yellow button, "Create a case & apply for the HR Award" the HRS4R Admin will create a case and initiate the process.

```
My HRS4R Case

                                                    hr HRS4R Procedure ⬇

University college of applied science Hrvatsko zagorje Krapina

CREATE A CASE & APPLY FOR THE HR AWARD
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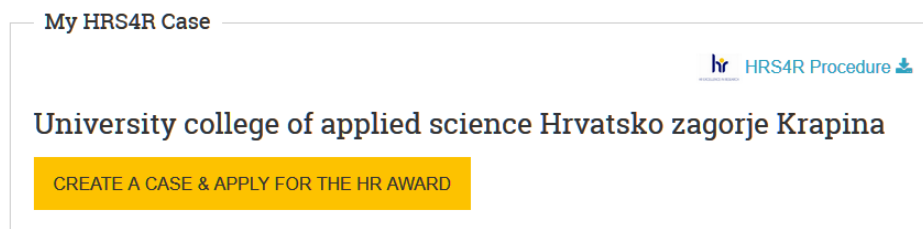
4.3 Endorsement of the C&C and submission of the Commitment Letter

When the institution is ready to get involved in the process, the first step is to send a commitment letter to the EC, issued by the Rector, President or other senior level position such as the Vice-President for Research, or another person representing the legal body authorised to make a commitment on behalf of the institution.

The letter should clearly express that the institution is committed to start the procedure and will undergo all subsequent cycles of the implementation phases.

The institution can use their own text and format to draft the commitment letter, however the below elements are mandatory requirements:

- ✓ The letter should be written in English.
- ✓ The letter should be signed by the current highest management representative within the organisation.
- ✓ The letter should be recently dated (not older than 12 months before submission).
- ✓ The letter should clearly state both the endorsement of the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, as well as the commitment to start the procedure and to undergo all subsequent cycles of the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R).

If the letter is not compliant with either one or multiple requirements as detailed above, it will be declined and the institution will have to resubmit an updated version. Get inspiration from examples of endorsement letters published in the Annex or the Policy Library.

Part of the initial application procedure is to also provide the contact details of the person who will represent the interface with the EC in terms of the HRS4R process. The procedure for to obtain the role of HRS4R Admin is detailed in section 3.2.3.

If needed, the contact person can be updated at any time during the application process. In order to do so, send an email to the Help Desk (support@euraxess.org) indicating the name, email address (as registered in the portal), function and contact details of the person that should be granted the HRS4R Admin role. Note that **this role is granted only to one person per institution, and it is the institution responsibility to ensure an active HRS4R Admin at all times.**

Endorsement & Commitment Letter

- **Endorsement Letter**: The endorsement letter is an official document signed off by the 1st level of management in your organisation, including the signature of the person responsible and the stamp of the organisation.

  - The letter should be written in English

  - The letter should be signed by the current highest management representative within the organisation.

  - The letter should be recently dated (not older than 12 months before submission).

  - The letter should clearly state both the endorsement of the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, as well as the commitment to start the procedure and to undergo all subsequent cycles of the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R).

- **Contact Person for the HRS4R**: HR Director or any employee within the organisation, responsible for the organisation's application and implementation process of the HRS4R on EURAXESS. This person will be the HRS4R Organisation Administrator on EURAXESS.

- **Management mandated to engage the organisation**: Rector/President/General Manager, or any other 1st level management lines within your institution, who signs off the official letter for the endorsement of the 40 principles of the Charter & Code and commits on behalf of the institution to implement the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) in the next 12 months

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Endorsement Letter *

| Browse... | No file selected. | UPLOAD |

More information

Contact Person for the HRS4R	Management mandated to engage the organisation
Name *	Name *
Position *	Position *
Email *	Email *
Office Telephone *	Office Telephone *

SAVE

Clicking on the "Save" button saves the provided information and still allows the information to be edited before it is submitted. The status of the application will be changed into "Pending" as below:

The pdf version of the endorsement letter will have to be uploaded in the HRS4R e-tool.

After clicking on "Submit", the application cannot be edited anymore and the action cannot be undone. The status of the application will consequently change into "Submitted".

At this point, the application reaches the EC, who will check the compliance of the commitment letter based on the previously detailed four main criteria. The institution will be informed if the application is accepted or declined within 10 working days.

The HRS4R dashboard will highlight the phase of the application, as well as the current task and the deadline, as shown below:

The approval of the endorsement letter by the EC will change the status of the "C&C Endorsement: Confirmation of Endorsement Letter" task from "Pending" to "Accepted".

Once this stage is completed, the institution will be able to move to the next task of the HRS4R process.
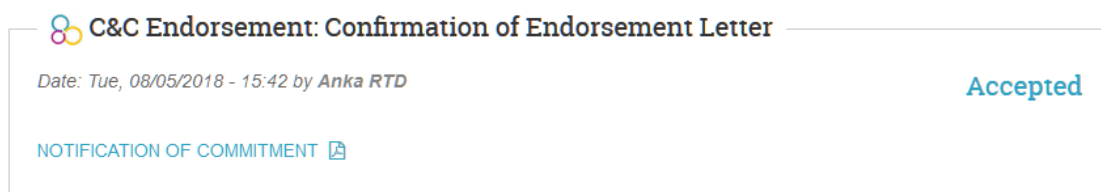
By clicking on "Notification of Commitment" the confirmation by the EC of the Endorsement of the Charter and Code principles and commitment to the implementation of the HRS4R is displayed.

Once the Endorsement Letter is approved, the EC will allocate a case number to the application. An application that has not been confirmed will have a "Pending" status.

Important: The case number allocated to the institution will be an essential code in all future interactions with the EC Services regarding the HRS4R process: do not forget to include it in all your correspondence.

If the application is "Accepted", the HRS4R dashboard of the institution will highlight the case number allocated and the deadline of the next task: Gap Analysis, OTM-R, Action Plan Design, calculated at 12 months from the date the endorsement letter was confirmed, as shown below:
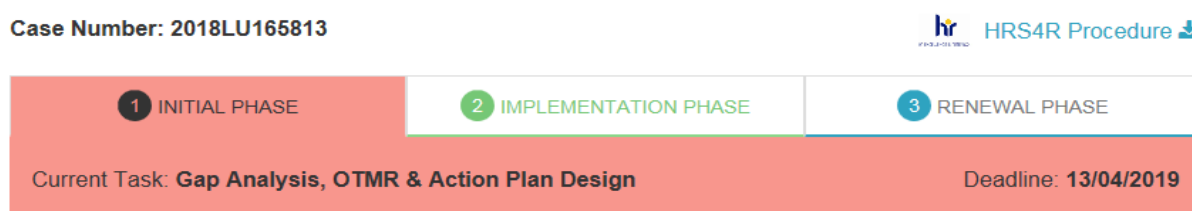
The institution can also assess its progress in terms of the completion of the tasks included in the Initial Phase, as marked in the top horizontal menu, as below:
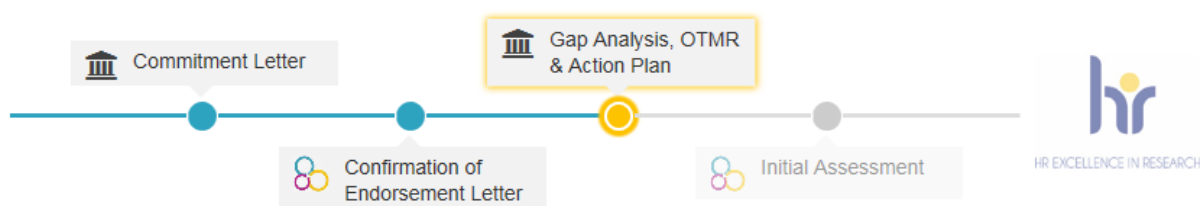
If the endorsement letter is "Declined", a notification will appear in the institution's dashboard.

The "Show more" feature will show the reasons for rejection:

In this case, the institution will have to **resubmit the application** based on the recommendations provided by the EC. The top horizontal menu will reflect the position of the institution at the first task of the flow – "Commitment Letter". The institution will have to resubmit the application within one month.

4.4   Filling in the application forms

The Gap Analysis, the OTM-R Checklist and the Action Plan are the three mandatory documents required to be completed by institutions within the 12 months' period after the confirmation of their endorsement letter. The three documents are standard forms to be completed in the HRS4R e-tool. Together, with the Process Description form, they constitute the application for the "HR Excellence in Research Award". The submission of these documents through the HRS4R e-tool is possible only as a package.

The institution will get indications in the HRS4R dashboard about the expected deadline by which the submission should take place.

The institution can **request an extension via the e-tool using the "request extension" button, which becomes active one month before the deadline** and must be accompanied by **a sound justification.** This option is offered only once. If the extension is approved, the deadline will be extended by **one month**. Upon exceptional circumstances, longer extensions may be granted on a case-by-case base.

4.4.1 Process Description

In this form the institution should describe hand explain how it proceeded to consult and involve the required internal and external stakeholder groups for the design of the Gap Analysis. Typically, all management departments directly or indirectly responsible for researchers' HR-issues should be included (i.e. the Vice-Rector for Research, the Head of Personnel, and other administrative staff members).

In addition, the institution must consult and involve a representative community of researchers ranging from R1 to R4, as well as appoint a Committee overseeing the process and a Working Group responsible for implementing the process. For a detailed description of R1-R4 researcher levels, please visit the information published on the [EURAXESS portal](#).

The institution can choose its own channels and tools to consult and involve stakeholders (i.e. surveys, workshops, etc.), but it should base its methodology on the Process Description form..

The institution can see some good practices of surveys to research staff in the [Policy Library](#).

4.4.2 The Gap Analysis

What it is
The Gap Analysis seeks to answer the questions "where are we?" (current state) and "where do we want to be?" (target state) as an institution, with regard to the 40 principles of the C&C.

Why it is important
The Gap Analysis provides a clear picture of the development needs, while identifying any deficiencies or shortcomings. Once the gaps are identified, it becomes easier to prioritise and quantify them, also establish the work effort that will be required to address them.

There should be a clear connection between the Gap Analysis and the subsequent measures outlined in the Action Plan.

Key elements to consider

The template of the Gap Analysis can be found in the Annex and in the EURAXESS [Policy Library](#). This template is for guidance only, the template available on-line on the application case should be filled in and submitted. However, we recommend working on the template offline together with the wide range of internal and external stakeholders whom the institution intends to consult and involve in the process, based on the specific working mechanism each institution will be willing to set. The Gap Analysis should not be the outcome of a unilateral approach, but of participative, collaborative cumulated feedback, comprising the overall views and needs of the stakeholders involved in working groups and committees. Once the preparatory phase of the template is considered completed, the HRS4R Organisation Admin can proceed with the integration of data in the HRS4R e-tool.

Gap Analysis Overview

The Gap Analysis addresses how the institution rates its performance with regard to the 40 principles of the C&C, what corresponding gaps are identified and how they will be addressed and if any barriers are currently impeding implementation.

The 40 principles are listed under the four thematic headings of the C&C:

- Ethical and professional aspects
- Recruitment and selection
- Working conditions and social security
- Training and development

The potential options to rate the performance or the states of achievement in terms of the implementation of the 40 principles of the C&C are the following:

++ fully implemented

+/- almost but not fully implemented

-/+ partially implemented

-- insufficiently implemented

If the institution is already fulfilling some of the principles, the rating will be "fully implemented". Nevertheless, the institution is required to provide evidence of the specific case (i.e. examples of programmes, policy in practice, etc.).

If the rating is "almost but not fully implemented", "partially implemented" or "insufficiently implemented", they should be accompanied by the description of the gap, as well as by details about the measures the institution will undertake in order to fill the gap and address it.

Comments should be also added on whether aspects of the national or local legislative environment support or constrain the implementation of a principle.

After filling in the Gap Analysis form in the HRS4R e-tool, it is essential to click the "Save" button, in order to be able to review and update data, at later stages, if needed. **The "Submit" button will be enabled only after the OTM-R Checklist and the Action Plan form are also completed**.

4.4.3   The OTM-R Checklist

What it is

It is a specific self-assessment checklist provided to report on the status of achievement in terms of the implementation of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) policies and practices, which aims at making research careers more attractive, while facilitating mobility and equal opportunities for all candidates.

Why it is important

The OTM-R Checklist builds on the C&C principles related to the Recruitment of Researchers. Coupled with the Gap Analysis, it will further provide to institutions a clearer picture of their development needs, which will be prioritised and addressed with concrete actions, part of the Action Plan to be implemented in the upcoming years.

Key elements to consider

The OTM-R checklist consists in a list of questions covering the various steps of the recruitment process, from job advertising through to the appointment phase.

Each specific question mentioned in the OTM-R Checklist should be considered in the self-reflection exercise of the institution. The state of achievement in terms of each issue will be rated, as below, in the column dedicated to "Answer". For each situation, there should be details included on the indicators to measure performance, either those used or to be further used, at later stages, if applicable.

	Open	Transparent	Meritbased	Answer:	Suggested indicators (or form of measurement)
OTM-R system					
Have we published a version of our OTM-R policy online (in the national language and in English)?	x	x	x	++ Yes completely	web link
Do we have an internal guide setting out clear OTM-R procedures and practices for all types of positions?	x	x	x	+/- Yes substantially	
Is everyone involved in the process sufficiently trained in the area of OTM-R?	x	x	x	-/+ Yes partially	
Do we make (sufficient) use of e-recruitment tools?	x	x		-- No	

OTM-R Checklist Overview

The "Open", "Transparent" and "Merit-based" checkboxes are indicative of the type of policies and practices the questions refer to, as detailed in the C&C. They are pre-set in the HRS4R e-tool and cannot be changed. No action is needed from institutions in their respect.

The difference between the ratings "+/- Yes substantially" and "-/+ Yes partially" is that in the first case the volume of the remaining work to be done until completion is little as compared to the effort that has been put so far in that direction. In the case of "-/+ Yes partially", the remaining work is either the same in volume or more than what has been achieved.

For the "Suggested indicators" column, whenever the mouse is hovered on the row dedicated to each question, a small text box will pop up, indicating options of potential indicators to use. However, each institution should identify their own measurements of the effectiveness of its OTM-R policy, which should be further reviewed and adapted.

Important:

The OTM-R Checklist is available as a template in the [Annex](#) and in the EURAXESS [Policy Library](#). As in the case of the Gap Analysis, this is a guidance-only template and the HRS4R Admin should fill in and submit the template available in the on-line case. However, it is highly recommended to be handled first offline, in order to collect the information needed based on a collaborative approach, with the consultation and involvement of the stakeholder working groups. Once the final version is internally validated, the information can be included in the HRS4R e-tool.

If the institution has a recruitment strategy which implements the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment, it is mandatory to publish it on the institution's website in a visible place. The web link will be provided part of the Action Plan form.

A step-by-step guide to better OTM-R practices, as well as examples of good practice can be found in the Annex, [section 7.2.2](#).

After filling in the OTM-R checklist in the HRS4R e-tool, it is essential to click the "Save" button in order to be able to review and update data at later stages, if needed. The "Submit" button will be enabled only after the Gap Analysis and the Action Plan sections are also completed.

4.4.4   The Action Plan

What it is
The Action Plan is a sequence of activities that must be carried out in order to help the institution advance from the current state to the target state, with regards to the implementation of the 40 principles of the C&C. They will address the improvement needs identified in the Gap Analysis and the OTM-R Checklist.

Why it is important
The Action Plan establishes the foundation of an HRS4R management by objectives process inside the institution. It stems directly from the Gap Analysis and the OTM-R Checklist and it presents the institution's strategic vision in terms of the priority areas and implementation steps to be undertaken in the next two years.

Key elements to consider

The Action Plan form to be used for reporting in the HRS4R e-tool comprises four separate parts:

Organisational information

This section is intended to illustrate the larger context in which the institution performs, its structure, its impact upon the communities it serves, as well as the resources leveraged. There are two categories of data required:

- ✓ Staff indicators to be presented as full-time positions (FTEs) at the moment of reporting in the HRS4R e-tool, and
- ✓ Budget and funding, if applicable, to be expressed as amounts in euro. For countries using other currencies than euro, official currency conversion tools should be used, such as currency conversion calculators of national banks.

Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice

In this section, the institution must provide an overview of its current state and practice under the four thematic headings of the C&C (Ethical and Professional aspects, Recruitment and Selection, Working Conditions and Social Security, Training and Development). Information on current practices related to OTM-R should be also included here.

We strongly recommend elaborating on both strengths and weaknesses (although there is only one text block provided for both headings), as they will highlight the institution's rationale for setting actions as priorities in the Action Plan.

Actions

In order to help connect actions to improvement needs easier, all principles with their implementation ratings will be retrieved automatically from the Gap Analysis into the Action Plan. The proposed actions can address either individual or multiple principles and a list of GAP principles not selected in any action is provided.

We propose an approach based on **SMART** Action Planning, which incorporates five characteristics of a goal: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based.

More specifically, the Action Plan should:

- ✓ include tasks that overcome existing/emerging gaps, as identified in the Gap Analysis and the OTM-R Checklist in a specific way,
- ✓ state task ownership and responsibility (i.e. assigned to a specific department, specific person/role within the institution),
- ✓ have a clear timeframe for implementation (at least two years up to the first Internal Review),
- ✓ indicate how the state of achievement will be measured by means of key performance indicators (KPIs).

No	Proposed ACTIONS	GAP Principle(s)	Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)	Responsible Unit	Indicator(s) / Target(s)
🗑 1		Select principle ▼			

- ✓ The timeline should cover at least two years up to the first Internal Review. Timing should be indicated by quarters of a year.
- ✓ The actions should reflect a balance between short-term interventions (i.e. such as organising a workshop) and long-term systemic actions that bring about culture change.
- ✓ The institution can customise planning based on own priorities and creativity. There is the possibility to add as many new fields as needed in order to include the desired volume of actions.

Add another row +

The Action Plan also includes a dedicated section to OTM-R policy and practices.

The establishment of an Open Recruitment Policy is a key element in the HRS4R strategy. The applicant institution must also indicate how the Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Toolkit will be used and how the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment will be implemented. Although there may be some overlap with a range of the actions already planned as emerged from the Gap Analysis, the institution must provide a short commentary demonstrating this implementation. The institution will have to make the link between the OTM-R Checklist and the overall Action Plan in a free text section.

If the institution already has a recruitment strategy that implements the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment, it must provide the web link where this strategy can be found on the institution's website.

Implementation of the HRS4R process

This section must include information on how the HRS4R will be coordinated and embedded inside the institution through working groups, alignment with HR policies or internal mechanisms, etc.

Besides describing actions in a free text, there is also a mandatory checklist with questions to answer, as below. The answer to each question should be responded in a maximum of 500 words.

How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress?*	⌄
How do you intend to involve the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?*	⌄
How do you proceed with the alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? Make sure the HRS4R is recognized in the organisation's research strategy, as the overarching HR policy. *	⌄
How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented?*	⌄
How will you monitor progress (timeline)?*	⌄
How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?*	⌄

Should the same answer be applicable to more than one question, please state clearly if the case instead of duplicating replies.

Important: The Action Plan and HRS4R strategy must be published in an easily accessible location of the institution's website. The URL to the corresponding webpage must be included in the URL field in the HRS4R e-tool, starting with "https://" or "http://". Typically, only one URL should be shared.

4.5 Submission of the application

Once the mandatory forms (Process Description, Gap Analysis, OTM-R Checklist and Action Plan) have been duly completed and submitted in the HRS4R e-tool, an option to upload other documents to support the application will appear in the organisation dashboard. It is recommended to use this option only to submit sensitive documents that cannot be published on your institution's website. This field accepts files in .zip format.

The button "Submit" should now be visible in the dashboard. If this is not the case, you should review the status of each form and fix the possible errors:

> ■ **Pending**: The form is either empty or needs to be revised because the EC has requested corrections after its submission.
>
> ■ **Draft - Invalid**: The form is saved as a draft version. Not all required fields are provided.
>
> ■ **Valid - Not Submitted**: The form is duly filled and ready for submission. **Must click "Submit" button** to send it to the next task.
>
> ■ **Submitted**: The form has been finalized and submitted to the next task- it is no longer possible to edit it.

When all documents are correctly filled in and saved, the "Submit" button will send your application to the EC. At this point, the institution will no longer be able to update the files and the action cannot be undone.

4.6 Initial Assessment

4.6.1 Description and timeline of the assessment process

After the successful submission of the HR Award application, the institution moves to the next level of the process, which consists of two separate steps:
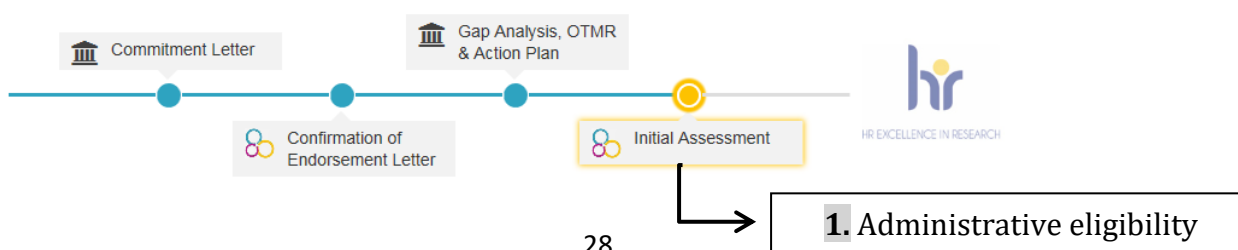
The administrative eligibility check

This check has the purpose to validate an application in terms of its formal compliance with the application procedure and will only verify that all the forms are duly completed in the HRS4R e-tool, and they contain sufficient information to enable the experts to proceed to their assessment.

The institution will be informed if the application is compliant and has passed the administrative eligibility check within approximately four weeks after submission.

If the application is considered non-compliant, the institution will be required to update it based on the feedback provided by EC Services. In this case, the institution's task is moved backwards on the process flow and so that the forms of the initial application can be further edited to make the required changes within two months from the check.
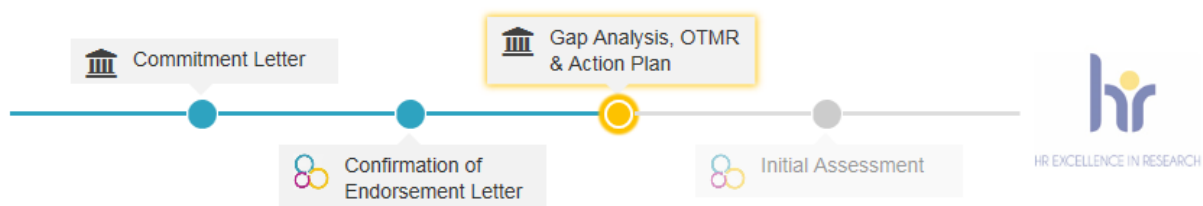
The assessment of the application

The second step of the Initial Assessment phase is performed by three independent experts and can only be initiated if an application has passed the administrative eligibility check.

How the experts are selected:

The experts are selected by the EC in a transparent process on the basis of the following criteria:

- ✓ Personal competence and experience in the HRS4R field or any similar HR strategy development and implementation;
- ✓ Geographic distribution over EU-27;
- ✓ Institutional spread (i.e. research institutions, universities, research funders etc.)

Prior to the involvement of the experts in the assessment, they receive appropriate training on all issues and requirements. Also, prior to any assessment, the experts sign a declaration of confidentiality covering issues such as performance or obligation of impartiality. These confidentiality obligations are binding on the expert unless the confidential information becomes public through disclosure of the confidential information by the institution or the Commission services.

How the assessment process is organised:

Each application will be assessed by three experts or peer reviewers. In general, they are from a different country than the applicant organisation. If the national context is too complex, an expert from the same country may be selected, provided no conflict of interest exist.

The experts use standard forms/templates and criteria for all applications in order to ensure fair treatment to all institutions.

The experts will specifically be interested to find:

✓ Clear information on the context overview in which the HR Strategy is designed (assets and barriers).
✓ Coherence between the Gap Analysis and the Action Plan.
✓ Concrete actions for the implementation of the principles of the C&C, with clear indicators and timelines.
✓ Examples of how the institution consulted and involved the required internal and external stakeholder groups in their HRS4R process.
✓ The HRS4R strategy published on the institution's website in English, in a visible place.

One of the three individual peer reviewers is assigned the role of lead-assessor and will prepare the commonly agreed consensus report integrating the input provided in the individual assessments.

The consensus report is the official feedback that the institution will receive in terms of their application to the "HR Excellence in Research Award". It is also based on a standard form/template, but it includes besides the result of the general assessment (whether the institution should receive the HR Award), customised recommendations in terms of their ambition and planning of the HRS4R.

The institution will have access to the consensus report within three or four months after the administrative eligibility check has been communicated as positive.

Important: Similar templates to the ones used by the assessors can be found in the [Annex](#) or the EURAXESS [Policy Library](#). It is strongly recommended to look into them carefully before submitting the application for the HR Award, in order to make sure every specific requirement has been considered.

4.7 General assessment

The general assessment, provided part of the consensus report, indicates whether the institution is granted the HR Award according to the options below:

4.7.1 Accepted

The application meets the criteria and the HR Award is granted by the EC.

The experts may comment on the submission asking for future focus on a particular
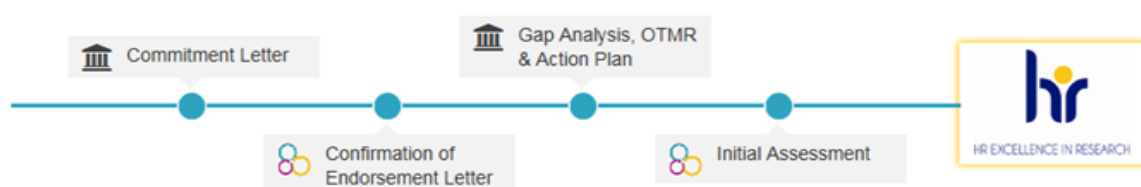
aspect or criterion, if appropriate. For example, they may say that they would like to see some elements addressed in the longer term, but acknowledge that the submission meets the criteria for the Award.

4.7.2 Pending minor modifications

The institution broadly meets the criteria but the external assessors have some concerns or questions about specific areas, in which case the institution is moved backwards on the HRS4R process flow in order to reflect and act upon the feedback received.
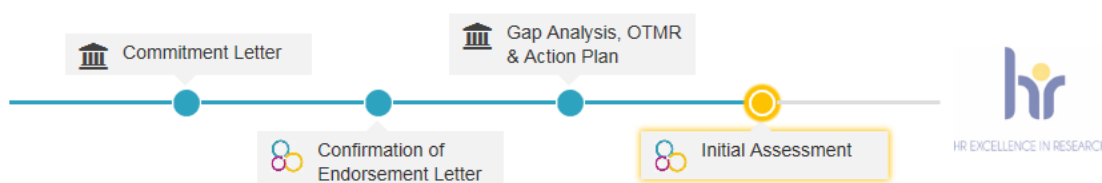
The institution should consider for immediate action the recommendations mentioned as mandatory in order to obtain the award. The other recommendations can be addressed during the second phase of the HRS4R process: the Implementation Phase.

The institution is required to update the documentation in the HRS4R e-tool and resubmit the application for review **within two months**. If the institution has difficulties in meeting the deadline, it can **request an extension via the e-tool using the "request extension" button, which becomes active one month before the deadline.** The request must be accompanied by **a sound justification.** This option is offered only once. If the extension is approved, the deadline will be extended by **one month**. Upon exceptional circumstances, longer extensions may be granted on a case-by-case base.

The assessors will review only how the institution has followed up on their feedback, so we strongly recommend acting upon the specific recommendations and clearly detailing the actions in the revised application.

Important: Special attention should be paid when resubmitting the revised application as only **one** resubmission is allowed at this stage. If the institution did not tackle the mandatory recommendations in the resubmission, the EC may temporarily suspend the logo from the organisation profile and remove its name from the list of [Awarded Organisations](). In this case, the organisation must resubmit their application until the experts issue a positive evaluation, after which the logo will be re-established and the organisation name will be listed again.

4.7.3 Pending major revisions

The institution does not seem to meet the criteria to get the HR Award yet and is required to make the appropriate changes taking into account the recommendations of

the assessors. In this case, the institution is moved backwards on the HRS4R process flow in order to implement the suggested actions provided in the feedback.

The institution is required to update the documentation in the HRS4R e-tool and resubmit the revised application for review **within 12 months**. If the institution has difficulties in meeting the deadline, it can **request an extension via the e-tool using the "request extension" button, which becomes active one month before the deadline.** The request must be accompanied by **a sound justification.** This option is offered only once. If the extension is approved, the deadline will be extended by **one month**. Upon exceptional circumstances, longer extensions may be granted on a case-by-case base.

The assessors will review only how the institution has followed up on their feedback that is why we strongly recommend acting upon the specific recommendations and clearly detailing the actions in the revised application.

Important: Special attention should be paid when resubmitting the revised application as only **two** resubmission is allowed at this stage. If the institution did not tackle the mandatory recommendations in the second resubmission, the EC may temporarily suspend the logo from the organisation profile and remove its name from the list of [Awarded Organisations](#). In this case, the organisation must resubmit their application until the experts issue a positive evaluation, after which the logo will be re-established and the organisation name will be listed again.

4.8   Granting of the "HR Excellence in Research Award"

The outcome of the assessment is officially announced via email (to the email address provided as contact when completing the first step of the application process).

The position of the institution on the HRS4R process flow will be reflected accordingly, as below:
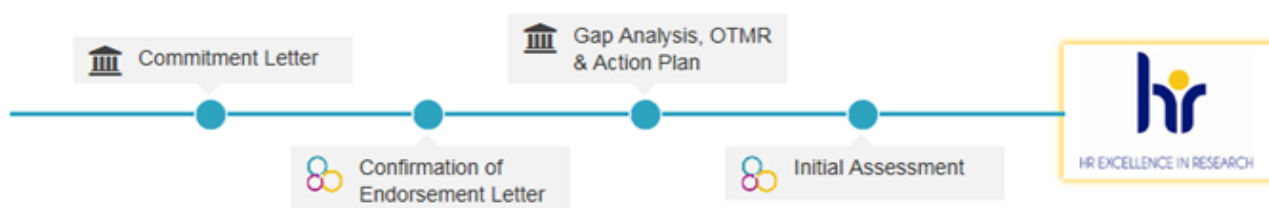
From this moment on, the institution can use the "HR Excellence in Research" emblem associated to its name on the institution's website, on social media, on marketing materials and collaterals, etc. in order to promote its efforts in providing a stimulating and favourable work environment for researchers. The HR Award icon can be downloaded in different formats together with the graphic guidelines at any point from the HRS4R Admin dashboard in the EURAXESS portal:

As a EURAXESS member institution, the HR Award emblem will be activated on the EURAXESS portal as well, and will increase your employer's visibility. Every time your institution publishes a vacancy on EURAXESS, the "HR Excellence in Research" icon will appear next to your institution's name.

The institution will be also listed on the Awarded Institutions webpage in the EURAXESS portal together with a link to the HR Strategy published on the institution's website.

5 Implementation Phase

5.1 Overview of the Implementation Phase

The granting of the HR Award represents the end of the Initial Phase and the start of the Implementation Phase.

The HR Award acknowledged institutions have 24 months to implement the actions outlined in the Action Plan and report on their progress with a view to the Interim Assessment.

At this stage, the experts will assess progress and quality of the actions and accompanying measures (such as embedding the HRS4R process). The institution is not in jeopardy of losing the HR Award but receives important recommendations on how to continue the implementation of the revised Action Plan for the next 36 months.
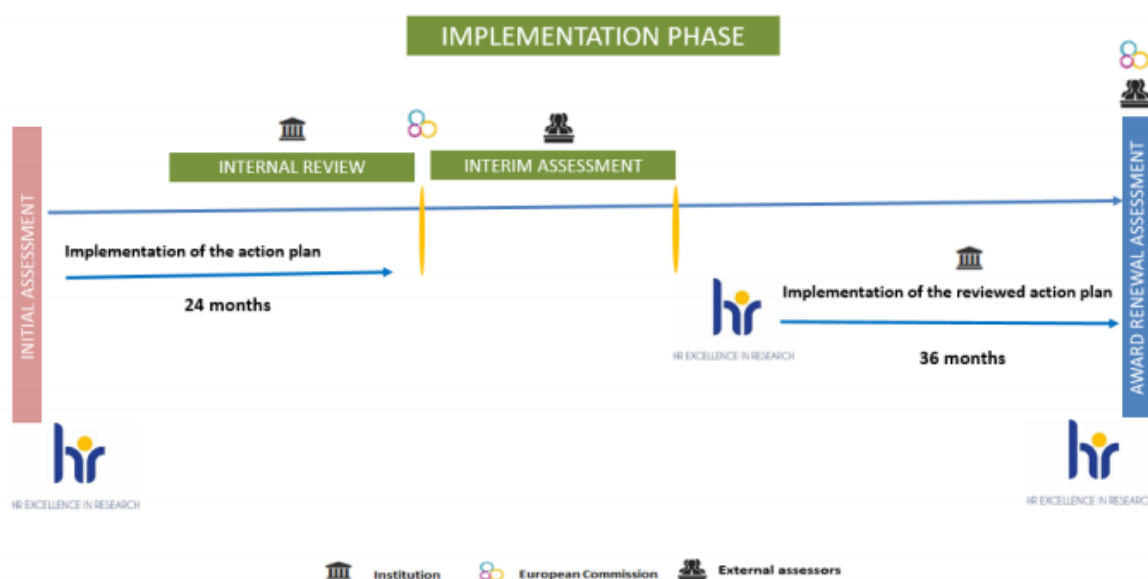
The EC will first screen the institution's Internal Review for administrative eligibility. The administrative eligibility check makes sure the application has all the required elements necessary for assessment. If the administrative eligibility check is not passed, the institution may be required to make corrections and resubmit the application.

Once the Internal Review is considered eligible from an administrative point of view, EC Services will send the file for the Interim Assessment to one peer reviewer, typically the lead expert who conducted the assessment in the Initial Phase.

The assessor uses standard assessment forms to ensure equal treatment for all applicant institutions. The expert will prepare the consensus report, which is shared with the institution as an official document containing pertinent recommendations.

The institution is **not in jeopardy of losing the HR Award** but receives important recommendations on how to continue the implementation of the revised Action Plan for the next 36 months.

The HRS4R process will continue after the Implementation Phase in a cyclical way, with an assessment for HR Award renewal every 36 months (alternating the organisation of site visits performed by experts).

5.2   Internal Review for Interim Assessment

What it is

The institution indicates in the Internal Review form how it has embedded into its policies and practices the actions set in the initial Action Plan after the acknowledgement of the HR Award. It also proposes new actions for the next three years.

The institution must **publish the reviewed version of the Action Plan or HR Strategy** (including the OTM-R policy) on the institution's website and provide the corresponding URL in a dedicated field of the Internal Review form.

If the institution did not fill in the **OTM-R Checklist** during the Initial Phase, it is mandatory to complete this task for the Interim Assessment.

Why it is important

The purpose of an Internal Review during the Implementation Phase is to allow the participating institutions to reflect and document progress, alter actions or timing of actions if necessary as well as to offer the opportunity to create new actions for the upcoming years.

Tasks, responsibilities and timelines

The image below details the flow of the main activities performed by 🏛 Institutions and the 8° European Commission (EC) based on a best-case scenario.
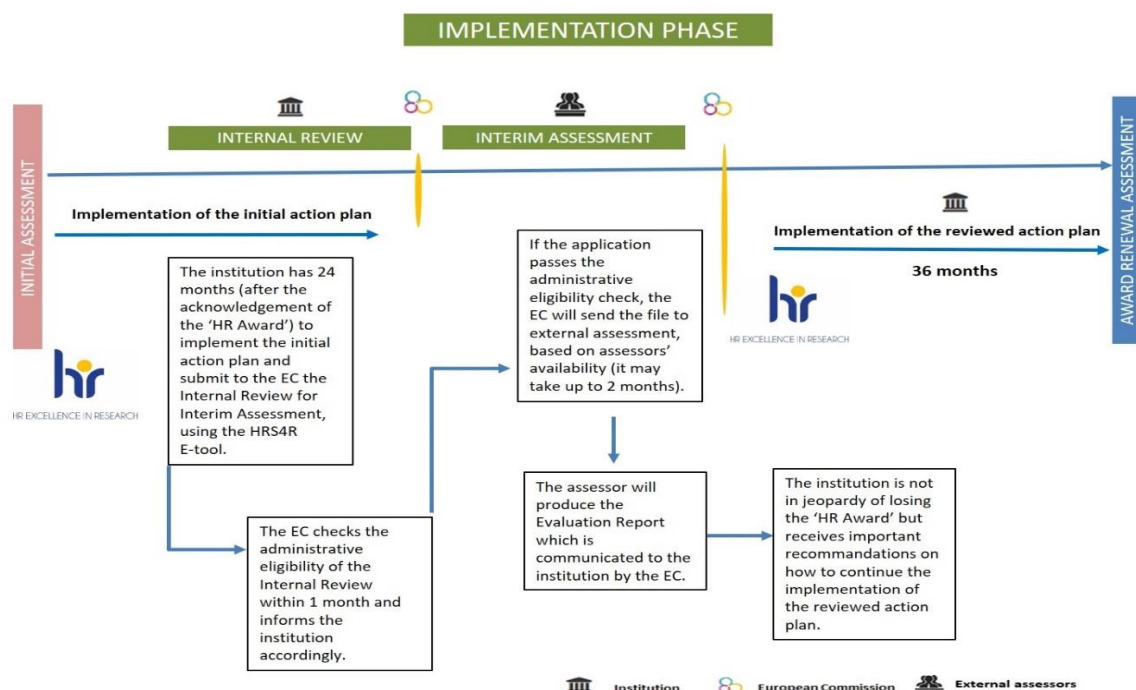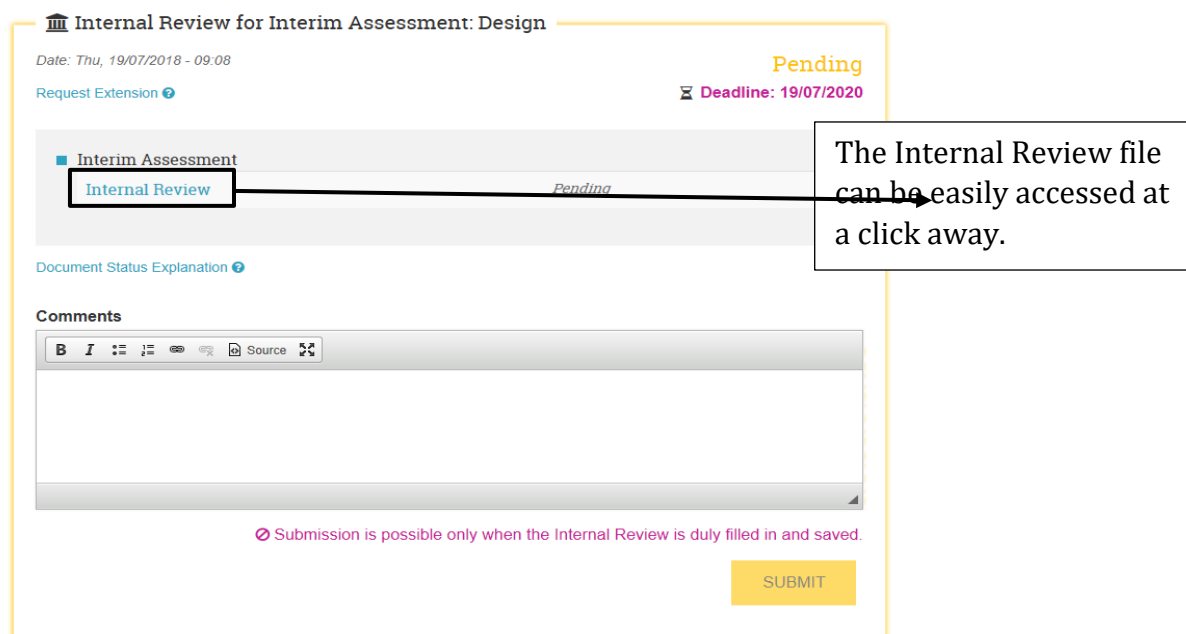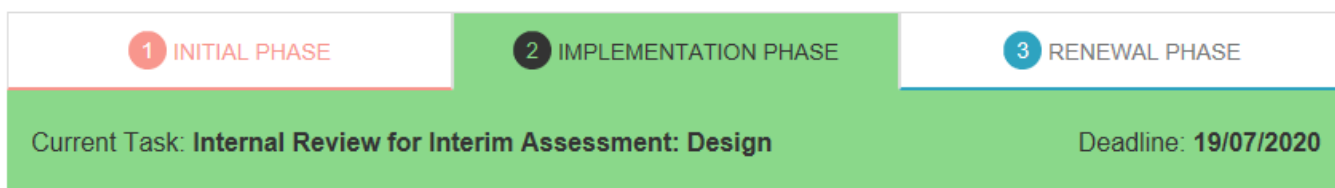
5.3   Access the Internal Review form in the HRS4R e-tool

5.3.1   If your institution applied via the HRS4R e-tool in the Initial Phase

The institution's HRS4R Admin will log in to the HRS4R e-tool in order to manage the reporting process, as done in the Initial Phase.

The click on the "Implementation Phase" green tab will illustrate the next task (Internal Review) with the status "Pending" and the corresponding deadline.

5.3.2 If your institution did not apply via the HRS4R e-tool in the Initial Phase

The institution must register the file in the HRS4R e-tool before filling in the Internal Review form.

N.B.: You will **receive assistance** from the RTD CHARTER team at the European Commission in order to have a smooth and quick transition of your institution's application files from paper to digital, in the HRS4R e-tool. Whenever you encounter difficulties throughout the process, you can send an email for clarifications to RTD-CHARTER@ec.europe.eu.

The following graph illustrates the enrolment process of institutions in the HRS4R e-tool:

ENROLLING INSTITUTIONS IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

Scenario for institutions in the Implementation Phase – Interim Assessment

REGISTER EURAXESS ORG. ACCOUNT

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The institution registers an organisational account on EURAXESS if there isn't any. It must be an account of the top organisation (not a department/ laboratory account of the top organisation).

CREATE A CASE IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

The institution uploads the endorsement letter of the Charter & Code in the HRS4R tool, as if it were a newcomer to the process. The old version of the endorsement letter must be used, not a new one.

BUILD APPLICATION HISTORY IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL.

The EC uploads in the HRS4R Tool all the application, reporting and assessment files which ensured the institution's progress from one phase to another. The files will be uploaded as pdfs.

PLACE THE INSTITUTION AT THE CORRESPONDING TASK IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

The EC informs the institution via email that the institution has been placed at the corresponding phase and task in the HRS4R E-tool, together with the history of the application, reporting and assessment process.

The Institution can fill in the Internal Review for the Interim Assessment in the HRS4R E-Tool. From this moment on the reporting and assessment process will be handled online.

GET HRS4R ADMIN ROLE

Once the registration of the EURAXESS org. account is approved by the Help Desk, you can ask for the HRS4R Admin role, to secure access to the HRS4R online tool. The domain of the email must be in the URL of the organisation. Only one person per organisation is granted this role.

CONFIRMATION EMAIL BY EC

The EC checks the endorsement letter and sends back to the institution the confirmation within 10 working days.

INITIAL PHASE

The EC will upload:
- Gap –Analysis,
- OTM-R Checklist,
- Initial Action Plan,
- Consensus Report with the outcome of the Initial Assessment.
- Resubmissions, if any, will be also marked in the system.

🏛 Institution   European Commission

Secure your access to the HRS4R e-tool

To access the HRS4R e-tool, you must have an individual EURAXESS member account. Registration and membership are free of charge. You can follow the steps outlined in section 3 of this guide. Follow also the instructions related to creating a HRS4R case in section 4.2 as if you were a newcomer to the process.

Submit the endorsement letter

The process is launched the moment you fill in the first task "Endorsement of the C&C", which consists in uploading the pdf version of the endorsement letter that your organisation used to apply to the HR Award for the first time. Please also indicate the contact person(s) in charge of the HR process in your institution.

N.B:
You must upload in the system the version of the endorsement letter provided by the institution to the European Commission the moment it initially enrolled in the process.

Clicking the "Save" button saves the provided information and still allows the information to be edited before it is submitted.

The status of the application will be changed into "Pending" as shown below:

Once the "Submit" button is clicked, the application cannot be edited any longer and the action cannot be undone. The status of the application will consequently change into "Submitted".
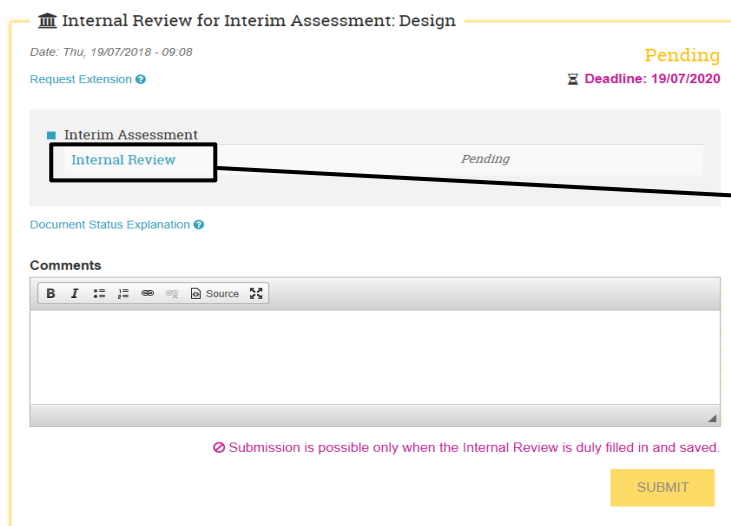
The EC will compile all the files already provided by your institution part of the application and acknowledgement of the HR Award (the Gap-Analysis, the OTM-R Checklist, the initial Action Plan, the assessment consensus report) and will upload them as pdfs in the HRS4R e-tool. The HRS4R Admin will have access to all the HRS4R history of application, reporting and assessment on the on-line dashboard.

The EC will confirm by email once the files are uploaded in the tool and will provide **the case number** assigned to the organisation's file which should be used in all subsequent correspondence with the EC Services or the Help Desk. The case is moved to the appropriate phase in the process and the HRS4R Admin can start filling in the Internal Review.

The institution's HRS4R Admin will log in to the EURAXESS account and through MY EURAXESS dashboard will have access to the HRS4R e-tool in order to manage further the reporting process.

The click on the "Implementation Phase" green tab will illustrate as below the next task, Internal Review, with the status "Pending" and the corresponding deadline.

The Internal Review file can be easily accessed at a click away.

5.4 Filling the Internal Review forms

The Internal Review forms are very similar in structure to the Action Plan form provided in the Initial Phase. Those institutions that used the e-tool in their application will see some text blocks automatically filled in with information retrieved from the Action Plan filled in at the Initial Phase.

The institutions that enrol in the e-tool at this stage will see these sections empty and should not manually fill them in. For details on the Action Plan form at Initial Phase, please see section 4.4.4.

5.4.1 Organisational information

This section is intended to illustrate the larger context in which the institution performs, its structure, its impact upon the communities it serves, as well as the resources managed.

There are two categories of data required:

- ✓ Staff indicators to be presented as full-time positions (FTEs), and
- ✓ Budget and funding, if applicable, to be expressed as amounts in euro.

The dedicated table for filling in the data will already contain the organisational information provided at the Initial Phase, if available, with the possibility to update it for the current situation.

5.4.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice

In this section, the institution must provide an overview of its current state and practice under the four thematic headings of the C&C, as already done for the Initial Phase.

The information regarding the "Strengths and weaknesses" expressed at the Initial Phase will be retrieved automatically from the system if the institution has filled in the initial Action Plan in the HRS4R e-tool. Otherwise, the relevant text block will show as empty and the organisation only needs to provide the information relevant to the Implementation Phase. We strongly recommend elaborating on both strengths and weaknesses, as they will highlight the institution's rationale for setting actions as priorities in the Action Plan.

If the institution is willing to provide more information about the way the strengths and weaknesses context evolved or changed from the Initial to the Implementation phase, there is a "Remarks" section within each of the tabs corresponding to the four headings of the C&C that can be used for this purpose.

The institution is also required to provide answers to specific questions regarding the way the it has operated after the acknowledgement of the HR Award. A text block is offered for the following questions, with the indication to elaborate the reply in maximum 500 words for each of them.

5.4.3 Actions

The institution has to report on the status of achievement for each of the actions planned in the Initial Phase, alter actions or timing of actions if necessary, and add new actions to be implemented in the next 36 months, after the Interim Assessment. For an on-going action evolving as planned, please use the "Current Status" IN PROGRESS. If a planned action is taking longer than initially foreseen, use the EXTENDED status. An action reported as COMPLETED in one phase does not need to be mentioned again in the following phase.

The actions, as well as the remarks on the status of achievement should be concise, but detailed enough for the assessors to evaluate the level of ambition, engagement and implementation. The institution should strive to provide a detailed plan, not only an enumeration of actions.

Mandatory requirements at this stage:

- ✓ **The institution has to publish on the website the extended version of the reviewed Action Plan or HR Strategy** (including the OTM-R policy) and provide the URL to the corresponding webpages in a dedicated field of the Internal

Review, starting with "https://" or "http://. Typically, only one URL should be identified.

- ✓ **If the institution has not made its self-assessment against the OTM-R Checklist at the Initial Phase** (as per the strengthened HRS4R in force since January 2017), **it will have an additional task** to perform at the Interim Assessment (see details [here](#)).
- ✓ **The Actions section also includes a dedicated section to OTM-R policy and practices**. Although there may be some overlap with a range of the actions already planned as emerged from the Gap Analysis, the institution must provide a short commentary demonstrating the implementation of the OTM-R policies and practices, since the acknowledgement of the HR Award to the moment of the Internal Review. The institution will have to make the link between the OTM-R Checklist and the overall Action Plan in a free text section.

A different procedure to fill in the Internal Review Actions may apply based on two situations, as described in .

5.4.3.1 Institutions that used the HRS4R e-tool for the application to the HR Award

There are two tasks to perform at this stage:

Establish the status of achievement of the actions already planned in the Initial Phase

The institutions that filled in the Action Plan in HRS4R e-tool at the Initial Phase will find some information in the Internal Review form automatically retrieved, such as the list of planned actions, the gaps and principles they address, the timing, the indicators and the responsible unit.

For each of the actions already set, the institution will have to establish the status of achievement in the column called "Current State", selecting from the options below:

If the status is IN PROGRESS or EXTENDED, the institution has to update also the timing of achievement. An action IN PROGRESS is evolving as initially planned. An EXTENDED action is an action for which a new estimated deadline has to be re-set.

Details can be included for each action and corresponding status of achievement in the column for "Remarks".
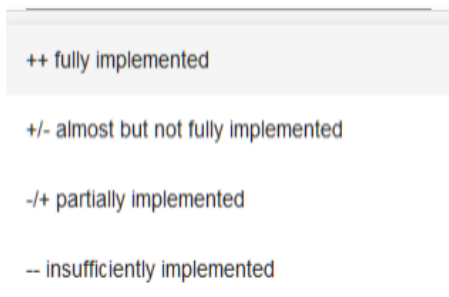
Add new actions to the Action Plan for the next 36 months.

The institution can customise planning based on its own priorities and creativity.

There is the possibility to add as many new actions as needed. The click on "Add another row" will create a new field in the form for the addition of a new action.

The principle of planning new actions at the Internal Review is similar to the Initial Phase. The proposed actions can address either individual or multiple principles. In order to ensure all the gap principles are addressed by the institution based on own priorities, the list of Gap principles not selected in any action so far will be provided for reference.

The selected gap will be automatically accompanied by the rating already set in the Gap

++ fully implemented

+/- almost but not fully implemented

-/+ partially implemented

-- insufficiently implemented

Analysis:

The timeline should cover at least 36 months up to the second Internal Review for Award Renewal. Timing should be indicated in quarters of a year.

The actions should reflect a balance between short-term interventions (i.e. such as organising a workshop) and long-term systemic actions that bring about culture change

5.4.3.2   Institutions that created a case in the HRS4R e-tool after they received the HR Award
Establish the status of achievement of the actions already planned in the Initial Phase
The Actions section of the Internal Review form will be empty. In order to report on the status of achievement, the institution will have to fill in first the actions set in the initial Action Plan, with the details provided at that time (the gap it addresses, timing, responsible unit, indicators (KPIs), etc). If the status is IN PROGRESS or EXTENDED, the institution has to include the timing of achievement.

An action can address multiple gap principles. The "Select principle" menu will provide the opportunity to quickly select from the 40 principles of the C&C those that the action addresses. The status of achievement will be set using the four options of the "Current Status". Details on the implementation process, difficulties or challenges encountered can be added in the "Remarks" column. An action IN PROGRESS is evolving as initially planned. An EXTENDED action is an action for which a new estimated deadline has to be re-set.

A list of Gap principles not selected in any action is provided in order to facilitate planning and keeping an easier track of the principles, which have to be addressed throughout the implementation and award renewal process.

Add new actions to the Action Plan for the next 36 months.

Once you have finalised the self-assessment regarding the status of achievement of the actions already planned in the Initial Phase, you can proceed with adding new actions to be further implemented in the next 36 months.

The institution can customise their planning based on its own priorities and creativity.

There is the possibility to add as many new actions as needed. The click on "Add another row" will create a new field in the form for the addition of a new action, the Gap principle it addresses, the timing of implementation, the responsible unit and the KPI(s). For the new actions, the "Current Status" will be "New".

There should always be a match between the gaps identified in the Gap Analysis at Initial Phase and the actions planned in such a way so as to make sure all gaps are addressed throughout the HRS4R process, based on the institution's own priorities and tactics.

5.4.4 Implementation of the HRS4R process

This section must include information on how the HRS4R was implemented and embedded inside the institution through working groups, alignment with HR policies or internal mechanisms, etc.

Besides describing the overall implementation process in a free text field, there is also a mandatory checklist with questions to answer, as below. The answer to each question should be detailed in maximum 500 words.

Should the same answer be applicable to more than one question, please state clearly if this is the case instead of duplicating replies.

How have you prepared the internal review?*	⌄
How have you involved the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?*	⌄
Do you have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress?*	⌄
Is there any alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the organisation's research strategy, overarching HR policy	* ⌄
How has your organisation ensured that the proposed actions would be also implemented?*	⌄
How are you monitoring progress (timeline)?*	⌄
How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?*	⌄
How do you expect to prepare for the external review?*	⌄

If needed, the institution can also add details on the implementation process in an additional text block created specifically on this purpose, as below.

Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process: (max. 1000 words)

5.5 Submission of the application

Once the Internal Review and, if the case, the OTM-R Checklist have been duly completed and saved in the HRS4R e-tool, an option to upload other documents to support the application will appear in the organisation dashboard. It is recommended to use this option only to submit sensitive documents that cannot be published on your organisation's website. This field accepts files in .zip format.

If the button "Submit" is not visible in the dashboard, review the status of the form(s) and fix the possible errors:

- **Pending**: The form is either empty or needs to be revised because the EC has requested corrections after its submission.

- **Draft - Invalid**: The form is saved as a draft version. Not all required fields are provided.

- **Valid - Not Submitted**: The form is duly filled and ready for submission. **Must click "Submit" button** to send it to the next task.

- **Submitted**: The form has been finalized and submitted to the next task- it is no longer possible to edit it.

When the document(s) are correctly filled in and saved, the "Submit" button will send the organisation's application further to the EC. At this point, the institution will no longer be able to update the files and the action cannot be undone.

5.6   Interim Assessment

5.6.1   Description and timeline of the assessment process

After the successful submission of the Internal Review using the HRS4R e-tool, the institution proceeds to the next level of the process, which consists of two separate steps:
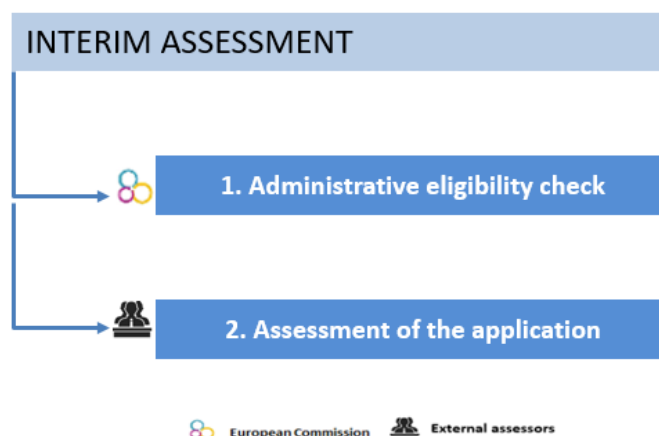
The administrative eligibility check
As for the assessment of the Initial Phase outlined in section 4.6.1.1, the administrative check intends to validate an application in terms of its compliance with the application procedure. The check has nothing to do with the quality of the data provided, but with the quality of the application as a whole, as suitable or not for the interim assessment.

The institution will be informed if the application is compliant and has passed the administrative eligibility check within approximately four weeks after submission.

If the application is considered non-compliant, the institution will be required to update it based on the feedback provided by the EC. In this case, the institution's task is moved back to "draft". This enables the institution to further edit the Internal Review forms. The deadline for the resubmission is two months.

The assessment of the application
It is the second step of the Interim Assessment phase and can only be initiated if an application has passed the administrative eligibility check. For the implementation phase, only one expert is involved in the assessment exercise.

How the expert is selected
It is intended that the institution's Internal Review is assessed by the same expert responsible for the Initial Assessment, who acknowledged the HR Award to the institution. The expert is selected by the EC in a transparent process, as outlined in section 4.6.1.2.1.

How the assessment process is organised
The expert will assess the case using standard templates and criteria for all applications in order to ensure fair treatment for all institutions.

N.B. A similar form to the one used by the individual assessment can be found in the Annex and in the EURAXESS Policy Library. It is strongly recommended to look into it carefully before submitting the Internal Review, in order to make sure every specific requirement has been considered.

At this stage, the expert will assess the progress and quality of the actions and accompanying measures (such as embedding the HRS4R process) and will provide specific recommendations.

The detailed assessment is subdivided as follows:

- ✓ Quality (of progress): Here the expert assesses the level of ambition and the quality of progress intended and obtained by the institution.
- ✓ Strengths and weaknesses of the HR strategy: On the basis of the information submitted and taking into account the institution's national research context, the expert will weigh/judge the HR strategy's strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Recommendations will be issued referring to the state of the art of institution's OTM-R policy, with regard to progress and quality of actions and their evidence etc.

5.7   The outcome of the Interim Assessment

The expert will prepare the evaluation report which represents the official feedback received by the institution in terms of their Internal Review. It is based on a standard

form/template, and it includes customised recommendations in terms of the implementation of the HRS4R procedure.

The institution will have access to the evaluation report within three or four months after the confirmation of the administrative eligibility check.

The institution is not in jeopardy of losing the HR Award but receives important recommendations on how to continue the implementation of the revised Action Plan for the next 36 months. The expert might also issue a warning in case the institution is not deemed to sufficiently progress or if there is a lack of evidence of such progress.

Find below the possible outcomes of the application at this stage.

- **HRS4R embedded:** The organisation is progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan. **There is evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded.**

- **HRS4R embedded, corrective actions needed:** The organisation is, for the most part, progressing with appropriate and quality actions as described in its Action Plan, but could benefit from alterations as advised through the Assessment process. **There is some evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded.**

- **HRS4R embedded, strong corrective actions needed:** The organisation is not deemed to be implementing appropriate and quality actions and this raises some concern for the future efforts to implement actions closely aligned to the Charter and Code. **There is a lack of evidence that the HRS4R is further embedded.**

6 Award Renewal Phase

6.1 Overview of the Award Renewal Phase

The Award Renewal is the third, recurrent phase of the HRS4R procedure. The first renewal phase takes place three years after the Interim Assessment, which means five years after the initial granting of the HR Award.

1 INITIAL PHASE	2 IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	3 RENEWAL PHASE
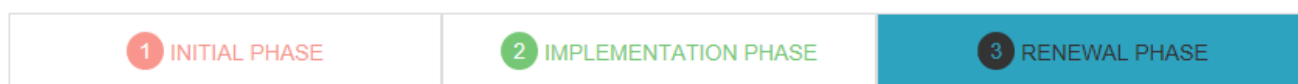
In order to renew the HR Award, the applicant institution will need to perform a self-assessment filling in and submitting the form available in the e-tool. An Internal Review template can be downloaded from the EURAXESS Policy Library. Note this template should be consulted for guidance only.

The assessment process for the first cycle of Award Renewal includes the organisation of a site-visit performed by three external experts. These experts will be nationals of a different country than the applicant institution and shall not have any conflict of interest. In the 36 months following the positive renewal assessment, the institution will proceed with the implementation of the improved Action Plan based on the recommendations provided by assessors in the consensus report. After this period of implementation, a second Award Renewal cycle will follow.

As summarised in section 2, the HRS4R process at Award Renewal phases run in cycles of three years, with new Internal Reviews every 36 months (alternating the organisation of a site visit).

After screening the application to assess its administrative eligibility, the EC Services will assign the file for to the assessment (see chapter 2 "General description of the HRS4R process").

If the institution is at a renewal cycle foreseeing a site visit (i.e. an odd-numbered renewal cycle), the assessment process will foresee a one-day onsite visit. Please refer to section 6.6 for a detailed explanation of the assessments with site visit.

6.2 Internal Review for Award Renewal

What it is

Using the e-tool, the institution applying for renewal of the HR Award will produce an Internal Review illustrating how it has embedded the actions set at Interim Assessment into its policies and practices. In the Internal Review, the institution will also propose new actions for the following three-year period.

The institution is required to publish **the reviewed version of the Action Plan** (including the OTM-R policy) on its own website and include the relevant URL (starting with "http://" or "https://") in the dedicated field of the e-tool Internal Review form.

If the institution has not completed the **OTM-R Checklist** at the Initial or Interim Assessment phase, it is **mandatory** to complete this task at the first Award Renewal. See the details on how to fill in the OTM-R Checklist in section 4.4.3 of this document.

Why it is important

The purpose of an Internal Review at this stage is to allow the participating institutions to reflect on its progress and to provide documentation, remove or modify actions or their timing, and to create new actions for the upcoming years.

6.3   Access the Internal Review forms in the HRS4R e-tool

6.3.1   If your institution used the HRS4R e-tool for the Initial/Interim Phases

The HRS4R Admin of the applying institution will log into the HRS4R e-tool and will manage the reporting process in the same way as the Initial or Interim Phases.

By clicking on the "Renewal Phase" tab, you will access the renewal phase space, which contains the new task(s) as "Pending". In the blue section, under the "Renewal Phase" tab you will also find the deadline.

The Internal Review file can be easily accessed at a click away.
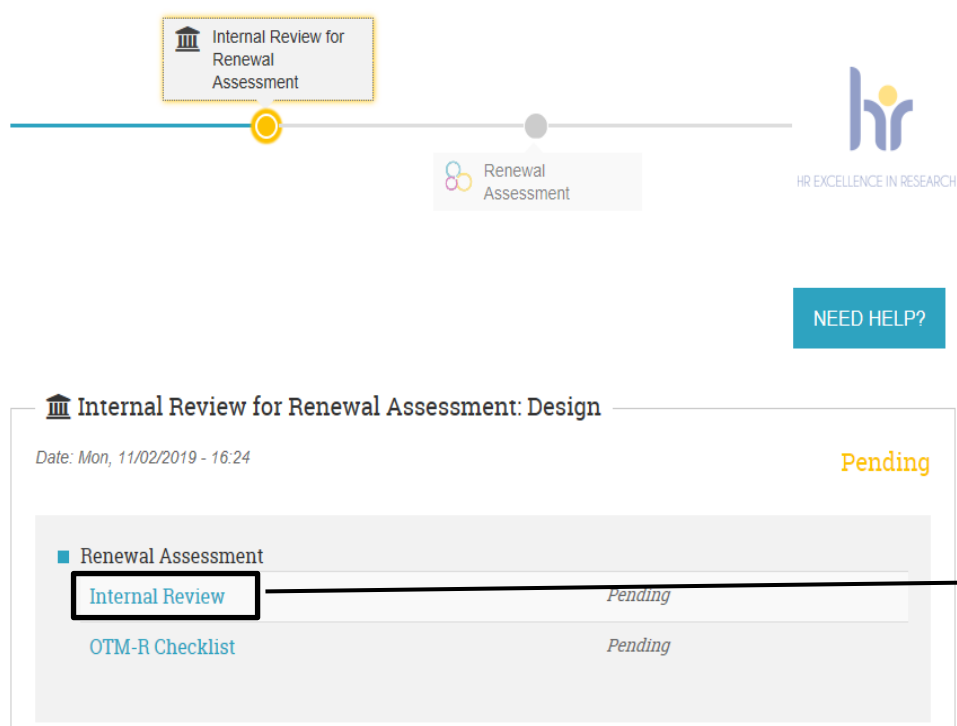
6.3.2 If your institution has not used the HRS4R e-tool for the Initial/Interim Phase

Since the e- tool is now the sole instrument for the HRS4R process and no manual applications will be accepted, the institutions that entered the HRS4R manual process must be transferred into the e-tool before they can take any action (i.e. filling in the Internal Review form).

N.B.: The RTD CHARTER team at the EC (RTD-CHARTER@ec.europe.eu) will assist you in the transition of your institution's files from paper to digital.

The picture below illustrates the enrolment process of already awarded institutions in the HRS4R e-tool ("injection"):

ENROLLING INSTITUTIONS IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

Scenario for institutions in the Award Renewal Phase

REGISTER EURAXESS ORG. ACCOUNT

The institution registers an organisational account on EURAXESS if there isn't any. It must be an account of the top organisation (not a department/lab account of the top organisation).

GET HRS4R ADMIN ROLE

Once the registration of the EURAXESS organisation account is approved, you can ask for the HRS4R Admin role to secure access to the HRS4R E-tool. The domain of the email must be in the URL of the organisation. Only one person per organisation is granted this role.

CREATE A CASE IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

The institution uploads the endorsement letter of the Charter & Code in the HRS4R E-tool, as if it were a newcomer to the process. The old version of the endorsement letter must be used, not a new one.

CONFIRMATION LETTER BY EC

The EC checks the endorsement letter and sends back to the institution the confirmation within 10 working days.

BUILD APPLICATION HISTORY IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL.

The EC uploads in the E-Tool all the application, reporting and assessment files which ensured the institution's progress from one phase to another. The files will be uploaded as pdfs.

INITIAL PHASE

The EC will upload:
- Gap –Analysis,
- OTM-R Checklist,
- Initial Action Plan,
- Consensus Report with the outcome of the Initial Assessment.
- Resubmissions, if any, will be also marked in the system.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The EC will upload:
- Internal Review,
- OTM-R checklist if filled in at this stage, not initially.
- Consensus Report with the outcome of the Interim Assessment.
- Resubmissions, if any, will be also marked in the system.

PLACE THE INSTITUTION AT THE CORRESPONDING TASK IN THE HRS4R E-TOOL

The EC informs the institution via email that the institution has been placed at the corresponding phase and task in the HRS4R E-tool, together with the history of the application, reporting and assessment process.

AWARD RENEWAL PHASE

The Institution can fill in the Internal Review for the Award Renewal Assessment in the HRS4R E-Tool. From this moment on the reporting and assessment process will be handled online.

🏛 Institution   ⚙ European Commission

Secure your access to the HRS4R e-tool

To access the HRS4R e-tool, you must have an individual EURAXESS member account. Registration and membership are free of charge. You can follow the steps outlined in section 3 of this guide. Follow also the instructions related to creating an HRS4R case in section 4.2 as if you were a newcomer to the process.

Submit the endorsement letter

After the creation of the HRS4R case, follow the steps outlined in Section 5.3.2.2 to submit the Endorsement Letter.

Once the relevant files are uploaded in the e-tool, the EC will send an email to the institution that will include the confirmation of the reception, the assignment of a case number, and will advance the case to the relevant phase.

After reception of the confirmation email, the institution's HRS4R Admin can log into the EURAXESS account to access the HRS4R e-tool and manage the internal reporting process.

By clicking on the "Renewal Phase" tab, the HRS4R Admin will access the renewal phase space, which contains the new task(s), appearing, at this stage as "Pending". In the blue section under the tab, you will also find the deadline for this task.

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The Internal Review form is just a click away. If the institution has already completed the OTM-R Checklist at previous phases, there is no need to do it again at this stage.

6.4 Filling the Internal Review forms

The Internal Review forms used for the Award Renewal Phase are the same used in the Implementation Phase.

Institutions that used the e-tool to apply to the Initial Phase or to the Implementation phase will find that the some fields in the Internal Review form is prefilled with information retrieved from the Initial Phase Action Plan and from the Implementation Phase Internal Review.

Institutions enrolling in the e-tool for the first time will see some empty sections related to the Initial and Implementation Phase: this is correct and these sections shall not be completed further.

The instructions to fill in the Internal Review for Award Renewal are detailed in section 5.4.

Important: A similar template to the one the experts will use in their assessment can be found in the Annex and in the EURAXESS Policy Library. While it must be kept in mind that the Policy Library contains only material for support, which may slightly differ from the actual templates, it is nonetheless strongly recommended to look into it carefully before submitting the application for the "HR Excellence in Research Award" to understand the elements that the experts will take into consideration during their evaluation exercise.

6.5 Submission of the application

Once the Internal Review and, if the case, the OTM-R Checklist have been duly completed and saved in the HRS4R e-tool, the dashboard of the organisation will show an option to upload other documents in support of the application. It is recommended to use this option only to submit sensitive documents that cannot be published on your organisation's website. This field accepts files in .zip format.

If the button "Submit" is not visible in the dashboard, please review the status of the form(s) and fix the possible errors, according to the information below:

- **Pending**: The form is either empty or needs to be revised because the EC has requested corrections after its submission.

- **Draft - Invalid**: The form is saved as a draft version. Not all required fields are provided.

- **Valid - Not Submitted**: The form is duly filled and ready for submission. **Must click "Submit" button** to send it to the next task.

- **Submitted**: The form has been finalized and submitted to the next task- it is no longer possible to edit it.

Once the document(s) have been completed and saved, they must be submitted by clicking the "Submit" button. This action will transmit the organisation's application to the EC. At this point, the action cannot be undone and the institution will no longer be able to update the files.

6.6 Assessment Process with Site Visit

6.6.1 Description and timeline of the assessment process

After the successful submission in the e-tool of the Internal Review and, when relevant, of the OTM-R Checklist, the institution proceeds to the next level of the process, which consists of three separate steps that include the organisation of a site visit.

AWARD RENEWAL ASSESSMENT

European Commission   External assessors

1. Administrative eligibility check

2. Desk-based assessment of the application

3. One-Day Site Visit
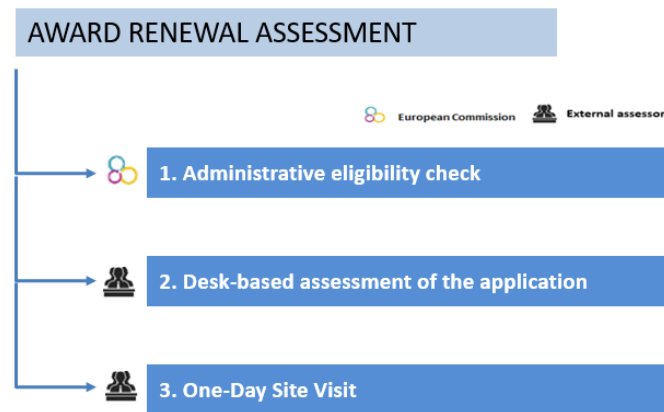
The administrative eligibility check

This phase is similar to the Initial Phase and to the Implementation one. Its scope is to validate an application in terms of its compliance with the application procedure. The check will not assess the quality of the data provided, but only the quality of the application as a whole and its suitability for assessment.

The administrative eligibility check is detailed in section 4.6.1.

The desk-based assessment

This is the second step of the Award Renewal Assessment phase and can only be initiated if the application has passed the administrative eligibility check.

The desk based assessment takes place before the site visit and is performed by the three experts. This desk based assessment is done on the Internal Review and, when relevant, on the OTM-R. In this phase, the assessment focuses on the two following aspects:

Quality assessment

The quality assessment evaluates the level of ambition and the quality of the progress of the organisation. With this assessment, the experts can already identify points to be further explored during the site visit.

Strengths and weaknesses

Based on the information provided in the Internal Review and the institution's international context, the experts will assess the strengths and weaknesses of the overall HR Strategy.

One-day site visit

When a site visit is part of the assessment process, the EC will liaise with the institution to establish a convenient date. Please check the section 6.6.2 for a guidelines on how to be prepared for the site visit.

Ideally, the internal review at the Renewal Phase is assessed by the same group of experts who assessed the corresponding Initial Phase. However, ultimately, this is subject to experts' availability.

The experts are selected by the EC in a transparent process, as outlined in <u>section 4.6.1</u>.

6.6.2   The Site Visit

The aim of the site visit is **the renewal** of the HR Award three years after the interim assessment. This is an opportunity for institutions to display their work and receive an informed and professional feedback from external experts, including suggestions for change and improvement. Moreover, the site visit contributes to raise the degree of awareness of HRS4R within the institution and to strengthen the engagement of the whole community in this continuous improvement process. The success of the award renewal carries the recognition of the EC of your institution efforts in implementing the principles of the C&C via the HRS4R.

The purpose of the site visit is multiple: it allows to reflect and to document progress, to alter actions or timing of actions if necessary, it also allows to create new actions for the upcoming period. Finally, it provides the opportunity for an in-depth discussion and for a stronger engagement on the work that has been undertaken.

During the site visit, the team of external experts will meet all key stakeholders, including researchers, management and practitioners. This is the occasion to confidentially discuss the issues and questions that might have arisen in the analysis of the Internal Review.

During the site visits, experts need to:

- ✓ be able to confirm the impression they gained during their desk based assessment;
- ✓ identify benefits the institution receives from implementing the HR strategy ;
- ✓ assess the level of ambition of the institution with regard to the HR strategy for researchers, taking into account the initial state of play;
- ✓ assess the institution's efforts to ensure the C&C principles regarding ethical and professional aspects; working conditions, development and training.
- ✓ highlight the institution's effort in implementing an OTM-R policy;
- ✓ assess whether the C&C principles are being implemented.

After the discussions on site or remotely, the external experts organise a debriefing session to reflect upon and to discuss the site visit in order to produce a Consensus Report.

This report will also contain:

- ✓ elements of good practice that the experts would recommend to other institutions, and

✓ examples of difficulties the institution encountered during set-up or implementation.

Finally, based on the information obtained from the Internal Review and the site visit, and taking into account the national research context of the institution, the experts will assess the HR strategy strengths and weaknesses. If relevant, they will provide suggestions for alteration or revisions to the HR strategy of the institution.

Checklist for Institutions

As soon as the Internal Review is submitted

Along with the submission of the internal review in request for the renewal of the HR Award, the institution shall also schedule an **indicative date for the site visit. This date shall be swiftly** communicated **to the EC at RTD-CHARTER@ec.europa.eu.**

The proposed date for the site visit should be comprised between two and four months since the submission of the Internal Review. Delays depending on exceptional circumstances will be taken into account on a case-by-case base.

Upon reception of the calendar proposal, the EC will organise an assessing team according to the procedure described in 4.6.1.2.1. and initiate the communication between the **HRS4R Admin and the lead expert to finalise the calendar and the agenda for the site visit**.

Once the date is finalised and agreed between the institution and the experts, the lead expert officially communicates it to the EC. The EC will register the date in the e-tool

The institution will proceed to block out time on the senior leaders' schedule and of the people involved in the management of the HRS4R process within the institution. Typically, the senior leaders will need to be available for up to a one-hour opening meeting (inclusive of half-hour presentation) on the day of the site visit and a one-hour long wrap-up discussion at the end of the site visit.

As soon as the site visit date is set

The institution should ensure that the **senior management is aware** of the effort and investment in the HRS4R process throughout the years, what the HR strategy is, the difference it made to the institution and the impact it has, as well as the need to continue to guarantee their full support. **The senior management must be present in the opening and closing meetings**.

Communicate with your colleagues and leaders

The institution staff should be fully aware of what to expect from the site visit: it is very important that the HRS4R Admin develop a good communication plan in view of the site visit. Usual topics include the site visit calendar and agenda, clarify the reason why external experts are visiting the organisation, the expected benefit for the organisation, what individual researchers and other staff groups can expect during the site visit. Specific communication (and training) activities should be planned to address different target groups.

Prepare for the site visit

Start **assembling the information** needed for the meeting.

The **site visit will take place in English**. If the organisation needs to use an interpreter, this will be included in the organisation's costs. The use of an interpreter is never considered negatively, but a favourable point in support of better communication and wider involvement.

At the opening meeting, the HRS4R Admin will provide a **half-hour presentation** to the experts. This first part of the visit should be used for presenting the institution (who you are and what you do), the reasons it participates in the HRS4R process, progress so far under Ethical and Professional Aspects, OTM-R, Working Conditions and Training and Development. Explain how your organisation hopes to improve and evolve its service to researchers from continuing with the HRS4R process.

The presentation should also include information related to **indicators for progress and quality**, highlighting elements such as quality of progress and quality of achievements. The breath, depth and integration of HRS4R within the organisation should be evidenced through indicators such as the level of ambition, the level of embedding and the quality of progress. It is recommended that the presentation is kept as short and to the point as possible and does not repeat every detail from the revised HRS4R Action Plan.

It is important to identify the staff members that will have face-to-face interviews with the experts (i.e. people involved in the management of the HRS4R process, staff responsible for implementing actions, researchers representing the different research positions at different level R1 to R4). External stakeholders should also be involved if relevant.

Two months before the site visit

Two months before the actual site visit, or the latest by the first exchange of email with the assessing team's lead expert, the HRS4R Admin should provide experts with the following information:

Institutional information

This includes:

- ✓ The current Institutional Strategic Plan (if one exists, in English).
- ✓ A current detailed organisation chart.
- ✓ A list of the key stakeholders - people, leaders, committee members, and others - who have been involved with and have contributed to the HRS4R process of self-assessment submitted to the European Commission.

Facilities information

For onsite visits, a map showing the location(s) of the meetings and the email address and telephone number of a point of contact in the institution should be provided.

Logistical information

At least one month before the meeting, the institution shall finalise the draft agenda in synergy with the lead assessor and transmit it to the assessing tam. Information on the demographics of research employees in the organisation (i.e. numbers, role title, etc.) should also be provided at this stage if not done yet.

Any other logistical information that the institution may be considered important for the experts to know should also be shared at this stage.

Before the start of the site visit

When organising an onsite visit, the institution should secure a private meeting room for the exclusive use of the assessment team for the duration of the whole visit. If the experts visit more than one site, a meeting room at each site is desirable.

The meeting room for the opening and closing sessions shall be equipped with a projector and a screen. Additional meeting spaces for interviews can also be helpful, (i.e. additional interview spaces might be needed for individual or group interviews). If the institution's premises require the visitors to be escorted to the different meetings, make sure someone is available.

At the beginning of the visit, the institution should provide the experts team with a printed copy of all documents and reports mentioned in the Internal Review narrative. There is no need to duplicate the documents if the experts visit more than one site.

The experts should also be provided with beverages, snacks and meals, and access to internet, Wi-Fi, copiers, printers, and telephones.

Before the team arrives on site, it is a good practice to review the detailed schedule with the lead assessor.

The agenda

The final agenda of the site visit should be agreed between the institution and the experts **three weeks** prior to the visit. In preparing the agenda, remember that the experts will require **15 minutes for private discussion after each meeting**.

During the closing meeting, the experts will relay their findings verbally to the institution. The formal consensus report will follow and will be transmitted via the e-tool normally within the next three to four weeks.

You can find a sample schedule for the site visit in the Annex, section 7.3.

6.7 Assessment Process without Site Visit

6.7.1 Description and timeline of the assessment process

If the institution is undergoing an Award Renewal cycle without site visit, after the submission of the Internal Review and, if needed, of the OTM-R Checklist, the institution passes to the next level of the process, which consists of two separate steps.

The administrative eligibility check
As outlined in section 4.6.1.1, the objective of this check is to validate an application in terms of its compliance with the application procedure. The check will not verify the quality of the data provided, but only the administrative consistence of the application as a whole, and its suitability for assessment.

The institution will be notified of the outcome of this check, **within approximately four weeks after submission**.

In case the application is considered non-compliant (e.g. incomplete, erroneously filled etc.), the institution will be asked to update it on the base of feedback that the European Commission will provide via the e-tool. In this case, the institution's task is rolled back and will show again as "Pending" so that the institution can edit and correct its internal review. The new internal review shall be completed and resubmitted within a **two-month** period.

The assessment of the application
This is the second step of the Award Renewal Assessment phase and it is performed by three independent experts. It can only be initiated after an application has passed the administrative eligibility check.

How the experts are selected:
The European Commission selects the experts in a transparent process, as outlined in section 4.6.1.2.2 of this document. Please refer to that section for more details.

How the assessment process is organised:
Each application will be assessed by three experts. As a general rule, the three experts shall be based in three countries other than the applicant institution. In special circumstances (e.g. complexity of the national context), one of the three experts may be a national of the assessed institution, provided that no conflict of interest exists.

The experts use standard templates and criteria for all applications in order to ensure fair treatment to all institutions.

The experts will specifically be interested to find:

✓ clear information on the context overview in which the HR Strategy is designed (assets and barriers);
✓ coherence between the Gap Analysis and the Action Plan;

- ✓ concrete actions for the implementation of the principles of the C&C, with clear indicators and timelines;
- ✓ examples of how the institution consulted and involved the required internal and external stakeholder groups in their HRS4R process; and
- ✓ the HRS4R strategy published on the institution's website in English, in a visible place.

One of the three individual peer reviewers receives the role of lead-assessor and will prepare, in consensus with the other two experts, a final report integrating the input provided in the three individual assessments.

6.8   General assessment

At the end of this process, the institution receives via the e-tool the Consensus Report: this is the official feedback on the institution's application towards the HR Award. It is based on a standard template, and in addition to the result of the general assessment (whether the institution should be awarded), it will include a set of customised recommendations in terms of their ambition and planning of the HRS4R.

If the renewal cycle includes a with site visit, the institution will receive the consensus report **within one month after the site visit has taken place**. If the renewal cycle is without site visit, the institution will receive the notification of the consensus report **within three to four months** from the positive administrative eligibility check.

The consensus report will contain a general assessment section indicating one of the three possible outcomes of the assessment:

6.8.1   Accepted

The application **meets** the criteria and the HR Award is renewed.

The experts may also provide comments on the submission. These comments are meant to provide advice and guidance on particular topics or criteria that should be addressed before the next assessment.

6.8.2   Pending minor modifications

The institution **broadly meets** the required criteria but the external assessors express concerns and doubts about specific areas. In this case, the institution is rolled back on the HRS4R process flow, and the internal review return to the "In progress" state.

The Consensus Report will list two separate sets of recommendations. The first is the set of "immediate mandatory recommendations", which the institutions should consider as a priority and for immediate action. The renewal of the award is subordinate to the compliance with these recommendations.

A second set is "Other recommendations". These can be addressed during the following Award Renewal cycle of the HRS4R process.

The institution is required to update the documentation in the HRS4R e-tool and resubmit the application for review **within two months**. Should the institution face difficulties in complying with the deadline, it can ask for an extension of the deadline. The extension can be requested via the HRS4R e-tool **one month before the deadline.** This extension is offered only once and it is standard for all institutions (one month from the previously set deadline).

After resubmission, the assessors will not review the whole application, but only how the institution has followed up on their feedback. It is strongly recommended to act upon the specific recommendations and detail the actions in the revised application as clearly as possible

Important: Special attention should be paid when resubmitting the revised application as only **one** resubmission is allowed at this stage. Exceptions may be accepted on a case-by-case basis. If in the resubmission the Institution did not tackle the mandatory recommendations, the EC may decide to ask the institution to temporarily suspend the use of the HR Logo.

6.8.3 Pending major revisions

The institution **does not seem to meet the criteria** for the renewal of the HR Award and is required to take appropriate actions taking into account the recommendations of the assessors. The institution is rolled back on the HRS4R process flow, and the internal review return to the "In progress" state.

The institution is required to update the documentation in the HRS4R e-tool and resubmit the revised application for review **within 12 months**. If the institution experiences difficulties in meeting the deadline, it can ask for an **extension via the e-tool using the "request extension" button, which becomes active one month before the deadline** and must be accompanied by **a sound justification.** This option is offered only once. If the extension is approved, the deadline will be extended by **one month**. Upon exceptional circumstances, longer extensions may be granted on a case-by-case base.

After resubmission, the assessors will not review the whole application, but only how the institution has followed up on their feedback. It is strongly recommended to act upon the specific recommendations and detail the actions in the revised application as clearly as possible

Important: Special attention is needed when resubmitting the revised application as only **two** resubmissions are allowed at this stage. If the outcome of the subsequent assessments results to be the same, the EC may decide to ask the institution to suspend temporarily the use of the HR Logo.

6.9 What's next

In the 36 months following the positive outcome of the renewal assessment, the institution will continue the implementation of the reviewed Action Plan based on the recommendations provided by the experts in the consensus report,

The HRS4R process will run in cycles of 36 months, alternating the organisation of a site visit, each cycle culminating with a new Internal Reviews for Award Renewal and its assessment.
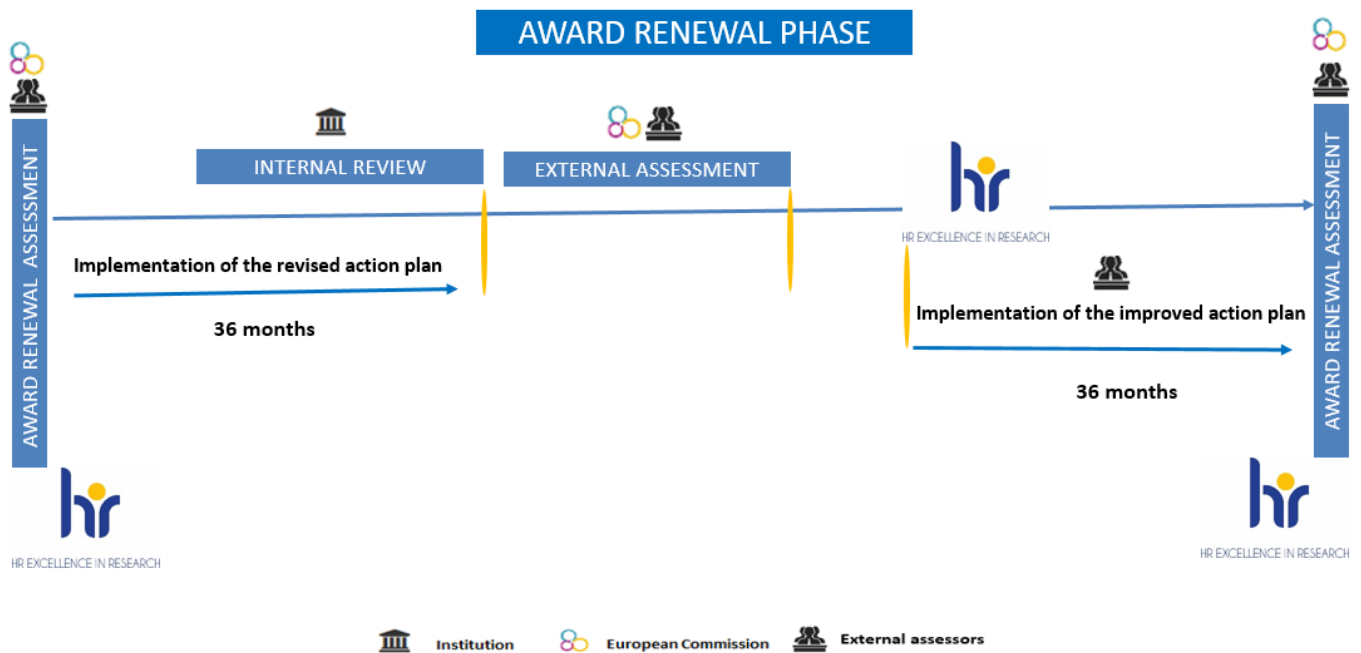
7 ANNEX

7.1 Templates (Gap-Analysis, OTM-R, Action Plan, Internal Review)

The following templates can be found in the Policy Library under "Research Careers > Strengthened HRS4R process": https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/euraxess/policy-library#group-collapsible-strengthened-hrs4r-process**:**

- **HRS4R Process Description**
- **HRS4R Gap Analysis**
- **HRS4R OTM-R**
- **HRS4R Action Plan**
- **Internal Review (implementation and renewal phases)**

For guidance, the templates used by the peer reviewers can be downloaded here: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/useful-information/policy-library#document-collapsible-strengthened-hrs4r-process-hrs4r-templates-for-assessors

7.2 Examples of best practices

7.2.1 Endorsement letters

Examples of Endorsement Letters can be found in the Policy Library under "Strengthened HRS4R process > HRS4R Process Guidelines" at: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/euraxess/policy-library#group-collapsible-strengthened-hrs4r-process **in the document: "HRS4R Examples of Endorsement Letters best practices".**

7.2.2 A Step-by-Step Guide to better OTM-R practices

This guide sets out, in chronological order, the various steps of the recruitment process, from the job advertising/application phase through to the appointment phase. It aims to build on the principles of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, providing more detailed information, practical solutions and includes examples of good practice.

Three phases have been identified:
- **Advertising and application phase**
- **Evaluation and selection phase**
- **Appointment phase**

Advertising and application phase:

a) Advertising the post:
In line with the principles "Recruitment" and "Transparency" of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, it is recommended to keep the job advertisement and

description of requirements as concise as possible and include links to more detailed information on-line. Applicants should be able to find information on:

- organisation and recruiting unit
- job title, specifications and starting date
- researcher career profiles (R1-R4) with the respective 'required' and 'desirable' competencies
- selection criteria (and possibly their respective 'weight'), including knowledge and
- professional experience (distinguishing the 'required' and 'desirable')
- number of available positions
- working conditions, workplace, entitlements (salary, other benefits, etc.), type of
- contract
- professional development opportunities
- career development prospects

It should also include:

- the application procedure and deadline, which should, as a general rule, be at least two months from the publication date and take account of holiday periods
- a reference to the institution's OTM-R policy
- a reference to the institution's equal opportunities policy (e.g., positive discrimination, dual careers, etc.)
- contact details

All vacancies should be published on EURAXESS. This implies that the advert should be published at least in two languages: the national language and in English. Additional information on the publishing process can be found at the following link: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/my/help-page-organisations-section-dashboard#organisation-profile-collapsible-8.

Although possible, any exception to the above should always be duly justified in the recruitment procedure.

b) Keeping the administrative burden to a minimum:

The request for supporting documents should be strictly limited to those needed in order to proceed to a fair, transparent and merit-based selection of the applicants. Moreover, in these cases where certain documents are legally required, applicants should be allowed to provide, in their stead, a declaration in which they engage to provide them after the selection process is concluded. For example, applicants should not have to provide original or translated certificates related to qualifications with their initial application. It is strongly recommended to allow the transmission of supporting documents by electronic means and possibly to develop an e-recruitment tool.

c) Acknowledging receipt and providing additional information:

All applicants should receive an (automated) e-mail acknowledging that their application has been received and providing them with further information on the recruitment process, indicating the next steps and including an indicative timetable (shortlisting or not, interview period, appointment date). Care should be taken to allow sufficient time before the interview for external candidates to make the necessary travel arrangements and prepare properly for the interview. If there are subsequently

significant changes or delays to this process, all applicants should be duly and timely informed by (a standard) e-mail.

Evaluation and selection phase:

a) Setting up selection committees:

In line with the principle "Selection" of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, selection committees should be established for all profiles (R1-R4), though the size and composition of the committees may differ according to the profile and type of contract. The process to nominate and appoint the selection committee should be transparent and made public.

The selection committees should be independent, members should not have any conflict of interest and the decisions must be objective and evidence-based rather than based on personal preference. The committee should make best use of the expertise of external members. The composition of the committee should be appropriately diverse. In order to achieve this, the following elements should be considered:

- a minimum of three members;
- gender balance, e.g., not less than one third of one gender in the committee;
- inclusion of external expert(s) in all committees (external meaning outside the institution);
- inclusion of (or contribution from) international experts, who should be proficient in the language(s) in which the process will be conducted;
- inclusion of experts from different sectors (public, private, academic, non-academic) where appropriate and feasible;
- the committee as a whole should have all the relevant experience, qualifications and competencies to assess the candidate.

Any derogation for certain positions, types of contract or indeed for specific disciplines should be clearly set out.

b) Screening and interviewing:

All applications should be screened. Depending largely on the number of applicants as well as the internal human resources available, the process may involve one or more steps, e.g., pre-screening to check eligibility, shortlisting of candidates for interviews, remote interviews by telephone or skype, face-to-face interviews. While remote interviews may often be appropriate, in particular at the first interview stage, they should not altogether replace face-to-face interviews in cases where these are being conducted for internal candidates. All candidates should be treated equally and in the same way.

It is recommended that the same selection committee is involved in all steps, although it is recognised that this may not always be feasible and that for example one committee may do the initial screening and another may conduct the interviews. Accordingly, it is strongly recommended that the process itself is transparent and made known to the applicants, including the various steps.

In case of face-to-face interviews, the institution should cover the (international) travel and accommodation expenses of the interviewees.

c) Assessing merit and future potential:

The criteria for selecting researchers should focus on both the candidates' past performance and their future potential. The emphasis is likely to change according to the profile of the post, e.g., when recruiting an R1 researcher, future potential is likely to outweigh past performance.

In line with the principles "Judging merit", "Variations in the order of CVs", "Recognition of mobility" and "Seniority" of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, the evaluation criteria should be consistent with the requirements of the position as regards research, supervision or, for example, teaching competencies.

Merit should be judged qualitatively as well as quantitatively, focusing on results within a diversified career path, taking into account career breaks, lifelong professional development and the added value of non-research experience.

A wide range of evaluation criteria should be used and balanced, according to the position being advertised. Depending on the specific profile of the post, this may include (in alphabetical and not hierarchical order):

- acquisition of funding;
- generation of societal impact;
- international portfolio (including mobility);
- knowledge transfer and exchange;
- management of research and innovation;
- organisational skills/experience;
- outreach/public awareness activities;
- research performance;
- supervision and mentoring;
- teaching;
- teamwork

It is strongly recommended to make use of the European Framework for Research Careers, which identifies both necessary and desirable competences for each of the four broad profiles for researchers (R1 to R4).

Appointment phase:

a) Feedback:

In line with the principle "Transparency" of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, all applicants should receive written or electronic notice at the end of the selection process, indicatively within one month and without any unnecessary delays. It is strongly recommended to inform all applicants who were admitted to the interview about the strengths and weaknesses of their application. Other applicants, who did not make it to the final stages, should receive a standard mail informing them of the outcome. All applicants must be entitled to further feedback upon request.

b) Complaints mechanism:

The institution should establish a procedure to deal with complaints made by applicants who believe that they have been treated negligently, unfairly or incorrectly. This procedure should be transparent and made public. It should include an indication of the timeframe within which a complainant will receive a response, which should in principle be no longer than one month.

7.3 Sample Schedule for the Site Visit

TIME	WHO AND WHAT?	WHY?	WHERE?
9 - 9.30	Introduction by the lead expert Presentation by the Institution	• Inform on how the HRS4R is embedded in the organisation and highlight progress and quality in implementing the C&C principles • Discuss challenges faced by the institution in implementing the C&C principles due to external constraints (e.g. national context and legislation) • The most important purpose is to introduce the external experts to the invited stakeholders and participants of the site visit and vice versa. However, it is also an opportunity to present your institution to the external experts.	
09.30 - 9.45	Meeting with	• Get an overview of the Institution	
9.45 - 10.00	**Experts private meeting/ reserved discussion**	To assess the information provided	To occur after each meeting
	Meeting with ...		
	Meeting with ...		
17.30	Debriefing meeting Assessment Team alone	Exchange impressions, discuss if further information/clarification is needed	
18.00	Meeting with Institution leadership	A short presentation by lead expert with some feedback, thank everybody for the cooperation and fruitful discussions Collect feed-back and recommendations for the future	

7.4 Abbreviations and glossary

Charter and Code (C&C)	The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers – 2 documents adopted by the European Commission in 2005 containing 40 principles that applicant institutions to the "HR Excellence in Research Award" must endorse and commit to implement: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter
EURAXESS Organisation Admin	Staff representative who registered a EURAXESS organisation profile in order to publish offers on behalf of the institution on EURAXESS.
EC	European Commission
EC Services	European Commission personnel supporting the implementation of the HRS4R
FTEs	Full-time employees
Group	A conglomerate, an association, an alliance or a set of independent legal entities that work together towards a joint purpose, i.e. the European University Alliances
HRS4R	Human Resources Strategy for Researchers https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r
HR Award	The European Commission's "HR Excellence in Research Award" giving public recognition to research institutions that have made progress in aligning their human resource policies with the principles set out in the "Charter & Code"
HR Manager	The person assigned of following up the implementation of the HRS4R on their organisation, generally someone working in the institution's HR Department
HRS4R e-tool	The official platform of the European Commission to apply for the "HR Excellence in Research Award" and manage the institution's HRS4R process. It can be accessed from the EURAXESS website by users with the appropriate permissions (accessible only after login): https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/my/hrs4r
HRS4R Admin	Staff representative assigned by the management of the applicant institution to fill in the application for the HR Award and manage the institution's HRS4R process in the HRS4R e-tool.
Institution	An independent legal entity such as a company, a funding institution or a university. Organisation and institution are used interchangeably in this text
Organisation	an independent legal entity such as a company, a funding institution or a university. Organisation and institution are used interchangeably in this text
OTM-R	Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment of Researchers. Included under HRS4R Process Guidelines https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/euraxess/policy-library#group-

	collapsible-strengthened-hrs4r-process
R1-R4	The European Framework for Research Careers profiles: https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors
Umbrella Organisation	The highest level of an institution or organisation which does not depend on a higher entity
Unit	In this text, a dependent entity of an organisation such as a faculty, a laboratory