

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers

“A Human Resources Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter and Code”

**2014 INTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY’S FIRST ACTION PLAN
(+ ACTION PLAN 2015-2016)**

Introduction

Since the submission of its First Action Plan in 2011, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (hereinafter: the VUB) has witnessed an ongoing process at the level of HR strategic planning but, more importantly, a whole series of measures aiming at the implementation, refining, steering and updating of its HR policies for researchers in compliance with the Charter & Code (hereinafter: C&C).

During the reporting period (2012-2014) the VUB had gone through a “strategic revolution” in terms of internationalisation (focus on supporting incoming and outgoing researchers’ mobility), staff policies & regulatory affairs (new transparent and accessible staff regulations, updated info sheets and forms etc.).

With the provisions of the C&C as a valuable guideline and support tool in these processes, the VUB managed to raise awareness to HR policies, mechanisms and the rights and duties of researchers among all internal stakeholders (central administration, faculties, departments, communication dept., R&D etc.).

Step 4 of the HRS4R was initiated in January 2014. A series of internal monitoring and audit provided the opportunity to systematically evaluate the progress of implementation and to pinpoint the stumbling blocks and new challenges ahead. However, due to an overall strategic reform plan that was initiated in 2012, the HRS4R assessment and monitoring had witnessed some months of stalemate. Yet, this had no impact on the daily practices and awareness of the HRS4R provisions which continued to serve as a main guideline.

The new staff regulations and other HR processes have been initially approved by the University Board on 30 June 2015. All staff regulations now contain an explicit link to the C&C, thus emphasising the VUB’s commitment to the further refining and updating of its HR strategy for researchers.

Step 4 of the HRS4R process provided new insights and opportunities, which will be included in the revised action plan for 2015-2016.

As indicated in the scheme hereinafter, some issues and actions which are/were already implemented are mentioned in the action plan as “ongoing” or “recurrent”. Other newly initiated (or to be initiated) policies and actions are mainly planned in the period Q4 2015 – Q3 2016.

To conclude: implementing the HRS4R is an ongoing process of learning, developing, refining, updating and implementing... As all other institutes of higher education, the VUB remains dedicated to these strategies and to its own values and commitments, despite all external and formal (= government) impediments such as diminishing financial schemes, legislative challenges and other red-tape.

I. Ethical and professional aspects

1. Research freedom			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
Belgian Constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University statutes (Free Inquiry) - Academic staff regulations; Research staff regulations¹ - Series of lectures (doctoral schools) - Series of lectures on Free Inquiry 	Maintain and further develop the series of lectures on these issues, to include all researchers (beyond target group of doc. schools).	<u>2015-2016²</u> * HR * Doctoral Training Programme * Research Dept.

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¹ Academic Staff Regulations (senior Academic Staff/faculty; Assistant Academic Staff); Contractual Research Staff regulations; Bursaries (pre-doc, postdoc)

² 2015-2016 refers to the academic year (1 Oct. 2015 – 30 Sep. 2016)

2. Ethical principles			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Law of 14 August 1986 (as amended) & Royal Decree of 1996 on Wellbeing of animals (chapter re ethical committees) - Law of 7 May 2004 re Experiments involving humans 	Ethics Committee and Committee on Animal Research (in the Faculty of Medicine & Pharmacy).	Reports of ethics Committees, as tool for further self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Research Dept. * Faculty of Med. & Pharmacy

3. Professional responsibility			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- (Federal) Legislation on IP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disciplinary procedures (in academic & research staff regulations) - Scientific Misconduct Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lectures/seminars on IP, scientific integrity - (work in progress): Manuals and code of conduct for supervisors and researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Recurrent</u> * Doc. Training Programme * Faculties: follow-up 2015-2016 HR (manuals)

4. Professional attitude			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Portal of research dept. - Code of conduct for researchers (approved 2014) <p>Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High attendance at information sessions provided by Doc. Schools and by faculties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewed version of the “code of conduct” - English version of all existing (and planned) regulations, manuals and information: - Further development of the “introduction & integration” trajectory for researchers - Manuals for researchers and for supervisors 	<p><u>Q4 2015</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR * Research dept. <p><u>Q1 2016</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR
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5. Contractual and legal obligations			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education³ (senior academic staff / assistant academic staff) - Law on Employment contracts 1978 (other researchers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff regulations (Existing Academic Staff regulation currently being reviewed and updated. Amended regulations enter into force 01 Oct. 2015) - Support staff (central & per faculty) provide answers & information on most frequent inquiries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review & update existing regulations - manuals for researchers & supervisors - Adequate online information (both in Dutch & English) - Further development of the “Introduction & Integration” brochure & procedure - English version of all regulations, manuals & online information - English version of forms & templates 	<p><u>Q1 2016</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR <p>(online info: in coop. with Communications Dept. and other internal stakeholders)</p>

³ Codex Higher Education (2013) = Formerly referred to as “Universities Decree” (in the Gap Analysis, Action Plan and all other reporting prior to 2013)

6. Accountability			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
(general rules on good governance for funded research)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provisions in staff regulations rules relating to external & internal audit - peer review involving international experts - renewed R&D database (PURE) - Profile of the good supervisor Profile of the good researcher: both incorporated in the Code of Conduct for researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informing existing and newly recruited staff (online/sessions) on issues related to transparent and efficient financial project management. - recurrent sessions on project management / project reporting - internal analysis of recent (if any) incidents → lessons learned 	<p>Recurrent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Research dept. * Doc. Training Programme

7. Good practice in research			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Law of 4 august 1996 on well-being of workers in the performance of their work - series of Royal Decrees re well-being and safety - Law of 8 December 1992 on the protection of personal data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - internal rules applying the well-being, safety and health legislation - internal rules and instructions in research units and labs - Ongoing: Workplace Safety & Prevention dept.: new project involving mapping risk analysis in labs and other workplaces - 2014: Survey on psychosocial risks at work - Biosafety coordinator - Environment coordinator - Confidential counsellors (<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integrating the recent legislation re psychosocial risks at work into existing staff regulations and communicating these rules to staff - action plan re safety and prevention of psychosocial risks based on the 2014 survey results: working group established. - information sessions for heads of departments, supervisors and researchers - 	<p>2015-2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR * Safety & Prevention dept. * IT / CIO <p>Recurrent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR + Communication dept.

8. Dissemination, exploitation of results			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renewed Research database (PURE) - Technology Transfer Interface (TTI): provides information and guidance to researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integrate rules and guidelines in the manual for researchers - recurrent sessions and seminars by TTI / doctoral schools 	<p><u>2015-2016</u> * HR</p> <p>* TTI & doc. schools</p>

9. Public engagement			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - Scientific Communications Unit 	further development / update of existing practices	Recurrent

10. Non discrimination			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who

Belgian & Flemish legislation on equality, equal opportunities and equal treatment - Contra: (Belgian) social security rules allow differentiation between EEA-citizens / third country citizens (from countries with bilateral social security) treaties and citizens of other countries.	- staff regulations - equal pay for equal work working group on gender: Gender Action Plan (GAP)	- implementation & monitoring of the recommendations of the GAP working group	2015-2016
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11. Evaluation/ appraisal systems			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- Codex Higher Education (Flemish universities): for professors and assistant staff	- staff regulations - Academic Matrix: evaluation indicators - PhD regulation: PhD progress report - guidelines for self-evaluation (“profile of the good researcher”)	- review of current staff regulations (work in progress) - new “Competencies profile matrix”	<u>2015</u> * HR <u>2016</u> * HR + research dept.

II. Recruitment

12. Recruitment			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- Codex Higher Education (2013)	- Staff regulations - HR guidelines regarding vacancies - vacancy templates - Gender Action Plan (i.a. measures to encourage female researchers to pursue academic careers)	- Optimising the use of EURAXESS job portal - Information sessions on working conditions and career development - Training for departmental staff (faculty) on gender and diversity issues	<u>Q4 2015 – Q3 2016</u> * HR * Doc. Training Programme * Gender policy staff

13. Recruitment (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
	- Staff regulations - recruitment/hiring of research staff & PhD/postdoc bursaries is decentralised. The faculties decide autonomously. - Profile of the good supervisor	- integrate C&C rules and good practices re recruitment in the manual for supervisors - improve recruitment portal - promote international recruitment	<u>2015-2016</u> * HR * HR + faculties

14. Selection (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education - Flanders Research Foundation (guidelines / funding regulations) - Anti-discrimination legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations (gender balance in selection committees) - GAP recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender balance in selection committees (+ monitor current committees) - Incorporate good practices in manual for supervisors 	<p><u>2015-2016</u> * HR * faculties / deans / heads of departments / supervisors</p>

15. Transparency (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education 	<p>Selection criteria mandatory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations / bursaries regulations - job vacancies on “EURAXESS jobs” and other channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - further assessment / follow-up of the online vacancy system - monitoring recruitment feedback (guideline to be included in manual for supervisors) - update details and date on EURAXESS portal 	<p>2015-2016 * HR * Faculties/ Department</p>

16. Judging merit (Code)			
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Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- Codex Higher Education	- staff regulation - Pilot project “competencies and skills matrix” (2015 in one faculty) - profile of the good researcher	- monitoring & assessment of the pilot project “competencies and skills matrix” (work-in-progress) -	<u>2015-2017</u> * HR * Faculty * research dept.

17. Variations in the chronological order of CVs (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
--	- no formal rules - Gender Action Plan report: measures for dealing with (consequences of) career breaks during maternity/parental leave etc...	- (currently in discussion): variations in CV and career breaks (e.g. during maternity/parental leave)	<u>2015-2016</u> * HR * Gender policy staff

18. Recognition of mobility experience (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education - Special Research Funds Ordinance (Flanders) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations: provisions re academic leave, inter-university mobility, sabbatical etc. - International Mobility Office provides information & support re exchange-programmes and cooperation agreements - university encourages and supports international cooperation and researchers' mobility, e.g. Horizon 2020 projects etc.. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - manual for researchers & manual for supervisors: clear and transparent guidelines on the promotion of international mobility as an advantage in career planning <p>Study the feasibility of creating a "single point of contact" for providing information and support related to international mobility (incoming and outgoing)</p>	<p><u>2015</u> * HR</p> <p><u>2016</u> * HR</p>
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19. Recognition of qualifications (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NARIC (National Recognition Information Centre – Flanders) - Codex Higher Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - Dept. of Students' Affairs: guidelines - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None: current guidelines & rules are clear 	

20. Seniority (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None: current practices are clear 	

21. Postdoctoral appointments (Code)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- Codex Higher Education	<p>- staff regulations: 2 categories of postdoctoral appointments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. employment contract 2. scholarship (international mobility): max. 3 years <p>Other categories: e.g. senior research positions</p>	<p>→ Fine-tuning of existing guidelines & criteria</p>	<p>2015-2016 * HR</p>

III. Working conditions and social security

22. Recognition of the profession			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
	Staff regulations: definition of the different categories of researchers: * PhD bursary = student * Technical staff in labs = not considered as researchers but as technicians / laboratory staff	No immediate action required	

23. Research environment			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
Law of 4 august 1996 on well-being of workers in the performance of their work - series of Royal Decrees re well-being and safety - Law on Labour regulations (only relevant for Contract Research Staff)	- Staff regulations - Labour regulation (only for Contract Research Staff): entry into force: 1 October 2015	- further monitoring of workplace conditions, safety guidelines etc. - further monitoring of "space allocation" survey (for certain labs, lack of sufficient space per researcher) -	<u>2015-2016</u> * HR in coop. with Safety & Prevention dept.

24. Working conditions			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education Law of 4 august 1996 on well-being of workers in the performance of their work - series of Royal Decrees re well-being and safety - Law on Labour regulations (only relevant for Contract Research Staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - Ongoing: Workplace Safety & Prevention dept.: new project involving mapping risk analysis in labs and other workplaces - 2014: Survey on psychosocial risks at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - manuals for supervisors and for researchers ➔ action plan (in progress) for the promotion of the prevention of work-related stress and the promotion of work-life balance 	<p><u>2015</u> * HR</p> <p><u>2015-2016</u> * HR (+ faculties)</p>

25. Stability and permanence of employment			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education (senior academic staff / assistant academic staff) - Law on Employment contracts 1978 (contract researcher staff) - rules relating to non-discrimination of employees with fixed-term contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - (CONTRA: termination of employment/contract depending of project financing) 2014: Pilot project (in 1 faculty): "Life after PhD"... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monitoring researchers' "exit" for a better enhancement of professional development prospects - clear and transparent (early stage) communication regarding fixed-term contracts (in manual for supervisors) ➔ similar project in other faculties 	<p><u>2016-2017</u> * HR, in coop. with faculties, Career Centre</p>

26. Funding and salaries			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education - Equal pay for male & female researchers - (CONTRA): no pension and no unemployment rights for third-country researchers (from countries with no bilateral social security treaty) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - application of statutory rules - research funding regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - transparent information in manuals and on personnel intranet 	<p><u>2015-2016</u> (ongoing) * HR</p>

27. Gender balance (see also point 14: selection committees)			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European, Belgian (federal) and Flemish legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Action Plan (GAP) - gender balance in all internal committees and commissions - working group on “maternity protection” (to provide guidelines for pregnant female researchers working in labs/hazardous substances) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - further implementation of the recommendations of the GAP - monitoring “female exit” during career path (pilot project 2016?) - guidelines for supervisors and researchers (in labs) in case of pregnancy/breastfeeding 	<p><u>2015-2016</u> * HR & gender stakeholders</p> <p><u>2015</u> * Working group</p>

28. Career development			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- Codex Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations - Charter for researchers (incl. Profile of the good supervisor) - central HR policy on career training (funding opportunities) - central PhD office: career training (general and per target group) / regular newsletter - Career centre - HR policy at faculty level (partial) - 2014: Pilot project: "Life after PhD" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clear guidelines in internal guidelines and in manuals for supervisor and researcher - provide the faculties/departments with instruments to assist with HR policy re career development 	<p><u>Recurrent</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR * Doc. Training programme * Career Centre * faculties

29. Value of mobility			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/ practices	Actions required	When/Who

<p>- Codex Higher Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staff regulations; - information & support for outgoing staff mobility (secondment, social security, tax issues, etc.); - bilateral staff-exchange agreements (worldwide); - credits and financial support for certain modules of outgoing mobility; - encouraging secondment/joint-projects with other research institutions, the industry ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creating a “single point of contact for staff mobility” - better monitoring (incl. statistics) of outgoing mobility, FAQs, in order to improve the services provided - including different forms of mobility in the periodic appraisal / staff evaluation - (inter-university: to facilitate the portability of pensions and other social security entitlements) 	<p><u>2016-2017</u> *HR and other internal stakeholders</p>
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30. Access to career advice

Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<p>- legal provisions related to “outplacement”: providing career advice to employees in case of dismissal (financed by the employer)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - idem legal obligations; - Career Centre on campus; - courses and seminars re career planning - 2014: Pilot “Life after PhD” 	<p>See point 28: Career Development</p>	<p><u>Recurrent</u> * HR * Doc. Training programme * Career Centre * faculties</p>

31. Intellectual Property Rights

Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - legislation re IP rights - Codex Higher Education - Decree (Flemish) on the scientific and social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patent Information Centre (Research dept.) - Technology Transfer Interface - support for spin-offs and start-ups - Doctoral Schools: courses & seminars 		<p><u>Recurrent</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * doctoral schools * R&D: TTI & patent information centre

32. Co-authorship			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Charter for the researcher (including “profile of the good supervisor” and “profile of the good researcher”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - incorporate guidelines in the manuals for supervisors and researchers 	<p><u>2015-2016</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * HR (in coop. with research dept.)

33. Teaching			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codex Higher Education (not for contract research staff and bursaries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introductory seminar on teaching methods & pedagogical aspects: mandatory for starting level professors 		

34. Complains/ appeals			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
- Codex Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - confidential counsellors (e.g. in case of harassment and work-related conflicts) - external counsel on (work-related) psychosocial aspects - ombudsperson for PhD students and early stage researchers - several “informal” channels: within the departments / central administration - appeal commissions for senior and assistant academic staff (decisions re negative evaluation, disciplinary measures) 	- consider the extension of ombudsperson service to other staff categories (to be discussed)	<u>2015-2016</u> * HR

35. Participation in decision-making bodies			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who

- Codex Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - researchers represented in the different institutional decision-making bodies, commissions - researchers (all levels) are represented within the faculty councils and boards - researchers (except PhD bursaries) have candidacy and voting rights in the quadrennial 'social elections' of works councils and prevention committees. 	--	
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IV. Training

36. Relation with supervisor			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PhD regulation (central and faculties regulations) - early stage researchers report regularly to supervisor and have regular feedback from supervisor - Annual (PhD) progress report to faculty and research dept. - Charter for researchers (approved 2014, needs to be reviewed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulation for PhD bursaries; - Charter for doctoral researchers (including MoU between researcher and supervisor re rights, duties and expectations); - Charter for researchers: to be reviewed; 	<p><u>Before 30/9/15</u></p> <p>* HR (to be approved by university board)</p>

37. Supervision and managerial duties			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who

- Codex Higher Education	- Senior staff regulation - (current) Senior Academic Staff Matrix - Profile of a good supervisor	- incorporate managerial skills and duties (as supervisor) in the senior academic staff “competencies matrix” and in the manual for supervisors; The “competencies matrix” is a tool for recruitment and appraisal procedures. - create a module (course/seminar) on managerial skills and people management for supervisors; - provide coaching & skills training, initially for heads of departments, and in a second phase for all supervisors.	2015-2016 * HR (in coordination with faculties)
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38. Continuing Professional Development

Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
--	- staff regulations - financial means for attending conferences, seminars (congress credits) - financing vocational training session, research-related training etc.	--	

39. Access to research training and continuous development

Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
	Idem point 38		

40. Mentoring			
Relevant legislation	Existing Institutional rules/practices	Actions required	When/Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Law and regulations on safety and health at work: mentoring for new employees - Regulations concerning the well-being at work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - implementation of health and safety legal provisions - compulsory information sessions for all members of the “hierarchical line” - assigning mentors for early stage researchers (intake policy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - extending the “welcome policy” and the information provided to new recruits; - provide training re coaching skills for potential mentors; - monitor, formalise and extend the “intake policy” 	<p><u>Q1 2016</u> * HR (in coordination with Safety and Preventions and faculties)</p>