Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

Åbo Akademi University
Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU)

Founded in 1918, ÅAU is one of the oldest universities in Finland. The activities cover research and education in most disciplines from the humanities, pedagogics and theology to social sciences, natural sciences and technology.

ÅAU carries extensive responsibility for providing education in Swedish in Finland and has a strong position on the Finnish educational market, in the interaction with society and business life, and in international research. ÅAU has a recognized position at the forefront of research in such areas as biosciences, computer science, democracy, human rights, material sciences, process chemistry and psychology.
ÅAU—Key Characteristics

- Founded 1918
- Campuses in Åbo, Vasa and Jakobstad. Activities also in Helsinki and on the Åland Islands
- 5,500 undergraduate students
- 820 postgraduate students
- A total of 1,300 employees, 660 working in education and research
- Overall annual budget ca 105 million euros, 38 million external funding
- 1,500 scientific publications annually
Organisation

The University Council appoints the external members of the Board, the auditors for the University. It approves the financial statement and grants the Board and the rector discharge from liability.

The Board is the highest decision-making body of the University. The Board decides on most issues of strategic nature, such as activity and economic plan as well as the budget. The Board appoints the Rector and makes decisions about admissions.

The Rector heads the University and is responsible for preparing and carrying out the decisions of the Board. The Rector exercises general authority as stated in the Universities Act.

Rector’s Executive Group consists of the Deans, both Vice-Rectors, the Head of Administration and the Rector for ÅAU in Vasa.

The two Vice-Rectors are responsible for Undergraduate Studies and Research and Doctoral Studies. They are chairmen of The Board for Research and Doctoral Studies and The Board for Undergraduate Studies, which are advisory and preparatory agencies for the University Board, the Rector and the Faculty Boards.
The mission of ÅAU is to provide an open, Swedish-speaking university environment for quality research and studies with a Nordic and international anchorage. ÅAU is particularly tasked with educating Swedish-speaking experts to satisfy the future needs in Finland.

The vision of ÅAU is to be widely noted for scholarship at the highest scientific level within its profile areas and for a Swedish-speaking environment for internationally competitive research and education.
Current State of HRM

Core employee rights and obligations are regulated by national legislation and by the Collective Agreement for Universities. In addition ÅAU has extensive internal instructions and processes regarding HR-related issues to further guarantee a smooth and fair dealing in matters such as e.g. non-discrimination, recruitment, competence development and occupational safety. ÅAU cooperates with other universities in Finland in order to share best practices and information and there is also collaboration with the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) and trade unions.

ÅAU strives to continuously develop and enhance a sustainable and attractive working environment for all employees and aims at providing an environment:

• where education, critical thinking, independence, activity and responsibility is encouraged,

• where all should be given a chance of involvement in decision making processes,

• where all are treated equally, and

• which promotes health and development.

To reach its goals the involvement of employees and students is crucial, as employees and student are the experts when preparing matters related to them. The involvement is enabled in many ways, e.g. representation in decision making bodies and working groups, participation through enquires, questionnaires and yearly development discussions. There is also an agreement on cooperation, which is implemented on three levels: individual, unit and university level.
Why an HR Strategy for Researchers?

In line with the ÅAU strategy the university has determinedly worked to develop and strengthen its role as a research university and to provide an environment that enables top-level research. This strategy has been implemented e.g. through enabling unique multidisciplinary entities both in research and education, increased international collaborations, effective service and support functions and infrastructure. As the University aims at making the researcher’s career more attractive, to promote career development and well-being at work and to enhance the quality of research and innovation, a separate HR Strategy for Researchers has been developed.

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers, defined by the European Commission, have provided excellent tools in identifying strengths and shortcomings at ÅAU and the process of making an HR Strategy for Researchers at ÅAU has been based on these recommendations and a model provided by the Commission. This process as well as the action plan itself will be presented next.

Read more about EURAXESS Rights and the HRS4R-process: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/
The HRS4R Process at ÅAU

- September 2012: Declaration of Commitment
  - the Declaration of Commitment to the Principles of the European Commission’s Recommendation *The European Charter for Researchers* and *The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* was made by Rector Jorma Mattinen

- October 2012: ÅAU was accepted to join the 4th cohort of the ”Institutional HR Strategy Group” and participated in the kick-off meeting of the 4th cohort in Brussels

- April 2013: The 4th cohort’s 1st mutual learning seminar in Warsaw

- November 2013: The steering group for the HRS4R process at ÅAU is nominated and begins its work with the five steps of the HRS4R:

  - **Step 1** Internal gap analysis
  - **Step 2** Creation of Action Plan
  - **Step 3** Review and acknowledgement by the European Commission
  - **Step 4** Implementation and self-assessment
  - **Step 5** External evaluation
The HRS4R Process at ÅAU

- January-May 2014: Step 1-2) Internal gap analysis process started in January 2014 in parallel with creation of the first draft for action plan
- April 2014: The 4th Cohort’s 2nd mutual learning seminar in Tarragona
- March 2015: Revisions to the action plan due to feedback from stakeholders
- May 2015: ÅAU Action Plan published and first application for acknowledgement by the Commission was made
- January 2016: Second application was made with an edited version of Action Plan
- December 2016: Learning café with researchers
  - Researchers were invited to discuss the HRS4R action plan and outcome of the gap analysis and some revisions were made due to feedback
- December 2016: Revised Action Plan published and third application for acknowledgement sent to the Commission

**Step 1**
Internal gap analysis

**Step 2**
Creation of Action Plan

**Step 3**
Review and acknowledgement by the European Commission

**Step 4**
Implementation and self-assessment

**Step 5**
External evaluation
The HRS4R Process at ÅAU

At ÅAU an internal steering group under Vice-Rector Mika Hupa’s guidance was appointed for the HRS4R process. The steering group played an active part in the whole process and also functioned as an advisory group for HR Services, which is the main responsible unit for the coordination of the HRS4R-process.

The steering group was formed to represent different functions, expertise and diversity of the University with representatives at different stages in their research careers, from all faculties, many disciplines and also with non-Finnish representation. Some members also were representatives of the unions for research and teaching staff.

**Members of the Steering Group:**

Mikko Hupa                     Vice-Rector, Professor in Inorganic Chemistry (Chairman until 4.1.2015)
Christina Nygren-Landgärds    Vice-Rector, Professor in Sloyd Education (Chairman from 5.1.2015)
Urpo Nikanne                   Professor, Finnish Language
Annika Meinander              Academy of Finland Research Fellow, Cell Biology
Marie Nordström               Postdoctoral Researcher, Environmental and Marine Biology
Tomas Eklund                  Senior Lecturer, Information Systems
Henrik Serup Christensen      Postdoctoral Researcher, The Social Science Research Institute
Linda Sjöholm                 Human Resources, HRM Manager (Secretary)
Malin Siimes                  Human Resources, HRD Manager (Secretary)
Step 1-2: Internal Gap Analysis and Creation of Action Plan

The internal gap analysis and the creation of the Action Plan were carried out in parallel mainly during January-April 2014. The steering group for the HRS4R project divided into three smaller working groups for this part of the process, each working with assessment of different parts of the Code and Charter. The data collected for the internal analysis and for creating the proposition for an Action Plan was gathered from many sources with the aim of finding relevant shortcomings and areas of improvement, according to the ÅAU researchers themselves.

1. **Gathering of background information and assessment in relation to the Code and Charter:** national legislation, regulations, internal instructions, internal strategies and decisions, agreements and praxis that regulate and effect everyday work at the University.

2. **Group discussions with stakeholders** where gap analysis findings and draft for action plan was presented and discussed. Meetings were held with:
   - Representatives of *Forskarföreningen vid Åbo Akademi r.f.* (a Union for researchers and teachers including PhD’s),
   - The Board for research and doctoral studies at ÅAU (chaired by the vice-rector responsible for research and doctoral studies and with representation of professors and PhD’s)
   - A self-organized and voluntarily based group of post-doc researchers called *Turku Early Researchers Career Union.*
   - Learning café with researchers
Step 1-2: Internal Gap Analysis and Creation of Action Plan

4. **Questionnaires:** The steering group had access to feedback and opinions of teachers and researchers through recent questionnaires:
   - Feedback from PhD Students was available from the so called *Doctoral Student Barometer*, which is performed every other year with the aim to learn about the situation for PhD Students and how they experience the university and their study progress,
   - The views of teaching and research staffs on working conditions and well-being at work was available from the “*well-being at work*-questionnaire”, which is performed every other year. It is possible to identify answers of specific staff groups and their experiences of current working conditions from this questionnaire, e.g. PhD students and post-doc researchers.

5. **In-depth interviews:** interviews were conducted with some experts, e.g. the chairing professor of the Research Ethics Committee

6. **Work-place discussions:** The members of the steering group also actively involved researchers and staff in different stages of their research career at their own workplaces in free discussions around the principles of the Charter and Code in relation to practices at the University.
The internal gap analysis at ÅAU was mainly carried out during January-May 2014 by the members of the ÅAU HRS4R Steering Group. The steering group was divided in smaller working groups that worked with gap analysis of different parts of the Charter & Code. The results were then presented to all in the steering group and discussed in-depth.

The outcome of the gap analysis was that when comparing current practices with the Charter and Code major development needs could not be identified since eg. matters concerning terms of employment, salaries, gender balance and participation in decision-making bodies are areas where the required regulations and instructions are already in place. However, many valuable insights were shared as well as many new initiatives and concrete ideas on how to tackle areas of further improvement in working conditions for researchers. A first draft for an action plan was made by the steering group.

Researchers and stakeholders were involved to some extent already in parallel with the steering groups work on gap analysis and making a first draft for an action plan. Researchers and stakeholders were also involved after the first draft for an action plan was made.
After the first draft was agreed upon researchers and stakeholders were involved again. The Charter and Code, the HRS4R-project, the results of the internal gap analysis and a draft for an ÅAU action plan was communicated through discussions with stakeholders: the Union for researchers and teachers at ÅAU, Turku Early Stage Researchers Career Union and the Board for research and doctoral studies at ÅAU. The Rectors Executive Group was also informed and consulted about the HRS4R-process.

The HRS4R process at ÅAU was less active in late 2014 and early 2015 due to ongoing organizational changes at the university. Finally a first action plan was published in March 2015 and a first application for acknowledgement was sent to the European Commission.

Thanks to feedback to ÅAU from the Commission some revisions were made and a second application for acknowledgement was sent in January 2016. With further insightful feedback ÅAU has worked with the HRS4R process and the action plan. As the process of steps 1-2 had been somewhat drawn-out timewise a learning café with researchers was held in December 2016 to discuss the HRS4R process, gap analysis and ÅAU action plan and open up for new and current feedback. Some revisions were made to the action plan due to the current feedback. After which a third application was made to the Commission in December 2016.
Key Outcomes of Internal Gap Analysis

On an overall level the 40 principles of the Charter and Code were found to already be taken into account relatively well at ÅAU as the HRS4R process started. For example employee rights and obligations are regulated by national legislation and by the Collective Agreement for Universities in Finland and these regulations form a solid foundation for a fair and equal treatment of all staff, researchers included.

The following short summary illustrates the priority areas for improvement that were found:

**Ethical and professional aspects:**
- Development of models for dissemination of recognized ethical principles to the entire scientific community

**Recruitment:**
- Revision of existing praxis on communication in recruitment
- Good recruitment practices to be further developed and disseminated to guarantee an open and validated process
- Development of rules and standards for recognition of qualifications

**Working conditions and social security:**
- Revision of introduction to workplace safety, laboratory safety and information security for new staff
- Development of solutions and support for combining family and work
- Development of career paths
- More career advice for PhD Students
- More support for mobility and active encouragement towards seeking international experience
- Clarification of procedures for complaints and appeals
- Clarification to staff on how to take part in decision-making
Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

Action Plan

Åbo Akademi University
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<tr>
<th>Actions/measures</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing models for dissemination of ethical principles and practices. Training on ethical principles for researchers at all levels.</td>
<td>University services - Research services</td>
<td>Staff training seminar on ethical principles and practices in Q2 2017. A continuous activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing models for dissemination of ethical principles and practices to degree programmes. Training will be held for PhD's. Easy-access information will be developed.</td>
<td>University services - Research services</td>
<td>Seminar for PhD's will be held in Q2 2017 on ethical principles and practices. A continuous activity. Assessing and strengthening introduction routines for new PhD's with focus on dissemination of ethical principles and practices starting Q1 2018.</td>
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<td>Development of principles and procedures for recruitment communications to job seekers including communication before, during and after recruitment.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Starting Q2 2017.</td>
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<td>Development of transparent rules and standards for recognizing and weighing in other qualifications than publications in the screening process of candidates in recruitment processes.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Starting Q3 2017.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development and dissemination of good recruitment practices. Making of Recruitment Guide with aim to support recruiting supervisors and members of recruitment panels. Unifying recruitment processes with aim to strengthen predictability and transparency.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Starting Q2 2017. First draft published in Q1 2018 at latest. The recruitment guide will be revised continuously according to feedback and recognized new development needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development and dissemination of good recruitment practices. Training for recruiting supervisors and members of recruitment panel members.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Staff training seminar will be held in Q2 2018 on recruitment practices as well as judicial aspects on recruitment. Thereafter with regular intervals every other year or more often on demand.</td>
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<td>Focus on a safe learning and working environment. Introduction to staff on workplace safety, laboratory safety and information security as well as to the core values of the university and workplace standards and regulations.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Ongoing, however, systematically structuring and strengthening already existing processes will start Q1 2018 to assure unified processes to all staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on communication to non-employed researchers active at the university on workplace safety, laboratory safety, information security and insurance coverage, as well as introduction to the core values of the university and workplace standards and regulations.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Already ongoing. However, systematically structuring and strengthening of already existing processes will start Q1 2018 to assure unified processes to all non-employed researchers active at the university.</td>
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<td>Clarifications on possibilities to balance career and family. Clear regulations</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Started in Q3 2016. A revised guideline for personnel at Åbo Akademi University is expected to be approved by the Åbo Akademi University Board during 2017. Communication to staff thereafter.</td>
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<td>on extension of fixed-term employment for researchers due to family leaves.</td>
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<td>Supporting research funding applications.</td>
<td>University services - Research services - HR services - Financial</td>
<td>Starting Q2 2017. Development and strengthening of new support functions for researchers. A new service concept is planned with more resources allocated to services supporting the funding application writing process. Also focus on clarifying communication on existing and new services to researchers in a new web concept, which will be launched in Q1 2018 as Åbo Akademi University launches its new website.</td>
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<td>services - University communications</td>
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<td>More support for mobility and encouragement to seek international experience</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Starting Q2 2017 a mobility seminar for researchers will be held every year with focus on sharing experiences.</td>
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<td>through sharing experience of mobility.</td>
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<td>Developing support services for new international staff arriving from abroad and strengthening integration of the international staff; new web pages, focus on orientation, support to develop possibility to strengthen language skills.</td>
<td>University services</td>
<td>Ongoing. Systematical developing and strengthening of international staff services will start Q3 2017 as more resources will be allocated for this purpose. A new web concept with relevant information for potential new international job seekers and incoming international staff will be launched Q1 2018 as Åbo Akademi University launches its new website. Starting Q2 2017; making sure web information on staff services and research services in English corresponds to the web pages in Swedish. Orientation for international staff will be benchmarked to orientation for domestic staff in Q3 2017 to assure equal treatment. Language courses for international staff are already offered, however, the current possibilities will be assessed in Q1 2018 to find possible areas of development.</td>
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<td>Improved access to career advice for PhD students.</td>
<td>University services - HR services</td>
<td>Starting Q3 2017. Individual and group coaching will be introduced. Continuous development of services.</td>
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<td>Clarification on procedures and how to go about with complaints or appeals and conflicts and disputes at the work place. Providing easy-access information about existing processes and instructions on rights and obligations of the employer and employee.</td>
<td>University services - HR services - Research services</td>
<td>Starting Q1 2017 and continuous activity. Raising awareness through information in introduction routines to new staff. Also regular reminders every other year to all staff through information in the Staff Newsletter (which is sent approx. 18 times a year to all staff).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarification to staff about how to take part in decision-making</td>
<td>University services - Management and faculty support services - HR services</td>
<td>Starting Q3 2017 and continuous activity. Clarified responsibilities and routines for communication of power structures and possibilities to influence everyday life at the university to new staff.</td>
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Next steps of the HRS4R process

Step 3 – Application for acknowledgement by the European Commission

The application for acknowledgement by the Commission was made in May, 2015 and with an edited version in January, 2016. The third application with further clarifications and revisions was made to the Commission in December, 2016. If the assessment is positive the badge *HR Excellence in Research* will be awarded.

Step 4 – Implementation of the HR Strategy for Researchers and self-assessment

Implementation of the action plan will mainly take place in the years 2017 and 2018. In accordance with the HRS4R process Åbo Akademi University will evaluate the realization of the action plan two years after the plan has been approved. Further improving the processes will continue during the coming years with focus on the involvement of and cooperation with the research community. Communication with researchers themselves will be of most importance when following progress in the taken actions as well as finding direction for both ongoing initiatives and possible further development and new initiatives to improve working environment and conditions for researchers.
Next steps of the HRS4R process

Research staff will be invited to participate and comment on the progress in workshops and learning cafés every semester as well as through meetings with representatives for stakeholders. Progress will also be measured through questions in the two recurring questionnaires: the Doctoral Student Barometer and Well-being at work-questionnaire. On the ÅAU website for HRS4R there will be a webform for researchers making it possible to send feedback and suggestions to HR services for further improvements anonymously.

Learning cafés, workshops, meetings and questionnaires are expected to generate insightful information on the progress of the implementation of the action plan as well as valuable information on possible new areas of improvement that ÅAU could address in coming action plans.

The implementation of the action plan at ÅAU will be monitored closely by HR Services and progress will be announced every quarter in the newsletter to all staff and current information will also be available through the ÅAU web pages for HRS4R.

Step 5 - External evaluation and renewal of acknowledgement

In accordance with the HRS4R process after four years Åbo Akademi University expects an external evaluation by external evaluators appointed by the Commission on the progress made towards the objectives of the HR Strategy for Researchers and its compliance with the principles of the Charter & Code.