

*Since the end of 2009, the European Commission has put the “European Charter for Researchers” back into the news through the “Human Resources Strategy for Researchers” (HRS4R) programme. Universities that can show that they apply the proper human resources policy and facilitate the mobility of researchers are granted the “HR Excellence in Research” logo by the Commission. In Belgium, the VUB is registering for the programme, just as the University of Antwerp. Before, the Flanders Research Foundation (Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen – FWO), the University of Hasselt, the National Fund for Scientific Research (Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique – FNRS) and virtually all the French-speaking universities have already done. The importance of the Charter chiefly lies in the fact that it is a standard designed for the internationalisation of scientific research while at the same time respecting the unique features of each university.*

## **1. The European Charter for Researchers**

Since 2000 and as part of the Lisbon strategy, the EU has been seeking to achieve a European research space. A career as a researcher should be attractive in all EU countries; there should be no barriers to European researchers moving from one European research institution to another; non-European researchers need to be attracted to EU research institutions. Governments are asked to increase the proportion of Gross Domestic Product allocated to scientific research to 3% (currently this is 2% for Belgium).

In practice, this greatly presupposes the creation of a European research area. Graduates must feel drawn to scientific research. Above all, research jobs and careers must be attractive. Mobility is a key point. There must be equal competition for researchers applying from other countries or universities. And researchers who work in different countries during their career must be able to retain their social security entitlements. Ideally, they should be able to build up pension entitlement through, for example, a pan-European pension fund.

Since 2000, the “European Research Area” (ERA) has referred to all EU research programmes as a whole. One of the five ERA initiatives is the European Partnership for Researchers, which is managed by the “ERA Steering Group on Human Resources”. The Charter was drawn up within this Steering Group.

The “European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers”, abbreviated to the “Charter and Code” or “C&C”, was published on 11 March 2005. The translations, including the Dutch, were published at the same time.<sup>1</sup> They are in the form of a recommendation by the European Commission to the EU countries.

The “European Charter for Researchers” sets out the respective rights and obligations of researchers, employers and funding providers (including the authorities that fund universities and the institutions that grant bursaries and which are not, therefore, the direct employers). The “Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers” sets out how recruitment should be undertaken. **In other words, together these texts set out what a university and its researchers or applicant researchers can reasonably expect from each other.**

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<sup>1</sup> The full Dutch and English 2005 texts can be found at : [www.europa.eu/eracareers/pdf/eur\\_21620\\_en-nl.pdf](http://www.europa.eu/eracareers/pdf/eur_21620_en-nl.pdf)

The Charter sketches out the specific institutional context within which scientific research should be performed, basing itself on the Frascati definition of a researcher<sup>2</sup>. A researcher is defined on an activity basis and not on a job basis. The Frascati definition confirms that a researcher must be of a university or master's diploma level. The Frascati definition makes a distinction between an early-stage researcher and an experienced researcher (i.e. after four years of research experience). The Charter makes no explicit reference to this distinction.

Although the Charter relates to all researchers, irrespective of their job, the emphasis in the points set out in the Charter is primarily on early-stage researchers with unstable employment prospects and on researchers with professional mobility.

## **2. Euraxess, HRS4R and the logo**

All human resources aspects of the seventh European framework programme are grouped under the "People's Specific Programme", of which Euraxess forms a part. Euraxess provides a range of information contributing towards a better human resources policy for researchers. It consists of the following component parts:

- Euraxess rights: in which the Charter is promoted, together with the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R);
- Euraxess jobs: in which job offers from all EU universities are brought together;
- Euraxess services: with information about social security and daily life in each country;
- Euraxess links: dealing with researcher mobility outside the EU (including Japan, China and the USA).

HRS4R is a programme through which researcher employers and funding providers are provided with support in drawing up an action plan for their HR policy for researchers.

An abbreviated and recast version of the Charter is used in HRS4R.<sup>3</sup> The result is a forty point text, points 1-12 and 22-40 coming from the "European Charter for Researchers", and points 13-21 from the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers".

It is now divided into four sections: (1) ethical and professional aspects (points 1-11); (2) recruitment (points 12-21); (3) working conditions and social security (points 22-35); and (4) training (points 36-40). The forty points are a form of checklist enabling researchers or university to check whether their behaviour lives up to expectations.

The "HR excellence in Research" logo provides some sort of guarantee to researchers that the institution to which they belong or are applying has an appropriate human resources policy for

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<sup>2</sup> Published by the OECD. See [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org) "Frascati Manual 2002: Proposed Standard Practice for Surveys on Research and Experimental Development".

<sup>3</sup> See [ec.europa.eu/euraxess/under](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/under) Euraxess rights, HRS4R.

researchers. It is just a logo and not a quality label. Currently, the Euraxess programme does not have the resources to undertake an audit of the institution's policy.

To obtain the logo, a light system in terms of administration is used. The underlying principles are:

- It is voluntary: the system is implemented at the initiative of the institution; it is not mandatory for EU contracts
- Self-evaluation: the institution determines its goals for itself and undertakes an initial appraisal of their realisation
- Simplicity: this may involve a series of small initiatives falling within the institution's general strategy.

To obtain and retain the logo there are five steps to be followed:

- Undertake a Gap analysis of the differences and similarities between the Charter recommendations and the way in which the organisation operates
- Draw up an action plan and publish it (i.e. NL/EN) on the institutional website; the action plan must be a realistic step-by-step plan moving towards compliance with the Charter recommendations
- Recognition must be applied for from the European Commission, and the logo granted
- Self-evaluation two years after the logo is awarded.
- EU evaluation four years after the logo is awarded.

An action plan for the VUB is scheduled for the period 2012-2015. It was approved by the Governing Council on 24 January 2012.

### **3. The VUB approach to the Gap analysis**

The Governing Council of the VUB subscribed to the European Charter in 2005. In advance of this, an initial comparison was made between the VUB rules and the points contained in the Charter.<sup>4</sup> This comparison concluded that the VUB rules were aligned closely with those of the Charter. This text was used as the initial reference point.

A key actor in lobbying for research rights in Flanders (i.e. the Flemish Region and Dutch speakers in the Brussels-Capital Region) is the Researchers in Action (*Onderzoekers in Actie*) academic researchers platform. In conjunction with the trade unions, this group organises petitions addressed to the Flemish Government and calling for improvements to the status of researchers. Researchers in Action is strongly represented within the VUB.

On 24 February 2011, the trade unions and Researchers in Action organised a debate with the Flemish Government, employer federations and the Flanders Research Foundation (*Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen – FWO*). The title of the debate was “Male/female researcher wanted, career lacking stability” (*Onderzoeker gezocht m/v, loopbaan onzeker*). The starting points for the debate were two undertakings from the European Charter for Researchers

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<sup>4</sup> [rd-ir.vub.ac.be/en\\_GB/editor-file/read/x/.../OZRBelplan\\_bijlage4.pdf](http://rd-ir.vub.ac.be/en_GB/editor-file/read/x/.../OZRBelplan_bijlage4.pdf)

to be given by employers: employment contracts providing greater stability and the guarantee of a fair salary and equitable social security entitlements.

In March 2011, the VUB Sociology Department's research group TESA was tasked with preparing the Gap analysis. An informal working party was also set up in which progress with the Gap analysis could be discussed. The working party consisted of both members of the VUB management and researchers, in particular representatives of Researchers in Action.<sup>5</sup> The working party convened three times to lay down the principles. More detailed discussions of the Gap analysis took place in separate consultations.

The Gap analysis drew on various sources:

- (a) interviews of members of the VUB management and various departments<sup>6</sup>;
- (b) VUB policy documents;
- (c) the junior researchers survey and senior researchers survey produced by the Research and Development Monitoring Expert Centre (*ExpertiseCentrum Onderzoek en OntwikkelingsMonitoring - ECOOM*);
- (d) three focus groups relating to the Charter, each involving five to seven anonymous researchers from different disciplines and at different job levels.

The members of the UAntwerpen, VIB, UHasselt and ULB universities were also consulted on the working methods.<sup>7</sup> Inspiration was also drawn from the ULg action plan and from the HRS4R meeting in Dublin on 23 and 24 June 2011.

The outcome of the Gap analysis was forty information sheets on the points raised in the Charter. Each information sheet contained: (1) a proposal for a summary of the Charter point concerned; (2) the actual text of the point made in the Charter; (3) the Government rules and policy on the issue raised; (4) the VUB rules and practices; (5) the actions contemplated; (6) the materials required for self-evaluation after two years.

The summaries proposed for the forty points in the Charter are given in Appendix 1. The full Gap analysis is given in Appendix 2.

#### **4. The key trends in the Gap analysis**

It should first be pointed out that the VUB has full university status and a strong research tradition. In terms of student numbers, compared to UGent and KULeuven, it is a smaller university. The VUB departments have relatively broad autonomy, including autonomy as regards HR policy for researchers who are not self-employed academic staff (*zelfstandig*

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<sup>5</sup> The members of the working party were: Ralph Clinckers, Jan Danckaert, Jean-Pierre De Greve, Jan De Schamphelleire, Ann Dooms, Mieke Gijsemans, Cathy Macharis, Yvette Michotte, Roland Pepermans, Jan Veny, Lode Wyns.

<sup>6</sup> This involved: Ingrid Adam, Jo Coulier, Jan Danckaert, Catherine De Clerq, Jean-Pierre De Greve, Julie Debrauwere, Jan Den Haese, Mieke Gijsemans, Cathy Macharis, Maha Najjar, Nadine Rons, Patrick Stouthuysen, Hugo Thienpont, Hans Vandevoorde, Jan Veny, Jacques Vilrocx, Lode Wyns.

<sup>7</sup> This involved: Annick Coutisse (ULB), Greet Dielis (UA), Sien Geysen (UA), Marijke Lein (VIB), Esteban Martinez (ULB), Yves Soen (UHasselt), Ralitzia Soultanova (ULB).

*academisch personeel - ZAP*). The administrative staff plays a general supporting role, but sometimes lacks personnel to meet the specific needs of the departments.

The VUB and its French-speaking sister university, the ULB, are free universities funded by the government. They have a long history of a distinct and free-thinking identity. The fact that the VUB is located in the Brussels-Capital region forms part of that uniqueness. With Brussels as its starting point, the trend towards internationalisation is natural. At the same time, the VUB is often somewhat unusual as compared with universities in the Flemish Region.

Charter points 1-3, relating to the need for free and original research, have an immediate impact on the identity of the university. The Gap analysis shows that the VUB rules and practices either comply with or go beyond the Charter. Nevertheless, against a backdrop in which the government is asking universities to make savings and increase competition, there is growing pressure for contract research and specialisation. Many other questions are also raised, for example regarding the contribution made by free research to contract research, and concerning guarantees of intellectual honesty in the face of increasing competition.

**Charter points 4-9**, dealing, inter alia, with knowledge of the institution and of personal employment terms and conditions, make it clear that VUB researchers need a greater flow of information about how the university works and how projects are managed. There is particular uncertainty regarding personal terms and conditions of employment. Surveys also shows that early-stage researchers have vague or false expectations regarding their potential career developments.

With regard to the day to day working and social integration of new researchers, VUB departments are often out on a limb. This is to some extent entirely normal, but more central support would avoid flawed information, misunderstandings and duplication of effort.

At the same time, a large amount of information has been placed on the VUB website by the various administrations, but that does not seem to be reaching the researchers. In other words, there are shortcomings in flagging up information relevant to researchers.

The need to enhance the flow of information is all the more important given that the number of researchers has increased significantly over the past ten years and the VUB itself is placing increasing emphasis on internationalisation. In stark contrast to this, the information about the VUB available to foreign researchers in English is very limited. This is true both as regards the website and for administrative documents.

A specific but characteristic sore point is the fact that the information on [www.euraxess.be](http://www.euraxess.be) relating to the Flemish Community only deals with the Flemish Region and does not extend to the Brussels-Capital Region. Furthermore, the information on research institutions is particularly fragmented. Foreign researchers find it difficult to surf to the different universities from this website and it is particularly difficult to get to the VUB.

Finally, the need for a flow of information is also of importance for a number of points in the Charter relating to employment terms and conditions (i.e. Points 24-32; see below).

**Charter Points 10-20** relate primarily to recruitment and appraisal. With regard to self-employed academic staff and academic support staff (*assisterend academisch personeel – AAP*), the VUB acts in accordance with its statutory obligations. Other researchers are recruited through the departments (as a general rule, any such recruitment is later confirmed by the faculties and the Governing Council).

There is significant room for improvement of the different organisational aspects of recruitment. The Personnel Department is currently preparing an electronic vacancy notice format for use by the departments. This should make it possible for a standard format to be used to communicate employment terms and conditions and job requirements. It should also be pointed out that recruiting should be undertaken systematically through Euraxess jobs. Finally, this should make it easier to provide feedback. In the meantime, however, these are also shortcomings in the existing recruitment procedure.

There are also more strategic issues and questions of principle. For example, it is by no means clear whether the question of “disadvantaged groups” (see Charter Point 12) has been adequately addressed, nor whether a range of criteria is genuinely applied (see Charter Point 16). The new budget allocation model means that there is a move towards appraisal on the basis of key work performed (rather than the number of publications). Be that as it may, a change to the selection criteria calls for in-depth discussion with the faculties and departments.

It should be pointed out that the Gap analysis shows that there is a need for more informal appraisal. This includes, for example, the question of a job evaluation review between a supervisor and researchers. Among members of self-employed academic staff there may also be a need for a change of career course, which is rather difficult under the current procedures.

**Charter Points 21-35** relate to employment terms and conditions, in other words, the need for the researcher to have good working conditions and for research to be covered by social security. These are the key points.

Different social security components are not a problem in Belgium or in Flanders. Social security applies equally to all researchers, at least as regards researchers from the EU. Non-EU researchers, however, do not build up pension or child benefit entitlements. There are also differences between scholarship schemes. The terms and conditions are in fact determined by the body funding the scholarship.

A key strategic point is the position of post-doctoral researchers. There is a great deal of uncertainty about their career development. The VUB does not have sufficient resources to develop a middle management grade for researchers. Measures could, however, be taken to enhance the status of post-doctoral researchers. Currently, the Personnel Department provides researchers with little information about their specific working conditions and career development prospects.

In other words, more can be done on a day-to-day and organisational basis to bring about workplace improvements for certain researchers.

Finally, **Charter Points 36 to 40** relate to training and more specifically to guidance for early-stage researchers. The research survey shows that researchers are relatively satisfied with the guidance they receive. But there are differences between departments. There is too little central support to ensure good guidance. Be that as it may, supervisors and department chairmen often have little expert experience of coaching other researchers.

## **5. The action plan**

Each of the points in the action plan is essentially a response to the problems identified in the Gap analysis. They are therefore listed with little in the way of additional justification. They are grouped in the same way as the points in the Charter. Some action points also cross-cut other points in the Charter. Details of the relationship between the action points and the points in the Charter are given in Appendix 3.

### **I. Research and society** (response to Charter points 1-3)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. A series of lectures on “Research freedom, university and society”</li><li>2. A series of lectures on “Current problems with intellectual honesty”</li></ol> |
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To respond to the current problems of research freedom and intellectual honesty, the university can use what it is best at: discussion and reflection. As a place for reflection for young researchers, the Doctoral Schools seem the most appropriately placed for taking the initiative in this regard. Researchers in Action and the invaluable Research Freedom Study Circle (*Studiekring Vrij Onderzoek*) could play a supporting role in this regard.

### **II. Information** (initial response to Charter Points 4-9)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Restructuring of the VUB website (flagging of subjects of importance to researchers)</li></ol> <p>4-9. Information sessions directed at specific target groups and improvements to website information on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(a) project types and drawing up a project proposal;</li><li>(b) day-to-day project management;</li><li>(c) checking that the R&amp;D database is complete;</li><li>(d) working conditions and career development (i.e. realistic expectations);</li><li>(e) intellectual property rights;</li><li>(g) wellbeing in the workplace, the role of confidential advisers and workplace health and safety.</li></ol> |
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Enhancing this information will call for significant consultation. Recasting the website format is a radical change. There is also potential for conflict between providing information that is readily understood and providing information that is legally complete and consistent. More departments must interlink their information. Information sessions must also attract sufficient researchers and appeal to different target groups.

### **III. Internationalisation** (second response to Charter Points 4-9)

10. English language VUB website
11. English language information sessions
12. Basic documents in English
13. A virtual and physical intake desk for foreign and mobile researchers
14. Opportunities for (new) researchers to meet
15. Ensure that corrections are made to [www.euraxess.be](http://www.euraxess.be)

The cost of providing a flow of information in English is high. The IRMO (International Relations & Mobility) Department is perhaps the best placed to determine the priorities. Firstly, there is the general information required for the VUB to become better known internationally and, secondly, there is the more practical or specific information required for English-speaking VUB staff.

Linking this to Euraxess rights would avoid the VUB having to duplicate unnecessarily basic information about Belgian social security. Prior to this, [www.euraxess.be](http://www.euraxess.be) must, of course, first provide the proper information about the Brussels-Capital Region.

#### **IV. Recruiting** (initial response to Charter points 10-20)

16. Systematic recruiting through Euraxess
17. Ensure that vacancy notices are published in time
18. Provide feedback on applications

These administrative and organisational action points can, in principle, be achieved using the electronic recruitment template. The template has still to be tested. It will be possible to check on Euraxess jobs whether the template is actually being used.

18. Attract disadvantaged groups through vacancy notices
19. Allow for more career variations in vacancy notices

These are points of principle or strategic issues for recruitment. How they are implemented will need to be discussed with the faculties and departments.

#### **V. Assessment** (second response to Charter Points 10-20)

21. In undertaking appraisals, give greater weight to creativity (see key work performed in the last five years in the core competencies).
22. Take different forms of mobility into account in undertaking appraisals.
23. Take a range of criteria (e.g. mentoring/coaching activities) into account in undertaking appraisals.
24. Facilitate experience across disciplines and changes in department.

Implementation and clarification of the action points call for in-depth discussion within the faculties and departments.



## **VI. Working conditions** (response to Charter Points 21-35)

Improving working conditions is central to the action plan.

25. Strengthening post-doctoral career development opportunities: (a) tenure track posts; (b) the prospect of some form of stability after 15 years of seniority; (c) introduce new salary scales.

This is the key action point. There is a commitment to achieving this with the current VUB resources.

26. To try to achieve more resources for middle management researchers.  
27. To try to put in place a second pillar pension (supplementary pension) for experienced or post-doctoral researchers.  
28. To try to achieve transferrable social security entitlements (illness, unemployment, pension, child benefit, holiday pay).  
29. To try to remove differences in working conditions between EU and non-EU researchers.

Each and every one of these issues are important action points to which the VUB and Researchers in Action are committed. As to whether this can be achieved, the VUB cannot do this on its alone. First and foremost, pressure must be put on the Flemish Government (action points 26-27). Consultation with the Federal Government and the EU is required for those action points relating to social security (action points 28-29).

30. Enhance financial project management (i.e. communication between funding providers, researchers and financial management).  
31. Provide the departments with instruments to assist with their HR policy.  
32. Put a rule in place limiting to 10% of working time the amount of time spent by researchers on work for the department (e.g., lab demonstrations) which does not form part of their duties.  
33. Exit interview when a post comes to an end.  
34. Extend the ombudsman's service to all staff (not just doctoral staff).  
35. More and improved working space for certain departments and researchers.

These are administrative and organisational issues on which the management must consult the departments.

## **VII. Training** (response to Charter Points 36-40)

36. Ensure supervision and guidance is guaranteed for early-stage researchers  
37. More training for supervisors on the provision of support.

Action point 36 calls for commitment on the part of the departments: researchers cannot be attracted if there is insufficient supervision or if projects are not sufficiently prepared for early-stage researchers to be able to work. Action point 37 calls for major financial input.



## **Appendix 1. Summary of the 40 points contained in the European Charter for Researchers:**

### **I. Ethical and professional aspects**

- 1. Research freedom:** Researchers have freedom in performing their research and in return have a social responsibility.
- 2. Ethical principles:** Researchers adhere to the ethical codes appropriate to their disciplines.
- 3. Professional responsibility:** Researchers undertake original research. They respect the intellectual property rights of others.
- 4. Professional attitude:** Researchers are familiar with how their institution works and duly report progress with their projects.
- 5. Contractual and legal obligations:** Researchers know their contractual and statutory working conditions.
- 6. Accountability:** Researchers contribute to the proper management of their institution. They are responsible for proper management of their research data.
- 7. Good research practices:** Researchers comply with workplace health and safety rules designed to ensure the wellbeing of employees. They protect their research data.
- 8. Dissemination and exploitation of results:** Researchers publish their research results. If possible, they contribute to the commercialisation of these results.
- 9. Public engagement** Researchers contribute to a better public understanding of their research.
- 10. Non-discrimination:** The employer does not discriminate against researchers.
- 11. Evaluation/appraisal systems:** A range of criteria is being used in appraising researchers.

### **II. Recruitment**

- 12. Recruitment standards:** The eligibility standards are set out clearly in job vacancy notices and are not such as to discourage disadvantaged groups.
- 13. Recruitment procedures:** Vacancy notices are drawn up in due time and set out the job requirements and working conditions.
- 14. Selection committees:** The composition of selection committees is evenly balanced, with members that are suitable for their duties.
- 15. Transparency:** The selection criteria are indicated in advance and feedback on applications is given.
- 16. Merits assessment:** Selection is undertaken on the basis of a range of criteria.
- 17. Variations in CV chronology:** For selection purposes, variations in career pathways are viewed as potential benefits.
- 18. Recognition of mobility experience:** Different forms of mobility experience are seen as contributing to the professional development of researchers.
- 19. Recognition of qualifications:** The employer ensure that the researcher qualifications are comparable internationally.
- 20. Seniority:** Selection is based on suitability for the post concerned, not on seniority.
- 21. Post-doctoral appointments:** Post-doctoral appointments provide additional professional development opportunities.

### **III. Working conditions**

- 22. Recognition of the profession:** Researchers are recognised as professionals.
- 23. Research environment:** The employer provides an adequate working environment.
- 24. Working conditions:** The employer ensures that there is flexibility for researchers.
- 25. Stability and permanence of employment:** The employer tries to provide stable employment contracts.
- 26. Funding and salaries:** The employer is responsible for ensuring fair pay and social security entitlement.
- 27. Gender balance:** The employer seeks to achieve a representative gender balance across all levels of staff.
- 28. Career development:** The employer draws up a career development strategy for its researchers.
- 29. Value of mobility:** The employer fosters different forms of mobility in career development strategies.
- 30. Access to career advice:** The employer is responsible for the provision of career advice.
- 31. Intellectual property rights:** The employer is responsible for promoting the intellectual property rights of researchers.
- 32. Co-authorship:** The employer protects the (co-)authorship rights of researchers.
- 33. Teaching:** Limited and well-supervised lectures are given by researchers without teaching duties.
- 34. Complaints/appeals procedures:** There is an ombudsman service for researchers.
- 35. Participation in decision-making bodies:** Researchers are represented in the institution's management.

#### **IV. Training**

- 36. Relationship with supervisors:** Early-stage researchers report regularly to their supervisors.
- 37. Supervisory and managerial duties:** Supervisors provide guidance to early-stage researchers as regards the transfer of knowledge and career development.
- 38. Continuing professional development:** Researchers continue their development.
- 39. Access to research training and continuous development:** Researchers have access to research training and continuous development.
- 40. Supervision:** Early-stage researchers are being assigned a mentor.

## **Appendix 2. Gap analysis**

Each of the forty points in the Charter are set out below in the form of information sheets. Each sheet contains the following headings:

- **Summary**, i.e. a proposed summary of the point concerned.
- **Text**, i.e. the specific text of the Charter point.
- Any **remarks**.
- **Government rules and policy** relating to the Charter point concerned. This sets out the margins within which the VUB policy can be mapped out.
- **VUB rules and practices**, i.e. the rules, current policy and prevailing situation.
- **Actions**, i.e. potential VUB actions to improve the situation. This pre-empts the Action Plan.
- **Self-evaluation**, i.e. the areas where it is proposed that the VUB check whether it complies with the Charter point concerned. This pre-empts the self-evaluation process to be undertaken two years after the logo is awarded.

### **Part I. Ethical and professional aspects**

The first part sets out the general principles that researchers first are autonomous and have research freedom and secondly have a social responsibility, meaning that they must contribute *inter alia* to the proper management of their institution and must make public the results of their research.

#### **1. Research freedom**

**Summary:** Researchers have freedom in performing their research and in return have a social responsibility.

**Text:** “Researchers should focus their research for the good of mankind and for expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge, while enjoying the freedom of thought and expression, and the freedom to identify methods by which problems are solved, according to recognised ethical principles and practices. Researchers should, however, recognise the limitations to this freedom that could arise as a result of particular research circumstances (including supervision/guidance/management) or operational constraints, e.g. for budgetary or infrastructural reasons or, especially in the industrial sector, for reasons of intellectual property protection. Such limitations should not, however, contravene the recognised ethical principles and practices to which researchers have to adhere.”

#### **Government rules and policy:**

##### *Principles*

- There is no problem as regards the principles themselves. The Belgian constitution guarantees the right to individual freedom of expression and the freedom to organise education.

##### *Funding*

- There is uncertainty about the extent of research freedom as regards funding of universities. The current university funding model establishes a fixed envelope for all

universities combined for the first and second flow of finance. The monies are to be redistributed on the basis of the output of each university. In addition, the third cash flow, for which the contracting body determines the subject of the research, is taking on increasing importance.

- More specifically, the government is obliging universities to increase in scale and to specialise. Universities must therefore decide the core competencies on which they will focus their research.

#### *Applied research*

- The starting point for the Flemish Government is one third basic research and two thirds applied research.
- “Universities cannot give any commitment as to the results of their research activities and service provision”.<sup>8</sup>

### **VUB rules and practices:**

#### *Principles*

- The Academic Staff Regulations confirm academic freedom (Article 10). It sets out certain limitations of freedom of speech.
- The VUB regulations go much further than the European Charter:
  - Principle of research freedom is enshrined in the VUB statutes.
  - The subjects of fundamental research are *not* determined by the Research Board. It makes a selection from projects proposed by self-employed academic research staff. In that sense, the way in which the Research Board Regulations (*Reglement Onderzoeksraad - OZR*) work is from the bottom up and is an institutional translation of the research freedom principle.

#### *Funding*

- The new VUB allocation model provides more autonomy to the departments. They themselves determine their priority research niche. The departments can apply to form a core competency. Twenty core competencies are selected by an external panel. The allocation model is therefore a strategy for abiding as far as possible with the Research Board Regulations subject to the limitations imposed by the government.

#### *Applied research*

- The R&D legal department monitors contracts relating to the third flow of money in terms of protection of intellectual property rights.

**Actions:** Reflection and positioning initiatives (among others, within the doctoral schools), e.g. in the form of a series of lectures: What does research freedom mean in practice at present? What rules should be followed in undertaking contract research? How can protection of the freedom to acquire knowledge be balanced against relevance to society. How has the VUB remained different from other universities?

**Self-evaluation:** Report on the lectures on research freedom.

## **2. Ethical principles**

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.vub.ac.be/infovoor/bedrijven/contractonderzoek.html>

**Summary:** Researchers adhere to the ethical codes appropriate to their disciplines.

**Text:** “Researchers should adhere to the recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their discipline(s) as well as to ethical standards as documented in the various national, sectoral or institutional Codes of Ethics.”

**Remark:** The general ethical responsibility of researchers is set out in Points 1 and 6. This point deals solely with ethical codes. This currently applies when people or animals are the subject of research. Ethical codes can also be envisaged for research commissioned or used for ethically inadmissible purposes. The European Charter itself can also be deemed to be an ethical code.

**Government rules and policy:** Requirement for ethical committees to be set up for the wellbeing of animals (Act of 14 August 1986), the protection of animals used for scientific purposes (Royal Decree of 1996), and experiments involving humans (Act of 7 May 2004).

**VUB rules and practices:** Two committees in the Medicine and Pharmacy faculty. Ethics Committee and Animal Testing Committee (<http://gf.vub.ac.be/commissies/>).

**Actions:** None required.

**Self-evaluation:** Report by the Ethics committees.

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### **3. Professional responsibility**

**Summary:** Researchers undertake original research. They respect the intellectual property rights of others.

**Text:** “Researchers should make every effort to ensure that their research is relevant to society and does not duplicate research previously carried out elsewhere. They must avoid plagiarism of any kind and abide by the principle of intellectual property and joint ownership of data if research is carried out in conjunction with a supervisor(s) and/or other researchers. The need to validate new observations by showing that experiments can be reproduced should not be interpreted as plagiarism, provided that the data to be confirmed are explicitly cited. Researchers must ensure that the person to whom any part of their work is delegated has the competence to carry it out.

**Remarks:**

- The phrase “ensure that their research is relevant to society” is not particularly academic. The relevance to society of research *per se* sometimes only emerges after a relatively long period of time.
- Reference is also made to intellectual property rights in Point 31, but in terms of validation of own research.
- There are many gradations between honest and dishonest. Plagiarism and the disciplinary sanctions imposed are just one facet. Even more important is a positive

culture of intellectual honesty (see “Research culture and ethical standards”, appended to the “2001-2006 Research Board Policy Plan – Research and Development Sector”).

- Pressure to publish can lead to publication for publication’s sake and to self-plagiarism. This is a secondary issue.

#### **Government rules and policy:**

- Original research is a key task of universities.
- Legislation on intellectual property.
- Intellectual property right disputes between universities are arbitrated by the Flanders Research Foundation (*Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen – FWO*) and the Academy.

#### **VUB rules and practices:**

##### *Disciplinary sanctions*

- The rules on honesty and plagiarism apply at the level of the students from the very start and form an integral part of the education provided. Each faculty has a disciplinary sanctions regulation for plagiarism.
- Disputes relating to researchers are handled in accordance with a procedure for scientific misconduct. The procedure is not only important for imposing sanctions where necessary, but also for absolving persons from all blame if the complaint is shown to be unfounded.
- A scientific misconduct committee was set up under the auspices of the Reneman Committee (2010).

##### *Generating values*

- Social integration within the Doctoral Schools.
- Publication of the “Profile of a good researcher”. This profile is recognised by the departments.
- Social integration with the departments/research units. No sign of any problems.

#### **Actions:**

- Along the lines of the lectures on research freedom and university funding, lectures or a debate could be organised on current problems with intellectual honesty.

#### **Self-evaluation:**

- Report on intellectual honesty lectures.
- Misconduct committee report.

### **4. Professional attitude**

**Summary:** Researchers are familiar with how their institution works and duly report progress with their projects.

**Text:** “Researchers should be familiar with the strategic goals governing their research environment and funding mechanisms, and should seek all necessary approvals before starting their research or accessing the resources provided. They should inform their employers, funders or supervisor when their research project is delayed, redefined or completed, or give notice if it is to be terminated early or suspended for whatever reason.”



**Government rules and policy:** None

**VUB rules and practices:**

*General*

- The administrative departments exchange information with researchers, but the departments or research units are primarily responsible for the day to day working and social integration of researchers.
- VUB website information for researchers is ordered on the basis of the different departments and less on the basis of the questions which researchers may pose about their rights and obligations, and still less those relating specifically to contract management.

**Actions:**

- Organisation of information sessions for researchers on types of projects, funding mechanisms and project management.
- Information on the VUB website that is tailored to the questions researchers may pose about project funding and management.
- Information in English for foreign researchers. Development of an English-language website.

**Self-evaluation:**

- (Large) number of consultations of information available on the website.
  - (High) attendance at information sessions.
  - (Falling) number of recurrent questions to the back office.
  - (Falling) number of cases relating to poorly managed projects.
- 

**5. Contractual and legal obligations**

**Summary:** Researchers know their contractual and statutory working conditions:

**Text:** “Researchers at all levels must be familiar with the national, sectoral or institutional regulations governing training and/or working conditions. This includes Intellectual Property Rights regulations, and the requirements and conditions of any sponsor or funders, independently of the nature of their contract. Researchers should adhere to such regulations by delivering the required results (e.g. thesis, publications, patents, reports, new products development, etc.) as set out in the terms and conditions of the contract or equivalent document.”

**Government rules and policy:**

- Anyone signing an employment contract confirms they are aware of its content. For some years now, special academic staff (*Bijzonder Academisch Personeel - BAP*) have signed an employment contract. Self-employed academic staff and academic support staff are appointed by the Executive Board.
- Doctoral bursary holders are legally not employees. They are exempt from tax. Employment law rules do not apply to them.
- In general, employment law is strongly read into contracts for clerical staff and officials.

It is difficult to slot researchers, and in particularly self-employed academic staff, into this format. Self-employed academic staff must, for example, be available, but not available on the shop floor.

- In the light of the above, providing information on researcher working conditions is a delicate exercise. On the one hand, the information must be legally correct, but, on the other, the broad outlines must be given and linked to the practical issues raised by researchers.

### **VUB rules and practices:**

#### *Working conditions*

- For some years now, special academic staff have signed an employment contract. Self-employed academic staff and academic support staff are also appointed by the Executive Board.
- The current Academic Staff Regulations set out, among others, the terms and conditions of employment of researchers. New staff members must declare that they have read and understood these rules. The text does not deal with what early-stage researchers need to know nor with any questions they may have.
- VUB website information for researchers is primarily ordered on the basis of the different departments, and less on the basis of the questions researchers may pose about their rights and obligations, still less specifically on the basis of questions about working conditions.
- Relatively frequent repeat questions to the Personnel Department back office about social security or failure to comprehend what a contract for a limited duration means.
- Work is currently being undertaken to draw up separate regulations for self-employed academic staff, academic support staff, special academic staff and bursary holders. In the new self-employed academic staff regulation there are, for example, definitions of leave, sabbatical year and career development. Employment rules specific to special academic staff will follow (these being the easiest to define since they have a clerical contract).
- Limited availability of information in English.

#### *Intellectual property rights*

- Specification of property rights in Article 13 of the Academic Staff Regulations.
- VUB evaluation regulation.
- Little spontaneous involvement of researchers in this matter.

### **Actions:**

- Establishment of website or brochure information relating to the working conditions of researchers. This should be in a format which pre-empts the questions raised in practice by researchers.
- Information sessions for researchers about their working conditions. Other sessions depending on the target audience.
- Make basic documents available in English.
- Information (sessions) in English.
- One-stop shop for foreign researcher intakes.

#### *Intellectual property rights*

- Information in a format which pre-empts questions posed in practice by researchers.

**Self-evaluation:**

- (High) attendance at information sessions.
  - (High) number of consultations of web pages on working conditions.
  - (Falling) number of recurrent questions posed to back office (e.g. confusion regarding the definition of a contract for a definitive duration).
- 

**6. Accountability**

**Summary:** Researchers contribute to the proper management of their institution. They are responsible for proper management of their research data.

**Text:** “Researchers need to be aware that they are accountable towards their employers, funders or other related public or private bodies as well as, on more ethical grounds, towards society as a whole. In particular, researchers funded by public funds are also accountable for the efficient use of taxpayers’ money. Consequently, they should adhere to the principles of sound, transparent and efficient financial management and cooperate with any authorised audits of their research, whether undertaken by their employers/funders or by ethics committees. Methods of collection and analysis, the outputs and, where applicable, details of the data should be open to internal and external scrutiny, whenever necessary and as requested by the appropriate authorities”.

**Government rules and policy:** No direct rules for researchers *per se*. There are indirect good governance rules for funded organisations.

**VUB rules and practices:**

*Sound management*

- As a funded organisation, the VUB is subject to internal and external audits.
- Since 1977, departments in their turn have been subject to peer reviews involving international experts.
- The R&D database provides the government with proof of publication output. Reminder to the departments and researchers to fill in their details correctly.
- Publication of audits by R&D or full-time VUB researchers under the VUB’s name (and hence reference to the “Vrije Universiteit Brussel” and not to the “Free University of Brussels”, which can lead to confusion with the ULB).

*Management of research data*

- Reference to good data management in “Profile of a good researcher”.

**Actions:**

- Information about project management in a format which pre-empts the questions posed in practice by researchers on administrative and academic project reporting.
- Information sessions on project management.
- Information (sessions) in English.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Reports on the peer reviews of departments.

- Full descriptions in the R&D database.
  - (Low) number of problems with full-time VUB researchers who do not publish under the VUB name.
  - (High) attendance of researchers at information sessions.
  - (High) number of consultations of web pages on project management.
  - (Falling) number of recurrent questions to the back office.
- 

## **7. Good practice in research**

**Summary:** Researchers comply with workplace health and safety rules designed to ensure the wellbeing of employees. They protect their research data.

**Text:** “Researchers should at all times adopt safe working practices, in line with national legislation, including taking the necessary precautions for health and safety and for recovery from information technology disasters, e.g. by preparing proper back-up strategies. They should also be familiar with the current national legal requirements regarding data protection and confidentiality protection requirements, and undertake the necessary steps to fulfil them at all times.”

**Government rules and policy:** Workplace health and safety rules are governed by the Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing Act of 4 August 1996 (this Act also encompasses other aspects, such as psychosocial stress [stress, harassment], health and safety on the shop floor, ergonomics and workplace upgrades). All companies must have a Workplace Health and Safety Department. The health and safety policy is set out in the five-year global plan and in the annual action plan: ([http://www.werk.belgie.be/welzijn\\_op\\_het\\_werk.aspx](http://www.werk.belgie.be/welzijn_op_het_werk.aspx))

The above legislation also means that a risk analysis must be carried out for each post. What are the potential risks and therefore the points to be considered for each post (i.e. the equipment, instruments)? This analysis is of particular importance for laboratories. Each employee must receive a document setting out the risks for his post based on the risk analysis and job description.

With regard to data protection, there is only the Act of 8 December 1992 on the protection of personal data.

### **VUB rules and practices:**

- Application of the Health and Safety Act. (<http://www.vub.ac.be/preventie/>)
- In addition to a Workplace Health and Safety Department officer, there is a Biosafety and Environment Coordinator.
- Risk analyses still have to be drawn up. There is a project underway to determine the time that would be required for these analyses.
- There are confidential advisers for workplace stress and harassment. There has been an awareness campaign In October 2011 (also in English).

- The protection of confidential research data is the responsibility of the project manager.

**Actions:**

- Discuss health and safety, and the protection of confidential (electronic or paper form) data in information sessions.
- Ensure greater familiarity among researchers (including foreign researchers) with confidential advisers.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report by the Workplace Health and Safety Department.
- Report by the confidential advisers.
- Report on the information sessions.

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## **8. Dissemination and exploitation of results**

**Summary:** Researchers publish their research results. If possible they contribute to the commercialisation of these results.

**Text:** “All researchers should ensure, in compliance with their contractual arrangements, that the results of their research are disseminated and exploited, e.g. communicated, transferred into other research settings or, if appropriate, commercialised. Senior researchers, in particular, are expected to take a lead in ensuring that research is fruitful and that results are either exploited commercially or made accessible to the public (or both) whenever the opportunity arises.”

**Government rules and policy:** University funding is partially dependent on the output of publications by researchers.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- In principle, the R&D database displays all the research publications.
- Technology Transfer Interface.

**Actions:**

- Inform researchers of the R&D database.
- Put pressure on the departments and researchers to enter full details into the R&D database.
- Ensure that the Industrial Research Fund (*Industrieel Onderzoeksfonds*) data are complete.

**Self-evaluation:** Check that the R&D database is complete.

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## **9. Public engagement**

**Summary:** Researchers contribute to a better public understanding of their research.

**Text:** “Researchers should ensure that their research activities are made known to society at large in such a way that they can be understood by non-specialists, thereby improving the public’s understanding of science. Direct engagement with the public will help researchers to better understand public interest in priorities for science and technology and also the public’s concerns.”

**Government rules and policy:** No binding rules.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- R&D scientific communications unit.
- Marketing and Communications Department (*Dienst Marketing en communicatie - MARCOM*).

**Actions:** None required.

**Self-evaluation:** Reports by the above departments

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## **10. Non-discrimination**

**Summary:** The employer does not discriminate against researchers.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders of researchers will not discriminate against researchers in any way on the basis of gender, age, ethnic, national or social origin, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, language, disability, political opinion, social or economic condition.”

**Remarks:**

- The question of staff gender balance is dealt with separately in Point 27.
- Non-discrimination in recruitment is contained in Point 12.
- Flexible working conditions are discussed separately in Point 24.
- Deciding what does and does not constitute discrimination is a delicate exercise. There are in any event differences in status, duties and duration of doctoral bursaries.

**Government rules and policy:**

*Equality on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and disability*

- The policy is designed to provide equal opportunities and equal treatment. (Decree of 1 July 2008 establishing a Flemish framework for equal opportunities and equal treatment policy – Belgian Official Gazette of 23 September 2008).

*Equal pay for equal work*

- In principle, there is equal pay for academic support staff, special academic staff and bursary holders. Differences may in fact exist due to differences in taxation.

**VUB rules and practices:**

*Non-discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and disability*

- Between 2005 and 2008, the VUB went much further by organising a diversity forum and drawing up a diversity plan. This has now been translated into practice at the various policy levels.

*Equal pay for equal work*

- Application of the government rules. There continues to be a difference with bursaries from outside the EU (Erasmus Mundus Students).
- Although some non-EU researchers have the same pay as EU researchers, they are not entitled to child benefit and do not build up any pension entitlements. Because of their smaller social security contributions, they generate a lower salary cost.
- Some doctoral students work under a bursary from their country of origin.

*Access to education*

- Not all training is accessible to all researchers. Bursary holders do not have access to teacher training. After all, they are not contractually expected to give lessons.

**Actions:**

*Non-discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and disability*

- No further action required.

*Equal pay for equal work*

- Determine in information sessions why *de facto* differences may continue to exist, despite formal equality of academic support staff, special academic staff and bursary holders.
- Discussion to be undertaken in conjunction with external actors: eliminate discrimination relating to non-EU researchers and Erasmus Mundus students.

*Access to education*

- To discuss, in conjunction with external actors, the status of bursary holder researchers.

**Self-evaluation:**

*Non-discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and disability*

- Report by the confidential advisers.

*Equal pay for equal work*

- Report on the information sessions.
- Evaluation of efforts to eliminate discrimination against non-EU researchers.

*Access to education*

- Evaluation of discussions of the status of bursary holder researchers.

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## **11. Evaluation/appraisal systems**

**Summary:** A range of criteria is being used in appraising researchers.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should introduce for all researchers, including senior researchers, evaluation/appraisal systems for assessing their professional performance on a

regular basis and in a transparent manner by an independent (and, in the case of senior researchers, preferably international) committee. Such evaluation and appraisal procedures should take due account of their overall research creativity and research results, e.g. publications, patents, management of research, teaching/lecturing, supervision, mentoring, national or international collaboration, administrative duties, public awareness activities and mobility, and should be taken into consideration in the context of career progression.”

**Remark:** Insofar as “evaluation” relates to recruitment and assessment, there is an overlap with Point 16.

**Government rules and policy:** It is laid down by law that universities must evaluate each member of their academic staff at least every five years (Universities Decree of 12 June 1991, Art. 106*bis*).

### **VUB rules and practices:**

#### *Formal appraisal*

- The Academic Staff Regulations set out, in Chapter VII, the procedure for the evaluation of academic staff. It only sets out the procedure for extensions and appraisals for academic support staff and self-employed academic staff. The evaluation relates to three areas: teaching assignments, scientific research and contribution to society.
- New allocation model: the self-employed academic staff matrix sets out a number of indicators for the different self-employed academic staff levels. These indicators are determined by the Research Board and the Research Board Regulations, and are discipline specific. Potential problems with a self-employed academic staff member are, moreover, identified on the basis of a traffic lights system. Based on this, an analysis and plan for remedial action must be drawn up.
- For special academic staff, an appraisal formula comparable to that for administrative and technical staff (*administratief en technisch personeel - ATP*) is being sought. This would be an internal evaluation, including a performance interview.

#### *Between formal and informal*

- Appraisal of departments and their individual members through a peer review.
- Allocation model: appraisal of a department and its members on the basis of the research niches they themselves have indicated as being a priority.

#### *Informal appraisal*

- There is a guideline for self-evaluation provided, for information, in the form of a “Profile of a good researcher”.

### **Actions:**

- Progress towards appraisal systems applicable to all researchers which take a range of criteria into account and which focus on the key work undertaken by the individual concerned, e.g. over the last five years (see below in Points 16 and 17).
- Suggestion 1: the mindset underlying the current evaluations is based to an excessive degree on good/bad service provision; more should be done to find formulae from which those assessed can learn.
- Suggestion 2: a researcher’s mentor or coach (see also Part 4 of the Charter) could hold a formal or informal performance interview in which the key issue would be whether the



researcher thinks he can develop his skills properly within the department or the project.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Evaluation of the appraisal systems for self-employed academic staff, academic support staff, special academic staff and bursary holders:
    - Is this planned as part of the appraisal of all researchers?
    - Does this appraisal encompass a range of criteria?
    - Are the criteria potentially meaningful and instructive for the researcher?
- 
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**Part II. Recruitment**

This part deals with how employers must organise recruitment and communicate with research applicants, and which criteria must be used in the selection process.

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**12. Recruitment standards**

**Summary:** The eligibility standards are set out clearly in job vacancy notices and are not such as to discourage disadvantaged groups.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should ensure that the entry and admission standards for researchers, particularly at the beginning of their careers, are clearly specified and should also facilitate access for disadvantaged groups or for researchers returning to a research career, including teachers (of any level) returning to a research career.

**Remark:** Many factors may be involved in attracting “disadvantaged groups”: it may be a matter of non-discrimination (see Point 10), or involve persons with a non-standard CV (see Point 17) or simply relate to circumstances where the vacancy needs not be filled from a single source (see Point 13).

**Government rules and policy:** The rules for bursaries depend on the funder. The rules for the appointment of academic staff are laid down by law (Universities Decree, Section 3, Fixed-term engagement and appointment of academic staff, Art. 83-90). Each University must specify the criteria that are used for the appointment of self-employed academic staff to the different grades.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- For self-employed academic staff and academic support staff, the rules laid down by law are applied. Applications are made through the departments (Academic Staff Regulations: Chapter III, Section I of the Academic Staff Regulations set out the rules for notification of a vacancy for officials). Recruitment of special academic staff is undertaken through the departments, which is empowered by the faculty.

- A template is being drawn up by the Personnel Department in which the eligibility criteria, working conditions and job descriptions must be given. It must also be indicated in the vacancy notice that women are invited to apply.

**Actions:**

- Implementation and testing of the new template.
- Discussion within the faculties. How should “disadvantaged groups” be encouraged to apply for vacancies?
- Suggestion: use of examples of research jobs held by those from disadvantaged groups or by researchers who are in one discipline but come originally from another discipline. On the ULB website, under the heading “research” there is a description of the career path of newly appointed researchers (hence not just top researchers).

**Self-evaluation:**

- Sampling of VUB vacancy notices on Euraxess jobs:
  - Are the eligibility criteria indicated clearly?
  - Are disadvantaged groups addressed?

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### **13. Recruitment procedures**

**Summary:** Vacancy notices are drawn up in due time and set out the job requirements and working conditions.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should establish recruitment procedures which are open 14, efficient, transparent, supportive and internationally comparable, as well as tailored to the type of positions advertised. Advertisements should give a broad description of knowledge and competencies required, and should not be so specialised as to discourage suitable applicants. Employers should include a description of the working conditions and entitlements, including career development prospects. Moreover, the time allowed between the advertisement of the vacancy or the call for applications and the deadline for replies should be realistic.”

**Remark:** Career development prospects are difficult to provide for project research. At best, an indication could be given of the general career path for persons involved in project and/or postdoctoral research.

**Government rules and policy:** The rules for bursaries depend on the funder. The rules for the appointment of academic staff are laid down by law (Universities Decree, Section 3, Fixed-term engagement and appointment of academic staff, Art. 83-90). Each University must specify the criteria that are used for the appointment of self-employed academic staff to the different grades.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- For job and working conditions, see point 12.
- “Junior researchers survey”: early-stage researchers, particularly in the humanities, often have uncertain or false expectations about their career development.

**Actions:**

- For job and working conditions, see point 12.
- To inform researchers about their career development prospects in terms of probability distribution (e.g. a breakdown can be provided by faculty or department of the career path for researchers [i.e. “x% become self-employed academic staff; y% become special academic staff; z% go into industry, the non-profit sector, etc.”]).

**Self-evaluation:**

- Sampling of VUB vacancy notices on Euraxess:
  - Are the job description and working conditions indicated?
  - Do the vacancy notices published use the Personnel Department's template?
- Report on the information sessions on working conditions and career development.
- Based on follow-up of the data from the “Junior researchers survey”: do researchers have (more) realistic expectations?

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**14. Selection committees**

**Summary:** The composition of selection committees is evenly balanced, with members that are suitable for their duties.

**Text:** “Selection committees should bring together diverse expertise and competences and should have an adequate gender balance and, where appropriate and feasible, include members from different sectors (public and private) and disciplines, including from other countries and with relevant experience to assess the candidate. Whenever possible, a wide range of selection practices should be used, such as external expert assessment and face-to-face interviews. Members of selection panels should be adequately trained.

**Government rules and policy:** (Universities Decree, Art. 167bis, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7; Art. 169bis, paragraphs 6 and 10); Flanders Research Foundation (*Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen – FWO*): management agreement

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Selection committees for self-employed academic staff and academic support staff are appointed by the faculties.
- The new self-employed academic staff regulation states that: (a) there must be an even gender balance; (b) external peers must be involved.
- The composition of selection committees is controlled by the VUB Senate.

**Actions:** None required.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report on the problems by the VUB Senate.
-

## **15. Transparency**

**Summary:** The selection criteria are indicated and feedback on applications is given.

**Text:** “Candidates should be informed, prior to selection, about the recruitment process and the selection criteria, the number of available positions and the career development prospects. They should also be informed after the selection process about the strengths and weaknesses of their applications.”

**Remarks:** (1) Career development expectations are dealt with in Point 13. (2) The remuneration could also be indicated (see Point 26).

### **Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Arts 87 and 91*bis*
- By law, applicants must be informed of their result in selection procedures and they can obtain a statement of the reasons for the decision on request.

### **VUB rules and practices:**

- The job requirements and documents required must be indicated in each vacancy notice.
- In the course of 2011, all vacancy notices are to be undertaken electronically using the template (see Point 12). Vacancy notices are being placed through Talentfinder. In principle, the electronic application procedure is as follows: applicants receive, first and foremost, a confirmation of receipt message; they are later informed whether or not they have been selected for the shortlist; applicants on the shortlist will receive a statement of reasons if they are not selected.
- Currently, VUB recruitment through Euraxess jobs does not work well:
  - 17 June 2011: Belgium - 123 vacancy notices; VUB – none; VIB-VUB – one, but with no mention of VUB in the heading.
  - 29 June 2011: Belgium - 149 vacancy notices; VUB – one; VIB-VUB – one, but with no mention of VUB in the heading, (ULeuven – six; UHasselt – seven; UAntwerpen – nine.)
- On the Belgian Euraxess website for Euraxess services there are at least two oddities ([www.euraxess.be](http://www.euraxess.be)).
  - (1) On the Home page, you can choose between “French community” and “Flemish community”. With the first, there is a regional description of Brussels and Wallonia, with the second you go directly to Flanders and solely to the Flemish Region.
  - (2) Under “French community” there is also a list of universities. Under “Flemish community”, "research landscape" must be clicked on to go to the Flemish Government Department for the Economy, Science and Innovation (*Departement Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie –EWI*), which shows a confusing list of all possible research institutions.

### **Actions:**

- Test the electronic vacancy system and template.

- Check that applicants receive feedback.
- Hold meetings with those responsible for [www.euraxess.be](http://www.euraxess.be) so that corrections can be made.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Sampling of VUB electronic vacancy notices:
    - Are all applicants informed of the acceptance/rejection of their applications? Do they receive a statement of reasons?
- 

**16. Merits assessment**

**Summary:** Selection is undertaken on the basis of a range of criteria.

**Text:** “The selection process should take into consideration the whole range of experience of the candidates. While focusing on their overall potential as researchers, their creativity and level of independence should also be considered. This means that merit should be judged qualitatively as well as quantitatively, focusing on outstanding results within a diversified career path and not only on the number of publications. Consequently, the importance of bibliometric indices should be properly balanced within a wider range of evaluation criteria, such as teaching, supervision, teamwork, knowledge transfer, management of research and innovation and public awareness activities. For candidates from an industrial background, particular attention should be paid to any contributions to patents, development or inventions.

**Remark:** Overlap with Point 11 on appraisal systems.

**Government rules and policy:**

Universities Decree, Art. 90

**VUB rules and practices:**

- The conventional three service provision criteria are: education, research and social contribution.
- Currently, all faculties are careful to provide a detailed statement of reasons for selection.
- Informal account must be taken of the “Profile of a good researcher” guideline.

**Actions:**

- Progress towards appraisal systems that are applicable to all researchers, which take a range of criteria into account and which focus on the key work undertaken by the individual concerned over the past few years.
- For discussion within the faculties: a range of criteria must be taken into account for recruitment and promotion, such as mentoring/coaching activities, training courses, supervision, team work and knowledge transfer. (Sub-discussion: How should behavioural skills be assessed? By testing them? Or must this be apparent from the CV?)

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report on the appraisal systems for self-employed academic staff, academic support staff, special academic staff and bursary holders, firstly from the point of view of key work undertaken and secondly from that of behavioural skills.

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## **17. Variations in CV chronology order**

**Summary:** For selection purposes, variations in career pathways are viewed as potential benefits.

**Text:** “Career breaks or variations in the chronological order of CVs should not be penalised, but regarded as an evolution of a career, and consequently, as a potentially valuable contribution to the professional development of researchers towards a multidimensional career track. Candidates should therefore be allowed to submit evidence-based CVs, reflecting a representative array of achievements and qualifications appropriate to the post for which application is being made.”

**Government rules and policy:** None

**VUB rules and practices:** No written rules on this matter. In selection committees, CVs are, of course, gone through (together with any unexplained gaps).

**Actions:**

- Discussion within the faculties and departments on vacancies and appraisal, the aim being: to determine the extent to which achievements count towards eligibility in the case of persons who do not necessarily submit a conventional CV.
- Discussion within the faculties and departments on facilitating persons who want to change departments, or combine several disciplines.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report on the appraisal systems for self-employed academic staff, academic support staff, special academic staff and bursary holders: Is there a move towards selection and appraisal criteria “accepting non-standard CVs”?

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## **18. Recognition of mobility experience**

**Summary:** Different forms of mobility experience are seen as contributing to the professional development of researchers.

**Text:** “Any mobility experience, e.g. a stay in another country/region or in another research setting (public or private) or a change from one discipline or sector to another, whether as part of the initial research training or at a later stage of the research career, or virtual mobility experience, should be considered as a valuable contribution to the professional development of a researcher.”

**Remarks:** Mobility may therefore be: international, interuniversity, intersectoral, interdisciplinary.

**Government rules and policy:**

(Universities Decree, Art. 168, paragraph 5;

Special research funds (*Bijzondere Onderzoeksfondsen - BOF*) order

**VUB rules and practices:**

*Geographical mobility*

- “Junior researchers survey” on geographic mobility: intake of junior researchers: 66% VUB; 14% other Flemish universities; 14% foreign universities; 2% French-speaking universities; 4% Belgian and foreign higher education institutions. Humanities and the social sciences (*humane en sociale wetenschappen – HSW*) and modern language sciences (*Moderne talen-wetenschappen – MW*): more VUB and other Flemish universities; economic and technical sciences (*economische en technische wetenschappen - ETW*): considerably more foreign universities.
- International mobility experience is a very important plus point in the exact sciences for engagement as self-employed academic staff.
- There are various exchange programmes (sabbaticals, Erasmus Mundus, cooperation agreements with other universities).
- The stimulus provided by mobility is one of the starting credits for self-employed academic staff.

*Interdisciplinary mobility*

- “Junior researchers survey” on interdisciplinary mobility: mobility is greater among persons who have studied (a) psychology and educational sciences, exact sciences and (b) economic, political and social sciences. Mobility in category (a) persons primarily relates to medical sciences; for category (b), there is no fixed pattern.
- There are “incentivisation funds” (*aanmoedigingsfondsen*) for working on an interdisciplinary basis.
- There is the possibility of taking a doctorate in a discipline other than that in which the master’s diploma was obtained.

**Actions:**

- Discussion within the faculties and departments on vacancies and appraisal, the premise being: mobility is a key criterion, but there are many forms of mobility.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report: should greater weight be given to different forms of mobility in the selection and appraisal criteria?

---

**19. Recognition of qualifications**

**Summary:** The employer ensures that the researcher qualifications are comparable internationally.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should provide for appropriate assessment and evaluation of the academic and professional qualifications, including non-formal qualifications, of all researchers, in particular within the context of international and professional mobility. They should inform themselves and gain a full understanding of rules, procedures and standards governing the recognition of such qualifications and, consequently, explore existing national law, conventions and specific rules on the recognition of these qualifications through all available channels.”

**Government rules and policy:**

- <http://www.enic-naric.net/>  
NARIC National Academic Recognition Information Centre – Flanders  
(<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/naric/>)
- Universities Decree, Art. 84 and 97
- ETS no. 165 - Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Faculties are the first filter; they receive the CVs.
- The Department of Student Policy has the know-how to recognise diplomas.
- Bursary holders are only approved for a bursary contract if they are enrolled as doctoral students.

**Actions:** None required.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report by Student Policy on the number of problem cases.

---

## **20. Seniority**

**Summary:** Selection is based on suitability for the post concerned, not on seniority.

**Text:** “The levels of qualifications required should be in line with the needs of the position and not be set as a barrier to entry. Recognition and evaluation of qualifications should focus on judging the achievements of the person rather than his/her circumstances or the reputation of the institution where the qualifications were gained. As professional qualifications may be gained at an early stage of a long career, the pattern of lifelong professional development should also be recognised.”

**Government rules and policy:**

Universities Decree, Art. 97

**VUB rules and practices:** Recruitment on the basis of suitability for the post.



**Actions:** None required.

**Self-evaluation:** The number of problem cases treated before the VUB Senate relating to recruitment on the basis of seniority rather than suitability.

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## **21. Post-doctoral appointments**

**Summary:** Post-doctoral appointments provide additional professional development opportunities.

**Text:** “Clear rules and explicit guidelines for the recruitment and appointment of postdoctoral researchers, including the maximum duration and the objectives of such appointments, should be established by the institutions appointing postdoctoral researchers. Such guidelines should take into account time spent in prior postdoctoral appointments at other institutions and take into consideration that the postdoctoral status should be transitional, with the primary purpose of providing additional professional development opportunities for a research career in the context of long-term career prospects.”

**Remarks:** Overlap with Point 28 on career development in general.

### **Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Arts 167*bis*, paragraph 6, and 196*bis*.
- Pressure put on the Flemish Government by Researchers in Action.

### **VUB rules and practices:**

- A degree of uncertainty regarding the status of post-doctoral researchers.
- New allocation model: Special research funds (*Bijzondere Onderzoeksfondsen - BOF*) self-employed academic staff should be appointed instead of the self-employed academic staff framework.

### **Actions:**

- Provide more tenure-track posts for assistant professors in the long term.
- Faculties receive a funding envelope. This should help to give post-doctoral researchers greater stability. That is to say, try to offer stability for post-doctoral researchers after a maximum of 15 years of seniority.
- Consider introducing new pay scales.

### **Self-evaluation:**

- Reports by the faculties and the Personnel Department on the measures to be taken.
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## **Part III. Working conditions and social security**

This section relates to the need for researchers to have good working conditions and social security to be able to undertake research.

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## **22. Recognition of the profession**

**Summary:** Researchers are recognised as professionals.

**Text:** “All researchers engaged in a research career should be recognised as professionals and be treated accordingly. This should commence at the beginning of their careers, namely at postgraduate level, and should include all levels, regardless of their classification at national level (e.g. employee, postgraduate student, doctoral candidate, postdoctoral fellow, civil servants).”

**Remarks:** Many questions in this regard. Is an early-stage researcher a professional? Is a bursary holder a professional? Clearly not, since they receive guidance. Furthermore, researchers in industry do not have the same degree of independence as researchers in the university.

**Government rules and policy:** Statutory definition of a researcher.

### **VUB rules and practices:**

- Statutory definition of a researcher. Any person belonging to academic staff is a researcher. Any person belonging to administrative and technical staff (*administratief en technisch personeel - ATP*) is not a researcher.
- Flanders Research Foundation (*Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen – FWO*) and other external bursary holders are not part of the academic staff. This means that bursary holders are not, in principle, entitled to take part in the work and tasks of the department. Consequently, they are also excluded from teacher training, for example. Nor may they vote for the works council.

**Actions:** None required.

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## **23. Research environment**

**Summary:** The employer provides an adequate working environment.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders of researchers should ensure that the most stimulating research or research training environment is created which offers appropriate equipment, facilities and opportunities, including for remote collaboration over research networks, and that the national or sectoral regulations concerning health and safety in research are observed. Funders should ensure that adequate resources are provided in support of the agreed work programme.”

**Government rules and policy:** Legislation relating to workplace health and safety (see Point 7).

### **VUB rules and practices:**

#### *Operating budget appropriations*

- Depending on approval of the project, there are various operating budget allocations for doctoral bursaries; no PC is provided for certain scholarship students.
- Departments receive basic funding from which they can make operating budget allocations for researchers.

#### *Workplace*

- Sharp rise in the number of researchers over the past ten years. Problem with providing space.
- “Junior researchers survey”: work space is a problem in human sciences. Visual inspection in buildings G and E: work space is also a problem in the sciences and engineering sciences.
- Focus groups: work space is a problem in various faculties and departments. There is one VUB research area (Nancy Musschebroek) in which the number of square metres per researcher is set per faculty. This could be the starting point for fair allocation of working space.

#### *Social integration*

- Need for opportunities to meet and interact socially, particularly as researcher mobility increases.

#### *Foreign doctoral scholarship researchers*

- Intake through the IRMO (International Relations & Mobility) Department. No systematic induction on arrival. No provision is made by VUB for housing for researchers with family.

### **Actions:**

- Equivalence of operating budget allocations.
- Better work space for certain departments and researchers.
- Provision of opportunities to meet.
- One-stop shop for foreign researcher intakes.

### **Self-evaluation:**

- Pursuit of the Nancy Musschebroek research.
- “Junior researchers survey”: number of problems with work space for researchers.
- “Junior researchers survey”: number of problems with shortfalls in operating budget allocations.

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## **24. Working conditions**

**Summary:** The employer ensures that there is flexibility for researchers.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should ensure that the working conditions for researchers, including for disabled researchers, provide where appropriate the flexibility deemed essential for successful research performance in accordance with existing national legislation and with national or sectoral collective bargaining agreements. They should aim to provide working

conditions that allow both female and male researchers to combine family and work, children and career. Particular attention should be paid, inter alia, to flexible working hours, part-time working, teleworking and sabbatical leave, as well as to the necessary financial and administrative provisions governing such arrangements”.

**Government rules and policy:**

(Universities Decree, Arts 68-77, 91bis. 92 and 94.

Flemish Government Order governing absences, Art. 2 (self-employed academic staff members, not special academic staff).

**VUB rules and practices:**

- In principle, researchers (including bursary holders) benefit, from the beginning, from all the statutory possibilities for part-time work and parental leave.
- In addition, informal arrangements are possible. Within the departments, researchers can take advantage of a wide range of arrangements for balancing work and private life. This includes teleworking.
- But at the same time, researchers have the pressure of problems for their project and tasks. In this sense, their duties must precede over their private lives.
- “Junior researchers survey”: in the humanities and social sciences (*humane en sociale wetenschappen – HSW*) there are often problems with work-life balance.

**Actions:**

- Provide researchers with better information on their working conditions through the website and in information sessions.

**Self-evaluation:**

- “Junior researchers survey”: reports on work-life balance.

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**25. Stability and permanence of employment**

**Summary:** The employer tries to provide stable employment contracts.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should ensure that the performance of researchers is not undermined by instability of employment contracts, and should therefore commit themselves as far as possible to improving the stability of employment conditions for researchers, thus implementing and abiding by the principles and terms laid down in the *EU Directive on Fixed-Term Work*.”

**Remarks:** Also see Point 21. “Post-doctoral appointments”.

**Government rules and policy:**

Act on the principle of non-discrimination against employees with a fixed-term employment contract.

**VUB rules and practices:**

### *General*

- Three consecutive fixed-term contracts lead to an open-ended contract.
- However, open-ended contracts do not provide greater certainty than fixed-term contracts. When the funds run out, six months' notice is given. No stability can therefore be offered to special academic staff.

### *Project management*

- Loss of project funding solely due to administrative management. For example: liability for double vacation pay is included in the contract cost in the expectation that the current contract will not be extended (i.e., for researcher X, double vacation pay is allocated to Project 1 for when X leaves; X then moves on to Project 2; Project 1 is closed without the double vacation pay having been paid).

### *Post-doctoral*

- Allocation model: Special research funds (*Bijzondere Onderzoeksfondsen - BOF*) self-employed academic staff.

### **Actions:**

- Enhance professional development prospects for post-doctoral staff and middle management (see Point 21).
- Better information for temporary employees regarding their contracts, not only on the statutory provisions but also on funding and management problems.
- Provision of information regarding researchers' career development: where are they going? (among others "junior researchers survey" data)
- Better financial management of project funding. Better and more proactive management activities with regard to administrative management of funding *per se*.
- Provide departments with better information on how to manage project funding.

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## **26. Funding and salaries**

**Summary:** The employer is responsible for ensuring fair pay and social security entitlement.

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

### **Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Arts 95, 96, 97, 101, 102
- All EU researchers, including bursary holders, have the same social security entitlements. The same is true for non-EU researchers from countries where a bilateral agreement is in place. No pension or child benefit entitlement for non-EU researchers.
- Lower grant for Erasmus Mundus doctorate bursary holders.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Application of the statutory rules.
- The same remuneration for all researchers at the same grade and with the same seniority.
- In principle: application of the post-doctoral scale when a doctorate is achieved. Accumulation of seniority.
- The Governing Council recently approved the proposal by the Vice-Chancellor for a differentiated pay policy within the University for the provision of services to third-party projects and for post-academic training<sup>9</sup>.”

**Actions:**

- Proactive monitoring of the correct application of pay scales and seniority.
- With external actors: to try to achieve a second-pillar pension (supplementary occupational pension) for all researchers, first for post-doctoral researchers.
- With external actors: to try to achieve equal social security entitlements for all researchers.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Number of files disputed with the trade unions relating to the correct application of pay scales and seniority.
  - Report on progress with endeavours to achieve a supplementary pension.
  - Report on progress with endeavours to achieve equal social security entitlements for all researchers.
- 

**27. Gender balance**

**Summary:** The employers seeks to achieve a representative gender balance across all levels of staff.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should aim for a representative gender balance at all levels of staff, including at supervisory and managerial level. This should be achieved on the basis of an equal opportunities policy at the recruitment stage and at the subsequent career stages without, however, taking precedence over quality and competence criteria. To ensure equal treatment, selection and evaluation committees should have an adequate gender balance.”

**Remarks:** Overlap with Point 14 on selection committees.

**Government rules and policy:** Decree on the promotion of more evenly balanced participation of men and women in Flemish Government advisory and management bodies.

**VUB rules and practices:** Between 2005 and 2008, the VUB went much further by setting up a diversity forum and drawing up a diversity plan relating to gender balance across all staff levels. This has now been translated into practice at the various policy levels.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.vub.ac.be/e-brief/index.php/news/nl/2/20110404/14/>

**Actions:** No further action required.

**Self-evaluation:** Relative number of men/women per faculty, in terms of students, graduates, PhDs, post-doctoral researchers, academic support staff, special academic staff and self-employed academic staff.

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## **28. Career development**

**Summary:** The employer draws up a career development strategy for its researchers.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders of researchers should draw up, preferably within the framework of their human resources management, a specific career development strategy for researchers at all stages of their career, regardless of their contractual situation, including for researchers on fixed-term contracts. It should include the availability of mentors involved in providing support and guidance for the personal and professional development of researchers, thus motivating them and contributing to reducing any insecurity in their professional future. All researchers should be made familiar with such provisions and arrangements.”

### **Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Arts 64, 72, 91*bis* and 169*bis*

### **VUB rules and practices:**

- Allocation model: an HR policy has been drawn up at department level.
- Problem: departments are primarily concerned with their continued operation and the careers of their researchers take second place.
- Mentoring relates firstly to development as a researcher, career development is a component of this.
- “Junior researchers survey”: (1) Special academic staff are not explicitly expected to achieve a doctorate but academic support staff and bursary holders are expected to do so. (2) 65% of special academic staff are undertaking a doctorate; almost all academic support staff and bursary holders are doing so. (3) One or more jobs held for appointment as a junior researcher: humanities and social sciences (*humane en sociale wetenschappen – HSW*) – 57.7%; Economic and Technical Sciences (*economische en technische wetenschappen - ETW*) – 35.7%. If one or more jobs have been held previously, full- or part-time research positions: human and social sciences (*humane en sociale wetenschappen – HSW*) – 34.3%; economic and technical sciences (*economische en technische wetenschappen - ETW*) – 61.2%.

### **Actions:**

- To inform researchers regarding their career development prospects in terms of probability distribution (e.g. a breakdown can be provided by faculty or department of the career path for researchers [i.e. “x% become self-employed academic staff; y% become special academic staff; z% go into industry, the non-profit sector, etc.”]).
- Providing the departments with instruments to assist with their HR policy (to be done by the Personnel Department).

- In conjunction with external actors: to try to achieve more resources for middle management researchers.

**Self-evaluation:**

- “Junior researchers survey”: career development expectations (would be more realistic if the correct information was provided).
- 

**29. Value of mobility**

**Summary:** The employer fosters different forms of mobility in career development strategies.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders must recognise the value of geographical, intersectoral, inter- and trans-disciplinary and virtual mobility as well as mobility between the public and private sector as an important means of enhancing scientific knowledge and professional development at any stage of a researcher’s career. Consequently, they should build such options into the specific career development strategy and fully value and acknowledge any mobility experience within their career progression/appraisal system. This also requires that the necessary administrative instruments be put in place to allow the portability of both grants and social security provisions, in accordance with national legislation.”

**Remarks:** Also see Point 18.

**Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Arts 97 and 167*bis*.
- The portability of social security entitlements is currently very limited.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- There are bilateral staff exchange agreements with other universities (coordinated through the IRMO (International Relations & Mobility) Department). This relates to six months mobility.
- There are also credits for mobility under Research Board Regulations.

**Actions:**

- One-stop shop for mobility (researcher intakes and exits).
- Inclusion of different forms of mobility in appraisals (see Point 18).
- Put pressure on the Flemish Government for the portability of social security entitlements.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Number of mobile researchers, geographically and also interdisciplinarily.
- 

**30. Access to the career advice**

**Summary:** The employer is responsible for the provision of career advice.



**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should ensure that career advice and job placement assistance, either in the institutions concerned, or through collaboration with other structures, is offered to researchers at all stages of their careers, regardless of their contractual situation.”

**Government rules and policy:** Requirement to provide career advice to employees aged 45 or over on dismissal (after at least one year of half-time employment).

**VUB rules and practices:**

- An Employment Unit was set up in 2000, but it had a short life. It may not be a good idea to do this again.

**Actions:**

- The same as for Point 28: ensure that the departments receive any support which can be provided by the Personnel Department on career development strategies.

**Self-evaluation:**

- “Junior researchers survey”: career development expectations (would be more realistic if the correct information was provided).

---

### **31. Intellectual property rights**

**Summary:** The employer is responsible for promoting the intellectual property rights of researchers.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should ensure that researchers at all career stages reap the benefits of the exploitation (if any) of their R&D results through legal protection and, in particular, through appropriate protection of Intellectual Property Rights, including copyrights. Policies and practices should specify what rights belong to researchers and/or, where applicable, to their employers or other parties, including external commercial or industrial organisations, as possibly provided for under specific collaboration agreements or other types of agreement.”

**Remarks:** (1) Intellectual property rights (IPRs) include copyright, patents, trademarks and design marks. See teaching sheets by F. Brison and Johan Brants. (2) This point relates to the protection and exploitation of the researcher’s work. Point 3 relates to respect for the rights of others.

**Government rules and policy:**

- Intellectual property rights legislation.
- Universities Decree, Art. 169<sup>ter</sup>
- Decree on the scientific and social service contribution of universities and higher education establishments and relationships between such establishments and other legal persons, Art. 5 and 6
- “As a general rule, the university has full economic and property rights to the research results of its researchers. The latter must therefore communicate to the university/higher

education institution all findings arising from their work. With regard to research cooperation, intellectual property rights could be shared with third parties; arrangements would be set out contractually. In certain specific cases (e.g. Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology (*Agentschap voor Innovatie door Wetenschap en Technologie – IWT*) industrial education and research (*Onderwijs en Onderzoek – O&O*) projects, private contracts), the University, as a knowledge institution, does not own the intellectual property rights”.<sup>10</sup>

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Within R&D: Patent Information Centre; Technology Transfer Interface.
- Enterprise courses within doctoral schools (Part 3 on awareness courses).

**Actions:**

- Information (sessions) on intellectual property rights.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Success of information sessions.
- Number of consultations of web pages on intellectual property rights.
- (Falling) number of visits for basic information.
- (Increasing) number of VUB patents.

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## **32. Co-authorship**

**Summary:** The employer protects the (co-)authorship rights of researchers.

**Text:** “Co-authorship should be viewed positively by institutions when evaluating staff, as evidence of a constructive approach to the conducting of research. Employers and/or funders should therefore develop strategies, practices and procedures to provide researchers, including those at the beginning of their research careers, with the necessary framework conditions so that they can enjoy the right to be recognised and listed and/or quoted, in the context of their actual contributions, as co-authors of papers, patents, etc., or to publish their own research results independently from their supervisor(s).”

**Remarks:** There is disagreement about whether or not the supervisor should be a co-author. An (early-stage) researcher may have written an article himself from start to finish, but if it is based on a research project drawn up by the supervisor, it is logical (or at least arguable) that the sponsor be a co-author. The more senior researchers are responsible for the organisational tasks

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[http://www.techtransfer.ugent.be/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=38&Itemid=1](http://www.techtransfer.ugent.be/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=38&Itemid=1)  
•

(i.e. drawing up projects), the more they are the co-authors of early-stage researchers' articles without actually having written them themselves.

**Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Art. 65, 65, 67, 68 and 69.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Guideline in the form of the “Profile of a good researcher”, “good supervisor”.

**Actions:**

- Coaching/mentoring training (see Points 37 and 40).

**Self-evaluation:**

- R&D database: number of publications without a supervisor.
- 

### **33. Teaching**

**Summary:** Limited and well-supervised lectures are given by researchers without teaching duties.

**Text:** “Teaching is an essential means for the structuring and dissemination of knowledge and should therefore be considered a valuable option within the researchers' career paths. However, teaching responsibilities should not be excessive and should not prevent researchers from carrying out their research activities, particularly at the beginning of their careers. Employers and/or funders should ensure that teaching duties are adequately remunerated and taken into account in the evaluation/appraisal systems, and that time devoted by senior members of staff to the training of early-stage researchers should be counted as part of their teaching commitment. Suitable training should be provided for teaching and coaching activities as part of the professional development of researchers.”

**Remarks:** Giving lectures is seen within departments as a necessity to guarantee education and not as a worthwhile option.

**Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree.
- By law, bursary holders are not employees and may not therefore give lectures.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Article 291, paragraph 2, of the Academic Staff Regulations states that bursary holders may not perform any work other than their doctoral research.
- “Junior researchers survey”: In the humanities and social sciences (*humane en sociale wetenschappen – HSW*) researchers tend to be academic support staff more than in the exact sciences. Giving lectures would mean that academic support staff would have much less time left for doctoral research.
- Giving lectures is less of a burden if the lectures are grouped into one or more days so

that the other days are free for working on the doctorate.

**Actions:**

- Draw up a guideline for departments to restrict the number of informal lecture hours for special academic staff.

**Self-evaluation:**

- “Junior researchers survey”: Number of researchers complaining about the workload involved in giving lectures.
- 

### **34. Complaints/appeals**

**Summary:** There is be an ombudsman service for researchers.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders of researchers should establish, in compliance with national rules and regulations, appropriate procedures, possibly in the form of an impartial (ombudsman-type) person to deal with the complaints/appeals of researchers, including those concerning conflicts between supervisor(s) and early-stage researchers. Such procedures should provide all research staff with confidential and informal assistance in resolving work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, with the aim of promoting fair and equitable treatment within the establishment and improving the overall quality of the working environment.”

**Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Art. 106bis

**VUB rules and practices:**

*Working conditions (e.g. harassment in the workplace)*

- Confidential advisers. There will be an awareness campaign In October 2011 (in English too).

*Job-related problems*

- An Ombudsman Service exists for doctoral students but not for self-employed academic staff.

**Actions:**

- Extend the ombudsman service to all staff.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Installation of a general ombudsman service.
- 

### **35. Participation in decision-making bodies**

**Summary:** Researchers are represented in the institution’s management.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders of researchers should recognise it as wholly legitimate, and indeed desirable, that researchers be represented in the relevant information, consultation and decision-making bodies of the institutions for which they work, so as to protect and promote their individual and collective interests as professionals and to actively contribute to the workings of the institution.”

**Government rules and policy:**

- Universities Decree, Art. 122

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Researchers are represented in the works council, except for bursary holders (Flanders Research Foundation (*Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen – FWO*) and foreign scholarship students).

**Actions:**

None required.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report on the discussions.
- 
- 

## **Part IV. Training**

The fourth and last part deals with the need for ongoing training for researchers and the rules of conduct between a sponsor and an early-stage researcher.

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### **36. Relationship with supervisors**

**Summary:** Early-stage researchers report regularly to their supervisors.

**Text:** “Researchers in their training phase should establish a structured and regular relationship with their supervisor(s) and faculty/departmental representative(s) so as to take full advantage of their relationship with them. This includes keeping records of all work progress and research findings, obtaining feedback by means of reports and seminars, applying such feedback and working in accordance with agreed schedules, milestones, deliverables and/or research outputs.”

**Government rules and policy:** None

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Doctoral schools.
- Annual report to the faculty on progress with doctorates.
- Most departments schedule departmental meetings in which progress with research is reported.
- A need for social integration of (mobile) researchers.

**Actions:**

- New opportunities for (mobile) researchers to meet.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Success of meeting opportunities.
- 

**37. Supervision and managerial duties**

**Summary:** Supervisors provide guidance to early-stage researchers as regards the transfer of knowledge and career development.

**Text:** “Senior researchers should devote particular attention to their multi-faceted role as supervisors, mentors, career advisers, leaders, project coordinators, managers or science communicators. They should perform these tasks to the highest professional standards. With regard to their role as supervisors or mentors of researchers, senior researchers should build up a constructive and positive relationship with the early-stage researchers, in order to set the conditions for efficient transfer of knowledge and for the further successful development of the researchers’ careers.”

**Government rules and policy:** None

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Self-employed academic staff matrix.
- “Profile of a good researcher”.
- In time, self-employed academic staff researchers become supervisors and coaches for new researchers, but without receiving any guidance for this role.

**Actions:**

- Provide coaching training, initially for supervisors and department chairmen.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report of the Ombudsman service. Complaints to the ombudsman.
  - “Junior researchers survey”: number of references by researchers to the fact that supervisors leave researchers with too little freedom.
- 

**38. Continuing professional development**

**Summary:** Researchers continue their development.

**Text:** “Researchers at all career stages should seek to continually improve themselves by regularly updating and expanding their skills and competencies. This may be achieved by a variety of means including, but not restricted to, formal training, workshops, conferences and e-learning.”

**Government rules and policy:** None

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Credit for departments for attendance at congresses.
- Possibility of following training sessions, perhaps reserved, for example, to those who have formal teaching duties.

**Actions:**

- Give access to training to those who have informal teaching or coaching duties.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Generalised access to training.
- 

### **39. Access to research training and continuous development**

**Summary:** Researchers have access to research training and continuous development.

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

**Government rules and policy:** None

**VUB rules and practices:**

- Access to the doctoral schools
- Sabbatical leave
- “Junior researchers survey”: need for training.

**Actions:** See Point 38.

**Self-evaluation:** See Point 38.

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### **40. Supervision**

**Summary:** Early-stage researchers are being assigned a mentor.

**Text:** “Employers and/or funders should ensure that a person is clearly identified to whom early-stage researchers can refer for the performance of their professional duties, and should inform the researchers accordingly. Such arrangements should clearly define that the proposed supervisors are sufficiently expert in supervising research and have the time, knowledge, experience, expertise and commitment to be able to offer the research trainee appropriate support

and provide for the necessary progress and review procedures, as well as the necessary feedback mechanisms.”

**Government rules and policy:**

- The Health and Safety Act already imposes mentoring for new employees, but clearly only within the context of health and safety.

**VUB rules and practices:**

- “Profile of a good supervisor”.
- The research survey shows that researchers are satisfied with their doctoral guidance.
- There are major differences between departments as regards guidance. There is a need to ensure that new researchers have sufficient time left for their doctoral research and receive guidance on this.

**Actions:**

- Provide coaching training, initially for supervisors and department chairmen.
- From October 2011, as part of intake policy: appointment of a mentor for new researchers.

**Self-evaluation:**

- Report of the Ombudsman service. Complaints to the ombudsman.
- “Junior researchers survey”: number of references by researchers to the fact that supervisors leave researchers with too little freedom.



**Appendix 3. Action plan for the forty points in the European Charter for Researchers**

See the Excel file “The VUB and the European Charter for Researchers” (Appendix 3).