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NEIKER

MEMBER OF
BASQUE RESEARCH
& TECHNOLOGY ALLIANCE

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European Human Resources Strategy (HRS4R)

**Interim Assessment
(summary document)**





Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice

Ethical and professional aspects

Initial Phase

As a Public Society of the Basque Government, we have developed the highest standards regarding the ethical aspects of our management system, also deploying a very intensive training programme for researchers to improve their specialization and skills. We must continue working in implementing a professional development plan for researchers adapted to the expected changes in our research lines and organization. We have created a “Code of Conduct” and an “Equal Opportunity Plan for Women and Men” covering many aspects dealt in this thematic area. We want to further stress the environmental aspects of our activity at all levels (ISO 14001) and work in the implementation and certification of the management system based on ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety. Non-discrimination is regarded as one of the highest-ranking principles regarding its implementation by researchers at NEIKER.

Interim Assessment

As strengths, it stands out that in this initial period NEIKER has reviewed and updated its code of ethics, which has come to be called the code of conduct. This code of ethics proposes an internal information channel that ensures the anonymity and protection of complainants. This channel reinforces the anonymity and protection of people, protecting not only present workers but also past ones. The channel is included in the WEB page, so it will be open not only to workers but also to clients or other interested parties. Possible complaints are dealt with by a compliance committee. In the channels enabled so far there have been no complaints.

The III Equality Plan has also been drawn up, in which the diagnosis reflects the non-existence of a wage gap between women and men and non-discrimination.

To announce both principles and raise awareness among workers, different training and informative actions have been carried out and we can consider that both aspects are fully internalized by all workers.

Important steps have also been taken in ISO 14001 environmental certification. Specifically in terms of sustainability and energy savings, the percentage of energy from renewables already exceeds 30% and an investment in geothermal energy has already been approved that will allow this percentage to be raised. At the same time, energy saving measures have been implemented that have led to a reduction of more than 20% in total energy consumption. In relation to the certification of the management model for occupational health and safety ISO 45001 in 2022, an internal audit was carried out to find out the situation of NEIKER.



The main weakness detected is related to the lack of a computer system that allows us to monitor our Occupational Health and Safety process and procedures and the maintenance plans quickly and efficiently for large infrastructures and unique equipment. These equipment and infrastructures significantly condition obtaining environmental certification. Another of the weaknesses is related to the great variability of activities that are carried out (animal care work in herds, laboratory animal care, field work on farms and mountain areas, specialized analysis in high biological safety laboratories, work in computer, etc...) executed, in addition, in very diverse fields: livestock, agriculture, forestry and natural resources. This means that the degree of complexity is very high and that very varied procedures must be developed, which makes it difficult and lengthens the path towards obtaining the certifications.

Recruitment and selection

Initial Phase

We have very well-developed procedures for detecting staff needs at NEIKER. Also established professional careers with competencies and skills defined, although they need an adaptation to the new roles and responsibilities expected nowadays. We conduct our selection process partially through the web page at NEIKER. The process for permanent positions hiring is based in merit assessment, an examination for evaluating knowledge related to the area of the position, and an-interview to evaluate different skills and abilities related to the specific functions to be developed. However, this system has been in place for quite a long time and has the need to be updated to incorporate new merits and skills, as well as to be more informative and personnel recruitment be conducted through the development of an e-tool in NEIKER's web page.

Interim Assessment

During this initial phase, a giant step has been taken in the dissemination of job offers. In addition to the WEB page, the offers are published on social networks and specifically, those corresponding to researchers are also published on the EURASSEX platform. With this practice we achieve that the offers reach a greater number of people who may be interested. In addition, the application submission system has been modernized and digitized, making it possible to do so electronically. This speeds up and facilitates the presentation of these, also speeding up the selection process. The selection process is defined in an internal procedure (PGC/SG-07) that describes how the process should be carried out. From the moment of publication, the requirements that must be met, the functions that must be carried out and the merits that are going to be evaluated are reported. The processes related to permanent job offers include a psychological evaluation to assess the suitability of the candidate for the job. The selection panel made up of researchers, members of the social part and members of the management ensures the impartiality and non-discrimination of any of the candidates. An agreement has also been signed with IKERBASQUE to be able to incorporate high-level researchers.



The main weakness is related to our public nature. We have a fixed number of permanent positions, all of them occupied, so for practical purposes, the permanent incorporation of new personnel can only be done with the retirement of other researchers. Consequently, researchers with temporary positions choose to go to other centres that can offer them a permanent position in a shorter period. The second weakness is related to our salary table. Comparatively with other research centres our salaries are not competitive and according to the collective agreement that currently governs our activity there is no possibility of economic incentives. The modifications that may be proposed in this regard must be agreed with the trade union party and require a long process of calm reflection. The need to design a plan to adapt the professional career to the requirements of the Basque science and technology network (RVCTI) is identified as an opportunity to work on this topic in depth.

Working conditions

Initial Phase

Research recognition by NEIKER is well performed for all the researcher categories R1-R4. As the organization is certified under the norms ISO9001:2015 and UNE 166.002:2014, there are many procedures dealing with many aspects related to working conditions. Stability is one main asset in NEIKER because being a Public Society of the Basque Government. However, not being an academic institution some of the researcher's needs are not well taken into consideration at NEIKER. Infrastructures and equipment need to be updated computer system must be rethought to face the new challenges we have undergone in later times and more especially under this pandemic situation. Funding by the Basque Government is fair for the activities carried out by NEIKER, although funding from national and European calls must be pursued to assure all the needed resources for research project. Career development needs to be redefined to adapt to the changing research environment regarding mobility, teaching, merit assessment, etc. so we are more in line with the guidelines in the European Research Area.

Interim Assessment

Faced with salary conditions that can be considered not very attractive, working conditions are one of the main attractions of working at NEIKER. NEIKER has a flexible entry and exit schedule, teleworking regulations are in place, there are numerous and varied types of licenses and permits (care for children or dependent persons, administrative acts, attendance at medical appointments, moving, etc...) that favour and allow the reconciliation between professional and personal life. NEIKER is clearly committed to favouring conciliation and, for example, in the case of maternity/paternity, in addition to the leave regulated by law, it offers parents two additional weeks of paid leave; In the case of leave due to illness or accident, NEIKER supplements up to 100% of your salary from the first day of leave or leave. In another order of things, all workers have 6 days of paid leave for personal matters and more days added depending on their seniority in the company. In this sense, since last year, the time that he has been able to work in other public bodies has also been recognized for



these purposes. There is also the possibility of opting for an economic fund in case of bankruptcy or requesting interest-free loans. It also covers 100% of expenses related to the training of English and Basque (the native language) that are beneficial for the development of functions, even if they are not mandatory. Part of the management procedures are digitized, and many others are in process, which facilitates the work of researchers. Likewise, after a pilot test in 2022, the possibility of teleworking two days a week has been implemented in 2023 for those people who can opt for remote work.

However, that same strength becomes a weakness since, at times, it is difficult to reconcile the rights of all colleagues or reconcile organizational and efficiency aspects of the company with the enjoyment of said rights by the workers.

Training and development

Initial Phase

A biennial training plan is developed and executed, and researchers have the opportunity of requesting courses they are interested in. A large amount of funding and hours is dedicated to training. Although there are some mechanisms to provide career advice by thesis directors and senior researchers, it seems to be a need for more counselling given the large number of doctoral students at NEIKER. Besides, specific personal career development plans must be incorporated to satisfy NEIKER needs as well as researchers' aspirations.

Interim Assessment

The professional career defined in NEIKER, and the training plan stand out as strengths in this area. On the one hand, the professional career defines the professional development of researchers by identifying the functions of researchers in the different phases. At present, a review of this career is being carried out in order to adapt it to the research career defined by the Basque Science and Technology Network (RVCTI). This review will strengthen the research career since it is based on the principles of the HRS4R. Regarding the Training Plan, important changes have been introduced that significantly strengthen it: 1) training is identified based on the challenges defined in the Strategic Plan, 2) a quarterly review of the training plan is carried out and 3) an evaluation of the effectiveness of said training has been incorporated into the training process. Said training plan includes courses in different areas (technical, occupational health and safety, equality, data protection law, corporate, use of computer tools, etc.). In addition to the needs identified through the challenges, the training plan is completed with the needs that the researchers themselves identify, which are usually much more specific and aimed at the line of research in which they work. Within the training process, attendance at congresses is also contemplated, which is provided not only to already trained researchers but also to all doctoral students.



During 2023, for the first time, a specific conference was organized for pre-doctoral researchers who have presented their work to the rest of the researchers. It is an important opportunity for students to gain confidence in defending their work and listen to the contributions of other researchers. It is expected that this event will be repeated every year.

One can also talk about encouraging the participation of doctoral students in internal seminars. The idea is to create a personalized training plan for each PhD student that includes transversal courses (statistics...), rotations through the NEIKER departments to learn techniques, stays abroad...). As a positive aspect, I would highlight that they usually go to conferences. Also, the department heads meet annually with the doctoral students to see how things are going.

The main weakness is that although several actions are carried out in the process of monitoring and training young researchers (meetings with those responsible, training courses, conferences for presenting results, etc...) these actions are not systematized or defined. In this second period, it is contemplated precisely to work on this systematization and on a personalized training plan for young researchers that allows for much more effective follow-up and monitoring.

Other questions

Have any of the priorities for the short- and medium term changed?

The priorities remain the same, but the defined actions have been reviewed, reconsidered, and specified. There are going to be two priorities that will be worked on in this period: defining the OTR policy and the accompaniment, monitoring and follow-up of young researchers.

Have any of the circumstances in which your organisation operates, changed and as such have had an impact on your HR strategy?

There have not been any circumstances that have caused us to change our human resources strategy.

Are any strategic decisions under way that may influence the action plan?

During this implementation period, the Basque Science and Technology Network (RVCTI) has made a professional career proposal for all the centres attached to the Basque Research and Technology Alliance (BRTA). NEIKER is part of this alliance. This proposal is based on scientific excellence, transfer and internationalization and is designed with Europe as its focus and in tune with the HRS4R. The RVCTI has asked the BRTA member centres for an action plan so that the professional careers of each centre are adapted to their career proposal. This fact significantly and positively reinforces the decision that NEIKER voluntarily made when it proposed its adhesion to the HRS4R.



Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles (Initial Phase)

We have two procedures: PGC/MC-04 Personnel: Roles and responsibilities [31/05/2019]; PGC/SG-01 Personnel, competencies, and awareness [31/05/2019] in which competences, roles and responsibilities are detailed, so personal recruitment follows these procedures, as well as the PGC /SG-07 Personnel Selection. As a Public Society all the process is very much detailed and explained to applicants. Assessment of requisites, scoring of merits and evaluations of examinations are performed precisely, and an expert from the IVAP (Basque Institute of Public Administration) participates in the interviews to the candidates. Positions are posted in NEIKER's web page, IVAP and LANBIDE (Basque Service for Employment). We wish to extend the posting of positions to an international audience through EURAXESS, IKERBASQUE..., and develop an e-tool for recruitment to facilitate applications by interested researchers. We want to have a clear and concise document in the web explaining the whole recruitment process. The final goal is to get the best candidates for the research positions offered by NEIKER to improve our scientific competence and provide to researchers from the European countries access to the information of the positions offered by NEIKER.

Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles (Internal Review for Interim Assessment)

The main progress that we have had in this period has been in terms of disseminating existing opportunities, since job offers for researchers are published on the Euraxess portal, they have also been incorporated into social networks and, in addition, the presentation of applications has been facilitated by implementing a digital platform that allows them to be submitted electronically. This platform also makes it possible to streamline the process and shorten periods. Proof of this strategy are the additions of foreign researchers to our staff in this period.

Also of particular importance is the work that is being carried out with the works council to review the functions, competencies and requirements of the different categories within the functional map, the work that is being carried out within the Basque Research and Technology Alliance (BRTA) to adapt the professional career plan for researchers and NEIKER's internal initiative of conversations for development that allows a fluid relationship with all researchers and defines a framework for the future and improvement.

The actions related to the monitoring and follow-up of young researchers are more delayed. Although many actions have been carried out in relation to the reception of all the new incorporations of NEIKER, it is necessary to carry out specific actions for young researchers. In this sense, although various actions have been carried out (meetings, specific events, etc.) they are not systematized. In this second implementation period, work will be done on it.



Implementation

General overview of the implementation process

The General Manager assumed the direction of this work and an example of this leadership is the inclusion of the HRS4R strategy in the people development challenge of the new Strategic Plan. In addition, this new Strategic Plan is deployed in annual management plans that include actions identified in the action plan designed for the implementation of HRS4R. In addition, NEIKER has equipped itself with a process-based management system and one of these processes is the one corresponding to the development of people in whose follow-up group researchers have a significant presence and in which the human resources management directly participates.

Important steps have been taken in the dissemination of the strategy and in implementing actions aimed at reinforcing the OTR, actions whose monitoring is carried out through indicators that are included in the control panel of the Management Plan and the respective processes. The alignment with the proposals made by the Basque Science and Technology Network (RVCTI) for adapting the NEIKER professional career to a professional career based on the HRS4R has also served to reinforce this strategy. It stands out as a positive way that this work is carried out jointly with the social representation of the company.

In general terms, it can be indicated that compliance with all the principles on which the HRS4R is based is ensured at NEIKER, although in some cases it is necessary to systematize some actions and define the policies in a concrete way. In this sense, the biggest gap identified is that in young researchers it does not exist, in addition to their thesis director who perform the function of tutor and supervisor, there is a lack of a figure that accompanies young researchers and facilitates their incorporation into the labour market outside of NEIKER. This constitutes the greatest challenge for this new period.

How have you prepared the internal review?

The leader of this review has been the Human Resources Manager, who is also responsible for the implementation of the HRS4R strategy. The report has been based on the review of the action plan initially presented, which has also been systematically reviewed every 4 months. The actions carried out, those delayed, and those not carried out have been identified and several actions have been refocused/modified so that they will better adjust to the achievement of the objective. For this, the incorporation of various actions within the annual management plans and the review of these has been of great help.



The various aspects have been discussed and reviewed especially with the scientific direction, which has its own mechanisms (scientific technical committee and value committee) to work on these aspects. The scientific management evaluates and monitors the indicators and proposes lines of research in accordance with the mission/vision of NEIKER. Specifically, it meets quarterly. On the other hand, the technical scientific and value committee that monitors the transfer and valuation of assets, meets monthly. In addition, specifically, the year 2022 has been the year in which the new strategic plan and the new PCTI (Science, Technology, and Innovation Plan) have been drawn up, which have served as driving documents for NEIKER's activity. The training area (training and dissemination activities, computer pills, etc...), the legal area (research freedom, ethical channel, etc.), the communication area (transfer to society, organization of events, etc.), the people area (job offers, working conditions, etc.) and the process area (monitoring and evaluation of indicators, areas for improvement, social responsibility, etc.) have also actively participated in the preparation of the report.

The general management is involved in the process and their support for it is total, facilitating all those initiatives that are estimated from the management of resources and the scientific management.

How have you involved the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?

The participation of the researchers has been carried out fundamentally through the scientific direction and the steering committee in which the heads of the scientific areas of NEIKER participate. It is these bodies that review and approve the management plans in which the actions and the HRS4R implementation strategy itself are identified. On the other hand, the process of developing people, which has identified the implementation of this strategy as one of the challenges, has modified its composition by increasing the presence of researchers and incorporating researchers in the training process into said group. This working group meets quarterly.

On the other hand, the specific aspects of the implementation of the strategy are always discussed with the workers' company committee where the researchers are also represented.

An important aspect is the fact that the research needs identification processes start from the scientific direction and from the directions of the scientific departments.

More general aspects such as corporate responsibility, the ethical channel, gender equality, etc... are dealt with through training actions via webinars, through the corporate email channel or through information pills.

Do you have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress?

Initially, a working group made up of researchers was defined to diagnose the situation and define



an action plan. However, the monitoring of the plan is carried out systematically every 4 months jointly between the human resources management and the scientific management. The existence of working groups within the scientific department, as well as the people development group (which meets quarterly) that discuss this strategy in their meetings ensures that adequate monitoring is carried out without the need to define more working groups.

Is there any alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the organisation's research strategy, overarching HR policy.

Yes, totally, both the strategic plan and the management plan incorporate the aspects and actions of HRS4R. Specifically, within the Strategic Plan, a line of action has been identified within the "People Development" challenge under the heading: adaptation of the professional career in accordance with the HRS4R and the career proposed by the Basque Science and Technology Network (RVCTI). The following indicator has been included in the 2023 Management Plan: "Degree of progress in the implementation of the HRS4R strategy" which is evaluated every six months. In addition to this indicator, there are other indicators such as "Researchers transferred to Basque companies" or "Percentage of applications that meet the requirements" or "Percentage of applications that pass the selection process" of their "Average score for calls" that reflect this alignment.

How has your organisation ensured that the proposed actions would be also implemented?

There are several aspects that ensure the implementation of the actions:

- 1) the involvement of the general management and the steering committee
- 2) a management system, based on the management of processes that are interconnected between them
- 3) inclusion of the strategy in the strategic plan (approved by the board of directors) and of the actions in the management plan
- 5) systematic follow-up of the management plans and the action plan
- 6) people process working group where the HRS4R strategy has been included.

How are you monitoring progress (timeline)?

Every 4 months, a specific follow-up of the action plan is carried out between the resource management and the scientific management. For this, there is a file in Excel format in which all the actions, those responsible, the deadlines and the indicators are incorporated. In this follow-up, the pending actions and those that are in progress are identified to see if it is necessary to propose a modification of these, both in the type of action and in the execution period. The indicators defined in the action plan are also monitored and the information that can be used as evidence is identified and compiled.



How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?

Given that the monitoring process carried out in the first period has been considered satisfactory, for this second period it is proposed to continue with the same dynamics, emphasizing the publication of the OTR policy and the monitoring and follow-up of young pre-doctoral researchers.

How do you expect to prepare for the external review?

For the external review, special care will be taken to collect the information/documentation that can be used as evidence (indicators, scorecards, new policies, revised procedures, impacts, etc.) so that it is easy for the evaluators to follow up on what is presented in the report. The follow-up will be carried out in the exposed way.

