HR Excellence in Research

Internal review of the UMONS Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

DECEMBER 2024

ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

- ### Key figures for your organization

STAFF & STUDENTS	FTE
Total researchers staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research	736,4
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)	198,3
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation) *	332,9
Of whom are women *	266,2
Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor	194,7
Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level *	130,3
Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with doctoral level *	411,4
Total number of students (if relevant) *	9526
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff) *	1402,9

RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)	€
Total annual organisational budget	135.373.549,11 €
Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)	19.688.397,10 €
Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)	37.721.646,84 €
Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research	2.634.333,84 €

ORGANISATION PROFILE

UMONS offers approximately 150 degree programs at the Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD levels to a student body of about 10,000 students. These programs are delivered across its 7 faculties and 3 schools.

Research at UMONS is driven by a community working within around 100 departments embedded in 10 multidisciplinary research institutes. The key strength of these institutes lies in the multidisciplinary nature of their teams and the flexibility of their structure, which fosters collaboration and innovation. (Learn more about UMONS Research Institutes)

Through its research and strong ties with industry, UMONS plays an active role in regional development. The university pursues its research objectives on both a regional and international scale, with its researchers' expertise being widely recognized at the international level.

UMONS is also a committed member of the European University Alliance EUNICE. (More about EUNICE).

1. Ethical and professional aspects

Since 2023, the UMONS has been actively engaged in the Research Assessment Agreement (CoARA) alongside other French-speaking Belgian universities. Building on its 2021 plan, which identified a need for formalized goals and structured actions in ethics and integrity, UMONS has progressively addressed these challenges through targeted measures. These efforts aim to strengthen the university's commitment to fostering a research culture rooted in responsibility and excellence.

Progress Since 2021
1. Formalized frameworks
UMONS established an Ethics and Integrity Committee and adopted a Charter of Scientific Integrity to provide clear guidance on authorship, conflicts of interest, and data integrity. These structures address the need for governance identified in 2021. To support this framework, UMONS has clarified the investigative procedures for suspected breaches of scientific integrity and the precise definitions of such breaches.
Also, the UMONS is developing a "PhD Student – Supervisor" charter to optimize academic and scientific collaborations, addressing specific needs and expectations of these stakeholders.

2. Training programs
The UMONS is developing a mandatory ethics and integrity training for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, to be launched in 2025–2026. Senior researchers will also be targeted through awareness campaigns. Additionally, the University is creating a dedicated chatbot that will complement the training program by offering personalized guidance and directing researchers to relevant resources based on their specific needs.

3. Communication and resources
Regular workshops, awareness campaigns and events have improved access to information on ethical practices. These efforts address the lack of communication noted in 2021 while fostering a proactive research culture.
The UMONS is also working to implement personalized discussion spaces, enabling researchers to exchange view on specific ethical challenges identified using shared tools. These spaces will foster a more inclusive and collaborative environment.
To further promote local engagement, the UMONS will introduce scientific integrity ambassadors who will serve as key advocates and contact points for ethical practices within their respective research institutes.

4. National collaboration
Through CoARA, UMONS contributes to a shared platform of best practices on research integrity, working closely with other Belgian universities. This collaboration addresses shared challenges, including the current development of a charter on co-authorship and responsible publication practices.

Expanding ethical horizons
Enhancing Institutional Synergies
Through CoARA and other partnerships, such as EUNICE, the UMONS will deepen its engagement with peer institutions, leveraging collective expertise to address shared ethical challenges.
Within EUNICE, the UMONS seeks to promote the exchange of ethical best practices among European Universities, while acting as a bridge to integrate these practices into the Belgian academic landscape.

Supporting Researchers
Digital tools, including the scientific integrity training program and the chatbot, will be integrated into institutional platforms to provide researchers with immediate access to guidance and support. Tailored workshops will be designed to address emerging ethical challenges, informed by feedback gathered from the use of these shared resources.

UMONS has made substantial progress since 2021, addressing critical gaps and laying the foundation for sustained advancements in ethics and integrity. These actions reaffirm its commitment to fostering a responsible and inclusive research environment.

2. Recruitment and selection

The HR department demonstrates a strong awareness of the need for continuous improvement, reflecting its commitment to excellence and quality. This ability to identify areas for enhancement is a major asset, showcasing organizational maturity and proactive management of human resources challenges in a demanding scientific environment.

The HR service prioritizes supporting all stakeholders, from researchers to managers. This collaborative approach translates into personalized support, aimed at meeting specific needs while strengthening skills and facilitating the integration of new recruits.

The deployment of a structured and progressive process reflects a well-thought-out strategy, which includes targeted initiatives such as:
- **A well-organized onboarding process** for new employees, including effective integration tools and clear information.
- **Ongoing training** tailored to the needs of scientific staff, contributing to their professional development and employability.
- **Proactive dissemination of job offers** to ensure maximum visibility and attract top talent, while respecting the principles of openness and transparency.
- **Dedicated support and guidance for managers**, providing them with the tools needed to effectively manage teams and optimize working dynamics.
- **Promotion of OTM-R principles** by university authorities through strategic plans and the establishment of working groups to foster collective intelligence in support of these principles.
- **Participation in inter-university projects** aimed at improving OTM(e)-R principles within the institution.
- **Involvement in European postdoctoral support projects**, such as Come2Wallonia, which strengthens the institution's support framework for postdoctoral researchers.
- **Effective management of hiring processes** through a multi-annual plan defined and validated by UMONS stakeholders.

Positive feedback from the scientific staff confirms the relevance and impact of the HR department's actions. The tools and initiatives in place are well-received, demonstrating their alignment with the real needs of end-users. This strengthens the image of an HR service that is both attentive and results-oriented.

These aspects highlight the HR department's capacity to evolve, adapt, and innovate while maintaining a strong focus on the core principles of open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment (OTM-R).

Weaknesses and Areas for Improvement
One of the major challenges faced by the HR department is the **lack of necessary resources** (budgetary and human) to ensure the rapid and large-scale implementation of planned actions. This constraint limits the ability to efficiently roll out initiatives identified as priorities for enhancing the quality of HR processes.

A significant portion of the workforce is absorbed by priority actions, the sustained pace of daily activities, the hyper-solicitation of staff, and limited resources (in terms of personnel and tools). These factors create organizational pressure, slowing down the implementation of desired improvements. This can also lead to frustration among stakeholders, who perceive a gap between the ambitious objectives set and the extended timelines required to achieve them.

This challenge particularly impacts key areas such as:

- Digitalization and modernization of HR tools, which are essential to support OTM-R processes.
- Generalization of best practices, which remains difficult to achieve without stronger coordination and increased material or financial support.
- Training and awareness of stakeholders, the scale of which is limited by the time constraints of those involved, resulting in difficult follow-up and monitoring.

Another significant challenge lies in the university context and the diversity of functions within the institution, which add an extra layer of complexity to recruitment processes. On one hand, the HR service must work to gain recognition for its recruitment-related services (publication, testing, selection, etc.) among the broader university community, which may be less familiar with the procedures.

On the other hand, HR staff must constantly adapt to the unique context of each department's recruitment needs, as procedures vary according to the different statuses that govern the university. All of this must be done while respecting academic and scientific freedom, which adds further complexity to recruitment processes.

Despite these constraints, the HR department continues to make gradual progress by optimizing available resources and prioritizing high-impact actions. However, it is essential to highlight that these structural limitations require strategic reflection to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of efforts, particularly in the context of renewing the HR Excellence in Research label.

3. Working conditions

UMONS provides a supportive and inclusive working environment for its researchers and staff. Through its diversity and sustainability initiatives, mental health support, interdisciplinary research platforms, and sports and cultural activities, UMONS maintains its commitment to the HRS4R principles of well-being, inclusion, and excellence in research.

UMONS is committed to ensuring inclusive governance. Representatives of all three bodies (scientific, academic, and administrative) are included in the university's decision-making committees, promoting equitable participation in governance.

A key strength of UMONS is its human-scale environment and the values of solidarity and cohesion that it upholds. Institutional policies reinforce these values through social events such as afterwork gatherings, museum visits, …

1. Institutional Values and Sustainable Environment

Since 2014, the Sustainable Development Council (SDC) has played a pivotal role as a formal advisory body to ensure that development projects align with sustainability principles. The SDC addresses environmental, social, and well-being issues. It is also responsible for assessing the impact of all new infrastructure projects, ensuring they meet standards related to biodiversity, accessibility, and energy performance. This approach aims to provide a healthy, accessible, and eco-friendly working environment for the entire university community.

The Well-Being Working Group (one of the thematic groups within the SDC) was established to support projects aimed at fostering individual and collective well-being among the various categories of UMONS personnel.

2. Well-Being and Mental Health Support

UMONS emphasizes employee well-being through its Human Resources Department (HRD) and Internal Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (SIPPT). Key support services include:

- Providing personalized support by HRD team and offering personal development training programs, such as time management, stress management, and well-being at work.

- Access to mental health professionals through partnerships with external consultants, complemented by a network of confidential counselors to address workplace issues such as stress, burnout, and harassment.

- Analysis of psychosocial risks: Since October 2023, UMONS has partnered with Cohezio, an external prevention service, to conduct a psychosocial risk assessment. The survey gathered feedback from nearly 900 employees (including researchers), revealing an average well-being score of 6.95/10, comparable to institutions of similar size. Notably, 88% of respondents rated their overall well-being as "above average" or "high." The survey results allow UMONS to tailor its well-being strategy to address specific issues raised by employees.

3. Diversity, Inclusion, and Gender Equality

UMONS promotes a fair and diverse work environment through its Diversity and Gender Plan, which outlines 21 key actions. Measures include OTM-R recruitment, support for researchers with disabilities, and promoting gender equality in decision-making bodies. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen women's representation in senior academic and governance roles.

4. Interdisciplinary Research and Collaborative Workspaces

UMONS supports interdisciplinary collaboration through its 10 Research Institutes and dedicated technological platforms. This enables access to shared infrastructure, cutting-edge technology, and resources like prototyping services and collective intelligence workshops (e.g., CLICK initiative | https://le-click.be/).

5. Health, Safety, and Ergonomics

The Internal Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (SIPPT) oversees the implementation of health and safety measures, including ergonomic improvements, risk prevention and emergency support and safe laboratory environments with risk assessments conducted in all research labs to ensure the safety of researchers and staff.

6. Access to Sports, Culture, and Well-Being Activities

UMONS supports work-life balance by offering access to sports, cultural, and recreational activities. The university's facilities include a multi-sports center (https://web.umons.ac.be/fr/vie-campus/umons-sport/) and MUMONS cultural center (https://mumons.be/), which promotes scientific and cultural discovery through exhibitions, events, and workshops.

7. Support for Early-Career Researchers

UMONS supports early-stage researchers through the PhD College, which promotes researcher development, well-being, and career guidance. Key support mechanisms include:

- Onboarding and orientation programs for new PhD students.

- Career development workshops for PhD candidates.

- Personalized support to reduce PhD dropout rates, with regular feedback and guidance.

The PhD House also provides a space for early-career researchers to meet, share experiences, and access support. New actions, such as Action 36 (Revitalization of the PhD House) and Action 38 (PhD Supervisor-Doctoral Student Charter), aim to improve the working environment for young researchers

Weaknesses and Areas for Improvement

- Lack of necessary resources (budgetary and human) to ensure the rapid and large-scale implementation of planned actions.

- Infrastructure and space limitations: Growing demand for research space and labs requires new investment.

- Workload and burnout: The psychosocial survey revealed concerns about workload and interpersonal issues. UMONS aims to strengthen support mechanisms and workload management.

- Gender representation in leadership: While progress has been made, there is room for improvement in the representation of women in senior academic and governance roles.

- Accessibility improvements: Further efforts are needed to ensure accessible infrastructure for researchers with disabilities, including adapted pathways and workspaces.

4. Training and development

UMONS is strongly committed to promoting the development and career advancement of its researchers by offering a structured, accessible, and continuously evolving training offer. This strategy aims to equip researchers with essential skills at all stages of their careers, ensuring alignment with the HRS4R principles and fostering a dynamic research community.

The 2021-2024 action plan included 7 actions related to training and career development. The 5 actions considered completed remain sustainable and will continue to operate "as routine activities." The extended actions *(n°26 : Career development and training programme for postdoctoral researchers and n°27 Open Science culture and practices)* still require further development, as explained in the action plan.

The new proposed actions (actions n° 33, 34, 37, 40, 41) also aim to support the training dynamic more precisely.

Comprehensive and Evolving Training Offer

- **Interdisciplinary and Transferable Skills Development**: UMONS provides training on a wide range of key topics, including Open Science, Project Management, Proposal Writing, Science Communication, Intellectual Property, Responsible Research, Entrepreneurship, Career Development, Language Courses, and Teaching Practices.

- **Doctoral Training**: Cross-disciplinary courses for PhD students have been consolidated into an accessible and well-organized catalog available via the UMONS website. Participants' feedback is collected to improve both the content and delivery of future sessions.

- **Collaboration Across Institutions**: UMONS actively collaborates with other universities in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation to co-develop training modules and share training catalogs. The goal is to pool resources and offer a comprehensive and harmonized training offer.

- **EUNICE Alliance Collaboration**: As a member of the EUNICE alliance, UMONS has been able to expand its training offer (and reciprocally for partner institutions). The alliance also facilitates researcher exchanges with partner universities across Europe, thereby strengthening mobility opportunities with a positive impact on career.

Career Development and Employability

Beyond the training offer, UMONS actively supports researchers' career development and professional integration.

- **UMONS Career Center**: Researchers and students can access personalized career guidance through the UMONS Career Center. This platform supports career exploration and job search strategies through workshops and individual coaching sessions. Participants receive guidance on CV writing, LinkedIn profile optimization, and job interview preparation. Networking events and job fairs are also organized.

- **Mentoring for Doctoral Researchers**: The "Ment'OUT" program connects PhD students with experienced UMONS alumni who have transitioned to non-academic careers. Depending on the maturity of their professional project, mentees may benefit from either general career guidance or tailored support from a dedicated mentor. A continuation of the Ment'OUT program is currently being prepared. In addition, the creation of a PhD alumni network is planned for 2025 to support professional integration and networking.

- **MSCA COFUND C2W Program**: Beyond the development of a specific training program, the MSCA COFUND C2W Program has also established career support through regular meetings with the PI and HR (see template in annex).

- **CoARA Project Participation**: As part of the CoARA project, UMONS contributes to discussions on researcher assessment and career development (in addition to the training offer developed within this framework).

Areas for Improvement

- **Expansion of English-Language Training**: While the number of English-language courses has increased, further efforts are needed to make training offer more accessible to non-French-speaking researchers. The C2W program has contributed to this goal, and additional progress is expected.

- **Centralization of the Training Catalog**: It remains challenging to have a clear view of all "cross-disciplinary" training courses organized within UMONS for researchers, particularly those organized within and by Research Institutes. These training courses could be opened to a larger audience (beyond the Institute) and could also avoid duplication with existing institutional offerings.

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

UMONS' approach is one of continuity with improvement, ensuring that existing priorities are refined to better meet emerging challenges, support research excellence, and strengthen the university's position on the international stage.

UMONS' strategic priorities for 2022-2026 remain consistent with the objectives set for the 2018-2022 period. Rather than introducing significant changes, UMONS has chosen to deepen and reinforce its key priorities to strengthen its position as an innovative, human-scale, and internationally engaged institution.

UMONS' research objectives are structured around the following key strategic pillars:
- Support for PhD candidates and early-stage researchers (ESRs)
- Support for research funding, notably via external funding
- Sustaining postdoctoral support beyond the COFUND C2W project
- Promotion of interdisciplinary research
- Use of technological platforms
- Awareness and training on integrity, ethics, and Open Science
- Support for innovation and entrepreneurship in service of the region and society
- Reinforcing international collaborations and participation in European projects
- Increasing the number of researchers in all fields, including Social and Human Sciences (SHS)
- Reducing PhD dropout rates
- Enhancing international visibility and attractiveness of UMONS research (notably via the Research Institutes)

By reinforcing interdisciplinary research, supporting researcher's careers, and ensuring researcher well-being, UMONS continues to align its strategic priorities with the principles of HRS4R.

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

Since the last review, the operating environment of UMONS has remained largely stable, and there have been no major shifts in circumstances that would require a significant change in its HR strategy.

The deployment of the SEQUOIA system (UMONS SMQ see below) has enhanced UMONS' capacity to monitor progress on HRS4R goals.

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

UMONS has not initiated any major changes that would require a shift in its current HRS4R action plan. However, several strategic decisions are under development that may influence future priorities or require adjustments to the action plan.

- **End of rectoral term and potential for new priorities (2026)**

The current Rectoral Team's mandate ends in October 2026, which could result in a revision of institutional priorities. While the 2022-2026 strategy focuses on continuity, the arrival of a new rectoral team may introduce changes to the institutional action plan.

- **Ongoing integration of CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment)**

Since 2023, the UMONS has been actively engaged in the Research Assessment Agreement (CoARA) alongside other French-speaking Belgian universities. (see also part "Ethical and professional aspects")

UMONS contributes directly to this process through its leadership of Work Package 4 (WP4), which focuses on Managing dilemmas related to scientific integrity; Rethinking the concept of "authorship" and its potential abuses; Challenging the "publish or perish" culture.

CoARA is structured around five work packages (WPs), each led by a different university:

WP1: Defining new methods for research evaluation

WP2: Opening access to scientific publications

WP3: Organizing ethics committees, including rules and practices for research projects

WP4: Managing dilemmas related to integrity, authorship, and the "publish or perish" culture (led by UMONS)

WP5: Enhancing researcher support and talent development

- **Plans for sustained postdoctoral support beyond the COFUND C2W Project**

The MSCA COFUND C2W project (2021-2026) has proven to be an effective model for attracting and supporting researchers.

As the project approaches its conclusion in late 2026, UMONS aims to sustain this model beyond the project's end. The goal is to continue supporting international postdoctoral researchers by creating internal opportunities or seeking additional funding. This strategic decision will reinforce UMONS' capacity to attract and retain talented researchers, thereby supporting the HRS4R principles of mobility and career development.

- **Ongoing political discussions on higher education funding**

Any changes to the financing model at the regional or federal level could impact the availability of resources to support research, recruitment, and training.

To mitigate potential impacts, UMONS is actively monitoring these discussions and engaging with key stakeholders. This approach ensures that the university remains agile and able to adapt quickly to regulatory or financial changes. While these developments are beyond UMONS' direct control, they are being actively monitored to preserve institutional stability.

- **Strategic Development of the EUNICE European University Alliance**

UMONS is actively involved in the EUNICE European University Alliance, a collaborative initiative between ten European universities to create a new, multicentric institution. This initiative aims to promote the co-construction of a shared research and education space that will operate symbiotically with its founding universities.

The deployment of EUNICE supports UMONS' strategic development in the areas of:

- Education: Development of joint degrees and collaborative learning opportunities.
- Research and Innovation: Strengthened research collaborations between partner institutions.
- Sustainable Development: Promotion of initiatives that support the green transition and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This initiative could impact the HRS4R action plan by requiring new actions related to researcher mobility, the development of new joint degrees, and the alignment of research and career development opportunities across multiple institutions.

See action plan annexed.

Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles

The HR department is committed to ensuring open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment and selection processes in accordance with HRS4R standards, while taking into account the constraints of time and available resources.

To achieve this objective, several priority actions have been and will continue to be implemented:

1. **Job Posting and Dissemination**
- Publish job offers on recognized national and international platforms to maximize visibility.
- Structure job postings with clear evaluation criteria and inclusive language to promote diversity.

2. **Selection Process**
- Formalize each stage of the process (pre-selection, interviews, evaluations) to guarantee transparency and fairness.
- Establish balanced recruitment committees and train their members on unconscious bias.
- Provide systematic feedback to candidates to improve their experience.

3. **Digitalization and Tracking**
- Implement a centralized tool to manage applications, track deadlines, and collect key performance indicators (such as recruitment duration, diversity, and candidate satisfaction).

4. **Training and Support**
- Train recruiters and managers on OTM-R principles and best practices in selection processes.
- Offer personalized support to managers to ensure the quality and fairness of recruitment processes.

5. **Continuous Improvement**
- Short-term goals: Raise awareness among stakeholders, structure a recruitment guide, and identify priority tools.
- Medium-term goals: Generalize best practices, broaden the dissemination of job postings, and conduct regular audits to assess the effectiveness of processes.

This policy is based on a progressive approach, leveraging the strengths of the HR department (step-by-step structuring, positive user feedback) to mitigate existing constraints and ensure a pragmatic and effective implementation of OTM-R principles.

General overview of the expected overall implementation process of the action plan

To ensure the effective implementation of the Human Resources Strategy (HRS4R) and to facilitate efficient monitoring, a dedicated and sustainable Steering Committee was established in early 2011. Originally chaired by the Vice-Rector for Research, the 2021 evaluation recommendations prompted a change, and the committee is now chaired by the Rector. This adjustment reflects the university's commitment to strengthening the embedding of the process within its governance structures and ensuring greater involvement of the authorities. The Rector's Quality Advisor has also been added as a member of the Steering Committee to reinforce coordination and oversight.

Composition of the Steering Committee
The Steering Committee brings together a multidisciplinary team of stakeholders representing key institutional roles. Its composition is as follows:
- The Rector: Mr. Philippe Dubois (Chair)
- Vice-Rector for Research: Mr. Ruddy Wattiez
- Quality Advisor to the Rector: Mrs. Anne Heldenbergs
- The Administrator: Mr. Philippe Mettens
- Representative of the Scientific Body: Mr. Lucas Equeter
- Representative of the FRS-FNRS Researchers Committee: Mrs. Sara Vandycke
- Directors of Key Administrative Departments:
    - Human Resources (HRD): Mrs. Naomi Sabu
    - Research Administration (RAD): Mrs. Céline Thillou
    - Quality Management (QUAT): Mrs. Sabine Soetewey
    - International Relations (IRD): Mrs. Géraldine Berger

The Steering Committee is responsible for:
- Validating news actions to be included during action plan revisions;
- Supporting the HRS4R and OTM-R strategy;
- Overseeing implementation and ensuring alignment with institutional priorities and European standards.

On a regular basis, a task force ("*Bureau*") composed of a member from the Research Administration Department (RAD), the Human Resources Department (HRD), and the Quality Management Team (QUAT) ensures overall coordination and provides progress reports to the Steering Committee. This role involves tracking actions, collecting indicators, and providing regular progress updates.

UMONS has integrated quality management into its institutional governance strategy, following a continuous improvement logic. To support this approach, UMONS relies on the Quality Management Team ("*Service Etudes, Qualité, Indicateurs et Pilotage"*), which is responsible for strategic questions related to quality and the production of key performance indicators for university management.
The key objectives of this service are as follows:
- Development of an information system: Ensuring the quality and reliability of data, creating dashboards, and providing tools to support evidence-based decision-making.
- Procedure and process quality: Establishing clear measurement tools to track the effectiveness of procedures and actions based on predefined objectives.
- Evaluation and continuous improvement: Supporting and coordinating regular evaluations (including AEQES evaluations, rankings, and surveys) to promote shared experiences and continuous optimization.

The QUAT provides operational support for the HRS4R process.

How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress? *

UMONS has established a comprehensive and systematic process for monitoring the implementation of the HRS4R action plan. This process is supported by a combination of digital tools, structured governance bodies, and a clear feedback mechanism that ensures the continuous improvement of actions.

1. Digital Tracking System: SEQUOIA

To ensure real-time oversight of action plan implementation, UMONS utilizes SEQUOIA'app (*Système Évolutif pour la Qualité à l'UMONS : Optimisation, Intégration et Amélioration*), a centralized dynamic information system designed to monitor, track, and evaluate the progress of actions related to institutional strategies, including HRS4R.

While SEQUOIA'app was not developed solely for HRS4R, it fully meets the European Commission's recommendation to establish a strong and sustainable tracking system for institutional action plans. It provides a clear, accessible, and systematic method for monitoring the progress of actions, measuring their impact, and supporting data-driven decision-making.

How SEQUOIA'app works:
Centralized Information: All information on the implementation of HRS4R actions is collected, consolidated, and made accessible through SEQUOIA'app.
Data Collection and Analysis: The system allows users to input progress updates, track milestones, and collect performance indicators (KPIs) related to each action.
Reporting and Alerts: Regular reporting is facilitated through the system, with clear alerts and notifications.

2. Quality Management Commission (CGQ - *Commission de Gestion de la Qualité*)

The CGQ serves as an additional coordination body, ensuring communication between academic authorities and the administrative departments. Meetings of the CGQ are held monthly.
Its primary roles are to:
Prepare and articulate transversal actions required to implement university policies, including those related to HRS4R.
Propose improvements to organizational procedures and workflows, including the optimization of services and coordination across departments.
Facilitate collaboration: The majority of Steering Committee members are also members of the CGQ, ensuring consistency in decision-making and strategic alignment.

3. Data Collection and Monitoring Process

The implementation of the HRS4R action plan relies on a distributed approach to data collection and monitoring, where each department responsible for specific actions is actively involved in the process. Each action has a designated referent within the responsible department. These referents are identified in the SEQUOIA' app and responsible for tracking progress, inputting data, reporting issues. These issues can be discussed during CGQ meetings, where solutions are identified collaboratively with representatives from the administrative and academic sectors.

Key Benefits of UMONS' Approach

The approach adopted by UMONS ensures that the implementation and monitoring process is:
Efficient: With SEQUOIA'app, stakeholders have real-time access to status updates and indicators, reducing manual data collection.
Collaborative: Stakeholders from multiple departments are actively involved in the process, creating a coordinated effort.

Transparent: All data related to HRS4R actions is accessible to relevant stakeholders via SEQUOIA.
Sustainable: The use of SEQUOIA enables a sustainable system for tracking, reporting, and improving institutional actions, extending beyond the HRS4R strategy.

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

UMONS has adopted an integrative and participatory approach to ensure the involvement of the research community in the implementation of the HRS4R strategy. By embedding this process into existing governance structures and engaging the research community at multiple levels, UMONS guarantees broad participation and fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

The Steering Committee serves as the main decision-making body for the HRS4R action plan. Representatives of the scientific body (PSS) are members of the committee, ensuring that the perspectives of researchers are considered in strategic discussions.
Additionally, representatives from the academic and scientific bodies act as a link between the university's governing bodies and the research community, facilitating a two-way flow of information, feedback, and requests.
In addition to the Steering Committee, researchers are included in all relevant university councils, commissions, and working groups, ensuring their representation at all levels of institutional governance. This is done to provide them with an opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes.

UMONS also relies on ad hoc working groups to address specific aspects of the action plan or broader university strategies. For example:

- Sustainable Development Council ("*Conseil du développement durable*"): Researchers (and academics, administration and students) contribute to the planning and implementation of institutional development strategies.

- Gender and Diversity Working Group ("*Groupe Egalité des Chances*"): This group addresses gender equality and diversity issues within the whole university community.

This multilevel involvement structure ensures that the research community is actively engaged at every stage of the process.

To increase awareness and foster researcher engagement, the Research Administration Department (RAD) has presented the Euraxess/HR Excellence label and the new 2024-2027 HRS4R action plan during the November meetings of the Quality Management Commission (CGQ), allowing for greater visibility of the HRS4R process among university stakeholders.

UMONS recognizes that effective communication is critical to engage the research community in the HRS4R process. UMONS uses internal newsletters, the university website, social media, and publications such as the LUMONS magazine to keep the research community informed of HRS4R-related developments.
Links :
Via LUMONS (p45)
News UMONS : https://web.umons.ac.be/fr/vous-connaissez-le-label-hr-excellence-in-research/
LinkedIn Recherche et Innovation : UMONS Recherche, Innovation & Entrepreneuriat sur LinkedIn : 🔍 Connaissez-vous le label "HR Excellence in Research" et son rôle pour…

- **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**

UMONS has embedded HRS4R principles into its organizational strategy, HR policy, and governance mechanisms, ensuring alignment with the European Charter for Researchers. Supported by strong governance, the SEQUOIA tracking system, and a clear integration of HRS4R into institutional plans, UMONS guarantees sustainability, coherence, and long-term impact of its initiatives.

UMONS' HRS4R strategy is directly linked to the 2022-2026 rectoral policy statement, which defines the university's strategic priorities (https://www.calameo.com/read/000265915e1fdd46d45b0).

The alignment is reinforced through the Steering Committee for HRS4R, which includes the Rector, Vice-Rector for Research, and senior governance members. This high-level involvement illustrates the importance placed on HRS4R at the highest decision-making level. The Quality Management Commission (CGQ) further supports this alignment by facilitating coordination between key departments and administrative services.

Additionally, every action listed in the HRS4R Action Plan is linked to at least one objective of the rectoral policy or action plans of the Vice-Rectors. This is managed through the SEQUOIA centralized tracking system, which ensures that all actions contribute to broader institutional goals. (see an example in the screenshot joined in the additional document)

UMONS has implemented concrete operational procedures and HR policies that reflect the principles of HRS4R, particularly regarding the Open, Transparent, and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R) framework.

The OTM-R Charter is published on the UMONS website. Research positions are posted on EURAXESS, ensuring transparency, visibility, and accessibility for candidates.
The HR Excellence in Research logo is displayed on UMONS' website and communications, reinforcing its commitment to research excellence.
UMONS highlights its HRS4R label in applications for European and national funding, enhancing its competitiveness and demonstrating its commitment to researcher-friendly policies.
These measures ensure that recruitment, onboarding, and support processes align with European Commission standards, offering researchers a supportive, transparent, and fair environment.

- **How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented?**

UMONS has established a robust, collaborative, and data-driven methodology to oversee, measure, and ensure the successful implementation of its HRS4R action plan.

This approach is based on :
- Collaborative, Cross-Departmental Coordination

The implementation of the action plan relies on a transversal, cross-departmental approach that brings together multiple administrative services, including the Research Administration Department (RAD), the Human Resources Department (HRD), and the Quality Support Unit (QUAT). These departments work collaboratively under the oversight of the Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Rector.
Also by ensuring that researchers, administrative staff, and senior leadership are all represented in governance bodies, UMONS guarantees broad engagement from all levels of the institution.

- ▪ Monitoring and Reporting Through SEQUOIA'app

The SEQUOIA system plays a central role in tracking, monitoring, and reporting the progress of the HRS4R action plan.

- • Action Referents: Each action is assigned a designated referent responsible for tracking and reporting progress. The referents regularly input data into SEQUOIA on the status of their respective actions.
- • Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): For each action, specific KPIs are identified to measure the effectiveness of the implementation process. Examples include participation rates, completion milestones, and qualitative feedback from stakeholders.

Summary of Key Tools and Governance Structures

Pillar	Key Tool / Structure	Function
Tracking & Monitoring	SEQUOIA'app	Real-time progress tracking, indicator monitoring, KPI tracking, issue escalation, and dashboards.
Governance & Coordination	Steering Committee	Strategic oversight, decision-making, and high-level supervision of the HRS4R implementation.
Feedback & Improvement	Quality Management Commission (CGQ)	Facilitates coordination between university authorities and administrative departments, ensuring timely intervention.
Data Collection	Action Referents	Designated individuals responsible for collecting and inputting progress data into SEQUOIA.

- • **How are you monitoring progress (timeline)? ***

See 2nd question "How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress" and 5th question "How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented"

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

See 2nd question "How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress" and 5th question "How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented"

RMQ | Promotion and dissemination of the HRS4R policy

UMONS is committed to the promotion and dissemination of the HRS4R policy, both internally and externally, especially within the framework of the EUNICE European University Alliance. This commitment aims to reinforce the university's role as a proactive and engaged actor in the European Research Area (ERA).

As a founding member of EUNICE, UMONS actively supports the dissemination of the HRS4R strategy across the network. EUNICE partners are at different stages of HRS4R implementation:

- • Experienced Partners: Institutions like UMONS (2011), the University of Cantabria (2020), and the University of Vaasa (2014) have already obtained the HRS4R seal.
- • Emerging Partners: Other institutions within EUNICE are in the process of developing their HRS4R strategic plans or beginning to implement concrete measures.

UMONS plays a central role in this collaborative process by sharing best practices, providing support and mentorship and developing shared actions: Together with other EUNICE members, UMONS works to propose and co-implement common actions that can jointly elevate the excellence of all partner universities.

A comprehensive report on this collaborative effort, including UMONS' contributions, is available in the following deliverable: https://eunice-university.eu/research/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/09/REUNICE_WP4_D4.1_FINAL_compressed.pdf