

## TEMPLATE 4: ACTION PLAN

Case number: **2022RO782646**

Name Organisation under review: Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara (West University of Timișoara)

Organisation's contact details: Bd. Vasile Pârvan no. 4, 300223, Timișoara, Timiș, Romania

**SUBMISSION DATE:** MAY 10, 2023

### 1. ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Please provide a limited number of key figures for your organisation. Figures marked \* are compulsory.

<b>STAFF &amp; STUDENTS</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research	1292
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)	44
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation)	3
Of whom are women	342?
Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor.	25
Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level	18
Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with doctoral level	645
Total number of students (if relevant)	15483
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)	975
<b>RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)</b>	<b>€</b>
Total annual organisational budget	57.511.468
Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)	882.642
Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)	1.536.279
Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research	340.841
<b>ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE (a very brief description of your organisation, max. 100 words)</b>	
<p>The West University of Timișoara is a comprehensive higher education institution. It is the largest higher education and research center in Western Romania. WUT has 11 faculties and a Teacher Training Department, offering study programmes at Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Levels. Some bachelor and master programmes (a few) are offered in English, French or German. The West University of Timișoara coordinates or partners in multiple national and international research projects implemented with the support of our research centers. The university's strong focus on quality in an increasingly competitive and globalized academic world is acknowledged in international rankings worldwide.</p>	

## 2. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT PRACTICE:

Please provide an overview of the organisation in terms of the current strengths and weaknesses of the current practice under the four thematic headings of the Charter and Code at your organization.

Thematic heading of the Charter and Code	STRENGTHS and WEAKNESSES
Ethical and professional aspects	<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All graduate students (master and PhD students) have a compulsory course on ethics / research ethics</li> <li>• The West University has an Institutional Review Board that ensures that all conducted research meet appropriate ethical standards as well as GDPR standards               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All theses, dissertations, and bachelor papers are screened for plagiarism under strict regulations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In line with the University Charter and the Code of Ethics and Deontology no form of discrimination is allowed or encouraged at UVT.</li> <li>• There are strong accountability mechanisms as each expenditure related to a grant is subject to UVT's Finance-Accounting Department checking whether it complies with national legislation. Periodic and final project implementation reports (technical and financial), alongside financial audits (internal or external), are submitted to the funding authority, as required by each funding contract.</li> <li>• The university management is preoccupied with strengthening the professional and ethical aspects through a reforming vision and an international outlook.</li> <li>• The existence of professional connections with individuals or international institutions. Our membership in networks like CERN has brought us major advantages.</li> <li>• Improving the research environment by implementing a performance evaluation system.</li> <li>• The support provided by the university through the organization of mentoring programs, including mentoring for innovative entrepreneurship facilitating technology and knowledge transfer.</li> </ul> <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, few international grant applications for international competition can highlight a limited professional responsibility regarding research activity compared with the top 5 universities from Romania.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High conservatism within some academic departments in UVT to attract academic and research staff from outside UVT (for high-level positions in academic or research).</li> <li>• The possible gap between research areas from the university and the development needs in scientific research.</li> <li>• Gap between formal documents and managerial practices in faculties and departments.</li> <li>• In some areas of research, a low level of know-how in entrepreneurship and collaborations with the socioeconomic environment (and for the area of technology transfer) may highlight a limited interest in commitment to society.</li> <li>• In general, few funding applications are submitted in research competitions can highlight a low level of ability to write the proposal applications or a small interest for the attract of the resources for the research. This situation can be interpreted as a low level of professional responsibility in the organization.</li> <li>• Many of the staff whose work also has a research character are overburdened with administrative tasks that reduce their time dedicated to research.</li> </ul>
Recruitment and selection	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The university management is preoccupied with strengthening the professional and ethical aspects through a reforming vision and an international outlook.</li> <li>• The existence of professional connections with individuals or international institutions.</li> <li>• Offering a dynamic and diverse academic environment with a variety of educational options and opportunities for professional development through the existence of a diverse and high-performing academic portfolio</li> <li>• The recruitment and selection process within the university's research bodies has been improved by the opening of the ICAM research centre focused on STEM and applied research potential for improved innovation performance..</li> <li>• Improving the research environment by implementing a performance evaluation system.</li> <li>• To stimulate the recruitment process of researchers, it is policy to allow supplementation of income through the surplus from winning grants.</li> <li>• The presence of Internal researchers interested in research and innovation activities creates a vibrant and collaborative research environment that fosters knowledge-sharing, creativity, and innovation.</li> </ul>

- The staff selected by the university must have high scientific expertise in smart specialization areas, bringing a high potential for innovation, technology, and knowledge transfer.
- Another factor considered in the recruitment process is the previous experience accumulated within the university in the entrepreneurial sphere through projects intended for entrepreneurial students and staff, respectively grants in partnership with economic actors.
- Offering a dynamic and diverse academic environment with a variety of educational options and opportunities for professional development through the existence of a diverse and high-performing academic portfolio
- The attractiveness offered by the research infrastructure within the ICAM research centre is an advantage for innovation and cooperation within the social and economic environments.
- Our recruitment efforts are enhanced by the reputation of the university and its brand among researchers and teaching staff.
- Absorption of Ph.D. students with successfully completed theses due to the many number of Ph.D. supervisors who can give their students more attention and help.
- Open innovation know-how gathered in the Living Lab system.
- Intellectual Property strategy to safeguard the management of IP generated from research and innovation activities performed by University staff.
- A dedicated programme for incentivizing innovation and technology transfer adopted in February 2023 – U InnoVaTe.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Low awareness among several teaching staff of the need to change academic practice, especially adapting and encouraging the achievement of scientific results with international relevance.
- High conservatism within some academic departments in UVT to attract academic and research staff from outside UVT (for high-level positions in academic or research).
- A low number of researchers or teaching staff in established fundamental research fields such as chemistry, biology, physics, or mathematics.
- The low relevance of the incentives offered for development and innovation activities compared to the incentives for a professional career based on the publication of scientific articles.
- A human resources policy focused on promoting and increasing the loyalty of departmental members and less on hiring competitive human resources from outside the institution.
- The undersizing of human resources in scientific fields with research potential in the STEM area, such as biology and chemistry.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A low motivation or ability to attract funds due to a low number of research grant applications submitted by the UVT staff.</li> <li>• The lack of interest among certain scientific fields' personnel towards developing research skills, citing the priority of teaching activities</li> <li>• Low salaries (less competitive salaries) for the European market, particularly for the entry-level positions and for highly performant researchers.</li> <li>• Lack of transdisciplinary teams that could investigate complex issues, with a higher impact at the economic and/or social level.</li> </ul>
Working conditions	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing the necessary conditions for research studies and publication in high-impact journals (Q1-Q2)</li> <li>• Offering a dynamic and diverse academic environment with a variety of educational options and opportunities for professional development by the existence of a diverse and high-performing academic portfolio</li> <li>• The recruitment and selection process within the university's research bodies has seen an improvement with the opening of the ICAM research centre with a wide area of coverage in STEM.</li> <li>• Access to specialized literature and documentation that provide a more stimulating and attractive work environment, which can increase professional satisfaction.</li> <li>• The existence of strategic partners of UVT from the socio-economic environment that create opportunities for collaborative research projects, access to industry expertise, and knowledge-sharing with industry partners.</li> <li>• A competitive research infrastructure, particularly in ICAM, - an advantage for innovation and cooperation with the socio-economic environment.</li> <li>• The existence of supportive departments (DCSCU, SupportTM, DAIP, CTT-UVT) that help researchers at UVT, help researchers to focus on their core research activities, improving their efficiency and productivity.</li> <li>• A competitive research infrastructure, particularly in ICAM, that attract top-level researchers and students, promote knowledge-sharing and technology transfer.</li> </ul> <p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gap between formal documents and managerial practices in faculties and departments.</li> <li>• Fields of research generate a limited impact regarding the transfer of knowledge (a lot of programmes in humanistic and social fields and few study programs in STEM).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal research facility development (very competitive in the area of environmental sciences, less competitive in other fields). Lack of technicians (personnel with expertise in using such equipments).</li> </ul>
<p>Training and development</p>	<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curricula for the preparation of doctoral students have been recently updated, with a clearer description of the entire process of doctoral training in accordance with performance indicators and criteria.</li> <li>• The Doctoral Studies Plan is correlated with the quality criteria imposed by national research standards.</li> <li>• Doctoral students take part in activities related to personal development as webinars/workshops (efficient learning development skills, socio-emotional development skills, career planning and employability skills) or as individual counselling sessions (educational and vocational counselling, career counselling, personal improvement counselling). These activities are provided by the Career Planning and Development Center.</li> <li>• Doctoral schools in cooperation with research centres and departments provide doctoral students with yearly entrepreneurship workshops.</li> <li>• Monitoring and mentoring are clearly defined by regulations regarding PhD students and postdoctoral researchers.</li> <li>• UVT provides early career researchers with motivating packages: START GRANT facilitates the integration of human resource among teaching and/or research staff in the early stages of the career, DEVELOP GRANT offers support for the professional development of researchers and staff who are not in their first year of activity at UVT.</li> <li>• Dedicated strategic action on Open Governance and Training of UVT research community in the area of innovation, entrepreneurship and technology and knowledge transfer, via the U InnoVaTe Programme.</li> <li>• Innovation and Entrepreneurship Capacity has been built based on the strategic partnership with the European Institute for Innovation &amp; Technology during the INNOUNITA project, a pilot in the EIT HEI Initiative calls.</li> </ul> <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the activity of Ph.D. students and postdoctoral researchers is clearly regulated and their training follows a clearly defined path, which meets all necessary research quality criteria, the monitoring of the activity of early career researchers – research or teaching assistants, who are Ph.D. students or doctors, needs improvement:</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The job description file of research assistants does not currently reflect their status as early career researchers (e.g., the indicators and criteria should be distinct from those related to the doctoral training program, in the case of Ph.D. students, from the postdoctoral program, for postdoctoral researchers, or from teaching staff). The job description file should explicitly mention indicators meant at increasing individual performance with institutional relevance (mobilities, study/research grants etc.)</li> <li>• Monitoring and mentoring for early career researchers (assistants who are no longer PhD students or postdoctoral researchers) is not clearly defined. Research centres or departments in UVT are advised to include mentoring activities for senior staff (one senior staff member can monitor max. 3 early career researchers/assistants). This mentoring and monitoring should result in yearly reports that can assess the progress of the early career researcher and suggest improvements, if necessary.</li> <li>• Trainers' training is not emphasized enough. While the Academic Development Centre offers specific counselling for academic staff (especially teaching staff), more emphasis needs to be put on the trainers' training at the level of the doctoral schools. Suggestions of improvement include biannual informative sessions, best practice examples exchanges, which should have an inter-transdisciplinary character and should be directed at least at newly affiliated doctoral supervisors.</li> <li>• Researchers' training could be improved. Not enough upskilling courses for researchers. Likewise, more training is needed for developing mentorship skills with regard to Ph.D. and postdocs.</li> </ul>
--	---

### 3. ACTIONS

The Action Plan and HRS4R strategy must be published on an easily accessible location of the organisation's website.

Please provide the web link to the organisation's HR Strategy dedicated webpage(s):

\*URL: <https://www.uvt.ro/cercetare/strategie-si-impact/hrs4r/>

Please fill in a sum up list of all individual actions to be undertaken in your organisation's HRS4R to address the weaknesses or strengths identified in the Gap-Analysis:

<b>Proposed ACTIONS</b>	<b>GAP Principle(s)</b>	<b>Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)</b>	<b>Responsible Unit</b>	<b>Indicator(s) / Target(s)</b>
<i>Free text -100 words max</i>	<i>Retrieved from the GAP Analysis</i>			
1. Implementing systematic measures to facilitate outreach and communication of the scientific results to a wider (general) audience, both through digital media channels and via social media.	1, 8, 9	2024, yearly	Vice-rector for research  UVT research support units	At least six press releases / interviews / scientific news for the general public annually.
2. Introducing some CoARA principles (plurality of research outcomes), stimulating diversity of inputs (i.e., teaching, administration) into the current assessment system of academic / research staff.	11	2024, yearly	Vice-rector for academic strategy  Vice-rector for research  Vice-rector for finance and human resources	Yearly individual assessments implemented
3. Updating internal recruitment and selection methodology to align with the OTM-R policy, including transparency issues (15), gender balance (14, and 27), non-discrimination (10, and 17), and recognition (18, and 19). The procedure as well as subsequent application forms and templates (i.e., for EURAXESS) will be made available both in Romanian and English, to facilitate international recruitment and use of European/ international online platforms	10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, and 27	2024, Spring semester	Vice-rector for academic strategy  Vice-rector for research  Vice-rector for finance and human resources	An updated Recruitment and Section Methodology  A portfolio of documents (i.e., templates, forms)
4. Continuous professional development courses will be available for faculty members as well as for early-stage researchers, including a training aspect on GDPR issues	7, 38	2024, yearly	Institutional GDPR Responsible  Counselling Centre personnel (Head of Unit)	At least 20 young researchers (beneficiaries) every year
5. Extending the beneficiaries of training sessions on managerial skills (financial, grant writing, acquisitions, IPR and technology transfer)	6, 37	2024, Spring semester	Vice-rector for research	At least 20 young researchers (beneficiaries) every year

6. Development of a Counselling Center for Researchers that will provide extensive services for professional development, research training, and continuous development. Young researchers (early-stage researchers) will also benefit from supervision	36, 38, 39, 40	The initiation of the Counselling Centre – 2023  Yearly activities, starting with the 2023-2024 academic year	Counselling Centre personnel (Head of Unit)  Vice-rector for research	1 specialized center  At least 50 Ph.D. / academic year students and postdoc researchers per year benefiting from the counselling services At least 20 researchers /academic year (i.e., mid, senior) that benefit from counseling sessions
7. Introducing mentoring and coaching services for young researcher, in line with ERA Talent and HRS4R principles.	40	The Counselling Centre for Researchers  Yearly, starting from the 2023-2024 academic year	Counselling Centre personnel (Head of Unit)  Head of Doctoral Schools	A minimum of 20 recipients of mentoring / coaching sessions during an academic year

The establishment of an Open Recruitment Policy is a key element in the HRS4R strategy. Please also indicate how your organization will use the Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Toolkit and how you intend to implement/are implementing the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment. Although there may be some overlap with a range of actions listed above, please provide a short commentary demonstrating this implementation. If the case, please make the link between the OTM-R checklist and the overall action plan.

Overall, as a global evaluation of the OTM-R principles in UVT, we can say that are significant advancements in R (Merit-based), and some improvements needed in O (open) and T (transparent) part. Partly, this is a consequence of the existing national regulations in terms of recruitment of researchers and academic staff that is very specific (i.e., compulsory locations where to advertise the vacant positions, the structure / composition of the selection committee, standard performance tasks for a given position etc.). Despite such rigid steps, the university still has enough room to improve the process in several ways such as: (i) paying more attention to gender balance in nominating the persons in the selection committee; (ii) paying more attention to the diversity and past achievements of these people; (iii) being more transparent and providing more details when describing the open position (informing potential candidates on career development perspectives); (iv) putting more efforts in attracting candidates from abroad; (v) using e-recruitment tools to a higher extent; (vi) providing feedback (not only grades) for all candidates who applied for that specific position, regardless whether they have been selected or rejected, etc

However, there are some national restrictions in applying all OTM-R rules. For instance, it is not legally possible to openly try to attract people from underrepresented groups advertise, as this is seen as a departure from non-discriminatory and meritocratic criteria.

In providing an updated methodology for recruiting and selecting academic staff (including researchers) in line with the Open, Transparent, and Merit-Based Recruitment Toolkit, we will both pay more attention in extending some of the existing measures (i.e., EURAXESS advertisement is done when this is a compulsory requirement such as vacant positions in grants, but not for other positions) (partly due to a very low number of English language programs), and we will implement specific aspects such as translating the job vacancy related documents in English, introducing the feedback mechanism for the appointment / announcing results phase, etc.

If your organization already has a recruitment strategy that implements the principles of Open, Transparent, and Merit-Based Recruitment, please provide the web link where this strategy can be found on your organisation's website:

URL: <https://www.uvt.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Anexa-2.-Metodologia-privind-org.-concururilor-de-ocupare-a-posturilor-did-si-de-cercetare-vacante-din-UVT.pdf>

The above link includes the current methodology in recruiting candidates for open positions (in Romanian language). It is partially compliant with the OTM-R principles, as there is room for improvement particularly in regard to O(open) and T (transparent) features.

#### 4. IMPLEMENTATION

General overview of the expected implementation process:

(free text, 1000 words maximum)

In the subsequent HRS4R steps, we will focus on implementing the action plan, in its approved form. The implementation process will be supervised by a steering committee that includes the rector, three vice-rectors (academic strategy; research; financial and human resources), the director of the doctoral schools, as well as several nominated experts from the university governance board (senior researchers with experience in supervising Ph.D. students, the head of human resources department; the head of research support unit at the university level, and, potentially, the head of the emerging counselling centre dedicate to researchers (including Ph.Ds, as early-stage researchers).

Each member of the steering committee will be responsible for the implementation of at least one planned action. A particular focus will be put on consolidating a culture in line with open, transparent, and merit-based principles as solely administrative checklists most likely will not suffice for a successful implementation of the HRS4R.

In the following 24 months of the implementation of the action plan we will take actions such as:

- Ensuring proper information of the ongoing processes and the HRS4R process, via periodic announcements sent to the UVT community via email, periodic meetings for debating the most sensitive issues; a dedicated webpage to access in-depth information.
- Each member of the steering committee could identify key actors from responsible units (i.e., IPR Office Coordinator, Acquisition Coordinator etc.) to involve them in the process, in a similar manner that was used for the current proposal, via working groups or individual inputs.
- Internal and external communication on actions, events and progress will be monitored and communicated, to have an open view on the work advancement/progress.
- The steering committee will monitor the progress during regular meetings (at least one per quarter). The governance bodies will be consulted when needed.
- Researchers and teaching staff (all teaching staff from UVT have research duties as well) will be involved in the process, particularly regarding things that are highly sensitive for them such as the research assessment system (when looking at CoARA-related changes), or in the case of the OTM-R policy (methodology to recruit and select new employees).

- If required, additional actions or slight changes in the action plan could be considered, if such adjustments are meant to strengthen the process of implementing the HRS4R process in UVT.

Make sure you also cover all the aspects highlighted in the checklist below, which you will need to describe in detail:

Checklist	*Detailed description and duly justification
How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress?	They will have regular meetings (at least one per quarter) in which they will monitor the progress of the process. For each action included in the implementation plan, there will be a few predefined milestones based upon an agreed calendar between the steering committee and the task force that will implement the specific action.
How do you intend to involve the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?	Some of the expected measures do not require too much persuading efforts for involvement, because they are seen as high-stake issues (i.e., the research assessment system that evaluates their annual results; recruitment and selection procedure/career developments). For other less high-stake aspects (i.e., continuous professional development, personal development, counselling), we will involve the research community in selecting the themes/topics of these courses, and we will monitor the satisfaction of beneficiaries of such services.
How do you proceed with the alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? Make sure the HRS4R is recognized in the organisation’s research strategy, as the overarching HR policy.	All upcoming regulations and methodologies need to be harmonized with the 40 principles behind HRS4R. As many internal documents needs to be update annually, there are significant chances that all organizational policies will be aligned with the HRS4R. For those few cases where an update in the regulations is not done annually, the steering committee will decide an appropriate adjustment, particularly where substantial contradictions (if any) are found with the HRS4R principles.
How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented?	UVT has not only signed a declaration of commitment to the European Charter or Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment Letter, showing a strong desire to adhere to the HRS4R principles, but has also taken active steps (i.e., securing resources, sharing best practices) in advance to the implementation step. Details are provided below, in the additional remarks section.
How will you monitor progress (timeline)?	Periodic assessment of the progress will be done by the Steering Committee, Potential delays will be identified, if the case, and mitigating / corrective measures will be taken. As already pointed out specific members from the Steering Committee will take the responsibility of leading a specific task (action) and assembling an appropriate

	task force to implement the specific actions. A briefly yearly report of the progress status will be considered, along with recommending actions to overcome potential barriers / delays.
How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?	In the case of most indicators will be easy to measure the progress as there are no current actions in the specific regards (i.e., no counseling center for researchers, no mentoring or coaching services, no institutional systematic approach for research outreach etc.). In other cases, we will rely on external peer-review, for instance, when comparing the current version of the recruitment process with the expected updated version that includes all OTM-R principles, within the national legislation limits.

Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process:

Very recently, UVT has managed to secure an amount of 3.7 million RON (approximately 750.000 euro) to implement ERA TALENT actions (i.e., counseling researchers, mentoring young researchers, boosting the interoperability of careers relevant to research). All these services align with many of the measures included in the action plan. Therefore, UVT has not only set the appropriate objectives but also managed to secure important resources (human, logistic) to implement the actions included in the plan. This financed project will last for three years, covering the entire expected period set for implementing the action plan.

Likewise, UVT is a founding member of a European alliance of universities, UNITA. This alliance includes universities which has successfully implemented the process and managed to receive the appropriate recognition by receiving the HR Excellence in Research certificate. Therefore, we will benefit from an external review / supervision from those universities within the alliance that demonstrated a successful completion of the roadmap towards receiving the formal recognition that they are fully compatible with all 40 principles behind the HRS4R.