



**“HR Excellence in Research”:
HR Strategy and Action Plan for
Researchers**

(approved by the Board of Governors 4/4/2014 – acknowledged by the
European Commission the right to use the HR Excellence in Research logo
16/5/2014)



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

SUMMARY

As a caring and concerned employer Ghent University promotes a talent-driven HR policy as a fertile ground for excellent research and education in a global world. Constantly seeking to improve and guarantee the quality of researchers' careers, Ghent University presents this **strategy and action plan implementing the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers**.

The plan's focus is on the effort and commitment to make **significant progress** in **academic human resource management** in compliance with the European Charter and Code.

The target group in the action plan constitutes **all academic staff** (doctoral researchers, postdoctoral staff, other scientific staff, professorial staff). Special attention is given to early career researchers with unstable employment prospects. Young researchers are recognised and valued by Ghent University as an essential part of the institution's human resources. They are the key to developing and delivering world-class research.

With this HR strategy and action plan Ghent University sets out the **priorities** in its academic HR management for the next 4 years (2014-2017) and commits itself to an internal self-evaluation (2016) and external review (2018).

EUROPEAN CONTEXT

In 2005 the European Commission published the **European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers**. The Charter and Code set out general principles on the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers and their employers.

The purpose of the Charter and Code is to push for an excellent human resources management and to make research careers more attractive in order to enhance the development of a dynamic European research society and an open labour market for researchers.

Organisations demonstrating their practical commitment to the principles in the Charter and Code gain the European Commission's **HR Excellence in Research logo**.

The concrete implementation of the Charter & Code by research institutions will render them more attractive to researchers looking for a new employer or looking for a host for their research project. The HR Excellence in Research logo will identify the institutions and organisations as providers and supporters of a stimulating and favourable working environment for excellent researchers.

The "**HR Strategy for Researchers**", started in 2008, supports research institutions and funding organisations in the implementation of the Charter & Code in their policies and practices.

The HR strategy for researchers contains **five steps** to be followed:

1. The university undertakes an **internal gap analysis**, comparing current practices and regulations with the general principles of the European Charter and Code and involving relevant stakeholders.
2. The university prepares an **HR action plan**: On the basis of this exploratory phase, an institutional HR strategy is drawn up focusing in particular on actions that will continue to improve the careers of researchers. After university board approval, this HR policy and action plan are submitted to the European Commission and published on the university website.
3. The European Commission acknowledges the HR action plan: Provided the plan meets the EC requirements, the university is granted the permission to adopt the **HR Excellence in Research logo** on all of its relevant communication as an acknowledgement of solid HR policies.
4. The university commits itself to an **internal self-evaluation after two years**.
5. The university commits itself to an **external review** four years after being awarded the logo.

The HR strategy for researchers is a voluntary, progress-oriented and peer-learning system.

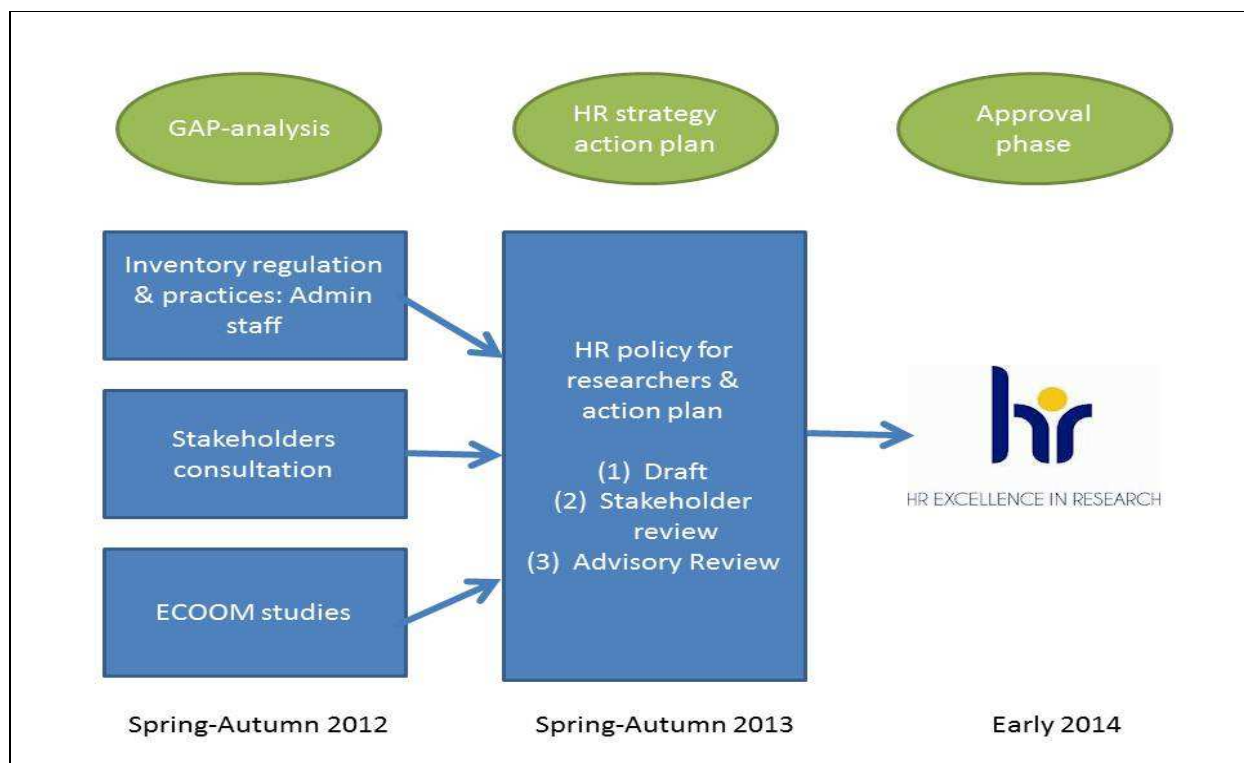
GHENT UNIVERSITY APPROACH

In 2006 Ghent University was the **first Flemish university** to sign the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

In the spring of 2012 the management at Ghent University decided to launch the HR strategy for researchers (HRS4R).

At Ghent University the Department of Personnel and Organisation and the Research Department shared the responsibility in preparing the HR strategy for researchers.

A plan was drawn up, as illustrated below, to maximize the quality of information gathered in this process and to guarantee a wide basis of support in establishing this strategy:



In the process of identifying current national regulations and university policies and practices, of evaluating past HR initiatives and their effectiveness, and of incorporating the researchers' own perspectives, three sources of information were selected to underpin this HR strategy:

- (1) Administrative staff made an **inventory of all current national legislation and institutional regulations**.

In a later phase, these were used to identify whether proposed changes could be tackled at institutional level or not, and to identify the legislative areas where change was most necessary. The inventory of regulations at national level was prepared by the Flemish Department of Economics, Science and Innovation. In the course of preparing this plan, a

number of developments at Flemish government level were given shape in a new Collective Labour Agreement. This agreement introduces a number of new commitments by the government and commitments by the universities, with regard to supporting researchers' careers.¹

Legislation and institutional procedures were complemented with Ghent University's strategic policy documents, e.g. the university's strategic plan, strategic research plan.

(2) **Bottom-up approach:** A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the **focus groups** (see the appendix for the full list of participants), in line with Ghent University's model of participation at all management levels.

In response to an open call for participation amongst the research community and amongst members of the University Research Council, a first plenary meeting was held (13 June 2012) in order to identify the major obstacles in researchers' careers. This working group was balanced in terms of gender, discipline and career stage (PhD researcher to full professor), and included a representation of researchers with special needs and representatives from the Diversity and Gender Policy Unit. In the months following the plenary meeting, 4 focus group meetings composed of 10-15 members held open discussions on the four areas of the European Charter and Code. Each of these were facilitated by a mediator; extensive notes were taken on flipcharts, starting with a SWOT analysis per theme.

(3) **Survey data** from the Flemish Centre for R&D Monitoring ECOOM, whose unit on researchers' careers is based at Ghent University, were consulted in order to complement the ideas and proposals that came out of the focus group meetings.

Two Surveys of Junior Researchers (2008; 2013), one Survey of Senior Researchers (2010), the Belgian Careers of Doctorate Holders' survey (2010) and the Exit Survey for Academic Staff (2009-2012) were used to gather statistical data on career opportunities, mobility issues, recruitment practices, etc.²

Subsequently, the Department of Personnel and Organisation and the Research Department compiled this extensive range of information into a draft **HR strategy and action plan**, which was submitted for a second round of consultation to the wide group of stakeholders.

Although many of the national and institutional regulations already follow the principles outlined in this charter and code of conduct, an evaluation of the implementation of these regulations and an investigation into actual practices identified the need to continue improving conditions for

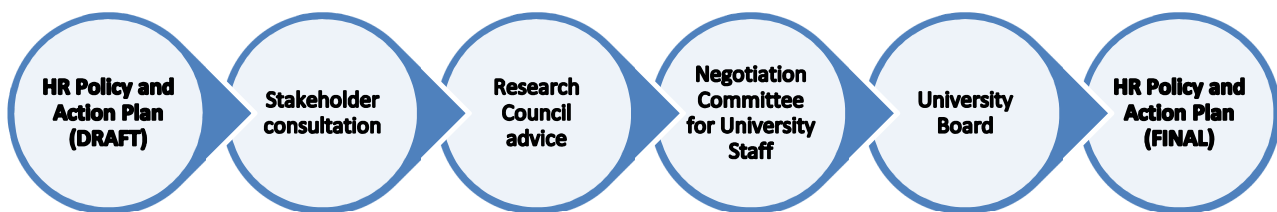
¹ https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/cao_IV.pdf

² Ervaringen van onderzoekers die aan een Vlaamse universiteit hebben gewerkt: resultaten van de Exit-survey aan de KULeuven, UA, UGent, UHasselt en VUB. Gent, België: HR2; te Kaat, A., Baute, S., Derycke, H., Vandevelde, K., Levecque, K., & Van Rossem, R. (2013). *Mobiliteit in de onderzoekscarrière. Vlaams Indicatorenboek 2013*. Expertisecentrum O&O Monitoring; Vandevelde, K., Debacker, N., Persijn, I., Levecque, K., & Van Rossem, R. (2013). *Onderzoekscarrières in Vlaanderen. Vlaams Indicatorenboek 2013*. Expertisecentrum O&O Monitoring.; Leyman, A., Vandevelde, K., Van Rossem, R. & Groenvynck H. (2011). *Senior onderzoekers aan het woord. Resultaten van de 'Survey of Senior Researchers' aan de Vlaamse universiteiten*. Gent: HR2.

researchers, as well as a need to 'frame' various existing initiatives such as the Doctoral Schools training programme, the academic leadership initiative, technology transfer initiatives, publication policy, introduction of new academic staff etc. under the same principles of the Charter.

In order to broaden the university-wide support for this plan, the HR strategy and action plan followed a process of broader consultation with advisory councils and decision making bodies within the institution, as outlined below:

Advisory review of HR strategy and action plan within Ghent University



Throughout this process, the HR strategy and action plan continued to be finetuned and was eventually endorsed by the University Board of Governors on 4 April 2014.

Next, it was submitted to the European Commission for acknowledgement by means of awarding the **HR Excellence in Research logo** to Ghent University.

GHENT UNIVERSITY AT A GLANCE

Ghent University is a research-intensive university in the Flemish part of Belgium. It is one of the major universities in the Dutch-speaking region of Europe. Formerly a state university, it distinguishes itself as a **socially committed and pluralistic university in a broad international perspective**. Ghent University's motto "Dare to think" underpins the importance of critical and creative reflection in the day-to-day work of all of its staff.

It has 38.000 students (including 3.800 foreign students) and **about 6.100 academic staff members** (8.500 including all staff), of which:

- 3.570 PhD researchers
- 1.145 postdoctoral researchers
- 1.385 professors (1185 professorial staff members + 200 visiting professors)

Up to 15 % of the academic staff is of foreign nationality (mostly PhD and postdoctoral researchers).

Ghent University is a fully-fledged university with **a broad range of scientific disciplines** spread across 130 faculty departments in 11 faculties (Arts and Philosophy, Law, Sciences, Medicine and Health Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, Economics and Business Administration, Veterinary Medicine, Psychology and Educational Sciences, Political and Social Sciences, Bioscience Engineering, Pharmaceutical Sciences).

In its **strategic research policy plan 2012-2016** Ghent University has published its commitment to ensure an attractive HR management policy for researchers. Ghent University wants to strengthen its position as an attractive employer for researchers, focusing on a balanced staff environment. In this type of environment, experienced researchers can consolidate their position, potential top researchers can bloom and new researchers can be appropriately guided. An HR policy that finds a balance in a highly competitive context between the stimulation of research mobility on the one hand (dare to send researchers out) and the creation of loyalty on the other (know how to keep researchers) is a mission that requires personal and structural efforts at all levels. Researchers must have access at all levels to further training and career guidance to increase their employability within and beyond Ghent University. Criteria for selection and promotion must be challenging and stimulating, within a differentiated evaluation system. As the gender balance in research careers has not improved over recent years, Ghent University is also developing an action plan to remove structural barriers which affect many researchers in their career development, but may affect women more often than men.

HR STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

The strategy and action plan are structured along five areas:

- 1. Recruitment and evaluation**
- 2. Career prospects**
- 3. Labour conditions and social security**
- 4. Training and development**
- 5. Ethical and professional aspects**

Needless to say, many of the items listed under one of these headings also relate to the principles outlined under others, as befits a coherent strategy. Each of these headings consists of general principles, existing and ongoing actions and proposed new actions.

1. RECRUITMENT AND EVALUATION

OPEN RECRUITMENT

Ghent University wants to continue to attract the best researcher for every position, by means of a recruitment process which is fair, straightforward and transparent. As in many universities on the European continent, internal recruitment traditions – assistant staff following in the footsteps of their professor – have been replaced by open recruitment policies resulting in far more staff mobility. Departments and faculties operate autonomously in this process but many feel the need for support in adopting these open recruitment principles in their internal processes (e.g. formal guidelines in application procedure, selection). Researchers' recruitment requires time and expertise if it is to be done adequately.

The GAP analysis showed that at the level of PhD admission, administrative procedures would benefit from better external communication and a more efficient administrative workflow. At the level of senior researchers and professors, the admission procedures are clear and the faculties set their own field-specific quality standards. The researchers, the faculties and the university would however benefit from central recruitment guidelines in order to avoid the risk that researchers' quality assessment may be limited to a bibliometric assessment of research performance.

ACTION: Quality admission procedure and supervision process for all PhD researchers

Admission procedures for foreign PhD researchers have long been cumbersome and inefficient. Steps have been taken over the last number of years to facilitate their admission. The introduction of the "PhD wizard", an on-line registration tool, has channelled the admission workflow for one substantial group of foreign PhD researchers, those who already have a Ghent University supervisor as well as research funding. Their time to admission has been reduced from a number of months to a few weeks or even less.

In addition to this improvement in administrative processes Ghent University also intends to introduce better quality processes in the recruitment phase, especially in the case of recruiting PhD candidates from abroad, and in the process of supervision. A more thorough screening of interested PhD candidates may help to attract top talent to the university as well as exclude candidates who may meet the formal requirements but not the expected knowledge, attributes or language skills. This institution-wide initiative will also reduce the responsibility of individual supervisors currently in charge of this quality screening without clear guidelines. Also in taking on their role as responsible supervisors, professors will benefit from intercultural training, leadership training and coaching skills. In order to introduce these elements of recruitment and supervision in the process, Ghent University is currently investigating good practices that are feasible and easy to implement. This will result in good practice guidelines for the recruitment and supervision of PhD researchers.

Target 1: Ghent University has the necessary processes in place to guarantee quality screening in the application procedure for all foreign PhD researchers and to introduce better quality processes in supervision for all PhD researchers.

ACTION: Make better use of international recruitment channels and portals (e.g. Euraxess) for posting all academic vacancies

Ghent University commits itself to an open and transparent recruitment and therefore invests in giving maximal international exposure to its vacancies. To this purpose, the university signed the Declaration of Commitment by the members of the Euraxess Service Network in 2012. Many departments already make use of Euraxess to post their academic vacancies, but this depends on their own initiative. Also the university's central services intend to further implement the tasks outlined in this Declaration.

Target 2: Ghent University raises more awareness within faculties and research departments for making better use of various online international job portals. If feasible through an automated process, all academic vacancies are also published on the Euraxess website.

ACTION: Evaluation criteria for hiring and promotion

see below under "Evaluation criteria for research"

INTERNATIONAL AND INTERSECTORAL MOBILITY

International and intersectoral mobility are important means of enhancing scientific knowledge and professional development at any stage of a researcher's career. Mobility is not an end in itself, but a means in order to realize knowledge exchange and to gain new experiences that ultimately make a researcher a better researcher.

A number of practical obstacles (family commitments, short-term contracts,...) certainly impose limits on researchers' international ambitions. An even stronger limitation is however imposed by a mindset in the academic environment which does not sufficiently appreciate the rewards of international and intersectoral mobility. As a result, some researchers are reluctant to leave their institution out of fear there might be no easy way to return. This fear is not wholly unjustified, considering the fact that academic recruitment criteria do not sufficiently take into account professional, non-academic experience, and the fact that the recruitment process often still relies on personal networks within and around a research team.

As a result, intersectoral mobility in the Flemish academic context is in practice still very much a one-way direction: leaving one's university to gain work experience in a different sector usually

results in a career away from the university. Moreover, the current academic evaluation system gives little importance to intersectoral work experience. It would however be very beneficial for a research team to bring in new colleagues with work experience in public authorities, international organisations, the private sector or industry, or to provide industrial internships allowing researchers to gain experience in companies related to their own area of expertise. Ghent University wants to support such 'brain circulation' and provide systems of recognition which acknowledge intersectoral experience.

Ghent University recognises the fact that a period of international research mobility is one of high demands and few guarantees. Despite the fact that international experience is widely recognised as an asset in an international career, some researchers are reluctant to spend time abroad as they believe being 'out of sight' might reduce their academic career chances at their home institution. International mobility is strongly supported (i.e. financial support, mobility schemes) but risks becoming a box-ticking exercise to strengthen one's cv rather than an opportunity to develop further as a researcher.

Investigation of current practices has demonstrated that Ghent University provides ample funding for researchers intending to spend research time abroad and supports its staff applying for external funding to sponsor research visits abroad - although this funding opportunities may not be sufficiently well known. The university must ensure that this support will continue, and be better communicated.

ACTION: Research mobility funding
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Ghent University will continue to earmark funding to support researchers' mobility. This funding can be used to eliminate many obstacles in research visits abroad (outward mobility): travel and accommodation expenses, replacement staff covering teaching and/or administrative duties, accompanying partner and children expenses,... It may also be used to cover the expenses of visiting foreign researchers (inward mobility). An internal review carried out in 2013 recommended aggregating the funds from a range of mobility schemes, delegating the responsibility for processing funding applications to the faculties, as well as providing clearer guidelines on awarding these mobility funds.

Target 3: Ghent University implements a new mobility funding scheme at the level of the faculties according to new guidelines and commits itself to a regular review of this new scheme.

In the current age of virtual mobility and electronic communication, there are many ways of making a researcher's network a high performing network. The establishment of an international portfolio, focusing on the added value of cross-border activities and collaboration, is an experience equal to that of international research visits. Unlike other institutions or countries, Ghent University does not require its academic staff to have spent research time abroad, but considers the establishment of an international portfolio as an essential element in the evaluation of academic staff.

Likewise, work experience in non-academic environments may also broaden a researcher's network, management skills and performance. Researchers who intend to return to academia after having spent a substantial part of their career in non-academic jobs are at a disadvantage when evaluation criteria are limited to academic performance only. In many cases, this intersectoral experience may benefit the exchange of knowledge between academia and other sectors, as well as benefit the career prospects of researchers.

ACTION: Sabbaticals for professorial staff

In the course of 2014-15, Ghent University will carry out a mid-term review of its policy initiative for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. As part of this initiative, a sabbatical system was set up for professorial staff, allowing them to be relieved of teaching and administrative duties for a term or a full academic year, and providing funds to cover international research stays. If the review of this sabbatical system proves to be possible, and if an extension of the sabbatical scheme towards the engineering, sciences and medical sciences faculties proves to be feasible, Ghent University commits itself to broadening the sabbatical system to all faculties at Ghent University. This will not only foster international exchange but will also benefit the work-life balance of researchers and the quality of research itself.

Target 4: Ghent University has a clear view on the feasibility of initiating an institutional sabbatical system for professorial staff and acts upon the recommendations of this study.

Mobile researchers have better chances of securing academic jobs compared to researchers who limit their applications to institutions within commuting distance. In order to foster brain circulation, Ghent University not only encourages its own researchers to pursue an internationally oriented career but equally welcomes international researchers to consider Ghent University as a short-term or long-term opportunity to become research leaders. The recruitment, integration and retention of foreign researchers however poses more challenges than in the case of native researchers. As the salaries for academic staff are fixed according to national standards, top academics must be attracted and retained within the university by means of additional work-related elements that guarantee a healthy work-life balance, excellent working conditions, career prospects, etc. Ghent University has already implemented a number of actions such as supporting the establishment of an international school, covering removal expenses, and providing a personal service for new international academic staff. It is necessary to keep reviewing whether improvements could be made.

ACTION: Attractive employer for top talent

The Department of Personnel and Organisation at Ghent University has clustered its expertise for supporting new international and local staff in a new "welcome team". The department commits itself to a regular review of the operations of this unit in order to guarantee that international staff members receive the kind of welcoming service,

integration support and information expected from an attractive employer. One of the elements recently introduced is the “buddy system” for new staff members, academic as well as support staff: everyone who is new to the university is appointed a “buddy”: a colleague in the same personnel category who is available for assistance with practical matters as well as more general questions. For new PhD researchers the Doctoral Schools organise a special introduction day once a year.

The university also commits itself to making more information for mobile researchers publically available in English on its website

Target 5: Ghent University regularly reviews its services for newly appointed staff – local and foreign.

Target 6: All Ghent University departments guarantee adequate and easily accessible information in English related to working at Ghent University.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH

Researchers are constantly subject to evaluation: ex ante evaluation focusing primarily on **potential** (e.g. when applying for competitive research funds, applying for research positions or submitting new academic work to peer reviewed articles); ex post evaluation focusing rather on **past performance** (e.g. in the case of discipline-level quality assessments, of bi-annual career evaluation or evaluation in the context of promotion).

The survey carried out amongst senior researchers (2010) revealed a lack of faith amongst the research community in the fairness of evaluation criteria (funding allocation as well as appointments). As the competition for academic positions and funding has increased, the pressure to perform has increased at the same rate as the chances to progress towards an academic career and the chances to obtain research project funding have been reduced. The current lack of faith in the system, therefore, is understandable.

In an effective quality framework, it is important to distinguish between individual level targets and evaluation on the one hand and group level evaluation on the other. Researchers cannot be excellent in everything, but groups of researchers can, through the combination of their various strengths. Ghent University wants to recognise and encourage high performance in research, teaching as well as service to society. Although top quality research is the foundation for quality teaching and other services, evaluation must not be focused solely on research.

Ghent University adopts the following principles in evaluation:

- Evaluation standards must be international and ambitious.
- Evaluation standards must be fair, objective and appropriate.
- Evaluation criteria must recognise cross-national and cross-sectoral research experience.
- Evaluation can be greatly facilitated by an efficient research information system.

- Evaluation criteria for research must correlate with the task description of academic staff, and be in balance with criteria for other tasks such as teaching and services to society

In order to implement these principles fully, a number of actions will be taken:

ACTION: Guidelines for the evaluation of candidates for academic staff positions (assisting academic staff and professorial staff), research positions and promotion

Evaluation standards must be international, ambitious, objective, fair and appropriate. Academic university staff and researchers appointed on the basis of the university's Special Research Fund, are appointed by the faculty and the research council respectively. The university has adopted substantial experience in bibliometric performance indicators and peer review procedures. Guidelines on how to adopt such evaluation practices at the time of recruitment will further (1) improve the quality of the evaluation process, (2) prevent an overreliance on 'easy' but narrow performance metrics, (3) allow for discipline-specific quality standards, (4) take into account the various dimensions of a university's mission and tasks, and (5) recognise the value of atypical careers.

Target 7: Ghent University sets up good practice guidelines for the evaluation of individual research performance at the time of recruitment of new academic & research staff.

ACTION: Review of the current implementation of individualized performance system for professorial staff and recommendations coming out of this review

Ghent University has created an opportunity to encourage and value excellence as well as recognise differentiation when its system of "personalized performance targets" for tenure track academic staff was introduced. This system has been extended towards the further career development of professorial staff with personalized targets to be met in order to qualify for promotion. At implementation level, however, reports have suggested that improvements could be made to ensure these targets are in line with the objectives of the personalized evaluation system.

This action is closely related to the previous action.

Target 8: A review of the personalized evaluation system is carried out and recommendations for further improvement will be implemented.

ACTION: Establishment of a solid research information system as part of a solid institutional information system (GISMO & UGI)

Much information that is useful for performance evaluation - and research evaluation in particular – is already available in university databases (publications, research projects, personnel details, PhD registrations,...). As long as these systems operate independently, re-using such information and generating cross-thematic data can be labour-intensive for researchers and administrative staff alike. Ghent University is preparing the establishment of GISMO, a research information system, and UGI, an institutional information system, in order to facilitate data collection and monitoring (as well as generating other benefits), resulting in a more transparent and efficient method of evaluation research performance. Over the course of 2014 and 2015 these information systems will be implemented gradually.

Target 9: Upon implementation of both information systems, Ghent University reduces the workload and increase transparency in the evaluation process of funding applications to its Special Research Fund, in reviewing personalized performance targets, in assessing applications for promotion, etc.

2. CAREER PROSPECTS

Since the last fifteen years the number of PhD and postdoctoral researchers has increased significantly. This is the outcome of strategic choices and decisions at institutional, Flemish and European level.

The Flemish government has substantially increased its funding for PhD research and postdoctoral positions, not with the intention to increase the number of academic staff at universities but in order to create sufficient critical mass for a knowledge society. Following the Lisbon Strategy (2001), many other European countries have expressed the same objectives. The EU 2020 Innovation Union Flagship Initiative has extended this policy of investing in human capital until 2020, and so has Flanders.

While these policies are well known at the level of national and institutional decision-making, many junior and senior researchers have different expectations about the academic career path. As is evident from the focus groups and survey results, many supervisors still expect junior researchers to pursue an academic career upon completion of their PhD, and many PhD researchers hope to follow their supervisor's career track of taking up a professor role in the same department upon completion of their apprenticeship period.

However, in the current context long-term career options beyond postdoc level within the own institution are scarce. The reality is that a majority of PhD holders will establish a career track outside their own institution or outside academia altogether, while many of them are still unaware of their potential role in a wider national and international knowledge society.

This fosters the view of the academic career path as one of fierce selection, consecutive competition, and major insecurity until mid-career stage. Ghent University's approach to tackle this problem is two-fold:

ACTION: Career development and guidance
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As an employer of academic staff of whom the large majority will leave the institution after a number of years, Ghent University invests in an **integrated strategy for career development and guidance** for researchers in all stages of their careers. The emphasis is on early career researchers with temporary contracts, i.e. PhD researchers and postdocs as this is the most precarious group.

Ghent university promotes career awareness, talent development and contact with the external labour market as a solid preparation for a wide range of careers. Central aim is to support early career researchers in their personal and professional development. This is done through a focus on **empowerment**, on taking **ownership** and control of their own career and future. Purpose is to increase the **employability**, i.e. the chances of successfully getting a job - inside as well as outside academia - matching with a person's talents, competencies and ambitions.

Empowerment already starts at the early stages of a research career. For PhD researchers the Doctoral Schools organise a broad scale of activities:

- Transferable skills seminars within the doctoral training programme (see also "training and development").
- "From PhD to job market": the annual doctoral conference, organised since 2008, targeting the transition of young high potentials with a PhD degree to the job market. Each year different disciplines are targeted.
- Graduate Fair: Since 2012 the Ghent University Doctoral Schools have become a partner in the successful Graduate Fair hosted by the Ghent University Association. The Doctoral Schools network with companies interested in hiring PhDs and offer workshops and CV analysis to PhD candidates as well as PhD graduates.

Target 10: Ghent University increases its number of initiatives drawing attention to the competencies of doctorate holders and raising awareness in the non-academic labour market regarding the value of research experience.

Both for PhD and postdoc researchers Ghent University offers **individual career coaching** by a careers adviser. Individual sessions help in getting a better understanding of one's personal competencies developed through research on the one hand and of further career expectations on the other, defining possible routes to a next career step – either in academia or beyond – and learning tips and tricks to successfully apply for jobs.

At postdoc level, **two mentoring programmes** match postdoc researchers with a professorial staff member (MENZA, started in 2009) or with a PhD holding mentor outside academia (MENTA, started in 2012); the purpose is to bring in successful individuals as role models for postdoc career development.

Ghent University is currently running a **strategic project on strengthening the employability of its postdocs ('postdoc talent management')** with the aim to widen their horizons for careers outside and inside academia, in Belgium and abroad. As part of this policy, Ghent University adopted in 2014 a university-wide vision about postdoctoral career development.

Career development and support is a **shared responsibility** of all stakeholders, involving not only the early career researchers, but also their supervisors and the large group of professorial staff.

Target 11: Ghent University further develops postdoc talent management, setting up:

- **postdoctoral training (see under "talent and development")**
- **contact events in order to increase the exposure to other labour markets (academic and non-academic)**
- **a university-wide postdoc community, a grass roots postdoc association, intended to strengthen the mutual career interests of this group.**

Target 12: Ghent University communicates openly about realistic career perspectives within and outside the university, both at the institutional level as on the departmental level. The heads of department and the PhD supervisors have the responsibility to raise career awareness amongst their research staff by giving them all possible exposure and opportunities in order to develop their competencies and skills.

ACTION: Long-term research positions

More and more research is carried out in teams, involving larger-scale infrastructure, bigger datasets and longer-term strategies, all of which need a different kind of 'management' than the single-researcher model. The organisational structure of 'research teams' has much to gain from long-term research-related positions; in some cases the research team needs to guarantee the continuation of high-level technical expertise; another team may rely more on professional management and coordination skills.

The university's basic funding allocation does not foresee any long-term contracts and only researchers funded through external sources, in departments with sufficient long-term funding capacity, are able to provide contracts of indefinite duration which truly provide long-term perspectives. Notable examples here are the contracts of indefinite

duration for “industrial research fund fellowships”, for mid-level researchers connected to consortia with high technology transfer opportunities.

Consequently, the majority of the researchers moving from one contract to the next run the risk of spending a long time of their professional life in insecurity, even with a contract of indefinite duration. Especially at postdoctoral level, high potential researchers may turn their back on an academic career as employers in other sectors provide better security, more interesting career prospects or better salaries. This may be beneficial in terms of knowledge exchange, and meets the university’s objective of “sending talent out”, but may also constitute a substantial loss for particular research teams.

Ghent University is currently investigating the opportunity to extend long-term career possibilities for a limited group of postdoctoral researchers with a designated management or coordination role. Recently, postdoc research managers have been recruited using the university’s Special Research Fund for the humanities and social sciences. This can be extended to similar initiatives in other faculties. Support from the Flemish government may contribute to a better legal framework for such contracts, and for funding such appointments using the basic university allocation funds.

Target 13: Ghent University completes a feasibility study investigating a new type of long-term appointment for a limited number of researchers with a designated management or coordination role.

3. LABOUR CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY

SALARIES, WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Like in other Flemish universities, labour conditions at Ghent University are fully compliant with Belgian employment standards. Researchers with employment contracts are fully covered by the Belgian social security system (health insurance, family allowance, pension and unemployment benefits). Moreover - and this is a strong asset in comparison to some other national systems - at Belgian universities all PhD researchers with bursaries also enjoy entitlements such as health insurance, family allowance, maternity benefit, basic pension and unemployment benefits usually associated with employee rights. In addition, these PhD researchers are registered as full time students guaranteeing their entitlement to training and development.

Salaries are based on fixed wage scales. In general early career researchers are considered to be well-paid, especially for PhD and postdoctoral researchers the Belgian salaries are amongst the highest in Europe. In contrast, for more experienced researchers (from the level of associate professor) salaries in some disciplines are rather low in comparison to the external labour market. Following the formal procedures, there is fairly little flexibility on wage setting. This can be a disadvantage in attracting excellent research talent.

ACTION: Provide better pension rights for researchers

Ghent university is currently preparing an initiative to provide all researchers (those with a Ghent University employment contract) on fixed-term contracts and contracts of indefinite duration with a supplementary pension, narrowing the gap with the pension rights of statutory employees in the university.

Target 14: Ghent University initiates a better pension rights plan for all researchers employed by the university.

FLEXIBILITY VERSUS STABILITY

Flexibility in one's working schedule is generally considered to be very favourable at Ghent University. Scientific work is output-driven within the context of flexible working hours, allowing both female and male researchers to combine a scientific career with (family)life. However, as there are no university-wide institutional rules yet, the management at departmental or research group level defines e.g. the work schedule policy. ICT support for telework (athenax, VPN) is already in place.

ACTION: "A new way of working"

Ghent University is currently running a strategic project on "a new way of working", aiming to foster a sustainable and motivating academic working environment for our research staff through an integrated vision on HR, an activity and result based work space policy, and an ICT support policy. Aim is to make the best fit between the professional needs, overall satisfaction and work-life balance of our research staff on the one hand and rational organisational development and institutional performance on the other hand.

Target 15: A strategy and action plan introducing "a new way of working" is undertaken with the aim to abandon the current ad hoc arrangements.

Ghent University offers various arrangements for a healthy work-life balance of its researchers: e.g. systems of part-time work (including on the higher levels of postdocs and professorial staff) and leave of absence (including parental leave), daycare services for children of staff members, and laundry services for all staff are available. Ghent University's Special Research Fund (BOF) grant female postdoctoral fellows 1 extra year per child born in the period of the fellowship.

The majority of early career researchers (PhD researchers and postdocs) are hired on the basis of **contracts of definite duration or fellowships**, ranging from several months up until two to three years (depending on the type of agreement, funding can be renewed for a limited period of time). This may create a **'false' sense of stability**, which can be particularly problematic at

postdoc level. Therefore Ghent University thoroughly invests in career development for these categories of researchers.

ACTION: See “Career prospects”

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

It is the university’s ambition to provide equal career opportunities to every researcher. Ghent University’s equality and diversity policy is based on 5 focus points: equal representation and participation, providing opportunities, responsibility, excellence and accessibility.

ACTION: Implementation of a gender policy plan

Despite several measures, there is still a considerable gender problem. Although recently more women are moving up to the rank of professorial staff, the number of female professors is in comparison to their male colleagues still significantly low. In the highest professorial ranks and the senior management positions women are still remarkably under-represented.

Ghent University is currently implementing a **gender policy and action plan** with the aim to raise the number of women moving up to the academic career ladder. Our institution is taking part in various gender policy networks, including within the Flemish Interuniversity Council. Concrete actions recently launched are:

- Information: systematic collection of statistics and monitoring of the gender evolution at all levels of research staff.
- Decision-making: making university board, advisory councils and commissions (including nomination and promotion commissions) gender-balanced, as is already the case in the University Research Council. This means that maximum two-thirds of the voting members are of the same gender.
- Communication: Bringing women in the spotlights as positive role models in internal and external communication.
- Recruitment: formulating gender neutral vacancies by developing a screening instrument
- Promotion: in the new promotion model for professorial staff based on individual targets more balanced careers (allowing for a differentiation between research, teaching and internal and public engagement) and absence due to maternity leave are taken into account.
- Mobility: a study is undertaken about flexible international mobility arrangements in order to give all genders equal opportunities to build an academic cv, meeting the criteria of international mobility.
- Mentoring: through mentoring programmes women are supported on a more individual basis to reflect on career issues, obstacles and expectations.

Target 16: Ghent University implements the actions of its recently launched gender policy plan.

ACTION: Implementation of a policy plan regarding researchers with disabilities

In 2013 a **policy plan regarding staff with disabilities** was adopted. The general purpose is to enable all staff members to autonomously deliver quality work and enhance a proportional and equal participation of all researchers by reducing all possible barriers for disabled people. This policy plan is in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ghent University is formally taking part in the Belgian committee for the implementation of the UN Convention.

Target 17: Ghent University implements the actions of its recently launched policy plan for researchers with disabilities:

- Information: systematic collection and monitoring of data.
- Recruitment and selection: vacancy notices are explicitly inviting people with disabilities; welcoming policy for disabled people; strategies for attracting financial support funds of the Flemish government.
- Reasonable adjustments: disabled people are entitled to reasonable adjustments of the working space and by the provision of support tools (e.g. large screen, special audio software, ...).
- Accessibility: digital spaces (e.g. Ghent University website) as well as building infrastructure will be made accessible for people with disabilities.
- Raising awareness: by making information available, offering advice and facilitation services for all possible academic events.

In creating and sustaining a fair and equally supportive working environment, Ghent University values the diversity of its staff and students. This HR policy encourages the participation from different backgrounds and nationalities. Fostering the talent of researchers from local ethnic minorities requires a different approach from the university's internationalisation strategy. In this process, the university's *current* focus is on the development of *students* to thrive academically. At this stage, this HR policy does not include any specific action directed at this target group at staff (researcher) level, but regular consultation with the diversity initiatives at student level will make sure that appropriate action will be taken if deemed necessary.

TEACHING

Teaching is an essential part of many researchers' everyday activities. Due to the increasing number of students, professorial staff are often obliged to teach large groups, which demands a substantive investment of time and energy. For the same reason it is common practice that early career researchers take up a reasonable amount of teaching responsibilities – depending on

their type of employment/funding. PhD researchers provide support in teaching at bachelor and master level (e.g. practical classes) or help to supervise master theses.

For all research staff, both junior and senior, **advanced in-house teaching training** is offered by specialists from the Department of Education. There are basic trainings (3 day courses) as well as advanced specialized courses (e.g. using ICT in class, giving feedback, peer assessment training, assisting practical classes, teaching for large groups). Group seminars are complemented with supporting e-coaching on the website (videos, tips & tricks).

ACTION: Full recognition of teaching in evaluation/appraisal systems

Despite the reasonable work load and time invested in these activities, teaching is not always fully taken into account in the current evaluation/appraisal systems, which is focusing on research publication output. Recognising the teaching load in evaluation and appraisal systems will encourage high-quality teaching as well as foster a better link between research and teaching.

Target 18: Ghent University ensures a better evaluation and recognition of teaching skills in both the recruitment process (e.g. by explicitly mentioning teaching responsibilities in researcher vacancies) and in the general evaluation/appraisal system.

A number of postdocs play an essential role as co-lecturer of all types of courses. However, reports suggest that not all postdocs taking up substantive teaching responsibilities are formally recognised as co-lecturer. This is problematic as a formal recognition of teaching responsibilities is an important asset for the development of a broad set of competencies, necessary for further career development. See also under “Career prospects”.

Target 19: Ghent University makes sure that faculties adopt the current regulation for postdoctoral researchers with substantive teaching responsibilities to be formally entitled as co-lecturer.

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Postdoc researchers have various responsibilities on the middle-management level. They are expected to play an active role in attracting and coordinating (often international or intersectoral) research projects. As such, they are actively involved in the financial management of project grants, in the establishment of new research lines (a prerequisite for ERC starting grant applications) and in the supervision of PhD and other researchers and technical staff. However, the responsibilities they take on and the level of independence at which they operate, often remain invisible or unrecognised.

ACTION: Full recognition of research management responsibilities of all postdoctoral researchers

In the application criteria for top-level funding at postdoctoral level (FWO, Odysseus, ERC starting grants), developing one's own individual research line is a prerequisite. Providing visibility and recognition for such research autonomy and expertise is crucial for them to increase their chances to establish this academic career and to obtain these funds.

Another element of recognition deals with financial autonomy. Postdocs at Ghent University are not allowed to manage their own budget, with the exception of ERC grant holders, Odysseus grant holders (limited control) and Industrial Research Fund Business Developers. However, if appropriate mechanisms of control (e.g. financial checks) and means of back-up (e.g. second project supervisor) are in place, there are no reasons not to grant other postdocs this level of autonomy. In case their staff appointment ends before their financial responsibility for a project comes to a halt, alternative solutions can thus be guaranteed.

In some cases postdocs are not formally recognised as co-supervisor of doctoral theses or other projects. In creating maximal opportunities for career development Ghent University intends to invest in the development of a broad set of competencies within the daily research work. A formal recognition of these competencies is also an asset for a future independent (academic or not-academic) career. See also under "Career prospects".

Target 20: Ghent University develops a policy with appropriate conditions and circumstances in which research autonomy, budget management and a co-supervising role for postdoctoral researchers can be formally recognised.

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

Researchers at all levels are very positive about the extent to which their voices are heard and their participation and representation is required in the relevant information, consultation and decision-making bodies of Ghent University. They are able to promote their collective interests as professionals at all institutional levels, up until the top level i.e. the Board of Governors and the Executive Board.

Ghent University already has a wide range of procedures aimed at improving the quality of the work environment. For complaints/appeals regarding work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, including those concerning conflicts between supervisor and early career researchers, every faculty has an ombudsperson for doctoral researchers, complementary to the institutional ombudsperson.

Since 2011 there is a central confidential counselor implementing a psychosocial welfare policy for all staff members, focusing on unacceptable behavior such as bullying, violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, stress management and general well-being at work.

ACTION: Risk assessment and the further implementation of a psychosocial welfare policy

In 2013 Ghent University organised a large-scale survey to map out the level of well-being experienced by all categories of our staff. Indicators were stress, motivation, inappropriate behaviour and absence at work. The most important impact factors were identified: work-life balance, learning opportunities, skills development, social relations, support from peers and supervisors/management, feedback from the management, job expectations, trust and faith in the organisation and organisational values, participation in decision-making, career prospects, the organisation of work.

Different staff categories identified different risk factors: while professorial staff indicated the high stress level and high work pressure, work-life balance, lack of support, and low mutual respect as negative factors, the large group of early-career researchers pinpointed the insecurity about career prospects, the heavy workload and in some cases the lack of clear expectations on job content and tasks as risk factors.

Based on the general findings of this survey, Ghent University will set priorities for action. Focus groups per staff category will provide input for concrete action plans on the institutional and faculty and departmental level, targeted at differentiated groups of staff with different needs.

Target 21: Ghent University develops an action plan to implement a psychosocial welfare policy framework, targeted at the different research staff groups and levels of the institution.

4. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Talent development for all staff categories is one of Ghent University's main strategic goals. Researchers at all levels have access to high-quality training. This is part of the institutional vision of developing a creative community of knowledge workers that are well-equipped for today's changing world.

Ghent University's talent development also focuses on raising researchers' awareness of sharing the responsibility for **continuing professional development**. This is crucial in the context of short term funding and temporary contracts for young researchers, and within the expectation that the majority of them will continue their careers outside academia.

All researchers in the international academic system experience pressure in terms of delivering research output and top publications. Many researchers indicate that there is little time left for learning and training opportunities. Ghent University will therefore invest in engaging with the

researcher community and stimulate a solid foundation for a “**life-long learning**” mindset amongst its research staff.

Ghent University invests in the **empowerment** of PhD researchers and postdocs by strengthening their self-awareness and stimulating greater understanding of career opportunities, development and planning, aiming at a wide range of career paths, both inside and outside academia. These initiatives will continue over the coming years. See also under “Career prospects”.

ACTION: Ghent University develops an integrated and sustainable model of researcher development

Ghent University offers training and development programmes for different categories of researchers:

1) PhD researchers

Since 2007 Ghent University has a **solid doctoral training programme**. 5 doctoral schools (covering all disciplines and faculties) offer training programmes that prepare young researchers for a wide range of careers after their PhD in a skills-based manner. There is a wide variety of courses, targeting all PhD researchers, offering them high-level specialist research courses in their disciplines as well as transferable skills seminars clustered around 4 themes:

- Career management
- Communication
- Leadership & personal efficiency
- Research & valorization

The doctoral training programme is organised in close collaboration with a wide variety of high-quality partners, from Ghent University departments, other Flemish universities and Research and Technology Organisations (e.g. VIB-Life Sciences Research Institute, ILVO-Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research, IMEC-Interuniversity Microelectronics Centre) and regional and international trainers or partners from strategic alliances.

Ghent University is constantly developing the doctoral training programme in order to meet the real and changing needs of the researchers. The courses are positively evaluated, but in some cases doctoral training is still only considered as a formal requirement, independent of the daily tasks of researchers. Supervisors have the responsibility to stimulate doctoral researchers to take part in the doctoral training process as a means of continuing professional development, especially paving the way for a career after finishing a PhD.

Target 22: Ghent University further develops strategies for embedding the doctoral training programme in the everyday research practice of PhD researchers and supervisors.

2) Postdoctoral researchers

There is a growing need for training targeted specifically at the group of postdocs, tailored to their tasks and responsibilities beyond PhD level and focusing on the middle-management level. Postdocs are actively involved in teaching, managing research projects and supervising master students and PhD researchers as well as other technical and scientific staff.

The Department of Personnel and Organisation is developing training programmes for postdocs as part of an **institutional strategic project on postdoc talent management**. In the first half of 2014 career management workshops (discovering personal competencies and career drivers; networking; application and interview skills) will commence, oriented towards the broader academic labour market and the external, non-academic labour market. This complements already existing courses for postdocs on teaching and innovation management/technology transfer skills.

Target 23: A training programme is available designed to position postdoctoral researchers in good jobs either inside or outside academia. There are 3 clusters of skills training:

- Career management
- Leadership and supervision of (PhD) researchers
- ‘Street skills’: creativity, positive impact and resilience

3) Professorial staff/supervisors

Since 2012 Ghent University has been developing an **academic leadership initiative**. A university-wide vision on leadership, enhancing community thinking, ownership and commitment, has been adopted by the Board. The outcome is a training programme tailored for professorial staff. Topics covered are managing research groups, departments, staff and conflicts. Supervision of PhD research is also a core task of professors. Training supervisors in coaching PhD researchers has started as part of the professorial training programme.

Target 24: Ghent University continues elaborating academic leadership and development for its professorial staff at all levels in close collaboration with the concrete needs of the target group (i.e. short and experience-based).

In 2012-2013 Ghent University co-organised the **international program “Academic Leadership. Leading Universities in a Global Context”**, organised as part of the strategic “U4”-partnership between the universities of Ghent, Groningen, Göttingen and Uppsala. The academic leadership programme allowed top-level executives in university management (Vice-Presidents, Deans and Directors) to strengthen their skills in leadership and to reflect on the greatest challenges facing them in today’s increasingly international, complex and competitive environment.

Target 25: Ghent University co-organises a new programme on strategic leadership for senior management (spread over 4 sessions of 2 days, for 20 top managers in total).

Starting professors get an introduction into the Ghent University and the Flemish and Belgian education and research system through short workshops ('Ghent University toolbox for professorial staff'): research policy, publications and digital footprint, funding opportunities, the university's financial management system and functional career plan for professorial staff, doctoral supervision, technology transfer, intellectual property,

5. ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom makes a university unique, valuable and powerful. Ghent University's motto "Dare to think" translates the value of critical independent thought into its teaching programmes, its research policy as well as HR policy. Academic freedom must be protected from internal and external threats: from interference or pressure when working with other partners; from conflicting interests; or from unethical or unprofessional behaviour. Academic freedom must also be encouraged, valued and promoted within and outside the university.

As part of its responsibility as an institution from and for the community, Ghent University wants to continue to take an active part in the public debate on academic freedom. When external partners doubt academics' objectivity as a result of membership of particular agencies; or when the general public confuses academic freedom with the right to biased opinion, the university must speak up and actively defend the ethical and professional standards of academia. This does not need to be limited to particular incidents requiring reaction, but can be done proactively by organising outreach activities such as Science Cafés, speaking out for academic freedom in the media towards politicians and the public, for example in support of the "Scholars at risk" scheme, and by promoting this academic freedom in the university's educational and international activities.

ACTION: Recognising academic freedom inside and outside the university

Despite the fact that Ghent University encourages its staff and students to "dare to think", public engagement, including research collaboration with developing countries, is not yet recognised by the institution as a valid criterion for research evaluation and remains an activity which is only occasionally promoted (e.g. science communication activities, excellence awards). Nor does the government incorporate societal impact in its evaluation system or funding allocation model.

Target 26: As part of its review of evaluation criteria, Ghent University incorporates societal impact and public engagement as an aspect of research practice that deserves specific incentives and requires recognition in research evaluation.

See also “Evaluation criteria”.

ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Academic freedom does not relieve oneself of the responsibilities of the academic profession nor of the accountability towards the funding provider, be it the citizen, private investor or funding agency. This responsibility means that researchers are expected to act according to **ethical standards** (respecting national and institutional regulations regard animal testing, human testing, data protection); to act according to the principles of **scientific integrity** (plagiarism, fraud, manipulation of data, carelessness and destruction of research results are unacceptable); to dissemination of **their research results** to the research community, to their sponsor and to the general public, in Open Access whenever possible; to protect and respect the **intellectual property** connected to their own research and that of others; and to engage in **equitable (public-private and public-to-public) partnerships** in case of international projects and cross-sectoral collaboration.

A number of institutions and guidelines are already in place at Ghent University to promote and to monitor these ethical and professional standards: Ethical Committees for human and animal testing; Commission for Scientific Integrity; Open Access Policy for Research Publications; Technology Transfer Office. A consultation with the research community however revealed that a number of academics have been faced with situations that threaten academic freedom and the quality of research they carry out: for example private research commissioners predefining particular research results, or sector lobby representatives attempting to influence research design. While the university acknowledges that collaborating with external partners involves risks of this kind, all contracts with other parties are thoroughly screened to minimize these risks. Quality standards within the research community – peer review in particular – aim to operate as a self-controlling mechanism.

Additional action may support the current initiatives:

ACTION: More attention for ethical and professional aspects in doctoral training programme
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Ghent University has a doctoral training programme for all early career researchers with training sessions covering a wide range of areas. Over the next few years, new modules will be developed, including those engaging with the ethical and professional aspects mentioned here.

One specific element contributing to improved professional standards is the initiative to develop a code of conduct for PhD supervision and PhD training, based on good practices. It will serve as a tool of communication between supervisor and PhD researcher, making clear what are acceptable rights and responsibilities on either side.

Target 27: The Doctoral Training Programme introduces sessions on scientific integrity and on the professional responsibilities of researchers as part of its regular programme.

Target 28: A Code of Conduct is drawn up serving as a framework for good practices in the supervisor – PhD researcher relationship.

ACTION: Open Access initiative for research data

Much of the research in medical and social sciences, but also in an increasing number of other disciplines, depends on extensive data collection. Making data collections accessible to other researchers, without infringement of privacy regulations and with respect for other data protection regulations, is the focus of the Open Data initiative. Open data create a number of benefits: being able to repeat the research results of others is an effective control mechanism for the quality of research. In addition, being able to build upon the work of other colleagues increases the return on investment in data collection activities and fosters research productivity and collaboration.

Archiving data and making these available to other researchers under particular, protected circumstances, requires appropriate ICT infrastructure, controlled access and data management protocols.

Target 29: Ghent University develops an Open Data policy. Depending on the feasibility of the initiative, an efficient structure for the storage, access and processing of open data is developed subsequently.

Ethical and professional standards invoke a responsibility on behalf of the institution to ensure that performance pressure is monitored regularly and that appropriate action is undertaken when scientific quality risks being impaired by scientific productivity. In response to the competitive funding model in academia in Flanders, established as well as promising academics have voiced particular concerns regarding the adverse effects of output-based funding mechanisms and one-sided bibliometric evaluation. Ghent University intends to maintain its institutional professional standards for research by regularly reviewing its own evaluation mechanisms and criteria.

ACTION: See “evaluation criteria for research”

HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH: STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

OVERVIEW OF TARGETS, TIMING & RESPONSIBLE ACTORS

Preparation phase
Preparation + implementation / ongoing activities
Implementation phase

1. RECRUITMENT AND EVALUATION	2014	2015	2016	2017	RESPONSIBLE ACTOR
Target 1: Ghent University has the necessary processes in place to guarantee quality screening in the application procedure for all foreign PhD researchers and to introduce better quality processes in supervision for all PhD researchers.					Doctoral Schools
Target 2: Ghent University raises more awareness within faculties and research departments for making better use of various online international job portals. If feasible through an automated process, all academic vacancies are also published on the Euraxess website.					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation/ Research Dept./Doctoral Schools
Target 3: Ghent University implements a new mobility funding scheme at the level of the faculties according to new guidelines and commits itself to a regular review of this new scheme.					Research Dept.
Target 4: Ghent University has a clear view on the feasibility of initiating an institutional sabbatical system for professorial staff and acts upon the recommendations of this study.					Research Dept.

Target 5: Ghent University regularly reviews its services for newly appointed staff – local and foreign.					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation
Target 6: All Ghent University departments guarantee adequate and easily accessible information in English related to working at Ghent University.					All departments
Target 7: Ghent University sets up good practice guidelines for the evaluation of individual research performance at the time of recruitment of new academic & research staff.					Research Dept./Dept. of Personnel & Organisation
Target 8: A review of the personalized evaluation system is carried out and recommendations for further improvement will be implemented.					University Commission for Professorial Staff/ Research Dept.
Target 9: Upon implementation of a solid research information system, Ghent University reduces the workload and increase transparency in the evaluation process of funding applications to its Special Research Fund, in reviewing personalized performance targets, in assessing applications for promotion, etc.					Research Dept.
2. CAREER PROSPECTS	2014	2015	2016	2017	RESPONSIBLE ACTOR
Target 10: Ghent University increases its number of initiatives drawing attention to the competencies of doctorate holders and raising awareness in the non-academic labour market regarding the value of research experience.					Doctoral Schools/ Dept. of Personnel & Organisation
Target 11: Ghent University further develops postdoc talent management, setting up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • postdoctoral training (see under “talent and development”); • contact events in order to increase the exposure to other labour markets (academic and non-academic); • a postdoc community, a grass roots postdoc association, intended to strengthen the mutual career interests of this group. 					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation

Target 12: Ghent University communicates openly about realistic career perspectives within and outside the university, both at the institutional level as on the departmental level. The heads of department and the PhD supervisors have the responsibility to raise career awareness amongst their research staff by giving them all possible exposure and opportunities in order to develop their competencies and skills.					Doctoral Schools/Dept. of Personnel & Organisation/ PhD supervisors/Heads of departments
Target 13: Ghent University completes a feasibility study investigating a new type of long-term appointment for a limited number of researchers with a designated management or coordination role.					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation/ Research Dept.
3. LABOUR CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY	2014	2015	2016	2017	RESPONSIBLE ACTOR
Target 14: Ghent University initiates a better pension rights plan for all researchers employed by the university.					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation
Target 15: A strategy and action plan introducing “a new way of working” is undertaken with the aim to abandon the current ad hoc arrangements.					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation (in collaboration with Dept. of Information and Communication Technology/Dept. of Infrastructure and Facility Management)
Target 16: Ghent University implements the actions of its recently launched gender policy plan.					Diversity and Gender Policy Unit
Target 17: Ghent University implements the actions of its recently launched policy plan for researchers with disabilities.					Diversity and Gender Policy Unit
Target 18: Ghent University ensures a better evaluation and recognition of teaching skills in both the recruitment process (e.g. by explicitly mentioning teaching responsibilities in researcher vacancies) and in the general evaluation/appraisal system.					Research Dept./Dept. of Education/Dept. of Personnel & Organisation/Board of the University

Target 19: Ghent University makes sure that faculties adopt the current regulation for postdoctoral researchers with substantive teaching responsibilities to be formally entitled as co-lecturer.					Dept. of Education/Research Dept./Faculty Boards
Target 20: Ghent University develops a policy with appropriate conditions and circumstances in which research autonomy, budget management and a co-supervising role for postdoctoral researchers can be formally recognised.					Research Dept./Dept. of Personnel & Organisation/Board of the University
Target 21: Ghent University develops an action plan to implement a psychosocial welfare policy framework, targeted at the different groups and levels of the institution.					Office of Prevention & Protection at Work
4. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT	2014	2015	2016	2017	RESPONSIBLE ACTOR
Target 22: Ghent University further develops strategies for embedding the doctoral training programme in the everyday research practice of PhD researchers and supervisors.					Doctoral Schools
Target 23: A training programme is available designed to position postdoctoral researchers in good jobs either inside or outside academia. There are 3 clusters of skills training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career management; • Leadership (e.g. supervising PhD researchers); • 'Street skills': creativity, positive impact and resilience. 					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation
Target 24: Ghent University continues elaborating academic leadership and development for its professorial staff at all levels in close collaboration with the concrete needs of the target group (i.e. short and experience-based).					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation
Target 25: Ghent University co-organises a new programme on strategic leadership for senior management.					Dept. of Personnel & Organisation

5. ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS	2014	2015	2016	2017	RESPONSIBLE ACTOR
Target 26: As part of its review of evaluation criteria, Ghent University incorporates societal impact and public engagement as an aspect of research practice that deserves specific incentives and requires recognition in research evaluation.					Research Dept.
Target 27: The Doctoral Training Programme introduces sessions on scientific integrity and on the professional responsibilities of researchers as part of its regular programme.					Doctoral Schools
Target 28: A Code of Conduct is drawn up serving as a framework for good practices in the supervisor – PhD researcher relationship.					Doctoral Schools
Target 29: Ghent University develops an Open Data policy. Depending on the feasibility of the initiative, an efficient structure for the storage, access and processing of open data is developed subsequently.					Research Dept.

Ghent University organized **4 focus group meetings** with research staff in order to consult them in the preparation of the HR Excellence in Research action plan:

- 13 June 2012
- 5 October 2012
- 26 October 2012
- 9 November 2012

These focus groups consisted of all relevant stakeholders:

1. PhD and postdoctoral researchers

- Stijn Baert (assistant academic staff member, Economics)
- Jan Baetens (postdoctoral assistant, Bioscience Engineering, Faculty Board member)
- Sarah Claerhout (postdoctoral assistant, Arts & Philosophy, University Board member)
- Ives De Baere (postdoctoral fellow Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO), Engineering, Faculty Board member)
- Goedele De Clerck (postdoctoral fellow Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO), Political and Social Sciences)
- Michaël de Potter de ten Broeck (assistant academic staff member, Law, Faculty Board member)
- Debbie De Neve (doctoral researcher, Psychology and Educational Sciences)
- Lise Gosseye (postdoctoral assistant, Arts & Philosophy)
- Ben Heylen (assistant academic staff member, Law, Faculty Board member)
- Wouter Leroy (postdoctoral researcher, Sciences, Faculty Board member)
- Klaas Mulier (assistant academic staff member, Economics, Faculty Board member)
- Timothy Nuttens (assistant academic staff member, Sciences, Faculty Board member)
- Maarten Oosterlinck (postdoctoral assistant, Veterinary Medicine, Faculty Board member)
- Wim Peersman (scientific researcher, Medicine and Health Sciences, Faculty Board member)
- Wouter Rogiest (postdoctoral fellow Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO), Engineering)
- Isabelle Sioen (postdoctoral fellow Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO), Medicine and Health Sciences)
- Stijn Speelman (postdoctoral fellow Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO), Bioscience Engineering, Faculty Board member)
- Wouter Vanacker (assistant academic staff member, Arts & Philosophy)
- Khaël Velders (assistant academic staff member, Political and Social Sciences, Faculty Board member)

- Annelies Verdoolaege (postdoctoral researcher, Arts & Philosophy, Faculty Board member)

2. Professorial Staff

- Prof. Ilse Derluyn (Psychology and Educational Sciences, University Research Council member)
- Prof. Freddy Haesebrouck (Veterinary Medicine, University Research Council member)
- Prof. Colin Janssen (Bioscience Engineering, University Research Council member)
- Prof. Mieke Uyttendaele (Bioscience Engineering)
- Prof. Tom Vander Beken (Law, University Research Council member)
- Prof. Paul Van Der Meeren (director Doctoral School of (Bioscience) Engineering)
- Prof. Jozef Vercruyse (director Doctoral School of Life Sciences and Medicine)

During the preparation process for these stakeholder meetings as well as in the follow-up phase, **policy experts** from various departments (Department of Personnel and Organization, Research Department, Department of Education, Doctoral Schools, Diversity and Gender Policy Unit) were consulted to provide further input and feedback.

In a second consultation round in October 2013, all of the stakeholders were invited to give feedback to the draft HR strategy and action plan before the final draft was submitted to the University Board of Governors.