

## **ADVANCING CAREERS IN RESEARCH**

### **YERUN Position on the European Charter for Researchers**

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The "European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers" was introduced by the European Commission in 2005 to unify standards for research career policies across Europe. Related initiatives such as the "HR Excellence in Research" [HRS4R] award and funding conditions helped organisations reflect on and guide changes. In December 2023, the original Charter and Code were replaced by a new unified "European Charter for Researchers," which was adopted by European Member States as part of a broader [Council Recommendation](#) on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe. The new Charter aims to provide a cohesive framework for creating effective human resources (HR) strategies that support attractive and sustainable research careers across Europe.

## Challenges on the road to improving standards of careers in research

Over the past two decades, the implementation of the Charter and Code for Researchers faced challenges due to its broad, general nature. To address this, the HR Excellence in Research awards were introduced to promote action and institutional commitment. Initially focused on awareness, the initiative evolved to emphasise quality, organisational change and stricter criteria. Despite these changes, issues arose from the lack of benchmarks for full implementation and the lack of flexibility in application, compounded by national barriers and unclear goals as well as very limited resources, lack of investment in external experts and a timewise discontinued focus in the priorities of the European Commission. Engagement varied across universities, with administrative burdens leading to disengagement and tensions between aspirational goals and compliance. The broad principles of the Charter also lacked specific guidelines, causing differing interpretations and fragmented responsibilities.

## Current roadblocks and missed opportunities

A major roadblock on the relevance of the Charter and the HR award is that since the updated Charter was adopted in December 2023, **the European Commission has been slow to align the HR Excellence in Research [accreditation process](#) with the updated principles leaving committed organisations confused and disappointed.** The overall communication and operational efficacy of the European Commission on the HR award process has also been found lacking by the beneficiaries.

Due to a lack of resources at the Commission, **attempts at community-building, peer or mutual learning systems have been limited** to a one-off annual Brussels event, which is not enough to foster continuous engagement. Regular opportunities for peer learning between the involved institutions as well as exchanges for cross-fertilisation purposes with related initiatives such as gender and inclusion, open science, or research assessment (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, [CoARA](#)) are systematically lacking. These kinds of engagement opportunities, alongside training, could greatly improve learning, mutual understanding and reduce the divergent interpretations of adequate research career systems.

Furthermore, the process suffers from a lack of experts training, resulting in inconsistent standards, further exacerbated by the reduction in experts assigned per institution from three to two. This limited capacity at the Commission level, which also includes insufficient staff dedicated to this topic, contributes to **significant delays of 6 to 12 months for institutions awaiting feedback**. Additionally, some institutions have withdrawn from the process yet remain listed as awardees on the Commission website, undermining trust in the award's value and the integrity of its quality assurance process.

## Recommendations and call to action

Given the above, YERUN recommends to the European Commission to:

- Urgently **update the HR Excellence in Research accreditation** process to align with the 2023 updated principles of the Charter.
- Focus on profoundly **harmonising and simplifying the Charter implementation procedures while improving synergies** with other R&I policies.
- Commit to and set up concrete processes to **improve communication between the Commission, experts/assessors and HR award applicants** so institutions are facilitated in this process instead of facing uncertainties and barriers.
- Prioritise the **creation of a community-building and peer learning system** to enhance engagement with the Charter and facilitate its implementation.

Looking ahead, **clarity regarding implementation strategies and goals is key**. Balancing aspirational objectives with practical compliance measures is likewise crucial for sustained progress.

**We call on the European Commission to address the above identified challenges to build on the past success of the initiative and facilitate the efforts of institutions to advance jobs and careers in research, especially in academia.**

While the European Charter for Researchers has encountered obstacles in its implementation journey, it has laid a foundation for improving research careers across Europe. With continued refinement and collaboration, it continues holding the potential to drive meaningful change in the European research landscape. YERUN reiterates its support for improving research and academic careers and stands ready to collaborate with the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders to co-create and leverage an improved award process for advancing HR policies for researchers in Europe.

## - About YERUN -

YERUN - Young European Research Universities Network - founded in 2015 and based in Brussels, brings together excellence and value-driven young research universities. The network's objective is to strategically represent its members in the decision-making process at EU level, thus shaping their future and promoting their role in European societies. Further to its policy advocacy activity, the network also strengthens cooperation opportunities among its members in areas of mutual interest and raises their visibility via a dedicated communication strategy.

## - YERUN Members -



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