



**L-Università
ta' Malta**

**Internal Review July 2023
&
Action Plan for Period 2023 - 2026**

Case number: **2020MT491694**



Table of contents

		Page
1.	Organisational Information:	
	Staff and Students	4
	Research Funding	4
	Organisational Profile	4
2.	Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current Practice:	
	Ethical and Professional Aspects	5
	Recruitment and Selection	7
	Working Conditions	8
	Training and Development	10
	Changes in the priorities for the short and medium term	11
	Changes in the circumstances in which the UM operates and their impact on the HR strategy	11
	Strategic decisions that may influence the action plan	11
3.	Actions:	
	A. Update on the Actions for Period August 2021 - July 2023	12
	B. New Actions for Period August 2023 - July 2026	21
	Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles	25
4.	Implementation:	
	General overview of the expected overall implementation process of the action plan	26
	Preparation for the internal review	27

	Involvement of the research community and the UM's main stakeholders in the implementation process	27
	Implementation committee to regularly oversee the progress	28
	Alignment of the UM's policies with the HRS4R, recognition of the HRS4R in the UM's research strategy, and the overarching HR policy	28
	UM's assurance to implement the proposed actions	28
	Progress monitoring progress (timeline)	29
	Measuring the progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment	29
	Preparation for the external review	29
	Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process	30

1. Organisational Information:

STAFF & STUDENTS	FTE
Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD students either full-time or part-time involved in research	Researchers: 992.75 PhD Students: 349
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)	Researchers: 162.75 PhD Students: 89.5
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation)	Researchers: 6
Of whom are women	Researchers: 386.02 PhD Students: 180.5
Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor.	261.26
Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level	199.32
Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with doctoral level	151.12
Total number of students	12,063
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)	2069.53

RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)	€
Total annual organisational budget	44,098,111.95
Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)	1,820,000
Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)	37,557,423.58
Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research	4,720,688.37

ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE

The University of Malta (UM) is the sole public and highest teaching institution in Malta, with its structures being in line with the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education area. UM has a 400-year history and presently hosts 12,063 students including 1,000 foreign/exchange students from nearly 92 different countries, following full-time or part-time degree and diploma courses. The study programmes are designed to produce highly qualified professionals with research experience who will play key roles within industry, commerce and public affairs. Around 3,500 students graduate each year. The University operates from four campuses located in Msida, Valletta, Marsaxlokk and Gozo, with three outreach centres in Argotti, Cottonera and Fawwara. During the last 15 years, the UM was involved as project coordinator and project partner in 365 EU-funded projects, through various funding channels. These include Horizon 2020 (70 projects), Horizon Europe (14 projects), Erasmus+ (114 projects), INTERREG EU, MED, ITALIA-MALTA (44 projects), FP7 (47 projects), Lifelong Learning Programme (76 projects). The UM is also involved in national funding programmes, other international initiatives and is even represented in a number of European and International University networks and groups. It currently has around 300 active projects. Recently the UM has also been registered as a Research Organisation, as per [Government Gazette Section 306 of 10th March 2023](#).

2. Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice:

Ethical and professional aspects strengths and weaknesses

Researchers at the University of Malta (UM) are treated as professionals in a non-discriminatory way and they enjoy the freedom of thought and expression, and are offered guidance by a number of offices during their research activities (Aspects 1 and 10).

A major strength of the ethical and professional aspects of the UM is that several policies and practices are in place to enhance the research experience of all researchers (Aspect 3). The Project Support Office (PSO), the Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD) and the Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) offer guidance on the funding mechanisms, budgetary details, operational details, intellectual property protection, and other limitations to carry out the research (Aspect 4). They apply an internal system of reviewing research projects at the proposal stage and award stage, as well as support on the financial management and auditing of the research projects. In addition, the UM provides guiding principles and standards of good practice, including data protection in research through the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and its Research Code of Practice (Aspect 2). The Research Ethics Review procedure of UREC reviews the Research Ethics and the Data Protection Self-Assessment Form that are submitted by the researchers prior to commencing their research.

Another strength concerns the accountability and professionalism at UM. The system of Ad Hoc Contracts, the Collective Agreement, and the contracts of employment bind all the researchers to be accountable towards the research projects they participate in (Aspects 5 and 6). It is standard practice at UM that all academics sign an ad hoc contract stipulating the financial terms, the commencement and completion dates of a project, the reference to the UM IP Policy, grant agreement, and confidentiality terms. On the other hand, the Research Support Officers have clauses included in their contract of employment indicating who to contact in case of defaults in the research project they work on, the working conditions, the delivery of results, and the national regulations. All academics at the University of Malta can refer to the Manual of Conduct and Procedures of the University of Malta regarding professional and ethical standards that need to be upheld in the conduct of their work. Plagiarism is strictly forbidden and when violated, an investigative process is carried out on a case by case basis and treated as a case of academic misconduct. Information sessions held by the Data Protection Officer are ongoing and are presently being held for all researchers across various Faculties.

Health and Safety matters are also a strength within the UM's ethical and professional aspects (Aspect 7). A Health and Safety Committee and a Health and Safety Policy are in place to oversee the health and safety matters across the UM. In addition, procedures, guidelines and assessment checklists are available online for all researchers. The Health and Safety Committee provides training as and when required in conjunction with the Office for Human Resources Management and Development (OHRM&D) and RSSD. Furthermore, standard operating procedures are being issued and continuously updated.

Researchers at the UM are encouraged to disseminate their research activities through various means within the UM, which is considered a strength (Aspect 8). An Open Science department is available at the UM Library, which caters for open access, open data, open educational resources, and open peer reviewing. The Library has an Open Access Policy in place and is available to all researchers, and it also provides information and training on how researchers can publish their research work online, especially on the open access depository. Currently, the Library is also working on the implementation of an Open Data repository system, which is expected to be launched in the very near future.

As per the suggestion included in the consensus report by the assessors regarding Aspect 9 (Public Engagement), a European Researchers' Night funded by the EU is still being held annually for the general public and includes activities related to science and research. Following are the percentages of people aged 65+ who attended the Science in the City Festival: Year 2020 - 10% (7% 59 - 68y and 3% +68); Year 2021 - 4% (2% 59 - 68y and 2% +68); and Year 2022 - 2% 59 - 68y (Source: Qualia Analytics).

The UM is also collaborating with the [Tiny Teen Science Cafe](#), which targets primary school students for STEM and other subjects. The Faculty of Engineering is also coordinating a [programme](#) of activities for secondary school students to show them what happens in the Faculty of Engineering laboratories in order to attract them to the STEM subjects. Information on these initiatives is available [here](#) and some academics form part of the [National STEM Engagement Working Group](#). In addition, a workshop for a Primary School as part of an Erasmus activity entitled "[Freedom to Learn](#) " has been organised in March 2022. Similarly, the Senior Executive for Science popularization of the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office is responsible for a radio show, [Radio Mocha Malta](#), which airs on Radju Malta, where most of the organic followers are 50+. Younger audiences are reached by uploading the video on the Radio's [Facebook page](#). The Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office continue to promote the research that is undertaken within the UM through the web portal Newspoint, as well as through the THINK magazine (Aspect 9), and a yearly [Research Expo](#) is being organised in order to promote the research activities taking place at the University of Malta. Furthermore, a UM Research Engagement Committee is in place to establish and formalise guidelines for engaged research with societal actors and implement actions towards this aim. In addition, the practice for commercialisation and exploitation of research results is in place and managed by the KTO, of which information is available online to all researchers.

Albeit the above strengths, the UM lacks a proper evaluation and appraisal system for its employees, which is still being considered as per Action 6 (Aspect 11). Presently, for the academics, the appraisal is contained in the guidelines of the Collective Agreement and is carried out in two methods: (a) There is the Quality Assurance Committee to maintain and improve academic standards at the UM, which evaluates the lecturing and assessment services; and (b) There is the appraisal for promotions of the academic staff, which includes an international evaluation of publications and research output as indicated in the Collective Agreement. There is presently no form of appraisal for the Research Support Officers working within the UM.

Remarks

A lot of work has been done regarding the ethical and professional aspects. Awareness in the guidelines and standard of ethics has been increased as per completed Action 1, which will continue being enhanced by the new Actions 25 and 26. Completed Action 4 has tackled the contractual and legal obligations by providing a [handbook](#) for the Research Support Officers and a collective agreement that has been issued in mid 2021 for the academics. Regarding the dissemination and exploitation of results, there have been updates as per completed Action 5, wherein online procedures and information are in place. Following the suggestion included in the consensus report by the assessors regarding Aspect 9 (Public Engagement), the University of Malta embarked in a number of activities to reach out to the public of various ages and backgrounds, as per explanation provided in the above strengths and weaknesses section. As from the Year 2022, the RSSD has also started to train members of staff on various standard operating procedures (SOPs) as per completed Action 7, which is a very important step for employees to carry out their research work in a safe manner.

Recruitment and selection strengths and weaknesses

The University of Malta (UM) has a section within the Office for Human Resources Management and Development (OHRM&D) that is dedicated to the recruitment and selection of employees. The section includes staff that are wholly dedicated to the recruitment and selection process in view of the heavy workload surrounding the area. One major strength of the recruitment and selection aspects at the UM is that the process is carried out in an open and transparent manner, and the eligibility criteria, as well as the selection process, are both always included on the calls for application (Aspects 12 and 15). In addition, the University of Malta is an equal opportunity employer and thus accepts applications from persons from outside Malta and also from outside the European Union. This is facilitated by the fact that calls for application are advertised on various web portals to reach out the best potential applicants, namely Euraxess, academicjobseu.com, jobs.ac.uk, LinkedIn, Facebook, and others.

Another strength is present in the thorough selection process, which involves three steps: (a) scrutiny of qualifications and experience claimed and supported by testimonials and/or certificates (copies are included with the application); (b) shortlisting, which is carried out by the department requiring the employee; and (c) an interview and/or an extended interview. The selection board members are enrolled in accordance with their area of expertise in order to be able to assess the candidates adequately (Aspects 14 and 16). They are provided with guidelines that direct the selection board members how to fairly and objectively assess and evaluate the academic and professional qualifications of the candidates in relation to the advertised call for applications (Aspects 17, 18, 19 and 20). As such, at the end of the interviews, a scoring sheet and a selection board report are duly filled and signed by the parties involved. Since the University of Malta is a publicly funded entity, a member of Council not employed with the University has to form part of the selection board members. This is especially required for the posts of academic staff. For employees required to work on a definite contract, such as that of a Research Support Officer, the Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer or his/her delegate has to act as the Chairman of the selection board for each call for applications. The practice of assigning Pro-Rector's delegates to assist in this chairing role was started in October 2022 and it is helping to alleviate the weakness that was present before where only the Pro-Rector was assigned to chair all selection boards, thereby creating a bottleneck for scheduling interview dates because this depended strongly on his/her availability (Aspect 13).

In recent years, the University of Malta has been very successful in securing competitive research grants through EU and other externally funded programmes. This has led to a significant increase in research projects and the employment of researchers to carry out research activities, which in turn led to a corresponding increase in the demands of the recruitment and selection processes. But unfortunately, this was not met with a proportional increase in human resources attached to the recruitment and selection section within the Office for Human Resources Management and Development, having remained at the same level for the past eight years. This insufficiency of human resource capacity may be slowing down the recruitment and selection process in view that all the administrative work in this regard is split between just three persons (Aspect 13). However, during the Year 2022 digital technologies were implemented for online recruitment as per completed Action 21 of the initial Action Plan. In addition, the standard operating procedure for the recruitment of research staff has been updated to include the postdocs as per completed Action 23 of the initial Action Plan (Aspect 21).

Remarks

Regarding the recruitment and selection aspects, there have been major updates as per completed Action 20, wherein the Head of Department or Dean is being informed of the adverts that are issued for Research Support Officer posts. In addition, completed Action 21 included the provision of an online recruitment process, namely the possibility of the applicants to apply for a post through an online form. This has proved to be very successful and efficient. As indicated in the above strengths and weaknesses section, the Pro-Rector is now delegating his role as Chairperson to share the load and increase efficiency. Furthermore, the principal investigator of a project is always present during the selection board as per completed Action 22, and the procedure for recruiting postdocs is also in place as per completed Action 23. The University of Malta has also issued and distributed the OTM-R Policy as per completed Action 24. As indicated in the profile section of this report, the UM has recently been registered as a Research Organisation, as per Government Gazette Section 306 of 10th March 2023. This should speed up the process of engaging potential non-EU researchers.

Working conditions strength and weaknesses

The University of Malta (UM) recognizes all academics and Research Support Officers (RSOs) as professionals and it makes sure that the research within the institution is stimulating (Aspect 22). In fact, over the past ten years, the UM has been involved as coordinator and partner in numerous EU-funded projects under various Programmes, which is in itself a strength, including Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, Interreg EU-MED-Italia Malta, FP7, Lifelong Learning Programme and various other international and national programmes and initiatives. Furthermore, the UM has a team in place (Aspects 23, 31 and 32) which offers a lot of support to the researchers through the following departments: (i) Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD); (ii) Project Support Office (PSO); (iii) Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO); (iv) Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office; (v) Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation (CEBI); (vi) Legal Office; (vii) IT services; and (viii) Office for Human Resources Management and Development (OHRM&D).

The UM has other strengths in terms of the employees' working conditions, one of them is concerned with the family and work balance, wherein the UM offers flexibility as and when required. For researchers with disabilities, working conditions are adopted on a case by case basis, in order for the employee to be able to be successful in his/her research performance (Aspect 24). Gender equality is also a strong feature within the institution (Aspect 27), which is supported by the Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee. The Committee was originally set up in 1991 in order to act as a focal point on gender issues on the recommendations of the Women in Society Secretariat. According to its terms of reference, the Committee advises the University Council on issues of gender equality as and when required. A "Gender Plus Equity Plan" was approved by the Senate on the 20th January 2022 and by Council on 17th February 2002.

The UM ensures that the contracts of employment of its employees are in line with the EU Directives (Aspect 25). It offers attractive and reasonable salaries with social security provisions in line with the Maltese legislation (Aspect 26). The UM recognizes the value of the various types of mobility of a researcher's career, and considers teaching as a valuable career path, and offers career advice as and when required (Aspects 28, 29 and 30). The provisions for both teaching and research are catered for in the collective agreement for academic staff, whilst the Research Support Officers engage in teaching duties on a casual basis (Aspect 33). Any complaints and appeals are administered by the OHRM&D as and when the need arises, and all employees are represented in the decision making processes of the UM (Aspects 34 and 35).

In the last few years, the UM has seen an increase in the number of human resources involved in research and development and this has created an issue in terms of space, which presently is considered a weakness (Aspect 24). There is an issue across the board with the provision of office and other work space, which at the moment is very limited. Researchers have to resort to hot desking, working remotely, or use temporary spaces such as porta cabins. In addition, research groups from the same department are at times dispersed on different locations across campus, making physical meetings burdensome. To resolve the matter two major projects are underway, partially funded through European Regional Development Funds, to build state of the art facilities for researcher space and laboratories mainly in the areas falling under the Faculty of Engineering ([TRAKE project](#)), and the Faculty for Built Environment plus other entities (Sustainable Living Complex -SLC project).

Another matter, which may be considered a weakness, concerns the employment conditions of the RSOs, which are presently employed on a definite basis, since their work depends on the duration of the project funding programme on which the RSO was engaged (Aspects 24 and 25). Having a contract of employment on a definite basis may sometimes create a disadvantage for the employee, for example when applying for a bank loan because jobs on an indefinite basis are looked at more favourably in the local banking system. Whereas in other larger countries there are typically several universities among which researchers can move around without having to leave their home country or region, as indeed many regions can also have more than one university, the scenario in Malta is different due to its small size and limited opportunities, and thus Maltese Research Support Officers often end up giving up on a research career due to financial instability and lack of permanent research positions.

Remarks

Regarding the working conditions aspects, a lot of improvements have been registered so far. As per completed Action 8, the HR is liaising with the Access Disability Support Unit to provide training and information on the services that are available for persons with disability within the University Community. As per completed Action 10, the University of Malta has also provided a Gender Plus Equity Plan and a lot of work is being done in that area to strive for gender balance across committees and groups. As per completed Action 11 and partly completed Action 13, the Research Support Officers and academics are being offered training programmes in liaison with the Doctoral School for their career development, as well as other development courses for the CPD of academics. Following the COVID-19 period, orientation programmes have also restarted for all members of staff. The Corporate Research & Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) has also made some progress as per completed Action 14 wherein information sessions regarding IP are being held for all research staff. KTO has also provided information on co-authorship as per completed Action 15. Regarding the teaching duties and complaints/appeals for Research Support Officers, the information is now covered by various sections in the [Handbook](#) as per completed Action 16 and partly completed Action 17. In addition the increase in the salaries of the Research Support Officers/Assistants (RSOs/RSAs) of the new Action 33, which was earmarked for quarter 4 of the Year 2023, has now been completed. The increases were approved by the Council on 13 July 2023 and the new rates will start being applied as of 1 January 2024 to allow for a smooth transition period.

Training and development strengths and weaknesses

One major strength in connection with the training and development aspects at University of Malta (UM) is that the Office for Human Resources Management and Development (OHRM&D) has a successful training and development section with dedicated staff. In the last few years, the UM enhanced the training and development of its researchers through various new practices and through the setup of entities such as the Doctoral School and the Office for Professional Academic Development (OPAD) (Aspect 39).

As soon as researchers start their career at the UM, they are offered an induction training programme to familiarize themselves with the systems, procedures and practices relevant to their tasks. The academics are also referred to the Collective Agreement in terms of their career progression (Aspects 38 and 39). The OHRM&D provides training in core competences and specialised fields. These courses are specifically designed to meet the needs of the UM and its employees. Certain short courses are especially designed to cater for the specific needs of individual departments and employee streams. Training is also delivered in conjunction with UM academic entities, Administrative Directorates and Units and in collaboration with several governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The Doctoral School within the UM offers guidance for both the academics as well as the Research Support Officers, regarding the relationship between the PhD candidates and their supervisors, and a number of committees have been set up in this regard (Aspects 26, 37 and 40). Moreover, with the recent setup of OPAD, the UM is providing training courses to academic staff at all stages of their career. Furthermore, the Scholarships and Bursaries Committee of the UM provides the opportunity for UM staff to apply for a scholarship (Aspect 39). In addition, academics are also provided with the Academic Resources Fund for attending conferences and research activities locally and abroad that are relevant to their area of expertise (Aspect 38).

Regarding the Research Support Officers, since these are employed on a definite basis according to the duration of the projects awarded to the UM on which they are engaged, there is no automatic career progression in place (Aspect 38). This fact may be considered as a weakness. If a Research Support Officer wishes to be employed in a higher category, s/he will be required to apply for the position through a call for applications, depending on opportunities for the requirements and funding of new research projects. In addition, no funding is made available to them for attending conferences, payment of the charges for publishing open access articles, and other research activities related to their tasks, unless such funding is provided for from the project budget they are working on (Aspect 38).

Remarks

The Training and Development Aspects had a boost following completed Action 10, wherein researchers are now being offered training on supervision, mentoring and leadership. A new Action no 32 is concerned with the training and the provision of a manual for principal investigators managing a project. This will continue enhancing their leadership skills, as well as other skills such as budgeting, promoting STEM subjects, Inclusivity and unconscious bias, and research team diversity.

Changes in the priorities for the short and medium

Since the year 2020, the entire functioning of the University of Malta has been affected by the COVID-19 situation. The rectorate and other management and decision-making bodies had to implement ways of how its employees and researchers work, and this had to happen in a very short period of time. The University community was pushed to switch to online teaching, and to the digitalization of all administrative processes. The change in the way the University had to function has put an importance on making the most of the modern technology available in terms of both teaching and research. Several courses are offered in a hybrid mode and meetings and other work is also carried out both online and physically. This was also necessary in view of the growing University community in terms of research projects and hence the increase in human resources, and the lack of office space that there is on campus. As indicated in the strengths and weaknesses section of the Working Conditions, two major projects are underway, partially funded through European Regional Development Funds, to build state of the art facilities for researcher space and laboratories mainly in the areas falling under the Faculty of Engineering ([TRAKE project](#)), and the Faculty for Built Environment plus other entities (Sustainable Living Complex -SLC project).

Changes in the circumstances in which the UM operates and their impact on the HR strategy

As mentioned above, the situation was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and certain contingency plans had to take place, such as that of going either completely online or hybrid. Nevertheless, the HRS4R Implementation Committee managed to fulfill most of the actions, even though some delays were experienced. The delays were not necessarily the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, the work on the actions continued with success and did not really affect the HRS4R strategy implementation.

Strategic decisions that may influence the action plan

The University of Malta is implementing a [strategic plan](#) for the years 2020-2025. It focuses on students' experience, resources, contribution of the academic community to society, and the University's impact on the nation. Part of the strategic plan is concerned with adopting the principles of the Charter and Code, and thus one of the goals is to enhance the recruitment and working environment for the researchers. Therefore, the adoption of the strategic plan will continue fulfilling the action plan since part of its focus is to have the HRS4R strategy in place. The change in the university's top management (Rectorate) will not take place until the Year 2026, therefore, no major changes are expected until that year in connection with the implementation of the action plan.

3. ACTIONS:

A. Update on the Actions for Period 2021 - 2023

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 1 UPDATED: The Rectorate and Chairperson of UREC in liaison with HR will continuously organise online or face-to-face information/training sessions regarding the standards, guidelines and procedures of ethics.	2. Ethical Principles	Quarter 4 of Year 2021 / Ongoing	Rectorate/ FRECs/HR	Number of Information sessions, and Number of persons who attend the sessions.	Completed	A mailshot issued by the Pro-Rector for Research & Knowledge Transfer has been sent to all FREC Chairs during the period October - December 2021 requesting information on what sessions regarding the guidelines and standard of ethics have been / are being held, and by which means the information is being provided. 24 sessions were held during 2020/21 by the FRECs. 20 sessions were envisaged for Year 2022 - New Action 25 will follow up on what sessions are held at Faculty level. Information/training sessions in liaison with HR are also being held: Two sessions were held during the Year 2022 and the number of participants were 49. In addition, the topic has also been included in the CPD course offered by OPAD for the academics.
ACTION 2: The UM will set up a Research Integrity Office (RIO).	3. Professional Responsibility	Quarter 4 of Year 2024	Rectorate	Provision of an office that strengthens the UM's codes and practices.	Extended	The HRSR Implementation Committee decided to extend this action due to lack of resources.
ACTION 3: (a) RSSD will continue providing information regarding the funding for research. The Project Support Office will also continue providing information on the services that they offer.	4. Professional Attitude	(a) Ongoing	(a) RSSD/PSO	(a) Number of proposals submitted by the researchers and total funding. The amount of funding awarded to the UM and total funded projects.	Completed	For period Oct 2020-Sep 2021: -Number of proposals submitted by researchers and supported by RSSD: 292; -Funding applied for by researchers and supported by RSSD: €48,585,332; -Total projects funded: 72; -Total funding awarded: €8,471,650. For period Oct 2021 - Sept 2022: -Number of proposals submitted by researchers and supported by RSSD: 279; -Funding applied for by researchers and supported by RSSD: €74,973,623; -Total projects funded: 120; -Total funding awarded: €14,666,144.

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 3 (cont.) (b) The UM will study the creation of a formal appeals mechanism to resolve conflicts.			(b) Rectorate/HR	(b) Provision of an updated Manual of Conduct & Procedures, and Handbook for RSOs/RSAs	Superseded by Action 17	There are also proposals that are supported by the Corporate Research & Knowledge Transfer Officer (KTO) in liaison with the Project Support Office (PSO). In fact, the total number of Projects awarded (including those supported by RSSD) during Oct 2021 - Sept 2022 was 208 with a total funding of EUR 19.4 million. Part (b) has been superseded by Action 17 which is concerned with the updating of the Manual of Conduct & Procedures to include information about complaints and appeals. Page 12 of the Handbook for RSOs/RSAs includes such information.
ACTION 4 UPDATED: HR in collaboration with OPAD will introduce elements of the working conditions and legal obligations during the series of short courses related to Continuing Professional Development. Furthermore, HR will circulate more information on the rights and obligations to the existing Research Support Officers via a Handbook.	5.Contractual and Legal Obligations	Quarter 3 of Year 2021	HR/OPAD	Provision of a Handbook for RSOs/RSAs.	Completed	The Handbook has been finalised and approved by UMASA, and is available online. Hard copies are printed and forwarded to the Research Support Officers that are being employed. The new Collective Agreement for academics has been issued earlier in 2021 and has been made available to all members of staff. It is also available online.
ACTION 5: The Corporate Research & Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) will continue organising information sessions to academics and Research Support Officers to provide information on the commercialisation and exploitation of results. The relevant procedures will be made available online.	8. Dissemination exploitation of results	Ongoing	KTO	Provision of online procedures/ information and Number of filing of patents.	Completed	Information sessions are organised on a case by case basis. Academics and RSOs can access commercialisation related documents, such as Material Transfer Agreements, Consortium and IP Agreements . They can also view the process to follow regarding the commercialisation of results. An infographic regarding the process from invention disclosure to commercialisation is available online. As of 2021, a total of 8 patent filings are recorded in KTO's database. This includes initial filings, international (PCT) and national filings. For the Year 2022, 3 new patents were initially filed.

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 6: The UM will consider the implementation of an evaluation/performance appraisal system that will also consider research performance.	11.Evaluation/ Appraisal Systems	Quarter 3 of Year 2023	Rectorate	Provision of a research performance appraisal system for UM employees	In Progress	The Director of OHRM&D is working on an evaluation for resident academics, including guidelines, which will form part of the Manual of Conduct and Procedures. The evaluation will serve for the Tenure Track Review of the Resident Academics.
ACTION 7: (a) The Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD) will keep on creating and continuously updating and improving the standard operating procedures for the use of equipment and facilities and training researchers accordingly, as well as all procedures concerning UM administrative processes. (b) The UM will continue making an ongoing petition to the government to commit more money for research resources.	23.Research Environment	Ongoing	(a) RSSD (b) Rector	(a) Number of SOPs issued and number of researchers trained. (b) Amount of funding available for research.	Completed	(a) During the Year 2021, a total of 171 SOPs have been issued (the number include those that have been updated from the previous year) and are available online . The number of SOPs issued in 2022 is 118. This figure includes new SOPs and new versions of existing SOPs. Tutorials to train staff on how to do SOPs started taking place some time in June of the Year 2022. Following are the details: "Hazardous Chemical Waste Management" SOP : 3 sessions, Participants : 31. "Management of Lab Equipment in the Fixed Asset module in AIMS" SOP: 1 session, Participants: 29. "Basic Radiation Safety Awareness": 1 session, Participants: 20. (b) The amount of funding for research provided by the government for the years 2021, 2022, 2023 is 1.2 million per annum.
ACTION 8: The HR Director in liaison with the Access Disability Support Unit has started to make information available on the services that are offered to employees with disability through training sessions. The sessions provide information on the accessible areas (e.g. wheelchair access).	24.Working Conditions	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	HR/Pro-Rector for Student and Staff Affairs and Outreach	Number of employees attending training sessions.	Completed	During the Year 2021 a total of 49 employees attended the training sessions. During the Year 2022, one session was held where 16 members of staff attended. There is a set of guidelines which is available online and which is being informed about during the training sessions. Information on the training session is available online .

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 9 ELIMINATED: The UM will discuss the issue of a pension scheme for Research Support Officers with the Social Security Authorities.	26.Funding and Salaries	Quarter 3 of Year 2023	HR/Rectorate	Provision of a pension scheme.	ELIMINATED	The HRS4R Implementation Committee agreed to eliminate this action in view that the government is not offering such pension schemes.
ACTION 10: The UM will be continuously vigilant to ensure committees and groups are gender balanced. An action plan for Gender Equality Diversity and Inclusion is underway, which will be approved by the Senate and Council. The Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee will make available gender balance statistics on the UM website and will circulate the details to all UM employees.	27.Gender Balance	Quarter 4 of Year 2021	Chair, Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee	Provision of the Gender Plus Equity Plan, and Provision of Gender Statistics.	Completed	The " Gender Plus Equity Plan " was approved by the Senate on 20th January 2022 and by Council on 17th February 2022 and has been made available online. Meetings to introduce the document with academics have been held between November and December 2021. Meetings are being held with the administrative staff and other meetings will be held to implement the plan. An Equity Officer has also been appointed to take on the role of auditing and implement training on the same plan. Discussions are being held with HR, OPAD and Registrar both for the training requirements as well as the provision of statistics and an action plan has been put in place.
ACTION 11 UPDATED: The Professional Development Committee within the Doctoral School will offer the training programmes to all Research Support Officers who are not reading for a PhD. The Doctoral School is also developing the Professional Development page on the website in time for the launch of the Professional Development Programme registrations for each academic year.	28.Career Development	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer/ Doctoral School/OPAD	Number of Research Support Officers registered for workshops and provision of an online catalogue listing all workshops.	Completed	There were 54 RSOs who attended the workshops during the Year 2021/22. The catalogue for academic year 2021/2022 is available online. During the Year 2022, there were 30 attendees. The catalogue for the Year 2022/2023 is available online.
ACTION 12 UPDATED: The consideration of the mobility experience has been included in the new guidelines for recruitment of employees, including researchers.	18.Recognition of Mobility Experience (code) 29.Value of Mobility	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	HR	Provision of guidelines for the recruitment of employees including researchers.	Completed	The mobility experience is included in the guidelines for the recruitment of employees, including researchers, at the UM. The guidelines have been approved by Council on 16th February 2023 and are available online.

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
<p>ACTION 13 UPDATED: The Doctoral School and the Office for Professional Academic Development (OPAD) will market their career support services. A mailshot in liaison with HR shall be sent to all researchers twice a year. In addition, an in-person orientation programme will resume in September 2022. In view of COVID, the orientation programme will be held in a hybrid mode in the following years.</p>	30. Access to Career Advice	Quarter 3 of Year 2021	Doctoral School/OPAD/HR	Provision of an online orientation programme and number of trainees attending the CPD course.	Completed	<p>For the CPD course offered by OPAD, 26 resident academics attend each year. In addition, OPD5002 Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Online Study-Units is offered at least twice during each academic year. Each iteration would typically enroll 25 - 30 academics.</p> <p>OPAD team also delivers these workshops for doctoral students (in liaison with the Doctoral School), UM resident academics pursuing doctoral studies at universities abroad and UM post-doctoral researchers: DOC6032 Introduction to Student Mentoring DOC6033 Basic Lecturing Skills DOC6034 Enhancing Small Group Teaching and Learning DOC6035 Basic Research Supervision Skills.</p> <p>The OHRM&D has re-started to organise in-person orientation programmes for researchers as follows: 1st March 2023 for all University staff, concerning the services and resources of the University Library; 8th March 2023 for all University staff, concerning the Strategic Plan of the UM for Years 2020 -2025; 8th March 2023 for resident academics, concerning the Collective Agreement, Manual of Conduct & Procedures and the Academic Profession; 16th March 2023 for resident academics, concerning the IT Services' key offerings.</p>
<p>ACTION 14: The Corporate Research & Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) will enhance the organisation of outreach events to raise awareness on IP matters.</p>	31. Intellectual Property Rights	Ongoing	KTO	Number of requests re IP matters. and number of researchers who attend the IP information sessions.	Completed	<p>Sessions are organised sporadically and on a case by case basis. Two events have been organised in October 2021 and April 2022 on IP protection specific to software/digital innovations. The first event was held online on the 29th October with 20 participants. The recordings of session 1 and session 2 of the event are available online. Details of the other event are also available online.</p>

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 14 CONT.						All UM employees who are currently reading for their Ph.D. and doctoral researchers and post-doctoral researchers (Research Support Officers and Marie Skłodowska-Curie European Research Officers) are offered the possibility to attend the DOC6007 workshop (page 92) on IP matters. Sessions are also being organised for academic staff. -Number of researchers who attended the IP information sessions in 2021 was 13. -Number of researchers who attended the IP information sessions in 2022 was 2. -Approx. ¼ of a month is spent sending replies in connection with IP matters.
ACTION 15: The Corporate Research & Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) and the Doctoral School will jointly instruct the Faculties to distribute information regarding co-authorship at the UM. A document shall be formulated which will possibly be transformed into a set of FAQs. Discussion on the method of how to make the researchers aware of the document/FAQs will take place.	32. Co-authorship	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	KTO/Doctoral School	Provision of online co-authorship documents and relevant FAQs.	Completed	The document has been created. It includes a few FAQs and is available on the Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office website. All researchers have been informed of the document via a mailshot.
ACTION 16: HR will include information regarding the teaching duties of the Research Support Officers (RSOs), which are currently assigned on an ad hoc basis, in the handbook that will be created by HR.	33. Teaching	Quarter 3 of Year 2021	HR	Provision of an online handbook.	Completed	The Handbook has been finalised and approved by UMASA, and is available online. Hard copies are printed and forwarded to the Research Support Officers that are being employed. A mailshot has been sent to all staff of the UM.

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 17: UPDATED - Regarding complaints and appeals, HR in liaison with UMASA, shall be providing a Handbook specific to Research Support Officers and an updated Manual of Conduct and Procedures specific to the academics.	34. Complaints/ Appeals	Quarter 2 of Year 2022	HR/UMASA	Provision of an online Handbook and Updated Manual of Conduct and Procedures.	In Progress	The Handbook has been finalised and approved by UMASA, and is available online. Hard copies are printed and forwarded to the Research Support Officers that are being employed. A mailshot has been sent to all staff of the UM. The updated version of the Manual of Conduct and Procedures is to be revised by the Legal Office, especially the part regarding complaints and appeals including the Code of Professional Conduct.
ACTION 18: UPDATED – There is a full representation of researchers on the various decision-making committees, including Council, Senate, even at Faculty, Institute, and departmental level. The UM will continue giving out information to all employees prior to making decisions to keep on encouraging their participation in the decision-making activities.	35. Participating in decision making bodies.	Ongoing	HR/Rectorate	Number of Academics and RSOs invited to vote during elections, and number of academics who vote during elections.	Completed	The updated collective agreement has been issued in April 2021 and is available online for all researchers which includes information on the voting rights (Section 33.10, Appendix C). All members of staff of the UM are invited to vote in an election. Statistics on the number of persons who voted are not available.
ACTION 19: HR in liaison with the Doctoral School and the Office for Professional Academic Development (OPAD) have developed courses related to mentoring, supervision, and leadership and will be offered twice a year. An email in liaison with HR is already being sent to all researchers twice a year.	36. Relation with supervisors 37. Supervision and managerial duties 40. Supervision	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	HR/Doctoral School/OPAD	Number of trainees.	Completed	During the Year 2021 there were 30 participants and from these 10 participants attended for a follow-up training session. Information of the courses is available online: Postgraduate research supervision and Challenge of doctoral supervision Other courses are offered by the OHRM&D: Mentoring (39 participants during Year 2021) Leadership skills (56 participants during Year 2021). There were no participants during the Year 2022.

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 20: UPDATED - The HR members of staff responsible for the recruitment of Research Support Officers will start including the Head of Department in their email sent to the Principal Investigator regarding the advertising of a call for applications. In addition, a revision of the Standard Operating Procedures regarding the employment of Research Support Officers will be carried out accordingly. All adverts of calls for application are disseminated to the whole UM community.	12. Recruitment	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	HR	Updated Standard Operating Procedure ZPS-001-03.	Completed	This practice started from the calls for application that have been issued from September 2021 onwards. Section 6.3.1 of the SOP has been updated accordingly.
ACTION 21: Discussions will take place between HR, Finance, AIMS, and IT Services regarding a possible introduction of an online recruitment system. In the meantime, the current technologies are being used to improve the process.	13. Recruitment (code)	Quarter 3 of Year 2022	HR	Provision of an online recruitment process.	Completed	Current digital technologies have been implemented for online recruitment. Work on the process per se continues to be developed to keep on improving the whole recruitment procedure.
ACTION 22: There have been recent changes wherein the Principal Investigator of a research project is always present during the selection process. The standard operating procedures are being revised accordingly.	14. Selection (code)	Quarter 1 of Year 2021	HR	Updated Standard Operating Procedure ZPS-001-03.	Completed	Sections 6.4 and 6.5 of the SOP have been updated accordingly.

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/ Target(s)	Current Status	Remarks
ACTION 23: The UM will start discussions regarding the creation of a structure to employ post-docs on fixed term contracts.	21. Postdoctoral appointments (code)	Quarter 3 of Year 2022	Pro-Rector for Research & Knowledge Transfer/HR	Updated Standard Operating Procedure ZPS-001-03.	Completed	A process is already in place to recruit postdocs under the term Research Support Officer III (with a PhD) and Research Support Officer IV (with a PhD and 3 years of research experience). The UM may also recruit a Senior Research Support Officer I, which is a postdoc with 6 years of research experience. The "Definitions" section (3.8) of the SOP has been updated accordingly.
ACTION 24: The UM will publish and disseminate its Open, Transparent, and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) Policy.	12. Recruitment	Quarter 4 of Year 2022	HR	Provision of the OTM-R Policy	Completed	The OTM-R policy reflects the details included in the guidelines for the recruitment of employees including researchers at the UM, and the Standard Operating Procedure number ZPS-001-03. It is available online and a notification has been sent to all members of staff of the UM.

B. New Actions for Period August 2023 - July 2026

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/Target(s)	Current Status
ACTION 25: The Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer will follow up on what sessions are held at Faculty level regarding ethical consideration and guidelines. The Pro-Rector will also check whether Research Support Officers and Assistants are invited to attend for such sessions.	2. Ethical Principles	Quarter 4 of Year 2023	Rectorate/ FRECs	Number of sessions and number of participants.	NEW
ACTION 26: The Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer will follow up with UREC regarding the increase in awareness of the material available regarding ethical guidelines, standards and procedures.	2. Ethical Principles	Quarter 4 of Year 2023	Rectorate/UREC/FRECs	Provision of material available for all staff, such as recordings, etc.	NEW
ACTION 27: The Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD) will increase and prioritise face-to-face sessions and interaction between RSSD staff and researchers. This will be complimented with online reproduction of such sessions.	4. Professional Attitude	Ongoing	RSSD	Number of sessions and number of participants/ Provision of online material	NEW
ACTION 28: The Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD) will issue a year-long calendar for researchers, including the calls for funding that will become available during the year in connection with MCST funded projects.	4. Professional Attitude	Quarter 3 of Year 2023	RSSD	Number of proposals submitted in connection with MCST Funds.	NEW
ACTION 29: The Office for Human Resources Management & Development will provide Research Support Officers (RSOs) employed on internal funds with information on the processes that exist that are relevant to their employment.	24. Working Conditions	Quarter 1 of Year 2024	HR	Provision of information/documentation for RSOs.	NEW

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/Target(s)	Current Status
ACTION 30: The Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office will check all the IP Policy links that are available on the UM website and update as necessary.	31. Intellectual Property Rights	Quarter 4 of Year 2023	KTO	Updated online information on IP.	NEW
ACTION 31: The Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Office will issue a document that simplifies the main points and other important aspects of the Intellectual Property Policy of the UM. This will be distributed to all employees of the UM.	31. Intellectual Property Rights	Quarter 1 of Year 2024	KTO	Provision of a simplified IP document.	NEW
ACTION 32: The University of Malta will provide a training manual, as well as training sessions for researchers acting as the principal investigator on a project.	4. Professional Attitude	Quarter 3 of Year 2024	RSSD/HR/KTO/Chair, Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee	Provision of training manual for PIs/Number of training sessions and number of participants.	NEW
ACTION 33: The Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer in liaison with the Director for Research Support Services Directorate, the Director of Finance and the Director for Human Resources Management and Development will work on and, prepare a proposal to present to the Council of the University of Malta, in order to increase the salaries of the Research Support Officers/Assistants (RSOs/RSAs).	26. Funding and Salaries	Quarter 4 of Year 2023 This has been done and the increases were approved by the Council on 13 July 2023. The new rates will start being applied as of 1 January 2024 to allow for a smooth transition period.	Rectorate/RSSD/HR/Finance	Provision of new salary scales for RSOs and RSAs	COMPLETED
ACTION 34: MCST registered the University of Malta as a research institution with the local authorities, in order to employ Research Support Officers from non-EU countries through a fast track process in accordance with Legal Notice 212 of 2018. The UM will work with all the stakeholders to implement these procedures.	13. Recruitment (Code)	Quarter 3 of Year 2023	Rectorate/HR	Timing of visa and work permit issuance for the Recruitment of RSOs from third countries.	NEW

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/Target(s)	Current Status
ACTION 35: The Office for Human Resources Management and Development in liaison with other directorates is in the process of preparing and organizing a set of induction sessions for the Deans and Heads of Department on the several processes of recruitment, budgeting, procurement, and other matters.	38. Continuing Professional Development	Quarter 1 of Year 2024	HR	Number of Induction Sessions	NEW
ACTION 36: The Office for Human Resources Management and Development will issue a recruitment process timeline document in point form for all the University of Malta Staff. This will be made available online.	13. Recruitment (Code)	Quarter 4 of Year 2023	HR	Provision of Recruitment Process Timeline Document.	NEW
ACTION 37: The University of Malta will explore the possibility of increasing the number of internal staff that can offer the training and information sessions regarding the standards, guidelines and procedures of ethics.	2. Ethical Principles	Quarter 1 of Year 2024	Rectorate/UREC/HR	Number of Training Sessions and Number of Trainees	NEW
ACTION 38: A discussion will take place between the Rectorate, IT Services and the Data Protection Office (DPO) regarding the possibility of a real encrypted central repository for post project consent forms and other documents.	2. Ethical Principles	Quarter 2 of Year 2024	Rectorate/IT Services/DPO	Provision of a Central Repository	NEW
ACTION 39: The Office for Human Resources Management & Development will increase the awareness of the services and facilities available for people with disability (both temporary and long-term) in liaison with the ACCESS Disability Support Unit.	24. Working Conditions	Quarter 4 of Year 2023	Rectorate/HR/ Access Disability Unit.	Provision of Information on the services offered for people with disability.	NEW

	GAP Principle(s) (Aspect/s)	Timing by year's quarter	Responsible Unit	Indicators/Target(s)	Current Status
ACTION 40: The Research Support Services Directorate (RSSD) will increase the awareness of the Standard Operating Procedures and the inventory of equipment for academics through information sessions.	1. Research Freedom; 23. Research Environment	Ongoing	RSSD	Number of information sessions.	NEW
ACTION 41: A discussion will take place regarding the enrichment of the career paths of the Research Support Officers (RSOs) and Research Support Assistants (RSAs).	28. Career Development	Ongoing	RSSD/PSO/ Rectorate/HR	Provision of information for RSOs/RSAs.	NEW
ACTION 42: The Office for Human Resources Management and Development will explore the possibility of making the training courses available on video to be more accessible to the UM staff at different timings.	38. Continuing Professional Development; 39. Access to Research Training and Continuous Development	Ongoing	HR	Provision of training videos.	NEW
ACTION 43: The ACCESS Disability Support Unit in liaison with the Office for Human Resources Management and Development will start organising information sessions to the Research Support Officers.	24. Working Conditions	Ongoing	HR/ACCESS	Provision of Information Sessions/ Number of RSOs/RSAs attending the sessions.	NEW - It is envisaged to hold the first session on 19th September 2023

Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles

The Office for Human Resources Management and Development (OHRM&D) of the University of Malta (UM) is responsible for the recruitment process. New recruitment guidelines for selection board members have been approved by Council on 16th February 2023, and are available online on the UM website for all members of staff. These guidelines serve to guide the selection board members in the process of selection and encircle part of the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment. Other information on the recruitment process is available in the Collective Agreement, the Manual of Conduct and Procedures, as well as the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the recruitment of researchers.

Areas that have made an improvement and that have been identified from the review of the OTM-R checklist include: (i) Items 1 and 9 - A formal OTM-R policy has been issued, circulated to all researchers of the UM, and is available online; (ii) Regarding Item 4, as from the Year 2022, the recruitment process is including the facility of an online application form for interested applicants to apply for a post. The list of candidates is easily generated and forwarded to the principal investigator; (iii) Items 6, 7 and 8 - the new recruitment guidelines, together with the OTM-R policy encourage external candidates to apply for research posts, and the positions advertised attract researchers from abroad including those from underrepresented groups. Regarding Item 8, the UM has a Gender Equality and Diversity Inclusion action plan in place to work on equal opportunities and gender balance. The OTM-R policy also includes information in this regard; (iv) Regarding Item 10, there is still no mechanism in place to monitor whether the most suitable researchers apply, though the UM continues to assess the type of persons that apply for specific posts; (v) For Item 12, all the necessary details, criteria and references are included on the adverts for all call for applications; (vi) Regarding Item 18, the UM is thriving to have all committees as gender balanced as possible and the Gender Equality and Diversity Inclusion plan is tackling the gender balance in the recruitment process; (vii) Regarding Item 21, the UM provides feedback to the interviewees if these ask for it; (viii) Item 23 - The UM has an integral quality control system in place, which is carried out at each stage of the recruitment process. This is done by the central HR staff as well as by the UM internal auditors.

4. Implementation:

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

The University of Malta received the HR Excellence in Research Award in July 2021. At that time, the HR Manager for externally funded projects took the role of HRS4R Coordinator to monitor the implementation process of the actions. This was endorsed by the HRS4R Committee which, following the award, took on the role of the HRS4R Implementation Committee. The HRS4R coordinator is fully involved in the implementation process, and is the HRS4R contact person for the institution. The HRS4R Coordinator is responsible for monitoring, coordinating and keeping records of the whole process, including also the responsibility of working on and implementing some of the actions. Therefore, the overall responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of the University of Malta's Action Plan lies with the HRS4R Implementation Committee, and the HRS4R Coordinator.

The actions stipulated in the action plan are actuated by the responsible entities and are overseen by the HRS4R Implementation Committee. The members of the HRS4R Implementation Committee include the Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer Professor Ing. Simon Fabri as Chairperson, the Director for Human Resources Management and Development Ms Jacqueline Fenech, the Deputy Director for Human Resources Management and Development Mr Robert Abdilla, the Director of Finance Mr Mark Debono, the Director for Research Support Services Dr Christian Bonnici, the Director for Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer Dr Anton Bartolo, the Deputy Director for Externally Funded projects Ms Alexandra Attard, the HR Manager for Externally Funded Projects Dr Karen Cacciattolo, and researchers ranging from R1 to R4. The R1 to R4 researchers have been chosen on the basis of their involvement in projects. Ms Audrey Zammit, Scientific Officer, Department of Geosciences, and Ms Natalie Galea, Research Support Officer, Centre for Resilience & Socio-Emotional Health, are representing the Research Support Officers, Dr Ingrid Vella, Lecturer, Department of Artificial Intelligence, was a previous Research Project Manager with the Research Support Services Directorate, Professor Saviour Formosa, Associate Professor, Department of Criminology, is an active researcher from the Humanities, and Dr Josette Farrugia, Senior Lecturer, Department of Mathematics and Science Education is an active Researcher in the area of science education. The committee is also gender balanced with six males and seven females. There is also a working group that is responsible for keeping updates on: the University's web page dedicated to the HRS4R; the indicators of certain actions; and the implementation of some actions. The working group includes the HR Manager for Externally Funded Projects Dr Karen Cacciattolo, the Manager for Human Resources Management Ms Amanda Borg Ciantar and other administrative staff as required.

The HRS4R implementation committee is keeping the University of Malta's community informed of the actions that took place and those that are still in progress. In this regard, the dedicated web page mentioned above is being continuously updated by the HRS4R Working Group. In addition, the HRS4R Coordinator is making sure that the community is being informed by making announcements through the Marketing, Communications and Alumni Office, as well as through presentations and other reports as necessary. A survey has also been distributed to all researchers of the University of Malta to gather feedback about the actions taking place. The HRS4R Coordinator in liaison with the HRS4R Implementation Committee is also in close contact with the management of the University of Malta, so that any necessary steps can be consulted and supported by the same management in discussions with other relevant groups and entities of the University of Malta. The groups that are being involved to facilitate the implementation of the action plan include the Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee, the University Research Committee, the ACCESS Disability Support Committee, the Professional Development Committee, and the Doctoral Academic Committee. Other groups may be involved in due course.

Preparation for the internal review

In order to prepare for the internal review and implement the actions included in the action plan, several stakeholders from within the University of Malta community were consulted, communication was ongoing, and reports were issued to keep abreast of the actions taking place. The HRS4R Implementation Committee relied on the data and information that was collected by the HRS4R Coordinator throughout the process of the action plan implementation. The HRS4R coordinator regularly reported to the HRS4R Implementation Committee and other stakeholders on the developments and issues regarding the implementation of the actions. Adaptations to some actions were required, following meetings and negotiations with the sections responsible for an action. The adaptations were necessary in order to implement the respective actions successfully. Following the evaluation of the implementation of the current actions by the HRS4R Implementation Committee, data was collected for new actions.

The topics of the new actions are based on the meetings held with the various groups mentioned in the general overview above, as well as on the researchers' questionnaire responses analysis during meetings held within the HRS4R Implementation Committee. The draft new actions were first commented on by the departments responsible for implementing the action plan. Subsequently, they were endorsed by the HRS4R Implementation Committee members. The HRS4R Coordinator made a few consultations on certain actions with other universities, such as the University College Cork of Ireland and the University of Gdansk in Poland. Moreover, to keep abreast with the Charter and Code developments, the HRS4R Coordinator attended any HRS4R workshops offered by the EU and then reported back the details to the rest of the HRS4R Implementation Committee, and where necessary, even to the University of Malta research community.

Involvement of the research community and the UM's main stakeholders in the implementation process

In general, meetings were held with the HRS4R Implementation Committee, and members of staff involved in the decision-making activities concerning research. The HRS4R Coordinator held ongoing meetings with the entities responsible for the actions in order to check the progress and issued quarterly reports accordingly. Several meetings were held with the Senior Managers of the Research Support Services Directorate, the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), the Chair of the Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee, the Equity Coordinator of the Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee, the Rector's delegate responsible for the Office for Professional Academic Development, the Senior Executive of the Marketing, Communications & Alumni Office, the Head of the Department of Systems & Control Engineering within the Faculty of Engineering, the Director and other staff of the Office for Human Resources Management and Development, the Director and staff of the Corporate Research and Knowledge Transfer, and the Director of the Doctoral School. The information was always reported back to the HRS4R Implementation Committee through a meeting. An online survey has been distributed during the period November - December 2022 to all researchers of the University of Malta ranging from R1 and R4 for the actions that were already implemented. This was necessary in order to monitor the success or failure of the actions, as well as to collect feedback and suggestions on other matters for any possible new actions that are required to be undertaken. A report of the feedback provided was distributed to the research community within the University of Malta and it is also available [online](#) on the HRS4R dedicated web page of the University of Malta.

Implementation committee to regularly oversee the progress

Following the attainment of the HR Excellence in Research award in July 2021, the initial HRS4R Committee took on the role of the HRS4R Implementation Committee. The main task of the HRS4R Implementation Committee is to monitor the implementation on the Action Plan in liaison with the HRS4R Coordinator forming part of the Working Group as well as the same Implementation Committee. More specifically, the tasks of the HRS4R Implementation Committee include: - (i) Coordination of the process of implementation of the Action Plan; (ii) Communication with the management/Rectorate of the University, other committees, the faculties/centers/institutes, the HRS4R Working Group, and the entities responsible for implementation of the action plan; (iii) Analysis of the data collection; (iv) Updating the action plan with adaptation of present actions and approving new actions; and (iv) Ensuring harmonization of the HRS4R strategy implementation with the strategic plan of the University of Malta for the years 2020-2025. Data is being collected by the HRS4R Coordinator via meetings with the relevant office managers, directors and researchers, and a quarterly report is provided to all the HRS4R Implementation Committee. A meeting is also set up every quarter with the HRS4R Implementation Committee to discuss the outcome and progress.

Alignment of the UM's policies with the HRS4R, recognition of the HRS4R in the UM's strategy, and the overarching HR policy

One of the themes of the Strategic Plan of the University of Malta for 2020-2025 is concerned with Research and Knowledge Transfer. The University of Malta is making great efforts to engage in world-class research within the local, regional, European and global scenarios. In order to achieve this important milestone, the University of Malta is looking for ways to strengthen the quality of its research output through its academics and through the provision of a strong research infrastructure. One of the main University of Malta's commitments include the designing of a human resources strategy that valorises and supports researchers that is in line with the Charter and Code. In fact, the chair of the HRS4R Implementation Committee and the HRS4R Coordinator participated in a forum during March of the Year 2022, wherein the principles of the Charter and Code were introduced and an explanation of the implementation of the action plan was presented. In addition, the University of Malta has a web page dedicated to the HRS4R, which includes information on the whole process. The chair of the HRS4R Implementation Committee is one of the University of Malta's top management team, namely the Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer. This ensures that the HRS4R is in line with the University of Malta's strategic plan.

UM's assurance to implement the proposed actions

As indicated in the previous section, the implementation of HRS4R is integrated into the University of Malta strategic plan 2020-2025, wherein one of the main University of Malta's commitments include the designing of a human resources strategy that valorises and supports researchers. The Pro-Rector for Research and Knowledge Transfer chairs the HRS4R Implementation Committee, and as part of the Rectorate, he is responsible for overseeing that the whole implementation process is in place, and regularly informs the Rector as and where required. In addition, the whole implementation process is monitored by the HRS4R Coordinator, who coordinates and plans all activities and prepares the necessary documents and reports. The HRS4R Coordinator also ensures communication between the management of the University of Malta, and the relevant groups. When there are delays or issues with the implementation of some actions, these are discussed as soon as possible with the HRS4R Implementation Committee and the responsible unit for the action in order to find the best possible solution.

Progress monitoring (timeline)

As a monitoring mechanism, the HRS4R Coordinator will continue organising meetings, keeping reports, and inform the HRS4R Implementation Committee accordingly. The fulfillment of the action plan will be supervised by the HRS4R Implementation Committee and by the HRS4R Coordinator. A report is issued every quarter by the HRS4R Coordinator which is presented to the HRS4R Implementation Committee during a meeting. The report includes progress of the actions taking place. For any issues that are identified, a decision will be taken between the HRS4R Implementation Committee members on how best to proceed. Meetings are also held with administrative staff that form part of the HRS4R Working Group as and when required.

Measuring progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment

The action plan includes measurable indicators that are set out for each action. The fulfillment of each action will be checked by the HRS4R Coordinator and reported back to the HRS4R Implementation Committee. The HRS4R Coordinator will set up meetings with the responsible entities for each action and will keep notes and reports accordingly regarding the indicators. Online surveys may be distributed to the research community of the University of Malta to check whether the actions taking place were successful or otherwise.

Preparation for the external review

The HRS4R Implementation Committee will regularly monitor the implementation of the actions. For the next three years, the Committee will continue to reach out to the University of Malta research community and where necessary seek advice from other Universities. The HRS4R Coordinator will also continue to attend any workshops that are organized by the EU regarding matters relevant to the HRS4R, which will then be reported back to the HRS4R Implementation Committee. If it is possible, members of the HRS4R Implementation Committee will also travel abroad to universities in Europe or connect online, to share experiences in connection with the implementation of the HRS4R. The Committee will also continue to link the activities of HRS4R with the University of Malta's strategic plan. In addition, the Committee will strive to improve the communication with the research community of the University of Malta in order to increase their participation in the implementation process. In order to measure progress and obtain feedback from the research community, an online survey will be prepared, which will also focus on the ethical principles, working conditions, recruitment and selection, and training and development aspects.

Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process

Below is an overview of the present [governance structure](#) of the University of Malta. The aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the institution that has embarked on the HRS4R implementation process.

As the supreme governing body of the University of Malta, the [Council](#) is responsible for the general administration of the University and for appointing new staff members, both local and foreign, to the various academic and administrative posts. The [Senate](#) is largely responsible for the academic matters, primarily regulating studies, research, documentation and examinations at the University. Entry regulations at the University of Malta are also established by the Senate. The Faculty Board directs the academic tasks of the Faculty and presents plans and proposals to the Senate and the Council. This Board determines the studies, teaching and research within the Faculty. Institutes, Centres and Schools are also governed by Boards which perform the same functions. The administrative set-up of the University of Malta involves a number of academic, administrative and technical staff members who are appointed or elected to the governing bodies of the University. Presently, the University Chancellor is Perit Karmenu Vella, and Professor Alfred J. Vella is Rector.

Currently, the University comprises 14 faculties, 115 academic departments, 1 academy, 17 institutes, 13 centres, 3 schools and 11 administrative directorates. The University operates from four campuses located in Msida, Valletta, Marsaxlokk and Gozo, with three outreach centres in Argotti, Cottonera and Fawwara. The University is one of the largest employers in the country, employing 3080 people: 880 full-time and 810 part-time academics, and 1,070 full-time and 320 part-time staff in administrative, technical and industrial roles. The implementation of the HRS4R is mainly concerned with the research community, namely the resident academic staff and the Research Support Officers/Assistants.

During the last 15 years, the UM was involved as project coordinator and project partner in 365 EU-funded projects, through various funding channels. These include Horizon 2020 (70 projects), Horizon Europe (14 projects), Erasmus+ (114 projects), INTERREG EU, MED, ITALIA-MALTA (44 projects), FP7 (47 projects), Lifelong Learning Programme (76 projects). The UM is also involved in national funding programmes, other international initiatives and is even represented in a number of European and International University networks and groups. It currently has around 300 active projects. The UM project teams are Resident Academics and Research Support Officers who are backed by support structures to assist during the application phase, throughout the life-cycle of the project and in all technical and financial reporting periods, right up to project closure. The departments in question concern:

1. Research Support Services Directorate
2. Project Support Office
3. Knowledge Transfer Office
4. Communication Office
5. Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation
6. Human Resources Office
7. Procurement Office
8. Legal Office and
9. IT services.