

Human Resources Strategy for Researchers Action Plan 2025

Contents

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 1 | Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2 | Organizational Profile | 3 |
| 3 | Ethical and professional aspects | 3 |
| 3.1 | Strengths | 3 |
| 3.2 | Weaknesses | 4 |
| 4 | Recruitment and selection | 4 |
| 4.1 | Strengths | 4 |
| 4.2 | Weaknesses | 5 |
| 5 | Working conditions | 5 |
| 5.1 | Strengths | 5 |
| 5.2 | Weaknesses | 6 |
| 6 | Training and development..... | 7 |
| 6.1 | Strengths | 7 |
| 6.2 | Weaknesses | 7 |
| 7 | Action Plan..... | 8 |
| 8 | Implementation | 10 |

1 Introduction

Laurea is committed to promoting high-quality applied research and supporting the career development of researchers. We are applying for the HR Excellence in Researchers certificate, which demonstrates our commitment to improving the working conditions of researchers and developing the research environment. This text also serves as a model for the documents produced for studies at Laurea UAS for long documents. The model includes a cover page and a table of contents.

Receiving the HR Excellence in Research recognition requires several steps that an organization must go through. Here's an overview of the process:

- Sending a letter of endorsement: The organisation must first commit to the European Commission's Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct. This is done by sending a letter of endorsement to the Commission.
- Gap analysis: The organization evaluates current practices and identifies areas for improvement in relation to the charter and policies.
- Action plan: Based on the analysis, the organization develops an action plan that defines concrete actions and a timeline for implementing improvements.
- Evaluation and approval: The European Commission evaluates the organisation's application and action plan. If all the requirements are met, the organization will receive a certificate.
- Monitoring and continuous improvement: The organisation should implement the action plan and report regularly on progress to the Commission.

2 Organizational Profile

Laurea is a University of Applied Sciences operating in Uusimaa region. Our values are openness, impact, and responsibility. Laurea community includes approximately 10 000 students, 680 staff and 36 000 alumni. Our fields of study are Business Management, Social Services and Health Care and Hospitality Management. Laurea University of Applied Sciences began operating in 1991.

The Finnish higher education system consists of dual model, Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. The Universities of Applied Sciences offer pragmatic education that support the needs of working life. The Universities of Applied Sciences conduct applied research, development, and innovation activities and regional development.

3 Ethical and professional aspects

3.1 Strengths

Researchers at Laurea University of Applied Sciences have research freedom and can apply funding for research subjects according to their own interest and it fits in the framework of Strategy of Laurea. Laurea has its own Ethical Guidelines since 2012 and all staff was invited to join and writing them. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide support and act as a tool for the everyday operations for personnel and students. Laurea is also committed to the guidelines of the Finnish National

Board on Research Integrity (TENK) responsible conduct of research both on ethical review in the human sciences. In addition, Laurea is bound by legislation, such as the protection of personal data. Laurea has also been a member in The International Coalition of Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) network since 2023. The CoARA aims to reform research evaluation practices. One of the goals is that business competence and the societal influence of research would become even stronger merits when evaluating research. According to the EFQM (EFQM Model) evaluation carried out for RDI during 2024, the identified strengths were that the Ethical principles are clearly defined: The organisation has strong ethical guidelines that are systematically followed in research activities. The freedom of the researcher is safeguarded: The report states that researchers have a wide freedom to choose their research topics and methods, which supports creativity and scientific quality. Ethical review and guidelines: Research activities are guided by ethical guidelines and, if necessary, ethics committees, which increases trust in the quality of research. Openness and transparency: Open access publishing of research results and transparent processes strengthen the ethical operating culture.

3.2 Weaknesses

Even though Laurea University of Applied Sciences is committed to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) responsible conduct of research both on ethical review in the human sciences and has the Ethical guidelines, the need to strengthen the ethical and professional aspects is still identified. The need to develop ethical knowledge regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence and also strengthen the competence regarding research and the understanding of research ethics is an aspect of continuous development. According to the EFQM evaluation the identified weaknesses were that Awareness of ethical practices varies: Not all employees are sufficiently familiar with the organization's ethical guidelines or how they are applied in practice. Tension between research and funding: In some cases, the expectations of funders can affect the direction of the research, which can limit the researcher's freedom. Ethical issues are not always dealt with systematically: Although guidelines exist, their practical application is not uniform in all units. International ethical standards: In international cooperation, the coordination of ethical practices can pose challenges.

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4 Recruitment and selection

4.1 Strengths

The recruitment processes at Laurea are transparent and follow the principles of fairness, equality and non-discrimination. Application process is described in the Guidelines for Recruitment. The positions are filled through an open application process and international recruitment is also encouraged. Before starting the recruitment process, the recruiter must obtain a filling permit. The filling permit procedure ensures the appropriateness and coordination of recruitments and, for example, the possibilities of offering additional work to existing part-time/part-time staff. The application procedure for open positions takes place simultaneously for

both internal and external applying. Evaluation is done for each recruitment if the required expertise is not found within the organization, the application procedure will be carried out as an external recruitment. A description of the position is published on Laurea's external website and internally in the staff intranet. The decision to start the recruitment process is made by the same persons who are entitled to hire personnel according to the company's bylaws. Persons who are relevant to the position's competences participate in the selection process. All applicants are treated equally, and our recruitment decisions are made in accordance with the principles of equality. We inform the applicants about the progress of the process and the schedule during the recruitment process is ongoing. Appropriate methods are used in applicants' assessments, such as interviews, video interviews, external expert assessments and aptitude assessments. Selection is based on an overall assessment of the person's qualifications and suitability for the open position. Laurea University of Applied Sciences researcher's career path has separately set goals for evaluation and progressing along the path which are published on Laurea's website. According to the EFQM evaluation the strengths of recruitment are Organizational Appeal: The report mentions that the organization is an attractive employer, making it easier to recruit new employees. Clear recruitment process: Recruitment practices are well-defined and support strategic goals. Diverse expertise: Recruitment has succeeded in attracting experts from different fields, which strengthens the multidisciplinary nature of RDI activities. Good orientation: The orientation processes for new employees have been described as functional and supportive.

4.2 Weaknesses

Even though the challenge of skill shortage that most likely will affect also the higher education sector is recognized, we still face the challenge of attracting international staff and researchers. The identified weaknesses and key findings from the EFQM evaluation support this are Competition for talent: In certain sectors, talent shortages make recruitment difficult, especially in technology and research. e.g. Safety, the context is not familiar where you are looking, long recruitment times: In some cases, recruitment processes have been slow, leading to the loss of good candidates. Workload in the work community: As recruitment has been delayed, the current staff has had to stretch, which has increased the workload. Attracting international talent: There have been challenges especially in the recruitment and integration of international experts. The researcher track at Laurea was implemented in 2021 and is still rather new.

5 Working conditions

5.1 Strengths

Working conditions are according to national regulations and Collective Agreements. Appropriate flexibility is granted for work, remote work is possible, it is possible to combine family and work, flexible working hours are at use as well as part-time working, remote working and sabbatical leave. Researchers are given support by the Service Unit when applying for external funding for their research. Equipment and facilities are given for researchers. National regulations concerning health and safety in research are followed. Salary scale is fixed according to Collective

Agreement and everybody is treated as professionals. Laurea has diversity of job descriptions, lots of opportunities and also much freedom to modify one's own job description when doing research. Non-discriminatory principles and laws are followed, and there is equal treatment for all genders. Every year a Personnel Balance is carried out which includes comparisons between genders; number of employed, salaries etc.

Staff survey is carried out every other year. Mentoring is offered, support from the Service Unit and also personal discussions at least once a year are being held with the supervisor. Benefits and incentives support research activity, career development, obtaining degrees and publishing. Laurea University of Applied Sciences is part of the Pioneer alliance, and one goal is to increase and support staff mobility by making it easier between the universities in the alliance. The research groups and the new competence-based organization increases the integration between RDI and teaching. This shows positively in the student feedback for instance. Laurea University of Applied Sciences is also committed to the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (Coara). This means that Laurea is committed to reforming the methods and processes by which research, researchers, and research organisations are evaluated. According to the EFQM evaluation the strengths of the working conditions were Work atmosphere and sense of community: The work community is described as encouraging and based on cooperation. Employees feel valued and included. Opportunity to influence one's own work: The report emphasizes that employees have good opportunities to influence their own work tasks and develop their own work. Flexible working methods: Remote work opportunities and flexible working hours support work-life balance. Safe and healthy working environment: Working conditions are physically and mentally safe, and well-being at work is invested in.

5.2 Weaknesses

According to the previous EFQM evaluation the weaknesses discovered were Un even workload: In some units, the workload is unevenly distributed, which causes strain and weakens coping at work. Variation in opportunities to influence: Although the opportunities for influence are generally good, in some teams' employees feel that their views are not sufficiently considered in decision-making. Deficiencies in facilities and equipment: Some locations have deficiencies in the ergonomics of the workspaces or technical tools, which affects working comfort. Internal communication: Employees feel that internal communication does not always reach everyone or is not clear enough, which can reduce the experience of empowerment. Other challenges that have been identified at Laurea are related to the integration of those on the researcher track to the organization which requires support in the future. This was seen as a possible challenge when developing something new, which takes time to integrate into the organization and mold into functional process. There is also some experience of unfairness between the terms of employment between different staff groups for example those doing RDI work and those doing teaching work. This can to some extent be explained due to the different employment terms of the collective agreement. Also, a challenge for those doing research work is some uncertainty in the continuation of contracts with fixed term employments. The term researcher is rather new still in the context of University of

Applied Sciences. In terms of leadership, the challenge for the future is how to lead sustainably and take into consideration the different generations and their different expectations about the working life and also how to take into consideration individual needs and requirements and offer sufficient support for all. A major challenge for the future is to find a way on how to balance the working time between innovations and routines, RDI and teaching, working time and free time etc.

6 Training and development

6.1 Strengths

Laurea University of Applied Sciences strengths are high professional standards. We have put in a lot of effort for example training leaders and managers and have offered several training programmes for them. A leadership development programme is currently ongoing. Also about four times a year a shared training and workshop for supervisors and about once a month HR holds an info session for supervisors about acute topics or going over different processes. A lot of internal training is offered for researchers and RDI staff for instance. In the future one action is to develop a mandatory online course for all those that are involved in RDI work. In addition, all those that work as project managers there is a tailored Certified Project Manager training. A TEAMS channel provides updates and information on current webinars, conferences, seminars, articles etc. related to the field of research. Formal discussions with the supervisor is held annually with all staff where the competences, skills and trainings are agreed as well as the goals set and follow up what has been done. The staff has a possibility to take part in conferences as well as required formal training regularly. Everyone is expected and encouraged to do active publishing. The EFQM evaluation found that the strengths include Continuous learning is part of the culture: An organization has a strong culture of learning, where competence development is seen as strategically important. Diverse learning opportunities: A wide range of training, mentoring, and on-the-job learning opportunities are available. Knowledge sharing: The sharing of knowledge and expertise between teams and units works well, which supports joint development. Personal development plans: Employees can influence their own competence development through personal plans.

6.2 Weaknesses

Even though Laurea has many strengths in this area, also some weaknesses are identified. Laurea has gone through a major organizational change from the beginning of 2025 which is now based strongly on teams that are formed based on competences. The new organization model will take time to form and at the moment the teams don't yet fully function according to the target. Also, the challenge of the lack of resources is a big challenge at the moment. The requirement to achieve more with less is a challenge everywhere, also at Laurea. Currently Laurea does not yet have a platform where trainings and competences can be followed, and this is a development point for the future. The platform will offer support in both sharing of the knowledge, raising awareness of staff's competences and on how they develop and are in line with our strategic goals. During the EFQM evaluation the following weaknesses were discovered. Uneven development opportunities: Not all employees

have equal opportunities to participate in training or development activities. Lack of time for learning: Rush and high workload sometimes prevent participation in development activities. Weaknesses in monitoring: The impact of competence development is not always systematically monitored, which makes it difficult to assess development. Uptake of digital learning solutions: In some cases, the use of digital learning environments is still low or fragmented.

7 Action Plan

| Action | GAP Principle(s) | Timing | Responsible Unit | Indicators/Target(s) |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Safeguarding the quality of Laurea's research and development work. Ensuring that Laurea's personnel receive sufficient and up-to-date information to be able to comply with legislation and guidelines when carrying out research and development work. | 2. Ethical principles 3. Professional responsibility 4. Professional attitude 7. Good practice in research | Autumn 2025 | RDI Services, HR | Developing training and a mandatory online course for all staff involved in research and RDI work |
| Strengthen the competence of researchers and staff doing RDI work. | 3. Professional responsibility 4. Professional attitude 7. Good practice in research 28. Career development 39. Access to research training and continuous development | Spring 2026 | RDI Services | A handbook for RDI work at Laurea Online course in research mandatory for all staff conducting RDI work |
| Raise awareness of the ethical guidelines and the principles of researcher's freedom are known to everyone and can be applied in practice | 3. Professional responsibility 4. Professional attitude 7. Good practice in research 28. Career development 39. Access to research training and continuous development | Spring 2026 | RDI Services | A handbook for RDI work at Laurea |
| The ethical guidelines and the use of Artificial Intelligence in research work | 2. Ethical principles 3. Professional responsibility 4. Professional attitude | Autumn 2025 and spring of 2026 | RDI Services, IT department | Creating clear guidelines for the use of AI in research work by arranging |

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| | 6. Accountability 7. Good practice in research | | | online work-shops |
| Enhance Integration of teaching and research | 8. Dissemination, exploitation of results 23. Research environment 33. Teaching | January 2026 drafting the new process, continuous development | RDI Services, team leaders in teaching staff | Clear process and guidelines how results in research are integrated into teaching, sharing of good practices via TEAMS |
| Increase internal career opportunities and awareness of the possibilities | 28. Career development 30. Access to career advice 38. Continuing professional development 39. Access to research training and continuous development | Autumn 2025 pilots and testing the model, in full use by beginning of 2026 | HR, RDI Services | Develop a process for internal recruitment, internal rotation and mobility model |
| Increase the support of international staff | 12. Recruitment 24. Working conditions 28. Career development | Spring 2026 | International Services, HR | Systematic language training and support for international staff coming to Laurea offered once employment and orientation begins |
| Evaluation of promotion criteria on the researcher career track | 11. Evaluation/ appraisal systems 12. Recruitment 14. Selection 15. Transparency 21. Postdoctoral appointments 28. Career development | autumn of 2026 to spring 2027 | Vice president of RDI, HR, Coara group | Criteria of the researcher career track evaluated and possibly updated |
| Ensuring the quality of research and success of research projects | 2. Ethical principles 4. Professional attitude 6. Accountability 15. Transparency 23. Research environment 24. Working conditions 36. Relation with supervisors 37. Supervision and | autumn 2025 creating the tool, in continuous use by 2026 | RDI directors, RDI Services, HR | Creating a feedback tool for project teams to make sure the progress, communication and working conditions support the success of the research work and |

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|---------------------------------------|--|-------------|---|--|
| | managerial duties | | | project |
| Increase staff mobility possibilities | 18. Recognition of mobility experience 28. Career development 29. Value of mobility | Autumn 2026 | Pioneer working group, International services, HR | Pilots created and development work within the Pioneer Alliance |
| Training of supervisors in research | 28. Career development 36. Relation with supervisors 37. Supervision and managerial duties 38. Continuing Professional Development 39. Access to research training and continuous development 40. Supervision | Spring 2026 | HR, RDI services | Regular training courses provided for supervisors and managers at least twice a year |

8 Implementation

Laurea University of Applied Sciences and its leadership is fully committed to the principles to align our HR policies and practices with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. Laurea is committed into creating a positive and supportive environment for researchers, focusing on fair recruitment, career development, and overall working conditions. We have done systematic and long-term development work in this area and received encouraging feedback and results already before applying for this award. Our ambition and goal are to constantly develop and improve in this area. This development work is strategically significant to Laurea, and it is included in the strategy and integrated into our continuous quality work. It is also an area, that we constantly evaluate and try find new ways to increase the impact of research.

The working group and the steering group meet regularly and follows up on the implementation of measures according to the table above within the agreed schedule. The progress work is regularly reported to the managerial board as well. Regular staff survey is carried out every other year, the impact of our research is measured every year and Laurea participates in different external evaluations regularly to provide us on the status and information on monitoring the progress and if we are on schedule. This enables us to make needed adjustments if necessary.

Key recommendations we received in the previous evaluations, for instance the EFQM evaluation last year, and audits we have participated in, are to strengthen a participatory development culture. Our goal in applying the Human Resource excellence award is to further encourage our staff and stakeholders to actively participate in the development of the research work. This we aim to do for example

through workshops and providing various feedback channels. Also to make use of co-creation methods is seen important. We are aware that the balance of the workload now isn't distributed as well as it could be. The goal during the action plan is to identify units where the workload is unevenly distributed and develop solutions to balance the load. One key element regarding future success for our researcher is also to develop competence management. To ensure that opportunities for competence development are equally available to everyone and find ways to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of development measures systematically. We have also identified the need to clarify ethical practices and communication. This we aim to improve by making sure that the ethical guidelines and the principles of researcher's freedom are known to everyone and can be applied in practice. The improving of communication is continuous. To ensure that staff receive up-to-date and understandable information about decision-making and development activities.

To summarize our priority areas for development are well-being at work and workload management, equality in competence development, stakeholder engagement and interaction, practical application of the Code of Conduct and strengthening opportunities to influence and improve the everyday work of our researchers. It is very important that Universities of Applied Sciences are involved in the reform of practices, as RDI work at universities of applied sciences differs from the activities of traditional science institutions in many ways.