INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Supporting the Implementation of the 20 Principles of the European Charter for Researchers (2023) within the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)

Burgas Free University
2026

1. Purpose and Institutional Context

The Integrated Institutional Framework presents the institutional environment through which Burgas Free University (BFU) supports the progressive implementation of the **20 principles of the European Charter for Researchers (2023)** within the **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)**.

The Framework brings together BFU's HRS4R core documents and the relevant strategic, regulatory, ethical, career-development, equality, inclusion, Open Science, researcher-support and quality assurance instruments that contribute to the University's policies and practices for researchers.

Its purpose is to provide a coherent institutional perspective on the relationship between:

- ✓ the 20 principles of the European Charter for Researchers;
- ✓ the four pillars under which these principles are organised;
- ✓ BFU's HRS4R Gap Analysis;
- ✓ the HR Excellence in Research Action Plan for the Initial Phase 2025–2027;
- ✓ the institutional OTM-R Policy;
- ✓ the University's existing policies, strategies, regulations and support mechanisms;
- ✓ the evidence generated through implementation and monitoring.

The Framework does not establish a parallel governance or administrative system. HRS4R implementation is integrated into BFU's existing institutional governance and Quality Management System and is supported through established academic and administrative responsibilities.

BFU's approach is based on the understanding that implementation of the Charter is a process of continuous institutional development. The existence of established policies and practices provides the foundation for this process, while the HRS4R Gap Analysis and Action Plan identify areas in which further systematisation, coordination, visibility, formalisation or monitoring is appropriate.

This approach corresponds to BFU's Gap Analysis, which identifies existing institutional mechanisms and interprets the main areas for development in terms of the degree of

institutionalisation, visibility, coordination and systematic monitoring rather than the absence of institutional commitment. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

2. The European Charter for Researchers and BFU's HRS4R Framework

The **European Charter for Researchers (2023)** provides the European framework guiding the development of supportive research environments and responsible institutional practices for researchers.

Its **20 principles**, organised under **four pillars**, provide the reference framework for BFU's HRS4R process:

Pillar 1 – Ethics, Integrity, Gender and Open Science

Pillar 2 – Researchers' Assessment, Recruitment and Progression

Pillar 3 – Working Conditions and Practices

Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development

BFU's HRS4R process translates these principles into the University's institutional context through three core documents.

Gap Analysis – Implementation of the European Charter for Researchers (2023)

The Gap Analysis examines BFU's existing policies and practices against the Charter framework and identifies institutional strengths and areas for further development.

It provides the analytical basis for the University's HRS4R priorities and establishes the connection between the Charter principles, existing institutional mechanisms and the areas addressed through the Action Plan.

HR Excellence in Research – Action Plan (Initial Phase), 2025–2027

The Action Plan translates the findings of the Gap Analysis into **12 institutional actions** for the Initial Phase.

The actions are designed to be realistic and proportionate to BFU's institutional context and are implemented through existing governance and quality assurance mechanisms. The Action Plan defines responsible units, implementation periods and indicators and provides the principal basis for monitoring progress towards the Interim Review. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

Policy on Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment of Researchers (OTM-R)

The OTM-R Policy establishes the institutional principles and procedural framework for open, transparent and merit-based recruitment.

It addresses open recruitment, transparency, merit-based assessment, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, selection committees, vacancy information and candidate feedback and is implemented in coherence with national legislation and BFU's existing internal regulations. 4. GAP ANALYSIS-BFU-ENG

These three documents constitute the **core HRS4R framework of BFU**.

They are complemented by the University's broader institutional framework, which provides the strategic, regulatory and organisational environment for implementation.

The existence of a supporting institutional document does not replace the corresponding action in the HRS4R Action Plan. Supporting documents provide the strategic, regulatory and organisational context within which the respective actions are implemented, evidenced and monitored.

3. Institutional Framework Supporting the Four Pillars and the 20 Principles

3.1 Pillar 1 – Ethics, Integrity, Gender and Open Science

BFU's institutional environment under the first pillar is supported by existing ethical, academic-integrity, equality, inclusion and research-management mechanisms.

The University's **Ethical Code**, **Academic Integrity Procedures**, **Gender Equality Plan**, **Diversity & Inclusion Strategy (2025–2028)**, **Social Inclusion Plan (2025–2028)** and relevant internal regulations provide complementary institutional instruments supporting ethical conduct, academic responsibility, equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, participation and respect within the academic and research community.

The Diversity & Inclusion Strategy and Social Inclusion Plan extend the institutional perspective beyond individual dimensions of equality by supporting a broader environment of participation, accessibility, fair opportunity and inclusion for students, doctoral candidates, researchers and staff.

Research integrity is further connected with responsible research-data management and Open Science.

The **Data Management Plan (2026)** provides an institutional framework for responsible management of research and related academic data. It supports appropriate documentation and metadata, data quality and traceability, ethical and legal compliance, data security, preservation, responsible access and sharing and the progressive development of Open Science practices.

Within HRS4R, this institutional environment directly supports the implementation context for:

Action 1 – Ethics and Research Integrity, which provides for systematising and publishing the existing research ethics and integrity framework and making introductory information accessible to researchers and doctoral candidates;

and

Action 2 – Open Science, which provides for mapping and systematising existing Open Science and research-dissemination practices and integrating relevant principles into existing institutional policies and procedures. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The supporting institutional documents therefore provide the foundation for these actions, while evidence of implementation is generated through the specific systematisation, publication, mapping, communication and monitoring activities undertaken under the Action Plan.

3.2 Pillar 2 – Researchers' Assessment, Recruitment and Progression

Recruitment, assessment and academic progression at BFU are implemented within the applicable national legislation and the University's established internal regulatory framework.

The Gap Analysis recognises the existence of stable institutional practices governing recruitment, assessment and career progression and identifies further opportunities for systematisation of OTM-R principles, broader use of bilingual and international recruitment channels, clearer formalisation of candidate feedback and stronger recognition of diverse academic merits and career achievements. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The institutional **OTM-R Policy** provides the principal HRS4R-related framework in this area.

It establishes that research and academic vacancies are publicly advertised; recruitment procedures are transparent and based on pre-established criteria; candidates have equal access to information; merit-based assessment reflects relevant research, professional and academic achievements; and applicants may request feedback in accordance with established procedures.

The Policy also provides for non-discrimination and appropriate consideration of career breaks, non-linear career paths and interdisciplinary and intersectoral experience. 4. GAP ANALYSIS-BFU-ENG

The **Strategic Framework for Career Development of the Academic Staff (2024–2028)** complements this regulatory environment by providing a broader strategic context for career and professional development, recognition of diverse academic achievements, mentoring, mobility and international cooperation.

Together with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff and applicable appraisal procedures, these documents support the institutional implementation context for:

Action 3 – Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment (OTM-R);

Action 4 – International Recruitment and Advertising;

Action 5 – Feedback to Candidates;

Action 6 – Career Development and Assessment.

Implementation evidence is generated through the actual application of OTM-R principles, standard recruitment documentation, relevant Bulgarian/English vacancy announcements, use of international recruitment channels where appropriate, feedback arrangements and developments in assessment practices.

The supporting policy framework should therefore be distinguished from evidence that the respective HRS4R action has been implemented.

3.3 Pillar 3 – Working Conditions and Practices

BFU's institutional framework for working conditions is based on existing rules governing employment, work organisation, appraisal and institutional quality assurance,

complemented by policies related to equality, accessibility, inclusion, health, safety and well-being.

The Gap Analysis identifies an established regulatory environment and recognises that measures concerning working conditions and well-being are already integrated into institutional policies and practices.

The areas for further development concern primarily **improved visibility and coordination of existing measures** and **clearer structuring and centralisation of information on available institutional support**. Importantly, the Gap Analysis expressly frames these developments as improvements to existing mechanisms rather than the introduction of additional administrative or organisational structures. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The **Policy and Information Guide on Health, Safety and Well-being**, together with the Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, Social Inclusion Plan and relevant institutional procedures, provides supporting context for an inclusive and supportive working environment.

Within the HRS4R Action Plan, this institutional framework is particularly relevant to:

Action 9 – Working Conditions and Well-being, which aims to improve the visibility of existing work–life balance and well-being measures through existing institutional communication channels;

and

Action 10 – Researcher Support, which aims to structure and centralise information on available institutional support for researchers. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The emphasis is therefore on **accessibility, coordination and visibility of existing support**.

Implementation evidence may include publicly accessible information, institutional guidance, structured researcher-support information and records demonstrating the communication and accessibility of relevant support mechanisms.

3.4 Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development

BFU's institutional framework for research careers and talent development builds on established mechanisms for academic advancement, doctoral training, research participation, appraisal, professional development, international cooperation and mobility.

The Gap Analysis recognises existing operational mechanisms supporting research careers, including the Rules for the Development of Academic Staff, appraisal arrangements, research-activity regulations and opportunities for participation in research projects and academic advancement. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The **Strategic Framework for Career Development of the Academic Staff (2024–2028)** provides the main strategic context for further coordination and development in this area.

It supports continuous professional development, mentoring, research development, recognition of diverse career trajectories, mobility and international and interdisciplinary cooperation.

The Diversity & Inclusion Strategy and Social Inclusion Plan provide complementary support for equal participation and accessibility of relevant career-development opportunities.

Within HRS4R, this institutional environment particularly supports:

Action 7 – Early-stage Researchers and Doctoral Candidates, concerning the formalisation and coordination of existing mentoring and support practices;

Action 8 – Training and Skills Development, concerning the planning and coordination of skills-development activities within existing institutional formats;

and

Action 11 – Mobility, concerning the formalisation of procedures for recognition of international and intersectoral mobility. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The objective is to strengthen the coherence and visibility of existing opportunities and practices while progressively documenting and formalising them where required by the Action Plan.

4. Integration of the 20 Principles through the HRS4R Action Plan

The four pillars and 20 principles of the European Charter for Researchers provide the overarching reference framework, while BFU's **12 HRS4R actions** translate the priorities identified through the Gap Analysis into a manageable institutional implementation programme.

The relationship should not be understood as a simple one-to-one correspondence between one Charter principle and one action. Individual actions may support several interconnected principles, while particular institutional policies may contribute across more than one pillar.

The integrated approach can be summarised as follows:

Charter area	HRS4R implementation priorities at BFU	Principal supporting framework
Pillar 1 – Ethics, Integrity, Gender and Open Science	Actions 1–2: Ethics and Research Integrity; Open Science	Ethical Code; Academic Integrity Procedures; Gender Equality Plan; D&I Strategy; Social Inclusion Plan; Data Management Plan
Pillar 2 – Researchers' Assessment, Recruitment and Progression	Actions 3–6: OTM-R; International Recruitment; Candidate Feedback; Career Development and Assessment	OTM-R Policy; Regulations for Development of Academic Staff; Strategic Framework for Career Development
Pillar 3 – Working Conditions and Practices	Actions 9–10: Working Conditions and Well-being; Researcher Support	Health, Safety and Well-being framework; D&I Strategy; Social Inclusion Plan; institutional support and QA mechanisms

Pillar 4 – Research Careers and Talent Development	Actions 7–8 and 11: Early-stage Researchers; Training and Skills Development; Mobility	Strategic Framework for Career Development; Doctoral School/faculty support; international cooperation and mobility mechanisms
Cross-cutting governance and participation	Action 12: Governance and Participation	HRS4R Working Group; Quality Management System; institutional consultation and feedback mechanisms

The Gender Equality Plan, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, Social Inclusion Plan and Quality Management System have a **cross-cutting role** and may provide institutional support across several Charter principles and HRS4R actions.

The table represents the relationship between the Charter, the HRS4R Action Plan and BFU's institutional framework. It does not indicate completion of an action solely on the basis of the existence of a supporting document.

5. Governance, Monitoring and Evidence

HRS4R implementation at BFU is integrated into the University's existing governance and quality assurance environment.

University management, the Academic Council and the relevant academic and administrative units contribute according to their established competences.

Depending on the action concerned, implementation involves the Ethics Committee, Human Resources, faculties, the Doctoral School, Research Unit, International Cooperation structures, Quality Unit, Library/IT and other relevant institutional units.

The **HRS4R Working Group** provides coordination within the HRS4R process and supports monitoring, consultation and preparation for institutional review.

No additional permanent administrative structure is required for implementation of this Framework.

Monitoring is proportionate to the nature of the respective action and is based on appropriate and available institutional evidence.

Such evidence may include:

- ✓ approved institutional policies and procedures;
- ✓ publicly accessible institutional information;
- ✓ recruitment and vacancy documentation;
- ✓ relevant recruitment templates and procedures;
- ✓ candidate-feedback arrangements;
- ✓ mentoring and researcher-support information;
- ✓ records of training and professional-development activities;
- ✓ mobility and international cooperation documentation;
- ✓ Open Science and research-data-management practices;

- ✓ institutional consultations and feedback;
- ✓ relevant quality assurance records and reports.

The existence of a policy or strategy constitutes **supporting institutional evidence**, while implementation of an HRS4R action is demonstrated through the corresponding operational evidence required by the Action Plan.

This distinction allows BFU to demonstrate both the **institutional framework** and the **progressive implementation** of its HRS4R commitments.

The University's Quality Management System provides the established context for monitoring, review and continuous improvement.

According to the submitted HRS4R Action Plan, implementation progress is reviewed annually and provides a basis for preparation of the Interim Review. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

Participation is also an integral element of the process.

Action 12 – Governance and Participation provides for regular consultations with researchers and doctoral candidates within HRS4R, with at least two consultation activities planned by 2027. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW…

The results of relevant monitoring, consultation and feedback activities may inform subsequent institutional improvements and future development of the HRS4R Action Plan.

6. Conclusion

The Integrated Institutional Framework demonstrates how BFU's existing and developing institutional policies, regulations, strategies, support mechanisms and quality assurance processes contribute to the **progressive implementation of the 20 principles of the European Charter for Researchers (2023)** within HRS4R.

The Framework establishes a clear relationship between the **four pillars of the Charter**, the findings of BFU's **Gap Analysis**, the **12 actions of the HRS4R Action Plan**, the **OTM-R Policy** and the wider institutional environment supporting researchers and academic staff.

This integrated approach enables BFU to build upon established institutional practices while addressing the areas for further development identified through the HRS4R process.

It supports progressive improvement in research integrity, Open Science, recruitment and assessment, career development, working conditions, researcher support, skills development, mobility, equality, inclusion and participation.

Implementation remains embedded within BFU's existing governance and Quality Management System, ensuring institutional continuity, proportionate monitoring and continuous improvement.

Through this Framework, Burgas Free University provides a coherent institutional basis for implementing and documenting its HRS4R commitments and for demonstrating progress in relation to the **20 principles of the European Charter for Researchers (2023)** in preparation for subsequent HRS4R review.