

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF

Burgas Free University

2024–2028

1. Purpose and Institutional Context

The **Strategic Framework for Career Development of the Academic Staff 2024–2028** defines the main institutional directions through which Burgas Free University (BFU) supports the professional and academic development of its academic staff, researchers, doctoral candidates and early-career researchers.

Career development at BFU is understood as a continuous process combining academic advancement, research development, teaching excellence, professional skills, interdisciplinary cooperation, international experience, mobility and participation in the institutional academic community.

The Framework builds upon BFU's existing regulatory and organisational mechanisms for academic staff development, appraisal, research activities and professional development. It is implemented within the applicable national legislation, the University's internal regulations and its Quality Management System.

The Framework is also consistent with the **European Charter for Researchers (2023)** and supports the implementation of BFU's **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)**.

In particular, it provides strategic support for institutional priorities concerning transparent and merit-based recruitment, career assessment, mentoring and support for early-stage researchers and doctoral candidates, skills development, mobility, internationalisation and access to researcher support.

The Framework complements BFU's **OTM-R Policy**, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, Gender Equality Plan, Social Inclusion Plan and other relevant institutional policies. It does not replace the specific regulatory procedures governing recruitment, appointment, appraisal or academic advancement.

2. Principles and Strategic Objectives

Career development at BFU is based on the principles of academic freedom and responsibility, transparency, merit, equal opportunity, professional development, research integrity, recognition of diverse academic contributions and continuous improvement.

BFU recognises that academic careers may develop through different pathways and combinations of teaching, research, innovation, project participation, institutional contribution, international cooperation and engagement with professional and academic communities.

The University's strategic objective is therefore to maintain an environment in which members of the academic and research community can progressively develop their competences, research profiles and professional contribution.

Within the period 2024–2028, the Framework pursues five interconnected objectives.

Research and academic development. BFU supports participation in research activities, projects, scholarly publication, academic networks and interdisciplinary initiatives. Access to appropriate research resources, information and institutional support contributes to the development of individual and collective research capacity.

Career and professional development. The University supports continuous development through existing institutional formats for mentoring, guidance, training, exchange of experience and professional learning. Particular attention is given to doctoral candidates and early-career researchers and to the coordination and visibility of existing forms of support.

Fair recruitment and career assessment. Recruitment, selection and career progression are implemented in accordance with national legislation, institutional rules and, where applicable, BFU's OTM-R Policy. Assessment practices should appropriately reflect relevant academic achievements and the diversity of academic and research experience.

Internationalisation, interdisciplinarity and mobility. International, interdisciplinary and intersectoral experience contributes to researcher development and institutional capacity. BFU therefore encourages participation in mobility, international projects, academic networks and cooperation across disciplines and sectors.

Academic leadership and institutional contribution. Career development includes opportunities to contribute to academic governance, research coordination, quality assurance, mentoring and the development of the university community. Such participation supports institutional continuity and the development of academic leadership.

3. Career Development and Researcher Support

BFU supports both vertical and horizontal forms of career development. Academic advancement within the established national and institutional framework is complemented by opportunities to broaden professional expertise, develop new research and teaching competences, participate in interdisciplinary work and gain international or intersectoral experience.

For **doctoral candidates and early-career researchers**, BFU seeks to provide a supportive transition into research and academic careers. Existing mentoring and support practices are progressively coordinated through cooperation between faculties, the Doctoral School, Human Resources and other relevant institutional units.

Mentoring and academic guidance may support the development of research competences, publication activity, project participation, professional networks and career planning. The form of support may vary according to career stage, disciplinary context and individual professional needs.

Professional and skills development is organised through existing institutional formats. Relevant activities may address research methods, research integrity, Open Science, digital competences, project development, academic communication, teaching and learning, transferable skills and other areas relevant to academic and research work.

BFU also seeks to improve the **visibility and accessibility of information concerning researcher support**. Information on relevant institutional services, research opportunities, training, mobility and other forms of support should be progressively structured and made easier to access through existing institutional communication channels.

This approach supports Actions 7, 8 and 10 of BFU's HRS4R Action Plan, which concern the coordination of existing mentoring and support practices, skills development and the consolidation of researcher support information. The submitted Action Plan expressly places these activities within existing institutional formats rather than creating new structures. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW...

4. Recruitment, Assessment, Mobility and Equal Opportunity

Recruitment and appointment of researchers and academic staff are governed by applicable national legislation, BFU's internal regulations and the institutional **Policy for Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment of Researchers (OTM-R)**.

The OTM-R Policy provides the specific procedural framework for open, transparent and merit-based recruitment. This Strategic Framework therefore does not create a parallel recruitment procedure.

BFU supports clear and accessible information concerning academic and research vacancies and the progressive international visibility of relevant opportunities. Where appropriate, bilingual Bulgarian/English vacancy announcements and national and international recruitment channels, including EURAXESS, contribute to the University's internationalisation objectives.

Selection and assessment are based on relevant academic and professional criteria. In accordance with the OTM-R framework, assessment may take account of research achievements and scholarly output, quality and relevance of research, professional and academic experience and potential contribution to BFU's research, innovation and educational mission.

Career breaks, non-linear career paths and interdisciplinary and intersectoral experience are considered in a non-discriminatory manner under the OTM-R Policy. 4. GAP ANALYSIS-BFU-ENG

In the broader context of career development, BFU seeks to ensure appropriate recognition of **diverse academic achievements**, including relevant mobility, interdisciplinary activity and other contributions consistent with applicable institutional assessment rules. This directly reflects Action 6 of the HRS4R Action Plan, which provides for assessment practices to better reflect mobility, interdisciplinarity and diverse academic achievements. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW...

Equal opportunity and non-discrimination are integral to career development. Career opportunities should be accessible on fair terms and implemented consistently with BFU's Gender Equality Plan, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy and other applicable institutional policies.

BFU recognises **international and intersectoral mobility** as a valuable component of professional and research development. Mobility can contribute to knowledge exchange, research collaboration, professional networks and the development of new academic competences.

The University therefore encourages participation in relevant mobility and international cooperation opportunities and progressively strengthens the institutional recognition of such experience. This corresponds to Action 11 of the HRS4R Action Plan, which provides for formalising procedures for the recognition of international and intersectoral mobility. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW...

5. Implementation, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

The Framework is implemented through BFU's **existing academic, administrative and governance structures**.

University management and the Academic Council provide institutional direction within their respective competences. Faculties, the Doctoral School, Human Resources, the Research Unit, International Cooperation structures and the Quality Unit contribute according to their established responsibilities.

No additional permanent administrative structure is required for the implementation of the Framework. Coordination is achieved through existing institutional mechanisms and communication between the relevant units.

This is consistent with the Gap Analysis, which explicitly frames further development as improved visibility, coordination and accessibility of existing mechanisms rather than the introduction of additional administrative or organisational structures. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW...

Implementation and progress are reviewed through BFU's established quality assurance mechanisms. Relevant evidence may include professional development and training activities, mentoring and support practices, participation in research and mobility, availability of researcher support information and developments in institutional assessment and career-development practices.

Feedback from academic staff, researchers and doctoral candidates may contribute to identifying development needs and improving institutional support.

The Framework is implemented in coordination with BFU's HRS4R Action Plan. Relevant HRS4R progress is monitored through the specific responsibilities, timelines and indicators already established in that Action Plan; this Framework does not replace or modify those commitments.

The submitted Action Plan provides for annual review within BFU's Quality Management System and the HRS4R process, with progress serving as a basis for the Interim Review. INTEGRATED INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEW...

6. Alignment and Final Perspective

The Strategic Framework for Career Development forms part of BFU's wider institutional environment for supporting researchers and academic staff.

Its implementation contributes particularly to the following interconnected areas:

- ✓ open, transparent and merit-based recruitment;
- ✓ fair and inclusive career development;
- ✓ recognition of diverse academic and research achievements;
- ✓ mentoring and support for doctoral candidates and early-career researchers;
- ✓ continuous skills and professional development;
- ✓ international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility;
- ✓ improved accessibility of researcher support;
- ✓ equality and non-discrimination;
- ✓ quality assurance and continuous institutional improvement.

The Framework provides the strategic context within which relevant measures under BFU's HRS4R Action Plan are implemented. It complements rather than replaces the University's OTM-R Policy, regulations for academic staff development, appraisal procedures and other institutional rules.

Through the period 2024–2028, Burgas Free University will continue to strengthen the coherence, visibility and accessibility of its existing career-development mechanisms while supporting opportunities for researchers and academic staff to develop their professional profiles, research capacity and contribution to the University's academic community.

In this way, the Framework supports a sustainable institutional environment for research careers and talent development and contributes to BFU's progressive implementation of the **European Charter for Researchers (2023)** and the **Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)**.