

TEMPLATE 3: INTERNAL REVIEW

1. ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Please provide an update of the key figures for your organisation. Figures marked * are compulsory.

STAFF & STUDENTS	FTE
Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research	77
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)	52
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation)	72
Of whom are women	43
Of whom are stage R3 or R4 ¹ = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor.	11
Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level	22
Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with doctoral level	44
Total number of students (if relevant)	0
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)	38
RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)	€
Total annual organisational budget	€4.655.500
Annual organisational direct government funding (block funding, used for teaching, research, infrastructure...)	€1.367.869
Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)	€2.807.106
Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research	€480.525
ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE (a very brief description of your organisation, max. 100 words)	
<p>The BCBL - Basque Center on Cognition, Brain and Language (www.bcbl.eu) is a world-class interdisciplinary research center for the study of cognition, brain and language founded in September 2008. It is one of the centers of the BERC network (Basque Excellent Research Centers). Its mission is to provide a platform for researchers and professionals to carry out frontline research, development, innovation, training, and knowledge transfer in the area of language sciences, complemented with science dissemination and outreach.</p>	

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Towards_a_European_Framework_for_Research_Careers_final.pdf

2. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT PRACTICE (NARRATIVE)

Please review the strengths and weaknesses under the 4 thematic areas of the Charter and Code, as provided by your organisation in the initial assessment phase. When doing so, you should do not only look back, but also consider new priorities, strategic decisions, etc. which may further influence the action plan. Please also provide a brief commentary in the "Remarks" column if major changes have occurred versus the initial plan.

Ethical and professional aspects (500 words max)

Taking into consideration the results obtained on the survey and gap analysis conducted in 2015 and in 2017, the Ethical and Professional aspects seem to be one of the center's strengths. Since the creation of the BCBL, the "HR team" has devoted time and effort to create, develop and update the internal HR procedures and policies, which seems to be very well valued by the research community and employees in general.

However, the survey highlighted that special attention should be paid to **Principle 11 Evaluation System**. The BCBL process to monitor researchers' work seemed to be not well-evaluated, and this was closely related to other principles, such as **Principle 28 Career Development** and **Principle 30 Career Advice**.

In order to further explore this issue, we organised a brainstorming session with researchers (R1-R4) and, in conclusion, we realised that the discomfort about the evaluation system was mainly due to the following reasons:

- The evaluation template was antiquated and obsolete.
- The periodicity of the process was low.
- The feedback was too general; it lacked a detailed evaluation criteria.
- The only person in charge of evaluating the researchers' performance was the Scientific Director and this fact generated a bottleneck situation.

Aiming at improving the situation, the "HR team" (BCBL's general Human Resources management team), together with the "HRS4R Working Group" ("HR team"+R1-R4 representatives), decided to implement the following two actions:

- To redefine and make public the new evaluation template on the internal wiki.
- To set a fixed agenda to perform the evaluation meetings and feedback on a yearly basis.

Having an independent—and preferably international—evaluation committee mentioned on the principle is not available, but it does not seem to be required by researchers. We believe that we still have other major important goals regarding this topic to be achieved before reaching that step.

REMARKS:

Even if the initial planned actions were implemented in due time, as part of the continuous development plan, some extra actions have been put in place within this period:

- Research Groups were created: this has been a direct consequence of the growth of the center and maturity of the researchers. The number of group leaders increased and, consequently, so did the number of evaluators, which contributed to dissipate the bottleneck produced by having only up-on-hierarchy members as evaluators.
- Web-based evaluation tool: we designed a web-based tool that integrates the former updated evaluation template. This is very helpful and helps the center to record and track the results of

each of the evaluation meetings.

- VITAE's RDF (Researcher Development Framework) Planner: After learning about the success of this evaluation tool in different European Commission events, we have recently joined the VITAE membership and acquired the RDF planner for all the researchers at the BCBL. The "HR team" will also travel to the UK to receive proper training so as to convey this knowledge to the rest of the employees (May 2019). Our actual goal is to start using this tool within our company from May 2019 on.

Recruitment and selection (500 words max)

The BCBL Strategic Plan 2018-2021 comprises a personnel policy based on two strategies:

- (1) To build research, administration and technical support teams which are highly-qualified, motivated, resourceful, team workers and open to the world.
- (2) To define a training structure adequate to the needs of the BCBL.

To these ends, the following Operational Aims have been defined:

- To incorporate excellent research personnel at national and international levels following OTM-R standards (see more below).
- To perform a comprehensive survey every two years within the HRS4R strategy, looking for the fulfilment degree and identification of the consequent gaps over the 40 principles of the C&C to be completed by the research staff.
- To set up mechanisms for recruiting and maintaining researchers from early levels of training.
- To facilitate the incorporation of new professional bodies with a multidisciplinary focus to guarantee the transversal direction of scientific activities.
- To build a flexible and efficient system of student and researcher exchange.
- To offer continuous training and professional development advice at the BCBL.
- To promote programmes of temporary collaboration with researchers of excellence in those research areas that are high-priority for the BCBL—but show deficiencies at present.
- To define and develop an ongoing training plan for research and other areas of interest.

The **Gap Analysis** conducted in 2015 and 2017 helped us to identify improvement areas in two of the categories related to Recruitment and Selection:

Principle 15 Transparency: In order to improve on the way candidates are informed all along the recruitment process, the "HRS4R Working Group" completed the internal BCBL recruitment process adding guidelines on how feedback to candidates should be performed. The new guidelines include information about Career Development Plans for the appointed positions following the OTM-R policy directions. Furthermore, as per researchers' request, all researchers are informed about each recruitment process from beginning to end. These guidelines are shared with every researcher joining the BCBL during the last phase of the recruitment process. This guarantees that, prior to signing the work contract, researchers are informed about all the terms and conditions related to the duration of the contract and the possible scenarios for contract extensions. This information is available on our internal wiki.

Principle 21 Postdoctoral appointments: With a focus on building clear rules and explicit guidelines for the recruitment, appointment, development and motivation of postdoctoral researchers, the following actions were put in place by the HRS4R Working Group: (1) Internal Postdoctoral call fiches were generated so as to guarantee that all postdoctoral calls for the BCBL included all the relevant

information following OTM-R standards; (2) We defined the criteria researchers should meet in order to get a permanent position at the center; (3) A Professional Development Plan/Career Path document aimed to provide researchers with additional professional development opportunities/information was designed, presented in one of our annual workshops and published on the internal wiki.

REMARKS:

We believe that initiatives around category **II. Recruitment** have been enhanced due to the following:

- (1) The internal performance of the OTM-R checklist policy in mid-2017 was especially crucial when improving all aspects related to Recruitment and Selection. The definition of an OTM-R policy in January 2018 and the design and implementation of a web-based tool for the internal management of recruitment procedures have been extremely helpful to improve the process.
- (2) The participation of the BCBL in the regional ERANTZUNKIDE programme (2018-on) (<https://www.gipuzkoa.eus/es/-/abian-da-erantzunkide-sarea>) launched by the Gipuzkoa Government focused on promoting and strengthening equality of women and men and co-responsible conciliation within organizations. Over the next year, the BCBL will elaborate a strong gender- and conciliation-policy taking advice from consultants of the local government.
- (3) The participation of the BCBL in a regional funded project focused on Employer Branding (2018-on). The project aims to strengthen the positioning of the BCBL in the international Talent market through the development and implementation of strategies and action plans around Talent Attraction and Retention and the improvement of its Employer brand. An external consultancy company is performing the analysis and action plan together with the BCBL HRS4R working group.

Working conditions (500 words max)

Brainstorming with researchers after every gap analysis helped us to better understand their vision and design actions to improve the situation. It should be mentioned that not all the identified gaps can be solved by the institution as they depend on legal issues that are not fully in our hands.

Principle 25 Stability and permanence of employment: It is a true fact that the vast majority of BCBL researchers would like to continue working in the center at all levels, which is positive for the center's employer branding reputation. However, at the same time, researchers are aware of the importance of mobility in their researcher careers. Additionally, researchers depend on competitive funding and both national and international grants are limited in time and do not provide tenure-track positions.

With a view to try and improve the situation, we have implemented two actions:

- (a) Definition of the criteria for stability in employment conditions.
- (b) Definition of clear guidelines about working terms and stability options.

Principle 26 Funding and salaries: Researchers' salary scales at the center are subject to the ones set by the external hiring funding agencies and to national/international salary scales. However, we have tried to improve the situation through the implementation of the following actions:

- Benchmarking on salaries in the research field performed by the General Manager.
- A plan to complement the salaries provided by the funding agencies.
- Definition of seniority allowances based on performance and experience.

Principle 28 Career Development and Career Advice: As mentioned previously, these two principles are directly connected to Principle 11 Evaluation System. Apart from the actions taken in that case, there have been two additional changes:

- The Ombudsman role has been reinforced by becoming a team instead of being represented by a single person. The Ombudsman team is now composed by a Senior Professor, a researcher and a manager. This team was elected through a public poll session.
- The implementation of the VITAE methodology in 2019 will coach researchers on career advice. A Career Path document was designed and is available on the BCBL wiki.

Principle 35 Decision Making: The decision of having more Group Leaders at the center enables researchers to have more representatives. Furthermore, every time there is a topic of debate, the center encourages researchers to create discussion groups to facilitate decision-making.

REMARKS

- **Stability and permanence of employment** (p.25): As previously mentioned, new research groups have been created along with the growth of the center. Most of the new group leaders have been selected by internal promotion, based on open, transparent and merit-based criteria, that has consistently increased their stability and salary.
- **Funding and salaries** (p.26): The external threat of the high living-cost in San Sebastian—an emerging touristic city—should be taken into consideration, which is very high compared to the rest of the cities in Spain. This fact is not only affecting researchers at the center, but also the rest of the citizens in the city. The local government is taking measures to control the impact of tourism on the citizens’ expenses (rental costs, travel costs, etc.), which we consider an external threat to our SWOT.
- **Career development** (p.28): The increasing number of group leaders is providing more supervisors to the center, which is speeding up the evaluation system; on the downside, not all are supervising experts yet. We are currently working on their equal training, with the help of the evaluation and transversal skills training-programmes of a company (VITAE).

Training and development (500 words max)

The **Gap Analysis** conducted in 2015/2017 helped us to identify improvement areas in three of the categories related to Training and Development:

Principle 36 Relation with supervisors and Principle 37 Supervision and Managerial: The internal analysis we performed showed that there was considerable scope for further improvement within this area. Actions were designed to solve the identified gaps. Additionally, during the 2016 Improvement process, the HRS4R Working Group, together with the PhD Program Graduate Director and the Ombudsman Team, examined the supervision issue at the BCBL and came up with some extra recommendations that were included in the “BEING A (PRE-DOCTORAL) RESEARCHER AT THE BCBL”. This document outlines in more detail the working conditions, rights and duties of PhD students, the implementation and monitoring of their supervision, as well as the needed training and its evaluation. It is meant as an in-house-document, giving an overview of what the PhD student may expect from the center and vice versa. Some examples of these extra recommendations are related

to special cases such as the departure of supervisors and conflict resolution.

Additionally, the Graduate Director is currently supervising the Supervisors' training and coaching and the Scientific Director is performing an annual, agreed and recorded Supervisors' evaluation based on a software tool we developed at the end of 2018. This web-based tool guarantees perfect timing, recording and monitoring of these evaluations.

Principle 39 Access to research training and continuous development: Our research community demanded a more specific, structured and personal training programme. An internal brainstorming was carried out along with the researchers' community, which had an interesting initiative as an outcome: the creation of a Knowledge and Skills database in our internal wiki, which includes a list of experts, skills and training needs. The database is coordinated by volunteers and internal training is organised accordingly. We still believe that a more ambitious scenario could be achieved. However, budgetary constraints are a handicap.

Principle 40 Supervision: The gap analysis showed the importance of identifying a person at the BCBL to whom early-stage researchers could refer to regarding the performance of their professional duties. This gap was solved with the implementation of better-structured group meetings to ease interaction/discussion, identify training needs, and solve problems. Apart from that, we have promoted the service through which the Ombudsman Team helps early-stage predocs to reach both their professional and personal goals.

REMARKS:

We believe that initiatives around category **IV. Training** have been enhanced due to two grants the BCBL obtained for the following actions:

- (1) A web-based tool was designed and implemented for the evaluation of researchers and the BCBL staff (action completed in 2018).
- (2) The HR Team will join the "Train the Trainer" workshop that VITAE offers. This way, we believe that the BCBL HR Team will improve its training skills and will be able to coach researchers in terms of social and transferable skills.
- (3) Group Leaders/Supervisors should be trained (internally) so that they enhance their supervision and mentoring skills.

Have any of the priorities for the short- and medium term changed? (500 words max)

There has been no change in the priorities for the short and medium term. We have focused on appointing the weaknesses identified through the two HRS4R surveys delivered within the BCBL research community (2015, 2017) and the brainstorming workshops.

Have any of the circumstances in which your organisation operates, changed and as such have had an impact on your HR strategy? (500 words max)

In 2016 the BCBL obtained the Severo Ochoa Excellence Award for period 2016-2019. The main goal of the award is the growth of the institution in terms of equipment and personnel. The BCBL has experienced a significant growth in the number of researchers and the HRS4R policy is contributing to making the BCBL an attractive institution to join. The HR team has made a great effort in updating

its procedures and policies to the HRS4R and OTM-R standards.

Are any strategic decisions under way that may influence the action plan? (500 words max)

n/a

3. ACTIONS

Please consult the list of all actions you have submitted as part of your HR strategy. Please add to the overview the current status of these actions as well as the status of the indicators. If any actions have been altered, omitted or added, please provide a commentary for each action.

Note: Choose one or more of the principles automatically retrieved from the GAP Analysis with their implementation ratings:

Examples:

<i>Proposed actions</i>	<i>Gap Principle(s)</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Responsible Unit</i>	<i>Indicator(s) / Target</i>	<i>Current status</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>e.g. Advertising all researcher vacancies on Euraxess</i>		<i>Spring 2016</i>	<i>HR recruitment unit</i>	<i>75% increase in applications 50/850 applications from abroad</i>	<i>Completed</i>	
<i>e.g. Granting postdoctoral researchers budgetary autonomy</i>		<i>December 2017</i>	<i>Finance Dept.</i>	<i>Board of Government endorsement for new regulation</i>	<i>In preparation</i>	
<i>e.g. Improve supervisor training for newly appointed tenure track staff</i>		<i>Continuous</i>	<i>Doctoral Schools</i>	<i>Min. 2 training courses on offer per term Continuous monitoring of effect: increase of positive evaluations from PhD students Mentor for every PhD supervisor with less than 2 years of experience</i>	<i>Action extended by introducing a new mentoring programme for PhD supervisors, based on the PhD students' feedback.</i>	

The extended version of the reviewed HR Strategy for your organisation for the next 3 years, including the OTM-R policy, must be published on your organisation's website.

Please provide the link to the dedicated webpage(s) on your organisation's web site *:

<https://www.bcbl.eu/staff/human-resources-strategy-hrs4r/>

If your organisation has already filled in the OTM-R checklist in the Initial Phase, please also indicate how your organisation is working towards / has developed an Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Policy. Although there may be some overlap with a range of actions listed above in the action plan (as emerged from the Gap Analysis), please provide a short commentary demonstrating the progress of the implementation versus the initial phase.

Comments on the implementation of the OTM-R principles

The BCBL has recently defined and published its OTM-R policy, as an improvement of the recruiting procedures/web-based job calls platform designed and developed according to our management model when the center started activities back in 2010.

We are convinced recruiting the best applicant, Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of researchers—and in general for all our staff—improves the effectiveness of our organisation and thus, our regional and national research systems. As a result, we believe implementing this methodology promotes optimal circulation of scientific knowledge.

Open Recruitment guarantees the equal opportunities principle. Our recruitment processes respect diversity, promoting non-discrimination because of their race, colour, age, sex, marital status, ideology, political opinions, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or any other personal, physical or social conditions among its professionals. Therefore job calls are widely published, both nationally and internationally.

Transparent Recruitment at the BCBL is guaranteed by the establishment of monitoring indicators and the quality control check performed at the BCBL every time a job call ends.

Merit-based Recruitment guarantees that applicants to any BCBL offer compete effectively for a job, based merely on their academic background, technical and professional skills, motivation, abilities and knowledge.

The process of implementing OTM-R at the BCBL can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The HRS4R group worked on the OTM-R check-list in July 2017.
- (2) The former recruitment process and web-based platform for our calls—created in 2009—was audited and compared to the OTM-R standards. The most relevant deviations were:
 - Advertising and application phase:
 - BCBL traditional job offers did not contain all the information OTM-R standards demand.
 - Feedback to all candidates was not included in our former process.
 - Selection committees differed from the optimal ones established in OTM-R.
 - Appointment phase:
 - Feedback to candidates and complaints mechanisms should be put in place.
 - General:
 - Quality control in OTM-R to be implemented.
- (3) The results of the internal audit and calendar for the adaptation into the OTM-R standards were communicated to the whole BCBL community in autumn 2017.
- (4) The HRS4R Working Group concluded that an update on the BCBL web-based recruitment platform was necessary. A proposal was submitted to the Regional Government (call for Talent Attraction actions 2018) and funding was achieved for this challenging project. The web-based tool is currently being updated and, in the meantime, we are working manually in order to keep up with the OTM-R standards.

 OTM-R PROCESS	2017				2018				2019			
	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q
1) Review current recruitment policy, practices and procedures												
2) Develop and put in place a revised OTM-R policy												
3) Publishing the OTM-R policy												
4) Quality control system												
5) Establish or adapt an internal OTM-R guide												
6) Training and awareness raising within the institution												
7) E-recruitment												

4. IMPLEMENTATION (MAX. 1 PAGE)

General overview of the implementation process: (max. 1000 words).

BCBL considers its staff to be its most important resource and only guarantee of success for its global project. As part of the challenges outlined in our Strategic Plan 2018-2021, our personnel policy is based on the strategies below:

- To build research, administration and technical support teams which are highly-qualified, motivated, resourceful, willing to work in teams and open to the world.
- To continue with the implementation of the HRS4R policies and procedures and adopt an ambitious approach towards new horizons such as OTM-R.
- To appoint a “HRS4R Working Group” devoted to implementing HRS4R activities at the BCBL, with the following composition:

1. **Miguel A. Arocena: General Manager (also member of HR team)**
2. **Larraitz López: Lab Manager (also member of HR team)**
3. **Ana Fernández: Project Manager (also member of HR team)**
4. Clara Martin: Group Leader/Professor R4
5. Marie Lallier: Group Leader/Staff Scientist R3
6. Simona Mancini: Group Leader/Staff Scientist R3
7. Daniel Alcalá: Postdoctoral researcher R2
8. Candice Frances: PhD Student R1

The role of the HRS4R Working Group is to ensure the proper deployment of the HRS4R process as well as its implementation. It is placed under the responsibility of the BCBL General Manager.

- To develop, implement and track the consequent Action Plan in order to improve any gap regarding the 40 principles of the C&C: Since 2017, at least every two years, a complete survey is completed by the research staff, aiming at learning about the fulfilment degree and identifying the gaps regarding the 40 principles of the C&C. The HRS4R group works to develop, implement and track the consequent Action Plan.
- To incorporate excellent research personnel at both national and international levels. Regarding the selection of personnel (updated to OTM-R standards as from 2018), BCBL places great importance not only on the technical skills and knowledge of the person but also on human aspects such as respect, ability to work in a team, people skills, empathy, constancy, creativity, learning curve, etc.
- To offer continuous training and professional development advise at the BCBL.

Make sure you also cover all the aspects highlighted in the checklist below:

How have you prepared the internal review? (500 words max)

With the purpose of preparing the internal review, we have followed the same methodology as the one we put in place in 2015 when the process to obtain the HRS4R award started.

First, two full HRS4R surveys were delivered to the research community at the BCBL. One in 2015 (participation of 55%) and another one in 2017 (participation of 70%).

After a thorough analysis of the 2017 survey results, a brainstorming workshop with researchers was organised. We presented the results and underwent a brainstorming session to discuss results and work together to identify and prioritise potential improvement actions. OTM-R information and training were also a core part of the session.

As a result of the process, the revised Action Plan 2018-2021 was created.

The web page section for HRS4R was updated.

How have you involved the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process? (500 words max)

The research community at the BCBL has actively participated in the implementation process. R1-R4 Researchers are the ones identifying the gaps and weaknesses and playing an important role in suggesting improvement actions in order to update the Action Plan. The HRS4R Working Group members guarantee that actions are carried out correctly.

Do you have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress? (500 words max)

Taking into account the size of the BCBL, and the fact that the General Manager of the institution is part of the HRS4R Working Group, the Steering Committee is embedded in the HR team.

The role of the HRS4R Working Group is to ensure the proper deployment of the process. It is placed under the responsibility of the BCBL General Manager.

Is there any alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the organisation's research strategy, overarching HR policy? (500 words max)

The BCBL working procedures, as well as our strategic plan, mission, vision and goals, comprise the key policies that are necessary to manage efficiently the institution following

transparent and professional management of human and material resources. Our former HR processes were designed when the center was created in 2009, and have been updated in 2016 and 2019, in order to achieve full alignment with HRS4R and OTM-R policies.

How is your organisation ensuring that the proposed actions are also being implemented? (500 words max)

The progress of implemented actions will be monitored by performing a quarterly control on the indicators and targets defined in our updated action plan. This periodical monitoring could lead to adjustments in the action plan and to additional and/or rescheduled new actions. This implies that we will firmly follow our action plan; however, we believe it is a living document and updated editions will be created so as to keep it as close as possible to the real needs of the center.

How are you monitoring progress? (500 words max)

The HR team meets at least every month to discuss HR general topics; in addition, the working group joins this meeting in order three times a year to discuss the topics outlined in the action plan that involve the researchers collective.

The HRS4R Working Group organises an **annual workshop dedicated to HRS4R**, open to all the research community at the BCBL. The aim of the workshop is to keep researchers updated on the HR activities, receive feedback on the HR procedures and extend the HRS4R spirit to all new comers. This will help us to monitor progress and see the effect of actions on our research community.

How do you expect to prepare for the external review? (500 words max)

With the purpose of getting ready for the external review/site visit, the HR team and the HRS4R Working Group will follow the Guides for Site Visits provided by the European Commission; that includes a thorough preparation of the agenda, a presentation of the institution, the national context and our HRS4R process from 2016-on as well as the participation of a representative group of R1-R4 researchers to take part in the site visit and interviews with advisors.

In our opinion, the site visit will provide us with very interesting feedback on both our HRS4R process and progress.

Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process: (max. 1000 words):

n/a

Please note that the revised HR strategy and Action Plan must also be published upon completion of the internal assessment.