

Methodology for open and transparent management of human resources at the J. Heyrovský Institute of Physical Chemistry of the CAS, v.v.i.

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1. Introduction

Open, transparent and merit-based recruitment (OTM-R)¹ brings benefits to researchers, institutions, a country's research system, contributes to the full implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) and to an increase in the cost-effectiveness of investments in research. The J. Heyrovský Institute of Physical Chemistry of the Czech Academy of Sciences, v.v.i. (JH-Inst) has identified management of human resources as one of its top priorities, recognizing open recruitment of talent as one of key factors for reaching its full potential. The implementation of a HR strategy is a part of concerted and synergic actions taken by the institute.

This HR recruitment methodology has been designed as a part of the Human Resources for Research project at the J. Heyrovský Institute of Physical Chemistry of the Czech Academy of Sciences, v.v.i. , but is well embedded into the Institute's internationalization strategy. It largely builds on the experiences collected during the international hiring of the J. Heyrovsky chair within the ERA-Chair project, which was recently awarded to the institute. It also reflects the procedures developed during the selection and recruitment of the J. Heyrovsky team members, who were hired also in an internationally announced process. The Methodology ensures that the best possible candidate for a job at the Institute is selected and hired in an open, transparent and merit-based recruitment process. This methodology is to be broadly applied to researchers of all categories, including temporarily employees like visiting scientists, post-doctoral fellows, PhD students, etc., irrespectively of their gender, age, origin or status. The same principles, simplified and adopted to suit specificities of those employee categories, shall apply to recruitment of technical and administrative staff of the institute. However, this is not the content and merit of the present document.

The Methodology is based on well-defined quality selection criteria. It is designed such that, in a transparent way, it guarantees equality, fairness and traceability of the entire selection and recruitment process. It aims to improve the HR management of the Institute according to the European standards. It is based on the Report of the Working group of the Steering group of human resources management under the European Research Area on Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers, which represents the main pillar of the European Charter for Researchers (Charter)² and, obviously, the Code of Conduct for their recruitment (Code)³.

The Czech Academy of Sciences as the first entity in the Czech Republic adopted the principles of the Framework of Charter and Code already in 2008, and has implemented its principles into the Career development rules⁴. These rules provide general guidance for all the Academy institutes

¹ Report of the Working group of the Steering group of human resources management under the European Research Area on Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers (OTM-R)

² <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter>

³ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/code>

⁴ <https://www.avcr.cz/en/about-us/legal-regulations/career-development-rules-for-cas-employees-with-a-university-degree/index.html>

and are the basis for the JH-Inst. The Institute has been following the principles of the Charter and Code ever since, though the formal endorsement dates 2017⁵. Inspired by external circumstances (like the ERA-Chair project, the HR award and others) the JH-Inst reinforced its effort on the effective implementation of the principles of OTM-R⁶. The aim is to revisit the current recruitment processes, assess them in a reflective and self-critical way, amending them where necessary to improve their effectiveness, openness and transparency. The same criteria and processes are applied irrespectively of nationality, gender, age, religion, political or sexual orientation to all applicants.

Huge inspiration came from the lessons learned from the hiring process within the J. Heyrovský Chair project⁷. The general aim of this project is to better integrate the J. Heyrovský Institute into the European research landscape. The capacities of the Institute shall be enhanced, and a proactive HR policy is pivotal for the internationalization of its staff. The primary project aims, i.e. attracting an internationally recognized personality and establishing an international research team, were very challenging, and have pushed the existing rules and procedures to the limits.

2. The status quo

The present principles for hiring scientific personnel, PhD students and administrative staff are based on good practices developed in the individual departments of the Institute, rather than on a formalized HR policy and corresponding regulation. The leading principles of the Charter and Code are respected in general terms; however, decisions are taken on the case-by-case basis.

Though clearly the primary aim of any recruitment has been and is to ensure that the best person for the job is selected, a systemic consistent and coherent recruitment strategy was never really formalized, and the corresponding procedures were not defined. Often the process is opportunity driven, i.e. based on availability of resources and guided by external rules resulting from the program requirements. The hiring processes are realized mainly by the individual project leaders, hardly coordinated at the institute's level, and often even without corresponding administrative coverage from the HR department. The advertisement is usually restricted to national portals only.

The example of recruitment within the J. Heyrovský Chair project, with a particular emphasis on attracting researchers from global pool of top-class scientists, has shown the limits and bottlenecks of the current situation. While no major issues appeared in the part of reviewing the submitted material, mastering the interviews and presentations, and determining the scientific qualities of the candidates, several problematic areas, where no guidance could be derived from internal rules, were recognized in course of the internationally advertised recruitment process. These difficulties resulted in obstacles, misunderstandings, delays and even failures in the recruitment. The major identified challenges are:

⁵ https://cdn4.euraxess.org/sites/default/files/cc-declarations-files/commitment_of_hipc_signed.pdf

⁶ It is important to stress that OTM-R principles refer to 'recruitment', i.e. the procedures for filling a vacant position, and not to career progression, for which the procedures need anyway to be transparent and merit-based.

⁷

- certain rigidity of the system and insufficient flexibility
- problems in defining the vacancy in terms of measurable selection criteria;
- missing guidance in advertising the opening;
- scattered responsibilities of the individual institutional actors;
- lacking experience with different habits and cultures;
- lacking experience with systematic HR management;
- too long and unrealistic timeliness;
- internal procedures not adjusted for foreign applicants;
- not having contracts signed in advance of job start day⁸;

A self-standing problem is the spread and level of English in the institute's administration. This, together with the increased workload and specific demands on skills when it comes to employment of foreign employees, represents serious drawbacks.

3. Internal recruitment guide of the J. Heyrovský Institute

The institute is developing a recruitment methodology, which is based on international good practices. This methodology, which addresses the issues in the OTM-R toolkit, will be implemented in summer 2020 following the internal recruitment guide, which was adopted in autumn 2019. The J. Heyrovsky chair project was hereby pivotal in providing guidance and inspiration. This guide sets out, in chronological order, the whole recruitment process, from the job advertising/application phase through to the appointment phase. It provides principles for appropriate assessment and evaluation of the academic and professional qualifications, including non-formal qualifications, skills and competences of all researchers, as well as international and professional mobility. The recruitment process at the J. Heyrovský Institute satisfies the OTM-R system as proven by the OTM-R checklist. Currently the institute is working on the preparation of a **Quality control** system, which considers also **measures for underrepresented groups**. These documents will be available in 6/2020

The revised recruitment process will be made public, both internally and externally. All personnel involved in the recruitment process will be appropriately trained on the procedures. This in turn should be embedded in the existing quality assurance system of the organization, without any unnecessary administrative and/or bureaucratic burden.

3.1 Principles of the HR management process

The aim of this document is to develop and provide an OTM-R based HR strategy at the J. Heyrovský Institute, which:

- is establishing clear guidelines for preparation, content and posting of a clear and concise job advertisement;

⁸ it is hardly thinkable that a strong candidate would quit their job BEFORE having their new contract signed and new job secured

- is providing a set of internal rules and processes, which are transparent, lean and keep the administrative burden for both, the candidate and the institute, to a necessary minimum;
- is strictly following the equal opportunity principles and incorporates measures for allowing career path for young families;
- is providing the applicants clear and transparent information on the whole selection process, including selection criteria and an indicative timetable;
- Is setting-up an internal guide on institutional HR policy and a detailed manual for the implementation;
- Is setting up an appointment phase guide, which allows also solving of eventual complaints, and includes first stage of the post-appointment phase;
- Will be published at a prominent part of the publicly accessible WEB pages of the JH-Inst;

All these measures are complementary and form part of an institution's overall policy to increase its level of quality, improve its reputation, attractiveness, and pursuit of excellence at the global scale. Hereby, the overarching guiding principles are openness, fairness and transparency.

3.2 Career regulation in the institute

The Institute follows the Career development rules (CDR) of the Czech Academy of Sciences⁴, which defines the following qualification grades to be applied to employees with a university degree (Article 22 (2) of the Appendix to the Statutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences) and are compliant with the European Framework of research Careers⁹. The four career profiles are refined into the following six degrees:

| | | |
|---|----|--|
| Grade 1 - Research assistant | R1 | An employee with a university degree; usually works to support research of the team. |
| Grade 2 - Graduate student (Early stage researchers) | R1 | An employee, who is enrolled in a doctoral study program (typically Ph.D.). |
| Grade 3a - Postdoctoral fellow | R2 | An employee, who has recently completed her/his doctoral study program; usually works under the supervision of experienced scientists and publishes her/his results individually and/or as part of a team. The employee may remain in this category for no more than five years after receiving her/his doctoral degree. |
| Grade 3b - Associated scientist | R3 | An employee who has not been assigned to category 4 or 5 within five years of obtaining her/his doctoral degree. |
| Grade 4 - Scientist | R4 | A researcher who has obtained a doctoral degree in her/his field; works independently and performs |

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Towards_a_European_Framework_for_Research_Careers_final.pdf

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|--|
| | | highly demanding and complex scientific work in her/his field. Regularly publishes research papers in domestic and foreign peer-reviewed journals or magazines and usually is assigned to work on grant or program projects. |
| Grade 5 - Senior scientist | R4 | A researcher complying with grade 4 qualification requirements. In addition to the grade 4, she/he is also a leading scientific personality significantly involved in the development of her/his scientific field on an international scale. |

The CDR`s, which are openly available at the WEB page of the Academy, also specify the general rules and procedures, which are related to each of the positions. These procedures are strictly followed by the institute. However, for better of understanding the European profiles are added to and displayed at any advertised position, i.e. R1 for Grades 1 and 2, R2 for Grades 3a and 3b, R3 for Grade 4, and R4 for Grade 5.

3.4 The advertisement process and application phase

This chapter applies to the advertisement process concerning scientific position mainly, i.e. 3a onwards, and may differ for announcing the positions of technical and administrative staff. Those positions are usually processed in a simplified way. A lighter procedure applies also for hiring to positions 3a and 3b, and modified procedure applies for short term contracts (typically scientific visits shorter than one year). The full procedure applies to hiring to the grades 4 and 5.

Anticipating the approval of the director with the newly filled position, which is subject of a separate negotiation between the director (director's board) and the project leader/head of department, the text of the advertisement can be prepared. The department/project leader and the HR department officer prepare the vacancy advertisement jointly. The text of the announcement must correspond to the details previously discusses with the director and consider this guide. Templates are available in the HR office together with the list of WEB portals and links to dedicated media. The job advertisement and the description of requirements are kept as concise as possible, and include links to more detailed information on the WEB pages of the Institute. All positions should be advertised internationally.

The advertisements contain information on:

- position title and brief job description;
- reference to the Grade (RCD) is made;
- list of required and desirable selection criteria¹⁰ (CV, list of publication, Scientific achievements, awards and grants received, teaching experience, softskills, etc);

¹⁰ The “*European Framework for research Careers*” which identifies necessary and desirable researcher profiles will be used. (see http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Towards_a_European_Framework_for_Research_Careers_final.pdf)

- reference to the planned duration of the employment;
- working conditions, terms of contract and entitlements;
- personal and career development opportunities;
- application procedure, application period and deadline for applications;
- list of required reference and supportive documents;
- explicit reference to the J. Heyrovský Institute's HR policy¹¹ will be made;
- contact details and a dedicated e-mail address for each hiring;
- further specifications (if appropriate).

As a general rule, the procedure has to be kept light and the administrative burden shall be reduced to a minimum. No original or certified copies of legal documents are requested within the application process. If such document required, it shall be provided only at a later stage.

All vacancies are to be published by a dedicated administrative staff for at least one full month ahead of the application deadline¹². Both printed and e-media are used for advertisement. Publication in a dedicated section of the Institutes WEB portal (for the first week also in the front page / News section) is mandatory for any vacancy. Openings for positions from Grade 3a upwards are done bilingually by default, i.e. both in Czech or English depending (or both on the media). Hereby, the publishing of a vacancy on the EURAXESS portal in top of any other media is obligatory. Selection of proper media for a vacancy advertisement is done jointly by the Department/Project leader and the HR department officer and is part of the recruitment protocol.

The applications are to be send to a dedicated address (submitted in paper or by electronic means). A confirmation mail acknowledging of receiving the application will be send out to the applicant.

All applicants will be informed at a later stage of the evaluation, but in due time, on further details of the recruitment process. This contains typically:

- Indicative timeline
- Interview/scientific presentation period
- Schedule of the interview and specific requirements
- Travel arrangements
- Provided logistic and financial support

All applicants will be duly and timely informed by a standard e-mail, if any significant changes of this process appear subsequently.

¹¹ The J. Heyrovsky institute promotes women and thus encourages them explicitly to apply. It is committed to the objective of being a family-friendly research institution. Severely disabled persons with equal qualifications will be given preference

¹² The publication deadline one month before the for application has to respect technical deadlines of the advertising entities.

The institute will ensure that appropriate training is provided to all those who are involved in the recruitment process, i.e. the administrative officers and the heads of departments. This includes also training on how to brief members of the selection committees. If the job advertisement is published in English, all administration including the interviews is prepared also in English.

3.5 The evaluation and selection phase

3.5.1 The selection committee

The director separately for each hiring process sets a Selection committee. Best effort is done to maintain gender balance in the Selection committee. All members of the Selection committee shall have the relevant experience, qualifications and competencies to assess the candidate, are proficient in the language in which the process will be concluded. The appointment of the Selection committee is made public. The size and profile of the Committee can differ depending on the Grade of the opening. However, it shall consist of minimal three members with representative of the HR department, the project leader or the head of the corresponding department, and one additional member with relevant scientific expertise. The project leader or the head of the department have a prominent role in the selection of the process including a veto vote. For hiring into the highest Grade 4 the head of the department is replaced by the institute director and at least two external experts are invited to the Selection committee.

Invitations to attend meetings of the Selection committee must be issued by the chair (to be elected at the first meeting by simple majority) of the Committee in good time. Meetings of the appointment or Selection committee are not open to the public. All discussions of the Selection committee shall be regarded as confidential. All of its members should attend meetings of the Selection committee. Minutes should be kept of every meeting of the Selection committee. All decisions must be documented, and all votes and their results must be recorded in the minutes. A record of attendance must be kept for each meeting. These minutes are taken and archived together with the attendance list by the HR department.

3.5.2 The screening and interviewing

After the application deadline all applications undergo a pre-screening for completeness and eligibility. A dedicated person does this screening, typically a representative from the HR department. Incomplete applications and applications received after the deadline will not be considered in the second step of the selection. Those applicants who were refrained from the process are informed about this circumstance without further delay. In exceptional cases, if advertising a vacant position leads to no application the entire process is repeated.

The Selection committee inspects the submitted material of the remaining applicants, and convenes for a meeting where a consensus on the ranking of the candidates according to the announced criteria shall be found. In this meeting the Selection committee also identifies three to five candidates who will make the final shortlist.

Shortlisted candidates are invited for an interview. This interview may be done remotely (by Skype, phone or other means) in cases where face-to-face meeting is not possible. The interviewing procedure typically consists of a closed session with the entire Selection committee, and in addition, the candidates may be invited for a public scientific lecture (mandatory for Grade 4 hiring) in the institute, which then is a part of the selection process. Hereby, all candidates are treated in the same way, i.e. if a scientific lecture is foreseen; it becomes mandatory for all shortlisted candidates.

The shortlisted candidates are informed well ahead¹³ about the details and foreseen timeline of the selection process, the dates of the interviews and presentations are agreed, travel arrangements are made etc. The institute covers the travel and accommodation expenses for all the applicants. Proper administrative arrangements are done by the HR department in order to support the interview logistics. Internal institute guideline regulates the reimbursement of the travel costs of the candidates. The process planning will also consider constraints, which may influence the availability of the candidates for interviews (visa application procedures, lengths of travel, etc.).

3.5.3 The selection

It is important to ensure in the selection process that the levels of qualifications and competencies required are in line with the needs of the position. However, it must be secured that those requirements are not too restrictive and/or requiring unnecessary qualifications. Fairness and transparency are the guiding principles and the Selection committee carries a huge responsibility in this respect. The selection criteria and their relative importance must be fixed and documented at the beginning of the selection procedure (first meeting of the Selection committee) in order to ensure the necessary transparency in the decisions. It is also of uttermost importance that the members of the Committee have clarified their potential conflicts of interest. The clear aim is to identify the best candidate for a given position. The meetings of the Selection committee, though closed, are minuted. The minutes are approved by all Selection committee members and archived for potential redress procedures.

The interview process shall focus on the candidate's past achievements based on the submitted material (CV, list of publication, scientific awards and grants received, teaching experience, soft skills, language proficiency etc.), and assess his/her potential for the institute, by exploring the motivation for going for this position. Merit should be judged qualitatively and quantitatively, focusing on results within a diversified career path, considering special circumstances (career breaks, life-long professional developments, teaching and industrial experience, other relevant non-research experience). For Grade 4 positions also, the future plans and prospects of the candidate will be discussed and evaluated by the Selection committee. This should be one of the

¹³ Experience from the ERA chair process shows that this step should be the most flexible, thus without a firm timeline, to meet the needs of both sides

most important elements of the interview, also in the context of the long-term strategy of the Institute.

The lectures held eventually by candidates (obligatory for Grade 4 positions) are public, should last 45 minutes and be followed by an open discussion of the lecture. Questions related to the lecture should take place during this public discussion. Members of the Selection committee will have an opportunity to direct further questions to individual candidates in a closed session. This closed session of applicant with Selection committee should serve for interviewing only.

A wide range of evaluation criteria should be used consistently with the requirements of the posted as regards research, supervision or, for example, teaching competencies in the vacancy advertisement (cf. also 3.4)¹⁰. These criteria may consist a selection of:

- education and scientific career path;
- documented research performance;
- specific scientific competences and expertise;
- supervision and mentoring including teaching, training or supervision experience;
- experience in management of research and innovation;
- organizational skills and capability of acquisition of funding;
- international portfolio (including mobility);
- expertise in knowledge transfer and in generation of societal impact;
- outreach/public awareness activities.

In order to safeguard transparency and fairness of the process, ideally, the same Selection committee is engaged in all steps of the selection process, i.e. shortlisting, interviewing, evaluating the scientific competences and other skills of the candidate. Changes in the Selection committee, if requires, shall be kept minimal in order to assure consistency of the process. After all candidates have been interviewed, the Selection committee shall present to the institute's director its final finding. Those findings contain a ranking of the candidates and a merit-based recommendation which candidates shall enter the appointment phase.

In line with the principle "Transparency" of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, all concerned applicants will receive by e-mail a written notice at the end of the selection process, sent by a dedicated administrative staff without any unnecessary delays and not later than after two months. The applicants who were admitted to the interview will receive feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their application, and those who selected will receive an information about the start of the appointment process. Other applicants, who did not make it to the final stages, will receive a standard mail informing them of the outcome. All applicants will be entitled to further feedback concerning details on their selection process upon request. The feedback will be formulated at the other Selection committee meeting.

3.6 The appointment phase

The appointment proposal by the Selection committee typically consists of one or more candidates (alternatively together with a ranking). It is discussed at the next meeting of the director's board, but can be approved also in a simplified *per rollam* procedure.

The director is entitled to reject the proposal and return it to the Selection committee with explanation of reasons for doing so. In general, the director adopts the proposal and issues, in accordance with the discussion in the board, an offer to the first-placed candidate, and formally starts negotiations.¹⁴ Once this formal appointment offer has been accepted in writing, all other candidates included in the appointment procedure are notified of the impending appointment by email (notification of competitors).

If the first-placed candidate rejects the appointment offer or fails to indicate a decision before the stipulated deadline, the offer will generally be withdrawn after due consultation with the head of the department/project leader and made instead to the next-ranking candidate on the proposal list. If there are no further candidates on the list or if the remaining candidates are no longer available, a decision is made by the director in consultation with the relevant actors on whether to re-advertise the post or terminate the appointment procedure.

3.7 Complaint mechanism

A procedure to deal with complaints made by applicants who believe that they have been treated negligently, unfairly or incorrectly is established at the institute.¹⁵ A redress procedure is established and the Institute ombudsman has a central role hereby.

4. Specific requirements for hiring foreign researchers

4.1 Legal frame

In connection to the intention to employ a foreign resident, several actions have to be undertaken prior an employment contract can be signed. The overall legal framework and the following regulations are particularly relevant for the employment of foreign researchers:

- **ACT No. 89/2012** the Civil Code
- **ACT No. 262/2006** as amended Labor code

¹⁴ It is important to consider that the whole set of 'employment conditions' being offered to applicants (for example, the type and duration of contracts, the salary and benefits, etc.) represents a key element of attractiveness.

¹⁵ This procedure should be transparent and made public. It should include an indication of the timeframe within which a complainant will receive a response, which should in principle be no longer than one month.

- **ACT No 586/1992** on Income Taxes in wording of later amendments (Income Tax Act)
- **ACT No. 379/2007** amending Act No 326/1999 on the residence of foreign nationals on the territory of the Czech Republic
- **ACT No. 589/1992** on Social security and State employment policy premiums
- **ACT No. 130/2002 Coll.** on the Support of Research and Development from Public Funds and on the Amendment to Some Related Acts (the Act on the Support of Research and Development)
- **ACT. No. 341/2005 Coll.** on public research institutions
- **ACT. No. 342/2005 Coll.** on amendment to some acts in connection with adoption of the act on public research institution's
- **Council Directive 2005/71/EC** of 12 October 2005 on a specific procedure for admitting third-country nationals for the purposes of scientific research
- **Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71** of the Council of 14 June 1971 on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community

4.2 Ex ante actions

Researcher resident in the EU or one of the H2020 associated countries does not require any visa or working permit in the sense of the act on the residence of foreign nationals on the territory of the Czech Republic. However, he/she may request a temporarily residence status, which applies to family members, who are residents of EU. A third country resident is asked to apply for a Long-term residence permit for the purpose of scientific research ("Scientific visa"). Similar applies to family members. The Institute will provide assistance to the foreign researchers in mastering all the administrative burdens through and dedicated staff member of the HR department. This help concerns mainly but not exclusively support in acquiring scientific visa and long-term residence permits. A part of the process is assistance with the necessary formalities and documents as requested by the by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who is the authority for issuing these documents. Similarly, the institute will issue the hosting agreement and the written obligation of the that it will cover potential expenses connected with the stay of the scientific researcher on the territory of the Czech Republic. On request the institute can provide help with acquiring the health insurance for the researcher and its family members. Detailed information about applications for the long-term residence permit for the purpose of scientific research is available at the web site of the Ministry of the Interior¹⁶, under which competence the portfolio of residence permits falls. ¹⁷More information can be found on the WEB

¹⁶ <https://www.mvcr.cz/mvcren/article/third-country-nationals-long-term-residence.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mw%3d%3d>

¹⁷ <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum/seznam-vyzkumnych-organizacischvalenych-pro-prijimani>