Human Resources Strategy for the incorporation of researchers in compliance with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers

Internal Analysis Record and Action Plan for the period 2010-2012
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1. INTRODUCTION

IMDEA (Instituto Madrileño de Estudios Avanzados – Madrid Institute for Advanced Studies) is the New Institutional Framework set up by the Madrid Regional Government to combine and increase public and private support effectively, focusing the research in this region on market demands and encouraging the private sector to take part in scientific design. IMDEA comprises a network of research institutes of excellence in the highest economic impact areas, among them water.

The first meeting of the IMDEA Water Scientific Committee members was held on 21 February 2007. As a recently created institution, it is currently still a very small centre (with around 25 people working directly), IMDEA water is currently growing, and although it was set up according to the principles of the Charter and Code (C&C), requires the continuous implementation of a Human Resources policy enabling adaptation to the new needs of the Institute.

To accomplish the implementation, the Working Team C&C of IMDEA water was constituted, consisting of representatives Juana Sanz (working team coordinator and management group), Eloy García (Executive and senior researchers’ group), Ana Berreteaga (Postdoctoral and junior researchers’ group) and Virtudes Martínez (Predoctoral researchers’ and senior support Technicians group).

2. INTERNAL ANALYSIS

2.1 Process description

The internal analysis was begun by organising a meeting to inform all the IMDEA water members about the content of the centre’s participation in the International HR Strategy Work Group and the importance of the implementation. As a result, initial feedback on the situation and the involvement of all members in the process was obtained.

Particularly, information was given on:

- Presentation of the historical evolution of the Research Charter and Code
- Description of the IMDEA Water position in the strategy
- Presentation of different websites and links related with the HR Strategy for researchers (http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/index, etc.).
- Setting out a plan of action to be followed after the Researcher Code and Charter were read and known by everybody in the meeting.

The internal analysis was based on measurements using indicators evaluating the level of compliance with the 40 principles set forth in the Charter and Code in line with four areas or dimensions:

I. Ethical and professional responsibility of researchers
II. Recruitment
III. Working conditions
IV. Research career training and development

The IMDEA Water members taking part in the process anonymously rated questions related to indicators and grouped in accordance with the four abovementioned areas or dimensions. To assess the different items of the Research Code and Charter, an internal analysis form was used, available on the European Commission HR Strategy for researchers website. To carry out the HR Strategy in a centre with the IMDEA Water features, a minor adaptation of the form was required. Thus, participants rated each item on the standard form from two different points of view. An initial personal rating of the importance or priority of each item for an institution like IMDEA Water, ascribing a priority score (1 meaning low priority and 4 maximum priority). A second approach rated the current adaptation of the centre to each C&C item, assigning an average score from 1 (maximum disagreement) to 4 (maximum agreement).

The personal rating was intended to detect the main aspects to be taken into account when planning improvements. The purpose of this assessment is to provide greater reinforcement for those items where the difference between the personal rating and the centre’s score was greatest. Especially those where the personal rating was very high and the centre’s score was low. Another target of analysis is the workers' attitude towards the code, as well as finding out if it is necessary to communicate the positive worth of complying with any item included in the Charter and Code.

For analysis of the results, participants who filled in the form were grouped in 6 professional categories as follows (Table 1): A) Executive, B) Senior Researchers, C) Postdoctoral and junior Researchers, D) Predoctoral Researchers and Senior Support Technicians, E) Laboratory Technicians, and F) Management.

2.2 Results

Participation in the analysis was high; around 90% staff filled in the form (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Nº of people</th>
<th>Participation in the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A_Executive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B_ Senior Researchers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C_Postdoctoral and Junior Researchers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D_Predoctoral Researchers and Senior Support Technicians</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E_Laboratory Technician</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F_Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>86,2%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Established distribution of the group and HR Strategy for researchers participation rate.

It is worth mentioning that all group A members (Executive) could also have been included in group B (Senior Researchers), since apart from being directors of the centre, they are also researchers and line supervisors. Nevertheless, as the main decisions have to be approved by them and it is they who know the organisational structure of the centre and its guidelines, it was decided to separate them.
General analysis (Fig. 1)

In the first analysis, an assessment of adaptation of the centre to C&C was used, and, as a result, the HR policy of IMDEA Water in the 4 areas (“Ethical and professional aspects”, “Recruitment”, “Work condition and Social Security”, and “Training”) in line with the principles of the C&C was noted. However, given the scores obtained, some of the aspects might be improved.

It is important to point out that the average rating for each factor in each group is always above 3 points (Fig. 1), and the general average (including all groups) for all factors is between 3 and 4 points, which reinforces the idea that satisfaction among the IMDEA Water staff is high. In general, the highest rated area is that of ethical and professional aspects, something that IMDEA Water has fully supported from its outset and which is outlined in the Institution statutes.

If we analyse the groups one by one, group A (Executive) presents the highest scores. The members of this group formed part of IMDEA Water from the very beginning and they are the most familiar with the institution's performance. Moreover, they have notable experience in several centres. The more negative scores correspond to group E (Laboratory Technicians). Due to their tasks, they might not have felt highly identified with many aspects of the Charter and Code. They are followed by group C (Postdoctoral and Junior researchers) who show a quite balanced scale in all factors, with a score over 3.
Fig. 1. Analysis by groups. Ratings of each of the groups by areas in which IMDEA Water staff has been structured. A (Executive and Senior Researchers), C (Postdoctoral and Junior Researchers), D (Predoctoral Researchers and Senior Support Technicians), E (Laboratory Technicians) and F (Management).

**Analysis of each item of the Charter and Code**

To observe which area should be improved, each of the 40 items was analysed one by one, thoroughly studying those with a lower score (Fig. 2). Values taken are total average scores.

**Ethical and Professional aspects (Fig.2)**

The ethical and professional aspects area is the highest rated throughout all the survey. The worst rated items are number 7 (Good practices in research), 11 (Evaluation and assessment systems) and 5 (Contractual and legal obligations).
Fig. 2. Average rating of each item in the ethical and professional area. Classified in the following groups: A (Executive and Senior Researchers), C (Postdoctoral and Junior Researchers), D (Predoctoral Researchers and Senior Support Technicians), E (Laboratory Technicians) and F (Management). The total average rating of each item is indicated in blue (including all the questionnaires filled in).

Recruitment (Fig.3)

The lowest average ratings correspond to aspects such as Transparency (item 15) and Recognition of qualifications (item 19). Even so, the average score is 3.2.
Fig. 3. Average rating of each item in the recruitment area. Classified in the following groups: A (Executive and Senior Researchers), C (Postdoctoral and Junior Researchers), D (Predoctoral Researchers and Senior Support Technicians), E (Laboratory Technicians) and F (Management). The total average rating of each item is indicated in blue (including all the questionnaires filled in).

**Working Conditions and Social Security (Fig. 4)**

In the working conditions and social security area, the lowest rated items are Complaints and appeals (item 34), Participation in decision-making bodies (item 35) and Access to professional guidance (item 30), which are in fact the lowest rated items in the survey. So far, the presence of a complaints and appeals department has not been considered a priority, since there is no structure in place for it. The rest of the items are rated over 2.5, a score which, even though good, still shows room for improvement. In this area, the items which might undergo a greater improvement are “Professional development” and “Access to professional information”. The main aim of IMDEA Water is research per se, along with training, professionally guided in collaboration with structures more specifically involved in training (Universities, etc.)
Fig. 4. Average rating for each item in the working conditions and social security area. Classified in the following groups: A (Executive and Senior Researchers), C (Postdoctoral and Junior Researchers), D (Predoctoral Researchers and Senior Support Technicians), E (Laboratory Technicians) and F (Management). The total average rating of each item is indicated in blue (including all the questionnaires filled in).

**Training (Fig. 5)**

In general, groups C and D consider the access to research training and ongoing development (item 39) in the centre policy as highly relevant. However, they think that supervision and management tasks should be improved (item 37).
2.3 Implementation strategy

Personal ratings (where participants established the degree of priority or importance of the different items) and centre scores (where the staff established the current adaptation level of IMDEA Water to the different items of the Charter and Code) were compared in a graph. (Fig. 6).

The Y axis represents the average ratings given to the items to indicate their importance or priority. This evaluation was carried out by all participants in the survey, awarding the items scores from 1 to 4. The X axis represents the average rating given to the different items in terms of the extent of their current application in IMDEA Water.
Fig. 6. Representation of the average rating for all the items.

The ideal result would be if all the ratings represented in Figure 6 were on the X=Y line, so that the degree of application of the item were in line with its importance. The points situated below the line are also correct, as the application level in the centre is greater than the importance researchers give to the item. When points are situated over the lines, the items are given a greater importance than that of the current implementation in the centre, and we therefore have items or vacuums which should be improved.

This type of analysis enables us to find out further aspects which might be better applied than the previous analyses, since even though the centre adaptation is high (section 3.2 of this document), the importance or priority of these items are still higher.

3. CURRENT PRACTICES AND ACTIONS TO BE CARRIED OUT

3.1. Strengths

IMDEA Water strengths are the best rated by the majority of the interviewees, both from personal points of view, in terms of important and necessary aspects, and from the institutional perspective, about how each person thinks they are being implemented or not within the institution.

Particularly, the most highlighted attributes are: non-discrimination; gender equality; open recruitment processes; professional acknowledgement at every stage; daily improvement of the research environment and adaptation to increasingly expanding needs; research freedom; the effort made in disseminating and applying the results, as well as in training.
### 3.2. Challenges

**Action plan for the period 2010-2012**

The principles requiring implementation, from the outcomes of the internal analysis and indications of current practices for each of them, as well as the necessary improvement actions, are stated below.

#### I. Ethical and Professional aspects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Professional attitude</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researchers should be familiar with the strategic goals governing their research environment and funding mechanisms, and should seek all necessary approvals before starting their research or accessing the resources provided. They should inform their employers, funders or supervisor when their research project is delayed, redefined or completed, or give notice if it is to be terminated earlier or suspended for whatever reason.</td>
<td><strong>Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water</strong> Periodic technical and economic reports bodies to financial backers  <strong>Improvement proposals:</strong> To set up procedures for periodic reports on incidents and progress  <strong>Who</strong> Management and line supervisors  <strong>When</strong> Ongoing process</td>
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<th>6. Accountability</th>
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<td>Researchers need to be aware that they are accountable towards their employers, funders or other related public or private bodies as well as, on more ethical grounds, towards society as a whole. In particular, researchers funded by public funds are also accountable for the efficient use of taxpayers’ money. Consequently, they should adhere to the principles of sound, transparent and efficient financial management and cooperate with any authorised audits of their research, whether undertaken by their employers/funders or by ethics committees. Methods of collection and analysis, the outputs and, where applicable, details of the data should be open to internal and external scrutiny, whenever necessary and as requested by the appropriate authorities.</td>
<td><strong>Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water</strong> Annual accountancy report and audit  <strong>Improvement proposals:</strong> To standardise the drafting of annual reports on activities and execution level for projects where all the people involved take part.  <strong>Who</strong> Management  <strong>When</strong> A few weeks prior to approval of the activity report and annual accountancy and some weeks before the annual action plan’s approval by the Foundation Board</td>
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<tr>
<th>7. Good practice in research</th>
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<tr>
<td>Researchers should at all times adopt safe working practices, in line with national legislation, including taking the necessary precautions for health and safety and for recovery from information technology disasters, e.g. by preparing proper back-up strategies. They should also be familiar with the current national legal requirements regarding data protection and confidentiality protection requirements, and undertake the necessary steps to fulfil them at all times.</td>
<td><strong>Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water</strong> Workplace Risk Management (RM)  <strong>Improvement proposals:</strong> To organise training sessions on workplace safety To carry out an IT audit every two years and improve safety conditions, setting up access keys and levels.  <strong>Who</strong> Management  <strong>When</strong> Short-term</td>
</tr>
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### 11. Evaluation/appraisal systems

Employers and/or funders should introduce for all researchers, including senior researchers, evaluation/appraisal systems for assessing their professional performance on a regular basis and in a transparent manner by an independent (and, in the case of senior researchers, preferably international) committee.

**Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water**

Evaluation and assessment implemented by the board and the scientific committee, made up of well-known international researchers and specialists

**Improvement proposals:** To create a permanent data gathering system in the intranet which enables us to assess the advances and performance of every researcher in their different activities.

**Who** Executive and Management

**When** Ongoing process

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### II. Recruitment

#### 15. Transparency

Candidates should be informed, prior to the selection, about the recruitment process and the selection criteria, the number of available positions and the career development prospects. They should also be informed after the selection process about the strengths and weaknesses of their applications.

**Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water**

Candidates are informed of the evaluation process, rating criteria, recruitment conditions, remuneration and possibilities of development within their professional career, someone being available to deal with any queries. After the selection process, every candidate is personally informed about the evaluation results via e-mail.

**Improvement proposals:** Information on qualification regulations (NARIC network and ENIC network)

**Who** Executive and Management

**When** Ongoing process

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#### 20. Seniority

The levels of qualifications required should be in line with the needs of the position and not be set as a barrier to entry. Recognition and evaluation of qualifications should focus on judging the achievements of the person rather than his/her circumstances or the reputation of the institution where the qualifications were gained. As professional qualifications may be gained at an early stage of a long career, the pattern of lifelong professional development should also be recognised.

**Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water**

The goals achieved will be rated notwithstanding other conditioning factors.

**Improvement proposals:** To maintain the evaluation criterion, acknowledging the pattern of lifelong professional development. To reflect this issue in tenders.

**Who** Executive and Evaluation Committee

**When** Ongoing process
## III. Working conditions and Social Security

### 24. Working conditions
Employers and/or funders should ensure that the working conditions for researchers, including for disabled researchers, provide where appropriate the flexibility deemed essential for successful research performance in accordance with existing national legislation and with national or sectoral collective-bargaining agreements. They should aim to provide working conditions which allow both women and men researchers to combine family and work, children and career. Particular attention should be paid, inter alia, to flexible working hours, part-time working, teleworking and sabbatical leave, as well as to the necessary financial and administrative provisions governing such arrangements.

*Regulation* An agreement is in place.  
*Current rules and practices in IMDEA*  
*Proposals* To observe rigorous compliance with the regulation, involving the research line managers.  
*Who* Executive Team  
*When* Ongoing process

### 26. Funding and salaries
Employers and/or funders of researchers should ensure that researchers enjoy fair and attractive conditions of funding and/or salaries with adequate and equitable social security provisions (including sickness and parental benefits, pension rights and unemployment benefits) in accordance with existing national legislation and with national or sectoral collective bargaining agreements. This must include researchers at all career stages including early-stage researchers, commensurate with their legal status, performance and level of qualifications and/or responsibilities.

*Regulation* Spanish regulation in force.  
*Current rules and practices in IMDEA*  
*Water* Researchers are entitled to all that anticipated in the Spanish Social Security system  
*Improvement proposals:* To study the establishment of a productivity-based system of incentives  
*Who* Executive Team

### 34. Complaints/appeals
Employers and/or funders of researchers should establish, in compliance with national rules and regulations, appropriate procedures, possibly in the form of an impartial (ombudsman-type) person to deal with complaints/appeals of researchers, including those concerning conflicts between supervisor(s) and early-stage researchers. Such procedures should provide all research staff with confidential and informal assistance in resolving work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, with the aim of promoting fair and equitable treatment within the institution and improving the overall quality of the working environment.

*Current rules and practices in IMDEA*  
*Water*  
*Causes for improvement requirement:* Lack of information and protocol  
*Improvement actions required:* More internal information  
*Who* Management  
*When* Ongoing process
### 35. Participation in decision-making bodies

Employers and/or funders of researchers should recognise it as wholly legitimate, and indeed desirable, that researchers be represented in the relevant information, consultation and decision-making bodies of the institutions for which they work, so as to protect and promote their individual and collective interests as professionals and to actively contribute to the workings of the institution.

**Regulation** Foundation Regulation  
**Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water** Researchers provide all type of information and suggestions, which are transmitted to the board, top responsible when making decisions  
**Improvement proposals:** To provide a better knowledge of the organisational and governing structure of the institution.  
**Who** Executive Team  
**When** Ongoing process

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### IV. Training

#### 37. Supervision and managerial duties

Senior researchers should devote particular attention to their multi-faceted role as supervisors, mentors, career advisors, leaders, project coordinators, managers or science communicators. They should perform these tasks to the highest professional standards. With regard to their role as supervisors or mentors of researchers, senior researchers should build up a constructive and positive relationship with the early-stage researchers, in order to set the conditions for efficient transfer of knowledge and for the further successful development of the researchers’ careers.

**Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water** There are tutors and research line managers  
**Improvement proposals:** To increase the number of doctors in the thematic areas where they are most needed and further new links with organisations. The incorporation of doctorate staff would reinforce team work and help in the tasks of tutoring and supervising new researchers.  
**Who** Executive and Line Supervisors  
**When** Mid-term  
**Difficulties considered** Depending on the funding available

#### 39. Access to research training and continuous development

Employers and/or funders should ensure that all researchers at any stage of their career, regardless of their contractual situation, are given the opportunity for professional development and for improving their employability through access to measures for the continuing development of skills and competencies. Such measures should be regularly assessed for their accessibility, takeup and effectiveness in improving competencies, skills and employability.

**Current rules and practices in IMDEA Water** Ongoing training is promoted and financed  
**Improvement proposals:** To continue encouraging staff and informing them about training possibilities. To continue assessing this issue as important in the annual budget programming.  
**Who** Executive and Management  
**When** Ongoing process
4. Conclusions and specific actions

Carrying out the internal analysis enabled all the members of the organisation to know the principles of the C&C, as well as achieving a general reflection on actions carried out and which ones should be improved, both by the institution and any of the people part of it.

The majority of the weak points detected may be solved with common strategies.

The fact that IMDEA Water is a young entity allows continuous growth in terms of staff, research activities and, therefore, technical and management requirements. Thanks to this, the importance of setting up certain protocols and procedures to describe and collate the organisation’s performance was recognised, so that it is known by everybody and they may act in consequence and following the principles established in the institution. These protocols should be available for all the staff to consult at any time and enable the recently incorporated personnel to keep up to date with everything from the outset. In these processes, among others, the following issues will be described: The steps to take to make complaints, information on the use of research results, information on best internal practices, and the established accountability system, importance of mobility actions or diffusion procedures.

Internal information channels will be improved to make the available information more accessible to all, to get to know the institution better. In general, the lowest rated aspects are the lack information for staff (especially those recently joined) on the organisation’s performance.

The main aim within the annual action plans of the entity will continue to be training-oriented actions, which will be reinforced if possible.

It becomes necessary to establish internal rules on intellectual property, data protection and IT security (the first step will be to ask for an IT audit).

The organisation, through tutors and line supervisors, will take charge of encouraging the youngest researchers to take part in all type of activities helping to reinforce their research career, as well as providing suitable guidance on their professional future.

According to budget availability, participation in research groups will be fostered by increasing the teams, which will favour the presence of more tutors guiding and helping new researchers throughout the process.

Also according to budget availability, research infrastructures will be improved in line with the needs of the scientific investigation lines open in the centre.

Constant monitoring of the C&C strategy will be carried out, and in 2012 the internal analysis will be repeated in order to create improvement or maintenance strategies on every aspect rated, as well as to detect the level of compliance and satisfaction.