

Institute of Geological Sciences PAS

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY FOR RESEARCHERS

Revised strategy and Action Plan



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Warsaw, 2019



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1. Introduction

The Institute of Geological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (ING PAN) was established in 1956 as the Research Centre of Geological Sciences in Warsaw. The Laboratory of Geology and Stratigraphy of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow, which was organized in 1954, was incorporated into the Research Centre as its branch in Cracow.

In 1979, a resolution of the Board of the Polish Academy of Sciences raised the Centre to the rank of Institute. Today, the Institute of Geological Sciences has three research centres located in Warsaw (the headquarter), Cracow and Wrocław.

IGS PAS is a scientific institute whose main mission, defined in its statute, is conducting research in the area of Earth sciences and planetary geology, dissemination of results and education in the fields of expertise of the Institute. Institute specializes in the studies of the age of rocks and minerals, their origins, evolution of orogens and reconstruction of palaeoenvironment. The fulfillment of our mission is to contribute to a better understanding of the geosystem, the use of this knowledge for the needs of modern society, through the input into technological innovation among the others.

The head of IGS PAS is the Director, who is responsible for the overall strategy and activities of the Institute. The advisory body is the Board of Directors. The Scientific Council also ensures a high standard of scientific activity. The Secretariat, the Scientific Information Office, the Chief Accountant, the Human Resources Expert and the Health and Safety Inspector answer directly to the Director. The Director appoints the deputies: Deputy Director for Research, supervising research groups operating in the three research centres, as well as PhD Studies and the Geological Museum in Kraków, and Deputy Director for Management, who is in charge of the Administrative and Economic Office and Archive.

On 14th of July 2015, the Institute of Geological Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences signed the Declaration of Commitment to adopt the European Charter and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers that endorsed and fully supported the Recommendation of the European Commission 2005/251/EC the principles on "The European Charter for Researchers" and "The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers". In the Declaration, the Director of Institute, recognized the values of the Charter and the Code, and their influence on simultaneous development of both - its researchers and the institution.

In 2017 the Institute was granted the HR Excellence for Research Award and is continuing its pursuit to fully implement all 40 principles included in Charter and Code.

2. Internal review – approach & methodology

Based on the experience from the first gap analysis, it was concluded that repeating the questionnaire using the same form will be too labor-intensive and complicated. Each C&C principle covers several issues, therefore it can be difficult to assess the importance and the degree of implementation.

The bilingual template for survey carried out for this internal review was prepared. The questionnaire was constructed as follows:

- based on the all 40 C&C principles.
- one question covered one issue.

- Some questions referred to the actions taken by IGS PAS as part of the implementation of specific principles
- Shorter and easier to understand questions
- After every question there was a field for comments

The survey was anonymous – the form was sent by e-mail to all employees. After completing the survey they were asked to print the questionnaire and deliver it to the Scientific Information Office. Mostly one person brought questionnaires collected from other colleagues.

Thus conducted survey gave more detailed insight into overall satisfaction level of respondents and allowed to come up with an Action Plan. The action plan for 2019-2021 is focused on improving areas that were recognized as the most important for employees.

3. Internal review – findings

Ethical and Professional Aspects

There are no restrictions as to the subject of research. Most scientists confirmed this in their responses in the survey. Some scientists considered the introduction of a minimum amount for above which one can apply for a task from statutory sources the restriction of freedom of research,. Introduction of this principle is meant to be an incentive to create teams and establish cooperation between employees, and in the longer term with external scientists. This was also dictated by critical voices from the bodies, supervising the institute, who did not like the fragmentation of research tasks, including the threat of not accepting scientific plans that the institute must present.

The rules regarding ethical principles are recognized as important and followed in the researchers' opinion, but there still is a need to remind them and carry a discussion on developing good practices for use in IGS PAS.

Employees point to the nature of the research conducted at ING that these are basic research, therefore they have little significance for society at the moment, which may change in the future. It is mainly cognitive and intellectual meaning. However, it would be worth spreading this importance more widely in popular science activities.

Researchers are aware of the importance of complying with national laws as well as those set by research funding institutions. Employees point to unclear regulations regarding financing of science, especially when it comes to grants obtained from the National Science Centre, the National Centre for Research and Development. Organizing training in this area could improve the situation.

The employees are aware of the existence of internal and national regulations regarding Intellectual Property Rights regulations, and the requirements and conditions of funders and want to comply with them. The problem of lack of understanding of regulations, their interpretation and application has been indicated.

Employees are aware of their responsibility for the effective use of funds for research, at the same time indicate the time-consuming nature of some activities that they must perform to effectively use funds for research (searching for offers for tenders, preparation of extensive forms, etc.). The bureaucratic burden has been reduced by raising limit amounts for shopping that do not require a written request. The public procurement department is available to help with purchasing procedures. The Institute, as a unit financed from taxpayers' funds, must comply with the regulations.

During the first Gap Analysis some serious concerns regarding working conditions were revealed in the comments in the survey. In the survey that is the basis of this internal review, the respondents noticed

the improvement of safety conditions in comparison to the previous analysis. There is still place for improvement.

Dissemination of the research is taken very seriously by the employees, however, the comments show that researchers lack knowledge and experience to commercialize the results.

The principle of non-discrimination is well implemented according to responders. However, it is noted that the building of the Research Centre in Krakow is not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. This problem was noticed already in the first analysis of gaps, an attempt was made to improve the situation, but unfortunately it was not possible to carry out the necessary work (see the Revealed Action Plan). Further attempts to obtain financing will have to be made.

Attention was also paid to the difficulties that may accompany foreigners who work / study in the Institution due to the language barrier. The Centre in Krakow, where most of the foreign researchers worked during last few years, established standards for bilingual communication. The Institute started cooperation with the sworn translator. For now, foreign researchers receive contracts in the Polish version together with a sworn translation into English. The scientific information office is in the process of preparing internal documents and forms, starting with the most important, to translating and publishing the English versions on the website. Ultimately, we want each new internal act to be published in two language versions.

In 2018, new criteria for periodic assessment of employees were developed and are similar to the criteria according to which the Institute will be assessed by the Ministry. Employees do not raise concerns about transparency. Some responders commented on the weight attributed to different categories of achievements. It should be noted that the first evaluation, based on the new criteria, will be carried out this year and only then the criteria may be assessed.

Recruitment and Selection

Even before the Institute started to implement the HRS4R strategy, the Scientific Council adopted the regulations for competitions for scientific positions. When declaring competitions for positions, the Institute must abide by the provisions of the Labour Code, the Act on the Polish Academy of Sciences, as well as those required by grant institutions.

The Regulations determine the compositions of the selection committees. In 2018, criteria for employment, contract extensions, and promotions for research personnel were developed.

For more information, see the OTM-R checklist.

In the area of recruitment and selection, a large number of "do not know" answers appeared, as well as comments about lack of knowledge about compliance with rules, resulting from the fact that some employees never took part in the work of committees choosing a candidate for a research position. However, according to the respondents, the implementation of the rules is quite advanced, although it requires further action. It will also be necessary to inform workers in an accessible way about the practical aspects of the recruitment procedures implemented.

The action plan for 2019-2021 envisages actions aimed at implementing the OTM-R policy, which will result in compliance with the principles in this area.

Working Conditions and Social Security

The researchers in the Institute are recognized as professionals and treated as such. Their contribution to the development of science is noticed and appreciated. However, it was observed that close attention should be paid to the relationships between young scientists and their more experienced

colleagues. Researchers at the early stage of their career noticed the lack of recognition of their professionalism from older scientists.

The equipment and facilities in the Institute are available for researchers. The scientists are strongly encouraged to cooperate with other institutions in order to stimulate the exchange of knowledge and to enable the access to equipment the Institute does not have at its disposal.

It is encouraged to present studies during internal seminars organized by Heads of Research Centres, most respondents think it is a good initiative.

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The answers to the questions considering elasticity of working conditions were polarized, which may suggest that some employees are not aware of the possibilities existing in IGS PAS (i.e. flexible working conditions, remote working, training leaves). Concise information for employees on existing possibilities is needed.

The employees perceive employment in IGS PAS as rather stable. Researchers are employed on employment contracts. Younger scientists are more often employed on fixed-time contracts, that of course can be extended in compliance to the national regulations, if the employee proves to be at least promising.

There were no complaints about gender issues and intellectual property rights.

Definite weakness in this area is insufficient access to career counselling and lack of procedure helping to cope with potential conflicts and issues noticed considering co-authorship. This issues require further, strong actions, that are listed in revised Action Plan.

The changes in law introduced by the Constitution for Science and their potential impact on the mobility of scientists, and the poorer scoring, during ministerial evaluation of Institute, of multi-authorship publications (to which the Institute encourages the employees) raise some concerns among the staff.

Training and Development

There are doctoral studies at ING PAN. Young scientists at R1 level also work in research teams and laboratories and prepare their doctoral dissertation (Polish law gives such a possibility). The regulations of Doctoral Studies determine, among other things, the rights and duties of a doctoral student and the duties of a supervisor. Young researchers at the stage of training should establish a relationship with their academic supervisor that will allow for optimal use of time and provide constant progress in scientific work. Surveys show that the relationship between a young scientist and a supervisor depends to a large extent on individual cases. Therefore some responders perceive that this principle is implemented very well, others that not at all.

Young scientists have the opportunity to present their results and progress in a wider group during doctoral seminars, institute seminars as well as during the annual program conference.

Constant professional development is recognized as very important. The staff wishes to develop their competences. The Institute strives to provide (despite a limited budget) access to training. Foreign researchers who come to the Institute within the framework of projects carried out together with our scientists, are always invited to attend a seminar and deliver a short lecture during their visit.

This area needs improvement, especially where the relations between young and experienced researchers fail to work as they should. Actions are listed in the revised Action Plan.

4. OTM-R policy

The first HR strategy had been prepared before the Strengthened HRS4R process was introduced, therefore it was not required to prepare the OTM-R checklist at the time of the Initial phase of the HRS4R process.

The OTM-R checklist was prepared during the internal review. The OTM-R policy is prepared. During the preparation of the checklist it was revealed that even though the policy was not in place some of its principles are already working. The regulation on the competitions for research positions needs to be revised and adjusted to be fully in line with C&C principles, the system to provide adequate feedback to the interviewees and appropriate complaints mechanism have to be prepared and implemented. The e-recruitment tools are not introduced, because presently the effort would be disproportionate to the benefits (as explained in the OTM-R checklist). The system for recruitment process works well, the bureaucratic burden is as reduced as possible for candidates and for selection committee.

After introducing the OTM-R policy and adjusting internal legal framework, extensive information campaign will be planned and conducted so that all employees will be able to work in selection committees with the highest standards.

The actions necessary to have the OTM-R policy in place are indicated in the revised Action Plan.

5. Conclusions

HRS4R is an important part of the mission of the Institute who strives to conduct research on the highest possible level.

The Institute works hard for its high position in the scientific community. One of the ways is to continually improve as a friendly and stimulating workplace for researchers. This efforts bring results attracting both experienced scientists with recognized position and promising young scientists whom we hope to retain in the team.

A certain difficulty for the implementation of the Action Plan was the fact that the Institute consists of three Research Centres scattered in three different cities. Therefore it is impossible to meet face to face whenever needed. Such structure of the Institute makes organization of any workshop or seminar for the whole Institute difficult. Hence the vital role of the Heads of the Research Centres.

The implementation of the HRS4R brought further changes and improvements. The Institute strives not only to maintain the quality of research activity but to develop further and be not only a leading research institution in the field of geology in Poland but become a leading research centre in Europe.

The responders generally positively assessed the situation and working conditions in Institute. Some aspects need further work.

The action plan for 2019-2021 is focused on improving areas that were recognized as the most important for employees.

6. Revised Action Plan

The complete Action Plan is available on Institute's website in the tab dedicated to HRS4R strategy.

Below a summary of Action Plan for years 2019-2021, including actions that will be continued and the new ones, is presented.

Following Actions established in the first Action Plan (for years 2016-2018) will be continued:

- *A4 - Organizing periodical legal advisory training (on numerous issues) for ING PAN personnel.*
- *A5 – Organizing periodical internal workshops for junior researchers to present and discuss their studies and obtain feedback from senior staff.*
- *A7 – Providing extensive training on research funding sources and applications procedures to researchers*
- *A8 – Improve communication between administration, directors, and research and technical staff by presenting quarterly plans and accomplishments, introducing progressive approach in problem solving as best practices*

The list of the new actions:

- Rising awareness on ethical aspects (on-going)
- Revision of the regulation on competitions for research positions so that it is in line with new national law and with OTM-R policy.
- Development of a uniform form of job advertisement so that all necessary information needed for publication on various portals is provided.
- Organizing regular workshops improving qualifications and skills
- Introduction of mechanism for coping with conflict in case that employees cannot resolve it themselves.
- Developing good practices in IGS of the recognition of co-authorship of technical employees taking active and creative part in the research
- Introduction of a system of monitoring student-mentor relationship. This way potential problems can be solved amicably and will not adversely affect further cooperation
- Develop a plan of cyclical popularization events the Institute participates
- Increasing the possibility of access to career counseling
- Thermo-modernization of the building in Warsaw in cooperation with other institutes residing there
- Dissemination of information on mobility offers (on-going)
- Providing English version of all necessary regulations and forms
- Gradual change of workstation equipment and furniture and renovation in Research Centre in Kraków (ongoing);
- Creating new workstations in the Research Centre in Kraków through reorganization of library and laboratory accommodation (on-going)

Providing young scientists with advice on the preparation of grant applications

7. Implementation and monitoring of revised Action Plan

The Revised strategy and Action Plan will be published on the Institute's website. The first Action Plan clearly assigned execution of individual actions to the relevant persons or units. Action Plan for 2019-2021 has similar structure. Indicators and/or target groups were added to make assessment of the progress easier.

Implementation of the Action Plan will be monitored by both Working Group and Steering Committee. The Group will be responsible for initiating activities listed in the Action Plan, monitoring timelines and quality of actions taken to implement the Strategy. The Group will analyse potential threats for

realization of the Plan in order to prevent problems. If for some reason independent of ING, one of the tasks cannot be implemented, the group will try to find another possible solution. It can suggest changing the order of works carried out or propose actions not previously included in the plan.

The Group will held quarterly meetings and when necessary (either face-to-face or by Skype, since members work in different Research Centres). The tasks include monitoring the current performance of tasks, adhering to the timelines, analysis of the effectiveness of undertaken actions and proposing corrective means if the efficiency is considered insufficient.

Once a year the meeting will be dedicated to analysis of the achievements and possible problems with implementation of the Action Plan during previous year. The Group uses the indicators listed in Plan to assess the efficiency of actions. The perception of specific actions and awareness of the Strategy should be monitored as well. The selection of the most effective and least incriminating method of assessing overall satisfaction with the activities undertaken among the staff of IGS PAS is left to the Working Group. The conclusions of the annual analysis will be presented firstly to the Steering Committee and then to all employees. The actions planned by the Group and accepted for realization by the Steering Committee should be included into quarterly plans and accomplishments sent to the staff.

8. Final remarks

Working on implementation of the principles of Charter and Code allowed the Institute to gain experience on the process and to better understand how the being in line with the principles can benefit whole community of employees. The effort put into preparatory phase and then two years of implementation of the Action Plan and internal review, resulted in a diagnosis of current situation in comparison to results from previous survey. The outcome is the revised action plan containing actions that should be continued and new solutions to mend the gaps.

The Institute strives for excellence both as a research institution and an employer and the high scientific category conferred by the Minister of Science and Higher Education together with the HR Excellence for Research Award are proofs for that.