A Human Resources Strategy for Researchers
Incorporating the Charter and Code

University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali"
Albania

Table of contents

Introduction about University of Vlora

University of Vlora was founded in 1994 as Vlora Technological University. It is a relatively new academic institution focusing now on a new range of disciplines. There has been growing interest in the BA, MA and PhD programmes that the university offers and the number of students has increase constantly in the last years. The university academic staff has been focused more and more on scientific research in the last decade. This has been reflected in various international collaborations with other institutions, involvement in projects, mobility as well as the number of publications. Also, the policies adopted in the last years aim at recruiting qualified academic personnel, who fulfills not only pedagogical needs but also scientific research requirements. New departments and study programmes have contributed to the scope of different disciplines and areas of study.

The objective of this report is to synthesize the outputs from the process of mapping the research human potential and issues in the university, which include a desk research and a survey among researchers, with objective to serve as a background document for the development of the HR strategy of the university. Based on the good practices of EU universities - the active partners in this process, initial action plan for moving towards an implementation of all principles of the European Charter for researchers and Code of conduct for the recruitment of researchers is also developed.

Methodology

This report has been developed in three phases.

First phase implemented a desk research, based on the "Questionnaire for mapping the research human potential and issues in WBC universities", which has been developed in scope of Re@WBC project. The questionnaire covers a range of topics relevant for HR management in research institutions, all of which are highlighted in the European Charter and Code, or The Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) process.

For the purpose of a desk research, a work group was established at the university. The work group was coordinated by Bledar Toska (Associate Professor, Faculty of Humanities). Other members of the work group were:

- Prof. Dr. Roland Zisi (Rector of University of Vlora),
- Assoc. Prof. Armela Panajoti (Head of the Department of Foreign Languages), and
- Dr. Ilda Kanani (member of the Department of Foreign Languages).

The desk research involved a review of the different legal documents, reports, procedures and manuals and a data collection, which has been performed with collaboration of the various departments and faculties.

The desk research followed a three-step procedure lasting for about one month and a half. Firstly, there was a general discussion regarding all the questions in the desk research questionnaire, for which a brainstorming task offered the group members to highlight all the main relevant points. Secondly, the team resorted to various hard copy and e-copy documents related to the information requested. This

step was successfully accomplished with the collaboration of several administration offices at the University of Vlora, among which the most important ones were the Rector, vice –rector, project and foreign relation, human resources, finance, academic, career and promotion offices. Additional information was also sought from the deans and heads of various departments at University of Vlora. And lastly, all the detailed data was processed and concisely supplemented and enriched the initial remarks made by the group at the first stage.

In the second phase, the outputs of the desk research were complemented with the data, collected by implementing a "Survey for mapping the research human potential and issues in WBC universities". The survey has been developed by the Re@WBC project and customized by the university.

The survey was sent electronically to more than 190 members of the academic staff, which was made possible thanks to the collaboration with the deans and heads of departments. Group emails to each faculty were sent. Besides the questions that directly address the C&C principles, the survey also included two questions related to the implementation of the new education law and the funding schemes in research.

76 researchers have participated in the survey, out of which 36.1% were PhD students. All scientific areas were represented among the respondents, with major participation of the researchers from social sciences (32.9%), humanities (23.7%) and natural sciences (18.4%). Most of the respondents (61.3%) were in age group 25-40, with additional 37.3% in age group 40-55. All scientific positions were equally represented in the responses. 35.5% of the respondents were aware of the European Charter & Code.

The third phase was focused at the development of the initial action plan for improving the current situation in HR management at the university. The action plan was developed as a result of a gap analysis that concerned the outputs of the desk research and researchers' survey data, as well as the collection of good practices acquired during the university staff study visits to EU universities.

A work group was established by the Rector of the University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali", Prof. Dr. Roland Zisi on 15.07.2016, Prot. No. 952, in order to compile the action plan. The group is composed of the following members:

1. Prof. Dr. Roland Zisi, rector of the University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" (UV)
2. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Armela Panajoti, contact person for Re@WBC for UV, Head of the Department of Foreign Languages
3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bledar Toska, researcher, member of the project's work group, Department of Foreign Languages
4. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elenica Pjero, expert on human resources, vice chair of the Academic Senate
5. Sokol Bana, PhD, legal expert
6. Elonora Hodaj, PhD candidate

The work group had three formal meetings (17.08.2016, 05.10.2016 and 14.11.2016) and various informal meetings and discussions, during which all issues related to the action plan, were addressed and duly reflected on this final report.
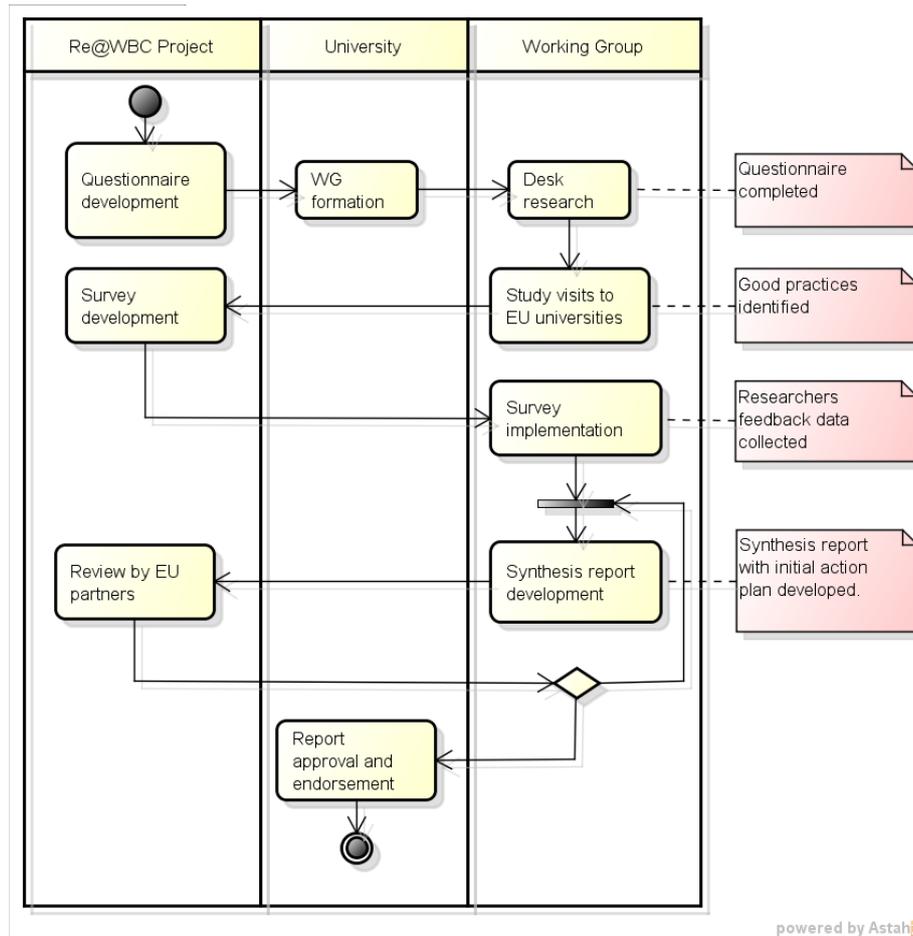
Figure 1. Workflow for developing this report

This report is also published on line at the university website (http://univlora.edu.al/arkiva/7944) and it is publically available to all net visitors.

Information and data sources

The following documents were used in development of this report:

- Law on Higher Education and Research in Republic of Albania, No. 80/2015
- Bylaw on Academic Personnel Activity in Higher Education and Research Institutions, No. 20/2008
- Resolution on Academic Personnel Salaries in Higher Education and Research Institutions, N. 507/2012
- Resolution on Academic Personnel Promotion in Higher Education and Research Institutions, 467, 2007
- Statutes of the University of Vlora, 2014
- Regulation of the University of Vlora, 2014
- Ethical Code of the University of Vlora, 2014
- Doctoral School Regulation of the University of Vlora, 2013
- Several internal documents and project reports provided in hard and e-copy formats by the University administration offices.
- Other relevant documents.

Outline of the report

The report covers the most relevant topics, covering the principles of the European Charter and Code, namely, employment and career development, ethics, working conditions, accountability and public responsibility, training and research projects and collaboration. It is divided into three main sections, namely, the internal gap analysis, the action plan and the implementation.

Research potential in the university

One of the particularly relevant contexts for developing this report is the dedication and contribution of the university in the realm of scientific promotion and work of young researchers. More and more qualified teaching research staff is employed and the ration of PhD candidates and PhD holders is changing rapidly on a yearly basis. There are also various aspects in the new Higher Education Law, introduced in October 2015 and due to be fully implemented in September 2016, which motivates and facilitates the direct involvement of university researchers in scientific activities, works, projects etc. This is expected to be an impetus for our university researcher's successful research involvement. So, our researchers are quickly progressing and are presently more motivated to be promoted. The semi-decentralization from the Ministry of Education is also an important aspect which would be an advantage to researches in the realm of scientific work.

In 2016, the overall number of researchers with employment contract, working at the university was 142. Figures below show the distribution of the number of researchers in scientific areas (OECD Frascati classification) and positions.
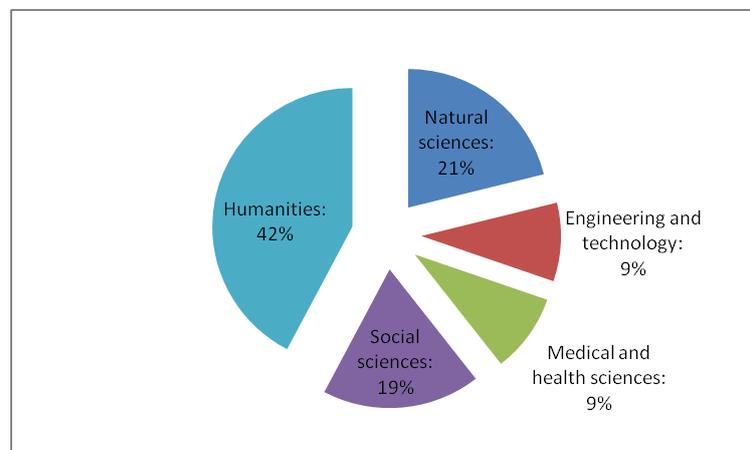

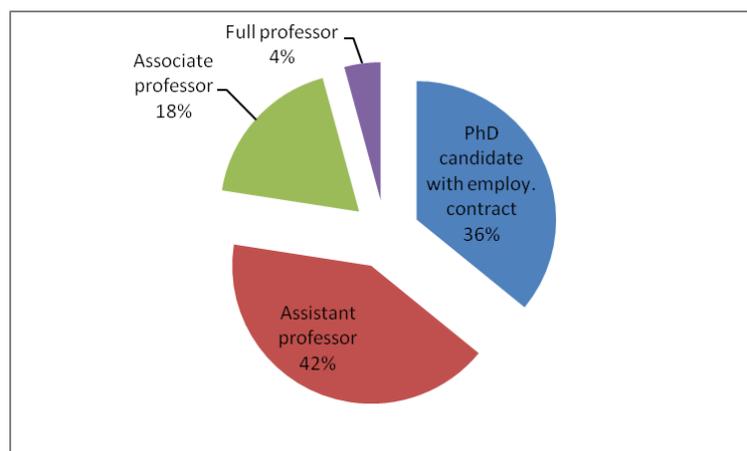Figure 2. Distribution of number of researchers among scientific areas

Figure 3. Distribution of number of researchers among positions

Note: Most of the PhD students working at University of Vlora are enrolled to doctorate schools at University of Tirana, since it is the only university in Albania which offers PhD degrees in almost all the scientific fields mentioned in this report.

University of Vlora does not have a significant number of researchers from abroad currently working or studying (PhD) at your university (full or temporary contract, visiting professorship, PhD or a research grant). Only 1 researcher is currently temporarily employed in humanities.

Overall number of PhD students in the university is 13, all in natural sciences, in specific – mathematics, which corresponds to 9.15% of the overall number of research staff.

On average, associate professors are 40-55 and full professors 55-65 years old.
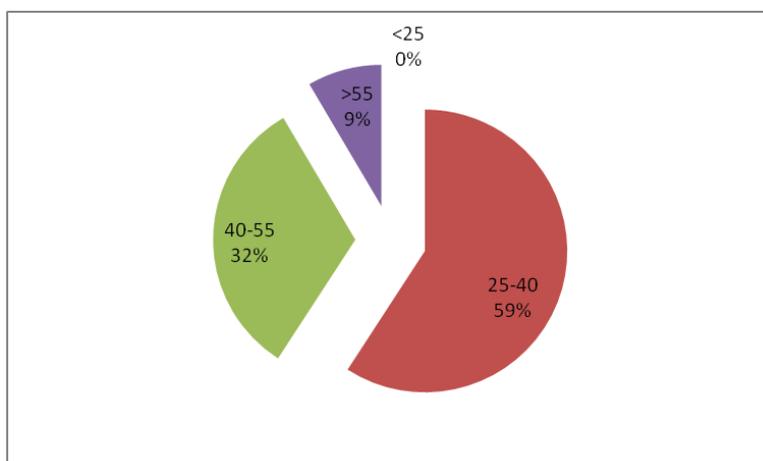
Figure 4. Age structure of the researchers employed in the university

Gender balance

Gender representation is generally perceived as balanced. Both female and male researchers at the university are actively involved in scientific activities at the national, regional and international level. Although female researchers slightly outnumber male ones, both genders have succeeded in their scientific advisory work, satisfactory project participations and close collaboration with other scientists

in Albania and abroad. This hopefully will bring some important outstanding scientific achievements in different disciplines. Both genders do also contribute to the university, faculty and departmental managements as well as at the decision taking bodies, such as the Senate, the Board of Administration or faculty councils. All in all, this is the general situation in all the different disciplines in our institution. Exceptions, such as the case of the researchers at the Department of Nautical Sciences, who are all males does not seem to distort the above-mentioned description.

In the researchers' survey, the respondents were asked to rate if the principles of gender equality were fully applied at all levels of operations and decision-making. The results show very positive perception and they are illustrated in a graph below:
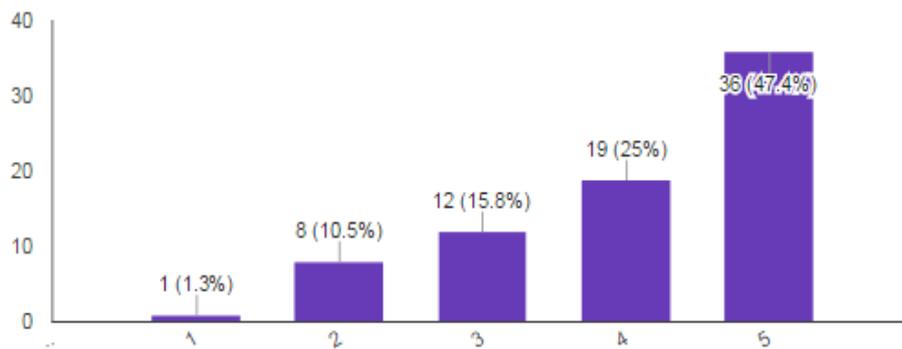

Figure 5. Perception of application of gender equality principles in the university among researchers

Part I: GAP Analysis

Employment and career development

In 2014, university recruited 7 researchers (4.9% of overall number of researchers), out of who 6 on senior positions (level of assistant professor and higher). 5 researchers were retired in the same period. Thus, overall growth of the human capacity was 1.4%.

All open positions are advertized in the respective faculty as well as on the institution website (main web page http://www.univlora.edu.al/). All open position announcements along with mandatory criteria remain still available for some long time on secondary web pages, but still accessible to anyone[1]. Open positions are announced by the Rector of the university (who is the legal employer) with the request of the Dean of faculties. Such decisions are based on the long-term employment strategy, departmental strengthening and promotional strategy and replacement of retired staff.

With the implementation of the new Law on Higher Education and Research in Republic of Albania, No. 80/2015, Article 64, starting from September 2016, Albanian universities will have more freedom and less centralization from the Ministry of Education and Sports for the recruitments of professors and researchers. The criteria, regulations and procedures for them will be settled by the institutions themselves. Also, at present, our university can promote only staff from natural sciences, a handicap which is expected to be overcome with the new legislation and bylaws in the next few coming years.

The positions are advertized only in local language. University does not publish the job ads to EURAXESS Jobs portal.

According to University of Vlora Regulation, 2014, the duration of the position advertisement is 20 days.

In accordance with the new Law on Higher Education and Research in Republic of Albania, No. 80/2015, the typical duration of the employment contracts for teaching assistant position is one year, while assistant professors, associate professors and full professors are employed on a permanent basis.

According to the Resolution on Academic Personnel Promotion in Higher Education and Research Institutions, 467, 2007, the conditions for applying for a position of the assistant professors are: completion of the PhD dissertation; at least three conference presentations, published in the conference proceedings; at least three published articles. As for the election into the position of associate professor, the requirements are as following: application after three years or more from becoming assistant professor; at least eight conference presentations, five of which published in conference proceedings; at least five published articles, one of which with IF; preparation of teaching lectures and materials for students; positive evaluation of pedagogical teaching abilities. The conditions for position of a full professor are: application after five years or more from becoming associate professor; at least fifteen conference presentations, eight of which published in conference proceedings; at least nine published articles, two of which with IF; one year research or teaching experience abroad; preparation of teaching lectures and materials for students; evaluation of pedagogical teaching abilities.

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[1] For instance, http://www.univlora.edu.al/?p=6967, http://www.univlora.edu.al/?p=6830

Any researcher who wishes to be promoted and has fulfilled the promotion criteria (as listed above) has the right to apply for promotion. The evaluation templates are basically the same for all universities in Albania and they include, among other things, the assessment of the candidate's scientific activity and his/her pedagogical abilities. The applications are evaluated by the evaluation committees. The evaluation committee members are nominated and voted by the Council of Professors at each faculty. The evaluation committee members should be full professors. The evaluation committee consists of seven members, three of who should be professors from the faculty and four should be external from similar disciplines.

There is usually some satisfactory level of competition for vacant positions. The number of applicants though is relative to the field of research and to the availability. There have been, for instance, a few cases for associate professors positions which have been no applicants. But, generally speaking, there are more applications than positions available.

No transferrable grants policies are implemented at the university.

Career development services

There is a career development center (CDC) established at the university, but it typically deals with BA and MA students, not researchers (including PhD students). CDC has proven as successful, especially in context of the issues it continuously struggles with. Namely, the office is small for the time being and it has only one administrative specialist. Staff did not receive a formal training. Lack of external funding is also present.

CDC provided services to approx. 200 students in 2014. Most commonly provided services are related to preparing a job application, professional CV, adapting their academic knowledge and abilities to the market and approaching different available job positions in Albania. There have been a couple of student trainings organized in 2014 focusing mostly on issues related to job applications and future career development.

The new educational law, which has to be implemented in September 2016, focuses more on the role of CD centers at HR academic institutions.

Overview of data from the researchers' survey

Survey data shows that researchers are in general satisfied with the way employment and career development processes are implemented in the university. Majority thinks that evaluation criteria are transparent, and there is a moderately good consensus on the fairness and satisfaction of the best interest of the organization in the above processes.
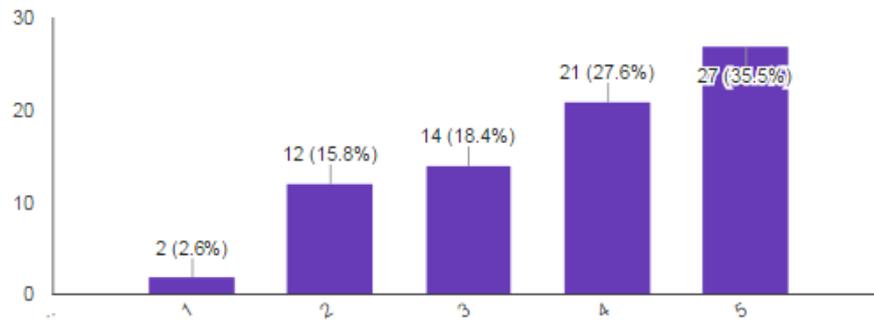
Figure 6. Perception of researchers of the transparency of the criteria for employment or career advancement
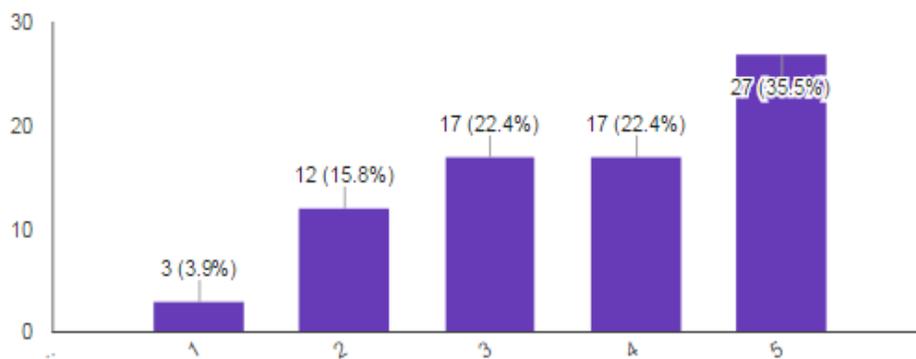

Figure 7. Perception of the fairness and satisfaction of the best interest of the employer in the processes of employment and career development

The respondents were almost unanimous in identifying published scientific publications (90.8%) and teaching experience (86.8%) as the most important criteria for employment and career development. Identified criteria of significant importance were professional skills (57.9%), teaching literature publishing (57.2%) and foreign language skills (55.3%). Factors that have been found as less important were industry (14.5%) and entrepreneurship (15.8%) experiences.

The respondents were also asked to provide general comments regarding the employment and career development in the university. Below, the highlighted comments are listed[2]:

-   I am not aware if researchers are employed in our institution.
-   Issues related to employment in our institution are related in a certain way to personal needs and not fully to the institutional ones.
-   The ability to work in group, where it can be proved, should be taken into account.
-   The candidates should be more motivated and attracted by university.
-    They should meet the requirements and needs in order to be able to conduct scientific research within the institution. Additionally, they should keep relations and contacts with international researchers and colleagues for further progress.
-   Transparent employment should be based on meritocracy.

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[2] Number of list items does not correspond to the number of received narrative comments. Some comments were merged, while the others were structured into several items.

- The institution should attract more talents. In many cases it is the subjective criteria or arguments which avoid them. The staff dismissal, after having been employed in the institution, is an indication of either non-qualitative selection, or of an individual lack of self-fulfillment of the candidate in accordance to institutional prospects.

Ethics

Ethical issues at the university are dealt by the University Ethical Council. Each faculty of the university nominates a representative in the Ethical Council. The nominees are then proposed to the Senate and approved or rejected. There have been no formal complains related to either the transparency or credibility of this procedure. The Ethical Council is seen as an independent body at the institution with their right and duties, which are included in the Ethical Code. One or two cases are handled by the Ethical Council annually. Members of the Ethical Committee are not remunerated for their work.

Typical reasons for the engagement of Ethical Council are: improper and unprofessional conduct from the academic and non-academic staff or university students, pedagogical and teaching responsibilities (for academic staff), Intellectual Property Rights related disputes and issues that have to do with research activity. The Ethical Council does not discuss about ethical issues arising from the research projects, such as privacy, data protection, animal testing, clinical trials, etc.

The consequences of the found misconduct vary from a formal wording to dismissal. Titles revocation is an option, but no such cases have been practiced at our institution, although this process involves other institutional bodies. All arguments of a complaint are seriously considered and evaluated. However, no consequences are included in the Ethical Code in case of unsupported evidence.

The Ethical Council reports formally to the Rector of the university and makes their own suggestions or forward any decisions taken related to particular cases. This is also reported to the university staff, but no information about the cases is published on the web site of the university.

There is no anti-plagiarism software available. However, all the dissertations defended by our staff at the University of Tirana are publicly listed and included at the university website (http://www.doktoratura.unitir.edu.al/).

Overview of data from the researchers' survey

In general, the respondents were moderately satisfied with the way the different ethical issues are being handled at the university. 46.1% of the researchers were familiar with the cases of the ethical principles breach. When asked if the cases of the ethical principles breach were resolved in a fair way, 15.8% of the respondents were negative and 22.4% positive. 61.8% of the respondents were not familiar with the outcomes of these cases.
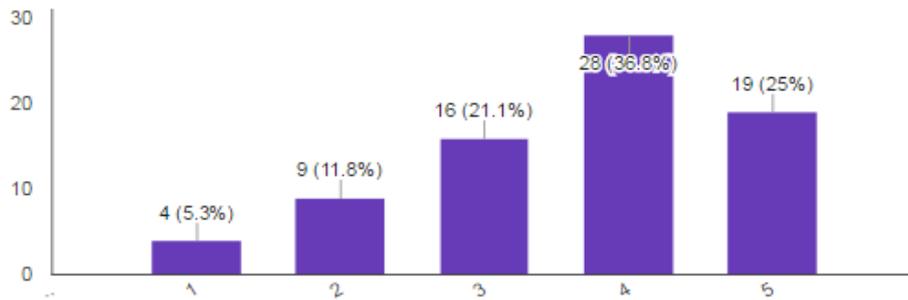
Figure 8. Perception of the satisfaction of the fundamental principles of professional ethics in research

Awareness of the researchers of the contractual and legal obligations arising from the employment contract and other signed acts and agreements is at high level. However, that is not the case regarding the level of implementation of good practices related to the protection of research results, their confidentiality (before publication), as well as the protection of the personal data which is collected in the research process. The results are even more negative when adequate presentation of the research work in general public is considered, with clear lack of consensus of the respondents.

The data related to the perception of the equal and active participation in the work of the decision-making bodies in the university are inconclusive, showing that additional investigation is needed.

The highlights of the narrative comments are provided below[3]:

- Plagiarism promotion should be avoided and professional scientific ethics should be empowered.
- It is necessary to follow a more formal and rigorous procedure for ethical implementation in research, starting from the review of a proposed scientific research project (structure of the paper, respecting ethics in research, preliminary review) up to its implementation and publication of research results. Research which is conducted at universities should be brought closer to the community and the labor market.
- Every professional should be treated according to the ethical institutional principles and not be left apart.
- There is lack of information in this respect. Everything is done individually and for the individual. Cooperation is missing.

Working conditions

No EURAXESS center is established at the university.

When concerning the issue of teaching and research balance, teaching must be 50-70 %, research at least 20 % and institutional support 10-20 % for all the scientific fields at our institution. Full professor teach 6-7 classes per week, on average, associate professors 7-8, assistant professors 8-9 and PhD students around 10. In many cases, though, the academic staff is engaged in more teaching classes. This

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[3] Number of list items does not correspond to the number of received narrative comments. Some comments were merged, while the others were structured into several items.

is regulated by the Bylaw on Academic Personnel Activity in Higher Education and Research Institutions, No. 20/2008.

Research infrastructure at our institution is not at a satisfactory level. Although more and more is invested on a yearly basis, funding from external bodies has been very little. There are a few formal or informal agreements either at the institutional or personal level with external institutions, institutes or industries which come to some help to our researchers.

No specific award system for extraordinary achievements in science and research has been established in the university.

According to the law, academic personnel with titles has the right to take a sabbatical year every seven years to work for his/her develop and promote his scientific career. They can also pursue the visiting professorship opportunity for up to three months in other institutions in Albania or abroad. This is a common practice at our institution.

Overview of data from the researchers' survey

In the researchers' survey, respondents were asked for the opinion on the adequacy of the research infrastructure, quality of the different services provided by the faculty (legal, HR, accounting, student affairs and EURAXESS SC), teaching-research balance and salaries.

Respondents were satisfied with the services provided by the HR and accounting department.

Data shows clear conviction of the respondents that the institutional research infrastructure is not adequate.
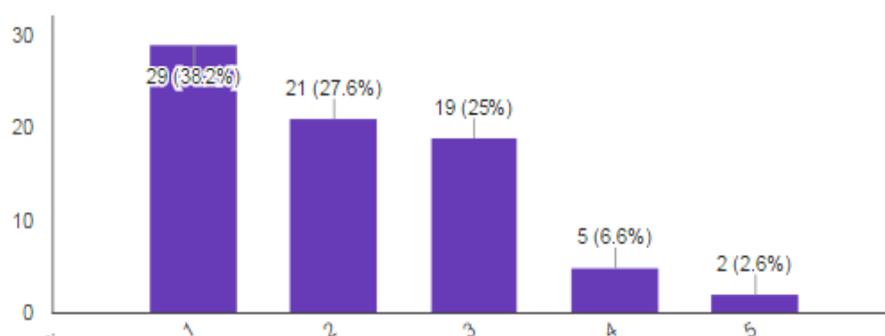

Figure9. Perception of the adequacy of the institutional research infrastructure, by the respondents

Majority of respondents believe that researchers are generally overburdened with the teaching engagement. Respondents were asked to state their average number of teaching hours per week. 38.2% teach 5-10 hours, the number consistent with the results of the desk research. However, additional 44.7% teach 10-15 hours and 13.2% even more than 15. This is considered as worrisome since such high engagement can significantly affect the availability of respondents to perform research activities, pursue professional skills development opportunities, etc.
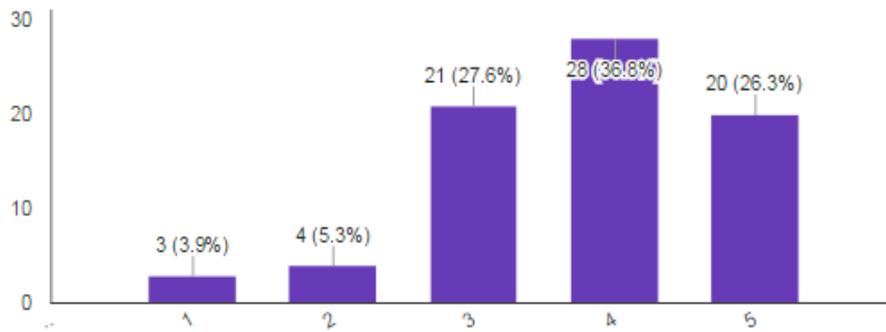
Figure 10. Perception of the overburden of the respondents with the teaching engagement

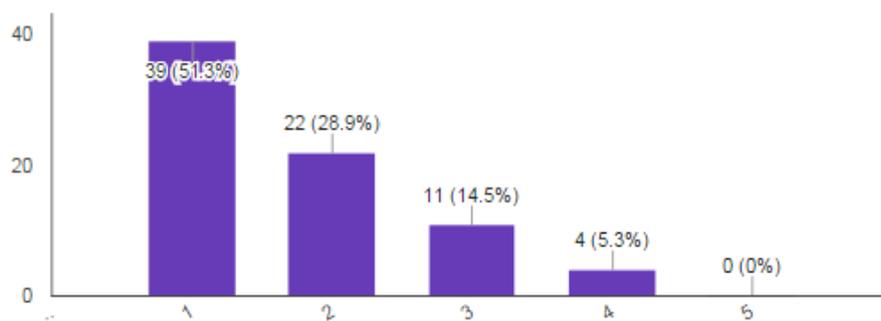Majority of respondents show dissatisfaction with their salaries.

Figure 11. Level of satisfaction of the respondents with the salaries

Finally respondents were asked to provide narrative comments related to working conditions and social security. Some of the highlighted feedbacks are provided below[4]:

- There is lack of internet and PCs for each researcher.
- It is urgent to establish scientific research centers and create the proper infrastructure for scientific research: starting from libraries, subscriptions to the prestigious database up to laboratory facilities, etc. in order to support it.
- Lack of infrastructure.
- They are not suitable. There is a lack of offices.
- Lab equipment for engineering branches should be considered seriously.
- Big investments should be done in technological infrastructure, premises etc
- Better research conditions should be provided such as better offices, more up-to-date computers and access to prestigious journals.
- Minimum requirements for teaching are not met. The projectors and laptops seem a faraway dream

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[4] Number of list items does not correspond to the number of received narrative comments. Some comments were merged, while the others were structured into several items.

Accountability and public responsibility

The level of awareness of researchers in the university on the ethical issues and standards in research, related to data protection, privacy, confidentiality, plagiarism and others, is considered as satisfactory (on the scale: very low, low, satisfactory, good, very good) by the WG members.

The level of awareness of researchers in the university on the contractual and legal obligations arising from work contracts, laws and by-laws is considered as good (on the scale: very low, low, satisfactory, good, very good) by the WG members. Contractual obligations and responsibilities are clearly stated in work contracts and are generally followed and monitored by higher structures.

The reporting process, regarding teaching and research is implemented in the university. The teaching report contains all courses taught during the academic year. The research report contains a detailed description of all the scientific work and activities carried out during the academic year. These reports are usually submitted to the head of the department, finance office, academic office and to the Vice-Rector at the end of the academic year (June or July). The reports are prepared to demonstrate that the staff has fulfilled their contractual obligations and to help the finance office to pay any teaching overload in some cases.

The university's public engagement in promotion of the research activities is considerable. The scientific results are typically promoted on the university website and the websites of the researchers themselves. Science career promotional activities are organized occasionally in spring, but there are some events also during other periods of the year. This is relatively new initiative and it is followed now by all the faculties. The Faculty of Natural Sciences has been more active in this regard for some years now. The university has a PR office, in which two people are employed. It makes public announcements related to university activities and collaborates closely with other university offices as well as faculties to promote the institution and its achievements. The university has a Facebook account[5], in which various activities are promoted.

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[5] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Universiteti-Ismail-Qemali-Vlor%C3%AB/690071477689556

Overview of data from the researchers' survey

Survey data shows that, in general, the respondents are aware of the contractual and legal obligations arising from the employment contract and other signed acts and agreements. Somewhat less positive data was obtained when researchers were asked to provide a rate of their satisfaction with institutional implementation of good practices related to the protection of research results, their confidentiality (before publication), as well as the protection of the personal data which is collected in the research process.
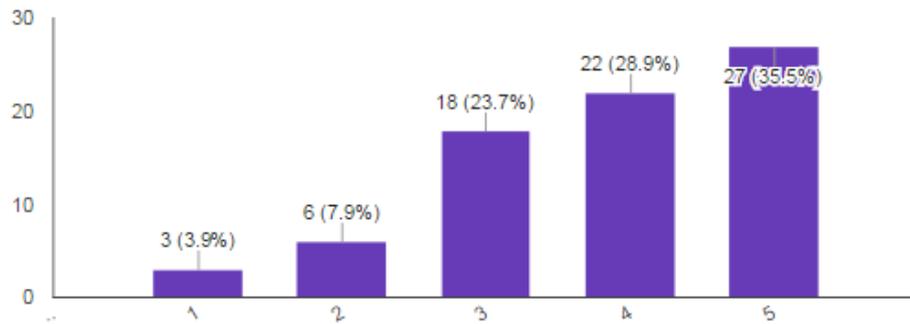

Figure 12. Awareness of the respondents about the contractual and legal obligations arising from the employment contract and other signed acts and agreements
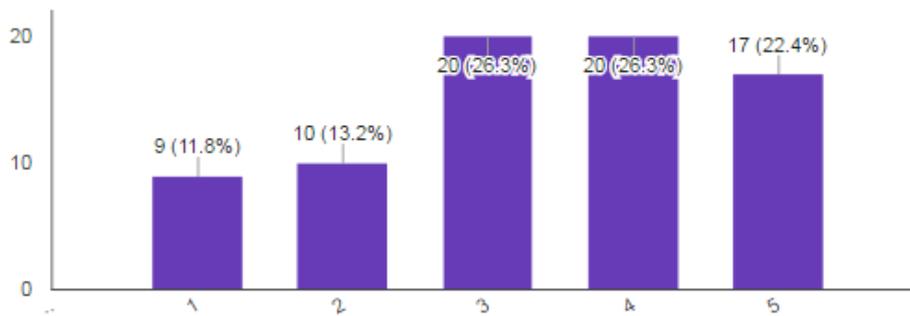

Figure 13. Perception on the institutional level of implementation of good practices related to the protection of research results, their confidentiality (before publication), as well as the protection of the personal data which is collected in the research process

However, respondents were not fully satisfied with the implementation of the reporting system (regarding research activities) in the university and methodology for evaluation of the individual researchers' works.
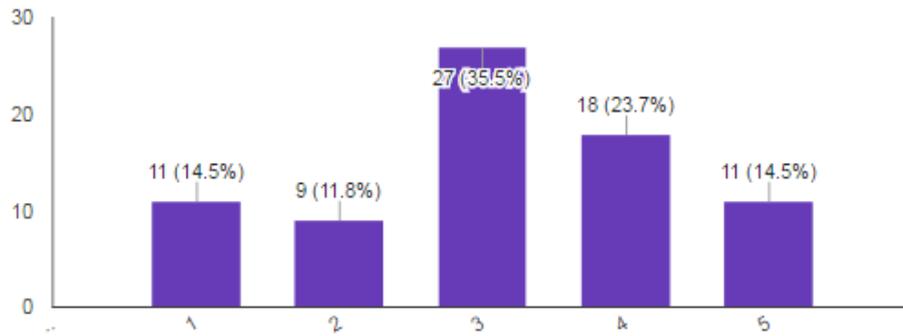
Also, the level of public responsibility of researchers regarding the dissemination of the scientific results in the broader communities is not favorable, according to the respondents' perception.
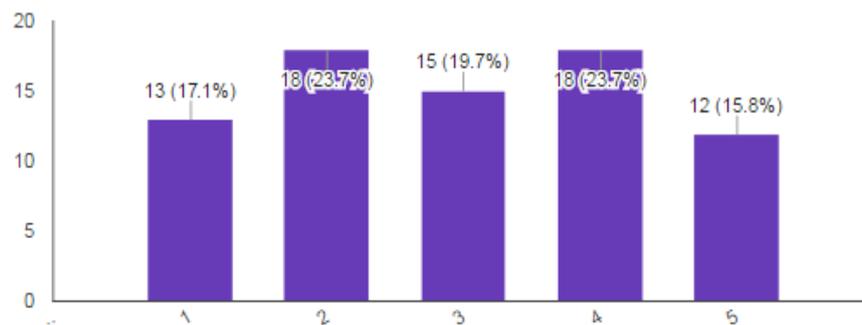
Training

University only offers PhD degrees in Mathematics. PhD course is implemented only in local language.

Lack of full professors and associate professors has been mainly the reason why there is only one PhD programme at the University of Vlora. Hopefully, the growing number of promoted academic personnel at this institution would enable new PhD programmes in all the faculties at the university in the near future.

Mentoring and supervision

PhD candidates can choose their supervisors with their formal written consent. If they do not have one, then the Council of Professors in the faculty assign a supervisor as soon as their application is officially accepted.

According to the legislation in power, in all Albanian institutions PhD students are supervised only by associate or full professors.

A PhD evaluation committee consists of only associate or full professors. Three of the five members must be internal and two external staff. The evaluation committee is approved by the Council of

Professors in the respective faculties. The Council of Professors appoints two opponents who formally prepare a written report for the defense. Usually, one of them is from within the department and one is external, from another faculty or institution, but from the same or closely related discipline.

PhD candidates present their work twice or three times during the time they write the dissertation to all the members of the department where they are pursuing their studies. Supervisors also write a report by the time these presentations are made to report on their progress. These reports contain information related to the fulfillment of the commitments included in the plan prepared by the candidate (approved by the supervisor beforehand) and included in the application.

PhD candidate can be granted a request to change an assigned supervisor, if the assigned supervisor suffers from serious health problems over a long period of time, or if the PhD candidate argues convincingly that he/she is not professionally and academically supervised by him/her. The latter case, however, is rare.

After the candidates' dissertation defense, supervisors are remunerated according to the legislation in force. The PhD evaluation committee has two opponents who are remunerated after the dissertation defense.

PhD training

University does not offer joint PhD degrees in collaboration with other universities. There have been some attempts recently to offer PhD degrees in Economics in collaboration with the University of Tirana, but the project has been unsuccessful up to now. As reported, there has been a lack of agreement.

PhD candidates are heavily engaged in teaching (in average 10 classes per week).

PhD students occasionally take part in summer schools and actively participate in scientific conferences in Albania and abroad. They only have some partial university financial support in this regard.

With regard to professional development, PhD candidates in the university are trained mainly in creative skills.

Overview of data from the researchers' survey

The researchers' survey addressed the quality of PhD training, namely the activities of mentorship and supervision; and development of professional skills in the university.

The survey data shows that significant number of respondents perceives the work on mentorship and supervision as superficial and not effectively evaluated. The most often highlighted reasons for that were lack of mentoring and supervision plan (47.4% of respondents) and lack of procedures for evaluation of those activities (42.1%).
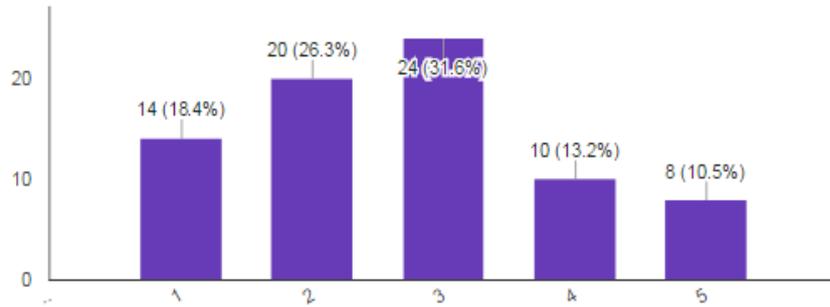
Respondents show strong conviction that researchers in the university are interested in pursuing professional development opportunities. Some factors that assumingly negatively contribute to above are lack of availability (overburden) of researchers (44.7% of respondents), lack of trainings/courses offers and lack of general institutional plan for individual professional development (42.1%) and the fact that the level of professional skills is not taken into account in career development (34.2%).
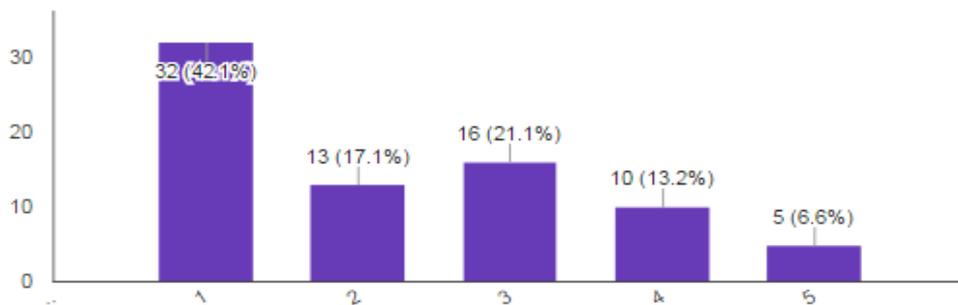

Figure 17. Perception of low interest of researchers to pursue continuing professional development opportunities

Some narrative comments regarding training and professional development of researchers are highlighted here[6]:

- Serious incentives should be given by the Rector and any other body entrepreneurs.
- Promotion of researchers' interests and increase of motivation through policies which assess researchers' commitments in scientific projects and in various applications for grants, which go in favor of the institution, will influence the continuous development of researchers.
- We should be given the opportunity to attend the PHD studies because the papers we have published seem a waste of time otherwise.
- This area requires vigorous and deep interventions.
- Research should be supported financially.
- The appropriate infrastructure should be provided to reduce bureaucratic barriers, in order to avoid delays and uncertainties in the implementation of projects.
- Everything is done on individual bases. There is a lack of cooperation on institutional bases. This means that even the achieved progress results from individual work, done on personal

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[6] Number of list items does not correspond to the number of received narrative comments. Some comments were merged, while the others were structured into several items.

expenses, and not from institutional incentives or transparent work of the responsible institutional bodies. I hope these changes soon and concrete initiatives should be taken to foster the work of real researchers.

- Transparency and inclusiveness is a must.

Research projects and collaboration

The scientific collaboration with institutions abroad is generally carried out at the personal level, in which cases some have been very successful. There are also a few institutional collaborations which have been quite useful.

Assistant, associate and full professors, but also young researchers are constantly motivated to pursue scientific activity in terms of works published but also projects involvements. Their status allows them to be freely engaged in joint and individual research projects in Albania and abroad.

However, there are an insignificant number of the research projects managed by young researchers.

Industry representatives are not involved significantly in formal research process (e.g. PhD programme), but the main reason for that is the structure of PhD programme (PhD courses only in mathematics).

Rate of the collaboration with other actors, e.g. public administration, NGO is below significant.

Overview of data from the researchers' survey

The survey have found that researchers are not satisfied with the way institution disseminate and share accurate and updated information about research funding opportunities.
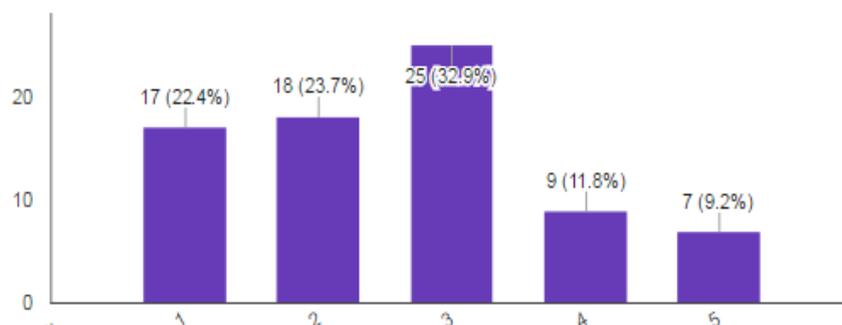
Figure 18. Perception of the respondents on the efforts by the institution to deliver accurate and updated information about the opportunities for research funding

Although funding has been identified as one of the major problems, especially in the area of working conditions (infrastructure), the researchers are hopeful that new financing schemes which will be introduced by the new law on higher education will make a positive contribution. In addition, 55.3% of respondents believe that new law will also contribute to increase of research collaboration within and outside national borders.

Part II: Action Plan

This second section of the reports includes the action plan developed by the working group and is divided into six major or categories: employment and career development, ethical, working condition, accountability and public responsibility, training as well as research and collaboration aspects. Along with the actions that University of Vlora has undertaken, a time period for their fulfillment and the institutional bodies that will implement them are clearly defined below. The following academic agenda includes a two-year action plan which will be applied within the institution and by its internal academic and administrative resources.

It should also be noted that the proposed following action plan includes almost all of the gaps identified here. Their inclusion in the respective action packages has been based on the immediate priorities and necessities that the university has, and in line with the new policies of the Albanian government for the reformation of higher education and research (highlighted, for instance, in the Law on Higher Education and Research in Republic of Albania, No. 80/2015 and its upcoming bylaws). This is also based on the practical judgment of the working group according to what can be realistically fulfilled and implemented in the first two years at the University of Vlora.

Action Package 1: Employment and Career Development Aspects

Actions required	When	Who
1. Increase the awareness on the European Charter & Code by organizing info days every year.	January 2017- July 2017	HR manager with the commitment and participation of the managing authorities
2. Translate university website into English. Publish to EURAXESS Jobs in English.	January 2017- June 2017	Department of Foreign Languages with the assistance of the IT Office
3. Consider Write guidelines for the possibility to include including all qualified pedagogical staff in the evaluation committees and implement it in the faculties.	Continuously	A committee lead by the Vice-Rectors, and made up of the Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments.
4. Open discussion meeting on the transferrable grants.	Continuously	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research
5. Increase capacity of CDC to deal with researchers, at least with PhD candidates. Define the set of services and provide trainings to CDC staff.	Continuously	Career Development Center (and/or Vice-Rectors)
6. Establish a strategic university research agenda plan as a way to promote research activities.	January 2017- June 2017	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research

Action Package 2: Ethical Aspects

Actions required	When	Who
7. Organize training on the protection of research results, their confidentiality (before publication), as well as the protection of the personal data which is collected in the research process.	September 2017- December 2017	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research, Ethical Committee
8. Develop and implement a strategy for communicating the scientific results with the general public.	September 2017- December 2017	Vice-Rector for Institutional Development and Communication
9. Reconsider and analyse the legal opportunities for researchers of all types to participate in the work of decision making bodies of the university.	January 2017 – December 2018	A committee lead by the Rector and consisting of the Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments.

10. Training in research ethics
   10.1 Develop a database of publications (self-archiving)
   10.2 Implement plagiarism monitoring tools
   10.3 Create a research ethics committee
	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research, Publication Office

11. Establish systemic cooperation with the community, regarding the exploitation of research outcomes 11.1 Involve industry and community in development of a strategic research agenda	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Institutional Development and Communication with the assistance of Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments.

Action Package 3: Working Condition Aspects

Actions required	When	Who
12. Establish EURAXESS contact person. Get involved in national EURAXESS network activities. Focus its service to outgoing mobility.	September 2017- November 2017	Rector and International Relations Office
13. Promote opportunities for projects funding and improve research infrastructure.	January 2017 – December 2018	International Relations Office
14. Establish an award system for researchers' outstanding scientific achievements.	September 2017- November 2017	Rector and University Senate

Actions required	When	Who
15. Prepare and implement a fund raising strategy for attracting investors from local and national governing bodies as well as business/industry to improve working conditions.	September 2017-December 2017	Rector and University Senate
16. Reduce the teaching load. First phase, make a survey and do benchmarking and second phase, act accordingly and where necessary.	January 2017 – December 2018	Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments.
17. Purchase access to major publisher databases. 17.1 Organize trainings on open access and use of free publication repositories.	September 2017-December 2017	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research.

Action Package 4: Accountability and Public Responsibility Aspects

Actions required	When	Who
18. Organize trainings, courses and workshops for researchers, especially younger ones related to data protection, privacy, confidentiality, plagiarism and others.	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research
19. Engage in science career promotional activities.	January 2017 – December 2018	Rector and Vice-Rector for Scientific Research
20. Develop and implement a strategy for communicating the scientific results with the general public.	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Institutional Development and Communication

Action Package 5: Training Aspects

Actions required	When	Who
21. Implement more PhD courses. Internationalize PhD programme.	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research, Deans of Faculties and University Senate
22. Investigate the possibilities to reduce the engagement of PhD candidates, so they can focus more on their research work.	January 2017 – December 2018	Heads of Departments
23. Promote MSCA grants for PhD candidates.	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and International Relations Office

Actions required	When	Who
24. Work on establishment of the professional courses programme for early stage researchers in project management, project proposal writing, communication and presentation skills, etc.	January 2017 – December 2018	Vice-Rector for Scientific Research

Action Package 6: Research Projects and Collaboration Aspects

Actions required	When	Who
25. Strengthen the capacity of the international cooperation sector and put the effort to further formalize the cooperation.	January 2017 – December 2018	Rector, Vice-Rector for Institutional Development and Communication
26. Systematically promote project opportunities. 26.1 Provide Project Management and Proposal Writing trainings to all researchers, primarily younger ones.	January 2017 – December 2018	International Relation Office and Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and International Relation Office
27. Establish a system which would enable a collection of relevant research funding opportunities data and its dissemination among researchers.	January 2017 – December 2018	International Relations Office

Part III: Implementation

The implementation of the action plans listed in the above section will be carried out by the respective bodies and within the periods specified. The top-management bodies of the University of Vlora are willing to support the initiative and contribute by all means to the fulfillment of the actions and provide all the necessary legal support to its implementation.

This implementation will be monitored and carefully scrutinized for the first two-year period. For this reason a monitoring group will be settled very soon, composed by two members from each faculty, one of whom will be the-vice dean for research and the other and one elected/appointed researcher. The monitoring group will have (in)formal meetings every three months and discuss/evaluate the implementation of the actions carried out, based on the information collected. They will also deal with any plausible problems that could be encountered and evaluate the concrete indicators. They will also revise the action plan on a minor scale, if necessary and if consensually approved.

The working group as well as a monitoring group will periodically report to the Rector, Vice-Rectors and the University Senate and compile reports on the advancement of the work done from January 2017 to December 2018. The two groups will also present the results to the university researchers and to the overall academic personnel.

If necessary, formal institutional proposals will be forwarded to each implementing bodies of the actions and sub-actions highlighted in this report.