



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

HR Strategy Action Plan 2026-2028

Table of Contents

Action 1: Broaden the support system for research	3
Action 2: Increasing attractiveness as an inclusive employer	6
Action 3: Strengthen international appeal for recruitment	8
Action 4: Stimulate and maximize objective recruitment and selection (OTM-R)	10
Action 5: Developing an appreciative, stimulating and safe (organizational) culture	13
Action 6: Develop effective, efficient and data-informed HR processes	16
Action 7: Embedding lifelong learning and talent development	18

Action 1: Broaden the support system for research

Responsible unit	Directorate Research, Library and Internationalisation, Rectorate
Timing	2026-2028
Gap principles	Ethical principles, professional responsibility, professional attitude, accountability, Research environment, good practice in research, dissemination, and exploitation of results

Hasselt University continues to strengthen its institutional support system for researchers by further developing and structurally embedding several research support initiatives launched in previous policy cycles that contribute to the implementation of the institutional research and innovation strategy.

1. Administrative simplification and digital infrastructure

The university further develops its research data infrastructure in line with the FAIR data principles and the institutional Open Science ambitions. Building on the existing research data storage platform, UHasselt will develop a secure solution for archiving sensitive research data (FAIR vault) and further expand institutional capacities for research data archiving and accessibility.

In parallel, the Current Research Information System (CRIS) and related research information systems will be (further) developed. Building on the foundations of the CRIS system, UHasselt will develop a Business Intelligence (BI) environment to improve the monitoring and analysis of research activities and to support data-informed research policy. This integrated data environment will also help reduce the administrative burden on researchers by ensuring that research data are collected and reused across institutional processes, allowing researchers to provide information only once.

UHasselt will also work towards the simplification and harmonisation of administrative workflows related to research processes. These workflows will be aligned with institutional IT systems, including CRIS, in order to enable further digitalisation and automation of research administration, and above all to streamline procedures and reduce administrative workload for researchers. In this context, UHasselt will explore and pilot the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to further support administrative processes, research data management, reporting and project preparation, with the aim of empowering researchers and increasing time for core research activities.

2. Coordinated research support network

The institutional research support network will be further strengthened. This network brings together research managers and central research support services to provide coordinated support to researchers in areas such as project development, funding opportunities, research data management and compliance with institutional and external requirements. The recently established Learning Network connects decentralised research managers and central research support staff across the university. The network will be further developed and institutionally embedded to strengthen alignment between decentralised and central support services, facilitate knowledge exchange and ensure coordinated support for researchers. The Learning Network will also serve as a platform to identify and implement initiatives aimed at structurally improving research support processes, bringing together both top-down and bottom-up improvement actions.

3. Ethics & research integrity

UHasselt continues to reinforce its policies on research ethics and integrity. The ethical committee on human rights will be reformed into an ethical committee on human rights, knowledge security, dual-use research and military research. Training and communication initiatives will inform researchers about these topics and the related ethical review procedures.

Responsible research practices are further supported through the continued use and active communication of the Mind the GAP integrity tool to postdoctoral researchers and professors, the organisation of training initiatives on research ethics and integrity, and the implementation of plagiarism screening for all PhD theses.

Indicators

1. Administrative simplification and digital infrastructure

- Implementation of a secure infrastructure for archiving sensitive research data (FAIR vault) as part of the institutional research data platform, Q4 2026.
- Development of a Business Intelligence (BI) environment building on the CRIS system to support research monitoring and data-informed policy, Q4 2028.
- Simplification and harmonisation of administrative research workflows, aligned with institutional IT systems (including CRIS), aimed at reducing administrative burden for researchers, Q4 2027.
- Development of institutional readiness and strategic frameworks for responsible AI-supported solutions (ex. agentic AI) in research support services and administrative processes, resulting in at least 3 institution-wide use cases, Q4 2027.

2. Coordinated research support network

- Structural embedding of the Learning Network for Research and Innovation staff to strengthen coordination between decentralised research managers and central research support services, Q4 2027.

3. Ethics & research integrity

- Availability of a dedicated webpage providing clear information on the ethical committee on human rights, knowledge security, dual-use and military research, Q3 2026.
- At least one annual training initiative for members of the ethical committee on human rights, knowledge security, dual-use and military research, Q2 2026.
- At least one annual training initiative for researchers on research ethics and integrity, Q4 2026.
- Plagiarism screening implemented for all PhD theses, Q4 2027.

Action 2: Increasing attractiveness as an inclusive employer

Responsible unit	HR, Rectorate, Steering Group Diversity & Inclusion
Timing	2026-2028
Gap principles	Gender balance, Non-discrimination, Ethical principles, Continuing professional development, Complaints/appeals, Participation in decisionmaking bodies, Research environment, Working conditions

To make UHasselt more inclusive every day, work is being done on 5 strategic objectives integrated in the [UHasselt inclusion plan 2023 - 2030](#).

- 1) UHasselt identifies barriers and removes them to maximize the intake and study success of all students with equal opportunities.
- 2) UHasselt focuses on increasing diversity in research.
- 3) UHasselt strives for greater diversity within its staff and a more inclusive working environment.
- 4) UHasselt communicates and interacts inclusively.
- 5) UHasselt encourages a warm and inclusive student life.

In this HR Strategy action plan, we highlight a specific objective of the UHasselt inclusion plan, namely **3) Hasselt University will strive for more diversity within its workforce and a more inclusive working environment**. In this way, we ensure that, in addition to the follow-up of the comprehensive Inclusion Plan within the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group, extra follow-up and focus are provided within the framework of the HR Label for researchers. This provides an additional leverage for the realization of the objective regarding Diversity and Inclusion. As an additional reinforcement, the objectives formulated in the inclusion plan are also reflected in the follow-up of the policy plans of the various departments involved that are represented in the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group.

Hasselt University strives for a more diverse workforce regardless of status or grade and for a working environment in which all employees feel accepted and valued. As a civic university, Hasselt University wants to play an exemplary role in the region in terms of diversity and inclusion. Promoting diversity and inclusion in the workforce is also an important lever for achieving the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) and providing better education for the university's diverse student population. For the university as an employer, focusing on more diversity and inclusion also yields benefits, such as becoming more attractive in the war for talent, making optimal use of talent in the organisation, motivating and retaining that talent, and improving collaboration, innovation and creativity.

Within Objective 3, various operational objectives have been formulated:

- **OO1: Diversifying staff intake** The university aims to remove unintended barriers in recruitment and selection. See also action 3.
- **OO2: Enhancing career prospects for under-represented groups** Focus is placed on supporting careers, especially within the "leaky pipeline" where diversity decreases at higher academic levels.
- **OO3: Fostering employees' diversity skills**
UHasselt invests in training to increase awareness and competence.
- **OO4: Embedding inclusion in operations and support processes**
Inclusion is integrated into the university's daily management.
- **OO5: Promoting employee well-being**
A supportive environment is essential for retaining diverse talent. See also action 5.

Indicators	<p>For more detailed information, please refer to the Inclusion Plan on the UHasselt website. Below we list the most relevant indicators for the HRS4R action plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Evaluation of the role of gender leads (currently taken by faculty directors). Extension of this role to gender and inclusion lead, Q1 2027.● Development and roll out of a HR dashboard tool to monitor parameters on diversity and inclusion; male/female ratio in recruitment, number of recruited international employees, age distribution at recruitment, etc, Q4 2027.● Further rollout of the “What do you want” employer branding campaign. Development of extra videos to attract diverse and international talent via online media, Q2 2026.● Adding narrative CV – which provides space to reflect on the personal context – to the tenure track academic file and evaluations of academic staff, Q4 2026● Implementation of the new Academic Promotion process, Q4 2026.● Evaluation of the new Academic Promotion process, Q4 2028.
------------	--

Action 3: Strengthen our international appeal for recruitment	
Responsible unit	Directorate Research, Library and Internationalisation, HR
Timing	2026 - 2028
Gap principles	Recruitment and selection, value of mobility, working conditions
<p>Hasselt University aims to strengthen its international attractiveness for research talent in line with its institutional strategy and the Research and Innovation Policy Plan. The university actively promotes an open and international research environment and seeks to attract excellent researchers from diverse international backgrounds.</p> <p>1. Targeted international recruitment and employer branding</p> <p>To further strengthen international recruitment, UHasselt is developing a structured approach to attracting international talent. This includes the strategic identification of priority academic domains and profiles that require international recruitment, and the development of a policy framework that defines criteria for international hiring based on academic added value. The university also strengthens its academic positioning by translating its educational and research strengths into targeted international recruitment and employer branding initiatives, with the structural involvement of academic leadership.</p> <p>Employer branding and recruitment channels will be aligned with priority profiles, making use of UHasselt's international reputation and the HRS4R label to increase visibility among international research talent.</p> <p>2. Onboarding, integration and monitoring</p> <p>In addition, UHasselt continues to improve the institutional framework for the recruitment and integration of international researchers. This includes developing a clear intake and appointment framework, aligned with onboarding and welcome processes for international researchers and guests, and embedded in institutional IT systems. The university provides clear information in English through its institutional and research webpages and further develops an inclusive reception policy for international researchers.</p> <p>Finally, UHasselt will monitor and evaluate international recruitment in relation to academic priorities, recruitment strategies and the quality of onboarding and integration support provided to international researchers.</p> <p>3. International mobility and networks</p> <p>Several initiatives contribute to this objective. UHasselt promotes international mobility through funding instruments and collaboration schemes such as mobility programmes and joint doctoral trajectories. In addition, the university continues to strengthen international research networks and partnerships, particularly within the EU region.</p>	
Indicators	<p>1. Targeted international recruitment and employer branding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of an institutional framework for international recruitment (including priority academic domains/profiles and criteria for international hiring), Q4, 2026. Share of academic vacancies disseminated through

	<p>international recruitment channels (e.g. international job portals, academic networks) and share of international applicants in academic recruitment procedures, Q2, 2028.</p> <p>2. Onboarding, integration and monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of international researchers among newly recruited academic staff (ZAP, AAP and BAP), Q2, 2026.• Implementation of a structured onboarding and welcome framework for international researchers (including clear information in English and coordinated reception processes), Q4, 2028. <p>3. International Mobility and Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of defended joint/double PhD trajectories with international partners, Q4 2026.• Number of incoming and outgoing research mobility initiatives supported by UHasselt programmes (ex. BOF, Global Minds,...), Q4 2026.
--	---

Action 4: Stimulate and maximize objective recruitment and selection (OTM-R)

Responsible unit	HR
Timing	2026 - 2028
Gap principles	Non-discrimination, Evaluation/ appraisal systems, Recruitment, Selection, Transparency, Judging merit, Variations in the chronological order of CVs, Recognition of mobility experience, Recognition of qualifications, Seniority

To further align our recruitment processes with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, the following initiatives will be undertaken:

1. Enhancing objectivity and transparency

- Transparent & clear vacancy texts and application process:** the UHasselt jobpage is available in both Dutch and English. The look and feel of both the job webpages was updated and made more clear for applicants. The application module was also adapted and administratively simplified to lower the barrier for applicants.
- OTM-R awareness & training:** It remains a permanent objective to actively increase awareness of Open, Transparent, and Merit-based Recruitment principles among academic selection committees to ensure objective evaluation. To this end, we collaborate intensively with faculty directors and school managers by offering training sessions to support them in objective recruitment and selection with a focus on diversity and inclusion. At least once a year, an open training session on competency-based interviewing is organized in collaboration with a specialized external party. Members of selection committees are invited to participate. However, the number of participants remains limited due to the non-compulsory nature of the training. The recruitment and selection team acts as an expert, assumes an advisory role, and is responsible for quality assurance supported by the vacancy management tool, which enables the monitoring of vacancies and selection procedures according to OTM-R principles.
- An intranet page** with supporting tools and information on objective recruitment & selection has been created. It is our objective to increase the use of this information by members of the selection committee and managers.
- Equity observer:** Further rollout of the "Equity observer" concept to provide expert oversight and safeguard objective selection procedures for academic staff. The Faculty Director and School Managers are required to be members of the selection committee for the recruitment of professors. In this way, they can assume the role of quality guardian and equity observer to ensure that agreements regarding diversity and inclusion are guaranteed.
- Conflict of interest mitigation:** Formal amendment of regulations regarding the composition of professor selection committees to rigorously prevent professional, financial, or personal conflicts of interest.

2. Data-Driven HR

- HR analytics & dashboards:** Leveraging the collaborative HR/IT dashboard to monitor recruitment trends, enabling evidence-based adjustments to selection

policies.

- **Retention & vacancy analysis:** Implementing data-driven HR practices to analyze voluntary turnover and structural bottlenecks, ensuring that recruitment strategies address the root causes of unfilled positions.

3. Merit-Based Evaluation and Professional Development

- **Assessment integration within academic recruitment:** Competency profiles were developed for each grade of professor. We aim for a systematic use of professional assessments during the recruitment of Professors, based on these competency profiles. The results are translated into a **Personal Development Plan (PDP)**, ensuring continuous support and follow-up throughout the Tenure Track period. Given that the integration of an assessment into the professorship selection procedure is relatively new at UHasselt, the challenge remains to optimize the follow-up of assessment results throughout the feedback and evaluation cycle. Close collaboration and coordination between HR and the management of faculties and schools is essential for this.

Indicators

1. Enhancing Objectivity and Transparency

- Monitoring the number of visitors to the job page via Google Analytics, Q4 2028*.
- Further disclosure of an intranet page and training initiatives with tips and advice to support committee members with the aim of objective recruitment and selection. The link to the intranet page will be included in the email to the selection committee when the selection process starts. We aim for a 20% increase in the number of visitors to the webpage by Q4 2028*.
- At least one open training each year about competency based interviewing skills for selection committee members. We aim for at least 50 participants in OTM-R training by Q4 2028*.
- Good Habitz e-learning platform training offer on objective recruitment & selection, permanent online offer. We aim for every internal selection committee participant to have completed the online Good Habitz module 'Choose the best' by Q4 2028*.
- One yearly training/intervision session on how to avoid bias for faculty directors & school managers who take on the role of equity observer, Q4 2028.
- Registration of relationship in the selection report by Q4 2027.
- 100% of selection committee members who have formally registered potential relationships or conflicts of interest, Q4 2028.

*baseline measurement in January 2027.

2. Data-Driven Policy Optimization

- Quarterly reporting of the key HR KPIs for HR BPs and the Executive Board. A quarterly discussion takes place, and action points are formulated and followed up within the HR staff member group, Q1 2026.
- HR data is followed up by the HR Business Partner quarterly

	<p>with the director responsible for each department/faculty, Q4 2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yearly gap analysis between the prepared personnel budget and the actual staffing of FTEs, Q4 2026. <p>3. Merit-Based Evaluation and Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 100% of recruitment files for permanent ZAP positions ($\geq 50\%$) contain a formal assessment report from the permanent external partner, Q4, 2028.• Development and dissemination of guidelines on how to use and integrate assessment results in the follow-up and feedback cycle of (new) professors, Q1 2027.• Personal coaching session for new professors with HR regarding individual assessment results and how to translate this into a personal development plan, Q1 2027.• Peer review session with the group of Deans to train them in the interpretation and follow-up of assessment results during the professors' feedback cycle, Q2 2027.
--	--

Action 5: Developing an appreciative, stimulating and safe (organizational) culture

Responsible unit	HR, Prevention and Safety Department, Rectorate
Timing	2026 - 2028
Gap principles	Working conditions Stability and permanence of employment

To ensure a sustainable and high-quality research environment, we focus on the well-being of our staff, professionalized feedback cycles, and diverse welfare initiatives.

1. A Safe and healthy work environment

- **Integrated wellbeing policy:** Recognizing that staff wellbeing is foundational, we have a comprehensive **preventive and curative wellbeing policy**, in close collaboration with internal and external occupational health and prevention services. The policy is yearly evaluated and if necessary adjusted to stay aligned with the evolving needs of the staff.
- **Professionalized absence & reintegration policy:** We are investing in a modernized **illness and reintegration policy** (*attendance policy*). By focusing on proactive support and structured return-to-work trajectories, we ensure researchers feel supported during and after health-related challenges.
- **Zero-tolerance for transgressive behavior:** We continue to strengthen a **zero-tolerance culture** regarding harassment and transgressive behavior. This is achieved by:
 - Expanding and professionalizing our **confidential support network** (ombudspersons, PhD mentors, etc.).
 - Providing support specifically addressing the **harassment of scientists** (e.g., external pressure or online harassment), in collaboration with relevant departments.

2. Appreciative feedback and performance cycle

We have initiated the **Career paths for professors project**, through which we developed an appreciative feedback cycle and a renewed promotion process for professors. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen transparency, ensure clear expectations across career stages, and provide more systematic support to academic staff throughout their professional development. In the next phases, we will:

- Continue to closely **monitor the implementation of these processes**, assess their effectiveness, and make adjustments where needed.
- Further develop **role clarity** for key academic leadership positions—such as deans—to ensure that responsibilities and expectations are clearly defined across the institution.
- Undertake a **review of the criteria used in the evaluation and promotion process**, aligning them with the principles set out in the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (COARA). This includes strengthening qualitative assessment, valuing a broader range of academic contributions, and ensuring that evaluation practices reflect responsible and inclusive research assessment standards.

3. Structured and targeted onboarding processes

UHasselt attaches great importance to a clear onboarding process. There are currently various onboarding initiatives active within UHasselt. Each of these initiatives is very meaningful. However, the approach is currently too fragmented. The HR department will use the 4C model to further concretize the onboarding policy. The **4C model of onboarding** is a framework used to design effective programs for integrating new employees into an organization.

- **Compliance:** The basic level focused on teaching employees the organization's fundamental rules, legal regulations, and administrative policies.
- **Clarification:** Ensuring that new hires clearly understand their specific job role, responsibilities, and all related performance expectations.
- **Culture:** Providing employees with a sense of organizational norms, both formal and informal, including shared values and "how things are done".
- **Connection:** Helping new hires establish vital interpersonal relationships and information networks.

Indicators

1. A Safe and Healthy Work Environment

- **Sabbatical uptake:** Tracking the number of approved sabbaticals, yearly
- **Wellbeing survey:** organise a wellbeing survey to measure the wellbeing of our researchers and based on the results define new actions to improve their well being, Q4 2026.
- **Absenteeism figures:** follow up on the illness figures of our researchers, define clear illness procedures and supporting options, Q4 2026.
- **Reintegration trajectories:** monitor the success rate and number of structured return-to-work plans following long-term illness, ensuring employees are supported during their transition back to the workplace, Q4 2026.
- **Annual Prevention Plan (JAP) Completion:** Evaluating the percentage of realized objectives within the Annual Action Plan for Prevention (JAP), Q1 2027.
- **Zero tolerance on transgressive behavior** for researchers: foresee extra support by offering at least one training for researchers on how to deal with internal or external pressure on for example social media, Q4 2028.

2. Appreciative feedback and performance cycle

- **Evaluation** of the **new feedback cycle** for professors, and make the necessary process adjustments if needed, Q4 2028.
- Institution-wide clarification of **responsibilities** and expectations for **key academic leadership roles** (e.g. deans), Q4 2027.
- **Revised evaluation and promotion criteria aligned with COARA principles**, integrating strengthened qualitative assessment, broader recognition of academic contributions, and responsible, inclusive research assessment standards. Q4

2028.

3. Onboarding

- Development of an organization-wide policy and structured approach regarding onboarding tailored to the needs of the various staff categories, Q4 2028.
- Development, rollout and evaluation of a **buddy/mentoring system** for all staff within UHasselT, Q4 2028.
- Tracking the total **number of participants in onboarding initiatives** to ensure every new researcher receives a consistent and warm start, depending on the rollout of the HRIS, Q4 2028.
- Evaluation of the onboarding breakfast initiative including the number of participants and representation of academic staff, Q1 2027.
- **Optimization of preboarding information** by making an internet page available with relevant information and to increase clarity, Q3 2026.
- Explore the possibilities for a common and structured onboarding for all new professors at UHasselT (timing, information, etc), Q4 2027.
- Explore the possibilities for a common onboarding for the new deans, Q4 2026.

Action 6: Develop effective, efficient and data-informed HR processes

Responsible unit	HR, IT department
Timing	2026 - 2029
Gap principles	Working conditions, professional aspect, contractual and legal obligations,

We aim to advance the digital transformation of our HR ecosystem to establish effective, efficient, and data-informed processes that reduce administrative burdens and strengthen evidence-based decision-making. By implementing an integrated digital HR system—including modules for recruitment, training, evaluation, and career development—more space for core activities will be created and the quality and accessibility of services for researchers will be enhanced. Additionally this type of approach aims to minimize manual errors and speed up HR response times for recruitment and contract management.

Through the use of HR analytics and dashboards, we can systematically monitor staffing levels, researcher wellbeing, and career development, enabling faculties, schools, and central units to receive robust, data-driven HR policy advice. In this way, digitalisation improves the overall researcher experience and supports a more responsive, equitable, and future-proof HR environment.

1. Professionalizing HR Services through Digitalization (HRIS)

We are developing an **Human Resources Information System (HRIS)** to ensure an efficient and transparent experience for all staff. In 2026, we will make a choice with which HR provider(s) we want to work with to implement the HRIS.

In the period 2027-2029, the HRIS will be rolled out modularly in function of the business requirements. The objective is to start with the centralized personnel administration system in 2027.

This HRIS will contribute to achieving the following objectives:

- **Centralized personnel administration:** Implementing a single, central personnel file with clear role management and **digital self-service** options. This empowers researchers to manage their own data efficiently and reduces administrative burden.
- **Training and Development:** Simple and streamlined management of and insight into followed training courses and growth path for researchers, including a clear overview of all training courses per target group and per competency.
- **Structured on- and offboarding:** The rollout of the **HRIS Onboarding module** ensures a warm and professional welcome, fostering an immediate sense of belonging. The **offboarding module** allows us to learn from departing talent to continuously improve our culture.
- **Performance & feedback cycle:** The implementation of the **HRIS Performance Management module** facilitates a continuous feedback culture. This shifts the focus from one-way evaluation to a stimulating dialogue about growth, recognition, and future aspirations. Digitizing and automating this process also gives HR more opportunity to proactively follow up and monitor.
- **Automated payroll & compliance:** Developing a payroll module with automatic validation and quality controls. This ensures **transparency in labor costs** and strict compliance with both Belgian social law and international (EU) regulations for mobile researchers. Further automating this process contributes to a more efficient way of working and reduces the administrative workload, allowing HR staff to be

- deployed more effectively on specialized, value-added tasks.
- **operational excellence:** Moving towards a "Digital First" approach to minimize manual errors and speed up HR response times for recruitment and contract management.

In addition to convenience for the employee, the HRIS also offers significant benefits for UHasselt:

- **Strategic support:** The system supports our strategic HR objectives and the institutional strategy plan 2025-2029.
- **Eliminating risks:** The system eliminates operational and security risks by replacing outdated systems with new applications that align with our ICT architecture and seamlessly connect with other systems.
- **Data-driven decision-making:** We optimize our reporting (HR analytics) so that policy choices are supported by accurate and consistent data.

2. Evidence-Based Monitoring and HR Analytics

We plan to build a **Business Intelligence (BI)** environment to monitor the health and sustainability of our research community:

- **Staffing & Budgetary Monitoring:** Real-time tracking of personnel capacity and budget allocation to ensure stable and sustainable research funding and career paths.
- **Wellbeing Analytics:** Systematic monitoring of wellbeing indicators to proactively identify risks (e.g., high stress levels or burnout) and evaluate the impact of our prevention policies.
- **HR Analytics Dashboard:** Integrating data into a self-service reporting tool for managers and HR. This allows for data-driven decisions and monitoring regarding diverse HR KPI's, such as gender balance, internationalization, recruitment trends, etc.

<p>Indicators</p>	<p>The rollout of the new HRIS runs from 2026 to 2029. Below is an overview of the phasing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation and roll out of the HRIS module regarding Personnel Administration, Q4 2027 <p>The timing for the following modules will be determined after this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation and roll out of the HRIS module regarding payroll • Implementation and roll out of the HRIS module regarding performance management and feedback cycle • Implementation and roll out of the HRIS module regarding training and development • Implementation and roll out of the HRIS module regarding on- and offboarding
-------------------	---

Action 7: Embedding lifelong learning and talent development

Responsible unit	Directorate Research, Library and Internationalisation; HR, Career center, Rectorate (beleidsplan OJO & beleidsplan Career center)
Timing	2026 - 2028
Gap principles	career development, access to career advice, Relation with supervisors, Supervision and managerial duties Continuing Professional Development, Access to research training and continuous development, Supervision

Continuous learning will become a natural and integral part of employees' career development. We will therefore implement an integrated approach to competence, talent, and performance management, with a strong emphasis on flexible career pathways, individual development plans, and access to training and coaching. Leadership development will occupy a prominent place for those in leadership roles and also for staff without formal supervisory responsibilities (self-leadership). In addition, we encourage internal mobility, job crafting, and structured mentoring and buddy programmes. All of the initiatives below contribute to the realization of this action and originate from the Career Center's policy plan, the doctoral schools' policy plan, and the HR policy plan.

1. Training & competency development

A competence framework is available for early career researchers and a competence profile for professors was recently also developed and approved. An on-campus training portfolio for different skills like generic skills, career development and well-being is available for all staff. The training portfolio also includes initiatives related to open science, research data management and responsible research practices. UHasselt will continue to strengthen the integration of digital and AI-related competencies in its institutional training portfolio for researchers at all career stages, with a focus on responsible use of AI and its potential to enhance research quality, productivity and career development. In addition to this extensive offer, every staff member has access to an online database of more than 90 training courses in various domains via GoodHabit. While on-campus training supports effective learning and community building, online formats increase accessibility for researchers who are less frequently present on campus.

For early-career researchers, there is an additional offer organised by the doctoral schools. This offer is a balanced mix of on-campus and online learning formats. The training portfolio will continue to be evaluated and improved, with attention to quality, accessibility, and the specific development needs of postdoctoral researchers. To help ECR identify which initiatives are most relevant to them, the competency overview, specifically developed for ECR, has been gradually embedded in several doctoral school processes. As a next step, the focus will be on further developing and integrating initiatives and procedures that encourage early-career researchers to gain insight into their talents, strengths, and areas for improvement (e.g., through the self-assessment tool), starting at the beginning of their PhD or postdoctoral trajectory. Based on these insights, they can select relevant courses and workshops and develop their own training pathway.

For professors, the training portfolio needs to be evaluated and potentially adapted to meet their needs based on the recently developed competence profile. In addition the competence profile will be included in evaluation and academic promotion processes.

We will advance the digital transformation of our HR infrastructure by implementing an

integrated HR information system that includes a dedicated module for training and professional development. This system will support transparent access to learning opportunities, streamline administrative processes, and enable evidence-based monitoring of researchers' development trajectories.

Specific initiatives:

- Increase awareness of the self-assessment tool and its use among PhD candidates, both at the start of the PhD and during the doctoral trajectory.
- Explore the use of e-learning platforms (e.g., Nature Masterclass) to expand location-independent training opportunities.
- Expand training opportunities for postdoctoral researchers, including exploring interuniversity collaboration for postdoc-specific courses..
- Strengthen supervisors' and doctoral committees' role in supporting PhD candidates' development by actively promoting the use of the self-assessment tool and the training offer of the doctoral schools, and by integrating attention to PhD candidates' overall development into the annual doctoral committee reporting template.
- Strengthen the Tenure Track Committee's role in supporting the personal and professional development of assistant professors by integrating competencies and relevant training opportunities into the Tenure Track criteria template and process.
- Integrate competencies into the evaluation and promotion process for professorial staff by introducing a structured self-reflection question. This approach is intended to further stimulate the professional development of our professors.
- Systematically evaluate courses through participant surveys and conduct a broader survey among early-career researchers every four years.

2. Leadership

In 2023, 'committed leadership' was approved as Hasselt University's vision for leadership. Committed leadership is leadership based on and aimed at connection. It involves balancing personal responsibility with encouraging others to take responsibility. It is a balance between offering support and being supported. Leadership is hereby not seen as a 'position' but as (part of) the glue that connects people, both with each other and with the organization. The professorial profile descriptions, which outline the responsibilities associated with the different academic ranks, and the corresponding competency frameworks explicitly highlight leadership, ensuring that it occupies a prominent and integral position. Currently, a training offer to support employees in developing the skills and insights needed to put this vision into practice is being developed. The training framework for leadership is structured around the following areas: leading yourself, leading others, leading a team, leading (within) an organization.

This vision of leadership, together with other policy instruments developed at Hasselt University (integrity charter, charter for PhD candidate-supervisor, code of conduct on Conflicts of Interest, competence profile for professors ...), clarifies the roles and responsibilities of supervisors. The doctoral schools, in collaboration with the Directorate of Personnel & Organization, offer voluntary training for supervisors. The aim of these trainings is to provide supervisors of PhD candidates with a framework, insights, and coaching techniques to improve the quality of doctoral supervision. These trainings also contribute to a positive relationship between supervisors and doctoral candidates and, therefore, indirectly to the well-being of early-career researchers. These policy instruments, training offers for supervisors, and the support that doctoral schools offer to early-career researchers are, however, not well known to our supervisors.

Specific initiatives:

- Exploring and implementing the options for the development of a mandatory training

trajectory for starting supervisors (including training on supervision) and for professors who take on specific policy roles.

- Develop a communication strategy for the available policy instruments and training offers for supervisors and incorporate them into onboarding processes for newly hired supervisors.
- Provide on-demand training for ZAP members who take up a certain leadership position within the university (eg. dean, chairman of a capacity group,...)

3. Career Development

At Hasselt University, career development is a strategic priority. In 2023, the Career Center was launched, which takes the lead in overall management and oversight of career development initiatives. While the Career Center acts as the central hub and sets the strategic direction, the actual implementation and execution are carried out in close synergy with two other directorates. This synergy ensures an integrated approach, from the start of a career (such as a PhD) to career transitions or progression to other academic or non-academic roles.

The doctoral schools encourage ECR to reflect on their careers and support them in developing a profile that opens doors, regardless of the sector in which they choose to continue their professional journey. UHasselt also promotes intersectoral career development by strengthening links with industry, public organisations and societal partners, thereby supporting researchers in exploring career opportunities both within and beyond academia. For this, the UHasselt doctoral schools also work together with the other Flemish universities through the PhD Talent Coordination Team. They take a lot of initiatives to prepare ECR for their next career step and to intensify cooperation with the external labor market and facilitate the match between PhD holders and employers. These initiatives also contribute to supporting the international career development of researchers through international networks, collaborations and mobility opportunities.

Also, professors are supported in their early career via a mentoring program. In addition, each professor has their own interests and strengths. A key principle of our recently developed policy is therefore that not everyone is expected to excel across all pillars. Every professor provides a basic contribution to teaching, research, and impact, while being able to place specific emphases in accordance with their expertise, motivation, and career development. In this way, professors are granted considerable freedom to shape their own careers.

Specific initiatives:

- Continuing the 'Civic Mentor Program', matching senior PhDs and postdocs with mentors from industry and society.
- Continuing the 'Academic Mentoring program' matching junior professors or newly started professors with mentors in our organisation.
- Organizing company visits and (online) career testimonials to inform and inspire ECR about the possible career paths after their PhD.
- Involving alumni as speakers and mentors for career events.
- Organise Stakeholder meetings with non-academic labour-market partners through the PhD talent coordination team.
- Evaluation of the newly developed policy for professors enabling job crafting (2029)

Indicators	<p>1. Training & competency development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 100% of doctoral schools' courses are evaluated through participant feedback surveys (Q4 2026). ● An institution-wide survey of the doctoral school training offer &
------------	--

	<p>communication is conducted every 4 years (Q2 2026).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Start a pilot project of Nature Masterclass (Q4 2026) and evaluate this pilot project.● Integration of digital and AI-related competencies in the institutional training portfolio for researchers, monitored through participation data and course evaluations (yearly).● Organization of 1–2 training activities per year specifically for postdoctoral researchers.● A knowledge clip explaining the self-assessment tool and how to use it will be recorded and made available to all PhD candidates and supervisors (Q1 2027).● Self-assessment tool and training offer communicated annually to 100% of supervisors (via newsletter, annual email, and faculty council agenda) (Q1 2027).● Update the reporting template of annual doctoral committee, TT committee and the template for evaluations and academic promotion of professors (Q4 2026)● <p>2. Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● A communication strategy and content plan to communicate the policy instruments and training offers for supervisors to newly hired supervisors is finalized (Q2 2027).● Implementation of on-demand training for ZAP members in certain leadership positions, Q4 2027. <p>3. Career development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Average satisfaction score above 7 from both mentors and mentees via end-of-trajectory evaluation, Q4 2028.● Number of ECRs participating in visits/testimonials, categorized by discipline (yearly).● PhD Talent Pool Flanders initiatives are consistently promoted through the doctoral schools' communication channels (continuous).
--	--