

Perception of UNamur by foreign researchers

Results of a survey conducted in October 2012

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Summary

Within the framework of the EURAXESS Rights program and the deployment of the European Charter for Researchers in Unamur, it was conducted an audit of the University practices with regard to Charter¹. To perform this audit, meetings were held with key stakeholders such as the scientific, academic staff and administrative services. In addition, on request of the scientific staff, workshops on specific themes have been held during the first week of September 2012. To complete the researchers consultation process which, due to the way how it has been organized (focus groups), was mainly targeted on French speaking researchers, it has been proposed to give the floor to foreign researchers (one of the target of Euraxess-Rights) through the organization of a survey (in French and in English). This action is part of the HRS4R of UNamur.

This survey is also justified by the fact that foreign researchers are a "target audience" under-EURAXESS Rights. In this context, the HRS4R UNamur plan clearly identifies the action to conduct a survey of foreign researchers to identify the promotion of mobility in all its forms and to increase the international visibility of the institution².

The purpose was to achieve a **satisfaction survey**, in order to assess the followings: reception at UNamur and quality of the information provided to the researchers upon arrival, research environment and suitability of the tasks with the aim of the thesis and potential impact of research on the career.

¹ « Audit of the legislation and the institutional practices of the University of Namur (Belgium) taking into consideration the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers(Gap analysis) », document approved by the Board of Directors, 12/10/26.

² See the following documents : « HRS4R, Human Research Strategy for Researchers , University of Namur », document approved by the Advisory Board, 13/01/25 ;

264 researchers constituted the **sample**. They have been identified as people coming from a foreign university and who have been passed (or were present) at UNamur between 2010, 1st January and 2012, 30th September. Among them, 88 or **33%** responded to the survey. This response rate is considered an excellent score for survey and demonstrates the interest of researchers in sharing their satisfactions and dissatisfactions.

Generally, regardless their home country (Europe, Africa, Asia, America), researchers who responded to the survey return a very positive image of UNamur. For some of them, their stay in the institution represents one of the best period of their post-doc. The university can be proud of thanks that have been sent both to the administrative services which have welcomed them and the academics who have supervised them. However, this must not hide the fact that one of the respondents mentions the harassment of its promoter and the lack of support when he reported it in his department.

Among the issues that gave the greater satisfaction: the relationships with the promoters even if improvements could be brought, as for example, sending, prior the arrival, of a work plan, a presentation of the working environment and an introduction to colleagues : apparently, all the promoters don't do it systematically. Another interesting suggestion, even if the way how it will be implemented must be analyzed, is the systematic implementation of a buffer period, in order to allow to settle paperwork or to make an upgrade prior to the research start. The latter would allow researchers who have gaps to fill them before embarking on their work and limit the discouragement and abandonment of the thesis consecutive to the feeling of being overwhelmed.

The procedures that have been set up for the reception largely received a positive assessment even if..."could do better". Desired improvements related to the reception address the delivery of a welcome pack, at least in English (preferably bilingual) and that, important issue would explain the Belgian tax system and its consequences on the net remuneration. The use of English by the administrative services, both in emails or contacts with researchers is a highly desired area of improvement. And finally, one of the issues mentioned several times addresses the employment contract: lack of transparency about remuneration, signature and/or too late renewal, which may have significant consequences for foreigners in terms of disposable income, of renewal of the work permit and/or the residence permit. We also emphasize the quality of the accommodation, one of the least valued dimensions: hygiene, sound insulation, condition of equipment, Internet connectivity... to be reviewed.

Several researchers mentioned the feeling of a lack: the low level of interaction with their Belgian counterparts within the university. Hence the demand for some of them to create friendly places where Belgian and foreign researchers could meet and learn to better know each other.

The assessment of the research

The evaluation of **research** conducted by the researchers gives rise to a very positive assessment. Almost all of them believe that the research they have conducted or lead at UNamur, meet the initial objectives they set for themselves. They are also satisfied in regard to their visibility in terms of publication. Carry out their research in the UNamur offered great opportunities for personal and professional development including contacts with other universities and research centers. If the majority of them hope to find a job in their home country after their stay at Namur, they are more than 60% willing to stay in Belgium: academic career would be the "icing on the cake" for the majority of them.

In terms of expectations, the survey thus **confirms the first results** of meetings with researchers conducted within the framework of the "gap analysis". This concerns both the management of contracts of employment (recruitment, signature, amount of pay, overtime), **contacts with the administrative**

services, the improvement of communication including information on social security, taxation and demand for a support to this communication as a welcome pack). (N.B. One can note that a welcome pack responding in part to expectations does exist now and that there are several initiatives to improve the reception of researchers.)

Another issue already pointed in the initial audit and found in the survey: lack of common policy at UNamur on researchers' **teaching loads** and the variety of situations from one department to the other. The request of a clear "contract" with the promoter on missions, on a work plan is part of the claims that are also found in the survey and finally, as before, the issue of **well-being at work** through the absence of a **policy of harassment** was also discussed. In terms of infrastructure, computing capacity made available to researchers was also raised earlier.

Among the issues that were not mentioned during the meetings, the demand for a stronger **positioning** of UNamur at **the international level** and the **increasing of collaborations** with **foreign research centers**. Another issue that was not raised in the gap analysis relates to strengthening collaborations with researchers at the UNamur and implementation of "**places**" for **social meetings**, "socialization" that would facilitate the integration. The particularities of the public targeted by the survey (i.e. foreign researchers) are that they are very sensitive to issues of mobility for themselves. They try to become integrated in the University and they wish to provide an international dimension to their research.

The survey also provides information on **career opportunities**, some issues that have not been a lot of discussed in the audit.

Remarks, suggestions contained in this survey will be incorporated into the actions defined by the Action Plan and will feed HR4R strategic approach of the university in order to achieve the objectives of improving the situation of researchers that is secured through the signing of the European Charter for Researchers. They will result in a document that will structure them around the axes defined in the action plan mentioned above.

In addition to the remarks mentioned by researchers, it will also be necessary to integrate the difficulties faced by the organizers of the survey for the establishment of a **reliable and comprehensive database of foreign researchers** passed at UNamur. An integrated view of all foreign researchers passed at UNamur could be valued at the international level and strengthen its position in terms of mobility and host University.

In conclusion, as shown by the results of the survey, UNamur is on the right track regarding the adequacy with the goals of this charter. It has already implemented numerous actions and continued improvements in this direction through the site "AXEL"³, through EURAXESS Rights or more "limited" initiatives. For the next twelve months, we can already discuss actions planned around harassment awareness, training promoters to team management. Efforts will be made in coaching researchers, in communication about career guidance services that are provided to researchers. Actions brought by the cell-EURAXESS RIGHTS, PRO-DOC cell and Employment Unit tend towards that goal.

³ "AXEL", "Axis for Excellence". This is a major project initiated in 2012 by the General Assembly of the University of Namur. It sets out the strategic lines that will guide the actions of the Board of Directors. The document is structured in four complementary sections: it defines the identity of the university; specifies the cultural evolution of the institution, based on three key dimensions; states the ten major strategic lines of action of the University of Namur and fixes the way in which the General Assembly intends to verify the proper implementation of these strategic lines by the Board of Directors. Several components of AXEL are directly connected with Euraxess Rights.

More information about the results of this survey?

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