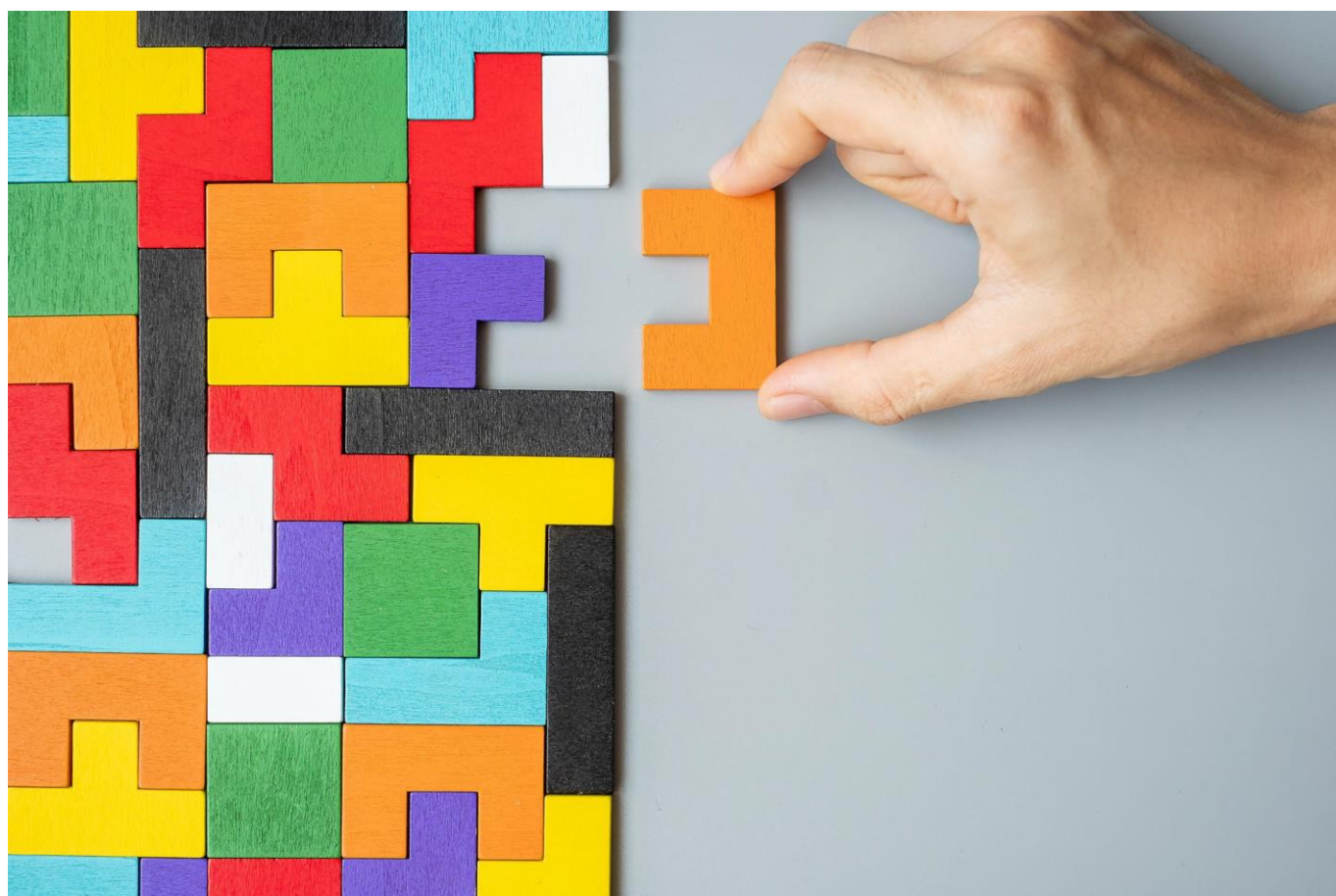




**ÚOCHB** <sup>AV</sup>  
<sup>CR</sup>  
**IOCB PRAGUE**

Ústav organické chemie a biochemie  
Akademie věd České republiky, v. v. i.  
Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry  
of the Czech Academy of Sciences



# **HR Excellence in Research**

## **HR Strategy and HR Action Plan**

### **(Interim Assessment updated version, Fall 2023)**

**Case number:** 2019CZ474773  
**Name of organization under review:** Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the CAS  
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# HR Strategy

## Introduction

Over the past three years, the HRS4R process has presented a positive and transformative challenge to the human resources strategy and daily operation of IOCB. It has become an integral benchmark against which every new administrative decision or procedural change is measured. Most importantly, it has catalyzed many transformative movements that would have otherwise not occurred as timely and thoroughly.

As of 5 October 2023, the number of IOCB employees grew to 990 people, of whom 507 (51.2%) were men and 483 (48.8%) were women; 247 employees (24.9%) were foreigners. Compared to the numbers from the Initial Review, the total number of employees grew by 16.7 %, the difference between men and women decreased from 4.2 to 2.4 % and the percentage of foreigners increased by 2.3 %.

Since receiving the HR Award in December 2020, the HRS4R process in IOCB has been affected by a number of unexpected external factors. Initially, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decline in face-to-face meetings and offline professional activities, which hindered the development of proposed changes in some regions. The pandemic was subsequently followed by the conflict in Ukraine, increased influence operations by China and Russia, related fluctuations of the energy markets, and an accelerating inflation rate, which resulted in unexpected shifts in governmental priorities and new complexity in our economic and social landscape.

Our initial Action Plan was written very ambitiously, and in the context of unforeseen obstacles, we started to identify barriers not anticipated in the original scheduling. Eventually, it led to an undesirable delay. We sought to mitigate these setbacks in our updated Action Plan, as presented in this document.

During 2022, IOCB underwent a planned leadership change, with the appointment of a new director and vice-directors. That was followed by organizational restructuring to accommodate the institute's expanding scale, increasing administrative intricacies, and diversifying project portfolios. Along the line of many changes in personnel, the HR Award Coordinator position (the role performed by a Scientific Coordinator) was also filled by a newly hired employee.

Among the newly established departments, the most relevant to the HRS4R agenda is the Research Support office, under the management of the recently appointed Vice-Director for Research. The Research Support staff consists of the Scientific Coordinator, a PhD Program Coordinator, and Scientific Editors. The Strategic Development department, also a new addition to our organizational chart, puts emphasis on safety management. Their success lies in introducing an Occupational Health and Safety e-learning tool. Additionally, the recent geopolitical development has highlighted the importance of institutional resilience. The Electronic Information System department was expanded due to rising demands for digitization and more electronically accessible functionalities.

The introduction of Ethical Proxies has proven to be well accepted. However, we intend to enhance the prevention of gender-based violence to match the trends in the international academic environment. We are very proud of our Equal Opportunities Plan and a newly established Equal Opportunities Officer who is responsible for removing barriers for disadvantaged employees to broaden institutional possibilities with respect to under-represented groups. Another recent addition to IOCB has been an English-speaking therapist providing psychological counseling, especially to foreign students.

The IOCB initiative "Women in Science" revived its efforts by organizing career workshops and inspirational talks about work-life balance. The organizers aim to encourage women researchers to participate actively in their workplace in order to promote an increase in the number of women in managerial and decision-making positions. Nevertheless, the initiative deals with topics common to all employees, regardless of their gender, for instance, career obstacles, mentoring, available employee support, and benefits.

IOCB continues its inclusive approach towards young families. The financial support for mothers returning to

work has been extended to all parents. Debates about founding an institutional kindergarten are still ongoing.

In early 2023, an extensive audit of research service groups, initiated by the Vice-Director for Research, was conducted. A new dedicated intranet page was built to bring together all technical and professional training provided by the service groups. Restructuring of the intranet content continues and will include the entire HR Award agenda and the Research Support office dedicated webpage.

Furthermore, a working group on Research Data Management (RDM) was established this year by a senior group leader. Recruitment for a Data Steward is underway. Training on general RDM is currently in preparation, electronic laboratory notebooks and Data Management Plan training will follow.

We also explored the soft skills training demand through testing rounds of various trainings such as peer support (ethical proxy) training, presentation skills, management skills, or AI workshops. As an example of a remarkable HRS4R improvement, brought up independently from the Action Plan, a Silent Study room can be mentioned. The room has been set up to cater especially to the needs of students should they have insufficient conditions for focused work in the labs.

Conclusively, we focused considerably on Ethical and Professional Aspects in the first phase. While there is still a need to further advance the prospects of training and methodologies, our new priority for the upcoming implementation period is Recruitment. We lack comprehensive manuals for candidates and selection committees. Also, we shall dedicate more efforts to analyzing the possibilities of a general employee evaluation system, taking inspiration from other institutes where it has been successfully implemented.

# Action Plan

## 1. Organisational Information

<b>Staff &amp; Students (as of 5 October 2023)</b>		<b>FTE</b>
Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research		525
Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)		170
Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organization is host organization)		0
Of whom are women		245
Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor.		213
Of whom are stage R2 = in most organizations corresponding with postdoctoral level		81
Of whom are stage R1 = in most organizations corresponding with doctoral level		195
Total number of students (if relevant)		218
Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)		765
<b>Research Funding (figures for fiscal year 2022)</b>		<b>€</b>
Total annual organizational budget		58,406,011
Annual organizational direct government funding (designated for research)		11,588,965
Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organizations – including EU funding)		14,901,847
Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research		31,915,199

IOCB is an independent research institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Our mission is to advance basic research at the interface of chemical and biological sciences and to encourage and assist translation of promising results into applications and commercial assets. The institute comprises of three research clusters and fifty-one research groups.

## 2. Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice:

<b>Thematic heading of the Charter and Code</b>	<b>Strengths and weaknesses</b>
<b>Ethical and professional aspects</b>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Considerable institutional growth in the ethical framework (Code of Ethics, Ethics Commission, Ethical Proxies)</li> <li>■ Continual improvement, new training initiatives in the ethical and professional aspects area</li> <li>■ Effective system of knowledge and technology transfer</li> <li>■ Research data management focus</li> <li>■ New communication platform “HR Award Roundtables”</li> <li>■ Introduction of OHS training as an e-learning module</li> </ul> <p><b>Weaknesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lack of employee evaluation and career advancement plans</li> </ul>

- Interdepartmental communication gaps
- Training initiatives and ethical infrastructure still need a viable systemization

The institution has experienced significant growth in institutional bodies and documents dedicated to ethics. This includes the establishment of Ethical Proxies, the development of a Code of Ethics, the formation of an ethical committee, and the introduction of whistleblower protection mechanisms. A culture of good ethical practices has been evolving as the institution actively addresses new cases and learns from experience. The institute has conducted past ethical training sessions and has a plan for ongoing training. These efforts contribute to the development of a robust ethical framework and methodology. Effective mechanisms are in place for the transfer of knowledge and technology within the institute, fostering collaboration and innovation. A Data Management working group has been established, and the recruitment for a Data Steward position is ongoing, reflecting a commitment to responsible data handling. The system for evaluating employees and facilitating career advancement is not effective in practice, potentially impeding professional development. Blind spots in communication exist between researchers and administrators, hindering effective information exchange and potentially leading to misunderstandings. The ethical infrastructure still awaits proper methodology, describing procedural requirements in detail.

## Recruitment and selection

### Strengths:

- Enhanced job advertising templates
- Academic inbreeding mitigation policies
- Control mechanisms ensuring transparency
- PhD Interview Day

### Weaknesses:

- Lack of centralized data on hiring procedures
- Incomplete methodology documentation
- Digitization of hiring process documentation is still not successful

In addition to Czech labor law, IOCB also follows Czech Academy of Sciences' regulations governing the processes of selection and recruitment. This commitment ensures compliance and fairness in the recruitment process; however, it also poses some challenges regarding lesser degree of flexibility in some aspects. IOCB has improved job advertising templates, incorporating gender-neutral language, bilingual communication, and transparent response mechanisms. Also, the commitment to adopt and maintain inclusive language and clear communication supports a diverse applicant pool. Recent optimizations in wage regulation reflect the institution's dedication to ensuring competitive and fair financial compensation for employees. Furthermore, implementation of policies aimed at minimizing academic inbreeding, such as encouraging mobility and supporting international postdocs through institutional fellowships, highlights a proactive approach to diversifying the workforce and fostering fresh perspectives. Group leaders are recruited through open calls and the selection process is overseen by the International Advisory Board. The continued use and success of the PhD Interview Day platform is a testament to the institution's efficient and standardized approach to recruiting PhD students. The most significant weakness lies in the absence of centralized data on all hiring procedures, which represents a challenge in terms of comprehensive oversight and analysis of the recruitment process. Also, inconsistent and partially available documentation regarding recruitment methodologies highlights the necessity to produce more detailed and accessible information, both for internal reference and transparency. Another obstacle is the inconsistency of an onboarding procedure, including the Welcome Pack, a planned guide designed for new employees. It signifies an area where improvements can enhance the experience of new hires and facilitate their integration into the institution. The ongoing attempts for implementing the complete hiring process documentation in electronic format have been associated with many challenges, underlining the importance of putting further efforts into streamlining and modernizing the recruitment process.



## Working conditions

### Strengths:

- High-quality working environment
- Excellent wage policy and benefits
- Diverse support mechanisms
- Women in Science initiative
- Equal Opportunities Plan and Equal Opportunity (EO) officer
- Flexible working arrangements
- Mental health support in English
- Safety Proxy

### Weaknesses

- Incomplete mobility rules
- Underdeveloped mentoring scheme
- Onboarding procedure gap

The working environment at IOCB is consistently rated well above the average compared to other academic institutions in the Czech Republic, indicating a positive workplace atmosphere. The institution boasts an excellent wage policy and offers attractive benefits, (such as recreational opportunities in institute-owned mountain chalets, contributions to a private supplementary pension scheme, short and long-term accommodation in institute-owned properties for incoming international recruits, etc.), contributing to job satisfaction and well-being among employees. IOCB offers various forms of support, including financial support for working parents to assist with childcare and dedicated fellowships, reinforcing its commitment to supporting employees at different stages of their careers. The "Women in Science" initiative promotes gender equality and the advancement of women in scientific decision-making roles, fostering diversity and inclusivity within the institution. The presence of an Equal Opportunities Plan and an EO officer underscores IOCB's commitment to equal opportunities and diversity. The institution offers flexible working hours and has successfully tested remote working arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing work-life balance and adaptability. The introduction of psychological counselling services in English caters to the diverse needs of the international workforce, promoting well-being and mental health. The institution's commitment to safety is reinforced by the presence of a Safety Proxy (in addition to a regular Occupational Health and Safety office and OHS committee) regularly checking the working environment and ensuring the security of employees. On the other hand, still outstanding is some form of clear set of guidelines on undertaking mobilities/research stays abroad available to employees, which could be potentially affecting career development and mobility opportunities for employees.



**Training and development****Strengths:**

- Diverse scientific and technical training opportunities
- Expansion of training courses (management course, presentation skills, AI course)
- Interactive First Aid course
- E-Learning for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

**Weaknesses:**

- Lack of centralization
- Limited soft skills training opportunities
- Feedback usually not collected and/or not evaluated

The institution offers a variety of scientific and technical training programs, including updated and extended GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) training, ensuring that employees stay current in their respective fields. IOCB has introduced numerous new courses and lectures, covering topics such as management skills, resilience, and first aid. These additions enhance the range of career development opportunities available to employees. The incorporation of e-learning for OHS training provides a flexible approach in an accessible format to ensure workplace safety. Unfortunately, the training system lacks centralization, which can lead to challenges in coordinating and monitoring training efforts across the institution. Onboarding training is not consistently in place, potentially impacting the smooth integration of new employees into the institution. The institution lacks a sufficient number of soft skills and interpersonal skills-oriented training programs, which are essential for employees' personal and professional development. The availability of ethical training sessions is limited, and therefore it is essential to expand the offer, ideally incorporating e-learning modules to address ethical considerations effectively.

<p><b>Have any of the priorities for the short and medium term changed?</b></p>	<p>From the perspective of IOCB, several priorities for the short- and medium-term have evolved since the initiation of the HRS4R process. In our previous assessment, our institution's priorities were largely influenced by the Gap Analysis findings, with a primary focus on strengthening the "Ethical and Professional Aspects" thematic area. However, a series of internal and external factors have prompted adjustments. IOCB recognized the need for a better organizational structure and centralization to efficiently manage its growing scale. The institute's expansion, increased complexity of administrative tasks, and diversification of project activities underscored the necessity for more coordinated administrative functions. Centralization emerges as an important aspect. While we have evolved in maintaining a degree of autonomy for individual group leaders, our current scale demands a more coordinated approach to certain administrative functions. This shift aims to eliminate bottlenecks that may have emerged due to outgrown administrative practices. Simultaneously, while our focus on institutional resilience is fortified in response to geopolitical issues, compliance with EU legislation has become a priority to align with EU standards and best practices. In the medium-term priorities, digitization and Research Data Management have received considerable attention. This includes reinforcing the Electronic Information System department and establishing a working group on Research Data Management, reflecting the shift toward digital research practices and data management. The highest priority for the upcoming phase lies within the Recruitment area. IOCB has recognized the need for comprehensive manuals for candidates and selection committees. Furthermore, there is a growing demand for exploring the feasibility of a general employee evaluation system, aiming to enhance the recruitment process and professional development.</p>
<p><b>Have any of the circumstances in which your organization operates changed and as such have had an impact on your HR strategy?</b></p>	<p>Several evolving circumstances have significantly influenced the operational environment of our organization, leading to a re-evaluation and adaptation of our HR strategy. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to remote work, which led to a re-evaluation of our workplace policies, communication tools, and the need for effective online collaboration. A noticeable drop in student numbers due to the demographic shift, mirrored by a reduced quantity of applications across study programs, including PhDs, has directed a change in our recruitment strategies. With fewer applicants, there's a compelling requirement to enhance our employer branding, present more attractive study and work opportunities, and possibly explore collaborations or partnerships to sustain academic excellence. Regarding the legal requirements, a few legislative amendments are in the pipeline, including the Law on R&amp;D and the Higher Education Act. The latter's potential impact on scholarships could affect our talent acquisition and retention strategies, especially for younger academics. Currently, we monitor the progress of new whistleblowing regulations. The potential introduction of an ombudsperson could influence our internal reporting and complaint mechanisms. Nonetheless, unexpected shifts in governmental priorities, such as those caused by ongoing war in Ukraine and the economic crisis, require us to remain agile and potentially re-evaluate our immediate priorities. The geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainties have highlighted the need for increased institutional resilience. The EU sanction list against Russia mandates proving business ownership during procurement, increasing our administrative burden. The possible reduction in the science and research budget necessitates a</p>

	proactive reassessment of our financial strategies.
<p><b>Are any strategic decisions under way that may influence the action plan?</b></p>	<p>We consider crucial to align our Action Plan with the broader organizational strategic plan. The new strategic plan envisioned by the Strategic Development department will incorporate the HR Award Action Plan as its part. As has already been described in the Introduction, IOCB experienced considerable organizational transformations in the previous year, the effects of which continue to resonate within the institute's internal structure and operation. Currently, there might be identified the three following developments:</p> <p>The ongoing construction of a cryo-EM facility highlights a strategic focus on advanced research techniques. This could influence hiring priorities, demand for relevant specialized training, or a recruitment of experts in the field.</p> <p>The HR department's initiative to prepare an overall training concept for staff indicates a strategic push towards enhancing staff competencies. This move might redirect focus and capacities within the Action Plan.</p> <p>We are contemplating increasing visibility for our PhD programs. This may include participating in trade fairs, which would require allocation of resources and a potential re-prioritization of certain HR activities. Moreover, plans for the upcoming PhD Interview Day are under review, and its format or content might be subject to changes.</p>

### 3. Updated Action Plan (2024-2027)

Link to the institute’s dedicated HR Strategy webpage:

- English version: [www.uochb.cz/en/hr-award](http://www.uochb.cz/en/hr-award)
- Czech version: [www.uochb.cz/cs/hr-award](http://www.uochb.cz/cs/hr-award)

#### 3.1 Update on Current Actions

Proposed actions	Timing	Target/Indicator	Status	Remarks
<b>1. Ethical and Professional Aspects</b>				
<b>1.1</b> The Code of Ethics for Researchers of the CAS will be adopted for the IOCB	Q1/2023	<p><b>Target:</b> All researchers will be acquainted with the ethical principles of scientific work and their specific settings within the organization.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The number of researchers who are familiar with the ethical principles will increase. The internal Code of Ethics will be posted to the institute’s website. Training courses on the ethics of scientific work will be organized on an ongoing basis, especially with regard to researchers at the beginning of their careers. PhD students will be introduced to the ethical principles during a PhD bootcamp – a team-building stay undertaken at the beginning of their studies.</p>	<b>Completed</b>	<p>The adopted code has been published on 6 January 2023. All employees were notified via e-mail. According to a recent survey, 72.9 % of employees are aware of the code. Training methodology still needs to be developed. See new action 1.11.</p> <p><a href="https://www.uochb.cz/en/code-of-ethics">https://www.uochb.cz/en/code-of-ethics</a></p>
<b>1.2</b> An Internal Commission for Scientific Integrity will be established.	Q1/2023	<p><b>Target:</b> Establish an internal ethics committee for the IOCB by the end of 2022.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The Internal Commission for Scientific Integrity will be officially appointed by the director of the institute.</p>	<b>Completed</b>	<p>The Ethics Committee has been appointed on 6 January 2023.</p> <p><a href="https://www.uochb.cz/en/ethics-commission">https://www.uochb.cz/en/ethics-commission</a></p>

<p><b>1.3</b> The two positions of Ethical Proxy were established at the IOCB during the fall of 2020. The operation of the Ethical Proxy will be evaluated at the end of 2021 and again at the end of 2022.</p>	<p>Q4/2025, Q4/2027</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All employees of the institute (scientific, technical, and administrative) have at their disposal elected representatives with whom they can discuss possible work disagreements and problems.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Internal statistics on the number and data of cases handled by the Ethical Proxies will be created while strictly maintaining the anonymity of complainants.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p>	<p><b>Performance of Ethical Proxies has been monitored. Anonymized statistics were collected from them, feedback from employees was received through a survey. There are around 25 cases handled by the proxies, 82.1 % of employees are aware of their activity. This monitoring will further recur on a biannual basis.</b></p>
<p><b>1.4</b> The internal rules for intellectual property protection and confidentiality of information will be translated into English.</p>	<p>Q4/2020</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All researchers will be introduced to innovative providers for the publication and application of their results. Each researcher will receive a written version of these rules in Czech and English and, if necessary, will be provided with support from the technology transfer team at IOCBTech.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The English version of internal rules for intellectual property protection and confidentiality will be posted to an internal webpage.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p><b>The rules were published internally via intranet in a directive entitled "Intellectual Property Protection and Confidentiality of Information".</b></p>
<p><b>1.5</b> The method of communication between scientists and administrative departments will be monitored.</p>	<p>Q1/2025</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> Internal recommendations for managing communication between administration and scientists in the form of a manual of internal procedures for various common life and work situations (for example, when going on an internship or, conversely, the arrival of trainees, for expectant mothers, for parents of small children, for collecting benefits).</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Improving the processes of official communication in everyday work and life situations.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p>	<p><b>In 2020 and again in 2023, surveys investigating overall employee satisfaction were conducted. In addition, there is an annual Assembly of IOCB Employees in place with an opportunity for anyone to voice their concerns. Also, all meeting minutes from the IOCB Board meetings and monthly group leaders' meetings are available on intranet. In 2023, many organizational changes were achieved. Notably, a Strategic Development department had been established that later administered an internal communication survey.</b></p>
<p><b>1.6</b> Regular meetings of researchers and administration representatives will be convened to address various issues.</p>	<p>Q3/2023</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> By the end of first assessment period, a communication platform will be fully established to improve communication between different administrative departments and scientists with the aim of sharing information and operationally addressing different situations.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p><b>The existing meeting opportunities for both administrators and researchers (e.g., biannual IOCB Retreat, annual Assembly of IOCB Employees, monthly group leader meetings, and weekly IOCB management meetings) are being developed into communication hubs. A</b></p>

		<p><b>Indicator:</b> Number of meetings held (minimum 4 per year).</p>		<p>new discussion platform, called “HR Award Roundtables”, was introduced in Q3/2023 by the newly established Research Support office. It brings administrative and scientific representatives together to exchange opinions on persisting interdepartmental issues. It is organized once every 1-2 months.</p>
<p><b>1.7</b> Special training in research ethics issues will be offered to young researchers.</p>	<p>Q2/2023</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All researchers will have free access to courses in scientific ethics and scientific writing.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Improving the qualifications of researchers (especially R1 and R2 stages) by developing their soft skills primarily with regard to writing scientific texts (papers, proposals). Statistics on the number of researchers who have taken courses in scientific ethics, scientific writing, or other courses with similar content will be compiled.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>All IOCB researchers have access to the “Course of Academic Work Basics”, organized by CAS. It includes lectures on ethics and writing. However, it is mainly in Czech. In 2023, two native English speaker editors were appointed to help researchers with written text; the scientific editors joined the newly established Research Support office. English lectures on research ethics and writing are in preparation.</p>
<p><b>1.8</b> The internal regulations in Occupational Health and Safety will be reviewed and translated into English.</p>	<p>Q1/2023</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All employees are regularly trained in occupational safety by their managers. They will now be provided with support in the form of simple written basicrules available online in Czech and English.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The reviewed regulations in Occupational Health and Safety will be posted on the website (both in English and Czech).</p>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>The newly established Strategic Development department had assessed the whole system of OHS training and commissioned development of an e-learning platform (both in Czech and English) allowing employees to complete the mandatory training online. The module has recently been extended to specialized safety trainings.</p>
<p><b>1.9</b> The internal rules for expectant mothers will be prepared.</p>	<p>Q2/2026</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All employees will have access to documents that make it easier for expectant mothers to navigate relevant legislation and understand their rights and obligations in this situation in relation to their employer.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The rules for expectant mothers will be posted on the internal website.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>In early 2022, a simple guide on “How to tackle the setting of maternity and parental leave with employees and without too much trouble” was published online both in Czech and English. The guide is planned to be developed in a greater detail in the future.</p>

<p><b>1.10</b> The system of the internal evaluation (attestation) of researchers will be reviewed and innovated.</p>	<p>Q4/2027</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All employees will be acquainted with an overview of regular career attestations that take place at the institute.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The reviewed rules for internal evaluation (so called attestation) will be posted on the internal website.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p>	<p><b>All scientific employees must be evaluated in the process of attestation on every contract renewal (based on a directive from Czech Academy of Sciences). To solve the issue, the plan is to formulate an internal directive reducing the excessive number of attestations. The group leaders have proposed that all employees due for attestation without change in their career stage should be evaluated <i>en bloc</i> (a list of employees would be signed by the committee instead of individual documents). However, a general system of employee evaluation will be considered, see Action 1.15 below.</b></p>
<p><b>2. Recruitment</b></p>				
<p><b>2.1</b> The internal regulation for Hiring University Graduates for research departments will be reviewed.</p>	<p>Q2/2027</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All potential job seekers at the IOCB will have a simple guide, issued in Czech and English, on how to apply for a job. This should lower the administrative barrier for new candidates for various positions.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The updated document will be made available on the internal website.</p>	<p><b>Extended</b></p>	<p><b>The process of hiring university graduates is based on Article 51 of the “Statutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences”. At the institute, there are many internal rules, some of them based on a customary practice, which are now being investigated and described in order to produce a recruitment manual (See Action 2.8 below). The information has already been partially available online on <a href="https://www.uochb.cz/en/study-and-career">https://www.uochb.cz/en/study-and-career</a>. To facilitate the recruitment of new PhD students, a PhD Interview Day was established. Calls for applications are published on the IOCB website and additionally cross-posted and advertised via different channels (social media and networking sites, posters, and career sites). The preselected applicants are invited to the PhD Interview Day, where they are further tested and interviewed. Then, the successful candidates receive</b></p>



				a conditional offer to join designated scientific groups, subject to passing an entrance exam to a university PhD program. More about PhD admissions on <a href="https://www.uochb.cz/en/how-and-when-to-apply">https://www.uochb.cz/en/how-and-when-to-apply</a> . Similarly, there is a well-described procedure for applicants interested in IOCB postdoc fellowships on <a href="https://www.uochb.cz/en/iocb-fellowships">https://www.uochb.cz/en/iocb-fellowships</a> . The proposed job seekers' guide will be developed as a part of the recruitment manual (2.8).
<b>2.2</b> The full support documentation for recruitment process will be available electronically.	Q3/2024	<p><b>Target:</b> All documents and templates for job seekers will be easily accessible in a uniform format from a single location.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Full support documentation for the recruitment process will be available electronically.</p>	Ongoing	<p>Two internal forms have been proposed for digitization: "A proposal concerning the filling of a vacancy in a research or research-service group with a university graduate" and "The minutes of the selection committee's meeting concerning the filling of a vacancy in a research or research-service group with a university graduate". The digitization possibilities of and the potential benefit of the above-mentioned documents in a digital form are under review. A working group on document digitization and integration into internal electronic systems has been established.</p>
<b>2.3</b> The rules for publishing job openings on different recruitment platforms will be unified.	Q1/2024	<p><b>Target:</b> All group leaders announcing job openings will have a template available for the preparation of advertisements.</p> <p>The aim is to simplify and clarify the administration of creating advertisements while maintaining their maximum information potential with an emphasis on the complete openness of all positions.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Creating a template for listing an advertisement for an opening.</p>	Ongoing	The template is currently in progress in collaboration between HR and Communication departments.

<p><b>2.4</b> The documentation used in selection will be revised, taking into account previous experience from selections for various types of positions.</p>	<p>Q2/2027</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All members of the selection boards will be provided with detailed documentation on the selection process in order to maintain its maximum openness and transparency.</p> <p>The documentation will also include instructions from the commission on the rules of the OTM-R policy.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The new documentation will be made available to selection committees (both in Czech and English).</p>	<p><b>Extended</b></p>	<p>The selection process is currently not documented enough and varies considerably depending on the position. The PhD students are selected at the PhD Interview Day or on a basis of a decision from a group leader. Junior researchers and postdocs are selected by group leaders individually. Group leaders are selected by the director on the recommendation of the International Advisory Board. A selection committee for administrative positions is appointed by the director and approved at a management meeting. It is essential for the director and IOCB Board to address the issue and develop a strategy leading to a unified selection process documentation. It will be necessary to establish a working group for this purpose, see Action 2.10 below.</p>
<p><b>2.5</b> Feedback will be provided to all candidates selected for an interview.</p>	<p>Q4/2021</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All candidates invited for interviews will be informed of the outcome and provided with feedback.</p> <p><b>Indicators:</b> The number of interviewed candidates, both accepted and rejected, will be analyzed by the HR department. Amount of feedback provided by the HR department.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p>Every job advertisement contains a clause "If you do not hear from us within 3 weeks, we have decided to proceed with another candidate." The candidates unsuccessful later in the selection process are given feedback either personally or in a phone call/e-mail. The number of interviewed candidates is not collected internally, the HR department has a record of only a portion of them. This will be solved in a separate action (See Action 2.10 below).</p>
<p><b>2.6</b> Comments arising from the postdoc platform will be recorded and provided to the institute's management as feedback.</p>	<p>Q3/2024</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> The frequency of feedback from researchers in the early stages of their careers (R1 and R2) to institute management will be increased.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Feedback from the postdoc platform will be included in the strategy of the institute.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p>	<p>A postdoc platform called "IOCB Postdoc Club" suspended its activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Q3/2023, the regular postdoc gatherings resumed; the feedback will be collected accordingly throughout the year.</p>

**3. Working conditions and social security**

<p><b>3.1</b> The new Wage Regulation was released during 2020. It will be fine-tuned in 2021.</p>	<p>Q1/2022</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> By the end of 2021, conclusions will be reached on the monitoring of the new Wage Regulation.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The amount of feedback from laboratory managers and employees gained through discussion in open forums (regular meetings with group leaders and staff meetings).</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p>	<p>A major revision of the internal payroll scheme was carried out during the first half of 2020. The purpose of this revision was to reflect on the legislative changes related to the minimum and guaranteed wage, and to update the list of positions at IOCB. This effort was transitioned into the Internal Payroll Directive effective as of July 2020. In March 2022, following a long-standing trade union's efforts to increase the wages at IOCB, an updated version of an internal payroll directive was published. By this directive, each wage rate was increased by a fixed amount of CZK 2,800. In 2022, in response to the outstanding inflation rate in the Czech Republic, the trade union representatives in cooperation with IOCB management agreed on a one-off increase by 15% of all the tariff wage rates. This increase became effective as of January 1, 2023, through the internal directive No. S2022-08 Internal Payroll Directive.</p>
<p><b>3.2</b> The simple overview of labor rules and policies will be summarized in a Welcome Pack for new employees.</p>	<p>Q3/2026</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> All new employees will obtain a Welcome Pack, the aim of which is to simplify and automate the administrative process when hiring new employees with regard to their cultural diversity.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The Welcome Pack for new employees will be available on websites.</p>	<p><b>Extended</b></p>	<p>The Welcome Pack is partially available as an unpublished Word document in various permutations (for PhD students, postdocs, etc.). A thorough revision is planned, which is intended to lead to issuing a complex onboarding brochure (for both online and printed publication). See Action 3.8 below.</p>
<p><b>3.3</b> Women will be encouraged to apply for decision-making positions.</p>	<p>Q4/2024</p>	<p><b>Target:</b> The number of women in decision-making positions will be gradually increased. For each position, in the event of a match in the profile of the candidates, a female candidate will be given priority in the selection procedure.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The number of women in decision-making positions will be increased.</p>	<p><b>Ongoing</b></p>	<p>Activities supporting women have recently become more abundant. The Equal Opportunities Plan (See Action 3.4 below) has introduced many ideas reinforcing women's position. More women are encouraged to apply for awards and IOCB Prague fellowships. Additionally, a visibility of female</p>

		The number of women in senior scientific positions and in the management of the institute will be increased by 10 % by the end of 2022.		<p>researchers has been strongly emphasized and pursued. Success stories of early career and senior female researchers from the IOCB have been widely publicized both internally on signage boards for the benefit of IOCB employees as well as externally on Twitter, LinkedIn, and public IOCB website. Following the COVID-19-enforced pause in activities, the Women in Science initiative has relaunched the seminar series of career talks with invited female speakers to present a variety of different career opportunities to early career researchers. Additionally, two women in group leader positions had their evaluation timetable adjusted taking into account their parenting duties. The deadline for their regular scientific group evaluation was extended in their case by 1.5 years in order to minimize the impact of increased family needs on their career. However, the announced 10 % increment has still not been met.</p>
3.4 A Gender Equality Plan will be prepared.	Q2/2022	<p><b>Target:</b> A strategic plan on how to further increase equal opportunities and diversity will be prepared.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> A gender equality plan will be drafted and published.</p>	Completed	<p>The Gender Equality Plan, called “Equal Opportunities Plan”, was published on <a href="https://www.uochb.cz/en/equal-opportunities">https://www.uochb.cz/en/equal-opportunities</a>. It states in the beginning: “The Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the CAS (IOCB Prague) is committed to providing a positive working environment for all employees regardless of their nationality, gender, ethnicity, or disability status. These principles have been formalized within this Equal Opportunities Plan.”</p> <p>In addition, a monitoring report is published annually with updated milestones and targets. The public</p>

				website offers comprehensive information including reports on activities.
<b>3.5</b> Rules for short-term and long-term mobility will be introduced.	Q2/2024	<p><b>Target:</b> All employees and trainees will have easy access to rules for different types of short-term and long-term scientific internships. The focus is on Erasmus-type internships and the IOCB's own summer student program.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Rules for short-term and long-term mobility will be prepared and published.</p>	Ongoing	As mobility is an important, desirable, and integral part of scientific work, careful attention has been given to formulating mobility regulations at IOCB. Nonetheless, due to varying circumstances in specific cases, assessments are often required on an individual basis, considering both the scientific interest of the employee and IOCB. In general, scientific stays abroad can be organized either as a business trip, study leave, or a temporary relocation from the usual place of work. An internal document has been created, although it is yet to be uploaded to the intranet.
<b>3.6</b> A career advice system for young researchers will be adopted.	Q1/2025	<p><b>Target:</b> All researchers in R1 and R2 positions will have access to a career program that will give them an overview of the possibilities for further career growth, including assistance in applying for various types of study stays and scholarship programs.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> A number of supported international mobility projects for researchers at different stages of their careers.</p>	Extended	A new series of career workshops was introduced in response to a PhD initiative. A positive assistance with career support was also provided by the IOCB Prague's initiative Women in Science. The initiative celebrates the achievements of female scientists and encourages employees (especially early career researchers) to take inspiration from them in an informal setting. This typically involves asking female guest speakers from the IOCB Invited Lectures series to conduct an afternoon seminar in addition to their morning presentation to talk about their career path and personal experience with maintaining family-successful career balance. The events are open both to women and men, with and without children, and all

				the participants are encouraged to take part in these discussions. A career advice system, inspired by these workshops and lectures, will be gradually drafted.
<b>3.7</b> The election procedure for all decision-making bodies will take place electronically.	Q3/2021	<b>Target:</b> All employees will have access to an electronic voting system. <b>Indicator:</b> The number of elections that will take place on an electronic basis.	<b>Completed</b>	<b>An internal directive “The Election Procedure for the Board”, published on 21 October 2021, permits the possibility of voting electronically:</b> “Article 10. i) If necessary, elections may be held electronically using appropriate technology to ensure secrecy.” In fact, the second round of elections for the IOCB Board, held in November 2021, took place electronically. Likewise, the elections for the Academic Assembly of the CAS, held in October 2022, were organized remotely.
<b>4. Training</b>				
<b>4.1</b> An interactive first aid training course will be implemented.	Q2/2022	<b>Target:</b> The aim is to train all staff in first aid in a modern way that will increase the readiness of staff for possible critical situations at work and beyond. <b>Indicator:</b> An interactive first aid training program will be carried out (if possible due to the SARS-CoV2 situation).	<b>Completed</b>	Following a demand survey from March 2022, eighteen runs (July, August, and December 2022, August 2023) of the first aid course have already been organized, both in Czech and English. The course has received very positive feedback for being highly informative and practical (authentic practice of rescue methods). The courses are expected to be held regularly twice a year.
<b>4.2</b> The possibilities of an online occupational safety training program in Czech and English will be tested.	Q1/2023	<b>Target:</b> All employees will have access to regular online safety training. <b>Indicator:</b> An occupational safety training program will be available online.	<b>Completed</b>	See Action 1.8 above
<b>4.3</b> A special website will be set up with an interactive list of training courses.	Q2/2025	<b>Target:</b> All employees will have access to a selection of online courses to enhance the continued training of the institute’s staff. <b>Indicator:</b> Access to a clear and filtrable selection of	<b>Ongoing</b>	Following an extensive audit of research service groups, a new section on the intranet was built to streamline all the specialized technical courses

		courses on the institute's intranet.		provided by the service groups. Legally obligatory courses, such as OHS training or training of drivers, are now implemented in the internal electronic system. Otherwise, information on available courses is still rather fragmented. Some courses are advertised through noticeboard, while other courses are advertised via emails only. Gathering all courses in one place has proven to be rather challenging thus far; however, it remains the objective.
<b>4.4</b> Evaluation of experiences from informal mentoring program and an increase of mentoring of junior group leaders will be implemented.	12/2022	<b>Target:</b> Availability of a mentoring program for all group leaders, especially for young beginning leaders. <b>Indicator:</b> Organization of a mentoring workshop.	<b>Completed</b>	In May 2022, the IOCB management organized a lab leadership course, provided by EMBO Solutions, for junior group leaders and recently promoted senior group leaders. In early 2023, there was a lecture on science communication and a professional development workshop aimed at group leaders. Furthermore, a list of mentors available to interested junior group leaders is published on the internal website. A question on the mentoring scheme was featured in the 2023 Employee Satisfaction Survey.
<b>4.5</b> The management course will be organized and evaluated.	12/2022	<b>Target:</b> All group leaders will have access to continued training of managers in the area of human resources management. <b>Indicator:</b> The number of courses and number of participants in the management course (if possible due to the SARS-CoV2 situation).	<b>Completed</b>	In 2023, a series of demand-identification workshops and follow-up management courses were launched. Overall, 4 rounds of sessions were attended not only by group leaders, but also by administrative department heads. In total, around 30 managers participated.





## 3.2 New Actions

Proposed actions	Gap principle(s)	Timing	Responsible unit	Indicator(s) / Target(s)
<b>1. Ethical and professional aspects</b>				
<b>1.11</b> E-learning on professional ethics as a part of the onboarding procedure	2, 3, 10, 24, 37	Q1/2025	Strategic Development department, Electronic Information System department	<p><b>Target:</b> Implement e-learning module on professional ethics, similar to the one in use for OHS training (see Action 1.8), to an onboarding scheme. All new employees will have to complete the e-learning on both OHS and professional ethics as part of their onboarding process.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Information about completing the e-learning should be transferred into user's profile in the internal electronic information system.</p>
<b>1.12</b> Participation in the working committee for appointing an ombudsperson at CAS	2, 10, 24, 27, 34, 35	Q4/2024	Scientific coordinator, Appointed representative	<p><b>Target:</b> Participate in the preparatory stage of appointing an ombudsperson, intended to function for all institutes under the umbrella of Czech Academy of Sciences. The working committee has been established in Q2/2023 and is attended by one of our group leaders, who shares updates about the process development.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Official announcement of the appointment of the ombudsperson and the launch of related services.</p>
<b>1.13</b> Methodology for prevention of gender-based violence	2, 10, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 34, 36, 37, 40	Q2/2024	Scientific coordinator	<p><b>Target:</b> Establish a comprehensive methodology and guidelines for preventing gender-based violence, ensuring a safe working environment. The cooperation on this matter has been started with the Czech national contact center (NKC) for Gender and Science and the non-profit organization Konsent, offering education about sex and sexual violence. NKC Gender and Science is currently conducting a thorough survey about gender-based violence in academia.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Publication and dissemination of the methodology and guidelines, and subsequent workshops or training sessions held to ensure understanding and implementation.</p>
<b>1.14</b> Research Data Management, Data Steward position	3, 4, 6, 7, 8	Q4/2025	RDM Working Group, IOCB Board, Data Steward	<p><b>Target:</b> Efforts to introduce a well-defined research data management (RDM) system are in place, with an ongoing recruitment process for Data Steward position. RDM Working Group was established by one of our senior group leaders in Q2/2023. General RDM training, electronic laboratory notebooks and Data Management trainings are planned in Q4/2023.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> RDM best practices compatible software, tools and guidelines available</p>

				for all researchers and integrated into the overall research workflow.
<b>1.15</b> Analyzing options for a general Employee Evaluation System	9, 11, 26, 32, 33, 37, 38, 39	Q1/2027	IOCB Director, IOCB Board, HR department, Research Support office	<p><b>Target:</b> Searching for inspiration within other CAS institutes which have successfully implemented some form of employee evaluation. This analysis will ideally precede another step of developing and implementing a robust and transparent employee evaluation system that would be acknowledged and adhered to by all departments.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> The results of the analysis will serve as arguments for negotiations towards an agreement on the employee evaluation system scheme, acceptable for the whole institute.</p>
<b>2. Recruitment</b>				
<b>2.7</b> New strategies enhancing the attractiveness of IOCB to attract PhD candidates	9, 12, 13	Q3/2024	Research Support Office	<p><b>Target:</b> Successfully implement at least three new strategies that enhance the visibility and appeal of IOCB for prospective PhD candidates, while engaging researchers in the marketing process. The proposals from the “HR Award Roundtable” (see Action 1.6 above) dedicated to the PhD program included: presence at higher education fairs, direct collaboration with partner universities, spreading references through former students, targeting selected countries, creating dedicated website content with both written and audiovisual testimonials.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Create a simple infographic describing the new strategies to researchers. Increase in the number of PhD applications compared to the previous year. Collect feedback from applicants acknowledging the new strategies.</p>
<b>2.8</b> Preparations towards a comprehensive Recruitment Procedure Manual (OTM-R)	12, 13, 15, 21	Q2/2027	HR department, Research Support office	<p><b>Target:</b> Investigate and describe current recruitment practices, together with consolidation of existing materials, leading to a centralized recruitment procedure manual, aligned with OTM-R policy. A dedicated working group will be established, comprising of representatives from the HR department, Communication department, IOCB Board and Research Support office. Together with the manual, a job seeker’s guide (See Action 2.1 above) will be produced to give out concise information on recruitment to any potential job applicant.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Finalize and distribute a comprehensive Recruitment Procedure Manual (OTM-R).</p>

<b>2.9</b> Exploring the possibilities of utilizing more electronic tools for recruitment	10, 12, 13, 15	Q4/2026	Electronic information system department , IT, Research Support Office	<p><b>Target:</b> Explore potential benefits of integrating suitable electronic tools that streamline the recruitment process and enhance the candidate experience. Similarly to the web interface used for PhD applications, these tools can engage more potential applicants .</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Suggestions of appropriate solutions and their testing.</p>
<b>2.10</b> Establishing a working group to coordinate selection process documentation (OTM-R)	14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	Q1/2026	HR department, Research Support office	<p><b>Target:</b> Establish a dedicated working group that will ensure standardization, coordination, and continuous improvement of the selection process documentation, adhering to OTM-R principles. Statistics on selection processes and their outcomes will be collected and centralized.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Selection process manual covering all types of positions.</p>
<b>3. Working conditions and social security</b>				
<b>3.8</b> Setting up a standardized onboarding process	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 31, 32, 36, 37, 40	Q3/2025	HR department, Research Support office	<p><b>Target:</b> Implement a standardized onboarding process that caters to all the identified gap principles, ensuring a seamless integration of new hires into the organization's culture, expectations, and operational procedures.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Feedback scores from new hires about their onboarding experience</p>
<b>3.9</b> Addressing mental health issues, especially among students	24	Q3/2024	English speaking therapist	<p><b>Target:</b> In-house English speaking therapist will have a semi-informal talk with students both to introduce herself and to briefly explain on the most common mental health issues (anxiety, depression, stress overload, burnout).</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Open dialogue meetings with the therapist twice a year.</p>
<b>4. Training</b>				
<b>4.6</b> New system of soft skills trainings organized by the HR department	24, 28, 38, 39, 40	Q2/2024	HR department	<p><b>Target:</b> Roll out a new system of soft skills training that addresses the identified gap principles, fostering a culture of continuous learning and personal development.</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Number of employees enrolled in at least one soft skills training module within a year and feedback from participants.</p>



## 4 Implementation

In 2022, IOCB Prague was subjected to personnel changes, including changes in management; a new director was appointed on 1 June 2022 and a new Scientific Coordinator in September 2022. Many focus group members had left the institute, while some had shifted to different roles or career stages. These changes further challenged the HR Award process, adding to the delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, since September 2022, the HR Award-related activities have been gradually reintroduced. An opening round of individual preliminary discussions with those previously involved in the HR Award process led to the re-establishment of the HR Award focus groups, aiming at resuming the process and outlining how it should proceed in the future. A crucial meeting, attended by the remaining members of all HR Award management bodies, titled “HR Award Restart” was presented on 29 November 2022. The meeting was chaired by the new IOCB director, Prof. Jan Konvalinka, who expressed his full support for the HR Award-associated endeavor and stressed its importance.

The meeting agenda included:

- a) Revised structure of the HR Award management bodies, considering personnel changes in various positions, and introduction of new focus group members
- b) Assessment of the Action Plan progress
- c) Schedule of regular focus groups meetings
- d) Introduction to an HR Award shared folder

At this opportunity, the revised structure of the HR Award management bodies was presented with new members enlisted. The format of four thematic groups (Ethical and Professional Aspects, Recruitment, Working Conditions, and Training) and one Main Working Group (Implementation Committee) was kept with the addition of cross-thematic roundtable meetings. An appeal for new members was also sent to PhD and postdoc mailing lists. A table with focus group members was made available online on the intranet.

A regular meetings schedule for focus groups covered the time frame of the following 6 months. The meetings were organized in two cycles, each consisting of 6 sessions (1 for the Main Focus Group, 4 for the respective focus groups, and 1 for a closing roundtable). Upon agreement, the Scientific Coordinator remained the Main Focus Group chair, while the thematic focus groups appointed their chair from among their members. The roundtable discussions were intended to be open to all institute employees, with external guests invited to share their experience with the process of HR Award Implementation Phase. The first cycle of meetings was planned to start in January 2023.

An HR Award shared folder has been created in OwnCloud system and the members of all HR Award management bodies have access to the folder. It contains the HR Award application documents and HR Award Restart meeting presentation. Consequently, all related documents, such as meeting agenda, meeting minutes, drafts of internal reviews, and Action Plan revisions, are being uploaded.

In a strategic outline introduced in the document “IOCB Goals & Organization 2021–2025” the HRS4R process is described as follows:

*In 2020, IOCB joined the EU program “HR Excellence in Research Award”, thus explicitly endorsing the European Charter & Code for Researchers. In practical terms, this means reviewing scientific conduct, hiring, and career development procedures at IOCB such that they comply with the highest EU standards. As a result of this joint effort, two respected scientists were elected as ethical proxies for mediating potential work-related conflicts between IOCB employees, and an Ethical Committee is being established at IOCB.*

The focus group meetings progressed as intended except for the roundtable meetings, commencing later. The first HR Award Roundtable took place on 13 October 2023 covering the topic of PhD programs. Alongside the Research Support office, organizing the event, many group leaders, representatives of HR, Communication department, and Project office attended and proactively contributed to the discussion.

During the meeting sessions, the Action Plan objectives were regularly organized according to their feasibility and complexity depending on their nature and in relation to current circumstances, and responsible professional units or individuals were assigned with particular tasks to ensure adherence to the Action Plan. Concurrently, the progress of the Action Plan was consistently evaluated. Observations collected throughout the meeting sessions were regularly documented in meeting minutes and subsequently refined in an internal monitoring report (finalized in June 2023). The internal monitoring report

laid the foundation for this Interim Assessment internal review report.

Importantly, the new points integral to the updated version of the Action Plan were introduced to address several critical areas, namely, sexual harassment prevention methodology (1.13), visibility (2.7), onboarding procedure (3.8), psychological counselling (3.9), and an expanded curriculum for soft skills trainings (4.6). Strategic trends set by the leadership and the ideas expressed at the focus groups facilitated the new program points formulation.

In October 2023, an employee satisfaction survey was conducted to provide another valuable source of information to enhance the quality of the internal review report. The questionnaire was a follow-up to a survey distributed by the Labor Union in April 2021. Although questions in the survey were considerably adapted to enhance its applicability to HRS4R agenda, there was still some overlap enabling comparison. Specifically, 42.3 % of employees selected “definitely yes” option in response to their job satisfaction, which is 4.7 % more than previously. Also, 21.1 % answered “definitely yes” to whether they felt adequately paid for their work. That indicates a significant increase of 12.4 % compared to the last survey. Furthermore, 53.9 % of employees answered they had opportunities for professional development, manifesting a 7.6 % increase from the last survey. In the current survey, questions directly about HR Award were included for the first time. Finally, the results indicate 49.7 % of employees are aware of IOCB receiving the HR Award, but only 19.6 % noticed HR Award-related improvements. About one third of the total number of employees participated, similarly to the last survey. In the future, we are determined to continue with similar surveys on a bi-annual basis to gather more feedback and identify blind spots (such as awareness about HR Award-related achievements).

<b>How have you prepared for the internal review?</b>	<p>To prepare for the internal review, IOCB undertook several interconnected steps. Following the employment of the new Scientific Coordinator in 2022, a comprehensive familiarization process was initiated. This involved studying materials from the EURAXESS website and participating in online lectures to gain a deep understanding of the HRS4R process. The Scientific Coordinator began individually consulting every department involved in the process (Project office, Communications, HR, IT) Relationships with HR Award Coordinators from other institutions were re-established. Networking also took place in various HRS4R-related conferences and seminars (ENOHE conference, visit of Mary Kate O’Regan to the Czech Republic). In November 2022 (a year before the submission date), a meeting attended by the director, Board members, group leaders, and other members of focus groups, was held to outline the proposed timeline of an internal review compilation. Consequently, meetings of focus groups and Implementation Committee (main focus group) resumed according to the outlined schedule. These meetings served as platforms for collecting essential input and insights from relevant stakeholders. The information collected throughout the meetings was used for drafting an internal monitoring report, assessing the progress on the Action Plan. All related documents (Gap Analysis, OTM-R Checklist, Action Plan, monitoring report, presentations, and meeting minutes) were made accessible to employees using cloud folder. Apart from the above-mentioned meetings, regular meetings with the Vice-Director for Research and the PhD Program Coordinator were instated, as well as consultations with the Equal Opportunities officer, Ethical Proxies, the Strategy Development officer, and others. An employee satisfaction survey was launched in October 2023 with the aim of collecting data for comparison with the survey conducted in April 2021. During the final stages of the internal review, the Scientific Coordinator organized and edited the available content and data, preparing them for inclusion in the e-tool and in documents to be published on the IOCB website. This comprehensive preparation ensured that the internal review process was thorough, transparent, and aligned with the HRS4R standards.</p>
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<p><b>How have you involved the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?</b></p>	<p>We organized formal meetings and engaged in informal discussions to ensure a wide reach. The Scientific Coordinator consistently attends the monthly group leaders meetings to provide updates on the HR Award agenda. A concise summary about HRS4R was featured in the director’s presentation during the 2022 Assembly of Employees. The IOCB Board took an active part in the process of compiling the Code of Ethics and establishing the Ethical Committee. From within the research community itself, the initiative to establish a focus group for Research Data Management originated from a senior group leader, illustrating a self-motivated approach to policy development. Also, the researchers constitute around two-thirds of the focus groups members. Furthermore, the establishment of HR Award Roundtables created a forum for cross-departmental dialogue, engaging both administrative departments and group leaders. This collaborative platform has facilitated the exchange of ideas and experiences, ensuring that a broad spectrum of perspectives was considered in the implementation process.</p>
<p><b>Do you have an implementation committee and/or steering group regularly overseeing progress?</b></p>	<p>As described in section 4, meetings of the Implementation Committee were held according to the suggested schedule. The Scientific Coordinator was informing the IOCB Board (Steering Committee) consistently about the progress. In addition, consultations with the director were undertaken to tackle more complex issues in the process flow. For the next round of focus group meetings, it was proposed that the chairs of respective focus groups attend the Implementation Committee sessions to report on developments in their focus area. This should strengthen the cohesion between reporting and monitoring activities.</p>
<p><b>Is there any alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? For example, is the HRS4R recognized in the organisation’s research strategy, overarching HR policy</b></p>	<p>The alignment between IOCB's organizational policies and the HRS4R is explicitly recognized in our strategic planning. The significance of implementing the HRS4R has been emphasized in the “IOCB Goals &amp; Organization 2021–2025” document, which outlines our strategic objectives for five years. As mentioned in section 2, there is the expectation to align the HR Award Action Plan with the broader organizational strategic plan, which is in preparation by the Strategic Development department. To achieve this, there is a collaborative effort between the Strategic Development department and the Scientific Coordinator to synchronize their efforts in the HR strategy area.</p>
<p><b>How has your organisation ensured that the proposed actions would be also implemented?</b></p>	<p>IOCB has ensured the implementation of proposed actions through a structured and committed approach. A comprehensive Action Plan was compiled, detailing objectives for each proposed action. Stakeholder engagement was a critical component. By involving researchers, administrative staff, and leadership in the planning stages, IOCB guaranteed that the proposed actions had broad consensus and were aligned with the needs and goals of the various groups within the institution. To track progress, IOCB established regular monitoring through the Implementation Committee. This committee, comprised of representatives from across the organization, meets periodically to review the status of each action, address potential obstacles, and make necessary adjustments to the plan. The director and the Board have demonstrated strong support for the HRS4R process, ensuring that HR strategy remains a priority and is integrated into the overall strategic objectives of IOCB.</p>

<p><b>How are you monitoring progress (timeline)?</b></p>	<p>Regular reviews of the Action Plan are conducted to assess the percentage of completed actions. These reviews also ensure that actions are being completed on schedule. In cases where potential delays are identified, proactive steps are taken to understand the root causes, and implement contingency plans to mitigate any impact on the timeline. At the same time, employee satisfaction surveys present a useful tool for our monitoring strategy. The outcomes of the surveys conducted in April 2021 and October 2023 were compared to identify trends, improvements, or areas that require additional attention. The results of this comparison are presented above (see section 4), offering a transparent overview of our progress in selected aspects.</p>
<p><b>How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment?</b></p>	<p>The completion and utilization rates of relevant documents and manuals will be tracked to ensure that they are not only available but also being actively used. The quality of our HR processes (recruitment, onboarding) will be assessed through direct feedback from newly hired employees. The key HR metrics will be closely monitored, including turnover rates, employee tenure, and promotion rates. This statistical data will provide insight into the efficacy of implemented strategies. A centralized sheet will capture main figures such as the number of open positions, advertising channels used, the volume of applicants, interviewees, job offers made, and new hires. These figures will serve as performance indicators for our recruitment processes. Additionally, anonymized questionnaires will be distributed as part of training session feedback to assess the quality and impact of professional development opportunities offered to staff. Future surveys slated for 2025 and 2027 will enable us to measure changes in employee satisfaction over time. These surveys will serve as critical indicators of the long-term impact of our HR initiatives.</p>
<p><b>How do you expect to prepare for the external review?</b></p>	<p>We will further promote awareness of the HR Award agenda by highlighting successful achievements that exemplify the benefits and impact of our HR Award initiatives. Regular updates will be disseminated through our internal communication channels to ensure that all employees of the organization understand the value and progress of the HR Award implementation. We will continue to foster collaboration through various focus group schemes. By promoting active participation and enhancing our existing discussion platforms, such as the HR Award Roundtables, we aim to engage a wider range of stakeholders in the process, facilitating a collective approach to the continuous improvement of our HR strategies. Efforts will be made to further appeal to students by integrating HR Award objectives with student initiatives like the PhD Science Club and the IOCB Postdoc Club. These platforms will be utilized to engage our younger academic community, encouraging their input and participation in the HR Award processes. We also plan to strengthen the connection between the HR Award and the Women in Science initiative, aligning efforts to promote an inclusive environment that is supportive of all members, regardless of gender. To foster a positive reception of the cultural changes associated with the HR Award, we would like to organize dedicated events, such as team buildings and sports meetings. These events are intended to not only promote the well-being of employees but also to serve as platforms for spreading awareness and understanding of the HR Award</p>

	<p>agenda. Lastly, we plan to expand on our networking activities and draw inspiration from other institutions that have undergone similar reviews. By learning from their experience and best practices, we can refine our own processes and ensure IOCB to be in the state of preparedness that will facilitate a successful external review.</p>
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