

## TEMPLATE 4: ACTION PLAN

Case number: 2022BG765736

Name Organisation under review: **Roumen Tsanev Institute of Molecular Biology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences**

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### 1. ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

*Please provide a limited number of key figures for your organisation. Figures marked \* are compulsory.*

| <b>STAFF &amp; STUDENTS</b>   | <b>FTE</b>            |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>Total researchers = staff, fellowship holders, bursary holders, PhD. students either full-time or part-time involved in research</i>               | 51                    |
| <i>Of whom are international (i.e. foreign nationality)</i>   | 2                     |
| <i>Of whom are externally funded (i.e. for whom the organisation is host organisation)</i>  | 1 full<br>7 partially |
| <i>Of whom are women</i>  | 34                    |
| <i>Of whom are stage R3 or R4 = Researchers with a large degree of autonomy, typically holding the status of Principal Investigator or Professor.</i> | 18                    |

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|--|---------|
| <i>Of whom are stage R2 = in most organisations corresponding with postdoctoral level</i>  | 20      |
| <i>Of whom are stage R1 = in most organisations corresponding with doctoral level</i>  | 28      |
| <i>Total number of students (if relevant)</i>  | 15      |
| <i>Total number of staff (including management, administrative, teaching and research staff)</i>   | 103     |
| <b>RESEARCH FUNDING (figures for most recent fiscal year)</b>  | €       |
| <i>Total annual organisational budget</i>  | 5890200 |
| <i>Annual organisational direct government funding (designated for research)</i>   | 2649400 |
| <i>Annual competitive government-sourced funding (designated for research, obtained in competition with other organisations – including EU funding)</i>  | 5000000 |
| <i>Annual funding from private, non-government sources, designated for research</i>  |         |
| <b>ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE (a very brief description of your organisation, max. 100 words)</b>  |         |
| <p><i>IMB is the leading research institution in molecular and cellular biology in Bulgaria. The institute was founded in 1960 and, since its beginning, has been an institution with a vibrant scientific environment and researchers striving to be at the forefront of current trends in life sciences. The mean age of its staff is 35 - the youngest in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - indicating that IMB, as it has always been, is attractive to young people as a place for work and career development. The IMB offers a wide range of core facilities including imaging, flow cytometry, next-generation sequencing and mass spectrometry.</i></p> |         |

## 2. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT PRACTICE:

Please provide an overview of the organisation in terms of the current strengths and weaknesses of the current practice under the four thematic headings of the Charter and Code at your organization.

| Thematic heading of the Charter and Code | STRENGTHS and WEAKNESSES  |
|--|---|
| Ethical and professional aspects         | <p>At IMB, a robust framework of internal regulations governs ethical and professional conduct and nondiscrimination reflecting our commitment to upholding the highest standards. Our researchers undergo comprehensive evaluation, assessing their scientific contributions and engagement in applied science, teaching, organisational endeavours, and expert activities. While we have established strong foundations, we continuously strive for enhancement, particularly in areas such as professional responsibility and attitude, good practice in research, dissemination, exploration of results, and public engagement and evaluation systems.</p>  |
| Recruitment and selection                | <p>At IMB, the recruitment and selection procedures are meticulously governed by internal regulations, ensuring equity and non-discrimination among applicants. These procedures adhere closely to national and institutional legal frameworks, guaranteeing a fair and transparent process. Initial eligibility screening is conducted by a technical committee, followed by an assessment of scientific merit by a specialised jury. Their evaluations are then presented to the Scientific Council, which casts secret ballots to finalize candidate selections.</p> <p>For Associate Professor and Full Professor positions, transparency is paramount, with clearly defined evaluation criteria corresponding to Bulgarian rulers for career and academic development. Each candidate undergoes thorough evaluation by an appointed committee, resulting in detailed assessments of their professional merit, published in both Bulgarian and English on the institute's website.</p> <p>Similarly, the selection process for the assistant and assistant professor follows internal regulations with explicit guidelines. While evaluations by the jury are rigorous, they are not publicly available, ensuring confidentiality in the decision-making process.</p> <p>While the institute announces vacancies on its website and in the State Gazette, not all postings include English translations. To improve accessibility and attract a diverse pool of applicants, they will be published on IMB's English version of the website and international platforms like Euraxess.</p> |

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|                    | <p>Enhancing the recruitment process entails implementing standardized templates outlining required documents and submission procedures. This would streamline the application process, particularly for foreign candidates who may find the current procedure unclear.</p> <p>Additionally, updating the new IMB website with concise information for newcomers regarding application procedures and state requirements for recognizing scientific degrees obtained from foreign universities would further facilitate international applicants' understanding and engagement with the institute.</p>  |
| Working conditions | <p>The governance structure of the Institute of Molecular Biology (IMB) consists of three main bodies: the General Assembly (GA), the Scientific Council (SC), and the Directorship. Membership in the GA is extended to all scientists holding academic positions or possessing scientific degrees, fostering a diverse and inclusive community. Meanwhile, the SC comprises esteemed associate and full professors, ensuring a high level of expertise and leadership within the institute.</p> <p>Despite the institute's commitment to excellence, challenges persist, particularly in attracting and retaining talent due to relatively low salary offerings. This issue not only affects the recruitment of foreign scientists but also impacts the retention of male employees seeking to advance their academic careers within IMB. Addressing this concern is crucial to maintaining a competitive edge in the global scientific community.</p> <p>To counterbalance the salary limitations, IMB offers a range of generous social benefits, including extended vacations and comprehensive maternity leave. This family-friendly workplace environment not only supports the well-being of employees but also makes IMB particularly attractive to women seeking a fulfilling career in science.</p> <p>Furthermore, IMB boasts state-of-the-art facilities and collaborates with top Bulgarian scientists from diverse backgrounds, enhancing its appeal to aspiring young researchers. Notably, the institute's microscopy unit serves as a EuroBioimaging node, further solidifying its reputation as a leader in cutting-edge research.</p> <p>Despite these strengths, some areas require improvement, notably in career guidance and planning within the institute. Establishing structured mentorship programs and professional development opportunities can help nurture talent and facilitate career progression for staff members at all stages of their academic journey.</p> |

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|                                 | <p>Moreover, enhancing mechanisms for addressing complaints and concerns is essential to fostering a supportive and transparent work environment. Implementing a structured process for handling grievances will ensure that issues are promptly and effectively resolved, promoting a culture of accountability and fairness within IMB.</p> <p>Overall, by addressing these areas of improvement and building upon its existing strengths, IMB can continue to thrive as a leading research institution, attracting top talent and making significant contributions to the advancement of science and technology.</p>  |
| <p>Training and development</p> | <p>The institute has implemented comprehensive guidelines for the training of PhD students, ensuring their progress is rigorously evaluated on an annual basis by the Scientific Council (SC). Under the auspices of the Doctoral Programme of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), a wealth of specialized courses is offered, encompassing over 400 distinct modules, including 10 dedicated to IT skills and 3 focused on language acquisition for researchers. Notably, additional courses are made accessible through the ERA Chair project, broadening accessibility, and covering a diverse array of topics critical to contemporary research endeavors. These courses encompass essential subjects such as project management, technology transfer, financial advisory, crafting competitive proposals for EU funding, advanced molecular and cellular methodologies, as well as imparting transferable skills vital for researchers' professional development. Furthermore, ethical considerations in research, insights into innovation, and intellectual property knowledge are also integrated into the curriculum, reflecting the institute's commitment to fostering a holistic understanding of the scientific landscape.</p> <p>Despite these commendable efforts, there remains a noticeable scarcity of post-doctoral scientists within IMB's ranks. Furthermore, the absence of a national or internal framework governing the appointment and training of post-doctoral fellows represents a significant gap in the institute's organizational structure. Rectifying this deficiency by establishing clear guidelines and support mechanisms for post-doctoral training will not only enhance the institute's research capabilities but also provide valuable career development opportunities for emerging scholars, thereby fortifying IMB's position as a hub of scientific excellence within the academic community.</p> |

### 3. ACTIONS

The Action Plan and HRS4R strategy must be published on an easily accessible location of the organisation's website.

Please provide the web link to the organization's HR Strategy dedicated webpage(s):

<https://imb.bas.bg/bg>

Please fill in a sum up list of all individual actions to be undertaken in your organisation's HRS4R to address the weaknesses or strengths identified in the Gap-Analysis:

| <b>Proposed ACTIONS</b>                                    | <b>GAP Principle(s)</b> | <b>Timing (at least by year's quarter/semester)</b> | <b>Responsible Unit</b>                    | <b>Indicator(s) / Target(s)</b>  |
|--|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Stimulation of public engagement of the researchers</b> | Public engagement       | Q2 2024   | Director<br>Scientific Committee (SC)      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A communications board (CB) of the institute will be created.</li> </ul>  |
|  |                         | Permanently   | PR specialist<br>Communications board (CB) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve communication with society IMB will organize regular science lectures (3-4 per year) for the public (high school and university students) and OPEN DOORS DAY once a year./ Number of visitors</li> </ul> |
|  |                         | Q4 2024   | ERA chair project<br>administrator         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IMB will organize workshops in the frame of the ERA chair project to present the results tailored specifically to medical or industry stakeholders as well as policymakers.</li> </ul>                              |
|  |                         | Permanently   | PR specialist<br>System administrator      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The website will be updated. Social media channels will be used to share the latest scientific achievements of the institute./Number of posts</li> </ul>  |

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| <p><b>Increasing competitiveness of the research staff and career development support</b></p> | <p>Career development<br/>Access to career advice<br/>Funding and salaries<br/>Evaluation/ appraisal systems</p> | <p>Q3-Q4 2024<br/>Q1-Q4 2025</p> <p>One seminar/year</p> <p>Q4 2024</p> | <p>ERA chair project administrator</p> <p>Scientific Secretary<br/>HR officer</p> <p>Scientific Council<br/>Attestation committee<br/>System administrator</p> | <p>Training in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project management</li> <li>● Technology transfer</li> <li>● Financial advising</li> <li>● Writing competitive proposals for international funding</li> <li>● Innovations and Intellectual Know how knowledge- courses available through the ERA chair project./Number of participants</li> <li>● <b>Online courses from LinkedIn Learning</b><br/>The institute will cover the participation fee/Number of courses and participants; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Haring of Technology Transfer officer</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Seminars for young scientists dedicated to career development possibilities at the institute.</li> <li>● Establishment of a Permanent Attestation Committee: To facilitate the career development of research staff and ensure fair evaluation, a dedicated Permanent Attestation Committee will be formed. This committee will undertake the responsibility of periodically reviewing and refining the attestation criteria to enhance the evaluation process.</li> <li>● Publication of Attestation Criteria: In a commitment to transparency, the latest version of the attestation card will be readily available for access on the institute's official website. This initiative aims to provide clarity to staff members and stakeholders regarding the criteria utilized for evaluation purposes.</li> <li>● Transparency in Budget Allocation: Criteria governing the allocation of Component 2 of the BAS budget, including bonuses to individual scientists' salaries, will be openly accessible on the institute's website. This measure is designed to promote transparency and accountability in budget allocation processes, fostering trust and confidence among staff and stakeholders alike.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Improvement of the recruitment process</b></p>  | <p>Recruitment<br/>Selection<br/>Transparency</p>  | <p>Q4 2024</p>  | <p>Scientific Council</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revision of the,, Rules for implementation of the law for the development of the academic staff in Bulgaria at IMB ", from 28.01.21 to include some changes related to the transparency of the selection of Research Assistants and Assistant Professors such as obligatory publication of the statements of the selection committee./New updated version of the document</li> </ul>   |

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|  |                                  | <i>Permanently</i> | <i>HR officer</i>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>All advertisements for the free positions will be posted on the website of the institute, and on platforms such as <b>Jobsbg</b> and <b>Euraxess</b> as well as will be shared on social media. They will be created using a standard template and will include all necessary information.</i></li> </ul>                                  |
| <b>Improvement of the research environment</b> | <i>Good practice in research</i> | <i>Q1-Q4 2024</i>  | <i>Director Committee on Working Conditions</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Renovation of laboratories/number of renovated rooms</i></li> <li>• <i>Replacement of old laboratory hoods/number of new hoods</i></li> <li>• <i>Prophylactic medical examinations for each scientist covered by the IMB/number of examined persons</i></li> <li>• <i>Once a year seminar on all safety and security topics</i></li> </ul> |

The establishment of an Open Recruitment Policy is a key element in the HRS4R strategy. Please also indicate how your organisation will use the Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment Toolkit and how you intend to implement/are implementing the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment. Although there may be some overlap with a range of actions listed above, please provide a short commentary demonstrating this implementation. If the case, please make the link between the OTM-R checklist and the overall action plan.

- **Transparent and Inclusive Recruitment Practices:** At IMB-BAS, all job openings are publicly advertised, and the recruitment process strictly adheres to the "Rules for implementation of the law for the development of academic staff in Bulgaria at IMB." These regulations are in alignment with the core principles outlined in the Charter and the Code. Notably, the criteria for eligibility are designed to be inclusive, welcoming applications from individuals of any gender, ethnicity, or religious background who meet the specified requirements.
- **Robust Oversight of Selection Committees:** The appointment of selection committees follows clearly defined protocols to ensure fairness and impartiality throughout the evaluation process. For candidates applying at the R3-R4 level, comprehensive evaluations are meticulously documented and made readily accessible on the institute's website, promoting transparency and accountability in decision-making.
- **Commitment to Enhancing Transparency:** Acknowledging the need for improvement, efforts are underway to enhance transparency in the selection process for R1-R2 researchers. As part of the upcoming Action Plan, revisions to IMB regulations will be proposed to address any existing gaps, aiming to establish clear guidelines that promote consistency and transparency across all levels of research recruitment.



If your organisation already has a recruitment strategy which implements the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment, please provide the web link where this strategy can be found on your organisation's website:

URL: <https://imb.bas.bg/bg>

#### **4. IMPLEMENTATION**

General overview of the expected implementation process:

Once the HRS4R award has been granted, a kick-off meeting with the SC and WG members will be held to organize the next steps for the implementation. In this first meeting Scientific secretary, ERA chair project administrator well as members of the Committee on Working Conditions, Director and Chairman of the Scientific Council will take part as they are directly involved in the implementation process. Later the working group will meet every four months to discuss the progress. The project progress will be monitored via regular project reports that will be reviewed by the SC. Each action will be implemented by the responsible unit indicated above.

Make sure you also cover all the aspects highlighted in the checklist below, which you will need to describe in detail:

| Checklist   | *Detailed description and duly justification  |
|---|---|
| How will the implementation committee and/or steering group regularly oversee progress?   | Working group will meet every four months to discuss the progress. The project progress will be monitored via regular project reports that will be reviewed by the SC.  |
| How do you intend to involve the research community, your main stakeholders, in the implementation process?   | <p>We will organize stakeholder workshop once a year to gather input from researchers on key decisions and implementation plan. This session will provide an opportunity for in-depth discussions, brainstorming, and collaborative problem-solving.</p> <p>Furthermore, we will conduct survey and utilize feedback mechanisms to collect input from a broader range of researchers who may not be able to participate in the workshops. Analysing survey responses can help identify common themes and priorities among stakeholders.</p>   |
| How do you proceed with the alignment of organisational policies with the HRS4R? Make sure the HRS4R is recognized in the organisation's research strategy, as the overarching HR policy. | <p>We have conducted a thorough gap analysis to identify areas where the organization's existing HR policies and practices diverge from the principles outlined in HRS4R. This analysis encompass recruitment, working conditions, career development, training, and other relevant HR domains.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We mapped the organization's existing HR policies and practices to the principles and recommendations outlined in the HRS4R framework. This helped us to identify areas of alignment as well as areas requiring adaptation or enhancement to meet HRS4R standards.</li> <li>2. The principles of HRS4R were recognized and the missing parts will be incorporated into the organization's research strategy.</li> <li>3. We engaged stakeholders, including researchers, HR, senior management, and relevant institutional bodies, in the alignment process. We sought input and feedback from these stakeholders to ensure that their perspectives are considered and that the resulting policies reflect their needs and priorities.</li> <li>4. We will revise the existing HR policies to align with HRS4R principles. These policies would address key areas such as recruitment and selection procedures, career development pathways and performance evaluation.</li> <li>5. We also plan to get a feedback from staff and stakeholders and make periodic improvements to ensure ongoing alignment.</li> </ol> |

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| How will you ensure that the proposed actions are implemented?             | The proposed actions are clearly defined with their timelines and the responsible unit for each of them. The working group will evaluate the effectiveness of implementation process against established objectives help and will prepare reports for the progress.  |
| How will you monitor progress (timeline)?                                  | SC will organize 2 meetings per year to discuss the progress. At the end of each year, SC will prepare a report on the progress that will be presented to the Scientific council of the institute.   |
| How will you measure progress (indicators) in view of the next assessment? | <p>Progress will be measured by the number of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ number of organized courses</li> <li>➤ number of trained employees and their feedbacks</li> <li>➤ number of attracted scientists from abroad</li> <li>➤ number of posts and news published on institute's website and social media accounts</li> <li>➤ organized public events (list of participants and photos)</li> <li>➤ number of scientists performed mobility</li> <li>➤ number advertisements published on international platforms</li> </ul> <p>as well as the overall satisfaction of scientific staff based on yearly questionnaire. All results will be published on the website.</p> |

Additional remarks/comments about the proposed implementation process:

