

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers

“A Human Resources Strategy For Researchers Incorporating The Charter And Code”

Self-Assessment After 2 years

**The Achucarro Basque Center for Neuroscience implementation process
Fourth cohort of the HRS4R**

December 2015

Self-Assessment after 2 years of receiving the *HR Excellence in Research Award*

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0. FOREWORD

Achucarro Basque Center for Neuroscience Fundazioa (hereinafter, ACHUCARRO) is a fundamental and translational research centre centred in the study of the neurobiology of the neuron-glia interactions.

ACHUCARRO is a private foundation established in April 2012, and officially launched in July 2012. From March to July 2013, we underwent the Internal Gap Analysis and the corresponding Action Plan, according to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (HRS4R), to improve our talent recruitment, retaining, development and continuous evaluation, towards a model of maximum satisfaction for all the stakeholders in this process.

After all this process, ACHUCARRO was awarded the “HR Excellence in Research” in September 2013., so according to the implementation of the principles of the HRS4R strategy and its policies, after 2 years from that milestone, we have to self-assess our organisation and the Action Plan designed back in 2012, to check our level of deployment and advance in the policies and principles of the *Charter and Code (C&C)*.

This document refers to some of the information given in the Achucarro Internal Analysis and Action Plan (2013) that is available online: <http://www.achucarro.org/hrs4r/>

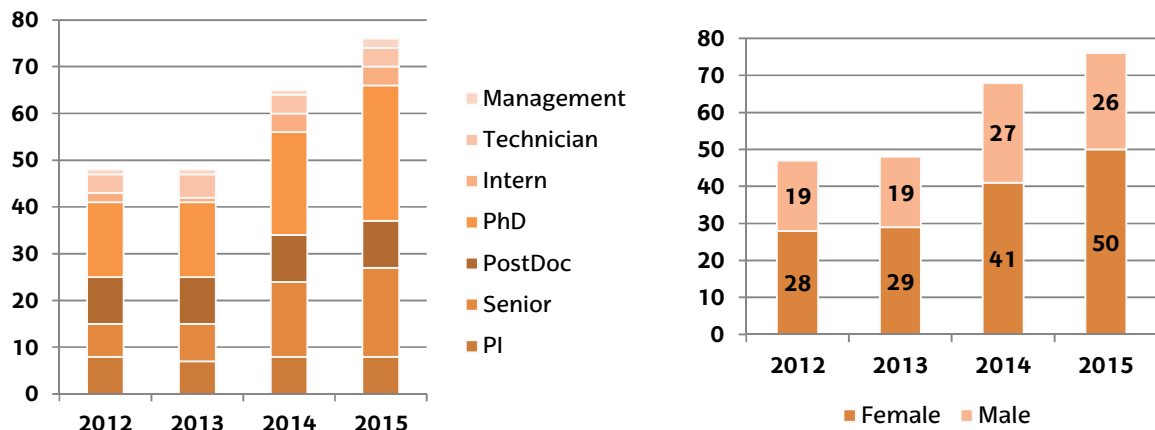
1. A GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE LAST 2 YEARS

One of the main drivers on the development of HRS4R is the general socio-economic environment in the current global world. ACHUCARRO was created in the middle of the toughest crisis that we have experienced in the last decades. The socio-economic conditions established by the international bodies and agreements of Spain have had a direct and hard impact on our capabilities to develop the Strategic Plan 2012-2017.

The overall conditions in Spain have been negative for developing research projects, and consequently for research related careers. Many Spanish or resident scientists have left the country. Calls for attracting talent in Spain and therefore in the Basque Country have disappeared for a while or indefinitely, most of the calls have delayed their publication, and have reduced the number of offered position.

In this adverse environment, the support of the Basque Government has helped ACHUCARRO not only to survive, but also to develop, at slower pace than expected and wanted, but increasing the research personnel, at least.

This has been the evolution



As we stated in our Internal Analysis report in 2013, even if we define all of them as "Achucarro Personnel" for this purpose, we have different working/contracting schemes with the ACHUCARRO appointed researchers, technicians and management staff.

The permanent Achucarro research staff (hereinafter Achucarro Staff) is composed by full professors (civil servants), contracted (tenured) professors, researchers or lecturers of the University of the Basque Country, and/or Ikerbasque –the Basque Foundation for Science.

The younger members of the centre, the PhD researchers and technician are commonly hired via the competitive research projects granted by regional, state and international funding calls. In particular, the Spanish ciberNED project/platform for excellent research groups in neuroscience is a valuable resource for long-term research topics, and research-related personnel attraction, in our case technicians.

Currently, the Achucarro Staff works in 3 different locations, the University Campus in Leioa, and the Science and Technology Park in Zamudio, both within the metropolitan area of Bilbao (north of Spain). ACHUCARRO has been working together with its trustees, in the identification of a proper location for the future deployment of the centre, and at the end of 2015; the Board of Trustees approved the plan for moving the headquarters of the centre to the Science Park of the University of the Basque Country, in Leioa, within the University campus. This strategic move will allow us to improve our condition of centre and all the strategies and policies.

2. INTERNAL ANALYSIS 2013

Bringing memories to the present, in the year 2013, we were already living in the crisis situation.

The members of the Task Force (see all the details in the 2013 Internal Analysis document) stated at that time that the situation of the Science ecosystem in Spain was bad in general terms.

The main conclusions of the internal analysis in 2013 were the following:

- The 40 principles are common sense recommendations, and have been more or less implicitly implemented or have the impression that they have been implemented by all the researchers participating in the sample and the Task Force (Only a few of them have previous information about the C&C before, mainly the Ikerbasque researchers).
- There are no relevant differences in the opinion and perception between the researchers according to their position or gender.
- No answer below seven has been provided for any item, which would mean that we are not really far from any of the principles.
- Since Achucarro does not have currently its own research and technical staff, these recommendations will be taken into consideration for the design and/or improvement of management processes (See Annex 1) and the Employee/Welcome manual (provided to all the staff, and updated regularly).
- The Direction of the centre will use the results of the survey to collaborate with the founding partners (The University of the Basque Country and Ikerbasque) to collaborate, disseminate, validate and improvement of the practices related to the 40 principles.
- Provided the research area of the centre, which has to do with biosciences, health and brain diseases, the researchers agreed to establish a particular Ethic/Conduct Code, aligned with the Values (Honesty, Cooperation and Excellence) of the centre, defined in the framework of the Foundation Statement and Strategic Plan of Achucarro for the 2013-2017 period. This could help to the creation and development of a particular organisation culture for the people working in Achucarro.

3. ACTION PLAN FOLLOW-UP

The actions and activities that were identified and agreed in the Internal Analysis were incorporated to the annual Management Plans for the next years, according to our management strategy and model.

The Action Plan designed to meet the improvement areas of the Internal Analysis had 6 points:

Action No.	1
Period/Deadline	Fall 2013
Action	Achucarro Code of Conduct (part of the Employee/Welcome Manual) Benchmark: ISCII Code of Good Research
Responsible(s)	Scientific Director, General Manager
Indicator(s)	Code Validated and Endorsed

Our internal Code of Conduct was written and endorsed by all the senior staff of the centre in October – November 2013 and was incorporated to all the new contracts of the centre, as one of the clause. The internal Code is in the Annex 2 of this document.

Action No.	2
Period/Deadline	Spring 2014
Action	Improve the coordination among Achucarro, UPV/EHU and Ikerbasque
Responsible(s)	Scientific Director, General Manager
Indicator(s)	Process for information exchange working

Inter-institutional policy and dialogue has continued with our main partners and trustees, the Basque Foundation for Science and the Public University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). Apart from the Board meetings, we systematically exchange information and ideas to improve our operations.

Nevertheless, periodically problems continue to arise, mainly due to the limitations established by the policies and laws that have been set up because of the consequences of the crisis (European Stability and Growth Pact, Deficit limits, etc.). Thankfully, the will of all the parties is to foster the ACHUCARRO project, and an example of that is the common agreement among the trustees to provide a future location to ACHUCARRO, so we can better develop our strategy being in one single location (we will increase our space 5 times, compared to the current location), and close to the campus and the services and support resources available there.

Action No.	3
Period/Deadline	December 2013
Action	Encourage Trustees to foster the groups within the centre and the use the BERC funding to support particular situations, if necessary.
Responsible(s)	Scientific Director, General Manager
Indicator(s)	No. People in December 2013 equal or more than January 2013 (except natural leaves)

This important issue is successfully solved with the support and commitment of the trustees. Thanks to this policy, all the research and technical personnel, in all the stages of their careers, have maintained their positions during these hard years, where call resolutions have been delayed, competition has increased and therefore limited the vacancies in certain funding schemes, etc. As we mentioned in the point 1 of this document, the structure of ACHUCARRO increased over the last years.

Action No.	4
Period/Deadline	Fall-Winter 2013
Action	Study the possibility of establishing a Mentorship Programme
Responsible(s)	Scientific Director, General Manager, Group Leaders
Indicator(s)	Mentorship Programme created and running Total number of complaints

This action has taken us more time than initially planned, for many reasons. In the one hand, we were busy with the previous actions of this plan, apart from the other activities and operations; and in the other hand, because we retrieved, analysed and discussed different models and examples from other institutions and environments. Most of the times, valuable and successful tools for other organisations and environments are not directly applicable to the own circumstances, and this was the case.

Due to our structure, where some of the supervisors or contractual and/or functional heads of the Achucarro Staff belong to the University or Ikerbasque, we have, as centre's Direction (Scientific Director and General Manager) little *margin of manoeuvre* to establish formal programmes or policies over people that receive their salaries from someone else.

What we have decided and implemented is to establish a "Recommendations on Mentorship of Personnel", which is a guide for all the people with responsibility over the supervision of others, to follow. This document is directly related to the Internal Code of Conduct.

The General Manager communicated with all the supervised staff to transmit that he is always open to confidentially listen to every complaint that may arise with supervisors. Probably for all this work, and also for our size, closeness among people, and other factors, the indicator for this has been 0 in these years, and we haven't got any problem with supervisor-supervised relationships.

Action No.	5
Period/Deadline	Annually
Action	Periodic training on IPR
Responsible(s)	General Manager
Indicator(s)	No. People trained in IPR; No. of Patents

We have fostered and established systematic training options on IPR. On the one hand, the University provides annual courses and dissemination events on this subject; and on the hand, Achucarro has followed IPR helpdesk Website (<https://www.iprhelpdesk.eu/>), a valuable resource provided by the EU. This website periodically offers webinars on IPR which have excellent contents, so we enroll and follow them from our seminar room.

The number of patents has not increased since we have training on this specific issue, but this has to do with the nature of our activity and research area.

Action No.	6
Period/Deadline	Fall 2013
Action	Recommendations to PIs about supervision duties
Responsible(s)	Scientific Director
Indicator(s)	Document validated by SD and GM

As we commented before, on Action 4, our idea of establishing a mentorship programme is currently implemented as a guide of recommendation on good practices for supervising people, so currently both actions have converged.

4. ACTION PLAN 2016-2017

As a summary for this period, ACHUCARRO has maintained its commitment with the C&C and the HRS4R, as part of our overall strategy of fostering excellence and continuous improvement in all our activities.

The ACHUCARRO centre is currently an organisation in development. We have only completed the first half of our first strategic plan, as we said, in very difficult circumstances. The next 2 years can suppose a huge step forward in many aspects, as we will be finally moving to a definitive location, where all (or most) of the people and resources will be together, so the overall management will be more efficient, as the sense of belonging increases and improves by sharing one modern space, close to the campus.

So our Action Plan for the next 2 years is:

When	What	Who	Indicator(s)
Fall 2013	Periodic training on IPR and the principles of C&C	General Manager	No. People trained in IPR; No. of Patents; Total number of complaints (Supervised)
Annually	Continue improving the coordination among Achucarro, UPV/EHU and Ikerbasque	Scientific Director & General Manager	Number of issues detected in the relationships
Annually	Keep legal processes or trials involving Achucarro and its personnel to zero	Scientific Director & General Manager	Number of trials and legal issues
Annually	Recommendations to PIs about supervision	General Manager	Document validated by SD
Spring 2017	Site visit of the Achucarro International Scientific Advisory Committee http://www.achucarro.org/isac	Scientific Director & General Manager	Report stating that the performance of the groups, and policies are excellent

ANNEX 1: ABOUT ACHUCARRO

Ikerbasque – the Basque Foundation for Science (HR Excellence in Research awarded organisation) and the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), fostered the creation of the Achucarro Basque Center for Neuroscience - a new research organisation within the Basque Network of Excellence Research Centres (BERC) - named in the memory of Nicolas Achucarro (Bilbao, 1880-1918), a pioneer of modern brain research.

The main strategic objective of **Achucarro** is to contribute to the development of a socially and economically sustainable Society. To do this we strive to perform world-class research in the study of **neuron-glia biology in the normal and pathological brain**. This research focus will allow us to contribute to the training of future generations of neuroscientists and be an active partner in the dissemination of the human knowledge about the brain.

The Mission and the Strategic Objectives set by the Board of Trustees of this research centre put a special emphasis in the central role of Achucarro with the compromise of collaborating with the raise of the new generations of neuroscientist, thus being an **active actor in the career development of the future neuroscientist**.

Although our will is to contribute in the future to more and better translational research, our current focus is more related to animal experimentation and in some cases, human samples (brain slices and blood taken from external Biobanks).

The Board of Trustees, in the first meeting for establishing the centre, decided to endorse the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/data/usgn_orgs/es%5Fachucarro%2Epdf

Besides, the **management model of the Achucarro centre is based in EFQM** (European Foundation for Quality Management), for which the management of and with people is a foundation for the success and excellence of an organisation. Taking this into account, the ethic compromise of Achucarro is with all the professionals working and developing their careers within the centre.

The adoption of EFQM as a management model came from the commitment of the Basque Government with quality and excellence. The Basque Government created a foundation to support and help introduce this model in our region, until we have become a reference in Europe in EFQM prizes and recognitions. In 2014, the Basque Foundation for Excellence and Advanced Management (EUSKALIT), developed its own model, the so called "Advanced Management Model", an open (free access) model that takes the key elements of EFQM (and other models like ISO) and goes a step forward, mainly, not being so "strict" with the internal management procedures, so not that based on processes.

ACHUCARRO, as a contributor to EUSKALIT, has received training on this new model, and has incorporated its ideas, even if we maintain our management model, based on processes, because it works for us.

ANNEX 2: ACHUCARRO CODE OF CONDUCT