

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”

Achucarro Basque Center for Neuroscience

4th cohort of the HRS4R

2019 Update

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0. Foreword

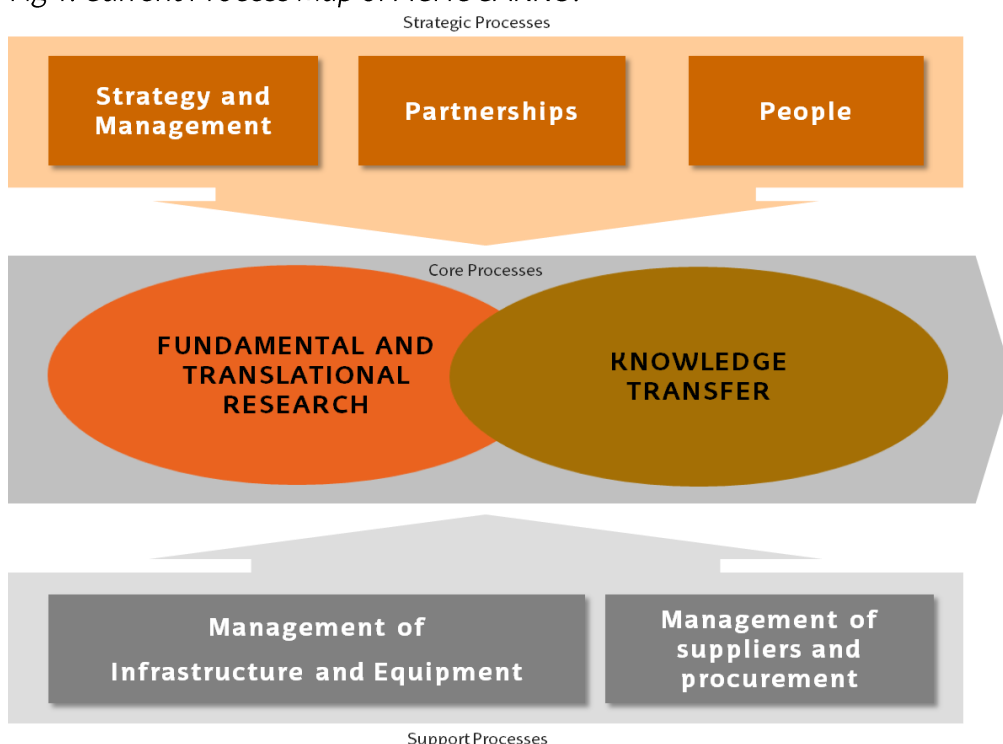
Ikerbasque – the Basque Foundation for Science and the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), fostered the creation of the Achucarro Basque Center for Neuroscience (ACHUCARRO), within the model of the Basque Excellence Research Centres (BERC), funded by the Basque Government and devoted to strategic and fundamental research areas in RIS3 strategy of our region. ACHUCARRO is a private foundation established in April 2012, that started operating in July 2012.

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”, <https://www.achucarro.org/hrs4r>

The strategy of ACHUCARRO (Strategic Plans) is designed and deployed in periods of 4 years, aligned with the BERC Programme of the Basque Government, a funding scheme that provides structural funding of the BERC centres. The first Plan covered the 2014 to 2017 period, and the current plan extends from 2018 to 2021. The overall strategy is designed and proposed by the Direction of ACHUCARRO and validated and followed up by the Board of Trustees.

ACHUCARRO developed a management model inspired by the principles of EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) and the *local* “Advanced Management Model” (MGA) by Euskalit (<https://www.euskalit.net/en/>) to deploy the Strategic Plans. This model is based in the definition of management processes and the operations are deployed in process oriented continuous improvement cycles.

Fig 1. Current Process Map of ACHUCARRO.



During the 6 and a half years of life of ACHUCARRO, our organisation has faced external and internal factors that have determined the infrastructure, governance, operation and management policies and procedures defined and designed and then implemented.

The 2012-2015 period was particularly tough. The effects of the global financial crisis hit the Basque Country later than other regions, but finally had an impact in our political and financial framework. The relative political instability in Spain also affected the research support and funding schemes, in a period of weakness for our centre, due to our youth.

One of the main strategic objectives of ACHUCARRO, when we launched the centre, was to unite all the research groups and facilities that were the base for the creation of our organisation (45 out of the 46 people appointed at the end of 2012 were already members of the Basque Science system, the other one was the General Manager, appointed on July 1st) under the same roof, since the resources of the centre were located, at that time, in 4 different spaces, being 2 of them within the campus of the UPV/EHU in Leioa, and the other 2 in the Science and Technology Park of Biscay, in Zamudio, at 15 kilometres away. The economic and financial limitations in the environment delayed the plans to unite the centre more than initially expected. The lack of appropriate headquarters complicated the implementation and deployment of many internal policies and procedures.

In the 2015-2017 period, with the approval of our Board of Trustees, we started the negotiations to refurbish and construct our current headquarters in the Sede building, within the Science Park of the UPV/EHU in Leioa. In the first quarter of 2017 we inaugurated these premises, that allowed us to finally implement efficiently, many of the internal policies and procedures defined in our management model, and create new ones, fruit of the experience of having an united organisation.

1. HR Strategy: The path in ACHUCARRO

Ikerbasque, the Basque Foundation for Science is one of the Trustees of ACHUCARRO. Ikerbasque endorsed the “*European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*” in 2011 and fostered the adoption and endorsement of this strategy in the Basque Country.

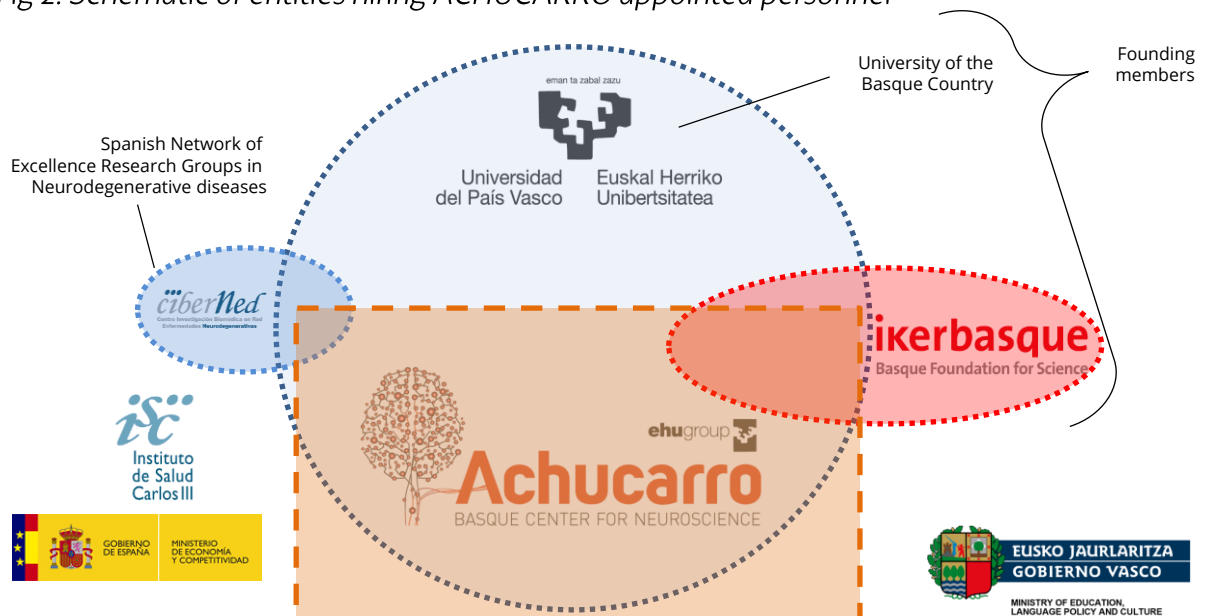
<https://www.ikerbasque.net/eu/about-us/hrs4r>

One of the first decisions of the Board of Trustees of ACHUCARRO, in the initial launching meeting of the Foundation, decided to endorse *the Charter and the Code* and entrust the newly appointed Direction to implement their principles.

In the year 2013, ACHUCARRO underwent a first internal analysis to assess our position according to the principles of the Charter and the Code.

The first relevant aspect that we realised was that, according to the structure and organisation model defined by the Board of Trustees, ACHUCARRO would have to clearly define general and specific policies and procedures, since the personnel appointed to the centre would be hired by, at least, 3 different legal entities: ACHUCARRO itself, Ikerbasque and the UPV/EHU. In this sense, ACHUCARRO is a mixed research organisation (as many other centres in the Spanish Science system), where research personnel from different employers share the premises of any of the science-based legal entities (typically, CSIC, Universities, and more recently, Foundations fostered by the different national or regional administrations).

Fig 2. Schematic of entities hiring ACHUCARRO appointed personnel



At that time, we identified the main laws (Legal Framework) related to recruitment and contracting of workers in the Science sector in Spain, and in particular in the biomedicine/biosciences sector, to assess if there were legal limitations to implement the principles. The outcome was positive, so no action had to be taken in this area. The laws that we identified where:

1. Spanish Constitution: Articles 44.2, 20.1, 20.4 and 149.15
2. Spanish Law on Science, Technology and Innovation (14/2011)
3. Spanish Law on Biomedical Research (14/2007)
4. Spanish Law on the Statute of Public Officials (7/2007)

Our Legal Framework established rights and obligations to employers and employees, and there are some differences in the employer is a public body (hiring public/civil servants).

The design idea and orientation of the Direction of ACHUCARRO was to set a common and general framework of policies with rights and obligations, regardless the employer.

ACHUCARRO is currently reaching a point of stability in our development and growth strategy. In the period from 2013 to 2019 we had increase of 77% in the number of people appointed to the centre. In the following lines we will summarise this evolution.

The details on the Internal Analysis process and the Action Plan defined in 2013 is accessible here:

https://www.achucarro.org/documents/10180/99382/Achucarro_HR_Strategy_2013.pdf

In 2015 we reviewed the implementation and re-assessed our position. This report is accessible here:

https://www.achucarro.org/documents/10180/99382/2015-12_Achucarro%20HRS4R_2Y_self-assessment.pdf

The main action areas identified in both processes (expressed differently, but meaning the same, by the effect of the evolution of the organisation) were related to:

1. The need to define and develop an organisation model and internal culture to blossom excellent research.
 - To this aim, we identified the need to create a "Code of Conduct" or a set of "Guidelines" to set the basic rules of interaction between all the people appointed in ACHUCARRO.
 - Aligned with this strategic objective, we have recently approved a document entitled "Letter of Understanding" to be used in the relationships between supervisor and mentees.
2. Close collaboration with strategic partners.
 - The support and identification of common and shared objectives with the entities/partners that created ACHUCARRO was and is crucial for an organisation in its first stages of development.
 - This is even more important when employees of these entities and working together under the same roof, with common and shared objectives, and with different labour frameworks and conditions. These different conditions could also have an impact in the culture and atmosphere identified in the point 1 of this list.

3. Stable structural funding.
 - The political and financial environment that show the birth of ACHUCARRO complicated the original plans and delayed some actions and objectives (mainly the creation of the headquarters).
 - The funding from the BERC Programme of the Basque Government is a crucial resource for ACHUCARRO, that needs to be maintained, and secured, by performing excellently and attaining high quality results.
 - The Direction of the ACHUCARRO, the General Management in particular, in his capacity of financial officer, has to ensure the availability of resources to face the challenges of the organisation and the environment (delays in publication of calls, resolutions, launch programmes to retain talent, etc).
4. Support to career development
 - Launch a "Mentorship programme" to contribute to the personal and professional development of our personnel.
 - Assessment of different Mentoring actions and dynamics.
 - Extension of the initial objectives of the programme to cope with ideas like the identification of training in soft skills and personal abilities; potential identification of harassment situations, etc.
 - Jointly (Direction, Supervisors, Mentees) identify new subjects and areas that require specific training to adapt and update to changes in our sector and research area. In example, in 2013 we identified Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), in 2015 the standards and use of biostatistics, in 2017 reinforce the training on safety at work (due to the change of premises and the adaptation to new facilities) and scientific writing, and career options out of academia in 2019.

2. Action Plan 2019 – 2022

In 2019 we reflected again on the status of ACHUCARRO according to the principles of *the Charter and the Code*. We completed a follow up report requested by the European Commission and probably will have a site visit in 2020 to assess our definition and implementation of the European HR Strategy.

The management model of ACHUCARRO, based in the idea of cycles of continuous improvement, will continue working on the same dimensions defined and developed over the last years, and they have proved to be effective to advance in this path and attain objectives.

1. Continuously listen to the organisation. Maintain a healthy and vibrant work atmosphere.
 - a) Keep reinforcing the internal participation and governance dynamics like the Group Leaders' meetings,
 - *Involved processes: E01 – Strategy and Management, E-03 People, O-05 Knowledge Transfer*
2. Close collaboration with strategic partners.
 - a) The support and identification of common and shared objectives with the entities/partners that created ACHUCARRO was and is crucial for an organisation in its first stages of development.
 - b) This is even more important when employees of these entities and working together under the same roof, with common and shared objectives, and with different labour frameworks and conditions. These different conditions could also have an impact in the culture and atmosphere identified in the point 1 of this list.
 - *Involved processes: E01 – Strategy and Management, E-02 Partnerships*
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 - *Involved processes: E01 – Strategy and Management, E-02 Partnerships, O-04 Research, S07 – Management of Suppliers and Procurement*

4. Support to career development
 - a) Launch a "Mentorship programme" to contribute to the personal and professional development of our personnel.
 - b) Assessment of different Mentoring actions and dynamics.
 - c) Extension of the initial objectives of the programme to cope with ideas like the identification of training in soft skills and personal abilities; potential identification of harassment situations, etc.
 - d) Jointly (Direction, Supervisors, Mentees) identify new subjects and areas that require specific training to adapt and update to changes in our sector and research area. In example, in 2013 we identified Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), in 2015 the standards and use of biostatistics, in 2017 reinforce the training on safety at work (due to the change of premises and the adaptation to new facilities) and scientific writing, and career options out of academia in 2019.
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