



## Acknowledgement EU charter and code

### VIB

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## Preamble

VIB herewith presents its HR strategy 2012-2016 and the HR strategic action plan, with actions currently undertaken and actions planned. It shows that important efforts are made and resources are invested to support professional development of all research staff. In doing so it also shows a clear shift in focus from a predominant orientation on scientific output criteria towards a more balanced orientation, including internal organization & people development criteria.

The implementation of the EU Charter & Code has proved to be a useful and inspiring guideline in our efforts to establish a coherent HR strategy. Wherever possible items of the C&C have been integrated in this HR strategy and HR practices. Other items of the C&C are being integrated in the 'VIB code of responsible research' and the 'VIB corporate governance charter'.

The HR strategy and action planning are published on the VIB institutional website under the heading 'VIB vision & HR strategy'. Furthermore a special page will be created (Q3-2013) to update readers on the implementation of the C&C at VIB.

With this document we apply for Acknowledgment by the Commission. Detailed reports of surveys, focus groups' proceedings, and details of gap analyses are available upon request.

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## 1. Introduction to VIB

### 1.1 VIB at a glance

*VIB is a non-profit research institute in life sciences. About 1.300 scientists and supporting personnel conduct strategic basic research in the molecular mechanisms that are responsible for the functioning of the human body, plants and micro-organisms. Through a close partnership with four Flemish universities - UGent, KULeuven, University of Antwerp and Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and a solid funding program, VIB unites the forces of 79 research groups in a single institute. The goal of the research is to extend the boundaries of our knowledge of life. Through its technology transfer activities, VIB translates research results into products for the benefit of consumers and patients and contributes to new economic activity. VIB develops and disseminates a wide range of scientifically substantiated information about all aspects of biotechnology.*

VIB was set up in 1995 by the Flemish government. The minister president at that time was fully aware of the potential of the Flemish life sciences based on cutting-edge research and the worldly reputation of its researchers with at the forefront Désiré Collen, Walter Fiers, Marc Van Montagu and Herman Van Den Berge. The Flemish government decided to join these 4 research departments with 4 other successful and forward looking groups into one institute 'VIB'.

The 8 VIB-departments are located at the campuses of the 4 Flemish universities (University of Gent, Leuven, Antwerp and Brussels), making it a 'virtual interuniversity institute'. VIB can count on substantial funding based on 5-yearly evaluations of currently around 44 million Euros on a yearly basis. The current evaluation cycle runs from 01/01/2012 until 31/12/2016.

VIB works as a decentralized organization, providing strategic guidance and funding to those researchers who meet rigorous selection and evaluation criteria. The researchers can conduct their research in a highly autonomous way within the strategic plan of the department and VIB as a whole. Their work is carried out in state-of-the-art premises located at the four partner universities and all researchers can make use of well-equipped labs and core facilities of which VIB's imaging core facility belongs to the best equipped in the world.

Every five years the Flemish government installs a stringent evaluation by an international evaluation panel consisting of leaders in the field for each department and research group. The evaluation is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative criteria in which the impact of the work can be clearly shown. The most important evaluation criteria are: publications in high impact journals, number of patent applications, income from industrial collaborations, international funding, creation of start-up companies, number of PhD's defended, teaching, fostering internal and external scientific collaborations.

## **1.2. Research fields**

VIB is predominantly active in:

- Cancer research
- Neurobiology
- Vascular biology
- Inflammation
- Plant systems biology
- Microbiology
- Structural biology
- Bioinformatics

## **1.3. Personnel structure**

VIB is structured around 8 departments in which altogether 79 research groups are active. Each research group is headed by a group leader who has full responsibility of the group, including the scientific, operational and human resources management.

VIB currently employs 1300 people. 63% of this overall staff is doing purely scientific work (department directors, group leaders, experts, staff scientists, postdoctoral scientists, and PhD students). 26% lab technicians are providing scientific support, and the remainder is working in support functions, such as: IT, administration, finance, and the staff working at VIB head office.

## **1.4. International work environment**

While there were hardly any foreign researchers during the first years of VIB's existence, it now hosts researchers from over 60 countries. This makes VIB into a truly international and rich multicultural community. Foreign researchers make up 50% of the postdoc and PhD population and about 23% of the group leaders. In the supporting functions we find mostly Belgian nationals.

## **1.5. Corner stones of VIB's science strategy**

VIB is building its research strategy on 4 key pillars.

A. An articulate research strategy

- No 'me too' research but exploring interfaces between thematic fields, science and technology, basic and translational research
- Excellence through critical mass
- Ambitious research goals and performance indicators

## B. An inspiring and enriching research culture

- Diversity of disciplines and cultural diversity
- A collaborative approach supported by a scientific discussion culture
- Promoting a sound work-life balance

## C. Continuous development and rejuvenation of talent and technology

- Working with the best scientists in an international port of talent
- Plenty of opportunities for authorship and co-authorship
- Mentoring, coaching and training to become true professionals in research

D. A decentralized management model, giving autonomy to researchers and empowering them to take full responsibility for their research.

## 2. The HRS4R background

### 2.1. VIB's traditional focus on scientific output

Excellence in science and technology transfer is, and has always been, the main driver in the VIB research strategy. It is this clear focus that has led to a research environment and a research culture that today attracts the best researchers and achieves world-class results. Currently, according to the Scimago science ranking (see annex 1) VIB is ranked as second best research institute in Europe (behind EMBL in Germany) and is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> worldwide. VIB's department 'Plant Systems Biology' is, according to several rankings, considered as the world's best performing department in plant sciences. Also, VIB currently hosts 17 group leaders who have managed to obtain an ERC grant.

The VIB organization is very lean and focused. The Human Resources department of VIB is alike, its goal is to support researchers in an efficient and personalized way. HR operates as a true research/business partner, ensuring that all legal and contractual obligations are smoothly dealt with, that newcomers quickly integrate, and that there is a broad offer in all kinds of training, focusing on scientific, technological and (inter)personal knowledge and skills.

### 2.2. Need to update the HR Strategy and integrate the EU Charter and Code.

The predominant orientation on 'output criteria' at the highest level has brought VIB in the top league of life sciences research centers in the world. Although this has been a major motivator for VIB collaborators, we felt that we should shift to a **more balanced orientation on both output and internal organization & people development criteria**. We felt that we could do better in listening to the concerns people have in the non-scientific areas of their work. This idea formed the basis for a review of the current HR practices. It was strengthened by the requirements of the Flemish government.

In 2010-2011 VIB was absorbed in the stringent 5-yearly evaluation process by peer reviewers. Not only science, technology and technology transfer were evaluated, but also the functioning of VIB as an 'institute' was scrutinized. Finance, internal & external communication, science policy, regulatory

affairs and HR processes were evaluated. And all these functional managers had to prepare their **strategic plan** for the next period (2012-2016). An important aspect in defining the HR strategy was the **requirement of the Flemish government** (VIB's main source of funding) to implement the **European Charter and Code** in all Flemish research institutes and universities. This was for us an important trigger to join the second cohort in the EU HRS4R process. For VIB, the implementation process started by joining the kick-off meeting in Brussels on 02/02/2011.

The implementation of the EU Charter and Code (C&C) has proved to be a useful and inspiring guideline in our efforts to establish a coherent HR strategy for the near and longer term future.

### **2.3. The kind of organization VIB wants to become in the years ahead**

While VIB's emphasis so far has been mainly on achieving the best possible scientific output, the need was felt to put more effort in creating a more supportive work environment. This was clearly stated in the two-day VIB management committee of June 2012, focusing entirely on the HR strategy for the years ahead. Managing directors, scientific department directors and directors of supporting staff concluded with a new strategic intent.

*"We want VIB to be an inspiring place for research at the interface of academia and industry, offering an appreciative and collaborative environment. We share responsibility for research, celebrate our successes together and learn from our mistakes.*

*We encourage risk taking, make things possible and meet and collaborate with the best scientists world-wide. In doing so, and in maintaining the highest standards of research, we mentor and coach our people in their professional development.*

*We will earn their appreciation as VIB-ambassadors throughout their career".*

This new strategic intent has formed the basis for defining the HR strategy for the years to come.

## **3. Approach and methodology in defining the HR strategy for 2012-2016**

### **3.1 Approach: generate ownership and buy-in**

From the very start of this project, VIB has decided to apply the following principles:

- The process is owned by the VIB management committee, ensuring alignment between the HR strategy and the overall strategy
- Create buy-in and involvement of all VIB scientists, through a top-down and bottom-up process, translating the HR strategic objectives into realistic action plans, acceptable to all people involved
- Take into account the points set forward by the EU Charter and Code during the overall process of defining the new HR strategy

### 3.2 Project methodology to define and implement a revised HR strategy

In the project, headed by the HR Director, the following steps were taken:

1. Start with a **strategic reflection** in the management committee to align the HR strategy to the overall VIB strategy and to define the scope of the project (November 2011).
2. **Evaluate current HR practices** through a **bottom-up approach** (November 2011–April 2012):
  - An elaborate survey to check satisfaction with current practices and define the expectations of researchers (mainly postdocs). More than 50% of all VIB postdocs responded
  - Informal feedback sessions at the departments regarding the daily working practices and culture
3. Management committee uses the results of the formal and informal surveys as a starting point for **defining the HR-strategic objectives**. (June 2012)
4. **Focus groups** discuss these strategic objectives and formulate recommendations as to the actions to be taken to make the HR strategy part of the daily functioning of the institute. (September 2012)

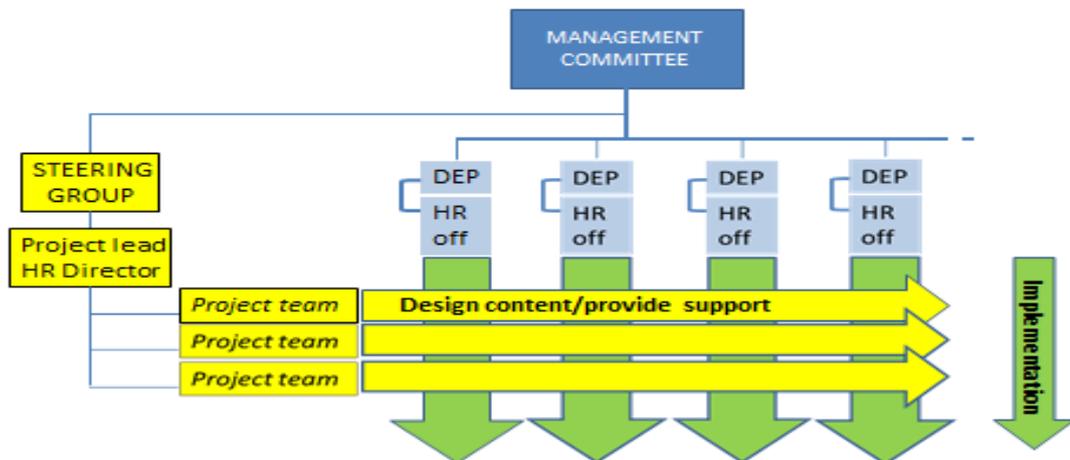
A focus group was organized for each of the following topics:

- **“Evaluation and feedback”** with representatives from the group leaders, postdocs and PhD students
- **“Professional development and career guidance”** with representatives from the postdocs and staff scientists
- **“Promoting female scientific careers”** with female representatives from group leaders, postdocs and staff scientists.

In total about 70 people took part in the focus group, with the aim to:

- Share experiences and best practices and analyze the current situation at VIB
  - Formulate recommendations towards management
  - Propose concrete and realistic actions that do not require extra administrative burden
5. Management committee to discuss, modify and agree on HR strategic action plans that were recommended by the focus groups (December 2012)
  6. Deployment of the HR strategic actions supported by the following Project implementation structure (April 2013 - ...)

### Project implementation structure



- Project owner: the VIB Management Committee
  - Review and discussion of the HR strategic actions is a fixed topic on the agenda of each Management Committee meeting
  - There is a formal reporting to the Management Committee and the Board of Directors on the status of the project twice per year (intermediate report - yearly report in December of each year)
- Steering Group: management and monitoring of the project. Composition of this group:
  - 2 representatives of each focus group ( feedback – professional development – female careers)
  - 2 representatives of the Group Leaders/ Principal Investigators
  - The VIB Research Integrity Officer
  - Headed by the HR Director
- Project Leader: HR Director, responsible for management of the project
- Project teams: responsible for design of the following project themes:
  - communication of the project
  - feedback and professional development of researchers
  - female careers
- The scientific departments are responsible for implementation of the project). The Department Director and Group Leaders are supported by the Local HR Officer. As of 2014 the yearly Departmental strategic plan will include a section about the HR strategic objectives and actions. This plan needs to be made up in Q4-2013.
- The Steering Group and the Project teams are responsible for the design of the strategic actions and the supporting communication and supporting tools.

## 7. Reporting Structure



The first yearly report to the Management Committee and the Board of Directors will be made in December 2013. This report is agreed by the Steering Group, upon presentation by the Project Leader/ HR Director. The HR Director prepares the report based on the input of the Local HR Officers. As of 2014 there will be an intermediate reporting. Because most of the development feedback is organized in September, this report will be made end of September.

### 4. EU Charter and Code integrated in the HR strategy 2012-2016

In this chapter we will give an overview of the HR strategy and more importantly the concrete steps VIB will take (or has already taken) to implement this strategy. All steps that are mentioned are agreed upon by VIB's management committee (meeting December 2012). For each topic the relevant EU Charter and Code points are indicated.

#### 4.1. HR Strategic Objectives

- I. Develop a collaborative and appreciative organization culture
- II. Install and monitor a process for exchanging expectations and feedback
- III. Train and develop research leaders in their role as mentor and coach
- IV. Offer a framework and a program for professional development for scientists and supporting staff
- V. Offer career guidance and support to researchers for a career either inside or outside VIB.
- VI. Coach all employees in responsible research ( ethical issues)
- VII. Facilitate career growth for female researchers
- VIII. Attract the right people to ensure excellence in science and technology.

#### 4.2. HR Strategic action plans

##### 4.2.1. Feedback and performance evaluation (C&C points 11,36,37,38,40)

The main item that came up in the focus group was the lack of feedback on the overall functioning of the co-workers. Current feedback only focuses on the science and the scientific performance, and is rarely development oriented.

Actions in 2013:

- As from 2013 VIB wants to guarantee that each co-worker has a 2-way **feedback exchange** with his/her supervisor on his/her overall functioning/performance once per year
- responsibility and timing:
  - responsibility for action: group leaders
  - a one-page report of the feedback exchange is made by the person receiving feedback
  - timing: September-October each year
- VIB HR supports these feedback meetings by offering ½ day workshops to all supervisors in order to develop the necessary skills
- VIB HR provides the tools to conduct these feedback exchanges
- VIB HR will monitor this process in collaboration with the department directors and the local HR officers

#### **4.2.2. Professional development and career guidance (C&C points 21,25,28,30,38,39)**

Discussions in the focus groups revealed a general discomfort with the current worldwide employment situation for postdocs. They are worried about their scientific future and they realize that future options in the academic world are more and more scarce. Postdocs realize that they have to change gear and become more open to positions outside academia. As a supportive and professional institute, VIB will offer guidance towards the next step in their career.

Actions in 2013:

- Installment of a **career center** aimed at postdocs with over 4 years of postdoctoral experience and attaining the end of their VIB contract, and at PhD students in their last year. The career center is set up as a coaching program consisting of individual and group sessions. It started in March 2013, with 60 people who have already participated. In these sessions special attention is paid to :
  - Defining the personal competency profile
  - Discovering the roles and competences potential employers are looking for
  - Discovering and extending the professional network
  - Learning practical tips and tricks to apply for a position
- Organize meet and greet sessions with industry and other potential employers
  - responsibility and timing:
    - responsibility for action: HR + Technology Transfer Office
    - target timing: Q1- 2014
    - target frequency: 1 X per year

- Increase exposure to industry through active involvement in scientific projects (technology transfer)
  - responsibility for action: group leaders/ on-going
  - follow-up: this action is one of the items on the agenda of each management committee meeting and the lab meetings
- Offer up-to-date information via VIB intranet about academic and other positions worldwide
  - Responsibility for action: HR head office/on-going
- Continue and extend the VIB training possibilities to enhance the 'employability' of the researchers
  - Responsibility for action: HR director/on-going

Actions approved for the longer term:

- Offer more clarity on the duration of the postdoctoral assignments at VIB by setting forward the maximum duration of postdoctoral stay at VIB - explore the possibility to create more long term positions for staff scientists ( ensuring the continuity of scientific expertise in the lab)
  - responsibility and timing: this subject is one of the items on the agenda of each management committee. The purpose is to discuss and develop appropriate policies and actions
- Provide, at the start of employment at VIB, information on the longer term scientific & managerial career structure and career opportunities
  - responsibility and timing:
    - HR head office already organizes 2 x per year a collective introductory session for all newcomers at VIB called 'New@VIB'
    - HR head office in collaboration with the local HR officer organizes 1 x per month per department an 'individual orientation session' to discuss specific topics on an individual basis.

#### **4.2.3. Female research careers (C&C points 24, 27, 10, 17, 24)**

At VIB, females make up for just over 50% of all PhD students and postdocs. But when we take a look at the female representation at group leader level, this percentage drops dramatically to 13%.

VIB is confident that it encourages females to go for the next step on the scientific career ladder and that recruitment processes are designed to choose the best candidate regardless of gender, nationality, religion, age, political opinion ....

However, there are still quite some barriers to build a career as a woman in the preponderant male scientific world. During the focus discussions these barriers were set out, but at the same time most female researchers acknowledged that they themselves should show more self-confidence and become more assertive.

Actions in 2013:

- Self-awareness and personal development:

- Installment of a “female only” coaching and mentoring program
  - responsibility for action: HR Director
  - timing: pilot session in Q4- 2013
- Bring female researchers together around certain topics of mutual interest and invite women who “made it” in the scientific world.
  - responsibility for action: HR Director
  - timing: learn from best practices at EU-life gender-symposium planned for Q2-2014. Set up internal project team at VIB thereafter ( Q2-2014)
- Structural measures:
  - Adapt a grace period for young mothers for evaluation and recruitment purposes, and accept variations in the chronological order in the CV due to family related reasons. Use “scientific years” instead of calendar years.
  - Explore which flexibility measures can be taken for a better combination between work and family life
  - Change the lab-culture: make “female career development” a continuing subject of attention and discussion in the lab. Inform and encourage female researchers to get out of their comfort zone
  - Offer child care on campus with long opening hours
  - Responsibility and timing for structural measures: this subject is one of the items on the agenda of each management committee. The purpose is to discuss and develop appropriate policies and actions

Actions approved for the longer term:

- Explore the possibilities to create a ‘re-integration’ program for women who wish to resume their career after a break
- Let female researchers define how they can develop and promote alternative ways of working leading to a more healthy work-family balance. Probably this will also lead to new work structures and new roles that will even improve the overall performance of scientific labs.
- Responsibility and timing for structural measures: this subject is one of the items on the agenda of each management committee. The purpose is to discuss and develop appropriate policies and actions

#### **4.3. Remaining C&C points embedded in current VIB HR practices**

The following topics have not been subject of discussion in the focus groups. However, they have been carefully re-examined during a gap-analysis, comparing current practices with the practices advocated in the European Charter & Code.

The following describes in particular how these practices are aligned with the C&C, and where improvements can be made

##### **4.3.1. Recruitment (C&C points 12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19)**

**Basic principles of the VIB recruitment & selection process:**

- All vacancies are open to all nationalities and are always posted on the VIB and university website. Additionally the vacancies are posted on dedicated websites dependent on the specific scientific topic. (Euraxess, EU-life, Nature, Cell, Science, Neuron, Bio-informatics, Inflammation, plant science, ....)
- The ads are made up according to a specific structure: main research of the lab, description of the job (not too specific) and description of the requirements to be able to successfully take up the position
- Candidates apply through an IT-guided system whereby they first have to complete an application form, providing evidence that their application is meeting the basic requirements. This has been installed to prevent that people apply without thinking carefully about the fit between the requirements of the job and their own competencies
- Foreign candidates, selected on the basis of cv-evaluation, are first interviewed through Skype. In case of a favorable outcome, they are invited to the lab to give a presentation about their work and explain how they would tackle the job they are applying for. These presentations can be attended by all people who are interested. Based on the outcome of the presentations and the following question and answer sessions a recruitment decision is made
- All candidates receive written information about the recruitment decision , either positive or negative, in each phase of the process

#### **Basic principles for evaluation:**

- The scientific value or strength of the CV and the correspondence between “required” skills & competencies and “offered” skills & competencies, are the most important criteria for evaluation
- Bibliometric indices have to be balanced with other criteria, such as: teaching, involvement in societal groups addressing science related issues, involvement in science communication activities, in bio-ethical committees, management of research, supervision and guidance of young scientists...
- Nationality, gender, political or religious background are not considered as evaluation criteria
- For female applicants in particular the recruiter is allowed to find out if this person has children. As mentioned before, VIB takes into account the number of “actual” scientific years to assess the scientific productivity. Career breaks due to family reasons are not to be used against the candidate
- Proficiency in spoken and written English is an important evaluation factor

#### **Special recruitment processes:**

Every two years VIB launches the “International PhD program” aimed at international master students looking for a position as PhD student outside their own country. Due to the huge amount of applicants (over 800 candidates in 2012 for only 8 open positions) many people are involved in making a first selection of the applications. Scores are given, and applicants with the best scores get invited to VIB head office for a presentation about their work, and explain their motivation for the chosen projects...

After a round of questions and answers and some more interviews the final candidates get selected. Those applicants who did not get chosen receive open and transparent oral feedback on the reasons for non-selection.

In terms of “nationality” it has to be mentioned that Belgian candidates are not allowed to apply in this program. Belgian students have ample possibilities to apply for funding through the Belgian granting bodies and universities.

The same way of working counts for other special international “calls” to recruit postdocs and group leaders. In these calls Belgians are welcome to apply, except in case the EU co-funds the program (e.g. “omics@vib” EU co-funded program aimed at internationally mobile postdocs)

#### **4.3.2. Training (C&C points 38,39)**

Since many years, VIB has put a lot of importance on continued education at all levels in the organization.

While scientific and technological training is a daily aspect of VIB’s functioning, we have over the years introduced more and more training and workshops on **transferable skills**, (scientific writing, giving effective presentations, basic leadership, .... ) on technology transfer, ethical issues, bio safety in the lab, emerging technologies and summer schools on imaging.

These training sessions and / or workshops on transferable skills are open to all VIB scientists and even to non-VIB life sciences scientists.

In 2010 VIB brought its training capacity to a higher level based on close collaboration with the doctoral schools of the 4 partner universities. A new program was founded: ‘VRTC’ which stands for VIB Research Training Course, in which a variety of courses is offered. In 2012 this program was elaborated even more based on interuniversity training collaboration that was originated by the Flemish government. This is called “FTNLS” which stands for Flemish Training Network Life Sciences in which VIB was instrumental in bringing the right people together and in working out the program. In 2012 about 160 people took part in one or more of the offered courses.

The 2013 training offer that is open to all life scientists who are active in Flanders can be found on the poster in annex 2 to this document.

On top of that VIB offers courses and programs to specific target groups within VIB only, such as:

- Coaching and leadership for group leaders, postdocs and staff scientists
- Giving and receiving feedback: for all employees in supervisory roles
- Career guidance (career center) for finishing PhD students and postdocs
- Facilitating career growth for female researchers
- Dutch language courses for foreign employees

#### **4.3.3. Teaching**

“Teaching” is a formally recognized role for group leaders. Part of their responsibility consists in giving courses to university students. Postdocs are occasionally involved in these teaching activities, but it is not part of their formal responsibility. It is common practice within VIB to guide and support master students in the preparation of their master thesis, and postdocs are actively involved in this process of knowledge transfer and mentoring.

#### **4.3.4. Working conditions and social security (C&C points 24,25,26)**

##### **4.3.4.1. Salaries and social security issues**

Due to the close partnership with the 4 Flemish partner universities VIB holds a hybrid funding system resulting in researchers being funded through different channels:

- VIB pay roll: by default through employment contracts & salary
- University pay roll: some through regular employment contracts (salary) and others via university grants (stipends)
- National and international grant holders (stipends)

##### **Researchers on VIB pay roll:**

These researchers all have an employment contract that is fully compliant with Belgian employment standards. Salaries are based on the salaries that are applicable at the Belgian universities. All VIB employees benefit from all aspects of the Belgian social security system: health insurance, family allowances, pension and unemployment benefits.

Additionally people on the VIB pay roll benefit from a hospitalization insurance (free of charge) and coverage in case of death, or long term illness, or accident in private time. These insurances are additional to the coverage offered by the Belgian health insurance services.

In defining the level of salary, no distinction is being made in nationality, gender or other more personal elements. The experience, skills, knowledge and other aspects relevant for the position determine the (entry) salary level.

It has to be said that at the level of PhD students and postdocs the Belgian salaries are amongst the highest in Europe. Details are available upon request.

##### **Researchers on the university pay roll:**

For people who are paid via an employment contract the conditions are almost the same as for those on the VIB pay roll. Also in terms of social security they have exactly the same benefits. Some variations in extra-legal coverage can exist between universities.

##### **Grant holders:**

Many researchers at PhD and postdoc level benefit from a university grant of which the yearly net income is similar to the net income of the people with an employment contract. All people with a Belgian grant are covered through the Belgian social security system.

*Grant holders of non-Belgian funding agencies:* VIB attracts quite some researchers who managed to obtain an international grant. Usually these people are not covered for social security aspects. In these cases VIB ensures proper health insurance and hospitalization coverage.

##### **4.3.4.2. Flexibility measures**

VIB holds a young population, meaning that it counts a lot of parents for whom combining a job and a family is not obvious. Therefore VIB offers flexible working conditions that allow both female and male researchers to combine a career with family life. Flexible working hours, part-time work,

working from home and up to 32 holidays per year are some examples. VIB will continue to extend flexibility measures, as pointed out already under the actions taken to promote female careers.

It has to be mentioned that the Belgian social security system offers quite some possibilities in part-time working whereby part of the salary loss is compensated (e.g.: a variety of leaves of absence, parental leave, compassionate leave, ...)

#### **4.3.4.3. Stability and permanence of employment**

At the level of personnel in support functions, VIB offers 'open ended contracts'. This is equivalent to what is called a 'permanent' contract.

For PhD students and postdocs the situation is different. PhD students are offered positions for 4 years, sometimes extended by 3 to 9 months to enable them to finish their doctoral project. This is a clear cut situation. The situation for postdocs is causing concern though. There is a mismatch between their career expectations and the limited career opportunities VIB can offer them. In principle the position of postdocs is for a limited period of time. In reality they frequently manage to extend their stay at VIB through successive grants. This is creating a 'false' sense of stability. In the long run it is not in favor of the person. VIB decided to tackle this problem, increase clarity and help postdocs to manage their career. This is why VIB started with a career center, and why we are convincing group leaders to communicate clearly about career opportunities and avoid keeping postdocs as long as possible.

#### **4.3.5. Participation in decision making bodies (C&C point 30)**

We have to point out that federal and regional legislation in Belgium in this matter is quite limited, and that VIB is complying. In practice it is even doing better. At the level of group leaders, there is a formal representation in the Management Committee, the highest decision making body at the VIB. At the level of postdocs such formal representation in a decision making body does not exist. However, it is common practice in several departments to involve postdocs ad-hoc in the group leaders meeting, being the decision making body at departmental level.

Because we don't know whether postdocs expect to be involved in decision making, we will examine their expectations more closely in the course of 2013 (Q4).

### **5. Ethical and professional conduct in research (C&C points 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,21,31,32)**

#### **5.1. An integrated code for the individual researcher**

At VIB, and in all partner universities, there is a team of people consisting of regulatory affairs managers, prevention officers, science policy officers, and integrity officers. They deal with policy matters related to: accountability, legal compliance, safety, bio-ethics, integrity, authorship, scientists in society.

All VIB collaborators have access to these policies and information via VIB intranet under the heading 'Responsible VIB research', with the following subdivisions: general principles, scientific misconduct, image manipulations, authorship, conflicts of interest, (bio)-ethics, (bio)-safety and environment, motherhood protection.

A **gap analysis** was made to compare actual practices at VIB with legal requirements and with the C&C. An overview of last year's status is to be found in annex 3 to this document. It shows that the overall evaluation was 'good'.

**Improvements** are now being made in following areas:

- Information used to be quite dispersed. VIB has grouped all these items under one coherent concept “**code of responsible VIB research**”.  
The grouping of items will make it possible to offer to newcomers one set of information, explaining clearly and consistently their rights and duties. Certain documents will have to be signed for acceptance.
- During the first months of 2013 the concept of Responsible VIB Research was communicated through a variety of channels and discussion events (VIB-news, E-talk, extensive info on VIB intranet and presentations in the departments)
- A statement of principles is being developed, serving as a landmark for this code/policy. The statement makes clear what VIB stands for when it comes to the way it wishes to conduct its research, and the kind of training it wants to give to researchers in this matter
- Documents and tools are being developed to set up a fraud free research environment
- Guidelines are being developed for acceptable image manipulations
- The VIB intranet shows a clear and transparent overview of all above mentioned aspects of research integrity and is continuously updated by the VIB Integrity Officer

Further improvements are planned by the VIB Integrity Officer for the years 2014-2016

- 2014: bio-ethics: definition of a policy and guidelines
- 2015: bio-safety: definition of a policy and guidelines
- 2016: scientist in society: implementation of programs for ongoing reflection and discussion on this topic.

## **5.2. Corporate governance charter**

At the level of the VIB Institution there is a corporate governance policy, which is fully spelled out in line with legal requirements and best practices. This policy is published on the internet under the title “VIB good governance charter”.

## **5.3. Complaints and appeals (C&C point 29)**

All staff can call upon confidential assistance in resolving work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances. VIB has installed, in line with legal provisions, an internal ‘person of confidence’ who is acting in a confidential and impartial way to deal with these matters. On top of that there is also an external ‘prevention officer for “psycho- social” matters that people can call upon when they feel their integrity is becoming under pressure. The ‘work regulations’ spell out clearly when and how people can call upon this assistance.

## **Annexes:**

1. Scimago ranking
2. Training at VIB
3. Ethical and professional conduct in research