

HR Excellence in Research

Progress to Date and Action Plan 2026–2028

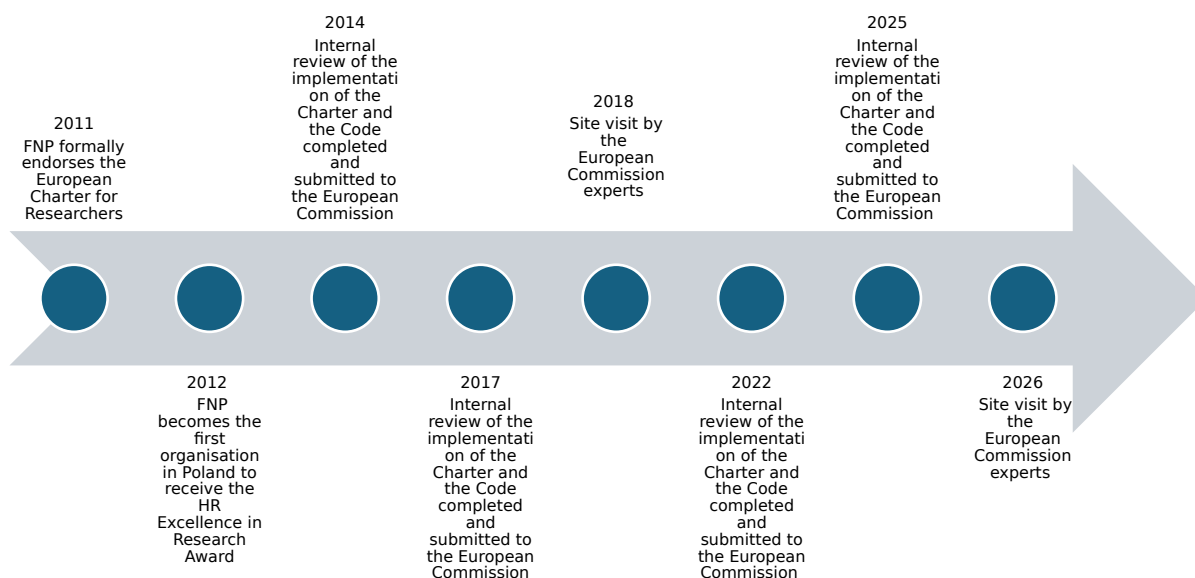
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Background

The Foundation for Polish Science (FNP) endorsed the European Charter for Researchers in 2011 and, one year later, became the first organization in Poland to receive the HR Excellence in Research

Award. Since then, the Foundation has regularly reviewed its policies and practices against the principles of the Charter, introducing successive improvements to strengthen their implementation across its activities.



Institutional Context

As a research funding organisation, rather than a research-performing institution, the Foundation does not employ researchers to conduct research. Consequently, its implementation of the Charter focuses primarily on the design and delivery of funding programmes and on the standards applied to applicants, beneficiaries and host institutions.

The Foundation promotes the Charter through:

- the design of funding schemes and eligibility rules;
- transparent and merit-based evaluation procedures;
- funding conditions and grant agreements;
- support provided to applicants and beneficiaries throughout the project lifecycle;
- mechanisms promoting research careers, international mobility and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Although the Foundation does not directly determine researchers' employment conditions, it has a significant influence on research culture through the standards and expectations embedded in its funding programmes.

The Foundation's activities must also be viewed in the context of its organisational scale. Compared with universities, research institutes, and the largest national research funding agencies, the Foundation remains a relatively small organisation, currently employing 76 staff members.

Its relatively small size enables efficient communication, close collaboration and agile decision-making. Conversely, limited organisational capacity requires the Foundation to prioritise carefully and to concentrate its resources on activities that provide the greatest value to the research community.

Funding framework

More than 90% of the Foundation's current budget is financed through the European Union Structural Funds. These resources are governed by detailed European and national regulations that define both the scope of eligible activities and the administrative requirements attached to their implementation.

The primary objective of the Structural Funds is to support socio-economic development and reduce disparities between regions of Poland and the European Union. Within this framework, support is also provided for scientific research, innovation, technology transfer, and the implementation of research results in economic practice. The Foundation uses these funds to strengthen Poland's research and innovation ecosystem by supporting excellent research, knowledge transfer and collaboration between academia and the socio-economic environment. Structural Funds have enabled the Foundation to deliver programmes on a scale that would not have been possible using national resources alone.

At the same time, this funding model inevitably limits the Foundation's flexibility. Structural Funds are primarily intended to support cohesion policy objectives and innovation-driven activities, while extensive regulatory and reporting requirements reduce the Foundation's ability to modify programme rules or introduce new instruments independently.

Alignment of the Charter with the Foundation's Mission

The principles of the European Charter for Researchers closely reflect the values that have guided the Foundation since its establishment: excellence, integrity, transparency, fairness and support for researchers' professional development.

For the Foundation, implementation of the Charter has therefore not represented a fundamental organisational change. Rather, it has provided a structured framework for consolidating and further developing practices that were already embedded in its funding activities.

Implementation Status – Key Achievements and Areas for Development

Over recent years, the Foundation has systematically strengthened its implementation of the Charter across all four thematic areas:

- Ethics, Research Integrity, Gender Equality and Open Science;
- Assessment, Recruitment and Career Progression;
- Working Environment and Working Conditions;
- Career Development.

Implementation has been achieved through both programme design and complementary initiatives supporting researchers, research organisations and the wider research community.

Beyond its funding activities, the Foundation actively contributes to national discussions on research policy, research assessment and Open Science. It also promotes evidence-informed public debate and

supports responsible science communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation became an important platform for communicating reliable scientific knowledge, including through its "Let's Trust Science" discussion series, which attracted more than 20,000 online views.

Ethics, Research Integrity, Gender Equality and Open Science

Key Measures Implemented to Date

Ethics

- Revised the Foundation for Polish Science Code of Ethics and the Code of Ethics for Applicants and Beneficiaries to reflect evolving standards of research integrity and responsible conduct of research.
- Established an Ethics Committee and adopted a publicly available Procedure for Handling Alleged Breaches of Ethical Principles, providing a clear framework for addressing ethical concerns.
- Introduced a comprehensive conflict-of-interest policy applicable to Foundation staff, applicants, beneficiaries, reviewers and external experts.

Research integrity and responsible research management

- Strengthened project monitoring and financial oversight to promote the responsible management of public funding.
- Reinforced compliance requirements by ensuring that all funded projects obtain the necessary ethical approvals and legal authorisations before research activities begin.
- Introduced Data Management Plans (DMPs) in selected programmes to promote responsible research data management throughout the project lifecycle.
- Strengthened requirements concerning intellectual property management, knowledge transfer and research commercialisation. Applicants in innovation-oriented programmes are required to present clear arrangements for managing both background and foreground intellectual property.
- Established and published a formal mechanism for reporting misconduct, financial irregularities and other breaches of applicable rules.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

- Removed biological age limits from all grant programmes except the START Programme, broadening access to funding opportunities.
- Developed dedicated funding schemes supporting researchers returning to research following career breaks related to parenthood or employment outside academia (POMOST and POWROTY).
- Adopted and published the Foundation's Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Monitored gender balance among applicants, beneficiaries, reviewers and expert panel members across Foundation programmes.
- Increased the representation of women in expert panels, review panels and among nominators for the Foundation for Polish Science Prize.
- Introduced a tie-break mechanism in selected programmes giving priority to proposals led by women where applications receive identical evaluation scores.
- Raised awareness of unconscious bias by providing reviewers and panel members with dedicated guidance and training materials.
- Piloted anonymous proposal assessment in the PRIME Programme, removing information on applicants' gender, institutional affiliation and academic status from the evaluation process (PRIME).
- Harmonised eligibility extension rules and project implementation periods for researchers affected by parenthood, pregnancy or long-term illness.

- Made all essential programme documentation available in English.
- Monitored the participation and experience of international researchers involved in Foundation-funded projects.
- Launched a new website compliant with recognised digital accessibility standards.
- Required beneficiaries of projects funded under the European Funds for a Modern Economy (FENG) Programme to comply with the principles of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Open Science

- Supported Open Access publishing through dedicated funding mechanisms.
- Encouraged researchers to deposit publications and research outputs in trusted repositories.
- Made Foundation-published monographs openly accessible after a 24-month embargo period.
- Began making earlier Foundation publications available in Open Access through agreements with authors and publishers.
- Adopted and published the Foundation's Position Statement on Open Access.
- Contributed actively to national and international discussions on Open Science, including participation in Science Europe working groups.

The researchers and free circulation of researchers

- Supported researchers returning to academia after career breaks through dedicated funding programmes.
- Ensured that all key programme information is available in English, improving accessibility for international applicants.
- Introduced narrative CVs, enabling applicants to demonstrate a broader range of academic contributions, including mentoring, leadership, knowledge transfer and community engagement.

Sustainable research practices

- Integrated sustainability principles into the design and implementation of projects funded under FENG.
- Introduced contractual obligations requiring beneficiaries to comply with environmental sustainability principles throughout project implementation.
- Embedded environmental requirements within programme documentation, grant agreements and project selection procedures.
- Monitored environmental indicators during both project selection and implementation.
- Required the application of green public procurement principles in infrastructure purchases financed through Foundation grants.
- Published practical guidance on environmental sustainability for project beneficiaries.
- Delivered training for Foundation staff on environmental sustainability and responsible resource management.
- Joined the Declaration of Civil Society Organisations for Climate Action.

Current Practice

The Foundation has established a comprehensive policy framework covering research ethics, research integrity, equality, diversity, Open Science and sustainable research practices. Although it is not a research-performing organisation, it promotes high standards through the design of its funding programmes, grant agreements, evaluation procedures and project monitoring.

Academic freedom underpins all Foundation programmes. Funding is awarded through bottom-up schemes that allow applicants complete freedom to define research questions, methodologies and scientific objectives.

Ethical conduct is supported through dedicated codes of ethics applying to staff, applicants, beneficiaries and reviewers. These are complemented by transparent procedures for handling ethical concerns, robust conflict-of-interest rules and mechanisms for reporting misconduct and financial irregularities.

The Foundation places considerable emphasis on legal compliance, responsible research data management, protection of intellectual property and the responsible use of research results. Beneficiaries are required to obtain all necessary approvals before commencing research and to manage public funds in a transparent, accountable and efficient manner. Projects are subject to continuous monitoring and audits carried out by the Foundation and other authorised bodies. Larger projects within selected programmes are additionally required to prepare comprehensive Data Management Plans. The Foundation obliges its beneficiaries to the appropriate protection and management of intellectual property generated through funded research.

Equality, diversity and inclusion have become integral elements of the Foundation's funding policy. Age limits have been removed from the majority of grant programmes, and a comprehensive Equality and Diversity Policy has been implemented. The Foundation monitors the participation of women and men in grant competitions and evaluation procedures, actively increases women's representation among experts and reviewers, and raises awareness of unconscious bias among evaluators. In selected programmes, where proposals receive identical scores, priority is given to projects led by women. Equal opportunities are further supported through harmonised rules governing eligibility extensions and project duration for researchers affected by parenthood or long-term illness. The PRIME Programme additionally applies anonymous proposal evaluation in order to minimise unconscious bias.

The Foundation is equally committed to improving the accessibility and inclusiveness of its programmes and activities. Key information on funding programmes and calls is available in English, facilitating the participation of international researchers. The Foundation monitors both their participation in funded projects and their experience of working within supported research teams. In addition, the Foundation's website has been developed in accordance with recognised digital accessibility standards to ensure broad access to information for all users. Beneficiaries of projects funded under the European Funds for a Modern Economy (FENG) Programme are also required to comply with the principles of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Foundation recognises and supports the professional status of researchers while respecting the diversity of research career paths. Assessment procedures increasingly focus on qualitative evaluation through the use of narrative CVs and broader recognition of different forms of scientific contribution, rather than relying solely on quantitative indicators. Participation in Foundation programmes is not conditional upon holding a postdoctoral habilitation degree, making funding opportunities more accessible to international researchers and supporting international mobility.

The Foundation recognises and supports diverse research career paths while promoting a qualitative approach to research assessment. Evaluation considers a broad range of research achievements and professional contributions, moving beyond bibliometric indicators alone. The increasing use of narrative CVs and holistic assessment enables reviewers to recognise diverse career paths and different forms of contribution to research.

The Foundation also promotes international mobility and an open research system. Participation in most funding programmes is not conditional on holding a habilitation degree, making the Foundation's programmes more accessible to researchers from outside Poland. All key information on funding

programmes and calls is available in English. Eligibility periods and project implementation timelines may be extended in cases of career breaks related to parenthood, illness or other justified circumstances.

The Foundation promotes Open Science by supporting Open Access publishing, encouraging the use of research repositories and making its own publications openly available. It also actively contributes to national and European discussions on the development of Open Science policies.

The Foundation also promotes sustainable research practices. Staff receive training on environmental sustainability and horizontal environmental principles, while projects funded under FENG Programme are required to comply with sustainability requirements. Environmental indicators are assessed during project selection and monitored throughout project implementation. Both the Foundation and its beneficiaries apply green public procurement principles when purchasing infrastructure financed through the FENG Programme. To support beneficiaries, the Foundation has published an Environmental Guide providing practical guidance on the application of horizontal environmental principles.

Challenges

Despite the progress achieved, several challenges remain.

- Gender disparities continue to characterise the Polish research system and are reflected, to varying degrees, in participation across Foundation programmes.
- The Foundation's Equality and Diversity Policy, adopted in 2021, should now be reviewed to ensure continued alignment with evolving European policies and emerging good practice in equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Due to the absence of dedicated funding, programmes supporting researchers returning to research following career breaks - particularly those related to parenthood or employment outside academia - have been discontinued despite their positive impact.
- Similarly, the Foundation's current Position Statement on Open Access requires revision to reflect recent developments in Open Science, including the increasing emphasis on FAIR research data, research assessment reform and responsible data sharing.
- A further challenge concerns the practical implementation of environmental sustainability requirements. Many beneficiaries continue to experience difficulties in identifying meaningful environmental indicators and integrating sustainability considerations into project management.

Future Actions

- Review and update the Equality and Diversity Policy to reflect recent European developments and good practice.
- Deliver the pilot "Conscious Leadership" programme to strengthen leadership competencies among women researchers.
- Revise and expand the Foundation's Position Statement on Open Access, incorporating recent developments in Open Science policy.
- Develop and publish practical guidance on the application of environmental indicators in Foundation-funded research projects.

Assessment, Recruitment and Career Progression

As a research funding organisation, the Foundation does not employ researchers. Consequently, its implementation of the European Charter for Researchers focuses primarily on the design and

delivery of research funding programmes, including grant evaluation procedures and the conditions governing funded projects. At the same time, the Foundation promotes the implementation of the Charter by its beneficiaries, in particular through requirements for Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) and for creating an environment that supports researchers' career development.

Key Measures Implemented to Date

Research assessment

- Introduced a broader, qualitative approach to the assessment of researchers' achievements, recognising a wide range of academic contributions beyond traditional publication outputs. Extended assessment criteria to include research leadership, supervision and mentoring, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration, knowledge transfer, research commercialisation and wider contributions to the research ecosystem.
- Enabled applicants to identify and describe the research outputs and professional achievements they consider most significant, allowing reviewers to assess excellence within the context of individual career paths.
- Introduced narrative CVs in selected funding programmes, enabling applicants to demonstrate the quality, relevance and impact of their contributions rather than relying primarily on quantitative indicators.
- Piloted anonymous proposal assessment within the PRIME Programme, removing information on applicants' gender, institutional affiliation and academic position during the review process.
- Provided reviewers and panel members with guidance on responsible research assessment, including consideration of career stage, career interruptions and diverse research trajectories.
- Continued to improve communication with applicants through detailed guidance documents, webinars, information meetings and comprehensive online resources.
- Allowed applicants, where appropriate, to clarify selected aspects of submitted proposals during the evaluation process.
- Provided applicants with structured evaluation reports and reviewers' comments to improve transparency and support future applications.
- Established formal appeal procedures for programmes financed under the Smart Growth Operational Programme (POIR) and the European Funds for a Modern Economy (FENG).
- Ensured transparency by publishing detailed information on eligibility requirements, evaluation criteria and assessment procedures for all funding programmes.
- Joined the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and actively contributed to both the Working Group on *Improving Practices in the Assessment of Research Proposals* and the CoARA Polish National Chapter.

Recruitment within funded projects

- Required beneficiaries to recruit researchers in accordance with Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) principles.
- Required vacancies within funded projects to be advertised internationally, including through EURAXESS, using recruitment templates developed by the Foundation.
- Monitored recruitment procedures to ensure compliance with programme requirements and OTM-R standards. (In the International Research Agendas (MAB) and FIRST TEAM programmes, Foundation representatives participate in recruitment procedures as observers prior to approving recruitment reports).
- Included recruitment practices among the criteria assessed during the mid-term evaluation of International Research Agendas (MAB POIR) projects, encouraging the adoption of good practices in research human resources management.

Current Practice

For many years, the Foundation has applied a qualitative, peer-review-based approach to research assessment. FNP competitions focus on the scientific quality of applicants' achievements, their research potential and the excellence of proposed research.

Over recent years, the Foundation has progressively developed a more comprehensive and responsible approach to research assessment. Evaluation extends beyond traditional research outputs, such as publications and patents, to recognise a broader range of academic contributions, including research leadership, supervision and mentoring, interdisciplinary collaboration, engagement with the socio-economic environment, knowledge transfer, and, where relevant, the implementation and commercialisation of research results.

Applicants are encouraged to identify the achievements they consider most representative of their careers, enabling reviewers to assess research excellence in the context of individual career paths and the broader impact of their work. In selected funding programmes, this approach is supported through the use of narrative CVs, which provide a more comprehensive picture of applicants' scientific and professional achievements.

The Foundation is also committed to ensuring that assessment is fair, transparent and free from unnecessary bias. In the PRIME Programme, proposals are evaluated anonymously, with information on applicants' gender, institutional affiliation and professional status removed before review. This enables evaluators to focus exclusively on the quality of the proposed research and the applicant's achievements.

Transparency remains a defining feature of the Foundation's assessment system. Programme documentation, eligibility rules and evaluation criteria are publicly available, while applicants receive structured feedback that supports the preparation of future proposals. Where provided for under programme regulations, formal appeal procedures further strengthen the credibility and accountability of the evaluation process.

Beyond its own funding activities, the Foundation promotes good recruitment practices among beneficiary institutions. Grant recipients are required to apply the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment (OTM-R) and to advertise research positions internationally. By monitoring recruitment procedures and promoting internationally recognised standards, the Foundation contributes to strengthening research careers and human resources management across the Polish research system.

The Foundation's accession to CoARA represents a further step towards embedding the principles of responsible research assessment within its funding activities. Through active participation in CoARA working groups, the Foundation contributes to the development of European good practices while continuously refining its own assessment procedures in line with emerging international standards.

Challenges

The Foundation's ability to further develop its assessment procedures is influenced by the regulatory framework governing programmes financed through the European Union Structural Funds. External regulations introduce detailed eligibility rules, formal assessment criteria and administrative requirements that limit the flexibility of programme design. While these provisions enhance accountability in the use of public funding, they also increase the administrative burden placed on applicants, reviewers and the Foundation itself.

The internationalisation of evaluation procedures has also presented challenges. Regulatory requirements applicable to some Structural Fund programmes limited the extent to which funding calls and evaluation processes could be conducted in English, affecting both international applicants and the recruitment of foreign reviewers. Although the Foundation has made substantial progress in increasing international participation, these constraints affected the implementation of previous funding calls.

The Foundation also recognises that the rapid development of artificial intelligence presents new challenges for research assessment. The increasing use of AI-assisted writing tools requires funding organisations to reconsider existing evaluation methods and ensure that assessment continues to recognise originality, creativity and genuine scientific contribution.

Future Actions

- Further strengthen guidance and training for reviewers to ensure the consistent application of responsible assessment principles and the recognition of diverse research careers.

Working Conditions of Researchers

Although the Foundation does not employ researchers directly, it nevertheless exerts an indirect influence on their working conditions, including remuneration, employment stability and contractual arrangements, through the design of its funding programmes and the requirements imposed on beneficiaries. By setting funding conditions and monitoring project implementation, the Foundation actively promotes an attractive research environment and supports the development of research careers in accordance with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and good practices in human resources management in research. At the same time, it promotes responsible research practices, Open Science and initiatives that strengthen the dialogue between science and society.

Key measures implemented

Remuneration, employment stability and social protection

- Developed remuneration guidelines for Foundation-funded projects, including recommended salary levels for different categories of research positions. The recommended remuneration framework has been designed to enhance the international competitiveness of Polish research teams.
- Introduced a requirement that researchers employed within Foundation-funded projects be hired under employment contracts providing the full range of employment rights and social security benefits, while ensuring working conditions consistent with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and good practice in research human resources management.
- Included institutional capacity, the long-term sustainability of project outcomes and opportunities for the continued development of research team members among the assessment criteria for selected programmes, particularly the International Research Agendas (MAB) Programme.

Conditions for conducting research projects

- Harmonised the rules governing extensions of project implementation periods in cases of parenthood, pregnancy or long-term illness.
- Provided funding enabling access to modern research infrastructure and specialised equipment necessary for conducting research at the highest international level.

- Clarified, harmonised and published rules governing changes to research team composition and project implementation arrangements, enabling beneficiaries to manage projects more flexibly.
- Included provisions on intellectual property management in programme documentation, grant agreements and application procedures for programmes supporting the implementation or commercialisation of research results.
- Introduced mechanisms enabling researchers to benefit from the commercial exploitation of research results generated within Foundation-funded projects.
- Conducted regular surveys among applicants and beneficiaries to gather feedback on their experience of participating in Foundation programmes.

Science communication and public engagement

- Included in the Code of Ethics for Applicants and Beneficiaries a commitment to undertake activities that strengthen public understanding of science and its contribution to social and economic development.
- Strengthened the recognition and prestige of Professor Maciej Grabski Award for outstanding achievements in science communication and public engagement.
- Organised public debates bringing together researchers to discuss both scientific discoveries and major societal challenges, as well as issues related to the research and innovation system and cooperation between science, society and the economy. These included the Science Explains the World and Let's Trust Science debate series.
- Established partnerships with organisations specialising in science communication, public engagement and the promotion of trust in science.

Current state

The Foundation is not the employer of researchers working on projects that it funds and therefore does not directly determine their employment conditions. Instead, it influences these conditions indirectly through the design of its grant programmes and the requirements imposed on host institutions. Through programme documentation, grant agreements, recruitment requirements and project monitoring, the Foundation promotes standards consistent with the European Charter for Researchers, encourages stable and transparent employment conditions, supports competitive remuneration and encourages host institutions to provide environments conducive to researchers' professional development.

One distinctive feature of the Foundation's approach is the application of recommended salary scales that help ensure the competitiveness of funded projects in both the national and international labour markets. In addition, the Foundation requires key members of research teams to be employed under employment contracts providing full employment rights and social protection. Beneficiaries are also required to conduct open, transparent and merit-based recruitment procedures, monitored by the Foundation, and to advertise vacancies internationally, including through EURAXESS.

Supporting continuity and stability in research careers remains another important aspect of the Foundation's activities. Researchers affected by parenthood, pregnancy or long-term illness may benefit from extensions of both eligibility periods and project implementation periods, helping to reduce the negative impact of career interruptions.

Through its funding programmes, the Foundation also contributes to creating high-quality research environments. Funding enables beneficiaries to establish strong research teams, acquire advanced research infrastructure and undertake ambitious scientific projects. In programmes focused on innovation and collaboration with industry, particular attention is paid to transparent intellectual property management and to ensuring that researchers receive an appropriate share of the benefits arising from the commercialisation of research results.

As a consequence, the Foundation's impact extends well beyond the provision of research funding itself. Its activities contribute to the dissemination of high standards in employment, recruitment and research career development across the Polish research system.

Challenges

A substantial proportion of the Foundation's programmes is financed through European Union Structural Funds. As a consequence, programme implementation is subject to extensive administrative and regulatory requirements stemming from both European Union and national legislation. These obligations create a considerable administrative burden for all parties involved, including the Foundation, applicants, beneficiaries and reviewers. At the same time, the Foundation's ability to reduce these burdens is largely constrained by external regulations.

The Foundation also recognizes the need to make greater use of its potential in the fields of science communication, public engagement and strengthening the dialogue between science and society. Existing partnerships and initiatives have created a solid basis for further development in this area. In the coming years, particular emphasis will be placed on establishing new partnerships, expanding cooperation with organizations specializing in science communication and identifying effective ways of engaging society in dialogue about science.

Another challenge arises from the rapidly evolving landscape of science communication. Changing communication channels and growing public expectations require the Foundation to continuously adapt its methods and tools. At the same time, these developments create an opportunity to develop more modern and effective approaches to science communication that better address the needs of diverse audiences while strengthening public trust in science.

Future actions

- Update the Foundation's recommended remuneration tables for projects funded by the Foundation in order to maintain the competitiveness of employment conditions offered to researchers.
- Organize a series of public debates in cooperation with the Copernicus Science Centre, promoting open dialogue between researchers and society and strengthening public trust in science.
- Produce and publish a series of video interviews featuring Foundation laureates, presenting the significance of their research in an accessible way and demonstrating how scientific discoveries contribute to the advancement of knowledge and the solution of contemporary societal challenges. The initiative aims to increase public understanding of the nature of scientific work and strengthen public interest in science and its outcomes.

Career Development and Researcher Support

Although the Foundation is not directly responsible for researchers' career progression, supporting their professional development is one of its core objectives. The Foundation views research careers as extending beyond scientific excellence alone to encompass skills development, leadership, collaboration, mobility, knowledge transfer, mentoring and public engagement. Through its diverse portfolio of funding programmes, it supports researchers at different career stages while recognising the diversity of career paths within and beyond academia.

Key Measures Implemented to Date

Recognising diverse research careers

- Introduced a broader approach to research assessment that recognises a wide range of academic contributions beyond traditional publication-based indicators.
- Expanded assessment criteria to include supervision and mentoring, research leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, cooperation with the socio-economic environment, knowledge transfer and research commercialisation.
- Enabled applicants to identify the achievements they consider most representative of their scientific careers, allowing reviewers to assess quality and impact in context.
- Introduced narrative CVs in selected funding programmes, enabling applicants to present a more comprehensive picture of their research careers and professional achievements.
- Launched the PRIME Programme, supporting researchers in developing competencies related to innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration with industry through integrated training, mentoring and advisory support.
- Established the Knowledge Hub, an online platform promoting the exchange of knowledge, practical experience and good practices in research commercialisation and innovation management.

Professional development

- Implemented the SKILLS Programme, offering training in research communication, scientific publishing, leadership, collaboration with industry, knowledge transfer and public engagement.
- Allowed project budgets to cover professional development activities, including specialised training and skills development relevant to project implementation.
- Included opportunities for researchers' professional development among the evaluation criteria for selected programmes, particularly those supporting the establishment of long-term research partnerships and internationally competitive research environments.
- Supported Foundation fellows and laureates in participating in internationally recognised initiatives, including the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings, the Leadership Academy and the Standing up for Science programme.
- Continued developing the PRIME Programme by strengthening training in entrepreneurship, innovation management, market analysis and cooperation with business partners.
- Regularly surveyed beneficiaries and fellows to identify training needs and improve the Foundation's professional development activities.

Supervision and mentoring

- Established a mentoring programme for Foundation fellows to support early-career researchers in their scientific and professional development.
- Conducted studies on doctoral supervision and mentoring practices within Foundation-funded projects.
- Introduced, within the HOMING Programme, a requirement that doctoral candidates receive additional mentoring from an independent researcher outside their immediate research team, broadening their scientific perspectives and professional networks.

Current Practice

The Foundation promotes a holistic approach to research careers that recognises excellence in research alongside leadership, collaboration, mentoring, innovation, knowledge transfer and societal engagement. Its assessment procedures recognise a broad range of research achievements and professional contributions, including research, publications, supervision and mentoring of early-career researchers, research leadership, collaboration with the socio-economic environment, and the

implementation of research results, with assessment criteria tailored to the objectives of individual funding programmes.

Applicants are encouraged to identify the achievements that best represent their scientific contributions, and selected programmes make use of narrative CVs. These measures support a qualitative approach to research assessment and recognise diverse career paths, in line with the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the objectives of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

The Foundation supports researchers' professional development through both training components embedded in funding programmes and dedicated initiatives. The PRIME Programme provides training, mentoring, expert advice and opportunities to strengthen collaboration with the socio-economic environment. These activities are complemented by the PRIME Knowledge Hub, which facilitates the exchange of knowledge and good practices in innovation, intellectual property management and research commercialisation.

The Foundation also recognises national, international and intersectoral mobility as important components of research careers. Through its programmes, it supports participation in prestigious international initiatives and events, encourages collaboration with industry and public institutions, and enables researchers to broaden their experience across different research environments.

Mentoring and high-quality supervision of early-career researchers also remain important priorities. The Foundation monitors the conditions for doctoral training within funded projects and promotes solutions that improve access to expert support. Building on experience gained through the SKILLS and HOMING programmes, it also runs a mentoring scheme for START scholarship holders.

Challenges

Demand for professional development opportunities among researchers continues to exceed the Foundation's available financial resources. While researchers increasingly recognise the importance of transferable skills and seek opportunities to strengthen their competencies, the Foundation's ability to expand its training offer depends on securing additional funding and establishing strategic partnerships.

Key needs have been identified in areas such as research project management, research leadership, team management and supervision, research data management, academic writing, science communication, intellectual property management, collaboration with industry and research commercialisation. These competencies are becoming increasingly important for successful research careers and the effective delivery of ambitious, high-impact research projects, yet they remain insufficiently developed across much of the Polish research system.

The Foundation aims to play a broader role not only as a funder of scientific research, but also as an organisation that strengthens the capacity of the research community, supports collaboration and helps ensure that science generates meaningful value for society. To achieve this goal, the Foundation is actively seeking new sources of funding and partners to develop a more comprehensive and accessible training offer for researchers.

The Foundation also recognizes that researchers need stronger institutional support in communicating science to society. Although awareness of the importance of public engagement has increased, many researchers still have limited experience and confidence in communicating research beyond academic audiences. Addressing this challenge will require both targeted training and stronger incentives for public engagement.

Future Actions

- Implement the pilot "Conscious Leadership" programme to strengthen leadership competencies among women researchers.
- Launch a pilot mentoring programme for early-career researchers in the humanities and social sciences in cooperation with the University of Oxford, supporting international networking and career development.
- Make the Knowledge Hub publicly available as an open platform for sharing knowledge, good practices and practical resources related to research commercialisation and innovation.

Action Plan 2026-2028

Action	Charter Area	Expected Outcome / Indicator	Timeline	Responsibility
Review and update the Equality and Diversity Policy	- Gender Equality - Embracing Diversity	Revised policy adopted and published on the Foundation's website.	Q2 2027	Equality and Diversity Working Group (coordinated by the Programme Evaluation and Analysis Expert)
Deliver the pilot "Conscious Leadership" programme for women researchers.	- Gender Equality; - Career Development	Pilot programme completed; participant feedback collected and evaluated.	Q4 2027	ARDEA
Review and update the Foundation's Position Statement on Open Access in line with current European Open Science policies.	Open Science	Revised Position Statement published and disseminated.	Q1 2027	ARDEA
Develop practical guidance on the application of environmental indicators in Foundation-funded projects.	Sustainability of Research	Guidance document published and made available to beneficiaries.	Q4 2027	Project Coordination Team; Communications Team; Programme Evaluation and Analysis Expert
Review and update the Foundation's recommended remuneration framework to maintain competitive employment conditions for researchers.	Working Conditions, Funding and Salaries	Updated remuneration recommendations approved and implemented in new funding calls.	Q3 2026	Project Coordination Team; Financial Coordination Division
Organise a series of public debates in partnership with the Copernicus Science Centre to strengthen dialogue between science and society.	- Dissemination and Exploitation of results - Science Communication	At least four public events organised.	Q4 2026	ARDEA
	Dissemination and	Podcast series launched;	Q3 2026	Senior Specialist for Research

Action	Charter Area	Expected Outcome / Indicator	Timeline	Responsibility
Produce and publish a video interview series featuring Foundation laureates to showcase the societal impact of research.	- Exploitation of results - Science Communication	number of episodes and audience reach monitored.		Communication
Launch a pilot mentoring programme for early-career researchers in the humanities and social sciences in cooperation with the University of Oxford.	- Career Development and Advice - Mentoring	Pilot mentoring programme completed and evaluated.	Q1 2027	ARDEA
Make the Knowledge Hub publicly available as an open platform for sharing knowledge and good practice in innovation and research commercialisation.	- Continuous Professional Development - Valuing Diverse Research Careers	Knowledge Hub launched and accessible to the research community.	Q3 2027	Academic Entrepreneurship Team
Identify barriers to project implementation, including beneficiaries' competency gaps	- Working Conditions, Funding and Salaries - Contractual and Legal Obligations - Valuing Diverse Research Careers	Evaluation report	Evaluation report	Evaluation and Program Analysis Expert