

HRS4R Workshop Outcomes Report

Context and Participation

As part of Karlstad University's ongoing HR award process (previously HRS4R), a structured series of workshops and consultations were carried out to gather input on priorities for the next action plan.

Five workshops were held with researchers representing all career stages, ensuring perspectives from early-career researchers, mid-career staff, and senior academics were included. A dedicated workshop with Heads of Department and their deputies formed part of this process, while the University Leadership Team was engaged through structured interactions. In addition, written contributions were received via email, providing an important channel for individual reflections that complemented group discussions.

This inclusive approach aimed to capture a broad picture of the research environment at Karlstad University. The process reflects the principles of the European Charter for Researchers, ensuring that the perspectives of the research community and leadership alike shape the next steps.

Workshop Methodology

The workshops were designed as facilitative and interactive sessions that encouraged participation, reflection, and dialogue. A combination of self-reflection, small group work, and larger group discussions was used to ensure that all voices could be heard.

Discussions were framed around three guiding questions:

- What currently works well at Karlstad University in relation to research and research environments?
- What barriers exist for researchers and for developing strong research environments?
- What changes would you propose to strengthen research activities and environments?

In addition, as a collective framing exercise, all participants were asked to respond in unison to the question: **"What do you want most from your research environment?"**

The shared responses were clear and consistent across groups: **time, collaboration, and better communication.**

This methodology ensured that the workshops combined critical reflection with constructive problem-solving, providing both depth and breadth in the perspectives gathered.

Key Themes Identified:

1. Collaboration (Internal and External)

- A strong call for more opportunities to collaborate across subjects, departments, and faculties.
- Recognition of the importance of strengthening external collaboration, including with business, public authorities, and civil society.

Contrasting perspectives emerged: Departmental managers reported that there are good arenas for research discussions and collaboration, while more than half of the researchers expressed that such arenas are limited or ineffective.

2. **Visibility of Research**

- Participants noted that science communication and the visibility of research in external arenas is currently limited. This reduces the wider impact of research and makes it harder for Karlstad University to position itself in national and international contexts.
- There is a strong wish for clearer strategies and support to help researchers share their work with external audiences, including business, policymakers, and the public.
- Sharing success stories, good practice, and achievements both within and outside the university was suggested as a way to inspire engagement and strengthen KAU's reputation.

3. **Research Support**

- Requests for strengthened research administrative support, especially in project development, research framing, and idea testing.
- A need for more structured support for EU projects, including both pre-award and post-award stages, was emphasised to strengthen participation and success.
- A need for support not only in a professional sense but also in relation to personal wellbeing, as some researchers described experiences of isolation and loneliness.

4. **Culture and Values**

- More arenas are needed for dialogue, idea generation, and cross-disciplinary interaction.
- A culture that encourages responsible risk-taking and recognises the value of learning from failure was considered important.
- Participants emphasised shared values, respectful interaction, and collective accountability as central to a positive and inclusive research environment.

5. **Transparency and Resources**

- Concerns were raised about a perceived lack of transparency in decision-making processes.
- Researchers noted inequalities in the distribution of resources across departments and disciplines. While recognising that differences in needs exist, there was a wish for clearer communication around the basis for allocation to ensure trust and fairness.
- A recurring theme was the need for more university-funded PhD positions, postdoctoral opportunities, and tenure-track lectureships to strengthen the long-term research base.
- Participants also called for more accessible statistics on research applications and awarded funding, from the individual to the departmental level, to better understand performance, track progress, and enable fairer resource planning.

6. **Access to Information and Resources**

- While Karlstad University has many communication channels and resources, researchers reported that internal communication can feel overwhelming, selective, and not always relevant.
- Much of the information reaching researchers was perceived as administrative in focus, with limited emphasis on promoting or highlighting research activities.
- A need was expressed for streamlined, targeted communication that is easier to navigate and that gives greater visibility to research and researcher achievements.
- Embedding information in everyday practice through clear, accessible platforms would help ensure resources are used more consistently and effectively.

7. **Balancing Education and Research**

- Participants raised concerns about the balance between teaching and research, particularly in terms of workload, recognition, and resources.
 - Ensuring that both activities are valued and that researchers have sufficient time to pursue their research was highlighted as a key challenge.
- 8. Recruitment and Career Progression**
- Researchers underlined the importance of transparent and merit-based recruitment processes.
 - There was a strong call for greater prioritisation of research merits in recruitment and career advancement decisions, alongside teaching qualifications.
 - Participants emphasised that recruitment and promotion practices should be consistent, fair, and aligned with international standards to strengthen Karlstad University's attractiveness and competitiveness.
- 9. Departmental Research Strategies**
- Participants highlighted the need for inclusive research strategies at the departmental level that integrate the breadth and depth of research being conducted.
 - Concerns were expressed that priorities sometimes focus narrowly on senior staff or externally funded projects, leaving other contributions under-recognised.
 - A fairer distribution of research priorities, representative of the whole department, was identified as an important step for building inclusive and sustainable research environments.
- 10. Supportive University Functions**
- Researchers identified IT support, HR, and the Grants and Innovation Office (GIO) as three critical units that play a central role in supporting research activities.
 - These functions were recognised as important partners in navigating both opportunities and challenges. At the same time, participants noted that continued development of these support services will be essential to meet the evolving needs of researchers.
- 11. Research Resilience**
- Participants stressed the importance of building research resilience: recognising that research ideas and proposals often need time to mature.
 - Funding rejections should not automatically lead to abandonment of an idea; instead, support should encourage refinement, persistence, and resubmission.
 - A resilient research culture values learning from setbacks and provides researchers with the resources and encouragement to continue developing promising ideas over the long term.

Integrated summary of strengths and gaps reported by participants

- **Strengths – What works well today**
 - **Support and infrastructure:** Strong technical support (IT); robust infrastructure (buildings, IT, library, GIO, HR); effective GIO support (applications, information on calls, competence development); well-equipped instruments and facilities.
 - **Collegiality and work environment:** Proximity to colleagues and a safe working climate; an attractive workplace that draws and retains staff.
 - **Research and collaboration:** Opportunities to collaborate across subjects and in researcher meeting arenas; strong internal and external collaboration capability; research with societal reach and applied benefits; world-leading strengths in certain areas; high external funding levels and a strong drive to apply.

- **Strategic investments and leadership:** KAU's investment in **REAL**; particularly skilled research leaders in some areas; capability to respond jointly to calls.

Gaps – Challenges and development needs

- **Strategic and organisational support:** Insufficient strategic thinking around research; support systems more oriented to teaching than research; unclear processes and responsibilities for applications; inadequate research administrative support (especially for EU applications); need for coordinators for large projects.
- **Economy and resources:** Funding difficulties in small research environments and artistic disciplines; frequent turnover of financial officers (noted in HS); lack of consolidated data on total external research funding.
- **Communication and information:** Insufficient access to information on current calls; limited recognition of researchers' application efforts; gaps in language support.
- **Capacity and competitiveness:** Environments sometimes too small for major initiatives; lack of capacity/infrastructure to lead large EU projects.

Conclusion

This report summarizes the background, implementation, and outcomes of the workshop. It serves both as a synthesis and a consolidation of the information gathered.

The purpose is to ensure that the perspectives and suggestions shared during the workshop inform the actions planned for the next period. recognising that not every issue raised could be translated into immediate action. It is also worth noting that the views expressed differ – likely reflecting variations in participants' underlying conditions and contexts.

As project leaders, our ambition is that the feedback collected will be of real value, and that participants will recognize their contributions both in this report and in the forthcoming actions.