

Academic Career Paths: A Journey from Planning to Evaluation

This tool is developed within the EUR R&R framework. It contains guidelines for introducing diversified career paths at a School of a university, from the very first preparatory activities to the post-evaluation actions. It presents the four phases of this process, and the steps within each phase. The guidelines provide a general overview of each phase and its details as well as what each step within a phase entails, which actions to take and who to involve. There are also additional tools and materials suggested for each phase.

Who can primarily benefit from this tool?

Individuals directly involved in the process of introducing career paths. These can be a person responsible for the daily, operational side of the process, such as HR Business Partner or a Policy Advisor, and leaders/decision-makers within a School who enable and finalise the new diversified career path policy, such as the management team and School governing bodies.

In which context is this tool useful?

Primarily, this tool supports the process of introducing diversified career paths when a School does not have any. The guidelines help to design and introduce career paths and the surrounding policy and procedures 'from scratch'. If desired, parts of this tool can also be used when re-assessing and re-designing the existing career paths, and the evaluation phase can assist Schools that have had diversified career paths for a while.

Academic Career Paths: A Journey from Planning to Evaluation

This tool, developed by the Recognition & Rewards (R&R) team, serves as a guideline for introducing diversified career paths at your School. Offering such career paths to academic staff is one of the key objectives of the *national R&R programme*. The process of introducing diversified career paths is visualised into a journey. It illustrates four phases: **Plan & Prepare**; **Develop**; **Implement & Communicate**; **Evaluate**. Each phase consists of steps which need to be considered when developing career paths.

How to read this document

This document serves to visualize the possible steps that come along when developing diversified career paths. Consider this document as a starting point for shaping a suitable process in your School.

This document contains clickable elements, to ensure easy navigation throughout the pages and the several phases. This document contains two types of pages: the overview page and four phase pages. This document can be printed on A3 if desired.

The overview page shows the full journey of diversified career paths, the four phases and more general information within the sub steps.

The four phase pages elaborate on important details within each phase. These pages outline what each step within the phases mean, how to act and who could be involved. Suggested tools and materials are presented at the bottom of each phase page.

The FAQ list at the end of this document answers some of frequently asked questions.

Why diversified career paths are important and needed

This tool is a step-by-step visualisation of a journey that a School can take to introduce diversified career paths. In this document the term diversified career paths is used, but each School can use their own terminology. Such career paths offer employees room to pursue and grow their unique talents and capabilities, which also enables better talent management and job satisfaction. This tool details what decisions and actions need to be taken to introduce career paths, how it can be done, and the involved stakeholders. The tool can be used by those responsible for different stages of the project, both on decision-making and operational levels.

The suggested timeline

The process of developing diversified career paths is a complex process therefore it takes time. The timeline below serves as a guideline, indicating estimated time needed for each phase. Use this timeline to adapt this to your Schools context and needs.

The suggested stakeholders

Different stakeholders are involved in the process of introducing diversified career paths, each with a specific role. The suggested stakeholders are grouped into three categories. The decision makers enable and finalise the new career path policy, project owners are responsible for project's operational side, and users are the main target audience of changes created by the new policy. Each phase page suggests stakeholders to involve: keep in mind that depending on the approach more stakeholders could be involved.

Decision makers

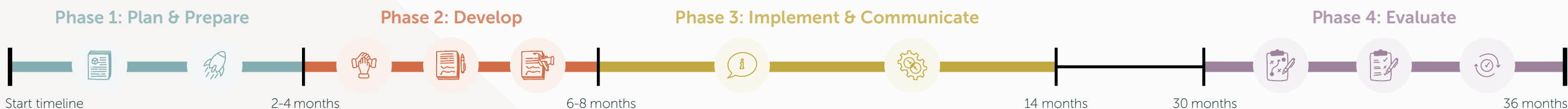
- MT School's management team
- SC School Council
- PC Promotion Committee
- DH Department Heads

Project owners

- PL Project Lead - Academic leader
- PM Project Manager - HR Business Partner/ Policy Advisor
- HR HR team
- DI D&I officer

Users

- AS Academic Staff



Academic Career Paths: The journey overview

Phase 1: Plan & Prepare



1. Set the stage

First, determine the goals and needs for the project. Explore the reasons and needs, along with the goals and objectives for having career paths. Define the project boundaries and what 'success' looks like.

Second, identify the stakeholders involved. Form a project team and divide the roles and responsibilities for each project stage and responsibility level.

Third, decide on guidelines such as the implementation budget. Pick an approach for the project, define the involvement level of stakeholders.

How: Desk research; MT discussions



2. Project proposal & kick-off

First, develop a project proposal summarising the decisions made in step 1. Outline the goals and needs, the project stakeholders, allocation of responsibilities, the project approach, and guidelines.

Second, discuss the project proposal within MT and other governing bodies. Officially kick-off the project by approving the project proposal.

How: Project proposal; MT meetings; kick-off meeting



Phase 2: Develop



3. Involve

Involve relevant stakeholders for designing career paths in an iterative process. Communicate the role of the stakeholder: what is expected and what to expect. Stakeholder involvement is done (preferably) bottom-up or top down.

How: Co-design sessions; Or decision-maker meetings; Sounding Board



4. Design & draft

First, gather input from relevant stakeholders. The method to gather input can depend on the top-down or bottom-up approach. Explore aspects of career paths such as composition, assessment criteria, entry requirements, and career development possibilities.

Second, decide on the collected input and converge decisions into a policy draft. Aim for a matrix or visualisation that summarizes the career paths. Both steps can be executed in an iterative process if desired.

How: Co-design sessions; Or decision-maker meetings; Sounding Board



5. Finalise

Discuss and approve the draft to finalise within MT. Involve department heads during final draft discussion to generate support and ensure transparency.

How: MT meetings; meeting(s) with department heads



Phase 3: Implement & Communicate



6. Share & inform

Ensure a transparent implementation process. Communicate the documented career paths with the involved stakeholders, in particular academic staff.

How: Information sessions; Intranet



7. Actively embed

First, actively embed and link the career paths to existing policies and processes within the School. Also, implement the application procedures for the development of career paths.

Second, train and guide promotion committees and those in leadership positions to execute the new policy as intended.

How: Adjusting HR procedures and policies; Trainings for committees and leaders



Phase 4: Evaluate



8. Plan the evaluation

Define the evaluation plan including the scope of the evaluation. Base the plan on the parameters of 'success' created in Phase I. Ensure a recurrent / iterative element in the evaluation plan.

How: Evaluation plan



9. Evaluate

Conduct the evaluation according to the evaluation plan. Monitor and evaluate the progress of career path implementation and adoption. Discuss the outcomes and identify learnings and improvements.

How: Evaluation procedure, outcomes, and learnings discussion



10. Update & communicate

Update the career paths based on the evaluation and detected improvement opportunities. Ensure to communicate updates with the stakeholders. Share learnings with staff and other EUR Schools, if desired.

How: Updating career path policy and processes; Knowledge-exchange with other Schools



Phase 1 Plan & Prepare



Start timeline

1. Set the stage

What

Goals & needs

First, determine the goals and needs for introducing diversified career paths at your School. Explore the reasons and needs, along with the goals and objectives for having career paths. Ensure to clearly define why you would want diversified career paths.

Define the project boundaries and what 'success' looks like when career paths are implemented. Explore the dependencies and potential alignment between future career paths and other existing School projects, policies, processes, and criteria.

Stakeholders & responsibilities

Second, identify the stakeholders involved. Form a project team and divide the roles and responsibilities for each project stage and responsibility level.

Map out the project stakeholders using a stakeholder map, aiming to understand the direct and indirect stakeholders involved in the project.

Guidelines & approach

Third, decide on guidelines such as the implementation budget. Pick an approach for the project, define the involvement level of stakeholders.

Decide on the involvement level of academic staff in the process of designing career paths. Decide in what format career paths will be designed, e.g. co-design sessions.

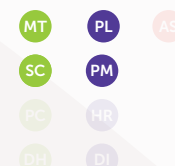
How

- Conduct desk research to inventory the current policy of career differentiation at your School.
- Organise MT discussions, aim to discuss the project boundaries, 'elephants in the room' and how to move forward from them.

- Define the direct and indirect stakeholders using a stakeholder map.
- Discuss the roles and responsibilities with the MT and if needed other governing bodies. Other bodies to possibly involve are the School Council and Promotion Committee.

- Decide on a top-down or bottom-up approach.
- Discuss the project approach and budget within MT and other governing bodies.
- Explore co-creation and other methods to involve stakeholders.

Who



Suggested tools & materials

✂ Prompt questions for Phase 1



2-4 months

GO TO PHASE 2

2. Project proposal & kick-off

Develop the project proposal

Summarise the boundaries of the project into a project proposal. Consider elements such as the goals & needs, stakeholders, guidelines, approach and others.

Summarise the decisions made in step 1 into a project proposal for introducing career paths at your School.

Approval project proposal by MT

Discuss the project proposal with the MT to ensure a concise kick-off of the project. Officially kick-off the project after approval of the project proposal by the MT and inform stakeholders about this.

If needed, reflect on what can be adjusted to move forward with the project. Ensure that the budget is available for Phase 2.

- Write the project proposal and summarise the decisions made in step 1.

- Discuss and present the project proposal to MT and other governing bodies.
- Officially kick-off the project. Communicate the kick-off with stakeholders through an information session, newsletters, or Intranet.



Phase 2 Develop



3. Involve

What

Involve stakeholders & gather input

Involve relevant stakeholders for designing career paths in an iterative process. Use a bottom-up or top-down approach. A bottom-up approach creates a sense of ownership among staff and ensures transparency.

Arrange the collection of data either through bottom-up or top-down approaches. Communicate the role of the stakeholder: what is expected of them and what can they expect. Consider organising several stakeholder sessions to deep dive on decisions that you need to make.

How

- Enable an iterative process with two-way communication and alignment between management, non-management academic staff and other stakeholders.
- Organise co-design sessions with stakeholders to enable internal consultation (involve academic staff for a bottom-up approach, involve decision makers for a top-down approach).
- Arrange a sounding board and organise decision meetings.

Who



Suggested tools & materials

✦ Prompt questions for Phase II

4. Decision & draft

Process input & decide

Structure the collected data from the "Involve" step. Organise the data in such a way that decisions can be made in the next step. Decide on basics such as career path names, numbers, composition. But also more complex aspects as duration of being in a career path, entry and promotion requirements, and career development possibilities. See the full criteria list for the paths below in [Prompt questions for Phase II](#).

Also discuss the administrative aspects, e.g. how to keep record of academics being in career paths .

- Structure data collected in co-design sessions with stakeholders (stakeholder depends on the approach).
- Organise MT meetings to discuss the collected and structured data. Make decisions based on the data.
- Involve stakeholders which participated in previous sessions or meetings (such as academics, a sounding board etc.) to evaluate and iterate the data and decisions made.



✦ Academic Career Paths: A Design Workshop

Develop a policy draft

Draft the data and decisions collected into a first policy document. Within the iterative process it could be valuable to gather extra input from stakeholders if needed.

Create a final draft of the new career path policy for the administrative route. Include a matrix or a visualisation that neatly summarises the career paths.

- Develop the policy documents that specify all the content of the career paths and surrounding procedures. Capture all the decisions and outcomes made in Phase I and Phase II in the documents.



5. Finalise

MT discussion & approval

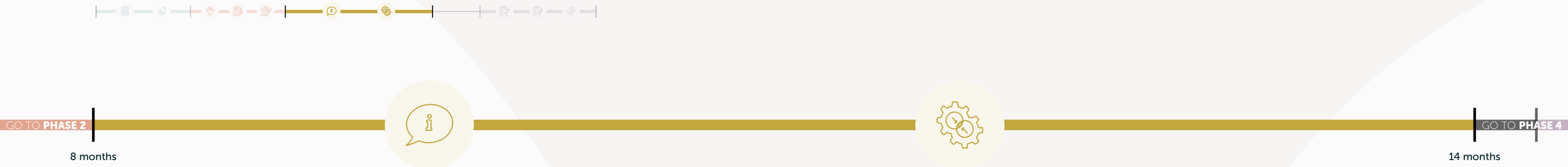
Discuss and approve the final policy draft within MT and include department heads. Involve other School governing bodies in the final draft discussion, such as the School Council.

Decide on the 'go' for the new career path policy implementation. If needed, reflect on what needs be adjusted to move forward with the implementation. Revisit step 3 and 4 if needed.

- Discuss the draft with the MT and department heads.
- If needed iterate the process by going back to step 3 and 4.
- Adjust the policy into the final document.



Phase 3 Implement



6. Share & inform

What

Informing & transparency

First, ensure a transparent implementation process. Communicate the documented career paths with the involved stakeholders, in particular academic staff.

Create a moment to inform staff about the new career paths. Indicate what it means for the employees, what changes, possibilities, and procedures there are.

Encourage department heads to create more informal, personal information opportunities within departments to talk about the new policy and to disseminate policy document(s).

How

- Make the career path document(s) available and accessible for employees e.g. on the School's Intranet.
- Organise information session(s) at School and department levels.

Who



Suggested tools & materials

🔗 Prompt questions for Phase III

7. Actively embed

Policy & guidelines

Second, implement the application procedures for the developed career paths with HR. Finalise the administrative route to ensure academics can 'apply' for a career path and keep record of someone being in a career path.

- Adjust HR procedures and policies.
- Develop a strategic personnel planning with HR
- Formally approve the planning and policies by the School Council



Training & guidance

Train and guide promotion committees and those in leadership positions to execute the new policy as intended. For example, train the promotion committee on how to assess candidates with a specific career focus besides research.

- Organise training sessions with input from Project Manager for promotion committees and those in leadership positions conducted by HR.



Phase 4 Evaluate



8. Plan the evaluation

What

Create an evaluation plan

Create an evaluation plan to evaluate the implementation of the career paths. Include the scope of the evaluation, base the plan on the parameters of 'success' created in Phase I. Ensure an iterative element in the evaluation plan.

How

- Write an evaluation plan. Define the scope of the evaluation and the stakeholders. Aim for an iterative evaluation element.
- Involve those who opted for a career path and those who did not, to ensure diverse perspectives.
- Use several evaluation methods: survey, focus groups, interviews, desk research, document analysis, evaluation framework for career paths.

Who



Suggested tools & materials

 Prompt questions for Phase IV

9. Evaluate

Assess & discuss

Conduct the evaluation according to the evaluation plan. Monitor and evaluate the progress of the career path implementation and adoption.

Discuss the outcomes and identify learnings and improvements within the MT.

- Conduct the evaluation according to the plan.
- Discuss the outcomes and identify learnings with the MT, department heads, D&I, HR and School Council.



10. Update & communicate

Implement & communicate learnings

Implement the learnings identified during the evaluation. Update the current career path policy and processes.

Share the learnings and updates with staff and other EUR Schools (if desired).

- Implement and update the career path policy.
- Share the learnings and updates made.



FAQ

Diversified career paths

Q: Do I need to follow all the steps described in this Journey to introduce diversified career paths at my School?

A: In short, no. This tool provides a concise overview of the possible steps and considerations that one might take when introducing career paths, and comprehensive prompts to guide the process. However, this process is unique at each School. It means that this tool should be viewed as a knowledge aggregation and a guide from which the tool user can pick the elements which they find most relevant and useful for their context. You are also free to add or adjust any steps and stakeholders which you consider important for your context.

Q: How do I choose the top-down or bottom-up approach for designing career paths? Which one is better?

A: The approach you choose should fit the needs, goals and way of working of your School. Generally, it is good to have (an element of) co-creation in the process of designing career paths, to ensure that you generate support and understanding of the new policy early on. It is also valuable to include the perspective of the career paths' target group to reflect authentic needs, through bottom-up approach. For the top-down approach, diversity of the involved parties matters as much, and internal consultation with leaders and governing bodies is strongly encouraged.

Q: How many diversified career paths do I need to introduce at my School?

A: This number is unique to each School. As a standard approach, you can design career paths for each of the themes of academic work highlighted by the Recognition & Rewards programme: research, education, impact/engagement, management/leadership, and patient care (for university medical centres). Career paths are also designed for different career stages and positions. Based on their unique vision, strategy, and outlook to the future, each School chooses the combination of themes and career levels/positions to create a number of career paths that they see fit. This process is facilitated and supported by the co-design session format tool.

Please feel free to reach out to the Recognition & Rewards team for other questions

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Q: If my School introduces diversified career paths, does it mean that all academics will now have a career path?

A: Timely communication, expectation management and transparency is crucial here, as highlighted in Phase 3. When career paths which differ from the standard profile become available to academics, there are application and selection procedures to enter the path. In addition, if applicable, aim to communicate about the number of career path spots available, and the reason behind this (e.g. financial considerations, personnel/talent planning policies, etc).

Q: How can diversified career paths exist alongside 'proving yourself' in your field, especially for earlier career academics?

A: It is understandable that earlier career academics want to establish a 'solid ground' in their field. That is why you can opt to make diversified career paths available to academics after they have held their (early career) position for several years. This gives the opportunity to first sharpen the skills in both research and teaching, and then focus more on a specific area.

Q: Why do you recommend for HR to be involved in the process of introducing diversified career paths?

A: Diversified career paths are a policy, which is closely connected to HR topics, for example promotion criteria. To be able to function effectively, new career path policy needs to be connected with existing School policies in a logical way and embedded into existing processes and procedures where applicable. At the same time, the new career path policy affects and changes some of the existing policies, processes, and procedures, for example yearly appraisals and promotion. All of this is challenging to implement without the expertise and support of HR team at the School. That is why it is recommended that the sooner HR is involved in connection with the new career paths, the more efficient the implementation stage will be.

Tools & materials

An overview of the suggested tools & materials

[Prompt questions for Phase I](#)

[Prompt questions for Phase II](#)

[Academic Career Paths: A Design Workshop](#)

[Prompt questions for Phase III](#)

[Prompt questions for Phase IV](#)

Colophon

These guidelines were created for academic and professional services staff who (plan to) work on introducing diversified career paths at their School. The guide provides detailed steps and considerations that can be used when planning and preparing for introducing career paths, designing them, implementing and communicating about them, and evaluating the career path policy and processes after a period of time.

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