



ESSDE Outcome Joint Declaration EFEE/ETUCE on “Supporting early career researchers in Higher Education in Europe”

The European Social Partners in education, EFEE (European Federation of Education Employers) and the ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee on Education), have worked jointly during the years 2013- 2014 on the project “*Supporting early career researchers in Higher Education in Europe and the role of employers’ organisations and trade unions*”. This work is supported by the European Commission through the Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations budget line (EU DGV Project VS/2013/0399).

1. Context setting

Conclusions on progress in the European Research Area¹, published in February 2014, noted that the new Horizon 2020 programme provides renewed momentum for the ERA and emphasises the importance of the ERA in the context of the ‘Innovation Union’² and the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. While the report notes that ‘much has already been achieved’, it encourages Member States to take ‘stronger ownership’ of building the ERA by reviewing their existing systems and identifying actions in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the report recommends that Member States should accelerate national reforms to boost the EU’s potential in research, development and innovation.

The Green Paper on the ERA (2007) emphasised that training, attracting and retaining more competent researchers was vital and that their mobility across Europe is more important than for other professions due to specialisation and to facilitate knowledge transfer.³ Supporting early career research careers and maintaining the attractiveness of the profession is thus fundamental to the effective operation of the ERA. Another key European document concerning the role of higher education and research in its contribution to the economic recovery is the European Commission Communication on ‘Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems’⁴. The Communication called for more doctoral candidates and emphasised the need to equip the existing workforce with research skills, and for ‘better information on opportunities so that career paths outside academia become a genuine career prospect for early career researchers’. The Communication emphasises that: ‘Tackling stereotyping and dismantling

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/141120.pdf

² http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm

³ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era_gp_final_en.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/policy/modernisation_en.pdf

the barriers still faced by women in reaching the highest levels in post-graduate education and research ... can liberate untapped talent’.

2. Social partners in education - supporting the objectives of the ERA

EFEE and ETUCE are committed to improve the quality of education and research in Europe and as such are keen to make an active contribution to the European Research Area.

We are especially committed to promoting and supporting the ERA initiatives that have been taken at European Commission level to both increase the supply of researchers and to improve support for these workers, with our shared focus on actions being taken within higher education. These include the European Charter for Researchers⁵ and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (2005)⁶, the HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)⁷ and the HR Excellence in Research logo.

This project has benefitted greatly from a partnership approach and through the networks of EFEE and ETUCE has enabled the collection of a balanced range of reflective and critical perspectives on the topic. Through this joint work, the European Social Partners in education wish to improve knowledge and practice in industrial relations in the higher education and research sector and to promote the exchange of information and experience among EFEE and ETUCE members.

3. Early career researchers in higher education – definition and scope

The term ‘early career researcher’ (ECR) is widely used in higher education across the world but there is no single accepted definition across the member states of the EU, or even indeed within individual member states. While the four-stage career model outlined in the European Framework for Research Careers provides a useful framework for cross-country comparison and discussion, there are issues about whether all researchers (including those working in public research institutes and the charitable and private sectors) should be included or whether the definition should only relate to higher education academic careers. In this research we have excluded researchers outside of higher education but, as we note in the literature review, much of the previous research on ECRs applies to all researchers, irrespective of where they work.

A second issue concerning the definition of ECRs is whether to focus specifically on those who are solely engaged in research or whether to include those who undertake teaching alongside research. In some countries there is a twin-track career structure whereas in other member states all those engaged as academics are expected to perform both teaching and research. Our research has therefore included both types of career track.

A third definitional issue concerns doctoral candidates and the nature of their status as students and/or employees. In a paper published in 2013⁸, ETUCE notes the differing status of doctoral candidates between and within Member States. This has significant implications for social dialogue as collective bargaining may cover only part of this group or no doctoral candidates at all. In the member states where some doctoral candidates have employed status, these individuals have access

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/europeanCharter>

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/codeOfConduct>

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/strategy4Researcher>

⁸ ETUCE. Recommendations on organising researchers. Adopted by ETUCE Committee on 25 April 2013. http://www.csee-etuice.org/images/attachments/Organising_ResearchersEN.pdf

to social security benefits, while others, including those receiving state-funded stipends, may not have access to such benefits. The lack of coverage in collective agreements also means that discussions between social partners about the working conditions of this group are limited. From the perspective of the PhD candidate the individual may experience a lack of clarity about their status which has implications for the psychological contract. This lack of clarity can continue into employment at the postdoctoral stage with the mutual obligations of the employee and employer.

4. Supporting early career researchers in higher education in Europe

This declaration is **addressed** to social partners in education representing the Higher Education and Research sector and their national, regional and local members as well as the European Institutions and interested stakeholders at European or national and local level.

The **aim** of this declaration is threefold, as the European Social Partners in education wish:

- To improve understanding about the specific challenges facing early career researchers in Europe incorporating the perspectives and roles of trade unions and employers and the potential options for responding to these challenges.
- To contribute to the European social dialogue between employers' organisations and trade unions in the education sector, more specifically to continue the current work of the Working Group 3 on Higher Education & Research and to improve the coordination, functioning and effectiveness of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue for Education.
- To inform and involve the European institutions as well as other interested stakeholders on their shared point of view on the topic of early career researchers.

Our literature research and in-depth interviews in six very diverse European countries (Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom) have enabled us to get insights in the challenges faced by early career researchers and the universities in which they work and study.

- The research indicates that there are number of elements that contribute to satisfaction among ECRs. These include: well-designed posts, well-structured career perspectives, strong funding, career development support, advice and support for diverse career pathways and shared responsibility for career development. The balance between the individual's core research and the teaching and administrative duties they are often called upon to perform, and which can be a vital part of career development, was an important area of discussion in each of the case study countries.
- It is acknowledged by trade unions and employers that the prevalence of fixed-term contracts in early career employment can be challenging for researchers, particularly where the individual remains at this stage of their career for a long period of time. Trade unions are particularly concerned about the effects of insecurity on researchers' ability to plan for the future, balance work and family commitments, and the effects that this can have on mental wellbeing. Employers remain constrained in their ability to offer open-ended opportunities for these individuals due to inter alia the fixed-term nature of research funding and, in some cases, the regulations governing the employment and progression of academic staff.

- One of the main issues identified in the literature is the existence of a large ‘bottleneck’ between early stages in the research career and what may be perceived to be more stable forms of employment. This was also a concern of interviewees in our case studies. According to Eurostat figures, there were 747,267 doctoral candidates in Europe in 2012 – yet the total research workforce in higher education, including those individuals with teaching and research responsibilities, is only around 1.2 to 1.5 million. The EU produced 1.70 doctoral graduates in per 1,000 population aged 25-34 in 2011 compared to 1.75 in the United States and 1.04 in Japan – yet the US and Japan have far higher numbers of researchers in the labour market overall and over 7 business sector researchers per 1,000 labour force compared to just 3 per 1,000 in the EU. Stakeholders are concerned that without a greater increase in demand for researchers in industry and the wider public sector the current rate of production of PhD graduates will continue to produce underemployment and intense competition at the early career stages in higher education.
- In addition to the generic challenges associated with attracting, developing and retaining high quality research professionals, there is a significant gender dimension. The Commission’s Innovation Union Competitiveness Report 2013 highlights that only 33% of researchers in Europe are women, including just 20% of researchers in industry, despite comprising 46% of new PhD graduates. Representation reduces at each stage of the career down to just 20% at the professor (R4) level. A number of issues have been identified in relation to female researchers including the opaqueness in decision-making, indirect discrimination from institutional practices, unconscious gender bias in the assessment of excellence, negative implications for the content of science itself and the occupational segregation/gendered organisation of work. For ECRs there can also be particular problems around career breaks for maternity.
- The European Research Area (ERA) is dependent on a high degree of mobility among researchers in the EU but also mobility and collaborations with researchers and research institutes further afield. However, the use of the term ‘mobility’ in European public policy needs to accommodate a wider definition of mobility than overseas experience of more than three months. Indeed the ESF advocates four different types of mobility: geographic, inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary and virtual. Interviewees for this study emphasised the importance of gaining international experience and expanding professional networks at the early career stage, but in some cases mobility between higher education and industry was a greater priority. This study identifies a range of good practice in promoting inter-sectoral mobility at the early career stage. Mobility within academic labour markets can also be an issue where rigid career structures persist. Those in the PhD phase cite funding as the main barrier to geographical mobility while personal/family reasons, finding a suitable position and logistical problems are also cited as significant barriers.

EFEE and the ETUCE wish to conclude their joint research work in this field by inviting their member organisations and wider stakeholders to support early career researchers in Higher Education in Europe, particularly inviting them:

1) To promote the employability of early career researchers

We identify a range of potential policies and actions for employers, trade unions and wider stakeholders, including:

- supporting early career researchers in career planning and managing researchers' career expectations;
- greater transparency about the possibilities of research within higher education being a short element within a career that, for many, will extend to other sectors;
- improving awareness of the employability and transversal skills of researchers within higher education and their attractiveness for the wider labour market;
- improving awareness raising of career options for researchers outside universities;
- improving the collection of information on the career paths of PhD graduates both within higher education and outside the sector;
- career guidance on progressing within and outside academia, for example in developing and using transferrable skills and establishing networks.

2) To promote the mobility of early career researchers

We conclude that there is a need for a broad understanding of mobility to incorporate the wider mobility issues, including mobility between research institutions and universities as well as cross-sectoral mobility and mobility within national higher education labour markets. Also that there is a need to recognise that international mobility in research extends beyond the ERA and carries with it a range of issues and concerns for member states regarding 'brain drain' and 'brain gain'.

We identify a range of potential actions for employers, trade unions and wider stakeholders, including:

- addressing a lack of awareness of careers for researchers outside HE institutions;
- prioritising the role of line managers and considering the benefits of mentoring for early career researchers;
- actions, where necessary, to remove legal and other barriers to the application of open, transparent and merit based recruitment of researchers;
- developing strategies to support the career development of researchers in line with the HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R);
- improving links between universities, research institutes and industry;
- consideration of more structured programmes to increase mobility – in both directions - between industry and academia.

3) To promote gender equality and equity

We note that the EU Charter and Code has been a key influence on HR practices vis-à-vis researchers particularly in the UK, but our project identified a loss of momentum in some countries on this agenda and a low level of formal action through the HR Excellence in Research logo. Our research identifies good examples of diagnostic approaches and action planning, including specific plans for early career researchers, yet involvement of trade unions as partners in this process is not immediately apparent. We conclude that there are important actions for trade unions and employers in relation to supporting the proliferation of, and adherence to, the principles of the Charter and Code, including:

- filling research positions according to open, transparent and merit based recruitment procedures proportionate to the level of the position in line with the basic principles of the Charter and Code and including non-EU nationals;
- improving efforts to mainstream gender equality and the gender dimension in research and innovation policies and programmes;
- considering representation of ECRs within academic governance structures;
- involving trade unions as a critical stakeholder in the HRS4R process.

We also conclude that there are actions for trade unions and employers in relation to the indirect enablers and obstacles, including:

- the need for flexible working policies to enable researchers to achieve a good life –work balance;
- consideration of the allocation of workload, access to career breaks, etc. as important enablers;
- consideration of how a need to be mobile may impact negatively on career options and choices;
- systems that acknowledge and recognise the contribution of researchers and ensure equity of treatment with other staff;
- sharing national initiatives such as the UK's Athena Swan Charter Mark⁹, Researcher Development Framework and Research Councils UK Statement of Expectations on Equality and Diversity¹⁰ and examples of positive outcomes from social dialogue such as the Hamburg Code of Conduct agreed between the Ministry of Education of Hamburg, the University of Hamburg and the trade union GEW in 2013.

⁹ <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charter-marks/athena-swan/>

¹⁰ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/skills/EqualityStatement.pdf>

5. Conclusion

EFEE and ETUCE reaffirm that open learning environments require the leaders of universities and research institutions to play an active role by ensuring a professional working environment and thriving learning community for early career researchers.

Our joint work on “Supporting early career researchers in Higher Education in Europe” has contributed to the development of mutual trust and support between the employers’ organisations and trade unions, respectively members of EFEE and ETUCE, and towards an awareness of the important role that these organisations can play in enhancing the attractiveness of a research career in European Member States.

During our meetings, research interviews, working groups and conferences, it became clear that the **dialogue** between universities and researchers, between trade unions and employers, between research institutes and their direct community is vital. Fora to share views and evidence are therefore crucial, particularly where formal platforms for social dialogue are not in existence.

The European Social Partners in education therefore commit themselves to actively promote this social dialogue and this declaration at national, regional or local level, respecting national and regional education structures.

At the same time we invite the European Commission to help Member States with the implementation and monitoring of these policies, as they should not remain empty words but go towards concrete national or regional actions.

This declaration has been adopted by the ESSDE Steering Committee on 19 January 2015.

For EFEE



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The original text is in English.