

EUROCADRES

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A researchers' labour market: Europe – a pole of attraction?

The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment as a driving force for enhancing career prospects

Panel discussion:

The researchers' labour market - employability and Europe as a location

Presentation:

Karen Skytte: Research without barriers

In making the researchers' labour market in Europe attractive, one of the most central questions is: How do we make it attractive to young graduates to enter it in the first place and head for a career in research? Right now we still have a sufficient pool of graduates wanting a career in research and fighting for it, but we see already today very qualified and interested graduates and young researchers choosing employment in other parts of the labour market.

Creating a successful career as an academic or a researcher can be a very insecure, unrewarding and tiresome way of making a living compared to other professional careers. There are numerous examples of young researchers working their way through a series of jobs on fixed term contracts spending most of their time and energy writing applications for the next small sum of money, in stead of concentrating on their research and creating and publishing results and at the same time qualifying for the more demanding tasks to come.

Therefore national governments and research institutions all over Europe should work together in creating more reliable career patterns and better possibilities for young researchers both at the entry to the profession and onwards during their career. A good starting point could be a common identification and analysis of the general and specific national barriers for a career in research in your own country and as a part of this some suggestions to overcome those barriers. The results of such an analysis in a Danish context will be presented.

Introduction:

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this conference. I represent EUROCADRES - the Council of European Professional and Manage-

rial Staff. EUROCADRES has more than 5 million professionals and managers in membership throughout Europe and puts forward proposals and intervenes in all issues relevant to professionals and managers.

Research without barriers

1. Is the researchers' labour market attractive for graduates?

In making the researchers' labour market in Europe attractive, I find that one of the most central questions is: How do we make it attractive to young graduates to enter it in the first place and head for a research career?

To the European Union and to our national governments as well it is crucial that the training and supply of young researchers respond to the qualitative and quantitative demands from both the public and private sectors. And to secure this – point 1: It is essential that the working conditions of young researchers in the public sector are competitive enough to attract and retain both national and foreign researcher talent. And - point 2: it is just as essential that the career paths in public research are attractive and dynamic enough to ensure the renewal or replacement of retiring faculty and researchers while promoting mobility between academia and other sectors of the economy.

These are some of the policy concerns stated in the just published OECD-report with the results on a questionnaire on the working conditions of researchers in Universities and Public Research Organisations and I think most of you in this room agree that these concerns are central goals.

At the same time the report states that in many OECD-countries there is evidence of a recent decline in the relative shares of enrolments in scientific studies among young people and it could only be a matter of time before we see the same tendency in the PhD studies. Right now we still have a sufficient pool of graduates wanting a career in research and fighting for it, but we see already today very qualified and interested graduates and young researchers choosing employment in other parts of the labour market.

But why is this? Let's take a look from the other point of view – the young graduates and researchers – why should they choose a career in research? Think about it: Would you do it yourself - or would you recommend your children to do so?

2. How difficult does it have to be?

In 2005 the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and research Policy at the University of Aarhus carried out a study of the career patterns of all researchers on post-doctoral level employed in Denmark in two specific periods. The background was that it was known from earlier studies that a considerable amount of post-doctorates ended up leaving the university.

The study was both quantitative and qualitative and the questionnaire used had some open questions. You could expect the least satisfied young researchers to comment on these open questions thereby telling a lot of stories to exemplify the problems the young graduates and researchers meet in the start of their career.

And so they did – so a specific analysis called "How difficult does it have to be?" was made of the answers to the open questions. It showed that a common feature in the comments was the insecure and not very attractive conditions of employment related to a career at a university. There is a discrepancy between the expectations

and wishes of the researchers on post-doctorates level about their career and working life on the one hand and their experiences of the conditions the universities offer on the other hand.

Table 1: Discrepancies between the expectations of researchers on post-doctoral level and the conditions the universities offer

The expectations and wishes of the post-doctorates concerning their career and working life	The working conditions and the conditions of employment that universities offer
More possibilities for having a permanent job and security, e.g. by more available tenures as associate professors.	Strong use of fixed termed contracts and abolition of permanent jobs.
Concern for the personnel and a sense of responsibility for the career of post-doctorates from the institution	Lack of responsibility and involvement
Prospects for promotion	Stagnation in career
Salary according to qualifications and workload	Inflexible compensation systems, with low basic salaries.
Better balance between teaching and research	An overload of teaching and as a consequence neglect of research
Distinct procedures for assessing performance and distinct conditions for appointment	Demands related to performance and appointment is subjectively laid down.

Some examples of the negative but not unusual comments from the researchers on postdoctoral level:

- "Very bad and frustrating conditions of employment. In 10 years I've only had one appointment of 3 years (that was my PhD) – the rest has been 6 to 18 months at a time without knowing anything about the future. From November I'm unemployed and have to go looking for at new appointment again. Sigh!"
- "As a researcher on post-doctoral level I was disappointed that my department – where there are a substantial amount of PhD's and post-doctorates – didn't have a more active policy and more interest in their employees on fixed term contracts. A lot of them provide their own salary through funding and contribute to the department free teaching, but they get nothing in return"
- "The conditions of employment are grotesque. In the department where I work 3 permanent associate professorships have been abolished and no new ones have been available for the past 14 years."
- "I liked teaching, but very soon I found out that the norm of 50 % of teaching didn't have anything to do with reality. I estimate that I used up to 80 % of my time teaching."
- "The assistant professorship was to lead to an associate professorship, which after a 9 month delay was made available and given to the only other applicant. We were both qualified. The other applicant had applied by request of my head of department."

3. Analysis of barriers

To overcome problems like these and secure the future recruiting of young graduates for the researchers' labour market, I suggest that national governments and research institutions at the national level work together in creating more reliable career patterns and better possibilities for young researchers. We need to secure better possibilities both at the entry of the career as a researcher and onwards during their career. A common national effort could help the institutions focus on these issues and design their local actions in relation to their specific problems.

A starting point for a special effort in this area could be a common identification and analysis of the specific national barriers for a career in each European country and some suggestions to overcome those barriers. In Denmark, where the government's ambition is to double the amount of graduates starting a PhD-education in the next 4-5 years, such an analysis has just been made in 2006. On the initiative of The Danish Confederation of Professional Associations and The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the ministry formed a working group to carry out the analysis and discuss the possible suggestions to make it more attractive to choose a career in research.

The barriers described in the report from the working group is to be seen in a Danish context, but they can serve as an example of the barriers for the young researchers in the European researchers' labour market in general and how to overcome them.

In Denmark the most important barriers are in seen as follows:

- **The PhD-students starts too late:** Too much time passes between the graduation and starting the PhD-education – often several years. In the perspective of a career in research, this time is unproductive and any doubts about choosing research can grow stronger in this period and cause drop-out.
- **Variation in the quality of the PhD-education:** Not all the environments for PhD-education in the research institutions have a sufficient quality and focus concerning education – especially not if the amount of PhD-students is set to grow substantially.
- **Lack of post-doctoral training possibilities and a coherent career path:** Most of the young newly educated PhDs have no job waiting for them and their first years normally consist of a series of jobs on fixed term contracts. These jobs are not always coherent or qualifying for a career in research, which is a waste of time and can make the young researcher leave for a career in another field.
- **Limited mobility between sectors:** There is not enough possibility for planned mobility between the public and the private sector and it's difficult e.g. for employees in the private sector to switch to a university job.
- **The procedures of appointment are prolonged:** It takes unnecessarily long time to handle the procedures when the institutions are appointing young researchers.
- **Too few career jobs:** There is a lack of career jobs at the senior researcher level and not enough different types of jobs. This means limited possibilities of

advancement and makes the researchers' labour market less competitive compared to other sectors.

- **The salaries are not competitive:** The development in the salaries of younger researchers cannot match the development of the salaries for other graduates working in the public sector in Denmark. This makes it difficult to recruit and retain the young researchers.
- **Bad working climate:** Too many research communities are characterised by a lack of cooperation and teamwork, and some of the young researchers find that research leaders and management don't take any interest in the development of their competences and career.

4. Research without barriers

And how can we overcome these kinds of barriers? The Danish report suggests some actions. Some of them are quite simple to carry out – others more complicated because successful implementation means involving several partners and getting better financing.

The PhD-students are starting too late:

- A better integration between the last part of the education at the graduate level and the first part of the PhD-level education.
- Methods to find the students with talents for research before they graduate.
- Open competition for the PhD-grants
- More occasions and flexible possibilities for putting in applications

Variation in the quality of the PhD-education:

- Universities and graduate schools should develop precise methods for quality assurance and make a focused effort for better supervision
- Development of the capacity of graduate schools as numbers of students rise

Lack of post-doctoral training possibilities and a coherent career path:

- The universities and the research communities should have financing for post-doc-grants, so they can offer talented PhD-students jobs immediately and thereby make the first steps of the career path more coherent.
- So: When government allocate money for education of researchers a part of this money should be reserved for post-doctoral appointments.
- A more detailed analysis of the post-doc part of the career: How can it become more integrated with the next levels of the research career?

Limited mobility between sectors:

- For researchers from the private sector without the same amount of publication universities should establish other kinds of appointments – and for foreign researchers who cannot formally fulfil the national rules of merit.

The procedures of appointment are prolonged:

- Central rules stating how long a case for appointment of researchers at the post.doc and senior lecturer level should take, e.g. 2-3 months.

Not enough career jobs:

- Universities should establish new types of advancement jobs beside the professorships, e.g. jobs as research leader.

The salaries are not competitive:

- The salaries at the universities must follow the same development as the salaries of graduates employed in other parts of the labour market.

Bad working climate:

- More focus on leadership in the research communities, e.g. leadership on working environments, teambuilding and competence- and development of careers.

This analysis exemplifies the problems and a few solutions in the Danish context and I hope it can be useful to you. These problems must be faced by all the research institutions and by private companies with research departments - within their specific local and national conditions. But my belief is that national efforts and a European focus can be supportive for the local actions.

And in conclusion: I think research can be very exiting and interesting for young graduates, because it helps one understand the present and makes one part of creating the future. But if we can't make the employment conditions in our research institutions and departments attractive – then I don't think the excitement of doing research is enough for the next generation of graduates to become researchers.