



This project is carried out with the support of the European Commission

Supporting early career researchers in higher education in Europe

Emerging Findings

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EFEE

THE EUROPEAN
FEDERATION OF
EDUCATION
EMPLOYERS

UC=EA
UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES
EMPLOYERS ASSOCIATION

EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION
COMITE SYNDICAL EUROPEEN DE L'EDUCATION



Research and project objectives

- Reach a **shared understanding** about specific challenges facing ECRs in Europe
- Provide **insight** to the European Social Partners in Education on improving social dialogue on IR and ER issues relating to ECRs
- Explore where **dialogue between national social partners** improves support for ECRs
- **Improve awareness** of the existing work in this area
- To **understand trends** in career progression of female researchers

Research and project objectives

- Produce a **set of resources** including case studies and practitioner-oriented research and policy guidance
- Facilitate **peer learning** between national social partners in the education sector
- **Contribute to the European social dialogue** between employers' organisations and trade unions in the education sector

Research questions (1)

- How are early career researchers defined?
- What support is in place in EU Member States to address the challenges faced by ECRs?
- What support do HE institutions provide to ECRs?
- What are the primary employment relations issues relating to ECRs?
- What are the roles of trade unions in supporting ECRs?
- What are the equality dimensions of the challenges faced by early career researchers in academia, particularly gender dimensions?

Research questions (2)

- What initiatives and policies have been successful in addressing these challenges and promoting gender equality?
- What are the institutional and non-institutional (e.g. legal, cultural, economic, political) barriers and facilitators to the successful adoption of the Charter & Code and HR Excellence award in Member States?
- What constitutes an attractive research career?

Project context



Context : EU wide initiatives

- European Charter for Researchers
- Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers
- HR Strategy on Researchers (HRS4R)

Project approach and methodology



Phase I:
Literature
review

Phase II:
Case studies

Phase III:
Dissemination

Literature Review Findings

- **Definition of ECRs** Employment status differs between EU member states and even within individual countries. This makes 'one size fits all' solutions difficult to implement.
- **Context of the European Research Area** – an ambitious strategy? Can this deliver the employment demand to meet current supply?
- **Challenges for ECRs** – international mobility and imbalance in scientific activity between EU states, demographics and demand/supply imbalances, mobility of researchers across sectors (i.e. HE to private industry), precarious funding for research and hence employment models, particular issues around gender discrimination.
- **EU Charter and Code** Take-up very uneven across EU states. And awareness among ECRs sometimes low.

Literature Review Findings

- **Support mechanisms for ECRs.** Uneven across EU states.
- **Employment practices and strength of social partnership.** Significant variation between countries.
- **Career development and structures.** General problem of oversupply and underemployment.
- **Gender discrimination.** Continuing issues, especially in terms of academic careers at professorial levels.
- **Attraction of a research career.** Research is a very attractive career for graduates, as evidenced by the MORE2 Survey and large number of candidates wishing to enter the profession. There is no problem of supply, rather one of demand.
- **ECR Satisfaction Levels.** Specific concerns about autonomy, opportunities for advancement and salary levels.

Case studies

- Four case studies (Cyprus, Finland, Germany (Hamburg) and Italy) completed and in process. UK case study close to completion. Romania visit in early October 2014.
- Semi-structured stakeholder interviews – high-level
 - Employer associations
 - Government officials
 - Trade union officials
 - Other relevant agencies / associations
- Country visits – led by UCEA with support of steering committee and relevant EFEE/ETUCE members
- Interview questions agreed by steering group

Cyprus

- Context of national financial crisis in 2012-13. National investment in R&D limited.
- Newly established national committee for R&D strategy. Cyprus Research Promotion Foundation established 1996 to distribute national research funding. Oversees treatment of ECRs.
- Limited employment opportunities for ECRs in Cyprus so most move abroad.
- Several successful programmes aimed at 'young researchers'.
- Good take-up of EU initiatives and welcomed by institutions.
- Good international networks established and potential growth in R&D high
- Need to develop a research culture and infrastructure
- Some progress on gender equality but few female PIs.

Finland

- Despite being one of smaller EU states, investment in R&D well above EU average. Strong private sector R&D sector.
- A good stock of researchers within the workforce and a number of national initiatives to develop this workforce.
- Research funding managed by the Academy of Finland.
- Major change in HE after 2009 Act – led to changes in employment status of academics. Also reforms of doctoral training in 2011-13 to deal with demand/supply problems.
- EU Charter and Code requirements seen as no problem in Finland.
- Main challenges are the employment status of PhD candidates, the high proportion of researchers on short-term contracts (63%) and international/sector mobility of ECRs.

Germany (Hamburg)

- Responsibility for Germany is delegated by the Federal government to Germany's 17 individual states. Case study concerns Hamburg.
- Germany's investment in R&D strong (above EU average) – two-thirds from private sources. Strong manufacturing sector where demand for ECRs is high. Good stock of researchers within the workforce and a number of federal initiatives to develop them.
- Strong social partnership arrangements cover ECRs. National career structure for academics. ECRs employed while undertaking doctorates.
- Challenges for ECRs include short-term contracts (54% of researchers), difficulty balancing work and study, lack of autonomy and recognition, international mobility (especially for those with families), difficulty in changing career path. Gender equality impeded by lack of female science graduates.
- Hamburg has agreed own Code of Conduct for researchers.

Italy

- Context of economic crisis and R&D investment well below EU average. Stock of researchers in workforce lower than EU average.
- Universities autonomous within a national framework. Staff have public servant status. Recession has led to reductions in university staffs.
- Researchers covered by national collective agreement for administrative staff in HE. Important changes under 2010 reform of universities led to new terms for ECRs. Mixed views on the impact.
- 2010 university reforms incorporated EU Charter and Code. Seen as helpful in improving HR practice.
- Challenges for ECRs include lack of mobility between institutions and sectors, workload concerns, short-term nature of contracts and gender discrimination (despite initiatives at national and institutional level). The union sees lack of a negotiating framework for researchers as problematic.

UK

- In the UK Government finances around a third of R&D. UK government investment in research doubled between 2001 and 2010 and, despite austerity measures, funding for science and research has been protected in cash terms from 2011/12 to 2015/16.
- The stock of researchers in the workforce is well above the EU average. The UK Government has implemented a number of measures to encourage the training of researchers.
- The percentage of women among professorial staff is below the EU average. Research Councils UK has an expectation for equality and diversity in its funding grants. There is a dedicated campaign (Athena Swan) to increase the proportion of female researchers in Science and Engineering.
- The UK has the highest proportion of institutions among the 29 EU member states adopting the EU Charter and Code and HR Excellence award.
- The UK has a well developed national support network (Vitae) for ECRs, set up in 2008. This operates both nationally and through local institutions. The 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' (2008) is an agreement between the employers and research funders on good management and quality working conditions for staff.

Emerging Findings

- The definition of ECRs is varied between EU states and is often contested by Governments, employers and unions.
- The PhD stage is clearly important to this study, irrespective of whether we define these candidates as students or employees.
- We have identified different types of ECR – those who are primarily ‘apprentice’ academics and those following a research-only career (either in HE or outside HE).
- The post-doc stage of the career is extremely competitive and can be difficult for ECRs to navigate.
- The EU’s concept of a research career that is sector neutral is embryonic. There is a tendency to see the doctorate as only a route into an academic career.

Emerging Findings

- Fixed-term contracts are the norm for most ECRs in the case study countries. This is largely due to the precariousness of research funding.
- There is significant variation in the flexibility of access (and re-entry) to research careers between EU member states.
- Careers in research remain very attractive, as evidenced by the large proportion of graduates wishing to pursue this avenue. There is no problem with supply side.
- Institutions offer a range of support mechanisms to ECRs in the case study countries.
- Job content is a key element in the attraction of research careers.

Emerging Findings

- Good line management is key to the satisfaction of ECRs and training for PIs in management skills is essential.
- ECRs want recognition for their contribution.
- Work-life balance is seen as a challenge by ECRs but no more than in many professional roles.
- There is a recognition by employers (and unions) that ECRs need to take responsibility for their own career development and transition from student to employee.
- The EU Charter and Code are widely recognised but their impact is varied across different EU member states. In some countries they have been welcomed as a means to improve HR practices.

Emerging Findings

- Collective bargaining (or state regulation) over salaries and conditions of ECRs is common where they have employed status.
- Trade union membership among ECRs is varied across EU member states and there are differences in how their concerns are prioritised by unions.
- There are few examples of ECR-led support which had the direct support of the union. In some countries there are separate associations pursuing ECR agendas.
- There are few examples of ECR initiatives that have emerged from social dialogue mechanisms.

Emerging Findings

- Mobility is a key issue for ECRs but this concept is wider than simply geographical mobility.
- Inter-sector and intra-sector mobility appear to be as important as geographic mobility.
- There is concern that alternative career paths (other than higher education) for ECRs are limited in some countries and in some disciplines while there is also a lack of awareness or wish to explore employment options outside HE.

Emerging Findings

- There are distinct differences in the representation of female and male researchers during their careers and the strategic responses vary between EU member states.
- Across all countries there is significant under-representation of females at professorial level.
- HE funding has been affected by austerity policies in Europe but in general it has been better protected than some other public spending areas.
- The rapid expansion of doctoral education has not been accompanied by a similar growth in demand for researchers, creating a demand/supply imbalance.
- The rapid expansion of doctoral education has led to intense competition for academic jobs which is exacerbated by low levels of inter-sectoral mobility.

Phase III: Outputs and dissemination

- Research report with 6 in-depth case studies published separately (December)
- Conclusions and recommendations
- London Conference on 21 November 2014.
- Joint declaration by EFEE and ETUCE
- Dissemination through EFEE/ETUCE and their networks

UCEA research team

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