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ETUCE policy paper on Early Stage Researchers /Doctoral candidates

Submitted for adoption by the ETUCE Committee to the ETUCE Special Conference, the Regional Special Conference of Education International, meeting in Vienna on

26-27 November 2014



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Preamble

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), the European Region of Education International, represents 13 million members in Europe, including academic staff of higher education and of research institutions. ETUCE pays special attention to the needs of researchers at the initial phase of their careers, for example doctorate candidates or early stage researchers

Background

Within the context of the European Research Area (ERA) early stage researchers / doctoral candidates are considered as being in the first phase of being professionals in research and of their doctoral careers. The *European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*¹, a recommendation developed by the European Commission, recognises this professional status.

While the European Higher Education Area and the Bologna-process intended originally to harmonise and safeguard quality in higher education in Europe, it also introduced third cycle studies for early stage researchers / doctoral candidates to complement the two-cycle Bachelor–Masters structure. As a result, such people are, in this context, seen both as doctoral students and as early-stage researchers².

These overlapping views on the status of early stage researchers / doctoral candidates also reflect a diversity of interests amongst different European policy making bodies. In this policy paper, ETUCE intends to address and tackle the most urgent problems facing early stage researchers/doctoral candidates and to make recommendations to overcome them.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/brochure_rights/am509774CEE_EN_E4.pdf
(Commission Recommendation of 11 March 2005 on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers)

² The Bologna Process considers “participants in third cycle programmes both as students and as early stage researchers”
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/050520_Bergen_Communique1.pdf, p. 4).

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Identifying challenges and demands

A. Access and recruitment

1. The employment market for researchers should be regulated in a manner which does not damage the spirit of free enquiry and public good research within the public sector.
2. Institutions must be obliged to accept and apply the rules set out in the *European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*. We stress that the remuneration of early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should not be based on concepts of performance related pay or payment by results. We also support the concept and practice of mobility but on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, with these reservations, we accept that institutions should apply the "Human Resources Strategy for Researchers" (HRS4R) as a tool to put the principles of the Charter and Code into practice.
3. Access to doctoral qualification should be made possible for all who possess the required qualifications This would normally be a Masters degree, or an equivalent award according to the European Qualification Framework.
4. It is essential that institutions run a transparent and fair recruitment procedure and institutions should be obliged to accept applications as long as there are sufficient financial and supervision capacities available.
5. The social composition of early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should reflect the diversity of the whole society. Institutions should encourage and support under-represented and disadvantaged groups to get access to doctoral education. Gender balance should be achieved by means of active equal opportunity policies. Applicants from abroad and/or with experiences or qualifications secured abroad should not be discriminated against; their qualification being assessed according to the *European Qualifications Framework* (EFQ).

B. Working conditions, contracts, remuneration, social rights and teaching duties

6. Early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should enjoy fair and attractive conditions of employment including in the area of remuneration. They should be entitled to adequate, acceptable and equitable social security provisions in accordance with existing national legislation and/or national or sectoral collective bargaining agreements. Early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should have access to adequate financing to cover all basic needs and to provide funding to attend doctoral activities and to perform research. They should not be liable for higher education or research institutions fees.

7. All early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should have the security of provisions including pensions, maternity and paternity leave, sickness benefit, basic health care and access to broader social services. On appointment they should be given an employment contract setting out working hours, amount and regularity of pay, provision for sickness, holiday, maternity and paternity leave. They must have the right to be a member of a trade union which is recognised and respected by their employer.
8. There should be sufficient funding for all research prerequisites and financing for joint degrees, Erasmus programmes, mobility grants, as well as the financing of publications.
9. In a number of European countries, early stage researchers /doctoral candidates are engaged in teaching activity, which is either a contractual requirement of a funded doctoral programme, or employment, or an additional means of obtaining remuneration and experience. In all cases they should be treated fairly and receive proper training, professional support and adequate remuneration and recognition for this teaching role.
10. Early stage researchers /doctoral candidates who wish to teach should be afforded the opportunity to do so. There should be a reasonable balance between research and teaching and teaching should not take precedence over research and successful completion of the doctoral thesis. Where teaching activities are a contractual requirement of a funded doctoral programme the number of contact teaching hours should be limited. ETUCE believes that early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should be covered by proper workload protection systems and mechanisms to ensure proper work-life balance.

C. Educational goals

11. Early stage researchers /doctoral candidates are expected to acquire the highest levels of knowledge, skills and competencies in their disciplines. This requires guidance, support and instruction during participatory training. All formal and informal modes of training should be available to them including lectures, seminars, colloquia, summer schools, group discussions, field activities, etc.
12. The duration and the content of the doctoral programme should be adapted for each early stage researcher /doctoral candidate on the basis of his/her research project. The minimum recommended duration of the initial training should be compatible with the research and teaching workload. Generally speaking according to the Salzburg Principles³ there should be three to four years allocated for fulltime research.

³ http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Report_final.1129817011146.pdf This document by EUA (European University Association) also includes the statement that ESR are professionals.

13. Higher education and research institutions should have clear procedures for monitoring and assessing early stage researchers /doctoral candidates by a supervisory team on research, teaching activities, training choices and career projects. Monitoring and review of the work plan, training and timelines for each early stage researcher/doctoral candidate should be carried out on a regular basis by the supervisory team.

D. Career prospects and employability

14. Employers in all public and private sectors should recognize the 8th level of qualification as described by EQF (The European Qualifications Framework). All doctorate graduates are able to claim knowledge and skills in the specialist research-related aspects of their doctoral topics. However, it should also be recognised that such graduates will have acquired a range of additional transferable skills such as long term project management, expertise and problem solving skills, communication skills (public speaking and writing), personal effectiveness and team working skills, pedagogical skills, ethics and social responsibility etc. ETUCE emphasises the statement in the Salzburg Principles that the core component of doctoral education is the advancement of knowledge through original research.

E. Participation rights

15. Early stage researchers/doctoral candidates should enjoy the same protection of academic freedom and intellectual property rights as other academic colleagues in line with the 1997 *UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel*.
16. Early stage researchers /doctoral candidates should always be treated as partners, co-researchers and co-teachers in research, research projects and teaching groups. They should be acknowledged as members of their institutions with the same rights as other researchers with longer service regardless of their funding status (full-time, part-time employment, grants etc.).
17. Early stage researchers/doctoral candidates should have the same rights to be involved in co-determination and participation as more experienced academic colleagues. Where graduate schools exist the early stage researchers/doctoral candidates must have the right to elect representatives who shall be acknowledged and supported by the Rector, the Dean and the Governing Bodies.
18. Early-stage researchers/doctoral candidates have the same right to join trade unions and to be represented by trade unions as all other workers.

Additional Recommendations to ETUCE Member Organisations

Member Organisations should:

1. Lobby for high quality PhD studies and work in Europe.
2. Advocate and support the status of the early stage researchers /doctoral candidates as employees, with all the social and professional rights of other employees.
3. Lobby for fair and transparent recruitment procedures for early stage researchers /doctoral candidates.
4. Organise early-stage researchers/doctoral candidates to join teachers' trade unions and to be represented by trade unions as all other workers.
5. Campaign for fair working conditions, adequate and fair remuneration, an appropriate research/teaching workload, and general equitable treatment of early stage researchers/doctoral candidates by the employer, the state and all other agencies.
6. Demand that the number of fairly remunerated early stage researchers/doctoral candidates should be increased especially in the areas of social sciences and humanities.