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## European Presidency Conference

### **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**

1 -2 June 2006

#### ***Introduction***

On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2006 the Federation of Austrian Industry and the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, the European University Association, supported also by the European Commission (Directorate General for Research), under the Austrian Presidency of the European Council, hosted a conference on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, on the issue of a researchers' labour market in Europe entitled: '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'.

With 231 participants coming from 34 countries across the EU Member and Associated States, the conference focussed on the question under which conditions the European researchers' labour market can be a pole of attraction for well trained and highly motivated researchers, at all levels, from all over the world. Furthermore, it also explored to which extent the Charter and the Code is a driving force for enhancing career prospects.

In addition, this event was an opportunity to evaluate progress made in the implementation of these instruments, to identify models of implementation according to different organisations, (e.g. industry and academia), to see how such experience can serve as an example to be followed, and to see where there are bottlenecks, which hamper a successful application at national, regional, institutional and inter-sectorial levels.

This conference aimed to bring together a vast variety of actors. Among these were policy makers at the governmental level, rectors, vice-chancellors, deans, as well as research and development directors in higher education institutions, national and European bodies, and representative bodies concerned with the interests of researchers. Furthermore, human resources and personnel directors working for non-academic and academic employers, as major recruiters of researchers, professional associations and institutions including the government representatives, and individual researchers themselves attended the conference.

## ***Emerging Themes***

During the conference, the discussion was focused on **how to create an attractive and competitive European researchers' labour market**, and how this needs to be embedded in the broader policy context, namely the EU's ambitious objective to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010.

It was also highlighted that much effort and determination will still be needed to achieve the objectives of the Lisbon strategy, and the development of the European Research Area.

Many of the discussions focused on employment in the public sector and at the universities. It was stressed that the gap, which the Lisbon process is trying to fill, must be seen as a serious shortfall in the beneficial translation of research "know how" into enterprise activities. Therefore, it was recognised that this "gap" is not to be found in any particular company but that it is of a much more systemic nature. This is even made worse, by a tendency that business moves away from Europe as markets start to grow in Asia, and as North America continues to offer a better environment for business. The key question was, how to create the conditions and the right 'ecosystems', in Europe, which will remedy this situation.

It was felt that the ways in which knowledge is turned into productive jobs require much more cooperation than in the past. This is because of the complexity of the process, and the need to bring products onto the market quickly and flexibly. Therefore, we need to establish ecosystems favouring a density of actors, who reinforce collaboration of knowledge and of ideas, as well as the capacity to implement them.

Reference was made to the "Aho Report"<sup>1</sup>, which starts by proposing a *Pact between government, industry and public research* and, which could be followed as an appropriate model.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/action/2006\\_ahogroup\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/action/2006_ahogroup_en.htm)

## ***Key conclusions and future prospects***

There was consensus amongst the three final speakers, Pia-Elda Locatelli, Andrew Dearing, and Raffaele Liberali, on the following issues:

- A **structured process** is needed to make cooperation work well and effectively.
- The willingness **to establish the ecosystems** that create jobs, which enable a better transfer of knowledge is needed. It is also necessary to ensure that, when new knowledge is discovered, the resources in place are adequate to ensure such transfer.
- The European Charter for Researchers, and the Code of Conduct for their recruitment, as well as all the ongoing work to implement these instruments by all the different actors, at Member State level, and at the level of the single institutions, **are valuable for stimulating this process, and make more visible what researchers are looking for in their careers.**
- There needs to be **evidence that such a process is effectively put in place** for knowing what people want/need from their employment, for relating this understanding to institutional objectives and for demonstrating to current/potential employees that something is happening.
- **Signing up to the principles of the Charter and the Code entails the expression of a commitment to engage in a process towards common objectives**, provided by the principles laid down in the Charter and the Code. Signing does not mean to apply every single word. The Charter and the Code **are not legally binding texts**; they are the expression of a framework of general principles and they should, and will, stay like this.
- **The transparency of this process**, published on e.g., the internet and **possibly linked to a label, does make visible those institutions that implement good practices.** Undersigning organisations, like e.g. universities that make clear that they treat early stage researchers well, will tend to attract better students, better researchers, and better research co-operations, just as companies that are seen to be good employers attract good employees.
- The importance of **considering researchers, also those in their first phase of research training (doctoral candidates), as “young professionals”**, is vital in this whole process. This also refers to **postdocs** – in line with the key message of workshop 5 – **as they are highly qualified researchers**, who perform research independently but are often seen as ever-lasting students or a cheap labour force.
- The **key-messages** presented as the main outcome of the discussion, in the **different working groups, need to be taken further** by all the actors concerned, so as to foster debate, and introduce the needed changes.
- The many different definitions of “researchers” constitute an obstacle. **Researchers are not well organised, their voices are often not heard.** Consequently, what is needed is one definition for all of Europe, of what a researcher is and a structure, which allows researchers to lobby, to engage in structured dialogue, and to better organise themselves.

- The proposal for a **European Platform for Researchers** put forward by the Member of the European Parliament, P.E. Locatelli, and supported by R. Liberali from the European Commission, and A. Dearing, as the representative from industry, has the potential of contributing to this.
- Such a **platform** should be created **on the model of an open forum** bringing together industry, universities, researchers' professional organisations, the social partners, researchers, etc.
- **The structure of the platform should allow for creating the necessary frame** for the much-needed **discussion and the structured coordination**. This, particularly, in view of enhancing the status of researchers in Europe, as well as the environment in which they produce, disseminate and transfer knowledge.
- The platform should **contribute to making the quality and variety of work more visible** - based on the examples developed in public and private sector research, thus contributing to the development of one genuine European labour market for researchers.

The Austrian Presidency welcomed the idea of setting up a “strong voice for researchers”, and expressed hopes that the future Presidencies would take these ideas further.

The conference chair, Barbara Weitgruber, also welcomed and supported the key messages presented in the workshops, and ensured that the outcome would be fed into the ongoing work of the “Bologna follow-up group”. She stressed the importance of continuing the work started during this conference, as regards the convergence of both the development of the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area. This is particularly relevant, in view of the next “Bologna” Ministerial Conference, in London, as recommendations related to the 3rd cycle will be an important part of the discussion.

The conference chair reminded all participants that in order to make progress, actions need to be taken further, at all levels, and **close cooperation between higher education and research actors needs to be fostered and ensured:**

- At the national level
- At the level of the Steering Group Human Resources and Mobility, and the Bologna Follow-up Group
- At the level of the European Commission

Closer cooperation will be the necessary condition for the development of the European knowledge area, based on the knowledge triangle of education, research, and innovation.

## **Summary of key messages from each of the 5 parallel workshops**

### **Workshop 1**

#### **How to make the European researchers' labour market more attractive and competitive – legal, administrative and financial challenges**

- > Research bodies (including universities) should ensure **coherence between their research agenda and their human and financial resources management**. This includes appropriate funding (national, European), fair redundancy procedures, and performance-related assessment systems. National and regional competent authorities need to provide the **appropriate legal framework** and support it through incentives.
- > **Fair, non-discriminating working conditions** (including social security coverage) should be ensured for **ALL researchers**, including doctoral candidates (according to “Bologna definition of the 3rd cycle”), both for European and non-European researchers and independent of their legal status.
- > Different research stakeholders need to become aware and to carry out in depth analysis of **relevant European and national legal provisions** (e.g. Proposal for a directive on portability of complementary pension rights, Fixed-Term Directive, entry conditions, etc.), which have an impact on a researcher's career path and career development. **This requires a structured dialogue with competent (primarily national) authorities.**

### **Workshop 2**

#### **Transparent career appraisal system**

- > The **Minerva Code**<sup>2</sup>, for good practices in the recruitment and promotion of researchers, should be considered, and taken up by the EC External Advisory Group on Human Resources and Mobility.
- > The **peer review system** (and process) should be **redesigned** to reflect the changing dynamics of the Research and Innovation System (knowledge triangle concept). It should reflect the multiple research “outputs”, now required for a successful research career.
- > Researchers should **take the initiative**, in improving transparency, in the appraisal process. They should be empowered to determine their own career progression.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.eracareersaustria.at/conference/slides/vallerga.pdf](http://www.eracareersaustria.at/conference/slides/vallerga.pdf)

### Workshop 3

#### The added value of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers: examples of good practice and monitoring models

- > A statement from the Commission clarifying that, signing the Charter and the Code does not mean full compliance on signing, but rather should be understood as a statement of intent, to adhere to the principals expressed in the Charter and the Code. In addition, it was stressed that signing up **will not be considered an eligibility criterion** for European funding.
- > Encourage institutions and firms to create **their individual profile on the basis of the principles of the Charter and the Code**.
- > Find ways of **disseminating the European spirit**, represented in the Charter and the Code, on all levels, especially among young researchers, to strengthen the bottom up process.
- > **Self assessment** should be used as a monitoring model instead of external control. **Create regular platforms, for 'exchange of best practice'**, on self-assessment, to be encouraged by the European Commission, for a national and European audience.

### Workshop 4

#### The European Charter and Code as a label for quality enhancement

- > The Charter and the Code is a very **useful labelling mechanism for quality enhancement**, in human resource management and in research.
- > The **practical implementation of the Charter and the Code** will be based on the indication, upon signature (which constitutes a formal commitment) by a research organisation, of the actual level of compliance with the various principles, stressing possible limitations, as well as a roadmap for future improvement. This information should be made public.
- > The **procedure to award the label** should be simple, non-bureaucratic, and not involving major additional costs and efforts. This will be based on a **fully transparent self-assessment process based on effectiveness, impact and transparency of the process**. An internal **ombudsperson function** would be advisable. This self-regulatory process should be complemented by an external independent assessment.

## Workshop 5

### Doctoral candidates as young professionals: funding and supporting mechanisms

- > **Doctoral candidates** are researchers engaged in professional research training and they should **receive fair treatment, adequate funding, and full social security**. This is still not the case in all countries. There seems to be an increasing tendency, in Europe, to award grants without any social security.
- > The position of a **post-doc is very unstable in Europe**. Post-docs are highly qualified researchers, who perform independent research, but are often seen as ever-lasting students or a cheap labour force. It is important to recognise the value of their work and to improve their long-term career perspectives.
- > **Inter-sectorial relationships, and mobility between universities and industry**, have to be improved. Institutions and governments should develop **clear policies and strategies**, to support and increase mobility between universities, and industry, and vice-versa.