



## Commentary on the implementation of the “European Researcher’s Partnership”

### PART 1: Open Recruitment

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**Eurodoc**, European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researcher, **is the Voice of Young Researchers in Europe**. It takes the form of a federation of 32 national associations of doctoral candidates and other young researchers. Please consult our website (<http://www.eurodoc.net>) for more information. Eurodoc welcomes the initiative of the European Commission on proposing a “partnership for researchers” in its communication “Better Careers and more mobility: A European Partnership for researchers”<sup>1</sup>. Eurodoc is ready to continue to add a valuable contribution to the debate of shaping the future of the European Research Area (ERA).

This paper focuses on the **first part** of the “Researchers’ Partnership”, only; it elaborates on how to make more researchers’ positions more openly available and how to improve recruitment practice for the benefit of researchers as much as for research institutions which depend on human resources in the end.

It has to be seen in context of other well-established policy with the aim to make the European Research Area more efficient and more attractive: **Recognition of doctoral candidates as Early Stage Researchers**, the necessity of **social security** provisions for all researchers including young researchers, **attractive career paths**, removing obstacles for mobility (**geographical as well as intersectoral mobility**), involvement of **young researchers in advisory and decision making bodies** and much more.

While these recommendations have been incorporated European key documents like the European Charter for Researchers<sup>2</sup>, their implementation remain a major challenge and much more work has to be done. This paper just adds another aspect – it can’t go without the principles mentioned above.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2008)317 final, 23.5.2008

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2008/pdf/com\\_2008\\_31\\_1\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2008/pdf/com_2008_31_1_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/rights>

## Clarifying the Setting

While the Communication on the “Researcher’s Partnership” rightly recognises the urgent need for action to create a genuine European researchers labour market, the underlying analysis is too coarse to grasp the complexity of the current situation. There is a considerable difference between:

### **Open in Theory versus Open in Practice**

Especially in the academic sector there are many vacancies which are advertised openly while in reality the (internal) candidate is already selected beforehand. Also, there are often disincentives or hidden discriminations for candidates of other nationality.

### **Jobs advertised somewhere versus easy, central access to vacancies.**

It is a huge difference between putting a short note somewhere on the homepage of the institution and centrally advertising the job so that it is accessible in the EURAXESS job database. Also, it is not the best solution to only advertise a vacancy in major European newspapers or commercial job websites. Today, applicants have to constantly monitor different sources while still missing many opportunities. It is also important that applicants have free access to job advertisements, which is not always the case for job sections of newspapers.

### **Unstructured collections of job advertisements versus targeted to researcher’s profiles**

For a job seeker, it is a difference between reading through a bunch of all kind of job advertisements and receiving only those vacancies which are really interesting for them.

The European Commission and the member states should not neglect the need for action to make also private sector vacancies more accessible. A quick check shows that positions in industry are underrepresented in the EURAXESS database. Evidence is lacking for the claims that “private sector recruitment in Europe is mostly open and competitive<sup>3</sup>” and “most private [...] sector research employers already advertise vacancies openly”. No reference is given. Despite economic pressure companies are certainly not immune to malpractices in recruitment. Knowing the right person can be more important than competence.

## What is internal recruitment?

The document on a “Researchers Partnership” describes internal recruitment as being opposite to a desirable open and transparent recruitment practice. Eurodoc invites to go more into detail and take up the challenge to ask why internal recruitment takes place in many European research institutions. Certainly, ignorance and chauvinism still play a major role.

Moreover resources and structures (manpower, time, experience and knowledge) to carry out a real open and competitive recruitment procedure are often lacking – this is especially the case for smaller public research institutions and SMEs.

In practice, research team leaders often prefer internal candidates which do not need too much guiding and time until they can start, in contrast to several months evaluating internal/external

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<sup>3</sup> “Researchers’ partnership”, COM(2008)317 final, 4.1, page 5.

candidates. While this is sometimes just a pretext to get rid of external candidates, it often has its justification. It is also for this reason that bureaucracy has to be kept minimal for candidates as well as for the research department by putting organisation load to the HR department.

Reticence to open recruitment should be addressed and not ignored. There are other cases, where more intricate arguments are put forward why recruitment should be restricted to a certain group of persons:

### **Internal hiring as part of internal career tracks and active HR management**

It is a widespread and recognised practice within international companies to promote mobility within the company and allow for employees to gain experience in different countries and jobs. They thus give preference to internal candidates or reserve certain vacancies for internal candidates. Note that also the European Commission itself follows such a policy of internal recruitment (even for R&D related vacancies)

### **Hidden tenure track.**

At many institutions transparent, structured and formalised career paths plans are still lacking. In absence of regulations, it often happens that researchers get an initial fixed term contract with a verbal supplement. They are being promised that if they performed well, they will be given preference for a new position after their contract runs out. It would be incorrect to denounce this practice as mere inbreeding.

We recommend that Member states and research institutions should develop structured career track schemes, taking into account the Eurodoc recommendation for Core Research Career Structures in Academia:

[http://www.eurodoc.net/file/20060125\\_eurodoc\\_recommendation\\_CoreCareerPathsAcademia.pdf](http://www.eurodoc.net/file/20060125_eurodoc_recommendation_CoreCareerPathsAcademia.pdf)

Tenure track arrangements should be made explicit and conditions for the assessment made transparent.

### **Research project money – hidden grants.**

Doctoral candidates and postdocs (or groups of young researchers) are not eligible to submit their own research projects in many funding schemes. Professor or senior researcher thus act as front (wo)man and file in projects written by others (sometimes they do not know much about the content of the application). Once money is granted, the real authors of the application are then directly being employed by the professor without any application procedure or open call.

This example shows the influence of inflexible structures and hierarchies which hinder early scientific independence. But it is also partly inherent: There will always be co-authors of a funding application and which have a legitimate claim to be given preference for positions the research project once money is granted. This should not be condemned as harmful internal recruitment.

Funding agencies should review their regulations and ensure that (co)authorship is being made explicit in all applications.

## **Five Principles and Recommendations towards a More Open Labour Market for Researchers**

### **1. Researchers should be provided with central and easy access to all vacancies that fit their profiles**

...so that no time is wasted browsing through totally irrelevant advertisements and no relevant vacancies are missed. At the moment, information on vacancies for researchers is scattered on homepages of universities and research institutions, news papers, subject-specific and commercial job web pages or else they are being distributed in relevant scientific mailing lists. In brief: Jobs are advertised somewhere in an unstructured way, and lot of potential is wasted.

Acceptance of the central job database at the EURAXESS portal is still low and the system could be improved. National databases should be integrated. Experience shows that mere promotion of a European wide database for open positions is not sufficient to counteract the highly fragmented researchers' job market and indifference of many recruiters – it seems to be necessary to go for appropriate legal action to ensure that at least all publicly funded researchers positions are advertised in a central database.

### **2. Application procedures should be efficient and user-friendly and should avoid waste of time for researchers.**

It is increasingly necessary and desirable that researchers prepare and search for their next job in the last year of their fixed term contract. They are high qualified workers. It has to be avoided that their time is wasted with routine work. Applicants should be able to focus on essentials. **In particular, it has to be ensured that application documents can easily be reused.**

Some employers feel the need to organise their application procedures with a database and invite applicants to fill in online forms with a pre-determined structure. Restrictions arising from these forms are often too strict to allow appropriate consideration of non-typical career paths. Moreover, poor implementation of the online forms often causes problems. Data entered can rarely be reused. Researchers are required to carry out tedious data filling chore and consequently have less time to concentrate on the content. To improve the situation, CV-based recruitment should be preferred, **common European guidelines for database-based application procedures should be developed.**

Bureaucracy has to be kept minimal. In particular, applicants should be asked to provide documentary evidence only for the final stages of the application procedure, not at the beginning.

### **3. Positions should be open for researchers regardless of their nationality.**

Within the EU, non-discrimination of workers from other EU countries is already stipulated, but we need to go beyond: non-discrimination should equally apply to employers in other ERA countries and to applicants regardless of their nationality. Hidden discrimination and disincentives must be avoided as much as possible.

This means in particular that as a general rule calls should also be advertised in the language which is most used in the discipline under consideration.

### **4. Application procedures should be transparent and fair**

The "Code of conduct for the recruitment of researchers"<sup>4</sup> (short: Code of Conduct) which was published by the European Commission along with the "European Charter for Researchers" in

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<sup>4</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/rights>

2005 already names a number of key principles for recruitment procedures. Employers should lay down their institutional guidelines and rules based on the Code of Conduct. To promote best practice, it could help to develop and promote sets of more concrete rules which go beyond the Code of Conduct.

### **5. Timely information of candidates should be a matter of course**

Candidates should be kept updated on the progress of the application procedure. This applies to successful candidates as much as to those which are sorted out. They should be informed as soon as they no longer under consideration. This allows applicants to adapt their plans and re-orient for other opportunities.

Also, as a matter of transparency, the results of the call (i.e. the names of successful candidates) should be made accessible to all applicants.

## **Proposed Implementation measures at European Level**

The “Researchers Partnership” names priority actions in the section on “open recruitment and portability of grants. Eurodoc recognises the importance to progress in these areas. However, we would like to add some final clarifications and comments on the implementation of these four priority actions:

*Commission Communication: Member States to ensure open, transparent and competition-based recruitment of researchers, in particular by giving institutions greater autonomy over hiring and by adopting best practice on the recognition of qualification from other countries.*

**Eurodoc comment:** While we recognise that rigid and antiquated centralised legislation is often a serious obstacle to implementing an open recruitment policy in some countries, greater autonomy does not automatically result in more open, transparent and competition-based recruitment. In general, greater autonomy needs to come with more coordination of the institutions, based on flexible standards and guidelines. Also, member states are reminded that more autonomy does certainly not mean that member states give up all responsibility for a coherent national research policy. Member states need to set framework conditions for public funding and should not hesitate to take appropriate action if institutions are unable to fulfil general policy goals like advertising vacancies openly.

*Commission Communication: Member States and Commission to ensure that all publicly funded researchers' positions are openly advertised online, in particular through EURAXESS*

### **Eurodoc Comment:**

- 1) We suggest Member States and the Commission to take/propose legal action to ensure that all vacancies are openly advertised in EURAXESS. It should be made a prerequisite to funding (details to be specified, see section “What is internal recruitment?”).  
It should not be forgotten that we need a central access point for *all* researchers' positions, including positions in industry.
- 2) There will not be a real success without substantial improvement of the EURAXESS job database itself. For that, appropriate funding should be made available, stakeholders heard. In particular, we see the need for
  - **Improvement of usability**, also for recruiters and HR departments
  - Development and promotion of **open interfaces**. On the one hand standards have to be agreed and technical problems solved so that national job databases feed job advertisements directly into the central EURAXESS database. On the other hand, EURAXESS

should offer modules and explain methods how to show all positions the institutions have entered in the EURAXESS database at their institution's homepage.

- Discussion on how to better handle vacancies for interdisciplinary positions and positions in knowledge transfer, innovation and research management. These positions fall into a **wider understanding** of the definition of a **researcher**; they are important for the European Research Area as well.

This is not a complete list; it should rather be seen as a start for a consultation process; Eurodoc is ready to contribute with its expertise.

- 3) Eurodoc also suggest developing indicators to measure progress (cf. "Open Method of Coordination"). An indicator could be the percentage of all vacancies of researcher's positions which are advertised in the EURAXESS database.

*Commission Communication: Member States and Commission to ensure adequate information and assistance service for researchers moving between institutions, sectors and countries including through EURAXESS and the EURES platform.*

**Eurodoc Comment:** Eurodoc fully supports this priority action, and appropriate funding needs to be made available for it. It is also important to ensure that all services provided meet the needs of the target group. For that aim, in particular, Eurodoc and its member organisations should be involved.