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

Main outcomes of the conference

The discussion on **how to create an attractive and competitive European researchers' labour market** needs to be embedded in the broader policy context, namely the EU's ambitious objective to become the most competitive knowldege based economy by 2010. 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 at the conference focused on employment in the public sector and at the universities. It is however important to remember that the gap that the Lisbon process is trying to fill is actually a serious shortfall in the beneficial translation of research know-how into enterprise activities.

So it is a gap not in any particular company but of a much more systemic nature, which is made worse, by the 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 is how to create **the conditions** in Europe that will remedy this and how to create the right 'ecosystems'.

Today, 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. So we need to establish ecosystems favouring density of actors who reinforce collaboration of knowledge and of ideas, as well as the capacity to implement.

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

There was consensus amongst the three final speakers that:

- We need **a structured process** to make cooperation work well and effectively.

- We need the willingness **to establish the ecosystems** that create jobs which enable a better translation of knowledge. Thus ensuring that when new knowledge is discovered, the resources in place are adequate to ensure the translation.

- 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 people are looking for in their careers.**

- There needs to be **evidence that such a process is really in place** for knowing what people want/need from their employment, then to relate this understanding to institutional objectives, then demonstrating to current/potential employees that something is happening.

- **Signing up to the principles of the Charter and 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 Code. Signing does not mean to apply every single word. The Charter and 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. 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 cheap labour force.

- The **key-messages** presented as the main outcomes 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 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 level **researchers' organisations' platform** 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 all 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 real European labour market for researchers.

The **Austrian Presidency welcomed** the idea to set up a "strong voice for researchers" and expressed hopes that the future Presidencies would take these ideas further.

The conference chair, B. Weitgruber, also **welcomed and supported the key messages** presented in the workshops and ensured that the **outcomes would be fed into the ongoing work of the "Bologna follow-up group".**

While thanking particularly the European University Association for specifically organising the workshop related to the 3rd cycle, she stressed the importance to continue 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 recommendation 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 the 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 education, research and innovation.

The conference report including the results of the following 5 conference workshops will be made available at the internet www.eracareersaustria.at/conference in due time:

Summary of the key messages of 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

In line with the principles laid down in C&C and through a simple and feasible approach:

- *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, 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* **<u>ALL</u> researchers,** *including doctoral candidates (according to "Bologna definition of 3rd cycle), European and non-European and independently from 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…) 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

- *We recommend the "**Minerva Code**" 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 processes) should be **re-designed** 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 and appropriate balance between individual & collective appraisal.*
- *Researchers should **take the initiative** in improving transparency in the appraisal process. They should be empowered by the greater clarity to determine their own career progression.*

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 EC **clarifying** that signing the C & C does not mean full compliance on the moment of signature, but rather is understood as an intention to adhere to the principals expressed in the C & C and importantly indicating that signing up to it **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 C&C**.*
- *Find ways of **disseminating the European spirit** represented in C&C 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 EC for a national and European audience.*

Workshop 4

The European Charter and Code as a label for quality enhancement

- *The C&C is a very **useful labelling mechanism for quality enhancement** in human resource management in research.*
- *The **practical implementation of C&C** 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.*

- *Position of a **postdoc researcher is very unstable in Europe**. Postdocs are highly qualified researchers who perform independent research, but are often **seen as ever-lasting students or cheap labour force**. It is important to recognise the value of their work and to improve their long-term career perspectives.*
- ***Inter-sectorial relationship and mobility between universities and industry** has to be improved. Institutions and governments should develop **clear policies and strategies** to support and increase mobility between universities and industry and vice-versa.*