



Attractive Careers in Research: the expectations & roles of different stakeholder groups

WORKSHOP CHALLENGE STATEMENT

When

Day	4 – 5 Nov 2024
4 Nov	14:00 – 17:30
5 Nov	09:30 – 12:30

Where

Online via Zoom

Science Europe Office

Rue de la Science, 14
1040 Brussels
Belgium

Register

Register for the open webinar on 4 Nov:

<https://eu01web.zoom.us/j/91012345678>

About Science Europe

Science Europe is the association representing major national research funding and performing organisations across Europe. It brings together the expertise of some of the largest and most respected European research organisations to jointly push the frontiers of policies and practices that underlie how research is programmed, conceived, conducted, and communicated. One of Science Europe's current strategic priorities is 'contributing to the evolution of research culture', where focus is given to the promotion of attractive and sustainable careers in research, and the recognition of a myriad of roles that contribute to research quality and impact.

About the Workshop

The workshop aims to explore the common and different expectations for careers in research by different stakeholder groups, and the opportunities for positive action that exist based on these expectations. Existing good practice examples from within and outside of academia will be presented and used as inspiration. Time will be dedicated to open discussions to foster and co-create new ideas to address the many well-documented challenges that the research sector faces. Finally, the workshop will turn to the specific roles and responsibilities of Science Europe Member Organisations (research funding and performing organisations) building on the lessons learnt to define practical recommendations for action that can be taken forward within Science Europe.

Science Europe's Careers in Research workshop aims to focus on opportunities for positive action to improve conditions for talented individuals within the research sector in Europe, thereby contributing to the quality of research and the evolution of research cultures.

To do so, we must recognise the myriad challenges and difficulties faced in our current systems. These have been discussed and written about at length over the past decades, and this statement aims to summarise the key issues, acting as a common reference upon which discussions on differential expectations can take place, working towards defining positive actions. A selection of key studies, reports, and policy papers is also provided that discuss and contextualise the challenges described below.

The key challenges facing careers in research

- The **precarity** of research positions, particularly at early career stages, leads to reductions in the attractiveness of academic career pathways and a **loss of talent** to other sectors. Precarity is the result of a **lack of available public funding for research**, the short-term '**projectification**' of research, and a lack of research positions that, combined, lead to an **overly competitive environment**. Competition is a necessary and important element in promoting quality and excellence, yet over-competition acts against promoting high-quality research by increasing talent loss and **reducing diversity** (both in terms of people and ideas). It is vital that actions to improve the conditions for careers in research act on precarity and over-competition without compromising on quality and excellence.
- Broad-scale, international reform of research assessment is underway, yet many of the traditional and **perverse incentives** that have shaped the way that research is conceived, conducted, and communicated remain influential in the careers of research professionals. '**Publish or perish**' remains a well-used idiom, and the focus on **individualistic** and easily quantifiable outputs in research predominate.
- All types of **mobility** within the research system should be recognised as valuable contributions, these include: geographical, virtual, intersectoral, inter-disciplinary, inter-role, and intellectual mobility. Yet, it is also important to recognize that not all roles or positions within the research profession benefit from mobility. Promotion of mobility must focus on and reward the skills and competencies gained, the research results obtained, the outcomes achieved, and coherence with the research strategy, rather than mobility for its own sake. Mobility should not be a requirement for career advancement, where it may introduce or **reinforce unwanted bias** and lead to reductions in equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- As a component of mobility, the international movement of research professionals offers specific benefits and challenges. The **brain drain** of talented individuals from certain regions of the world (or within the European Research Area) seeking more attractive conditions poses significant challenges and will require international collaboration and whole-systems thinking to overcome. The same is true for inter-sectoral mobility, which is heavily skewed towards industry from academia currently – promoted both by more attractive conditions in the private sector and a **lack**

of recognition of non-academic skills and achievements as part of standard research assessment processes.

- Career progression remains **narrowly focused** upon advancement as a function of increasing **leadership**, as is highlighted by the R1-R4 classifications (i.e. Doctoral candidate (R1), junior academic (R2), research fellow (R3), research professor (R4)). Yet, many important specialised roles in research (lab technicians, science communicators, data scientists, research managers, as examples) would be served better through recognition of increasing skill, experience, and/or competency over increasing leadership.

These are some key examples of the many challenges facing careers in research, upon which there are opportunities for positive action by research funding and performing organisations: the subject of this Science Europe workshop.

Looking forward

With the above (and more) challenges facing the sector, how can we develop positive actions as research funding and performing organizations to make careers in research more attractive and sustainable? – Our workshop will learn from existing good practices and focus on the expectations of different stakeholder groups towards careers in research. Understanding the different career expectations that exist within the research sector will help in developing actions that work towards more attractive and sustainable working environments for everyone in the research sector, contributing to positive research cultures that foster high quality research for the benefit of all. There is no perfect system, but by focussing on good practices and expectations, we can work together to improve the conditions for research in Europe and globally.

Science Europe aims to contribute to improving the careers in research through careful and considered policy and practice changes, and the outcomes of this workshop will form the basis for recommendations for action to be taken forward by Science Europe Member Organisations.

A selection of key studies, reports, and policy papers.

- DORA (2012). The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. <https://sfdora.org/read/>.
- Science Europe (2016). Postdoctoral Funding Schemes in Europe. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.5059938](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5059938)
- Wellcome (2020). What researchers think about the culture they work in. <https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/what-researchers-think-about-the-culture-they-work-in.pdf>.
- Aubert Bonn & Pinxten (2021). Advancing science or advancing careers? Researchers' opinions on success indicators. PLOS One 16(2): e0243664. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0243664>.
- De Herde, Björnmalm, & Susi (2021). Game over: Empower early career researchers to improve research quality. Insights: the UKSG Journal 34, 1-6. <https://hdl.handle.net/2268/308575>.
- EUA, DORA, Sparc Europe (2021). Reimagining Academic Career Assessment: Stories of innovation and change. <https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/reimagining-academic-career-assessment-stories-of-innovation-and-change.html>
- OECD (2021). Reducing the precarity of academic research careers", OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers. <https://doi.org/10.1787/0f8bd468-en>.
- Science Europe (2021). Statement on Research Culture – Empowering Researchers with a Thriving Research System. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.5726893](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5726893)
- CoARA (2022). The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment. <https://coara.eu/agreement/the-agreement-full-text/>
- LERU (2022). A Pathway towards Multidimensional Academic Careers - A LERU Framework for the Assessment of Researchers. https://www.leru.org/files/Publications/LERU_PositionPaper_Framework-for-the-Assessment-of-Researchers.pdf
- YERUN (2022). Rethinking academic careers: cultural change as key bottleneck to be addressed. <https://yerun.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/YERUN-RethinkingAcademicVFinalSpreads.pdf>.
- CESAER (2023). Position 'Supporting modern and stable research careers in Europe'. <https://zenodo.org/records/8096603>
- OECD (2023). Promoting diverse career pathways for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers. OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers. <https://doi.org/10.1787/dc21227a-en>.
- European Commission (2023). Proposal for a Council recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM:2023:0436:FIN>.
- EUA (2024). EUA Research & Innovation Agenda 2027: Seizing the moment, driving the change. <https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/eua-research-innovation-agenda-2027.html>
- EUA (2024). Trends 2024: European higher education institutions in times of transition. <https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/trends-2024.html>