

Doctoral Programmes in Europe

Nice 7/9 december 2006



WG7: Prospects in academic research career: From PhD to Postdoc as Tenure Track?

I. Topic

WG7 will address academic research career paths for doctoral graduates with the main focus on the role, status and nature of the “postdoc” position across Europe.

II. Starting Point

The question of academic career prospects for doctoral candidates and young researchers were clearly identified in the EC’s “European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers”, which encourages EU Member States “to offer researchers sustainable career development systems at all career stages”. The Charter and Code further state: “Clear rules and explicit guidelines for the recruitment and appointment of postdoctoral researchers, including the maximum duration and the objectives of such appointments, should be established by the institutions appointing postdoctoral researchers. Such guidelines should take into account time spent in prior postdoctoral appointments at other institutions and take into consideration that the postdoctoral status should be transitional, with the primary purpose of providing additional professional development opportunities for a research career in the context of long-term career prospects” (C&C 2005, p. 27).

III. Issues for Discussion

Postdoctoral positions do not exist in all European countries at present and are more prevalent in some disciplines than in others. They are usually seen as a bridge to permanent tenure-track employment, but often this is not the case. Many researchers move from one postdoctoral position to another without any clear career perspective and stability – often in positions of assistant researcher - used as a source of highly skilled professional but cheap labour. Only a small number of “postdocs” become principal investigators with independence and own responsibility for a project or a research team.

By considering the role and position of the “postdoc” in Europe the Working Group is encouraged to look critically at the question of the viability of academic research career structures in Europe at a time when the political objective is to increase significantly the overall number of researcher in Europe.

Good practices from various countries and institutions should be explored while at European level the potential impact of new EU initiatives such as the European Research Council and the redesigned Marie Curie Actions should also be considered.

IV Workshop Outcomes

- Areas of consensus
- Areas for further discussion