EARTO Inputs for a European Framework for Research Careers (Comments to Technical Document)

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EARTO represents the interests of more than 350 Research and Technology organizations (RTOs) in more than 20 European countries. EARTO members represent more than 150.000 highly skilled researchers and engineers managing a wide range of research and technology infrastructures. EARTO, as the representative of European RTOs, is strongly committed to improving research careers.

EARTO supports the development of a Commission proposal for a European framework for research careers. EARTO views any activities directed to attracting talents to research to be beneficial. Today, EARTO specifically addresses and brings further recommendations regarding the following issues:
- Definition of researchers in the European Research Area, and of the research professions
- Funding and flexibility
- EURAXESS, talent platform and R&I careers observatory
- Incentives for early-career researchers
- Draft new European Charter for Researchers.

1. Definition of researchers in the European Research Area, and of the research professions

The recognition of career levels needs to be flexible and based on each organization's needs and not to be defined too narrowly. EARTO is concerned that the current ERA Action on supporting research careers does not represent the way to assess researchers outside of academia and might still limit the intersectoral mobility and career development. We see that other aspects such as excellence and impact, should be considered. Recognition should also be given to research performed in applied science and direct projects with the industry. Consequently, EARTO supports the Commission's view that the proposal for a European framework for research careers should also highlight and strengthen the link between research careers, entrepreneurship and innovation. There should be flexible support models to support this as career paths can be different even within the research community.

Table 1 (Examples of Occupations in the European Framework for Research Careers) is problematic for RTOs as it does not reflect their reality and how the career progression goes within RTOs. EARTO understands that R1-R4 profiles are going to be used to ensure comparability and inter-operability of research careers across institutions, sectors and Member States. As it is presented, the table does not reflect the RTOs' career structure. It may also not fit other sectors outside academia such as researchers working in industry own labs for example. We would recommend allowing different mapping mechanisms. Should it not possible, we advise to update table 1 to at least better fit to the needs of the RTOs. Many HR systems used currently by the RTOs clearly do not support this structure.

2. Funding and flexibility

RTOs operating in the field of applied science need to have the relevant career level elements built into both EU and national funding to support career development and attractive careers. The proposed career levels itself table is not suitable for the RTOs' career structure. So, the career support should not be limited to a given structure. We see that, on a national level, the funding of research careers needs to be included in the normal project funding, which would then enable career building within the existing operating models of RTOs and support career development which would be suited to each country.

We would also like to highlight that fellowships are not a suitable model for all organizations: for example, some of our members are not allowed to pay scholarships according to national laws. Organizations should therefore also be allowed to pay salary for the fellow if it is a better method for that organization or country. Accordingly, EARTO fully support the Commission's idea that flexibility in the delivery should already be implemented to this technical document.

EARTO members clearly support researchers' mobility: relevant EU and national legislations should be implemented to support researchers' mobility to increase the possibilities for early career mobility (See EARTO Paper that highlights current issues in EU regulations). In addition, the framework conditions for international mobility of researchers are not appropriately reflected in the technical document on a European framework for research careers. This is explicitly a topic in the context of MSCA-projects, where secondments for a longer period are mandatory: the administrative burden and efforts have shown to be

immense and could therefore lead to less applications for MSCA-projects by RTOs in the future. EARTO emphasizes once again, that the hurdles of international researcher mobility need to be eliminated at full speed, at EU- as well as national level and at the level of international tax law.

RTOs fully support any action directed to strengthening the European research area's attractiveness and networking for early career researchers within the ERA. The possibility of having dual positions in institutions established in different Member States, thereby fostering knowledge transfer, collaboration, and preventing talent drain is interesting. However, based on the current legislation, it is not a real possibility for many RTOs (i.e. many RTOs are 'public' entities/having a public legal status, while they all have a public mission). Having roles in two countries for a researcher typically means worse net compensation and high administrative burden for the researcher and its employer. It also creates situations where organizations need to register as an employer in another EU member state. This registration is costly and hinders an organization's possibilities to allow this option. If this is to be supported, then it cannot be a compulsory element of any funding programme. To render such option attractive for researchers and RTOs, it would require to amend the relevant EU and national legislations and even tax treaties to specifically target researchers.

3. EURAXESS, talent platform and R&I careers observatory
Any action such as strengthening the use of the EURAXESS portal is good for talent attraction and retention purposes. For the portal to attract companies, it should be made possible on the national platforms to automate the upload of relevant positions into the portal and to support the use of AI to pull research related positions to the site. Now, from the RTOs' experiences, the platform does not attract enough suitable candidates for the open positions within the RTOs and RTOs have to use their own channels to attract talents.

RTOs already support diversity in their operations and the hire of the best candidates globally. Describing the career path on the job positions might be challenging as we see that even the research careers in many sectors are definitively not linear. An advertisement for recruitment should therefore always be built to attract the best candidate for the position. It would be beneficial for national bodies and unions to work together to bring general employment terms for each country to the EURAXESS portal. And, this should not be the responsibility of each organization with each job advertisement.

For applied research organizations, the tenure track should not be a compulsory requirement, even if it would be deemed fit for academia. And we would like to highlight that RTOs are already following national legislation regarding employment terms and conditions.

4. Incentives for early-career researchers
Careers in application-oriented research do not run in a straight line. Tthere is a broader spectrum of possible careers apart from achieving a professorship. Regarding this, the academic criteria and the additional soft skills required for a successful career vary depending on the career path. Therefore, it is also difficult to apply the R1-R4 profiles for RTOs. In addition, the systematic and professional support for researchers about career planning and development requires appropriate expertise (personnel development and organizational development) in terms of human and financial resources in the research organizations.

5. Draft new European Charter for Researchers
RTOs fully support a revision and actualization of the European Charta for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers that is summarized in the draft Charter for Researchers. EARTO emphasizes the need to allow mapping mechanisms that differ from the R1-R4 profile to consider RTOs' specific career structures.

In addition, the recommendation of a maximum threshold of one third of fixed-term contracts in the overall researchers' human resources of a given employer does not map the missions and funding systems of many RTOs. The goal should be a balanced relationship between fixed-term and permanent employment relationships.

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