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European University Association

Conclusions from Working Group 4: Different roles of doctoral candidates/ Individual conditions for doctoral candidates

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Early Stage Researchers (ESRs): Definition

- ESRs are professionals who are trained through research in the conception or creation of new knowledge, products, processes, methods and systems, and in the management of the projects concerned (*definition based on the European Charter for Researchers*)
- ESRs are „*Knowledge workers*“

Main issues discussed

- Status of doctoral candidates (students vs. employees)
- Social protection of early stage researchers
- Rights and responsibilities of ESRs
- Training content and duration of doctoral programmes
- Support and recognition of different kinds of mobility

Status of ESRs

- Regardless of the name, ESRs should be recognised as professionals who make an important contribution to the creation of new knowledge.
- Therefore, they should be treated with due respect.
- In particular, they should be engaged in all aspects of the running of their institution (academic as well as non-academic) in an appropriate way.
- A written agreement should be concluded at the start of the doctoral programme, specifying the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved.

Social protection

- Assure adequate standards of social security, regardless of the legal nature of the employment.
- The same principles should apply independently of the discipline or work place.
- This includes health care and parental leave, unemployment benefits, contributions to pension schemes, accident insurance etc.

Rights and duties

- Adequate means should be provided for the full professional development of ESRs, including regular and proper supervision.
- ESRs are obliged to adhere to ethical standards and codes of conduct as applicable to other researchers.
- ESRs should be given adequate opportunities for teaching.

Training content and duration

- Training in transferable skills is important but should not be overemphasised with respect to original research.
- The ideal way of acquiring skills should be by guided “learning by doing”
- There should be a guideline for the duration of doctoral programmes (full-time equivalent 3-4 years), but application should be flexible, taking into account the personal circumstances of the ESR.

Mobility

- Mobility should be seen as a means, not an end in itself.
- The Dublin descriptors should be used to develop a the framework for an automatic recognition of foreign titles from (accredited) institutions of HE.
- Mobility (including inter-sectorial or inter-disciplinary mobility) should be encouraged and never be penalised.