

EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION
General Assembly 2001

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AN ETUCE PERSPECTIVE ON RESEARCH IN THE EUROPEAN
UNION

1. Introduction

The ETUCE represents teachers and research workers throughout the European Union, particularly in higher education institutions, where it has always had a significant number of members, organised both in general teachers' unions and in higher education and researchers' unions. During the 1990's ETUCE has significantly increased its membership among research staff in universities, and other higher education and research institutions. This increased level of representation has been reflected in an increased level of activity in the field of research policy. Five annual seminars for representatives of ETUCE unions engaged in research have been held since 1996 with the support and cooperation of the European Commission, including Commission officials, ETUC representatives and Members of the European Parliament as speakers. On the basis of this increased representation and activity, the ETUCE has developed its policy on research and research workers in the European Union. We take the opportunity to raise our concerns with the ministers responsible for research under each Presidency of the European Union.

The ETUCE acknowledges the scope and the formal limitations to the European Union, its institutions and programmes, in the field of research. However, both by the strategic use of EU resources and by the promotion of good practice, the EU has a considerable actual and potential importance in the development of research at the European, national and institutional levels. The main concerns of the ETUCE and its member organisations, as trade unions in the field of education and research, are with the position of research workers, both research specialists and academics generally, who are engaged in a wide range of research, consultancy and scholarly activities.

The ETUCE believes that research, scholarship and consultancy have a crucial role both in their own right and in underpinning the quality, rigour and relevance of higher education, as well as contributing significantly to the broader social and economic objectives of higher education. A strong research base is crucial to the quality of higher education, and academic staff in higher education should all have access to research or related opportunities appropriate to their needs and interest. This has implications for the recruitment and career structures of research staff. ETUCE believes that skilled research staff have as much right to job security and career progression as other employees, and that this would be to the benefit of institutions too. Teachers in higher education are generally engaged in research, consultancy and scholarship as well as their teaching roles : these activities must also be supported, and the rights of higher education teachers to conduct research must continue to be asserted.

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2. Research policy and funding

In an increasingly complex society, facing new social, economic, technological and environmental challenges, research is an essential underpinning to policy and action: it follows that research policy must support a strong and wide-ranging research base. The unpredictability of society's future needs means that research must not simply be driven by the customer-contractor principle, but must contain the capacity to explore freely at the margins of our present knowledge. The link between research and other scholarly activity, and the quality of higher education teaching is vital and must be sustained. It should be recognised as the norm, that teachers in higher education have a mix of teaching and research responsibilities, although of course this mix will vary between posts and within the same post over time. Funding systems should encourage the links between research and teaching. They should also permit academic staff to allocate sufficient time for research and scholarship. It is unrealistic to base research funding in universities on student numbers, although we recognise that this is in some countries one measure, alongside others, in determining the overall funding of institutions.

Within the policy parameters set by democratic institutions, the Social Partners should be involved in identifying research needs; however, research strategies should be developed by the researchers themselves. Research policy should be developed at the European Union and national levels as far possible based on co-determination involving the relevant unions. Research should be subject to strong measures to provide for accountability, in which academics and the Social Partners are well represented. In this respect, public authorities, including the European institutions, should set high standards which private research providers should be expected to match. A careful balance must be achieved between broad accountability and transparency and the protection of academic freedom. This is particularly important in the face of growing pressures arising from customer-driven research. While private and other funding is necessary and welcome, the public sector has the primary responsibility for research in determining the conditions and values under which research should be conducted, including role of planning, accountability and academic freedom.

All disciplines need to benefit from funding, not only high technology or other projects which attract political support. The expansion of the European Union's concerns into the social/employment sphere, requires that this is supported by funding for research. The full range of research, including research in science and technology, the social sciences and humanities, must be addressed by both national and European level research policies. Research into education itself is of increasing importance, and must be supported. As society becomes more complex, the need for research-based policy and action grows.

There is a need for a balance to be achieved between innovation and continuity and basic and applied research. In concrete terms, this means a balance between block grants and contract funding, set at realistic levels. While opportunities to develop new ideas must be created, it is also important for research to be followed through over the necessary time span.

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The overall funding level must be pitched to meet as many of the legitimate aspirations of research institutions and research workers as possible, and should be aimed at the best level of funding across Europe (approximately 3 % of GNP).

While public sector remains the principal source of funding for basic research, private sector funding must be increased in the appropriate areas of research. A reasonable balance between basic and applied research, however, must be maintained. To assure the basis of heterogeneity and academic freedom for research, models for public sector funding which include a diversity of sources within the sector must be promoted. However, true diversity should not be allowed to prevent the establishment of common good conditions under which research workers are employed.

Research funding must include infrastructure support to maintain the quality and continuity of research. The funding of projects, both on the national and the international levels, should cover all the costs of a project. Support for the necessary infrastructure such as offices, laboratories and equipment, books and capital expenditure which supports the project, must be provided. Also, money should be available for staff development and training, for rewarding the staff for high-quality performance, and for making promotion possible.

There is a need for a balance of funding, including long-term funding both to assure research quality and to maintain cadres of research workers, and to protect the conditions of research workers. This should include both long-term funding of projects, as appropriate, and capital and current funding to support research in institutions generally.

When making decisions about research funding, the negative effects of short-term contracts on research quality, and on the working lives of researchers should be born in mind. Research grant allocation criteria should include good working conditions, pay and career opportunities for research workers, and these should be underpinned by a code of practice agreed at the European and national levels. Working conditions, conditions of employment and career prospects of contract research staff must be as good as those enjoyed by the permanent staff.

3. Research workers: status and working conditions

In establishing the standards for the employment of research workers, particular attention must be paid to research in public sector higher education institutions. The ETUCE recognises that research staff are employed in private research centres of market-oriented firms and corporations as well as in public research institutes and in universities. However, we would assert that the public sector must set the values and standards of best practice for research and research workers as a whole.

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3.1. The need for a permanent researcher status

The ETUCE regards job security for full-time researchers their key demand in respect of research, and would wish in principle to eradicate the use of short term contracts. Best practice among European higher education systems, and the aggregate level of research funding from year to year, suggests that this is feasible. The trade unions believe that skilled research staff have as much right to job security and career progression as teaching staff, and that this would also be to the benefit of institutions and the quality of research.

Researchers also require academic freedom and working conditions which must be guaranteed by specific full-time researchers' status. The same principles of academic freedom and intellectual property ownership should apply to researches as other academic staff.

As concerns European projects such as the 6th Framework Programme, the European Commission should actively support the principle of a code of practice which protects rights of research workers and which would be developed and implemented through dialogue with the representatives of academic staff at the European and the national levels.

The conditions of employment and career structure of research staff should form part of the selection criteria for the allocation of funding in such programmes and should be borne in mind in the negotiation of contracts between the Commission and educational institutions.

Considerable concerns are felt among ETUCE affiliates at the national level, at the problems arising regarding the recruitment and retention of young people, particularly young women, on sciences and technology courses, which must form the basis for the next generation of researchers in these disciplines. The ETUCE asserts the need to address this problem at both the national and the European Union level.

In some countries, the roles of junior research worker and full-time research student have become blurred. The unions and employers should both seek to ensure that as far as possible, the roles remain distinct, or at least that, if a student has an employment contract, this is for a clear and limited range of duties, in order that they can pursue their own research objectives.

The European Commission has rightly recognised that research workers are one of the most highly developed groups of workers in terms of their mobility nationally and within Europe. ETUCE believes that the mobility and recognition of qualifications of full-time research workers should be enhanced, recognising the high levels of skills and qualifications researchers will already have achieved, and in many cases, the considerable

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transferability of their skills and experience. Mobility should be encouraged, as a right, not an obligation. Researchers should be encouraged to study or collaborate with colleagues in other countries, to develop their knowledge and skills, to share ideas and resources with colleagues and to promote cooperation rather than duplication.

3.2. Dealing with the precariousness of short-term research contracts

The vulnerable position of short-term contract research staff should be recognised, and their employment rights strengthened. The practice of short-term contracts in research does not fit with requirements of scientific work, including the need for continuity. Presently, in order to promote the generalisation of full-time academic status for the research staff, it is necessary to recognise equivalent rights for short-term contract research workers as other workers in higher education, to for example, periods of probation and staff development, so that they can build upon their experience from job to job, and not be trapped in a repetitive cycle of employment.

Also necessary is the transferability of research workers' rights, so that pension rights or accumulated years of service for other purpose can be achieved : it is recognised that this will be extremely difficult to achieve on a bilateral inter-institutional basis, but ETUCE should take this up, both with the European Community institutions and with the Rectors organisations.

At least, the following rights should be guaranteed to short-term contract research workers :

- Research staff should be employed on contracts which at least run for the entire length of the period of funding of the project;
- Contract staff should have as far as possible the same employment rights, redundancy pay, academic freedom, intellectual property rights, rights to participate in the government in the institution in which they work, and rights to facilities, as other established staff;
- Contracts should have the same pay and conditions of service as established staff, e.g. parental leave, sick pay, pensions, etc;
- Where contract staff are employed on a series of short-term contracts in the same institution over a period they should be able to establish the right to recognition as permanent staff of that institution within a reasonable time period;
- Research staff should have the opportunity to develop a career in research, with continuity, progression and the opportunity for appropriate training and retraining.

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3.3. The necessary development of Research activity in the Higher Education sector

The links between teaching and research should be enhanced, and teachers in higher education should be given the opportunity to undertake research and scholarly activities as part of their employment. Students should also have the opportunity to be trained through appropriate research activities. It is essential to ensure that the quality of higher education institutions is maintained; this is essential as they are responsible for the training of the next generation of scholars.

Thus, it is of major importance that research and teaching are integrated in ways that give every teacher in higher education the right to do research and every researcher the right to teach as appropriate. Researchers should be given the status of full members of the academic community on the university, faculty and department levels (the right to vote, the right to be a member in the various decision making bodies, etc).

The relationship between research, teaching and other duties needs to take account of the abilities and interests of higher education teachers and research workers, which may evolve over time, as well as of the needs of their employing institution. This balance will need to be the subject of sensitive negotiation, and the unions have an important role in facilitating this process and asserting the rights of the employees. This is an area where contract workers are particularly vulnerable. There need to be appropriate appeal mechanisms and protections for all research workers, as well as mentoring and staff development opportunities.

It is also important to increase the attractiveness of a career in research by changing the very rigid system of promotions in many European universities into a more flexible one (the Irish system of applications sent to promotion committees is a good example); more flexible ways of defining jobs and teaching and research duties related to them have become essential tools for motivating staff and for commending them for high quality performance.

Research and associated activities, require an investment of resources, including not only finance for research staff and equipment, but sufficient time for all academic staff to undertake these activities. This includes the need for more technical support staff, and the maintenance of their important distinctive role in support of research staff: they should not become cut-price researchers or instructors. Financial grants must cover the costs of this distinctive technical support.

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4. Intellectual Property Rights

The ETUCE work on Intellectual Property Rights is continuing, but some key principles and important issues can now be identified. The same principles of academic freedom and intellectual property ownership should apply to researchers as to other academic staff.

There needs to be greater fairness and transparency in research workers' ownership of the outcomes of their research, their moral rights to be identified as the originators of research, and their rights to the appropriate material benefits from their research work. This is particularly important for contract researchers who may have moved on before the results of the work to which they have contributed are published. No academic worker should be required to sign away their basic rights, particularly their moral right to be identified as the originator, wholly or in part, of a piece of research. The Intellectual Property Right system must support creativity.

The position of technical support staff in research projects needs to be clarified, including their right to be recognised as part of research teams. This is a group whose interests are in danger of being neglected.

Academic journals play a role in exercising patronage, in controlling copyright, and in validating research. The ETUCE is conscious of the proliferation of academic journals, but believes the EU should take the initiative in promoting the publication of European research findings. The overriding principles must be access to information and the quality of the research which the EU supports.

EU standards should be at least as good as the best European standards, and there is some evidence (e.g. in Finland) that national standards of intellectual property rights could be eroded by adoption of EU norms. ETUCE will do further work to analyse to what extent the researchers' rights (intellectual property, right to publish) have been infringed in European Union-funded research; to identify the risks of research funding motivated by short-term political objectives and to defend the academic freedom of European Union-funded researchers.

5. Evaluation of research

The ETUCE asserts that the criteria for research evaluation, like the quality assurance mechanism for higher education as a whole, should balance the demands of academic freedom with those of quality and social accountability. Evaluation must be carried out by peer review, set up under democratic procedures within the relevant academic Community. Publication of research results in refereed academic journals is part of the evaluation process, but should not be abused, and should be used alongside other criteria. Also, academics have consultancy and advisory roles which need to be taken into account in the evaluation process.

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Evaluation procedures must be transparent, and the criteria well-publicised; they must not be bureaucratic or expensive, and the costs of evaluation should not fall on research workers or on the funding of their projects, unless this is specially provided for in the project funding.

The ETUCE strongly asserts that the ethics of research must be taken into account in all stages of research programmes, from the planning to the evaluation stage, and that the social value of research must be taken into account as far as possible. The relevant unions should be involved as Social Partners in European-level and national research planning and evaluation structures.

Concern has been expressed that the evaluation system applied in connection with the 5th Framework Programme might place additional burdens on institutions, which might also work in contradiction to institutions' own evaluation procedures. The ETUCE believes there should be a minimum of bureaucracy and proper peer group evaluation procedures, in EU funded as in other research activities. The procedures must be as transparent as possible.

6. A research policy for Europe

6.1. Accountability democracy, fairness

Research policy should be developed at the European Union and national levels as far as possible, based on democratic accountability, social partnership and co-determination involving the relevant unions representing academics and research workers. At the European Union and national levels, the public higher education and research institutions should take the lead in setting high standards for the whole of the research sector.

Dialogue should include the representative unions, but also policymakers and organisations of rectors, both nationally and at the European Union level. Also the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) should be engaged in this dialogue, in view of its particular concern for short-term contract personnel.

In January 2000, the European Commission proposed the creation of "A European Research Area". The Lisbon Summit in March 2000, the Council of Research Ministers and the European institutions have supported the proposal and invited the Commission to present new proposals concerning how to implement it. Research bodies, individual researchers and trade unions have sent their comments in a wide-ranging consultation. ETUCE has brought forward its opinion in meetings with Commissioner Busquin and his staff, and in other contexts.

More needs to be done to promote research training, and this could be actively promoted through the conditions applied to EU research programmes. The question of training links to the status and recognition of research workers, and the mobility of academic and

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research staff within the European Union should be promoted, as well as links with other non-European Union-European countries.

The subject basis for financial support should be widened to include social and educational research, and also to support basic research. It is understood that scholarly excellence is always the most important factor. This objective cannot be met within existing resources, and greater investment in research by the European Union as well as at national levels will be necessary.

6.2. Towards a European Research Area

ETUCE unions have concerns about the all too great importance given to the economic aspects and finality of research, with research itself becoming a merchandise.

The Commission's vision is portrayed as too restrictive, too economic oriented, with little interest for social problems. The social sciences and the humanities are left aside and Europe's economic integration will rest mostly on its social and political integration and cohesion as well as on the development of democratic political structures and human rights. This restrictive vision by-passes the role of Research in the global international context. This short-sighted view removes the Commission's capacity to deal with the other intended missions of research, such as its cultural function and its importance in the Universities and the training of students.

As far as comparisons with other countries are concerned, they should no longer be limited to measuring Europe against the U.S. and Japan, but should take account of the gap between industrialised and non-industrialised countries in the field of research.

The Commission's proposal to create a network of "centres d'excellence" is welcome, provided it does not lead to elitism, which unfortunately now seems to be the trend.

Furthermore, the Commission is weak in its proposals to strengthen the means afforded to scientific employment in the public sector. In current practice, too much weight has been laid upon the demands of private enterprise, which could ultimately result in the redeployment of resources to the benefit of competing private businesses.

Likewise, in the area of assessment by experts, care should be taken to prevent subservience to the economic and political forces at play in the sector. If evaluation is to remain objective and transparent, the scientific community should be more involved. Therefore, evaluation by elected peers seems to be a proper method.

All ETUCE unions have denounced the on-going "brain drain" of competent young European scientists settling in the US, as well as the failure and lack of interest of small and medium scale enterprises to invest in research and win over the commitment of young researchers, who are put off by the devaluation of scientific careers in Europe. Altering the trend would require greater awareness of the problem and greater willingness

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to remedy it. Concretely, mobility and exchanges (as already practised by researchers) should be further facilitated. Here too the Commission comes up short in terms of proposals and solutions.

The Commission contradicts itself when offering to attract to Europe young scientists from all over the world, winning over those from the Eastern European countries, as this means replacing what has been denounced as an evil situation for Europe, namely the exile of her own young scientists to the USA, by another exile towards Europe from elsewhere. What is needed is a reorganisation of European and world research so as to reach a better balance inside Europe itself as well as create cooperations.

6.3. EU Research Programmes

The ETUCE demands that within European Union-funded programmes the employment conditions and career opportunities for research staff should be seen as key criteria for the allocation of funds: these should be established in a code of practice, agreed with the relevant unions, on the lines discussed in this document.

EU research grants should ensure that the receiving institutions recognise their responsibilities as employers, and under the research proposals, the full costs of the proposed research are covered. Priority should be given to projects where good employment practices are applied and where high-quality performance can be rewarded.

It is important to determine whether the priority given to applied research in the fields of science and technology, for example in the 4th and 5th Framework Programmes, has led to discrimination against women and the worsening of their working and career conditions in research institutions of various kinds and in other fields of work. The choice of research subjects needs to more adequately represent the needs and interests of all groups in society, and particularly women. There are some signs that the range of potential disciplines supported by the 5th Framework Programme has improved, although the outcomes depend on the range of successful bids. It is also important that there is a genuine 'European' aspect to the research, so that the limited EU funds available are targetted to meet the relevant objectives. However, this must not be at the expense of the quality and intrinsic merits of the research itself. Expenditure which is primarily for the promotion of cohesion or other EU policies should come from funds specifically for those purposes.

The ETUCE was concerned that the EU 4th Framework Programme was inadequately evaluated before the development of its successor. We believe that evaluation processes must be strengthened in the 5th and 6th Framework Programmes, and that a wider range of criteria should be taken into account, including the conditions under which researchers are employed.

The ETUCE will be particularly concerned that the employment consequences of contracts under the 5th and 6th Framework Programme must be fully taken into account at

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the European Union, national and institutional levels. Research workers have the right to expect that the EU will pursue best employment practices, particularly in respect of the continuity and security of employment of researchers. Certainly it is quite unacceptable for the terms under which EU contracts were offered to increase the precariousness of employment in research.

6.4. The ETUCE

The ETUCE will continue to seek to influence EU research policy generally and the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the 6th Framework Programme, through the ETUC, European Parliament and European Commission. As well as the 6th Framework Programme, the ETUCE will develop its concern for relevant research programmes funded from other Directorates in the European Commission structure, and apply the same criteria to them.

Also, the ETUCE will monitor research developments at the national level and disseminate information on best practice, particularly in respect of the employment of research workers, and encourage the adoption of best practice.

The ETUCE will explore the possibility of developing research projects within the relevant European Commission programmes, to further the interests of its member unions.

The ETUCE attaches considerable importance to equal opportunities for both staff and students at all levels of education and research. The particular character of research work, including short term work and contract funding, a lack of resources to meet the existing demands and the lack of career research progression in a number of national systems, as well as the special relevance of mobility and cooperation within Europe, make the adoption and implementation of equal opportunity policies all the more important in the field of research. ETUCE will continue to press for the adoption of equal opportunities policies and criteria in the development of policy and action at the European level, and will continue to give a strong emphasis on this aspect in its discussions with national affiliates.

The ETUCE will also work to facilitate the flow of information about matters related to research and researchers between the member organisations of the ETUCE.

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