



ETUCE response to the European Commission's Green Paper: *The European Research Area – New Perspectives*

ETUCE welcomes the debate launched by the Commission's Green Paper on the future direction of the European Research Area (ERA). ETUCE is the European trade union industry federation for education within the ETUC, representing 110 teachers' unions in the EU/EFTA from all levels of the education sector, including teachers and researchers in higher education and other research institutions. ETUCE is also an autonomous organisation within the Education International Pan-European Structure. ETUCE has thus closely followed the development of the ERA since 2000. For the purpose of responding to the debate launched by the Green Paper, ETUCE will focus mainly on the issues related to the mobility of researchers and the strengthening of research institutions.

ETUCE fully endorses the mobility dimension of the ERA, which aims to ensure an adequate flow of competent researchers across Europe and to enable mobility opportunities for the individual researcher. In relation to the analysis presented in the Green Paper, ETUCE wishes to bring forward the following comments:

- ETUCE highlights that there is still a lack of comprehensive data on researchers' career paths and mobility patterns. This bottle-neck is recognised in the annex to the Green Paper¹, but not sufficiently highlighted in the analysis in the Green Paper itself. The further development of better data collection should feature among the actions to be undertaken within the ERA². ETUCE moreover stresses that the lack of comparable data not only concerns researchers in general, but also specifically data on the mobility of researcher-teachers employed in higher education institutions. For data collection, as for all EU research policy measures, proper coordination with the European Higher Education Area within the Bologna Process should be ensured where relevant.
- In addition to the obstacles to geographical and inter-sectoral mobility highlighted in the Green Paper, such as legal, administrative and practical barriers, ETUCE stresses that overcoming obstacles to mobility is also a question of bringing about a change in the culture of management of research institutions. There is a need for the management of higher education and research institutions to take on a greater degree of responsibility in facilitating mobility for its staff. All too often, mobility is seen as an individual responsibility and an individual benefit to the researcher, and not, as it should be seen, as also enhancing the quality of higher education and research as a whole. The lack of recognition of the merits of a work period abroad in the recruitment and promotion of researchers still features high among the obstacles to mobility; it is the second most cited obstacle to mobility in the Bologna Process National Reports from 2004-2005.³ In order to increase the degree of institutional responsibility, ETUCE suggests that every higher education institution should be required to develop and implement a mobility policy

¹ Annex to the Green Paper, p. 64.

² Cf. the work currently developed jointly by OECD, Eurostat and UNESCO. Annex to the Green Paper, p. 64.

³ Conor Cradden: "Constructing Paths to Staff Mobility in the European Higher Education Area: from individual to institutional responsibility". Survey for Education International, January 2007, p. 44.

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consistent with the requirements of the Bologna Process and the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their recruitment. This should also include providing better and more systematic information on mobility opportunities to the staff as well as ensuring better cooperation between mobility offices in higher education and other research institutions across Europe.

- ETUCE strongly supports the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their recruitment, and agrees with the Green Paper's analysis that much more needs to be done to ensure its proper implementation. ETUCE has supported its voluntary nature, and the two-year period since its adoption is a fairly short period of time to judge its impact at present. However, one concrete measure that could be considered to facilitate its implementation could be to link funding of research from the EU research programmes to the recognition and the implementation of the principles of the Charter at the institutions receiving funding from the EU.⁴ ETUCE also believes that more could be done to make public in all Member States evaluations of the degree of its implementation, as provided for in the Charter and Code of Conduct.
- The European Charter and Code of Conduct refer to the broad category of researchers comprising all persons professionally engaged in R&D at any career stage. ETUCE believes that a specific Charter for mobile university teachers should be developed in order to address the specific issues facing this category of researcher-teachers. Universities employ about 36.6% of the researchers in Europe⁵, and hence addressing specifically measures to boost their mobility will have a significant impact. This should however be developed in the context of the Bologna Process rather than in the context of the ERA.
- The Green Paper stresses the need to ensure effective “brain circulation” within Europe as well as the need to attract and retain qualified researchers in Europe. However, in the opinion of ETUCE the Green Paper does not sufficiently recognise the problem of brain drain within Europe due to the existing socio-economic inequalities in the region. Proper attention should be given to the problems arising from a brain drain from the poorer countries to the richer ones within Europe, and policies to mitigate the effects of brain drain are needed. Such policies could include extending non-commercial forms of research cooperation between the poorer and the richer countries, such as the development of joint degree programmes, or extending the funded mobility programmes for research staff in higher education institutions. It could also include providing better information in order to counteract existing prejudices on the quality of education and research in other countries.
- In the debate on addressing obstacles to mobility, ETUCE reminds that at a European level the definition of obstacles must be made with a fine distinction between what is a proper obstacle to staff mobility or recruitment and what is an entirely appropriate employment regulation with the intention of preventing

⁴ See the Statement on “The European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment”, by the Education International Pan-European Structure's Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (September 2005).

⁵ Annex to the Green Paper on ERA, p. 49. Statistics from 2004.

exploitation and ensuring proper salaries and working conditions.⁶ It should also be reminded that certain obstacles can be justified from a socio-cultural perspective, e.g. to avoid cultural homogenisation.⁷

In addition to the above-mentioned comments on the issue of mobility, ETUCE also wishes to address the issues raised in relation to section 3: “Strengthening research institutions”:

- The Green Paper outlines the role of universities and public research institutions in highlighting their primary role in fundamental research and research on issues of public interest, as well as their important role as provider of applied research. ETUCE agrees with the Green Paper’s analysis that universities in particular face growing funding and organisational challenges.⁸ ETUCE also agrees that universities and research institutions can only meet the challenges if they are “given autonomy to position themselves, cooperate and compete at European and international levels”.⁹ In this context, however, ETUCE stresses that institutional autonomy should be a twin principle to that of academic freedom, as put forward in a recent Recommendation by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.¹⁰ In some cases, as in the Commission’s Communication on *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities* (May 2006), institutional autonomy and accountability is taken to mean that Member States should “guide the university sector as a whole through a framework of rules, policy objectives, funding mechanisms and incentives for education, research and innovation activities”¹¹. ETUCE can only support overarching political frameworks referring to basic principles, but opposes more detailed and prescriptive interventions in this respect.¹² Thus, in response to the Green Paper’s question on whether European principles for autonomy should be developed¹³, ETUCE would support a set of basic principles emphasising the concept of institutional autonomy as defined by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, according to which: “*the institutional autonomy of universities should be a manifestation of an independent commitment to the traditional and still essential cultural and social mission of the university, in terms of intellectually beneficial policy, good governance and efficient management (...) The social and cultural responsibility of universities means more than mere responsiveness to immediate demands of societies and the needs of the market, however important it may be to take these demands and needs seriously into account. It calls for a partnership in the definition of knowledge for society and implies that universities should continue to take a longer-term view and contribute to solving the fundamental issues of society as well as to finding remedies to immediate problems.*”¹⁴

⁶ Cf. Conor Cradden: “*Constructing Paths to Staff Mobility in the European Higher Education Area: from individual to institutional responsibility*”. Survey for Education International, January 2007, p. 20-22.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Green Paper, p. 14.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ On academic freedom and university autonomy - Recommendation 1762 (2006).

¹¹ Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities* (2006), p. 5.

¹² As also highlighted in the statement adopted in September 2006 by the Education International Pan-European Structure’s Higher Education and Research Standing Committee on “the EU Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities*”.

¹³ Question 20(i), page 16.

¹⁴ On academic freedom and university autonomy - Recommendation 1762 (2006).

- In relation to the Green Paper’s points on the issue of public funding of universities and other research institutions, ETUCE rejects the simplistic reference to the merits of output-based funding.¹⁵ This is a notion which needs to be examined with extreme caution, as it can give rise to a number of negative and harmful consequences. Due consideration has to be given to the considerable effort needed in identifying the relevant indicators on which such output-based funding is built, and in trying to avoid over-complication of the system. Experience has shown that systems based on numerous and complex indicators have failed, that large transaction costs are required in the reporting process, and that increased pressure on universities and academics to focus on output does not ensure better quality of higher education.¹⁶
- Thus, with regard to the Green Paper’s question (20(ii), page 16) on whether shared European criteria should be developed for the “funding and assessment of research institutions, notably universities, giving stronger weight to linkages beyond academia, as well as to output and performance factors?”, ETUCE is of the opinion that it would not be beneficial with such shared European criteria. Notwithstanding that such criteria obviously – due to the legal basis in article 149 in the Treaty – would only take the form of a recommendation, it is the opinion of ETUCE that systems of funding and assessments of universities and research institutions are deeply embedded in the cultural and national context, including each national government’s organisation of the public sector. At European level, it is more beneficial to deal with the issue of funding of research institutions and universities as a question of identifying ‘best practices’, in relation to which the full context of the cultural and national setting can be taken into account when reviewing the funding practice.
- In relation to the Green Paper’s call for stimulating public-private partnerships in research, ETUCE reminds that a key issue to take into consideration in this context is the question of the academic freedom of researchers and rules for Intellectual Property Rights. Negative consequences which may occur as a result of public-private partnerships, if not properly conducted, include: excessive separation between teaching and research, which is particularly problematic when research is carried out in universities; restrictions placed on the use of research funds in terms of fields of research, and thus also restrictions on academic freedom; as well as restrictions on publication of research results.¹⁷ In this context, ETUCE looks forward to engaging in the forthcoming debate in relation to the Commission’s current development of a European Charter on the management of IPR for public research institutions and universities, as called for by the European Council in June 2007.

On a final and more general note, ETUCE stresses that it is crucial that the further extension and deepening of the European Research Area takes on a broad and

¹⁵ Green Paper, p. 15.

¹⁶ See also the statement adopted in September 2006 by the Education International Pan-European Structure’s Higher Education and Research Standing Committee on “the European Commission Communication: *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities*”.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* On the issue of Academic Freedom, see also the statement “Academic Freedom” adopted in September 2006 by the Education International Pan-European Structure’s Higher Education and Research Standing Committee.

comprehensive view on research. In the Green Paper, there is a tendency to link the ERA primarily to the economic and innovation strand of the Lisbon Strategy. As a result, the predominant focus is on the development of research that meets the immediate needs of industry and society while the importance of fundamental research – including its essential role in innovation on a long-term basis – risks to be left in the background. The European Research Council which supports frontier basic research is in this respect one important new initiative on the side of prioritising basic research within the ERA.

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