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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned Recommendation, adopted by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting on 25 November 2024.

Council Recommendation

on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 292 in conjunction with Article 153(1), points (b) and (i), and Articles 165(4) and 166(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

1. Attractive and sustainable careers in higher education are essential for thriving Union higher education institutions and deeper transnational cooperation between Member States, in line with the Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe¹. Reinforcing European higher education is one of the strategic priorities set by the Council² for the current decade.

¹ OJ C 167, 21.4.2022, p. 9.

² Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1).

2. For the purposes of this Recommendation,
 - ‘sustainable careers in higher education’ should be understood as continued employment of academic and professional services staff in sequences of career experiences that facilitate their personal and professional development and well-being over time;
 - ‘academic staff in higher education’ should be understood as staff whose primary or major assignment is teaching or research in institutions offering programmes at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 5 to 8. Staff covered by this Recommendation comprise both those working in higher education institutions who engage in both teaching and research, and those involved only or mostly in teaching, regardless of their status. The term also includes researchers working in higher education institutions, who may not have a permanent teaching assignment but are involved in the life of the institution and may occasionally be involved in teaching;
 - ‘higher education institutions’ should be understood as a reference to the whole sector, representing the entire area of tertiary education, thus covering all types of higher education institutions, in accordance with national law or practice.
3. Some recommendations include professional services staff active in higher education who are not strictly considered as ‘academic staff’, but who have extensive high-level expertise in strategic, legal, transnational cooperation or communication fields, professionals working in areas related to academic tasks but with no direct involvement in them, or higher education professionals with an extensive knowledge of higher education and other relevant policy.

4. Higher education institutions are strategic in addressing socio-economic challenges contributing to innovation, competitiveness, multilingualism, cultural, social and democratic development at the local, regional, national and European levels. They are experiencing changing conditions, and new types of governance, educational models and academic activities are being created. Academic staff in higher education are expected to fulfil various roles, ranging from traditional education and research to creating upskilling and reskilling opportunities for the fast-changing needs of working life, and to entrepreneurship and innovation, leadership, knowledge valorisation and transfer, regional, national and transnational cooperation, business and community engagement³, regional and local development, mentoring, support to policy-making, administration and management and participation in institutional governance. These varied roles are unevenly recognised. In order to tackle bias in career structures and in overall social recognition of research at the expense of teaching and other non-research academic activities, it would be appropriate to promote approaches which acknowledge the diverse academic career paths and take them into consideration in staff appraisal and career promotion processes.

³ The mission of higher education goes beyond the functions of education and research. *Business engagement* means establishing partnerships between higher education institutions and business, leading to mutual benefits such as access to novel technologies for companies, and access to dual education and training opportunities, equipment, expertise or networks beyond academia for higher education institutions. *Community engagement* means strengthening democratic values and civic engagement, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, contributing to cultural and socio-economic development, informing public policy and addressing large-scale social challenges.

5. Creating better conditions for academic staff and addressing barriers can help increase the attractiveness of higher education institutions as places of work and enhance their capacity to trigger additional positive spill-over effects, in particular on the labour market, by stimulating the development of talent. Better valued and supported academic staff can help nurture the workforce needed to develop the economy, which is increasingly dependent on knowledge, innovation and highly skilled people. The importance of attractive and effective higher education institutions has been recognised in particular in regions facing a talent development trap or at risk of falling into one, which are lagging behind in terms of creating new economic opportunities.⁴
6. Increasingly, strategic national and transnational activities and cooperation, such as building European Universities alliances or other forms of alliances and developing transnational educational programmes and projects, academic staff exchanges and creating education and training offers for continuous learning, require academic staff, as well as professional services staff to devote additional time and energy to those activities on top of core teaching and research. In order to support these activities, human resources policies, such as appraisal and promotion, need to acknowledge staff involvement in work on national and transnational cooperation and the additional workload that it may create.

⁴ Commission Communication of 17 January 2023 on Harnessing talent in Europe's regions (COM(2023) 32 final).

7. A free, safe, and non-discriminatory working environment, with equality policies promoting inclusiveness, diversity and anti-discrimination and that is free from all forms of harassment and violence, including gender-based violence, is an important factor enabling academic staff to provide high-quality teaching. Academic staff and professional services staff may also face challenges relating to unsatisfactory working conditions⁵, a heavy workload and gender or other biases in assessment and recognition. In addition, women are employed on precarious and temporary contracts more often than men⁶. To address those challenges, it is necessary to promote competitive, transparent, accessible and fair working conditions in academia.
8. Institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education are key means to ensure high-quality higher education and they should be protected and promoted.
9. Union action to promote inclusiveness, diversity and gender equality in higher education is based on an inclusive excellence approach. It seeks to support excellent higher education while ensuring equality of participation, with a special focus on women, under-represented groups and disadvantaged communities. To address the situation facing certain under-represented groups, in particular in leadership positions, it would be appropriate to promote equality, diversity and inclusion plans in higher education institutions and in career promotion processes.

⁵ Including a lack of reasonable accommodation measures for persons with disabilities, as referred to in Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16).

⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, She figures 2021 – Gender in research and innovation – Statistics and indicators, Publications Office, 2021.

10. This Recommendation is designed in close synergy with the Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe⁷, which aims to promote more attractive research careers in all sectors, including academia, as well as full recognition for all types of career paths. Both recommendations aim to improve working conditions, career stability, skills and competences, gender equality, inclusiveness and social protection measures for their respective target groups.
11. This Recommendation aims to promote measures to enhance continuous professional development, and to further acknowledge the variety of activities that academic staff perform. This will allow for staff mobilisation to develop innovative teaching and learning practices as part of a lifelong learning perspective, stimulate the upskilling and reskilling mindset and promote the acquisition of skills and competences for the green and digital transitions, including the use of artificial intelligence in teaching, learning and research based on ethical principles.
12. This Recommendation aims to promote competitive, predictable, fair, inclusive, accessible, safe and non-discriminatory conditions for academic and professional services staff in order to attract them to, and retain them in the higher education sector. Academic staff should be allowed to develop innovative teaching methods in an environment where working conditions are competitive and fair, where fundamental rights are protected and there is no fear of reprisal and/or undue external influence, and where the possibility for professional development is enabled.

⁷ Council Recommendation of 18 December 2023 on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe (OJ C, C/2023/1640, 29.12.2023, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1640/oj>).

13. This Recommendation also aims to improve the evidence base for developing human resources policies and strategies in higher education. Since internationally comparable data on academic staff remain insufficient and diverging sets of staff categories are used in different higher education systems, it would be appropriate to explore the possibility of compiling more detailed data through relevant instruments, primarily through the European Higher Education Sector Observatory⁸ and the Research and Innovation Careers Observatory (ReICO) in order to sufficiently monitor emerging trends and take truly evidence-informed policy steps whilst enhancing deeper transnational cooperation at the level of the Union.
14. Deeper and effective European transnational cooperation in higher education is key to supporting Union values, identity and democracy. It is also vital for Europe's competitiveness and attractiveness. By cooperating across borders, higher education systems and institutions become stronger, more innovative and more efficient. The engagement of staff in preparing, encouraging and subsequently supporting student and staff mobility, including those involved in embedding mobility in curricula, should be promoted, recognised and better valued.

⁸ See Commission Communication of 18 January 2022 on a European strategy for universities (COM(2022) 16 final). The Commission is setting up the European Higher Education Sector Observatory. The Observatory is intended to combine the best of the current EU data tools and capacities in a single place, while further enhancing their use.

15. This Recommendation aims to encourage better recognition of the energy and time that academic staff and other professional services staff devote to transnational cooperation activities, for example the European Universities alliances. To ensure the full roll-out of this initiative and encourage transnational cooperation activities, including the development of joint degrees, the full involvement of staff and career perspectives for academic and professional services staff involved in strategic coordination functions should be promoted. Incentivising staff to promote transnational and intersectoral mobility should also contribute greatly to the development of transnational innovative and interdisciplinary educational programmes, for the benefit of all students,

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:

With due regard to institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and in accordance with national circumstances:

1. Promote, acknowledge and value diverse academic roles, including innovative and effective teaching and knowledge transfer to society, and in particular:
 - a) engage in consultation with the higher education sector, with the aim of:
 - i) enhancing human resources policies in the higher education sector to further recognise and reward similarly diverse roles of academic staff, such as teaching, research, entrepreneurship and innovation, knowledge valorisation and transfer, national and transnational cooperation, business and community engagement, regional and local development, mentoring, administration and management, and participation in institutional governance;
 - ii) further promoting both new and existing approaches that value, acknowledge and reward diverse academic career paths, so as to facilitate the permeability of careers across the different roles of academic staff as referred to in point 1(a)(i); across various public and private sectors; and across countries, taking into account career breaks⁹ in a transparent manner;

⁹ For example, due to parenthood and caring responsibilities or health issues.

- iii) further developing practices in the higher education sector with a view to valuing teaching enhancement and staff development, and to promoting parity of esteem for teaching as compared to research, in staff appraisal and promotion;
 - iv) encouraging institutional leadership in higher education institutions so as to increase and maintain the focus on learning, teaching and knowledge transfer, by paying as much attention to these activities as to research, and to value those who actively champion teaching and learning excellence at higher education institutions and promote good practices in assessing excellence in teaching;
 - v) supporting the participation of academic staff in discussions on reform and processes at national, regional and institutional level related to their career, including assessment and professional development;
- b) support the development of practices in the higher education sector with a view to investing in continuous skills and professional development by:
- i) providing appropriate training and support for academic staff conducting teaching activities, including early career staff and part-time teachers;
 - ii) supporting teaching enhancement with new pedagogical methods, for example by using research on teaching and creating innovative teaching and learning centres across higher education institutions, building on existing communities of practice and university libraries, in order to assist academic staff with their teaching mission;

- iii) providing support for continuous professional development for academic staff in innovative and student-centred approaches to learning and teaching, leading to certification, for example through micro-credentials¹⁰, so as to enhance digital and innovative teaching methods and practices, including by leveraging the safe, ethical and transparent use of artificial intelligence, embedding learning for the green transition and sustainable development in their courses¹¹, promoting inclusive learning approaches targeting diverse groups of learners, including the most vulnerable, integrating transnational cooperation within education and training programmes, and sharing knowledge through online courses with the rest of the world based on open educational practices¹²;
- c) consider the possible integration of indicators assessing the degree of innovation and quality in teaching and learning into existing quality assurance processes, drawing on the expertise of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.

¹⁰ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 10).

¹¹ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1).

¹² Open educational practices represent teaching and learning techniques that draw upon open and participatory technologies and open educational resources to facilitate collaborative and flexible learning.

2. Encourage respect for collective agreements, effective social dialogue and the autonomy of the social partners, and take supportive action allowing employers to provide attractive, inclusive and competitive working conditions in which academic and professional services staff are valued, encouraged and supported. Such supportive action could include:
- a) improving the recruitment practices and working conditions for academic and professional services staff, as well as related funding mechanisms, in order to make those conditions more transparent, predictable, accessible and stable, especially for staff who are at an early stage in their career;
 - b) providing commensurate remuneration free from gender pay gaps, and a work-life balance and flexible working conditions for academic and professional services staff that help bring together personal and family life and caring responsibilities, as well as health, safety and overall wellbeing, without prejudice to their careers;
 - c) providing access to adequate social protection irrespective of the form of employment, without prejudice to the right of Member States to define the fundamental principles of their social security systems. Such measures could pertain to the following branches, insofar as they are provided in the Member States: unemployment benefits; sickness and healthcare benefits; maternity leave; paternity leave and parental leave and related benefits; invalidity benefits; disability benefits; old-age benefits and survivors' benefits; benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases;

- d) providing access to updated, comprehensive, user-friendly and clearly understandable information on social protection rights and obligations, and strengthening the preservation, accumulation and/or transfer of entitlements – whether acquired through mandatory or voluntary schemes – across all types of employment and self-employment statuses, across borders within the EU, and across economic sectors, throughout a person’s working life or during a certain reference period and between different schemes within a given branch of social protection;
- e) encouraging academic staff to engage, at all stages of their careers and whatever their type of employment contract, in teaching and learning, research, and knowledge transfer without interference or fear of reprisal by:
 - i) contributing to the effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms promoting and defending academic freedom;
 - ii) defining frameworks to protect individual members of academic staff against undue external interference and threats;
 - iii) contributing to transparency in funding or cooperation agreements by applying effective risk management;

- f) supporting gender equality, gender balance, equal opportunities and inclusiveness with an intersectional approach for academic staff from all backgrounds, including by developing and sharing good practices in higher education with regard to gender equality, inclusiveness and diversity;
- g) supporting effective measures aimed at creating an inclusive and safe working environment that embraces diversity in the broad sense and that is free from all forms of violence, harassment and discrimination of any kind based on grounds such as gender, age, disability, racial, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, by:
 - i) encouraging initiatives helping female academic staff achieve a high level of academic seniority and senior management/leadership roles;
 - ii) promoting the introduction of gender equality plans and broader diversity and inclusion plans at higher education institutions, and in career promotion processes, and encouraging higher education institutions to either use existing tools or develop new ones such as diversity and inclusion charters, codes of conduct, guidance materials or handbooks;
 - iii) contributing to more supportive and trust-based appraisal practices, prioritising intrinsic motivation, open feedback and collaboration, including by developing the basis for evidence-informed policy-making on inclusion and diversity.

3. In consultation with higher education institutions, promote, recognise and value engagement in deeper regional, national and transnational cooperation, and in particular:
 - a) encourage and support the engagement of academic and professional services staff in deeper regional, national and transnational cooperation activities such as joint degree programmes or joint education and training offers that may lead to certification, such as micro-credentials, at all levels and across all disciplines, by valuing such activities. For example, by:
 - i) considering the integration of objectives relating to educational cooperation in career pathways and in staffing policy at the national, regional and institutional levels;
 - ii) taking the development of joint educational activities into account in the academic career appraisal of academic staff;
 - iii) taking into account work relating to regional, national and transnational cooperation in the total working hours of academic and professional services staff;
 - b) pursue the objective, in consultation with the higher education sector, of developing long-term flexible career perspectives and talent management measures targeting academic and professional services staff involved in the coordination and management of transnational cooperation of higher education institutions, such as European Universities alliances and other Erasmus+ cooperation models;

- c) encourage the development and promotion of new opportunities for European and international mobility, also offering alternative forms such as virtual collaboration for those who cannot travel, for academic and professional services staff, including by leveraging existing instruments for career management and labour mobility, such as the Europass platform and the European network of employment services (EURES) mobility advisers;
 - d) enable higher education institutions to devote adequate human resources capacity to transnational cooperation;
 - e) encourage the possibility for academic and professional services staff to engage in lifelong learning, including by taking sabbatical or other forms of leave for the purpose of improving their skills and competences.
4. Engage in more evidence-informed policy-making aimed at creating competitive, predictable, safe, fair and non-discriminatory conditions in academia based on available organisational, regional, national and European data on higher education careers and staffing policy.
5. Follow this Recommendation in due time in order to allow for the full implementation of the key objectives of the Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe¹³.
6. Inform the Commission, in the context of the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training¹⁴, of the corresponding measures to be taken at the appropriate level to support the objectives of this Recommendation as essential steps towards achieving and further developing the European Education Area.

¹³ OJ C 167, 21.4.2022, p. 9.

¹⁴ Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (OJ C 497, 10.12.2021, p. 1).

TAKES NOTE OF THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. Coordinate, in close cooperation with Member States, higher education institutions and the social partners, in the Working Group on Higher Education of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, the work preparing the implementation of this Recommendation in line with the Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, and provide advice as to how higher education institutions can improve the attractiveness of academic and professional services staff careers; prepare a European competence framework for academic staff, to enhance the permeability of careers across sectors, building on and drawing on, as appropriate, existing relevant competence frameworks at Union level, including the European Competence Framework for Researchers (ResearchComp) and tools such as those offered by the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) and the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.
2. Enhance support for social dialogue at Union level on the careers of academic and professional services staff, particularly within the European sectoral social dialogue in education, facilitate peer learning between Member States on effective mechanisms to ensure recognition of academic and professional services staff engagement in transnational cooperation and innovative teaching activities; and to support evidence-informed policy and the monitoring of progress by mapping existing data on higher education careers and staffing policy at the European, national, and institutional levels through the European Higher Education Sector Observatory and ReICO by using synergies, and identifying data gaps and needs.

3. Foster synergies with the Council Recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe, in order to ensure improved and consistent careers for academic staff working in higher education institutions and engaged in both teaching and research as well as knowledge transfer.
4. Further develop, promote and provide support for transnational educational cooperation and innovative educational excellence through relevant financing sources at Union level, including through the Erasmus+ programme¹⁵ and other EU programmes, and encourage Member States to use the Technical Support Instrument to receive tailor-made technical expertise for designing and implementing the necessary reforms in the higher education area, including by fostering cooperation between policy-makers, researchers, academia and socio-economic actors and by enhancing the attractiveness of academic careers.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council
The President

¹⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1).