Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff (working title)

Scoping note

March 2016

Introduction

Following the first two thematic reports on the modernisation of higher education produced by the Eurydice network (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011; 2014), the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission (DG EAC) has commissioned a new thematic report from the network on the situation of academic staff. Starting from the policy background (Section 1), this paper outlines the content and scope of the report (Section 2), presents data sources and methodological approaches (Section 3), as well as the timeline of the project (Section 4).

1. Policy background

In recent years, the higher education sector has been subject to profound changes. Influenced by national and international developments, the sector has both expanded and altered. Alongside the growth in student numbers and diversity, the sector has become increasingly differentiated, both in terms of institutions and programmes. Moreover, while public authorities still have a central role in regulating and co-ordinating higher education provision, there has been a gradual shift away from detailed central-level control towards new forms of steering and influence, in particular through new funding models and the development of quality assurance systems. The Bologna Process has also contributed to structural changes in the sector, particularly with regard to curricular reforms, quality assurance and mobility (Eurydice, 2008). These alterations have been associated with changes in specialisations, expectations, work roles and statuses of academic staff, (Locke, 2007) creating a need to investigate the academic profession across different countries, cultures and institutions.

At the European Union level, the higher education profession has been subject to explicit policy attention. The Commission's modernisation agenda for higher education ([1]) recognises that 'the reform and modernisation of Europe's higher education depends on the competence and motivation of teachers and researchers' (European Commission 2011, p.7). Yet, the agenda acknowledges that 'teaching and research staffing has often not kept pace with expanding student numbers which puts pressure on already strained capacities' (ibid., p.7). Thus, it calls for "better working conditions including transparent and fair recruitment procedures ([2]), better initial and continuing professional development, and better recognition and reward of teaching and research excellence' (ibid., p.7) . It also highlights the necessity to ensure sufficient institutional autonomy, enabling higher education institutions to attract and retain the best teaching and research staff. Moreover, it pays special attention to international networking, promoting mobility opportunities for academic staff.

Against this policy background, DG EAC commissioned the Eurydice Network to produce a report that will contribute to understanding the academic profession in Europe. To conduct this task, the network has been invited to make a full use of its reporting capacities, including through cooperation with other relevant actors, while also considering its already existing data (e.g. the report on the Higher Education Governance produced in 2008 and information included in Eurypedia) and data from other sources (e.g. the UOE data collection and the European Tertiary Education Register – ETER ([3])). The two sections that follow outline the scope, content, data sources and methodology of the project.

([1]) Launched in 2011 by the Commission's Communication 'Supporting growth and jobs – An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education Systems' (European Commission, 2011).
([2]) Including in line with the 'European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment'.
([3]) The European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) is a database of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe, currently including 36 countries and 2 673 HEIs. For more details, see: http://eter.joanneum.at/imdas-eter/.

2. Content and scope of the report

The aim of the report is to contribute to an in-depth understanding of the academic profession in Europe, and to better understand how academic staffing policy is responding to the increasing demands on higher education. Following this objective, the report will be organised around seven thematic areas (outlined below), combining quantitative and qualitative data. The reference year for the data will be 2015/16, and statistical information will also aim to show changes that have taken place in recent years (since 2000).

The concept of 'academic staff' within quantitative indicators ([4]) refers to staff whose primary assignment is instruction or research, including staff who hold an academic rank (e.g. professor, associate professor, assistant professor, etc.) and staff with other titles if their principal activity is instruction or research ([5]).

Qualitative data gathered by the Eurydice Network will explore the most representative national categories of academic staff working in public and publicly-subsidised private higher education institutions offering programmes at ISCED levels 5-8[6]. The data collection will include a mapping of national categories of academic staff, identifying them within a broader framework that includes issues such as the type of higher education institution and the nature of employment contracts. The report will also gather information on key issues to understand the evolving reality for academic staff in Europe, and will be organised as follows:

Part 1: Setting the context for analysing academic staff in Europe

This part will provide contextual information that will help to understand the environment in which academic staff in Europe operates. It will present a selection of background statistical data capturing the main trends in higher education during past decades, including information on student enrolments and investments in education and science. Beyond quantitative indicators, this introductory part will also outline structural changes in the sector over the last 15 years, driven by both national and international processes. The outcomes of available research will feed into this general overview.

Part 2: Profile and categories of academic staff

This part will concentrate on providing a general picture of the academic profession. It will explore available statistics (data from international surveys), including data on the share of part-time practitioners, and gender and age distribution of the profession.

This information will be complemented by data collected from the Eurydice network, providing a mapping of different academic staff categories (according to national terminology, but within a comparative framework), highlighting their share in the profession. The comparative information may be complemented with national diagrams/information sheets. This section will also open the question of the role of public authorities and institutional autonomy in academic staffing.

Part 3: Recruitment to the academic profession

This part will explore one of the key stages of academic career - the recruitment process. It will provide information about decision–making powers and responsibilities of different bodies in defining recruitment methods and conducting recruitment procedures. This section will also examine information on main recruitment methods.

Alongside the distribution of responsibilities and taking account of levels of autonomy at higher education institutions, the section will provide some information on the organisation of recruitment processes and criteria taken into consideration (e.g. research outputs, teaching experience and performance, qualifications,

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([4]) Refers to the UOE data collection and the ETER project.
([5]) Adapted from UNESCO-UIS/OECD/Eurostat (2015, p. 42) and Lepori et al. (2015, p. 46).
[6] Upper secondary school institutions offering ISCED 5 programmes are, however, excluded from the scope (see glossary)

working experience abroad, foreign languages, ICT competences, ability to attract funding, participation in international research projects and networks, etc.)

Part 4: Employment Conditions

This part will explore employment conditions of academic staff such as main duties, working time and remuneration. It will examine the degree of autonomy that higher education institutions have with respect to these conditions. The section will also analyse job security with regard to the different status of academic staff and the main types of contract. Information will also be gathered on the framework for academic staff salaries and measures to prevent gender pay gaps in academia.

Part 5: Career progression and continuing professional development

This part will explore career development opportunities for academic staff within higher education systems, showing what aspects are regulated and what is left to institutional autonomy. It will examine conditions for career progression and present information on academic career paths. Moreover, this part will explore the existence of systematic provision of training opportunities for academic staff, including opportunities to improve teaching methods, foreign language and ICT skills.

Part 6: Internationalisation and mobility

This part will focus on policies and practice encouraging academic staff to cope with the increasingly global academic environment. Building on the Eurydice overview 'Staff Mobility in Higher Education: National Policies and Programmes' produced in 2013 (European Commission/EACEA, 2013), it will cover international mobility of academic staff, providing information on existing national policies that address academic staff mobility and their stipulated targets. The section will also examine large-scale programmes or actions designed to facilitate outgoing and incoming mobility, as well as central level measures to motivate academic staff to participate in joint international programmes.

The section will also enquire about mechanisms to monitor mobility flows and, where data is available, will present available international mobility statistics.

In addition to mobility, information will also be gathered on policies and measures to support academic staff in developing joint programmes, MOOCs and collaboration in international research projects.

Part 7: Quality assurance and evaluation

This part will concentrate on internal and external quality assurance mechanisms that relate to academic staff. The role of external quality assurance in ensuring that internal higher education institution processes function effectively in relation to academic staff will be under scrutiny.

The report also aims to understand which bodies and stakeholders intervene in defining evaluation criteria and establishing performance levels for different categories of staff. The analysis will explore whether steering documents guide institutions on how academic staff performance should be measured and linked to career advancement. and what mechanisms are in place to reward outstanding performance or address unsatisfactory performance Among different criteria used to evaluate performance of academic staff, special attention will be paid to teaching performance, i.e. whether the quality of teaching is a criterion of staff appraisal, and if so, how it is assessed.

3. Data sources and methodology

The main data source of the report will be information gathered by the Eurydice Network through an in-depth questionnaire prepared by EACEA A7. The information submitted by Eurydice National Units will be complemented by data from other sources, namely:

- Statistical data from international surveys, in particular data included in the ETER database and the UOE data collection;

- Other qualitative research undertaken by surveys and/or interviews with different organisations, potentially including academic staff trade unions, quality assurance agencies and national rectors conferences. The outcomes of this work will feed into different parts of the report.