


YERUN POSITION PAPER

Towards a European Framework for Sustainable and Attractive Careers in Higher Education

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The higher education sector has been invited to contribute to a [consultation](#) for a European Framework for Sustainable and Attractive Careers in Higher Education, taking place after extensive work on and in parallel with another Framework on Research Careers, promoted by another Commission directorate. In this context, YERUN would like to make the following observations.

Distinguishing between research careers and careers in higher education may be reasonable, as researchers also pursue careers in non-academic sectors, whereas careers in higher education comprise tasks and responsibilities which go beyond research. However, it is not clear why these initiatives were not run together, feeding into one another to ensure consistency, noting that the two documents will be applying to some of the same peoples' careers. The process unfortunately reinforces the lack of synergies between education and research policies and it constitutes yet another signal that research comes first in the design and assessment of academic careers. With this in mind, **YERUN calls for the necessary efforts to be made to articulate the two documents and related initiatives in a way which makes sense to all actors involved, notably to academics combining research and other responsibilities, as well as to the services dealing with their careers.**

This being said, the scope given to the new consultation should be commended. It takes a broad and encompassing view of the tasks and responsibilities performed in higher education, as well as of the challenges we face. Many academics do research and teaching, hold administrative and leadership positions, contribute to knowledge valorisation and/or engage with society. Concerns for their careers range from contract conditions, remuneration and workload pressures to issues of equality and inclusion and, in certain contexts, academic freedom. One of the key questions transpiring from the consultation is well-placed: **to what extent can academics perform all their expected tasks appropriately and in good conditions in Europe?**

The challenges are multiple. Teaching must adapt and be innovative in the face of numerous transformations: digital imperatives, Artificial Intelligence, the green transition, as well as countless other evolutions require teachers to ensure that new skills are taught and learned, that new knowledge feeds into their teaching, and that they develop innovative processes and pedagogies. However, appropriate training and networking opportunities to renew teaching practices are often lacking, whereas investing time, efforts and creativity in innovative teaching and learning becomes a struggle where assessments of professional performances give priority to bibliometric indicators, attracted funding and project management. **Rebalancing the assessment of research and teaching is overdue** and should **avoid too simple quantitative solutions like counting the number of hours or years of teaching**, in favour of a qualitative appraisal of the adequacy of teaching in view of richer criteria.

Beyond research and teaching, **revised assessment systems for career progression should be tried and tested to give appropriate recognition to all the different activities performed by academics.** The idea is not to ask academics to excel in all activities at the same level and at the same time. Rather, the system should allow for different career paths to emerge and complement each other within teams, each individual developing certain competences and skills more prominently depending on their talent and personal priorities, leading to more personalised assessments.



The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) is a precious forum to start from to create systemic change in this regard. But CoARA cannot succeed fully without appropriate support: support by public authorities at European, national and regional levels, as well as the commitment of RPOs, RTOs and HE institutions is and will remain crucial to ensure the success of this initiative. Alongside this necessary support, **while we understand that COARA must narrow its focus in order to make progress, its implementation will be impossible without also including the broader dimensions of an academic career** as highlighted in the current survey on broader academic career progression.

Finally and crucially, making careers in higher education sustainable and attractive **depends on the regulatory and financial conditions in which careers develop. Universities remain by large underfunded.** They may not remain in a position to retain the best talent in fields where careers in other sectors are more profitable while offering a better work-life balance. Strong differences also exist between entry level and senior academics, the former experiencing various forms of precarity depending on national or regional contexts and the employment and social security systems applying to them. Additional, systemic problems persist than hamper equality, diversity and inclusion, with different levels of ambition to tackle this issue across Europe. Against this backdrop, YERUN very much welcomes the initiative of the Commission to increase the evidence base of its assessment of the situation of careers in HE, and **stresses the importance of building mechanisms and developing practices for constructive engagement at different levels between policy-makers, funding organisations, universities and other stakeholders**, so that each can take their share of the work to change careers in Higher Education for the better.

In light of the above, YERUN welcomes the opportunity to give input to the European Commission for its new Framework for sustainable and attractive careers in higher education, and will continue to work constructively with policymakers and other stakeholders to make our common ambition a reality. Finally, and to conclude:

- **Coherence should be ensured** between the Framework for Research Careers and the Framework for Sustainable and Attractive Careers in Higher Education.
- **Academics undertake a number of activities and responsibilities beyond research which should be appropriately recognised.** An adequate rebalancing of assessment grids and methods is necessary to allow for different and complementary professional profiles to emerge in our teams.
- **The work of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment must continue to be supported and complemented** by actions undertaken by public authorities at regional, national and European levels, and it should be acknowledged that in its **practical implementation within universities, it should be broadened to all the dimensions of an academic career.**
- **Public authorities** should **work more closely** with their universities and other stakeholders **to improve their collaboration and shape the regulatory and funding contexts** in which careers develop.

- YERUN Members -



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