

# LERU TAKES CONCRETE STEPS TOWARDS ERA

A BRIEFING PAPER ON LERU'S ACTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING  
SIGNED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND LERU ON 17 JULY 2012

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## What has LERU done to help achieve the European Research Area (ERA)?

In the MoU signed by the European Commission and LERU in 2012 (cf. press release) we identified twelve areas for action<sup>1</sup>. We conducted a survey of LERU universities' activities in these areas. The twelve topics were also the subject of many discussions at the meetings of LERU's governing bodies, communities and working groups.

Below is a summary of what we as a network and as individual universities have accomplished, what we have learned and what we identify as remaining obstacles or recommendations for the future.

Headline message on research careers: Many initiatives have been taken by LERU as a network and by the universities to establish or further develop open recruitment procedures, to openly advertise vacancies for researchers (albeit not primarily through Euraxess), to implement HR strategies in line with the EU Charter and Code of conduct for researchers, to engage in the HRS4R process and obtain the HR Excellence in Research logo, to develop and/or implement a gender strategy or action plan, and to explore the feasibility of a pan-European supplementary pension fund for researchers.

### I. Open recruitment criteria

The criteria for the recruitment, selection and appointment of researchers are to a large extent clearly specified and easily accessible at LERU universities. This is especially the case for more senior researchers but a little less so for junior researchers.

We recommend that universities, in addition to specifying recruitment criteria and making them easily accessible, also provide the necessary explanatory guidance to researchers about the criteria and that they embed this in continuous professional development and career services in the case of researchers already employed by the university.

<sup>1</sup> See press releases of July 2012 and December 2013.  
<http://www.leru.org/index.php/public/news/press-release-leru-and-era-lets-make-progress/>  
<http://www.leru.org/index.php/public/news/press-release-leru-takes-concrete-steps-towards-era/>

Another recommendation is to provide, where appropriate, translation into English to improve international attractiveness, keeping in mind that the native language would constitute the legally binding text.

## 2. Advertising research vacancies

We asked the LERU universities how well they know and use the EU job portal Euraxess to post job vacancies. It turns out that LERU universities are underutilising the portal, in large part due to the fact that it is seen as duplicating existing institutional, national or other initiatives without added benefit while creating an extra administrative burden. However, thanks to our activities in the past year they have become more aware of it and we have as a result made a suggestion to the Commission, namely to develop a service to make uploads to the portal more automatic or to automatically harvest vacancies from university websites. This would make the tool easier to use and more attractive to universities.



## 3. HR strategies for researchers

We asked the LERU universities about their HR policies to promote good research careers. This was shown to be an area of much activity: policies, frameworks, strategic plans and implementation are evident at the LERU universities, often in parallel with or driven by national initiatives (e.g. Concordat in UK) and many examples of good practice are available, although some of the challenges discussed in the LERU (2010) 'Harvesting talent' paper remain.

For example, the principles outlined in the European Charter and Code are common practice at the LERU universities. It should be recognised that all LERU universities have signed up to the Charter and Code either as an institution or via their representative umbrella organisation (e.g. Rectors' conference)<sup>2</sup>. LERU universities are thus performing extremely well on this point, given that the total number of organisations that have endorsed the C&C amounts to 480 out of a potential of thousands of universities and their representative bodies in Europe<sup>3</sup>.



- <sup>2</sup> The Universities of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Freiburg, Genève, KU Leuven, ULP (2006 – before it was merged into the Université de Strasbourg), Utrecht and Zurich signed the C&C as institutions. The following representative bodies of which LERU universities are members in the following countries have signed the C&C: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands (VSNU), Sweden, Switzerland, and UK (UUK).
- <sup>3</sup> See European Commission. SWD (2013) 333. European Research Area facts and figures 2013.

In addition, LERU has developed a Model Code of Practice for Research Employment, which has been endorsed by all LERU universities<sup>4</sup>. The LERU Model Code of Practice is a succinct statement of principle defined by the LERU universities themselves, codifying the existing high HR standards across all LERU universities and expressing these as a direct commitment to their research employees. The LERU Model Code of Practice has been developed through a process of extensive consultation with and among LERU members. It is designed to complement and support the specific requirements of the European Charter for Researchers, the European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, the UK Concordat on Research Career Development, academic labour agreements and HE legislation affecting LERU universities, quality processes such as the Swiss Label Mechanism, and other applicable national and local HR policies. Its adoption by the LERU Rectors' Assembly in November 2009 reflects a shared commitment among LERU members to provide research staff with excellent working conditions within a stimulating and challenging professional environment.

#### 4. The European HR Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) and the HR excellence logo



LERU has encouraged its member universities to engage in the HRS4R process for several years now either through the cohorts, individually or otherwise, by informing them about the process and sending them information about the cohorts. For example, LERU organised a one-day workshop on the HRS4R for its members in the spring of 2013. A report with the main discussion points and conclusions was sent to all LERU universities and a number of comments on the HRS4R were formulated for the EC. In the autumn of 2012 we asked the LERU universities to join the fourth HRS4R cohort when the call was launched and we distributed the call for experts for the HRS4R peer review (step 5) phase to our member universities.

LERU universities are performing very well in terms of their participation and success in the HRS4R process, with almost all members now either having obtained or sought to obtain the logo, or are planning to participate in the process. LERU universities score significantly above the reported figures for all European institutions<sup>5</sup>. For example, all UK LERU members have obtained the logo (compared to 74 out of hundreds of potential institutions in the UK according to the ERA progress report), seven continental LERU members participate(d) in the cohort groups, of which one has received the logo and the others are well on their way to receiving it. This compares to a participation of 230 organisations in the cohorts out a potential of thousands of universities and other research performing organisations according to the ERA progress report.

4 Available at [http://www.leru.org/files/publications/Code\\_of\\_practice\\_final.pdf](http://www.leru.org/files/publications/Code_of_practice_final.pdf)

5 See European Commission. SWD (2013) 333. European Research Area facts and figures 2013, p.22.

LERU considers the HRS4R a successful process because it encourages universities to conduct a self-assessment, implement a strategy for progress and be assessed on progress. We would welcome its continuation and are willing to promote and support the mechanism. On the other hand, LERU is not so positive about a possible HR accreditation scheme currently being studied by the EC, which could potentially replace the current HRS4R process in the future. LERU has fundamental concerns about the feasibility of creating a valid pan-European system of HR accreditation. We see no need for or benefit of such a scheme, since LERU members (and many other universities) have sound HR accreditation mechanisms in place at the institutional or national level. To build another layer of accreditation potentially duplicates or conflicts with existing systems and will almost certainly add another layer of unnecessary administrative burden.



*LERU Roundtable on women, research and universities*

## 5. Women and research careers

LERU published the position paper “Women, research and universities: excellence without gender bias” in July 2012. To further disseminate the paper, LERU organised a roundtable discussion on women in academic careers in Brussels on 22 March 2013, featuring a panel of experts from academia, the EC and the private sector. About twenty people from various stakeholder organisations and the media participated in the roundtable discussion. A LERU delegation then also met with Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn to discuss the paper and gender actions. Moreover, LERU has actively participated in the activities of the ERA SHO gender do-ers, as well as in the Lithuanian EU Presidency conference on gender on 21-22 November 2013.

All LERU universities have taken many initiatives to recruit and retain women in academic careers and almost all have a gender strategy and/or action plan to guide, implement and monitor aspects of gender equality. This compares to about 23% of responding institutions in the 2012 ERA survey who have drawn up a gender strategy or plan<sup>6</sup>. LERU universities clearly have a long-term commitment from the leadership to gender (and diversity) and make this concrete with plans, actions and a budget.

In accordance with the commitment to gender equality expressed in the LERU 2012 paper LERU universities are actively collecting information and data on gender in a mutual learning exercise to inform and promote good practice. The LERU WG Gender has also started work on the gender dimension in research, focusing on how to implement gendered innovation research at universities. The goal is to develop an advice paper with recommendations for universities, funders and policy makers.



6 See European Commission. SWD (2013) 333. European Research Area facts and figures 2013, p26.

## 6. Pensions and social security

LERU published the advice paper “Improving the social security of internationally mobile researchers” in 2010. To follow up on the paper, LERU has participated in the EC’s (DG RTD) activities to set up a European supplementary pension fund for researchers. The Office distributes the meeting agendas, reports and requests for information to all LERU members, soliciting their input and comment. LERU also organised its own workshop dedicated to the topic in January 2012.

Although LERU universities are looking with interest at the development of a pan-European supplementary pension fund, most universities report that they would be unable to participate because of national legislation or because they see no added benefit. Obstacles mentioned include costs, compliance, legal and tax issues and divergence of the level of expected benefits.

Even though most members would be unable or unwilling to participate in the near future, it is recognised that a pan-European scheme has immediate potential in some cases and that in the longer term it is likely to become more generally feasible or more attractive.



## 7. Doctoral training

Headline message on doctoral training: LERU and the LERU members have taken many initiatives to promote and develop innovative doctoral training structures and programmes and to provide opportunities for PhD candidates to take part in professional development training, as well as in international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral training.

LERU published its views on doctoral training in two position papers: “Doctoral studies in Europe: excellence in researcher training” in 2007 and “Doctoral degrees beyond 2012: training talented researchers for society” in 2010. To illustrate and promote the implementation of innovative doctoral training principles, the LERU Doctoral Studies Community started a follow-up project collecting good practice examples of innovative doctoral training, the result of which will be published as a







LERU Doctoral Studies Community Meeting  
at the University of Milan

LERU advice paper in early 2014. LERU has participated as an active observer in the Commission's WG Skills of the ERASGHRM, working on the development of innovative doctoral training principles.

The survey conducted for the MoU confirmed that structured doctoral training is firmly established at LERU universities with a rich variety of implementation modes and structures. Opportunities for professional development and international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral experiences are plentiful, but vary considerably in scope and uptake across disciplines and for individuals, which makes them challenging to quantify.

In line with the innovative doctoral training principles, LERU has organised four doctoral summer schools to date, every time on a different career training and development topic: in July 2013 on “The development of leadership skills for employment in enterprise, government and academia” at the Pierre & Marie Curie University Paris, on “Beyond open access: open education, open data and open knowledge” at the University of Barcelona (2012), on “Essential enterprise skills for early career researchers” at University College London (2011) and on “Communicating about academic research” at the Universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam (2010). Research integrity is the topic for the 2014 doctoral summer school, which will take place at the University of Helsinki<sup>7</sup>.

LERU has developed a model agreement for joint doctorates. The model, which was developed by the LERU Doctoral Studies Community and joint doctorate experts from LERU universities, is now available as a template for setting up joint doctorates.

LERU is collaborating with the EIT Foundation on a PhD internship programme for PhD candidates from LERU universities at selected companies.

7

More information about the LERU doctoral summer schools is available at <http://www.leru.org/index.php/public/activities/other-activities/doctoral-summer-school/>. Video impressions of past summer schools are available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/zobz91xf7lxq6mn/LERU%20logo%20OK.mov>, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE4b1O5daE4&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE4b1O5daE4&feature=player_embedded) and <http://vimeo.com/28792264>.

## 8. Academia-industry (or intersectoral) mobility

The MoU survey revealed an extensive and wide variety of intersectoral activities, showing them to be firmly embedded in practice at LERU universities. For example, doctoral and post-doctoral researchers have access to external placements and training, specialised KT and IP sessions, careers seminars and talks focussing on non-university employment, non-academic supervision, grants to develop internships or projects involving extra-university partners, etc.

## 9. Twinning and teaming

Headline message on twinning and teaming: LERU has promoted the potential benefits of twinning and teaming initiatives, LERU members have been shown to have institutional links with less research-developed universities and the LERU network is willing to participate in relevant EU initiatives that are cost-efficient and flexible.

The MoU survey revealed that LERU universities engage with many institutions from the EU<sub>13</sub> and are willing to explore further synergies and opportunities arising from ERA, Horizon 2020 and cohesion policies. LERU universities stress that twinning and teaming projects should first of all be research-driven and of high quality, that they should offer mechanisms that are not currently in place and should be flexible, so that excellence is truly stimulated.

Related activities include a LERU workshop on “Interactions between the EU’s regional and research policies and opportunities for LERU universities”, held in Leuven in May 2012, and LERU Secretary-General Kurt Deketelaere’s presentation about the possible role of LERU universities in twinning and teaming initiatives in the framework of smart specialisation strategies for research and innovation at the ninth annual Technopolicy network conference in September 2012. Kurt Deketelaere has also spearheaded a twinning partnership on climate change between KU Leuven and the University of Malta<sup>8</sup>.

LERU was one of nine organisations involved in developing a “Teaming for Excellence” white paper, showing how to demonstrate the benefits of and success factors in teaming efforts, following on from a workshop organised by the Max Planck Gesellschaft. The paper was submitted to Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn, Director-General (Research) Robert-Jan Smits and the Irish Presidency in January 2013. LERU distributed the paper to its members encouraging them to think about possible win-win actions with EU-13 universities.





In 2012 a total of 893 patent applications (priority filings) were filed by LERU universities (an average of 42.5 per university), 155 start-ups were formed (an average of 7.38 per university) and 837 licenses were executed (an average of 39.86 per university).

It should be noted that knowledge transfer in a broader sense, including not only economic but for example also societal impact of scientific output, is an important issue for LERU universities. LERU has organised several internal meetings on this topic and plans to develop a paper on the importance of impact and how it can be measured in several domains.

LERU has collaborated with the JRC TTO-Circle, a forum which brings together the transfer offices of 25 important European research institutes, participating in its 2012 conference in Munich and co-organising the 2014 conference in Leuven. Moreover, five LERU universities are partners in the EIT KICs and participate in the KICs' knowledge transfer activities. Finally, LERU organised a fringe session at the 2012 Innovation Convention in Brussels and will again co-organise a fringe session at the 2014 Innovation Convention with EARTO and EUA.

## 12. E-science

Headline message on e-science: LERU and its universities have actively promoted and developed e-science activities aimed at providing connectivity, computing, software and data digital services so researchers can effectively and efficiently carry out their research.

The MoU survey revealed that e-science provision at LERU universities tends to involve several services (primarily the library and IT), tends to be handled both centrally and decentrally and tends to offer a wide variety of services, ranging from bibliographic searches, to managing publications and data, database searching for grant application, software and statistics courses. Developing the right mixture of services and training can be a challenge to universities. We suggest that universities may find it useful to inventorise and evaluate their provision of e-science services and that a central policy can be helpful to provide a common vision and strategy for the university.

## Conclusion

LERU and its universities have regarded the ERA MoU as a beneficial initiative, not only because it showed that the LERU universities are doing many good things in the twelve action areas, but also because the repeated and thorough discussions of the MoU actions in the various LERU groups and bodies have generated new insights and reflections both in the institutions and in the network about specific challenges, obstacles and gaps and how to address them. Where there are gaps, for example in developing and implementing good research data policies and enabling open access to research data where appropriate, we will encourage LERU universities to take action and will work on taking appropriate actions through the LERU network.

The collaborative partnership with the EC and the ERA platform stakeholders has been a positive experience. LERU is willing to continue with the ERA partnership in the future and is committed to developing appropriate initiatives on the part of universities to help realise ERA. Naturally, much will depend on the vision of the next Commissioner in 2014.

We hope that the EU member states will contribute their share towards realising the ERA objectives and that they will take measures inspired by the LERU papers to support and enable universities to help achieve a better functioning ERA. LERU and its universities are willing to support and inspire that process.

On some issues universities are simply not in the driver's seat, for example, when it comes to legal measures regarding social security or VAT on research infrastructures. We hope that appropriate measures will be taken at the national and EU level to solve these obstacles to ERA.

*Dr John Bell,  
chief of staff of  
Commissioner  
Màire Geoghegan-Quinn  
discusses ERA  
with the LERU rectors at the  
Rectors' Assembly in Oxford*



*LERU's autumn reception "ERA at the Horizon of 2020?"*

## LERU PUBLICATIONS

LERU publishes its views on research and higher education in several types of publications, including position papers, advice papers, briefing papers and notes.

LERU publications are freely available in print and online at [www.leru.org](http://www.leru.org).

## ABOUT LERU

LERU was founded in 2002 as an association of research-intensive universities sharing the values of high-quality teaching in an environment of internationally competitive research.

The League is committed to: education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; the promotion of research across a broad front, which creates a unique capacity to reconfigure activities in response to new opportunities and problems.

The purpose of the League is to advocate these values, to influence policy in Europe and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience.

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