

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The key factor for successful research and research-based teaching as a basis for Europe's further success as a knowledge society is to attract the best and most creative minds to the universities and to support them in a nourishing and challenging environment. In light of Europe's demographic development and the undeniable need to keep the advantage over international competitors, it is absolutely imperative that research-intensive universities such as the LERU members and others pay special attention to the careers of the most promising excellent post-doctoral researchers.
- To attain this goal, we need to create reliable and projectable post-PhD career paths for young academics¹, who often also have to reconcile the demands of family and career in this phase of their lives. Particular attention must therefore be paid to providing them with equal opportunities and balancing existing gender-based disadvantages (LERU, 2012, 2010). To this end, we see the concept of tenure track as a key tool for attracting and keeping the brightest minds at an early career stage in Europe's universities.
- An attractive and open labour market for researchers is also one of the goals of the European Commission, identified as one of five European Research Area (ERA) priorities (EC, 2012). LERU supports and actively engages with this agenda (LERU, 2014a, 2014b).
- Tenure track is defined in this paper as a fixed-term contract advertised with the perspective of a tenured, i.e., permanent, position at a higher level, subject to positive evaluation and without renewed advertising of and application for the next position. This contrasts with 'probation-on-the-job' or other models in which academic promotion is granted on the basis of merit but at the same level.
- In Europe's changing academic landscape, which is defined by diverse regulatory frameworks, higher educational systems have experimented with and systematically operated tenure-track models. Nonetheless, the chosen models vary not only in different European countries but also between universities. In general, universities have chosen an "up-or-out" system. The United Kingdom, France and Spain have not yet experimented with tenure-track models. While in the UK the probation-on-the-job model has been tried and tested successfully, in France strict regulations on academic job competition leave no room for the implementation of tenure track. So far there has been no attempt in Europe, even at the level of any individual country, to introduce a tenure-track academic faculty system as a direct equivalent to the North American system.
- One of the advantages of the tenure-track system is the possibility of providing an early signal to scholars who wish to stay in academia. This evolution is in line with the trend of introducing more formal autonomy (i.e. academic independence) at the earliest possible stage of an individual's research career. Projectable career paths can also be an effective tool to keep women in academia, who otherwise may seek employment outside academia when facing the need to reconcile family and career.
- This advice paper analyses the "set-up phase" of implementing tenure-track programmes at LERU universities, describes the country-specific and academic cultural barriers to the development and implementation processes and provides an account of recent developments. Having extensively consulted our members, we identify three models of implementation of the tenure-track concept in those LERU universities and countries where the system exists.
- At most LERU universities tenure-track programmes are in a relatively early trial or implementation stage. Many LERU universities are in the process of learning from the first cohorts of researchers who have gone through, or are still going through the tenure-track process. Therefore it is not yet possible to come to a comprehensive or definitive appraisal among LERU universities of tenure track as a suitable strategic tool for attracting the best young researchers and implementing professorships.

1 "Young" should be understood in terms of academic seniority, since the age at which doctoral candidates graduate and the ways in which they subsequently progress vary widely.

- Universities, and indeed all organisations that are developing or planning to develop tenure-track programmes as a means of improving the career prospects of excellent young researchers, should carefully evaluate this model in relation to other career tracks in place. LERU thus formulates a number of recommendations to the following bodies:
 - **Universities and other research institutions** should provide guidance and support for beginning tenure-track appointees, continue with appropriate support and mentoring along the way, and pay special and timely attention to those researchers to whom tenure might be not granted.
 - **National governments** should grant universities the financial support and the autonomy to experiment with the tenure-track process and learn from their experiments. They can support universities in their efforts to bring quality, clarity and transparency to the tenure-track process.
 - **The European Commission** could support and fund the further study of tenure track at European universities. It should encourage national governments to open up traditional career paths to new possibilities such as tenure track and to remove legal barriers that prevent research institutions from providing outstanding young researchers with attractive career perspectives.