



MCFA Careers Workshop

Trends in European career systems - how much flexibility do we need, how much insecurity can we accept?

Date: 2004-08-28

Time: 11:00-12:30

Venue: Folkets Hus, 2nd floor, room 203

Synopsis:

In this session of the MCFA Careers Programme we will discuss various burning issues related to the latest developments in the landscape of European career systems. In short talks our speakers will try to give an overview over the current situation in different areas of Europe. In the discussion following the presentations the audience is encouraged to contribute with their own views, to help identify the major areas of concern, and to formulate concrete recommendations to policy makers and other stakeholders.

Coordinators:

Magda Lola
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Coordinator of the Science Policy Committee
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Dagmar M. Meyer
Marie Curie Fellowship Association
Brussels, Belgium
Chairperson
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Speakers:

Juan de la Figuera (Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, President of the National Association of Ramon y Cajal Researchers in Spain)
"The 'Ramon y Cajal Programme': towards a tenure track system in Spain"

Christoph Bargholtz (Stockholm University, President of SULF - Swedish Association of University Teachers)
"Transparency, quality and legal rights - academic careers in an open society"

Patricia Arsene (University Politehnica of Bucharest, and Head of Science Policy and Scientometrics Department, Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding, Romania)
"Flexibility and Insecurity versus Cultural Heritage in Building-up Scientific Careers"

Discussants:

Magda Lola (MCFA Administrative Board, Co-ordinator of the MCFA Science Policy Panel)

Andrej Mirossay (Safarik University, Kosice, Slovak Republic)

Rapporteur:

Fiona Wood (Centre for Higher Education Management & Policy, University of New England, Armidale, Australia & Australasian Research Management Society)

ABSTRACTS

JUAN DE LA FIGUERA

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid,
President of the National Association of Ramon y Cajal Researchers in Spain

The "Ramon y Cajal" Program: toward a tenure track system in Spain

Spain has traditionally lacked any tenure track system. The Spanish system of Science and Technology in public institutions (research labs and Universities) is based on civil servant researchers/professors, with short term contracts (or grants) for PhD students and postdocs. The method of selecting the new civil servants is cumbersome and is often dominated by considerations other than the scientific merit of the candidates, with strong inbreeding components. To address this points and promote the incorporation of researchers, Spanish and foreign alike, the "Ramón y Cajal" program (named after the only Spaniard that ever received the Nobel prize for his research in Spain) was launched in 2001 by the Spanish Government. Its declared goal was the creation of a tenure track system with up to 2000 5-year research contracts, to be distributed between 2001 and 2003. The selection of the final candidates was done by the same Spanish agency that evaluates and funds research programs (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Prospectiva, ANEP).

Among the clear successes of the program are the fulfillment of the promised positions, which have salaries in the range of those corresponding to (new) civil-servants professors in Spain (30k€/year). The evaluation system in general is considered to have selected better candidates than the traditional methods used in Spain. Up to 16% of the researchers are not Spanish citizens, a number completely impossible in any other part of the Spanish Science system. Limitations which soon were apparent in the day-to-day work were the lack of start-up money (although the program includes an small amount of "installation" money in the range of 10k€) which greatly complicates the start of new research lines, as well as the unusual status of the researchers in the Spanish system (which strongly assumes that the researchers are civil servants). The problems of the program have been due to the reluctance of the universities and the research centers to accept the researchers as fully fledged members of their institutions, and the uncertainty of the future of the researchers at the end of their 5-year contract.

CHRISTOPH BARGHOLTZ

Stockholm University, President of SULF - Swedish Association of University Teachers

Transparency, quality and legal rights - academic careers in an open society

The demographic situation in Europe is such that in the near future young people will have many different career possibilities open to them. It is then likely that short-term contracts, low salaries etc. in the academic career will influence them to choose other professions or to leave for the US where career opportunities are better for young researchers. This poses an obvious threat to the possibilities of recruiting the best people to academic research within Europe.

In order to establish an attractive and efficient academic career in Europe a major expansion of the number of postdoc positions and tenured research positions for qualified academics, alone, is not sufficient. In addition, the recruitment policy of European universities must honour principles such as transparency, quality, and legal rights of the individual. A certain degree of flexibility may well be a prerequisite for the intellectual vitality of the University as is true academic freedom for the individual researcher. Insecurity has no place in it.

The presentation takes the situation of young academics in Sweden as its point of departure.

PATRICIA ARSENE

University Politehnica of Bucharest, and Head of Science Policy and Scientometrics Department,
Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding, Romania

Flexibility and Insecurity versus Cultural Heritage in Building-up Scientific Careers

Academic life should gravitate around elites, able to create schools with high potential in research and dissemination of information. In the beginning of the 20th century, the bright minds of the moment put their seal on the evolution of the Romanian education system, with highly positive effects on the development of the country. Unfortunately, due to historical context, there were moments of syncope, which altered our valuable tradition in this field. After 1990, by being conscious that the only viable alternative is that of the "European way", Romanian scientists are gathering their strengths in rebuilding-up a real intellectual elite.

Educated, in general, with the idea of being born, living and learning in the same city or not too far from home, things that sometimes become constraints due to economical aspects, used to the culture of becoming students and after this PhD students and assistants in the same university, Romanian young scientists are learning at present, with high speed, the way of building-up valuable careers.

Are they flexible enough, are they ready to accept insecurity and until what point? Mobility represents only a way of improving their expertise, or there should be also considered the economic reasons? Are, we, scientists who have reached maturity and policy makers, ready for real transparency in the dissemination of information? These are questions to which this paper intends to try to give, partially, answers.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS AND OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

JUAN DE LA FIGUERA

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid,
President of the National Association of Ramon y Cajal Researchers in Spain

Juan de la Figuera is currently a professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid with a "Ramón y Cajal" contract. He is one of the founders of the National Association of Ramón y Cajal researchers, and its current president. He is also a member of the Association for the Advancement of Science and Technology in Spain since his stay in the USA.

He got a Physics PhD degree from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in 1995, and has worked as a professor both at that university and at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He was on a Fulbright fellowship at Sandia National Laboratories (California, USA) as a postdoc, and then as a (limited term) researcher in the same institution for a total of five years. He has been back in Spain since 2002 under the "Ramón y Cajal" program. He has more than 35 publications in the field of surface science, with over 600 citations.

CHRISTOPH BARGHOLTZ

Stockholm University, President of SULF - Swedish Association of University Teachers

Christoph Bargholtz received his PhD from Stockholm University in 1975 and worked one year as a post doc at NORDITA in Copenhagen. His research is mainly in low- and intermediate energy nuclear physics, both theoretical and experimental. Following one year as a visiting associate professor at SUNY, Stony Brook, in the beginning of the eighties, Bargholtz has held positions as lecturer and professor (since 1991) at Stockholm University. Since 2000 he is the president of the Swedish Association of University Teachers.

PATRICIA ARSENE

University Politehnica of Bucharest, and Head of Science Policy and Scientometrics Department,
Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding, Romania

Graduated the Power Engineering Faculty in 1985. After some years of working in energy industry, she became assistant in the Faculty of Control and Computers, University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania, university in which, after following during the years different steps of the academic career, she is holding at present a position of Associate Professor. In 1999 she obtained her PhD in Automated Systems with a thesis on "Modeling and Fault Detection Methods for Heat Exchangers". Her research fields of interest covers control theory, fault detection and fault tolerant systems with applications to industrial processes, project management for information systems.

Beginning with 2003, Patricia became also Head of Science Policy and Scientometrics Department within the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education and Research Funding. Between her responsibilities related to this affiliation, there can be mentioned: participation in the development of science policy strategies in higher education, management of the European Science Foundation national contact point, evaluation of Romanian scientific journals and publishing houses.

MAGDA LOLA

Marie Curie Fellowship Association, Bruxelles

M.L. graduated with first class honours from the Physics Department of the National University of Athens and obtained a PhD from the University of Oxford, for research on Particle Physics and Cosmology. She worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Heidelberg and CERN's Theory Division (1993-2000) and subsequently joined CERN's Human Resources, as a Deputy Group Leader for Recruitment. In November 2004, M.L. will return to Greece as an Associate Professor in the Physics Department of Patras University. She is currently in charge of the Marie Curie Fellowship Association Science Policy Panel, and is particularly interested in equal opportunities, training, career development and benchmarking of framework conditions for research mobility in Europe.

FIONA WOOD

Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy,
University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia,
& Australasian Research Management Society

Fiona Wood is a senior research fellow and senior lecturer at the Centre for Higher Education and Management Policy, School of Professional Development and Leadership at the University of New England, Australia. She is also chair of the International Committee of the Australasian Research Management Society.

Her areas of research interest and expertise are:

- *science, engineering and technology policy*

the capacity of national research funding agencies to contribute to economic competitiveness and realise social priorities; the role of peer review; measures of research performance; institutional research management; international scientific networks and brain drain/gain/churn.

- *comparative higher education policy*

governance; management; funding; the role of the market; and diversity issues.

Fiona has been a keynote speaker at a number of international meetings including at the OECD, NWO, and provided expert testimony to the Canadian Parliament regarding its peer review system used for the allocation of research funds. Fiona also teaches a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses both through her Faculty and also through the MBA Program in the Faculty of Economics, Business and Law. She teaches students within Australia and also delivers courses in 3 universities in Hong Kong, in Vietnam, and in New Zealand. She has supervision responsibilities for Honours, Masters and PhD students.

DAGMAR M. MEYER

Marie Curie Fellowship Association, Bruxelles

Dagmar M. Meyer studied mathematics at the Universities of Heidelberg and Cambridge. The work for her doctoral dissertation on a problem in Algebraic Topology was done mostly at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the Max-Planck Institute for Mathematics in Bonn. After her PhD she spent two and a half years at the University of Paris 13, first with a fellowship from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then with a Community funded Marie Curie fellowship. In 2001 she returned to her native Germany where she currently holds a temporary position as Assistant Professor at the University of Göttingen. Since her time in Paris she has been actively involved in the Marie Curie Fellowship Association, first as one of the French national co-ordinators, then at European level holding various positions within the Administrative Board. She is currently the Chair of the association.

Dagmar is particularly interested in issues related to the career development of young researchers and how to improve the framework conditions in this respect at a national and European level.