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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

### Recommendations on organising researchers Adopted by ETUCE Committee on 25 April 2013

ETUCE "Organising Researchers" Working Group and HERSC agreed on the following recommendations and list of obstacles to organise researchers:

Researchers in Europe face numerous challenges when their working rights are at stake, deriving from a series of reasons.

- a. Frequently researchers cannot join trade unions, as in some countries the **conditions** for joining laid down by the trade unions exclude them.
- b. Researchers can be engaged by state-funded public institutes or universities, or by privately funded institutes. Working for a private institution is sometimes an obstacle to joining trade unions, which often only organise public employees.
- c. The percentage of staff joining trade unions is much lower in the **private sector** than in the public sector.
- d. Most researchers only join a trade union when they have a **permanent post**.
- e. The status of doctoral candidates is different from country to country: sometimes they **are considered, and they consider themselves, as students** and not as employees.
- f. Many researchers are employed on **insecure and precarious contracts**. While this gives them a ready-made grievance, which only trade unions can deal with effectively, it also leads to fear of victimization. Universities that do not receive regular and continuous funding tend to provide only short-term contracts to their researchers, and have, therefore, fewer trade union members.
- g. Researchers usually **lack information** about the possibility of joining a trade union and often they are not aware of the advantages of the trade union membership. Younger researchers are the most reluctant to join the trade unions.

- h. Researchers are constantly told to strive for excellence and to be the best. Stereotypes promulgated by union-hostile media and management suggest that trade unions “protect mediocrity” and “the lowest common denominator”. This may, even subconsciously, be a major **psychological barrier to joining a union**.
- i. Working rights and trade union work are generally understood by professors and researchers as **bureaucratic constraints** to achieve their goals. There is a dominant attitude among researchers that trade unions are “old-fashioned”, “weak” or “confrontational”.
- j. **Scarcity of time** prevents researchers from participating in trade union activities. Only few researchers engage in teacher trade union work, because a lot of time must be spent on securing funding or finding a new contract.
- k. There is a strong culture of **individualism and competition** among researchers. Autonomy in research, which is the basis of quality research, makes researchers frightened of the idea of “being organized” because they think that they might lose their independence.
- l. Researchers tend to join **scientific associations**, post-doctoral organisations or students unions, which do not protect their working rights.
- m. Researchers are in a highly **mobile profession**, thus trade union membership and the protection of working rights are problematic when moving from one country to another. Foreign researchers may have very different cultures of organisation in their respective home countries.
- n. **Female researchers** are more disadvantaged than male researchers. They are often forced to interrupt their careers because of maternity leave. More women than men have short-term contracts, thus fewer women are organised in trade unions.

It is of utmost importance that researchers should join trade unions and receive full protection in their workplace.

**Therefore, we recommend that teacher trade unions should:**

1. Recognise that the protection of **working rights of researchers** is a real and serious problem.

2. Pay continuous attention to **improving the research sector** and the researchers' working rights.
3. Revise their **by-laws** concerning eligibility for membership of the teacher trade unions in order to open the possibility for grant-recipients, short-term and fixed term contract researchers, contracted doctoral candidates and researchers of private institutions to join the trade union.
4. Change the **attitude** of how doctoral candidates are perceived by themselves, by society and by legislators so that young doctoral candidates are not considered as students, but as employees.
5. Ensure that there is **transparency of employment requirements** for doctoral candidates and early stage researchers.
6. Identify the **employers of researchers** at the national level and establish a **social dialogue** on research.
7. Lobby for an increase in a number of permanent contracts and a decrease in the **number of short- and fixed term contracts** of researchers and lobby the European Union to act against the breaches of the directive on short-term contracts.
8. Raise awareness that **lack of funding** is never justifiable as an excuse of unequal treatment of employees.
9. Lobby to ensure a larger share of **permanent funding** for universities to hinder the increasing number of short-term contracts for researchers.
10. Initiate **campaigns** to raise awareness among researchers about trade unions and encourage to joining trade unions. Highlight that trade unions protect working rights and career development.
11. **Collect data** regularly on the number of researchers organised in order to measure progress in organising researchers and encourage member organisations to actively work towards these goals.
12. Cooperate with **researcher's scientific associations** and convince them that the most effective way to represent researchers is through trade unions.
13. Pay special attention to **gender equality** in organising researchers and enhance female researchers' access to full-time permanent contracts.
14. Establish **bilateral agreements** between trade unions from other countries with the aim of addressing and improving the position of foreign researchers.

15. Encourage **foreign permanent and temporary researchers** to join the local trade union and let them know what their working rights are in the host country.
16. Extend the use of **English communication** by trade unions to overcome the language barrier for foreign researchers to actively engage in trade unions.

**Therefore, we recommend that EI / ETUCE should:**

- disseminate this message to the general public, to partners and other relevant stakeholders.