TIETEENTEKIJÖIDEN LIITTO
FORSKARFÖRBUNDET
The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers

The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers higher education and research policy programme 2019–2023

Foreword

The current Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers higher education and research policy programme comprises various objectives our union wishes to promote over its coming years of activity. In terms of union activities, the programme is situated in between the electoral goals for the 2019 parliamentary elections drafted together with the Finnish Union of University Professors and the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers' own action plan. Compared with the 2019 electoral goals, the higher education and research policy programme is a larger set of objectives, as it comprises themes that our union aims to promote together with both political decision-makers and other higher education and research policy organisations such as the Academy of Finland and Finnish universities.

The electoral goals concerning higher education and research policy drafted with the Finnish Union of University Professors outline three main issues in the Finnish university and research sector: (1) Insufficient public funding, problems and a negative trend in research funding, (2) the university community has fewer opportunities to participate and have an influence, and (3) appreciation of higher education and research is not evident in political decision-making.

The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers higher education and research policy programme seeks solutions to the issues listed above. Our objective is to ensure better operational conditions for Finnish higher education and research activities and thereby help achieve an internationally high level of research and education; to improve staff well-being at higher education and research institutes, including the well-being of grant-funded researchers; to promote the appreciation of scientific knowledge and higher education in the Finnish society and in decision-making, as well as the acknowledgement of Finland as a country of high-level expertise, quality research and research-based decision-making.

The higher education and scientific policy programme has been approved in the fall (1.12.) 2018 union meeting, and its role is to steer the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers' activities and core objectives for the years 2019–2023.

Research requires stability

Challenge: Research careers comprise uncertain funding, short-term work and unclear forms of financial support. This uncertainty in terms of funding and careers particularly concerns early career and grant-funded researchers.

In the Ministry of Education and Culture's vision for higher education and research 2030, it is stated that "Finland's success and well-being is built on education, know-how, science and technology. We are among the best in a renewal based on skills and know-how."

This vision cannot be realised unless the situation of researchers is improved.

1. The fragmentation of research funding must be abated. A new stabilising funding element must be added to universities' funding models, securing long-term research activities.
2. Research and teaching personnel must be allowed periods that are free of teaching and administrative work to focus on research. Calm conditions for creative work must be ensured for universities.

There have recently been discussions about the definition of an early career researcher, and some of the definitions used are contradictory. This became evident in the Academy of Finland's new project funding programme in fall 2018. The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers considers "early career researcher" to refer those in the first two phases of their research career, in other words doctoral candidates and junior researchers who have recently defended their doctoral theses (i.e. postdoctoral researchers, usually 1–5 years after completing a doctorate). In the union's definition, "early career" does not refer to a researcher's age, but to the stage of his/her research career. The European Charter for Researchers published by the European Commission refers to these researchers as "early-stage researcher".

An early career researcher's position and research funding are typically fixed-term, which is often justified based on their career stage and the fixed-term nature of a research project (e.g. doctoral thesis). The union

therefore notes that the term early career or junior researcher should not be unreasonably extended to cover researchers who have already defended their theses and advanced in their career.

The insufficiency and quality issues of supervision received by early career researchers often result in feelings of dissatisfaction and uncertainty in research work. Supervision at the doctoral thesis stage must be further developed.

As a minimum requirement, a doctoral candidate should have more than one supervisor. If possible, one of the supervisors should come from outside of the university. Supervision should include comprehensive career counselling, considering that approximately 40 per cent of graduating PhDs continue working at universities while the majority moves on to work outside of the university sector. Supervision and career counselling services for researchers who have recently completed their doctorate should also be developed further.

The majority of early career researchers live together with their partners and children, and therefore are responsible for a family. The working conditions and income of early career researchers must stabilised in such a way that they do not place unreasonable pressure on the balance between work and personal life.

The time limits and funding for doctoral training should clarify the rules related to family leave and sickness absences. The “Assistant Regulation” previously given by the Ministry of Education to universities (originally in 1953, amended to cover family leave in the 1980s) obligated universities to extend their doctoral researchers’ fixed-term employment contracts automatically for the duration of e.g. maternity and nursing leave. Unfortunately, this practice now varies between different universities, and family leave is no longer granted automatically but is often a matter of discretion. Nursing leave from research work faces particularly negative attitudes. This creates an unequal career situation for early career researchers and is an indication of poor HR policy at universities. From an equality perspective, prolonged sickness absences and conscription/non-military service should also be taken into account in the time limits and funding of doctoral training.

Doctoral training is an investment for the society, and early career researchers should not be viewed as instant loans.

3. Universities should have a more clearly defined responsibility for doctoral training as a whole, for career coaching and for improving employability of doctorates.

Higher education is changing

Challenge: Students' starting levels and potential for learning are increasingly heterogeneous, which creates a need for additional supervision. However, these factors are not taken into account in any way in work plans or in the numbers of teaching hours defined in universities' collective agreement. Furthermore, the universities' collective agreement does not acknowledge modern learning and teaching methods, student-centred approaches or the role of student supervision as an important part of teaching.

The future of the society relies on professionals trained by universities and universities of applied sciences. The core value and strength of university education lies in the vibrant connection between education and research. When discussing the future and the changing working life, the themes of skills and know-how as well as constant development arise most often.

The higher education policy's key objectives are as follows: to increase the share of those completing a higher education degree, improve the opportunities for continuous learning, facilitate access to higher education institutions and increase the flexibility of the degrees. The Ministry of Education and Culture's vision for higher education and research 2030 states that "higher education is available to everybody. A minimum of 50 per cent of young adults (25–34 years) complete a higher education degree, and flexible and personalised study paths and degree programmes enable continuous learning throughout different stages in life." As Finland's national economy and age structure are not likely to allow for large new investments in expanding student selection for higher education institutes or free access into higher education, it has been proposed that the 50 per cent educational objective is achieved by increasing the selection of subjects available for study in higher education.

The trend of so-called higher education for the masses, targeting new student groups and developing new kinds of educational content, requires skilled personnel but also new resources. Already the inclusion of upper secondary school students, open university students and adult students in training programmes resulting in a degree have created considerable additional work for personnel at higher education institutes. At the same time, insufficient resources and dismissals of staff in various universities have resulted in a situation where there is not enough time for research or its is performed outside of working hours. The personnel at universities and universities of applied sciences is under tremendous strain.

4. The opportunity to conduct research alongside teaching duties must be secured.

Open and digital education

The higher education institutes' digitalisation objectives (see the government programme of Prime Minister Sipilä) do not factor in personnel. In the universities' collective agreement, open and digital education and its planning is not included in teaching work. In its reports (Acatiimi 8/2017, 8/2016), the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers teaching and research career work group has found that this is a factor in why many members of staff feel it is pointless and frustrating to draw up an annual work plan. Terminology must also be developed to better account for new forms of teaching. Concepts fundamentally related to teaching work (e.g. contact teaching) must be redefined and applied in a consistent manner.

In the universities' collective agreement, contact teaching must refer to teaching where the teacher is present, teaching or supervising the students. Online teaching is considered contact teaching insofar as it constitutes active teaching from the student's perspective, meaning the content, supervision and feedback provided by the teacher. The definition of multi-modal teaching must be further refined.

5. The concept of higher education must be redefined at the national level to cover all teaching methods.

Continuous learning

The fundamental idea of continuous learning is that students are given the opportunity to supplement their higher education at any point in their lives. The educational content offered by higher education institutes should be varied and flexible. The objective is to promote both an individual's social mobility as well as their continuous professional development. (EHEA Paris communique 2018.) Creating student-centred learning environments open to all requires that student administration is enhanced and extended and that supervision services for new groups of students and learners are renewed. However, this cannot be done without constant additional resources or without running the risk of reduced educational content and research.

6. The task of continuous learning requires added resources for higher education institutes.

As learners come from highly varied backgrounds, individual learning must be assessed in order to develop content, teaching methods and environments suited to the needs of new student groups. This also requires investments in the development of teaching personnel's skills and know-how. Emphasis should be placed on pedagogical training in implementing the proposed changes.

7. All personnel must have the opportunity to participate in pedagogical studies and supplementary training to support their professional development.

High-quality administrative services and specialist support must be secured

Challenge: The work description and content of administrative personnel is not fully acknowledged and appreciated. The efficient and successful operation of higher education institutes relies on skilled administrative staff whose support services are crucial both in terms of teaching and research activities and the students.

The tasks appointed for libraries all have in common the professional skills related to the organisation, implementation and finding of information. These tasks should be understood in relation to one another, and they should be developed as a whole in universities and at higher education and research institutes.

Budget cuts and staff dismissals have particularly affected the universities' administrative and specialist personnel. The negative impact of this is two-fold: positions available in university administration and specialist positions have decreased, and as administrative tasks increasingly take up teaching and research staff resources, less time is available for actual teaching and research activities. However, research funding application processes and administration, the performance of core tasks, and higher education libraries cannot function without specialist staff.

8. No more budget cuts targeted at specialist and administrative staff at research and higher education institutes.

Specialist and library personnel currently have very limited opportunities for working remotely. More flexibility is needed in terms of different ways of working and time management to better serve planning and creative work tasks. Travel time must be compensated for as time spent working, and sufficient time for recovery must be ensured. The maximum compensation limit for working hours must be removed.

9. Administrative and specialist personnel must have the opportunity to work remotely and working time banks must be implemented.

The status of grant-funded researchers must be improved

Challenge: Perseverance is a prerequisite for high-quality research, but grant recipients are often forgotten when the complexities of working life are considered. However, a majority of researchers conduct significant scientific research over prolonged periods of time or throughout their entire careers funded by various grants.

As public research funding has declined in the 2010s, grants awarded by various foundations have taken on a significant role in supplementing the funding deficit in research. According to the union's membership survey, three out of four academics are or have at some point in their career been funded by grants. This results in a situation where researchers work in the short term, plagued by uncertainty and unclarity about their status both at the workplace and in the society. Finnish foundations should be factored into the universities' funding model, meaning that through such model, universities would benefit from the Finnish grants received by their researchers.

Researchers' daily lives are made difficult by periods of unemployment between different grants. The dismantling of unemployment services for academics and the labour administration's lack of knowledge about the particular characteristics of academic careers have deteriorated the level of labour services available to researchers, while no changes have been made to the Unemployment Allowances Act or its application. *The union's stance is that applying for research grants and all related work must be viewed as actively searching for employment in the current activation model.*

In many ways, grant recipients tend to fall through the cracks in the system, for example when it comes to the Unemployment Allowances Act. From the perspective of the Unemployment Allowances Act, a grant recipient's income is not considered grounds for earnings-related allowance, and in making an allowance decision, earlier salary-based income is always looked at. A grant term likewise does not contribute toward

the employment condition of the earnings-related allowance, although it does extend the review period. In employment services, grant recipients may be mistaken for students or entrepreneurs. This means that grant-funded researchers can face significant obstacles and unequal treatment when seeking employment services.

10. A national action plan must be made to improve the status of grant-funded researchers.

11. The employment services' guidelines in terms of academic unemployment must be clarified and the social security of grant-funded researchers improved.

Grant-funded researchers often become marginalised in the healthcare service system. Healthcare services for higher education students are organised through the Finnish Student Health Service. The personnel working at universities, research institutes and universities of applied sciences is covered by occupational healthcare, like the rest of Finland's workforce. Entrepreneurs and farmers are entitled to occupational healthcare services organised by municipalities. Universities should be encouraged to organise healthcare services for grant-funded researchers, too, in cases where the researchers work at a university and their work contributes to the university's success. In other cases, grant-funded researchers must receive the same level of occupational healthcare services as entrepreneurs and farmers, meaning that along with the social welfare and healthcare reform, the organising of such services will become the municipalities' responsibility. In the second scenario, grant-funded researchers must be added in the Occupational Health Care Act as equal to entrepreneurs and other self-employed persons.

12. Grant-funded researchers should receive occupational healthcare services as part of the occupational healthcare offered by universities, or organised by municipalities in accordance with the new social welfare and healthcare reform.

The annual tax-free grant sum in 2018 is EUR 20,461.72 (EUR 1,705.14 per month). The average monthly income of a grant-funded researcher is approx. EUR 2,000. Subtracted from this are the statutory retirement

pension insurance fee (14 %) and other possible expenses related e.g. to an office, equipment and travel. The remaining monthly income is very small, and its amount is not significantly influenced by the researcher's level of education, in other words, whether the researcher is currently writing his/her dissertation or has already defended it. The sum of the tax-free grant could be increased to EUR 30,000 ensuring a better income for grant-funded researchers (and their families).

13. The sum of the tax-free research grant should be increased to EUR 30,000 per year.

Average monthly earnings of persons with a higher education degree (based on the union's membership survey and survey for early career researchers):

	monthly earnings EUR (median)
Doctors	4,900
A higher education degree working outside of a university	4,000 (persons under 40 years old 3,600)
Postdoctoral researchers employed by a university	3,400
Doctoral candidates employed by a university	2,400
Grant-funded researchers	2,000

The 2009 legislative reform securing statutory retirement pension insurance for grant-funded researchers was very welcome. However, there are still researchers working in Finland whose work was grant-funded before the introduction of the statutory retirement pension insurance system and who, as a consequence, have accumulated very little pension. It would be reasonable to award them a researcher pension equivalent to the artist pension.

14. Preparations for a general researcher pension system should commence in 2019.

Higher education institutes and research environments as great places to work

Challenge: It is unjustifiable that 70 per cent of all teaching and research staff at universities have fixed-term employment contracts, when according to section 2 of the Universities Act, it is the universities' responsibility to provide the highest level of education based on scientific research.

The Employment Contracts Act states the following: Chapter 1, section 3: "An employment contract is valid indefinitely unless it has, for a justified reason, been made for a specific fixed term. Contracts made for a fixed term on the employer's initiative without a justified reason shall be considered valid indefinitely. It is prohibited to use consecutive fixed-term contracts when the amount or total duration of fixed-term contracts or the totality of such contracts indicates a permanent need of labour."

As part of its spring 2018 financial framework negotiations, Prime Minister Sipilä's government stated that it will promote the employment of young unemployed people by preparing changes to the Employment Contracts Act. These changes would allow an employer to enter into a fixed-term employment contract with an under-30-year-old job-seeker who has been continuously unemployed for a minimum of three months without any specific statutory grounds. This is highly problematic. From the perspective of academic employees, providing grounds has not, up to date, had much impact against a fixed-term contracts in the university sector. Our stance is that rather than remove the need for presenting grounds entirely, the section of law in question in the Employment Contracts Act should be clarified and the statutory requirements for presenting grounds increased.

15. The Employment Contracts Act must be clarified. In all cases, the grounds for a fixed-term employment contract must be clearly stated in the contract.

Many studies have concluded that women are systematically paid lower salaries compared to men at universities. This issue could be remedied by increased openness about salaries, meaning that, for example, shop stewards would receive more information about the personnel's salaries.

Promoting occupational well-being

Challenge: There is not much comparable information available on occupational well-being at higher education and research institutes. Various organisations conduct occupational well-being surveys, but the application of survey results is lacking. In academic organisations, management can become overly focused on administration or scientific expertise, resulting in a situation where HR management is overlooked.

Occupational well-being surveys must be comprehensively applied at higher education and research institutes as a management and monitoring tool for promoting occupational well-being and for coping at work. It must be ensured, under changing circumstances in particular, that occupational well-being is maintained among staff and within the work community, and that the work culture is further developed with a healthy and open mindset, thereby promoting the personnel's well-being and longer careers. Best practices in HR management must be promoted and poor ones let go of. In an expert organisation, management must be open and collaborative, and the staff's opportunities for having an influence must be secured.

16. The occupational well-being of personnel working at research and higher education institutes should be regularly monitored at the national level, using comparable data.

More attention should be paid to the psychological strain: increasing workloads, unstable funding, the fragmentation of work and constant change create uncertainty. Increased competition and uncertainty create conflicts in work communities, and members of staff no longer have sufficient resources to develop themselves.

Based on the union's membership survey in 2016, 40 per cent of our members with a higher education degree and as many as 66 per cent of those with a doctoral degree work overtime with no compensation. 64 per cent of the membership survey respondents said they have to work on their primary work tasks at home at least once a week. As a result of the mismatch between the set objectives and resources, work performed at home during evenings and weekends is typical especially in the university sector and in teaching tasks. Supervisors must intervene on work performed outside of the official working hours, as sufficient recovery is crucial for coping at work. Guidelines for reporting harassment must be clear and easily available to all personnel working at higher education and research institutes.

The Finnish scientific community is international

Challenge: While internationality is a key merit for higher education and research institutes, international academics often encounter issues with integration, and too many of the risks of mobility are left for the individual employee to bear.

The internationalisation of Finnish universities is clearly visible in the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers. A third of all new union members are researchers and teachers coming from outside of Finland. However, there are still various issues in the day-to-day work of international staff at universities. In the future, university communities must continue to develop support services for their international staff, and there is also plenty of room for development in the reception services organised together with other local operators.

We as a country must hold onto our international experts. Educating and inducting international early career researchers is a considerable investment for the Finnish society, and therefore more attention should be

paid to the integration of these academics. Our aim must be for international experts who have received their doctoral training in Finland to be also employed in Finland. *Alongside the PoDoCo (Post Docs in Companies) programme, a new national action plan is required for offering early career researchers' comprehensive opportunities to work in private companies, public administration or for third sector employers while writing their doctoral theses. In implementing the programme, particular attention must be paid to international researches' opportunities for establishing contacts into the Finnish society and employment market.*

17. A national programme should be devised to ensure international researchers' comprehensive contacts with the Finnish employment market.

On the other hand, researchers and teachers with a Finnish background are also working abroad, and such international mobility should be made as smooth as possible. Unfortunately, this is currently not the case. The majority of issues are not realised until an employee returns to their country of origin. There are various unclear conditions related to the unemployment security of an employee returning to Finland, emphasising the employee's personal responsibility and the risks they are forced to take in their work. Work performed outside of the EU/ETA or Switzerland does not contribute toward the Finnish employment condition, unless the employee has been sent on an assignment by their employer. On the other hand, the inclusion of work performed outside of the EU/ETA or Switzerland in the Finnish employment condition requires, among other things, that the employee has, immediately upon their return to Finland, worked for a minimum of four weeks (or operated as an entrepreneur for a minimum of four months). Mobility is increasingly emphasised in gauging an academic employee's career development, but in the current system, too many of the risks of mobility are left for the individual employee to bear.

18. Researchers' opportunities for international mobility should be clarified: working abroad should always be considered an acceptable reason for being absent from the Finnish employment market.

Fair play in open science

Challenge: Open science is used to justify a number of things, but the definitions for open science vary. Open science cannot be forced, and the requirements set for open access publications must not put researchers or different areas of study in an unequal position.

The scientific community wishes for research data produced with taxpayers' money to be made widely available free of charge. However, in developing the key principles of open science, fair play in research activities and the equal treatment of researchers must be ensured.

19. The principles of open science should be developed jointly with researchers, universities and research institutes, funders and publishers.

Among others, the European research funding programme Horizon 2020 requires open access publication. The European Commission and the European Research Council (ERC) published their Plan S programme in September 2018 with the objective of making all publications produced with public research funding freely accessible by 2020. Following the European example, the Ministry of Education and Culture has also set open science as one of its objectives, and the Academy of Finland has joined the Plan S programme.

The Ministry of Education and Culture monitors the number of open access publications produced by organisations. Researchers often do not view the parallel recording of their article drafts in their own organisation's research data base as being very important, which makes some open access publications difficult to track down.

20. In promoting open science, care should be taken to ensure that the new requirements and principles applied do not create an unequal situation for researchers due to their funding or field of study.

The employer side has proposed that researchers give up their copyrights to organisations in return for access to materials produced by other researchers, including teaching materials and research data. In this way, all research materials could be made freely accessible. However, open science in no way requires the relinquishing of copyrights to one's own work. This is also emphasised in the European Plan S programme.

The incentives for open science should be directed at researchers, not only universities. The incentives directed at researchers should be concrete, involving e.g. added funding or merits, not just a good reputation. Organisations must offer support and concrete services, making the opening up of research data as easy as possible. In many universities, university libraries are responsible for developing open access research services. Researchers must not be burdened with additional responsibilities, meaning that higher education institutes' libraries require additional resources in order to perform their function in supporting the implementation of open science.