

## **Recommendation on the advancement, funding and career development of young researchers in Austria**

### Executive Summary

I.

With the present recommendation the Austrian Science Council wishes to draw attention to the need for targeted and comprehensive support for young researchers in Austria and for the promotion of comparable initiatives. The recommendation indicates ways in which the measures announced in the governmental programme for the 23<sup>rd</sup> legislative period regarding an increase in the support of young researchers, as well as more extensive advancement of the reserve of Austrian talent can be implemented.

First of all it will be necessary to improve the situation of doctoral students and to take steps to finance them adequately. This will require well-resourced funding programmes; for this the government is responsible. In addition, universities must recognise their responsibility for strategic and responsible human resource development: this will need a focus on the recruitment, training and advancement of young researchers, able to compete internationally. The imminent conclusion of the collective agreement for university staff justifies the production of statements dealing with the need for academic careers to be appropriately designed, and with the collective agreement and its resulting options for action.

The recommendations focus on two areas of action:

- As far as the recruitment and support of young researchers is concerned, secure financial provision, combined with appropriate programmes and stipends, is key. This must be allied with well-designed study conditions and arrangements which ensure the quality of dissertations.

- For those young researchers who do not [intend to] seek employment outside the university, universities must offer performance-oriented career paths, which are at the same time secure, and which make academic careers in Austrian universities attractive for the ablest students.

## II.

Regarding the development, design and support of doctoral studies which lead to a recognised qualification, the Austrian Science Board recommends:

### ❖ To universities

that:

- they establish appropriate procedures for admission to doctoral studies, which ensure that talented young students are motivated to undertake research and that only able candidates are admitted. An adaptation of the legal framework is also required.
- they are careful to ensure that the support of doctoral students is provided by appropriately qualified persons. This requires a deliberate selection of academic staff for doctoral study programmes, the ensuring of good working conditions, and the application of quality assurance mechanisms characterised by a sense of shared collegial responsibility.
- they ensure that during doctoral study it is possible, in addition to the completion of a dissertation, to acquire further qualifications necessary for academic careers within or outwith the university.
- through the establishment of graduate schools (doctoral schools, research schools) - either autonomously, or in collaboration with research funding bodies -

they improve the conditions needed to achieve enhanced performance in internationally competitive research.

- they continue to offer, alongside structured doctoral programmes, the opportunity for individually-tailored doctoral study, ensuring that all such forms of study meet selection and admission criteria that ensure quality, responsible mentoring and competent assessment.

❖ To the Government

that:

- it provides sufficient financial means for a doctoral studies 'quality offensive' to be mounted. Through this, efforts should first of all be made to augment the number of students in doctoral schools and similar institutions, initially to at least 10% of the total.
- it considers providing additional funding for successful doctoral programmes through the mechanism of the institutional performance agreements with the universities.
- to ensure equality of opportunity for young female researchers, it gives further encouragement to those programmes providing support for women, in which the official bodies responsible for decisions on funding take account of this particular point when designing criteria for applications and for decision-making.

### III.

Regarding the design of secure and performance-orientated career paths for young researchers, the Science Board recommends:

❖ To universities

that:

- they introduce a tenure track for qualified young researchers. The forthcoming collective agreement creates an appropriate framework for this.
- By taking care to differentiate on the basis of “rotation positions” and “tenure positions”, they ensure an adequate ratio between these types of positions, so that realistic chances of development and of qualification are kept open for young researchers and that universities can prevent any type of ‘ossification’. In the view of the Science Board the number of tenure positions should in no circumstances constitute more than 50% of the number of academic staff and should perhaps be lower than this.
- they should give particular attention to appointments to tenure positions (positions conditional on the successful completion of an agreed qualification). This should ensure that a university career as an assistant professor opens out only on the basis of already proven, significant academic performance, taking account of broader evidence of competence (e.g. external teaching/research activity). If the collective agreement were to make possible the candidacy of graduates or doctoral students for a tenure track position whose academic qualifications are not yet proven, this could prove to be an error with fatal consequences. It is not yet clear [i.e. prior to the conclusion of the collective agreement] whether the disadvantageous consequences can in all cases be contained through the successful completion of appropriate individual employment agreements.
- they draw on (evidence from) necessary performance evaluations at certain points in the career path (above all for the assessment of the agreed

qualification), using methods of evaluation which are orientated to the highest professional standards and, that they subsequently show the readiness and the sense of responsibility needed to deal with the outcomes consequent on the evaluations.

❖ To the Government

that:

- it supports the conclusion a collective agreement for university staff, not least with regard to carrying forward the university renewal process introduced through UG 2002.
- together with research funding agencies, it examines whether the existing funding possibilities for post docs are sufficient to provide appropriate support for this group of young researchers, who are in a difficult transition period between the completion of academic education and secure employment.