

CONCEPTS

1 THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN UNIVERSITY AS A DESTINATION OF CHOICE FOR ACADEMIC TALENT

This concept note was developed with the expert guidance of Professor Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Macquarie Business School and Dr Victoria Hurth, Independent Pracademic and Fellow, University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership.

2 NEW TRENDS IN RESEARCH(ER) EVALUATION AND THE IMPACT ON ECRs

This concept note was developed with the expert guidance of Professor David Budtz Pedersen, Aalborg University and Dr. Karen Stroobants, CultureBase Consulting, Vice Chair CoARA.

3 ACADEMIC TALENT PROGRAMMES

This concept note was developed with the expert guidance of Head of Research Careers Campus Johanna Stadlbauer, University of Graz and Head of Research and Libraries Dario Pellizzon, University Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

4 WORKING TOGETHER FOR INTERSECTORAL MOBILITY

This concept note was developed with the expert guidance of Dean Tanya Bondarouk, University of Twente / CESAER, Head of Research Christian Kjær Monsson, Danish Industry and Julia Chiossi, Novo Nordisk, MCAA.

5 WORKPLACE CULTURE, DEI AND WELL-BEING

This concept note was developed with the expert guidance of Dr. Marcela Linková, Czech Academy of Science, Sif Lehman Jensen, DEI Officer, DTU - Technical University of Denmark, Policy Officer Senem Sanal Erginel, MSCA Unit, European Commission and Gian Maria Greco, Chair MCAA.

CONCEPT 1: THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN UNIVERSITY AS A DESTINATION OF CHOICE FOR ACADEMIC TALENT

"Business-as-usual" in academia is under growing strain. A rising generation of early-career researchers (ECRs) is challenging institutions that measure success by rankings, citations, or income, rather than meaningful societal contribution. Today's researchers want to work in institutions that reflect their values and empower them to make a difference. In this context, purpose is no longer a "nice to have" - it is an essential shift.

The purpose-driven organisational logic orientates universities to re-anchor themselves in a meaningful, enduring reason to exist. It reshapes their identity, governance, and core activities - research, education, and public engagement - around a clear commitment to serve others and support long-term wellbeing for all (sustainability). Purpose-driven universities strive for a net-positive impact: 1) avoiding harm to the basis for collective long-term wellbeing; and 2) maximising their genuine contribution.

Moving from aspiration to action requires a deep consideration of the governance in place and how it needs to change - starting with the governance direction that shapes all decisions, the institutional reason to exist and the boundaries that will not be crossed. Leaders must start with a clear understanding of the value their institution's current governance creates. What are the expectations and outcomes of their teaching, research, operations, and partnerships? Are they aligned with long-term wellbeing and positive impact, or do they reinforce short-term, extractive norms? From there, universities must build dynamic "theories of change" to guide purpose-led strategy, backed by concrete targets and decision-making parameters. Adaptive feedback and accountability mechanisms must secure alignment between purpose and performance.

- 1 Purpose-driven organisations, including universities, exist to generate a lasting positive impact by contributing their strengths to the collective good (wellbeing) of all people and the planet. A purpose-driven university embeds this goal across research and education through governance.
- 2 Being purpose-driven goes beyond mission statements of general intent: it requires clarity about governance - what value is to be generated and protected for the world, the university and its stakeholders. This organisational direction sets the frame for strategic rethinking of structures, incentives, and all the other ways decision-making is shaped at every level.
- 3 Research suggests that purpose-driven organisations foster greater engagement and retention among students and ECRs because purpose enables meaningful contribution. This is critical in a world where our collective long-term wellbeing is under severe and urgent threat.

Participants are invited to consider: What bold transformations are needed for universities to become purpose-driven and hence judged not as being the best in the world - but the best *for* the world?

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CONCEPT 2: NEW TRENDS IN RESEARCH(ER) EVALUATION AND THE IMPACT ON ECR_s

The 1970s and 1980s marked a shift from assessing researchers through informal peer-based assessment to using metrics such as publication counts, journal impact factors, citation rates. Yet, there is growing recognition that these indicators capture only part of the story, often missing the quality, integrity and societal value of research.

A suite of new methodologies for responsible research assessment is emerging as a more holistic approach, valuing scientific rigour, research quality, collaboration, societal impact and diverse outputs, alongside the responsible use of quantitative indicators. Initiatives such as DORA¹, the Leiden Manifesto² and CoARA³ are prompting research organisations to rethink what they reward and to embrace emerging practices like narrative CVs, qualitative assessment, and frameworks that recognise collaboration, mentoring, open science, and societal engagement.

Responsible assessment is not about abandoning metrics but about broadening assessment approaches. It requires institutions to balance external pressures for visibility and competition with organisational missions, such as promoting diversity and creating genuine impact.⁴

In practice, implementing these reforms demands strong commitment across the research ecosystem, including from research funding and performing organisations, as well as from the people that lead them. It requires engagement at multiple organisational levels to address both practical barriers and deeply rooted cultural norms. Fundamentally, transforming research culture requires that organisations take a deep look at their values and their societal commitment – and design their reward structures accordingly.

- 1 Narrow metrics such as journal impact factors and citation counts often dominate researcher assessment, limiting recognition of diverse contributions and potentially compromising the quality and impact of research.
- 2 Responsible research assessment aims to support collaboration, openness, and engagement with society, providing opportunities for multiple talents.
- 3 One *size does not* fit all: practices and priorities differ across regions and institutions, and flexible, context-sensitive approaches are key to balancing equity and institutional needs.

Participants are invited to discuss the progress, challenges and early outcomes of efforts to embed responsible research assessment in practice, to explore how these changes can be sustained, and to consider their implications on the career paths and opportunities for early career researchers.

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¹) DORA: [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#) ²) [Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics](#) ³) [CoARA: Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment](#) ⁴) These ideas will also be explored under the conference focus areas Workplace culture, DEI, and well-being' and 'The purpose-driven university'.

CONCEPT 3: ACADEMIC TALENT PROGRAMMES

Across Europe, universities have started to invest in talent programmes – supported by EU schemes, national and regional authorities, private foundations and institutional resources – to attract, develop, and retain promising researchers. Initiatives such as UiB Ferd¹, FLF Development Network², UCPH Forward³ and Research Career Campus Graz⁴ are examples that combine mentoring, coaching, training in research management and leadership, guidance on funding strategies, and opportunities to build interdisciplinary networks.

For early and mid-career researchers, talent programmes help clarify career paths, set goals, and strengthen qualifications, equipping them to conduct high-impact research, and secure competitive grants. At the same time, they offer universities a strategic means to enhance research excellence, strengthen reputation, and develop capacity for future needs.

Talent programmes reflect a rich diversity of aims and formats. Some fast-track high-potential researchers toward academic leadership, while others support a broader range of ambitions, including careers beyond academia. As talent development evolves in the EU, questions arise about how to define access, measure success, balance individual achievement with collective contributions, and look beyond quantitative metrics (e.g., publication counts)⁵ to assess long-term impact on skills and career development.

- 1 Talent development programmes are strategic tools to align individual researcher growth with institutional priorities and long-term capacity building – both by supporting researchers' careers, and by strengthening institutions through the development of future research leaders.
- 2 Initiatives vary widely in scope and design, raising important questions about how to balance selectivity, inclusiveness, and support across different career ambitions and career stages.
- 3 Assessing the impact of talent programmes requires looking beyond quantitative indicators and understand how they contribute to 1) strengthening **researchers'** careers, 2) improving **institutional** research environment and talent management, 3) adapting **funder** programmes, while ensuring long-term planning, stable rules and adequate resources.

Participants will hear institutional examples of talent programmes and contribute to shaping future recommendations for inclusive, impactful talent initiatives that foster sustainable research careers and strengthen Europe's research and innovation capacity. How can talent programmes recognise diverse talents and provide sustainable, fulfilling career paths while balancing selectivity, inclusiveness, and tailored support across career stages? How can these initiatives align individual researcher development with institutional priorities and future leadership needs?

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¹) [UiB Ferd Career Center for Early Stage Researchers](#) ²) [FLF Development Network - Future Leaders Fellows Development Network](#)
³) [UCPH Forward, University of Copenhagen](#) ⁴) [Research Careers Campus Graz, University of Graz](#) ⁵) Topic also discussed under the conference topic: 'New trends in research evaluation and the impact on ECRs'

CONCEPT 4: WORKING TOGETHER FOR INTERSECTORAL MOBILITY

The EU recognises intersectoral mobility and talent circulation as vital to a resilient European knowledge economy and to fostering dynamic, attractive research careers. When researchers move between academia, industry and other sectors, they gain versatile skills, broaden career prospects and fuel innovation.

Yet, despite this potential, relatively few researchers move beyond academia. Indeed, while most R&D personnel in the EU work in the business sector¹, the MORE4 survey² found that only a quarter of doctoral graduates in EU higher education have experience beyond academia. Nearly a third of researchers collaborating with non-academic partners do so as a result of previous intersectoral mobility². More recent data from eight EU universities suggest some positive change, with over half of recent PhDs transitioning at least once to non-academic roles³.

Although initiatives such as EURAXESS and EU funding programmes (e.g., MSCA) have improved access to positions and resources, significant barriers persist: slower academic timelines compared to industry; limited institutional recognition of intersectoral experience; difficulties transferring benefits and professional status; conflicts over data and IP; and limited funding for industry retention after projects. At the same time, researchers are *motivated* to pursue intersectoral mobility by factors such as professional networking, practical industry exposure, and the desire to contribute to society².

- 1 Intersectoral mobility between academia, industry, government, and other sectors fosters knowledge exchange, boosts innovation capacity, enhances the societal impact of research, and strengthens researchers' employability across sectors.
- 2 Several barriers restrict mobility, including limited institutional recognition, limited transferability of benefits and professional status, cultural differences around intellectual property (IP) and publication priorities, and insufficient access to career support, positions or research funding.
- 3 Better integration of career pathways and supportive cross-sector cultures are essential for an attractive and sustainable research and innovation ecosystem capable of retaining research talent.

Participants are invited to consider: How can Europe design policies and institutional strategies that make intersectoral mobility a valued and integral part of research careers and research(er) evaluation?⁴ Addressing this challenge requires better insight into mobility trends and closer collaboration among universities, industry, public bodies, and research funders to remove barriers and enable smooth cross-sector transitions.

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¹) [Eurostat \(2023\): R&D personnel by sector](#) ²) [MORE4 study](#): Support data collection and analysis concerning mobility patterns and career paths of researchers, European Commission Directorate-General for Research & Innovation, PPMI, IDEA Consult and WIFO, February 2021 ³) [Boman et al \(2025\). Determinants of the career pathways of doctorate holders: Evidence from eight European universities. Higher Education](#) ⁴) Research(er) evaluation is also discussed under conference topic: 'New trends in research evaluation and the impact on ECRs'

CONCEPT 5: WORKPLACE CULTURE, DEI AND WELL-BEING

The academics of tomorrow, early-career researchers (ECRs) face mounting pressures that affect their mental well-being, professional satisfaction, and sense of belonging. While institutions often express a commitment to attracting and retaining diverse talent, challenges within workplace culture can persist. Factors such as employment insecurity, inequitable practices, bullying, abuse, gender based violence, and hyper-competitive research environments (e.g., intense pressure to publish or to attract external funding) can negatively impact the well-being of ECRs and affect their long-term engagement with academia. In turn, leadership and senior management may fall short in taking full accountability or advancing meaningful structural reforms.

Mental health and well-being, along with the promotion of diverse and inclusive workplaces, are thus gaining traction on university campuses, alongside growing recognition that **proactive**, system-wide strategies - rather than individual-focused or **reactive** approaches - more effectively foster well-being and prevent burnout, depression, stress, and anxiety, with positive effects on performance and productivity.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are not parallel agendas to mental health promotion - they are foundational to how individuals experience their workplace. Structural inequalities related to gender, race, disability, language or socio-economic background intensify pressure on historically underserved groups, who often feel compelled to exceed expectations simply to gain equal recognition and belonging. As universities become more diverse, transforming academic culture requires more than policy statements. It calls for institution-wide structural change, embedding inclusion, well-being and intersectionality into policy, leadership, and daily life, while fostering psychological and physical safety and a true sense of belonging.

- 1 ECRs face workplace cultures often shaped by precarity, inequality, and hypercompetition. This challenges well-being and risks driving exclusion rather than engagement. These effects are especially pronounced for ECRs from minoritised groups.
- 2 Effective mental health and well-being promotion in universities demands a whole-system approach, i.e., moving beyond individual interventions to address the structural conditions that shape how researchers experience work, inclusion, and belonging in academia.
- 3 Progress in academic culture depends on establishing and implementing DEI policies that address cultural and behavioural change, supported by inclusive leadership and structural reform to foster psychological and physical safety and long-term well-being for all.

Participants will be invited to explore: How can universities build, encourage and safeguard inclusive, equitable and sustainable environments that support and preserve well-being, while making ECRs feel valued and empowered? What actions go beyond statements to achieve real change? The discussion will offer recommendations for institutions who recognise that caring for the people who make research possible is an essential part of advancing research excellence.

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