
REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON IMPLEMENTING THE BRATISLAVA DECLARATION OF YOUNG RESEARCHERS IN IRELAND

Workshop held on 22 March 2017, Dublin



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn



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Research**

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Bratislava Declaration of Young Researchers (BDYR) is written by young researchers and calls on member states and the European Commission (EC) to recognise the special role that young researchers play in the wider European research landscape.

The Irish Research Council organised a workshop on the implementation of this Declaration in Ireland in collaboration with Dr Shane Bergin (UCD), a co-author of BDYR. A cross-section of early career researchers from pre-PhD to post-PhD stages was invited as well as other relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI), Irish Universities Association (IUA), funding agencies, Deans of Graduate Studies, and representatives of higher education institutions' Research Offices. Overall, almost 70 attendees from across the country participated in the workshop.

The event was formally opened by the Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation, John Halligan TD. The Minister spoke about the need to harness the energy and ideas of young researchers to future-proof Ireland in an increasingly competitive and globalised world. The Minister encouraged the early career researchers present to actively engage in developing suggestions for how Ireland could realise the scholarly environment envisaged by the Declaration. The Minister looked forward to receiving a report of the workshop.

The workshop was moderated by Dr Conor O'Carroll, formerly Director of Research in the IUA. Dr Lynn Kamerlin (Uppsala University), another of the co-authors of the Declaration, made a presentation on the background and substance of the document. The workshop included a panel discussion, comprising Dr Eucharía Meehan (Irish Research Council), Dr John Donovan (EARMA, Dublin Institute of Technology), together with early career researchers Dr Sarah Hayes (University of Limerick) and Dr Mairead Foody (Dublin City University). The panel discussed the Declaration and its relevance to the Irish context. Discussion points included how conditions for young researchers have changed over the past 20 years, persisting issues and priorities for the near future. Following the panel session, the workshop participants engaged actively in roundtable discussions on individual areas of the Declaration. Outcomes of the individual roundtable discussions were shared with the forum by rapporteurs, and the workshop concluded with an overall summary of the proceedings, presented by Dr Andrea Valova (Irish Research Council).

As the workshop organiser, the Irish Research Council has prepared this summary of the roundtable discussions. Suggestions that have the potential to aid in the implementation of the Declaration in Ireland are outlined in the summary table below. While potential enablers of individual measures are outlined, these are initial suggestions intended to inspire further reflection and action by not only institutional and other stakeholders but also by early career researchers themselves. It is recognised that early career researchers need to take the initiative to ensure that they avail of existing resources and supports, be they available within their HEI/employer, local or professional community, or online.

The full text of the Bratislava Declaration of Young Researchers (BDYR) is available [online](#). The summary table which follows is organised thematically, whilst also referencing the relevant part(s) of the Declaration. In addition, those stakeholders which are considered enablers in successfully implementing actions are proposed for each action point. The relevant part(s) of the Declaration referenced in the table are:



1

Enabling great
people and ideas



2

Sustainable and
transparent career
trajectories



3

A diverse, collaborative,
interdisciplinary,
open, and ethical
research environment



4

Healthy
work-life balance

Suggestions for core research and career development support

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
A Training and Career Development			
1	Training and career development plan to be mandatory in all funding schemes where early career researchers are to be funded (including project funding)	All funders, including local schemes in HEIs; Principal Investigators (PIs). Cost neutral	1
2	Provide dedicated funding for training and career development within funding schemes, both within awards made to individual early career researchers and within PI-led projects	All funders including local schemes in HEIs; early career researchers should articulate training and career development goals within their own funding applications where possible. Can be cost neutral	1; 2
3	Provide training for supervisors and mentors to enable them to support early career researchers in their career development and training more effectively	HEIs, by offering training to supervisors and mentors; supervisors and mentors, by availing of existing resources and opportunities within their HEIs and externally (NAIRTL, VITAE...); funders, by exploring running joint training opportunities	2
4	Provide mandatory modules on career development for all PhD students	HEIs, by maintaining/enhancing their portfolio of graduate skills development; PhD students, by availing of existing opportunities. Measures in line with the relevant national policy	2
5	Early career researchers should avail of existing training opportunities available at their HEI as well as externally, such as within the framework of structured PhD programmes, staff development opportunities existing in their HEI, or training opportunities offered by their funding agency	Early career researchers, by actively engaging with providers of existing opportunities; supervisors/mentors, HEIs, funding agencies, by providing better and targeted information about existing opportunities. Can be cost neutral	2; 3
6	Provide training for non-traditional career trajectories at HEIs	HEIs; funding agencies	2
7	Specialised research career manager appointed within all HEIs	HEIs	2
8	A career restart programme for those re-entering academia from industry, or vice versa	HEIs; funding agencies; industry partners	2; 3; 4
9	National website for all early career researchers: one-stop shop for information on skills, training, careers, advice. Moderated forum; peer support	HEIs; funding agencies. Ongoing maintenance of the website once set up would be critical	1; 2; 3; 4
10	Offer induction sessions for higher education students before they start doctoral studies, to prepare them better for the demands of fourth level education and research	HEIs; experienced PhD and PD researchers; third-level students by availing of opportunities. Can be cost neutral (open existing sessions to final years undergraduate students/taught postgraduate students; change timing and content of sessions that are already offered; offer sessions during open days)	1; 2
11	Provide support to early career researchers beyond the funding period	Funding agencies. Some measures can be cost neutral (i.e. opening career development events to past award holders)	2
12	Increase awareness of career options while in higher education. Ensure that PhD students start considering their career options and preparing for post PhD from early stages of doctoral studies	HEIs; mentors/supervisors; early career researchers. Some measures can be cost neutral (i.e. include in institutional policies: research students' progress monitoring mechanisms; supervisor training)	2; 3; 4
13	Self-awareness of value of the doctoral degree and relevance of disciplinary and transferrable skills to employers beyond academia	Early career researchers; HEIs; funding agencies. Can be cost neutral	2; 3; 4

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
A Training and Career Development [continued]			
14	Limit the number of early career researchers who can be supervised/mentored by one supervisor/mentor, to help to ensure high quality supervision/mentorship	HEIs; funding agencies. Can be cost neutral with more balanced distribution	2
15	Support access to research careers for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (provide family support, work with disadvantaged schools, eliminate unconscious bias)	HEIs; funding agencies. No substantial costs to implement some systemic changes (e.g. tackling unconscious bias at assessment stage). Cost implication for financial supports (e.g. rent contributions, living grants)	2; 3; 4
16	Provide training on publication strategies	Supervisors/mentors; HEIs; funding agencies. Can be cost neutral as part of existing training/mentorship	2
B Structure of Funding Schemes			
17	Extend duration of funding for early stage researchers past PhD: postdocs should be at least 3 years, possibly up to 5 years	Funding agencies	1; 2; 4
18	Roll out a system of funding schemes to support career progression, whereby gaps existing currently will be covered	Funding agencies. Coordination among funding agencies critical	1; 2
19	Parameters for funding schemes should recognise the different disciplinary practices and approaches	Funding agencies	1
C Interdisciplinary Research and Mobility			
20	Run funding schemes to support interdisciplinary research, including support to networking activities	Funding agencies; HEIs	3
21	Establish more clarity around the definition of interdisciplinarity	Funding agencies; HEIs; mentors/supervisors and early career researchers, by engaging in discussion about interdisciplinary research	3
D Research Performance Assessment			
22	Career progression assessment criteria based on core competencies (e.g. management, leadership) and/or more expansive criteria and not "one-size-fits-all" approach	HEIs/research performing organisations (RPOs)	2; 3
23	Revision of performance criteria to include more up-to-date skills/competencies, e.g. public outreach, coding, formal recognition of teaching, grant-writing, etc.	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers	2
24	Consider Altmetrics as an option for measuring research performance	HEIs	2
E Work–Life Balance and Mobility			
25	Increase awareness of existing supports around mobility (visa fast-track and similar)	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers; funding agencies; early career researchers. Can be cost neutral/low cost measures	2; 4
26	Mandatory regulation of working hours for all research team members	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers	4
27	Maternity provisions for postgraduate research students	HEIs/RPOs, employers of early career researchers; funding agencies; parent departments	4
28	Maternity/family leave provisions for contract researchers	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers; funding agencies	4
29	Increase in or provision of funding for childcare	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers; funding agencies	4

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
E Work–Life Balance and Mobility [continued]			
30	More opportunities for part-time PhD and research positions	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers; funding agencies. Can be cost neutral	4
31	Funding for return to research opportunities after short breaks (1–2 years), e.g. along the lines of Marie Curie Career Restart	HEIs/RPOs and other employers of early career researchers; funding agencies	4
32	Provision of counselling and well-being services specific to the needs of early career researchers	HEIs; research office; early career researchers	4
33	Retention of pension contributions when moving internationally or between institutions	Institutions and employers	4
34	Portable funding, to facilitate national and international mobility	Funding agencies; HEIs. Cost neutral	4
35	Increase individual responsibility for people around us (e.g. impact of peer pressure)	Researchers at all stages; support from HEIs and other employers. Cost neutral	4
36	Social support: provide opportunities for social interaction and peer support	HEIs and other employers; researchers at all stages. Can be cost neutral	4
37	Provide workshops on well-being, stress management and similar	HEIs and other employers; funding agencies; early career researchers by availing of existing opportunities	4

Suggestions for broadening career opportunities

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
38	Ensure that employers beyond academia recognise the value of PhD	Funding agencies; HEIs; outside-academia employers	2; 4
39	Offer placements beyond academia, particularly in industry and NGO sector, e.g. one month of non-academic placement in all funding schemes	Industry or outside-academia partners; funding agencies; HEIs	2; 3; 4
40	Where placements beyond academia are provided, offer experience in various roles within a placement	Industry or outside-academia partners; funding agencies; HEIs	2; 3; 4
41	Strengthen ties outside academia: industry representatives could seek suitable research candidate from within existing or prospective PhDs or postdocs	Industry or outside-academia partners; funding agencies. Cost neutral	1; 2; 3

Suggestions for measures to engage young people

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
42	Restore Science as a compulsory subject at Junior Certificate level	Department of Education and Skills, and National Council for Curriculum Assessment	1
43	Engage second-level students in longer-term research projects that foster student-led science, creative and critical thinking and experimental lab work, not overly-directed one-off experiments and rote-based learning	Department of Education and Skills, and National Council for Curriculum Assessment; secondary level teachers	1
44	Critical thinking and philosophy to be mandatory and integral part of curriculum	Department of Education and Skills, and National Council for Curriculum Assessment; secondary level teachers	1

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
45	Introduce changes in teachers' education and continuous professional development to enhance their approach to teaching of science and research	HEIs with teacher training courses; Teaching Council	1
46	Increase uptake in BT Young Scientist and similar competitions; introduce a similar competition beyond STEM disciplines	Secondary level teachers; parents. Cost neutral	1
47	School visits and/or placements by researchers in primary and secondary schools: demonstrate experimentation and research	Researchers at all stages of career; HEIs; secondary schools/teachers. Small costs involved in facilitating visits (transport, etc.)	1
48	Visits and/or placements by researchers to undergraduate students: discuss nature of research careers	Researchers at all stages of career; HEIs. Small costs involved in facilitating visits (transport, etc.)	1
49	More emphasis on transferrable skills at second level (writing skills, referencing, critical thinking, how to communicate one's work)	Department of Education and Skills, and National Council for Curriculum Assessment; secondary level teachers. Cost neutral	1

Suggestions for change at wider European level

ITEM NO.	SUGGESTED MEASURE	ENABLERS	BDYR AREA
50	Junior ERC grants to be awarded not on the basis of past achievements but on promising ideas	European Commission (ERC). Would require additional investment in ERC budget.	1
51	Extend duration of funding provided to early career researchers to 3 years minimum under all schemes	European Commission; ERC. Would require costs entailed in extending existing funding streams < 3 years	1; 4
52	EU-level agreement with major academic publishers to tackle high cost of publication in open access journals	European Commission; major academic publishers. Would require coordination and negotiation with publishers around related costs	3
53	Ring-fencing of funding for career development for all members of research teams (i.e. not just PIs) within all EU-funded projects	European Commission; PIs on EU-funded projects. Cost neutral	2

Conclusion and Next Steps

The workshop, organised by the Irish Research Council, proved to be a very valuable exercise in capturing the perspectives of early-career researchers and those that support them. A number of positives were taken from the day, not least the huge enthusiasm and passion of the many researchers present for their work and the new knowledge and discoveries they are helping to bring to fruition. In addition, it was recognised that the Irish research and innovation system has been transformed in a relatively short space of time, not least as a result of large-scale initiatives such as PRTL. However barriers remain to ensuring that we retain and attract the very brightest talent for the research and innovation eco-system. This workshop facilitated those early-career researchers 'at the coalface' to identify and discuss those barriers.

The Council is particularly grateful to Minister of State John Halligan TD for opening the workshop and his continuing interest in Ireland's early-career researchers and young scientists. We will present this report to the Minister in due course. In addition to publishing and raising awareness of this report, the Council will circulate it to relevant stakeholders within Ireland. It will also send the report to EU Commissioner Carlos Moedas. The Council wishes to thank all those who gave of their time and contributed to the workshop.