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CAREER VIEW

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A more attractive career

Eurodoc seeks better conditions for graduate students.

Koen van Dam

While member states of the European Union (EU) stress the importance of developing knowledge-based economies, they often overlook those likely to play a crucial role: highly educated early-stage researchers.

That was the conclusion of a meeting in London of more than 50 delegates at the annual conference held by Eurodoc, the European council of doctoral candidates and other junior researchers. This federation now consists of organizations from 28 countries, making it a strong partner for the European Commission and the European University Association, among others.

In 2005, the commission adopted the European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, with recommendations on making research a more attractive career. Much work remains, particularly in recognition of doctoral candidates as professionals instead of students. Training for research by performing research, they deserve a fair salary and social security, including pension rights and parental leave.

At the meeting, the delegates started a campaign to promote the Charter and Code. Universities and governments should realize that in a competitive global market, talent will only stay if treated well. Many young researchers still plan to leave for the United States to gain higher status and better career prospects.

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In a keynote lecture, Cornelis-Mario Vis from the European Commission's directorate-general of research advocated a single, open and attractive labour market for researchers — whose mobility is often limited by legal and administrative obstacles.

Eurodoc is enthusiastic about proposals such as the €4.75-billion (US$6.38-billion) People programme, building on the highly successful Marie Curie fellowships to support researcher mobility. We plan to contribute to the EU's European Research Area Green Paper, which should push for more concrete, even more enforceable, measures. Perhaps signing the Charter and Code should become a necessary condition for an institute to participate in EU research funding programmes.

Delegates also decided to conduct a Europe-wide survey on working conditions and career paths later this year. We hope to determine an overview of the different doctoral models and point out best practices.

Koen van Dam is the president of Eurodoc and a PhD candidate at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

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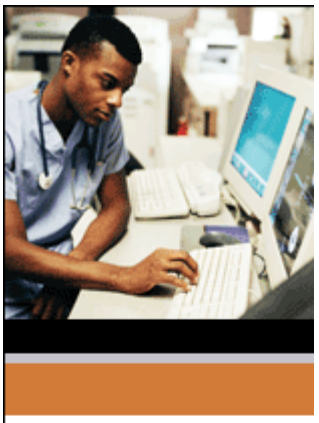

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