Transforming academic careers in Latvia
Implementation roadmap proposal

This implementation roadmap proposal is Output 3 of the project: "*Support for Institutionalising the New Academic Careers Framework in Latvia*" (23LV24) which is funded by the European Union's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and implemented by OECD together with the European Commission's Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM). It proposes actions that can be implemented in the coming years to support the success of the reforms and lasting improvements in academic staff conditions and career attractiveness in Latvia. It builds on research and analysis conducted throughout the project as well as discussions with Latvian stakeholders, academic leaders, and international experts.

The actions proposed in this roadmap are selected for their feasibility in the Latvian context and their potential to support effective implementation of academic career reforms. They are organised into three focus areas: continuously improving academic staff working conditions at institution level, updating and aligning the policy framework, and promoting at all levels collaboration and practice sharing among institutions and staff.

The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

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Introduction

Context

Latvia has faced persistent challenges building up its capacity to perform research and contribute to innovation, because of the low and decreasing share of doctorate holders in the population, an ageing academic workforce, and unattractive conditions in the academic career. These challenges make it difficult for the higher education and science sector to adequately renew and expand its academic and research staff. To address this situation, **Latvia is in the process of comprehensively reforming its academic career framework.**

The reform proposals emerged from the analysis, research study visits and consultations undertaken in a previous EU-funded technical support project carried out between 2020 and 2022 (World Bank, 2022[1]). Based on these recommendations, Latvian public authorities and stakeholders developed some foundational principles for the academic career reforms. The reforms promise to strengthen Latvian higher education institutions and research organisations and their staff, making them more attractive partners for business, research and joint education development. **The reforms are also intended to gradually and continuously increase Latvia's attractiveness as a destination for academics and researchers.**

The academic career reforms are ambitious and multidimensional. The required legislative amendments and new regulations required for the doctoral education reform were concluded in 2024 (Saeima, 2024[2]; Saeima, 2024[3]) and implementation of the reforms within institutions is well underway. . Several other reforms to the academic career are in pilot stages or under development, including new definitions for academic staff grades and roles, expansion of postdoctoral education opportunities and tenure track positions, new criteria for recruitment, promotion and workload allocation of academic staff, salary increases and modalities for retirement. Furthermore, **several wider reforms of the Latvian higher education and research system, encompassing governance, accreditation and funding, are underway**, many of which have implications for the work and careers of academic staff.

As Table 1 highlights, **the academic career reforms, together with wider sectoral reforms, create a very dynamic context** for policymakers and a challenging operational environment for institutions and academic staff adapting to the rapidly changing regulatory context. As is the case in many countries across Europe, Latvian authorities are facing the challenge of building institutional capacity to effectively absorb and coordinate financing for higher education and research coming from various sources, including EU funds, state funds, and private sector contributions. It is vital to effectively manage and align these funding streams to achieve broad policy objectives and to avoid a piecemeal and unsustainable implementation of reforms.

The previous technical support project on academic careers in Latvia implemented by the European Commission and the World Bank laid out several scenarios for implementation of the reforms to academic careers and doctoral education. These ranged from a full comprehensive implementation with substantial funding support to incremental implementation without any additional funding (World Bank, 2022[1]).

Given the wider context and its funding situation, **Latvia has proceeded on an incremental basis with the reforms.** Officials and stakeholders have succeeded in backing the inception of many of them with funding from state and European sources, despite a difficult environment for securing financing. Recognising that an incremental approach with uncertain commitment of resources risks the long-term sustainability of the reforms, Latvian state authorities have made commitments to continue improving the financial situation in the sector as resources allow and has engaged international assistance wherever possible to provide technical support and monitor progress on implementation. The current TSI project is an example of this assistance and demonstrates Latvia's sustained commitment to progress on reform

implementation despite challenging conditions. One of the key deliverables of this project is to propose a roadmap of actions to guide and support the implementation process in the coming years, which this document presents and explains in detail.

Table 1.. Summary of recent and ongoing reforms and policy initiatives in the Latvian higher education sector with implications for academic careers

Reform/policy initiative	Potential implication(s) for academic careers	Status
Reform of the **internal governance structures** of higher education institutions commenced in 2020 with consequent changes to the Law on Higher Education Institutions in 2021. This reform transfers greater responsibility for governance and administration from the Ministry to the institutions themselves.	HEIs need to cultivate greater leadership, administrative and management skills in staff, in order to meet their new responsibilities. Academic staff have potential to follow more differentiated career tracks.	Completed
Mergers and consolidation of the higher education sector to promote excellence, improve the quality of higher education and science, and support efficient use of HEIs' resources in a challenging demographic context (Eurydice, 2024[4])	Academic staff need to adapt to the reorganised work environment, new colleagues and new management and administrative structures	Completed
Introduction of **a new model of doctoral education**, providing employer status and guaranteed salary for doctoral candidates, as well as the organisation of doctoral education in central administrative units within institutions. (Likumi, 2020[5])	Improve financial security and employment conditions for early-stage researchers, enhance quality and consistency of support and creating clearer onward pathways into academic and research careers.	Legislative changes completed; implementation ongoing
Multidimensional reforms to the academic career framework including new definitions for academic staff grades and roles, expansion of postdoctoral education opportunities, the rollout of tenure track positions, new criteria for recruitment and promotion, new criteria for workload allocation of academic staff, salary increases and modalities for retirement. (Cabinet of Ministers, 2025[6])	Clearer and more structured career pathways and new opportunities for advancement, increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of academic careers in Latvia.	Concept fully agreed and implementation proceeding on an incremental basis
Redevelopment of the state higher education standard to improve the labour market relevance of study programmes. This design of the revised standard commenced in 2023 as a co-created "innovation sprint" involving stakeholders from across the sector and public officials (Eurydice, 2024[4])	Academic staff may need to more frequently revise curricula, undertake more regular professional development and ensure connections with business and industry to ensure labour market relevance of their teaching activities.	Ongoing
Latvia's National Development Plan 2021-2027 ("Knowledge and skills for personal and national development") has set national objectives and actions focused on further developing Latvia's specialisation areas defined in its Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3), promoting excellence in science, and taking longer-term, more strategic approach to investing in national research and innovation programmes (Saeima, 2020[7]).	Staff have more opportunities to conduct and participate in research, but also increased pressure to improve research productivity, produce demonstrable evidence of the impact of their research activity and contribute to innovation	Ongoing

A **new model for financing HEIs from public funds** started as a pilot process in late December 2024, with pilots in three institutions. The reform will further develop the existing three pillar model for state funding of higher education and will entail the replacement of state funding for a defined number of study places each year to a block grant for core activities, complemented by performance funding. The reform aims to permit HEIs greater autonomy in the use of their funds while requiring better performance in education and research and more strategic alignment (Latvian Cabinet of Ministers, 2024[8])	May potentially create more job stability and predictability for staff, assuming appropriate funding levels are provided through the new system. It may also more closely connect performance criteria set for staff to performance criteria that the state will use to allocate funding.	In pilot stage
A **new model of cyclical accreditation of HEIs and programmes** will be gradually introduced from 2025 to 2027. The new model is expected to reduce administrative burden associated with current external quality assessment procedures, which require accreditation of individual study fields within institutions. Institutions will be assessed regularly and receive a comprehensive evaluation of their operations. (Latvian Ministry of Education and Science, 2025[9])	May reduce the amount of time academic and professional staff spend on administrative tasks designed to meet state regulations. Institution-level accreditation may also lead to greater clarity for current and prospective academic staff on recruitment, promotion and professional development policies and practices within HEIs.	In development

Source: National sources cited throughout the table

Purpose and scope

This roadmap seeks to address the implementation issues that were identified during fact-finding and diagnostic activities of the current TSI project. It has been developed following a comprehensive assessment by the project team, carried out in 2024, of the readiness of the Latvian authorities and state-founded higher education institutions and research institutes to implement the reforms (see Output 4 of this project). It also draws on information gathered during 2025 on the progress of reforms within institutions (see Progress Reports One and Two) and practices and policies in other European countries that have relevance for Latvia.

Recent reforms to institutional governance, several mergers of higher education institutions and reform of the state financing and external quality assurance models (Table 1) are strengthening the capacity of Latvian higher education institutions and provide more freedom for them to adopt practices that create attractive working conditions for academic staff. On the other hand, the scale of reforms and their simultaneous initiation creates administrative and operational challenges. Policymakers and institution leaders remain highly concerned about fragmentation of funding streams to the system and the long-term sustainability of financing the reforms, while current pressures on the state budget may limit the ability of the state to continue funding some initiatives at the same level after their pilot phases end.

The roadmap proposal adopts a realistic scope and perspective, acknowledging the context outlined above and the various structural constraints Latvia currently faces, while identifying actions that can preserve and build upon the momentum of ongoing reform efforts. It draws on experience from other countries, building on Latvia's ongoing successful engagement with international peers, and its increasing involvement in European initiatives. It strongly highlights, given the challenging context, the need for national actors to learn from practices in other countries, but also, most importantly, from each other. The Community of Practice for academic staff, piloted and launched under the TSI project, is highlighted in several actions of this roadmap as a potential mechanism for dialogue, collaboration, and professional development.

This roadmap is not intended to be overly prescriptive, but rather to provide a scaffold for further discussion and adaptation to external conditions as they develop. That said, the proposed actions aim to address the

key challenges relating to reform implementation as identified by the project team. Moving forward with these actions can help Latvia to successfully complete the implementation of reforms, promote their positive impact and further strengthen the public higher education and research sectors. Where relevant, interesting policies or practices from other European countries are highlighted that may provide some inspiration for Latvia. These policies are summarised as case studies in Annex A.

The starting point for this roadmap is taken as the beginning of 2026, following the approval of the conceptual note for the academic career reforms by the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers in November 2025– a culmination of several years of development, discussion and negotiation across the Latvian higher education and research system. The related legislative amendments are planned to be submitted to the Saeima for consideration in early 2026 and enter into force by the end of 2026. Applying exact timing for each of the proposed actions in the roadmap is challenging in Latvia's very dynamic policy environment. However, for each objective, a distinction is made between short-term actions (2026 - 2027) and medium/long-term actions (2028 onwards). The choice of time periods aligns with the plans of Latvian authorities to complete many important aspects of current reforms by the end of 2027 and with Latvia's broader policy planning cycle, the next period of which starts in 2028.

Roadmap focus areas and actions

The following sections propose a series of objectives and associated actions that aim to address implementation challenges identified throughout this project and support the success of academic reforms in Latvia. Objectives are organised around three broad focus areas identified by the project team as key to improving career prospects and working conditions of academic staff in Latvia. These are (1) continuously improving academic staff conditions within institutions; (2) putting a supportive policy framework in place; and (3) sharing practices and working together for the benefit of academic staff. The sections below provide a brief description of each of the focus areas, objectives and actions contained in the roadmap, followed by Table 2 which summarises the proposed actions.

Focus area: Continuously improving academic staff working conditions within institutions

Evidence gathered during this project shows that, while all institutions are making progress with the academic career reforms, they vary in terms of capacity and resources for implementation, reflecting their diverse missions, sizes, governance, cultures and staff profiles. In particular, the project team noted fragmentation of practice within institutions relating to the introduction of the reforms, challenges with integrating new recruits joining under different conditions to existing staff and ensuring that the benefits of reforms diffuse throughout the system . The following sections propose **two objectives and associated actions for institutions,** which they could use to benchmark existing practice and/or inform their future internal policies.

Objective 1: Ensuring a smooth and effective transition to the new doctoral education model in all institutions

Latvia's new doctoral education model represents a significant shift in its higher education and research system. Granting doctoral candidates employee status and embedding doctoral training in institution-level doctoral schools can consolidate supports for students and increase the quality, transparency, and attractiveness of doctoral study in Latvia. At the same time, information gathered by the project team indicates a lack of clarity and different interpretations of the implications of the new measures between and even within institutions. Many institutions may also lack the critical mass to sustain a full suite of courses and services for doctoral students. Efforts at this stage to coordinate approaches, share resources, and

communicate clearly across institutions, as outlined in the actions below, can help build a more integrated and doctoral education provision and ensure consistent support and conditions for all doctoral candidates.

Action 1.1: Provide pre-reform candidates with equal access to resources developed through the new doctoral schools

The transition period to the new system of doctoral education creates a two-tier system between "old" and "new" doctoral students, with candidates admitted under the previous regime having less advantageous funding conditions and retaining student status. Many pre-reform candidates reported a feeling of demoralisation to the project team, which may culminate in large shares of them choosing to discontinue their programmes. This transition period is unavoidable; however, its effects can be reduced by ensuring that pre-reform candidates can benefit from training and supervision improvements created through the new doctoral schools. Institutions could ensure equity of treatment by, for example, clearly communicating available supports to pre-reform candidates, specifically inviting them to participate in doctoral school activities, and ensuring that doctoral schools monitor their progress and wellbeing during the transition period.

Action 1.2: Strengthen communication and connection among doctoral candidates

Doctoral study can be a relatively isolating experience compared to study at bachelor or master's level, particularly in smaller systems like Latvia's, where research teams are often limited in size and academic staff frequently balance multiple institutional or professional roles. This sense of isolation can have serious consequences: research shows that weak social supports can be just as significant an obstacle to doctoral completion as financial challenges. Clear communication and connection become even more critical during organisational transitions. Many doctoral candidates in Latvia reported a lack of clarity and reliance on informal or word-of-mouth channels for updates about important matters such as new doctoral education regulations, salary payments, and assessment criteria.

To address this challenge, institutions should provide access to a range of effective channels for communication and interaction among, to, and from doctoral candidates. The project team noted several promising examples already in place across Latvian institutions, though their scope and level of development varied. Strengthening existing communication efforts and integrating them into a structured institution-wide approach (for example, a regular newsletter or an online information hub) would help ensure that key updates are shared widely, clearly, and consistently. Equally important is to provide regular, structured opportunities for doctoral candidates to engage with peers and institutional leadership. For example, an annual forum, or informal but regular scheduled networking sessions, can help candidates connect with peers and engage directly with institutional leadership. Such initiatives require minimal financial investment but could substantially enhance motivation, wellbeing, and a shared sense of belonging.

Action 1.3: Achieve sustainable critical mass at institution level for all aspects of doctoral education

Doctoral schools in Latvia remain in the early stages of development - at the time of writing candidates admitted through the new system had just entered the second year of their programmes. At this stage, institutions are likely still working to establish the necessary critical mass of services, expertise, and infrastructure to support high-quality doctoral education. Over time, institutions should be making continuous progress towards providing comprehensive academic and social supports to doctoral candidates through the new schools.

Doctoral candidates reported to the project team that accessing some forms of guidance and training were difficult (for example, required classes for their programmes not being held at feasible times). While such challenges may reflect the early implementation phase, as doctoral schools evolve, institutions should

periodically assess the range and quality of supports available and identify areas where the school is realistically unlikely to achieve critical mass alone. In cases where resources are limited, joint initiatives, such as shared doctoral training or inter-institutional networks, can help achieve the scale and consistency needed for sustainable, high-quality doctoral education. The Estonian Doctoral School, presented during an international workshop organised within the TSI project, provides an example of how critical mass can be achieved in the development of important skills in doctoral candidates (see Case Study 1).

Action 1.4: Institutionalise mentoring of early-career researchers as a core competency of senior academic staff

High-quality doctoral education depends on the capacity, motivation and engagement of supervisors. In Latvia, supervisory experience has not traditionally been treated as a formal criterion for recruitment or promotion. Many institutional leaders reported to the project team their challenges in encouraging senior staff to participate in supervisory or mentoring training, while several supervisors themselves noted low "success rates" in guiding candidates to completion.

Some of the academic career reforms, such as the introduction of the new four-tier academic career framework, the expansion of tenure-track positions and incentives to promote staff turnover create important opportunities to, over time, embed mentoring as a recognised and rewarded element of academic practice. For example, considering competencies relating to mentorship and supervision within reformed evaluation criteria can help promote a culture of senior staff as mentors and improve the overall environment for early-career academics. Building a culture of mentorship among senior staff can be pursued at individual institution level, or more productively as a collective initiative among institutions. The statement of "*Healthy Practices in the Dutch PhD system 2.0*", released in April 2025, provides an inspiring example of a collective approach to establishing common principles for training and supervision of doctoral students (see Case Study 2).

Objective 2: Promote evidence-informed and aligned approaches to the management of academic careers within institutions

The project team noted a fragmented approach to the implementation and financing of the academic career reforms in Latvia. While this has drawn some criticism, it reflects the practical realities facing policymakers and institutions. Latvia cannot wait to have perfect reform conditions - it should continue its approach of making as much incremental progress as resources and capacity can allow. It is also important to recognise that several elements of reform are linked to specific financing requirements, including commitments to external funders such as European structural and investment funds. These obligations mean that implementation must proceed within defined timeframes, even when some aspects of the reforms are still evolving. With that said, institutions can help reduce the impact of piecemeal implementation by collecting insights on reforms and using them, with staff input, to continuously improve conditions. Some actions to support this objective are proposed below.

Action 2.1: Evaluate the postdoctoral and tenure track pilots to inform future expansion

Even though the academic career framework is still being finalised, several Latvian higher education institutions have moved ahead with the recruitment of postdoctoral, tenure track and tenured positions as funding has become available to do so. Institution leaders highlighted that "the funding has come before the framework", resulting in diverse institutional practices and experiences.

As the number of staff recruited through these schemes grows, institutions should, in the coming years, periodically evaluate the processes and results of their postdoctoral and tenure-track/tenure recruitment. These evaluations could examine the experiences of both the new recruits and existing staff working with them and assess the extent to which the recruitments are supporting institutional and national objectives

and contributing to the overall attractiveness of the academic career. Evaluations could also help to systematically identify barriers and pain points faced by the recruits themselves or those working to recruit them. For example, some institution leaders reported to the project team severe logistical difficulties some appointees face when relocating to Latvia from abroad.

Findings from these evaluations, especially if shared between institutions, could be used to inform a cohesive policy for the future development of postdoctoral and tenure-track roles, and ultimately strengthen Latvia's capacity to attract and retain talented staff.

Action 2.2: Review and, if necessary, strengthen internal dialogue on reform issues at institution level

The project team's "readiness survey" received over 500 responses and highlighted a diversity of views on the academic career reforms among staff working in higher education institutions. Open-text responses indicate that many staff are not only unsure about the broader reform agenda but also experience various career-related difficulties within their own institutions.

With this in mind, institutions may benefit from reviewing whether their internal communication and dialogue mechanisms give all staff clear and meaningful opportunities to participate. Such a review could assess existing channels (for example, faculty or school meetings, union discussions, or internal committees) and identify whether they are accessible and/or used by all groups of academic staff. Strengthening and expanding communication channels, informed by the results of such a review, could help to engage less vocal staff members and ensure a more representative and informed dialogue on reform priorities and implementation.

Action 2.3: Initiate recurring data collection and analysis of staff experiences at work and viewpoints on career-related issues

Building on Action 2.2, in time, and as resources allow, institutions could, if not doing so already, consider implementing a more systematic and recurring data collection on staff experiences, working environments and viewpoints on career-related issues. If data is collected at regular intervals, with qualitative as well as quantitative elements, and covers all staff categories, it could provide a robust evidence base to monitor the impact of reforms and update internal human resource policies. It can also promote greater trust and engagement between academic staff and institution leadership. In the United Kingdom, the University of Sussex carries out a comprehensive staff survey operation on a recurring basis and makes extensive use of the results (see Case Study 3).

Action 2.4: Implement policies for responsible and holistic evaluation of academic staff throughout the institution

The project team heard that, in Latvia - as in many higher education systems - staff wellbeing is often affected by perceived or actual pressure caused by a reliance on quantitative, research-oriented metrics as key performance assessment criteria. The pressure is exacerbated in Latvia by the fact that research funding has come to represent an increasingly important share of budgets in many institutions, as demographic changes have reduced the number of students enrolling in degree programmes. As Latvia works to strengthen its research capacity, there is a growing risk that the teaching mission, service activities, and broader contributions to institutional life become marginalised, with adverse effects for students' experience and for academic staff who feel that their efforts outside of research performance are not equally recognised.

International initiatives such as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) have gained considerable momentum over the past decade. Both promote a more balanced and contextualised approach to evaluating research and

researchers, that values a diversity of outputs, contributions, and career paths. While some institution representatives highlighted the importance of these initiatives to the project team, overall Latvia's involvement in them up to recently has appeared limited compared to many European neighbours. However, there are indications of change – for example, six Latvian institutions have now signed the CoARA declaration, with the Council of Science publishing an associated Action Plan in 2025. While it is unclear whether this development has yet had any positive impact for staff in the concerned institutions, it provides an encouraging signal of public commitment to a more holistic approach to evaluation of research and researchers.

Building on this momentum within Latvia and inspired by the recent advances made in other countries, Latvian higher education institutions should take further practical steps in the coming years to ensure that responsible and holistic assessment becomes the standard practice in recruitment, promotion, and staff performance evaluation. Transparent institutional policies that aim to gradually align with DORA and CoARA principles can help create a more inclusive, attractive and sustainable environment for academic staff.

Focus area: Updating and aligning the policy framework

Implementation of academic career reforms is primarily an internal responsibility of institutions, who, as detailed above, can take several actions to support and strengthen the process. At the same time, successful reform also depends on an enabling policy framework and adequate funding. As noted, Latvia's funding for higher education and research remains low by OECD standards, and significant increases are unlikely in the short term. In the meantime, however, there are other policy actions to pursue to progress the reforms and support the efforts of institutions. Chief among these is to finalise outstanding legislation and implement the outstanding elements of the academic career framework as soon as possible. In parallel, policymakers can work to simplify and improve the flexibility of the regulatory environment, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, and coordinate across concurrent reform processes to the maximum extent possible. The following sections propose specific actions to progress these objectives.

Objective 3: Ensure improving academic staff conditions remain at the forefront of higher education policy in Latvia

As other reforms in the higher education sector progress in the coming years, it is important to keep the conditions and attractiveness of the academic career at the centre of the higher education policy agenda. The following actions can help ensure that academic careers remain a core policy priority and coherent with broader higher education policy, as it develops.

Action 3.1: Roll out the four-stage harmonised academic career framework in the Latvian system as a priority

A new four-stage academic career framework has been defined which will harmonise the career structure of academic staff and replace the prevailing convention where staff must be separately elected as academic staff and researchers to participate fully in both teaching and research. However, the new framework has yet to be rolled out, because of various delays in the reform process. The project team understands that the results of the COMPAC research project, which is identifying the key competencies and training needs for each of the four career stages, will be incorporated into the final specification of the framework (see Progress Report One). With the COMPAC project due for completion in 2026, the new career framework should be introduced without further delay thereafter, to enable institutions and staff to move forward with confidence in recruitment, evaluation and promotion processes.

Action 3.2: Put criteria relating to staff conditions and working environment at the centre of the new accreditation framework

As Latvia revises its approach to external quality assurance of higher education, moving its emphasis from study field to institutional accreditation, quality assurance criteria that explicitly assess the working environments and conditions of academic staff should occupy a central position in the new framework. OECD research shows that working conditions for academic staff—such as contract stability, workload, and opportunities for career progression—are closely associated with the ability of institutions to deliver high-quality teaching and research (OECD, 2021[10]; OECD, 2024[11]). Consequently, quality assurance frameworks should include staff conditions to assess institutional quality holistically and, in Latvia's case, verify that the academic career reforms deliver their intended benefits.

In Latvia, where underemployment and precarity among academic staff has been a persistent challenge, it will certainly be important that external quality assurance procedures evaluate the extent to which employment practices promote long-term stability for academic staff. Other important criteria, such as the extent to which academic staff workloads are reasonable and reflect the full range of duties; the transparency and consistency of salary calculations across the institution; the extent to which conditions of employment for academic staff are improving over time, and the space provided to staff to engage in professional development to enhance their expertise for competence development, should also be considered for inclusion in the new framework. As an example, the European University Association's Institutional Evaluation Programme review process examines multiple aspects of human resource policies and staffing conditions within the institutions under review (see Case Study 4).

Action 3.3: Establish a national data collection on staff profiles and conditions

The success of Latvia's academic career reforms cannot be fully assessed without a proper monitoring and evaluation framework that includes relevant data and statistics to track progress toward the reform goals. As mentioned in the previous point, academic working conditions are one of the most important components of quality of outputs of higher education. It will also be important to evaluate how the profile, grades and work intensity of staff is changing over time across Latvian institutions.

In Latvia, systematic staff-related data collection from higher education institutions does take place and some aggregate annual statistics are published annually by the Latvian official statistics portal. However, there is significant scope for expansion of the information collected and more comprehensive publication of the data, including by institution level. Data collection on staffing aspects of higher education, particularly at institution level, has tended to be overlooked or minimised compared to collection of student-related data. There are some examples within European countries of comprehensive initiatives that collect and publish comprehensive data about academic staff conditions and profiles at national level on a recurring basis (such as the Irish Higher Education Authority Institutional Staff Profiles – Case Study 5) that could provide inspiration for Latvia. Latvia is also introducing a new Research Management Information System (PURE) to centralise data on research activities. This new system also holds promise for improving the evidence available to monitor research careers.

Objective 4: Balance stability with performance in the allocation of state funds

Action 4.1: Thoroughly evaluate the pilot of the new state funding model to assess its impact on the conditions of academic staff

Latvian higher education institutions have faced a continuously evolving funding situation in the last 15 years, with deep spending cuts in the late 2000s followed by a major reform of state financing of institutions in 2015 aimed at improving performance. A new adjustment to the state funding model, currently in the pilot stage, will further incentivise institutions to improve performance by allocating funding based on

agreed outputs (e.g. numbers of skilled graduates) rather than inputs (e.g. a quota of state-funded study places).

As noted, the new approach to financing gives institutions greater autonomy over admissions, state funding levels, and internal resource allocation. It appears to have been broadly welcomed by higher education institutions and seems well-targeted to deliver benefits in terms of student outcomes. At the same time, its consequences for academic staff remain unclear. Increased institutional flexibility should hopefully lead to substantially improved working conditions by enabling more strategic staffing and investment in staff development. However, it may further intensify workload pressures, depending on the resources needed to achieve the targets defined in the agreements.

As the pilots of the new model begin to wind down in 2026, it will be critical to carry out a systematic study of its effects on academic staff in the pilot institutions, including their employment stability, workload, career progression, and well-being. Findings from the evaluation can ensure that incentives to improve student outcomes do not hinder progress in making academic careers more attractive, and that any necessary adjustments to the model are made before full implementation.

Action 4.2: Pilot more adaptive durations and amounts for competitive state research funding

Since 2018, the Latvian Council of Science has successfully supported fundamental and applied research through competitive project funding. The introduction of such competitive funding in Latvia has been widely welcomed by the research community. Though its funding remains limited, the programme is broadly considered to have successfully supported research excellence and expanded opportunities for researchers to engage in basic and applied research. At the same time, the project team heard that the programme's current structure might be too standardised to meet the needs of some researcher types, groups and disciplines. Funding is generally awarded for a fixed three-year period with a standard funding in 2025 of EUR 300 000 per project. This means that researchers may have to make unsuitable adjustments to their practices and research design for their proposals to align with the available timeframe and budget. Moreover, while the inclusion of doctoral students in project teams is commendable, some doctoral candidates reported difficulties in aligning their own programme requirements and research focus with others' projects whose duration or topics only partially overlap with their own work.

Potentially, these issues could at least be partially mitigated by adopting a more flexible approach to the allocation of competitive funds, in terms of timeframes, the size of the grants and the composition of the research teams. Recognising that a more flexible system may require additional administrative resources, the state could pilot such an approach for a single funding round and assess its impact on evaluator workload, as well as on the diversity of supported projects and researchers.

Focus area: Sharing practice and working together for the benefit of academic staff

The two focus areas above highlighted sets of actions that institutions and policymakers, respectively, can take to support the improvement of academic staff conditions in Latvia. This third focus area proposes actions that promote knowledge sharing and collaboration within the Latvian system - an area of focus where the state, stakeholders, individual institutions and staff can all make effective contributions. The following sections present proposed objectives and actions, informed by project activities and stakeholder discussions.

Objective 5: Prioritise community building within the reformed higher education and research sectors

Countries across the OECD are increasingly recognising the value of joining forces on higher education initiatives to achieve shared benefits, particularly as many systems face shrinking student populations and

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funding constraints. Efforts to improve knowledge-sharing on academic career issues are becoming more common across OECD countries. In Latvia, information-sharing and collaboration among academic staff takes place regularly but often informally, and it is unclear the extent to which its benefits reach all staff members. Below, two actions are outlined that could be prioritised in the coming years to provide more structured opportunities for community-building among Latvian academic staff.

Action 5.1: Put the Community of Practice for Latvian academic staff on a firm legal and financial footing

This project has initiated and piloted a Community of Practice to promote collective exchange of information and practice and capacity building among academic staff in Latvia. Such a community would institutionalise regular opportunities for the exchange of knowledge, experience and practice among those involved in, and affected by, the various higher education reforms. The Community is currently in an inception phase, experimenting with different options for bringing staff together to address topics of joint interest (for example, holding its inaugural conference in November 2025 and the establishment of working groups to tackle particular issues). During this inception period, the community's work will be overseen by the Council of Higher Education, while consideration is given to its future governance, working methods and funding.

Given the vital importance of knowledge- and practice-sharing in the context of the constrained resources currently available in Latvia, the Community of Practice should be endorsed, provided with an adequate legal basis and receive a minimum level of financial support from public authorities to be established on a sustainable basis. As discussed during the pilot conducted within this project, there are several governance and funding models for collaborative initiatives in other countries in Europe that could potentially inspire a legal and financial footing for the Latvian Community. One interesting model is the Portuguese National Council for Pedagogical Innovation (*Conselho Nacional de Inovação Pedagógica em Ensino Superior* (CNIPES)), inaugurated in 2025 which aims to bring together disparate initiatives on pedagogical innovation across the higher education sector (see Case Study 6).

Action 5.2: Establish a Latvian Young Academy to support early-career researchers

Several European countries have established Young Academies, aiming to engage early-career researchers in national science and education policy and develop their leadership potential. These academies have proven highly effective in providing advocacy and support for science policy while improving the skills, visibility, and collaboration of young researchers. They have also gained growing influence in European science policy, for example through the Young Academies Science Advice Structure (YASAS), which coordinates input from national Young Academies to consultations of the European Commission and other policymaking bodies.

The project team understands that Latvia currently does not have a Young Academy of early-career researchers, affiliated with the Latvian Academy of Science, although the Latvian Association of Young Researchers tries to fulfil some of the functions of a typical Young Academy. In the medium term, once the Community of Practice for academic staff is on a firm footing, consideration could be given to full establishment of a Young Academy in Latvia, which could operate under the auspices of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, with strong links to universities and research institutes. Such a structure would not require substantial funding but could significantly strengthen the pipeline of future academic leaders, build a more cohesive community of early-career researchers and increase the influence of young Latvian academics on European science policy.

Objective 6: Expand collective efforts to tackle academic career issues

Action 6.1: Create a sector-wide training and professional development framework for each grade of academic staff

As noted above, the COMPAC project is expected to deliver analysis and recommendations that can inform the future design of training and professional development pathways for academic staff, consistent with the emerging career grading structure. The value of this output could be maximised by developing it into a sector-wide training and development framework for academic staff, to be adopted simultaneously with the commencement of the new career structure. The framework could be developed, for example, under the guidance of the Community of Practice, and adapted by institutions to their local context. It could provide a core reference point to institutions for identifying gaps in their current training provision and develop responses for meeting the identified needs, either at institution level or through collaborative efforts. The main benefit of such a framework would be to reduce the resources required by each institution in devising individual training plans for staff. Indeed, collaborative training initiatives are now common across European HEIs, with a 2024 EUA survey showing that two-thirds of responding institutions organise staff training through university networks, while one-third indicated that national and regional organisations offer resources for higher education staff development (EUA, 2025[12]).

Action 6.2: Identify and prioritise academic career issues where collective development of shared norms and principles would be beneficial

As a complement to Action 6.1, the Community of Practice could be convened regularly to identify and prioritise academic staff related issues where developing shared norms and principles would benefit the sector. Latvia already has experience with such collective approaches - for example, the joint commitment to good practice in attracting international students and ensuring high-quality study experiences (see Progress Report One). As another example, the Community of Practice has initially identified "AI in academia" as a priority topic and is aiming to strengthen shared capacity for the effective and responsible use of AI across higher education institutions. This work could culminate in sector-level guidelines and recommendations for academic staff on the use of AI.

Other areas highlighted by the project team as suitable for future collective work in Latvia include:

- principles for doctoral candidate supervision,
- guidelines for sharing research infrastructures,
- a model cotutelle agreement for Latvian institutions, and
- guidance on managing intellectual property arising from research, development, and innovation collaborations.

The Latvian Community of Practice could work together on determining the order of priority among these topics and others they identify, taking account of available resources and the potential benefit of collective action. Adopting a "collaborate-first" approach wherever possible could promote efficient use of Latvia's institutional expertise and funding and strengthen capacity system-wide to address common challenges through coordinated approaches.

Action 6.3: Position the Community of Practice as a conduit for partnerships supporting excellence in the teaching and engagement missions of higher education

Along with an appropriate legal framework and governance structure, the Community of Practice will likely require a baseline level of recurrent funding to ensure stable operation. This funding could come from a modest grant from the state, membership contributions by individual institutions or both. Beyond this, and

especially if the Community is established as a separate legal entity with a clear brand and identity, it could serve as a strategic conduit for project-based funding that helps advance various aspects of Latvia's teaching and engagement missions in higher education.

As the Community of Practice moves towards full implementation, it should be established as a formal structure that would allow it to apply for project funding from national and international sources on behalf of the higher education sector it represents. Such an arrangement could allow the Community to access project funding opportunities that might be out of reach of individual institutions or smaller partnerships, while helping to progress on Latvia's strategic shared priorities in higher education teaching and engagement. In this way, the Community would function not only as a convening and coordinating mechanism, but as a means to secure external funding for diverse collaborative teaching and engagement initiatives (for example, lifelong learning provision, andragogic research, consulting services or internationalisation initiatives) under the Community's brand. The Special Interest Groups of the Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education (DUN), although not focused on attracting project-based funding, offers an example of a formal structure that acts as a conduit for pursuing diverse interests, projects and activities collectively (see Case Study 7).

Table 2. A roadmap for supporting academic career development in Latvia from 2026 onwards

Focus Area: Continuously improving academic staff conditions within institutions			
Objective	**Actions for the short term (2026–27)**	**Actions in the medium- to long-term (2028+)**	**Relevant international case studies**
1. Ensuring a smooth and effective transition to the new doctoral education model in all institutions	1.1 Provide pre-reform candidates with equal access to resources developed through the new doctoral schools 1.2 Strengthen communication and connection among doctoral candidates	1.3 Achieve sustainable critical mass at institution level for all aspects of doctoral education 1.4 Institutionalise mentoring of early-career researchers as a core competency of senior academic staff	**Case Study 1:** Estonian Doctoral School **Case Study 2:** Healthy practices in the Dutch PhD system 2.0 **Case Study 3:** University of Sussex staff survey
2. Promote evidence-informed and aligned approaches to the management of academic careers within institutions	2.1: Evaluate the postdoctoral and tenure track pilots to inform future expansion 2.2: Review and, if necessary, strengthen internal dialogue on reform issues	2.3: Initiate recurring data collection and analysis of staff experiences at work and viewpoints on career-related issues 2.4: Implement policies for responsible and holistic evaluation of academic staff throughout the institution	
Focus Area: Updating and aligning the policy framework			

3: Ensure academic staff conditions remain at the forefront of higher education policy in Latvia	3.1 Roll out the four-stage harmonised academic career framework in the Latvian system as a priority 3.2 Put criteria relating to staff conditions and working environment at the centre of the new accreditation framework	3.3: Establish a national data collection on staff profiles and conditions	**Case Study 4:** European University Association's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)
4: Balance stability with performance in the allocation of state funds	4.1: Thoroughly evaluate the pilot of the new state funding model to assess its impact on the conditions of academic staff	4.2: Pilot more adaptive durations and amounts for competitive state research funding	**Case study 5:** Institution level staff profile data collected by the Irish Higher Education Authority
Focus Area: Sharing practice and working together for the benefit of academic staff			
5: Prioritise community building within the reformed higher education and research sectors	5.1: Put the Community of Practice for Latvian academic staff on a firm legal and financial footing	5.2. Establish a Latvian Young Academy to support early-career researchers	**Case study 6:** The Portuguese National Council for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education (CNIPES) **Case Study 7**: The Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education (DUN)
6: Mobilise collective action to tackle academic career issues	6.1: Create a sector-wide training and professional development framework for each grade of academic staff	6.2: Identify and prioritise academic career issues where collective development of shared norms and principles would be beneficial 6.3: Position the Community of Practice as a conduit for partnerships supporting excellence in the teaching and engagement missions of higher education	

Annex A: Selected case studies of academic career reforms in peer European countries

Case Study 1: The Estonian Doctoral School

The Estonian Doctoral School model is a new initiative in Estonia primarily funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), with additional support from the Estonian government. With a total budget of EUR 7 million for the period 2024- 2029, it aims to enhance the quality of doctoral education through structured programmes. It brings together doctoral candidates, supervisors, and researchers from multiple institutions to foster collaboration and improve training. Participants engage in joint activities such as seminars, workshops, and conferences, which promote interdisciplinary learning and knowledge exchange. The objective of these activities is to encourage networking and exposure to diverse research practices, strengthen the overall research environment and prepare candidates for careers in academia, industry, or other sectors.

All Estonian doctoral students (2283 in 2024) are included as members of the Estonian Doctoral School. In terms of governance, the project is led by the University of Tartu, with the Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Estonian Business School, Tallinn University of Technology and Tallinn University as partners. A Steering Council comprising vice-rectors for research from the participating HEIs is responsible for setting annual strategic priorities and budgets. Collaboration takes place through specialised sections aligned to disciplinary fields, each with a lead partner university. The project is ambitious, seeking to overcome common challenges associated with collaboration among HEIs, including finding time and space for collaborative activities, aligning interests of different partners, ensuring the involvement of different levels if each HEI and support effective exchange of knowledge among partners on their practices and needs, with a view to eliminating duplication of effort.

In its first year of operation the Estonian Doctoral School organised a total of 65 events, including retreats, skills development workshops and a career conference. It also enabled the short-term mobility of 165 doctoral students. Feedback to date on the activities indicates that the project holds considerable promise for improving the overall quality of doctoral education and the experience of doctoral candidates, with a particularly beneficial effect for smaller institutions.

Source: (Estonian Doctoral School, n.d.[13]; University of Tartu, 2025[14]) and presentation by Ms. Monika Tasa of the Estonian Doctoral School

Case study 2: Healthy practices in the Dutch PhD system 2.0

A statement of "Healthy Practices in the Dutch PhD System" principles was developed collaboratively and endorsed in 2025 by members of the Council of Rectors of Universities of the Netherlands to provide a framework for quality assurance and promote a healthy, high-quality PhD system. The statement updates a similar document first prepared in 2019, reflect changes in doctoral education and introduce new themes, including psychological wellbeing. It establishes shared standards for supervision, assessment, and candidate support, while allowing flexibility for local adaptation. Universities remain responsible for implementation and will review progress biennially through a national PhD system working group.

One of the areas covered in the document is the training and supervision of doctoral students. The document outlines the minimum standards expected throughout the system in terms of number of supervisors, frequency of meetings between the candidate and supervision team, the development and operation of training and supervision strategies for candidates. It also asks universities to commit to

professionalisation of the supervision function within institutions, stating that all supervisors should receive formal training on topics including situational leadership, guiding candidates towards timely completion of their PhD, managing mutual expectations between supervisor and candidate, intercultural supervision, social safety (including awareness of the dependency relationship) and mental health.

Source : (Universities Netherlands, 2025[15])

Case Study 3: The University of Sussex staff survey programme

The University of Sussex carries out a biennial staff "Pulse" survey, along with a mini survey in the years between full surveys. A Staff Survey Working Group within the institution oversees the strategic planning of the survey, while it is operated by an external organisation to ensure independence and the confidentiality of the results. Themes covered in the survey include wellbeing, development, leadership, and inclusion.

Results of the survey, in aggregate form, are made available across the institution and used to monitor progress against institution-level strategies on human resource management and inclusion. The institution also prepares an action plan to address issues highlighted in the results. Subsets of the results are also made available to individual schools and faculties, who are encouraged to run workshops with staff to explore the findings together, with a view to using the results to improve the working environment.

Finally, the university aims to support practice sharing by publishing case studies of efforts to improve the staff experience within schools and faculties following the identification of issues in the survey results. For example, at the School of Media, Arts and Humanities, the survey revealed concerns about workload balance, transparency of task allocation, and development opportunities. In response the School created a Planning of Annual Workload Working Group made up of academic and professional services staff. It also streamlined and condensed meetings and duties wherever possible, introduced staff-development mornings once per term and new induction and training initiatives for managers. These combined initiatives have helped shift culture toward being more inclusive, collegial and responsive to staff needs.

Source: (University of Sussex, 2025[16])

Case Study 4: Human resources elements of European University Association's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)

The IEP, a full member of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), supports higher education institutions in developing their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change. Managed by the European University Association, it has conducted more than 450 institutional evaluations in its 30-year history, mainly in the European Higher Education Area. The programme operates on a voluntary, university-initiated basis. Each participating institution conducts a self-evaluation focused on its own development challenges. An international team of three rectors reviews the self-evaluation, visits the university, and consults with stakeholders before presenting findings publicly and submitting a written report to institutional leadership.

The standard review process addresses several aspects of human resources, including the main features of the institution's human resource policy, the composition and profile of academic and support staff across faculties and demographic groups, and the mechanisms in place to ensure staff competence. It also examines the support available to staff in carrying out academic functions, the institution's approach to professional development and motivation, and the extent to which scholarly activities are organised to strengthen the connection between education and research. In addition, the review considers how the institution promotes innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

Source: (Institutional Evaluation Programme, n.d.[17])

Case study 5 – Institution level staff profile data collected by the Irish Higher Education Authority

Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles are collated and published annually by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland, to provide detailed information on academic staff across all publicly funded higher education institutions. The dataset and a series of associated dashboards provides both headcount and full-time equivalent staff numbers, covering academic, professional and research/specialist staff. The dashboards show staff data disaggregated by a range of characteristics, such as discipline, contract type (permanent, temporary and zero-hours) and gender. One feature that may be of particular interest to Latvia is the reports within the profiles of the numbers and shares of staff that are funded by the institution's core funds (i.e. staff whose salaries come from the institution's core government grant, which is part of the institution's permanent or recurrent budget) and those paid from non-core funds (i.e. external or temporary sources such as research grants, contracts, or special projects, where the posts are time-limited and depend on continued external funding).

All of the data presented in the dashboards can be broken down to individual institution level. The profile data supports monitoring of equality, diversity, and employment conditions, and enables comparison across institutions and staff categories on important matters of human resource policy.

Source: (Higher Education Authority, 2024[18])

Case study 6 – The Portuguese National Council for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education (CNIPES)

CNIPES was inaugurated in February 2025 as a new permanent, independent and collegial advisory body for higher education in Portugal, focused specifically on pedagogical innovation and training. The Council's Governance is independent and multi-stakeholder, composed of approximately 25 national and international experts with experience in higher education. Its creation was funded via the Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan. It will serve as a platform for sharing pedagogical knowledge, exchanging evidence-based teaching methods, and co-developing resources that advance digital, inclusive, and research-informed education across the Portuguese higher education system.

The CNIPES offers an interesting model of a national collaborative initiative, as it aims to integrates and build on existing practice-sharing for the benefit of the whole higher education community, coordinating with existing institution-level and smaller scale collaborative initiatives on pedagogical innovation. For example, it will bring together and act as a reference point for seven existing smaller-scale centres for pedagogical innovation across Portugal, which together encompass 90% of higher education institutions. As another example, the 2025 edition of the long-running annual National Congress of Pedagogical Practices in Higher Education (CNaPPES) was combined with a meeting of the CNIPES, to leverage synergies between the Council and the Congress participants. The meeting included sharing of several "next practices" of teaching innovation.

Connecting disparate initiatives in this way aims to break down institutional silos, promote cross-sector collaboration, and create a coherent national community of practice. Going forward, CNIPES is also expected to play fundamental role in advising the State on key aspects of higher education, helping to improving the quality of teaching and contributing to the success and well-being of academic communities in Portugal.

Source: (Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior, 2025[19])

Case Study 7: The Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education (DUN)

The Danish University Educational Network (DUN) is a national association dedicated to enhancing the quality of university education and teaching in Denmark. It advances this mission by organising collaboration through networks, events, and shared professional activities. The members are generally institutions and all individuals working in the institution can automatically join. Its work is overseen by a committee of up to nine members, which serves for a two-year standard period and is financed by membership fees from institutions. Within the Network, Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are convened which address specific topics and support practice sharing. The extent and type of collaboration in a SIG can vary depending on its size, topic and purpose. The SIG groups share the results of their work at the annual DUN conference.

The Network further increases the visibility of its work through its "University Pedagogical Talk" podcast and the Danish Journal of Higher Education a scientific, open-access journal established by the Network in 2006.

Source: (Danish University Network, n.d.[20])

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