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Transforming academic careers in Latvia

Progress Report One



Introduction

This report forms part of Output 5 of the project “*Support for Institutionalising the New Academic Careers Framework in Latvia*” (23LV24), funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), and implemented by the OECD, in cooperation with the Reform and Investment Task Force of the European Commission. It follows up on the project “readiness report” (Output 4) which offered an external assessment of the extent of readiness for implementation of the academic career reforms as at December 2024. It summarises the project activities carried out from January – June 2025, and the findings from them. It is intended to support the deliberations of the Ministry of Education and Science, higher education institutions and other stakeholders with responsibility for supporting academic staff careers in Latvia. The report shows that:

- Reform of doctoral education is progressing within institutions, but challenges persist. More clarity on reform implications is needed, as admission, progression and assessment criteria continue to vary widely. Some institutions lack sufficient critical mass to support diverse learning opportunities and access to research resources.
- For aspects of academic career reforms, funding has often preceded clear frameworks. This is especially true for postdoctoral and tenured professorial roles, leaving institutions to individually set norms, tasks, and expectations for new recruits.
- The increased autonomy provided through recent reforms requires institutions to effectively manage decisions previously determined at the state level. If well managed, this could reduce administrative burden and shift more emphasis towards staff development within institutions. It will also be important to ensure that additional autonomy is accompanied by appropriate accountability mechanisms and improved transparency on academic staff working conditions.
- Smaller and specialised institutions are proactive in fostering beneficial partnerships, sharing resources, and collaborating. Despite this, employment and workload stability remain uncertain for academic staff, though a shared sense of responsibility encourages collective action to address precarity.
- While expanding research capacity is a key focus, teaching and learning enhancement should not be neglected, particularly in the age of AI.
- The short-term nature of project-based funding places significant pressure on institutional operations while structured mentoring and professional development opportunities for staff remain limited.
- In light of financial constraints, promoting stability of funding and reducing bureaucracy will become even more important. Putting dialogue and information exchange on a more systematic footing can help to improve the flow of information on reforms and provide greater clarity to academic staff on their implications. Promoting collaboration within the system can also help provide a more supportive environment for staff, particularly in teaching, learning and the use of AI.
- Institutions and policymakers alike will need to seek out the best ways to monitor the pace of reforms and improve the information available within the system to assess the working conditions of academic staff.

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

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1. Summary of project activities carried out between January and June 2025

During the first six months of 2025 the project team continued to monitor and gather feedback on progress with reforms of academic careers in Latvia in terms of policy, legislation and changes made by individual higher education institutions. The team compiled this information through various activities: stakeholder interviews, piloting a Community of Practice for academic staff in Latvia, a peer-exchange session for quality assurance policymakers, site visits to Latvian higher education institutions and an international workshop, as described below.

1.1. Stakeholder interviews

In Spring 2025 the team conducted a series of interviews with stakeholder organisations, gathering their perspectives on how reforms were progressing and challenges faced by their implementation. Table 1 shows the interviewees and meeting dates. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with the project team sending questions to participants beforehand to encourage reflection ahead of each meeting. Each meeting also offered the opportunity for open discussion of various issues associated with the reform process.

Table 1. Interviewees and meeting dates

Stakeholder interviewed	Date of the meeting
Latvian Council of Science	17 March 2025
Latvian Association of Young Researchers	18 March 2025
Research Latvia	21 March 2025
LIZDA	21 March 2025
Latvian Council of Higher Education	21 March 2025
Project manager - Academic Staff Competence Model (COMPAC) project	03 April 2025
Latvian State Research Organisations (<i>Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis, Latvian Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment (BIOR), Biomedical Research and Study Centre and Institute of Electronics and Computer Science</i>)	06 May 2025

Note: The team also reached out to the Latvian Council of Rectors to request a meeting but did not yet receive a response.

1.2. Peer-exchange session on quality assurance of doctoral education

The project team organised an informal peer-exchange session on quality assurance in doctoral education (see Section 2.1 below), at the request of Latvian officials to inform their ongoing deliberations on the revision of quality standards for doctoral education. While this was not an agreed deliverable as per the project Detailed Project Description, the peer exchange supported the project's objectives to "*provide expertise and guidance to promote the successful implementation of the reforms of the academic career framework*".

1.3. Piloting a Community of Practice

In the first quarter of 2025 the project team prepared an initial concept for a Community of Practice serving Latvian academic staff. The concept was first presented and discussed with the project Working Group on February 13, 2025. It was then further refined considering feedback from the Working Group and the input of two national experts engaged by the project team to support its development.

This refined Community of Practice concept was piloted at an in-person workshop which took place on 29 April 2025 in Riga, bringing together more than 30 representatives of academic staff from across Latvian higher education institutions. The participants split into groups and considered various questions relating to the development of the Community, including its legal status, governance, membership, activities and funding. The conclusions of the workshop are discussed later were also presented at an international workshop which took place in June 2025 and will be shared in more detail in the second planned progress report for this project (in late 2025).

1.4. Site visits to higher education institutions

In early June 2025 the project team carried out site visits to six Latvian higher education institutions. The purpose of the visits was to collect information on progress and challenges associated with reform implementation. The site visits also provided opportunities for academic staff and institution leaders to discuss specific issues facing their organisations with a team of international experts. The June 2025 round of visits focused on smaller, specialised and regional higher education institutions, following the project team's visits to the four largest Latvian universities in November 2024. The institutions visited were:

- Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences
- Ventspils University of Applied Sciences
- Latvian Academy of Culture
- Art Academy of Latvia
- Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music
- Turība University (private institution)

1.5. International Workshop on academic careers

On 04 June 2025 the project team organised an international workshop as a hybrid event. The workshop, entitled "*The Future of Academic Careers in Latvia and beyond*", attracted around 40 in-person participants with 70 additional participants joining online. It featured keynote speeches from two international speakers:

- Dr. Rita Morais from the European University Association provided a keynote on important developments regarding research assessment and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) - a collective of organisations with the objective of reforming and broadening the methods by which researchers are currently evaluated, such as heavily publication-based metrics.
- Professor Thomas Weko, international higher education expert and research professor at George Washington University in the United States, shared perspectives on diverse forms of collaboration between higher education institutions within a national context, drawing on European examples. He also highlighted potential benefits of increasing inter-institutional collaboration within Latvia.

The workshop also provided a platform for updates from national policymakers on progress with the reforms from the legal and administrative perspective and reflection of national perspectives on academic career issues. The workshop was opened by Dr. Lana Franceska Dreimane, Director of Higher Education,

Science and Innovation at the Ministry of Science and Education and the representative of the European Commission, while senior expert Dr. Brigita Kukjalko provided an overview of the status quo of the academic career reform implementation and planned next steps.

2. Summary of key policy actions taken over the period

The previous written output of this project, reporting on readiness of the Latvian system for academic career reform, highlighted the importance of progressing with outstanding legislation and ensuring that, given the Latvian landscape and scale of reform, steps are taken to ensure that different reform elements are well aligned and complement each other. Notable progress has been made on policy and legislation relating to the reforms between January and June 2025, as detailed in this section.

2.1. Policy and legislation relating to doctoral education

Several aspects of progress with policy and legislation became evident over the first half of 2025. Firstly, with the planned completion of the regulations for supervision and assessment of doctoral students in mid-2025, the framework for the operation of the new doctoral model will be effectively completed. As mentioned in Section 1, the project team provided support to Latvian authorities in their policy deliberations relating to supervision and assessment criteria by:

- preparing a document summarising standards and regulations established at national level for doctoral education in eight European education systems (Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovak Republic and Portugal).
- organising a peer exchange among policymakers and quality assurance experts from six countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovak Republic and Portugal) on March 6th, 2025.

These activities helped to showcase a variety of approaches used to establish national standards and criteria for organising doctoral education, supervision, assessment, and external quality assurance, for the benefit of Latvian authorities. They also provided some illustrative examples of how the nationally-set criteria had been adapted at the institutional level.

2.2. Policy and legislation relating to the new academic career framework

The overall framework for the academic career reforms made substantial progress towards approval by the Council of Ministers between January and June 2025. The final draft of the concept note for the reforms, a document which has been in development since late 2022 following the previous EU's technical support project, was released for comment by stakeholders in April 2025. The concept note provides a unifying framework for the distinct aspects of the academic career reforms. Its overarching purpose is to establish principles and promote best practices for recruitment, selection, working conditions and performance evaluation of academic staff, within a clear staged career structure. Previous reports from this project and several other national documents outline in detail the specifics of the reform proposals, as described in the concept note; therefore, for the sake of brevity, they are not repeated in this report.

The conceptual framework was originally envisaged to be finalised at an earlier point in this project lifetime. The complexity of the reform, need to align with legislative processes, ongoing debates about the balance of regulation between the policy and institution level and financial uncertainty have all contributed to its delay. However, the framework is now in its final stages of completion - national authorities indicate that the final version should be approved by the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers by **November 2025**.

The project team noted the consultative approach taken by the Ministry when developing and revising the conceptual framework. The concept note itself was largely developed within a Working Group convened by the Ministry, comprising diverse sectoral representatives. In the latest round of revisions, during Spring

2025, another wide-ranging consultation took place on the document. Substantial feedback from sectoral and institutional representatives, in the form of comments directly made on the concept note text, were received by the Ministry and subsequently incorporated to update the document.

The resulting concept note, in the opinion of the project team, provides a framework that allows substantial flexibility and autonomy to institutions in how they implement the reforms into their specific contexts. At the same time, the project team's analysis of comments and feedback on the concept note indicated that there may still be differences in interpretation of the reforms' intentions and terms between different actors in the system – a point taken up later in this report.

The concept note also specifies the exact regulatory and legislative changes required to implement the full set of envisaged reforms, and an associated timeline for enacting them. Legislation will be updated on an incremental basis, with full implementation of the legislative changes foreseen by 2027. The outstanding legislative requirements (comprising updates to the Law on Higher Education, the Law on Scientific Activity and new drafts or revisions of 11 associated cabinet regulations) are extensive and are likely to demand a substantial share of the resources of higher education policymakers from now until 2027.

2.3. Progress with complementary and related reforms in the sector

Along with the fulfilment of regulatory requirements relating to the academic career reforms, the Ministry of Education and Science is progressing several other higher education reforms in parallel, with legislative changes also expected to be approved in 2025 and 2026. Many of these reforms are likely to have implications for academic staff in Latvia, as detailed in the implementation roadmap document for this project (Output 3). The two most prominent additional reforms currently underway are:

- A new cyclical accreditation framework for higher education institutions and colleges is being introduced. Under the new model, the separate accreditation of individual study areas will cease in favour of institution-level holistic evaluation, encompassing management, resources, internal quality systems, academic programs, research, and societal impact. Amendments to the higher education law and cabinet regulations are in development, with policymakers anticipating their adoption by the Cabinet of Ministers by the end of 2025. Piloting of the new model is planned for 2026, while the full implementation of cyclical accreditation will commence in 2027. This new model will also take into account some aspects of accreditation of doctoral education.
- Latvia is reforming its three-pillar funding model for higher education institutions, notably moving from the current model where the government funds places on study programmes, to block funding based on institutional agreements on outputs. Envisaged changes also include further development of the student funding system, an increase in the share of funds allocated as performance-based funding, and the introduction of new performance indicators. The objective is to permit greater autonomy of institutions in the use of their funds while requiring better results and more strategic alignment in return. Piloting of the new model commenced in 2024 and is continuing in 2025. Following the conclusion of the pilots and the legislative processes, the Ministry intends to conclude performance contracts with all institutions and fully transition to the new funding modalities by Spring 2026.

2.4. Setbacks with funding

As detailed in previous activities of this project, despite efforts to increase funding in recent years, Latvia's level of investment in higher education and research remains among the lowest in OECD countries, even as it plans and implements ambitious reforms to these sectors. Given scarce resources available in the state budget, European funding has been leveraged to fund the initiation of many sectoral reforms.

As 2025 has progressed, concerns have grown about the deteriorating situation of the state budget and its capacity to fund the reforms, especially considering a greater than envisaged share of the state budget likely needs to be allocated to defence. Stakeholders reported tightening budgets and requests to achieve cost savings and budget reductions. The project team heard concerns that the promised increases in staff salaries in the coming years may not materialise. Indeed, the revised concept note for the reforms indicates that current funding constraints necessitate a two-year delay in meeting the previous commitment¹ to raise the average gross monthly salary of academic staff progressively to 142% of the average level of public sector workers with a doctorate by 2027.

It was clear to the project team from conversations with ministry officials that every effort is being made to secure funding to the greatest extent possible. Regardless, the emerging reality of the budget situation creates additional uncertainties on the timeline for implementing reforms, as well as the extent of funding institutions will have available to invest in the career development and job stability of academic staff.

3. Perspectives on reform progress

3.1. Summary of interviewee perspectives

During interviews, stakeholders provided updated reflections on the reform progress and highlighted their most prominent and persistent concerns to the project team.

The reform of doctoral education continues to embed in institutions, although some challenges remain

Stakeholders reported an impression that doctoral education and career pathways for young scientists are becoming more structured, particularly in terms of curriculum, training and supports provided to candidates, because of the reforms. Following the reform, doctoral education in Latvia appears to be aligning with broader European norms, where recent years have seen efforts to adopt a more professionalised approach. However, stakeholders also highlighted areas of ongoing difficulty with the administration and operation of doctoral education.

One challenge relates to **improving clarity about the implications of the reform** for doctoral candidates. While there is clear that the new model requires an employment relationship between candidates and institutions, stakeholders reported a lack of common understanding about rights and responsibilities of employers and employees in the very specific context of doctoral study. For example, candidates have reported not having a clear understanding about prospects for continuation of employment if they do not defend a thesis within the expected four-year period and what their rights are in this regard with respect to national employment law. Similarly, stakeholders reported that some candidates lack clarity on the types of administrative tasks they are expected to carry out in the context of their employment, and those where administrative support may be accessed within their institution.

Stakeholders also noted that **eligibility to progress in and complete doctoral education programmes continues to vary significantly across institutions**. In Latvia, as in most European countries, establishing eligibility for doctoral defence is within the remit of institutions. Stakeholders noted that there are few best practice norms established across the system on performance expectations for candidates in terms of progression and submission of doctoral theses. While it is expected that institutional autonomy will lead to flexible adoption of practices suitable for each context, there is a risk that a very wide disparity

¹ as made in Latvia's Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027 "Skills for the Future Society". The concept note outlines further specifications relating to the relative salaries of staff at different career grades (P1-P4) to be taken into account when computing the average salary of academic staff.

of practices between institutions can lead to perceptions of differences in rigor or inequities in working conditions of doctoral candidates. The project team recently analysed doctoral education in eight countries and found that many had reasonably well-established and widely shared norms and principles governing doctoral education, sometimes developed collectively within the sector.

A final key concern raised by stakeholders was **a continuing lack of critical mass in some aspects of doctoral education at a level sufficient to support varied learning opportunities and access to research resources**, despite some consolidation of provision through doctoral schools. For example, although doctoral students are expected to complete coursework as part of their programmes, many do not have a suitable and varied choice of courses available within their institutions. In addition, many early-career researchers would benefit from access to research infrastructures not currently available within their institutions. Stakeholders reported that even though many institutions and research organisations offer external use of research equipment in theory, the means of access is often not communicated very effectively, and there are often no distinct points of contact that provide a starting point for researchers to negotiate access.

For some aspects of the academic career reforms, the “funding has come before the framework”

While some reforms to the academic career framework have slowed or stalled due to challenges of funding from the state budget, in other instances **state funding has become available to higher education institutions before they or stakeholders have set out plans and identified best practices on its use**.

The expansion of postdoctoral research is included as a deliverable in Latvia's 2027 National Development Plan (NDP), with co-funding provided by the European Regional Development Fund. In accordance with the timeline of the NDP, recruitment of postdoctoral researchers has continued to gather pace in Latvia. The Council of Science issued calls for postdoctoral researchers in November 2024, March 2025 and May 2025. Successful applicants, whether individual or partnerships, benefit from relatively generous funding of EUR 192 360 to perform a research project over 36 months. Similarly, the piloting of tenure-track and tenured positions has also continued in recent months. The tenured professorships offer an attractive career opportunity, with successful applicants awarded a six-year contract and a starting gross salary of EUR 6 050 per month.

It is positive that funding is available to support these underdeveloped aspects of the academic and research landscape in Latvia. However, with the establishment of criteria for different levels of academic roles still in progress, **institutions have been left to individually develop norms, tasks and expectations for incoming recruits**. Stakeholders acknowledged that, as is widely recognised, institutional flexibility and autonomy in setting such practices are essential foundations for research excellence and effectiveness. At the same time, worries similar to those raised for doctoral candidates were expressed about potentially unrealistic expectations, as well as overly divergent working conditions and progression criteria across and within institutions.

Institutions need to build capacity to take on new responsibilities

Stakeholders noted that ongoing reforms of institutional funding, external quality assurance and governance, along with a series of institutional mergers, provide the institutions with new and expanded responsibilities. These will include, for example, organisational reform, responsibility for managing internal allocation of state funding for student places, acting as employers to young researchers for the first time, and investing more in human resource development. Thus, the **greater freedom and autonomy that will come with the reforms will require institutions to make effective decisions on matters that were previously mandated by the state**.

If managed well, the increased freedoms afforded to institutions will shift resources from unproductive compliance activities towards activities that promote positive impact in the system, such as much-needed investment in staff development and additional supports for students. Stakeholders reported, therefore, that continuing to build capacity within each institution to address their new responsibilities should be a priority across the system in the coming years.

A redefined relationship between the Ministry, institutions and academic staff will need to carefully balance trust and accountability

Some stakeholders stressed during interviews that **the benefits of increased autonomy and less bureaucracy for institution leaders will need to be balanced with appropriate oversight and accountability**, including accountability to academic staff working in the institutions. Trusting relationships between institution leaders and policymakers will become even more important in the context of reduced funding, where everybody will be expected to do more with less. At the same time the institutions will also need to be accountable to the public and those they employ and serve.

Relatedly, some stakeholders indicated **a need for greater transparency on the working conditions of academic staff within institutions, and how they are impacted by the reforms**. There is a concern that many academics do not have a full understanding of the reforms or their implications for their work – a concern echoed by the survey of Latvian academic staff carried out by the project team in 2024, which found that a large share of academics lacked clarity on the terms and implications of the reforms.

A key example shared by interviewees was the lack of clear information available within the system about the likely impacts of the reforms on salaries, stability of employment or workload allocation. Even computing basic data on the average academic staff salaries at different grades in Latvia is extremely complex, given that individual staff members tend to work part-time or have more than one employment contract with multiple employers. This limits transparency and comparability about staff actual salaries across the Latvian system with different data sources reaching different conclusions. Similarly, few conclusions or norms seem to have been reached to date to about the revision of workload allocation models considering the reforms.

Thus, interviewees called for more transparency from institutions about the impact of the reforms on the career conditions of academics. Stakeholders also stressed that collective negotiations and reform efforts within institutions need to be as inclusive and representative as possible of staff cohorts, and that transparency and flow of information throughout institutions should be prioritised.

3.2. Summary of perspectives from smaller and specialised institutions

Despite the widespread mergers in the Latvian higher education and research landscape in recent times, some smaller institutions remain. This section summarises some of their perspectives gathered through site visits by the project team in June 2025 to six of these higher education institutions (see Section 1.4). Their experiences provide a complementary viewpoint to those of the larger higher education institutions the team visited in November 2024.

Smaller and specialised institutions in Latvia appear very proactive in seeking beneficial relationships, sharing resources and engaging in collaboration

There are several potential areas where higher education institutions can beneficially collaborate in order to achieve their objectives, progress their missions and provide more rewarding working conditions for academic staff. These include: (a) formal institutional collaboration on teaching or research within Latvia among institutions working in complementary fields; (b) international collaborations among scholars working within their field; (c) staff holding multiple teaching appointments across higher education

institutions; (d) collaboration in teaching/advising/mentoring students and (e) collaboration with national and regional enterprises, and international research teams.

The project team observed all the above-mentioned forms of collaboration in action among the smaller and specialised institutions visited. Illustrative examples of **collaboration across complementary fields** include the joint doctoral programme in the arts being developed between the three Latvian Academies, and a collaborative teacher training programme between the Academies of Culture and Music. The team also encountered admirable efforts to **build collaboration with international partners**. At one institution for example (the Jāzeps Vītols Academy of Music) the project team spoke to international collaborators of the Academy in the United States, Austria and Germany, all of whom highlighted their appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with the Academy, and its ability to move forward quickly and flexibly with joint projects in a way not always be possible within administrative or organisational constraints of larger organisations and systems. Similarly, the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences had clearly benefited substantially from the shared activities and networks developed through its membership of the E³UDRES² European University Alliance.

Collaboration in Latvia is also stimulated through **staff holding teaching appointments in multiple institutions**, including across the public and private sector. In Turība University, for example, more than one-third of the employed faculty also have a working relationship with other universities, which supports the cross-fertilisation of knowledge across sectors, and can help promote the involvement of private institutions in research projects administered by public universities. The project team also observed **strong collaboration in teaching and student advising**, particularly within the Academies - rectors and vice-rectors reported being involved in governance and assessment across all three, while students and staff noted regular opportunities to take courses and engage in joint educational activities in other Academies.

Finally, the project team encountered several examples of **collaboration with partners outside of the higher education sector**, such as businesses or regional authorities. One striking example came from a visit to one of the regional locations (Ventspils University of Applied Sciences) where it was clear that there was a productive and dynamic relationship between the University, the local authorities, other education providers and social and cultural services in the city, based on regular contact and shared resources. This was evident, for example, from the participation of a city official in the project team visit, who stressed the vital role that the institution played in Ventspils. The project team also noted the co-location of a new vocationally oriented secondary school on the same campus, which was helping to provide continuity of education in important skill areas for the local region.

Overall, the small and specialised institutions (and their academic staff) visited by the project team seem to be equally active - or, in some cases, perhaps, even more active - than larger more comprehensive institutions) in seeking opportunities for collaboration. Considering Latvia's particular context, staff members need to be especially nimble in seeking relationships and sharing resources, and many have become commendably skilled at doing so. The project team concluded that this organisational flexibility among smaller institutions is a particular strength of the Latvian system that should be maintained and further encouraged.

Being elected does not guarantee employment or workload stability for academic staff...

As is the continuing practice in Latvia, academic staff are elected to their positions by the institution's Senate for a period of six years, following an open competitive process. They may then be re-elected after the six-year period. Institution staff reported to the project team that being elected does not provide any additional rights to job stability – most staff still must ensure that there is adequate project funding and teaching hours available to “stitch together” into a full-time position. Some institutions reported that, through the combined efforts of leadership and staff, they can offer full-time or close to full-time employment to

most elected academic staff. However, achieving this requires substantial flexibility in workload allocation models. For example, if the staff member is not concurrently elected as a researcher (which remains, for now, a separate election process), then performance of research may be included in the planning of the academic workload, along with preparation of lectures, teaching and administrative work.

The need for continuous flexibility in workload management at institution level must also be balanced with the requirements of funders. Staff reported that translating their actual workload into concrete numbers of hours or apportioning them to different activities is almost impossible, with many staff participating in multiple research projects in addition to teaching and other duties. Nevertheless, when writing project proposals, it is often necessary to estimate exact workloads for the staff assigned to the project.

Most staff expressed an idealised wish for a simpler and more stable workload allocation, comprising a fixed allocation of their time to teaching and research in exchange for a stable salary. However, many staff also acknowledged that they could not rely solely on the fixed minimum salaries set in legislation, and the only way for many of them to earn a liveable wage is to get involved in multiple research projects. While this was occasionally given a positive framing in interviews (i.e. “staff are empowered to design their own job and own workloads”), for the most part it was acknowledged that, to remain and progress in the system, staff need to continuously work to build relationships and find funding to support themselves. Indeed, some longer-serving staff described themselves as ‘survivors’ of the system, noting that many others had been unable to withstand the challenges and instability of an academic career in Latvia.

Importantly, interviewees noted to the project team that, while many of the more senior academic staff had started their careers in a culture where multiple jobs and projects were needed to secure full-time employment, the expectations of younger entrants are now different. Many potential young academics have experienced higher education environments in other countries and were less willing to take on the types of workloads that are seemingly required to progress in an academic career in Latvia. Despite the emergence of new opportunities in the system through project funding, interviewees are largely of the opinion that providing more stable opportunities for younger staff remains fundamental to creating attractive academic career prospects in Latvia.

....but there is a sense of responsibility and collective action that attempts to mitigate the instability

As detailed in the previous section, during site visits institution staff shared insights into the contexts in which they are currently operating. Challenges relating to shortage and fragmentation of funding, along with falling student numbers (and loss of associated funding) has in many cases created a collective approach to diversifying funding streams and stabilisation of salaries from year to year. Many staff members interviewed by the project team expressed a feeling of gratitude to senior colleagues and institution management for their dedication to securing funds for their continued and stable employment. They also highlighted their own sense of responsibility to contribute effectively to raising funds, involve themselves in multiple research projects and perform to a high standard.

As was the case in the previous visits carried out in November 2024, the project team found that academic staff and researchers display a variety of motivations to continue in the academic career, even in imperfect conditions. These motivations included contributing to the cutting edge of a particular scientific field (for example, the development of national and European aerospace capacities), contributing to innovation and development of talent within their local region, or dedication to exploring and building Latvia’s artistic, cultural and musical identity. In some cases, these motivations appeared to induce acceptance of precarious employment and modest salaries. At the same time many interviewees expressed concern that they would not be able to maintain the same level of output, in the context of continuing job instability, for the entirety of their careers.

Issues relating to teaching and learning were rarely raised during interviews

The project team noted that most of the discussions relating to academic careers centred around research activity and research projects, with little emphasis on teaching and learning issues. In one way this is not surprising, as one of the original objectives of the academic career reforms was to build Latvia's research capacity. Nevertheless, the interviewees notably focused on improving research and raising additional research funding as opposed to improving teaching and learning. Interviewees highlighted that pay for teaching was very low and relatively unattractive for younger staff compared to the potential pay that could be achieved from being involved in research projects or working in state research organisations. Similarly, institution leaders noted, given the low state budget for higher education, that students and teaching are not the drivers of institution funding and that prospects for increasing funding through the teaching channel are limited given Latvia's demographic situation. In one case, an institution reported that funding coming from outside the state subsidy for education already comprised more than 60% of its budget.

At the same time, many staff spoke about their efforts to build strong relationships and interest in research among bachelor's and master's students, hoping to increase their motivation to pursue careers in academia, including teaching. Institutions were also aware of their distinctive missions in teaching the next generation of students either in their region, or in their speciality. In general, the project team noted a risk that, in the pressure to access sufficient funding, institutions and their staff might naturally focus more on their research mission and may be left with lower strategic motivation and fewer resources to devote to improving the student learning experience.

Common research performance metrics may not be most suitable to measure academic's achievement in applied and specialist fields

Latvia's higher education and research system has placed a lot of emphasis on journal-based performance metrics in recent years, as a basis for assessing performance of applicants for research funding, and in assessing research performance. Interviewees, particularly those in the highly specialised Academies, noted that metrics such as publications in SCOPUS Q1/Q2 journals appear to be afforded more importance within the system than professional and applied achievements (for example, performances by professional musicians or actors). Interviewees reported losing highly talented people from their respective fields due to this focus on metrics and stressed the need for a wider view of staff performance to be taken, which could include both quantitative and qualitative elements. This approach would more closely mirror international developments such as those advocated for through the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) initiatives.

In the Academies, staff also highlighted the importance of creative and artistic output as a means of measuring and assessing performance of their staff. Many staff are successfully producing both teaching, research and artistic output, but there are specific challenges staff in creative sectors face in producing outputs across all three domains. Besides the workload involved, many creative outputs are costly and may require additional funding or the involvement of additional staff (for example, putting on a play), and the extent to which these costs and requirements can be met also impacts on the ability of staff to achieve their objectives. Interviewees noted that these external factors cannot be considered in highly quantitative measures of staff performance, a point also stressed to the project team in its previous round of site visits².

² For example, in the previous visits doctoral candidates and their supervisors highlighted that in some fields, such as agriculture, external factors such as weather conditions can delay the collection, generation and subsequent reporting of research results, and such factors cannot be taken into account in highly standardised quantitative measures of researcher performance.

The short duration of project-based funding creates additional - and severe - pressure on higher education institutions' operations

All the institutions interviewed by the project team stressed the difficulties that short-term and project-based funding create for the long-term sustainability of their activities. For example, senior institution staff reported that funding from the Research Council of Latvia is awarded for a fixed three-year period, regardless of the project specifics or suitability to be completed in that period. Other project-based funding also often comes with still shorter timeframes. This makes navigating and coordinating between projects an ongoing challenge, where institutions must focus continuously on meeting immediate deliverables instead of taking a more long-term strategic view of research activity and human resource management. This is certainly not an emerging issue, having already been identified as a challenge in previous reviews of the Latvian research system³. It appears that, while funding has increased, the instability caused by heavy dependence on project-based funding continues to be a pressing concern for many institutions.

Some institutions report having more diversified access to recurrent funding than others (for example, the Academy of Culture receives funding from both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education). Regional universities also reported that, while they legally are not allowed to receive recurrent funding from local authorities, they can and often do receive specific funding from them to conduct research projects. Institution leaders and senior research managers report try to disperse resources from both recurrent and project-based funding in ways that can benefit the maximum number of staff possible, but the short delivery period for research projects creates year-on-year volatility in the amount of “workload” they can offer individual staff members. As a result, the overdependence and short-term nature of research funding continues to be one of the fundamental limiting factors in the commitments that Latvian higher education institutions, as employers, can offer to academic staff.

Institutionalised mentoring and professional development opportunities for staff remain scarce

Most staff reported to the project team a sense that professional development opportunities were improving. Staff particularly appreciated increased opportunities to experience mobility and attend conferences in their field. The involvement of the institutions in European University Alliances (EUA) also provide staff with greatly expanded opportunities to participate in joint research projects or professional development with other institutions across Europe. Most institutions reported very positive viewpoints of the benefits of involvement in EUAs. Some staff remarked that it is easier in many ways to find common ground with, and learn from, similar institutions in other countries than with other Latvian institutions.

Senior institution leaders articulated diverse efforts to provide professional development opportunities within their own institutions. For example, Vidzeme University leaders highlighted an international multimedia and Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality (AR/VR) hackathon it was hosting in June 2025 as a week-long event, bringing together industry representatives, stakeholders, professionals, staff and students to engage in team-based learning and collaborative project development. Others mentioned efforts to seek training opportunities outside of the institution or through partner institutions, if they were unable to provide training directly.

While recognising the importance of on-the-job training and mentoring, some institution leaders reported difficulties encouraging more senior staff to mentor junior colleagues, often because the pressure of their workload did not permit them the time to do so. Some interviewees advocated for a mentoring role for level 4 researchers to be enshrined in descriptions of expected tasks and responsibilities, either within institutions' human resources policies or as part of the system-level development of the academic career framework. Institution leaders also noted that efforts to improve mentoring for junior staff would also likely

³ <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/statistics/policy-support-facility/specific-support-latvia-ii>

require some senior staff to develop stronger capacities in this area – not all senior staff are adept at navigating the administrative requirements of the system, communicating effectively to junior staff and engaging with industry or other external partners.

Mentoring of early career researchers may be even more effective if provided through external partnerships or additional employment outside the institution, for example, industry or public research organisations. Currently, there appears to be no means within the system to incentive, recognise or reward such mentorship, whether financially or otherwise. Representatives of state research organisations interviewed by the project team also noted this point – in many cases doctoral researchers may be employed full-time by a public research organisation and effectively only registered with the university for administrative reasons, but there is no possibility for supervisors of doctoral candidates within public research organisations to receive any remuneration or recognition of the mentoring they provide.

Overall, the project team concluded that the extent of mentoring that may be available to young researchers from seniors in the field is likely to differ substantially across and within institutions.

4. Reflections of the Project Team on supporting reform implementation to improve academic careers

As the project team has previously noted, few OECD countries offer comparable examples of higher education systems undergoing reforms as extensive and simultaneous as those currently underway in Latvia. The changes are widely acknowledged as necessary. The project team also notes that they have already begun to yield some positive results and are expected to strengthen the system over the long term. Nevertheless, in the short to medium term, a period of substantial adaptation is inevitable as institutions adjust to the new framework. During this period, it is important to set realistic expectations regarding the ability of public authorities to provide immediate clarity on all issues and for higher education institutions to fully assimilate the reforms into their organisations. A measured and patient approach from all parties will be essential to ensure sustainable progress and effective implementation over time.

With that said, the following sections provide a concise summary of key reflections from the project team, based on fact-finding activities to date in 2025. These reflections provide suggestions for both public authorities and institutions that may inform ongoing policy deliberations and support more effective implementation of the reforms during this continuing period of transition.

4.1. Reflections for public authorities

Seek to reduce instability of funding from public sources as much as possible

One of the greatest risks to the success of the reforms is the extent of fragmentation in implementation of different elements. Each individual measure is being introduced on a distinct timescale, often accompanied by specific regulations and funding mechanisms for its initiation. This greatly increases the complexity of coordinating the financing and implementation of the reforms for both policymakers and institutions.

Fragmentation of funding may even worsen in the current context, where public funding for higher education and research, still at a very low base, seems unlikely to be significantly increased in the coming years (see Section 2.4). The Latvian central government is aiming to meet its current commitments to the sector but is simultaneously asking line ministries to seek cost savings. Uncertainty about public core funding is exacerbated by a proliferation of grant schemes and funding sources. These allow institutions to substantially augment revenue, but force staff to devote considerable effort to preparing and submitting funding applications. Limited stable funding means administrative tasks for researchers will often take

precedence over innovation and development. Meanwhile, inconsistent rules governing funding allocation, overhead charges, salary calculations, and workloads – both across grant schemes and within individual institutions – will continue to perpetuate job instability for academic staff.

Public authorities have limited options to substantially increase base funding for the sector. In these circumstances, the only option for improving stability of employment for academic staff is through prioritising funding certainty for the sector and reducing administrative and bureaucratic costs. The new funding model, with its move towards block funding, appears to be a potentially positive step in this direction, although the details remain to be seen. Public authorities would ideally carefully evaluate ex-ante how planned increases in performance-based funding might affect the financial stability of institutions, aiming to strike a balance between incentivising high performance and maintaining the stability needed to support their long-term development. Recent OECD analysis indicates that performance-based funding often has adverse financial consequences for institutions, especially when prioritised over funding for institutional development, while its beneficial impacts on higher education systems are often more modest than hoped⁴.

Regarding core research funding, policymakers could explore the potential impact of providing some funding that, while project based, can be customised to support different project durations. This could be done in a collaborative and adaptive way, working with applicants to estimate the time needed to complete projects and allowing that to factor in the decision process, rather than setting a rigid benchmark for funding duration at the outset. Such reflection could be carried out as part of a wider deliberation on the ideal balance of allocation of research funding between base institutional funding, project-based funding and funding with the aim of achieving socio-economic objectives, in Latvia's particular context. It is outside of the scope of this project to provide recommendations on this topic. Nevertheless, Latvia could draw inspiration from recent policy initiatives in many European countries aiming to provide more flexible and stable research funding, reducing bureaucracy and allowing institutions to focus research efforts on their strengths rather than pursuing projects that may not best align with their disciplinary profiles⁵.

Longer-term funding for research can also help to make the evaluation process for research projects less resource intensive – an important consideration for funders. In some cases, it may also provide additional time and space for institutions to build deeper connections with industry – an area of collaboration that has been noted to be underdeveloped in Latvia.

Explore opportunities to systematise information exchange and open new forms of dialogue between public authorities and academia.

Alongside ongoing reforms to quality assurance and public financing (see Section 2.3), institutions and stakeholders report difficulty keeping up with constant regulatory changes and ensuring that information about these reforms and their implications is effectively communicated across their organisations. The project team observed that, while there was extensive and thorough consultation on reform issues, a core group of institutional and stakeholder representatives appeared to engage most consistently in the discussions. This reflects to some extent the limited resources available in the Latvian system to support engagement in consultative processes – the professional and administrative cadre of staff that have become the norm in many other systems seems still to be quite limited in Latvia.

The team also noted that while consultation is clearly at the core of all the reform processes, it is not “systematised” in the sense that engagements tend to happen mainly in relation to a specific reform or piece of legislation. The emerging four-tier academic career model along with the expansion of tenure and

⁴ OECD (forthcoming 2025), The financial sustainability of universities: Insights from policy in OECD countries

⁵ EC-OECD (2025), STIP Compass: International Database on Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP), edition August 01, 2025, <https://stip.oecd.org>

tenure-track position provide opportunities to develop more widely distributed leadership on academic staff issues within institutions. This could offer significant benefits both within and beyond the current reform processes - improving the flow of information and enhancing understanding of reforms and policy deliberations across the system. It could also help ensure that regulatory changes align with the needs and realities of different categories of staff. Wider engagement in reform processes can also help to cultivate a greater sense of agency among academic staff, and, ultimately, their commitment to contributing to reform efforts. Seeking these benefits appears especially important in Latvia's fragmented system.

There are several options that could be pursued to open new opportunities for dialogue between academia and public officials in Latvia. Such opportunities could help strengthen the research and policy analysis capabilities within the Ministry, which were found in a recent OECD report to be constrained by lack of resources. Indeed, the project team heard that the State Chancellery of Latvia is coordinating a working group on improving cooperation between doctoral schools and public administration - a follow-up action to a recent EU-funded Technical Support Instrument project in which Latvia participated⁶.

One possible way forward would be to introduce a joint public policy doctoral programme that allows for cooperation and mobility, to ensure that line Ministries (including the Ministry for Science and Education) can access young talented policy analysts even on a short-term basis. However, other forms of short-term mobility of academic staff, such as fellowships for public policy researchers or higher education specialists to the Ministry could also provide mutual benefits.

The Ministry can also continue to develop the Research Latvia portal, which is evolving from a project-level activity towards a more institutionalised and permanent national platform showcasing Latvian higher education and research institutions, research results and innovation achievements. The platform is now used to widely communicate information about academic career reforms, including the entry into force of new cabinet regulations. Event announcements for academic staff and researchers, media coverage about academic staff issues, and profiles of researchers are also routinely shared on the portal. A potentially valuable enhancement would be to develop the portal into a two-way communication channel, enabling members of the academic community to submit feedback or questions to the Ministry regarding reforms and regulations. This could help inform policy implementation by highlighting diverse perspectives from across the sector.

Finally, the development of a Community of Practice for academic staff provides another important opportunity to widen communication and engagement on issues of common interest, as discussed in Section 5 and to be addressed in more detail in Progress Report 2. One could envisage a scenario, for example, where the Community of Practice organises an annual event or retreat on higher education issues that enables deep dialogue between public officials, stakeholders and staff.

Incentivise collaboration between institutions to drive greater efficiency

The project team concluded that institutional mergers already substantially consolidated the Latvian higher education and research system. The increased autonomy granted to institutions through the reforms to academic career policies, quality assurance, and funding should also, in time, afford them more scope to achieve greater efficiency in the management of their resources. Institutions are already working to progressively build their own capacities to achieve these efficiencies. However, significant additional

⁶ The TSI project was entitled "*Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe*" as a multi-country support project funded by the Structural Reform Support directorate of the European Commission. The Latvian working group is seeking to implement the recommendations developed within the project, in particular addressing the recommendation "*Improve the interface between research and policy to increase the impact of science on policymaking*", [OECD Presents the Final Report on the Development of Evidence Informed Policymaking in Latvia | researchlatvia](#)

efficiencies could be unlocked through enhanced collaboration between institutions, an area where policymakers can wield considerable influence via targeted policy levers. While many OECD countries have traditionally promoted competition among institutions to drive excellence, there is a growing recognition of the value of fostering mutually beneficial cooperation among institutions. Increasingly, European and state investments are being directed toward collaborative initiatives in higher education, such as resource sharing and the exchange of best practices, aiming to strengthen systems as a whole.

With this in mind, Latvian authorities could consider reserving a dedicated share of state funding, however small, towards supporting cooperative activities for higher education institutions in the future, including activities pursued through the Community of Practice. These cooperative activities would ideally focus broadly on all the missions of higher education, not just research. Box 1, based on the presentation at the international workshop in June 2025, provides some recent examples that may help to inspire Latvian policymakers and institution leaders.

Box 1. “Next practices” in collaboration in Latvia and across OECD countries

There is potential for deeper collaboration and resource sharing within the existing network of Latvian higher education institutions. International experience shows that greater cooperation in **doctoral education, digital services, and professional development** could particularly benefit the Latvian higher education system, as described below.

Doctoral education:

Latvian doctoral schools now offer taught curricula, parts of which can be shared across institutions to provide students with a broader and more flexible course selection. Doctoral students can also potentially benefit from access to better research facilities, larger peer groups, and more extensive mentorship available in larger, well-resourced programs. In many EU systems, this is achieved through:

- Collaboration between HEIs and public research organizations (PROs) in curriculum development, teaching, staffing, and degree awarding (for example, in Bulgaria).
- Partnerships between HEIs with complementary strengths to jointly deliver doctoral education across related disciplines, such as the NAWI Advanced School of Science in Austria—a joint initiative by the University of Graz and Graz University of Technology supporting 600 doctoral students and 450 research projects.
- National graduate schools focused on single disciplines, like the Netherlands’ National Interuniversity Graduate Schools. For example, the Institute for Programming Research and Algorithmics (IPA) is led by TU Eindhoven with nine participating universities

Digitalisation:

Shared digital support in the Latvian higher education system is progressing through the development of a “Higher Education and Science IT Shared Service Centre,” a collaboration of four scientific universities (UL, RTU, RSU, LULST), governed by a council including representatives from these universities, the IT industry, and government. Best practices from similar initiatives in other European systems highlight the importance of:

- Broad representation of the HEIs in governance (as for example, in the governance model of SURF, Netherlands)
- A diversified revenue model and service offerings (as in the example of JISC in the United Kingdom)

- Focusing on digital services for both teaching and learning, as well as research

Additionally, consideration should be given on whether AI support would best fall under the remit of an IT Shared Service Centre with a wider mandate and more inclusive governance, rather than progressed as individual institutional initiatives.

Professional Development

The Latvian Higher Education Act and Cabinet Regulations require teaching staff to complete 160 hours of professional development every six years, including 60 instructional contact hours. Ideally, the new academic career framework would establish a clear obligation for academic staff to demonstrate continuous professional growth throughout their careers. Furthermore, best practice among HEIs is to implement a comprehensive professional development framework (potentially based on the COMPAC project - see Box 2) and to actively support sustained learning opportunities for academic staff. Currently, while Latvian academics often find professional development opportunities through their own networks and institutions, these are frequently limited. Many EU systems enhance support for professional development through broader collaborative initiatives, such as:

- Government co-funding of university centres that promote pedagogical excellence and innovation (e.g., Germany, Netherlands, Finland, France, Austria, Switzerland).
- Sector-wide guidance on professional development frameworks developed jointly by the higher education sector, such as the University Teaching Qualification in the Netherlands, the Professional Standards Framework or frameworks by professional societies in the United Kingdom (such as the Royal Academy of Engineering).
- University-based teaching and learning centres (typically in larger universities) providing shared services, often on a subscription basis.
- Coordinated national networks of teaching and learning practitioners and experts supported and managed by a national public body (for example, the Irish National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and CNIPES- the Portuguese National Council for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education).

The emerging Latvian Community of Practice for academic staff would ideally take responsibility for identifying and prioritising where further collaboration might be most beneficial, and how best to institutionalise collaboration

Consider how to best measure success of reforms at institution level

Few countries have developed accountability and performance funding measures linked to the staffing of higher education institutions or the working conditions of academic staff, reflecting the autonomy of institutions in many systems regarding human resources policy. For example, indicators used in formula funding models across OECD countries tend to overwhelmingly be student, graduate or credit-based metrics, bibliometrics or indicators of the institutions' capacity to independently attract funding. Public authorities could reflect on whether there is a case to be made for defining and assessing some staff-related metrics at institution level in Latvia, given Latvia's unusually high share of staff working part-time, the year-on-year precarity faced by academic staff, and the extent of investment in reforms intended to provide more attractive and stable careers.

There are yet few international examples to provide inspiration for Latvia in this regard. However, there are signs that focus on staff turnover, staff well-being or other indicators of workforce stability (for example, the share of staff on permanent contracts or the share of staff funded by project-based funding) are becoming more prevalent, whether assessed as part of quality assurance processes, within institutional

performance contracts or as part of funding decisions. Latvian authorities could reflect on which measures of staff conditions within institutions could be both feasible to define and assess and provide useful indications of the impact of the reforms on individual institutions and the system.

4.2. Reflections for institutions

In the context of the comprehensive and transformative reforms, institutions are tasked with creating conditions that enable academic staff to thrive in the new system. They can do this by providing access to relevant professional development and fostering a culture of collaboration and co-creation on shared priorities. Many institutions reported to the project team their efforts in doing so. Below, some short reflections for institutions from the project team are shared, based on the recent fact-finding activities.

Seek to improve diffusion of information about reform processes through the institution, including commitments to academic staff development

As noted earlier, institutional representatives have generally engaged actively in working groups and ongoing consultations with the Ministry and other stakeholders in the discussion and development of academic career reforms. However, there is a risk that a small circle of representatives from a limited number of institutions could engage closely in consultative processes, while at the same time the broader academic community remains unaware of or uncertain about reforms. Project team discussions with staff and stakeholders revealed that many Latvian academics are not clear about the impact that reforms may have on their own careers.

To ameliorate this situation, institutions should ideally ensure clear two-way communication channels are available to all staff, enabling easy sharing of information and effective gathering of feedback on reform processes. Concerted efforts to improve in this regard can help prevent “blind spots” or unintended consequences relating to the reforms and ensure that diverse perspectives are reflected in negotiations with policymakers. These channels could include regular meetings, events, retreats, or dedicated online platforms that offer clear guidance on implementing reforms and provide accessible resources to resolve any uncertainties.

It was clear to the project team that national reforms have instigated widespread institutional reforms. At the same time, interviewees indicated that there may be opportunities to further develop and streamline the professionalisation of management and HR functions within certain institutions. If not already implemented, institutions could seek to ensure that a clear rationale for institution-level reforms is developed and communicated to staff, along with articulation of expectations on staff in the context of these reforms and the resources and commitments that will be provided by the institution for their professional development. This could form part of institutions’ HR strategies or be communicated directly. In addition, if not already developed, institutions could reflect on how best to monitor important indicators of workforce sustainability and well-being at institution level.

Pursue opportunities to achieve economies of scale for the benefit of academic staff

Project-based collaborations between higher education institutions on important academic career issues have already been supported and have shown promising results in Latvia (for example, the ongoing COMPAQ initiative – see Box 2). However, short-term project funding is unlikely to be sufficient to establish a long-term culture of collaboration and improve efficiency and consistency within the system.

In a system at Latvia’s scale, collaboration and consolidation of scarce research resources will be vital. The project team noted a strong case for greater sharing of research infrastructures (RIs) and facilities,

which, as recent OECD research shows⁷, is one of the key pathways to promoting efficient use of resources and allow greater scope for researchers to tackle more ambitious questions and topics than could be addressed in a smaller more limited laboratory setting. Internationally, there are trends towards developing more coherent national or regional research ecosystems, and Latvian institutions could therefore also ideally seek to develop new cooperation models in this direction. While there are practical challenges, including the need to establish of governance models for sharing infrastructure, these challenges could be overcome if collectively prioritised within the sector. Sharing of research infrastructure can also open new opportunities for academic staff to work together and even diversify the funding sources available to maintain and improve equipment for the institution hosting the research infrastructure.

Collaboration on other issues can also help to yield benefits for individual institutions and their staff. For example, efforts to define and communicate institutions' intentions and commitments towards academic staff (as outlined in the previous section) could be more effective if based on a set of "best practice" principles agreed for the entire system. This could take the form of a collective agreement developed and signed between the Ministry of Education and Science and Latvian higher education institutions, along similar lines to the existing collective commitment to good practice in attracting international students and providing them with high quality study experiences⁸. It could also be pursued as an agreement between institutions only. Such collective agreement of basic principles can help to promote consistency and clarity for academic staff across the system, particularly for those with multiple employment contracts with different organisations.

Box 2. The COMPAC project – features and considerations

More than 15 researchers from Rīga Stradiņš University and the University of Latvia are collaborating through the publicly funded COMPAC research project, aiming to develop a new framework for the assessment of academic staff competencies in Latvia. The framework is intended to help academics assess their own competences and identify their learning needs. It will also inform professional development planning and HR policies and practices in higher education institutions.

Reflecting the planned introduction of a four-level integrated (teaching, research and service) academic career framework in Latvia, the project is defining important competencies at each of the four career stages and will also propose measures to measure the specified competencies. The underlying principle is that the competencies should progress and deepen with each career stage. The specification of transversal skills for academics (i.e. important skills that are independent of any particular career stage or field of knowledge) are also under consideration in the context of the model development.

While the project is ongoing, analysis and consultations to date have revealed the importance of distinguishing clearly between indicators of *competence* (knowledge, skills and behaviours that are in line with expectations for the job and career stage) and indicators of *performance* (outcomes and achievements of the academic's work). The project work to date has also highlighted concern among many academic staff about the dominance of bibliometrics and other quantitative indicators as the key measures of academic excellence, which can marginalise pedagogical work, engagement with regional and national stakeholders, and potentially harm the quality of education programmes in the longer term.

The project emphasises that the model should be adaptable to different job roles and institutional types, given the diversity of institutions and academic staff roles in Latvia. It is being designed to serve as a

⁷ Forthcoming working paper by the OECD Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation

⁸ ([Agreement on good practice in attracting foreign students | Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija](#)).

general baseline that can flexibly accommodate different institutional contexts. The project is informed by existing national and international academic competence frameworks and will provide a basis for future training and policy support (for example, by designing micro-modules for professional development in areas where there is strong learning need).

Source: Project Team interviews, [RSU Website](#)

Finally, as advocated throughout the current TSI project, collaboration on teaching and learning and other matters of joint interest could be effectively pursued as part of a standing Community of Practice of academic staff, which would guarantee some persistent minimum resources for the development of guidance and professional development for Latvian academics.

5. Next steps - building institutional collaboration through a Community of Practice

This section briefly summarises progress as at the time of writing towards the development of a Community of Practice for Latvian academic staff. The second planned progress report for this project, to be prepared at the end of 2025, will provide a more comprehensive report of the Community of Practice pilot phase and recommendations for its full establishment.

The case for a Community of Practice for academic staff in Latvia (summarised)

Collaboration among higher education institutions in Latvia is widespread and commonplace. Cooperation between academic staff on research projects occurs regularly across higher education institutions and with state research organisations. There are also some recent examples of institutions collaborating to support the development of policy and good practice related to academic careers, such as the COMPAC collaborative research project on academic staff competencies (see Box 2 above). In addition, many different bodies provide opportunities for academic staff to update their professional competencies and gain new knowledge. The Latvian Association of Young Researchers, for example, organises events, seminars and other activities for early-career researchers, and fulfil many functions of a National Young Academy⁹, since one currently does not exist in Latvia as a distinct organisation.

However, much of the collaboration appears to be initiated through informal connections and personal networks, with few formally designated focal points to coordinate or facilitate joint efforts. While informal mechanisms offer flexibility, they also risk excluding newcomers or those not embedded in existing relationships. Stakeholders noted considerable variation across institutions in their openness to collaboration, often driven by competitive pressures for funding, concerns over attribution of research outputs, and complexities surrounding the ownership and management of intellectual property. Collaboration in other areas - such as teaching, entrepreneurship, or innovation - can be even more challenging, particularly in the absence of a clear incentive structure, dedicated funding or institutional recognition to motivate and sustain such efforts (European Commission, 2024^[1]).

Evidence indicates that formal focal points for collaboration can help to address some of these concerns and lead to more consistent and sustainable outcomes over time. The analysis prepared by the project team for the pilot Community of Practice workshop highlighted the potential benefits of more formalised collaboration for the Latvian system. Earlier fact-finding activities of the team, such as the readiness survey conducted in 2024, showed clearly that the expansion of opportunities for collaboration and practice-based interaction among the academic staff community in Latvia would be widely welcomed. International

⁹ [National Young Academies - Global Young Academy](#)

evidence also indicates that nurturing a sense of community among academic staff and providing platforms for networking and professional learning promotes greater staff satisfaction and sense of belonging, and better student outcomes¹⁰.

A Community of Practice offers Latvia a focal point for dialogue and grassroots collaboration on issues of mutual interest to academic staff, providing greater flexibility and responsiveness than is possible in its more structured formal organisations. It can support practitioner-led cooperation on issues that affect job satisfaction, professional development and career prospects of academic staff and bring greater visibility to the breadth and depth of the work that academics do. Thus, the project team concluded that a Community of Practice could provide vital support to academic staff navigating the ongoing reforms.

Those attending the pilot workshop also shared their enthusiasm and wish for more opportunities to work together on “practitioner issues” as evidenced by the report of the workshop (to be included in Progress Report 2). Following the pilot process, first steps have been taken towards the establishment of the Community of Practice for an initial trial phase, which will provide an opportunity to test modes of working and topics of mutual interest for the Community. These first steps, as discussed between the project team and Latvian stakeholders in June-July 2025, are outlined in the next section.

First steps in the Community development

Oversight

The Latvian Council of Higher Education will be responsible for establishing and organising the activities of the Community of Practice in its initial phases, supported by advisory sessions from the project team and international experts on request. The OECD secretariat has already met with and advised the Council members on multiple occasions during 2025.

Initial thematic focus and inaugural conference

Based on consultations with its membership, the Council has identified “**artificial intelligence use in academia**” as a first priority topic to engage members in a Community of Practice. The rationale articulated by the Council (and strongly supported by the project team) is that artificial intelligence is a live issue of concern and urgent debate across the entire Latvian higher education system. There is a widespread need and interest among academics to better understand its capabilities, its implications for teaching, learning and research, and opportunities for using it to improve efficiency and impact of tasks. This latter reason is deemed especially important in a context where academic staff and higher education institutions face difficult budgetary decisions and a need to “do more with less”.

Furthermore, the enormous impact that AI is having on academic publishing is becoming increasingly evident - AI-assisted coding, research, and drafting is leading to exponential growth of publication submissions, jeopardising the capacity of the peer review system and disrupting publication metrics, while the use of AI to review publications is raising serious ethical questions. This raises serious reflection for systems like Latvia’s that tend to focus on publication metrics and journal quartiles as measures of academic staff performance.

Council members highlighted the opportunity presented by AI to improve practice, while being mindful of the risks associated with doing so. The project team, in its role as coordinator of the TSI project and at the request of the Council, will therefore focus its planned advisory sessions (Activity 5.3 in the Detailed Project Description) on this topic.

¹⁰ OECD (2024), The State of Academic Careers in OECD Countries: An Evidence Review

As an initial step, the project team has discussed, collated and shared OECD research and analysis on artificial intelligence relevant to higher education and research systems with Council members. The project will also engage an international expert on AI and Higher Education to provide a keynote speech at the planned inaugural Community of Practice conference in Riga (which will take place on November 7th, 2025 in the Art Academy of Latvia, Riga). The same expert will also provide an additional advisory session as a side session of the conference for up to 20 CoP members drawn from across the system and provide a short summary of the session afterwards. These sessions with the international expert will be tailored specifically to the needs of Latvian colleagues. The inaugural conference will also provide an opportunity for practitioners from across the Latvian system to share their practices relating to AI.

Other planned activities

In the coming months, the Council intends to establish some initial Working Groups from among Community of Practice members to collectively work on topics of joint interest. As mentioned above, and as the other planned activities are concretised, the second planned progress report of this project will focus on the initial activities of the Community and provide some reflections on possible modalities for its permanent establishment.

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- European Commission (2024), *Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/161c2e3e-ec48-11ee-8e14-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/>. [1]