

# Academic career reform in Latvia: Taking stock and looking forward



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# Abstract

This report examines Latvia's ongoing reforms to doctoral education and academic career pathways, offering advice to support effective implementation. The report was developed through technical support to the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science under the EU's Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the OECD with the European Commission, and it compares Latvia's challenges to broader international trends. Key issues include strengthening support for doctoral education, addressing the prevalence of precarious academic positions, reducing reliance on short-term research funding, and improving approaches to assessing research performance. Latvia is advancing these reforms alongside other higher education system changes, creating an environment that seeks to improve academic staff conditions and long-term sustainability. The roadmap produced through the project identifies three priorities: improving institutional working conditions, aligning and updating national policy frameworks, and encouraging collaboration in the academic sector, including a stable Community of Practice for academic staff.

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# Executive Summary

This education policy perspective takes stock of Latvia's ongoing efforts to reform its approach to doctoral education and academic careers and offers advice to support the ongoing implementation process. It is the outcome of technical support provided to the Latvian Ministry of Science and Education, 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).

The challenges Latvia faces as it seeks to create more attractive and sustainable academic careers are familiar to many other OECD countries – the need to improve supports for doctoral education within higher education institutions; the precarity of a large share of academic staff positions; over-dependence of academic careers short-term research funding and ongoing debates about how to best assess the research performance of academic staff at all stages of their careers.

In Latvia, as in many other countries, policy makers, higher education institution leaders and stakeholders are striving to secure more resources and take other actions to improve academic staff conditions. In Latvia's case, academic career frameworks are being reformed concurrently with reform of several other aspects of the higher education system, creating a context that, while dynamic, seeks to strengthen the system against current and future challenges. As this report shows, much has been achieved, while much remains to be done in the coming years to complete the implementation of reforms and assess their impact.

The roadmap for future implementation of the reforms of doctoral education and academic careers in Latvia, developed as part of the TSI project and summarised in this report, identified three core priorities for the Latvian higher and education sector and authorities:

1. Continuously improving **working conditions for academic staff within institutions**, including actions to ensure a smooth and effective transition to the new doctoral-education model in all institutions and to promote evidence-informed and aligned approaches to the management of academic careers within institutions.
2. Updating and aligning the **policy framework**, including actions to ensure that improving academic staff conditions remains at the forefront of higher education policy and to achieve an appropriate balance between stability with performance in the allocation of state funds.
3. Sharing practice and **working together for the benefit of academic staff**, including actions to put a Community of Practice for Latvian academic staff piloted during the TSI project on a firm legal and financial footing and expand collective, sector-wide efforts to tackle outstanding academic career issues.

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# 1 Latvia's reform agenda

## 1.1. Context

Latvia has embarked on a complete reform of doctoral training and academic careers, aiming to create more attractive, rewarding and stable working conditions within academia and public research. Reforms of this magnitude are essential for Latvia, which has faced challenges in renewing and expanding its academic and research workforce. Although the share of tertiary-educated adults in the population is similar to the OECD average, the share of doctorate holders is among the lowest in OECD countries (Figure 1.1) and Latvia also faces an ageing academic workforce (Figure 1.2).

Furthermore, the existing academic workforce must contend with fragmented working conditions and considerable precarity. Most academic staff are employed on part-time contracts, with careers that comprise a “portfolio of jobs” rather than a single, secure position (World Bank, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>). This partly stems from the existence of two separate models for academic careers: a teaching-oriented and a research-oriented model, each based on different regulatory frameworks and reflecting the separated funding systems for higher education and science in Latvia.

Latvia has developed an ambitious and multidimensional response to these challenges, as outlined in Box 1. The reform proposals emerged from analysis, research study visits and consultations undertaken in an EU-funded technical support project carried out between 2020 and 2022 (World Bank, 2022<sup>[2]</sup>). Based on these recommendations, Latvian public authorities and stakeholders developed some foundational principles for the academic career reforms and a plan for their gradual implementation, commencing with doctoral education. 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.

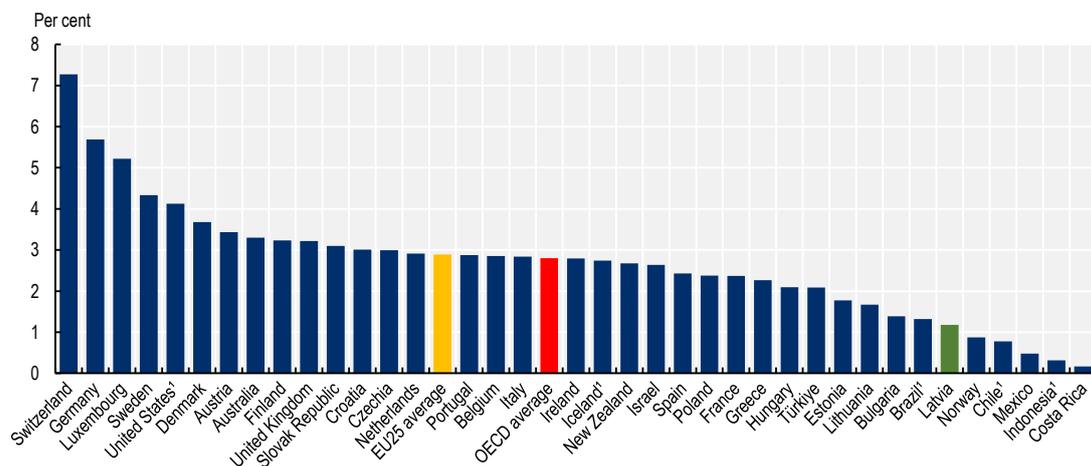
The required legislative amendments and new regulations needed for the doctoral education reform were concluded in 2024 (Saeima, 2024<sup>[3]</sup>; Saeima, 2024<sup>[4]</sup>) and implementation of the reforms within institutions is well underway. These reforms require doctoral education to be organised through doctoral schools, established as structural units of higher education institutions. Employment contracts must also be concluded between higher education institutions and newly enrolling doctoral candidates, who are entitled to a guaranteed minimum salary for the duration of their training.

Moreover, various improvements to the wider academic career framework have been piloted (e.g. tenure track positions) or have commenced implementation (e.g. incremental salary increases for academic staff). An additional major milestone was achieved in November 2025, with the approval of the concept for the academic career reforms by the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers, including a unified four-step academic career framework - 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 enter into force by the end of 2026, with updates to cabinet regulations to follow in 2027 (Valsts Kanceleja, 2025<sup>[5]</sup>).

Importantly, doctoral education and academic career reforms are being implemented in the context of several wider reforms of the Latvian higher education and research system, including mergers of higher

education institutions and reform of their governance, accreditation and funding, many of which have implications for the work and careers of academic staff (Table 1.1).

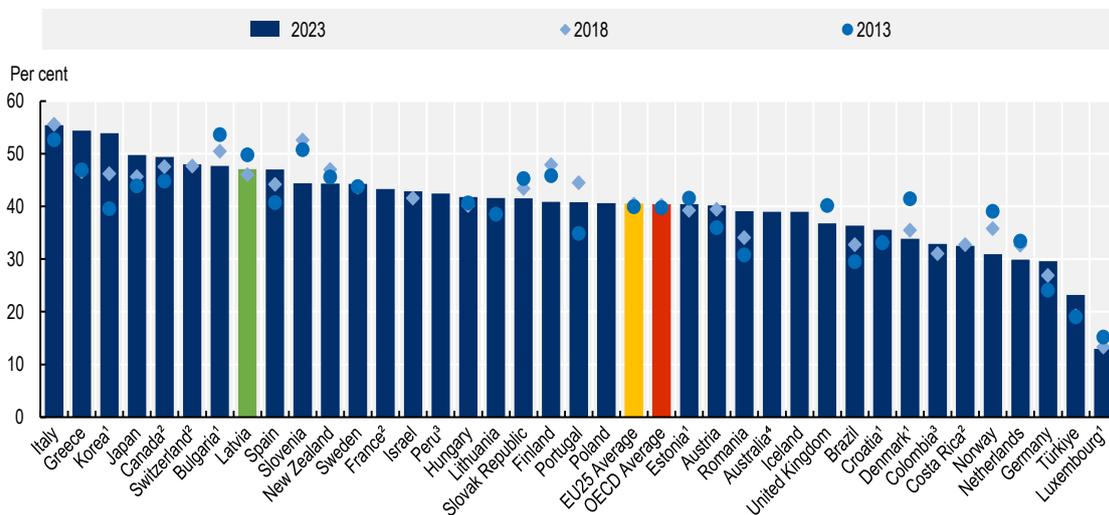
**Figure 1.1. Share of doctorate holders among the tertiary-educated population aged 25-64 (2024)**



Note: 1. Year of reference differs from 2024.

Source: OECD (2025) Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>.

**Figure 1.2. Trends in the share of academic staff aged 50 and over**



Note: 1. Year of reference differs from 2013.

2. Public institutions only.

3. Year of reference differs from 2023.

4. Excludes short-cycle tertiary.

Source: OECD (2025) Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>.

### Box 1. Key features of Latvia's doctoral education and academic career reforms

This box summarises the main characteristics of the academic career reforms planned and ongoing in Latvia.

#### Doctoral education

The new model, which commenced implementation in September 2024, introduces a more professionalised approach to doctoral education within higher education institutions, aligned with international good practice. The reforms establish several key principles.

- Doctoral schools should become structural units of higher education institutions, responsible for ensuring that students have access to opportunities to conduct research, teach or engage in creative artistic work as needed to achieve the learning outcomes of the doctoral programme.
- Employment contracts are to be established between higher education institutions and doctoral students, paying at least EUR 1 000 per month for 20 hours of study and research per week towards a doctoral dissertation. It is expected that doctoral candidates will be employed for the remainder of their time in research projects located within higher education institutions or state research organisations. The salary provided is taxable, and the candidate will be covered by social insurance.
- Doctoral candidates will be recruited through open competitions for places, organised through doctoral schools. Recruited candidates will be expected to complete their programme within three or four years and will be able to take a formal break from their studies if required.
- The employing higher education institution will establish a fund to pay the salary of the doctoral candidate, using state funds and funds from other sources.

#### Academic careers

Building on recent pilot initiatives in Latvia to expand postdoctoral and tenured positions, the reformed framework for academic careers is expected to enter into force by the end of 2026, following approval of the concept note by government in November 2025. The main features include:

- a new structure of academic positions based on the four-stage European Researcher Career Framework, providing opportunities for institutions to introduce practice-oriented academic positions involving high-level professionals from science, culture and economic sectors in academic work. The new unified framework aims to support the transition of staff from part-time contracts to a single employment contract based on normal working hours as defined in Latvian labour law.
- the introduction of new principles for academic staff employment, balancing teaching, research, supervision of early-career researchers, and public engagement.
- a new academic staff performance evaluation framework based on unified quality criteria, taking into account contributions to education, research and public engagement.
- providing institutions with flexibility to expand recruitment into academic positions with permanent employment contracts, including tenure and tenure-track positions, and creating a more predictable academic career system.
- providing a framework for voluntary and incentivised retirement and the conferral of emeritus status on academic staff reaching statutory retirement age, while allowing for continued employment or continued involvement in the academic life of the higher education institution.

**Table 1.1. Recent and ongoing wider 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 <b>internal governance structures</b> 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.	Need to cultivate greater leadership, administrative and management skills in staff, to meet their new responsibilities. Academic staff have potential to follow more differentiated career tracks.	Completed
<b>Mergers and consolidation</b> 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 <sup>[6]</sup> )	Academic staff need to adapt to the reorganised work environment, new colleagues and new management and administrative structures.	Completed
<b>Redevelopment of the state higher education standard</b> (the statement of national standards for programme objectives, obligatory core content and criteria for assessment and award of degrees) 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 <sup>[6]</sup> )	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 <b>National Development Plan 2021-2027</b> ("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 <sup>[7]</sup> ).	Staff have more opportunities to conduct and participate in research but also face increased expectations relating to their research productivity and research impact.	Ongoing
A <b>new model for financing HEIs from public funds</b> started 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 <sup>[8]</sup> )	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 <b>new model of cyclical accreditation of HEIs and programmes</b> 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 <sup>[9]</sup> )	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

Note: National sources cited throughout the table

## 1.2. Support for Latvia's reform process

The comprehensive reforms outlined in the previous section, while undoubtedly disruptive in the short term, have great potential to gradually increase Latvia's attractiveness as a destination for academics and researchers. Nevertheless, the academic career reforms, together with wider sectoral reforms, have created a very dynamic context for policymakers and, at times, a challenging operational environment for institutions and academic staff. Successfully achieving such complex transformation requires careful coordination and monitoring along with ongoing dialogue among national authorities, state higher education institutions, research organisations and other stakeholders. Considering the extent of regulatory change required and challenges with securing sufficient state funding, Latvia has proceeded on an

incremental basis with the reforms, engaging international assistance wherever possible to provide technical support and monitor progress on reform implementation.

In this context, the European Commission's Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM) and the OECD were requested to provide technical support, through a project<sup>1</sup> funded by the Technical Support Instrument of the European Union, to Latvia as it proceeds with the implementation of the academic career reforms. The project, operational between September 2023 and February 2026, provided analysis, international expertise and guidance to promote the successful implementation of the reforms of the academic career framework within state-founded (public) higher education institutions (HEIs) and research institutes.

The project involved several activities and deliverables, including international expert workshops on reform-relevant themes, a comprehensive survey of Latvian academic staff, site visits by the project team to ten Latvian higher education institutions, and a series of in-depth interviews and meetings with key stakeholders. As part of these efforts, a new Community of Practice for academic staff was established in late 2025 to support ongoing engagement and knowledge exchange. The project concluded with the development of an implementation roadmap proposal, outlining recommended actions that Latvia could undertake in the coming years to further strengthen and sustain the positive impact of the reforms.

Although the project's activities and outputs were carefully tailored to Latvia's specific context and reform priorities, many of the underlying issues and challenges associated with reforming the academic profession are not unique to Latvia. Similar pressures and policy questions are prevalent across higher education systems in several OECD and European Union member countries. This paper therefore synthesises the key messages emerging from the full body of project work through the lens of Latvia's experience, aiming to offer insights and lessons that also have broad relevance for other national contexts.

# 2 Assessing the conditions for successful reform implementation

Effective education reform implementation depends not only on the suitability of the policy design to the context. Turning policy intent into practice on the ground requires adequate resources, institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, and, in Latvia's context, coherence and coordination across reform initiatives. Without these conditions in place, reforms may lead to surface-level change only or even fail outright. This project employed a concept of “readiness” for academic career reform implementation, considering it from three viewpoints:

- **readiness of government/public authorities** – the adequacy of actions taken by public authorities to establish frameworks for the reforms, enact necessary regulations, secure sustainable resources and monitor and evaluate their impact.
- **readiness of institutions** – the preparedness of state-founded higher education and research organisations to implement and benefit from reforms, irrespective of their mission, size, governance, culture, or staff profiles.
- **readiness of academic staff** – the adequacy of supports and development opportunities for academic staff (including doctoral researchers) to manage reform-driven workloads and expectations, build their skills and enhance their prospects for secure, successful careers.

The remainder of this chapter analyses the underlying conditions that support or inhibit Latvia's readiness for reform, drawing on evidence collected during the project. It addresses issues related to doctoral-education reform and broader academic-career reform separately.

## 2.1. Conditions relating to doctoral education reform

Doctoral education is an area of increasing policy focus across OECD countries as policymakers seek to ensure a sufficient supply of trained researchers to the labour market. Although many countries have been successful in increasing output of doctoral graduates in recent years, persistent challenges remain in current systems for doctoral and postdoctoral training. These include intense global competition for highly qualified talent, high rates of non-completion of doctoral training, precarious early-career conditions following completion, and limited preparation for careers outside academia. While most entrants to doctoral programmes may aspire to a career in academia, an increasing proportion of graduates pursue careers outside academia after graduation and may struggle to acquire or demonstrate the necessary preparation and transferable skills within their programmes to support this transition.

Many countries have designed policy responses to tackle these challenges in recent years, including conferral of employee status and salaries to doctoral trainees, attempts to create doctoral programmes with more diverse career orientations, improving financial supports, updating regulations and accreditation processes and expanding efforts to support international mobility. These policy directions are also reflected in many of Latvia's reforms to doctoral education (Box 1).

### 2.1.1. Recent trends in Latvian doctoral education

Even before the commencement of the new model, entry into doctoral education in Latvia had been on an upward trend. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of enrolments in doctoral education increased substantially, reaching 3 223 in 2024 from a level of 2 039 in 2020. Although there are year-on-year fluctuations, the number of doctoral graduates also almost doubled between 2020 and 2025. This expansion contrasts with trends at other levels of tertiary education, where enrolments have decreased or levelled off in recent years (Table 2.1). Current information systems in Latvia do not allow for calculation of the non-completion rate of doctoral candidates using a true-cohort approach (i.e. tracking the pathways of individual entrants into doctoral education). However, as Table 2.1 shows, comparing the number of entrants with the number of graduates four years later suggests that a substantial proportion of doctoral candidates either do not complete their studies or require longer than four years to graduate (again noting the comparison is indicative rather than based on true-cohort methods).

**Table 2.1. Doctoral education is a growth area in the Latvia higher education system**

Statistic	Level of education	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2020-2024 (%)
Enrolment	<b>Doctoral or equivalent (ISCED 8)</b>	<b>2 039</b>	<b>2 032</b>	<b>3 277</b>	<b>3 254</b>	<b>3 223</b>	58.1
	Master's or equivalent (ISCED 7)	18 192	17 444	16 021	16 298	16 637	-8.5
	Bachelor's or equivalent (ISCED 6)	44 187	43 556	43 126	41 668	42 400	-4.0
	Short cycle degrees (college) (ISCED 5)	14 130	14 344	12 944	12 797	12 530	-11.3
Entrants	<b>Doctoral or equivalent (ISCED 8)</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>822</b>	<b>800</b>	46.0
	Master's or equivalent (ISCED 7)	7 107	6 958	6 215	6 703	6 625	-6.8
	Bachelor's or equivalent (ISCED 6)	14 817	15 157	14 174	15 791	16 182	9.2
	Short cycle degrees (college) (ISCED 5)	6 233	6 327	5 344	5 596	5 591	-10.3
Graduates	<b>Doctoral or equivalent level (ISCED 8)</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>229</b>	90.8
	Master's or equivalent level (ISCED 7)	4 372	4 345	3 730	3 744	3 798	-13.1
	Bachelor's or equivalent level (ISCED 6)	6 788	7 150	6 443	7 027	6 327	-6.8
	Short cycle degrees (college) (ISCED 5)	3 245	3 063	3 066	3 129	3 127	-3.6

Source: Official Statistics Latvia (2025<sup>[10]</sup>) Official Statistics Portal of Latvia, <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/education/higher-education> (accessed on 29.01.2026).

Latvian HEIs had begun to update many aspects of doctoral education admission and provision within their institutions far ahead of the formal establishment of the reform. Doctoral study positions are now largely offered through advertised and structured application and admission processes with a specified theoretical duration (most commonly four years). Basic entry criteria are also converging – applicants for doctoral education programmes across Latvia are generally expected to have a minimum level of English and a master's degree in a relevant field, similar requirements to most European countries. Institutions have also taken steps to formalise administrative arrangements for the supervision of doctoral candidates. A multi-supervisor approach is increasingly becoming the norm; newer doctoral candidates are more likely to have access to a supervisory panel or at least a second supervisor – which is particularly beneficial where the joint supervision is linked to intersectoral collaboration on research projects (such as having one supervisor from the higher education institution and one supervisor from a scientific research organisation).

At the same time, institutions have adapted the national model to serve the needs of their strategic objectives and research activities. For example, the four largest institutions each created models which are similar in many ways, albeit with distinctive features, tailored to their unique contexts and specialisations.

### 2.1.2. Viewpoints from the sector

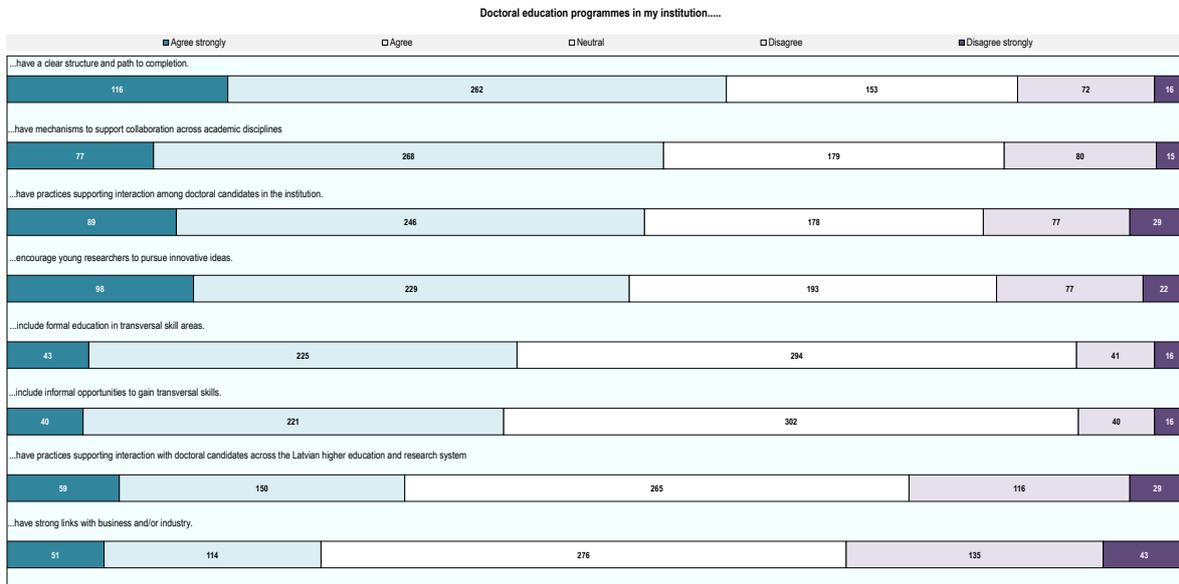
The recent developments mark a clear departure from the previous tradition of doctoral study in Latvia, which tended to be initiated through informal contacts between students and supervisors and progressed mainly through a one-to-one “master-student” relationship. The commencement of the new measures should provide additional possibilities for talented researchers to enter and successfully complete doctoral education programmes in Latvia in the coming years. However, much will depend on how the reform is implemented in institutional settings. Site visits and a survey of academic staff carried out during the project provided insights into the perspectives of institution leaders and academics (including doctoral candidates) during the early stages of the reform implementation, as outlined below.

*Stakeholders perceive that doctoral education is becoming more organised and professionalised, and the new reforms are expected to lead to further improvements*

Findings from site visits and the survey indicate that Latvian institutional leaders, staff, and students largely view the organisation of doctoral education within institutions as having improved in recent years. In the survey (Figure 2.1), most respondents agreed that doctoral programmes have a clear structure and path to completion, and that mechanisms to support collaboration were provided within their institutions, particularly for collaboration across disciplines and interaction among doctoral candidates. Respondents were generally positive about the support provided within institutions for young researchers to pursue innovative ideas. Survey respondents showed a tendency towards more neutral views of the new model, with the most positive views expressed about the likelihood that the new model will improve the financial situation of doctoral students and their future job prospects in Latvian higher education and research.

**Figure 2.1. View regarding current doctoral education in Latvian higher education institutions**

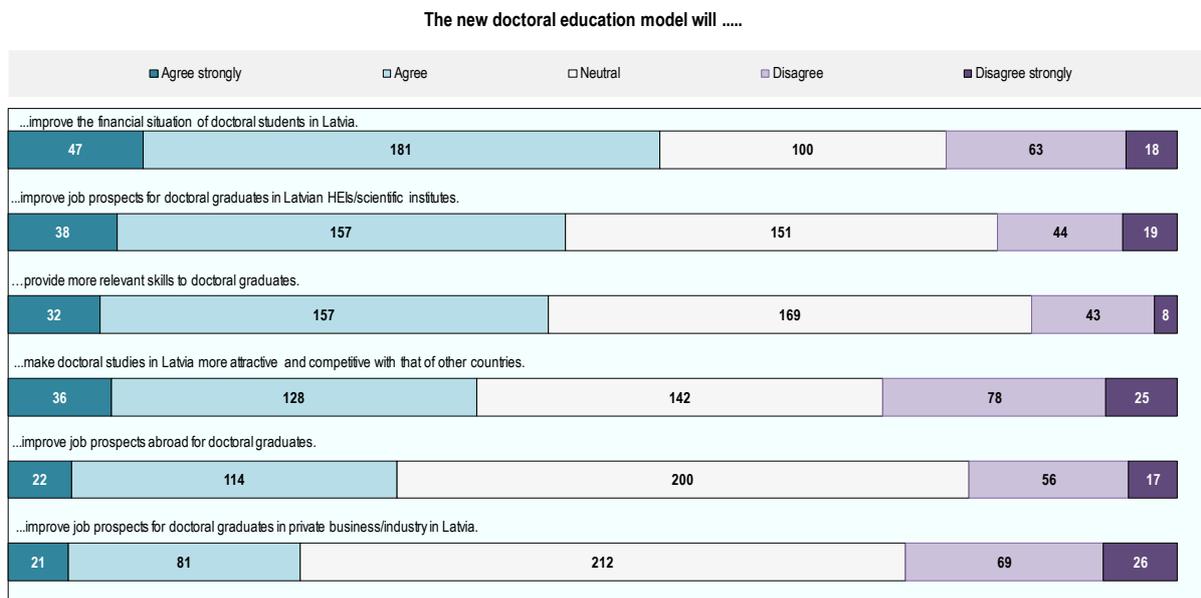
Number of respondents reporting along a 5-point Likert scale their extent of agreement with each statement



Source: OECD (non-representative) survey on readiness for academic career reforms in Latvia. N = 619 for the first chart and N = 409 for the second (corresponding to respondents who indicated they were aware of the details of the new doctoral model).

Just under half of respondents who were aware of the new system also agreed or strongly agreed that the new model will help to improve the relevance of the skills developed during doctoral training (Figure 2.2). Some Latvian institutions have made skills development a central component of their reformed offering of doctoral education, an important element of ensuring that doctoral graduates are prepared for subsequent careers both inside and outside academia. Well-being initiatives within doctoral programmes have also become more advanced, with health and well-being services seen not only as an important component of support for doctoral researchers, but also as a strategic imperative – a more nurturing, attractive and productive research environment produces better research outcomes.

**Figure 2.2. View regarding the new model of doctoral education in Latvian higher education institutions**



Source: OECD (non-representative) survey on readiness for academic career reforms in Latvia. N = 619 for the first chart and N = 409 for the second (corresponding to respondents who indicated they were aware of the details of the new doctoral model).

*Managing the transition period and future uncertainties will be challenging for higher education institutions*

Compared to entrants to state-funded doctoral places from 2024 onwards, students who enrolled before 2024 are less likely to receive stable financial supports during the completion of their dissertations (i.e. after completing the doctoral degree examination – a key stage of the previous model) and are therefore more vulnerable to excessive workload, stress and demoralisation. The transitional period is expected to extend until at least 2028, during which institutions will need to operate both the legacy and reformed models in parallel, posing a significant challenge for institutions, supervisors, and policymakers.

There is also no doubt that despite the increased investment through the state budget and international sources, the current financial situation in Latvia remains difficult and the outlook is uncertain. At the level of the State, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has diverted a greater share of Latvian state funding towards strengthening defensive capability. Moreover, the Latvian higher education and research system must compete for state funding with education and training in other sectors, which also suffer from under-investment. Considering these uncertainties, institutions are adopting different approaches to doctoral education, which may focus on "quantity" – recruiting candidates on a large scale to build critical mass in

research activity and provide adequate resources for research projects, or “quality” – preferring to concentrate available resources on providing better support to fewer candidates. The funding situation is also creating hesitancy in some institutions in making longer-term investments in certain elements of research capacity – such as research infrastructures – or putting substantial resources into the development of industrial PhDs or international partnerships.

*Supervisors and doctoral researchers may both face increased expectations following the reforms*

As noted, many Latvian doctoral schools have begun to implement more formal arrangements for doctoral supervision, aiming to clarify expectations on both sides. However, more is needed beyond administrative changes. The project team noted that in some cases supervisors had limited formal training opportunities, while in others institutional leaders noted ongoing challenges engaging supervisors in initiatives to enhance mentoring quality, reflecting the workload and competing commitments of academic staff and, in some cases, varying levels of engagement. There is a prevailing concern that if the number of entrants to doctoral studies increases in the coming years and with it the institutional commitment to their development expected in the new model, doctoral candidates will increasingly lack sustained access to high-quality supervision. Despite efforts to increase their number, full-time academic staff remain a relative rarity in Latvia, while, as of 2022, only slightly more than half of all staff had a doctoral degree (Figure 2.3). Although this situation should improve in the coming years, for now it is likely that a relatively low share of the existing cohort of Latvian academic staff is able to take on a substantial supervisory role.

The new model and improved salaries are likely to provide many doctoral candidates with greater stability and more time for independent research. At the same time, concerns are evident in some cases about potentially expanded expectations linked to the employment status doctoral researchers now enjoy. Doctoral researchers in Latvia are often involved from the outset in dealing with the administrative and operational challenges that they will realistically face in their academic careers, at least in the early years. Arguably, this makes them better prepared for their future careers than doctoral researchers enjoying more privileged conditions elsewhere. However, they must balance several competing responsibilities, including funded research projects, producing publication-ready work, teaching, tutoring, and administrative tasks, while also completing mandatory coursework and skills development. While enthusiasm for the scientific process and interest in their research topics motivates many to continue despite these demands, sustained high workloads risk undermining progress towards their objectives and may negatively affect well-being.

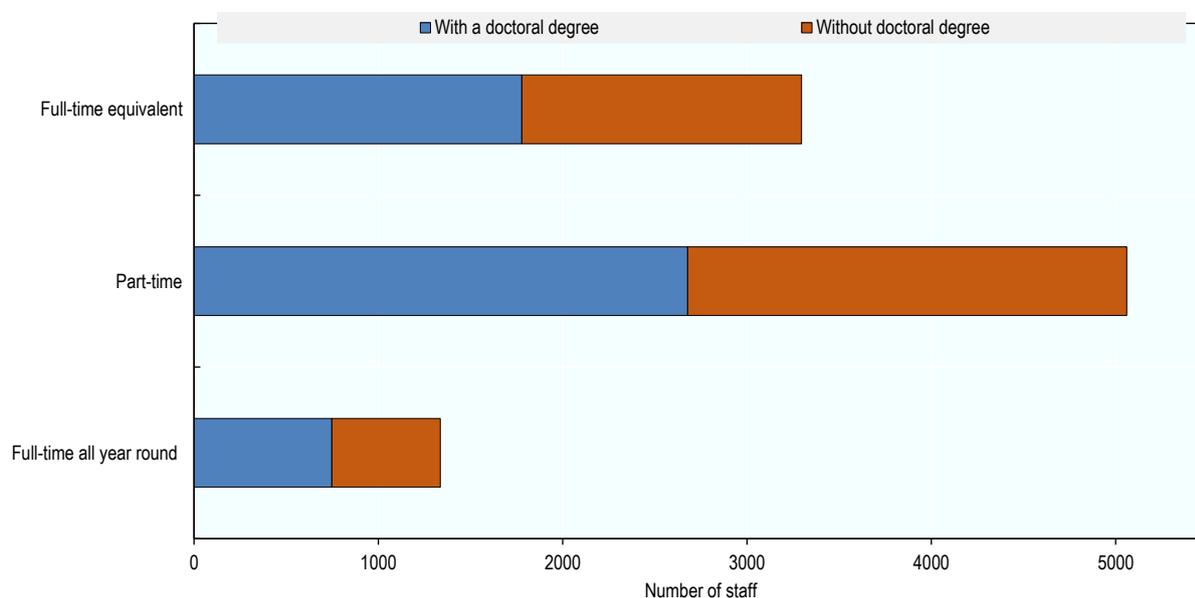
*Strengthening internationalisation and engagement with industry presents ongoing challenges*

Latvian HEIs are seeking to strengthen internationalisation and industry engagement for the benefit of doctoral researchers. Attracting a higher share of foreign students from both EU and non-EU countries is reported as a high priority. Outgoing mobility is also being encouraged by institutions, although it presents a serious practical difficulty for many doctoral researchers, particularly those working across more than one employment or research project.

There also appear to be limited opportunities to develop inter-institutional collaboration within Latvia's higher education and research system, and, in some study fields, few opportunities to establish links with business and industry. The survey also highlighted this viewpoint within higher education institutions, with only about one-quarter of respondents expressing agreement with the idea that doctoral education in their institutions has strong links with business and industry. Most institutions appeared not yet to have a clear strategic vision for the development of industrial PhDs, although they are recognised as a priority and an area of current weakness. As in other countries, practical and ideological matters limit their development in practice. For example, within companies, budgets are often approved from year to year, which is incompatible with the four-year horizon of a PhD programme, making companies unwilling to invest in them. Intellectual property issues also present a major barrier, along with uncertainty among staff about

the best practices for establishing legal agreements on the ownership of inventions or research outputs from industrial doctorates.

**Figure 2.3. Full-time and part-time academic staff in Latvia with doctoral degrees (2022)**



Note: Based on unpublished personnel data for Latvia provided to the project team by the Latvian authorities.

## 2.2. Conditions relating to broader academic career reform

The reforms to the academic career framework were still in development for most of the project period. However, the project provided several opportunities to gather perspectives from academic staff on their career prospects within the Latvian system, which are summarised in this section.

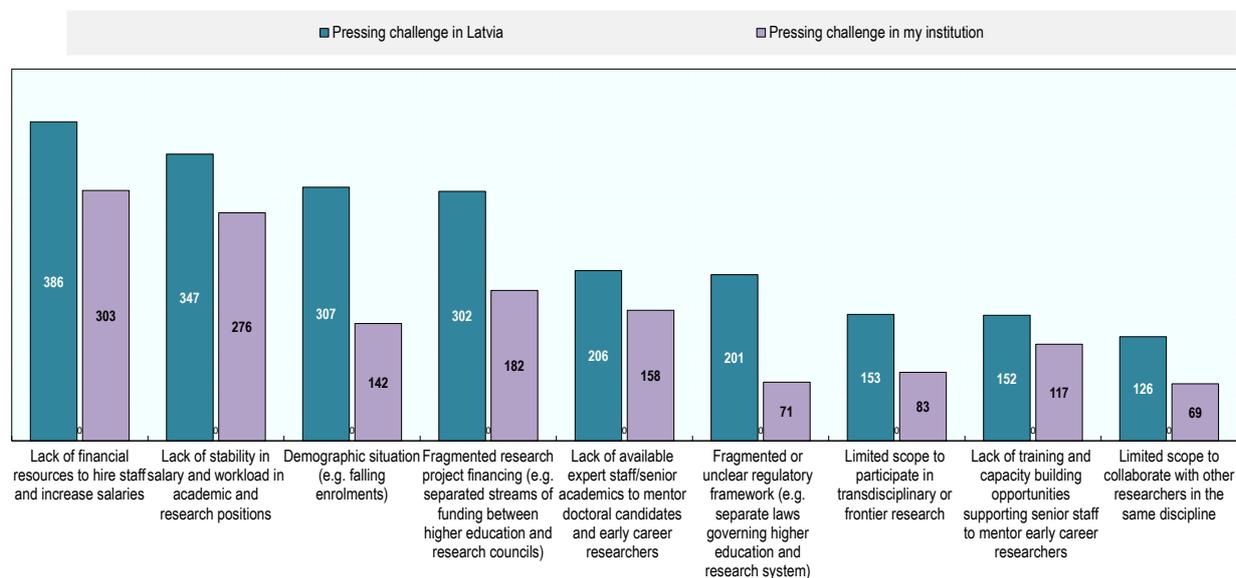
### ***Financial instability and fragmentation of employment contracts remain fundamental difficulties for Latvian academics...***

The financial situation in the Latvian higher education sector continues to create challenging conditions for Latvian academic staff. In the readiness survey, lack of financial resources to hire staff and increase salaries was cited as the most pressing challenge to academic career development in Latvia as a whole, and within individual institutions (Figure 2.4), followed closely by the lack of stability in salary and workload in academia and research positions. Providing more stable and predictable contracts and increasing salaries therefore remains the key priority in the sector. The project team heard that the fixed minimum salaries set in legislation were insufficient, and it is necessary to get involved in multiple research projects to achieve a living wage.

Notably, for all the challenges listed in the survey question, respondents tended to consider the challenge more prevalent in the Latvian system as a whole than within their institutions. This might indicate that respondents believe that their institutions have been able to take some actions to partially address or mitigate the wider set of systemic challenges. Indeed, during site visits it was clear that most institutions are making concerted efforts to improve stability for students and their supervisors but face persistent difficulty aligning long-term human resources planning and multiple short-term funding streams (e.g. from research projects). Finding ways to better coordinate the different research-project timelines and resources

needs with diverse funding streams from different sources of state and European funding will be the key to improving the situation for human resource development, and, in turn, research quality and productivity.

**Figure 2.4. Lack of financial resources remains the key challenge to improving academic careers**



Source: OECD (non-representative) survey on readiness for academic career reforms in Latvia. N = 577.

### ***...while at other times “the funding has come before the framework”***

Even before the finalisation and approval of the academic career framework, there had been incremental progress on several different aspects of reforms. One of the areas where progress has been made is in the creation of tenure and tenure-track positions. While different forms of tenure already existed in some institutions, there have been efforts to expand the numbers of tenure-track positions through pilot initiatives. In 2024, legislative updates prepared the ground for establishing a more systematic and standardised approach to funding tenured positions, allowing institutions to enter into an agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science regarding the allocation of funding for tenure of a professorship. To secure the agreement, the institution must submit necessary documentation, including confirmation of at least 30% co-financing and approved tenure regulations outlining internationally recognised scientific achievement criteria used for recruitment. 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.

The expansion of postdoctoral research is included as a deliverable in Latvia’s current 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.

It is positive that funding is available to support these under-developed aspects of the academic and research landscape in Latvia, even if the longer-term prospects for continued funding availability are not yet clear. 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. 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. As is widely recognised, institutional flexibility and autonomy in setting such practices are essential foundations for research excellence and effectiveness. At the same time, the lack of established practice raised concern from some staff about potentially unrealistic expectations, as well as overly divergent working conditions and progression criteria across and within institutions.

### ***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. However, the project team learned that being elected does not provide any additional automatic rights to job stability – most staff must still ensure adequate project funding and teaching hours available to “stitch together” into a full-time position. Some institutions, through the combined efforts of leadership and staff, 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 for now remains a separate election process), then performance of research must be included in the planning of the academic workload, along with preparation of lectures, teaching and administrative work.

Similarly to doctoral candidates, more senior academic staff in Latvia 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 talent development 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 the project team noted pervasive concern among staff about their ability to maintain existing high levels of output, in the context of continuing job instability, for the entirety of their careers.

### ***Professional development opportunities remain scarce but are starting to improve***

The project team concluded from site visits that professional development for staff is receiving increasing focus and effort in Latvian institutions. Many of them are creating in-house training programmes or seeking training opportunities outside of the institution or through partner institutions, if they were unable to provide training directly. Professional development through increased opportunities to experience mobility and attend conferences in their field also appear to be greatly appreciated by academic staff in Latvia. The involvement of the institutions in European University Alliances (EUA) has also provided 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 concerning the benefits of involvement in EUAs.

While recognising the importance of on-the-job training and mentoring, many institutions experience persistent difficulties encouraging some senior staff to take on the mentoring role for junior colleagues. This can be, as noted, because of workload pressure, but it may also require additional access to professional development to support 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.

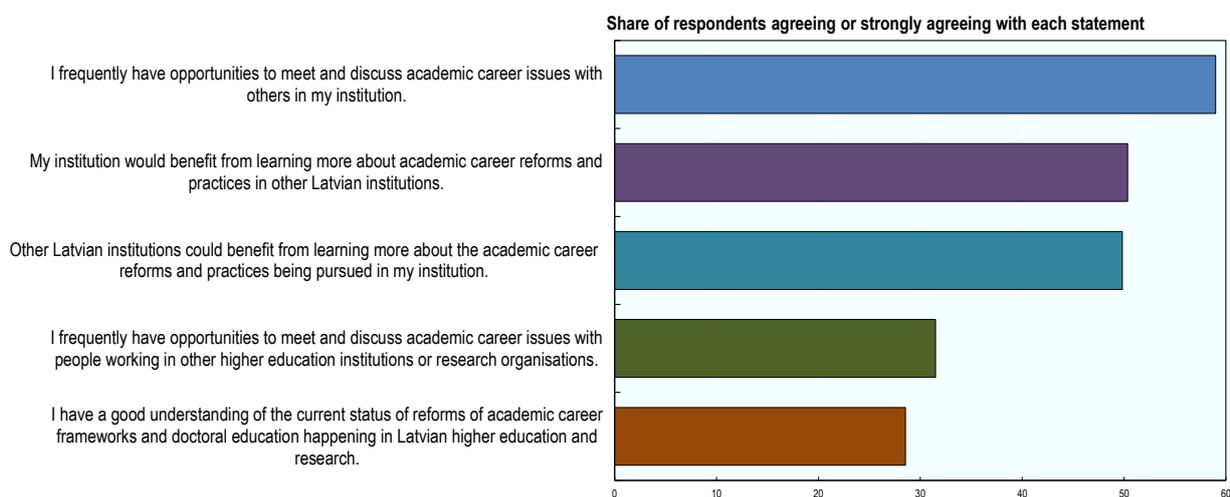
### ***The comparative size of the Latvian higher education and research sector is advantageous in some respects***

As Figure 2.4 shows, relatively few respondents to the readiness survey cited a lack of scope for collaboration with other researchers within the same discipline or to engage in transdisciplinary research as a pressing challenge for the Latvian system. The smaller size of the academic and research community is considered among many in the academic community as an advantage that Latvia enjoys over many other systems, allowing for informal contacts to be made within and across disciplines, and making it easier for early-career researchers to quickly understand the scope of research on a particular topic or discipline at national level. Survey comments also highlighted the benefits of the small community, mentioning the flexibility of the system, opportunities to gain significant practical experience in fields where Latvia has a specialisation, and (in light of the small labour market for academic staff) good opportunities for talented and enthusiastic individuals to make quick progress in their careers, compared to some other countries.

### ***There is substantial scope for improvement in information flow and practice-sharing across the higher education system***

Despite the networking advantages of Latvia's smaller system mentioned above, site visits and the survey results both provided a very clear signal to the project team that, in such a dynamically evolving environment, all actors are having difficulty keeping up with and absorbing changing regulations that affect human-resources management within the higher education and research sectors, including the new regulations governing doctoral education. The survey results showed that about half of respondents felt that, respectively, other institutions in Latvia could learn from their human resource practices and that their institutions would also benefit from learning from what others in Latvia were doing (Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5. There is scope to improve knowledge and practice sharing on academic career issues within Latvia**



Source: OECD (non-representative) survey on readiness for academic career reforms in Latvia. N = 577.

# 3 A roadmap for the future

The reforms to doctoral education and Latvia's academic career framework – along with the reforms to institutional governance, mergers of higher education institutions and reform of the state financing and external quality assurance models – should, in the long term, strengthen the capacity of Latvian higher education institutions and provide them more freedom to create attractive working conditions for academic staff. On the other hand, the scale of reforms and their simultaneous initiation has created administrative and operational challenges, as higher education institutions and academic staff adapt to the rapidly changing regulatory context and seek to coordinate implementation. Policymakers and institution leaders also remain concerned about fragmentation of funding streams to the system and the long-term financial sustainability of some aspects of the reforms.

In this context, and considering broader systemic conditions, a roadmap of actions was proposed by the project team to guide and support the implementation process in the coming years, which this section presents and explains. The roadmap proposal adopts a realistic scope and perspective, acknowledging the context outlined earlier in this report and the various structural constraints that 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.

A concept for a Community of Practice for academic staff was piloted during the project (Box 2) and held its inaugural conference in November 2025. It is highlighted in several actions of the roadmap as a potential mechanism for dialogue, collaboration, and professional development.

## 3.1. Focus areas and actions in the roadmap

The roadmap is divided into three broad focus areas: (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. Each of these focus areas includes 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. For some actions, an international case study is highlighted with an interesting relevant policy or institutional practice.

This section provides a brief description of each of the focus areas, objectives and actions contained in the roadmap, followed by a summary table. Annex A contains further information about each of the case studies mentioned in the table.

## Box 2. Piloting a Community of Practice for Latvian academic staff

In Latvia, several bodies and organisations provide focal points for inter-institutional discussion and formal collaboration on academic career issues. These include the Council of Higher Education, Council of Science, Council of Rectors of Latvia, the Research Latvia initiative, the Latvian Association of Young Researchers and the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees. Other cooperative efforts that support the academic career reforms are carried out as individual projects. However, as shown in Chapter 2, the expansion of existing opportunities for informal collaboration and practice-based interaction would be welcomed by a large share of academic staff in Latvia.

A Community of Practice (CoP) can contribute to fulfilling the expressed interest among Latvian academic staff for greater interconnection. Research indicates that such communities can provide a more flexible and effective form of communication and collaboration than traditional bureaucratic organisations. Communities of Practice focused on knowledge- and practice- sharing among academic staff are already commonplace across the European Higher Education Area. Such a community has the potential to become a key focal point for dialogue and grassroots collaboration on issues of mutual interest to academic staff in Latvia, providing greater flexibility and responsiveness than its more structured formal organisations. A CoP can also support practitioner-led co-operation 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.

A concept for a Community of Practice for Latvian academic staff was proposed in the course of the project and piloted at an in-person workshop in April 2025 in Riga, which brought together 38 representatives from higher education institutions, academic staff, support personnel, and related organisations. The participants were chosen to reflect a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, career stages, institution types and job roles. They were randomly assigned into small teams and worked in sprints to design prototypes for the CoP, which were then further refined based on input from other teams. Participants collectively articulated several options and ideas for the development of the CoP, following reflection on their own co-creation exercises during the workshop. They concluded that:

- the CoP should be designed as a body that can achieve meaningful impact on the sector through its actions. It should serve to strengthen academic networks, build trust among participants, contribute to improved teaching and research quality, and help to support the next generation of academic staff.
- a CoP is a potential platform to unify and amplify the academic voice, particularly during periods of political or policy change.
- it should offer diverse engagement formats to foster meaningful collaboration and knowledge exchange across its membership and convene thematic and interdisciplinary working groups essential for tackling some cross-cutting issues.
- CoP-related activities need to be funded in a way that does not place an unreasonable burden on individuals or institutions. Overall, participants favoured starting with a voluntary and low-cost structure but highlighted that long-term sustainability would likely require more formal arrangements such as NGO status, membership fees, and project-based financing.

Discussions between the project team and stakeholders, including during the pilot workshop, highlighted the need for continued deliberation on issues related to the permanent establishment of the CoP. Many participants expressed a preference for an initial informal phase, allowing for experimentation with different forms of collective activity and additional time to determine the Community's permanent legal form and operational arrangements. Bearing these factors in mind, the project team proposed a two-phase initiation of the Community – a preliminary inception period of one year, beginning in 2025, followed by the more formal establishment in late 2026.

The inaugural conference of the Community of Practice took place on 7 November 2025 at the Art Academy of Latvia, Riga, with the theme of “Artificial Intelligence in Latvian Higher Education: From Implementation to Governance”.

### **3.1.1. Focus area: Continuously improving working conditions for academic staff within institutions**

While all Latvian HEIs 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. This section of the roadmap focuses on actions that institutions can take with a view to continuously improving working conditions for academic staff while implementing the reforms.

*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. However, across the sector there may be different interpretations of the implications of the new measures between and even within institutions, while many Latvian institutions lack the critical mass to sustain a full suite of courses and services for doctoral researchers. 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 consistent supports 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 candidates, with candidates admitted under the previous regime often having less advantageous funding conditions and retaining student status. This transition period is unavoidable; however, its effects can be reduced by ensuring that all 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 well-being 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's or master's level, particularly in smaller systems like Latvia's, where research teams may be smaller and academic staff frequently balance multiple institutional or professional roles. This sense of isolation can have serious consequences: weak social supports can be just as significant an obstacle to doctoral completion as financial challenges (OECD, 2019<sub>[11]</sub>). Clear communication and connection become even more critical during organisational transitions. Institutions should ensure access to a range of effective channels for communication with – and interaction among – doctoral candidates. Equally important is to provide regular, structured opportunities for doctoral candidates to engage with peers and institutional leadership. Such initiatives require minimal financial investment but could substantially enhance motivation, well-being, 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 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. 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 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. 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. Considering competencies relating to mentorship and supervision within reformed evaluation criteria can also help embed the role 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 productively as a collective initiative among institutions – the “*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*

Latvia has taken an incremental approach to the implementation and financing of the academic career reforms. While such an approach risks losing momentum if progressed too slowly, Latvia cannot wait to have perfect reform conditions and must continue to make as much incremental progress as resources and capacity allow. 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.

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

Institutions should periodically evaluate the results of their postdoctoral and tenure-track/tenure recruitment to assess the extent to which the recruitments are supporting institutional and national objectives and contributing to the overall attractiveness of academic careers. Evaluations could help to systematically identify barriers and pain points faced by recruits or those working to recruit them. 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 researchers across institutions, and ultimately help 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**

Latvian HEIs 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, standing faculty meetings or internal committees) and identify whether they are accessible and/or used by all groups of academic staff. Making improvements to communication channels, informed by the results of such a review, could help to engage less vocal staff members and ensure a 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 and covers all staff categories, it could provide a robust evidence base to monitor the impact of reforms and update internal human-resources 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**

In Latvia – as in many higher education systems – staff well-being is often affected by perceived or actual pressure caused by a reliance on quantitative, research-oriented metrics as key performance assessment criteria. As Latvia works to strengthen its research capacity, research funding has come to represent an increasingly important share of budgets in many institutions, increasing pressure to produce research outputs that support improvements in indicators based on bibliometrics. It is equally important to ensure that teaching, service activities, and broader contributions to institutional life do not become marginalised and for academic staff to feel that their efforts outside of research performance are equally recognised.

The new approach to staff performance outlined in the conceptual framework for academic careers seeks to ensure that responsible and holistic assessment is the standard practice in recruitment, promotion, and staff performance evaluation, and should become the benchmark for institutions to measure their own policies. Institutions can also gradually align policies for research assessment to emerging best practices, such as those advanced by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), which 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. To date, six Latvian institutions have signed the CoARA declaration. While it is unclear if this development has yet had any positive impact for staff in the concerned institutions, it provides an encouraging signal of Latvian commitment to a more holistic approach to evaluation of research and researchers.

#### **3.1.2. Focus area: Updating and aligning the policy framework**

Implementation of academic career reforms is primarily an internal responsibility for institutions, which, 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 this context, it is even more important 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 that improving academic staff conditions remains at the forefront of higher education policy*

With several concurrent reforms to Latvia's higher education system underway, it is important that improving academic career conditions remains central in the policy agenda. The following actions can help ensure that academic careers remain a core priority and coherent with broader higher education policy.

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

The new four-stage academic career framework has been long awaited, and the legal framework to support it should be in place by the end of 2026. The related COMPAC<sup>2</sup> project, which is tasked with defining competencies and professional development goals for each of the four career stages, will also culminate in 2026. The new career framework should be rolled out without further delay thereafter, to enable institutions and staff to move forward with confidence in recruitment, evaluation and promotion.

### **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 suggests 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<sup>[12]</sup>; OECD, 2024<sup>[13]</sup>). 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. 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**

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 towards the reform goals. It will also be important to evaluate how the profile, grades and work intensity of staff is changing over time across Latvian institutions. Systematic staff-related data collection from higher education institutions does take place, but, with modest investment of time and resources, there is significant scope for expansion of the information collected and more comprehensive publication of the data, including by institution.

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 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 – a system that 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**

A reform to the Latvian state-funding model for higher education institutions, currently in pilot stage, is designed to 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). 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. 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 wind down, it will be critical to evaluate 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 the new model does not hinder progress on improving academic careers, 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 budget 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, in the programme's current structure funding is generally awarded for a fixed three-year period with a standardised funding amount (EUR 300 000 per project in 2025). 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.

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.

#### **3.1.3. 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 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 the extent to which its benefits reach all staff members is unclear. 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**

A Community of Practice was piloted during the project to promote collective exchange of information and practice and capacity building among academic staff in Latvia. Such a community could 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. 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. There are several models for collaborative initiatives in other countries in Europe that could potentially inspire a legal and financial footing for the Latvian CoP. For example, the Portuguese National Council for Pedagogical Innovation (*Conselho Nacional de Inovação Pedagógica em Ensino Superior – CNIPES*), inaugurated in 2025, 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 by the European Commission and other policymaking bodies.

Latvia currently does not have a Young Academy of early-career researchers, affiliated with the Latvian Academy of Science. The Latvian Association of Young Researchers is, however, currently in the process of developing a concept for a Young Academy, supported by the Ministry of Education and Science. 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, 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 outstanding 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 for institutions in identifying gaps in their current training provision and developing 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 to devise 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<sup>[14]</sup>).

**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 Latvian CoP could be convened regularly to identify and prioritise academic staff related issues where developing shared norms and principles would benefit the sector. Members of the CoP could work together on determining the order of priority among issues 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 CoP 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 3.1. A roadmap for supporting academic career development in Latvia from 2026 onwards

<b>Focus Area: Continuously improving academic staff conditions within institutions</b>			
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Actions for the short term (2026–27)</b>	<b>Actions in the medium- to long-term (2028+)</b>	<b>Relevant international case studies</b>
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	<b>Case Study 1:</b> Estonian Doctoral School  <b>Case Study 2:</b> Healthy practices in the Dutch PhD system 2.0
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	<b>Case Study 3:</b> University of Sussex staff survey
<b>Focus Area: Updating and aligning the policy framework</b>			
3: Ensure academic staff conditions remain at the	3.1 Roll out the four-stage harmonised academic career framework in the Latvian system as a priority	3.3: Establish a national data collection on staff profiles and conditions	<b>Case Study 4:</b> European University Association's Institutional Evaluation

forefront of higher education policy in Latvia	3.2 Put criteria relating to staff conditions and working environment at the centre of the new accreditation framework		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	<b>Case study 5:</b> Institution level staff profile data collected by the Irish Higher Education Authority
<b>Focus Area: Sharing practice and working together for the benefit of academic staff</b>			
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	<b>Case study 6:</b> The Portuguese National Council for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education (CNIPES)
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	<b>Case Study 7:</b> The Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education (DUN)

## 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 brings together doctoral candidates, supervisors, and researchers from multiple institutions to foster collaboration and improve training. Participants engage in joint activities such as seminars and conferences aimed at promoting interdisciplinary learning knowledge exchange and networking, exposing students to diverse research practices, strengthening the overall research environment and preparing candidates for careers in academia, industry, or other sectors.

All Estonian doctoral students (2283 in 2024) are members of the Estonian Doctoral School. 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 seeks to overcome common challenges associated with collaboration among HEIs, including finding time and space for collaborative activities, aligning interests of different partners, and support effective exchange of knowledge among partners, with a view to eliminating duplication of effort.

In its first year of operation the Estonian Doctoral School organised 65 events (including retreats, skills development workshops and a career conference) and short-term mobility for 165 doctoral students. Feedback to date indicates that the project holds considerable promise for improving the quality of doctoral education doctoral candidates' experience, with a particularly beneficial effect for smaller institutions. (Estonian Doctoral School, n.d.<sup>[15]</sup>; University of Tartu, 2025<sup>[16]</sup>).

### *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 well-being. 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 is the training and supervision of doctoral students. The document outlines the minimum standards expected in terms of number of supervisors, frequency of meetings between the candidate and supervision team and the development of training and supervision strategies for candidates. It also asks universities to commit to professionalisation of the supervision function, stating that all supervisors should receive formal training on 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 (Universities Netherlands, 2025<sup>[17]</sup>).

### ***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 well-being, 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 (University of Sussex, 2025<sup>[18]</sup>).

### ***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 (Institutional Evaluation Programme, n.d.<sup>[19]</sup>).

### ***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 also show staff data disaggregated by a range of characteristics, such as discipline, contract type (permanent, temporary and zero-hours) and gender. One feature of particular interest is 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 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 (Higher Education Authority, 2024<sup>[20]</sup>).

### ***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 integrate 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 acts 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 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 improve the quality of teaching and contributing to the success and well-being of academic communities in Portugal (Direção-Geral do Ensino Superior, 2025<sup>[21]</sup>).

### ***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 (Danish University Network, n.d.<sup>[22]</sup>).

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# Notes

<sup>1</sup> The project's official title is "*Support for Institutionalising the New Academic Careers Framework in Latvia*" (23LV24), with the work funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), and implemented by the OECD, in cooperation with Latvia's Ministry of Science and Education and the Reform and Investment Task Force of the European Commission.

<sup>2</sup> More than 15 researchers from Rīga Stradiņš University and the University of Latvia are collaborating through the publicly funded Academic Staff Competence Model (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.

This report examines Latvia's ongoing reforms to doctoral education and academic career pathways, offering advice to support effective implementation. The report was developed through technical support to the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science under the EU's Technical Support Instrument, implemented by the OECD with the European Commission. The roadmap produced through the project identifies three priorities: improving institutional working conditions, aligning and updating national policy frameworks, and encouraging collaboration in the academic sector, including a stable Community of Practice for academic staff.

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