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Academic Career Framework for Latvia: Ideas Paper

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Contents

1. Introduction

According to previous studies on academic careers and career models (Arnhold et al. 2018; Arnhold et al. 2020)**, academic careers in Latvia are shaped by two basic factors: the autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs) and the legislative and administrative features of the Latvian academic landscape.** To start with the autonomy of HEIs, comparative studies made by international agencies (OECD 2016; EUA 2017; Eurydice 2018) show that Latvian HEIs have high autonomy, especially in staffing. For instance, Latvian HEIs, both public and private, are allowed to open and close positions, define the content and number of positions, and define their salary system, including its performance-based components. In practice, however, they are strictly following the regulations, funding, and public policies that form the practical administrative framework for the HEIs. This is particularly true for public institutions.

The Latvian characteristics of personnel policies in higher education consist of multiple administrative and regulatory details and traditions. For instance:

- **Separate legislation concerning science and higher education** impact job descriptions and faculty structures.
- **Minimum salaries** determine the overall salary level of academics and academic managers.
- **The minimum quantitative targets set for PhD holders and professors** have an impact on personnel planning in institutions.
- **The selection procedures** closely follow the national tradition based on elections, the qualifications framework, and the policies of the Council of Higher Education.
- **A system of a renewable six-year term** for academic positions has created a unique career system without permanent academic positions.
- **The lack of retirement age** has had an impact on the termination of careers and the career prospects of young researchers and academics.
- **The national regulation on the doctoral degree (before the current reform)** partly disconnected the doctorate from the institutional educational policies and personnel practices.
- **Language regulation** has had an impact on the status of non-Latvian-speaking staff.

In other words, the formal staffing autonomy in Latvia is high, but the autonomy in use is somehow weak or intermediate, at least in some public institutions. The main reason for this is limited financial resources and national level staffing policies.

However, the landscape is changing. For instance, the Ministry of Education and Science has taken first steps to reform PhD education. Professors and associate professors can be permanently employed, because the Constitutional Court struck down the six-year rule. Furthermore, the current government is implementing governance reform consisting of changes to the internal governance structure of universities and to the institutional status of some of the universities, and reforming the Career Framework so that it encompasses both the higher education and science sectors. In addition, several initiatives to modernize personnel management and remuneration practices have been launched in HEIs.[1]

[1] For example, the ESF (European Social Fund) programs for 2014–20, such as specific objective 8.2.3, which aims at better governance within HEIs, including the review of remuneration principles and practices for academics; specific objective 8.2.2, which aims at strengthening the capacity and competences of academic staff members; and specific objective 8.2.1, which aims at the development of competitive study programs in European Union languages and joint doctoral programs.

With this background in mind, **it is timely to start planning for the new Career Framework for Latvia.** It is also timely because the knowledge base about the strengths and weaknesses of the higher education system and the development of academic careers has been strengthened by the advisory services of the World Bank to the Government of Latvia beginning in 2013. This analytical work led to the identification of best practices and recommendations for a system-level framework for academic careers and their management by institutions published in 2018 (Arnhold et al. 2018). Now is the time to harness the best international knowledge, Latvian best practices, and current government initiatives for the development of a Latvian Career Framework that would meet global academic excellence.

This ideas paper is structured as follows. It begins with a brief description of the structure of the Latvian higher education and science sectors. This is followed by chapters on the main aspects of the Career Framework in Latvia, including principles, staff categories, progression models, and processes. Each of these chapters concludes with practical questions for policy makers that highlight the critical aspects to be discussed when a Career Framework is developed. The last chapter presents a first “skeleton” of a career framework, taking into account the questions proposed in each chapter, and proposes a co-constructive process for developing a Career Framework. This paper draws heavily on the previous work done by the World Bank.

2. Context of Academic Career Framework

2.1 Higher Education Institutions

In 2019, there were six universities, 21 higher education institution (HEI) and academies, 17 state colleges and eight private colleges, and two branches of foreign HEIs in Latvia.[2]

2.2 Staff in Higher Education Institutions

In 2018–19, there were 5,136 academic staff employed in the state-funded HEIs, of whom 4,195 had their primary place of employment at an HEI. Of those, 593 were professors and 1,194 were researchers and senior researchers. There were 4,575 general staff.

Of the number of academic staff whose primary place of employment was at a higher education institution, 6 percent were under 30 years of age, 49 percent were aged 30–39, 24 percent were aged 40–49, and 16 percent were over 64 years old.

Latvian state-funded HEIs employ a significant proportion of women, 2,312 women, or 55 percent, of whom 259 are professors and 568 are leading researchers.

In the private HEIs, there were 1,138 academic staff, of whom 511 had their primary place of employment at an HEI. There were 438 general staff. The percentage of staff by gender is similar to that in the state-funded HEIs: 284 women, of whom 37 are professors and 17 are leading researchers.[3]

The following are the state-funded HEIs arranged (decreasingly) by number of students:

1. University of Latvia (UL)
2. Rīga Technical University (RTU)
3. Rīgas Stradiņš University (RSU)
4. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LULST)
5. Daugavpils University (DU)
6. Rēzekne Academy of Technologies (RAT)
7. Latvian Academy of Sport Education (LASE)
8. Liepāja University (LiepU)
9. BA School of Business and Finance
10. Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC)
11. Art Academy of Latvia (AAL)
12. Latvian Maritime Academy (LMA)
13. Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeUAS)
14. Vidzemes University of Applied Sciences (ViUAs)

[2] See *Pārskats par Latvijas augstāko izglītību 2019. gadā. Galvenie statistikas dati* (*Review of Latvian higher education in 2019. Key statistics*):
https://izm.gov.lv/images/P%C4%81rskats_par_Latvijas_augst%C4%81ko_izgl%C4%ABt%C4%ABbu_2019._gad%C4%81.pdf, p 5 (in Latvian).

[3] According to the draft document of the *Guidelines for Education Development for the years 2021–2027*; https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/IAP2027_projekta_versija_apspriesana_16072020.pdf (in Latvian), p. 20.

15. Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Musics (JVLAM)
16. National Defence Academy of Latvia (NDAL).

The two leading state-funded universities – the University of Latvia (UL) and Riga Technical University (RTU) – account for more than 50 percent of academic staff in employment, including researchers.

2.3 Scientific Institutions and Institutes

According to the Law on Scientific Activity,[4] scientific institutions include "scientific institutes, higher education institutions, commercial companies, and other institutions whose articles of association, by-law or constitution refer to scientific activity and participation in the process of acquiring and improving scientific qualification and that are registered in the register of scientific institutions." Currently, there are **23 state-funded scientific institutions** and 48 privately funded scientific institutions in Latvia.[5]

The following are the state-funded scientific institutions arranged (decreasingly) by the amount of state funding they receive:

1. University of Latvia (UL)
2. Rīga Technical University (RTU)
3. Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis
4. Rīgas Stradiņš University (RSU)
5. Daugavpils University (DU)
6. Institute of Solid-State Physics, University of Latvia
7. Latvian State Forest Research Institute "Silava"
8. Latvian Biomedical Research and Study Centre
9. Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LULST)
10. Latvian State Institute of Wood Chemistry
11. University of Latvia - Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science
12. Institute of Food safety, Animal Health and Environment "BIOR"
13. Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics
14. Institute of Electronics and Computer Science
15. Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VeUAS)
16. Institute of Horticulture
17. Liepāja University (LiepU)
18. Rēzekne Academy of Technologies (RAT)
19. Vidzemes University of Applied Sciences (ViUAs)
20. Art Academy of Latvia (AAL)
21. Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Musics (JVLAM).

[4] https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/107337.
[5] https://izm.gov.lv/lv/nozares/zinatne/zinatniskas-institucijas (in Latvian).

In addition, the **Latvian Maritime Academy (LMA) and the Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC)** have the status of a scientific institution, although they do not receive core scientific funding, but rather performance-based funding for their scientific activities.

Information on Latvian scientific institutions, researchers, research infrastructure, projects, and research results is compiled in the Latvian National Scientific Activity Information System (NZDIS).[6] The number of institutions has dropped recently mainly due to legislative changes that allowed universities as organizations to register as research performers (earlier on, only sub units had this status). According to the Law on Scientific Activity, a scientific institution should comprise at least five PhD holders in the corresponding field of science (European Commission 2019).

The Law on Scientific Activity divides scientific institutes into four categories:

1. Public agency
2. Derived public entity
3. Structural unit of a higher education institution
4. Private law legal entity or its structural unit (founded as a state or local government capital company).

The following are the state-funded scientific institutes arranged by the amount of the state budget funding they receive:

1. Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis
2. Institute of Solid-State Physics, University of Latvia
3. Latvian State Forest Research Institute “Silava”
4. Latvian Biomedical Research and Study Centre
5. Latvian State Institute of Wood Chemistry
6. University of Latvia – Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science
7. Institute of Food safety, Animal Health and Environment (BIOR)
8. Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics
9. Institute of Electronics and Computer Science
10. Institute of Horticulture.

2.4 Staff in Scientific Institutions

The number of research personnel[7] employed full time (in state-funded and private scientific institutions) has increased minimally – from 5,396 in 2013 to 5,806 in 2018. The largest proportion of researchers work part- time. In 2018, only 25 percent of researchers were employed full time. At the same time, although the renewal of research human capital has been significantly promoted (in 2018, 50 percent of the research-oriented staff was under 44 years of age), the total share of researchers in Latvia is still critically low – only 46 percent of the European average in 2018. The small number of researchers is not enough to develop

[6] https://sciencelatvia.lv/#/pub/home.

[7] According to the Law on Scientific Activity: scientists; research technical staff; research attending staff. In English, also “research personnel”, “R&D staff” etc.

stable links and knowledge flows with industry and organizations, to be fully involved in EU-wide projects and programs, and to ensure the mobility needed for knowledge transfer.[8]

[8] *Guidelines for Science, Technology Development and Innovation for the years 2021–2027* (Forthcoming); https://izm.gov.lv/images/1_ZTAIP2027_priek%C5%A1likuma_dokuments_uz_16_07.pdf#page=7&zoom=100,92,96 (in Latvian), p. 13. The statistics are based on https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=rd_p_perslf&lang=en.

3. Principles

Higher education and science are labor-intensive in that the quality of its outputs, outcomes, and impact are strongly correlated with the quality and competences of its workforce. Consequently, almost all higher education and science policies are eventually implemented by academics, and the implementation relies on their competences, work environment, motivation, and resources. In other words, the main goals of higher education and science policies should be taken into account when planning a Career Framework; conversely, human resources (HR) policies should be considered when defining the aims of higher education and science policies.

Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science is working on the goals of both higher education and science policies for the period 2021 to 2027. The draft document of the *Guidelines for Science, Technology Development and Innovation for the years 2021–2027*[9] outlines six policy priorities:

1. Excellence in science
2. Research for society
3. Integration of higher education and research
4. Digital transformation and open science
5. Implementation of the smart specialization strategy
6. Innovation: to stimulate development, to promote implementation.

Consequently, the main tasks for policy makers would be to:

- Reduce institutional fragmentation of the research and development (R&D) system, and improve the efficiency of the management of universities and scientific institutions and their resource sharing
- Develop the system of performance funding to strengthen the research profiles of universities, and increase success in seeking external funding
- Increase the attractiveness of academic careers and introduce a tenure-track system, and improve the quality of doctoral education and increase the number of doctorate holders
- Improve collaboration and integration of Latvian researchers at the international level and in global science, and support the mobility of researchers, including from abroad to Latvia, to attract talents from abroad
- Promote the mobility of academic staff, including researchers, in the business sector
- Develop and strengthen the culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education, thus also promoting entrepreneurship with a view to possible career options
- Increase R&D funding by balancing the amount of state funding and European Union (EU) funding, increasing the amount of state funding, considering the changing higher education quality monitoring system and the availability of EU funding.

The priorities and tasks mentioned above are based on the recommendations provided by several international and national reports that were recently prepared on higher education and science in Latvia,[10] and on the proposals and solutions included in recent national policy documents.[11]

[9] https://izm.gov.lv/images/1_ZTAIP2027_priek%C5%A1likuma_dokuments_uz_16_07.pdf (in Latvian).

The draft document of the *Guidelines for Education Development for the years 2021–2027*[12] includes the following four aims in education:

1. Highly qualified, competent, and excellence-oriented pedagogues and academic staff
2. A modern, high-quality education focused on the developments of highly valued skills in the labor market
3. Support for everyone's growth
4. Sustainable and efficient management of the education system and its resources.

The most essential planned changes in higher education are:

1. Strengthening the quality of academic staff and ensuring a sustainable academic career:
   - Developing and implementing a new academic career framework
   - Strengthening strategic and effective governance and management of HEIs
2. Promoting excellence in higher education:
   - Developing a quality assurance system for higher education
   - Transitioning to cyclical institutional accreditation starting from 2024
3. Changing the governance of HEIs:
   - Establishing a system for public funding allocation related to the development strategies of HEIs and monitoring their implementation.

Government's policies are usually conceived in a specific political environment, bound in time and dependent on a specific political power balance and political analysis of a changing environment. By contrast, the timespan of a career framework is longer. Therefore, such framework should be prepared based on academic excellence, professional development, and best HR practices, while taking into account policy aims. On a generic level, a range of principles are identifiable from the international literature and have been integrated in the work done by the World Bank expert team in Latvia (Arnhold et al. 2018).

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[10] "Study on open science and the development of a policy road map" (2020, in Latvian), https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/zinatne/P%C4%93t%C4%ABjums-Atv%C4%93rt%C4%81_zin%C4%81tne_2.pdf; European Commission, *European Semester: Country Report – Latvia 2020,* https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584543810241&uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0512; and European Commission, *European Semester: Country Report – Latvia 2019,* https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-latvia_en.pdf; European Commission, *Specific Support on the development of the human capital for research and innovation in Latvia* (2019), https://op.europa.eu/lv/publication-detail/-/publication/e84a9d0f-b98a-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-106068252; and *Specific Support to Latvia. The Latvian Research Funding System* (2018), https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/report/H2020%20PSF_Specific%20Support%20Latvia_Final%20report.pdf; and University of Latvia, "The Diaspora of Latvian Scientists: Networks and Capabilities. Study Results" (2018, in Latvian), https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/statistika/petijumi/LU-SPPI-DMPC_Zinatnieku-diaspora-2018.pdf.

[11] Conceptual Report "On the introduction of a new doctoral model in Latvia" (2020), http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40488284; informative report "Monitoring of the Smart Specialization Strategy. Second Report" (2020, in Latvian), http://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/tap/?pid=40479055; informative report "Monitoring of the Smart Specialization Strategy" (2018, in Latvian), http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40427624; World Bank Support to Higher Education in Latvia. Academic Careers, vol. 3., 2018, https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/103901524227639207/academic-careers.

[12] https://www.izm.gov.lv/images/IAP2027_projekta_versija_apspriesana_16072020.pdf (in Latvian).

Based on the World Bank's previous work, the principles for the development of a comprehensive Career Framework for Latvia can be grouped into the following three categories:

1. Principles that are aimed at **academic excellence** (while potentially competing):
   - **Academic integrity.** Career Framework supports academic freedom, common ownership, objectivity, and independence of science.
   - **Relevance.** Career Framework enables societal implications, competitiveness, and efficiency of academic work as well as its participatory nature.
   - **(Cross-)disciplinarity.** Career Framework takes into account disciplinary differences and enables cross-disciplinarity.
2. Principles that are aimed at **professional development:**
   - **Professional advancement.** Career Framework provides predictable and clear transition steps from PhD candidate to professor for most talented individuals.
   - **International comparability.** Career Framework supports international compatibility of career steps to international funding schemes and career systems.
   - **Internationalization.** Career Framework has entrance and exit points for international mobility.
   - **Diversity.** Career Framework has entrance and exit points for mobility between universities and other sectors of society.
3. Principles that are based on best **HR practices:**
   - **Transparency.** Career Framework is transparent.
   - **Fairness.** Career Framework enables fair treatment of individuals from multiple backgrounds.
   - **Strategic.** Career Framework enables strategic management of HEIs.
   - **Rewarding and steering.** Career Framework is aligned with salary, incentive, and performance measurement systems.
   - **Administrable.** Career Framework is aligned with legislation, policies, funding, and resources, as well as a reporting system.

Taking into account the development principles above and the recommendations of the World Bank's advisory work, the following questions should be carefully discussed under the project and within the framework of the Working Group to be established by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Questions:

- How should the balancing and prioritizing between academic curiosity-driven research and societal relevance of science be achieved?
- How should the new Career Framework be integrated into the Latvian labor market for a highly skilled labor force?
- What is the relationship of the Career Framework to the international academic labor markets?
- What are the main administrative values that need to be taken into account (for instance, the balance between efficiency and participatory approaches)?
- How should the new Career Framework fit into current legal (administrative law, higher education legislation, labor law), political (including employers and unions) and financial steering of higher education and science?

4. Staff Categories

The basic building blocks of an Academic Career Framework are the staff categories. The most typical boundaries between the staff categories are briefly described below and refer to the following categorizations:

- Between **administrative and support staff, and academic staff.** Even this seemingly self-evident distinction might sometimes be problematic (see, for example, Pekkola et al. 2020; Rydberg 2020). In this paper, we acknowledge the existence of hybrid positions combining administrative and academic tasks (for example, curriculum developer, graduate school coordinator) and managerial and academic tasks (academic managers). However, the complexity of these positions as part of an overall framework is not the main emphasis of this paper, even if they have become increasingly important to the good functioning of an HEI.
- Between **research-oriented and teaching-oriented positions.** This distinction can be deeply institutionalized, with separate legislation and career tracks or based on job descriptions.
- Based on **qualifications.** Typically, categorization of academic positions includes predoctoral positions (junior positions), postdoctoral positions, independent established academic positions (senior positions), and professorial positions (leading academic positions).
- **By institutional types.** Different institutions such as universities, scientific institutes, polytechnics, or Universities of Applied Science (UAS) may have similar or different staff categories under similar or different legal frameworks.
- Into **permanent and fixed-term positions.**
- Into **part-time or full-time positions.**
- Into **salaried and non-salaried** (for example, scholarship) **positions.**
- In addition to the previously mentioned categories, variable academic positions can be divided into different categories based on the following factors: **seniority** (serving years), **managerial responsibilities** (hierarchy), **background of a position holder** (visitor's positions, industry positions and so forth), and the **funding basis** of a position (academic researcher, postdoc, and so forth).

All these dimensions and the need of separate or integrated categories must be carefully considered when planning the overall career framework for Latvian academic staff working in HEIs and scientific institutes.

Based on the World Bank work in Latvia, **currently,** positions are often held on a **part-time basis** and academics have several positions. The system-level regulations **distinguish between mainly "teaching-oriented" and purely "research-oriented" positions.** However, both are considered "academic positions." Teaching-oriented positions are stipulated in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (LHEI), and research-oriented positions are determined by the Law on Scientific Activity. Teaching-oriented academic positions are not exclusively teaching positions; according to the LHEI, they should also include research.

The teaching-oriented career track (as defined in the LHEI) for academic staff working in HEIs includes the following categories:

1. Assistant
2. Lecturer
3. Docent
4. Associate professor

5. Professor.

The research-oriented career track (as defined by the Law on Scientific Activity) for academic staff working in HEIs or scientific institutes consists of three research-oriented staff categories:

1. Research assistant
2. Researcher and
3. Senior researcher.

The World Bank report (Arnhold et al. 2020) observes that, on the system level, **the qualifications of associate professors and professors are defined** (Arnhold et al. 2018). There is also a system-level regulation on the positions and minimum salaries of academic managers (rector, pro-rector, dean, pro-dean, and head of department). **However, the official career track does not include the position of "doctoral candidate / junior researcher"; neither is there a regulation on postdoctoral positions.** Doctoral candidates are considered to be students rather than junior researchers, even if doctoral candidates can receive a (state) stipend or be employed, for instance, as an assistant. The postdoctoral researcher is not an official career step in the Latvian system. However, European Science Fund funding has been used to open postdoctoral positions, and some institutions have had their own policies to support postdoctoral researchers.

Questions:

- Is it sensible to develop a single set of staff categories for both HEIs and scientific institutes, or should research and teaching-oriented staff categories continue within the same framework?
- How should research and teaching duties be integrated in the two subsectors (higher education institutions and scientific institutes), or is the integration done only in higher education?
- Are the minimum qualifications for different staff categories regulated nationally and should they be the same in all types of institutions?
- Should all institutions be able to use all staff categories such as PhD candidates (should they be a staff category?) and professors? Should some of the staff categories always be permanent or always fixed term, or could this depend on institutional circumstances?
- Is the framework based on an idea of full-time positions as a presumption and part-time positions as an exception?
- How should the framework recognize different funding sources (stipends, external funding, and so forth) while fairly treating all employees, regardless of the funding source, in enabling their career development?
- How should the staff categories be linked to minimum qualifications, salaries, and (state) funding?

5. Progression Models

The academic progression models can be heuristically divided into three variants (Kivistö et al. 2019). These variants are outcomes of the historical development of each higher education system and are part of the administrative tradition in each country, as argued in the World Bank report (Arnhold et al. 2020).

The basic mechanisms for career progression are (a) through an application process for an open vacancy, (b) promotion, or (c) the tenure track. The Career Models based on open vacancies are called vacancy-based models, and the Career Models based on promotions are called career-based models. The entrance points have two significant variants. In the **career-based model**, the entrance happens through an application process to the first step of a career. In the **vacancy-based model**, the entrance to a career is possible, at least in theory, from each career step. The third career variant, the **tenure-track model**, combines the two pure variants. It is based on open vacancies while allowing a possible progression through promotions for some of the positions.

Contrary to common assumptions, the tenure-track model is not a uniform and standardized system but has multiple variants in Anglo-Saxon countries. **The recent trend of developing tenure-track models in continental Europe has even increased the fluidity of the concept, and thus, tenure track has multiple applications and meanings.** However, in most cases, the idea of tenure track is to achieve the tenured position of professor through a certain number of probationary periods, and assessments of academic work and outcomes, before moving from one career step to another.

Pekkola, Siekkinen, and Kivistö (2019) have conducted a literature review on tenure tracks and defined the basic "parameters" of the tenure systems. When considering establishing a tenure-track-based Career Model, at least three aspects should be carefully considered: **need, extent, and scope** of tenure track.

1. **Need: the policy / strategic aims for establishing a tenure-track model**

Typically, there are several reasons for establishing a tenure-track model. The most typical reasons include:

- Safeguarding academic freedom
- Increasing fairness, predictability, and transparency
- Increasing the attractiveness of an academic career
- Increasing the internationality of academic careers
- Increasing the efficiency and productivity of academic work
- Profiling academic work
- Setting new targets and quality standards for academic work
- Supporting professional development
- Decreasing the organizational risks of recruitment
- Reaching other policy goals, such as gender balance.

Before establishing a tenure-track system (or institutional tenure tracks), its aims should be explicitly set, since tenure track does not automatically lead to any of the above-mentioned aims.

Questions:

- What are the purposes and aims for establishing a tenure track as part of the Career Framework in Latvia?
- Who will decide on the establishment (and funding) of the tenure positions and on what basis?

2. The extent of tenure track

One of the most central questions in establishing tenure track is its **relation to "traditional" academic career and recruitment.** Depending on the aims of the tenure track, it can be the main avenue toward a professorial position, or it can be a "fast track" meant for profiling or attracting talents, for instance. In the latter case, the fairness and balance between persons holding traditional positions and tenure positions should be carefully considered to avoid the unintentional creation of double standards.

Question:

- What should be the relationships and relative shares of "current," "new," and "tenured" Career Frameworks in Latvia?

3. Scope of tenure track

The scope of a tenure-track system (criteria, assessment, and so forth) can be built at the system level, the institutional level, the faculty level, or even the task level. **The progression of an academic career can be based on universal or specific criteria** defined at the level of the HIE and science system, the university, a discipline, an organizational unit, or a task. In addition, the **tenure track can take into account the different content areas of the work** (teaching, research, management, service) with different emphases on the different tasks. **The tenure system may be built to support mainly institutional aims or individual aims.** The weight of assessment of the different tasks can be determined by managers or by the staff member when they are agreeing on the performance targets. Tenure track does not have to be a research-intensive, standardized system leading to comparability of different performing individuals. It can also be built on other premises, such as individual development and support of educational activities.

Questions:

- What is the minimum that should be regulated at the national level?
- Who are the key stakeholders in planning, implementing, and assessing the tenure-track system in Latvia?

6. Processes

The processes of recruitment, selection, and progression on academic careers are dependent on the type of career model. In a vacancy-based model, the formal qualifications and the recruitment and its transparency are the most crucial aspects for planning and implementing the model. In a career-based model, the assessment criteria and frequency of assessment as well as the promotion practices are important. **The details of processes related to a tenure-track career model** are discussed below, and are based on the work of Pekkola, Siekkinen, and Kivistö (2019).

1. Titles and steps

Staff categories (see chapter 4) are closely connected to the processes of career progression. **Internationally, a typical career track consists of three steps: assistant professor, associate professor, and professor.** In some systems, there is also a fourth step for "distinguished" professors. Typically, the first step is considered as probationary, after which the decision on tenure is taken.

In Europe, the titles are not always easily applicable to a national system and compared to a traditional career model. In the Latvian case, after the recent Constitutional Court's ruling, international practice could probably be applied to the Latvian system by which the docent could be translated into assistant professor and would be fixed term, and the associate professor and professor would be considered the tenured positions.

In addition, remuneration should be discussed simultaneously while planning the career steps. The future Latvian model must reduce disparity of employment conditions and link more clearly workload and remuneration both at system and institutional levels.

Questions:

- How many steps should the tenure-track model have?
- How should the steps be related to each other and to current practices and other academic positions (for example, what is the relation of assistants and to tenure track)?
- What principles should guide remuneration at system level? At institutional level?
- How could the remuneration model provide an incentive for improved performance in both teaching and research?

2. Recruitment and selection

Recruitment practices for tenure-track position have multiple variants. The recruitment can be done at all levels of tenure track or at only one or two levels. To further complicate the scenario, there are variations on the application procedure. In some cases, the applicant himself or herself chooses the level that he or she is applying for; in some cases, the selection committee evaluates the level of an applicant. The comparison among applicants is highly challenging since they can be on different career levels; thus, in one form or another, the selection committee has to evaluate the "potential" in addition to the merits and qualifications.

In most higher education systems, the recruitment of full or tenured professors is done by following so-called professional recruitment patterns (Siekkinen et al. 2016). This means that the scientific excellence and qualifications are evaluated by external members of the professional community, rather than by the

managers, administrators, or internal colleagues. The Latvian higher education system follows this pattern to some extent. The selection is done by a Council of Professors, which is a discipline-specific body. The Council consists of five members and may contain external member if a university does not have five professors within a field. National regulation does not stipulate that the involvement of international experts is mandatory, unlike in many other countries where such a practice is considered to support a more balanced, outward-looking approach, as is pointed out in the World Bank report (Arnhold et al. 2020; see LHEI Sections 33–35). However, according to the website of the Higher Education Council, as of 25 May 2020, 58 Councils of Professors and 18 Councils have involved international experts.[13] In addition, the Higher Education Council has also prepared recommendations on the procedure for electing professors and associate professors and on the criteria for assessing the qualifications of applicants. The second Recommendation is about international experts: "Each candidate for the position of Professor must correspond at least one of the international evaluation criteria set by the Council of Higher Education (CHE). If the candidate does not meet any of these criteria, he/she must receive an independent international evaluation organized by the Council of Professors of the respective field in accordance with the rules developed by the (CHE).[14]

If the typical tenure model is implemented in Latvia, **a major change to the decision-making method from election to selection/appointment is needed. In other words, the current system of recruitment would have to be changed to use external (international) experts who would be chosen specifically for each position.** An informal national pool of experts would probably be needed to select the expert panels because of the small size of some institutions that would not have the requisite neutrality to select experts.

Questions:

- What will be the main recruitment method for professors in the future?
- How can the legitimacy of the process be ensured if it is not based on elections?
- How can Latvia tap into the existing expertise in recruiting international experts?

3. Timing of and assessment in tenure track

Time plays an essential role in two major ways when planning a tenure system. The first is as it relates to individual staff (sometimes referred to as a tenure clock). **The tenure clock defines the individual's time frame in which tenure should be reached.** Already, during the planning of tenure models, the legitimate reasons to stop the clock ticking should be taken into account (for example, pregnancy, career breaks, illness, and so forth), as well as how many "second chances" should be given to an individual if the criteria are not met. The second relates to consideration of what happens to the original work contract within an institution if a person is transferring from a non-tenure to a tenure career.

The timing of the steps and assessment cycles is another aspect of time that should be taken into account in tenure systems. Typically, at least five types of assessment are employed during a tenure track:

1. Annual assessment and professional development discussions
2. Midterm assessments during the tenure periods (for example, assistant professorship) in order to reach the goal of a period

[13] http://www.aip.lv/prof_saraksts.htm
[14] http://www.aip.lv/prof_ievelesana.htm (available in Latvian)

3. Assessment of tenure period before granting the tenure
4. Assessment related to the tenure decision
5. Assessment related to promotion after tenure decision.

Typically, the number of tenure periods varies between three and five and the length of typical tenure period is four to five years. The current system in Latvia is based on assessment and reapplication to a vacancy every sixth year. The absence of a mandatory retirement age for professors should also be considered when establishing tenured positions. As argued in the World Bank report (Arnhold et al. 2018), this would provide an exit point to the career and enable a dynamic, more balanced personnel structure, given the permanence of tenured positions.

Questions:

- What would be an ideal length (or range) of a tenure period in Latvian institutions?
- How can individuals in different life and work situations be treated equally (fairly) when assessed on the tenure track?
- How and when should the assessment be done and by whom?
- How should a career be terminated if a person fails the assessment or when reaching a certain age?
- Are there political, financial, and legal avenues to discuss the retirement issue?

4. Assessment of research, teaching, and other tasks

Based on the international literature on assessment practices, Pekkola et al. (2020) have discussed the importance of assessment of three dimensions of academic work for any academic career model. Fair evaluation of academics requires good and transparent quantitative indicators and qualitative assessment methods, since academic work is difficult to assess and measure. In addition, there are major disciplinary differences that should be taken into account, as well as different approaches to the assessment of teaching, research, and other tasks in higher education, as briefly discussed below.

Teaching assessment follows two principles. The first is the assessment of teaching-related outputs. For instance, the experiences or number of supervised PhDs can be considered as an indicator of competence in PhD supervision. The second is the assessment of competencies. Teaching competences can be assessed directly (by peers or students), indirectly (through portfolios, pedagogical certificates, or teaching awards), or as a combined approach.

Research assessment is typically done by using quantitative indicators on research outputs, by assessing the quality of publication forums (for example, journals), or by using peer reviews in assessing the quality of research. The fair assessment of research outputs and quality has been a major international topic of discussion in recent years and there have been increasing demands to develop qualitative assessment methods for research. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) is one good example of a global attempt to ensure fair and transparent methods of assessing research.[15]

There is also the necessity of assessing the administrative or service functions of academic work, and terms such as “publicness,” “community engagement,” “outreach,” and “academic citizenship” have been used to describe tasks that do not fall under research or teaching. These tasks are often measured through

[15] https://sfdora.org.

assessment of tutoring, assessment activities, positions of trust, administrative duties, management tasks, public communication, expert tasks, and publications for the wider public.

Questions:

- What criteria and methods should be used for assessment?
- How should the assessment balance the different tasks?

5. Organizing a tenure-track system

On the institutional level, the organization of a tenure-track system is demanding and resource intensive. First, **the institutions need to have the required management capacity** (academic leaders and peers) to evaluate, assess, support, and provide feedback on progression of an individual on a career track. Second, **resources in personnel administration** are needed to standardize the procedures related to assessment and implement them in a professional manner. Third, careful **financial planning** – in addition to flexibility in the use of resources – is needed to foresee the financial implications of the tenure positions since, when recruitments are successful, the candidates will get more qualified, their salary will increase, and they will be tenured for the long run.

A concrete question to raise is whether the tenure practices will be **organized as part of "normal" HR practices, or whether staff on a tenure track will be treated differently as "special" employees.** Furthermore, HR practices can be organized in a centralized manner or as a decentralized service in faculties.

The World Bank work in Latvia revealed that the personnel administration has been mostly concentrating on the management of contracts and procedures related to opening and filling positions and evaluating formal qualifications. Thus, human resource management is focused on teaching hours and project tasks. Qualifications are evaluated as part of the election processes but not in a long-term perspective in connection to talent management and ongoing work processes (Arnhold et al. 2018). This means that the implementation of tenure track would require a great deal of adaptation on the part of administration and institutional management in Latvian universities.

So far, the Latvian system has not allowed an approach based on tenure track leading to a permanent, tenured professorship because of the six-year rule. At the same time, Latvian higher education staff and staff in scientific institutes are used to the continuous assessment of their work. Consequently, "midterm evaluation" is not totally new for the Latvian higher education and science system. However, the tenure assessment is not typically based on election but on professional (often external) evaluation of candidates. The tenure track would also require the full-time employment of the candidate in one position, since this is the only way to build fair and transparent assessment criteria and timing of tenure. The tenured positions should also have an exit point at the end of a career. In other words, implementing a tenure track should also lead to reconsidering the retirement practices.

Questions:

- Are all suitable institutions prepared, willing, and resourced to implement tenure-track practices?
- If not, what steps should be taken to increase the skills and competences of HR staff?
- Is it realistic to assume that newly recruited staff will work exclusively in one institution?

7. Heuristic Model and Steps Forward

The specific objective of the project (supported by the European Commission's DG REFORM and executed by the World Bank) is to support the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science in reforming its academic career system by proposing a new academic career framework in line with European and international good practice, including a proposed system of academic positions and related selection and promotion processes. It builds on previous work by the World Bank that is summed up by Arnhold et al. (2020):

> "Going forward, the main challenge for the Latvian higher education system is thus to create an integrated career approach on the individual, institutional and system level and bring them together in an overarching strategic approach and related practices. On the individual level, this would mean shifting the focus from multiple contracts to the management of the annual working time and career development of core staff. On the institutional level, the recruitment and development of staff would need to be connected to the strategy of the universities and respective faculties and departments, while on the system level, research and teaching careers would need to be integrated."

This paper described the authors' understanding of the current academic staff categories, proposed new integrated categories, and presented a tenure-track model associated with these categories. Table 1 presents the current career steps, that are grouped based on a European Research Career Model (R1-R4).[16] In addition, new integrated categories are presented for teaching- and research-oriented positions. These new staff categories could be used in all types of institutions depending on the primary tasks related to the position. The lecturer's position is placed in an independent "box" since it is difficult to place it on a career track. We have also placed the professor of practice (PoP) in a separate box to remind the reader that the integration into other sectors of society should be considered when drafting the framework.

Table 1. European career steps and their Latvian equivalent

Career step	Current Latvian titles[17]	Title in traditional track based on vacancies (if needed)	Title in tenure track based on promotion (if separate)	Qualifications
Junior (R1) (4 to 8 years, permanent)	Research Assistant Assistant (PhD Stipendiat)	Junior Researcher Junior Lecturer		Master's degree with excellent grades, competence for PhD studies
Postdoc (R2) (4 to 5 years, permanent)	Docent Researcher (optional postdoc)	Postdoctoral Researcher Lecturer	Assistant Professor	PhD (or other work experience to fulfill the criteria?)
Independent (R3) (4 to 5 years, permanent)	Associate Professor Senior Researcher	Senior Lecturer Senior Researcher	Associate Professor	Qualification comparable to four years' postdoctoral research or other merits
Leading (R4), permanent	Professor	Professor	Professor	External evaluation

Lecturer

PoP

[16] https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors.

[17] These academic positions have different functions from practice elsewhere.

The positions could be fixed-term or permanent. The tenure track is proposed as a separate track that could be used / piloted first in some (large) institutions. To avoid misunderstandings, the titles (at least in their English translation) are different in "tenure track" and "normal positions." We have also proposed some preliminary ideas about the qualifications for different career steps. However, before going any further in designing the model, multiple steps should be taken. These steps should be integrated into the activities of the project, and consist of **interviews, workshops, and site visits**, as described in the following sections.

Step 1 – Vision for new Career Framework

Aim: To create a solid foundation for reform, based on a shared vision of the needs, purposes, and aims of the new Career Framework.

In order to define the vision, the following questions should be discussed:

- How should the balancing and prioritizing between academic curiosity-driven research and societal relevance of science be achieved?
- How should the new Career Framework be integrated into the Latvian labor market for a highly skilled labor force?
- What is the relationship of the Career Framework to the international academic labor markets?
- What are the main administrative values that need to be taken into account (for instance, the balance between efficiency and participatory approaches)?

Activities: Interviews of main stakeholders and a policy workshop.

Step 2 – Depth of integration

The integration of teaching-oriented staff and research-oriented staff careers is one of the main aims of the reform. The integration has multiple dimensions and partly moves beyond the Career Framework within higher education. Thus, at the very least, the following questions should be discussed:

- Is it sensible to develop a single set of staff categories for both HEIs and scientific institutions, or should research- and teaching-oriented staff categories continue within the same framework?
- How are research and teaching duties integrated in the two subsectors (HEIs and scientific institutes), or is the integration done only in higher education?
- Are the minimum qualifications for different staff categories regulated nationally and should they be the same in all types of institutions?
- Should all institutions be able to use all staff categories such as PhD candidates (should they be a staff category?) and professors?

Activities: Group interviews / focus groups of managers in HEI and scientific institutes.

Step 3 – Basic terms and preconditions for transition

After the overall aims of the new Career Framework and the depth of integration of the sectors have been discussed, the new vision should be adapted to the specific Latvian political, legal, and financial context. When discussing what kind of Career Framework can be established, at the very least, the following questions should be discussed:

- Should some of the staff categories always be permanent or always fixed term, or could this depend on institutional circumstances?

- Is the framework based on an idea of full-time positions as a presumption and part-time positions as an exception?
- Are there political, financial, and legal avenues to discuss the retirement issue?
- How should the framework recognize different funding sources (stipends, external funding, etc.) while treating all employees fairly, regardless of the funding source, in enabling their career development?
- How should the staff categories be linked to minimum qualifications, salaries, and (state) funding?
- How should the new Career Framework fit into current legal (administrative law, higher education legislation, labor law), political (including social partners – employers and unions), and financial steering of higher education and science? What changes are needed?

Activities: legal analysis, interview of institutional representatives, Ministry of Education and Science, Rector's Council, and other representative bodies; workshops and discussions in Working Group.

Step 4 – Purpose and need of tenure track

As soon as the basic building blocks and context of the Career Framework are defined, the tenure-track model should be discussed. The most important discussion topics are the scope of the tenure-track model, its purpose, and its relation to other parts (if any) of the Career Framework.

- What are the purposes and aims of establishing a tenure track as part of the Career Framework?
- Who will decide on the establishment (and funding) of the tenure positions, and on what basis?
- What should the relationships and relative shares be of "current," "new," and "tenured" Career Models in Latvia?
- What is the minimum that should be regulated at the national level; and who are the key stakeholders in planning, implementing, and assessing the tenure-track system?

Activities: Workshop for institutional managers and rector's council, and other stakeholders.

Step 5 – Designing a career progression model

Only after the overall planning of the Career Framework can the actual design of the model (that is, the means to an end) be started. Depending on the aims of the reform, and the depth of the integration, the end product can be a loose framework that provides some basic guidelines for institutions, or it can include a more detailed description of the procedures. When planning the progression model, at the very least, the following questions should be discussed:

- How many steps should the tenure-track model have?
- How should the steps be related to current practices and other academic positions (for example, what is the relation of Assistants and to tenure track)?
- What will the main recruitment method be for professors in the future?
- How can the legitimacy of the process be ensured if it is not based on elections?
- What would an ideal length (or range) of a tenure period be in Latvian institutions?
- How can individuals in different life and work situations be treated equally (fairly) when assessed on the tenure track?
- How and when should the assessment be done and by whom?

- What criteria and methods are used for assessment?
- How is the assessment balanced among different tasks?
- How should a career be terminated if someone fails the assessment or because he or she has reached a certain age?

Activities: Survey of institutions; site visits (Finland and Ireland); discussion in Working Group.

Step 6 – Institutional preparedness and reflections

Finally, the implementation will happen in HEIs and scientific institutes. Thus, to avoid failures in implementation, there should be institutional reflection on and consideration of how to ensure that the framework will work.

- Are all institutions prepared, willing, and resourced to implement tenure-track practices?
- If not, what steps should be taken to increase the skills and competences of HR staff?
- Is it realistic to assume that newly recruited staff will work exclusively in one institution?

Activities: Comments from institutions, mapping of challenges for implementation, roadmap development, consideration of legal and financial implications.

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