

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ACADEMIC PROFESSION COMPETENCIES AND THE PROFESSIONAL SOCIALISATION OF JUNIOR RESEARCHERS

The recommendations on the academic profession competencies and professional socialisation of junior researchers are the result of the study conducted within the framework of the research project *Academic Profession Competency Framework: Between New Requirements and Possibilities* (APROFRAME). The recommendations are presented through (1) the proposal of the competency profile of the academic profession; (2) the results regarding the understanding of the process of the junior researchers' professional socialisation into the science and higher education system in the Republic of Croatia; and (3) the recommendations for further research.

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Competency Profile of the Academic Profession



The proposed profile is based on the non-hierarchical clustering approach to the competency profile modelling; that is, the model of multiple competencies. The profile provides a broad consideration of different competencies, but allows for a more specific approach to particular competency groups as well. It can be applied to a wide range of academics regardless of the particular scientific fields or disciplines. The proposed competency groups/competencies should be contextualised and rendered more flexible, honouring the complexity and tradition of the academic profession in the process.

The recommendations which are based on the proposed competency profile of the academic profession are related to the different phases of the academics' career path. In that context, the competency profile of the academic profession enables:

Defining the employment criteria which are based on knowledge, skills, and abilities

The competency profile enables a clearer definition of the employment criteria which would be based on the candidates' knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as the profiling of genuinely competent employees who enter into (or advance through) the academic profession.

Traditional academic careers, characterised by job stability, security and commitment to a single institution, have been gradually disappearing. *Flexibility* in today's academic careers, on the other hand, can be considered a synonym for *insecurity* and *precariousness*. Nowadays, it is almost impossible to describe the academic professional path as simple, linear, and

bound to one institution. Therefore, competencies are no longer related and adapted to the requirements of one organisation. In that context, junior researchers are expected to continually develop their competencies in order to successfully perform different tasks in different institutions, in the national and international context.

Organising the academic staff development in accordance with the defined competencies required for work in the institution or profession

The science and higher education system in the Republic of Croatia is characterised by the absence of systematic, institutionally supported practice regarding the university teachers' professional development in all the (core) academic activities. The competency profile would enable the planning and organisation of the university teachers' development in accordance with the defined competencies required for their work. Furthermore, the existence of the competency profile indicates a need for the permanent "culture of learning" at the Croatian universities through the monitoring of the current trends and changes within the profession, thus providing better individual, as well as institutional results and achievements.

Revising the current requirements for academic promotion based on the competency profile

The adoption of the competency approach is connected to the achievement assessment and in that context the existing criteria for academic promotion in Croatia should be revised. The revision of the Decision on the Required Criteria for the Assessment of Teaching and Professional Activity in the Appointment Process for Senior Academic Ranks (*Official Gazette*, 106/2006) is considered to be especially important, as the results of the analysis of the Criteria point to a conclusion that more than 50% of the criteria is focused exclusively on the research activity. The approach to the

achievement assessment should be flexible and provide an opportunity to demonstrate the competency outcomes from a much wider perspective which would involve different forms of (measurable) knowledge, skills, and abilities that are not exclusively based on the quantitative indicators as the measure of academic success

Planning the future direction of the development of the institution or profession and redefining the requirements for the academics

To plan the direction of the profession's development based on the competency profile means to contemplate its development in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities which would preserve its position in the system of professions, but also advance its current state, taking into account a number of particularities which characterise the academic profession. An open and flexible approach to the development of competency profile would prevent its strict standardisation, reduction, and rigidity, as well as the fear of decreasing the university teachers' academic freedom. The introduction of the competency approach would enable the institutions to plan their development more successfully and base it on the competencies of their staff.

Professional Socialisation of Junior Researchers

The recommendations on the (junior researchers') professional socialisation into the academic profession, which are based on the research results, predominantly pertain to the institutional level. In other words, this shows that a large number of changes and improvements could be implemented on that level, which is consistent with the idea of university autonomy and the universities' different manners of development, visions, and missions.

To structure and carefully plan the professional socialisation into different scientific fields/disciplines because it is a prerequisite for the junior researchers' stable professional identity formation

The research results show that junior researchers strongly identify with the scientific field/discipline, but they also reveal some context-related challenges, such as weak collaboration and support among colleagues, insufficient and inconsistent support during the process of socialisation into the scientific field/discipline, and a low quality of production accompanied by the pressure toward hyperproduction. These determinants influence the junior researchers' negative perception of the scientific field/discipline, as well as weak outcomes of their socialisation. For that reason, and in order to ensure the development of all the scientific fields/disciplines in Croatia, a structured and effective strategy for the socialisation of junior researchers into the scientific fields/disciplines should be developed. That would ensure junior researchers' stable identity formation within the context of different scientific fields/disciplines.

To structure and carefully plan the professional socialisation into the organisation and establish a more transparent and intensive collaboration at the institutional level and the lower organisational levels

The research results show that the junior researchers mostly identify with their immediate research/teaching and institutional context (and more often than not, with a particular office or research group) when it provides collaboration, support, and stimulating climate; that is, when their habitat acts as a community of practice where they can learn in a direct manner. However, the experiences of socialisation are diverse and some junior researchers feel marginalised in their environment which does not function as a community of practice because the collaboration is sporadic, relationships are cold, and the research and teaching activities are atomised and independent. In the process of socialisation, junior researchers perceive the wider institutional environment as predominantly bad and unfavourable and believe that it enables those whose results are not satisfactory to remain in the system. That creates an atmosphere in which effort, work, and quality are less important than connections and political suitability, which is discouraging for junior researchers. In accordance with the aforementioned, the recommendation is to ensure the junior researchers' placement into a context which has the characteristics of a community of practice, to develop the institutional (department/faculty/university) awareness of the importance of the communities of practice and quality culture development, as well as to intensify the collaboration on the level of junior researcher – community of practice - institution.

To establish balance with regard to the teaching and research overload

The research results point to a discrepancy between the amount of time devoted to teaching and research, as well as negative correlation between the focus on teaching and research. Junior researchers often experience teaching (and administrative) overload and point out that they are not able to conduct research activities during their working hours, which causes an intertwinement of their professional and private life. In that context, it is very important that the institutions recognise the described situations and develop protective policies and practices.

To provide the academic development programmes for junior researchers which are based on the competency profile

The professional socialisation of junior researchers into the teaching profession points to the lack of structured professional development which results in the initial sense of insecurity and an insufficient level of preparation for teaching. That situation requires a systematic and structured approach to the development of the junior researchers' teacher competencies on the national level, and the creation of the academic development programmes. In the process, it is very important to create an institutional culture which promotes the importance of teaching and stimulates junior researchers to develop and enhance their teacher competencies.

To improve the doctoral study programmes in order for them to strongly contribute to the acquisition and development of the research competencies

The research results reveal the junior researchers' serious criticism of the doctoral study programmes' quality. In that context, it is especially important to ensure that the doctoral study programmes facilitate the acquisition and development of the research competencies, which should be their essential characteristic. The junior researchers' criticism of the doctoral study programmes predominantly concerns their weak contribution to the acquisition and development of the competencies pertaining to the methodology of scientific research and the procedures of data processing and analysis, which represent the key competencies for the development of junior researchers.

To encourage the junior researchers to establish a connection between their research and teaching activities

The scholarship of teaching fosters the connection between research and teaching due to the benefits which this approach provides to both students and university teachers. In the context of the nexus between teaching and research, the research results show that the institutional support of the synergy between teaching and research is not evident, but depends on the junior researchers' individual initiative. In line with that, it is necessary to develop policies and instigate the teaching-research nexus on an institutional level.

To establish the mechanisms and strategies for the strengthening of mentorship at the institutional level

The research results confirm the findings regarding the notable importance of mentorship in the professional socialisation of junior researchers, but also point to a relatively weak influence of the institutional/organisational level on mentorship in the context of the professional socialisation of junior researchers. The research results reveal the challenges regarding the positioning of mentorship according to the personal, informal level, which demand a more clearly structured and objective mentoring practice. The mechanisms which regulate the mentoring of junior researchers should be objective and more clearly defined. Furthermore, it is very important to clearly outline the mechanisms for abandoning the dyadic mentoring relationship when it becomes limiting and does not lead toward the set objectives. It is also necessary to ensure a supportive institutional and mentoring practice which would empower the junior researchers for their teacher role through careful and structured guidance.

To promote the alternative forms of mentoring

Even though the traditional dyadic relationship is still a predominant feature of the professional socialisation of junior researchers, recent studies indicate the benefits of the alternative forms of mentoring (multiple mentoring, peer mentoring, group mentoring, developmental networks) which are considered to be more efficient in terms of meeting the requirements of the professional socialisation. It is especially important to consider the inclusion of junior researchers into the intellectual community where they can engage in implicit and explicit learning.

To encourage the discussion on the challenges of mobility management in science and higher education institutions

The research results show that the international mobility and networking are the key elements for the junior researchers' scientific maturity, their professional socialization into the international disciplinary community, and the achievement of researcher legitimacy in the early stages of the academic career. In that context, it is important to encourage the Croatian universities to engage in serious discussion in terms of managing mobility and brain circulation in our higher education and research context. Additionally, it is crucial to capitalize on the knowledge and skills of the returning researchers in order to ensure the contribution of the mobility experience to the institution and the disciplinary community.

To deliberate on the development of the incentive institutional policies and practices for the realisation of mobility in science and higher education

The results of this research highlight the institutional policies and practices at the Croatian universities (and their constituents) which have been recognised as supportive of the advocacy and realisation of the junior researchers' international mobility. In that context, the recommendation intended for all the higher education institutions is to deliberate on the systematic development of the institutional policies and practices which would encourage and support the realisation of the junior researchers' international mobility, and at the same time would not disadvantage those individuals who are not able to engage in mobility for any reason. Therefore, it is recommended that the institutions provide adequate support for the shorter, recurring visits (in the duration of one to three months), coordinate the lesson planning with the policies for (the stimulation of) international mobility, and develop the mechanisms for providing the financial support to the junior researchers who undertake mobility.

To detect and change the gender-based discriminatory institutional practices and provide a systematic institutional support to the female junior researchers

The research shows that the female junior researchers' experience of the professional socialisation is the most challenging experience in the science and higher education system for a number of reasons. Female junior researchers are often systematically discriminated because they are assigned less prestigious research tasks and experience the teaching and administrative work overload, which makes them feel overworked and incompetent. The female researchers who have families and young children experience a lack of understanding, as well as underestimation and harassment. The higher education institutions and the system in general do not sufficiently pay attention to, raise awareness of, and combat this discriminatory practice. The unjust practice should be identified, the specific guidelines and steps for combating the discrimination of female junior researchers should be established, and a system of support which would ensure the high-quality outcomes of their professional socialisation should be developed.

To recognise academic capitalism as an additional factor in the science and higher education system development and as a challenge for the development of the junior researchers' professional identity

The research results point to an increasingly strong influence of the negative features of academic capitalism at all levels of the junior researchers' professional socialisation. At the disciplinary level, there is a tendency toward hyperproduction in all disciplines, accompanied by a weak or non-existent monitoring of the quality of the research activities. At the institutional level, junior researchers point to an evident bureaucratisation and an increased administration, an expanded administrative workload, and

the need to acquire and develop an increasing number of different competencies. At the personal level, the challenges connected to the contemporary conditions in academic capitalism predominantly concern the difficulties of achieving the work-life balance, including the prominent question of balancing motherhood and a scientific career. In this context, the recommendation for the institutions and educational policies is to neutralise these negative influences by developing the timely and equitable institutional and national strategies in order to create an encouraging environment which would enable young individuals to develop and remain in the profession.

Recommendations for Future Research



To focus on the exploration of the process of the junior researchers' professional identity development

Taking into account the fact that the development of a stable professional identity is connected to the sense of satisfaction with the profession, constant motivation, dedication to work, and a sense of self-efficacy, conducting research in this context is of great importance. Since the studies on the junior researchers' professional identity are current and relevant in the international research community, but still not sufficiently present in the national research area, the recommendation is to focus on researching this phenomenon in order to better understand it.

To encourage further research on the junior researchers' mastery level of the academic profession competencies

The research results point to the junior researchers' high self-assessments of the academic profession competencies' mastery, which could result in the lack of the need for investing further effort in their enhancement, especially with regard to the teacher competencies. In that context, new studies would need to focus on the specific (exceptional, extreme, and/or typical) cases of different experiences of the professional socialisation into teaching in order to analyse the range of experiences in relation to different professional contexts (institutional, the environment of research field/discipline, mentoring...).

To conduct a more comprehensive analysis and exploration of mentoring in the science and higher education system in Croatia

The research results reveal a lack of data which could be the basis of the precise and objective analysis of mentoring and its role in the professional socialisation into the academic profession. This especially pertains to the studies which would include doctoral students and junior researchers who have left the system of science and higher education. The mentors' perspective should certainly be included into the studies on the professional socialisation of junior researchers in Croatia, and it is especially important to explore the alternative forms of mentoring.

To encourage research on academic mobility

The future studies in this area should focus on the role of the junior researchers' mobility in their professional socialisation, including the particularities of the disciplinary contexts and institutional policies and practices which have been recognised as supportive of the international mobility, as well as the personal level (experiences, socio-economic and educational background). Research should focus on how to concurrently develop the balanced (scientific) and institutional policies which would need to be adapted to the contemporary context of the (junior) researchers' mobility and networking. Studies should also focus on different models of mobility management at the Croatian universities and their constituents. Future research should also encompass those junior researchers who have not experienced the international mobility.

To explore and analyse the institutional practices regarding the junior researchers' academic development

The identified unsupportive institutional practice is characterised by the absence of a systematic support for teaching, the lack of opportunities for the acquisition and development of teacher competencies, poor organisation of the teaching activities, and teaching overload which renders the junior researchers' mobility and research productivity more difficult. In that context, a more detailed analysis of the unsupportive institutional practices should be conducted, that is, the specific reasons for the higher education institutions' mismanagement of the junior researchers' introduction into the teaching profession should be explored. Furthermore, the manner in which particular universities and their constituents invest into the development of teaching should be determined more precisely.

The recommendations are based on the following editions:

Books, book chapters, and papers in journals

Ledić, J., & Brajdić Vuković, M. (Eds.) (2017). *Narratives about the Professional Socialisation of Junior Researchers*. Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka.

Ledić, J., & Turk, M. (Eds.) (2017). *Teaching and Research in the Professional Socialisation of Junior Researchers*. Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Turk, M., & Ledić J. (2016). *Academic profession competencies. Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*. Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka.

Turk, M., & Ledić, J. (2016). *Between Teaching and Research: Challenges of the Academic Profession in Croatia*. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 6, 1, 95-111.

Turk, M. (2016). (New) competencies of the academic profession in Europe. Napredak – a journal for pedagogical theory and practice, 157, 1-2, 145-164.

Turk, M., & Ledić, J. (2016). *Croatian Academics' Attitudes on the Importance of Academic Profession Competencies*, International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research, 2(1), 142-159.

Turk, M. (2015). *Academic Profession in Europe: Changes and Challenges*, In: Teaching, Learning, and Research in the "Just Google It" Age, 5, 1, 449-466, University of Harvard, Boston, USA: 21st Century Academic Forum.

Nokkala, T., Ćulum, B., & Fumasoli, T. (2016). *Early Career Women in Academia: An Exploration of Networking Perceptions*. In H. Eggins (Ed.). Women in Academia. Dordrecht: Springer.

Ribeiro, F. M, Politis, Y., & Ćulum, B. (Eds.) (2015). *New Voices in Higher Education*, IGI Global

The results presented at conferences and invited lectures

Marko Turk, invited lecture, Department of Theory of Education and Social Education, Faculty of Education, National University of Distance Education, Madrid, Spain, 5 February 2016. Title of lecture: Academic Profession in Europe: Changes, Challenges and (New) Competencies

Marko Turk and Jasminka Ledić, 8th World Conference on Educational Sciences, Madrid, Spain, 4 – 6 February 2016, presentation: Mastery of the academic profession competencies: Croatian academics' attitudes

Bojana Ćulum and Terhi Nokkala, 40th ASHE Annual Conference: Inequality and Higher Education, 2 - 7 November 2015 (engagement on the conferences' mentoring programme), Denver, CO, USA

Marko Turk and Jasminka Ledić, International Conference on Social Sciences and Education Research, Antalya, Turkey, 29 – 31 October 2015; presentation: Croatian academics' attitudes on the importance of academic profession competencies

Marko Turk, Croatian qualification framework: Knowledge and creativity, Zagreb, 22 – 23 October 2015; presentation: Academic profession competencies: Attitudes of university teachers

Bojana Vignjević, Croatian qualification framework: Knowledge and creativity, Zagreb, 22 – 23 October 2015; presentation: Challenges of the academics' professional socialisation

Bojana Ćulum, Tatiana Fumasoli and Terhi Nokkala, CHER 28th Annual Conference, Lisbon, Portugal, 7 - 9 September 2015, presentation: Reputation game and networking for academic careers – early career female scholars as strategic and organic networkers

Bojana Ćulum and Terhi Nokkala, CHER 28th Annual Conference, Lisbon, Portugal, 7 - 9 September 2015, panel presentation: Critically problematizing academic mobility and work/life balance

Jasminka Ledić, Days of Educational Sciences 2014, Zagreb, 16 – 17 October 2014, invited plenary presentation: The impact of research on the changes in higher education: The national picture from the biographical perspective

Marko Turk and Jasminka Ledić, Days of Educational Sciences 2014, Zagreb, 16 – 17 October 2014, presentation: Janus face of the academic profession: Between teachers and researchers

Terhi Nokkala, Bojana Ćulum and Tatiana Fumasoli, ASHE 2014, 39th Annual Conference, Washington DC, SAD, 19 - 23 November 2014, presentation: Reflecting upon the Networking Perceptions of Early Career Female Scholars

Bojana Ćulum, 27th CHER Annual Conference, Rome, Italy, 8 – 10 September 2014, presentation: International and global knowledge production in higher education research and the limitations and virtues of national explanatory frameworks

Marko Turk, Teaching, Learning, and Research in the "Just Google It" Age, University of Harvard, Boston, SAD, 8 – 10 March 2015, presentation: Academic Profession in Europe: Changes and Challenges

Turk M., Rončević N, & Ledić L. (2016). Research Management Competencies: Croatian Academics' Perspective. The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences EpSBS XVI (pp. 167-178).

Rončević, N., Turk, M., & Vignjević, B. (2017). Research development competencies: Junior academics' perspective. CERI2016 9th International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation, Conference Proceedings.

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