

## Impact Outlook

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- 'We have working groups dedicated to specific topics for early-career researchers, such as employment and career development, intersectoral mobility, mental health and Open Science'

# Representing early-career researchers

*President Gareth O'Neill and Vice President Ieva Kruminā share how the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) advocates tirelessly for the interests of early-career researchers across Europe*

### Who are the stakeholders that the European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (Eurodoc) represents?

**GO:** Eurodoc is a non-profit organisation run exclusively for and by early-career researchers (ECRs) in Europe. We are a grassroots federation of national organisations representing the local interests of doctoral candidates and junior researchers in 32 countries across Europe. We are the *de facto* representative for more than a million ECRs in Europe and engage with all major European stakeholders in higher education and research. This includes the European Commission (EC), Council of Europe, European University Association (EUA), and Science Europe.

**IK:** We collaborate directly with many other national and European stakeholders representing researchers, research performing organisations, research funders, and civil society. We are in constant contact with our stakeholder base of ECRs in Europe through our network and actively engage and involve our ECRs in all decision and policy making within Eurodoc. Our administration members are elected democratically by our member organisations who together set our strategic agenda and form the highest decision-making body in Eurodoc.

### Can you elucidate the drivers for Eurodoc being set up, its goals, and its role in European research?

**GO:** In 2001, several members of national organisations representing ECRs met at a conference by the Swedish presidency

of the Council of the European Union (EU). They recognised the need to establish a grassroots organisation for ECRs which could act as a European stakeholder. Eurodoc was thus founded in 2002 to consolidate the community of ECRs across Europe and to represent their interests at the European level. Our statutory goals are: to represent ECRs in matters of higher education, research and career development; advance the quality of doctoral programmes and standards of research activity; circulate information on issues for ECRs, organise events, take part in debates and create policies on higher education and research; and promote cooperation between national organisations for ECRs. Eurodoc plays an essential role in the higher education and research landscape in Europe by being the official voice of ECRs and ensuring that their opinions and needs are heard.

### How did you initially become involved in representing ECRs?

**GO:** ECRs are a vulnerable group in academia and I have always found it important to engage actively and constructively to improve their conditions and to give them a loud voice. As a result, I became involved in science policy at university and national level in the Netherlands and at the EC. I joined Eurodoc to share and build upon this experience.

**IK:** When I started my doctoral research, I ran into many unclear issues and joined the Association of Latvian Young Scientists, which is the main stakeholder for ECRs in Latvia. I have now been actively addressing issues for ECRs in Latvia as their President for

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Gareth O'Neill



Ieva Krumina

two years. I became involved with Eurodoc to represent ECRs from post-soviet countries at a European level and to gain insight into the situation of other ECRs in Europe. Eurodoc is an amazing network for reaching out and gaining perspective.

### What are some of the key functions within the organisation that you have responsibility for?

**GO:** As President of Eurodoc, I am responsible for overseeing the general activities and administration as well as publicly and legally representing the federation. Eurodoc is a highly active organisation that relies on a large team of volunteers to carry out its activities. We currently have 28 administration members who are responsible for the daily running of the council as well as active delegates from each of our 32 national organisations. Coordinating all of these volunteers and our activities is a challenging but rewarding task.

**IK:** As Vice President of Eurodoc, my responsibilities include forming a strong team with the President and other board members and using our skills fully to implement the goals of the organisation. I am responsible for communication with our national organisations and within our administration. Eurodoc is an important stakeholder at the European level, but to truly represent ECRs of all member organisations, we need to keep an eye on actual issues across Europe and ensure collaboration, external visibility, and smooth internal operations. Working with an international team, often virtually, is challenging but gives great insight into different mind-sets and cultures, and gives lots of inspiration. As Gareth said, it is very rewarding.

### Could you outline some of the main challenges and opportunities facing Europe's research sector in the near future?

**GO:** Obviously, the impact of Brexit will be a fundamental challenge for the EU, with the loss of the substantial British contribution to the research and innovation budget as well as the as yet unknown consequences for researcher collaboration and mobility in Europe. A positive outcome for both sides can only be achieved through constructive dialogue between the UK and the EU, and involving all

research stakeholders. Some main challenges we see for ECRs are the working conditions and opportunities for career development both inside and outside academia, and the serious mental health issues facing ECRs. Some main opportunities we see for ECRs are the adoption of an Open Science system, which will give greater access to education and research outputs as well as the related shift towards Science with and for Society, which is breaking down the ivory tower and involving the general public in science. Eurodoc is actively working on raising awareness and creating policy recommendations with working groups dedicated to specific topics for ECRs, such as employment and career development, intersectoral mobility, mental health and Open Science.

### How important is it for Eurodoc to be engaging with academic institutions both within Europe and internationally?

**IK:** It is essential for Eurodoc that we engage with academic institutions where the majority of ECRs are in fact conducting their research. One of our main partners is the EUA, representing more than 850 universities across Europe, and their Council for Doctoral Education. Whilst our focus is predominantly on Europe, we also interact with international stakeholders such as the International Association of Universities, representing more than 650 universities worldwide. This keeps us informed of worldwide trends and developments, while ensuring that European ECRs are taken into account and contribute to policies outside of Europe.

### What tools does Eurodoc use to achieve successful engagement?

**GO:** An important aspect of representing ECRs is that we know what the ECRs themselves think and find important. Apart from regular physical meetings and workshops with representatives and ECRs of our member organisations, we employ a variety of digital tools to engage and get the views of ECRs, such as video chat consultations, focused online surveys and topical mailing lists. Looking to the future, we are planning on expanding our website and developing a fully interactive Social Knowledge Environment for our member organisations and ECRs in Europe. This year we celebrated our 15th anniversary. Here's hoping for another 15 successful Eurodoc years!