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Preliminary Report on the Application of the 1974 UNESCO *Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers*

Prepared September 21, 2012 by the International Consortium of Research Staff Associations (ICORSA)

This report is based on a survey of the personal experiences of nine representatives of research staff organisations. The representatives reported knowledge of the conditions in 16 countries: Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States of America, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

This initial survey focused on nine of the recommendations that are particularly relevant to the researchers represented by ICoRSA, based on views expressed by researchers who represented their organisations at the launch of ICoRSA the Euroscience Open Forum (ESOF) in Dublin, July 2012.

Please note that there are difficulties defining “researchers” internationally. Those surveyed described researchers variously as postdocs, staff, staff scientists, group leaders and fellows. Many respondents identified with the term early career researchers as being a way of defining the membership of the national organisations that they represented.

Researchers do not feel secure in their chosen career. The majority of responses indicated that researchers do not feel secure in their careers. This was not uniformly the case, however, as researchers in senior positions and some of those in Australia felt secure.

Researchers are well regarded and recognised by the international scientific and technological community. Whilst the majority of researchers indicated they were well regarded and recognised, researchers in Africa, Ireland, and the United States stated otherwise. Notably, in the African states, excluding South Africa, access to research funding is limited.

Researchers do not have adequate incentives to remain in their current country of employment. The majority of countries do not provide adequate incentives to retain their research staff; only those in Canada felt such incentives were available.

Researchers do not have satisfactory career development opportunities. With the exception of the United Kingdom and some European Union research institutions, researchers feel that satisfactory career development opportunities are not available.

Researchers are provided with challenging opportunities. All those surveyed agreed that challenging opportunities were available.



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Researchers suffer avoidable hardship due to the nature of their work. All those surveyed agreed that researchers suffer avoidable hardships.

Researchers do not universally have access to a fair process to gain greater responsibility and reward. Half of those surveyed indicated that fair processes were not present, with the majority of the remainder indicating that fair processes were only occasionally available. Only researchers in the United Kingdom reported that fair processes were normally available.

Not all researchers have written terms and conditions of employment that clearly state their right to intellectual property that is generated as part of their research. Whilst researchers in the European Union enjoy such terms and conditions, those outside the European Union do not.

Researchers and organisations representing researchers were able to gain recognition with their employers and governments. Whilst the majority of researchers and organisations have been recognised, most found it easier to gain recognition with their governments than with their employers. Some organisations remain unrecognised.

Whilst the statements above show much commonality between the experiences of researchers in the countries represented, they also highlighted some significant differences. In terms of managing the international movements of scientific researchers, it is clear that further work needs to be done to ensure that mobility promotes “brain circulation” and does not lead to brain drain in certain countries and that the expectations of researchers are met.

ICORSA intends to build on this survey in the coming year by carrying out a more detailed survey of its member organisations. It is hoped that this will help national research staff associations establish priorities for their engagement with policy makers in order to meet international expectations. ICORSA is eager to contribute to this conversation; further guidance on the ways in which the views of researcher communities can impact international policy is welcome.

About ICORSA

The International Consortium of Research Staff Associations (ICORSA) was established in 2012 to represent the interests of national research staff associations on a global level, share best practices, and cooperate internationally. The ICORSA steering committee is currently working to establish a formal membership structure and plans to publish a list of member organisations in early 2013.