

## EDITORIAL

## Support for research career development in nursing science

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For some time, research career development and academic and other support systems have been identified as being in need of systematic development (European Commission, 2011). Predictability and transparency of a research career are of utmost importance for individual researchers but are even more important for academic and disciplinary regeneration and, therefore, need the development of structures and policies to enable the sustainable development of disciplines and organisations. While research careers have existed since the beginning of nursing science as a discipline, the number of early career researchers has increased rapidly and several careers other than academic research have appeared. However, such careers are not clear enough for individuals to become recognised as independent researchers (McKenna, 2021).

A research career is usually divided into four stages, starting as an early career researcher working on doctoral research (doctoral education and research), followed by the second, post-doctoral stage of someone who recently finalised their doctorate. The third stage is the level of advanced academics, independent research and education by professionals capable of academic leadership. Finally, the fourth step is professorship.

Several structural frameworks exist, especially for the first stage of career development. For example, the doctoral-level stage has been regulated and guided by several international and national stakeholders. One of these is the European University Association Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE) (EUA Council for Doctoral Education, 2023) leading the transformation and strengthening of doctoral education in Europe across all disciplines. Building on the outcomes of this council's work on doctoral programmes and research careers, the EUA-CDE has been the driving force behind the implementation of the Salzburg Principles and Recommendations (European University Association, 2010) and the promotion of doctoral education as the main intersection between European higher education and research. The Salzburg Principles and

recommendations have led to reforms in universities and the establishment of doctoral schools with clear structures. This document, for example, takes a position of the researcher career starting point by stating that “Doctoral candidates as early-stage researchers: should be recognised as professionals – with commensurate rights – who make a key contribution to the creation of new knowledge”. Especially in nursing science in Europe, the European Academy of Nursing Science (EANS) (European Academy of Nursing Science, 2023) provides a scientific framework for researchers, being “an independently organised body composed of individual members who have made significant contributions to the advancement of nursing science in Europe through scholarship and research”. The EANS has put great effort into doctoral education in particular. It is worth noting that the members of the organisation are devoted voluntary academics, nurse researchers.

While doctoral education has been strongly developed in many countries, the next post-doctoral stage does not have these clear structures. Several transdisciplinary support structures exist, but those solely focused on nursing researchers or nursing science are rare. There are, however, some examples of such structures, including mentoring programmes (Hafsteinsdóttir et al., 2020), postdoctoral fellowship programmes (The Duke University School of Nursing, 2022) or a post-doctoral programme in nursing science (University of Turku, 2023). Therefore, the most urgent development needs to be put into post-doctoral development and positions in general and especially in the discipline of nursing science, both nationally and internationally. Many doctorally prepared nurses have their positions in education in academia, other educational organisations, healthcare organisations and similar, with full-time allocation for duties other than research (van Dongen & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2022). The European Commission is currently working on offering funding to tackle problems within research careers. It (Bisson, 2023) considers research

career support and development to be organisational and institutional issues rather than a matter of individual careers. Individual support for those in the early research career stages is certainly needed, but the more serious problems include, for example, precarious employment, reaching a competitive income for living and similar issues to be solved.

From the discipline's point of view, the post-doctoral stage is expanding with initiatives of formulating structures and networks. Nurse researchers and academics in nursing science need to be proactive in developing strong networks, programmes and positions for the post-doctoral stage and further to ensure the vitality of nursing science in academia.

Support for individuals in their career stages should be focused on increasing their competencies. Several stakeholders have published competence requirements for researchers at different stages of their career development. A recent review (Numminen et al., 2020) summarised the main competences, including the management of 15 domains: research field, research skills, research ethics, cognitive competence, self-management, research communication, team work, team leadership, resources, career, pedagogy, implementation, future vision, technical competence and intercultural competence. These may not be exhaustive but give some guidance for competencies to be supported by education, supervision and mentoring and developed by early career researchers' goal-directed activities. However, academic organisational structures and innovative mentors are needed for career development from the early career stages into independent researchers.

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