

Research Infrastructures Staff Exchange (RISE): a new scheme for staff mobility within European Research Infrastructures

The proposed scheme is not trying to solve the wider general problem of mobility of researchers and technical staff in Europe, but focuses on the more specific and urgent need to respond to an increased demand of expert personnel for the design, construction and upgrade phases in the development of an EU capability in Research infrastructures (RIs). The ESFRI European Roadmap together with the national roadmaps have enabled a strategic approach in which a coherent fabric of world-class research infrastructures can be established. The possible use of structural and local funds for the construction and upgrade of existing RIs play constitutes important elements of this approach. However, the lack of qualified and experienced personnel is now being strongly felt as an issue and a possible bottleneck with respect to the realisation of these ideas. Indeed the existing expert human resources are limited, and in most cases there is the need to allow a transfer of personnel and knowledge from projects, which has been successfully implemented to new projects. The increase in mobility advocated below can also stimulate the training capabilities of different European centres for junior researchers and technicians in a more open and internationally oriented environment.

1. Staff mobility: lack of a scheme adapted to the needs of European RIs

The exchange of knowledge and capacity building within European Research Infrastructures (RIs) is crucial for Europe to increase its competitiveness worldwide. Staff mobility can make significant contributions that lead to the acceleration of capacity building, improvement of staff employability, absorption of peak work-loads and assurance of the availability of suitably qualified professional project teams. The increased interaction and involvement in the exchange of experience and know-how in all domains (including, for example, safety/security, engineering, project organisation and management, procurement methods, quality assurance, communication,...) is of benefit to both the involved parties (that is, expert individuals and RIs, including those in the process of progressing from the ESFRI road-map to construction) and the research community as a whole.

Having said that, staff mobility **between European RIs appears to be very poor**, for example:

- only half a dozen professionals are subject to a significant trans-European move each year within the synchrotron community, which has overall about 3000 staff;
- the moves result more from individual decisions than from a clear analysis and strategy; thus, there are risks for all participants (individuals and RIs).

The current FP7 mechanism - Marie Curie Fellowships - meets many of the needs for researcher mobility but is limited by scope and procedures for many of the

specific needs of an RI. Specifically, the present target for the allocation of Marie Curie Fellowships is too narrow to match the broader, more project-oriented and operations-related needs of RIs (which includes high-level engineers and other professionals) and the time required to complete the Marie-Curie process (call/evaluation/negotiation) is incommensurate with the urgency of the needs of the RI. The incentives needed to promote mobility are also limited. A wide gap exists between the current situation and that needed to promote and facilitate the exchange of S&T expertise between European RIs.

The purpose of this document is to make concrete suggestions and identify a **pragmatic solution** that would increase employability and facilitate staff mobility within European RIs. Such a solution could be the introduction of **an attractive scheme for the temporary secondment of expert staff** from a **sending RI** to a **receiving RI**.

2. Scheme benefits: scope, duration and added-value

Staff mobility should bring clear **benefits** to all the parties involved. The benefits should be recognisable already in the definition of the **scope and duration** of the scheme for staff mobility, with the **added-value** for the sending and receiving RIs and the expert individual being highlighted, and complemented by **clarity, transparency and flexibility** in application.

The **scope** of the scheme should be broad but focussed on the specific needs of the RIs and the expert individuals. It is proposed that the scheme be:

- open to a wide range of suitably qualified expert individuals, including instrument scientists, engineers, technicians and administrators;
- recognised as of mutual interest for both RIs and the expert individual;
- subject to the generation of a relevant transfer/exchange of knowledge;
- project-oriented (development, training, commissioning, etc);
- based on a case-by-case initiative in which the individual expert can devote effort fully to the success of the project and, in return, expect career progression;

The **duration** of the scheme should be established clearly at the outset, together with the conditions under which **extension, repatriation** to the sending RI, or **integration** into the receiving RI could occur. It is proposed that:

- The duration of the scheme should be fixed, lasting from, say, 3 months to 3 years. It should reflect properly the needs of the receiving RI, the impact on the sending RI and the implications for the individual expert's career;
- The balance between extension, repatriation or integration should be given careful consideration. Conditions should be established at the outset and reviewed periodically by all parties, including the individual expert;
- Repatriation should be possible at any time, in principle, providing a reasonable notice period is given; individual experts should be assured of this; force-majeure repatriation should allow, whenever possible, the timely completion of the mission while limiting the impact on the individual expert.

Turning to the **added-value for the sending and receiving facilities**, the receiving RI is usually the primary beneficiary. Therefore, it is important for the sending RI to be adequately compensated, to a level that reflects the impact of the individual expert's departure. Specifically, it is proposed that:

- The sending RI should be reimbursed by the receiving RI for salaries and other permissible charges and, depending on whether or not this constitutes a reasonable compensation, additional in-kind costs should be considered; the dispositions regarding the legal aspects and the reimbursement should be concluded in a separate agreement between the two facilities,
- Opportunities for promoting young individuals or recruiting fixed-term contractors within the overall financial support associated with the scheme should be explored.

With regard to the **added-value for individual experts**, full consideration should be given to security of employment, career development and financial remuneration. It is proposed that:

1. The participant remains an employee of the sending RI (or institution); the location where he/she works is changed but the employment contract is not interrupted, but eventually amended by clauses relating to conditions of mobility;
2. The sending RI continues to pay the related remunerations, social security and pension contributions and unemployment provisions (even if these are recovered from the receiving RI, or another funder)⁽¹⁾. Thus, additional formalities are limited since existing rules, rates and coverage remain applicable;
3. The participant should receive a remuneration package that is sufficient to cover the additional expenses incurred as a result of mobility.
4. a common system for managing mobility between the RIs could create an Institution for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORP), a tool recently introduced by the EU (http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/social_protection/l24038b_en.htm) and valid for all workers. IORP makes it possible to transfer funds accumulated under the social security law of a single EU country, to a fund created ad hoc in another EU country, according to the social security law of that country. This allows earning money from each country and ensuring a substantial income at the end of career.

It should be noted that (2) would require changes to be made to the legal situation in the case of many national RIs as well as international RIs in Europe that fall under national law due to their organisational setup.

Finally, the **benefits** of mobility will be recognised fully by all the parties involved only when a

'**culture of mobility**' exists within the participating organisations and permeates to all levels:

- Directors need to be fully supportive of the need for the mobility of their staff outside their organisation, even when their most expert staff are involved;

¹ Such a scheme is clearly different from a "detachment" where the expert individual signs a local job contract in the receiving country, under the local regulations in terms of pension rights and health-care cover.

- HR departments need to facilitate staff mobility and ensure proper career progression within their organisation;
- Line-managers need to recognise the significance of staff mobility and the opportunities that arise when even their own expert staff need to be replaced on a temporary basis;
- Individual experts need to balance the disruption often associated with mobility with the benefits to themselves, to their sending and receiving institutes and to their research community in terms of knowledge exchange and capacity building.

Such a 'culture of mobility' is considered to be a pre-requisite for increased mobility within Europe.

3. The proposed secondment-based scheme: implementation and consequences

It is proposed to establish a Europe-wide secondment-based scheme for staff mobility within an integrated structure of European RIs covering one, or several, research communities. This would provide a solid framework within which staff mobility could occur, individual experts could follow a career path across a wide range of RIs and career development within a group of RIs, rather than within a single RI, could be envisaged.

The faster the process for implementation, the better. European RIs, together with those in the process of progressing from the ESFRI road-map to construction, need administrative mechanisms that can react rapidly to short-term mobility actions and limit the delay for processing ('time to secondment').

Specifically, it is proposed to establish a **close relation between HR Managers** in order:

- to organise, where appropriate, an '*RI staff mercato*' once a year where job opportunities and standard CV of staff willing to move could be proposed under strict rules of confidentiality;
- to ensure that the **selection process** is simple, accessible, open and quick (open call with regular examination; the overall process should not exceed 3 months). A **permanent group of experts from the participating RIs** could make the selection; they should be fully aware of the specific needs of the RIs and the competences of the individuals;
- to ensure that the secondee's career progresses in line with the benefits that accrue for the RIs;
- to monitor progress during the secondment, by both the sending and receiving RIs, in order to optimise the quality of the expertise, to demonstrate effective and appropriate knowledge exchange and to reduce the associated risks; each step should be documented;
- to establish a permanent dialogue between the secondee and the RI managers, if needed, from a short-term secondment to a longer-term stay that may lead to a permanent job position.

The larger the participating community, the better. This approach might be **applied progressively** in different parts of the European Research Area, beginning with those European RIs that have urgent and specific needs regarding researchers and engineers, operational requirements, etc. However, the benefits of this scheme should be limited to European research facilities respecting basic HR rules in term of employment conditions, social advantages and career follow-up.

A financial scheme should be established to support this secondment-based mobility. It is proposed to include a specific set of accompanying measures:

- A set of **financial measures** that include a living allowance and the reimbursement of removal expenses; exceptional solutions may be considered to cover education expenses or the loss of a partner's job; existing European-level financial rules should be examined for applicability;
- An additional funding mechanism should be established to provide the **budget needed to cover the supplementary costs associated with these measures.**

The financial resources needed to implement these accompanying measures could come from a **common fund**, either:

- as part of the “**FP8-PEOPLE-equivalent**” or “**FP8-CAPACITIES-equivalent**” Programme and/or
- A dedicated fund established together with the research communities that participate in the integrated structure of European RIs;

Last but not least, in case of full or co-funding by the European Commission, a joint governance structure composed of representatives from the facilities and the European Commission, should be in charge to ensure the validation of the selection process as well as the attribution and the control of funds.

4. Conclusions

The proposed secondment-based scheme for staff mobility will facilitate the exchange of those suitably highly qualified experts within European Member States willing to support RIs, including those Member States which have no RIs or have yet to host large-scale RIs. The scheme has four significant impacts.

First, there is clear added-value not only for the sending and receiving RIs and the secondee but also for the community as a whole in the exchange of knowledge and capacity building opportunities.

Second, the scheme may also be attractive to young researchers who often take up post-doctoral research positions in European RIs outside their home countries. For them, it is not unusual to move two or three times during the early years of their careers to benefit from interactions with experienced researchers and engineers. Thus, the stress-less approach of this scheme could impact fixed-term employment

in European RIs. **This may change completely their perception of career progression.**

Third, this scheme may ultimately stimulate the **knowledge transfer between the facilities and the industry**. Under certain conditions, private companies could be entitled to benefit from the scheme in connection with joint innovation projects.

Fourth, increased mobility may extend the influence of European RIs beyond the boundaries of the European Research Area, establishing **a new equilibrium between Eastern and Western European countries** and progressively integrating European border countries (IPCP, Mediterranean Partner Countries) using support from EU neighbouring policies.

Finally, it may even be appropriate, if supported by a significant number of RIs, to establish a **pan-European 'Charter for Mobility'** that would be adopted by participating RIs. The beneficiaries of the support could be limited to those coming from RIs whose management signed the "Charter for Mobility". This would reinforce the confidence of the expert-staff.

**J-P Caminade
A. Crivelli
C. Madsen
S. Suhr
C. Rizzuto
M. L. Watkins**

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