

Are Latvian doctoral students/candidates and academic staff ready for reform?

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Context – wide-ranging reforms and new regulations aim to increase the attractiveness of academia and research careers in Latvia



- ❑ Increased financial supports
- ❑ New models of doctoral education
- ❑ New framework for academic and scientific careers,
 - qualification and competency requirements, selection procedure, workload considerations, contract modalities, performance appraisal, mobility, exit
- ❑ Initiation of tenure track and postdoctoral positions
- ❑ Increasing salaries for academic staff
- ❑ Relaxed language requirement for foreign academic staff coming to Latvia



Transforming academic careers in Latvia – staff survey

- Launched October 2024, approx. 4-week field period
- Objective – Gather perceptions on the ongoing reforms and highlight emerging challenges with implementation
- Results are very preliminary
- Full results will be included in the OECD’s assessment report on implementation readiness, a deliverable of the project



Transforming academic careers in Latvia

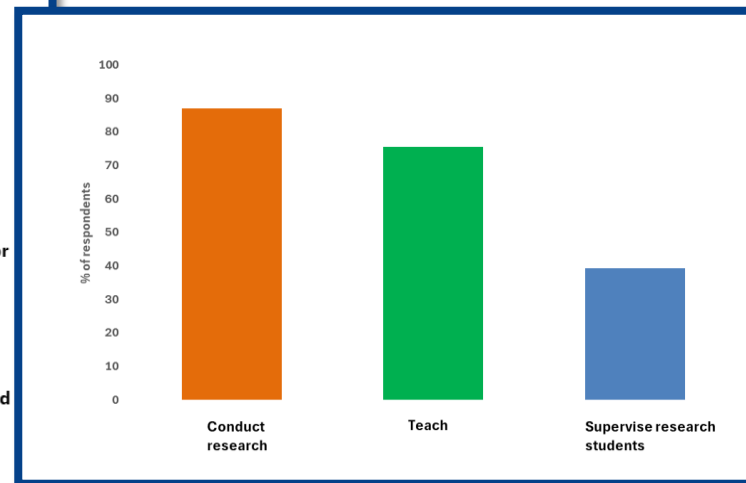
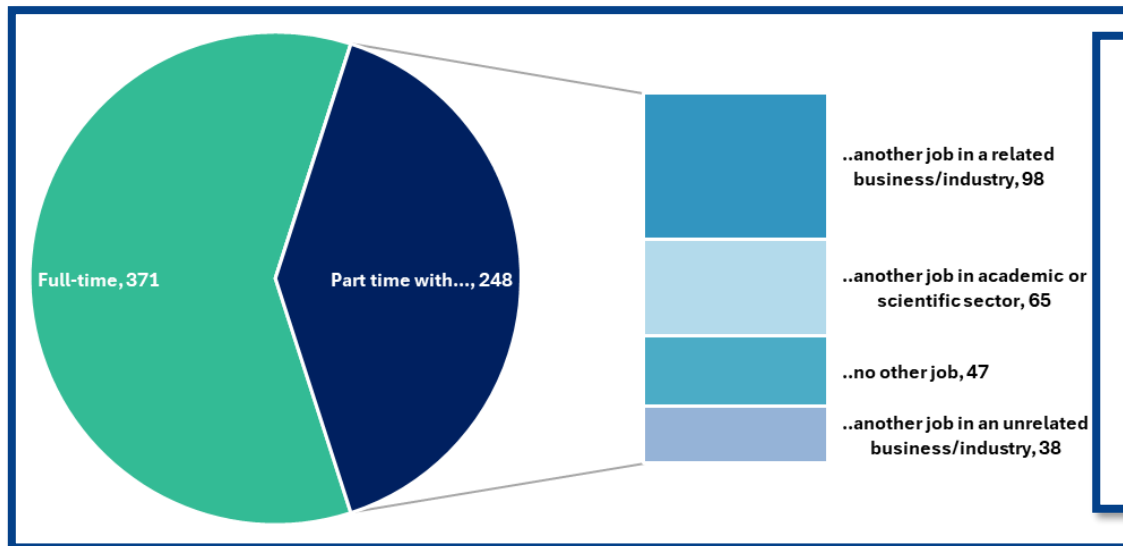
Staff survey



Respondent profile

Full responses retained	577
<i>Partial and duplicate responses discarded</i>	<i>(360)</i>
Partial responses retained (where at least the doctoral education section was completed)	42
Total included	619

Good response levels but not representative – the volume received provides potential for some statistical weighting





Breakdown of responses by institution and role

(almost 200 respondents reported having more than one role/job)

- Doctoral student/candidate only
- Doctoral student candidate AND another role
- Academic, professional and managerial staff (one or more roles)

University of Latvia



Rīga Stradiņš University



Other institutions



Riga Technical University



Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies



Perceptions of doctoral education in Latvia



Viewpoints on doctoral education skew positive overall...

Doctoral education programmes in my institution.....

■ Agree strongly ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Disagree strongly

...have a clear structure and path to completion.



...have mechanisms to support collaboration across academic disciplines



...have practices supporting interaction among doctoral candidates in the institution.



...encourage young researchers to pursue innovative ideas.



...include formal education in transversal skill areas.



...include informal opportunities to gain transversal skills.



...have mechanisms to support collaboration across academic disciplines



...have strong links with business and/or industry.



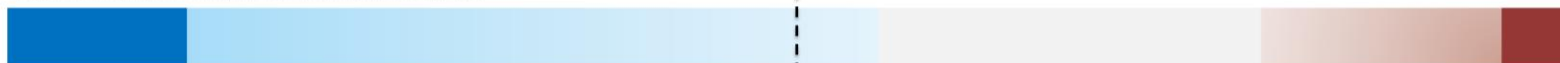


Respondents who know about the new model (n=409) tend to believe that it will improve on the current situation, but there appears to be a lot of uncertainty

The new doctoral education model will

■ Agree strongly ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Disagree strongly

...improve the financial situation of doctoral students in Latvia.



...provide more relevant skills to doctoral graduates.



...make doctoral studies in Latvia more attractive and competitive with that of other countries.



...improve job prospects for doctoral graduates in Latvian HEIs/scientific institutes.



...improve job prospects for doctoral graduates in private business/industry in Latvia.

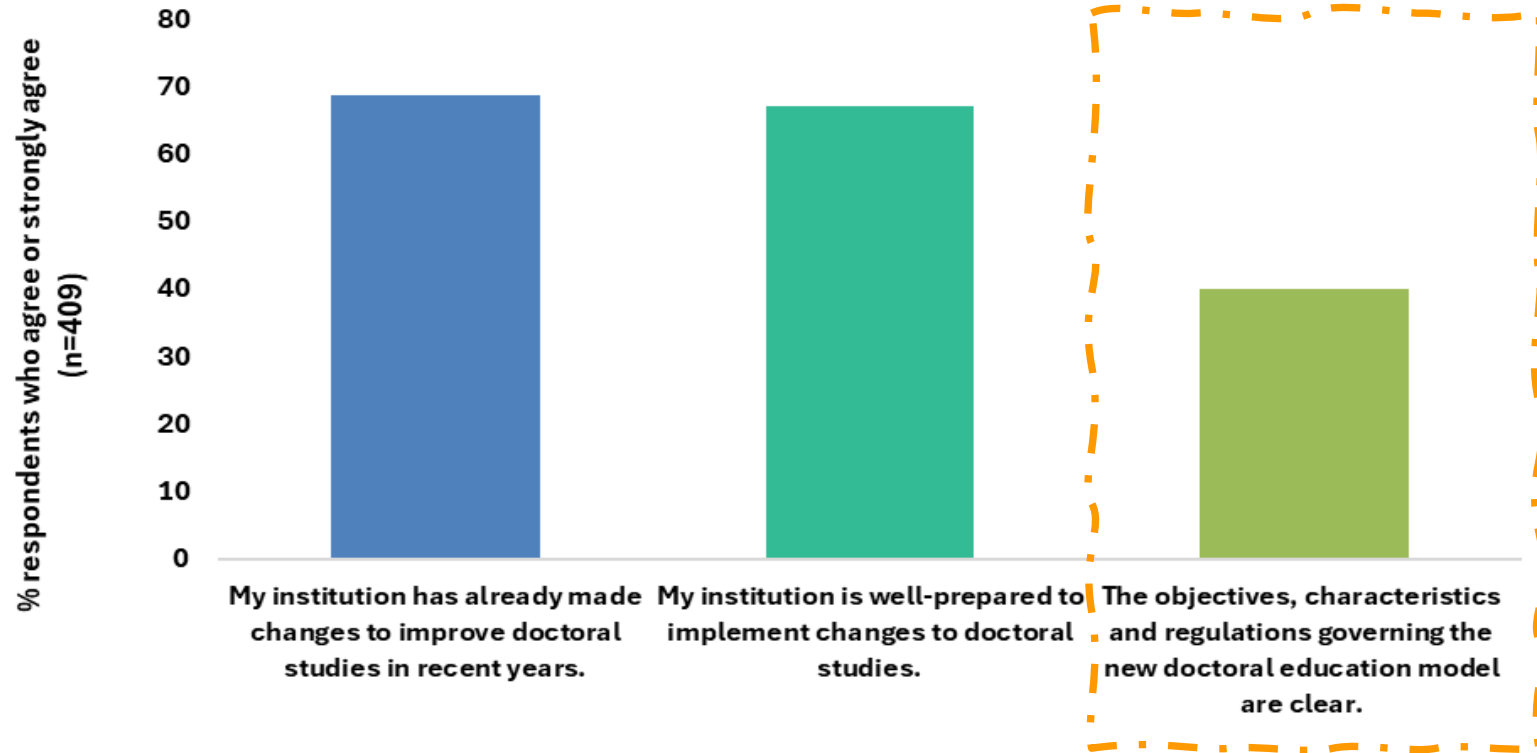


...improve job prospects abroad for doctoral graduates.





Respondents have a high opinion of their own institutions' efforts, but much remains to be done to improve clarity





Strong opinions on the status quo of doctoral education – over 250 free text additional responses provided. Some were positive.....

A few commentators noted positive perspectives for the future and continuous improvements

"It is not easy yet, but it will get easier with time, when all the rough edges are ironed out."

"Doctoral education is becoming more responsible every year"

"financial support is definitely a motivator in the new model"

"It is good that thought is being given to increasing funding and opportunities for PhD students"

"the employment of PhD students is generally welcomed"

The new model might allow more motivated PhD students to focus on their research without requiring them to juggle various commitments

Praise for the supports available and quality of doctoral education

"I feel supported by the PhD School at the University - encouraging, helping with organisational issues. For now it is enough."

"Doctoral education in Latvia is at a fairly high level, with a wide range of applicants."

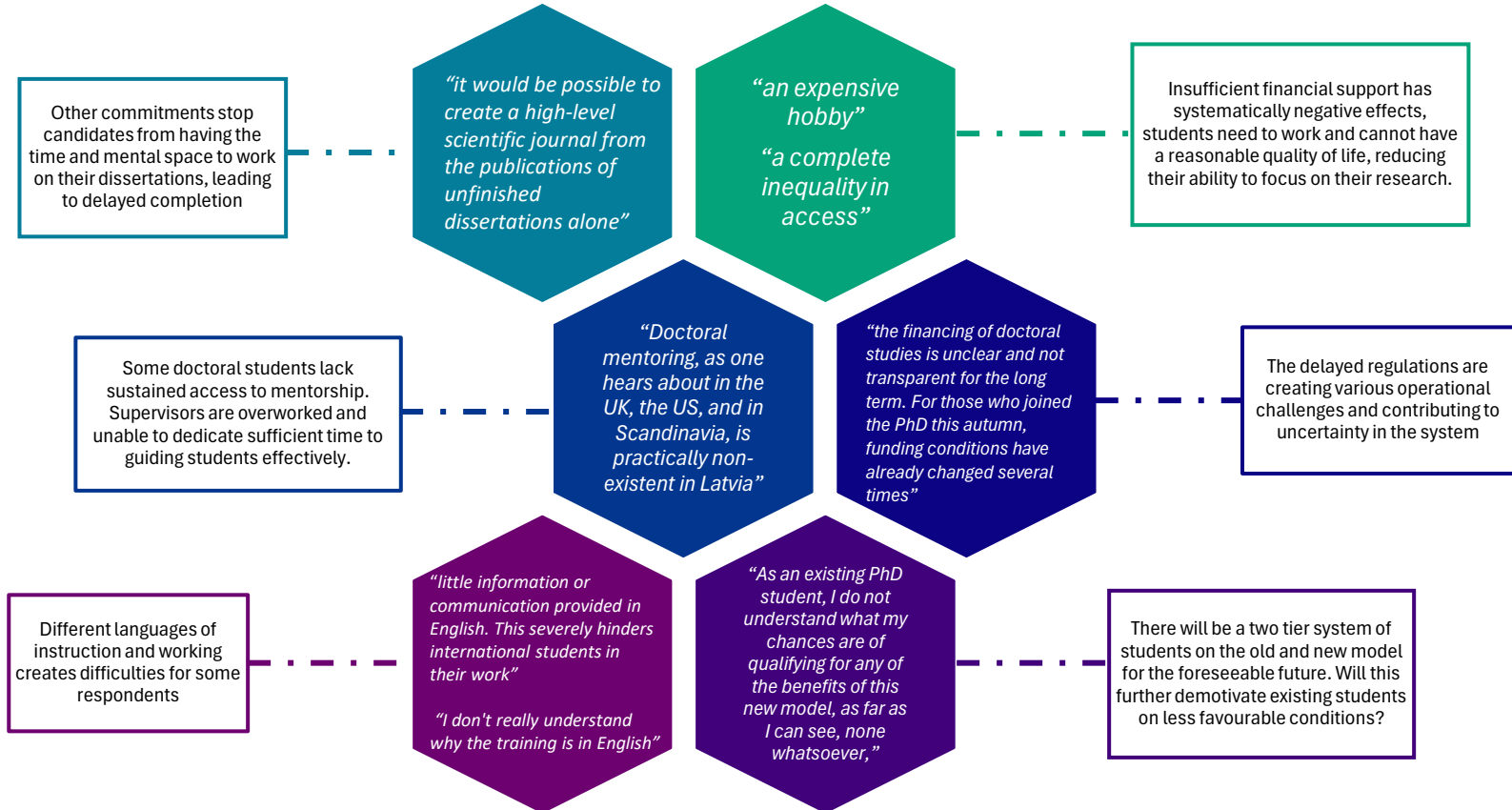
"Everything is great. I'm excited to study for my PhD and develop my academic and research skills."

"Overall, the path towards a new doctoral model is positive"

Some respondents displayed positive attitudes to their PhD journey



...but most gave voice to a range of concerns and challenges

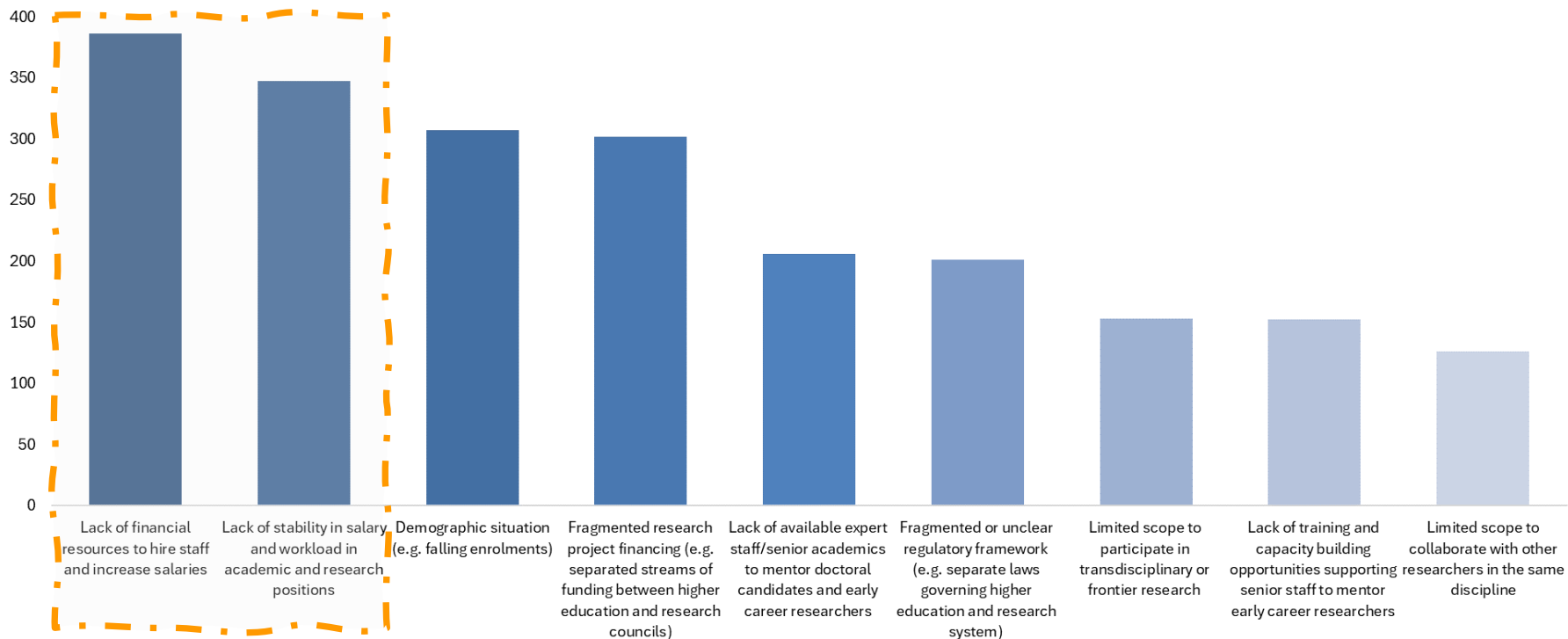


Improving the stability and attractiveness of academic and scientific careers – needs, challenges and solutions



Limited financial resources and lack of stability remain fundamental challenges to a stable and attractive academic career

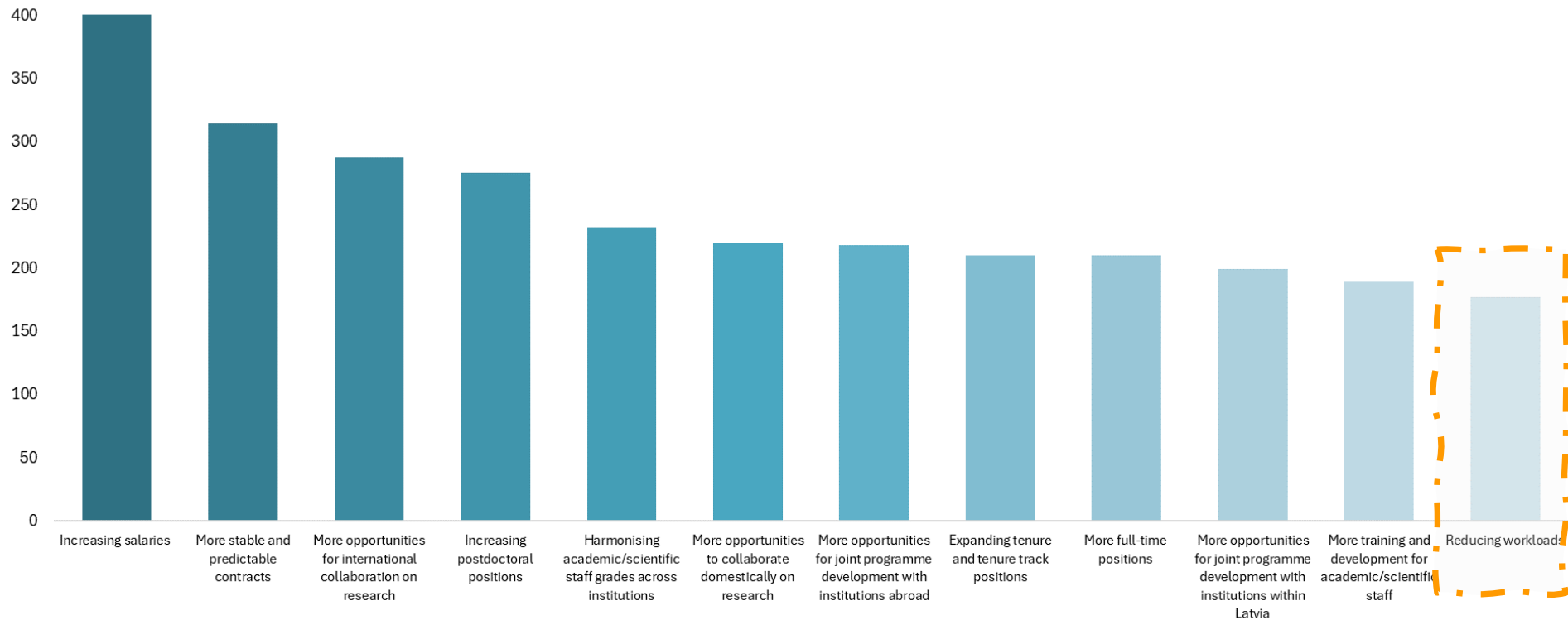
The most pressing challenges negatively impacting academic/scientific careers in Latvia





Limited financial resources and lack of stability remain fundamental challenges to a stable and attractive academic career

The highest immediate priorities for providing a more stable and attractive academic career





What does Latvia do well compared to other countries?

“absolutely nothing”

“It is relatively easy to set up a start-up based on a project developed through research”

“Enthusiasts still working in the field”

“Flexibility and the advantage of a small country to meet and collaborate with other researchers.”

“a smaller community of researchers”

“a more relaxed environment with more freedom to work”

“We are few, we are getting fewer, so there will be work for a while.”

“The small labour market is forcing academia to focus more on sectors that are in demand in the country... This allows them to develop excellent practical skills and gain valuable experience that is unthinkable abroad, where researchers are often forced to specialise in a very narrow field and rarely get full-fledged internship experience.”

“Talented people have the opportunity for rapid career development. More gender equality.”

“everything”

“Less tension in case of re-election.”

“less competition”

“there are still local universities where students from rural areas can easily get to, and relatively cheaply obtain, both a Master's degree and....often without competition, a PhD.”

“Only the fittest and the most intrinsically motivated survive, which means a good working environment.”

“I don't know”

“Comparative freedom of expression”



What practices from other countries could work in Latvia?

Pay students a salary for the duration of their programme (UK style)

Give institutions financial rewards for completed PhD defences (Netherlands)

Cut red tape

Implement both clinical and research professorships (Denmark)

Dissertations in English only

A clear map of how to move up the academic ladder

Don't adopt another model 1:1, make our own and learn the good things from others

Distribution of funding so that there can be regular PhD students who don't need to work a second job

Adequate measures so that older staff don't hold onto their positions at all costs

The Scandinavian mindset- collaboration and information sharing for the greater benefit of society

Tie PhD studentships to specific research projects

Clear criteria and open competition for appointments

More stable institutional funding and longer national grant programmes (Estonia)

Stronger focus on interdisciplinary research and study programmes (Finland)

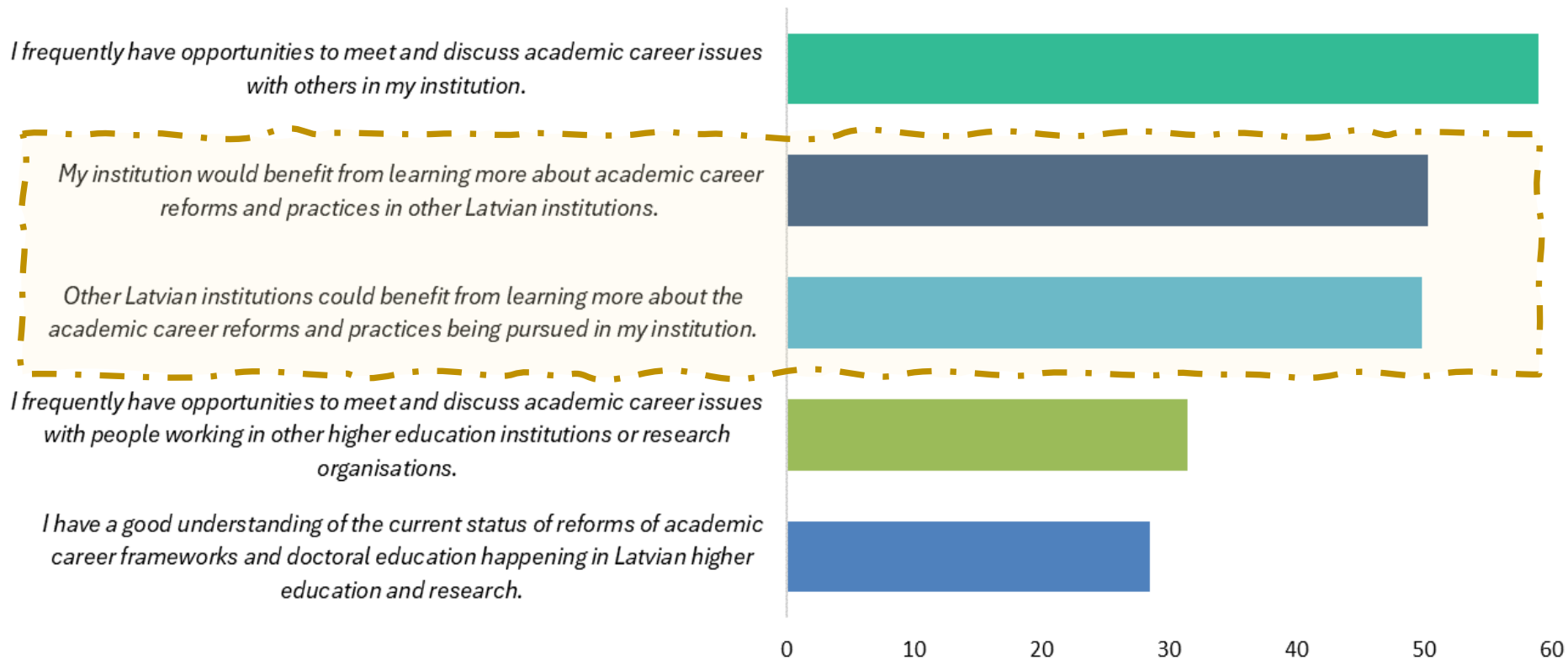
Design a system suited to Latvia's specificities and sectors of interest

Require doctoral candidates to have an experience in more than one institution/setting/country



There is an appetite among respondents for greater sharing of experience and practice between institutions

Outlets for learning from each other



Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

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