



**Trends in International Academic and Research Staff Recruitment:
Insights from 2012 European Career Fair Exhibitor Survey**

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14 February 2012

INTRODUCTION

Although universities often speak of “brain gain” and “brain circulation,” most institutions’ main priority is to recruit the best people from all around the world to take on long-term research and teaching positions. Internationally-mobile individuals may consider positions in a variety of different countries – and they likely have family or other obligations that will play a strong role in where they decide to study or work.

The Brenn-White Group is a New York-based agency that focusses on helping universities reach international audiences and works with a large number of institutions in Germany and Europe. academics.de/.com is the leading website for recruitment in higher education and R&D in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The two have partnered together to create this paper in an effort to identify trends in motivations and strategies of German and other European universities when it comes to recruiting researchers and faculty members from other countries.

The analysis presented on the following pages is based on the results of a survey conducted by The Brenn-White Group, in conjunction with academics, at the European Career Fair (ECF) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in January 2012. The ECF is an annual event held on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that provides a forum to connect employers who offer career opportunities in Europe to candidates from American universities. The 2012 ECF featured roughly 100 exhibitors; alongside many multinational corporations, roughly half of the exhibitors were European academic institutions offering research and faculty positions.

This survey primarily targeted exhibitors representing German universities, as these accounted for the majority of European higher education institutions at the fair, and because German institutions account for the largest share of job postings on the academics website. As comparison cases, representatives from one institution in Switzerland and one in the Netherlands were also interviewed. These respondents – primarily research staff and international office and human resources staff – represented seven comprehensive research universities (five German, one Swiss, one Dutch), five German universities of applied sciences (which cannot grant PhDs themselves, but often have robust research programs and partnerships with research universities to allow them to award doctoral degrees), and two university-based research institutes.

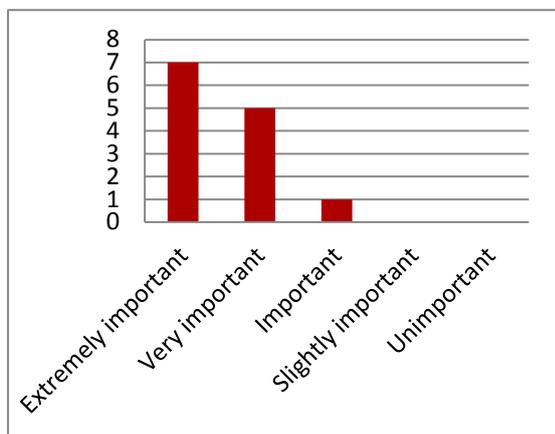
By sharing the results of our in-person survey at the ECF in this brief analysis, we hope to help other institutions in Europe, and in the rest of the world, gain a better understanding of some of the most important trends, obstacles, and strategic solutions European universities encounter in recruiting international research staff and faculty.

I. HOW IMPORTANT IS INTERNATIONAL STAFF RECRUITMENT – AND WHO ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TARGET GROUPS?

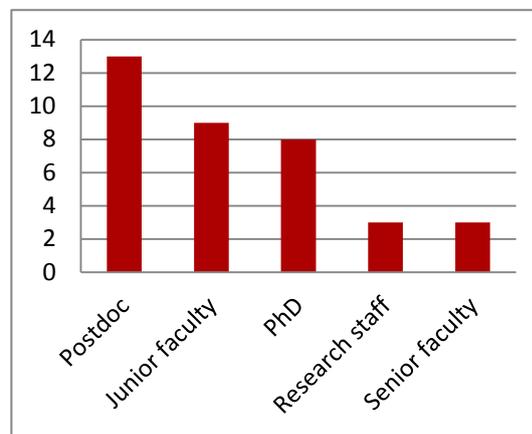
International research staff recruitment is reported to be very or extremely important at all institutions surveyed – a not entirely surprising result considering that all respondents were taking part in an international career fair outside their own country. Overall, **postdocs were cited as the most important target population**, although this may have been due in part to the setting of this survey – a fair to targeting younger job-seekers who have recently completed an undergraduate or

graduate degree. Several respondents indicated that postdocs are the most internationally mobile of the main target groups to recruit since they are nearly fully trained but young, with fewer professional or familial commitments. Institutions that recruit PhDs and postdocs also often hope that these young researchers will stay on as postdocs or junior faculty members.

How important is recruiting international research and academic staff at your institution?



Who are your primary target groups?



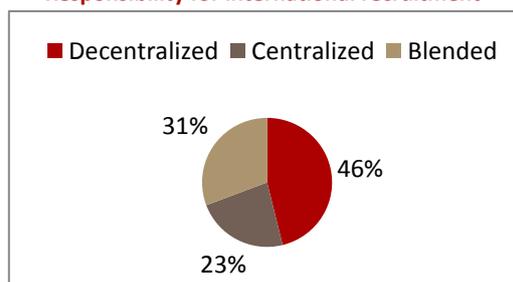
Numbers in all tables' vertical axes represent the number of responses

Two of the three institutions who try to attract senior faculty from abroad were the ones in Switzerland and the Netherlands. Indeed, for these institutions and one other, international recruitment was described as a necessity simply because the domestic supply is not sufficient, particularly in some highly specialized technology disciplines.

However, the respondents from Germany pointed out a **key reason why German universities do not focus on recruiting international senior faculty**: reportedly due to the German civil service regulations (*Beamtensystem*) that govern the hiring and salaries of university professors, which lead such hires to cost institutions substantially more than a domestic candidate or an international junior faculty hire.

For most institutions questioned, **international recruitment was a decentralized responsibility** (based in departments or academic faculties). Centralized recruitment was the case only at two German schools of applied sciences and one non-German university.

Responsibility for international recruitment



II. IN WHICH GEOGRAPHIC AREAS ARE RECRUITMENT EFFORTS TARGETED?

Overall, respondents repeatedly said that they just want “the best” academic staff, no matter where they’re from. Many institutions seemed not to be deeply engaged in strategic planning when it comes to international recruitment, instead simply responding in a rather passive way to the applications received from posted openings. When asked to identify **target geographic regions**, however, the most commonly mentioned places were:

1. Asia (especially China, India, and Singapore)

2. English-speaking countries (United States, Canada, and England)
3. South America

Close to half of the institutions (all of which are based in Europe) also stated that **Europe was also a geographic focus** for them, and one even said that research staff recruitment within Europe was their top geographic priority.

Regarding **countries that were observed to be increasing in importance** for their institution, respondents identified BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) plus Argentina. Another trend that many respondents noted was the large growth in applications from southern European countries, particularly Spain, Greece, and Italy; the public research operations and funding there have suffered during the recession, and as such experienced scientists from these countries are looking to northern Europe for career stability.

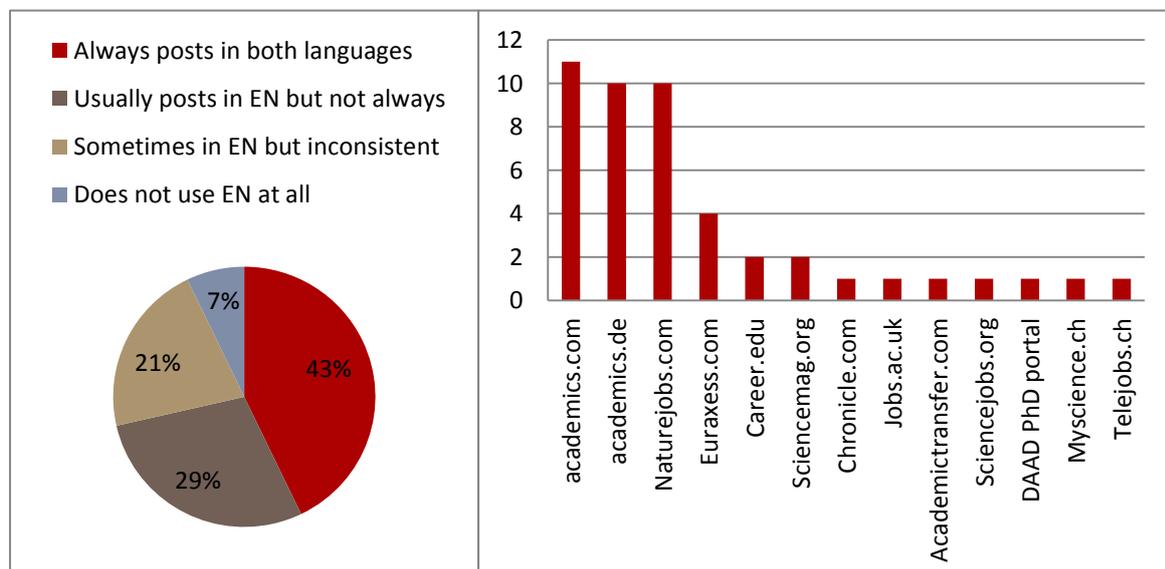
III. WHICH CHANNELS ARE MOST COMMONLY USED TO ANNOUNCE OPENINGS?

Respondents most commonly reported using the following channels for international research staff recruitment:

1. The institutions’ **own websites** and **personal contacts** (particularly at academic conferences)
2. Job announcement websites, academic journals, and other networks/ mailing lists
3. Regional, domestic, and international newspapers

Overall, the responses indicated that universities prefer to advertise for PhD and postdoc openings online through their own website and online job boards, while they use newspapers and academic journals to advertise for faculty positions. Compared to domestic recruitment, in international recruitment there is **stronger reliance on online channels** and universities tend to include **additional information about their national higher education system** in internationally-targeted announcements (e.g. university structures, childcare and education, and national social benefits). The majority of institutions always post their job announcements in English, but most institutions are inconsistent in this policy.

In a further breakdown of one of the most popular recruitment channels – online job portals – the respondents identified specific websites commonly used, as illustrated in the following chart:



IV. IS INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN PARTICULAR DISCIPLINES?

The most important and most common disciplines for international research staff recruitment were reported to be the **life science (lab research and medicine), physical science, and engineering** fields, which may be influenced by the fact that English is quite often the working language in these disciplines. Other disciplines mentioned by one or two respondents include social sciences, mathematics, art, design, and architecture.

V. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC STAFF – AND HOW DO UNIVERSITIES ADDRESS THESE ISSUES?

The most commonly cited challenges in attracting high-quality researchers and scholars from other countries were:

Language/cultural barriers	5
Awareness of the university	5
Family concerns/quality of life	4
Lack of career integration options	2
“Broad net” problem	1

To overcome the barrier of **foreign language and culture** (which most respondents felt was largely a psychological one), these institutions are making special effort to communicate to prospective staff that host language fluency is not required to start a successful career in the host country.

Many of the smaller institutions – and indeed, even a few of the larger research institutions – find it challenging at times to **effectively communicate their unique selling points and generate interest and enthusiasm among international researchers**. This means that in an increasingly competitive global field of higher education institutions all clambering for the best minds in the world, European institutions are beginning to place greater emphasis on their international marketing and communications efforts.

Many institutions mentioned that **family concerns** account for why many talented researchers end up returning to their home country after just a few years. Examples of services designed to overcome these issues include welcome centers for international staff, dual-career services for partners or spouses, language courses, family services such as on-campus kindergartens with English-speaking staff, and (in one case) guaranteed university housing for all international research staff. In an effort to provide early-career academics with attractive long-term career prospects, two surveyed universities also indicated plans to restructure the way that new early-career researchers are promoted into more senior research positions, improving opportunities to really advance and pursue a career within the university.

One university reported a sort of positive challenge – being **overwhelmed by the volume** of untargeted applications it receives. Often, individuals just looking to get out of typically developing countries apply to all the positions they find online, whether or not they’re actually qualified.

SUMMARY

- Early-career research staff such as postdocs and PhD candidates are the most highly sought-after international populations among universities surveyed.
- The recruitment of senior faculty is more or less vital in smaller countries such as the Netherlands and Switzerland, but is extremely challenging at universities in Germany for a variety of reasons.
- The main geographic target regions for recruitment are Asia and North America, and engineering and natural sciences are the disciplines in which international recruitment is most important. However, these are rarely identified as explicit institutional goals, e.g. in institutional recruitment strategies.
- Online platforms, mainly university websites and online job portals, are the main recruitment channels for international researchers – though personal networking and connections remain critical as well.
- In order to overcome potential barriers to international research staff recruitment, universities and research institutions are placing greater emphasis on and devoting more resources to clearly communicating their international-friendliness, unique institutional/academic features, and special services designed to support, integrate and advance newly recruited international research staff.

*The **Brenn-White Group** (www.brenn-white.com) provides marketing, strategy, editorial, and translation services with a focus on helping universities reach international audiences. The company draws on the extensive industry experience of the executive team and their network of experienced writers, researchers, marketers, and international education experts to provide cost-effective services that help organizations compete more efficiently in a global marketplace.*

***academics** (www.academics.com) – a subsidiary of DIE ZEIT, Germany's top weekly newspaper – is the leading website for recruitment in higher education and R&D in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. As an expert recruitment partner for universities, graduate schools and research institutes, academics supports you in finding suitably qualified scientists in all disciplines and at all career levels.*