

# Guide to the European Job Market

There exist many excellent guides and pieces of advice on how to navigate the economics job market, including the following pieces:

- <https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=869>
- <https://sites.google.com/site/pfeiferecon/job-market-resources> (a collection of resources)
- <https://www.europeanjobmarketofeconomists.org/uploads/Job-Market-Guide-EEA-Website-Michela-Carlana-with-EAYE-Interventions.pdf>

I am writing this piece to point out a few particularities of the European Job Market that are not well reflected in those pieces. No worries, I'm not going to repeat advice on your spiel, dress code, etc. All insights are derived from my own participation in the job search (2016/17, when there was no dedicated European market yet) and from serving on the search committee at Tilburg twice. Some of the advice is particularly geared towards applicants from American institutions. Feedback and improvement suggestions are very much welcome!

## Applications

European universities quite often exhibit huge heterogeneity in faculty quality (in terms of research output) within departments, rather than across departments

(contrary to many U.S. departments). For example, university A might be THE place for game theory in Europe, but their public economists are not visible at all. University B might be the exact opposite. There are very few places equally good at everything. This stylized fact bears an important implication: Rather than looking at rankings of entire departments (if that is what you would usually do for U.S. schools), you should compare the faculty members within your area when deciding where to apply.

## Cover letters

Many European departments are worried that candidates are not particularly interested in them and only apply because the costs are close to zero. Because interview capacity is limited, they will look for clues in the cover letters. That's why it is important to send customized cover letters to most European departments (especially for applicants from other continents). The customization can be limited to one or two sentences, but doing it can be worth the cost.

At Tilburg, we assign each application to between one and three faculty members for review. Comments I have often seen from reviewers are, for example: "This candidate does not show any particular interest in Europe." or "I don't expect this person to come." These reviewers then often did not recommend interviewing these candidates. While we as the committee explicitly deliberated these cases, not all departments will do so. In 2019, we received far over 600 applications. The time we can spend on individual cases to avoid them falling through the cracks, therefore, is naturally limited (and even though we try hard, we surely don't always do the candidates justice). That's why it is so important to pre-empt such concerns.

I found the following cover letter customizations to be particularly helpful in swaying the referees:

- Stress your ties to Europe, for example through study abroad, language skills, etc.
- Name a few faculty members in the department who work in similar areas as you. Careful: You always run the risk of picking someone who is about to leave the department. A formulation like "I look forward to working with the great group of contract theorists at University C, including Professors Alpha, Beta, and Gamma." can be quite effective, especially since these people are particularly like to review your application. Make sure that people you name are research active.
- Explicitly say that you are looking forward to coming (returning) to Europe.

- Stress the department's strength in your area.
- If your job market paper relates to "U.S. specific topics" (like gun violence, 401k plans, etc.) you could try to link your research profile to things Europeans care about.

## Informal recommendations

Networks matter a lot! When I was on the market, I had the impression that some places invited me for interviews because of their connections to my supervisors, not their interest in my research (I remember some hiring committees were surprised after I started my Spiel that my job market paper was applied econometrics and not experimental even though the paper abstract and application cover letter made that abundantly clear). Therefore: Make sure that your supervisors contact their contacts in other departments you applied to. Make a Google Sheet with all the places and have all your letter writers (and other friendly faculty) indicate whom they know and reach out to. It won't guarantee you an interview slot, but committees may have a more in-depth look at your profile.

## Interviews

One recommendation I have not yet seen so far in any job market guide (apologies if I overlooked it) but I found invaluable (for both, the European and the U.S. job market) is to bring support. This could be your partner, friend, neighbor, roommate, mortal enemy, whoever can help you best. They can carry your bag with refreshments, deodorants, and all other supplies you may need during these stressful days. You won't need to carry the heavy bag yourself and your supplies are ready in the hotel lobby for when you've finished your interview. They can also have your schedule ready, order the cab to the next hotel and buy you lunch if you have a longer lunch break. Most importantly, they can provide moral support: If an interview didn't go well, they can distract you and help you focus on the next interview. They can direct your thoughts to more positive things when needed.

## Information about the job

Because the institutional setting is so different across different European nations, it is important to carefully listen to how committees describe their job opening. Some junior positions will come with tenure (e.g., in some U.K. universities), others will have a tenure track (e.g., the Netherlands), or be fixed term without the possibility to earn

tenure (e.g., many German universities). In some cases (I believe in many Scandinavian countries), there may be a fake tenure track, in which they advertise a fixed-term position but promise to advertise a tenured more senior position tailored to your profile in case you pass the department's tenure assessment. Such information would normally not be mentioned in a job posting (due to legal restrictions) but could be announced verbally during the interviews or fly-outs.

## Seeking reassurance

Presumably because of the huge within department heterogeneity, the uncertainty over your preferences seems to be a huge concern among hiring committees. In many of my interviews, I had to answer a variant of the question "Where would you rank us compared to your other interviews?". You should think about your answer ex-ante: Do you want to play the dominant strategy (which may involve lying) and rank it the department among your very top or be honest? After discussions with people who had asked me this question, I believe the more successful strategy is to (possibly) lie. In any case, it is important to have something prepared that sounds credible.

Recruiting committees may try to find out how well the market is going for you by asking these or similar questions. In my experience, the more ambitious a department, the less likely you will receive such a question. Committees from more ambitious departments also tend to be more likely to have read your job market paper. Usually, they will assign one or two people to lead the discussion with others having a more superficial read of your paper. So while many committees may not even have looked at your job market paper at all, you should also expect some to have read it closely! (From my set of interviews: IIES, Tilburg, and Bonn were the ones where it became obvious that someone paid close attention to my job market paper. If you interview with any of these, don't be surprised to get detailed questions.)

## Flyouts

### Job talks

Note that some departments, for example in the U.K., Ireland, or Belgium organize fly-outs on only a few days, hosting several candidates at once. This bears two implications: First, you will have no flexibility in scheduling a fly-out. If you have something else planned on that day, your loss! So make sure to reserve the fly-out days of these schools that you're interviewing with. Second, you will meet and interact with

the other job market candidates. This can be quite awkward, but doesn't have to be. I experienced this myself during a fly-out in Israel, where I shared the day with two super nice other candidates. If the other candidates are friendly and helpful people it can be relaxing to observe others go through the same things you do (shared pain and such). But if you have a few overly competitive ones, it can be less fun. Be prepared for both.

Expect varying crowd sizes at your job market seminar. In some departments, it is common that everyone attends these seminars, while in others it may be more of a secretive process (possibly due to legal restrictions). To figure out if a low turnout is a bad sign (for the department atmosphere), you should use your bilateral meetings to ask if that was a typical turnout for a seminar talk.

You should also be prepared for vastly differing formats. I've had everything from 20-minute talks to 1.5 hours (although 60 minutes seems to be the mode). Make sure to have enough versions of your talk ready. Some departments may also ask you to give a talk about your teaching vision or display your teaching effectiveness in a mock lecture, mostly due to legal requirements in the respective countries.

## Bilateral meetings

Especially smaller departments will struggle with filling a full day with bilateral meetings for you. As such, you should not be offended if you have to meet with, for example, the teaching staff. On the contrary, you should use these meetings to find out what the specific roles of these people are, how they fit in the department. During my department visits, I noticed that (mostly due to some idiosyncratic historical reasons), almost every department had a few people that did not seem to fit the rest in terms of research output but bore the same titles. In some European countries, there will be no distinction between research and teaching professors, and only by talking to them directly, you will be able to find out that someone who is not doing good research may in fact be a teacher only (and not expected to do any research). To judge where a department is headed, I found it quite instructive to ask who the hires of the last five years were. These are your peers you'll be compared to.

## Dinners

Different European countries have different regulations on spending. I have seen everything from lunch or dinner at Michelin starred restaurants to bland sandwiches. Rumor has it that some places aren't even allowed to pay for dinner at all and instead

pay an honorarium to the candidate who then has to invite everyone for dinner. Some German universities can only pay for the candidate and the host and everyone else needs to pay for themselves. Realize that different places have different constraints, so don't take it personally if you don't get to dine lavishly but somebody hands you a box of pre-packed sandwiches for lunch instead. More importantly, you could try to find out how far these food expenditure-related concerns carry over to other domains (use of research money, buying out of teaching, hiring RAs, etc.) One good question to capture this (and also to entertain the group over dinner) is to ask everyone to share their most treasured interaction with university bureaucrats. Be prepared for some rants (I'm looking at you Italy and Germany!)

## Offers and negotiations

Congratulations, you've received an offer! Now comes the weirdest part. Because different European countries allow bargaining over different parts of the contract, it is not always clear how best to negotiate. I break this down into several categories:

### Salary

Most European countries will have collective bargaining agreements (or differently determined salary scales) that regulate salaries for professors. In some countries, they may be more generous (Switzerland) than in others. When comparing salaries across countries, do not forget to adjust for PPP, this matters. Also, try to gauge real estate prices in the respective cities. A USD150k salary in Boston will probably not get you as far as a EUR60k salary in Berlin if you want to live centrally.

Additionally, some countries offer amazing tax breaks and loopholes. My knowledge in this area is limited to the Netherlands, but I tell all our prospective candidates that a modest Dutch university salary plus using the tax breaks is certainly competitive in terms of PPP to American salaries (outside of business schools maybe). To gauge how competitive a salary in a given country is, it makes sense to ask current tenure trackers how they live, how often they can afford a vacation, and so on. Note that salary may not be negotiable at all in some European countries.

You should also take into account that salaries in continental Europe are quite often expressed in monthly salaries. Make sure that you have an understanding of how many monthly salaries you can expect in a year (it is typically 12-14).

Some European countries may pay additional benefits. For example, I understand that the Netherlands and Israel pay you more money, the further you live away from work (up to a limit). Explore these options as well!

## Teaching

Teaching is often expressed in courses per year. My impression from the European job market is that 2-4 courses per year (+ reductions in the first year(s)) are standard loads. Note that semester lengths differ across European countries so you should inquire how many hours “teaching a course” entails (also, will there be tutorials or will TA’s do these?). Also, find out if you have the freedom to teach what you want (and how you want). Some universities may define the contents for you, others may give you more freedom.

Importantly, universities may impose additional requirements on teachers. In most European universities it is common that you have to proctor a large number of exams. Some Dutch universities (and maybe others), however, hire external people to do the proctoring so faculty don’t have to. Nobody made me aware of this until I started my job and I think it is a great help! British universities (and maybe others) often require you to do ‘second marking’, i.e., re-grading the exams of a colleague. This may increase the amount of time you spend on ‘teaching tasks’ considerably. For all these reasons, it is important that you inquire about all the details surrounding teaching.

In many European universities, it is common that you supervise bachelor’s and master’s theses. These usually come on top of your teaching load. Make sure to know how many you can expect and how they are allocated. Larger universities tend to have more supervision load. Typically, a thesis project lasts between a month and half a year and encompasses 3-8 meetings with the student, giving feedback on a draft, and possibly a short thesis defense. Ask faculty members how much work they spend on thesis supervision to get a better idea of the associated workload.

## Admin

Make sure to inquire if you’ll have to take over admin tasks and if so, how many. Some universities spare faculty on tenure track from admin entirely, others involve them. If you will be involved with admin ask how admin tasks are allocated to make sure that it leaves you with enough research time.

## Research budget

Some universities don't have dedicated research budgets, but only an overall budget for the whole department, and every expense requires approval by the department chair. Others will grant you a personal budget. Importantly: Inquire what costs you can expect to pay from this budget. Some universities include all research costs, others have extra funds for experiments, RAs, data access, etc. Don't forget to inquire if the budget is only guaranteed for the tenure track or also the periods after.

## Spousal hires

Many departments are keen on hiring couples, especially ones that would usually be slightly too good for them. If a department tenures both, they know that the likelihood of them leaving is lower than for a 'single' hire. I learned from one of my colleagues (who was on the market with his partner) that he was surprised to see how many departments were willing and able to accommodate couples. Note that there may be heterogeneities with respect to what departments can make possible. Some countries are more flexible than others. It is worth signaling your two-body problem during the flyouts.

## Language & other requirements

With most European countries having an official language other than English, it is important to find out how important it is for you to learn the local language. Some countries are known for being easily navigable only speaking English (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands), while others not so much outside the major tourist hubs (e.g., Spain, Italy, France). Make sure to ask other international faculty how they get around in daily life and if they did make the effort to learn the language.

As part of negotiations (see above), it might make sense to ask if the department supports you acquiring the local language (by paying for language classes for example), or if it even is a requirement to teach in the local language at some point. You should ask which languages are used to teach at which level, because that may affect what classes you can expect to teach (some German programs for example have undergraduate teaching in German but graduate teaching in English, a perfect incentive to not learn German for anyone preferring smaller classes and more motivated students).

## Tenure

If you successfully secured a position with the possibility of receiving tenure, you should inquire how the process works. Some universities have rigid point systems based on journal metrics, others do a more wholistic review. Committees may be formed in some places, administrators make decisions based on pre-conceived rules in others. The duration of the tenure track can also be very different, depending on the local labor laws. In the Netherlands, a tenure decision must have been made after 6 years, whereas some places in the U.K. make it significantly earlier. All of these details may be crucial depending on your preferences and beliefs about your capability to publish in certain journals. Explicitly ask for the tenure criteria and process before accepting a job.

Some universities may look for other factors beyond research when evaluating a colleague for tenure. Quite often, teaching performance and citizenship are among the criteria. Additionally, universities may impose additional requirements, for example obtaining a teaching qualification. Having a teaching certificate, for example, is expected in many departments in the Netherlands and obtaining one is costly (in terms of foregone research time). Include extra requirements in your calculations of how much time you will effectively have for research.

## Legal Notice

© 2021 DAVID SCHINDLER – UP ↑