

Career Preparation and Development

**Perceptions of PhD candidates and institutional
implications**

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Agenda



- Doctoral Education at University of Vienna
- Center for Doctoral Studies
- Studies on Doctoral Experience
- Benefits
- Open Questions

University of Vienna

Facts & Figures



- **Large Comprehensive University: 94 000 Students, Around 8000 doctoral candidates**
- **Doctoral Studies in Natural-, Life-, Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Economics**
- **Diverse group of doctoral candidates (part-time vs. full-time, different funding, differently embedded, special programmes..)**
- **Challenges:** Free access to all programmes, little funding



- Established in 2009 as central support and service unit
- Support, transferable skills programme, policy, monitoring
- Built on best practice models
- Comprehensive monitoring (ttd, completion rates, funding..)

Overview Studies

Focus Groups

- 13 focus groups: 36 PhD candidates and 15 recent graduates
- Different fields of study, phases and funding
- Topics: motivation, challenges and problems, supervision, work-life-balance, career plans

Special Programme

- Online Questionnaire
- Sent to all doctoral candidates of this programme = 1293 persons
- 22% response rate
- Goal: how successful were the measures of this programme

Employed PhDs

- Online Questionnaire
- Sent to all employed doctoral candidates 6 months before their contracts end
- Start: July 2016
- Topics: Work environment, reasons to start a PhD, Supervision, Career planning, research community, hinderances

Experience with “Academic Profession”

„Uncertainty“ experiences

Concerning academic working environment:

- Short term contracts
- High mobility and flexibility
- Very competitive (publications, third-party funds etc)

-> Different experiences according to funding and discipline

-> Adjustment and flexibility of institutional support to heterogeneity of PhDs

Experience with “Academic Profession” and Career Plans

„Uncertainty“ experiences

Concerning decisions on the individual/personal level:

- How combine requirements of academic profession with personal life planning?
 - role models
- Right time to leave academia?
- Positioning on labour market outside academia?

Career Plans and Strategies

Outside academia

„...my problem was that my supervisor just gave tips how you can stay in academia. But if you want to do another thing, then this is not possible and you won't get advice, you have to fight alone.“ (Graduate in Political Science)

„...There are also other interesting positions [outside academia]. This is not conveyed by the university because nothing ever could be as good. But of course there are alternatives.“ (Graduate in Mathematics)

Career Plans and Strategies

Outside academia

- „Second option“, not good enough for academia
- Role of supervisor(s)
 - Competence?
 - Afraid of discriminating treatment

-> Lack of support to deeply reflect on career possibilities especially outside academia

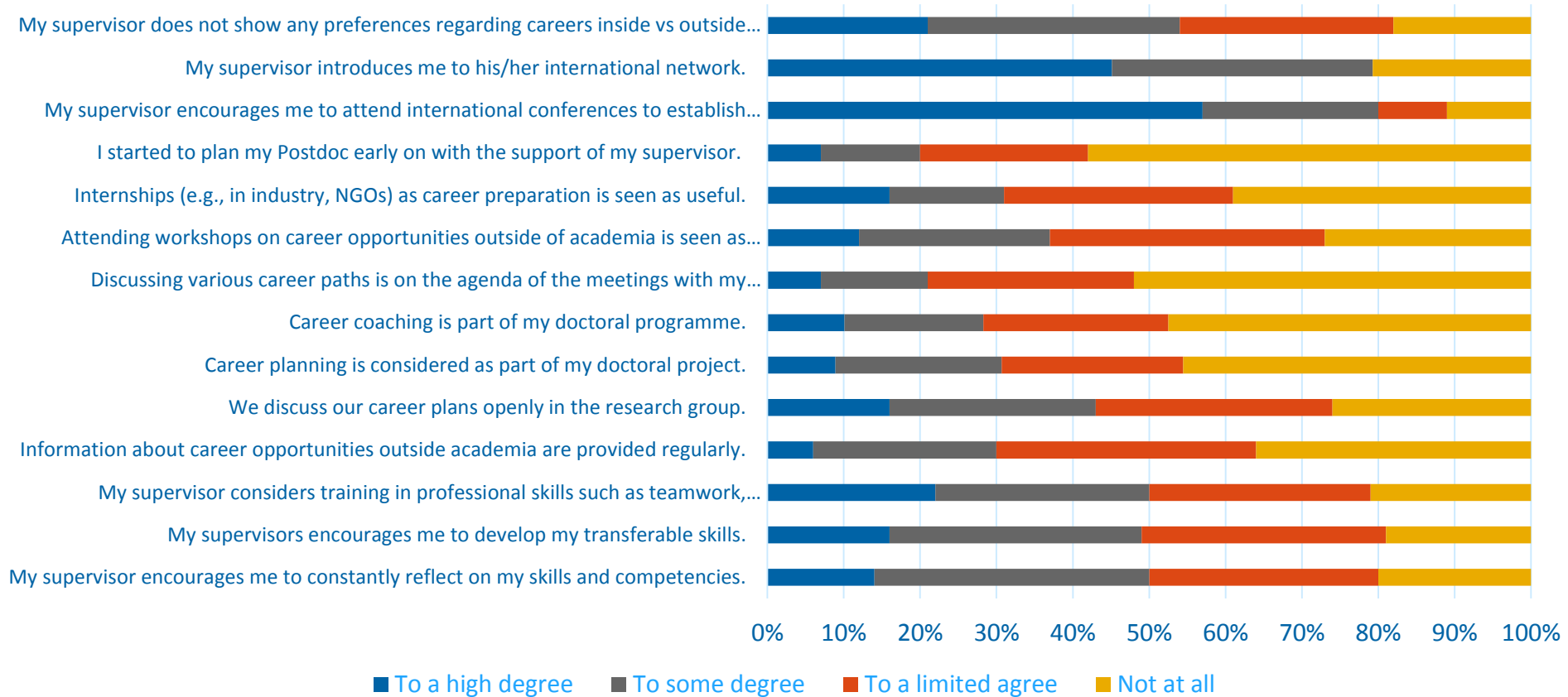
Special Programme

- **Structured programmes (at UoV but also all of Austria)**
- **Cohort-based**
- **Well funded**
- **Very much focused to start careers in academia**
- **Questionnaire in 2015**

Questions on Career Planning

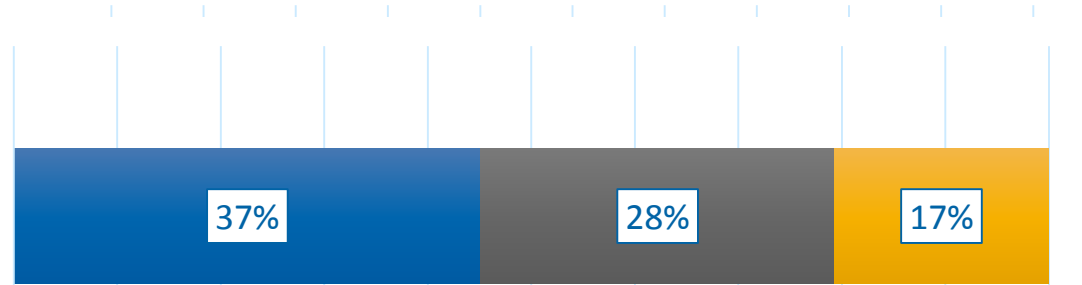
- **Careers in- and outside academia**
- **Transferable skills**
- **Networking and conferences**
- **PostDoc preparation**

There are many different ways to prepare for a career after graduation. To which degree do the following statements correspond to your experiences during your doctoral studies?

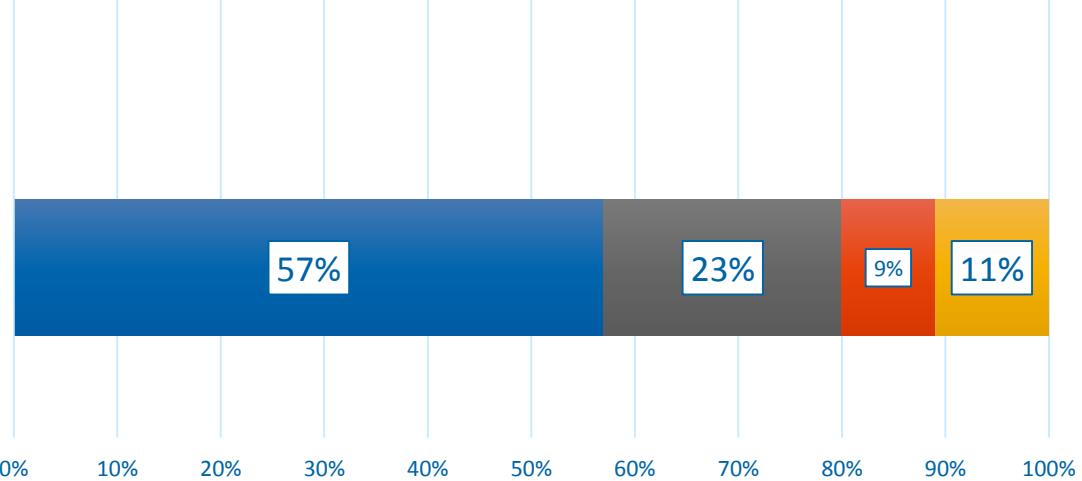


There are many different ways to prepare for a career after graduation.
To which degree do the following statements correspond to your
experiences during your doctoral studies?

My supervisor introduces me to his/her
international network.



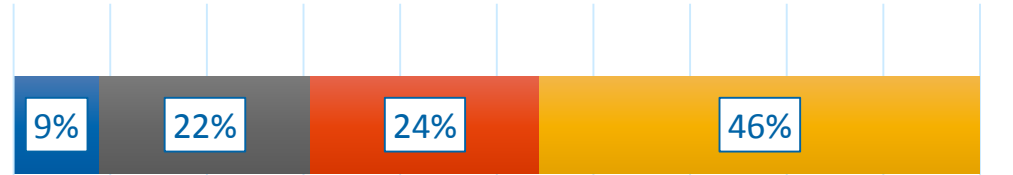
My supervisor encourages me to attend
international conferences to establish my own
network.



■ To a high degree ■ To some degree ■ To a limited agree ■ Not at all

There are many different ways to prepare for a career after graduation.
To which degree do the following statements correspond to your
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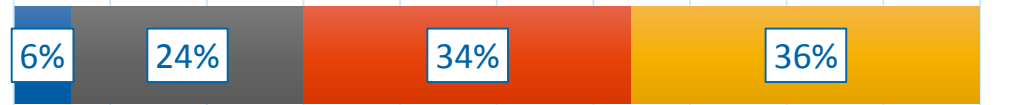
Career planning is considered as part of my
doctoral project.



We discuss our career plans openly in the
research group.



Information about career opportunities
outside academia are provided regularly.

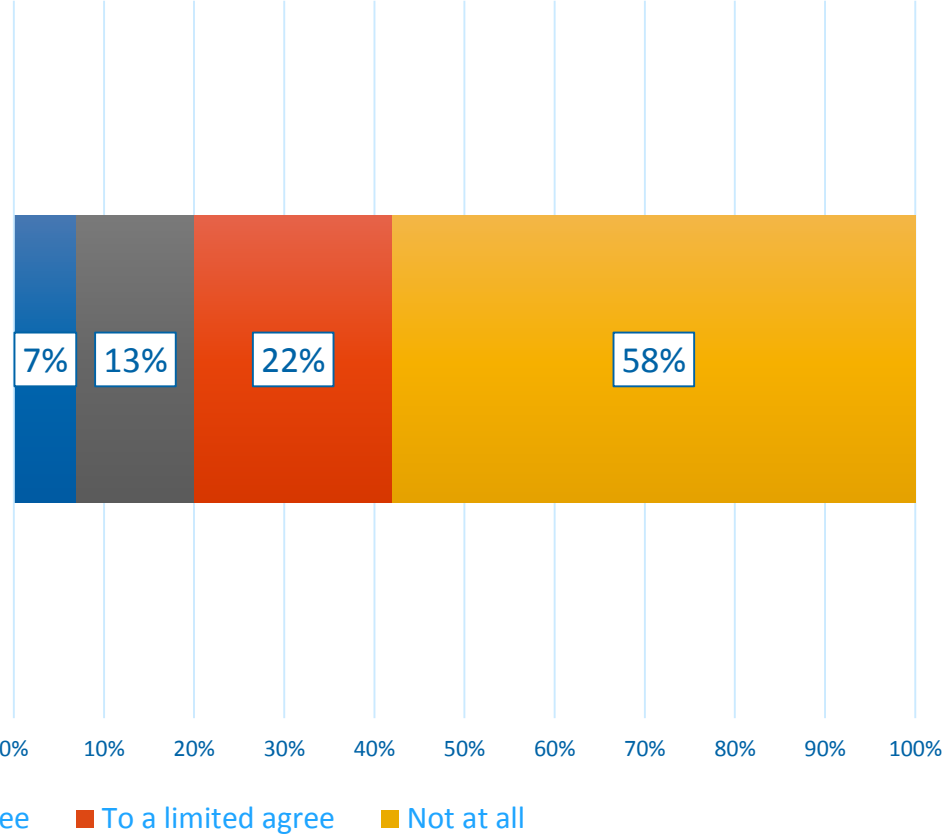


0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ To a high degree ■ To some degree ■ To a limited agree ■ Not at all

There are many different ways to prepare for a career after graduation.
To which degree do the following statements correspond to your experiences during your doctoral studies?

I started to plan my Postdoc early on with the support of my supervisor.



How would you describe career preparation in the framework of your doctoral programme? (open question)

- „**Non existent.**“
- “Everyone **is pushed towards an academic career** neglecting the fact that there are nearly no position to fill, once your done with your postdoc phase...”
- “unless you actively seek it, there isn't much career preparation. **It's more about the PhD** and less about the future plans.”

- **Will start in July**
- **Employed candidates whose contract runs out within the next 6 months will receive this**
- **Results hopefully in 2 years**

- **Why? Because we see problems in areas which according to international best practice examples should result in good performances, but just don't.**

Being embedded, what could this include?

- Exchange with supervisors (structured and unstructured)
- Exchange with peers
- Culture and atmosphere at the department
- Isolation...

Additionally

- Workload in which working areas
- Gender issues
- Ressources
- General personal circumstances...

Benefits

- Data based decisions for establishing support offer (e.g. career support)
- Creating awareness of problems (e.g. university leadership)
- „Active voice“ of PhDs
- Expertise from different units have been pooled
- Awareness of multiple roles of PhDs (employee, PhD candidate etc)
- A lot of data material – concrete measures?

Open Questions

- How far goes the responsibility of universities in supporting the career of doctoral candidates?
- How can institutions encourage PhDs to take responsibility of their own career?
- Should institutions invest in career tracking? What are experiences in setting up career tracking systems?

