

EUA-CDE ANNUAL MEETING

Postdoctoral researchers at European universities: profiles, roles and institutional support structures

Insights from the 2023 EUA-CDE Thematic Peer Group

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Presentation of the Thematic Peer Group



- EUA-CDE TPGs offer participating universities with an opportunity for mutual learning and exchange of experiences. The call for participation in the third TPG was launched in July 2022.
- **Consisted** of 28 EUA-CDE members from 16 countries.
- **Gathered** in three different occasions to discuss the topic:
 - ❑ First meeting at University of Vienna (16-17 February)
 - ❑ Second meeting at Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology (13-14 June)
 - ❑ Third meeting online (5 October)
- **Collected** information and best practices by inviting external experts
- **Discussions** inside the TPG resulted in a report published in March 2024

EUA-CDE TPG on
Postdoctoral
researchers at
European universities:
participating universities



Context

- Postdoctoral researchers play an essential role in the European higher education system as they make an important contribution to research, education and outreach to society.
- Despite their valuable contribution to the research environment, their situation remains challenging in Europe due to:
 - critical issues related to their employment status
 - high workload
 - pressures in terms of expected scientific productivity
 - lack of recognition for their expertise
 - mental health challenges
- This situation is further complicated by the lack of consolidated information about the situation of postdoctoral researchers or the size of this population in Europe.

Purpose and aim of Thematic Peer Group



- **Reflect** on current profiles and situation of the postdoctoral community at European universities
- **Identify** the support and tailored services designed by universities for postdoctoral researchers
- **Share** good practices and suggest areas of improvement regarding postdoctoral services and support
- **Discuss** the main challenges encountered by universities when dealing with this group and how to make this period a fruitful experience for postdocs
- **Present** examples of good practices on how to enrich the postdoctoral experience

- Supporting postdoctoral researchers requires a systematic definition that enables universities to identify this group.
- To provide clarity for its work, TPG members have identified the following working definition:

Definition and profile

‘A postdoctoral researcher is someone holding a doctoral degree, whose primary activity is conducting research and who is in a transition phase towards a long-term career path inside or beyond academia.’

- Postdoctoral position is a temporary or limited term appointment & serves as a period of professional training and development which allows further specialisation in a specific field.

Institutional structures

- Universities have invested considerable resources in the integration of postdoctoral researchers with their organisational frameworks.
- A broad variety of institutional structures available for postdoctoral researchers:
 - **Graduate and doctoral schools:** (in collaboration with career centres or research offices)
 - **Dedicated structures** e.g. Postdoc Offices
 - **Human resources departments** (when postdoctoral researchers benefit from a work contract etc.)

Areas of institutional support

Career development

Postdocs are at a crucial point in the career path as they have to decide if they want to deploy their expertise in an academic or non-academic position.

- **Motivation**
 - help postdocs identify their needs regarding career development
 - assist them in narrowing down the number of career paths one could finally take
 - connect postdocs with potential employers
- **Key initiatives developed by universities**
 - career orientation formats
 - coaching and mentoring
 - networking formats.

Training

Developing research and analytical skills is highly relevant for postdoctoral researchers as these competences are instrumental in enhancing their future employability and ability to handle the daily tasks of a job in a specific area.

- **Types of training**

- **Early-career researchers (all)**

- advanced courses on communication, collaboration, data analysis, writing skills, research data management, publication strategies

- **More advanced early-career researchers**

- courses on leadership, project management, strategic thinking, entrepreneurship or teaching skills.

Areas of institutional support

Funding application

Providing appropriate funding support is fundamental given that securing a grant or fellowship is often a central factor in enhancing the career of a postdoctoral researcher.

Key initiatives developed by universities

- assist with funding applications
- provide advice on funding plans
- organise grant writing workshops and information sessions
- provide specific information on different funding schemes

Support for postdoctoral researchers with childcare responsibilities

• Structures delivering this support

- welfare offices
- equal opportunity and diversity offices
- HR units

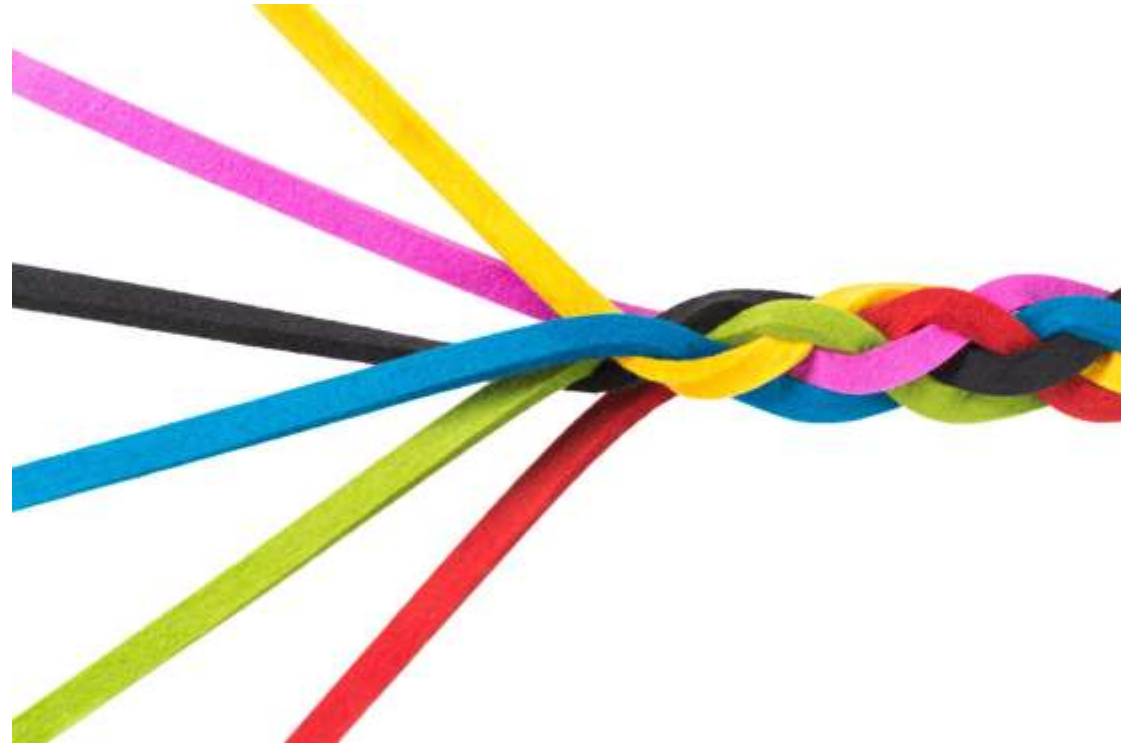
• Key initiatives/services developed by universities

- child day-care services and centres
- additional home working days
- maternity and paternity leave.

Ways to enhance institutional support

1. Organisational issues

- **Vision & strategy**
- **Representation**
- **Research assessment**
- **Diversity**
- **Specific contact points**



Ways to enhance institutional support

2. Career development

- **Transversal skills**
- **Reserve time for career planning**
- **Engage PIs**
- **University partnerships**
- **Networking & leadership**



Ways to enhance institutional support

3. Training

- **Onboarding**
- **Awareness of career paths**
- **Foster wider impact**
- **Diverse training offer**
- **Personalized support**



Ways to enhance institutional support

4. Role of teaching

- **Allow for teaching**
- **Recognition for teaching**
- **Provide training**



Ways to enhance institutional support

5. Funding support

- Recognize career diversity
- Encourage professional development
- Facilitate intersectoral mobility



Want to learn from existing good practices?



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION !

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