

2025 Survey Report on Postdoc Wellbeing at Wageningen University and Research

by Wageningen Postdoc Council

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1 Introduction

Postdoctoral researchers (colloquially termed *postdocs*) are a valuable working force in the university with multiple responsibilities such as carrying out research, teaching, supervision and contributing to departmental and group activities. Postdocs usually commence employment after completing a doctoral degree (i.e. PhD). They frequently work on a research project led by a principal investigator or pursue their own line of research, oftentimes finalizing outcomes from their doctoral research projects. Some postdocs continue working on a second or even third postdoc contract at the same or different institution before they move into a new position.

With few exceptions, most postdocs are on a fixed term or temporary contract of one to five years, with varying outlooks on a permanent position. If they wish to stay in academia, they can apply for a job at university if these are advertised, but another likely path is that they develop their own research lines and seek external funding to secure future employment at university, which is a highly competitive process. At the same time, they may look for job security and more permanent contracts outside of academia. Regardless of their trajectory, the period of postdoc employment may feel like a pressure cooker, as this report will further detail.

Because postdoc contracts vary temporally and rely on internal or external funding sources, postdocs are a heterogenous group of workers at most universities, including at Wageningen University and Research (WUR, from here on). There are an estimated 350 postdocs at WUR who work as temporary researchers across research groups and departments. Many of these researchers, but not all, are part of one of the six Wageningen Graduate Schools: Experimental Plant Sciences (EPS), Production Ecology & Resource Conservation (PE&RC), VLAG Graduate School (VLAG), Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS), Wageningen Institute of Animal Science (WIAS) and Wageningen Institute for Environment and Climate Research (WIMEK).

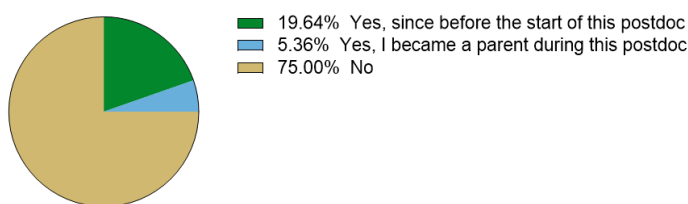
The recently formed Wageningen Postdoc Council (est. 2024), aims to connect, inform and represent postdocs at WUR. The Council is made up of regular members and four members who fulfil the roles of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Communication Manager. Each Council member is part of one of the Wageningen Graduate Schools and we aim to ensure even postdoc representation on the board across the graduate schools. The Council advocates for training and workshops tailored to postdoc needs, and is an active voice to represent, advocate and implement beneficial changes, such as improving postdoc recognition. To establish what the postdoc community looks like at WUR, and what their experiences and needs are, the Council set out to conduct a survey to collect more information.

The survey consisted of four parts: 1. *Who are you?* which asks demographic information from the respondent; 2. *How are you?* which asks about postdocs' experiences and working conditions; 3. *What do you want and need?* which makes an inventory of postdocs' career aspirations; and 4. *How can we help?* which asks what support and resources postdocs need to further improve their working conditions and future outlook. While the overall participation in this survey was low (N=56, 16% of the estimated total postdoc number) the results are nevertheless valuable and provide important suggestions for further improvement of postdocs' working conditions and support structures. With the results of the survey, which are outlined in the following sections, the Council wishes to advocate for changes via the WUR Graduate Schools (WGS). The survey will be recurring and sent out every other year, to keep of track of how postdocs are doing and check whether their situation is improving.

2 Demographics

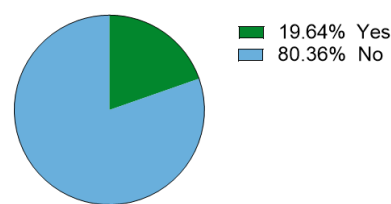
Who are the postdocs at Wageningen University and Research who participated in this survey? We received a total of 56 responses among which 25 respondents identified as man, 30 identified as woman and one person identified as non-binary. In terms of nationality, 22 respondents indicated they had the Dutch nationality (40%), 22 respondents (40%) had nationalities in countries in Africa, Asia, North- and South America, and 11 respondents had nationalities in other countries in the EU (20%). The average age of the respondents was 34 years and 80% of the respondents were between 30 and 40 years of age. According to the Dutch and EU Bureau of Statistics this age range corresponds with a phase in life during which, on average, people become first-time parents or are in the early years of parenthood (first time parents NL: women 30,3 years; men 32,8 years; EU: women 28,8 years). However, among the postdocs at Wageningen University, very few are parents with 42 of the survey respondents (75%) indicating they did not have children. Among the remaining respondents, 11 had become parents before the start of the postdoc and were between 32 to 44 years of age, while the remaining 3 respondents had become parents during their postdoc employment. Aside from the care that the small subset of postdocs took for their children, 20% of all respondents indicated that they had caring responsibilities for others, such as parents, siblings or otherwise. In several of the results sections below, we will reflect on how social categories such as gender and nationality influence the issues some of the postdocs experience at WUR and how their support structures could be tailored accordingly.

Are you a parent?



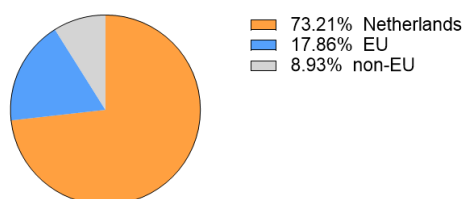
Total=56

Do you have other care responsibilities?

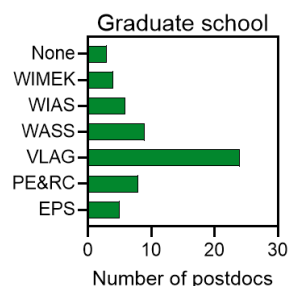


Total=56

Where did you complete your PhD?



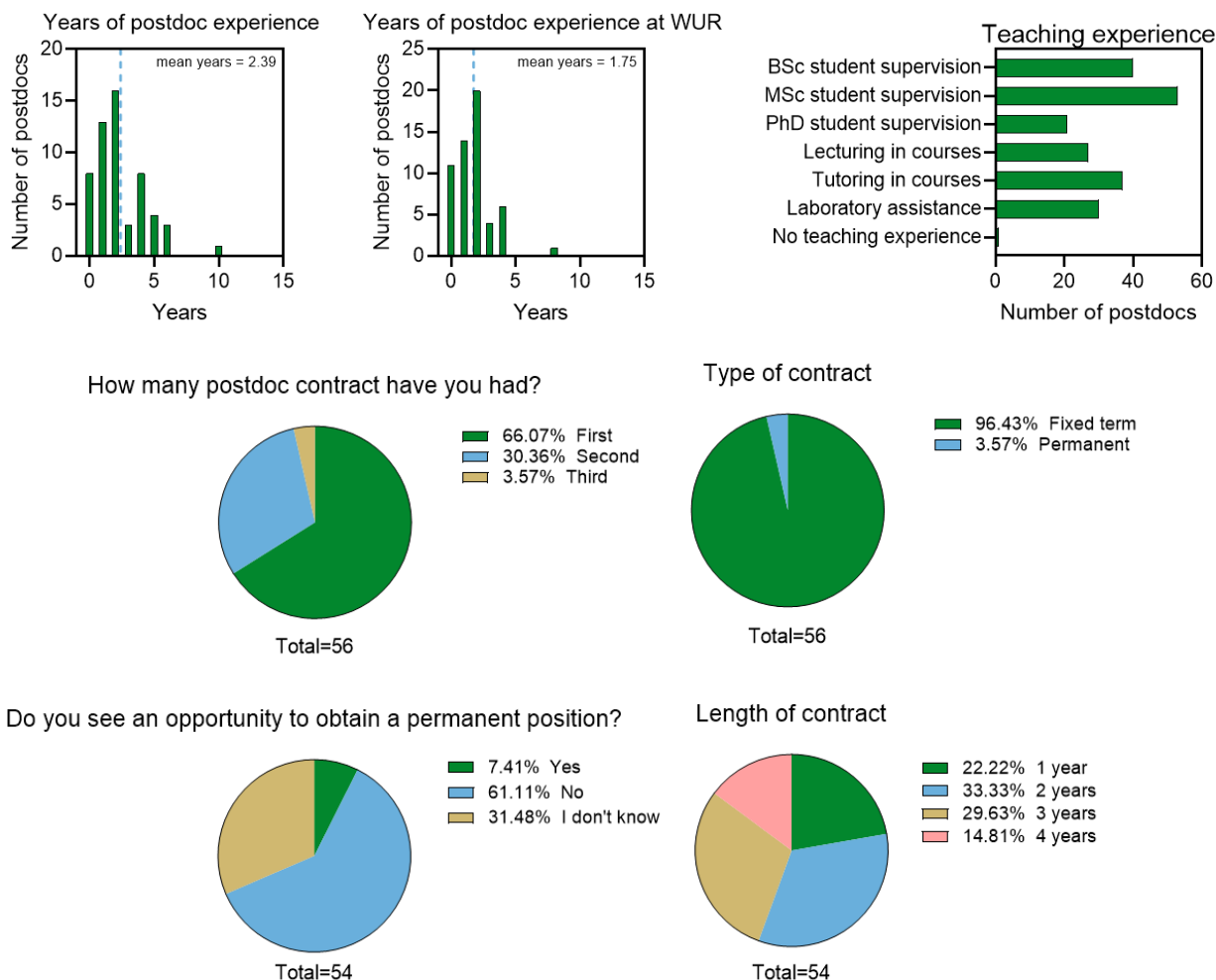
Total=56



In terms of prior education and training, almost three quarters of the respondents completed their PhD in the Netherlands and among this subset almost half had the Dutch nationality, followed by 7 respondents with the Chinese nationality. Ten respondents completed their PhD in another European country, and the remaining 6 completed their PhD outside of Europe. There was an uneven representation of graduate school affiliation in our sample with VLAK affiliates assuming 43% of all survey responses. These were followed by 8 responses from WASS and 8 PE&RC members respectively, 5 responses from EPS- and 5 from WIAS members respectively, and only 3 responses from WIMEK affiliates. These skewed numbers need to be considered in terms of the representativeness of the survey responses.

3 Postdoc working conditions and work experience at WUR

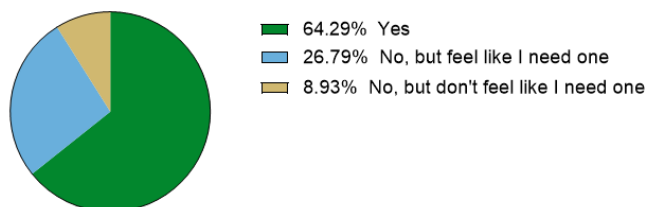
What are the conditions of work for postdocs at WUR and how is work experienced? On average, postdocs had completed a little over 2 years of postdoc employment at the time of filling in the survey. Among all respondents, 66% was on their first postdoc contract, 30% on their second and 4% on their third postdoc contract. Among those on their second or third contract, half had the Dutch nationality and there was an even division in this subset among men and women. On average, postdocs who filled in this survey had spent a little less than 2 years at WUR. Out of 56 respondents, two indicated that they were on a permanent contract, although no details were provided to motivate this unusual employment status. Length of contract varied significantly with 22% of postdocs working on a 1-year contract, 33% working on a 2-years contract, 30% on a 3-years contract, and the remaining 15% on a 4-years contract. While almost half of all respondents were not aware of the exact number of holidays they contractually had, almost all respondents mentioned that they did take holidays; usually all the available holidays they were entitled to or an average of 23 days a year, plus parental leave.



In terms of mentorship, 64% of the respondents indicated that they had a faculty member at the institution whom they consulted for advice about career development and other matters of concern. The remaining 27% indicated that they did not need a mentor while 9% felt like they did need a mentor but did not have one. Their mentor's qualities were reviewed along the following categories: 1) giving feedback, 2) inspiring/motivating postdocs, 3) explaining things

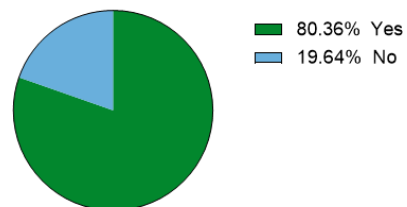
clearly, 4) being positive, 5) showing care and compassion, 6) helping postdocs be autonomous, 7) making postdocs feel recognized, and 8) reflecting on their own performance. The 36 postdocs who assessed these qualities, generally thought their mentors were good or excellent at *inspiring* (83%), *being positive* (92%), *showing care and compassion* (93%), *explaining things clearly* (78%) and *helping postdocs be autonomous* (89%). The first three of these categories interestingly reflect more on the attitude of the mentor rather than support regarding content and institutional knowhow. The other categories were also reviewed positively, but more clearly showed room for improvement. For example, 33% of the respondents thought their mentors were fair or average at *giving feedback*. In terms of *making postdocs feel recognized*, 36% of the respondents assessed their mentors as fair or average regarding this quality. Regarding the *reflection on their own performances* as mentors, a relatively high number of the respondents (39%) thought their mentors were doing fair or average. Almost three quarters of all responding postdocs, regardless of mentorship, have a yearly progress and development talk. Postdocs who have a supervisors met with their supervisors regularly in one-on-one meetings (80%).

Do you have faculty members that you consider mentors?



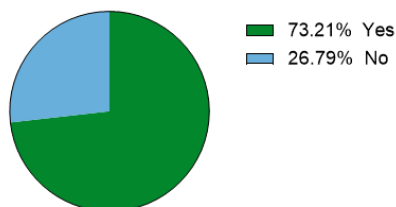
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Do you have regular one-on-one meetings with your supervisor?



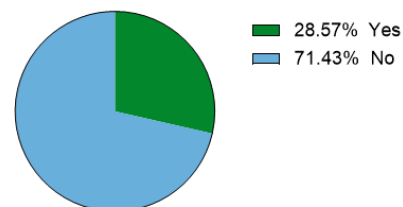
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Do you have a yearly progress and development (P&D) talk?



Total=56

Have you heard about the WGS career development plan?

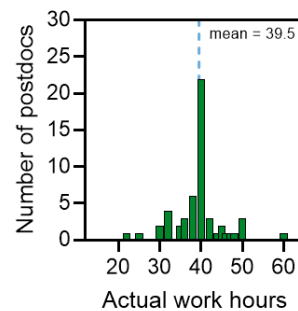
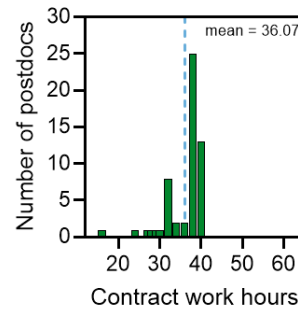
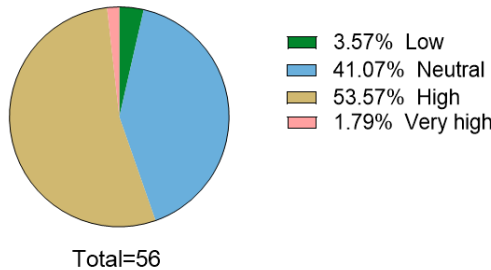


Total=56

More than half of the respondents (54%) experience a high work pressure, whereas the second largest group of respondents (41%) feels neutral about their work pressure. High work pressure can tentatively be linked to the prevalence of overwork. On average, postdocs are employed on a 36-hour contract. Over half of the respondents work on a 38 or 40-hour contract but some work parttime and less than 30 hours a week. However, more than half of all surveyed postdocs work 3,5 hours per week beyond their contract hours, which adds up to 182 hours of overwork per year, on average. Almost two thirds of the respondents mentioned that they occasionally or often work on the weekend. Although it is possible that postdocs work beyond their hours in the weekend, the reasons for working on the weekends were not mentioned so they cannot necessarily be attributed to overwork. The flexibility to schedule your own working days and hours may be a reason that some postdocs decide to work on non-contractual days. Nevertheless, overwork appears to be common, only a little less than half of the respondents worked their actual hours. Around thirty percent of the respondents (16) worked between 2 and 7 hours of overtime per week and around one quarter of the respondents (13), worked between

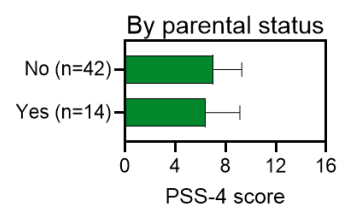
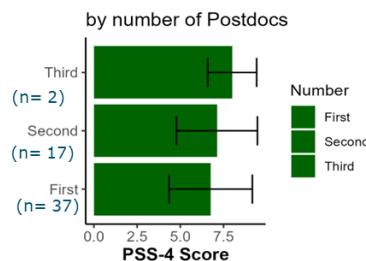
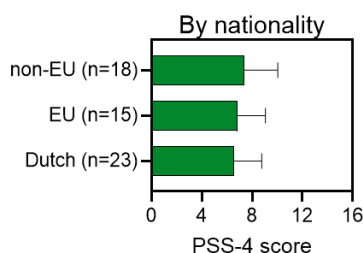
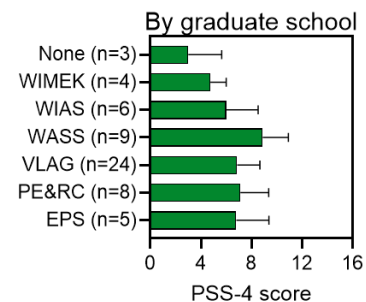
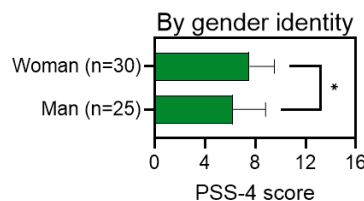
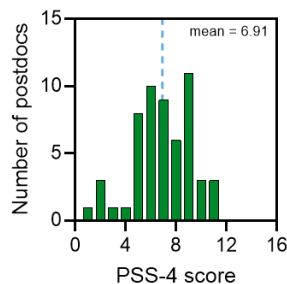
a full working day (8 hours) to 20 hours beyond their contractual hours per week. Some worked less than their contractual hours due to parental leave.

Perceived work pressure

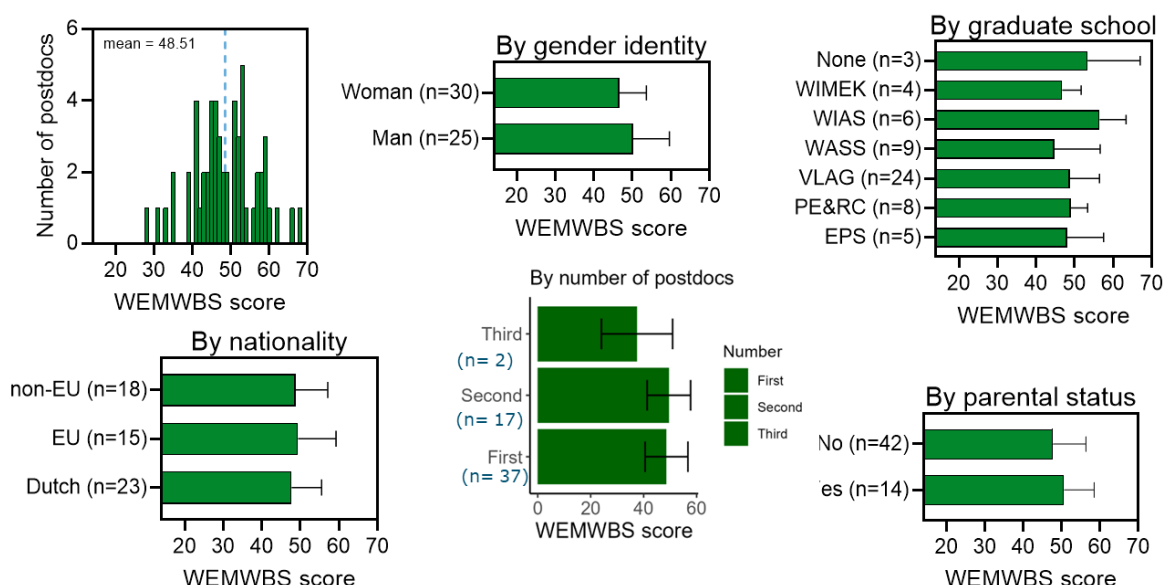


Perceived stress and mental wellbeing

To assess WUR postdocs' perceived stress, we incorporated the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)-4 questionnaire in our survey (Cohen et al. 1983). This validated instrument contains four statements about perceived stress and is widely used for assessing cognitive and emotional responses to dealing with stress in the last month. A high PSS-4 score indicates higher perceived stress, and the score ranges from 0-16 points. For WUR postdocs, PSS-4 scores averaged 6.91 (range: 1-11). This indicates that on average, perceived stress is mild, although some report scores above average (> 8) ($n=17$). No differences were found when stratifying postdocs by nationality (Dutch, EU, non-EU) or parental status. There is also no difference across graduate school membership, however, we must keep in mind that we did not have an even distribution of responses among different graduate schools. However, women reported significantly higher PSS-4 scores, albeit still below the median score.



Mental wellbeing was tested using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant, et al. 2007). This scale consists of 14 questions related to optimism/cheerfulness, satisfying interpersonal relationships and positive functioning. The score ranges from 14-70 points, and a higher score relates to greater positive mental wellbeing. The WEMWBS scores for postdocs averaged 48.51 (range 28-69), indicating that the majority of postdocs experience positive mental wellbeing. However, some score below average (n=12). No differences were found when stratifying postdocs by nationality, gender identity or parental status.



The additional comments that postdocs provided on this quantitative section of the questionnaire, did elicit some more complexity regarding the relation between postdoc demographics and life stage and perceived stress and wellbeing. For example, in the absence of a convincing job perspective after the postdoc, some respondents mention that they must change or postpone important life choices and obligations toward family:

I have less than a year to go, combined with my personal plan to get married, the pressure from [religion] council to get married even earlier, healing relationship with my partner, and 3 papers/projects to finalise before next year, plus finding a job which is practically collecting rejection letters. I have been seeing a therapist because beginning of this year, my relation with my spv [supervisor] was not great, it is improving now, so I am not taking any sleeping pills anymore, but the pressure is very real, even after winning [name award/grant, omitted to maintain anonymity].

I think being a parent of young kids (including breastfeeding/pumping) and all expectations and requests from work without paying attention to your own career as a Postdoc is a very bad recipe and I would not recommend it to anyone. On top of that the time you spend parenting or on maternal leave is 'your own loss' as you will not get extensions on your contract for that. I do not experience taking care of my kids as a loss at all, but for your career it is not a good choice when you are working as a postdoc.

Uncertainties regarding my job is severely impacting personal life and possibility to plan for a family.

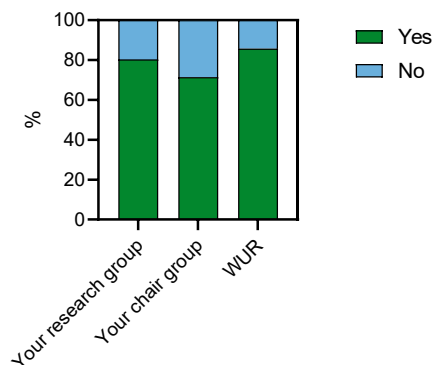
The current political climate in the Netherlands was also recurrently mentioned in the survey as a cause for feelings of anxiety and uncertain future perspectives:

Most of the stress that I currently experience is related to the overall political landscape in the Netherlands, the distrust in science, the implications of the budget cuts for postdocs and other temporary-employed staff at universities. I returned to Wageningen University (my alma mater) after 10 years because I felt that - with the international experience and research profile established - I could have a chance at permanent employment at the university, in a city where my relatives live. But these hopes have really diminished in the last year and a half and it makes me anxious. Also because my CV is very academic in nature, I have been very deliberate to work towards a good profile for academia. The university, with some shortcomings, still remains the place of work for me.

Recommending a postdoc at WUR

Asked about whether postdocs would recommend others doing a postdoc at their research group, chair group, or at Wageningen University, answers were mostly positive and differently motivated. The vast majority (86%) would recommend doing a postdoc at WUR, based on their overall assessment of the institution in terms of providing research facilities, cross-departmental relations and working conditions.

Would you recommend doing a postdoc at...



It's a decent place, lots of holidays. And some groups (including) mine are well-funded and do relevant research.

I've been exceptionally lucky in cultivating this specific relationship so might be biased – certainly there is room for improvement but beyond the increasingly precarious nature of academic employment I think WUR colleagues and leaders do a lot to improve our future opportunities or at least point us in direction of opportunities. More of this.

I find most things I need for my research in my chair group. If needed, I can easily collaborate with other research groups at WUR to carry out some of my experiments.

Both WUR and my chair group have good facilities and a good name that helps to build career. My research group is anoxic.

However, multiple motivations for recommending doing a postdoc at WUR did hint at lacking support or career perspective. Similarly, many of the respondents (71%) would recommend doing a postdoc at their chair group, or research group (80%). While relations with other chair/research group members were generally positively assessed, the overall career perspective and related career support were often lacking.

Wonderful staff members, though I have to say the postdoc support (pro-actively stimulating postdoc career development) could be improved in both my research group and chair group.

Compared with the PhD in Germany, my experiences here at WUR and in my chair group have been very positive. I am mindful of keeping my stress levels low, and this is accepted and encouraged in the chair group. The only drawback is a continuous uncertainty about the future - initially I had a one-year contract, and until the very end it was unclear if I would get a prolongation. And nobody can give me a clear answer on my chances of getting a permanent contract after my postdoc.

I can only speak for my experience in the chair group because I am not a member of a research group and can't speak for the entire university. At our chair group we have the support of a chair who generally says yes to many things, he is an enabler. At the same time, we are working on individual projects unless you really seek out collaboration within the group. This is not just because I am a postdoc, but a general development. So, it is sometimes hard to sense that there is a research-oriented-future within the group. Nevertheless, postdocs are included in every aspect of the group's activities such as meetings, research away days, and other events.

I would recommend it if I compare the situation with other places, however, at WUR as in other places we have responsibilities as assistant professors, but no stability, and the added pressure of having to constantly look for other opportunities. I feel that as a staff member I am worth less than others and this does not encourage me to get more involved in the department life, nor does it contribute to my overall wellbeing.

The department is very collaborative and encouraging. The research environment is exciting but there certainly are work pressures. It is sometimes a challenge being an international employee.

Those who would not recommend others doing a postdoc at their chair-, research group and/or WUR were mostly motivated by the poor career opportunities and the unclarity about expected tasks and responsibilities.

It's really a dead-end situation, we are many postdocs at our group and over half is leaving this summer for various reasons. [...] I have seen so many colleague postdocs really almost go overboard during my three years here with caring for a young family, having to do more than your contract in terms of also doing teaching and acquisition to make a chance at staying. And now towards the end of my contract, I am on the opposite spectrum of being really bored because there is no perspective.

Within my group there is no to very poor tutoring, even after asking for it. Within our chair group there is one PI where this guidance is present, yet that is not my supervisor, but doing a Postdoc with that person will be much better. I would not recommend doing a postdoc at WUR in general because of the temporary contracts, the lack of growth and guidance, the skewed expectations towards teaching, supervision and doing your own research.

In my research group, PostDocs are 'helping hands' and do not really have an own research project.

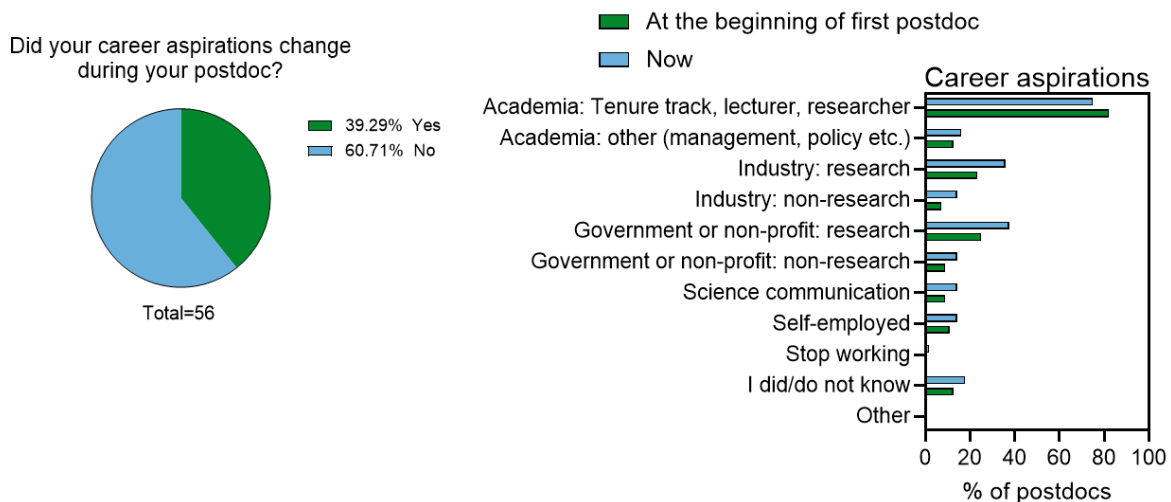
I don't feel much connection to the chair group (yet), not even sure who is included to be honest

The research group, headed by a personal professor, belongs to the top of the field worldwide but the chair holder is not supporting postdocs within the research group.

As a computer scientist, there are no future possibilities to have a career at WUR.

4 Career development and perspectives

What are the career aspirations of postdocs at WUR and how do these aspirations evolve over time? A large group of respondents (61%) still have the same career aspirations as they did at the beginning of their postdoc, whether these careers are in academia or in the public or private sector. When asked about if the positions that postdocs currently aim for require a PhD, 70% of the respondents answered “yes”, whereas 23% of the respondents did not know, and only 7% aimed for a position that would not require a PhD at all.



Interestingly, an overwhelming 80% of the respondents had the ambition to continue working in academia at the outset of their postdoc, the vast majority of which was aiming at a tenure track position. Half of this group still aspires to continue this trajectory. The remaining 20% of the surveyed postdocs wish(ed) to pursue a career in government (2 postdocs) or the industry (6 postdocs).

Postdocs who have changed their career aspirations since they started their postdoc employment (39%) mention a variety of reasons. Those who had initially set their mind on a career in government or the industry changed their minds due to their positive working experience in academia. Relatedly:

I talked with my supervisor about applying for grants and my mindset changed a bit from “I will never get it to why not try and see”.

Among the respondents who initially had the ambition to pursue a career in academia 17 respondents (38%) have changed their minds since. They mention that they are pessimistic about the opportunities obtaining a permanent contract in academia, due to the nationwide budget cuts, or because of discouragingly high levels of competition to gain the few existing jobs.

I need to consider alternatives. At present there seemingly are only few permanent (tenured) positions available at university. So, I am also looking at management/policy/admin-related functions at university.

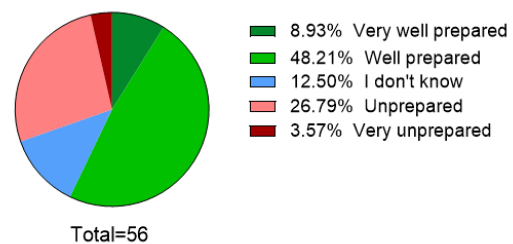
In addition, issues such as discrimination form an additional hurdle to an already underrepresented group of early career scholars in academia:

I perceive declining opportunities in academia. And it is even more difficult for non-white researcher in social-science related topics.

Most respondents think they will *not* obtain a permanent position at WUR after their contract ends (61%) or are unsure about it (32%). When asked about their motivations, some are sceptical about competition and their chances, also given the proposed budget cuts. Some are therefore very invested in writing grant applications. Yet, successful grant applications do not necessarily guarantee permanent employment, as stated by one participant: “*I can apply for grants, but I will have to be unemployed for 6 months since I won't be granted a permanent contract...*”. To prevent employers like universities to extend fixed term contracts without limitations (disallowing employees from being hired on a permanent basis) postdoctoral researchers are only allowed an extension of 3 months on their contracts. Alternatively, they must ‘wait’ for 6 months until they can be hired on another fixed term contract as a postdoc or researcher. During this waiting period of 6 months, they will be either unemployed or employed by a different employer. Some of the participants in our survey mention that they will be granted a 3-month extension if ongoing contributions to their project are needed.

Asked about being prepared for the next step in their career, more than half (57%) of the postdocs feel (very) well prepared, whereas the other surveyed postdocs feel unprepared (27%), very unprepared (4%) or do not know if they feel prepared (12%). Those who feel (very) well prepared for the next steps in their career are confident about their professional profiles and CV and, for example, their acquisition of mentoring- and supervision skills, which have currency in positions outside of academia as well. Several comments point at the skills that postdocs have already acquired during their PhD trajectory. Notably, some mention the guidance of their supervisors and colleagues toward a possible career to be very helpful.

Do you feel prepared for the next step in your career?



Since I have been looking for jobs in the halfway of my postdoc and received a lot of suggestions and helps from our group or outside the group.

The relationship with my supervisor has taught me how to navigate in Dutch academia and I feel prepared for the next step in my career.

Motivations provided for feeling (very) unprepared vary. Some refer to the solitary and isolated nature of postdoctoral work and connected lack of opportunity to acquire relational skills such as teamwork or leadership skills. Related to feelings of isolation, others sense that their expertise or field is too specific or too broad.

I have been training in a specific field and so far, all I obtain is rejection letter after rejection letter. So no, I have not properly learnt to work with other people, and all I did was focused on my work, and that brings result, but to work in the real society actually involves learning to work with others. While I believe that I have somewhat adequate decency, I feel that it is never enough.

The postdoc does not give enough opportunities to develop other skills needed for an academic job, like leadership skills.

Currently I am in a very niche-field of research, this research takes up all of my time, leaving no room to expand my knowledge on other fields that may be more relevant to future jobs.

It is difficult to explain it. But since I did multidisciplinary research, it is difficult to fit in one topic completely.

Others comment on their perceived under- or overqualification or not knowing how to “sell” their skills in jobs outside of academia, or beyond the European context. This could indicate that the training courses and skills sets currently offered are not necessarily of (socio-cultural) value beyond the academic-, Dutch- or European context.

[I] don't know how/if what I've learned in my PhD and Postdoc translates into jobs outside academia, or if I'm often considered "overqualified".

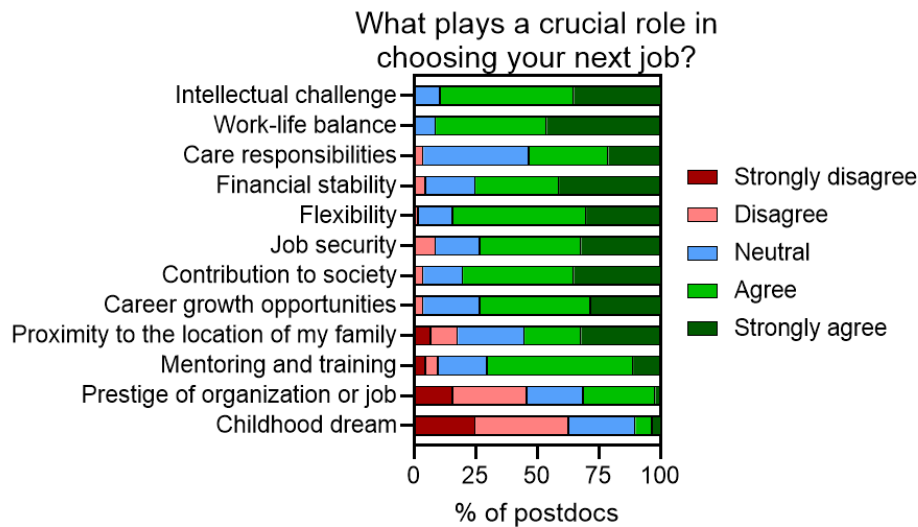
Some companies may find that I am overqualified, and I don't know how to sell myself in a society (outside of Europe) where PhD/postdoc is not viewed as work experience and possibly too niche

All this time I was aiming for an academic career, so making the step to a different career is very different. I will not be a perfect fit for any other job. Yet, I feel confident that I can easily make it and I will quickly learn and adapt.

Others currently feel overwhelmed about their next steps, tired, or uneasy. In terms of support, a mere 29% of the surveyed postdocs know about the Wageningen Graduate Schools Career Development Plan, whereas 71% have not heard about it. Some respondents indicated that they receive career advice via their peers in academia, LinkedIn or former colleagues. Three quarters of the respondents indicated that they would welcome career advice and suggestions on how to obtain employment inside and outside of academia. These could come in the form of information about grant applications, tenure track, and CV building towards positions in companies (beyond R&D).

In the survey, respondents were given a range of factors that could play a role in choosing a job after the postdoc. The factors work-life balance, intellectual challenge, flexibility, contribution to society, financial stability, career growth opportunities, job security and

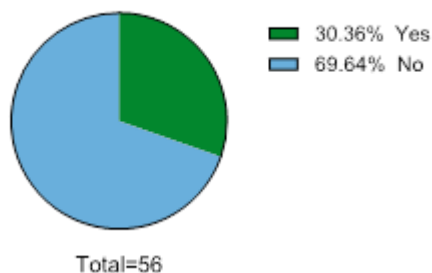
mentoring and training stood out in this respect. Postdocs were less concerned with the prestige of the organization or job, or whether the job represented their childhood dream.



5 Community and support

What can the Wageningen Postdoc Council do in order for postdocs to feel part of the postdoc community? Of the 56 postdocs, 33 further elaborated on what the Wageningen Postdoc Council could do to feel part of the postdoc community. Twenty-two postdocs asked for the organization of formal as well as informal meetings, receiving information, networking platform, and a postdoc space. In terms of formal meetings, suggestions were made to hold regular seminars or lunch meetings on the topics of career orientation and development. Moreover, the Annual Postdoc Day was appreciated and should be kept as a recurring event.

Do you feel part of postdoc community?



Keep organizing the Postdoc Day - that was a very important day for me last year where I really realized I will never get my work values recognized in this job so wanted to leave.

Informal meetings like the ‘monthly postdoc borrel’ should be continued. New events were also suggested, such as a “speed-dating event” to meet other postdocs, or a “postdoc BBQ” open to family members, ensuring family duties and postdoc life can be combined more

easily. In terms of receiving information, suggestions were made to send a regular newsletter on topics that the Council is currently working on, including information on (in)formal events, open positions and courses. Furthermore, the Council should have social media presence to ensure a digital network of new and old postdocs. At this point, the Wageningen Postdoc Council is present on Viva Engage, LinkedIn and Bluesky. Two respondents recommended creating a ‘postdoc space’, a room which only postdocs have access to, where they can spend time together at days and times of their own liking.

However, 11 people answered ‘Nothing’ as they are already part of other communities, related to their residency in/around Wageningen, or because of their active membership of their chair

groups. Some respondents have little to no time to join the organized events because of family duties, too many work meetings, and mood-related reasons. Some respondents indicated that they see no additional benefit from meeting other postdocs.

[...] If we reflect on this only from a professional point of view - at the end, most of publications and projects come as a result of personally knowing someone - but this is almost never a group of postdocs who met randomly. So, besides not having a socio-personal reasons, I do not have a particular professional interest into meeting other random postdocs.

The survey also asked what the Wageningen Graduate Schools (WGS) could do for postdocs? Twenty-nine postdocs elaborated on this question and gave suggestions. Most of the answers were focused on career opportunities (11) and job interview skills (6). WGS should keep providing training/workshops/seminars on career opportunities within and outside academia. Even talks by WUR-alumni could spark inspiration for current postdocs. In relation to interview skills, suggestions were made about helping with finding secure employment and potentially providing a coach for job hunting. Other suggestions included making job postings within WUR more accessible, establishing a postdoc career office, creating more activities exclusively for postdocs, ensuring greater involvement of chair groups in postdoc career development, providing cheaper courses (if possible), extending postdoc contracts to finalize research (if possible) and, finally, better signposting of resources for new (international) postdocs. Some respondents elaborated:

Make postdoc career development a top priority for supporting postdocs. Make sure every chair group pro-actively discusses postdoc career development with their postdocs, and make sure this is a recurring theme in the yearly R&O talk (which is not a yearly talk in every chair group at the moment). Install a postdoc career development office at WUR.

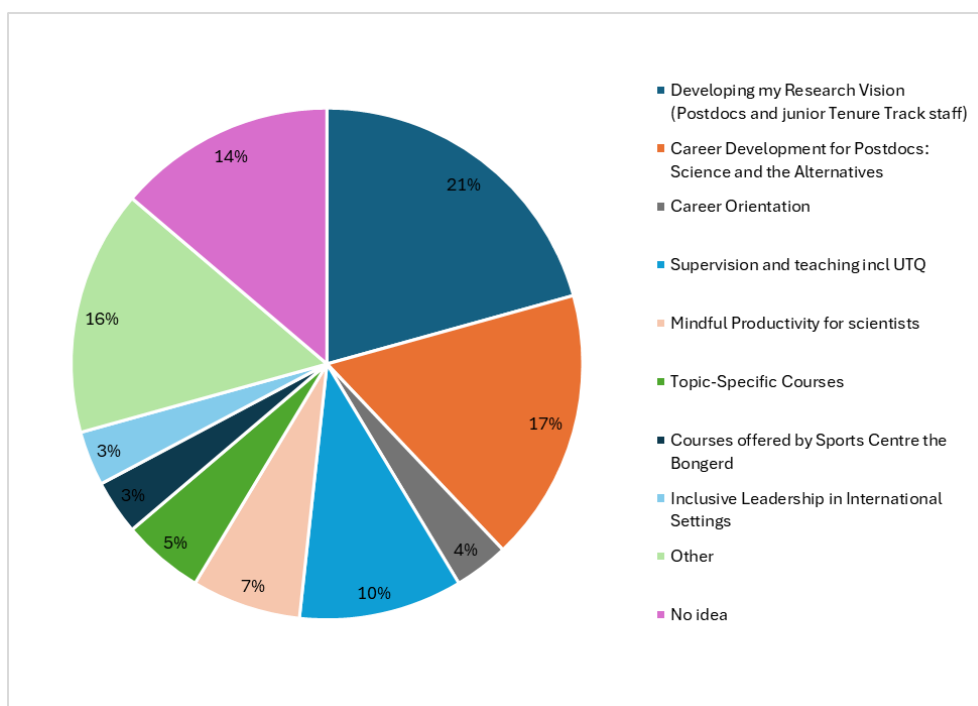
More communication maybe about what support is available for postdocs. Signposting resources for international employees.

A ton of meetings useless for me are out there, so I now immediately delete those emails without even reading it properly. I know for a fact that this is the case for most of my colleagues. Though I also know some for whom this is "the thing".

Survey respondents were provided with a list of courses offered by WGS and were asked which courses would support the next step in their career. A total of 50 responses were given to this question. Courses related to career development were considered of support (~40%). These were made up of the courses *Developing my Research Vision. Postdocs and junior Tenure Track staff* (21%), *Career Development for Postdocs: Science and the Alternatives* (17%) and *Career Orientation* (4%). The next biggest category (10%) included courses on supervision and teaching, including all the course of the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ).

Some courses that were mentioned less often are *Mindful productivity for Scientists* (7%), research specific courses (5%), *courses offered by the Sports Centre the Bongerd* (3%), and *Inclusive Leadership in International Settings* (3%). The category 'Other' are courses that were mentioned only once and included the following 9 courses: 1. *Project and Time management*, 2. *Science journalism*, 3. *Effective behaviour in your professional surroundings*, 4. *Presenting with Impact*, 5. *Making impact*, 6. *Professional in Supervision of PhD candidates*, 7. *Reviewing*

a Scientific Manuscript, 8. Any courses from writing/presenting section and 9. Any courses from the PhD/postdoc well-being section.



Asked for motivations, respondents replied:

Applying for grants - more of these courses. The Veni training was filled up super quickly...

I prefer to look for a job instead of course.

I'm not sure if I'm allowed to follow courses. Something on career development would be nice, but I already followed some courses on that during my PhD.

The course to developing my research vision would be interesting but cost are very high. 700 euro for postdocs.

Overall, the available catalogue of provided courses is extensive, but some courses are missing. Suggestions for courses were made: more business focused courses, how to write a CV for the industry (in addition to courses on academic CV writing), preparation for assistant professor interviews (mentioned twice), courses about other funding opportunities (besides VENI grants) and learning how to work with AI. Multiple answers also related to the frequency of the provided courses given. The grant writing courses are highly popular and should be given more frequently (mentioned 4 times). One person mentioned to also include personal coaching for job applications.

Respondents were asked if they have other postdoc-related ideas or issues they would like to see addressed by the Council, and a total of 47 answers were provided. Seventy percent answered 'No' or 'I don't know'. Of the remaining answers, most of them (50%) focused on advocacy for postdocs' job security, specifically tackling (very) short-term contracts (e.g. 6

months to 1 year) and ensuring WUR assists postdocs more in their transition towards permanent employment (e.g., by acquiring funding). Furthermore, the rules around temporary employment contracts at WUR should be more clearly communicated at the beginning of postdoc employment. Even though these rules are enforced to reduce the number of temporary contracts, many postdocs feel it hinders them to continue their research at WUR. This rule should be made more flexible if funding has been acquired. Another 25% of the respondents mentioned that career related events and seminars with alumni would be appreciated. Finally, 25% of the respondents variously indicated that they would like to 1) meet more postdocs in the Social Sciences, 2) create a social network, 3) receive automatic emails with WGS courses ahead of time, and 4) to see the Council actively fight the budget cuts.

6. Recommendations

Based on the answers from the survey, the following recommendations aim at improving postdoc employment at the University. We divide the recommendations and improvements according to the different institutional organisations involved in the support of postdoctoral researchers.

What can the Wageningen Postdoc Council do?

Several concrete suggestions were given as to how the Wageningen Postdoc Council could help postdocs. The Council should be more active in spreading information, which can be done via their own website (once created) and social media. Reiterating the abovementioned findings, a regular newsletter can be sent out on topics that the Council is currently working on, including information on (in)formal events, open positions and courses. Sending newsletters via email would require access to a contact list of all postdocs employed by WUR; information that resides with HR. Postdocs would first need to agree with being on the said mailing list. Furthermore, the Council should have (more) social media presence to ensure a digital network of new and old postdocs. At this point, the Wageningen Postdoc Council is present on Viva Engage, LinkedIn and Bluesky. Moreover, regular formal events such as monthly seminars on career opportunities should be organized. This could include talks of previous postdocs and their career paths within and outside academia. The Annual Postdoc Day is a valued event and should be held on a yearly basis. In addition, informal social events that connect postdocs should be organized, like the monthly postdoc drinks. But also new events such as “speed-dating” for postdocs were suggested as are events that are inclusive to family members.

What can the Wageningen Graduate School do?

Overall, the courses provided by WGS were evaluated as sufficient, especially courses on career development and orientation. However, some courses should be given at a higher frequency such as grant writing and funding-related courses and new courses should be designed for interviewing and CV writing skills. One-on-one sessions with a career coaches would also be appreciated by the postdoc community. The WGS should develop courses that have relevance or value outside of the Dutch context as well. Courses that are currently given by external companies/experts could be replaced by in-house expertise to reduce costs. Relatedly, there is a strong need to clarify what the course budget for postdoc/employees is at the outset of their employment. The WGS should play a more pro-active role in informing postdocs about the budget available for courses at the outset of postdoc employment.

What can the university do?

Provide the (digital) infrastructure and space for postdocs to connect and meet. The postdoc network and Council currently have a Viva Engage space but a physical space – like those provided to study associations – would enable the Council to hold council meetings, have a stable and continuous office presence, which also ensures that postdocs have a “drop-in” opportunity. Now, the Council and network rely on ad hoc and open spaces at university (e.g., the Spot at Orion). The university can greatly assist the direct communication between the WGS, the Council and the postdocs by asking opt-in/out communication during contract signage. Additionally, the findability of the current WGS website could be improved as it is currently linked to the PhD programme contact support [page](#). A postdoc-specific website that is not situated under the domain of a specific graduate school, that includes all information on graduate schools, the Wageningen Postdoc Council, available courses, and open positions would greatly help new postdocs settle in. Finally, although the culture of overwork might persist across different employment categories at university, this is an adverse development that should be addressed in relation to postdoc employment as well.

What can chair groups/supervisors do?

In the initial meetings of starting up a postdoc position, the chair and/or supervisor should encourage the postdocs to sign up at their graduate school so they receive the appropriate information about training and seminars. They further should encourage the postdoc to contact the Wageningen Postdoc Council to be enlisted in the emailing list and/or social media platforms for networking opportunities with other postdocs. On top of that, the regulations on fixed and temporary contracts (a maximum of 3 contracts, not longer than 4 years in succession) should be made clear from the start of employment. Regarding the supervision and mentorship of postdocs, mentors/supervisors can improve their own skills in the categories of 1) giving feedback, 2) making postdocs feel recognized and 3) reflecting on their own performance. To counter feelings of isolation, postdocs should be more actively included in the social and intellectual life of the chair groups or research groups, even if their employment is temporary.

What can the postdoc do?

Postdocs can ask for support and take initiative in contacting people. They can seek out graduate school membership, enrol in courses and come to the events organized for postdocs.

How can the postdoc survey be improved for 2027?

This was the first time the survey was sent around and, although we have learned a lot from the responses, some improvements can be made in the next iteration. This would include additional questions on postdocs’ housing situation, discrimination, and more deepening questions on the why very few postdocs entering parenthood during this phase.

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