



# **GUIDELINES FOR ADVISING AND SUPPORTING POSTDOCS**

**at Forschungszentrum Jülich**

# GUIDELINES

## for Advising and Supporting Postdocs at Forschungszentrum Jülich

---

The guidelines were developed as part of the Strategy Process at Forschungszentrum Jülich with the widespread participation of all actors and target groups and with the support of the Board of Directors and the Scientific and Technical Council (WTR).

The Career Center of Forschungszentrum Jülich supports the implementation of these guidelines.

---

Forschungszentrum Jülich offers exceptional conditions for postdocs. Our outstanding infrastructure provides the basis for excellent research and international visibility while also offering young scientists the best possible opportunities for attractive positions both within and outside of the scientific community.

The postdoctoral period is an important career phase as it is a time in which the course is set for future career development. In addition to establishing a clear scientific profile, the acquisition of soft skills and expertise is therefore of crucial importance.

Supporting young researchers in their further development as scientists as well as in planning their careers is a high priority at Jülich. We are therefore committed to the following standards and guidelines and to maintaining high quality standards.

### **Definition of the target group**

Postdocs at Forschungszentrum Jülich are defined as individuals who have completed their doctorate, currently find themselves in the phase of attaining further qualifications, and are usually employed on a fixed-term contract. They are active in the field of research and possibly also in teaching and the transfer of knowledge, while also contributing scientific value through their direct work on research issues.

### **Conditions for postdocs**

The range of scientific expertise and overall success in science at Forschungszentrum Jülich is based on impulses provided in part by new scientists. Fixed-term employment contracts are therefore an important part of Jülich's personnel policy. They ensure that opportunities are given to young scientists of every generation and also encourage a change of institution, which is often beneficial to an individual's scientific career. As a rule, we believe that contract periods should be no shorter than two years. The duration of a contract is dependent on the resources and requirements of the institutes and the postdocs and should be determined on an individual basis in accordance with statutory regulations and the provisions of collective agreements.

Forschungszentrum Jülich supports the notion that postdocs establish their own scientific profiles. The independent scientific work of the postdocs within the institutes and their programmes forms the basis for them to do so. They are provided with supervision and support from their superiors<sup>1</sup>. The rules of good scientific practice form the foundation for the work of all scientists at Forschungszentrum Jülich.

Forschungszentrum Jülich recognizes the important role played by postdocs in providing guidance and transferring knowledge to students and doctoral researchers. Postdocs should be given the necessary scope by their superiors to fulfil this task.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term superior here can refer to an organizational head or an immediate advisor.

In order to provide young researchers with a comprehensive range of qualification opportunities, Jülich offers a host of special training programmes that are adapted to each step on the career ladder. In addition to scientific expertise, we therefore also promote the acquisition of soft skills tailored to each scientist's individual career plans.

Forschungszentrum Jülich is aware of the special challenges facing women scientists and thus considers the implementation of equal opportunities an important task.

In order to reconcile work and family life, we pursue a family-friendly corporate policy that permits models for flexible working hours and includes a variety of advisory and support services. This ensures that postdocs are supported in the best possible way in their efforts to combine high scientific requirements with their family commitments.

Forschungszentrum Jülich also looks to accommodate international postdocs and their individual requirements. Both they and their families are therefore offered support in the integration process.

### **Central point of contact**

The Career Center is the central point of contact for postdocs. It informs, supports, refers and advises all postdocs carrying out research at Forschungszentrum Jülich.

### **Network and visibility**

The visibility of a postdoc's own work plays a crucial role in establishing a profile on national and international platforms. For this reason, participation in conferences is enabled and encouraged by superiors. Scientific prizes, grants, and the acquisition of third-party funds also contribute significantly to the reputation of an early-career scientist. We therefore actively support scientists in their applications for prizes, awards, grants, and third-party funding.

The regular communication and forwarding of information concerning calls for proposals and funding opportunities, for example, is an important component of support for young scientists at Jülich. For this purpose, we make use of communications channels tailored to specific target groups. In addition, Forschungszentrum Jülich also hosts information events on funding possibilities and career opportunities which also help to expand a postdoc's network. In order to ensure postdocs are also given the opportunity to communicate with Jülich in a structured manner, and as a quality control measure for these guidelines, we regularly survey the young scientists with respect to their wishes and requirements.

In addition to expanding their international network, we also recommend that postdocs network with their fellow postdocs at Jülich both within and outside of their area of expertise in order to exchange experiences and best-practice solutions as well as representing the interests of their field.

In order to ensure that postdocs are appropriately represented in the decision-making process at Forschungszentrum Jülich, their participation on various Jülich committees is viewed as important. They should be provided with the necessary freedom to do so by their superiors.

## **Career planning and establishing key scientific responsibilities**

In order to start planning their careers at an early stage, we recommend that postdocs make a decision with respect to the direction of their future careers in the first qualification phase (one to four years after completing a doctorate). Postdocs can make use of the support services offered at Jülich at their own initiative and in coordination with their superiors.

We recommend the creation of a personal development plan shortly after postdocs join Forschungszentrum Jülich so as to highlight the career opportunities open to them. In the personal development plan, postdocs and their superiors outline what objectives are to be targeted with respect to working activities and medium-term career prospects as well as what expertise will be required to this end. Personal development activities which help in achieving the development objectives are also agreed on at this stage.

Furthermore, we recommend that a postdoc's key scientific responsibilities are defined shortly after taking up work at Jülich. In doing so, the duration, content, and conditions, as well as the qualifications required for these responsibilities should be agreed on between postdocs and their superiors and documented in writing.

The objectives, measures, and prospects, as well as the written agreements with respect to the key scientific responsibilities are then considered and altered where necessary in an annual discussion between postdocs and their superiors.

The further prospects of a postdoc at Forschungszentrum Jülich are clarified and documented – if necessary with the aid of the personal development plan – six months before the end of the postdoc's contract. This helps to ensure a far-sighted approach to fixed-term working contracts. In the case of a long-term perspective of the postdoc at Forschungszentrum Jülich, the personal development plan supports the intention of Forschungszentrum Jülich to follow transparent criteria for the appointment of permanent positions. As a permanent contract is often not a possibility for many postdocs, they should look outside of Forschungszentrum Jülich when planning their careers.

In addition to discussions with superiors, overarching career counselling services for individuals, offered by the Career Center, are a great support in the orientation, advancement, and active planning of a career. The central career counselling services are available for all postdocs to make use of at their own initiative. The subjects discussed are then combined with the regular talks held between postdocs and superiors.