



SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

MAX PLANCK POSTDOC
PROGRAM

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR
SUPERVISORS



The Max Planck Postdoc Program at a Glance

The Max Planck Postdoc Program is designed to attract the world's most talented scientists to the postdoctoral phase, and aims to support and develop these talents in their respective career phases. The Program combines several components designed to enhance the careers of its participants, including a minimum contract period of three years (with the possibility of extension), career development workshops and coaching, offered through the Planck Academy, and a mentoring program, in which postdocs are supported by a second mentor in addition to their supervisor. In addition, the Program offers these supervision guidelines, which reflect and complement the [Guidelines for the Postdoc Stage in the Max Planck Society](#)¹, to clarify expectations and responsibilities of both the supervisor and postdoctoral researcher (Guidelines for the mentors are provided [here](#)).

To provide the best possible support for the research and career development of postdoctoral researchers, the role of the supervisor and the researcher must be clearly defined. Within the Postdoc Program, supervisors are supposed to support postdoctoral researchers in their research (details see 1.1), in their well-being (see 1.2), in communication and conflict resolution (see 1.3), and career development (see 3.4).

The Institutes (MPI) of the Max Planck Society provide postdocs with an excellent working environment, and thus optimal conditions for the development of their scientific profile. The Max Planck Society is strongly committed to supporting early career scientists, and therefore special emphasis is placed on the postdoc's personal scientific development, e.g. by supporting independent research and by conferring responsibilities (see 3.1. to 3.7.)

For supervisors, participation in the Max Planck Postdoc Program has several advantages, including a broader, global reach of postdoc position advertisements, an online application platform that facilitates easy access and evaluation of applications, and the development of their own supervisory skills within a specially tailored program.

The following guidelines are meant to provide additional information for supervisors engaged in the Max Planck Postdoc Program.

¹ <https://www.mpg.de/guidelines-postdocs>



General Guidelines for Supervisors within the Max Planck Postdoc Program

1. Role of the Supervisor

The more general principles and integration of the researcher include the provision of access to research equipment, resources, facilities, and/or fieldwork that enables and facilitates researchers to access the necessary information and resources required for their research activities. This includes access to background information and results needed for their research, as well as access to all necessary information at the beginning of the postdoctoral phase. Equal treatment of researchers, including those with special needs, must be ensured in order to provide equal opportunities in the field of research.

The following are tasks and responsibilities of the supervisor:

1.1. Research support

- a. Encourage the researcher to acquire academic, technical, and transferable skills.
- b. Provide support, guidance, and constructive feedback to the researcher on the research and the standard expected.
- c. Monitor and assess the progression of the research and regularly provide feedback on it.
- d. Develop jointly with the researcher, regularly review and promote the implementation of a career development plan throughout the postdoctoral phase.
- e. Support the researcher in the identification of an appropriate second mentor (either internal or external to the Max Planck Society) and support (at a minimum) annual meetings between the researcher and the mentor.
- f. Support the researcher to engage in the mandatory Career Workshop within the first two years of their appointment and encourage the researcher to take advantage of career coaching and other Planck Academy offers throughout the duration of their contract as appropriate.
- g. Provide the conditions for the researcher to achieve autonomy, gain management experience, and learn to conduct independent research.
- h. Provide counselling and support on career development and information on different career paths or ensure the researcher has access to this support.
- i. Actively support the researcher in defining a current and prospective work plan to match future research and professional ambitions.
- j. Support the networking opportunities, inside and outside academia, enhancing the researcher's access to global knowledge, experiences, and key scientists in the field or other relevant players.

1.2. Well-being of the researcher²

- a. Serve as a role model for the researcher by performing research with integrity and high ethical standards.
- b. Support the researcher in overcoming possible hurdles and suggest alternative solutions to the problems.
- c. Direct the researcher towards institutional/social support mechanisms when necessary.

² See also the [Max Planck Postdoc Program Mentoring Guidelines](#)



- d. Raise awareness of the need to ensure the well-being of the researcher, explaining the possible problems that may arise during the different stages of the research career, and informing the researcher about available support systems, including for mental health.
- e. Provide excellent working conditions and promote an inclusive, supportive work culture.
- f. Enable flexible, family-friendly working conditions.

1.3. Communication and conflict resolution

- a. Ensure a regular, clear, and open communication, that provides clarity and consistency regarding mutual expectations (e.g., frequency of meetings).
- b. Ensure a coherent and complementary approach in joint supervision/mentoring with the second mentor.
- c. Agree with the researcher, from the outset, on a common approach in case of disagreements or conflict between them and inform the researcher about existing institutional conflict resolution mechanisms.
- d. Refer the researcher to the relevant communication channels in case of persistent problems or complaints that cannot be addressed or resolved through internal conflict resolution procedures.

2. Role of the Postdoctoral Researcher

The role of the postdoctoral researcher is to conduct independent research under the leadership of their superiors (without extensive administrative or personnel management duties) and to contribute to the development of their field through their research. They can use this freedom to identify a field of science in which they can distinguish themselves internationally through original contributions. Postdocs exhibit particularly high commitment and dedication as this phase is decisive for their future careers.

The following are tasks and responsibilities of the postdoctoral researcher:

2.1. Research

- a. Manage and sustain progress according to the agreed research plan and follow their career development plan.
- b. Acquire academic, technical, and transferable skills.
- c. Prepare for regular monitoring, assessment, and feedback on the progress of the research.
- d. Develop, together with the supervisor/mentor, a postdoctoral career development plan that is periodically reviewed and whose implementation is encouraged.
- e. Participate in mandatory Career Workshop within first two years of appointment.
- f. Engage with Planck Academy research and career development offers, including career coaching.
- g. Identify second mentor (with support of supervisor) and meet with them at least once per year.
- h. Achieve autonomy and gain management experience.
- i. Engage in collaborative and interdisciplinary research efforts.
- j. Disseminate research results effectively.
- k. Contribute to the academic community and societal impact.



2.2. Well-being

- a. Communicate concerns, uncertainties, and problems, whether research-related or personal, to the supervisor as early as possible.
- b. Commit to maintaining a healthy work-life balance and personal well-being.
- c. Do your part in creating and maintaining an inclusive, supportive work culture for all.

2.3. Communication and conflict resolution

- a. Ensure a clear and open communication with the supervisor and mentor, providing clarity and consistency regarding mutual expectations (e.g. frequency of meetings).
- b. Keep the supervisor informed of the progress of the research, providing relevant information and data related to it.
- c. Make use of the relevant communication channels in case of persistent problems or complaints that cannot be addressed or solved through the internal conflict resolution procedures.

3. Role of institution

The Institutes (MPI) of the Max Planck Society provide postdocs with optimal conditions for the development of their scientific profiles. However, the postdoctoral phase is limited in time, and only a minority will eventually attain leading academic positions. Therefore, this career stage generally entails a high degree of career uncertainty, which can often lead to promising talents leaving academic research. Among these are many more women than men, resulting in a preferential drop-out of highly qualified women scientists from academic careers.

It is important during this career stage to clearly communicate expectations regarding research performance, to support postdocs in achieving their personal goals for further qualification, and to provide regular career advice. Such advice should also include guidance on the wide range of job opportunities outside the realm of academic research. Thus, the Institute and Max Planck Society as a whole provide training, guidance and implement mandatory reviews to ensure researchers receive this feedback and support.

3.1. Status Review and career development meetings

Within the Postdoc Program, the supervisor(s) and the postdoctoral researcher should have an annual meeting each year to discuss and evaluate the development of their research and career.

Additionally it is mandatory for all postdocs, inside and outside the Max Planck Postdoc Program, that a Status Review occurs no later than the fourth year after the start of the first postdoctoral position (even if the first position was held outside the Max Planck Society). The goal of the Status Review is to realistically assess the researcher's own development and prospects of success in relation to the career objectives and to develop alternative career prospects, if necessary. If it is planned for a postdoc to work in a time-limited position for longer than four years after commencement of their first postdoc position, the review is mandatory.



More information on the status review is available on the [Guidelines for the Postdoc Stage in the Max Planck Society](#)³.

3.2. General principles and integration of the researcher

- a. Provide researchers with all necessary information at the beginning of their postdoctoral phase (relevant services, availability of training, helpdesks for administrative questions, local networks, communication rules, and local/national social rules and welfare benefits).
- b. Raise awareness of existing documents or codes of ethics and research integrity in the institution.
- c. Provide a safe, equitable, and constructive working environment for researchers.
- d. Ensure access to the background and results needed for research activities.
- e. Maintain the highest standards of diversity and inclusion, and continuously work towards achieving gender equality.
- f. Ensure equal treatment of researchers with special needs and provide them with equal opportunities in the research field.
- g. Raise awareness of existing code of conduct within the institute and/or the Max Planck Society.

More information in the [Code of Conduct](#)⁴ and the [Diversity Understanding](#)⁵ of the Max Planck Society

3.3. Research support

- a. Provide training for researchers on transferable skills and recognize these skills.
- b. Where possible, offer access to institutional training programs to the researchers.

3.4. Career development

- a. Provide appropriate career services for researchers, as well as information on career paths, inside and outside academia.
- b. Support the networking opportunities, inside and outside academia, enhancing the researchers' access to global knowledge, experiences and key scientists in the field or other relevant players.

3.5. Mentoring and well-being of the researchers⁶

- a. Provide support and guidance mechanisms and services for researchers and supervisors.
- b. Create a healthy, inclusive environment for all researchers to carry out their work and encourage their integration in the research group and community.
- c. Ensure a healthy work-life balance (e.g. working hours).
- d. Raise awareness on the growing problem of mental health issues for researchers, properly monitor them and address potential issues.
- e. Provide inclusive, high quality services, taking into account all aspects of accessibility and adjustments required for researchers with special needs.
- f. Enable flexible, family-friendly working conditions.

³ <https://www.mpg.de/guidelines-postdocs>

⁴ https://max.mpg.de/Career/Planck-Academy/Documents/Code%20of%20Conduct_VEn.pdf

⁵ <https://max.mpg.de/Career/Documents/MPG-Diversitaetsverstaendnis-DE+EN.pdf>

⁶ See also the Max Planck Postdoc Program Mentoring Guidelines (add link as soon as available).



3.6. Supervision management and conflict resolution

- a. Recognize the work of the supervisor and the mentor and take that work into account in their evaluation.
- b. Develop and sustain anti-discrimination procedures and training for supervisors and mentors.
- c. Ensure transparent conflict resolution procedures.
- d. Provide the researcher with the relevant communication channels in case of persistent problems or complaints that cannot be addressed or solved through the internal conflict resolution procedures.

3.7. Training and professional development for supervisors

The host institution should offer the opportunity for continuous, high-quality professional development, and should provide supervisors with sufficient resources that match their responsibilities in dealing with researchers, including aspects such as pedagogical methods, harassment, research ethics, mentoring, communication, and career advice.