

Principles for Supporting Postdoctoral Researchers in the Orientation and Establishment Phase

Postdoctoral researchers in the orientation and establishment phase make a vital contribution to research at TU Dortmund University. At the same time, they face challenges such as establishing their academic profile, identifying medium- and long-term career prospects, and balancing work and family responsibilities. TU Dortmund University is committed to making these career stages more predictable and attractive – alongside integration into an excellent academic environment – through transparency, regular feedback, individual guidance, and appropriate support measures, thereby fostering the sustainable development of researchers at different career stages.

1. Regular Exchange

Regular meetings between supervisors and postdoctoral researchers shall take place throughout the duration of the employment contract.

At the beginning of the appointment, the anticipated long-term career objective following completion of the doctorate should be discussed in order to align the forthcoming career phase as effectively as possible with the individual's professional aspirations. Topics include motivation, career goals, and mutual expectations regarding the collaboration, which provide the basis for decisions on issues such as the frequency of meetings and the appropriate balance between individual responsibility and supervisory support.

Subsequent regular meetings should address topics such as progress toward career goals, including research progress, changes to projects, presentation of research results within the academic community, any need to adjust support measures, and the reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities.

2. Written Agreement

In addition to recording essential information such as contact persons, a written agreement may define the roles, rights, and responsibilities of all parties involved and provide a structured framework for supervision and support.

3. Working Conditions

Access to research infrastructure, professional development opportunities, and other resources, as well as sufficient time for independent research, should be supported to enable researchers to achieve their individual qualification and career objectives.

4. Good Research Practice

The principles of good research practice, appropriate research data management, and applicable safety regulations shall be consistently observed in daily research activities. Measures for interdisciplinary and discipline-specific quality assurance, including the promotion of an open culture of learning from mistakes, are an integral part of the orientation and establishment phase.

5. Promotion of Academic Independence

An appropriate balance between guidance and personal responsibility must be maintained to foster the increasing independence of postdoctoral researchers during the orientation and establishment phase. Postdoctoral researchers are entitled to appropriate opportunities for participation in academic decision-making.

Their individual achievements should be appropriately recognized and acknowledged, for example in publications, grant applications, responsibility for independent budget accounts, and teaching. They should be enabled and supported in independently acquiring third-party research funding and conducting their own externally funded projects.

Postdoctoral researchers who meet the criteria for academic independence, for example, by pursuing their own research agenda with an independent budget and leading their own research group, should be entrusted with the supervision and examination of doctoral candidates.

6. Responsibilities of Supervisors

Supervisors serve as role models. They should be recognized for the demanding and responsible nature of their role and supported through professional development opportunities and leadership training.

In addition to providing academic guidance, supervisors support their staff through general career advice, training, and leadership. Supervisors should be aware of their dual responsibility: to provide leadership while simultaneously fostering the growing independence of postdoctoral researchers.

Their approach should be constructive and supportive, with communication characterized by openness, respect, and appreciation.

Abuse of power and exploitation of dependency relationships must be prevented through appropriate organizational measures, both within individual research units, for example, by agreeing on qualification objectives and reviewing them regularly, involving additional academic mentors, or ensuring transparent decision-making regarding the allocation of resources, and at the level of institutional leadership.

7. Responsibilities of Postdoctoral Researchers

Postdoctoral researchers in the orientation and establishment phase likewise contribute to successful collaboration by conscientiously fulfilling their official duties, proactively keeping their supervisors informed about the progress of their work, and notifying them in a timely manner of changes to their planning or of extended absences.

In particular, supervisors and researchers should jointly discuss how individual activities can be integrated synergistically into the work of the research group as a whole.

Postdoctoral researchers assume responsibility for both their assigned tasks and their own career development by taking an active role within their working environment and the broader academic community.

8. Career Development and Staff Development

Supervisors support the career development of postdoctoral researchers by facilitating their integration into the academic community and helping them build professional networks—for example, through participation in research colloquia, conferences, international research stays, discussions about future career steps, and teaching experience.

Supervisors should enable and encourage appropriate development of both disciplinary expertise and transferable skills through existing staff development programs and other support measures designed for different career paths. Transitions between career stages should be actively supported.

Different career trajectories—including careers outside academia and alternatives to a professorship—are to be valued equally. Mentoring programs provide additional support.

9. Conduct in Cases of Conflict

In the event of conflicts, postdoctoral researchers may seek advice and support from the Ombudspersons of TU Dortmund University or from the Ombuds Committee for Research Integrity in Germany by the DFG.