

## **NUI Maynooth Charter on Postdoctoral Research**

### **Characterisation of a Postdoctoral Research Appointment**

A postdoctoral appointment is recognized as an important intermediate phase in career development where the primary purpose is for the holder of a PhD or equivalent doctorate to undertake high level research as part of research and scholarly training leading to a wide range of careers in academia, industry or government.

The Commission of the European Communities has adopted in 2005 a Recommendation on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in order to contribute to the development of an attractive, open and sustainable European labour market for researchers, where the framework conditions allow for recruiting and retaining high quality researchers in environments conducive to effective performance and productivity.

NUI Maynooth aims to comply with this recommendation through the development and maintenance of a supportive research environment and working culture, where individuals and research groups are valued, encouraged and supported, and provided with the necessary tangible and intangible support to enable them to fulfil their objectives and tasks.

This document sets out details of the organisation of expectations and working and training conditions in the postdoctoral stage of the researcher's career. This includes guidelines for recruitment methods and career evaluation/appraisal systems in order to develop a transparent, open, equal and internationally accepted system for recruitment and career development as a prerequisite for a genuine European labour market for researchers.

### **General Principles upheld by NUIM as Employer**

#### **Recognition of the profession**

All postdoctoral researchers employed by NUIM will be recognised as professionals and be treated accordingly.

#### **Non-discrimination**

The NUIM Equality Policy applies which states that NUIM will not unlawfully discriminate against any employee on grounds of age, disability, membership of the Traveller community, marital status, family status, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

#### **Research environment**

NUIM will endeavour to ensure that a stimulating research or research training environment is created which offers appropriate equipment, facilities and opportunities, including for remote collaboration over research networks, and that all relevant regulations concerning health and safety in research are observed.

## Contracts of employment

Postdoctoral research positions are almost always of a fixed-term nature since they inextricably linked with external or internal funding provided for a very specific research purpose. NUIM will endeavour to ensure that the performance of postdoctoral researchers is not undermined by instability of employment contracts. A clear and mutual understanding at the outset between NUIM (as employer) and the postdoctoral employee as to the purpose and expectations for the employment is central here. NUIM will abide by the principles and terms laid down in the *EU Directive on Fixed-Term Work* and the Fixed Term Workers Act (2003). This act aims to prevent fixed-term employees from being treated less favourably than comparable permanent employees, to prevent abuse arising from the use of successive fixed-term contracts, to improve access to training for fixed-term employees and to ensure that fixed-term employees are informed about available permanent jobs.

## Supervision and mentoring

All postdoctoral researchers will have a supervisor or mentor recognised by the university. The responsibility of supervisors and mentors will include providing support and guidance for the professional development of researchers. The supervisor/mentor must be sufficiently expert in a relevant research area, have the time, knowledge, experience, expertise and commitment to be able to offer the researcher appropriate support and provide for regular progress and review procedures, as well as the necessary feedback mechanisms.

## Continuing Professional Development

Postdoctoral Researchers will have access to the same opportunities for continuing professional development courses at NUIM that are available to all other staff. This will include advice on career development. These measures will be regularly assessed for their accessibility, take-up and effectiveness in improving competencies, skills and employability.

## Intellectual Property Rights

NUIM will ensure that postdoctoral researchers can reap the benefits of the exploitation (if any) of their R&D results through appropriate protection of Intellectual Property Rights. The NUIM policy on Inventions and Patents applies.

## Funding and salaries

NUIM will seek to ensure, insofar as it is within the University's control, that postdoctoral researchers enjoy fair and attractive conditions of funding and/or salaries with appropriate access to social security provisions (including sickness and parental benefits, pension rights and unemployment benefits) in accordance with existing national legislation. These salary conditions should reflect the level of responsibilities associated with the post.

## Value of mobility

NUIM recognises and seeks to promote the value of geographical, intersectoral, inter- and trans-disciplinary and virtual mobility as well as mobility between the public and private sector as an important means of enhancing knowledge and professional development at any stage of a postdoctoral researcher's career.

## Workplace disputes

NUIM will ensure that postdoctoral researchers have access to confidential assistance in resolving work-related conflicts, disputes and grievances, both formal and informal, with the aim of promoting fair and equitable treatment within the institution and improving the overall quality of the working environment. Details can be provided by the Human Resources Office.

## Orientation

It is the responsibility of the Human Resource Office to ensure that newly appointed Postdoctoral Researchers are informed about NUIM policies and procedures, sources of information within NUIM, support and services available. The induction events on offer to all staff will be available to postdoctoral researchers.

## **Obligations on Postdoctoral Researchers**

Postdoctoral Researchers have certain obligations to their supervisor or mentor, the laboratory or grouping in which they are working, the Department/Institute with which they are associated, the grantor whose funds support them, and the University. These obligations include but are not limited to: (i) the conscientious and professional discharge to high standards of their research and other post responsibilities; (ii) conformity with high ethical standards in research, including the European Charter for Researchers; (iii) collegial conduct towards coworkers, members of the research group and department; (iv) compliance with all applicable University policies.

## Ethical principles

Postdoctoral researchers should adhere to the recognised ethical practices and fundamental ethical principles appropriate to their discipline(s) as well as to ethical standards as documented in the NUIM policy on Ethical Conduct of Research.

## Professional responsibility

Postdoctoral researchers should make every effort to ensure that their research is relevant to society and does not duplicate research previously carried out elsewhere. They must avoid plagiarism of any kind and abide by the principle of intellectual property and joint data ownership in the case of research carried out in collaboration with a supervisor(s) and/or other researchers.

## Accountability

Postdoctoral Researchers should be aware that they are accountable towards their employers and funders as well as, on more ethical grounds, towards society as a whole. In particular, researchers funded by public funds are also accountable for the efficient use of taxpayers' money. Consequently, they should adhere to the principles of sound, transparent and efficient financial management and co-operate with any authorised audits of their research, whether undertaken by their supervisors or funders or by the university.

Ensuring the integrity of research undertaken is a priority. Methods of collection and analysis, the outputs and, where applicable, details of the data should be open to internal and external

scrutiny, whenever necessary and as requested by the university, funder or other appropriate authorities.

### Good practice in research

Postdoctoral Researchers should at all times adopt safe working practices, in line with national legislation, including taking the necessary precautions for health and safety and for recovery from information technology disasters, e.g. by preparing proper back-up strategies. They should also be familiar with the current national legal requirements regarding data protection and confidentiality protection requirements, and undertake the necessary steps to fulfil them at all times.

### Dissemination, exploitation of results

All postdoctoral researchers should seek to ensure, in compliance with their contractual arrangements, and as appropriate given the details of the specific circumstances and programme of research undertaken, that the results of their research are disseminated and exploited, e.g. published, communicated, transferred into other research settings or, if appropriate, commercialised.

### Relation with supervisors and/or mentors

Postdoctoral Researchers should seek to establish a structured and regular relationship with their supervisor(s) and/or mentors so as to take full advantage of their relationship with them. This includes keeping records of all work progress and research findings, obtaining feedback by means of reports and seminars, applying such feedback and working in accordance with agreed schedules, milestones, deliverables and/or research outputs.

### Continuing Professional Development

Postdoctoral Researchers should seek opportunities to continually improve themselves by regularly updating and expanding their skills and competencies. This may be achieved by a variety of means including, but not restricted to, formal training, workshops, conferences and e-learning.

### Participation in decision-making structures

NUIM recognises it as desirable that postdoctoral researchers be represented in the relevant information, consultation and decision-making structures of the university, so as to protect and promote their individual and collective interests as professionals and to actively contribute to the workings of the institution. In particular, there will be postdoctoral researcher representation on the Research Committee of Academic Council. A forum for postdoctoral researchers will facilitate this participation.

### Teaching

The primary purpose of a postdoctoral research appointment is to carry out a defined research programme. Nonetheless a postdoctoral researcher may, under certain

circumstances consistent with the good management of the University, undertake additional activities, such as limited teaching, e.g., for purposes of training, gaining experience or career development. Any such activities should only be undertaken with the approval of the supervisor or mentor, but such approval will not be unreasonably withheld. Such additional activities may generally be pursued and make up to 10% of the researcher's working time. Opportunities for such additional activities may be offered by the University, but there is no requirement or onus on any researcher that they undertake such activities. In general, such additional activities will be remunerated separately to the research employment contract.

Suitably experienced postdoctoral researchers may act as part of a supervisory team for research students provided the team is led by a permanent member of academic staff.

## Recruitment

NUIM is committed to adherence to the principles set out in the European Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers when recruiting and appointing postdoctoral researchers.

## Career Progression

The reality of all postdoctoral positions is that the duration and salary level of the appointment depends on funding made available by an external body for a specific research programme and for a limited time. Whilst the conditions attached to postdoctoral positions are therefore somewhat variable, and whilst a postdoctoral research position is an intermediate and transitory career phase, NUI Maynooth recognises several general levels to a postdoctoral research progression based on experience, competencies required and degree of responsibility attached to the post. These are intended for guidance rather than as definitive descriptors of the role.

### Level 1 – Post Doctoral Researcher

During the first level of the researcher career path, the newly or recently qualified postdoctoral researcher will be supervised or mentored by a Principal Investigator (PI), either one who has secured funding for the position or who is named as a mentor on an individual fellowship that the Post Doctoral researcher has secured.

This is a level where the researcher will contribute to the project under which they are funded and further develop both their research and practical skills. A particular emphasis during this stage should be placed on developing transferable skills (e.g. skills also relevant for enterprise- or public sector-related jobs). International experience in institutions/enterprise abroad is highly desirable here and would be strongly encouraged.

### Level 2 – Senior Post Doctoral Researcher

The second level on the researcher career path is that of Senior Post Doctoral Researcher. The Senior Researcher would normally have completed four or more years of research experience, following achievement of their doctorate and to have demonstrated the capacity to develop as an independent researcher. The Senior Postdoctoral Researcher will typically remain under the guidance of a PI who has secured funding for the position. The Senior Postdoctoral Researcher would have a track record of peer reviewed publications, might assist with supervision of postgraduate students and be involved in project management. This researcher could be expected to apply for external research funding on behalf of the Principal Investigator who would act as their mentor and facilitate access to the research infrastructure.

### Level 3 – NUI Maynooth Research Fellowship

A limited number of competitive externally funded research positions may be available following an open, transparent and competitive selection process based on research excellence and merit (e.g., Science Foundation Ireland President of Ireland Young Researcher Award (PIYRA) or Starting Investigator Research Grant).

The Research Fellow would be expected to secure their own independent, external funding whilst still being associated with a Principal Investigator who would act as their mentor and facilitate access to the research infrastructure.

### External Fellowships

It is also the case that there are a number of sources of prestigious competitive fellowships that offer salaries and stipends at various (and sometimes relatively low) stipend levels. These include IRCHSS and IRCSET fellowships and EU Marie Curie Fellowships. Such fellowships may be held at any stage of a postdoctoral research career.

### Salary/Stipend Level

Each level of the career progression is associated with a guideline salary scale to be used in applications to funding bodies, and which may be amended from time to time by the university. The salary offered for any given position, however, will be based on availability of funding from the external source.

### Progression from one level to another

It is not envisaged that progression from one level to another would take place in the course of a single funded project. Rather, an application for funding would be made for, say, a senior postdoctoral researcher (level 2) for three years, and an appointment would be made at that level. For an individual researcher to progress from one postdoctoral level to another requires that an open recruitment competition or a distinct and formal evaluation of performance takes place. Such a formal evaluation would be appropriate if an individual researcher is named on a particular proposal for external funding and would normally take place within a department and involve the research supervisor and the head of department.

### Application for Grants as independent investigators

Postdoctoral researchers may apply for external funding as an Independent Investigator provided:

- the application has the support and approval of the supervisor/mentor, and
- the new funding sought will not impede or detract from any current obligations;
- the duration of the current employment contract extends past the expected end date of the grant sought, or
- the grant sought will provide salary for the postdoctoral investigator for the duration of the new project.

### Review of Charter

This charter will be reviewed not later than 28<sup>th</sup> February 2014.