

VIB Postdoc Policy

Preamble

The postdoctoral scientists, who make up for one third of VIB researchers, are valued members of the VIB research community. VIB aims to provide a rich environment for postdoctoral training through excellent research, a diverse scientific community, the guidance of the supervisors, training opportunities, state-of-the-art core facilities, and other support provided.

A postdoctoral position is a transitional position beyond the doctoral level in preparation for an independent scientific career, a role in industry, or many other career paths. After having obtained a doctoral degree, the scientist is appointed for a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training with the aim to significantly broaden their professional skills and expertise. The postdoctoral position helps them to define their future career path in an academic setting or in the external labour market.

With this policy, VIB sets out the basic principles of the postdoctoral journey within the institute. Each new postdoctoral candidate should be fully informed about this postdoctoral policy by providing this document at the moment of discussing the contract.

Article 1. Aim of the postdoctoral policy

By establishing a policy, VIB

- creates a flexible and positive framework within which each individual postdoctoral scientist can develop their talent and career, and conduct outstanding research,
- ensures transparency and clarity for all parties involved,
- clarifies the mutual expectations and responsibilities, for both the postdoctoral scientist and the supervisor,
- encourages supervisors to discuss future career options on a regular and timely basis,

thus setting up for optimal collaboration and improving the further career prospects of postdoctoral scientists.

Article 2. Postdoc recruitment

VIB aims to attract great postdoctoral scientists. All postdoctoral vacancies are open to international talents and are by default posted on the VIB website, Indeed and Nature jobs and on the website of the partner university.

Depending on the research field, they are also posted on dedicated websites.

For each position a hiring manager is appointed who will assess the applications and invite the best candidates for online or live meetings. This is mostly the supervisor or research manager of the research center. Once this hiring process leads to a final candidate, the Human Resources services from VIB or the partner university will proceed with an offer, followed by an employment contract (VIB or partner university) or stipend (partner university).

Article 3. Duration of the postdoctoral career at VIB

3.1 Default duration of postdoctoral appointments

Postdoctoral appointments are by default fixed-term appointments. VIB aims to provide 2 or 3-year contracts. Depending on the circumstances, a shorter appointment of minimum one year may be considered, in discussion with the candidate, in case of a specific project. Postdoctoral appointments can be renewed based on satisfactory performance and the availability of research funding. Appointments can be made through contracts at VIB, the partner university, a personal grant or a combination between the different possibilities. The legal aspects of consecutive contracts are handled by the HR services of VIB and the respective partner universities.

The total time spent in postdoctoral research appointments at VIB is dependent on how the postdocs wish to orient their career after the postdoctoral phase.

During the postdoc assignment, the postdoctoral scientist and the supervisor should have regular feedback moments during which they discuss the career aspirations of the postdoctoral scientist. These discussions should clarify how the next years at VIB will be filled in.

This can be the achievement of an academic career in a university or research institute. In that case, the postdoc will further build on their scientific output and prepare for applications for group leader or other scientific managerial positions outside or inside VIB. Their group leader should play an important role, and they can be assisted by VIB's career guidance initiatives. Further extensions are possible, on a case-to-case basis, e.g. to finish a paper or in case of long application periods for academic positions. Regular feedback meetings should be held to evaluate if and how the postdoctoral researcher can achieve their career goals.

The postdoc may rather aim to pursue a career in an industrial or other environment. In this case, they can be assigned to work full-time on industrial projects or in the framework of VIB start-ups and will be officially appointed as 'innovation scientist'. The ultimate goal of the innovation scientists is to obtain a position in industry or other environments of the outside labour market. The length of this period is dependent on the goals and deadlines of the industrial projects they are working on. During this period the postdocs obtain relevant experience and enhance their employability. The VIB career guidance initiatives will support this process, and ensure that the innovation scientist develops the skills required for their career development. Mentorship initiatives can further support the transition of the postdoctoral researcher to industry.

In general, VIB aims to have postdoctoral assignments not exceeding 6 to 7 years.

In case this foreseen period would be exceeded, an agreement of the scientific director and the HR director of VIB is required, subject to acceptable justification.

3.2 Circumstances that may lead to an extension of this period

Certain circumstances may lead to an extension of the postdoctoral period, including but not limited to

- the birth of a child
 - o the birth mother is eligible for a contract extension of one year;
 - o the other parent is eligible for an extension of six months.
- illness or an accident with an absence of more than one month: in consultation with the supervisor, the appointment can be extended with the duration of the absence.
- special, individual circumstances leading to a significant reduction of research time such as due to the loss of a close family member or care of a sick family member; in this case a potential extension will be discussed with the supervisor and HR.
- Other requirements linked to the career progression of the postdoctoral researcher, e.g. finalisation of a project (such as revisions of a paper), or application for a permanent academic position, or starting grant. In this case, a potential extension will be discussed with the supervisor and HR.

Article 4. Salary (only for VIB pay roll)

A starting postdoctoral scientist who is appointed after completion of the PhD, will be paid in VIB-salary scale 'W2'. After three years in their postdoctoral career (VIB + elsewhere), the postdoctoral scientist moves to VIB salary scale "W3".

VIB wishes to offer an appropriate income level to all postdocs, irrespective of their basic funding channel. In case a postdoctoral scientist funded through an (international) grant does not reach the minimum income level of 70.000€ gross per year (or the net equivalent of a monthly gross salary of 5.000 €), a top-up should be added.

Special attention is given to postdocs who have obtained funding through EMBO and Marie-Sklodowska-Curie actions. They are paid according to the available funding and they also receive a top-up to align their total income with the postdocs whose funding is administered by the university.

In case a postdoctoral scientist stays at VIB after termination of these programs, they will be subject to the applicable VIB salary scales.

Article 5. Role of the postdoctoral scientists

5.1 Conducting research

Postdoctoral scientists conduct their research activities with significant autonomy and in close collaboration with the other members of their research group. They proactively take responsibility for the accomplishments of their postdoctoral assignments. They design and implement research activities

and apply for funding. Postdoctoral scientists comply with good laboratory practice, including the maintenance of research records and data. They detect the potential technology transfer activities of their research and report to their supervisor and VIB Innovation & Business. Postdoctoral scientists are aware of the VIB policy on intellectual property rights regarding research results. They adhere to the principles of correct data management and open science. They are expected to discuss research findings with their supervisor and avoid disclosures of confidential property information without the consent of the supervisor and/or VIB Innovation & Business. Postdoctoral scientists publish the results of their research in a conscientious and ethical manner. The expectations of the PI and research group regarding the postdoctoral scientist, should be clearly defined at the beginning of the contract and should take the seniority of the postdoc into consideration.

5.2 Professional development

Postdoctoral scientists are expected to proactively take charge of their careers and actively contribute to their career development. They are invited to make use of VIB's career support, establish a professional network, and exploit opportunities to gain experience that will qualify them for other positions inside and outside of VIB. During their appointment, postdoctoral scientists are encouraged to make their ambitions and expectations known to their supervisor. This will allow securing a timely transition towards an independent career and to acquire skills conducive to employment in a wide array of sectors. The postdoctoral scientists regularly (at least annually) discuss their activities and further career development with their supervisor. This discussion includes the current activities, the career prospects, the professional objectives, as well as the competences that need to be developed further. The discussion results in concrete agreements in an individual plan, that are followed up and updated each year.

5.3 Connection with the professional environment and the broader community

Postdoctoral scientists are expected to behave respectfully and conform to the applicable policies and rules. They should care for the facilities and equipment.

Postdoctoral scientists are encouraged to participate in the activities of the VIB postdoc community and to take care of their well-being and contribute to a positive working climate. They establish collaborations and links with the local as well as the international scientific community.

A template job description can be found in Attachment 1 (still to be drafted).

Article 6. Role of the supervisor (PI)

6.1 Conducting research

The supervisor treats their postdocs as colleagues who are launching their research careers. They create a safe learning and working climate for the postdoctoral researcher. They spark confidence to set up experiments and plan projects, as well as share concerns about data interpretation, or even the limits of their capacity. The supervisor guides, encourages and supports publication of the postdocs' research for the benefit of the lab and of the postdocs' professional development. (Co-)Authorship is timely and

openly discussed. They properly inform their postdocs about VIB's and the partner universities' policies on responsible and ethical research, about rules about conflict of interest and intellectual property. Clear expectations corresponding to the postdoc's seniority, defined at the start of the contract by the PI and research team, enable a healthy work relation, with defined goals.

6.2 Professional development

The supervisor arranges for regular meetings to ensure steady progress of the scientific work and offers constructive feedback at all levels (scientific work, behaviour, work ethics, communication style, ...). Postdocs are given due recognition for their contributions, e.g., as co-supervisors for (doctoral) research in the research group, or contributors to inventions and patents.

The supervisor offers maximum opportunities to the postdocs so they can further develop their CV and career. They discuss career opportunities on a regular basis (at least annually) and motivate the postdoc to participate in training, counselling, or other activities within the context of postdoctoral career development. At the moment of hiring, the supervisor gives a realistic view to the postdoctoral candidate of the (limited) possibility of a obtaining a PI position at VIB.

The supervisor guides their postdoctoral scientists during their appointment to enable a timely transition to an independent scientific career, by promoting visibility of the postdoctoral researcher, through for e.g. (Co)corresponding authorship positions or application to research project funding as co-supervisor.

They show empathy and are active and supportive in promoting the well-being of the postdoctoral scientists. This can be done through the regular feedback sessions and directing them to appropriate support systems within VIB and the partner universities if needed.

6.3 Connection with the professional environment and the broader community

The supervisor ensures that all lab members act ethically and respectfully.

Article 7. Support from VIB and the partner universities

7.1 Conducting research

VIB offers a stimulating and excellence-based research environment with state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. VIB also offers grant writing support through its grants office.

7.2 Professional development

VIB supports postdoctoral scientists arriving from abroad regarding their visa, and other administrative or logistical topics. VIB offers a flexible and diverse postdoc career framework that allows postdoctoral scientists to pursue their research interests and goals, supporting them to develop their skills and competencies. After 3 years of experience as 'Post-Doctoral Researcher' (W2) scientists evolve to the role of 'Senior Postdoctoral Researcher' (W3). The latter entails additional responsibilities within the research group and the skill sets that are to be developed. Among others, senior postdocs are expected to be specialists in a certain field of research and must be able to define autonomously a research theme

within the framework of the long-term strategy of the center, plan the research. In this role, they can supervise the daily work of several scientific or technical employees.

The institute aims to significantly broaden the professional skills and expertise of the postdoctoral scientists and thus help them to define their future career path in an academic setting or in the external labour market. VIB has an extensive training program that includes courses to expand scientific skills and knowledge as well as training in leadership, transferable skills, and bioinformatics. Career guidance sessions are offered individually or in a group setting and are guided by an external professional career coach. Further career guidance can be obtained through career days, company visits and other activities that are organized by the postdoc committee, VIB training, or the partner universities.

The possibility is offered to go to international conferences (in consultation with the supervisor).

7.3 Connection with the professional environment and the broader community

VIB supports the VIB postdoc committee to build and develop a strong inclusive community of VIB postdocs, providing an avenue to bring postdocs together to create a network and to share experiences.

It fosters the contacts with the alumni, to help postdocs to widen their professional network for instance during the joint VIB New Year reception.

Article 8. What to do if things are not going well

In case a postdoctoral scientist faces problems or difficulties, or if they feel to be subject to unrespectful behaviour, there are several ways to get support and guidance. Both VIB and the partner universities have policies on bullying and harassment, they can consult the confidential advisor at VIB and/or the dedicated ombuds people at the universities. VIB and the universities commit to take all complaints seriously and act upon them in a timely and transparent manner.

All further information can be found on: <https://home.vib.be/#/knowledge-base/collection/well-being-at-vib>.

Article 9. Effective date

This policy was adopted by the Directors Committee on 23 January 2024 and by the Board of Directors on 08 February 2024.

Policy

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Revision date: 48 months from effective date or if significant changes to the relevant legislation

Attachments

Attachment 1: Document history

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Document title and version	Document History Description of Revision	Effective Date
VIB Postdoc Policy, version 1.0	New Policy Author: Marijke Lein, HR Director	09 February 2024