

# Guidelines for the Postdoc Phase at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)

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## PREAMBLE

The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is the research university in the Helmholtz Association. KIT uniquely combines the traditions of a renowned technical university and a large-scale research facility. KIT offers scientist the extraordinary potential to network with each other across 125 institutes. To this effect, they use a unique scientific infrastructure in which KIT provides excellent support for young scientists with a variety of instruments to strengthen their profile.

As an indispensable pillar of the German science system, young scientists contribute significantly to research, teaching and innovation. In accordance with the overarching KIT 2025 strategy, KIT considers them to be of particular importance and supports them comprehensively, reliably and with high priority. In this regard, KIT supports its young scientists in their professional and personal development with excellent framework conditions, target-group-specific offers and advice on career paths in science as well as on career perspectives outside academic research. KIT's postdocs are thus ideally equipped to fill senior-level positions in science and the private sector in the future.

The following guidelines for the postdoctoral phase at KIT help establish transparency and reliability for postdoctoral researchers (hereinafter referred to as postdocs) and their superiors during a qualification phase important for the career. They are based on the overarching KIT 2025 strategy.<sup>1</sup> These guidelines apply to all postdocs, regardless of their source of funding.

## DEFINITION OF THE POSTDOC PHASE

Postdocs at KIT are scientists with a doctoral degree who work as scientists for a limited period of time of generally up to three years. According to the overarching KIT 2025 strategy, the postdoctoral phase at KIT can follow directly after the doctorate or after an already completed postdoctoral phase at another university or non-university institution. Postdocs conduct their own research under the direction or leadership of their superiors. Postdocs are highly qualified, professionally experienced scientists. They take personal responsibility for their research and career development and are supported therein by their superiors. Both postdocs and their superiors are equally responsible for the successful course of the postdoc phase.

In fact, the time after the doctorate is important for gaining further scientific qualifications as well as for getting better orientation in both the national and international scientific system. Moreover, the postdoc phase serves for making a decision as to whether pursue a further scientific career or to rather shift to a career elsewhere, for instance in the industry. In addition to completing research publications from the doctoral project, postdocs can use this career phase to identify a new scientific project and to familiarize themselves with it respectively. In accordance with their superiors, they develop a sustainable research agenda and seek to raise third party funding. The professional future of postdocs is shaped during the postdoc phase through the expansion of their non-technical skills, which are decisive for a career both within and outside academia.

Postdocs are expected to prove their scientific capabilities, deepen their technical and non-technical knowledge and skills, expand their professional networks, ideally gain additional international experience thanks to stays abroad and identify the professional goals that are desirable and feasible for them.

KIT supports its postdocs in all developments and decisions. A postdoc phase at KIT normally lasts three years. At the end of that period at the latest, the course of the postdoc's further career development within or outside KIT is defined. On the basis of a targeted planning discussion, the postdoc phase can be followed by either a temporary position (e.g. preparation of a Habilitation, application for a junior research

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<sup>1</sup> These „Guidelines for the Postdoc Phase at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)“ are based on the “Guidelines for the Postdoc Phase within the Helmholtz Association“ which were adopted by the Assembly of Members of the Helmholtz Association on April 18, 2018.

group leader position, project-related activity) or, in some cases, by a permanent<sup>2</sup> position at KIT.

## EXCELLENT FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

**Recruitment.** KIT aims to attract the best national and international young scientists by offering outstanding opportunities for young people who have studied and/or received their doctorate at KIT or elsewhere. Postdocs are selected in manifold ways at the national and international level. For this purpose, KIT institutes can make use of a wide range of personnel selection tools. KIT also stands for equal opportunities and diversity.

**Employment relationship.** Postdocs are either employed as academic or research staff or do research at KIT funded by an external scholarship. KIT offers all postdocs comprehensive access to the necessary infrastructure for their research, regardless of funding.

**Good leadership.** Superiors of KIT are aware of their responsibility for young scientists. Their duties of care are clearly regulated and an integral part of KIT's governance. In particular, postdocs at KIT are actively supported by their superiors in strengthening their scientific profile (participation in conferences, publications, own applications for third party funding, etc.). Postdocs regularly receive constructive feedback from their superiors regarding their research project and further career prospects, especially in science. In addition, KIT superiors allow postdocs a high degree of individual responsibility and scientific freedom. They encourage them to take on management tasks and gain teaching experience. Superiors of KIT live gender equality, are aware of the existence of unconscious biases and have skills in didactics, leadership and management.

**Support for postdocs.** The Karlsruhe House of Young Scientists (KHYS) is the central institution for the promotion of young scientists at KIT and is the contact point for all postdocs and their superiors of KIT. KHYS advises postdocs on career orientation and development, provides specific (mobility) offers tailored to their needs, advises them in conflict situations and promotes them in their career within and outside of academia. As soon as the decision for a career in science has been made, postdocs find further specific personnel development offers at the service unit (Dienstleistungseinheit; DE) Human Resources Development and Vocational Training (PEBA). In addition, they receive support in the acquisition of third party funds and in the coordination of research projects with the service unit Research Office (FOR). With regards to spin-offs and patent applications, postdocs get support from the service unit Innovation and Relationship Management (IRM).

**Good scientific practice.** KIT has established rules for good scientific practice in a regulation.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of their work at KIT, all scientists commit themselves to the observance of these rules. Especially postdocs carry responsibility for complying with the principles of good scientific practice for themselves, for the students and doctoral researchers they supervise, and for their subordinates. For this purpose they are supported and advised by the two Ombudspersons of KIT.<sup>4</sup>

**Reconciliation of private life and career.** In particular, KIT promotes the compatibility of family and academic career and is certified by an external audit as a "family-friendly university". Postdoctoral researchers often face the particular challenge of devoting themselves both to their scientific work at KIT and to their family life including childcare and/or care of dependent relatives. Various measures, such as flexible and family-friendly working hours, family-friendly scheduling of events as well as childcare services, are intended to provide parents with support and relief. The possibility of, among other things, reducing working hours and taking time off exists when dependent relatives are in need of care.

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<sup>2</sup> The topic is addressed in KIT's personnel development concept.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.sle.kit.edu/downloads/AmtlicheBekanntmachungen/2018\\_AB\\_032.pdf](http://www.sle.kit.edu/downloads/AmtlicheBekanntmachungen/2018_AB_032.pdf) (in German only)

<sup>4</sup> See <https://intranet.kit.edu/gute-wissenschaftliche-praxis.php> (in German only)

**Diversity and Equal Opportunities.** The realization of equal opportunities and the notion of diversity also and especially applies to young scientists. All KIT scientists can make maximum use of their scientific potential regardless of their origin, gender or socialization. KIT offers fair and transparent conditions and enables different life plans. KIT believes that the confluence of different cultures, nationalities and traditions enriches scientists in the postdoctoral phase and prepares them optimally for a (possibly international) scientific career. Superiors explicitly promote qualified female postdocs in their scientific career. They support them in strengthening their scientific profile, networks, and visibility in the scientific community.

## RESEARCH PROJECTS, QUALIFICATION GOALS AND CAREER GOALS

**Initial agreement.** At the beginning, postdocs and superiors agree on specific research and qualification goals. They develop these in a joint discussion and document the results in a suitable manner. The resulting individual development plan (including research and qualification steps) serves as a basis for future bilateral discussions.

**Regular professional exchange regarding scientific collaboration.** Discussions and/or exchanges on research progresses take regularly place between the postdocs and their superiors at KIT. Discussions can focus on the content and progress of the research project, on necessary thematic - and possibly methodological - adjustments, on the learning new techniques, on the utilization and dissemination of research results (publication strategy and authorship of publications, organization of events, active participation in conferences, workshops, patents etc.) as well as on general aspects of teamwork and existing (international) cooperation. Such discussions can also be used to address the qualification progress of the postdocs, e.g. degree of independence and level of development of the scientific profile, acquisition of teaching competence, experience in personnel management, training in "professional skills", entrepreneurship, Habilitation or requisite skills for a career e.g. in science or industry.

**Annual staff appraisals and career development.** In addition to the regular scientific discussions and the regular exchange of information on the progress of the scientific work respectively, postdocs and their superiors conduct a detailed annual staff appraisal, or career interview at least once a year. The aim is to assess the previous research performance as well as the prospects for a career within and outside academia. Postdocs and their superiors are jointly responsible both for implementing the agreements concluded at the beginning of the postdoc phase as well as for the completion of trainings for the acquisition of transferable skills and the use of career consultation offers. Visits to career fairs, contacts with industry representatives and the involvement of alumni enable postdocs to better plan their next career step.

**Mobility.** To establish a recognizable profile in a competitive (inter)national environment, it is essential that one's work is visible. Superiors therefore enable and encourage postdocs' active participation in conferences. In addition, KIT enables stays at research institutions and companies in Germany and abroad, as well as participation in (inter)national projects.

**Promotion of self-organized scientific activities.** Involvement with tasks in the scientific community and gaining organizational experience is supported in an appropriate manner (e.g. organization of events, invitation of guests). Initiatives of self-organizations (e.g. postdoc networks) are encouraged, assisted and, if necessary, supported logistically and financially.

**Leadership and teaching.** Postdocs at KIT have the possibility to gain experience in both personnel leadership and teaching. These skills are very important for a future career within and outside academia. This includes taking on and designing lectures, supervising an appropriate number of bachelor's and master's theses, co-supervising doctoral researchers and expert leadership tasks.