

avuba Postdoc Survey 2020

Summary of results including areas with need for action

March 2021

Contents

- I. Background information, page 1
- II. Which areas show high levels of satisfaction and where is action required, page 2
- III. Details of the results of the avuba Postdoc Survey 2020
 - A. Overview, page 3
 - B. Details of responses by postdocs in the life sciences and social sciences, pages 3–7
 - C. Details of statements by postdocs with children, page 7

I. Background information

At the avuba board meeting on 19 May 2020, a decision was taken to conduct an avuba postdoc survey. This aimed to close a gap in employee surveys at the University of Basel. As of 2021, doctoral students are to be surveyed regularly at the departmental level on “employment, supervision, career planning, administration and central services, personal integrity, health and continuing education” by the Quality Development team at the University of Basel. At that time, no comparable plans had been made for postdocs. The postdoc survey aims to gain a similarly representative picture of postdoc satisfaction and areas that may present problems or require action.

A total of 192 postdocs had completed the survey by 20 December 2020.

Field	Number of avuba postdoc members	Number of participants	Participation rate
Life sciences	349	121	35%
Social sciences	155	64	41%
“Other” selected in survey	-	7	-
Total	504	192	38%

The following analyses are available on the [avuba website](#):

- Answers given by all participating postdocs (N=192)
- Answers given by all participating postdocs from life sciences (N=121 – Faculty of Science, Faculty of Medicine or university/associated institute)
- Answers given by all participating postdocs from social sciences (N=64 – Faculty of Theology, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Business and Economics, Faculty of Psychology or university/associated institute)

The data was analyzed on a descriptive basis.

II. Which areas show high levels of satisfaction and where is action required?

Postdocs are particularly satisfied with:

- Their academic independence (84%*)
- The availability of their supervisor for inquiries and conversations (81%*)
- Their workplace (80%*) and technical equipment (83%*)
- The opportunity to present their research findings at least once a year and to obtain feedback (79%*)
- The opportunity to acquire and/or deepen teaching experience, presentation techniques and educational skills (77%*) and excellent communication skills (71%*)

avuba believes that action is required in the following areas:

Working conditions

- 40% of postdocs with a 100% workload state that they work at least 19% more than contractually stipulated (this equates to at least 8 additional hours per week). 59% of postdocs with a 60% workload state that they work at least 35 job percentages more (this equates to at least 14.7 additional hours per week).
- Just 45%* of postdocs agree “slightly” or “completely” that they are satisfied with their work/life balance (family and postdoc).
- Only 28% of postdocs with children feel that University of Basel services are family friendly.

Supervision and career path

- When asked if they were satisfied with the University’s services for postdocs (structured mentoring, institutionalized networking opportunities, etc.), just 33%* agreed “slightly” or “completely” (36%* from the life sciences, 26%* from the social sciences).
- Around half of postdocs would like more international visibility and networking (52%*), more interaction with other researchers at the University of Basel (53%*), more orientation (44%*) and/or a mentor who advises them and helps them to develop their career and build a network (50%*).
- 40%* of postdocs would like more support when applying for project funding (37%* from the life sciences, 46%* from the social sciences).

Career prospects

- In 5 years, if everything goes according to plan, 45% of postdocs (36% from the life sciences, 66% from the social sciences) see themselves as a professor (incl. assistant professors and extraordinary professors) at a university or university of applied sciences. According to estimations by Dr. Matthias Hirt, Head of the Coordination Office for the Promotion of Early Career Researchers at the University of Bern, on the topic of “[surveying non-professorial teaching staff](#)” (slide 20, German-language document dated 27 March 2018), a postdoc has around a 10% chance of securing a professorship in Switzerland.
- In the future, 27% of postdocs (28% from the life sciences, 27% from the social sciences) see themselves as a permanent scientific member of teaching and research staff at a university or university of applied sciences.

*The percentage is calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

III. Details of the results of the avuba Postdoc Survey 2020

A. Overview

- All responses are from postdocs who have concluded a postdoc employment contract with a faculty/university department or a university institute i.e. the university.
- 63% of all respondents come from the field of science or medicine.
- 30% of respondents are Swiss or have a permanent residence permit. 53% have a permit B and 13% have cross-border permits.
- 48% of respondents were women and 51% were men. 1% selected “Prefer not to say” when asked about their gender.
- 76% of respondents are aged 31–40.
- 32% of respondents have children.
- 60% of respondents are in the first or second year of their postdoc. 26% are in their third or fourth year, and around 10% are in their fifth or sixth year.
- 36% of respondents have a current employment contract lasting one year or less.
- 41% of respondents have a position that is funded entirely by the University (life sciences 31%, social sciences 56%).
- 11% of respondents have raised third-party funding for their postdoc themselves (of which 14% between CHF 1–49,999, 5% between CHF 50,000–99,999 and 81% over CHF 100,000).
- 55% of respondents have a 100% workload according to their postdoc employment contract (or this is the sum total of multiple postdoc contracts) and around 20% have a 60% workload. 8% have a smaller workload than 60%.

B. Details of responses by postdocs in the life sciences and social sciences

Answers to question 6): “Actual working time: On average, how many hours do you actually work per week as a postdoc?”

	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
Postdocs with a 100% workload (equivalent to 42 hours per week) work:	N = 105	N = 83	N = 18
- At least 19% (8 hours) more	40%	43%	28%
- At least 43% (18 hours) more	15%	18%	6%
Postdocs with a 60% workload (equivalent to 25.2 hours per week) work:	N = 37	N = 5	N = 30
- At least 10% (4.2 hours) more	84%	N<15	87%
- At least 35% (14.7 hours) more	59%	N<15	67%
- At least 59% (24.8 hours) more	30%	N<15	30%

Answers to question 7): “Actual working time: On average, what percentage of your actual postdoc working time do you spend on the following activities? (Must add up to 100%)”

	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
	N=192	N=121	N=64
Own research (including publications)	54%	61%	43%
Applying for funding for your own research/financing	7%	6%	9%
Teaching and supervising students and/or other colleagues	22%	20%	28%
University administration and management (supporting the professorship and the project team, including managing research infrastructure such as databases, etc.)	10%	9%	13%
Self-government/committee work	4%	3%	6%
Other	3%	2%	2%

Answers to question 8): “To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your working situation?”*

	“Agree slightly” or “Agree completely”		
	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
You can cope with your work well in terms of content and time.	63%	69%	51%
You feel sufficiently supported.	63%	65%	58%
You receive adequate orientation.	56%	60%	48%
You experience appreciation.	75%	76%	72%
You feel that you are being treated fairly.	75%	74%	78%

*The percentages in this table are calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

Answers to question 9): “How satisfied are you with your working conditions?” *

	“Agree slightly” or “Agree completely”		
	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
Academic independence	84%	82%	91%
Interaction with other researchers at the University of Basel	47%	48%	46%
International visibility and networking	48%	45%	50%
Time for your own academic work	63%	67%	58%
Work/life balance (family and postdoc)	45%	47%	37%
University services for postdocs (structured mentoring, institutionalized networking opportunities, etc.)	33%	36%	26%
Technical equipment (laboratory, facilities, IT etc.)	83%	86%	80%
Workplace	80%	77%	83%

*The percentages in this table are calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

Answers to question 10): “To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your superior?” *

	“Agree slightly” or “Agree completely”		
	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
He/she is available for your inquiries and conversations.	81%	84%	76%
Meetings help you with the content and/or methodology of your work.	71%	72%	67%
The targets you are expected to meet – including any required contribution to your postdoc funding – are explained prematurely and in detail.	66%	70%	58%
You can talk openly about your career plans (within or outside of academia) and your superior will give his/her opinion.	73%	75%	69%
Your performance is rewarded appropriately (including co-author status in accordance with subject-specific standards).	76%	79%	73%

*The percentages in this table are calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

Answers to question 11): “Why did you choose to do a postdoc at the University of Basel?” *

	“Agree slightly” or “Agree completely”		
	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
Standard of research	72%	78%	64%
Reputation of the research team	79%	81%	74%
Proximity to other research institutions	43%	47%	37%
Technical facilities	54%	64%	32%
Working conditions	67%	69%	61%
International environment	58%	66%	43%
Attractive place to live	62%	64%	57%
Family reasons	44%	43%	45%
Other	41%	38%	42%

*The percentages in this table are calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

Answers to question 12): “To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your future career?”*

	“Agree slightly” or “Agree completely”		
	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
You have mentors (if desired) who advise you and help you to develop your career and build a network.	50%	52%	44%
You receive the support you need to participate in workshops, conferences and continuing education programs.	69%	71%	64%
You have the opportunity to present your research findings at least once a year and to obtain feedback.	79%	79%	78%
You receive the support you need to apply for project funding.	60%	63%	54%
You are aiming for an academic career.	66%	58%	81%
You have an alternative career plan (Plan B) in case your academic career doesn’t work out.	53%	59%	42%

*The percentages in this table are calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

Answers to question 13): “Would you agree that your postdoc allows you to acquire and/or deepen the following?”*

	“Agree slightly” or “Agree completely”		
	All postdocs	Life sciences	Social sciences
Independent research achievements	85%	83%	89%
Management experience	66%	75%	48%
Project management experience	70%	77%	58%
Excellent communication skills	71%	71%	68%
Teaching experience/presentation techniques/educational skills	77%	71%	88%

*The percentages in this table are calculated on the basis “N minus count NA”.

Answers to question 14): “Where do you see yourself in 5 years if everything goes according to plan?”

	All postdocs N=192	Life sciences N=121	Social sciences N=64
As a professor (incl. assistant professor or extraordinary professor) at a university or university of applied sciences	45%	36%	66%
As a permanent scientific member of teaching and research staff at a university or university of applied sciences	27%	28%	27%
In the private sector	15%	21%	2%
In university administration	1%	1%	2%
In the public sector (excluding university administration)	4%	5%	3%
At an NGO (charitable organization)	0%	0%	0%
In your own start-up or self-employment	3%	4%	0%
Other	5%	5%	2%

C. Details of statements by postdocs with children

32% of the 192 participants of the survey said they already had children (25% from the life sciences, 48% from the social sciences) and 5% said they would soon have children (7% from the life sciences, 2% from the social sciences).

Answers to question 18): “Family friendliness – responses from postdocs with children”

	All postdocs with children/ soon to be parents N=72	Postdocs from life sciences with children/soon to be parents N=39	Postdocs from social sciences with children/soon to be parents N=32
Average childcare taken over			
0–20% of time	22%	26%	19%
21–40% of time	26%	18%	38%
41–60% of time	40%	44%	34%
61–80% of time	8%	10%	6%
81–100% of time	3%	3%	3%
Agree slightly or completely that the workplace is family friendly	51%	49%	53%
Agree slightly or completely that the superior is family friendly	72%	72%	72%
Agree slightly or completely that the University of Basel services are family friendly	28%	26%	31%