

The career-wise postdoc

*From expectation management
to conscious career decisions*

John Creemers
Director Doctoral School Biomedical Sciences
KU Leuven, Belgium



Quo vadis American postdoc?

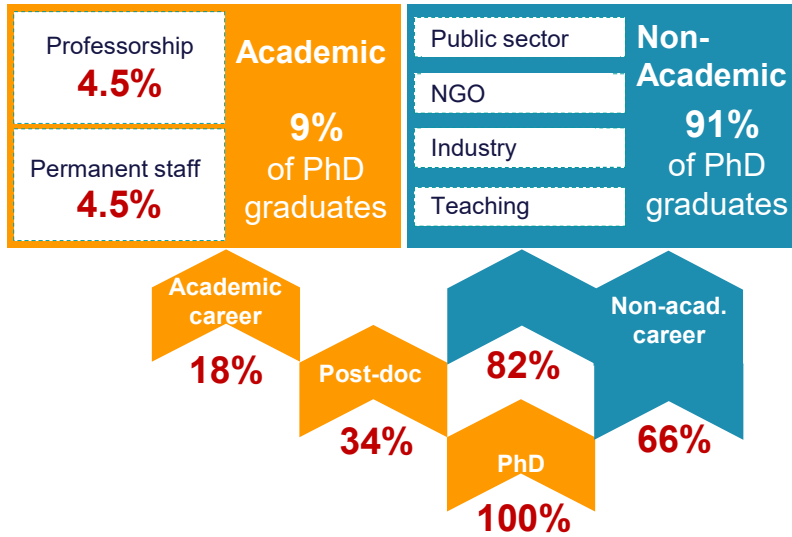
[Roland W. Herzog](#)

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...where starting PhD students at KU Leuven hear from John Creemers already during the Welcome Session that most job opportunities afterwards are outside academia. I think that this is fundamentally wrong!

email Prof. LvO to Luc Sels, Rector KU Leuven

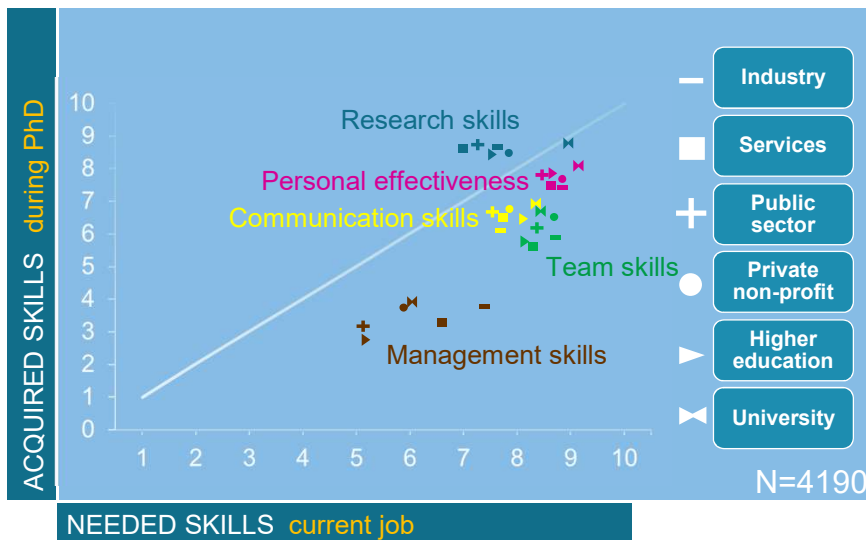
A PhD prepares talented researchers for society



Source: VRWB

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Many skills used to be underdeveloped at the end of a PhD



www.belspo.be/belspo/scienceconnection/012/careersdoctorateholders.pdf (year: 2010)

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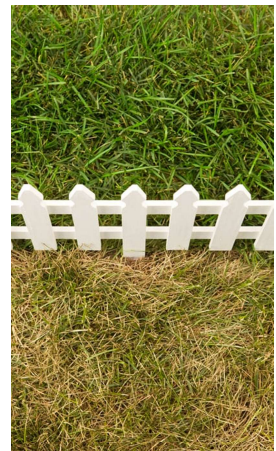
Chose your love and love your choice...
...but always have a plan B (A')



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Doctorate holders are happy outside academia

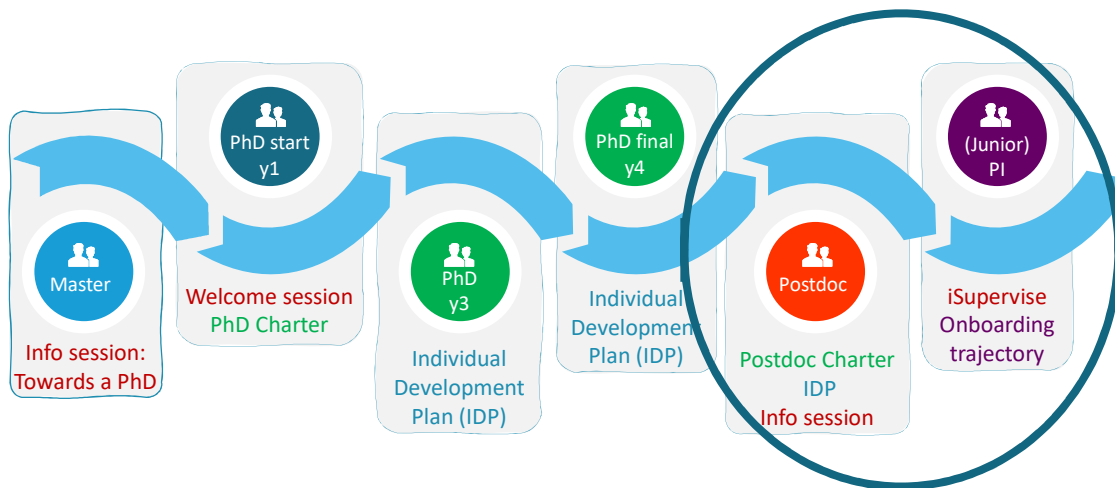
- **PhD was required/important** for current employment (82%)
- (Very) **Satisfied** with their career **outside academia** (83%)
- Had **no inclination to return** to academia (76%)



<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/>

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The aim of academic training is communicated through an integrated approach from MSc students up to professors



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It is bitter irony that universities destroy human capital like no other

Knack magazine: article-opinion-963793

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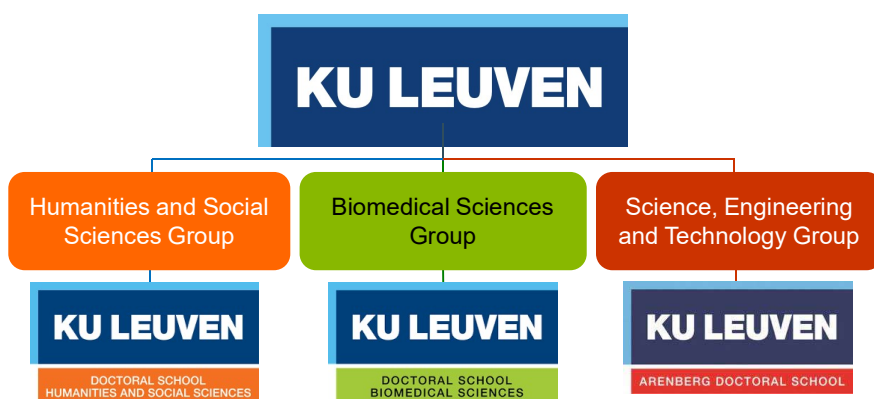
#IchBinHanna: German postdocs complain about their prospects



www.riffreporter.de/de/artikel/wissenschaft-befristung-mittelbau-ich-bin-hanna-bmbf

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KU Leuven has 3 groups, 7000 PhD researchers and 1500 postdocs



#PhD researchers:	2000	1800	3200	Total: 7,000
#Postdocs:	370	500	630	1,500

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YouReCa supports the career development
of KU Leuven's **young researchers**



All PhD researchers, postdocs and assistant professors
Sponsored by the Flemish Government (~2.2 M€/year **ringfenced**)

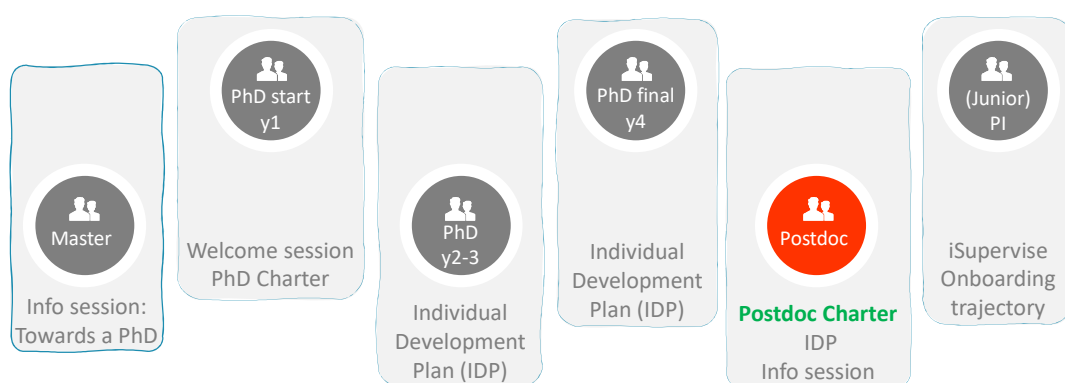
- Training courses
- Career support
- International mobility
- Grassroot initiatives
- **Interuniversity events** in Flanders (35% of budget)



**Vlaamse
overheid**

<https://www.kuleuven.be/english/research/youreca>

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<https://research.kuleuven.be/en/career/postdoc/postdoc-charter>

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The charter is a guideline to discuss the mutual expectations and responsibilities and to guarantee a good cooperation

Contains:

- Role of a postdoc
- Role of a supervisor (senior academic host)
- Role of KU Leuven

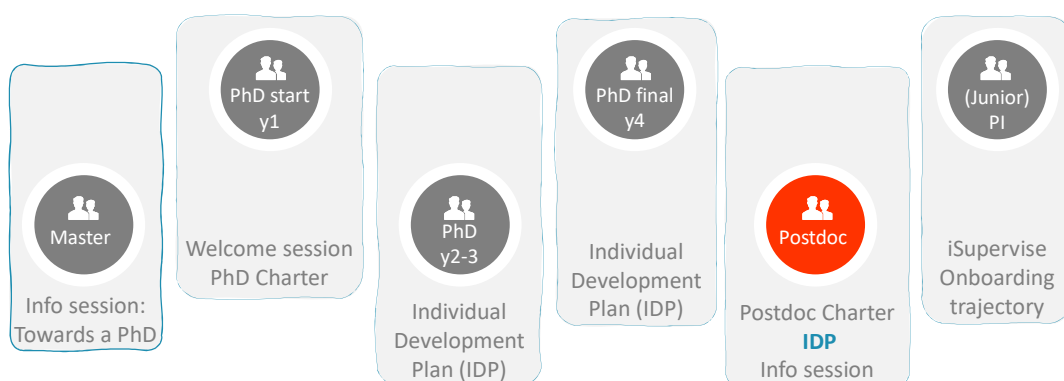
Deals with:

- Research: independence and (inter)national profile
- Publications and other realizations
- Teaching and supervision
- Personal and professional development (**mental health**)
- Fair, honest and ethical scientific conduct
- Problems and conflict management

Discussed & signed within 3 months after start of postdoc

<https://research.kuleuven.be/en/career/phd/charter>

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https://gbiomed.kuleuven.be/english/phd/PhD_Researchers/individual-development-plan-idp-for-phd-researchers

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The IDP aims to stimulate a career reflection process between a young researchers and their supervisor



https://gbiomed.kuleuven.be/english/phd/PhD_Researchers/individual-development-plan-idp-for-phd-researchers

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Acknowledgements for IDP@KUL-BMS



Joey Barnett
Vice-dean,
Vanderbilt University, USA

2014



Christophe Vandembrielle
Postdoc Representative
KU Leuven

2016



Stefan Wellens
Learning & Development
KU Leuven

2024

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IDPs are commonly used in the USA



Molecular Cell
Forum

Yearly Planning Meetings: Individualized Development Plans Aren't Just More Paperwork

Ben J. Vincent,^{1,2} Clarissa Scholes,^{1,2} Max V. Staller,^{1,2,3} Zeba Wunderlich,^{1,2,4} Javier Estrada,^{1,2} Jeehae Park,^{1,2} Meghan D.J. Bragdon,^{1,2} Francheska Lopez Rivera,^{1,2} Kelly M. Biette,^{1,2} and Angela H. DePace^{1,2,*}

¹Department of Systems Biology, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA 02115, USA

²These authors contributed equally to this manuscript

³Present address: Department of Genetics, Center for Genome Sciences and Systems Biology, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO 63108, USA

⁴Present address: Department of Developmental and Cell Biology, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697, USA

*Correspondence: angela_depace@hms.harvard.edu

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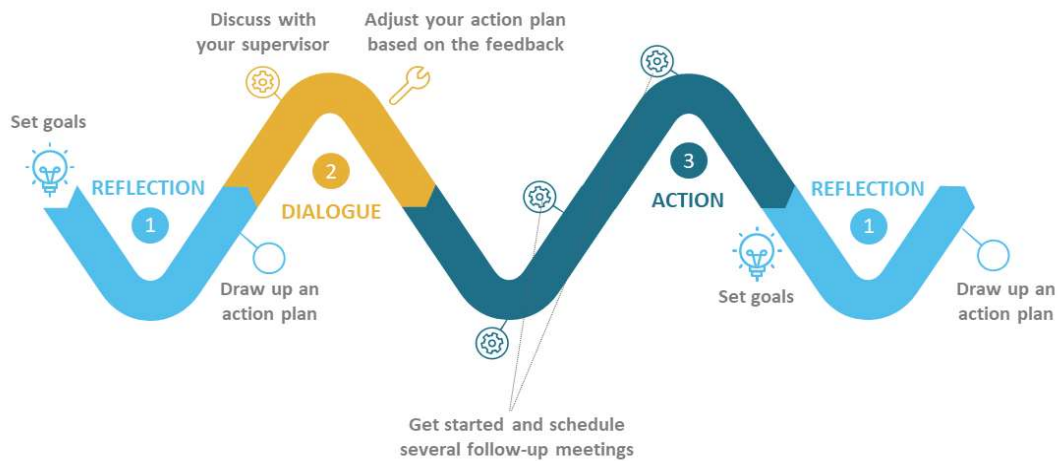
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An IDP facilitates constructive discussions
between young researchers and their promotor



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An IDP describes a continuous process of reflection, dialogue and action



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What are the topics that are discussed in the IDP?

- 1.1 Research objectives (short)
- 1.2 Career planning (long term, motivation, what is needed, plan B)
 - Links to: academic path requirements, testimonials alumni, job shadowing, job fairs,...
 - Guiding examples to stimulate the thought process & avoid too much focus on science
- 1.3 Development of (transferable) skills
 - Links to: KU Leuven skills brochure, interuniversity offer,
 - Link to: Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) to develop language & level of skill

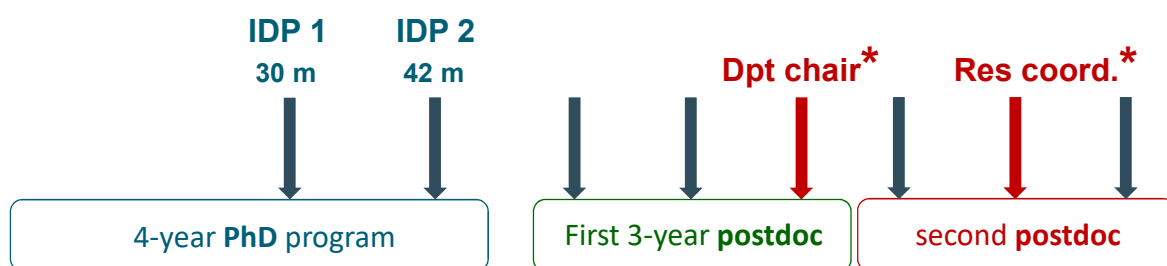
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What are the topics that are discussed in the IDP?

- 2 Action Plan (short term objectives)
 - Research goals, skill development, teaching, and career planning
 - What support do you need from your supervisor
 - Question for supervisor: Special recommendations, hidden talents, extra support,...
- 3 Have an **in-person meeting** to discuss the IDP
 - It should not be used as an appraisal!!

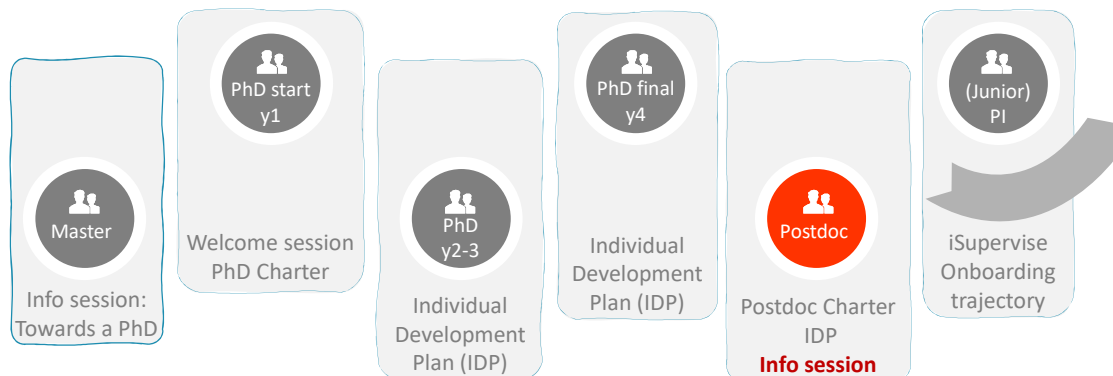
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IDPs are filled out twice by PhDs and yearly by postdocs



* If pursuing an academic career

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<https://gbiomed.kuleuven.be/english/phd/forpostdocs/career-information-session-for-postdocs>

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The info session for postdocs ensures that they are well-informed and actively reflect about their longer-term career

How can KU Leuven support you with your career orientation and management?

HR Talent & Development

How does the Individual Development Plan (IDP) work?

Director Doctoral School

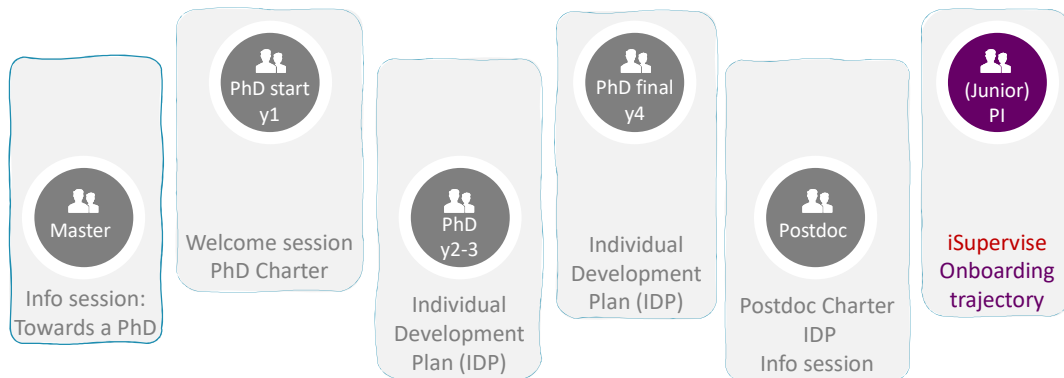
Which staff categories are there for postdocs and what do they encompass?

HR-businesspartners

<https://gbiomed.kuleuven.be/english/phd/forpostdocs/career-information-session-for-postdocs>

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iSupervise and the onboarding trajectory prepares tenure track professors for their role as supervisors



<https://admin.kuleuven.be/personeel/english/trainings/isupervise-masterclass-for-supervisors/isupervise-masterclass-for-supervisors>

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iSupervise and the onboarding trajectory prepares tenure track professors for their role as supervisors

- All aspects of the Doctoral School
 - * Milestones, QC, different elements of the doctoral training,...
 - * **Effective use of the charters and IDP**
- Aspects that are important for research
 - * **Research integrity**, open science, data management, ethics,...
- Aspects that are important in leading and coaching a research team
 - * recruitment and selection, **leadership**, building inclusive team environments,...
 - * career development of PhDs/postdocs, **stress & well-being**,...
- ❖ **Onboarding trajectory** spread over the first 2 years (not obligatory)
 - * Tailored & modular program, coach & buddy, teacher training,...

<https://admin.kuleuven.be/personeel/english/trainings/isupervise-masterclass-for-supervisors/isupervise-masterclass-for-supervisors>

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Conclusions and remaining challenges



KU Leuven's postdoc policy is still work-in-progress but the improved expectation management has already facilitated more conscious career decisions

An efficient postdoc policy requires appropriate training of promotor

IDPs are often not filled out by postdocs & the charter is not discussed before signing

Only ~20-25% of all PI's have currently followed iSupervise

john.creemers@kuleuven.be

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