

Postdoc Conference 2024



Liz Elvidge joined Imperial in 2008 and launched the Postdoc Development Centre in 2009 — the first center of its kind in the UK, established to provide support and development opportunities to Imperial’s Postdocs and Fellows. Liz is Head of the Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre as well as being Head of Postdoc and Fellows Development for the College. She is particularly committed to supporting female early career researchers and academics. In 2015, she was awarded the Dame Julia Higgins Medal for outstanding support for early career researchers and academics. In 2023, Liz was appointed to Imperial’s Council representing the College’s academic job family. This enables Liz to advocate for early career researchers, academics, and women at the highest level of the university. The appointment was the first of its kind in the history of the college and represents a significant step forward for the early career researcher community.

Keynote 1: What every Postdoc needs to know

Thinking of starting a postdoc? Want to know how to move on from a postdoc? Or simply want to make the best of your postdoc years? Being a postdoc is not a career, but it can be the pivotal point in the making of one. My talk will be friendly, humorous, and you’ll leave with an action plan!



John Creemers holds an MSc in Chemistry from Radboud University Nijmegen and a PhD in Medical Sciences from KU Leuven. He has worked as a postdoc at the University of Cambridge and as a Visiting Professor at the Barbara Davis Center for Childhood Diabetes (UCHCS, Denver, USA). Currently, he is a Professor at the Department of Human Genetics (KU Leuven). Since 2012, he has also been the Director of the Doctoral School of Biomedical Sciences, responsible for the doctoral training of approximately 1,700 PhD researchers and 500 postdocs (<https://gbiomed.kuleuven.be/english/phd>). This training aims to prepare them for a career in frontline research, healthcare, and education or for high-level roles in professional sectors where creative, critical, independent, and responsible thinking is required. John is a member of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) working group Doctoral Schools (<https://vlir.be/>) and president of ORPHEUS, the Organisation of PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in the European System (<http://www.orpheus-med.org/>). In the last few years, John has been heavily involved in developing a postdoc policy, the [KU Leuven Charter of the post-doctoral researcher and the senior academic host](#).

Keynote 2: The career-wise postdoc: From expectation management to conscious career decisions

Postdoctoral researchers help bridge the gap between emerging and established researchers. They make indispensable contributions to universities by conducting research, managing research projects, valorising research findings, and taking on teaching commitments. In this way, they help ensure both continuity and innovation, both of which are crucial to sustainable research. However, despite the ambition of many postdocs to secure permanent appointments within academia, the vast majority will have to progress to positions outside academia due to the limited number of available permanent positions inside academia. To assure a win-win for both postdocs and universities, a clear and transparent policy is needed. At KU Leuven, this policy relies on four key elements. At the

start of a postdoctoral period, a charter needs to be discussed and signed. This charter is a guideline for the postdoctoral researcher and their supervisors to discuss the mutual expectations and responsibilities and to make the necessary arrangements for optimal cooperation and career development. In addition, an Individual Development Plan (IDP) needs to be filled out each year to discuss not only the scientific objectives for the coming year but also a plan for additional training to prepare for the career after the postdoctoral period. The third component is an information session about opportunities and content of positions in- and outside academia and the offer of KU Leuven to prepare you optimally. If the postdoc has the ambition to stay in academia, this information session is followed by a meeting with the head of the department to obtain an objective view. Finally, the success of this policy is largely dependent on the cooperation of the supervisors. Therefore, we train newly appointed professors in the effective use of the charters and IDP as part of their tenure track program.



Lucas Zinner has been working in research or research-related institutions for about 30 years. A mathematician by training, he heads the Department of Research Services and Career Development at the University of Vienna and is responsible for around 45 professionals who support researchers at all career stages, from ECRs to advanced ERC grantees. Since 2007, Lucas has been particularly involved in the debate on the doctorate in Europe and beyond. In 2017, he co-founded the PRIDE Network Association for Professionals in Doctoral Education. PRIDE aims to increase the visibility of professional support staff and provide an international forum for exchange and continuous development.

Postdocs in Austria

In this session, chaired by Lucas Zinner, we will get a taste of the situation for Postdocs in Austria, a glimpse of the future, and a to-do list for the years to come. Elmar Pichl, Director General of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), introduces the audience to the political view on postdocs. Susanne Leeb, Director of the LBG Career Center, brings several years of expertise in Career training, coaching, and development of postdocs. Susanne will shed light on best practices, where more attention is needed, and how interinstitutional offerings add value for the target group. Anna Durnova, a member of the Postdoc Advisory Board of the University of Vienna, will give the postdoc community a voice by sharing the outcomes of the recent report on the employment situation of doctoral candidates and postdocs at the University of Vienna. Finally, Thea Vidnes from the University of Vienna will share the outcomes and learnings of the REWIRE - REinforcing Women In REsearch – program.



Sabine Hunke is a science manager with an extraordinary professorship and PhD in microbiology. She is the managing director of Humboldt Graduate School (HGS) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. HGS provides strategic support for early career researchers. Within the Berlin University Alliance (BUA), a consortium of excellence of HU, FU, TU, and Charité Berlin, she is a member of the Steering Committee for "Promoting Talent" and of the Postdoc Academy Council.

During her time as a postdoc, as habilitation candidate, and a junior professor, she supervised several doctoral candidates. From her personal background as a PhD supervisor and a mobile researcher with children, she knows how important it is to support doctoral and postdoctoral researchers with advice, networking, training, and career perspectives.

What are other universities implementing?

The Berlin universities Freie Universität, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität and Charité –

Universitätsmedizin Berlin have founded the joint Postdoc Academy as part of the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) in 2022. This has created a new level of cooperation within the BUA to develop a completely new programme with the support of the target group and critical friends.

On the one hand, the aim of the BUA Postdoc Academy is to offer a joint career orientation programme for early postdocs and to make the group visible and networked. On the other hand, sustainable funding structures are to be established among the partners. The portfolio of the BUA Postdoc Academy is being continuously developed and currently consists of 10 elements.



Since 2015, **Claudine Leysinger** has been the head of Graduate Campus at the University of Zurich – a service platform for PhD candidates and postdocs, committed to promoting postdoctoral researchers and enhancing the quality of doctoral training at the University of Zurich. In this position, Dr. Leysinger has been fundamental in promoting good supervision practices at UZH and beyond. The Graduate Campus offers a course for supervisors, and it awards a prize for good supervision, the UZH Mentoring Award. Recently, the Graduate Campus has shifted its focus towards postdocs, acting as an information platform and offering bespoke funding opportunities and coaching for postdocs.

Dr. Leysinger studied Latin American history and political science at Columbia University in the City of New York and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She obtained her PhD in history at Columbia University with a dissertation on the history of photography, anthropology, and archaeology in nineteenth-century Mexico.

What are other universities implementing?

In her talk, Dr. Leysinger will address the support the Graduate Campus offers to postdocs and the changes the division implemented last year. She will also briefly show the kinds of services that are being offered to postdocs at the University of Zurich in general. In addition, she will talk about a national initiative financed federally and driven by the umbrella organization of Swiss universities that aims to support postdocs and that will last from 2025-2028.