

Career Development and Planning for Postdoctoral Researchers at SOCIUM

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At the SOCIUM Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy, researchers employed at postdoctoral level perform key tasks in research and self-administration (as well as in teaching, which, however, is no responsibility of the SOCIUM and is therefore not covered in this paper). The success of SOCIUM can therefore also be attributed to its mid-level academic staff ("Mittelbau"). This paper serves to explain SOCIUM's guidelines for supporting its postdoctoral employees, particularly with regard to their career planning, and to provide information about these guidelines. This includes all postdoctoral employees employed at SOCIUM and in affiliated third-party funded projects, regardless of the type of funding. Since the group of postdoctoral employees is heterogeneous in terms of its characteristics and goals, the support considered optimal will vary depending on the individual situation and blanket recommendations or measures for career paths are not appropriate.

The fundamental conditions of job positions (contract duration, basic job descriptions, questions of qualification etc.) for postdocs and other mid-level faculty are not primarily the responsibility of SOCIUM and therefore not the subject of this paper.

Preliminary remark: Since BIGSSS (Bremen International School of Social Sciences) is responsible for doctoral training, this concept paper refers to postdoctoral researchers; however, the described principles also apply to doctoral researchers. Professorial and similar faculty members at SOCIUM are actively involved in BIGSSS, support its structures and endorse the principles of doctoral training implemented there.

Goals and guiding principles

Professorial faculty and other supervisory staff at SOCIUM support postdoctoral employees (as mid-level academic staff in general) in developing their skills for further qualification and in their career planning. For positions which are fixed-term due to qualification, it is mandatory, in accordance with the provisions on qualification agreements (Bremer Hochschulgesetz (Bremen Higher Education act), paragraph 23, section 1), to allow employees one third (for full-time employees) or half (for part-time employees) of their working hours for their own qualification/research. In general, the aim is to provide all mid-level faculty members with an environment that gives them the time and other resources needed to develop their own research profile and work on their own publications. In addition to the corresponding substantial exchange on research-related issues, there should also be regular individual discussions on **further career prospects** within and outside SOCIUM (as well as, as needed, within and outside academia); for such discussions, not only the postdoc's own supervisors or line managers are available, but other professorial staff, project leaders and equivalent persons at SOCIUM as well. The respective supervisors ensure **transparency** regarding further job prospects, provided these fall within their area of responsibility. Regarding these and related matters, professorial staff and other supervisory staff at SOCIUM are fully committed to **open, non-hierarchical and collegial communication** in both demeanor and tone.

Measures and good practice

The following specific measures will be taken in order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives. Some of these measures are already common practice (and are implemented to varying degrees in the working groups), while others still need to be implemented (more fully). The SOCIUM Executive Board emphasizes that all these measures are to be implemented by the working group leaders (or

other responsible persons, such as project directors). Supporting and advising postdoctoral researchers is one of the duties of line managers and forms part of their personnel responsibility. This includes postdocs who are newly recruited to a working group/department with third-party funding they have secured independently. If necessary, postdoctoral researchers may request the appropriate guidance and information.

Working groups and departments

- **Annual reviews:** Like all university employees, academic staff are entitled to an annual review meeting outside of their daily work routine; this review provides an opportunity to take stock of cooperation and working tasks, and to discuss career development and prospects. Career planning (within and outside academia, as required) is an explicit part of these reviews. The exact format of these reviews is up to the participants and the needs they identify. We consider transparency about the concrete job prospects at SOCIUM to be an indispensable part of these reviews.

The university provides materials on the annual review meetings here:

<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/human-resources-development/leadership/annual-appraisals>

- Also **outside these annual reviews**, development and career prospects as well as job prospects at SOCIUM should be discussed upon individual request. Direct supervisors can be approached for this purpose, as well as other professors, project managers or other suitable senior colleagues.
- **Funding applications by postdoctoral researchers:** The SOCIUM welcomes third-party funding applications from postdoctoral researchers and supports them. Details should be discussed in advance with the direct line manager and then with the SOCIUM management. Other relevant professors and senior colleagues can also be contacted for further advice. While professors usually are (and must be) formally (co-)responsible for funding applications submitted by postdoctoral researchers and assume personnel responsibility, SOCIUM is committed to ensuring that postdocs can implement and manage the third-party funded projects they have secured themselves as independently as possible.
The university already provides a wide range of resources to support such projects (see below for details). In addition, SOCIUM aims to work with BIGSSS to systematize the relevant consultancy and support (see below).
In return, postdoctoral researchers with their own projects are expected to be willing to present their projects at SOCIUM's regular seminar, at the SOCIUM annual conference, or at the advisory board meeting. Participation in the annual conference and the advisory board meeting is mandatory for all postdoctoral researchers (as well as for all doctoral researchers).
- **The university and its affiliated institutions and networks** provide a wide range of further resources for skills development, career advancement, and networking. These are listed at the end of this document.
- **Networking among researchers:** Networking among research staff represents (yet another) essential source of support for career-related issues, the acquisition of important information, and for the exchange of substantive and strategic ideas. The research staff's representative body (which represents them on the Executive Board) organizes at least annual meetings (see the SOCIUM website and the corresponding email list for "Mittelbau"). The SOCIUM jour fixe and other presentation series (including self-organized brown-bag lunches

and workshops) are open to anyone who would like to participate and present their research. New initiatives are always welcome. Information about such events is distributed primarily via the SOCIUM email list (socium@mailman.zfn.uni-bremen.de; new employees are signed up automatically) as well as through the regular UNICOM newsletter, which is sent out regularly via the SOCIUM email list and also provides information about numerous other events at SOCIUM, BIGSSS, the large collaborative projects etc.

Information and exchange, collaboration with BIGSSS

In collaboration with BIGSSS, the SOCIUM aims to promote and institutionalize support and career development for postdoctoral researchers.

To this end, and with a primary focus on social science research, the following events for postdocs will be offered in flexible cooperation with BIGSSS (current status, changes/combinations possible):

- Regular/annual **orientation workshop** providing an overview of all relevant opportunities for support, counselling, and further education offered by the university and its partners – including the opportunity for networking among participants
- Regular/annual **Career Day** (especially) for postdocs, where alumni and guests from within and outside academia provide information on career paths
- Possibly, as needed and maybe at longer intervals, **workshops on the publication and dissemination** of research results, as well as **workshops on acquiring research funding and on project management**

Where appropriate, larger third-party funded projects in which a number of postdoctoral researchers is employed should also be included in the planning and implementation of these workshops (e. g. 'Postdoc College' in the third phase of CRC 1342). In addition, BIGSSS already offers events on various topics that are also relevant for postdocs. Depending on capacity, funding and curricular affiliation, these events are already open to postdocs.

Further information including more technical and organisational details about working at SOCIUM can be found in the '**Information for new employees and guests at the SOCIUM / Unicom building**' which is given to new employees by the SOCIUM administration. Direct supervisors, working groups and secretaries are responsible for supporting (especially the new) postdoc and all other mid-level faculty members in everyday matters.

University services for career development, third-party funding and similar topics

- **Overview of university services for 'Skills development and career support for researchers'** (<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/university/academic-career-options-at-the-university-of-bremen/career-and-further-training>)
- **Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences** (BIGSSS, <https://www.bigsss-bremen.de/>): Courses on methods and other topics – remaining places are available to doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from SOCIUM
- **Bremen Early Career Researcher Development** (BYRD, <https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/byrd>): Courses, talks, networking and much more for early-career researchers at various career levels
- **Staff development for university employees** (<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/human-resources-development/scientists>): a wide range of additional training opportunities, including diverse general skills, career development and coaching, amongst others

- **Mentoring/support programmes for women* at doctoral and postdoctoral level:**
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<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/chancengleichheit/services/plan-m-mentoring-in-science>
Navigare (English, international target group – not offered anymore until further notice)
<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/chancengleichheit/services/navigare-career-coaching>
- **Central Research Development Fund (CRDF) of the university:** Internal competitive research funding, for postdocs, e.g., the Call 04 funding line ‘Independent Projects for Postdocs’, but also other kinds of additional funding (e.g. conference trips). Current calls for proposals and newsletter subscription can be found here:
<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/research/support-for-researchers/calls/crdf-calls>
Overview on all research-related funding lines:
<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/research/support-for-researchers>
- **University funding advisory service for third-party funding (national and international):**
Counseling, information events, information gathering
<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/research/support-for-researchers/foerderberatung>
- The **High-Profile Area Social Sciences** sometimes allocates additional funds for smaller projects, events, etc., some of which are also open to postdocs.
<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/high-profile-area-social-sciences>
- **YUFE – Young Universities for the Future of Europe**, of which the University of Bremen is a member, offers exchange programmes and other funding opportunities, among other things.
<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/cooperation/university-cooperation-1/yufe-young-universities-for-the-future-of-europe-1>
- **Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg – Institute for Advanced Study** (<https://hanse-ias.de/en/fellowships/fellowship-program>): Postdoctoral program/and associate junior fellowships implies opportunities for networking as well as for funding and organizing an event at the HWK in Delmenhorst.