

# THE POSTDOCTORAL PROGRAMME REPORT FROM THE PILOT PHASE

UiO : **Faculty of Medicine**  
University of Oslo





## Content

Introduction .....	3
Background.....	4
Organization .....	6
<i>Model 1: Programme Structure</i> .....	6
<i>Model 2: Activities in the Postdoctoral Programme in 2016</i> .....	7
A Brief Description of the Courses in the Postdoctoral Programme.....	9
Leadership Course 1: Career Development.....	9
Leadership Course 2: Research Management and Supervision .....	10
How to Attract External Funding .....	12
Group Mentoring Scheme .....	13
School of Health Innovation .....	14
Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Programme and Courses .....	15
Interviews with Stakeholders at the Start of the Programme .....	15
Admission .....	15
Evaluation of Courses.....	15
Budget .....	19
Summary, Future Plans .....	19



### The Postdoctoral Programme: Report from the Pilot Phase

*Faculty of Medicine, University of Oslo*

#### Introduction

The Postdoctoral Programme<sup>1</sup> is directed at postdoctoral researchers in their starting phase and provides structured and tailored support for their career development. It aims to prepare participants for complex working tasks in- and outside academia by providing them with generic skills and knowledge in a creative and stimulating learning environment.

The Postdoctoral Programme offers leadership training emphasizing personal development and self-management, as well as team building, strategic leadership and supervision of young researchers. In addition, the programme provides a group mentoring scheme where the participants can exchange experiences and develop their career plans in dialogue with their peers and seniors within their field. The programme also provides grant writing support, as well as courses on innovation and entrepreneurship in close collaboration with the School of Health Innovation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.med.uio.no/english/research/postdoctoral-programme/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.med.uio.no/english/research/school-of-health-innovation/>

## BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATION

### Background

The Postdoctoral Programme was launched in February 2016. The development of the programme was based on a broad analysis of the career paths of postdoctoral researchers. According to the report “The path from postdoctoral researcher to academia” published by NIFU in 2015,<sup>3</sup> a substantial share of postdoctoral researchers who follow international mobility schemes move away from higher education and research institutions. According to this report, only 25 percent of the postdocs obtained a permanent academic position in the five to six years following their postdoctoral fellowship. These findings underline the need for preparing postdocs for different career paths and supporting them in translating their competencies and skills to various sectors of society. The need for providing general career support to postdocs has also been emphasized by the Norwegian Academy of Young Researchers.<sup>4</sup>

In this light, the overarching aim of the new Postdoctoral Programme was to offer resources and tools for strengthening the chances of successful career development of researchers at the beginning of their career, while in addition, increasing the focus on innovation at the Faculty.

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<sup>3</sup> H. Gunnes/P. Børing: “Veien fra postdoktor til akademika: En statistisk analyse av postdoktorenes karriere ved utdannings- og forskningsinstitusjonene” on the NIFU website: <http://www.nifu.no/publications/1282075/> (published 20.10.2015, downloaded 21.12.2016). <sup>4</sup>

“Når usikkerheten rår. Forskningsledelse og karriereveier for yngre forskere”: <http://akademietforyngreforskere.no/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Når-usikkerheten-rår.pdf>. (downloaded 01.06.2017).

## BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATION

In 2015, the Faculty of Medicine launched its EU COFUND<sup>5</sup> programme Scientia Fellows,<sup>6</sup> encompassing 82 new postdoctoral positions. The EU grant resulted in performance-based funds from the University of Oslo. The Faculty Board decided to use these funds for three main purposes, assembled under the umbrella FORNY-Med:

- To strengthen the Faculty's ability to obtain external funding, especially from the EU (EU +);
- To strengthen the Faculty's commitment to innovation (InnovEnt) and;
- To strengthen the career development of researchers in the early stage of their career (the Postdoctoral Programme).

The last of the three priorities led to the creation of the Postdoctoral Programme, in which Scientia Fellows candidates are an important target group.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/about/cofunding\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/about/cofunding_en)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.med.uio.no/english/research/scientia-fellows/>

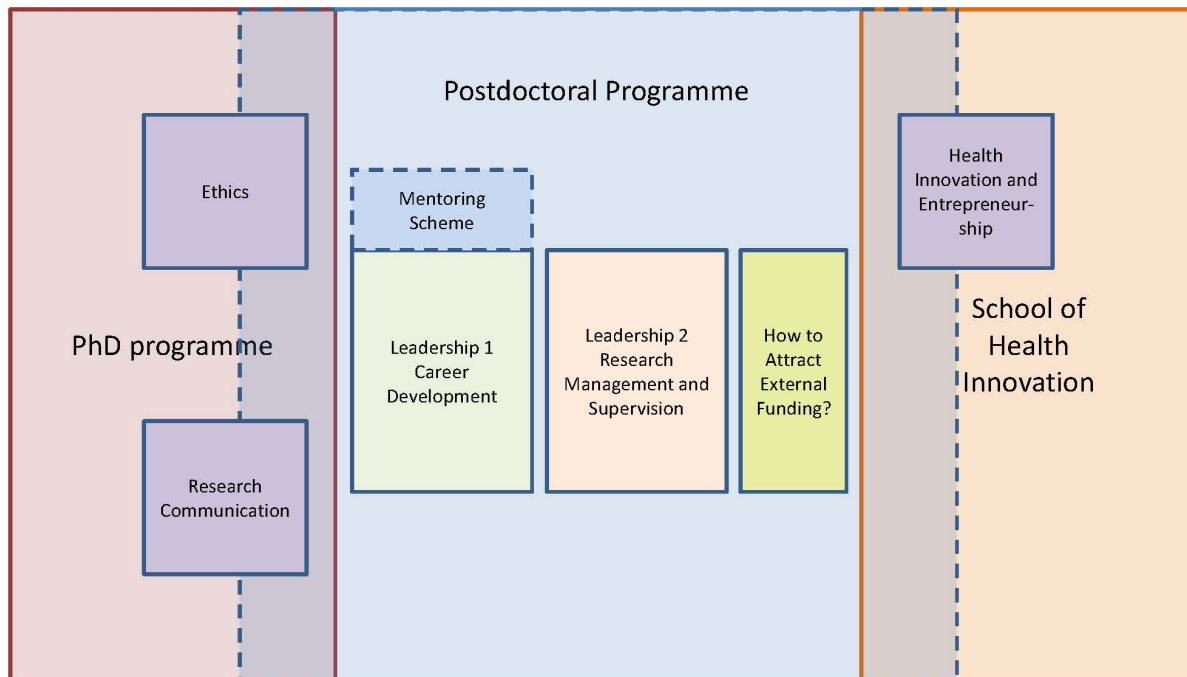
## BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATION

### Organization

The Dean of Research and Innovation, Professor Hilde I. Nebb, has the overall academic responsibility for the programme. The management of the programme is delegated to the Research Director of the programme, Professor Eivind Engebretsen. Senior Advisor Åse Sørheim and Senior Advisor Mette Groseth Langballe provide administrative support.

The different courses in the programme portfolio can be taken independently of each other, but the mentoring scheme is only open to those who have taken Leadership Course 1. All programme costs are covered by the Faculty

*Model 1: Programme Structure*





## BACKGROUND AND ORGANIZATION

The main elements of the programme are the two leadership courses, the funding course and the mentoring scheme. In addition, the programme collaborates with the School of Health Innovation and the Ph.D. programme and the postdocs are welcome to follow courses within the frame of these two programmes.

Status per 2016

In 2016, we completed five courses and launched two mentoring groups; please see Model 2.

*Model 2: Activities in the Postdoctoral Programme in 2016*

Date	Course	Participants
February/March	Leadership Course 1	24
May	How to Attract External Funding	12
June	Mentoring Scheme	16
September/October	Leadership Course 1	25
October	How to Attract External Funding	12
November/December	Leadership Course 2	30



## A Brief Description of the Courses in the Postdoctoral Programme

### Leadership Course 1: Career Development

The course focuses on:

- How to make well informed career decisions?
- How to research one's career goals?
- How to handle conflicts between work life and personal life?

To answer these questions, the following topics are explored:

- Career patterns: Theories, tools and models;
- Personal development: Analyze strengths and weaknesses;
- Organization and context: How to navigate, networking, possible career paths and research policy;
- Building your career: Skills, career goals and how to lead a research field;
- Leading yourself.

## COURSES

Working methods include presentations, case-work, experience-sharing, individual tasks, and group discussions. A JTI (Jungian Type Index) Preference-test with a personal profile report and a home assignment are included. Participants are asked to interview resource persons representing different career paths.

Duration: 5 days

### **Leadership Course 2: Research Management and Supervision**

The course has two main goals: (a) to support development of research management and leadership capabilities, and (b) to help develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills with regard to supervision of Ph.D. and Master's students. These two topics are closely connected because supervision is an important part of research leadership. The course has two modules, each lasting two days.

The module on research management focuses on the following topics:

- Understanding leadership in a research context;
- Developing research organizations;
- From strategic management to strategic leadership;
- Culture and personal leadership;
- Portfolio leadership.

The supervision module covers the following topics:

- The supervisor–candidate relationship;
- Giving feedback;
- Supervision in medical academic writing;
- Ethical aspects and dilemmas;
- Phases in the supervision trajectory;
- Institutional contexts / the Ph.D. programme.

The course provides both theoretical introductions and practical training. Working methods include presentation, casework, experience-sharing, individual tasks and group discussions. In addition, individual interviews with the participants are performed before the research management module in order to capture the participants' individual needs.

Expected learning outcomes:

- Knowing how to establish, organize and lead a research team;
- Being able to set goals and make plans for the work of the group;
- Being able to be professional supervisor of research students;
- Awareness of ethical responsibilities, qualifications and limitations as a supervisor.

Duration: 4 days

## COURSES

### How to Attract External Funding

This course focuses on funding opportunities relevant for researchers on a postdoctoral level:

- How to write scientific proposals and text analysis;
- Career development and how to build a good CV.

It gives advice on how to structure and write scientific proposals and reviews, and on the differences in writing styles for scientific publications and proposals. Career building elements are also included, and attention is paid to the participants' individual CVs.

The course involves a series of presentations, two practical exercises, as well as discussions and interaction. Participants are expected to take an active part in the course.

Expected learning outcomes:

- Awareness about which are the relevant funding opportunities and what are their demands;
- Knowledge about how to approach a call and structure a scientific proposal;
- Understanding the structure, presentation form and important elements of a good CV.

Duration: 2 days

### Group Mentoring Scheme

The Group Mentoring scheme is based on peer mentoring principles. Each mentoring group consists of six to eight participants and one of them is appointed as chair. The group meets each month over a period of one year.

In the Group Mentoring Scheme for postdocs, participants will:

- Explore different career paths;
- Exchange experiences and discuss with peers;
- Develop career plans;
- Explore dilemmas encountered as a postdoc;
- Receive advice from and share experience with seniors within their fields.

The group can invite an external guest, a guest mentor, to their meetings. The guest mentor can be a senior researcher or a representative for any career path inside or outside academia that the group would like to explore.

The Mentoring Scheme lasts one year and has an annual enrolment. An applicant needs to complete the Career Development Course before they can apply for the Group Mentoring Scheme.

Work in the groups is based on a case methodology. For each meeting, at least one of the participants has the responsibility to write a brief description of a case that she/he would like to discuss with the group. The case can touch on any topic or dilemma related to the postdoc position. The group should also discuss and further develop members' individual career plans.

Duration: 1 year (monthly meetings)

## COURSES

### School of Health Innovation

At the initiative of the Dean of Research and Innovation, Hilde I. Nebb, the Faculty of Medicine has established the School of Health Innovation (SHI)<sup>7</sup> in collaboration with NTNU, Karolinska Institutet (KI) and the Nansen Neuroscience Network. The SHI collaborates with the Postdoctoral Programme and offers courses to researchers at the beginning of their career aiming at strengthening researchers' capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship.

*Course 1: Health Innovation and Entrepreneurship* was created to equip medical, healthcare and life science researchers with tools and knowledge to innovate services for patients, create companies based on their research ideas, or bring their research ideas into existing companies.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.med.uio.no/english/research/school-of-health-innovation/about/>



### Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Programme and Courses

#### Interviews with Stakeholders at the Start of the Programme

As part of the development and implementation of the programme, we conducted interviews with current and former postdoctoral researchers. In addition, we performed focus group interviews with Scientia Fellows during spring 2016. The interviews were based on a predefined interview guide and focused on the postdocs' wishes and needs. The interviews gave solid support to the courses and mentoring scheme that we currently provide.

#### Admission

There has been strong interest in the courses. In the admission process, we focused on the following:

- Affiliation with the university;
- Quality of the application;
- Composition of the groups of participants.

#### Evaluation of Courses

Evaluation sheets covered the assessment of overall impressions of individual components, course content and administration, as well as participants' own learning experience. Scoring was performed on a four-step scale from very poor to very satisfactory. There were also open questions and places for free text and comments.

## EVALUATION

*Leadership Course 1: Career Development.* The course was run twice in 2016, in February/March and in September/October, with respectively 24 and 25 participants. A written evaluation form was sent to all participants after the courses, which was answered by 18 people in the spring and 19 in the autumn semester. The feedback after the course was generally very positive.

The participants' overall impression of the spring course was 4.47 out of 5, while the autumn course had an average of 4.11 out of 5. Based on participants' feedback, we made minor changes in the course plan. Among other things, we replaced some of the guest speakers and added a greater variety of working methods. Some participants felt that the name of the course (Career and Leadership) led to a certain discrepancy between expectations and perceived outcome. Based on this feedback, the course name is now adjusted to *Leadership Course 1: Career Development*.

*Leadership Course 2: Research Management and Supervision.* This course was run for the first time as part of the Postdoctoral Programme in November and December 2016, with 26 participants. Course leaders were Lars Christian Lassen (research management), Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke and Eivind Engebretsen (research supervision).

The evaluation of the first module was performed electronically and 22 participants answered the questionnaire. The evaluations were generally very positive. The participants expressed a strong preference that the module should last two days rather than a day and a half, due to the workload. This resulted in a prolonged course duration in the next round of courses. In addition, we introduced individual interviews with participants before the course start, which allows for better tailoring of the course content to the needs.

The evaluation of the module on research supervision was carried through at the end of the last day. The evaluation of this module consisted of seven questions, five of which were free texts. All participants reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the course, and everyone had gained new knowledge that they could use as supervisors. Topics that were emphasized as important were communication and meta-communication, and the “difficult supervision”. Some commented that the ethics section should be more case-/task-based. We have changed and expanded the ethics part based on this feedback.

*How to Attract External Funding:* This course also took place spring and autumn 2016, with 12 participants in each course. Course leaders were employees of the External Funding Unit at the Faculty of Medicine. We received eight evaluation forms after each course, and the participants were very pleased with the course in general. The score on overall impression was 4.5 in the spring term and 4.25 in the autumn. The participants told us that they wanted more direct and tailored feedback on their personal CVs. This has been changed in the 2017 version of the course.

*The Mentoring Scheme.* The Mentoring Scheme started as a pilot project in the fall of 2016. Participants were recruited from the Leadership Course 1 spring 2016. The participants were organized into two groups. After a start-up meeting with an introduction to the working methods of the scheme, the groups worked more or less independently. The faculty provided a small amount of money to support each group in their work. According to the mid-term evaluation of the mentoring scheme, each group had organized five meetings, and five more meetings were planned. Topics were e.g., external funding, supervision and communication/solving of conflicts. With the financial support from the Faculty, the groups were able to invite external experts to several meetings.

## EVALUATION

So far, the group members are very pleased with participating in the mentoring scheme. The fact that they organize the work and economy of the groups themselves was emphasized as a very positive aspect. The mid-term report provided some constructive feedback that will be considered when the next mentoring scheme starts, for example: Mandatory participation at the kick-off meeting and larger groups: up to 10–15 persons in each group.

### Framework Agreement with Mobilize Strategy

In the autumn of 2016, the Faculty of Medicine placed a call for tenders to establish a service contract with a team of course leaders for the Postdoctoral Programme. The tender should meet the following criteria:

Up to 4 courses per year;

- The agreement should be valid for approximately 3 years;
- The tender should encompass all the courses;
- Course leaders must have scientific/research background, preferably within the field of health sciences;
- The agreement would add up to a total of 1,2–1,5 million NOK over a period of three years.

Within the deadline, the Faculty received an offer from Mobilize Strategy Consulting AS, with Moveo Nordic IVS as their subcontractor. The agreement was signed November 24, 2016.

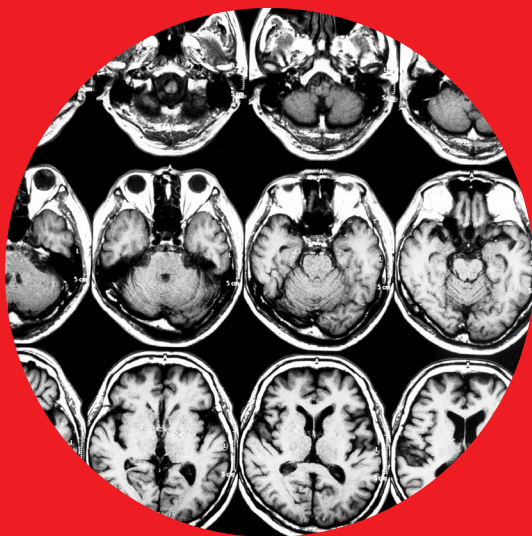
### Budget

The Postdoctoral Programme has an annual budget of 3,450,000 NOK.

### Summary, Future Plans

As a whole, we consider the development and implementation of the Postdoctoral Programme in the piloting phase to be very successful and corresponding to the defined goals of the programme. Apart from some minor adjustments, we do not see the need for substantial changes in the programme structure per now. Based on our 2016 experience, we have introduced a common call and application deadline for all parts of the programme, starting 2017. The overall learning outcome of the programme will be evaluated in 2017/2018.







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