

Postdoctoral Agreement Guidelines

General Information

On April 16, 2019, the Executive Board of the University of Bern adopted new Regulations on Duties and Employment of Postdoctoral Researchers (Postdoc Regulations), effective August 1, 2019. As per Section 8 of the said Postdoc Regulations, a contractual agreement ("Postdoctoral Agreement") must be in place for every employment position to which a postdoctoral researcher is appointed.

A Postdoctoral Agreement primarily serves to

- regulate all the elements of an employment position that are mentioned in the Postdoc Regulations, namely: duties, objectives, supervision;
- meet the stipulations of a job description.
- Easy-to-use templates for career discussions that go beyond the objectives of the respective postdoctoral employment position are available on our website.

With the revision of the Postdoctoral Agreement, as adopted by the Executive Board of the University of Bern on September 16, 2025, reviews on achievement of objectives are now integrated in the employee appraisal interview (EAI) and are thus no longer part of the Postdoctoral Agreement.

Target Group

The Postdoctoral Agreement template is intended for use for all postdoc categories (Early Postdoc, Advanced Postdoc, Senior Research Assistant) as well as for various scientific/academic settings. This results in considerable heterogeneity. The template can be adapted according to situation and need, but it must, at the very least, include the core components that are imperative to every Postdoctoral Agreement.

Supervision

A Postdoctoral Agreement must be drawn up and finalized by no later than six months after the start of employment and is to be kept by both the postdoctoral researcher and the supervisor. As a rule, the main supervision is carried out by the postdoctoral researcher's direct line supervisor (who also performs the EAI). SNSF-Ambizione grant recipients are ranked in the category of Senior Research Assistant and will have obtained their grant independently. They do not have a direct line supervisor and require the support of the management of their respective institute. Postdoctoral Agreements for SNSF-Ambizione grant recipients are to be drawn up by the contact person or management of the respective institute.

The Portal for Junior Academics provides a range of important information concerning the postdoctorate that is relevant to both supervisors and postdoctoral researchers. This includes an overview of the current funding landscape to help plan grant applications, if necessary. Supervisors are encouraged to bring the portal to the attention of their postdoctoral researchers: [Postdoctorate at the University of Bern](#)

Mentoring

Postdoctoral researchers have the option of seeking out a mentor individually, typically as a third supervisor, or of enrolling in a faculty mentoring program. Mentoring describes a medium- to long-term, trusting relationship between an experienced person (*mentor*) and a less experienced person (*mentee*). The relationship is designed so that the experienced person guides the mentee on their professional and personal development path by sharing personal experiences and knowledge. The mentor does not necessarily have to come from the same institution and does not assume any role within the university's official supervision structure. More information on mentoring, faculty programs, and support in finding a suitable mentor can be found here: [Skills: Mentoring - Portal for Junior Academics](#)

Research Project

The term "Research Project" is rooted in the Postdoc Regulations (Section 8.1). Postdoctoral researchers may be involved in several research projects, one of which will generally be their main research project. The information provided in the Postdoctoral Agreement should outline the specific situation as concisely and precisely as possible.

Schedule

When supervising postdoctoral researchers, it is particularly important to explore funding opportunities early on, as applications to funding programs often require a long lead time. Planned applications to funding programs must be taken into account when drawing up the schedule of the postdoctorate and selecting milestones.

Protected Research Time

Protected Research Time (PRT) amounts to at least half of a full-time workload (Postdoc Regulations, Section 7.2). Companies and clinics providing recurring services in the medical and veterinary field (in accordance with University Ordinance, Article 110) may set the PRT to at least 20%, on condition that tasks in providing services have been taken on. These tasks must be listed in the Postdoctoral Agreement.

Other tasks that are not directly part of the research project should also be listed in the Postdoctoral Agreement. These include, in particular, teaching duties (cp. Postdoc Regulations, Section 8.1), as well as duties in the domains of service provision, administration, self-management, student counseling, etc.

Employee Appraisal Interview (EAI)

Employee appraisal interviews (EAI) are conducted (at least) once a year and serve to review research and educational milestones as well as achievements related to other institutional duties that extend beyond the postdoctoral researcher's PRT. An EAI will also include mutual feedback-giving on how collaboration is progressing (Postdoc Regulations, Section 9.1 and 9.2).

The form to use for employee appraisal interviews is the EAI form provided by the Human Resources Office. Should the need for an interim status review arise, the status review form, available on the website,

may optionally be used for this purpose. Interim status reviews can provide additional opportunities to discuss milestones and progress in research and educational achievements independently of the EAI. Interim status reviews are particularly suitable for Early Postdocs who want closer supervision right after completing their doctoral thesis.

Career Discussions

Career discussions serve to discuss further career steps and individual circumstances with the respective postdoctoral researcher. The focus of these appraisals should be on discussing career paths not only within but also outside academia. The Postdoc Regulations do not specify who is to conduct career discussions. If need be, external experts can also be consulted (e.g., Universities of Bern Counselling Centre, mentor). The frequency of career discussions should be reasonable and practical for all types of postdoctoral studies. Situations should be avoided whereby postdoctoral researchers work as Advanced Postdocs for several years without ever having a career discussion with their supervisors. To prevent this from happening, career discussions should be conducted at least every two years, even during long-term postdoc phases that do not involve switching to a different employment category.

Bilateral Exchange between Supervisor and Postdoctoral Researcher

Based on the level and needs of the respective postdoctoral researcher, informal bilateral conversations should be had at varying intervals between the postdoctoral researcher and their supervisor, and potentially with other people as well. Bilateral exchanges offer a chance to discuss various topics, including status of research, any issues or challenges, publications, acquisition of external funding, or conferences. The framework for bilateral exchanges (frequency, meeting participants, institutionalization, format, protocol) is specified in the Postdoctoral Agreement.

Amendments to the Postdoctoral Agreement

Any substantial changes (e.g. change of supervisor, change in employment, etc.) require a direct amendment in the Postdoctoral Agreement. Minor changes, such as changes to the schedule, are subject to employee appraisal interviews (EAI).