

PhD Students, Assistants and Post-Doctoral Researchers

The university's most important asset is its future. This is shaped by PhD students, assistants and post-doctoral researchers. They must be able to fulfil their major ambitions in terms of research and education, in a climate of trust. Two points are especially important: the recruitment of talented young people and the supervision of the track they are following.

1. PHD STUDENTS AND POST-DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

Talented young people are our university's future. So it is vital that we attract and assist talented PhD students and post-doctoral researchers. They help achieve the university's core tasks. At the same time, however, they must have sufficient time for their own development and research. The university must also be able to offer an attractive work environment and atmosphere to recruit the best students - including international students - and interest them in doing a PhD at KU Leuven. Ad hoc and strategic partnerships with carefully selected international institutions can play an important role in this.

Our three doctoral schools are responsible for attracting, training and supporting PhD students. We have made the doctoral track more consistent across the board by implementing revised, university-wide doctoral regulations. A training programme for supervisors was developed in cooperation with the doctoral schools of each of the three Groups. We have facilitated the reporting and solving of problems by setting up a large network of trusted employees and stressing the role of the ombudsperson in this. The approved 'charter of the PhD students and the supervisor' defines the role of the supervisors and the work that PhD students are expected to do.

The supervisors and PhD students must regularly review the scientific progress made, the supervision and their cooperation and make work agreements in view of the annual evaluations that are enshrined in the charter. We will generalise the survey among PhD students, e.g., at the end of their PhD (whether or not) they received a diploma to better identify major problems in terms of supervision. We will pay special attention to the issue of drop-out among PhD students. The evaluation after nine months is a vital factor in this. The end stage of the completion of the dissertation will also be analysed in this framework.

We have cut red tape for the monitoring of the doctoral process on the administrative level, by phasing out the local databases and by implementing one application for the enrolment, progress and completion of the PhD. We shall see to it that PhD students and post-doctoral researchers do not have to do too much administrative work so they can concentrate on their core tasks. We will plan a thorough analysis to eliminate ambiguities and contradictions in the regulations about secondary employment and the differences in terms of IP rights between researchers. We will also examine how the feedback from students about the teaching performance of PhD students and post-doctoral researchers - including for supporting teaching activities such as practicals and labs - can be combined to enrich the doctoral programme. The preparation and training for these teaching activities will also be reviewed. Finally and where possible, we will ensure that teaching is equitable and balanced for all PhD students.

Post-doctoral status is an important stage in a student's career, between the PhD and a permanent career within or outside of university. It allows students to further deepen their specific knowledge, develop international experience, introduce new knowledge from elsewhere into a research group and develop the valorisation of the research. In the upcoming period, we shall work on developing an appreciative and integrated post-doctoral policy. Transparency and the correct appreciation/evaluation of teaching efforts, the combined supervision of projects, the margin for transferable skills and the development of a post-doctoral society will be major points for attention in this respect. An important formal objective of the HR policy for young researchers is to achieve the European “HR Excellence Research” label, for which an application file has already been submitted. This label will help attract (inter)nationally excellent researchers. At the same time, it also confirms that our HR policy meets the criteria of the EURAXESS HRS4R standard.

One of the university's main tasks is to offer realistic prospects for the future in terms of career options for young researchers. Only part of all of PhD students go on to become post-doctoral researchers and only part of the post-doctoral researchers will have an academic career. The large majority of all PhD students will thus be employed outside of university, in industry, in government, as a self-employed entrepreneur, in the social or cultural sector, and in education outside university. That is why it is our explicit task to respond as much as possible to young researchers' specific career questions. To achieve this, we have established a dedicated centre for them within the *KU Leuven Career Center*, called the *YouReCa Career Center*. Young researchers can find answers here to their career questions and needs, including collective and individual career counselling, advice about the labour market, training for writing a résumé and job interviews. This is our way of supporting our talented young students as they embark on their future career.

In this framework, it is equally important that doctoral training does not just focus on research activities and an academic career, but also on more professionalisation, by giving students the opportunity to learn broader skills (including project management and time management). This option must be offered across all Groups as an integrated part of our doctoral training. Doctoral students must be trained to be broad-minded and decisive professionals, who are capable of holding all kinds of technical and managerial positions in the job market, in today's innovation and knowledge economy. This also holds true for post-doctoral researchers.

An important option for after graduation is the valorisation of research, e.g., by starting up a spin-off. To continue to fulfil our social role, we will stimulate and promote entrepreneurship and enterprise among students, researchers and professors. This is achieved among others by targeted actions by the LRD (*Leuven Research & Development*) and the LCIE (*Leuven Community for Innovation Driven Entrepreneurship*). Our young researchers must help play this valorisation role. That is why we wish to further develop valorisation training for PhD students, among others by explicitly offering management and entrepreneurship training in the doctoral programmes of the three doctoral schools. The IRF and the KICs of the EIT (*European Institute of Innovation and Technology*), in which KU Leuven is a successful participant, offer options in terms of valorisation training and valorisation projects and will be actively stimulated.

Besides the scientific experience, working in Leuven is also a social and cultural experience for international doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, which will significantly contribute to their life experience and career. The fact that they do not speak Dutch can be a major obstacle however. At the request of several researchers, we will look into how they can acquire basic notions of Dutch and European

culture in a flexible manner. This will intensively enrich their experience in Leuven, extending their career here, within or outside of the university.

2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Some research activities and technical jobs require specific expertise and permanent support. In addition to this, the innovation and valorisation of research results is an important objective and part of the university's mission, on the societal level. Stimulating and offering support for entrepreneurship, e.g., spin-offs, is vital in this framework. In 2007, the university developed the research framework for a targeted HR policy for permanent research and valorisation jobs. After having worked for ten years with this system, we have now developed a new arrangement for the research framework, which confirms and optimises our policy. The main principles of this, among others, are that the focus of a job in the research framework can consist of the development, management and valorisation of research and that henceforth all these positions will also be appreciated in a (financially) similar career path. IOF fellowship holders will also be integrated in this arrangement.

Here we will strengthen the option for valorisation by making the additional job profile of valorisation manager, with so-called third and fourth funding, more explicit, besides the profile of IRF fellowship holder, with so-called IRF funding. Henceforth, the research entity and the department or the faculty will be actively involved in the recruitment, selection, supervision and promotion of members of the research framework so they can also play a role in the embedding of members of the research framework and the career decisions associated with this.