

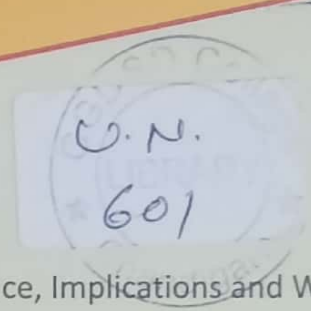


# UNIVERSITY NEWS

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## Postdoctoral Fellows in HEIs: Importance, Implications and Way Forward

H A Ranganath\*

*Charles Darwin, has emphasized the importance of transitional or linking species for understanding how new species emerge from common ancestors through gradual modification.*

Post-doctoral fellows constitute an important segment of the University Research Ecosystem. In the words of Balram (Current Science, 1999), together with PhD students, postdoctoral fellows are the backbone of the scientific enterprise. They are, indeed, foot soldiers of science. Postdocs represent an intermediate stage/step between academic staff/independent research faculty and the research students. Postdocs, as a skilled scientific cadre, can contribute towards building a sustained and innovative scientific activity exploring new domains of research. This is akin to the argument of Charles Darwin, emphasising the importance of transitional or linking species for understanding how new species emerge from common ancestors through gradual modification. In a way, the presence of post-docs reflects many dynamic aspects of the research ambience of institutions.

The journal NATURE conducted a global postdoc survey, and the full survey data sets are available at [go.nature.com/3tmckuq](http://go.nature.com/3tmckuq). Chris Woolston has captured the essence of the outcome of this survey in articles that appeared in Nature (2020). Nature's survey of postdoctoral researchers drew responses from more than 7,600 respondents in 93 countries, including a series of questions about job prospects. One of the major responses to this query was 'Cloudy prospects', as Postdoctoral researchers often struggle to turn their temporary positions into full-time, stable careers. Most of them were worried about their career progression. Further, it depends on the reputation of the mentor and the laboratory where one had the postdoc position, as well as the domains/disciplines of research. Researchers have opined with little job security, poor compensation and an unclear path to a permanent post.

In spite of a postdoc stint, the fellows suffer from limitations like computational skills, some wished they were better at specific experimental techniques, and a lack of proficiency with statistics and lack skills to compete, especially in the current job climate. Thirty per cent said they had already completed two or three positions, a few reported having more than four or five, and some had done as many as six or seven. Some have felt after a postdoc, "There is a disappearance of options"!

Prior to NATURE's survey, another attempt to get the feedback from Postdocs was the 'U-MARC survey' (2017, Understanding Motivations for Academic Research Careers). U-MARC included Postdoctoral scholars ("postdocs") in the biological and biomedical sciences from across the United States. The summary of the qualitative analysis of this survey was published in PLOS ONE (Afonja et al., 2021). Even

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