

# Applying to Post-Doctoral Positions

## Resource for Doctoral Students

### Intro

This handout is intended to serve as a starting point as you prepare to search for and apply to post-doc positions. You will find here a general overview about types of post-doctoral positions, resources for finding them, and advice on common application documents. We have also included links to additional resources. Plan to continue your research into best practices by speaking with your career advisor, with alumni, with peers, and with faculty in your field.

We encourage you to explore and prepare for multiple possible directions, within academia and beyond it. Your PhD prepares you for a wide range of career opportunities, but discovering those that make most sense for you personally takes time. Make sure you plan to start your search as early as you can. It is crucial to be aware of the realities of the academic job market, so that you can make informed decisions.

### What is a post-doc?

A post-doctoral position is a role you pursue after finishing your doctoral degree. It allows you to demonstrate your potential to make a significant contribution in your research field by collaborating with like-minded researchers, publishing, broadening your teaching and supervisory experience, expanding your network, and developing your reputation in academia. A post-doc is an important step in becoming an independent senior researcher.

The length of a post-docs varies from institution to institution, and it often lasts between one and three or four years. Depending on the source of funding and the place of work, you can find post-doctoral positions:

- At a university, where you join an existing group of researchers or a faculty member working on a research agenda that has been already decided and may also be expected to fulfil duties as a lecturer and/or contribute to the life of the department or the institution by organizing events, seminars, etc.

- Via a fellowship funded by a university or a funding body, such as a research council, and awarded to individuals proposing their own research ideas.
- At an external organization, such as a research institute, think-tank, government organization (for example, national banks), or a private company.

## Timing

Generally, most post-doc opportunities are advertised between October and January, however openings may appear throughout the year. Your research into possible opportunities should include finding out when openings are advertised in your discipline.

It is recommended that you start looking for a post-doc early, gathering information and connecting with people who can share information about their experiences and/or provide advice. Plan ahead. You should be ready to start actively applying about a year before you would like to start the position. (Most commonly, this means sending out applications during the fall of your final year as a PhD student).

## Clarifying motivation and goals

The primary and most realistic reason to consider a post-doc is if you are planning to become a researcher or aiming for a teaching role at a research-oriented institution. (If you do not aim to become a researcher and view the post-doc only as a comfortable solution to postpone looking for jobs, please make sure you speak with a career advisor and/or seek access to information and resources about career destinations for doctoral students, such as the Alumni Employment reports on the [Facts & Figures](#) page of the Career Services Office website.

If you decide to go ahead with it, take time to reflect on your short- and long-term goals and on your values and interests. Consider how you would like to invest your energy and time. Think about things such as: your research topics, faculty members or researchers you would like to collaborate with, specific research programs and departments, the reputation of the institution you are aiming to join, location, visa and language requirements, and considerations related to family and/or significant others. These criteria will help you narrow your search. You can make a more compelling application for a role in an institution that matches your values, your priorities, your interests.

## Finding post-doc opportunities

The most common way to search for post-docs is by following dedicated online platforms or websites of the institutions of interest (see some examples below). Reaching out to departments and faculty members who share the same research interest as you and asking directly about possibilities to cooperate via post-doctoral roles is also efficient. The ideal approach is a hybrid involving both research and outreach.

Make use of your network in the field: ask current professors and supervisors, people you meet at conferences, and your peers if they are aware of any vacancies.

## Sample resources

Some of the broad platforms publishing post-doc and other academic positions include:

- <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/> **EURAXESS** – a [jobs&funding board](#) addressing mobile researchers in the European Research Area. The portal also includes links to local EURAXESS contact organizations in different countries, providing advice about job environments, visas, relocations, pension, organizations and institutions, resources and more
- <https://www.eui.eu/ProgrammesAndFellowships/AcademicCareersObservatory/AcademicCareersbyCountry>, **Academic Careers by Country** - with country-specific information on career advancement, eligibility for non-nationals, sometimes salaries, links to academic institutions and research centers, and various job portals
- <https://academicpositions.com/> **Academic Positions** – international post-doctoral, research and faculty positions in fields including Social Sciences, Gender Studies, Sociology or Cultural Studies
- <https://jobs.chronicle.com/> **The Chronicle of Higher Education** – listing administrative, post-doctoral and faculty positions in academia, and also opportunities outside academe with educational service providers, for-profit organizations or non-profit & governmental institutions
- <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/postdoctoral-fellowships> **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** European and Global Postdoctoral Fellowships

- <https://www.researchresearch.com/jobs/> , **Research** - a wide range of vacancies across the UK and Ireland, covering roles in research policy, management, and support
- <https://www.postdocjobs.com/> **PostdocJobs** - a major platform for postdoc recruitment worldwide (although majority of opportunities US based) including positions in Environment and Earth Science

## Application process - Overview

As with any professional application, a post-doc application must be tailored to the specific requirements. You will need to demonstrate that you possess research skills and that you have a genuine interest aligned with the targeted position.

The most common application materials are:

- a **letter of motivation** or a **statement of purpose** explaining your interest in and fit for the position;
- a **tailored academic CV** that includes your academic and non-academic experience and credentials; a **research statement** (also known as a statement of research interest, project proposal, or research philosophy statement) introducing your academic identity to the selection committee;
- **letters of recommendations** (also known as reference letters).

Occasionally, a **list of publications** is requested in the form of a separate document, and you may be required to submit **writing samples** or **degree certificates**, as well.

If you apply for a fellowship built around your own research agenda, you are expected to submit a **research proposal**. This requires more effort due to the challenge of convincing someone to fund your project, rather than joining a research project that has already been approved for support.

To read more about these documents and about the information that should be included, check the list of Academic Application Documents on the [Career Knowledge Hub](#) page of the Career Services Office website.

### Additional resources:

[How to Apply for Postdoctoral Positions and Choose the Right One](#)  
[The Guardian article on Applying for a postdoc job](#)