

DKFZ Career Day Academia, 2020

The DKFZ Career Day on Academia was held on October 2nd and 3rd of 2020 and was organized by volunteers (PhDs and Postdocs) from DKFZ with the guidance of the DKFZ Career office. The aim of the event was to expose early stage researchers to different facets of Academia, how to transition to a group leader, and how to be successful in the Academic world. In Academia, competition is very high as you climb up the ladder and the ascent is very steep. Therefore, to equip ourselves early on will help us to make better-informed decisions, be it if this is a career path you want to take, what your destinations can or should be, or how to reach that destination. The program was designed keeping this in mind.

The Event

Due to the coronavirus pandemic we moved this event to a virtual setting. Although this created a few challenges especially regarding the networking opportunities when compared to a physical event, we tried to tackle this by setting up a slack channel where speakers and participants could join and continue their discussion. The virtual format also provided us an opportunity to reach far and wide with participants joining in from Mexico, Egypt, Finland and Palestine.

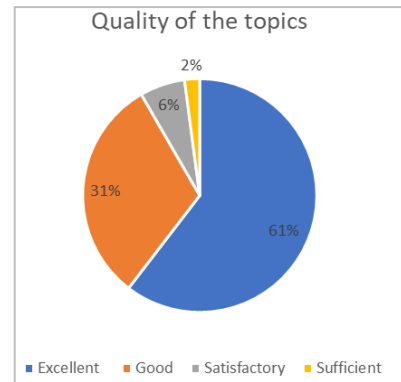
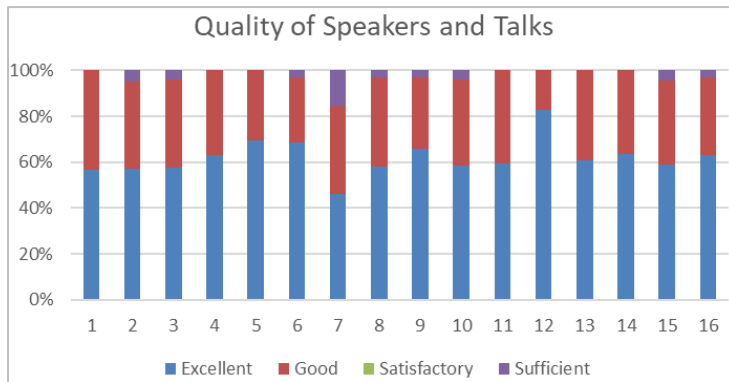
We had 26 speakers including 14 DKFZ alumni, 9 currently working at DKFZ, and 3 external speakers. Spread over two days the program included a mix of talks, round table discussions, workshops, and one-on-one meetings. For the talks we invited speakers from different stages of their career and various backgrounds, and also from grant organizations, to present a broad overview of the career prospects in Academia. Additionally, each speaker was asked to focus on a particular aspect of their career which was highly appreciated by the audience, as this avoided overlaps and repetition between the talks. The two workshops, *Creativity in Science* and *Well-being in Academia* were in great demand and the limited spots were filled soon after we opened the registration. The participants were also very positive in their feedback. The round tables focussed on lateral aspects of the academic field. Finally, the one-on-one meetings were arranged for pre-selected participants and their speaker of choice to facilitate networking and mentorship within the constraints of a virtual event.

We would like to express our gratitude to our sponsors

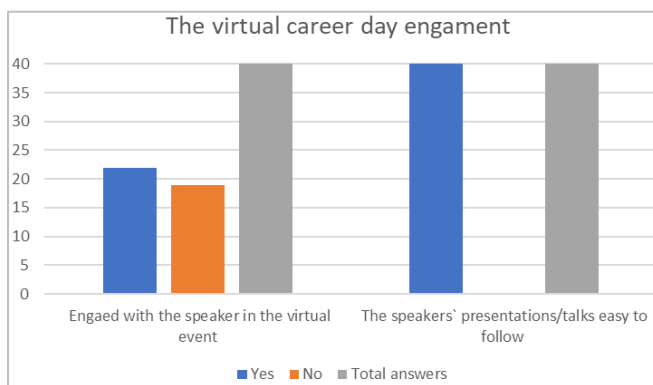


Participants

The total number of registered participants was 217 for the event. The number of attendees per session was around 97; on an average 75 for the talks, and varied between 13-45 for the round table discussions. The background of the participants was 4% Bachelor students, 13% MSc students, 34% PhD Students, 33% Postdocs, 3% Senior Scientists and others. Of these 77% were from DKFZ or alumni of DKFZ and 23% from other institutions in Heidelberg and beyond. Based on the feedback we received from 48 of the attendees we can infer that they were very satisfied with both the quality of the speakers and the topics covered.



Despite being a virtual event, participants had the opportunity to interact and network with the speakers due to our initiatives such as slack channel and one-on-one meetings. This is reflected in their responses to the below questions summarized here



Suggestions for improvement from participants (selected)

- More (one-on-one) sessions, with more time for each.
- More focus on mentoring and academic writing
- Research grants during postdoc to show ability of grant acquisition
- Maybe inviting more speakers from abroad (non-HD alumni)
- Always have an option to attend it virtually, even if we are not staring in the face of a pandemic.

Take Home message (selected)

- Very appropriate field related topic and the speaker was very friendly, informative and gave precise experimental and scientific guidance for my future work
- Setting up my expectations joining academic careers
- Start early in your postdoc shaping your publication record, soft-skill toolbox and networking skills
- Try achieving your goals despite difficulties of the profession & the limitations of your CV
- Networking is very important
- You have to build you team slowly and with people you can rely own.
- Limited contract duration and short-term extensions in academia are a problem
- I liked very much the tips about starting your own research and the ones about keeping a good balance between work and personal life
- Find a good mentor