

Spring Newsletter of the PostDoc Network

Editorial

Dear PostDocs,

The PDN committee made a good start of the year. Many of you know that the first Academic Career Day took place in the beginning of February. The organization of this long-awaited event was a joint effort of the PDN, PhD representatives and the DKFZ Career Service. We are happy to report that it attracted almost 250 participants, and the feedback was enormously positive. We thank the organizers and the speakers for making it possible and we plan to continue addressing the aspects of academic career in our future events. You will find a personal account about the day on pages 2 and 3 of this newsletter.

If you are interested in pursuing a career in academia, you will enjoy reading the article about last year's German Alumni Meeting (page 4). The conference was organized by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the frame of promoting alumni research in Germany. Representatives of DKFZ and other institutes in Heidelberg were invited to attend. Our report also features a list of funding opportunities that were mentioned at this meeting, held in Berlin in November 2013.

As you know, the PDN committee regularly elects new speaker and deputy speaker, whose main task is to represent the PDN to the DKFZ management board. The last election took place recently, and we are proud to introduce Anna Shavinskaya and Christian Breunig as our new speaker and deputy speaker (see page 5). Sarah Mang and Inés Fernández Ulibarri, who performed these functions for the past two years, will step down and leave DKFZ. They share their thoughts and experiences with the PDN in this newsletter (see boxes on pages 5 and 6). We would like to thank Sarah and Inés for the great work they have done and wish them luck and success in their future career.

Finally, I kindly ask you to pay attention to the Annual Survey ad below. The PDN committee is doing its best to adjust its activities and current projects to your needs. By filling the survey you will help us determine the best direction in which our efforts should be applied.

Olga Ucar

Editor of the PDN Newsletter

Dear PostDocs,

In our continuous effort to identify your needs and make the necessary steps to meet them, we would kindly ask you to answer our questions in this year's PostDoc Survey:

<https://survey.dkfz.de/>

In the last years, we found that we have a high turnover PostDoc population, but the challenges of PostDoc life remain the same. Many PostDocs want to stay in academia, but they are uncertain how to achieve this goal. Through the PostDoc survey we could assess the need for further information on this topic and recently the first academic career day was held at the DKFZ with great success. By answering this survey, you will help us to have a solid ground for our discussions with the management board when suggesting future events, career days and other good opportunities for PostDocs at DKFZ. Besides, we will accordingly shape the activities of the PDN to best meet your needs. We thank you very much for your cooperation and we will be happy to have your valuable suggestions.



The PDN Committee (photo by Nick Kepper)

A Passion for Science: Academic Career Day

The first Academic Career Day in DKFZ which took place on the 7th of February was a joint initiative of PhD council, DKFZ Career Service and PostDoc Network. Among 240 registered participants, over a 100 PhD students and about the same number of PostDocs took advantage of this opportunity to hear what our senior peers have to say about making it to the top in the academic research. We are very pleased with the outcome and massive feedback. The PDN will continue to address the topic of the academic career development in the future.



Some of the organizers:

Marion Gürth, Christopher Domnick, Timo Kehl, Barbara Janssens, Christian Breunig, Anja Geselhart, Hadeel Khallouf

Reflected by the main target groups, the day featured two panel discussions about transition from PhD to PostDoc and from PostDoc to professor. The morning session was dedicated to securing own funding, be it a scholarship or bench money. Additionally, the participants had a chance to meet the speakers at the lunch table discussions. The Career Day was a huge success, demonstrating again that a lot of young people in DKFZ and other institutes in Heidelberg are interested in a career in academia and want to hear advice and receive tips on how such a career should be pursued.

Funding

During the morning session, we heard short presentations on specific funding programmes from Dr. Gerlind Wallon (EMBO), Dr. Schallum Werner (DFG), Dr. Steffen Mehlich (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation) and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wick (DKH). Personal and research funding opportunities are vast: you should choose the appropriate funding agency depending on your project specifics. There are several key issues to consider: Your research and CV should be at least solid or outstanding, your proposal should be very well written and concise, but the key to

success is networking and international mobility. You have to go abroad for at least a year; there is no way around it. For some stipends you will also have to show that you intend to come back to Germany afterwards, and some programmes are intended for people who are coming to Germany from overseas, but mobility has to be there. It is better to think about mobility early during your career planning, but better late than never. International mobility was also mentioned in the panel discussions, so if you thought you could go around it and still stay in academia – well, think again.

PhD to PostDoc: how to choose

Here the key words are: start early, mobility (again!) and networking (ditto!). True, if you aim for scientific career, you have to start thinking about your steps immediately after starting your PhD. You all know that the next step will be doing a PostDoc – but how to choose where to do it? Most of our invited speakers agreed that the best way to find a postdoctoral position is through networking. How do you develop your network? The answer is: by attending meetings and talking to people. Do not be shy, approach senior scientists and let them know you are interested in their area of research and invite yourself to give a talk – it pays off! Choose your research area and your mentor wisely and remember: you have to move to a foreign country at some point.

PostDoc to Professor: what really matters

Prof. Wiestler opened this panel session with a brief but definitive statement: discover the area in science you are truly passionate about, find the best stimulating scientific environment for networking, keep open for moving as changing the labs promotes your creativity. This is true at all stages, from M.Sc. students to people already on tenure track. A passion for scientific research was mentioned as the key to success. I found it interesting that more senior scientists tend to mention this more often than young group leaders. Young group leaders rather concentrated on publications, networking, mobility, getting funding. It seems these topics are very pressing to them. It rather makes one wonder: are young scientists under too much career pressure, uncertainty and stress? But once you have tenure, you can think of science again as your passion, not as a tool to achieve career goals (or so we all hope).

In this regard, it was a pity that many participants attended only one of the panels: PhD students only went to the morning session, and PostDocs – only to the afternoon. In fact, all of them could gain important insights from both sessions. Those who are doing their PhD now would benefit from planning well ahead and hearing about the steps that they have to take AFTER a successful PostDoc. On the other hand, it wouldn't hurt PostDocs to listen to advice



Panel discussion "From PostDoc to Professor":
A short introduction by Christian Breunig (PDN)

they should have heard BEFORE their PostDoc time and see what they could have done differently and whether there are ways to amend it.

So what do we PostDocs have to do in order to make it? When you apply for a group leader position, you are mostly judged by your independence, i.e. if you want to strengthen your application, you have to:

- Publish as a corresponding author
- Apply for own funding
- Make sure you can carry your project with you
- Generate preliminary data beforehand
- Be recognized in the scientific community

Many professors underline the importance of a mentor, who can give you constant advice. It is extremely important to pick a supervisor who is not just interested in guiding your research but also willing to mentor you as a person. Getting a mentor, who is not your supervisor, can also be an advantage. You are grown-up enough to take your career into your own hands: approach people and ask for help and advice, go to conferences and establish

your network, take initiative in your lab. Some speakers mentioned teaching experience and acquiring communication skills (writing and presentation) as "DOs". As for "DONTs", avoid major gaps in your career, especially doing a PostDoc without publications, and do not wait too long after publishing. Nowadays people aim for getting a tenure-track position latest by the age of 40, and the earlier you do so, the higher your chances are. As one of the speakers mentioned, remember that age discrimination is a much more serious problem in Germany than overseas. Speaking of overseas, have you moved yet? How many professors you know do not have US or UK on their CV? These two countries seem to be popular in particular because of the language skills you acquire in a native English environment; however, many professors agree that you can find possibilities to do excellent science elsewhere in Europe. As Tim Beissbarth mentioned, many PostDocs who stay for a long time at the DKFZ get reluctant to move on and this might hamper their career. Do not be afraid to move, it can make all the difference.

And here is a last piece of advice to those who apply for group leader positions: a novel and exciting research proposal might be even more important than your publication record. Have self-confidence and courage to follow the unexpected, do not be afraid to take risks, - then you will have all the chances of making it to professorship. Because science is your passion, of course.

Olga Ucar

You can find the programme, slides, reports and feedback on the intranet (kindly provided by the DKFZ Career Service): <http://intracoop/sites/phd-careers/>



Research Alumni Conference Germany 2013

In November 2013 the 1st Research Alumni Conference Germany took place in Berlin. This event was organized by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the frame of promoting research alumni work at universities in Germany. Heidelberg University was nominated to participate and representatives of the Heidelberg Alumni International, Silke Rodenburg and Jena Friedrich, together with five selected research alumni from Heidelberg. DKFZ had the opportunity to be represented there as well.

The focus of the conference was the relations of international research alumni with German university and non-university organizations, which seems to be essential to promote the outstanding research and development in Germany. The idea is to build a network of students and scientist who have been in German universities to act as ambassadors in their own country. These relationships would contribute to advertise the excellence in research and funding opportunities as well as facilitate connections to their host universities or with research institutes in Germany.

Funding opportunities is one of the strong factors which make Germany very attractive for doing research, in particular for younger investigators. Postdoctoral researchers and junior group leaders have great chances to obtain

funds. During the conference, different funding opportunities were presented for junior researchers to perform their work in Germany or to collaborate with German universities (see the list below for further information about funding possibilities in Germany). There are, however, fewer options for senior postdoctoral researchers; they seem to have difficulties to find funding possibilities for the continuation of their scientific career. Unfortunately, this issue is overlooked not exclusively in Germany, but also on the international level. Representatives and participants agreed that changes in the system need to be implemented to improve the current situation of senior scientists.

I would like to thank Heidelberg Alumni International (HAI) and Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for involving us in this inspiring event and providing an excellent environment for networking with international scientists working in Germany.

Inés Fernández Ulibarri

Some of the funding opportunities in Germany

Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

- Research Fellowships - postdoctoral researchers
- Sofja Kovalevskaja Award - Junior Group Leaders

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

- Research Grants for PhD projects - Exceptionally for Postdoctoral Researchers
- Research Stays for University Academics and Scientists with Doctorate Degree
- Re-invitation Programme for Former Scholarship Holders
- Mobility measures to Promote International Research Cooperation

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)

- Individual Grants: Individual Research Grants; Mercator Guest Scientists; Reinhard Koselleck-Projects
- Coordinated Programmes: Research Units; Priority Programmes; Collaborative Research Centres; International Research Training Groups, Excellent Initiative
- Promoting Young Researchers: Research Fellowships; One's own position; Emmy Noether-Programme; Heisenberg-Programme
- International Scientific Contacts
- Infrastructure
- Prizes: Gott Wilhelm Leibniz-Prize and many others

Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft – TALENTA (for female scientists)

- Fraunhofer TALENTA excellence – leading position
- Fraunhofer TALENTA speed up – transition step or career planning
- Fraunhofer TALENTA start – Master's degree

International Networking, Helmholtz Association

- Helmholtz PostDoc Program
- Helmholtz Young Investigator Group

The Leibniz Association

- Leibniz Mentoring programme for women
- Leibniz-DAAD Research Fellowship for international postdoctoral researchers
- Funding possibilities for foreigners to come back to host countries

Max Planck Society

- Max Planck Research Group (MPRG)
- Max Planck Partner Group
- maxNet – platform for exchange
- International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS)

Websites of interest

www.euraxess.de
www.research-in-germany.de
www.research-alumni.de

New speakers of the PDN

The PDN committee comprises a group of PostDocs, who keep the network active by organizing events, distributing information, and, most importantly, represent the PDN to the management board of DKFZ. Our three main areas are Networking, Career Perspectives and Visibility, and we always welcome new members. As you know, PostDocs do not stay too long at one place, and the PDN committee welcomes new members and says good-bye to the old ones on a regular basis.

This time we announce the changes of our speaker and deputy speaker. Our former speaker **Sarah Mang** steps down to continue her career as a software developer at SAP, Waldorf. Sarah worked in the group of Dr. Floca, Software development for Integrated Diagnostic and Therapy (E071) since October 2009. While being an active member of the PDN, she developed and maintained our website and Facebook page and put an enormous amount of work into the Annual Survey (which you are invited to complete again this year). She has been the speaker of the PDN for the last two years.

Our former deputy speaker **Inés Fernández Ulibarri** has worked in the group of Dr. Nettelbeck, Junior Research Group Oncolytic Adenovirus (F110) since March 2009. She has been an active member of the PDN and headed the Career Seminar Group since 2010. As a deputy speaker, she helped Sarah organize the PDN activities, while still spending a lot of time on seminars and Career Days. Her latest effort will result in the Clinical Research Career Day on the 24th of March.

We are grateful to Sarah and Inés for their passionate and devoted work in the committee and wish them all the best in their future careers! At the same time, we would like to welcome new speaker and deputy speaker: **Anna Shavinskaya** and **Christian Breunig** (pictures on the right).

Anna is a molecular biologist and works as a PostDoc at the DKFZ since April 2010. She just returned from her ma-

ternity leave, before which she was a scientist and coordinator in the Clinical Cooperation Unit "Molecular Oncology of solid Tumors" (G360). She also coordinated one of the central S2 Facilities of the DKFZ. From February 2014 she takes over new scientific management tasks in the Division of Vascular Oncology and Metastasis (A190) of Prof. Augustin. She has been a PDN committee member since September 2010 and is the new speaker of the PDN and your main contact person.

Christian is a cell and molecular biologist and works in the Division of Molecular Genome Analysis (Prof. Dr. Stefan Wiemann, B050) as a PostDoc since January 2012. His research focus is in the field of mechanisms of cell signaling and deregulated miRNAs in breast cancer. He has been a PDN committee member since spring 2013 and is the newly elected deputy speaker of the PDN. He also heads our Academic Career Group.

The established working groups of the PDN will continue their work to improve the situation of PostDocs at DKFZ by providing information on career possibilities, answering specific questions regarding any aspect of PostDoc life, and providing space for scientific and non-scientific exchange between PostDocs. If you are interested in learning more about the PDN or would like to see your ideas come to life contact us (pdn@dkfz.de) or join our next meeting.



I got interested in the PDN in 2010 because I was looking for contact with PostDocs outside my group. In my first Committee meeting I met the founders of the PostDoc network, a group of motivated and enthusiastic PostDocs working on improving the situation for PostDocs at the DKFZ. They made me welcome and included me in their projects. In the following years I did support general PDN projects such as the career seminar and developed own projects with fellow PostDocs such as the Facebook page, the retreat or the Annual Surveys. All PostDocs in the PDN were always very supportive for new ideas and everybody got involved in the projects. As former speaker of the PDN I learned a lot about organizing heterogeneous teams and project management and negotiating with groups outside our own network. The contact to PostDocs, especially those from different disciplines, got me a wider view on the scientific landscape at the DKFZ as well as a different view on my own

scientific projects. I am now leaving the DKFZ to join a large software company. The experiences from my time with the PDN will help me in my future projects, since networking and project management is essential in all job opportunities. Being part of the PDN made my PostDoc experience special and I hope lots of PostDocs will take the chance to join this network and make new ideas come true.

Sarah Mang, former speaker of the PDN



Three year ago I joined the PDN to get to know PostDocs working at my research institute. I thought it would make my life in Heidelberg and workplace more pleasant. Surprisingly, I turned out that joining PDN was even more enriching and stimulating I expected. I did not only meet friendly and competent Post-Docs, but also other scientists from DKFZ, from other institutes in Heidelberg and even from other institutes in Germany. Furthermore, I have learnt to organize events which have given me the opportunity to better understand the structure of DKFZ, to extend my professional network and improve organizational and communication skills. In addition, it has been very important to decide how I want to continue my professional career.

Now I am stepping down from the positions of deputy speaker and coordinator of Career Seminar. It is time to move on. It has been a pleasure to meet all you and I wish you all the best in the future. Being part of the PDN Committee has been a great experience and I strongly encourage PostDocs to join the PDN to make your stay at DKFZ more fulfilling.

Inés Fernández Ulibarri

DKFZ Career Day

Clinical Research & Regulatory Affairs



24th of March 2014

**DKFZ, Communication Center,
Lecture hall**

Upcoming events:

PDN committee meeting: 18th of March, 12:00, D0.02.010

Clinical Research Career day: 24th of March, 09:00 - 16:00, Lecture Hall

Get-Together: end of March (check your e-mail)