

## KIPA report on postdoc survey 2016

### Aim of the survey

KI Postdoc Association (KIPA) is a member driven organization representing postdoctoral scientists at KI. Our mission is to give KI postdoc scientists a voice and a supportive network. We aim to work together with KI leadership to improve working and training conditions for postdoc scientists. This will lead to enhance productivity and higher quality science run by postdoctoral scientist, therefore increase attractiveness of KI as an employer.

To be able to better represent KI postdoc scientists, KIPA run regular surveys and report this results to KI leadership.

### Main findings:

#### Administrative information

- After January 2015, the percentage of postdoc scientists that received information on the benefits derived by scholarship or employment increased compared to previous years.
- We found irregularities on minimum stipend duration.
- Regarding matters to settle in Sweden (personal number, Swedish ID, VISA), the majority of KI postdoc scientists rely on the information provided by KI. Therefore, they must be as clear and complete as possible.

#### Working conditions

- The majority of postdoctoral scientists at KI are quite satisfied with their working conditions. Low satisfaction is related to job instability, low income, poor work-life balance, lack of certain social benefits on a stipend.
- KI postdoc scientists see as unequal treatment the opportunity to be a stipend holder when a foreigner with a foreigner PhD degree.
- Voting rights are limited to employed postdoc scientists. Stipend holders cannot vote.
- KI postdoctoral scientists would recommend a fellow postdoc to work at KI, but not on stipend.
- Approximately half of the KI postdoctoral scientists do not know who to contact in case of harassment, intimidation, or conflict.

#### Postdoctoral training conditions

- Postdoctoral training conditions are considered mildly positive.
- Postdoctoral scientists need more career support, more transparency on career advancement, and more opportunity for career development.

#### KIPA proposal to improve postdoctoral working and training conditions

- 1) Ombudsman for postdoctoral scientists to address the insufficient support postdoctoral scientists receive in case of harassment, intimidation, or conflict;
- 2) Extension of voting rights to all postdoctoral scientists, regardless employment status;
- 3) Representation for postdoctoral scientists at Department Councils and Board of Research;
- 4) Improve information provided before joining KI. Having postdoc representatives and changing the interview routine will facilitate this process;
- 5) Better control mechanisms to assure the correct implementation of current KI regulations (e.g., irregularities on minimum length of scholarship, signing of understanding of scholarship regulation);
- 6) Implementation of new regulations to improve the career advancement and working conditions for postdoc scientists (increased transparency; decrease of the academia leaky pipeline);
- 7) Implementation of regulations that protects stipend holders, as they are the most vulnerable group within the postdoc community (increase equality);
- 8) Enrich the postdoctoral training to increase their professionalism, marketability, and career advancement.

We are confident that happier postdoc scientists will run better science for the benefit of KI and medical research. **KIPA would like to support and be part of the positive changes** necessary to

improve postdoc working and training conditions. KIPA should be recognised by KI leadership as representative of KI postdoctoral scientists.

Importantly, our suggestions are in line with the “Regeringens proposition 2016/17:50”. Indeed, among the numerous directives, the Ministry of Education clearly stated that **universities and colleges in Sweden have to take responsibility for the career system and working conditions of young researchers.**

## Survey Analysis

### Methods

KIPA sent this survey to KI postdoc scientists in June 2016. **269 active postdoc scientists at KI responded to the survey.** 39.2% of respondents were male, 60.8% were female. **The pool is representative of all department at KI,** as we got responses from 20 out of 22 departments at KI. The exceptions are departments with a high presence of medical doctors, such as Department of Clinical Sciences and Department of Dental Medicine.

Data are reported as percentages. For some questions in the survey, we subdivided the respondents in two groups: arrived at KI before or after January 2015. We clearly stated when such sorting was made.

We chose January 2015 as watershed because we are aware that KI worked to improve the quality of information provided to newly arrived postdoc scientists at KI regarding several administrative matters, including scholarship- and salary-derived benefits. The parties that affected these changes were the Dean of Research at that time, Hans-Gustaf Ljunggren, the HR Office at the central administration, and the KI International Staff Office at KI. All these parties were made aware of the need to improve communication by KIPA elected representative (e.g., Chair and Vice-Chair) based on the results of a previous survey run by KIPA within the postdoc community at KI (Annex A).

### Results

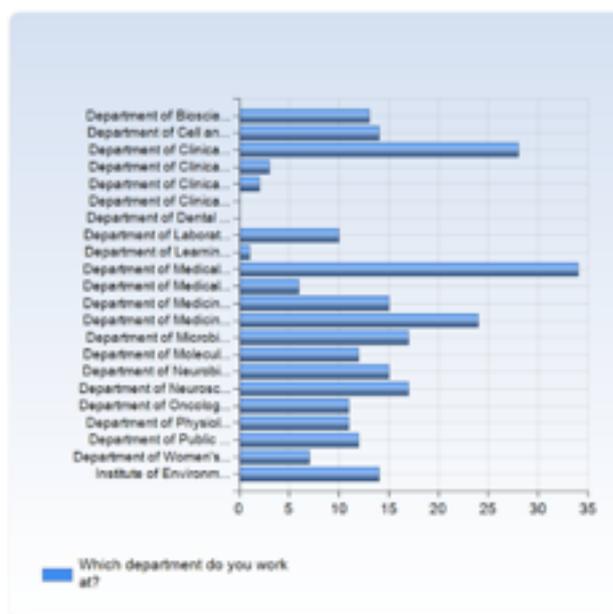
#### Demographic

21.3% of respondents were Swedish, 46.1% were non-Swedish EU citizens, and 32.6% were non-EU citizens. The respondents to the survey work in 20 out of 22 KI departments.

Regarding the type of income, 15% and 10.5% of respondents hold a KI internal or external (awarded to the postdoc researcher) scholarship, respectively. 38.5% are now employed after a period as scholarship holder. 37.6% are employed since the start of their work as postdoc scientists at KI.

The position at KI is the first appointment as postdoc scientist for 73.4% of respondents, while 26.6% have already worked as postdoc scientists somewhere else.

Which department do you work at?	Number of Responses
Department of Biosciences and Nutrition	13 (4.9%)
Department of Cell and Molecular Biology	14 (5.3%)
Department of Clinical Neuroscience	28 (10.5%)
Department of Clinical Science and Education, Södersjukhuset	3 (1.1%)
Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology	2 (0.8%)
Department of Clinical Sciences, Danderyd Hospital	0 (0.0%)
Department of Dental Medicine	0 (0.0%)
Department of Laboratory Medicine	10 (3.8%)
Department of Learning, Informatics, Management and Ethics	1 (0.4%)
Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics	34 (12.8%)
Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics	6 (2.3%)
Department of Medicine, Huddinge	15 (5.6%)
Department of Medicine, Solna	24 (9.0%)
Department of Microbiology, Tumor and Cell Biology	17 (6.4%)
Department of Molecular Medicine and Surgery	12 (4.5%)
Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society	15 (5.6%)
Department of Neuroscience	17 (6.4%)
Department of Oncology-Pathology	11 (4.1%)
Department of Physiology and Pharmacology	11 (4.1%)
Department of Public Health Sciences	12 (4.5%)
Department of Women's and Children's Health	7 (2.6%)
Institute of Environmental Medicine	14 (5.3%)
Total	266 (100.0%)



## Information provided by the employer (KI)

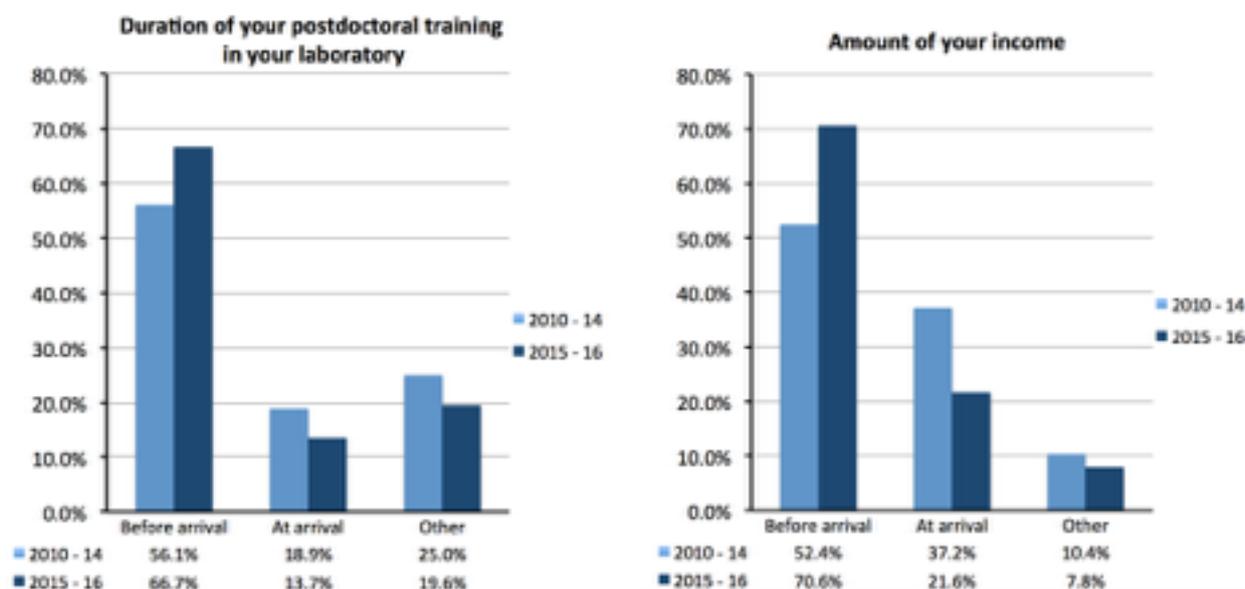
In this section we investigated the flow of information from the KI Administration to the KI postdoc community. All the questions regarding this section were posed as follows:

*“Were you provided sufficient information from your PI or the HR office in your department on...?”*

and the respondents could choose whether they got the information before or at arrival at KI<sup>1</sup>.

As mentioned, we filtered the respondents based on the year they joined KI as postdoc scientist, in order to be able to verify whether there have been improvements after the application of the new regulations.

We found that, **before arrival**, the majority of postdocs are properly informed on **duration of the postdoc period** in the hosting lab and the **amount of the offered stipend/salary** as shown in the graphs below.



## Benefits derived by scholarship and salary

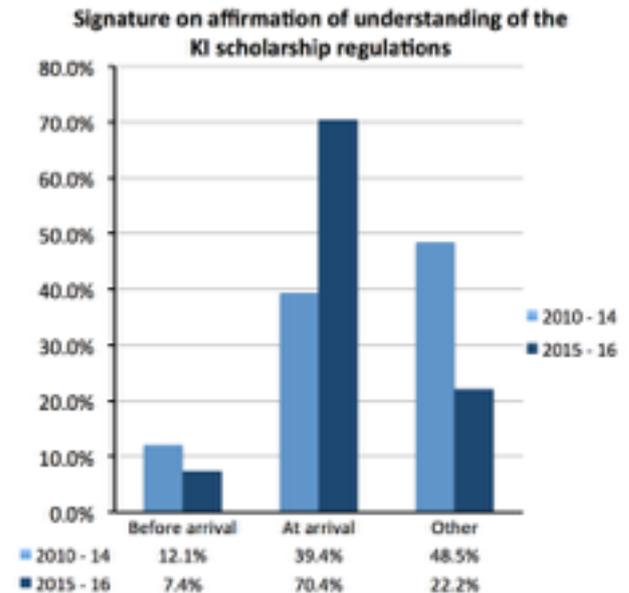
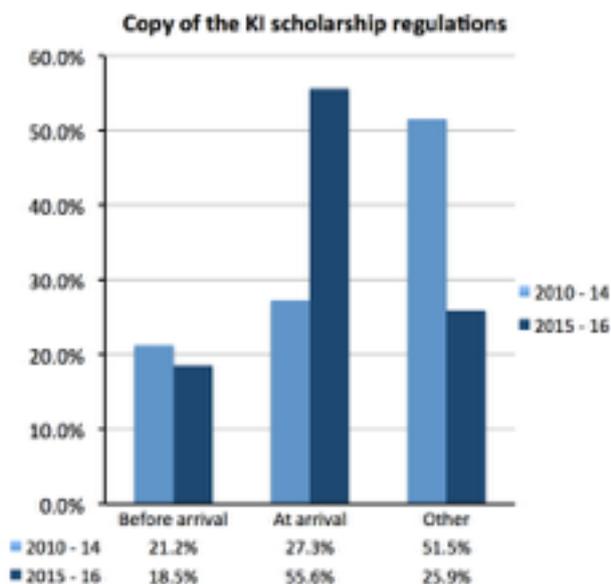
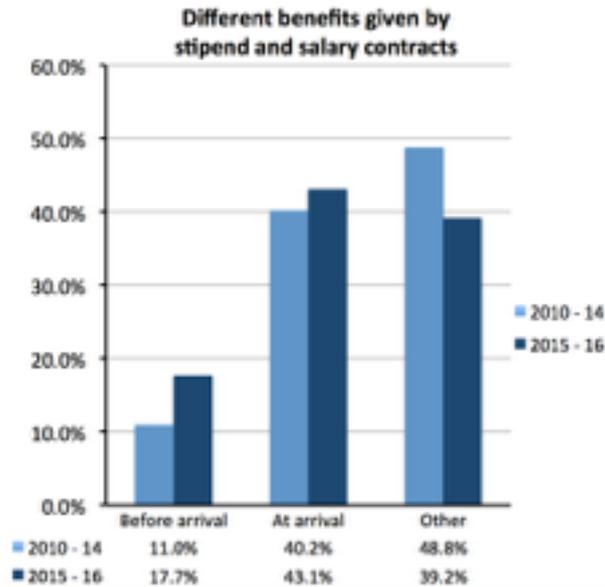
KI postdoc scientists reported that they **received information on the different benefits provided by stipend (scholarships) and salary before or at arrival at KI in 51.2% (2010-14) and 60.8% (2015-16) of cases**. Despite the increase in provided information after January 2015, **39.2% (2015-16) of postdoc scientists at KI did not get this type of information**.

In line with this observation, before January 2015, 48.5% and 51.5% of postdoc scientists received a copy of the KI scholarship regulation and signed the affirmation of understanding of it, respectively. **After January 2015, the scenario substantially improved as 74.1% and 77.8% of postdoc scientists received a copy of the KI scholarship regulation and signed the affirmation of understanding of it, respectively**. However, 22.2% of postdoc scientists declared they did not sign the mandatory affirmation of understanding of the KI scholarship regulation<sup>2</sup>.

Importantly, at KI there are **numerous cases of irregularities on the minimum stipend duration** (minimum 12 months since July 2014). Postdoc candidates are still offered stipends of six month duration (private communication to KI Postdoc Association). This phenomenon completely disregards the administrative reasons why KIPA asked and obtained the increase in minimum

<sup>1</sup>In the graphs “other” includes “no/ not applicable /not needed”.

<sup>2</sup>For this question, the data are filtered only to postdocs on scholarship.



stipend duration (difficulties in getting a personal number, opening a bank account, applying for VISA, etc...).

Regarding this latter point, the chairperson at KIPA promptly informed HR central of the issue and the report was ignored (email dated Oct 31st, 2016). KIPA continues receiving requests to clarify why newly arrived postdoc scientists are offered six month scholarships.

Overall, we found that the situation improved comparing the answers given by postdoc scientists<sup>3</sup> enrolled before or after January 2015, despite some irregularities (minimum duration of scholarship, signing the understanding of the KI scholarship regulation).

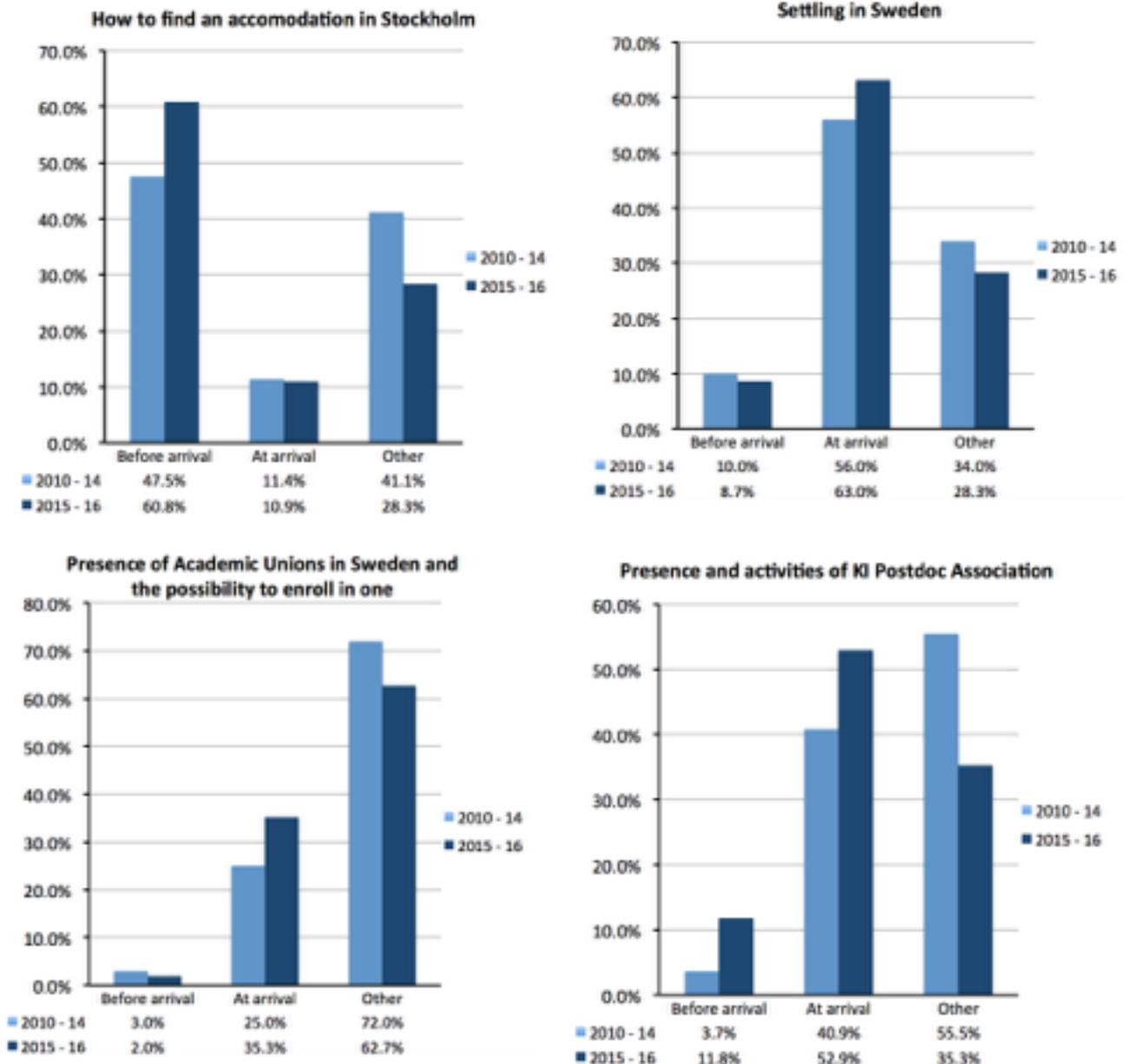
Additionally, the majority of KI postdoc scientists (65.2%) is aware that in Sweden the income is negotiable. Some KI postdoc scientists reported that they were given very little or no opportunity to negotiate their income (private communication to KI Postdoc Association).

<sup>3</sup> For this questions the data are filtered only to postdocs on scholarship.

## Settling in Sweden

International KI postdoc scientists<sup>4</sup> collect information about how to find an accommodation in Sweden “before arrival” (total average: 54% of respondents, regardless the year of arrival at KI). These data are reassuring, provided the limited accommodation available in Stockholm and surrounding areas.

However, regarding matters to settle in Sweden (e.g., how to get a personal number, Swedish ID, VISA, bank account) the majority of KI postdoc scientists rely on the information that they receive once at KI campus/hospital. Furthermore, at arrival at KI, postdoc scientists get informed on the presence of Academic Unions and KI Postdoc Association in 39.1% and 63.8% of the cases, respectively.



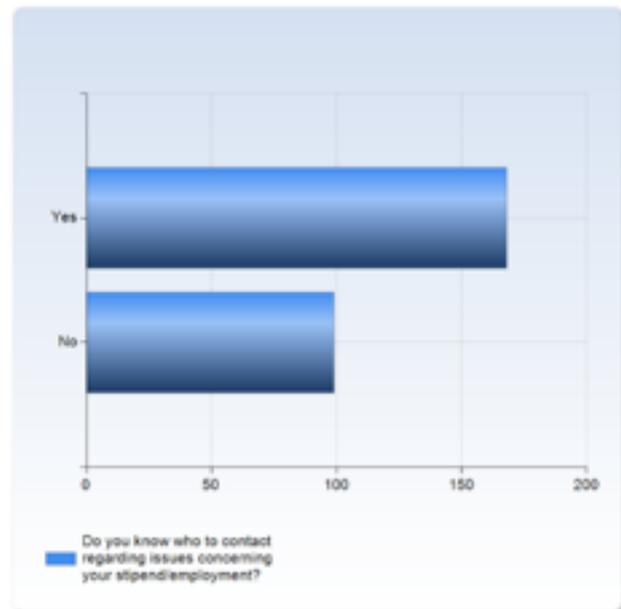
<sup>4</sup> For this questions the data are filtered only to postdocs moving to Sweden from a foreign country.

## Work environment and conditions at KI

### Issues concerning stipend/employment

Although the majority of our respondents (62.9%) indicated that they know whom to contact regarding issues related to their contract, still a large number of respondents (37.1%) do not know whom to ask about such issues. **Open-ended comments on this question (Annex B) often mentioned that the administrative staff are not proactive enough in providing relevant information and that some of the documentation available online is only in Swedish.** Thus, the pipeline to pass to KI postdoc scientists information on this matter can be improved both at the KI department level (administrative staff) and the central level ("Internwebben").

Do you know who to contact regarding issues concerning your stipend/employment?	Number of Responses
Yes	168 (62.9%)
No	99 (37.1%)
Total	267 (100.0%)



In spring 2016, we have proposed at HR central to **modify the interview routine at KI to improve communication on administrative matters and routines at KI.** The candidate could seat with the HR representative at the department for about 30 minutes. The HR representative can have a checklist of points to discuss and documents to provide (already available from KIPA or KI International Staff Office). This will avoid confusion and misunderstanding later on. Some units already implement this routine with positive results. HR central was thrilled by this proposal, but, to the best of our knowledge, this has not become a rule.

Regarding the interwebben, we are confident that the KI Communication Office is aware that the site is overcrowded with information not easy to navigate, unless very familiar with the KI administrative structure.

### General satisfaction with working conditions

76% of respondents are generally satisfied with their working conditions. Looking at individual comments to this question (Annex B), it seems that the main reasons for this low satisfaction are employment uncertainty, too low income, lack of work-life balance, and lack of social benefits on a stipend. We suggest that KI takes a closer look into ways of **improving work satisfaction** among KI postdoc scientists, as this **would increase their productivity and commitment.** We especially suggest to improve the gap between Swedish versus non-Swedish postdoc scientists. KI postdoc scientists see the opportunity to be a stipend holder when a foreigner with a foreigner PhD degree as **unequal treatment.**

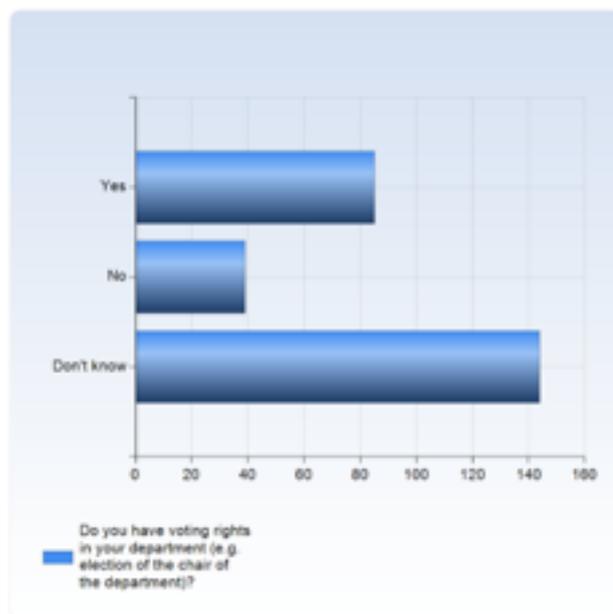
Furthermore, the individual comments also highlighted a **lack of control on Principal Investigators who create a toxic working environment,** even when the issue is reported higher up in the hierarchy.

### Active involvement in KI organizational structure

**Only 31.7% of our respondents have voting rights** (e.g., election of chair at their department or deans). 14.6% of responders do not have such rights and, importantly, most KI postdoc scientists

(53.7%) do not know whether they have such rights or not, suggesting they don't have them. **These results raise a serious concern that many KI postdoc scientists are not or do not feel engaged in the organizational structure and do not have an active role in the decision-making process.**

Do you have voting rights in your department (e.g. election of the chair of the department)?	Number of Responses
Yes	85 (31.7%)
No	39 (14.6%)
Don't know	144 (53.7%)
Total	268 (100.0%)



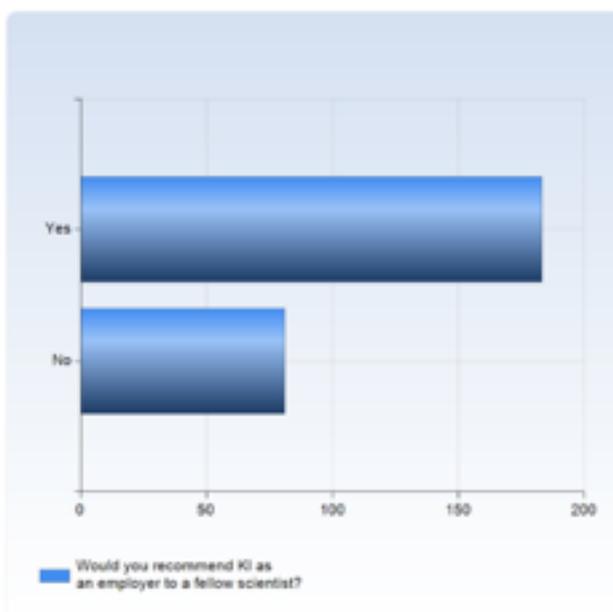
Postdoc scientists have a major active role in the scientific productivity and progress at KI. They participate in designing projects, writing grants and manuscripts. They run the science and train master and PhD students. They implement new techniques and approaches in their host laboratories. PIs know that good postdoc scientists will make the difference in their careers, as PIs do not run the science anymore and are overwhelmed with administrative duties and networking activities. Therefore, it seems very reasonable to extend voting rights to all postdoc scientists, regardless being a stipend holder or an employee.

Postdoc scientists engaged in the organizational structure of their institution are scientists who will be more committed and loyal.

### **Reputation: Recommending KI as an employer to a fellow scientist.**

Most of our respondents (69.3%) indicated that they would recommend KI to a fellow scientist. Looking at the respondents' comments (Annex B), it seems that the opinions are very mixed; while

Would you recommend KI as an employer to a fellow scientist?	Number of Responses
Yes	183 (69.3%)
No	81 (30.7%)
Total	264 (100.0%)



many KI postdoc scientists appreciate KI scientific quality and working conditions on a contract, they strongly emphasize **they would not recommend working on a stipend at KI**. Based on these results we suggest that KI management improves the work agreements. This will benefit postdoc scientists and KI, as it will improve work satisfaction and KI attractiveness.

### Information on safety regulations

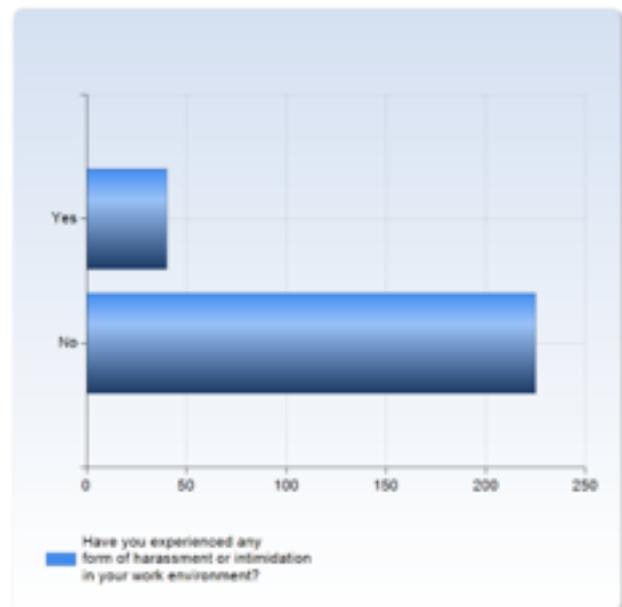
The majority of the respondents (84%) stated that they have been provided with sufficient information about the safety regulations in their department. However, 16% of the respondents did not think they were sufficiently informed. Among these postdoc scientists, 16.7% felt that their work environment was not safe, compared to 2.7% of the postdocs that had received sufficient information about the regulations.

Importantly, 95.1% of the respondents feel their work environment is safe.

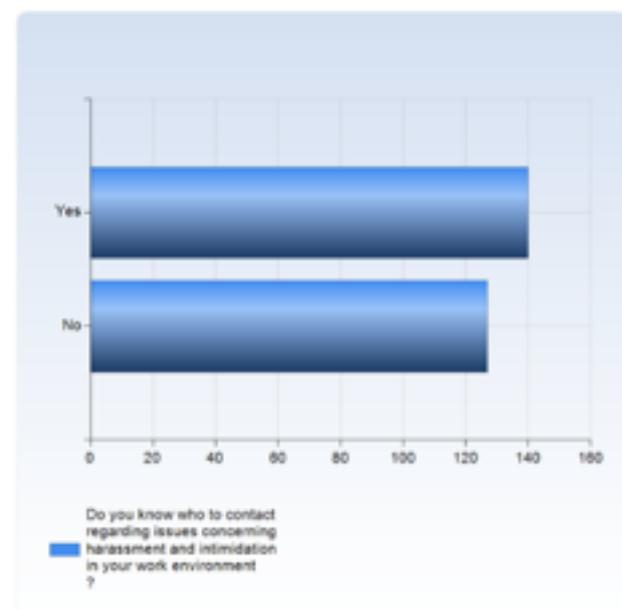
### Harassment and intimidation

15.1% of KI postdoctoral scientists reported that they have experienced harassment or intimidation during their time at Karolinska Institutet. In addition, and even more worrisome, **52.4% of KI postdoctoral scientists do not know whom to contact in case of harassment and intimidation**.

Have you experienced any form of harassment or intimidation in your work environment?	Number of Responses
Yes	40 (15.1%)
No	225 (84.9%)
Total	265 (100.0%)

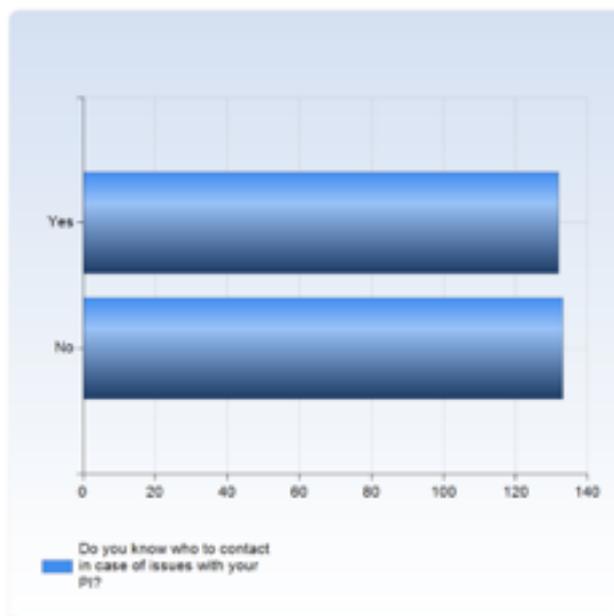


Do you know who to contact regarding issues concerning harassment and intimidation in your work environment ?	Number of Responses
Yes	140 (52.4%)
No	127 (47.6%)
Total	267 (100.0%)



A lack of information on support in cases of conflict seems to be widespread among KI postdoc scientists. Indeed, **about half (50.2%) of the responding postdoc scientists answered they do not know whom to contact in case of issues with their PI.**

Do you know who to contact in case of issues with your PI?	Number of Responses
Yes	132 (49.8%)
No	133 (50.2%)
Total	265 (100.0%)



**These data on lack of information indirectly highlights the absence of independent figures, such as an ombudsperson for postdoc scientists.** This is an important issue, as postdoctoral time is a critical period and the pressure and complexity of the modern academic environment can lead to conflicts that, in absence of an independent mediator, can escalate. Additionally, postdoctoral scientists should be provided with a work environment that protects and supports them from harassment and intimidation.

In summary, based on the responses to this survey and our daily close contact to postdoc scientists, we conclude that the average postdoc scientist at KI is satisfied with the scientific environment, infrastructure, and opportunities to collaborate. However, they are concerned with important aspect of working conditions (e.g., inequality, lack of transparent and clearly explained and applied rules) and unclear career progression.

## **Postdoctoral training conditions at KI**

### **Supervision**

The majority of responding KI postdoc scientists (79.8%) is content with the amount of supervision they get from their supervisor, while about one fifth (20.2%) does not feel that they get sufficient supervision<sup>5</sup>.

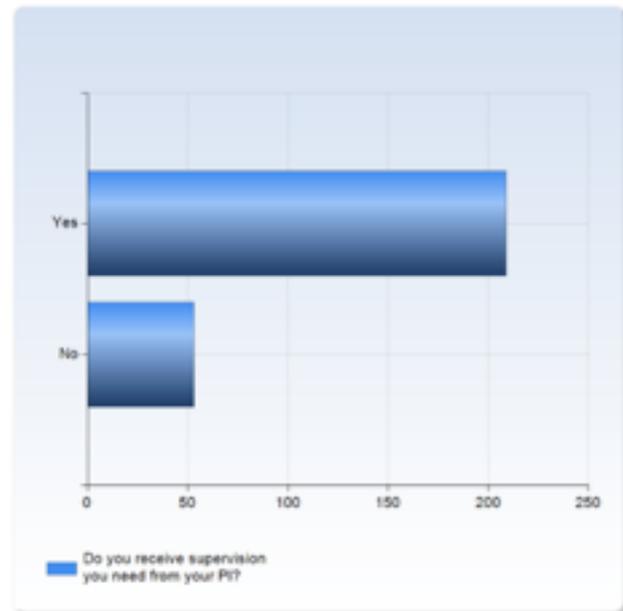
**Overall, postdoctoral training conditions are viewed „mildly positive“.**

Slightly over 60% of respondents agree, that:

- KI offers enough opportunities to develop scientifically (60.9%),
- there are sufficient scientific networking opportunities (62.1%),
- they receive necessary training for transferable skills (62.6%).

<sup>5</sup>For this question, data are represented as a whole. During the analysis of the survey results, we evaluated whether any group of KI postdoc scientists was overrepresented among the 20.2% who does not receive proper supervision. We found that there is no unequal distribution when the data were filtered by gender, nationality, stipend holder or employment status.

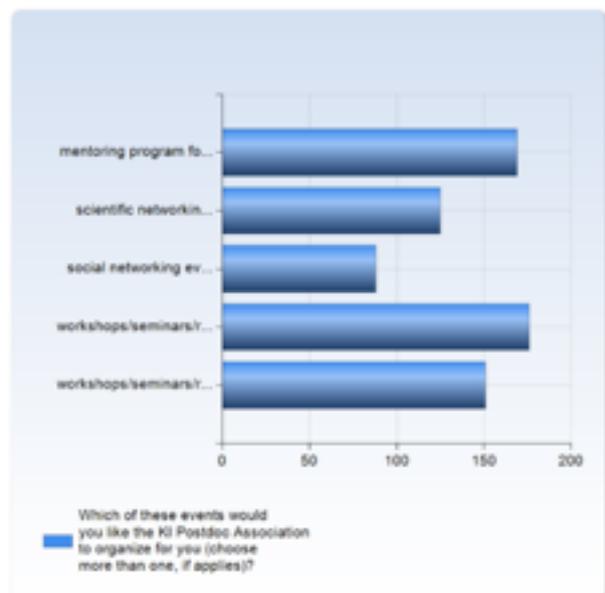
Do you receive supervision you need from your PI?	Number of Responses
Yes	209 (79.8%)
No	53 (20.2%)
Total	262 (100.0%)



At the same time, this means that almost 40% of KI postdoc scientists don't agree to these statements, which leaves considerable space to improve the training conditions for KI postdoc scientists.

As KIPA mission includes the promotion and implementation of professional development targeting KI postdoc scientists, we asked KI postdoc scientists what type of professional training they are interested in. An impressive **82.4% of respondents would be interested in more career coaching**, but the list also includes a **mentoring program for postdoc scientists, scientific network opportunities among fellow postdoc scientists, workshops, seminar or round tables to explore the academic and the non-academic career paths.**

Which of these events would you like the KI Postdoc Association to organize for you (choose more than one, if applies)?	Number of Responses
mentoring program for postdocs	169 (67.1%)
scientific networking events among fellow postdocs	125 (49.6%)
social networking events among fellow postdocs	88 (34.9%)
workshops/seminars/round tables on academic career paths	176 (69.8%)
workshops/seminars/round tables on non-academic career paths	151 (59.9%)
Total	709 (281.3%)



Based on the responses to this survey, we report that there is a need for KI postdoc scientists to:

- 1) get more career support;
- 2) more transparency on career development/progression opportunities and more independent from the lab supervisor;
- 3) the extension of some career development opportunities (e.g., internships in companies) to KI postdoc scientists on stipend.

On the positive side, **KI postdoc scientists recognize the good support and helpfulness of the KI Career Service.**

## **KIPA proposal to improve postdoctoral working and training conditions**

- 1) Ombudsman for postdoctoral scientists to address the insufficient support postdoctoral scientists receive in case of harassment, intimidation, or conflict.
- 2) Extension of voting right to all postdoctoral scientists, regardless employment status.
- 3) Representation for postdoctoral scientists at Departmental Councils and Board of Research. Postdocs are underrepresented, therefore KI leadership has limited and fragmented access to their opinion, concerns, training and working environment conditions. Representation will improve communication between KI leadership, administration, and postdoc scientists. Postdoc scientists at KI are about 1000 trained scientists who run medical research (KI core business) full time. Providing representation to this large active part of the KI community will also increase transparency and improve ethical behavior.
- 4) Improve information provided before joining KI. Having postdoc representatives and changing the interview routine will facilitate this process.
- 5) Better control mechanisms for implementation of current KI regulations (e.g., irregularities on minimum length of scholarship, signing of understanding of scholarship regulation).
- 6) Implementation of new regulations to improve the career system and working conditions for postdoc scientists.
- 7) Implementation of regulations that protects stipend holders, as they are the most vulnerable group within the postdoc community.
- 8) Enrich the postdoctoral training to increase their professionalism, marketability, and career advancement.

**KIPA would like to support and be part of the positive changes** necessary to improve postdoc working and training conditions and we kindly ask to work together on the matter. We are confident that happier postdoc scientists will run better science for the benefit of KI, medical research, and ultimately human kind.

**KIPA has been representing the interests of KI postdoc scientists since its foundation in 2012.** We suggest that KI leadership recognizes our efforts and includes KIPA in the ongoing discussion on postdoctoral related matters.

## **What KIPA can do**

- 1) continue survey and monitor KI postdoc scientists' opinions, working and training conditions in order to collect quality data and open a constructive discussion with KI leadership and administration;
- 2) hire a postdoc ombudsman under an agreement similar to MF;
- 3) organize postdoc representation at department and central level;
- 4) co-organize professional development events (Annexes C and D) of high interest for the postdoc community.