



## Who will be Karolinska Institute's Deputy Vice-President for Research?

### Candidates for Deputy Vice-President for Research



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## Who will be Karolinska Institute's Deputy Vice-President for (Post?) Doctoral Education?

### Candidates for Deputy Vice-President for Doctoral Education



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## Background

Until September 5th, the elections for Deputy Vice-President for Research, Doctoral Education, and Education are being held in the context of restructuring KI management. From 2019 on, the new Deputy Vice-Presidents will head the Committees for Research, Doctoral Education, and Education and thus also shape the research and professional development conditions for Young Researchers at KI, among them approximately 800-900 postdocs. The KI Postdoc Association (KIPA), an interest organization of postdocs at KI, conducted a series of interviews with the candidates for Deputy Vice-President for Research and sent out a questionnaire to the candidate Deputy Vice-Presidents for Doctoral Education.

Young researchers – spanning from postdocs to young PIs- are currently represented by the voice of Junior Faculty (JF) in the Board of Research. Both JF and KIPA agree that it is beneficial to have our two organizations work in parallel – thereby allowing JF to focus on the more advanced steps in the academic career ladder, whereas KIPA focuses on the interests of postdocs in an earlier stage of their career. As KIPA strives to get separate representation for postdocs at KI Boards, postdocs might get affiliated to either the Board of Research (emphasizing the research nature of the postdoc position) or the Board of Doctoral Education (emphasizing the training character of the position), which in this case could be remodeled to a “Board of Postgraduate Education”.

It is for these reasons that the election for both positions, Deputy Vice-President for Research and Deputy Vice-President for Doctoral Education, is of interest to postdocs at KI. By summarizing the candidates’ answers below, we hope to provide orientation for your informed vote about KI’s future. Make your voice heard and exercise your voting rights!

PS: The interviews with candidates for Deputy Vice-Presidents for Research were conducted together with KI’s Junior Faculty (JF) who will also publish a report with their questions of interest. Please see <https://ki.se/en/staff/junior-faculty-at-karolinska-institutet>

On behalf of KIPA,

Eva Berg (Chair)  
Eva Daskalakis (Vice-Chair)  
Fatima Memic (Secretary)  
Nina Jensen  
Mathew Tata



# Who will be Karolinska Institute's Deputy Vice-President for Research?

## 1. What is a postdoc for you? Trainee or employee?



CG: A postdoc is someone who is within 7 years from PhD graduation and can be very junior or senior with years of experience. A postdoc is a person you give freedom to design and lead a project with opportunities to develop leadership and management skills. There is plan for the person's development within the group, with coaching and performance reviews (medarbetarsamtal). Also it is important to have a parallel track because not everybody wants to be a group leader so other possibilities need to be discussed.



AG: A postdoc is a time limited position that you have after your PhD and you are not supposed to be an independent researcher during that time. Trainee is not the correct term but postdocs are not independent researchers either and we have both employed and postdocs on stipends. We need to re-evaluate postdocs at KI, they are an important part of KI and they must be treated well.



BHN: A postdoc is an education. This is an individual that has just come out of their PhD and is continuing their education within research. It is also their first step, into their next step of becoming an independent researcher. There are, however, many possibilities during this time as not all postdocs will continue within the academic ladder. It is an opportunity for the postdoc to understand what they want to do. Some individuals already know before completing their PhD, however others do not- it is not an easy decision. This can also be dependent on the level of training this individual has received during their PhD. I think that the postdoc is very limited with time. Two years is a small amount of time, which can also be extended to four years. I try to give my postdocs as much time as possible, as I am aware of this issue. To be competitive, can take many years, especially if you want to have high quality research. It is also important where you choose to do your postdoc, the type of help and support the postdoc can receive during this time. It is important to know where you may want to end up so that you can choose the trainer that is best for you.

## 2. What is your view on postdoc stipends? What is a good timeline to abolish the stipends?



CG: The Swedish legal system is clear, if you are on a stipend you are not supposed to deliver results and I doubt there is any group leader that expects a postdoc to just be here and not deliver. I consider it illegal in Sweden to have people on stipends but as it is really expensive to have employed postdocs at KI a lot of group leaders like to keep the stipends.



AG: In the long run I would like the stipends to disappear from KI. There are two reasons and one of them is that when I look at the regulations and tax authorities I am worried from the tax perspective that KI will have to pay a lot of taxes for postdocs if it is decided that they are not trainees but employees. The other thing is that the postdoc time can be really good or really bad and my feeling, as well as in discussions with KIPA, is that postdocs on stipends have a tendency to have quite tough working conditions. That they don't get to be on papers, go to conferences, courses and that there are a lot of postdocs that don't like their time here at KI. If we do have stipends it is really important that the financial level is comparable to the employed postdoc salary levels. In all announced positions it has to be very clearly stated if it is a postdoc stipend, so people know what they are getting into.

### **KIPA: What is a good timeline to abolish the stipends?**

In the long run we should move towards only having employed postdocs but this transition will take time as many research groups will not be able to afford having employed postdocs. I think that the government will take that decision for us, as the signals coming from them is that they do not like stipends at all and they will disappear as they did for PhD students.



BHN: There are pros and cons with a postdoc stipend. If you start as a postdoc on a stipend for two years then you can continue for up to 6 years, and that provides you with more time- which can be particularly useful if you want to change field, as two to four years is usually too short. All postdocs should be regarded the same, whether you are on a stipend or salary- this is very important. All postdocs should be taken care of in the same way. The funds a postdoc receives on a stipend should match that of a salary. There are also issues regarding who can go on a stipend- Swedish vs a foreign postdoc. There are a lot of discussions regarding the stipend, but in general irrespective of where you come from you should receive a good salary also on a stipend.

### **KIPA: Are you aware of the issues related to stipends? For example, the social insecurity?**

I am not sure if I am aware of all the insecurities, as you are able to receive the same health benefits. However, what you will not receive is a pension. Yet, what we should consider is that the postdoc is an education. Many of the junior faculty would like to keep the stipend, as it would be too expensive otherwise. Therefore we have to find a balance.

### **KIPA: Are you therefore thinking to abolish the stipends, or improve the conditions of the stipends?**

It is important to evaluate the conditions and discuss steps forward with the Junior Faculty to see what they want. It is a critical question for the more junior researchers vs. the more senior ones who have more funds for their groups. It is important to find a balance and have discussions about this matter to find the best solution.

### 3. What is your opinion on a centrally organized, structured postdoc training program and would you support postdocs spending time on participating in the program?



CG: As a group leader, if you have postdocs you want them to develop, personally and professionally. I would support postdoc taking part in courses but it is complicated. When doing research you need to visit a lab, take courses and implement the knowledge back to the project. I do not believe we need a specific postdoc program for it because it all depends on the individual postdocs abilities and previous experience. The existing courses at KI need to have a more clear structure. The levels of the courses are not clear from the course description e.g. basic or advanced level. Here KIPA could help with scoring the courses and how we could grade the courses. I think we also could have more clear programs based on science areas, for example Neuroscience, Endocrinology, Cardiology etc.

**KIPA: There are courses at KI that postdocs can attend but many of them are PhD courses that postdocs cannot take. We have asked for a certain percentage of seats to be reserved for postdocs or some more specialized advanced courses targeted toward postdocs - centrally organized and supported by KI.**

The problem is finding which courses are available and what level they are because you could be a postdoc or a Biträdande lektor and attend the same course. If there are very popular courses, that means those courses should run 2 or 3 times per semester not only once per year. We could organize all the courses available at KI in categories and have them at different knowledge levels regardless of who you are - you should be able to apply to what you need.



AG: I think that there must be one. When speaking with colleagues, both national and international, I realise we are not doing as much for our postdocs as many other places and I want KI to have a good reputation in the research community. We cannot force PIs to allow their postdocs to take many courses each semester but a reasonable number of courses should not be too complicated to achieve. Postdocs are allowed to take PhD courses already today, but the really popular ones might be difficult to get in to because PhD students are prioritised. We could change that and say that postdocs will have the same priority, meaning that we do not need to have a lot of new courses but rather a smaller number of specific postdoc oriented courses to the already existing ones at KI. The cost of arranging courses is not the problem, the problem is convincing the PIs to let their postdocs attend. I am positive to including a percentage of time a postdoc is entitled to spend on courses, meaning saying to PIs if you have postdocs we expect you to allow them to spend time on courses and conferences.



BHN: I think that this is very important, as a postdoc is a training position. I support my postdocs to go to different training programs, for example the internship program that KI has with industry. There are postdocs that may not want to continue within academia, so it is important to be mentors as well for the next career path. The reality is that postdocs may or may not stay in science, so it is important to consider this early on. I would, of course, like to support the training program.

**KIPA: Is there a time which you deem appropriate to participate in such a program?**

The timing depends on the postdoc and I am usually very supportive if a postdoc has some ideas of what they want to do. I find that this is very important.

#### 4. Are you in support of having postdoc representatives at the boards (separately from JF), for example the board of research?



CG: There is a limit of how many people can be in a meeting so that you can have a creative discussion but naturally we have to have representatives from all levels of KI somehow in the committees. Your voice must be heard.



AG: I have said no to postdoc representatives so far as I believe the boards are already too big. What we need is a postdoc ombudsman that would give a voice to postdocs towards the Departments and the Institute.



BHN: I think that it is important to include the junior researchers and teachers in decisions that affect them. It is important to have an open communication with the junior faculty. The postdocs should have the opportunity to address matters that affect them as well and I am positive to include them where it is important for them and for KI.

# Who will be Karolinska Institute's Deputy Vice-President for Doctoral Education?

## 1. What is a postdoc for you?



MF: A PhD not fully independent and before having a position as a researcher. The Swedish “career staircase” for researchers, and perhaps especially at KI, seems to lack positions between the doctoral degree and professor. The Swedish academic title “Docent” is a sign of independence and can be regarded as the end-point of being a postdoc.



EF: A postdoc researcher is someone who has made an active decision to pursue academia, in part or in full, after their PhD education. Many times postdocs change their PhD environment, research group, university, field of science or country with the aim of gaining new knowledge and starting to develop their niche area, identify their passion, and extend their network in order to establish their unique line of research. Having said that, in my opinion, the postdoc period is either make or break in terms of developing as a researcher, therefore it is of utmost importance to have policies and resources available to build capacity in our future PI's. Furthermore, post docs are valuable contributors to KI's present and future through bridging and transferring knowledge between different areas and contributing to its international and national networking.

I did my postdoc at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland about 10 years ago, and although it meant moving my family across the world and a lot of hard work, I now reflect on and appreciate the amazing experience which has shown to be the most important investment made into my career. I still have many of my best friends in science from those years. In all, one's postdoc period is invaluable in terms of academic development but also personal growth.



RH: A postdoc is a person who has completed their thesis within the previous 4 years (a postdoc period internationally is often 2 years, so 2+2 years).

## 2. Are you in support of having postdoc representatives at any of the committees (separate from Junior Faculty representatives)?



MF: I am not in favour of having too many different groups of special interests. I have a background in the union organisation, and my view is that KIPA should join forces with the Junior Faculty to get representation in the KI committees.



EF: Post docs should be afforded the space and voice in various committees, boards or working groups since they are involved in many tasks, including research, teaching and education, and to some extent management and administration of research projects. This is important since some post-docs will become faculty members in the future and could contribute with their experience since they are often the eyes and ears in the organisation's everyday business.



RH: I believe that all professional groups at KI should be represented in any official organ of the Institutet. At least within the Committee for Research a postdoc representative would be the minimum.

### **3. What is your opinion on a more extensive postdoc training program and would you support postdocs spending time participating in the program?**

**(A postdoctoral training program is aimed to enhance transferrable skills of postdocs in and outside of academia- for a detailed look of our proposal please visit the following link to our website: <https://kipostdocassociation.org/news-1>).**



MF: I am clearly in favour of increasing the possibilities of further training for postdocs. Whether this should be arranged in a formal training program or in highly individualised training opportunities has to be carefully thought through.

EF: A postdoc training programme might be necessary to formalize the rights and obligations



and to attract the best postdocs, however, I consider that every postdoc supervisor already have a responsibility to care for their postdoc's professional development. It is still a training period (postdoc) and attending courses that increase their skills and abilities and propel their future career is as important as writing papers and performing experiments. In my field, "postdoc training programs" usually means

attending pedagogical or leadership courses but also grant writing seminars or gaining practical teaching merits.

As a starting point, all supervisors should set up a plan for professional development at the "medarbetarsamtalet". This process/implementation strategy is already formalized at KI but not always implemented in practice.



RH: Professional development should be available for Professionals at all levels within KI. I have advocated for specific postdoc training for years, but as postdocs have been under the jurisdiction of the Board of Research no action has been apparent. A program of different activities should be available for postdocs in my opinion.

The program you define is quite good, but missing certain elements. For the science aspect there should be opportunities to take part in real science courses, but at an advanced level. Not all postdocs will automatically be experts in their postdoc research areas as they often differ from their own PhD studies. A possibility for high level, intensive knowledge training would be optimal. I have suggested to the KI PhD programs to organize half-day workshops on highly focused research topics that would be suitable for both advanced (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> year) PhD students and postdocs to attend together, but as yet none have tested this concept.

For the generic skills then 'giving & receiving feedback' as well as 'time management and coping with stress/life balance' would be additional activities I would advocate.

In the new organizational structure (Faculty Board) I believe it will be easier to raise the issue of postdoc training and it is high on my agenda.

#### 4. Would you support the Committee of Doctoral Education taking on responsibility for postdocs and, for example, evolve it to a “Committee for Postgraduate Education“?



MF: So far, the responsibility for postdocs lies with the Board of research (as well as the money). We will have to see if the cooperation between the research and the education representatives increases in the new KI Faculty Board.



EF: This is an interesting suggestion and an organizational question that needs to be discussed further. At this stage I have not fully reflected upon the advantages and disadvantages of amalgamating these two professional bodies.

As you may be aware, doctoral education at KI and Sweden at large conforms to European regulations concerning duration, scope and outcomes. There are clear directives for that and we, here at KI, have put systems in place to monitor and evaluate our doctoral education. Unfortunately, no formal guideline, local or European, is available for post doctoral researchers/education. It would be important to engage in dialogue and through, perhaps, national consultation to ascertain the merits and advantages of such a committee for post-docs.



RH: My vision of education at KI is that there should be ‘research training’ at undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral levels and that there should be seamless transition between these. This will require the combined efforts and acceptance of the respective vice rectors for education, doctoral education and research to realize this vision. I am confident that within the new Faculty Board this will be possible and so whether it is the Committee for Doctoral Education or Research that proposes the program is less relevant, as long as it is done. But I would prefer this initiative to come under the jurisdiction of the Committee for Doctoral Education.

## 5. What is your view on postdoc stipends?



MF: I am not in favour of stipends, of any kind.



EF: I believe that all postdocs (and other researchers) should have a salary that reflects their work and also have all the social benefits to be able to have a secure and protected life in Sweden based on equal terms, regardless of nationality, gender, or any other basis.



RH: All forms of stipends as employment forms are likely to soon be outlawed, and I expect we will soon hear this from the government regarding postdoc stipends. The lack of security and social benefits associated with a stipend are no longer appropriate for professional researchers. The impact of absolving postdoc stipends will certainly be expected to have an impact on numbers of externally recruited postdocs, however.

## 6. Do you see hiring more staff scientists as a reality?



MF: I think it is necessary, but there is no quick-fix, and there are several national employment and university regulations to consider. At KI, the individual researchers have to accept that we really have an ongoing inflation on professor positions.



EF: In my field of research, the employment of staff scientists is increasing and I believe that the new career track, for this group, at KI is encouraging and important.



RH: The current international statistics reveals that 10-15 years post-thesis defence there are less than 5% of all PhD students remaining as independent academic research faculty Professors/Assistant Professors. In countries such as the UK then staff scientist has been a viable career alternative for many years, and some of the most successful labs I know have at the side of a charismatic PI a smarter staff scientist who preferred not to become PI themselves. With the recent alteration in the career path imposed on us by the government, I believe that there is more need than ever to explore different options for people to stay in academic research science at different levels, and staff scientist is an obvious start.