



Stockholm, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018

From: Karolinska Institutet Postdoc Association

To: Vetenskapsrådet

## **Subject: Comments on Forskningsöversikt Medicin och Hälsa 2019**

### **Synopsis**

The Forskningsöversikt Medicin och Hälsa 2019 sets goals to gain international competitiveness in biomedical research. Karolinska Institutet Postdoc Association (KIPA) agrees it is necessary to increase investments in and prioritization of basic research for the generation of new knowledge to enable real breakthroughs and innovation. To achieve these goals, KIPA agrees it is necessary to urgently increase project funding, to implement effective policies, and a clear career path to be able to train, retain, and attract the best and the brightest biomedical researchers at Swedish Institutions.

### **Comments**

KIPA is a research interest group that advocates achieving optimal training and working conditions for postdoctoral researchers at Karolinska Institutet and in Sweden. Therefore, we will comment focusing on this career stage of the academic career ladder.

### **Lines 288-290**

KIPA agrees that time restriction after PhD graduation as eligibility criterion for faculty positions forces postdoctoral researchers to favor safe projects detrimental to achieving real scientific breakthroughs and innovation for Swedish research institutions.

### **Lines 309-312**

Postdoctoral appointments have become a fundamental and most critical career stage for the successful advancement of young researchers to faculty positions. The training needs have increased and KIPA highlights the need of Swedish institutions and the Swedish Research Council to gain proper awareness and design proper strategies to match these needs.

Therefore, KIPA considers the measures suggested in this document related to the postdoctoral career stage overall insufficient. KIPA suggests that the Swedish Research Council launches a systematic evaluation of the current training and working condition needs of postdoctoral re-

searchers. This will allow to make better informed recommendations on the changes needed to enable postdoctoral researchers at Swedish institutions to express their full potential and for Swedish institutions to become international attractive places for the best and the brightest postdoctoral researchers. This investigation could be performed in collaboration with the Swedish Postdoc Associations (e.g., KIPA, Uppsala University Postdoc Association, and Swedish Network of Postdoc Associations).

### **Lines 309-312**

KIPA noticed the absence of clear description of measures to improve postdoctoral research appointments. KIPA takes this opportunity to share its opinion that postdoctoral scholarships and employment provide insufficient job stability (the use of non-guaranteed multiple short term scholarships/contracts is common practice in most Swedish institutions).

KIPA also suggests considering the detrimental effects of scholarships on Sweden international research competitiveness. In addition to job instability, postdoctoral researchers on scholarships often find themselves without proper allowances (e.g., family and mobility allowances) and social benefits (e.g., retirement contribution). This adds personal difficulties that negatively impact the ability of these scholars to prioritize their research.

Moreover, postdoctoral researchers on scholarship do not have the same parental leave rights as employed postdoctoral researchers. Indeed, scholarship holders often have to use their scholarship during parental leave (rather than parental benefit from försäkringskassan), reducing their active research time. This generates a gender bias, as female postdoctoral researchers on scholarship cannot avoid taking parental leave, while male postdoctoral researchers on scholarship can choose.

### **Lines 310-312**

KIPA agrees it is an absolute necessity to increase the postdoctoral time to ensure the acquisition of better qualifications and higher quality scientific productions of the postdoctoral researchers, hence of Swedish research institutions.

### **Line 313**

Additionally, KIPA suggests changing the nomenclature of faculty positions to match international standards to simplify comparison and therefore competition for international funding (e.g., ERC grants) and recruitment of international researchers, who might be unfamiliar with it (e.g., use the term “Assistant Professor” and “Lecturer” for research and teaching intense positions, respectively, rather than Biträdande Lektor).

### **Lines 315-317**

KIPA agrees that the five-year limit for eligibility of faculty position diverges from the best international standards for the recruitment of junior faculty; hence it is a practice detrimental for the ability of Swedish research institutions to gain international competitiveness.

### **Lines 318-319**

KIPA disagrees that bringing the time limit to seven years after PhD graduation for eligibility of faculty positions will sufficiently harmonize with international best practice. Excellent research councils, such as MRC in the UK or NIH in the USA, do not put time limits after graduation.

KIPA does not suggest that the postdoctoral appointment should be permanent. KIPA suggests that the Swedish Research Council investigates this matter in more depth in collaborations with the Swedish Postdoc Association (e.g., KIPA, Uppsala University Postdoc Association, and Swedish Network of Postdoc Associations). Indeed, different research fields require different amount of time to build strong and internationally competitive professional portfolios.

Furthermore, KIPA suggests having additional forms of permanent employment in academia (e.g., staff scientists) as an additional strategy to retain highly skilled talents in academic research and increase Swedish research competitiveness.

Please, do not hesitate to contact **Karolinska Institutet Postdoc Association** for any further information.