National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine: Next Generation Researchers Initiative

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Updates since The Postdoc Experience Revisited (2014)

1. Period of Service – Postdoc Term Limits
    - University of Chicago instituted a term limit in 2004
    - NPA Institutional Policy Database: 80% (68) reported a term limit, average is 5 years 61% (42). BUT 60% don't include previous experience

2. Postdoc Titles and Roles
    - University of Chicago: consolidated to two titles (PD scholar, fellow) in 2004. Benefits: eases transition for postdocs from one title to another – benefits, salary, mentoring and review reqs are the same.
    - ASBMB has a working group on "Harmonizing Postdoc Titles" as follow up to 37 titles for postdocs by McDowell
      http://www.asbmb.org/asbmbtoday/201604/Education/Postdoc/

3. Career Development
    - NIH BEST Programs promote diversified training
    - Professional Societies
    - Career launching programs (e.g. DP5, K99, Burroughs Welcome Fund, etc.)

Updates since The Postdoc Experience Revisited (2014)

4. Compensation and Benefits
    - NIH raised stipends to $47,484 (still not $50,000)
    - At University of Chicago: benefits equivalence between employee and fellow type postdocs and a stipend supplement for fellows

5. Mentoring
    - NRMN – for faculty and all levels of trainees (including a postdoc-specific curriculum)
    - NRMN-CAN model
    - New NIGMS T32 guidelines require faculty mentor training

6. Data Collection
    - NIH evaluation for programs (F32, K, etc.)
    - University of Chicago National Postdoc Survey 2016

2017 Recommendations

1. Postdoc Term Limits, Titles, and Roles
   - Need data from more institutions
   - ASBMB working group report
   - Starting salaries (NIH NRSA year 0) should be matched with annual inflation
2. Career Development
   - Data on outcomes from various career launching programs (some data on K99 so far)
   - Institutionalize BEST programs
3. Mentoring
   - Basic premise of benefit to careers is well-established
   - Institutionalize for all (NIH, Professional Societies, etc.)
4. Diversity
   - FOBGAPT recommendations
5. Data Collection → Standardization
   - BEST working group career taxonomy
   - Data ownership, compatibility and publicly sharing
   - Mechanisms for tracking, lack of institutional resources

For reference, our response to ASBMB's follow-up

1. The greatest benefit was that standardization fulfilled our main objective of having equity between postdoc scholars and fellows as well as across departments and university divisions.

2. Standardization was administratively beneficial because it streamlined the process for the departments/divisions and for HR to have clear designations for each role.

3. Standardizing the postdoc title also improved the ease of data analysis and reporting for both internal and external requirements (e.g. to funding agencies) by lessening confusion for administrators collecting and disseminating those data. Any change can be a "hassle", but keeping the end goal in mind and clearly communicating the ultimate benefits to all was vital to effecting the change.

4. It also eased transitions from one status to the other because the benefits, salary, mentoring and review requirements, etc. were identical.

For the second question, we don't think that there was a major change in funding opportunities because eligibility for grants isn't dependent on title but time from degree, etc. for postdocs. However, it did remove the dis-incentive to seek independent fellowships which often only provide health insurance, since the standardization process supplements the Fellows so they receive the same benefits as the Scholars (Employees).