

Results of the panel discussion of the Stress Survey results 30 January, 2020

Posts indicate the messages, which were posted in Flinga.

Answers indicate the thoughts offered by the members of the wellbeing group

Career advancement concerns:

Post: Does postdoc performance even mean anything in terms of promotion?

Answer: Unfortunately, the wellbeing group does not have authority to influence this issue directly, since the salary system and career promotion opportunities are designed by the University and the Faculty boards. However, we will convey this message to the University/Faculty administration. More actively, these issues can be also discussed at the meetings of the Junior Faculty club, which is an organization with the specific goal of supporting the needs and interests of early-stage researchers.

Post(1): What do you expect the standard progression path for an average postdoc to look like?
E.g. PhD students have clear time-gated raises.

Post(2): Could docentship serve as a threshold for post docs for moving from one salary level to the next one

Answer(1,2): As we all experience this, the salary raise is indeed badly designed for the postdocs at the University, since time-gated demand level raises are not possible in the same way as for PhD students. This is essentially due to the fact that post-doctoral positions were originally meant to be limited in time, as a first opportunity for newly graduated researchers to try their skills in independent research. Yet as it is now, early-career researchers may be hired as post-doctoral researchers for extended periods of time. However, an evaluation for a raise in performance level based on achieved results can be requested annually. Also, receiving the title of Docent may enhance the career path options.

As a wellbeing group, we will forward this concern to the University administration and the labor union, who should consider this issue on an administrative level.

Post: We need to have a debate about 'impact'. Everyone's goals need not be aligned in a research group: a PhD student may not want to remain in academia after graduating, and a postdoc may want to develop their pedagogical skills. We should be able to encompass all these career goals.

Answer: Good idea! We will return to this issue in the coming event. The goals within the University are set personally. The professors in the groups usually act as mentors for all early-career researchers: one should be able to talk about career advancement options to find one's own way. If the advice of the immediate supervisor is not sufficient, one can approach any professor at the Department with the request of being a mentor. Courses to improve the pedagogical skills are available at the University.

Mental health issues:

Post: PhD students are well known to have higher rates of mental illness, why are university psychologists only available to bachelors and masters students?

Answer: This issue was addressed in the event, however, we repeat here the answer that all employees of the University of Helsinki (including PhD students and postdocs, who may not have Finnish

citizenship or even permanent residence permit) are eligible to attend medical services at Mehiläinen (The information in Flamma, search for Human Resources/Occupational health care). The only problem group is the PhD students whose work is supported via foundation grants and are not employed by the University directly. These students should contact the directors of the doctoral programmes.

After contacting the Director of the Doctoral school, Prof. Ilkka Kilpeläinen, we learned the following (translation from Finnish):

In essence, the doctoral school or its doctoral school programmes (such as CHEMS or MATRENA) cannot take responsibility of long-term treatment, however this practice holds also for those who are in a working contract (if long-term treatment is needed, the doctors in Mehiläinen transfer the person to the public health care system). Yet, it is quite clear that a fellowship researcher cannot be left alone to deal with problems. That is, when an acute problem is identified, it will be reacted to as quickly as possible. The acute treatment can then be offered by e.g. Mehiläinen, and long-term treatment in turn by the public sector's health care system. As to expenses, it is primarily the doctoral school programme in which the doctoral student is doing the research that would be liable to take care of the cost.

Post: Unfortunately there aren't even enough study psychologists for the students. This is a major problem here in Kumpula.

Answer: This post is related to the previous. The problem for the undergraduate students is out of the scope of these discussions.

Posts for general information:

Post: Kumpula LGBTQ+ has now a web page: blogs.helsinki.fi/kumpula-lgbtq

Post: You can also contact for example INAR contact people even if you work in Physics or HIP

The posts to be transferred to the new event:

On group-level or research-level activities to promote well-being:

Post: Groups should as be porous and as non-hierarchical as possible while still keeping clear lines of responsibility for HR and supervision purposes.

Post: Good also to share difficulties with your peers too, so people can tackle them together. We do a format of each group member presenting 1 thing that worked and 1 that didn't in the past week.

Post: How many groups have a strategy? Everyone should have.

Post: How to make use of the time spent in "failed research", i.e. such that cannot result in an article?

Post: How can we help someone from a different research group who is facing stress and overworking, but does not dare to speak up? It can be hard to act when we don't witness the group's atmosphere ourselves.

Post: In the recent years I doubt I have seen a single person working enough to just reach the expected level. Where does the overworking come from? People would come to work and drink coffee, discuss their family, read web articles, even just watch YouTube (!) And stuff like that during their office hours. And then they try to catch up with the deadlines, gaining a lot of stress as a result of their procrastination. Calling it "overworking", which it is not.

Post: I don't want to work in a department where I can't have interesting non-work discussions with my colleagues. That doesn't mean I'm not overworked. Indeed it can be the only way to cope.

Post: Regular short breaks (including chatting to coworkers and coffee breaks) have been scientifically proven to increase productivity.

Post: Does anyone have any experience for group practices which don't work well?

Post: As a group leader one has a responsibility to avoid setting unreasonable expectations, even inadvertently: answering emails on the weekend may make students feel that have to do the same to succeed.

Post: What happens when a group environment is bad? What process can lead to improvements, assuming it requires some outside influence?

Wellbeing group members:

Prof. Flyura Djurabekova (Chairperson)

Prof. Ippo Vattulainen (Vice-chairperson)

Prof. Simo Huotari

Assoc. Prof. Aleksu Vuorinen

Dr. Eija Tuominen – Chief Engineer

Dr. Thomas Hackman - Lecturer

Dr. Waldemar Kulig - Lecturer

Dr. Lucile Turc – Academy Research Fellow

Dr. Eleanna Asvestari – Postdoctoral researcher

Dr. Oliver Gould – Postdoctoral Researcher

Outi Haapanen – CHEMS PhD Student

Harriet George – PAPU PhD Student

Elise Veranen – HR Coordinator