

Recommendations for implementing career development support for improving PhD programmes

The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations for institutions or universities looking to implement a career development support strategy for their researchers along with best practices for their effective implementation. These recommendations were developed as part of the H2020 project ENABLECARES with the involvement of expert from all participating institutions.

Having a career development plan is crucial for junior researchers and the European Commission recognizes the importance of career development plans for researchers, as outlined in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment.

Firstly, it provides researchers with a clear and structured path towards achieving their professional goals. This helps them to identify and develop the skills, knowledge, and experience required to succeed in their chosen field.

Secondly, a Career Development Plan (CDP) can help researchers to stay focused and motivated in their work. It can provide them with a sense of direction and purpose, and help them to prioritize their activities and resources.

Thirdly, a CDP can help researchers to identify and take advantage of career opportunities as they arise. By having a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their goals and aspirations, researchers can make informed decisions about their career path and take actions that will help them achieve their objectives.

Finally, having a CDP can also help researchers to be more resilient and adaptable in the face of changing circumstances. By continuously evaluating their progress and adjusting their goals and strategies as necessary, researchers can be better equipped to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of their profession.

Besides, CDPs are an important tool for promoting diversity and inclusivity in research. By supporting the career development of all researchers, regardless of their background or circumstances, the European Commission aims to create a more equitable and inclusive research environment in Europe.

For all the reasons mentioned above, we offer some general recommendations for Institutions who want to establish a CDP for junior researchers:

- Ensure that the career development program is inclusive and accessible to all young researchers, regardless of their background, identity, or experience. This can include providing accommodations, offering mentorship opportunities to underrepresented groups, and addressing unconscious biases.

- Integrate the career development program into the institution's culture and values. This can include recognizing and rewarding the contributions of mentors and supporters, showcasing the achievements of young researchers, and promoting a culture of continuous learning and growth.
- Provide ongoing support and resources to young researchers, even after they have completed the program. This can include access to networking opportunities, funding for research projects, or mentorship beyond the program's duration.
- Collect and analyse data to evaluate the effectiveness of the career development program and make data-driven improvements. This can include gathering feedback from participants, tracking program outcomes, and measuring the impact of the program on young researchers' career trajectories.
- Partner with external organizations or individuals who can provide expertise, funding, or other resources to support the career development program. This can include industry partners, non-profit organizations, or government agencies.

Some key aspects to take into consideration towards the implementation of a CDP within the institution can be:

- Assess the current level of support (if any) provided for career development to the young researcher community at the institution.
- Gather feedback from the researcher community regarding the need for career development (including satisfaction with current existing support, if any; perception of being prepared for the labour market both inside and outside academia).
- Identify the needs of young researchers in terms of skills, resources and training opportunities currently missing needed to succeed in their careers (through surveys, focus groups or one-to-one interviews).
- Identify the need for a structured career development support program at the institute that is tailor-made for the institution and the community of researchers, secure institutional support and raise awareness among senior staff.
- Ensure the allocation of appropriate resources to maintain a CDP support to the young researcher community. This includes to recognise the role of Career Advisors in the coordination and follow up of the CDP and to support their professional training and networking opportunities in order to be aligned with existing best practices.

Finally, below we provide some last recommendations to ensure that the implementation of a CDP runs smoothly and successfully within the Institution:

- Define the goals of the CDP: Based on the needs assessment. Determine what outcomes you want to achieve and how you will measure success (KPIs).
- Develop internal tools to provide support to young researchers engaged in the CDP.



- Develop a comprehensive curriculum that includes training, workshops, and mentoring opportunities. Ensure that the curriculum covers key skills, such as grant writing, project management, communication, and leadership.
- Partner young researchers with experienced mentors who can guide them through their career development. Mentors should be able to provide feedback, advice, and support to help young researchers achieve their goals.
- Create networking opportunities for young researchers to connect with peers, mentors, and other professionals in their field. This can include attending conferences, participating in online forums, or joining professional organizations. Involve alumni and make sure to create connections with the young researcher community who can benefit from it.
- Offer funding and resources to support young researchers in their career development. This can include travel grants, access to equipment, or support for research projects.
- Provide young researchers with opportunities to teach and lead within the institution. This can include teaching assistantships, leadership roles in student organizations, or involvement in institutional committees.
- Make sure to keep an open dialogue with the young researcher community and provide a clear and structured communication about the program related actions within the Institution.

