



**GHENT  
UNIVERSITY**

VISION STATEMENT

POSTDOCTORAL CAREER POLICY AND CAREER  
GUIDANCE AT GHENT UNIVERSITY

Approved by the Board of Governors on 14 February 2014

This vision statement was drawn up by the steering committee of the strategic project “Postdoc talent management: postdoctoral career policy and career guidance” within the context of the strategic plan at Ghent University (2013-2014).

### Members of the project steering committee:

- Jasmien Van Daele (project leader – policy advisor Department of Personnel and Organization)
- Hugo De Vreese (project sponsor – director Department of Personnel and Organization)
- Karen Vandeveldde (policy advisor Research Department)
- Sarah Claerhout, Kim Heylen, Lieven Huybregts, Isabelle Sioen (postdoctoral researchers)
- Prof. Tom Coenye, Prof. Ilse Derluyn, Prof. Magda Vincx (professorial staff)
- Prof. Frank Witlox (director Doctoral Schools)

### Target audience for this vision statement:

- all postdoctoral researchers
- all professorial staff members
- the university management on the central and the faculty level
- the external labour market

In line with its global strategic objectives, Ghent University aims to be a **caring and concerned employer** for all its staff members. It aims to maintain **an excellent and motivating HR policy**, providing the fertile grounds required for outstanding research, education, innovation and services.

For its postdoctoral researchers in particular, the career policy pursued by Ghent University strives for the maximum development of talents in order to **improve the future and career prospects of postdoctoral researchers**, both within and outside of the university:

- Ghent University's career policy enhances the *employability* of its postdoctoral researchers. It creates maximum opportunities for postdoctoral researchers in order to optimally prepare them for a next step in their career: a career on the external labour market, preferably taking into account the postdoctoral experience, or an academic appointment at Ghent University or another knowledge institution in Belgium or abroad.
- Ghent University's career policy is **talent-oriented**: our university creates the context and preconditions for developing talents and skills that contribute to the wider societal objectives posed by the university. It implements a career policy that does not just target the expansion of knowledge and research skills, but that actually focuses on a **wider development of skills**, stimulating and recognizing the various tasks, authorities and responsibilities (i.e. academic and all other research-related performances in a wider sense). The coaching, mentoring, training and tailor-made education helps postdocs to fine-tune their competencies and boosts their appeal on the internal and external labour market.

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<sup>1</sup> *Employability* refers to individuals' capacities to successfully find and maintain a job that is in line with one's personal talents, competencies, preferences and experiences. It focuses on the acquisition of skills and the motivation to exploit career opportunities in an independent way.

*A talent-oriented career policy at Ghent University capitalizes on three opportunities:*

- 1) **Attracting good postdocs:** A talent-oriented career policy, starting from open and transparent recruitment, makes Ghent University an attractive working place offering excellent terms of employment and labour conditions, and it will make talented candidates choose for a research career at Ghent University.
  
- 2) **Supporting postdocs during their postdoctoral phase at Ghent University:** Supporting postdocs in their career development stimulates their creativity and innovation and helps them bring out the best in themselves. In this context, Ghent University seeks the open and equal participation of all parties.
  
- 3) **Preparing postdocs for the next step in their careers:** Ghent University sees its postdoctoral researchers as multi-talents that may play a leading role in various sectors of the current national and international knowledge society. Equally, it encourages them on their path to either a professorship in Belgium or abroad or a career in an external environment (e.g. at knowledge centres, in the corporate world, in higher education, for the government, or for non-profit organizations). It goes without saying that PhDs and postdocs are also employed outside of university. Ghent University optimally encourages the development of a widely spread network of postdoc alumni, who pride themselves on their postdoctoral experience at Ghent University and who are the pride of Ghent University.

*Ghent University's postdoctoral career policy assumes a shared responsibility of the parties involved:*

- 1) As a “good employer”, **Ghent University** carries the responsibility to create room and opportunities for postdocs to optimally develop their own talents. It does so in several ways: by stimulating and recognizing the wide variety of research-related tasks and authorities, by offering tailored transferable skills courses and career guidance, and by removing bottlenecks in its own regulations. In its academic HR policy, Ghent University strives to achieve similar interests among professorial staff and postdocs, so that both parties make each other stronger.

- 2) **The researchers** do not assume *a priori* that a postdoctoral position will automatically result in a professorship at the own department or institute. Instead, they proactively take charge of their own careers and actively contribute to their own career development by making use of the university's career support, by establishing a professional network, by exploiting opportunities (including intersectorial and international opportunities) in order to gain experiences that will qualify them for other positions inside and outside of the university, and by making their own ambitions and expectations known to the professorial staff member in charge.
  
- 3) **The professorial staff (supervisor/head of department/professorial staff member in charge)** should offer maximum opportunities to the postdoc so that (s)he can further develop her/his CV and career. As a first contact point and important role model, the professorial staff member in charge is required to give responsibility to the postdoc and subsequently honour this agreement. S/he also needs to motivate the postdoc to participate in training, counselling or other activities within the context of postdoctoral career development. Finally, as a good leader, s/he is expected to be clear from the start of the postdoctoral appointment about the limited opportunities of an academic appointment at Ghent University. Good leaders pride themselves on the fact that former employees succeed and realize that these former employees in fact reinforce their network, even if they pursue a career outside of the academic community.
  
- 4) **The external labour market:** As a public institution, the university is responsible for communicating the societal value of postdoctoral knowledge and experience to the public at large. Ghent University proactively seeks out ways to exchange expertise and aims to structurally raise awareness among employers, so that they are better informed of the added value of research-oriented and other specific competencies, talents and trumps of postdoctoral researchers.

Academic researchers develop their careers in a rapidly **changing and globalizing world**: more than ever, researchers are part of interdisciplinary, international and intersectoral co-operation. Therefore, Ghent University's postdoctoral career policy focuses on fundamental, strategic as well as applied research(ers).

In conclusion, a talent-oriented and caring career policy increases the motivation and commitment of postdoctoral researchers. Ghent University actively pursues strong ties with and among these researchers by establishing a **postdoc community ("Ghent University PostDoC")**, connecting postdocs across faculties in

a social network and sharing information and support on all postdoc related affairs, with the focus on career support and professional development opportunities for postdoctoral researchers.