The 2013 Canadian Postdoc Survey

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Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars – Association canadienne des stagiaires post-doctoraux

Introduction
In 2009, CAPS informally surveyed postdocs in Canada, in an attempt to learn more about their needs and aspirations.

With the rapidly growing number of postdocs in Canada, it became apparent that a more rigorous, formal survey was required to support discussion with universities and granting agencies.

In January, 2013, Mitacs agreed to fund a 3rd party survey of all Canadian postdocs and we contracted Academia Group to prepare the instrument and collect the data.

Response
1830 Canadian postdocs completed the survey between March 22 and April 29th, 2013, in about 20 minutes each.

This constitutes more than 20% of Canada’s estimated 9000 postdocs.

Respondents are from 183 institutions across the entirety of Canada.

Respondents by Institution
University of Toronto:
University of British Columbia:
McGill University:
University of Alberta:
Western University:
Université Laval:
McMaster University:
University of Saskatchewan:
St. Michael’s University:
Université de Montréal:
University of Calgary:
University of Waterloo:
University of Ottawa:
University of Victoria:
Université de Sherbrooke:
Queen’s University:
Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute:
Carleton University:
Memorial University of Newfoundland:
Other:
Total:

1,830

Additionally, more than 1000 postdocs gave long-term contact information for follow-up data collection.

Administrative Ambiguity
Postdocs do not have clear employment or administrative status. Positions vary between institutions and within institutions, often not in line with federal or provincial employment classification.

Satisfaction with Status

Low Compensation and Benefits

Gross Annual Salary / Stipend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary ($)</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 or more</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$71,000 - $79,999</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$65,000 - $69,999</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - $64,999</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$55,000 - $59,999</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $54,999</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,000 - $49,999</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $44,999</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 - $39,999</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$30,000 - $34,999</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25,000 - $29,999</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 or less</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than half of the respondents were happy with their salary or stipend, and only 29% are satisfied with their access to employment benefits.

“I don’t think that it is fair to expect someone to go through an extended period of education, and then 3-5 years of temporary, low-paid employment as a ‘trainee’ with no benefits, probably in several different locations, before they can even start to apply for permanent employment. The uncertainty is incredibly difficult, especially at a time when people are trying to maintain long-term relationships and start families.”

-Survey Respondent

“I make less as a postdoctoral fellow than I [made] as a PhD because of income tax.”

-Survey Respondent

Insufficient Training

Most postdocs (80%) are looking to move into academia. The reality is, there are not nearly enough positions to accommodate these goals.

“I am constantly stressed that I won’t be able to get a job as a university professor, but I really don’t have a satisfactory ‘Plan B’ if this doesn’t work out.”

-Survey Respondent

Exposure to Non-Academic Career Opportunities

Part of the solution is to expose postdocs to the diverse career opportunities outside of academia and provide training for these options.

Outcome
The three urgent issues presented here demonstrate that postdocs have a variety of different needs than graduate students. They are adults: in the middle of their lives, but at the beginning of their careers.

The three national funding councils (NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR) along with the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Administrators (CAPA) are beginning to discuss various issues within and between themselves and with CAPS-ACSP.

The questions in the survey were based on a framework of similar surveys from other countries (such as Sigma Xi in the US), allowing for easy comparison of postdoctoral affairs between countries.

The full survey report may be viewed on CAPS-ACSP’s website, at:

http://www.caps-acsp.ca/Home/survey

To contact us regarding this report, please e-mail: survey@caps-acsp.ca

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