

# NUI Galway School of Psychology

## Individual Development Plan for Postdoctoral Researchers

**Purpose: Individual Development Plans (IDPs)** provide a planning process that helps identify both professional development needs and career objectives. Furthermore, IDPs can serve as a tool to help facilitate communication and guide conversations between researchers and their mentors. This IDP is not prescriptive – not all sections may be relevant to all researchers.

**Timing:** This may vary depending on factors such as contract length etc, but may be most useful *at the beginning of post-doc (within first month)* and *repeated at 3 or 6 months* (as appropriate) and *yearly for about 1-1.5 hours*. It is intended that the first meeting would be scheduled by the mentor as part of the researcher’s induction. Scheduling of subsequent meetings should be mutually determined.

**Outline of the IDP Process:** The development, implementation and revision of the IDP involve a series of steps to be conducted by the researcher, and then discussed with their mentor. These steps are an interactive effort; ideally both the researcher and their mentor will fully participate in the process.

| <i>For the Researcher:</i>   | <i>For the Mentor:</i>   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1) Self-reflection on interests/values:</b><br/>The IDP process provides an opportunity to reflect on your career-related interests and values. This can enable you to develop suitable goals (if desired) matched to these values and interests. It may be most helpful to complete <i>in advance</i> of the meeting.</p>                     | <p><b>1) Discuss Opportunities with Researcher:</b><br/>This should be a private, scheduled meeting distinct from regular research-specific meetings. There should be adequate time set aside for an open and honest discussion.</p> |
| <p><b>2) Skills/needs self-assessment:</b><br/>The IDP process provides an opportunity for you to conduct a self-assessment of your strengths, weaknesses and learning needs. This can enable you to develop suitable goals (if desired) matched to these skills and needs. It may be most helpful to complete <i>in advance</i> of the meeting.</p> | <p><b>2) Review IDP and Help Revise:</b><br/>Provide honest feedback - both positive and negative to help researchers set realistic goals if this is something they want to work on.</p>   |
| <p><b>3) Goal-setting:</b><br/>An IDP can be one component of a broader mentoring program and can help researchers identify career goals. Goal-setting can be useful to help give a clearer sense of expectations for both researcher and mentor and help identify milestones along the way to achieving objectives.</p>                             | <p><b>3) Establish Regular Review of Progress:</b><br/>The mentor should meet with the researcher at mutually-agreeable intervals to help them self-assess their progress, expectations and any change in goals.</p>                 |
| <p><b>4) Creating and reviewing your IDP:</b><br/>Discuss your IDP with your mentor; implement the steps in your IDP; outline a mutually-agreeable time to review progress with your mentor</p>  |  |

## 1) SELF-REFLECTION ON CAREER-RELATED INTERESTS AND VALUES

A discussion around career-related interests and values may be a useful way to start your IPD meeting. While this is a useful reflection for everyone to complete periodically, it may be most useful to complete this step once at the beginning of the post-doc, if both the researcher and the mentor find this useful. This may also serve as a useful means of the researcher and mentor getting to know each other rather than being strictly about developing the IPD.

### A) Career-related interests – discussion points:

- Reflect upon the things you most like about your current position as a researcher
- Reflect upon the things you like least about your current position as a researcher
- Reflect upon and outline the things that you would like to learn more about in the future (areas of scientific knowledge to get into and/or career paths that seem interesting, new skills to learn about, possible new directions for your research program)

### B) Career-related values: What factors are most important to you?

The following table describes a wide variety of satisfactions that people obtain from their chosen careers. Review each item on the list, reading each definition, and rate the degree of importance that you would assign to each item for yourself, using the scale below:

1 = Very important to my choice of career; 2 = Reasonably important; 3 = Not very but somewhat important; 4 = Not important at all

Once completed, the following activities might further facilitate and stimulate conversation and/or reflection:

- List the work-related values that are ranked as “1’s”
- If this is your first time completing these, how could setting short or long term career goals allow you to attain these values and satisfactions that are most important to you?
- If this has been completed before, have these items changed from the last time you conducted a self-assessment? Changes might provide a topic for conversation between you and your mentor

**Table 1: Career-related values**

| <b>RANK</b> | <b>VALUE</b>                  | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>   |
|-------------|-------------------------------|--|
|             | Help society                  | Do something to contribute to the improvement of the world I live in   |
|             | Help others                   | Be involved in helping other people in a direct way either individually or in small groups   |
|             | People contact                | Have a lot of day-to-day contact with people as a result of my work activities   |
|             | Affiliation                   | Be recognised as a member of a respected organisation  |
|             | Friendships                   | Develop close personal relationships as a result of my work activities, or have a job that allows me to maintain close friendships outside of work |
|             | Competition                   | Engage in activities that pit (or rank) my abilities or achievements against those of others   |
|             | Make decisions                | Have the power to decide courses of actions, policies etc.   |
|             | Work under pressure           | Work in situations where time pressure is prevalent and/or the quality of my work is judged critically by supervisors, customers, peers or others  |
|             | Power and authority           | Control the work activities of other people  |
|             | Influence people              | Be in a position to change attitudes or opinions of other people   |
|             | Work alone                    | Work on or complete projects by myself, without any significant amount of contact with others  |
|             | Knowledge                     | Engage myself in the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding: intellectual stimulation   |
|             | Intellectual or expert status | Be regarded as a person of high intellectual prowess or as one who is an acknowledged expert in a given field                                      |
|             | Creativity                    | Create new ideas, programs, organizational structures or anything else not following a format previously developed by others                       |
|             | Aesthetics                    | Be involved in studying, appreciating the beauty of things, ideas etc., or in creating that beauty   |
|             | Supervision                   | Having a job in which I am directly responsible for the work done by others  |
|             | Stability                     | Have a work routine and job duties that are largely predictable and not likely to change over a long period of time                                |
|             | Change and variety            | Have work responsibilities which frequently change their content and setting: avoidance of routine   |
|             | Precision work                | Work in a situation where there is very little tolerance for error   |
|             | Security                      | Be assured of keeping my job and a reasonable financial reward   |

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Fast pace                          | Work in circumstances where there is a high rate of activity and work must be done rapidly  |
| Recognition                        | Be recognized (by individuals/co-workers/the public/superiors) for the quality of my work   |
| Excitement                         | Experience a high degree of (or frequent) excitement in the course of my work   |
| Adventure                          | Have work duties which involve risk-taking or trying new things: could be a position that allows a lot of travel  |
| Profit-gain                        | Have strong likelihood of accumulating large amounts of money or other material gain  |
| Independence                       | Be able to determine the nature of my work without significant direction from others: not be required to do what others tell me to do                                     |
| Moral fulfilment                   | Feel that my work is contributing significantly to, or is in keeping with, a set of moral standards which I feel are very important                                       |
| Location                           | Find a place to live (town, area) which is conducive to my lifestyle and affords me the opportunity to do things I enjoy most   |
| Community                          | Live in a town or city where I can get involved in community affairs  |
| Physical Challenge                 | Have a job that makes physical demands which I would find rewarding   |
| Time freedom                       | Have work responsibilities which I can work at according to my own time schedule: flexible work schedule or no particular work schedule                                   |
| High earning anticipation          | Monetary rewards will be such that I am able to purchase those things I consider essential as well as the luxuries of life that I wish to have                            |
| Status                             | It is important that the position I have carries respect with my friends, or my family, or some community of people   |
| Advancement                        | A job that provides the opportunity to work hard and make rapid career advancement  |
| Challenging problems               | The position does not have to be "essential to the survival of the human race" but it should provide challenging problems to solve and the avoidance of continual routine |
| Creative expression                | Opportunity to express in writing or verbally my ideas, reactions, and observations concerning my job and how I might improve it  |
| Job tranquillity                   | To avoid pressure and the "rat race"  |
| Family friendly                    | A job or organisation that allows me to blend family/work   |
| Work on the frontiers of knowledge | a) Be involved directly in science and/or b) Work in an organisation considered to be one of the best at striving for better product advances                             |

|   |                        |  |
|---|------------------------|--|
|   | Exercise<br>competence | An opportunity to involve myself in those areas in which I feel I have talents greater than the average person |
| <p>This step of the IDP process provides an ideal opportunity for you to conduct additional career-related research. If you believe that you should be considering a non-academic career path, or if you would like to find out more about the range of career options available, <b>Appendix 1</b> details some resources that you might want to review.</p> |                        |  |

## 2) SKILLS/NEEDS SELF-ASSESSMENT:

**Assess your strengths, weaknesses and skills (self-evaluation)** Evaluate your skills and abilities in the following areas where: 5 = Highly proficient, 1 = Needs improvement

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Overall Core Scientific Knowledge</b>                                |  |
| Knowledge area _____  |  |
| Knowledge area _____  |  |
| Knowledge area _____  |  |
| <b>General Research Skills</b>  |  |
| Qualitative skills  |  |
| Quantitative skills   |  |
| Designing experiments   |  |
| Analytical skills   |  |
| Problem solving/troubleshooting   |  |
| Creativity/developing new research directions                           |  |
| Ethics applications   |  |
| Critical appraisal  |  |
| Other general skills relevant to your area, please identify: _____      |  |
| <b>Professional Skills</b>  |  |
| Oral presentation skills  |  |
| Teaching skills   |  |
| Grant writing skills  |  |
| Manuscript writing skills   |  |
| General scientific writing skills                                       |  |
| Other professional skills relevant to your area, please identify: _____ |  |
| <b>Leadership and Management Skills</b>                                 |  |
| Supervision skills  |  |
| Leading and motivating others   |  |
| Budgeting   |  |
| Managing projects and time  |  |
| Organisational skills   |  |
| Other skills relevant to your area, please identify: _____              |  |
| <b>Interpersonal Skills</b>   |  |
| Getting along with others   |  |
| Communicating clearly in writing  |  |
| Communicating clearly in conversation                                   |  |
| Other skills relevant to your area, please identify: _____              |  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Other Skills not mentioned above (e.g. laboratory skills, clinical skills)</b> |  |
| Skill set _____   |  |
| Skill set _____   |  |

**How do you spend your time?**

Provide a rough estimate of how your time is spent– what % of your time was spent on each of the following activities during the past year?

This activity might help you determine what areas you might like or need to focus more on in terms of any needs identified previously. Your mentor may help you identify what areas might be more or less important to prioritise depending on what your interests, needs and goals are.

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|
| Research (e.g. designing studies, data collection and analysis)   |          |
| Reading in your field   |          |
| Reading to expand your knowledge of other fields  |          |
| Writing   |          |
| Applying for funding/grants   |          |
| Disseminating your research (e.g. delivering seminars, public outreach/engagement, presenting at conferences) |          |
| Attending training/career development seminars/workshops  |          |
| Attending seminars  |          |
| Attending conferences   |          |
| Teaching/marking  |          |
| Curriculum development/module coordination  |          |
| Contribution to professional bodies/disciplinary organisations/societies                                      |          |
| School/College/University committees  |          |
| Mentoring/Supervision   |          |
| Volunteer or leadership activities  |          |
| Networking/social activities  |          |
| Job search activities (CV writing, informational interviewing, researching job opportunities)                 |          |
| Other (please specify)  |          |

### 3) GOAL-SETTING

In Step 1 and Step 2 above, you have reflected on your skills, needs, values and interests. All of these may help you define your career goal, if this is something you want to develop. Your mentor can discuss these with you and help you develop goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed.

### 4) CREATING AND REVIEWING YOUR IDP

This section will enable you to provide you with a way of documenting your IDP and any particular goals you may want to develop and how your training should move forward for you. This may be useful for you to revisit at each mentoring meeting to help structure discussions and track progress or highlight any issues or concerns.

#### Individual Development Plan (IDP) for \_\_\_\_\_ (year)

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of current position: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Term Goals (if any):

Long Term Goals (if any):



Overall, which goals will receive your top priority over the next while? Create a timeline for fulfilling these goals.

Any particular needs identified/skills you would like to develop/improve during your current position?

Informal/formal means identified of achieving this?

Any activities you would like to spend more time on during this time?

Informal/formal means identified of achieving this?

*FOR REVIEW MEETINGS:* Progress with goals/skills/activities? What has hindered/helped progress?  
What might reduce barriers or help further?

## Tips for implementing your IDP

Writing your IDP is just the beginning of the career development process and serves as the road map. Now it's time to take action!

- Put your plan into action. Read it over regularly to check your progress.
  
- Revise and modify the plan as necessary. The plan is not cast in concrete; it will need to be modified as circumstances and goals change. The challenge of implementation is to remain flexible and open to change.
  
- Plan to set a time and date for the next meeting with your mentor to review and discuss your IDP. Be sure to prepare a written outline for this discussion. For example, create a prioritized list of the most important items you wish to discuss.
  
- Revise the plan on the basis of these discussions.

## APPENDIX 1 – additional resources:

UK Vitae framework for supporting researcher development

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers>

Resources for careers outside academia

### Resource 1: Weblinks:

[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_magazine/previous\\_issues/articles/2006\\_12\\_01/noDOI.2875808810157605580](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine/previous_issues/articles/2006_12_01/noDOI.2875808810157605580)

<http://gradschool.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fchronicle.com%2Fjobs%2F2001%2F04%2F2001040604c.htm>

[http://chronicle.com/jobs/sidecol\\_library/nonacademic.htm](http://chronicle.com/jobs/sidecol_library/nonacademic.htm)

<http://www.phds.org/jobs/nonacademic-careers/>

### Resource 2: Books:

- **“Moving on in Your Career: A Guide for Academics and Postgraduates”**, by Lynda Ali and Barbara Graham. This book shows researchers what is required to make a continuing career in academic research or lecturing and gives advice on taking alternative career paths. The authors draw on their experience of careers guidance in higher education to outline various options in which researchers can use the skills developed at university. They advise on sources of advertised and unadvertised vacancies and how to use methods such as speculative applications and the internet. The book also provides practical exercises and ideas to enhance essential job-search and self-presentation skills.
- **“Alternative Careers in Science: Leaving the Ivory Tower”** by Cynthia Robbins-Roth. Dr. Robbins-Roth’s book features 23 chapters, each providing information on a different career path available to PhD-level scientists. It is by US authors, and so is somewhat US-focused, but it will stimulate you to “think outside the box” in terms of a career path.