



## COMMITMENTS OF POSTDOCS AND SUPERVISORS

### Preamble

Postdoctoral training is an important stage in scholarly development and career advancement for individuals who have obtained the terminal degree in their discipline (PhD or equivalent; medical specialty). The training is conducted under the supervision of a professor who is a member of McGill's academic staff. They have the dual responsibilities of supervising the Postdoc's research and mentoring for career development. Postdoctoral trainees are expected to perform research (either in collaboration with the supervisor or independently under general supervision), to write manuscripts and research proposals, and to present their research effectively, all at a competitive level. In addition to research skills, it is important that Postdocs achieve proficiency in other professional skills important in embarking upon a successful career. Although responsibilities other than research, such as teaching, are usually minimal, such activities can be pursued in the context of the Postdoc's personal training goals.

A condition of [postdoctoral registration at McGill](#) is a [Letter of Agreement](#) between the Postdoc and the Supervisor, approved by the Head of the Academic Unit and Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. It is important that this agreement outline not only the research expectations of the Postdoc but also the training objectives of the Postdoc. These may include, but are not limited to, an individualized training program to achieve those goals, and the responsibilities that define the working relationship between the Supervisor and the Postdoc to achieve those objectives, as well as other expectations of the Supervisor.

Both the Postdoc and the Supervisor must be aware of and pledge to follow the approved McGill University regulations and guidelines governing postdoctoral research and supervision in the following documents:

- [Postdoctoral Research](#) section of the McGill University eCalendar, including guidelines and policies on postdoctoral education
- [McGill University Expectations for Graduate Supervision](#) outlined on the [Supervision](#) website
- [University Policies and Regulations](#) regarding Conduct of Research; Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants; Research Misconduct; and Inventions and Software, among others
- Other official [University Policies and Regulations](#) including the Policy on Harassment and Discrimination, and the Policy Against Sexual Violence
- The [Collective Agreement](#) (for unionized postdocs only; consult [this page](#) for a definition of the different postdoctoral categories)
- *Unit policies and procedures* as defined and publicized by the academic unit

In addition, postdocs and supervisors are expected to observe generally accepted core tenets that define the working relationship between any trainee and their supervisor. This addendum provides guidelines

governing the responsibilities and conduct of postdocs and supervisors. By signing the [Letter of Agreement for Postdoctoral Education](#), all parties pledge to abide by these principles.

## **Areas of Responsibility and Commitment for Postdocs and Supervisors<sup>1</sup>**

### **Responsibility for Career Development**

Each Postdoc is responsible for developing their own career in consideration of their talents, skills, interests and personal values. The decision to come to McGill and the choice of supervisor should be made in that context, with training objectives designed to achieve specific competencies.

The Supervisor must acknowledge that the purpose of postdoctoral studies is advanced training to develop the research and other skills of the trainee in accordance with their plan for career development. Ideally, these goals should fit with the research goals and the general expectations of the Supervisor. The arrangement should not exploit one party or the other but contribute to the growth and success of both.

### **Creating an Individualized Training Program**

Training objectives and existing competencies will vary with the individual. The Postdoc is responsible for articulating their career goals and particular objectives for the training period, including development of research and other professional skills.

The duties of the Supervisor are:

- To work with the Postdoc to ensure that a mutually agreed upon set of attainable objectives are established and documented in the Letter of Agreement
- To assist the Postdoc in developing an individual plan for career development over the course of the training period. This includes exposing the Postdoc to multiple academic and non-academic career options and assistance in exploring appropriate options.
- To ensure that the Postdoc has sufficient opportunities to acquire the competencies necessary to become an expert in their scholarly discipline.
- To ensure that the Postdoc has sufficient opportunities to acquire technical and other professional skills necessary for a successful career.
- To provide the Postdoc with a stipend commensurate with their qualifications and the policies of the granting agency, the academic unit and the University. The minimum salary requirements are listed on [this page](#).

### **Planning and Executing a Suitable Research Project**

The Postdoc and Supervisor together will define a research project that addresses the research goals with well-defined objectives, milestones and timelines.

The Postdoc is responsible for:

- Performing research conscientiously

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<sup>1</sup> The [Compact between Postdoctoral Appointees and their Mentors](#) from the Association of American Medical Colleges was instrumental in preparing this addendum.

- Performing research according to the standards of practice for the discipline.
- Keeping good records.
- Archiving and cataloguing all tangible materials associated with the research.
- Assisting with preparation for conference posters and talks, research grants, progress reports and manuscripts.

The Supervisor is responsible for:

- Providing financial and physical resources adequate to support the research.
- Ensuring that the Postdoc understands and follows standard practices of research for the discipline.
- Ensuring that the Postdoc receives proper and adequate instruction in all aspects of conducting the research project.
- Providing opportunities to present at conferences, prepare funding applications, and to write reports and manuscripts.
- Providing a safe working environment and working conditions.

Postdocs and supervisors are invited to consult the [Guidelines on Supervisor-Trainee Collaboration in Grant Writing](#).

### **Conducting Research in Compliance with the Highest of Ethical Standards**

Research must be carried out in accordance with all institutional and granting agency regulations and guidelines as they relate to the responsible conduct of research, use of human subjects and animals in research, use of biohazardous materials, general occupational health and safety, laboratory safety, and policies governing copyright and intellectual property.

Postdocs are responsible for:

- Awareness of these regulations and guidelines.
- Obtaining required training and certifications.
- Complying with these research practices.
- Requesting guidance when presented with ethical or compliance uncertainties.
- Reporting compliance violations to a superior.

Supervisors are responsible for:

- Setting an example of high ethical conduct of research.
- Clearly defining expectations for compliance of all laboratory personnel.
- Being available to discuss concerns as they arise.
- Discussing matters related to authorship, copyright and intellectual property *a priori* or at early stages of a research project.

Postdocs and supervisors are also invited to consult the [Guidelines for disclosing a Conflict of Interest](#).

### **Providing a Collegial Working Environment**

Both Postdoc and Supervisor will conduct themselves professionally and with mutual respect. Collegiality will extend to colleagues, support staff and any other individuals encountered in the working

and scholarly environment. Concerns will be discussed openly in a timely manner, with respect for the other person's opinion and position and with the aim of reaching a mutually satisfactory solution.

The Supervisor should discuss expectations concerning workload and responsibilities, interactions with trainees and employees, hours, frequency of meetings, travel, etc. Postdocs should advise the Supervisor of absences, circumstances affecting performance, etc.

### **Mechanism for Conflict Resolution**

Any issues or conflicts that may arise, including actual or a potential cause of failure on the part of the Postdoc or Supervisor to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations as outlined in the Letter of Agreement and University Policies and Regulations, should be dealt with in the same manner as similar issues would be dealt with for graduate students. If the issue cannot be resolved by discussion between the parties, it should be brought to the Chair of the academic unit. If the conflict remains unresolved, the [Associate Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) should be consulted. Unionized postdocs may also refer to the grievance procedure outlined in the [Collective Agreement](#).

### **Routine Review of Performance and Adjustment of Training Objectives**

Regular and open discussion helps ensure that the expectations of both Postdoc and Supervisor are met and provides opportunities to adjust training objectives over time. Formal feedback on performance and progress in attaining training objectives should be conducted routinely and can occur at the request of either the Postdoc or the Supervisor. Progress reports are highly recommended at minimum annually and should include review of the stipend paid to the Postdoc. During the discussion, the Postdoc and the Supervisor should review milestones met and consider recalibration of research and career path strategies as they evolve with time. A final progress report is required at expiration of the agreement. The Supervisor is responsible for ensuring these reports are duly submitted and included in the Postdoc's personnel file in the unit.

### **Timely Communication and Publication of Research Findings**

An integral part of academic research is making findings available to the larger academic community and the public. The Postdoc should discuss issues surrounding dissemination of research and materials with the Supervisor as part of the negotiation of the Letter of Agreement and subsequently as research projects develop.

The Supervisor should facilitate timely publication of the Postdoc's research by providing opportunities for the Postdoc to present at conferences, through submission of manuscripts for publication, and other venues characteristic of the discipline. Authorship, acknowledgements and intellectual property should be according to institutional and granting agency guidelines and the convention of the discipline.

### **Promoting and Achieving Independence**

The Postdoc is responsible for:

- Assuming increasing responsibility and management of their research project(s) as it develops.
- Attending seminars and conferences, interacting with colleagues.
- Keeping up with advances in knowledge in their area of specialization and related disciplines.
- Critically reviewing the literature and their own research findings.

- Actively seeking opportunities to present research findings and to develop the complement of professional skills necessary for successful career development, including seminars and workshops.

The Supervisor is responsible for:

- Providing proper guidance and mentoring for the Postdoc to achieve technical and intellectual proficiency in their area of specialization.
- Encouraging progressive increase in the level of responsibility and independence to promote the transition of the Postdoc to independence.
- Providing guidance and opportunities for the Postdoc to practice professional skills, including mentoring.
- Providing opportunities for the Postdoc to interact with colleagues, develop contacts and expand knowledge of the area of specialization and related disciplines
- Advising and facilitating transition of the Postdoc to the next stage of career.

**At the End of the Appointment**

- Original notebooks, data, electronic files and research materials must be organized and left with the Supervisor. The Postdoc may retain copies and have continued access to research materials generated through their research.
- The Postdoc must return any identification cards, keys, passes, etc. to the appropriate official.
- The Postdoc should provide new contact information to the academic unit and the Supervisor.
- Both Postdoc and Supervisor are responsible for the timely submission of research results for publication.
- The Supervisor is encouraged to assist the Postdoc through the subsequent stages of their career and to remain a supportive colleague.