

doesn't match the number of people who want it. Funding isn't likely to increase, so what can be done? We need to reduce the number of institutions doing research. That would free up money for the later stages of research and lower the numbers of people applying for grants. However, it's not a very politically viable option.

But we do need a change in culture. There are two reasons to stop the incentives that encourage the jerks: it would increase the quality of research, and it would contribute to the sum of human happiness.

EMILY BERNHARDT

Tone down the criticisms

Ecologist at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and author of an essay on kindness in science.

When I began drafting my essay (go.nature.com/2czt3pc), I intended to write a scathing one. But then I realized we needed something more positive. We all need to be more attentive to being kind. The low-level racism and sexism that exist in science do real harm.

Senior people should be calling out bad behaviour: "I think that's a little over the top or unkind." That will make people step back. And saying "Can you back up that statement?" can be quite effective among peers.

Unkindness is rife in the review process, and journal editors can do a lot to help by asking reviewers to tone down their criticisms. I've seen students destroyed by a mean review that insults their intelligence or writing, rather than focusing on the science. First papers are such important things for young scientists, and that first review feels like a statement on their abilities as a human being and a scholar.

There's this idea that it's OK to be an awful person as long as you are brilliant. But there are tons of people who are generous with their time or positive energy and who make academia work better.

BINYAM MOGESSIE

Make mentoring matter

Cell biologist, University of Bristol, UK.

As a new principal investigator, the most important thing for me is to be a member of the lab and not 'the boss'. A lab should be a place for the growth and development of

everyone who joins it. If someone needs my support, not just for trouble-shooting experiments but because science is very challenging and demotivating at times, I will tell them, "You should take a week away, go to a conference or give a seminar, and get excited about the science again." As a principal investigator, you need to acknowledge that you have a responsibility for every person you hire.

When you move from a PhD to a postdoc or academic position, no matter how hard you work, you still need a lot of mentoring. The person you are working for must think about your career progression and the things you should be doing — even if that means just taking 10 minutes to sit down with you and find out what you are interested in doing.

Nothing is definite in this business. You can't have an edge on people competing for the same job if you do not know what to expect at the next level. That's when an adviser or a mentor has to step up. If someone is willing to share that information with you, it is really kind.

STEPHANIE GALLA

Build bridges, don't burn them

PhD student in biology, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, and a founder of the Kindness in Science movement.

Being an early-career scientist is a cool time. It's when you get to explore what kind of science you want to study and what kind of scientist you want to be. It sets up the trajectory of your career.

But some things make me ask, do I really fit in here? There are long-lived lab rivalries that affect the quality of the science. That's disheartening. I've also met people who are more possessive about their science and not willing to share their research wisdom, data or code.

Overall, I've been fortunate to work with very kind scientists. I've just come from a meeting with government agriculture researchers who invited me to their lab group to talk about bioinformatics, and they were willing to share their hard-earned wisdom with me.

This helped me to make leaps and bounds in my own research and also led to mutually beneficial conversations on how to best approach shared research questions.

I think kindness is the path forward. I don't want to be a bridge burner, but a bridge builder. That's going to lead to better science.

INTERVIEWS BY KENDALL POWELL

Interviews were edited for clarity and length.

POSTDOCS

Support slowly grows

Academic institutions in the United States have helped to improve life for postdoctoral researchers but changes are still needed, according to a 3 January report from the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) in Rockville, Maryland, which represents postdocs in the United States and Canada.

Supporting the Needs of Postdocs recommends that postdocs receive higher compensation, equal benefits regardless of how a researcher is classified or funded, and more-generous parental leave.

The report collated results from a 2016 survey completed by 102 of the 190 institutional NPA members that maintain a postdoctoral office on campus. The survey results, published in partnership with Sigma Xi, a researcher association in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, indicate that 94% of member institutions require that new postdocs and other recruits learn about appointment policies and resources, and that 85% of institutions have an orientation programme that outlines services and amenities available to postdocs.

Postdoc pay rates, however, are less consistent across member institutions, despite federal legislation passed in 2016 that compels employers to either raise the minimum salary for all US hourly workers to US\$47,476 a year or offer overtime pay. Survey responses indicate that 77% of institutions pay that rate or are raising their minimum compensation to that level. Just 36% of institutions require annual stipend increases, 43% recommend it and 21% have no policy on the matter, the report says.

Most postdocs receive health-insurance benefits and paid time off, but postdocs who have their own funding often lose access to institutional benefits. This is a continuing point of contention, and the NPA urges institutions to address it.

The report recommends that institutions determine postdoc needs more effectively by gathering information on diversity, disability and disadvantaged backgrounds. It also calls for universities to maintain contact with postdocs after they leave, so as to develop a comprehensive alumni network and to track career pathways. Currently, 45% of institutions carry out exit surveys, and 28% track their postdocs after they leave the institution.

Since 2000, various societies and organizations have published reports on the importance of postdoctoral researchers to the US scientific enterprise and how postdoctoral training can be improved.