

## EDITORIAL

# The Pathway to Independence programme: helping postdocs navigate the transition to independence

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Making the leap from postdoc to principal investigator is tough. As one of our ‘Transitions in Development’ interviewees, Margot Kossman Williams, told us ‘applying to get a new job is a full-time job!’ (Eve, 2022). From articulating a research vision and putting together budgets to what to expect during the application and interview process, entering the academic job market throws up many new challenges. Although some institutes provide comprehensive training and mentorship to their postdocs, many do not, and access to good advice and support can make all the difference. Another of our interviewees, Aman Husbands, told us that – as a postdoc about to go on the job market – discussions with an Assistant Professor in his department were hugely instructive: he ‘helped me think about the process, put my chalk talk together, and figure out what questions I wanted to ask’ (Grewal, 2022). From speaking to postdocs applying for independent positions and to the community more broadly it’s apparent that many people would appreciate a little more support as they navigate the job market and start their first independent position. This got us thinking about what we at Development could do to help. As part of the not-for-profit charitable organisation The Company of Biologists, one of our core aims is to support the biological community – not only through our publishing activities, but also through our grants, meetings and fellowships. As discussed in this recent editorial, over recent years we’ve been particularly focussed on how we can better support early career researchers (ECRs) (Briscoe and Grewal, 2021). Now, we’re delighted to announce a new scheme, Development’s ‘Pathway to Independence (PI)’ programme, aimed at researchers about to go on the job market for their first independent position.

What does this programme involve? For this first pilot scheme, we invite any developmental biology or stem cell researcher planning to apply for their first principal investigator position in 2023 to apply to become one of our ‘PI fellows’. This will be a competitive scheme: given our limited resources, we will only be able to support a small number of people. These individuals will receive a tailored mentorship session with one of our editors – which might, for example, help the fellow refine their research proposal or conduct a mock job interview. We will give feedback on a job talk and we will also offer to host a recording of a talk on the Node as a showcase of their work. Through features in the journal and on the Node, we will help raise the fellows’ profiles, thus benefitting them as they apply for positions. Although details are still being developed (and will be designed in consultation with the first cohort of fellows), we also plan to provide some financial support for training to help make the transition to an independent position.

So if you are a postdoc about to go on the job market and think this scheme could be useful to you, please do apply! The application procedure is straightforward – you can find more details on our website (<https://journals.biologists.com/dev/pages/pi-programme>) or apply directly via our grants portal (<https://cob.smartsimpleuk.com/>). Applications must be received by 31 January 2023, and we aim to announce our first group of PI fellows in March 2023. All applications will be reviewed by our team of academic and professional editors, and the successful applicants will be selected based on their research record and future plans, as well as on the extent to which they are likely to benefit from such a scheme. We hope to receive applications from across the world, and we aim to support researchers from a diverse range of backgrounds.

We recognise that we’re only able to offer this scheme to a small number of individuals compared with how many postdocs in our field go on the job market each year. For this reason, we are looking at ways we might be able to support more of the applicants who do not go on to become PI fellows. When you apply, you will have the option to tell us whether you’d like to be considered to give a talk as part of our ‘Development presents’ webinar series; from this, we aim to put together a set of topic-focussed webinars. We also plan to run one or two seminars for applicants to the scheme focussing on, for example, navigating the publishing process as a new principal investigator.

Importantly, we hope that this programme will create a growing network of the next generation of leaders in the developmental biology and stem cell field – we aim to facilitate peer-to-peer mentorship and provide opportunities for our PI fellows to interact with each other and (in subsequent years) with previous cohorts. We anticipate that this network will not just be about the job search but extend to those first important years of running a research group. As we’ve heard in our ‘Transitions in Development’ interviews with junior group leaders (<https://journals.biologists.com/dev/collection/8029/Transitions-in-development>), running a lab means moving away from the bench and developing administrative and managerial skills, figuring out how to get funding, how to buy equipment, recruit new team members and set up collaborations. Peer-to-peer support can be invaluable for exchanging information and sharing problems in what can be an isolating experience.

Overall, we hope that Development’s ‘Pathway to Independence’ programme will provide a valuable set of benefits to our PI fellows and will help to nurture the future leaders of our field. If you have any other ideas of how we can support postdocs as they transition to independence, please do get in touch.

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