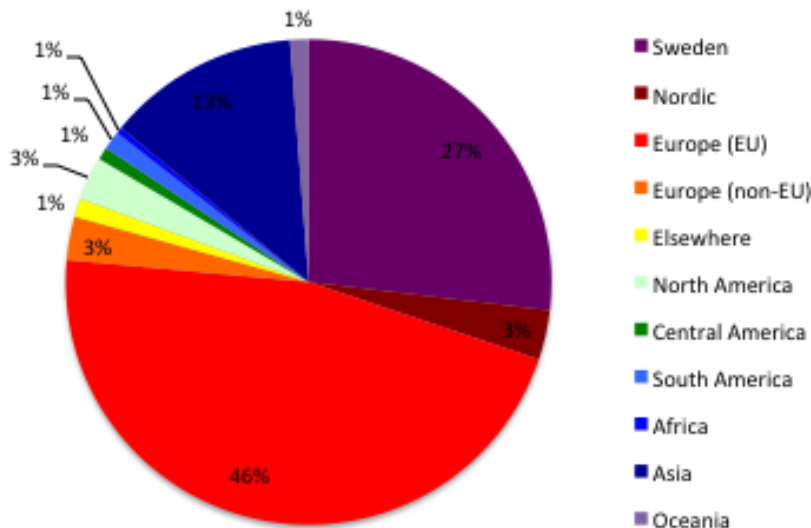


Postdoc experience at Karolinska Institutet, 2014

Conducted by the Postdoc Association, updated 19 January 2015

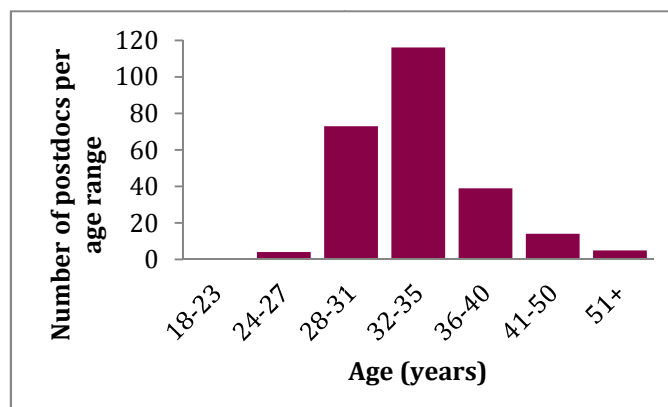
In April/May 2014 an internet-based websurvey was sent out by email to 979 postdocs to ask about the working conditions at Karolinska Institutet (KI), as most of these postdocs were excluded from filling in the AHA questionnaire for KI employees. The questions of this survey were based on the following questionnaires: 'Best places to work for Postdocs 2013' (AAAS), 'Euroscience survey on working conditions and career development of Young Researchers' (Euroscience), and the AHA questionnaire. The questionnaire had previously been sent out to 806 postdocs, in November/December 2012. Then, the number of respondents was higher. Now 251 postdocs responded, of whom 242 gave informed consent to use their answers in this report, 89 males (36.8%) and 153 females.

Nationalities



26.9% of the respondents came from Sweden, 3.3% from another Nordic country; 46.3% came from EU-Europe, 2.9% from non-EU Europe; 12.8% from Asia, and the others from other parts of the world (elsewhere is not specified outside Europe).

Age



The majority of the sample was aged between 28-35 years of age. However, around 23% was over the age of 35.

Family

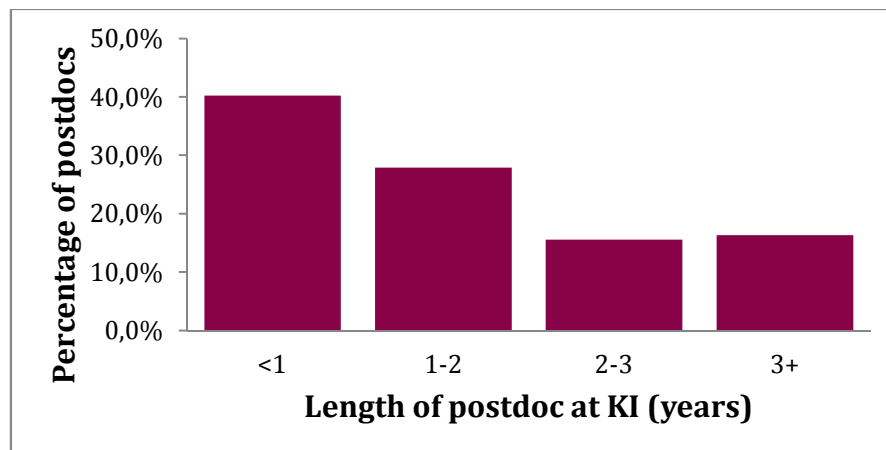
64.7% of respondents reported that they do not have children while 34.0% responded that they do (1.2% did not answer to this question).

Having children is more common among Swedish respondents than non-Swedish postdocs (58.5% vs. 25.0% with children). It is also more common among postdocs on salaries than among postdocs on scholarships (46.1% vs. 10.0% with children). Being Swedish and having a salary usually coincides (2 out of 65 Swedes receive a stipend only, see next section).

Among non-Swedish postdocs, it was more common to have children when working on salary than when working on stipends (37.2% vs 10.3%).

How long time spent as postdoc at KI

The majority (almost 70%) of respondents had been at KI for less than two years, with the largest group being here less than one year. There was a significant percentage (over 16%) of respondents who had been at KI for longer than three years.



Salary vs scholarship

47% of respondents (n=118) reported receiving a salary when they started their initial postdoc position at KI, 51.4% received a scholarship (n=129), and the remainder something else.

Of the 251 respondents 66 were Swedish, 41 of whom had completed their PhD at KI. 37 of these received a salary at the beginning of their postdoc, leaving 4 who received something else (external stipend or other form of funding). Out of the 25 Swedish Postdocs that had completed their PhD elsewhere, 23 received a salary at the beginning of their postdoc.

Of the remaining 185 non-Swedish respondents 25 had completed their PhD at KI, of which 24 received a salary at the start of their postdoc. Out of the 160 non-Swedish postdocs that completed their PhD elsewhere, 33 received a salary

when they started their postdoc at KI, and 125 received a stipend, and 2 received another type of funding.

Information on arrival

We asked postdocs whether they received proper information upon arrival. 49.6% of all postdocs indicated that they did not receive proper information regarding their contract. We then divided the postdocs up in three categories: postdocs that received a stipend upon arrival, those that received a salary upon arrival, and those that had done their PhD at KI. For these categories, 63.4% of the postdocs starting on a stipend, 36.4% of the postdocs starting on a salary, and 34.4% of the postdocs had done their PhD at KI indicated that they did not receive proper information regarding their contract.

Furthermore, 41.3% of all postdocs indicated they did not receive a proper introduction to KI; again when dividing them up, 52% of the postdocs starting on a stipend, 38.2% of the postdocs that started on a salary, and 23.4% of the postdocs that had done their PhD at KI indicated they had not perceived a proper introduction to KI.

We also asked whether they received proper information regarding other aspects of living in Sweden/Stockholm and how they rated the importance of information. In the following table, topics of information are ranked on subjective importance (from top to bottom, based on all postdocs); we then give the percentage of postdocs (of new arrivals on stipend, new arrivals on salary, and those that did their PhD at KI) that answered that they did not receive appropriate information:

Percentage of postdocs that did not receive appropriate information regarding:	New arrivals (stipend; n=123)	New arrivals (salary; n=55)	PhD at KI (n=64)
personnummer	26.0	21.8	18.8
accommodation	39.8	29.1	26.6
bank account	29.3	21.8	23.4
health care	52.0	29.1	21.9
benefits	70.7	47.3	37.5
insurance	65.0	45.5	39.1
swedish id	45.5	29.1	25.0
holidays	67.5	29.1	23.4
unions	69.9	72.7	51.6
JF	71.5	58.2	51.6

There is a striking difference in information supply regarding holidays between those on stipends and those on salaries. Probably due to the fact that holidays are regulated for those on salaries, but not for those on stipends.

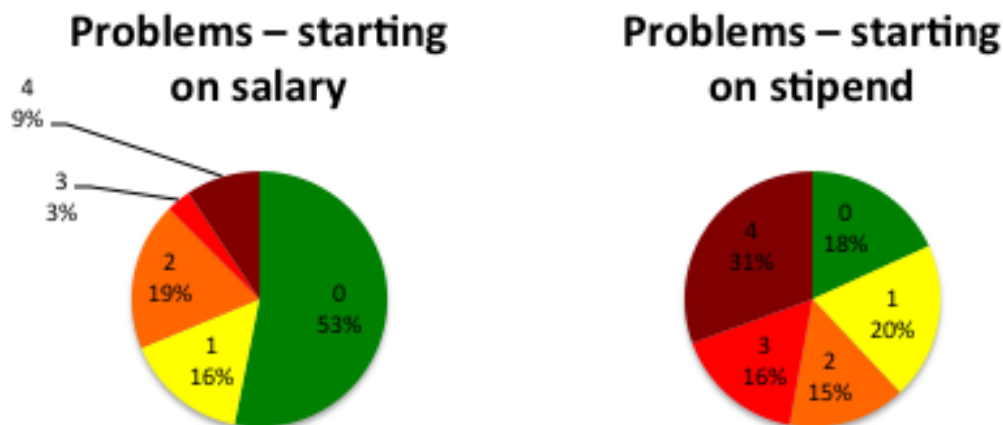
We are hopeful that the lack of information regarding health care will decrease over the coming years with the new stipend rules. However, there is room for improvement for almost all aspects of information.

Accommodation

See separate report

Encountering problems

Receiving a scholarship exempts the postdoc from paying tax. Whilst this may seem attractive to all parties, it presents a number of problems for the postdoc, including a lack of social security and difficulties with social integration into Sweden, especially considering the short durations of these scholarships (6 months or less for a KI stipend). For the following figures, only responses from non-Swedish postdocs that started either on a salary (n=32, excluding the ones that did their Ph.D. at KI) or a scholarship (n=121) were used:

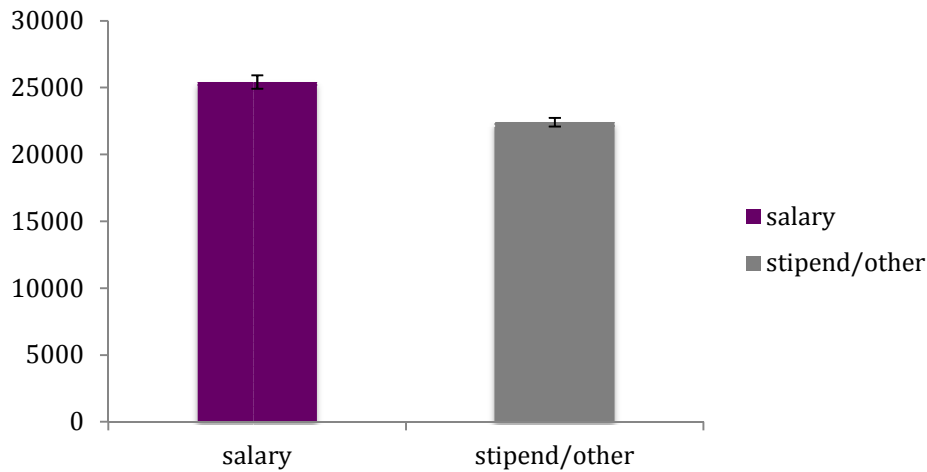


Postdocs on scholarships encounter significantly more problems in comparison to those on salaries, when applying for a visa, trying to get a personnummer, registering with försäkringskassan, opening a bank account, finding accommodation, getting a telephone or internet contract, arranging a personnummer for their partner and/or children, getting daycare, or something else.

The maximum duration of a KI stipend is 2 years (made up of four 6-monthly renewed contracts). However, an external stipend can be longer. At present a postdoc position can be for up to 7 years at KI after completion of a PhD. At the time of filling in the questionnaire, 64,5% were receiving a salary (only 2,6% of these had brought their own salary), 33% were receiving a scholarship (only 2,5% of these had brought their own), and 2,5% something else (including receiving both, part salary and part stipend).

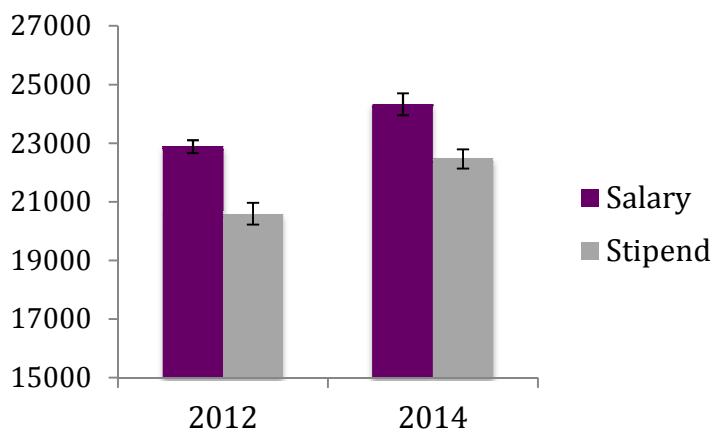
Income

Monthly income 2014



The above figure illustrates that, even after tax, postdocs on salaries receive greater incomes than those on stipends or other incomes (two-sample t-test, two-tailed), $p < 0.0001$; based on postdocs that were working at least 35 hours per week and that received a salary ($n=129$) or a stipend ($n=67$) at the time of filling in the questionnaire; 46 postdocs did not answer this question). Three postdocs on scholarships received less than 20,000 SEK per month, which is the minimum stipend level; two of them did not specify why, while the third has to pay taxes in his/her home country. The median working hours per week was 45-50, irrespectively of income type (salary or stipend).

As previously stated, when working on a scholarship a postdoc does not pay tax or make social security contributions, and are therefore excluded from such benefits as full parental or sick leave, pension contributions, and unemployment welfare. Postdocs on stipends therefore have to make up for the lack of these benefits through their own income.



As it can be seen in the figure above, although reported postdoc stipends demonstrated a significant increase between 2012 and 2012 ($t(152)=3.662$, $p < .001$) so did salaries ($t(311)= 3.57$, $p < .001$). Therefore that average monthly salaries after tax remains significantly higher than the average stipend in 2014 ($t(185)=3.339$, $p = .001$) as it did in 2012 ($t(278)= 5.601$, $p < .001$).

We suggest coupling the stipend level to the minimum postdoc salary: minimum stipend = minimum salary – 5000 sek, maximum stipend = minimum salary + 5000 sek.

Regarding gender equality, the average income (after taxes if on a salary) does not differ significantly between male and female postdocs. It is 24277.83 ± 4913.43 SEK for the 71 male and 24059.41 ± 4862.56 SEK for the 128 female postdocs who answered the question.

Furthermore, 58.5% of postdocs disagree or slightly disagree to the statement "I believe that all/most postdocs at KI are paid fairly" whilst only 19.2% agree (or slightly agree). The rest chose either "neither agree nor disagree" or "N/A".

Equity

Overall, 21.5% of the postdocs disagree with the following statement: "*Postdocs from other countries are treated fairly and equitably by their PI [Principal Investigator] and colleagues.*" (percentage for 2012 results: 22.5%)

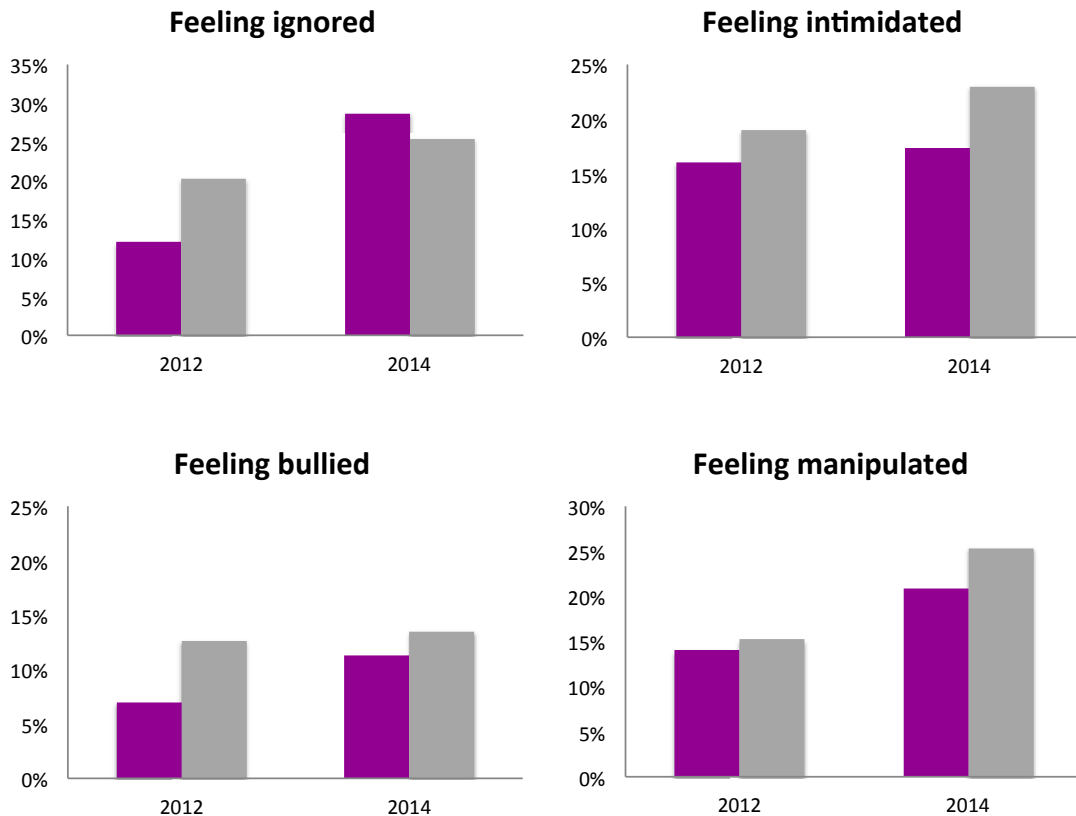
12.8% of the postdocs (9% of male and 15% of female) disagree with the statement; "*There are no differences between the treatment of male and female postdocs by their PI and colleagues.*" (percentage for 2012 results: 14.6%)

9.1% of the postdocs disagree that "*There is no discrimination against postdocs based on their religious beliefs or ethnic background.*" (percentage for 2012 results: 7.4%)

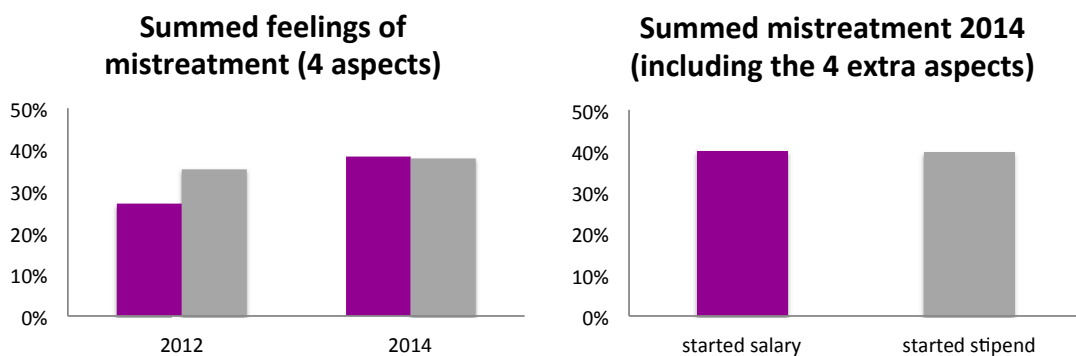
Mistreatment

In 2012, we asked about four aspects of mistreatment/harassment: feeling ignored, feeling intimidated, feeling bullied, and feeling manipulated. Furthermore, we combined the scores to a general mistreatment score if someone answered yes to one or more of these aspects.

In 2014, we asked about the same aspects (see the figures below; postdocs starting on salaries in fuchsia, postdocs starting on stipends in grey), but we also asked about additional aspects.



The total percentage of feelings of mistreatment based on these four aspects has increased (from circa 31% to circa 38%). However, if we add the additional aspects that we now asked about, circa 40% of the postdocs answers to feel mistreated in some way:



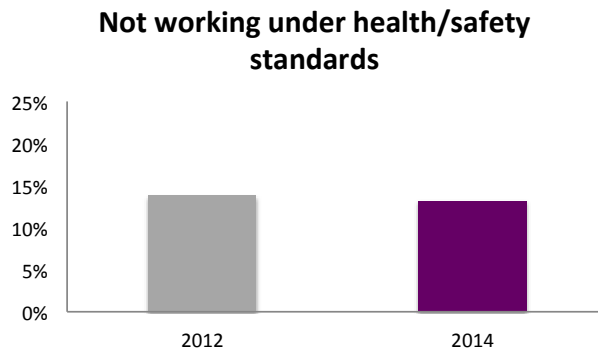
We cannot compare the new aspects with the previous results, but they are worth mentioning: 9.5% of the postdocs indicate to be publicly humiliated; 9.5% of the postdocs indicate to be verbally abused; 2.1% of the postdocs indicate to be physically abused; 2.5% of the postdocs indicate to be sexually harassed. Furthermore, 26.0% of the postdocs indicate to have witnessed harassments at KI. We understand that it is hard to do anything about these forms of abuse and/or harassment if the victims do not step up and file complaints. The question of course still is how to file such complaints and how to deal with them (26.4% of the postdocs indicate that they think that there are no good procedures in place at their department to deal with cases of conflict).

The (psychosocial) working environment of postdocs

Besides harassment, we also investigated other aspects of the working environment.

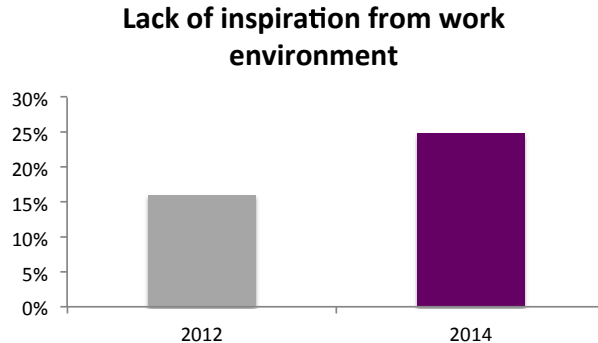
Safe working environment

In 2014, 13.2% of the postdocs answer that they cannot perform their research according to all safety and occupational health standards, comparing to a similar percentage (13.8%) in 2012.



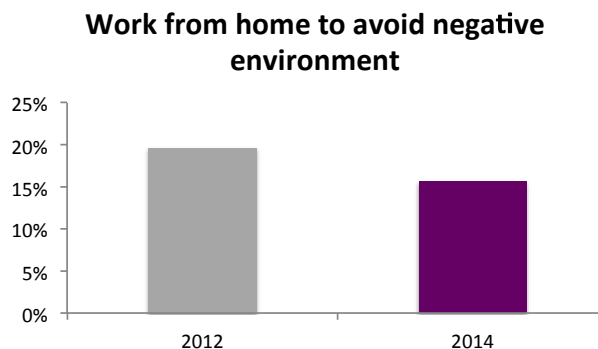
Inspirational working environment

In 2014, 24.8% of the postdocs answer that KI does not inspire them to make their best effort, compared to about 16% in 2012.



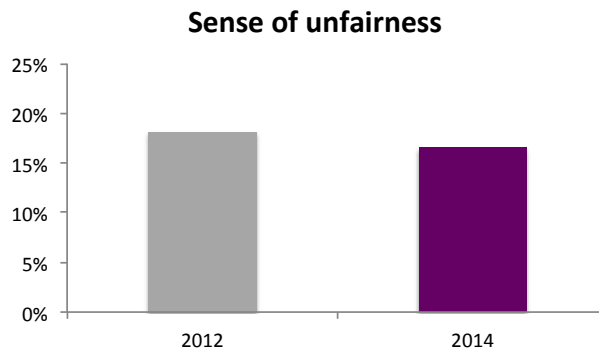
Avoiding a negative atmosphere

In 2014, 15.7% of the postdocs answer they sometimes work from home to avoid a negative atmosphere at work, compared to about 19.7% in 2012.



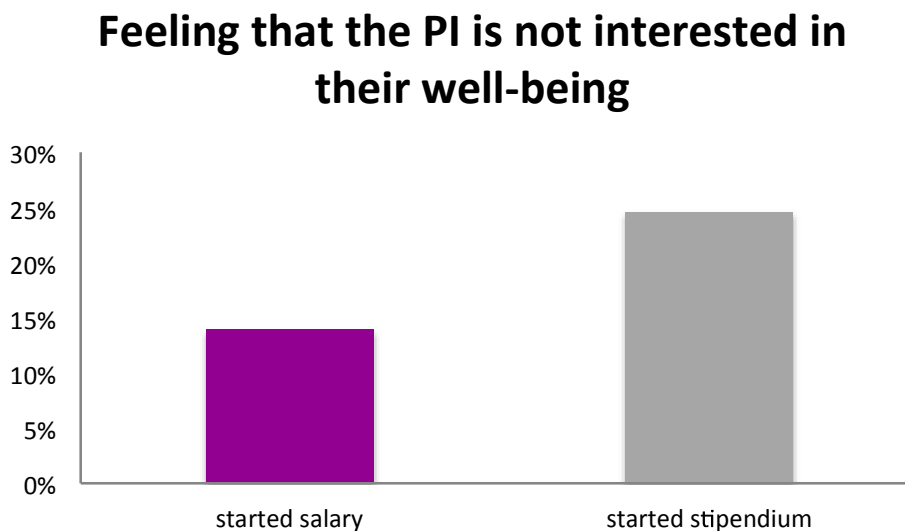
Unfair treatment

In 2014, 16.5% of the postdocs answer they feel they have been treated unfairly, compared to about 18% in 2012.



PI interested in well-being

Postdocs who are on salary feel that their PI is more interested in their well-being compared to postdocs who are on stipend ($p < 0.05$) (there are no similar data since 2012).



Other interesting findings

There is a positive correlation between PI's interest in the post-doc's well-being and the post-doc's thinking that choosing KI was a good decision (Spearman's $r = .371$, $p = .000$).

There is also a positive correlation between feeling proud of your work and wanting and feeling confident about a scientific career ($r = .421$, $p = .000$; $r = .297$, $p = .000$).

There is a significant relationship between country of origin and contract type (NOW) at KI. People who are from Sweden are almost entirely on salary (out of 65 Swedish respondents, 60 were on salary), compared to other nationalities (χ^2

=72.931, $p = .000$). Out of 112 EU citizens, 51 are on salary and 59 on stipends (2 on bit of both).

There is a significant difference between people who are on stipend NOW and people who are on salary NOW. Independent t tests showed that post-docs on salary think that their PI values their work more than post-docs on stipend ($t_{233} = 2.197$, $p = .029$). Furthermore, post-docs on salary worry less over their current contract compared to post-docs on stipend ($t_{178.917} = -2.816$, $p = .005$). There is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of feeling confident over scientific career ($t_{233} = 1.101$, $p = .272$), thinking that choosing KI was a good decision ($t_{233} = 1.894$, $p = .059$), feeling proud of their work ($t_{233} = 1.025$, $p = .306$), and being happy with work balance (juggling different tasks) ($t_{233} = .908$, $p = .365$).

Conclusions and recommendations

We suggest the following:

1. More frequent corrections of the minimum stipend level, in order to more closely follow the annual increases in salaries.
2. Implementation of clear guidelines by KI, so that cases of conflict could be properly handled.
3. Increase of the level of information that postdocs at KI receive prior and upon their arrival.
4. Focus should be given to the accommodation issues that postdocs face. The suggestion of an International Office that was put forward by the Dean of Research (Hans-Gustaf Ljunggren) was a first positive step.