

## **RWTH Code for Early-Career Researchers Who Have Completed their Doctorate**

Excellently qualified, motivated researchers are the foundation of outstanding performance in research and teaching. With the aim of providing our early-career researchers the best possible conditions for their work and thus successfully attracting the best scientists from all over the world, RWTH has defined guidelines for the support of postdoctoral researchers, which are laid down in the present code.

The postdoctoral stage is an important career phase in which decisions about one's future career path must be made. In addition to raising one's scientific profile, if the chosen career goal requires it, non-subject-specific qualifications and competencies need to be obtained.

We at RWTH support our early-career researchers as best as possible, placing particular importance on equal opportunities and offering transparent career paths and framework conditions. In order to empower researchers to plan their career as well as possible, RWTH adheres to the following standards.

### **Target Group**

This code applies to early-career researchers at the post-doctoral qualification stage. This group includes the so-called "Advanced Talents," i.e. tenure-track and non-tenure track junior professors, junior research group leaders who have received external awards and fellowships (such as Emmy Noether or ERC grants), and researchers currently completing their post-doctoral lecturing qualification ("habilitation") to pursue a career in science. Members of this group provide important contributions to research and teaching through their scientific work on strategically important topics. Typically, they have a fixed-term employment contract at RWTH.

### **Career Planning**

It is advisable for early-career researchers to decide whether or not to pursue a professorship position within three years after obtaining their doctoral degree, i.e. the decision should be made earlier than is often the case today. Concerning career planning and transparency, RWTH recommends for postdocs to create individual development plans shortly after the doctorate, which defines key research focuses, objectives for one's professional activity and position, as well as medium-term career perspectives.

"Advanced Talents" who meet the required formal criteria have the opportunity to apply for tenure-track positions at RWTH within a competitive process. The [Tenure-Track Regulations](#) describe how the career path of a tenure-track professor at RWTH is being implemented as a strategic measure to recruit outstanding international junior researchers. It describes how comprehensive criteria for tenure-track positions are to be defined and outlines the evaluation process. For each tenure-track position, evaluation criteria are defined and laid down in the appointment agreement, a measure to improve career planning and guidance. The [Interim Evaluation Regulations](#) (in German) provide a framework for the evaluation of tenure-track and non-tenure track junior professors. Based on the regulation, the current situation of the junior professor is to be evaluated, taking present framework conditions and prospects for further development into account. In order to make postdoctoral career planning more predictable, RWTH seeks to make the tenure-track professorship the standard career path.

As it cannot be guaranteed that the candidate is finally appointed as a full professor at RWTH or at another university, RWTH supports all early-career researchers with centrally organized, targeted [career advising](#) services. If the candidate prefers to continue to pursue a

career in academia, other [structured career paths](#) below the professorial level may be a viable option. Furthermore, the candidate is offered qualification measures for positions in industry and society.

### **Independent Research and Teaching**

RWTH supports early-career researchers who are actively enhancing their scientific profile. A basis for this is their independent, self-responsible scientific activities. The University places particular emphasis on encouraging early-career faculty to undertake responsible research and ensuring that the [principles of good scientific practice](#) are adhered to. Further important areas of responsibility for researchers include [Responsible Research and Innovation \(RRI\)](#) and [Research Data Management \(RDM\)](#). Therefore, the University offers information events on these topics on a regular basis.

RWTH considers the teaching activities of postdocs an important component of their qualification; for this reason, we provide educational offerings to help them improve their ability to supervise and guide doctoral candidates and students. Academic leaders and managers at RWTH are to provide researchers with the time and sufficient leeway to engage in these important activities. Here, a good balance between “early independence” of the postdoc and “responsible leadership” on the part of the supervisor is to be achieved.

### **Accompanying Qualification Programs**

RWTH considers it essential that researchers in the qualification phase benefit from appreciative, encouraging scientific supervision and guidance.

Aside from providing postdocs with a scientific qualification, RWTH supports their career paths through the educational offerings of the [RWTH Center for Young Academics](#), which focus on imparting cross-disciplinary skills. There is a range of comprehensive training courses and qualifications that are tailored to the needs of early career researchers at different career stages. Particular emphasis is placed on the development of leadership skills.

Furthermore, we recommended that the qualifications required by the postdoc and the corresponding career development activities be defined in advance. The agreed upon measures, milestones and perspectives are to be reevaluated and possibly adapted in an [annual appraisal meeting](#) between the postdoc and his or her superior/supervisor.

### **Mentoring**

In cooperation with the German Association of University Professors and Lecturers (DHV), RWTH offers mentoring and individual coaching to their “[Advanced Talents](#).” The postdoc is responsible for identifying a suitable (possibly University-external) mentor and for maintaining the mentoring relationship; if necessary, RWTH offers assistance in this process. In addition, the University has a [mentoring program for women postdocs](#) in place that is specifically tailored to the needs of women scientists.

The mentoring program, and in particular the mentor selection process for tenure-track junior professors, are outlined in detail in the Tenure Track Process Regulations. The mentor is to provide the mentee with critical, constructive feedback, be available for advising, and assist the candidate in an advisory role with writing the self-report which is part of the evaluation process. The mentor does not participate in the tenure-track evaluation process.

### **Business Start-Up Support**

Postdoctoral researchers who have developed a business model based on their research activities and who are interested in setting up their own business have the opportunity to receive guidance and support from the University's advisors. Experts from the responsible department and the [Entrepreneurship Center](#) answer questions regarding the protection of intellectual property and strategies for commercial exploitation. Furthermore, they provide information on entrepreneurship funding opportunities such as the EXIST Business Start-up Grant.

### **Equal Opportunities and Family-friendly Framework Conditions**

RWTH is fully aware of the particular challenges that researchers have to master at this stage of their lives. Postdocs at RWTH are thus supported and supervised under positive consideration of aspects such as gender, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or ideological affiliation, disability, age, sexual orientation, and identity. In order to achieve equal opportunities, we place particular emphasis on supporting women in assuming leadership roles within and outside of academia.

In case of longer absences due to family responsibilities, postdocs are supported by their superiors in successfully resuming their career path. As a family-friendly institution, RWTH provides postdocs with [support and advising services](#) on the question of leaves due to family responsibilities.

International postdocs and postdocs from other German educational and research institutions are supported in preparing for and undertaking their research stay at RWTH, so as to offer them the best possible start in Aachen.

### **Memberships in Committees**

As non-professorial faculty, postdocs have the opportunity to participate in university bodies and committees. We at RWTH value such activities as we consider it highly important that postdocs contribute to the University's decision-making processes. Their supervisors and superiors are asked to provide them with time and leeway to participate in University committees.

### **National and International Visibility**

It is important for postdocs that their research activities are broadly visible to ensure their competitiveness at the national and international levels. For this reason, their supervisors are expected to support activities such as their participation in conferences nationally and abroad. RWTH proactively supports postdocs in the acquisition of external funding, the application for grants, and the nomination for [research awards](#), as grants and awards are instrumental in building the reputation of researchers.

Furthermore, it is essential that early-career researchers are made aware of funding opportunities (e.g. calls for application) and career development opportunities. For this reason, RWTH has established the relevant communication channels, provides advising services, and hosts regular information and networking events.

### **Quality Control**

RWTH understands itself as a learning organization which continually reappraises its strategic outlook concerning the promotion of early-career researchers, redefines objectives, and re-evaluates and further develops its measures and tools.

## Further Information

Vice-Rectorate for Human Resources Management and Development

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/cbqk/lidx/1>

Early-Career Researchers at RWTH

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/psfi/lidx/1>

Tenure Track Appointment Process at RWTH

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/ptlx/lidx/1>

Directive on the Interim Evaluation of Postdocs (in German)

[http://www.rwth-aachen.de/global/show\\_document.asp?id=aaaaaaaaaaxyq](http://www.rwth-aachen.de/global/show_document.asp?id=aaaaaaaaaaxyq)

Career Advising for Researchers from the RWTH Division of Career Development

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/niin/lidx/1>

Career Development Workshops from RWTH's Center for Professional Leadership (CPL)

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/opu/lidx/1>

Career Paths for Early-Career Researchers

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/jgdl/lidx/1>

Principles for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice

[https://www.rwth-aachen.de/global/show\\_document.asp?id=aaaaaaaaayexqu](https://www.rwth-aachen.de/global/show_document.asp?id=aaaaaaaaayexqu)

University Committee for the Investigation of Scientific Misconduct

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/qjvg/lidx/1/lidx/1>

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) – Humtec Technology Center (HumTec)

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/qiir/lidx/1>

Research Data Management

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/hnhg/lidx/1>

Research Data Management Guidelines

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/ncfw/lidx/1>

Workshops on Responsible Research and Innovation and on Research Data Management

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/ebog/lidx/1> and <http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/ngqk/lidx/1>

RWTH Center for Young Academics

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/psbp/lidx/1>

Programs for Advanced Talents

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/ptmh/lidx/1>

Mentoring for Women Postdocs

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/jqhn/lidx/1>

Equal Opportunities Office

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/wnu/lidx/1>

Integration Team – Human Resources, Gender and Diversity Management (IGaD)

Entrepreneurship Center

<https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/fkiq/lidx/1>

Family-Friendly University – Advising and Support

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/xfalidx/1>

Research Funding

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/oia/lidx/1>

Promotion of Teaching Skills at the Center for Excellent Academic Teaching (ExAct)

<https://exact.rwth-aachen.de/>