



"Postdocs are needed to build a modern research team, you want to bring in people with different backgrounds and different skills."

– Frank Press

"If you are facing in the right direction, all you need to do is keep on walking."

– Buddhist saying

## Dear colleagues,

An important step in the career of many higher education professionals starts with a postdoctoral position. These positions provide the necessary experience, mentoring, and networking opportunities for an early-researcher's career.

Laboratories and centres at HSE's Moscow and St. Petersburg campuses are looking to hire a number of holders of PhD degrees from major international research universities in 2014 and this figure at the HSE increases every year.

This issue of The HSE Look is devoted to postdocs. What is the university's strategy regarding postdoctoral fellows? What is it like being a postdoc at the HSE? What future do our postdocs anticipate for their careers? To explore the issues in question we will talk to current HSE postdocs Dr. Seth Bernstein, Dr. Michael Rochlitz, Dr. Irina Andrievskaya and Dr. Lili Di Puppò, who got a position of an Assistant Professor after her successful completion of the postdoctoral fellowship with the Faculty of Sociology.

We will be also writing about a very important forthcoming event – XV April International Academic Conference. The International Conference on Economics and Social Development is the university's annual academic forum.

**Yulia Grinkevich**

**Director for International Academic Integration**

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## Postdocs On the Track

**A postdoctoral fellow, or postdoc, is usually defined as a non-tenured position that one obtains after earning a doctorate. The main value of such an appointment is that it provides an early opportunity for its holder to focus almost exclusively on research with few if any teaching obligations or administrative responsibilities.**

Offering temporary positions for young researchers was and still is not common in Russia. The HSE realised the need to introduce this practice back in 2009 when the university's first programme of development was launched. In line with the best practices of world research universities, the HSE aspired to gradually introduce a system of non-tenure positions for young researchers with PhDs from top universities from around the globe. This innovation was incorporated into the university's academic development plans for several major reasons. This step allowed the HSE to correspond to international standards and better reflect the demands of the modern research university.

Postdoctoral research is considered significant when it advances the scholarly mission of the host institution. This is especially true for research-oriented universities where postdocs are expected to

be productive in terms of presenting and publishing their scientific work. Additionally, successful postdocs are seen as potential candidates for junior tenure-track professor positions. Thus, the introduction of postdoctoral fellowships is also a way to secure a stable incoming flow of young faculty to fill its vacancies, especially important at a rapidly growing institution such as the HSE.

### All Postdoc Experiences are Different

Junior research fellows' scope of duties varies depending on the country. The time spent as a postdoc is sometimes seen as a period of advanced professional apprenticeship, such as when a junior researcher works under the mentorship of a supervisor and collaborates with them on their projects. However, sometimes postdocs work on their research quite independently. Conditions for individual work might be productive for some postdocs, yet others may find it more motivating to work on a team.

Many claim that a postdoctoral fellowship in the west today is nothing more than a form of low-paid employment while waiting for a more permanent and rewarding professional position. Even if true, newly minted PhDs often complain about the tough competition in the international market for postdocs due to the limited number of programmes available at good research universities.

**Stefan Heßbrüggen-Walter**, a tenure-track Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at the HSE, describes his experience as a postdoc in Germany: "I had two postdocs after my PhD. The first one was in an International Graduate School organised by the universities in the US and in Germany and funded by the German Research Society (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). During this postdoc appointment I had basically two different tasks: doing my research and mentoring graduate students. The particularity of the German system is that there are also private foundations funding postdocs. So for my second postdoc I got a grant from a private German foundation and I was once again affiliated with the university where I did my PhD. This was really just a pure research post. I did not have any teaching duties or anything else, I just worked on the project I had begun previously. One problem with this construction is that when you only get such a grant and then just work on it is that you are not necessarily connected to other scholars at the same institution who may be interested in what you do. So, the advantage of the construction as I understand it at the HSE is that you can expect people to be actually interested in what you do and collaborate."

### The Current Situation with Postdocs at the HSE

The Global Competitiveness Programme of the HSE adopted in 2013 (we wrote about this in [Issue 7/2013](#)) suggests that increasing the number of international postdocs is essential to one of the HSE's major strategic initiatives: that of attracting top international talent. According to the Programme, the number of foreign postdocs working at the HSE should reach 50 by the year 2015.

This is the plan, but what is the current situation? The first international postdocs came to the HSE in 2011 to the Faculty of Sociology. Today there are eight postdocs in six research labs and centres with 10-month contracts. For the upcoming 2014-2015 academic year, 25 research labs and centres in Moscow and two labs in St. Petersburg are seeking to hire young promising scholars from abroad. Preference is given to candidates that possess a degree from doctoral programmes with a strong research orientation from major international universities. The goal is for HSE postdocs to pursue their research interests under the supervision of the head of a research centre, while contributing to ongoing research projects of the department and making presentations on their research. A light teaching load is usually encouraged, although it is not a requirement.

**Martin Gilman**, Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies, that is in charge of international recruitment, thinks that inviting postdocs to the HSE is a promising experiment: "As an investment by the university it makes sense because having people come here and then go to other places helps to develop familiarity and demystify the HSE and living in Russia. So that's good! In terms of their publication activity, which is an absolute priority for the university, it's very individual. Some people enjoy being postdoctoral researchers as they find teaching very distracting to their research, others use time more efficiently when they have a structure to it, when they have teaching and other routines. We only started the postdoc programme two years ago, so it's very premature to say what kind of results we can expect."

The tendency for postdocs to remain at the HSE and then apply for tenure-track positions seems to be on the rise. We hope that at the beginning of the next academic year we will be able to welcome new postdoctoral researchers and perhaps introduce some of our ex-postdocs as new permanent faculty members.

## What's Up, Postdocs?

Young international researchers speak about their time spent at the HSE as postdocs and what it gave them in terms of their professional development. We will talk to current postdocs **Seth Bernstein** (International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and its Consequences), **Michael Rochlitz** (International Centre for the Study of Institutions and Development), and **Irina Andrievskaya** (International Laboratory for Institutional Analysis of Economic Reforms) as well as **Lili Di Puppo**, a former postdoc who later applied and was hired as an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Sociology.

### On Choosing an Academic Career

**Seth Bernstein:** I think it is a unique position being an academic in society. It allows you the freedom to choose what's important, what to study, what things society should be interested in. I don't think you can do that working in the business world or even in the government.

**Michael Rochlitz:** As an academic, you have the freedom to study the questions that you are really interested in. I can decide on what topics I want to do my research, I can plan my agenda, and even though I also have to teach a bit and have some institutional commitments, I still have much more freedom to decide where to go with my career than in other professions. This is what I really like in academia. You don't have this kind of freedom in public professions, where other people think up the tasks and questions that you have to deal with. Here with a bit of initiative you can design your own path.

**Irina Andrievskaya:** I really like conducting research. And academia provides all opportunities for carrying out research plus flexible working hours and freedom in defining an area of research.

### Their Research Interests

**Seth Bernstein:** I am examining the interaction between authoritarian ideas and social practices in the context of the Soviet 1930s and 1940s. My specific topic looks at Soviet youth in that period. What I am trying to show is how factors like economic dislocation, military threats and political violence, in conjunction with ideological factors, created the conditions for authoritarian social practices to grow in the Soviet Union like they did in other states in the interwar period and during World War II. In a broader sense, I am a historian who tries to look at the intersection of different aspects of life – especially how politics, society and culture interact with one another.

**Michael Rochlitz:** When I came to the HSE, I had a paper on corporate raiding in Russia. With a colleague, we are now continuing to work on the topic of property rights security in Russian regions, by building a database of all different data sources on how property rights security has evolved in Russia during the last 15 years. Another research topic we are currently working on is the comparative analysis of regional administrations in China and Russia. Both countries are characterised by a lack of political competition, while the way regional administrations are organised has become relatively similar in recent years. For example, regional governors in Russia and in China are appointed by the centre in Moscow or Beijing (or at least have been until fairly recently in Russia), but then the regional administrations have quite a lot of autonomy to initiate economic policies in their region. So, we want to see how these appointment mechanisms influence the incentives of officials in the regions to promote economic and social development. Apart from working on these topics, I am also helping to organise a PhD seminar that will take place during the April International Conference, where we invited six PhD students that are at the end of their studies to come and present their papers at the HSE.

**Irina Andrievskaya:** I am engaged in several projects at the International Laboratory for Institutional Analysis of Economic Reforms. These projects focus on banking system issues, including banking system transparency, market discipline, and depositors' behavior. Moreover, with my colleagues from the International Decision Analysis Laboratory we analyse systemic risk issues applying game theory methods.

**Lili Di Puppo:** I developed an interest in corruption and the fight against corruption, which led me to examine the relations between governments and international organisations and, more generally, informality. I'm interested in studying the state and I use anthropological approaches to do it. I was able to deepen all these aspects of my research during my year as a post doc and now I have developed a new research idea on religion and Islamic education in Russia. I think this is quite important in this region of the former Soviet Union and Eurasia and it's very rich – there are so many religions coexisting in Russia, it's a very interesting topic and there is still so much to study. In the future I would like to link these two research fields together looking at religion in relation to the role of the modern state.

## On Their Postdoc Experiences

**Seth Bernstein:** My main activity is to put together a book. I am supposed to turn my dissertation into a book by doing more research and revising my dissertation project. I've also been writing articles because that is a requirement and a point of emphasis at the HSE, but it has also been rewarding. In other ways I have been helping out at the Centre of World War Studies and its Consequences. Sometimes I meet with students for consultations and hold seminars with them. As for the centre, we have a nice team and a lot of what I've been doing with that team is translations. Another thing you have to do as a postdoc is give talks. Last semester I gave a talk based on a paper I wrote while at the HSE and hope to publish it soon.

**Michael Rochlitz:** I met Andrey Yakovlev, the Director of the International Centre for the Study of Institutions and Development at a conference last year in Suzdal, where he told me about this position. So I applied for it and I succeeded. So far, I'm very happy with the work I've been able to do at ICSID. We initiated quite a number of new projects during the last couple of months. Earlier this year, I received an offer for a position as Assistant Professor in Politics at the HSE, so I'm very happy that I will be able to continue working on these projects for the next three years to come.

**Irina Andrievskaya:** I would like to emphasise that there is a friendly environment within my department. I always have the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues on publications and research. I also work with other faculty, carrying out interdisciplinary research, which is very interesting. And I would like to mention free accommodation – this is an important benefit for a non-Moscow citizen as I am.

**Lili Di Puppo:** I came together with two other post-docs and back then we were a part of the Faculty of Sociology. That was two years ago. Now postdocs are a part of research centres: the idea is that they should be more integrated with a team of researchers. We concentrated on publications. Postdoc time in general is the time to focus on writing articles. One of us set up a working group to discuss our article projects and how to get them published in peer-reviewed journals. In our group we are staying in contact by reviewing each other's works. So, that is a good outcome of our postdoc activities here. One year is a short time. It was productive in the sense of writing articles. But it's too limited to develop more long-term projects – you have time to write two or three articles and start developing further research ideas. A good thing to do for a postdoc is to develop contacts that they will be able to use in the future. Postdocs are often busy applying for jobs and sometimes it may be really time consuming, so you have a lot to do in one year.

## Their Plans for the Future

**Seth Bernstein:** I would like to continue along the academic path and publish my book. If this doesn't work for me, I would consider a government job or some corporate job that combines data analytics and my computer programming skills.

**Michael Rochlitz:** I have a friend in East China Normal University in Shanghai, and we are thinking about teaching a comparative class together on the political economy of China and Russia, both here at the HSE and in Shanghai. I will also continue to work on the comparative analysis of regional administrations in China and Russia, while probably extending the analysis to India eventually. Then with my colleague Lili Di Puppo, we have just started a small project on African immigrants living in Moscow. We would like to find out why they decided to come to Russia, how they are organised, what African countries they come from, and what their lives look like here in Moscow. I am also very much looking forward to doing some teaching. I like communicating with students. Sometimes one has the feeling that not many people read the papers you write. But when you teach, you see the result, you see how it works.

**Lili Di Puppo:** I hope to build more connections with other researchers. So my plans will be linked to these possible research projects I would initiate with other colleagues. I would also consider starting a bigger research project connecting German colleagues and the HSE. Next year we are also starting an international Master's programme on comparative social research at the Faculty. I will contribute by teaching. This is only one of the projects I am taking part in at the moment. I also work with partners from other European universities.

### Post Scriptum

**Lili Di Puppo:** I stayed at the HSE because of my research. In particular I will soon start field research in Russia. Since I was here for a year I could see what the HSE is like and I was quite

happy with many things here: the research, the environment, the colleagues. Everything worked really well. I also see that the HSE is well connected on the international level, so I can take advantage of this. For example, we have money to go to conferences which is important to connect internationally. Also, I have colleagues coming from different universities around the world. Not only because of my research in Russia, but the university as such is a good place to continue my academic career in the sense of building research projects with other international partners. Since I have a three-year contract, now I can develop my new research ideas and start new projects. I can deepen my interest on corruption and informality, but I can also develop a new research focus – examining religion in Russia. I have enough time now to start a new field research.

## XV April International Academic Conference

**One of the university's most important annual gatherings for discussion and debate will take place at the HSE from 1-4 April 2014. The International Conference on Economic and Social Development is organised by the HSE and is supported by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.**

As at previous conferences there will be plenary sessions to focus on the key issues. Leading foreign experts have been invited to join top Russian academics and representatives of the Presidential Administration in the debate. This year the plenary sessions of the Conference beyond Russian Government officials, will feature high-level representatives from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the CEOs from several influential Russian and international companies.

Featured topics of the conference include governance (models, problems, challenges), cultural evolution and modernisation, inequality and economic growth, and varieties of capitalism.

Among the honorary guests who will give a talk at a plenary session this year is **Richard Edgar Pipes**, a distinguished Polish-American academic and a specialist in Russian history. During the 1970s he was an advisor to US Senator Henry M. Jackson and in 1976 he headed Team B, a team of analysts that studied the strategic capacities and goals of the Soviet military and

political leadership. In the 1980s he served as the Director of East European and Soviet Affairs of the National Security Council under US President Ronald Reagan.

**Leonardo Morlino**, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Research Centre on Democracies and Democratisations at LUISS (Rome) will also give a lecture during the Conference. His most recent books include *International Actors, Democratisation and the Rule of Law: Anchoring Democracy?* (Routledge, 2008, with Magen) and *Changes for Democracy* (OUP, 2011). Morlino developed the theory of anchoring, which attempts to explain the nature and driving factors for democratic consolidation and democratic crises.

Session meetings and round tables will be held after the plenary sessions. The working languages of the Conference are Russian and English: conference interpreting will be provided during all plenary and most session meetings.

**For more information go to [conf.hse.ru](http://conf.hse.ru)**

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