



Report of the GSCN non-PI Meeting

Münster, 12-13 Sep. 2022

This year's in-person non-PI meeting took place at the Max Planck Institute for Molecular Biomedicine in Münster. We had this year 20 participants from German institutions and three from research centers abroad meeting ahead of the conference. Besides, two senior PIs, one start-up founder, and two scientists working in the industry joined for the career session. This was definitively unprecedented compared to previous occasions and allowed participants to get a feeling from experienced persons for what a career inside and outside academia would look like. Prof. Ralf Adams (MPI Münster) and Prof. Micha Drukkker (Leiden University, Netherlands), Dr. Sara de la Cruz Molina (Miltenyi, Germany), Dr. Eva Mall (Mosa Meat, Netherlands), and Dr. Kai Kruse (MPI Münster) described their career path and explained the reasoning behind his professional decisions, challenging moments, and good outcomes, and gave recommendations to young scientists. Prof. Micha Drucker also shared his experience and thoughts on developing a (GMP grade) core facility for stem cells.

All in all, the information acquired by the participants through the meeting is an absolute invaluable good essential in the career of junior scientists and will undoubtedly help them and their labs progress in their objectives. We are delighted to learn that some participants have joined the meeting for their second or third time, and many of the rest have expressed their will to join next year. This, thus, indicates that the goal of the meeting in connecting non-PI scientists inland and abroad is successful.

This year's get-together greatly allowed open fervent discussion between junior scientists in an informal setting about conceptual and technical challenges and methodological troubleshooting. We categorized the talks based on the shared content so that participants could follow the discussions easier and get to know the other attendees in their field faster. During the introductory talks, participants exchanged the main ideas of their research project, critical information about protocols and procedures, the latest technologies, and reagents for cell culture and molecular biology and asked advice for open questions. Getting to know other researchers from a similar area before the main GSCN conference is critical as it allows young scientists to meet more easily during the following conference days.

We ended the session with a dinner at a restaurant offering traditional local food in the old city center.

General comments:

This year we were full, with some returning and many new participants. Notably, the number of participants was higher than in previous online meetings, and perhaps even than previous in-person meetings too. However, as with last year's meeting, we did not have participants from neighboring countries (Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, Denmark, or France), indicating that the meeting is good in attracting scientists within Germany but still not many abroad. Indeed, this is a point that can be improved through advertising GSCN internationally to improve the GSCN visibility further.

Comments and conclusion on the Academic Term Contract Act:

Based on the discussions in this non-PI meeting, our impression is that with time young scientists are becoming more aware about the benefits and security of joining a non-academic (research) institution, including having fix contracts, getting paid overtime, getting more time to spend with families, make savings and improving the rent. In other words, it is becoming increasingly more attractive for many young scientists not to pursue a career in academia and instead join e.g., a company after (or even before?) finishing Ph.D. studies.

Not having at least the possibility of getting a permanent contract at the senior post-doc level can lead to financial instability and the mental load and integrity of young scientists, which can, of course, affect the quality of research. This could and – if not improved – will lead to a loss of many of Germany's best young researchers, as they would prefer a non-academic path or move to other competitor countries with a more balanced life quality.

Future improvements:

No big future improvements at this point. We recommend further inviting established PIs, non-academic researchers, and/or company founders to share his/her experiences and strategies.

Gülce Percin
Verena Börger
Caitlin MacCarthy
Deepthi Chandramohan
Germán Camargo Ortega