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Tracking of past Marsden-funded Postdoctoral Fellows

In late 2001, Victoria Link Ltd was commissioned jointly by the Royal Society of NZ, the Foundation of Research, Science and Technology, and the Health Research Council, to undertake a tracking survey of scholars and fellows formerly funded by these agencies.

A summary of results with a focus on Marsden Fund Postdoctoral Fellows is available below.

Summary

Formerly Marsden-funded postdoctoral fellows were surveyed to find out where they are now, what they are doing, and what their attitudes are towards doing research in New Zealand. The survey was done in collaboration with HRC and FRST, who tracked their own formerly-funded students and postdoctoral fellows.

Results

Response Rate

39 of the 83 Marsden fellows responded (47% response rate). The overall response rate across all RSNZ/FRST/HRC schemes was 36%,

Experience and Age

- 23% said that they had not yet finished their Marsden-funded fellowships (some confusion among respondents may have arisen due to the fact that Marsden grants are not awarded directly to postdoctoral fellows)
- 65% were < 4 years since completion of their fellowships
- 12% were 4-8 years since completion

64% of those who had completed were still in their first position after completion of their fellowship

Age:

- 7% < 30 years old
- 82% 30-39 years old

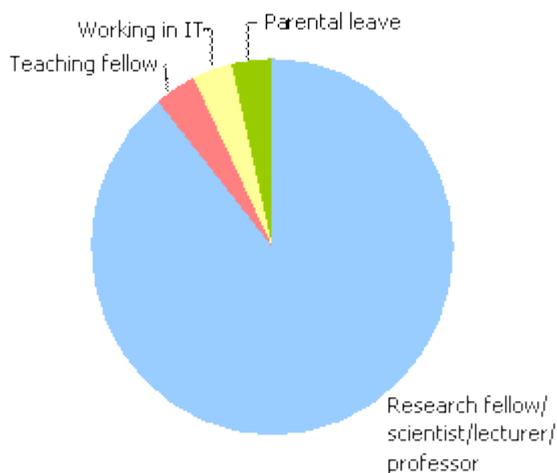
- 7% 40-49 years old
- 4% 50+ years old

Career Path

After completion of their fellowships, the majority of Marsden fellows continued in research:

- 86% (25/28 respondents) were working as research fellows, scientists, or lecturers/professors at the time of the survey or in their most recent positions
- 3% (1) was working in IT
- 3% (1) was a teaching fellow
- 3% (1) was on parental leave

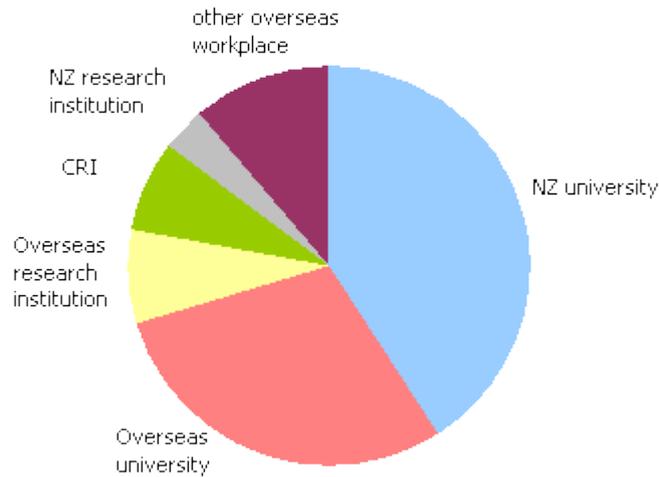
Current profession of Marsden fellows



Most fellows were working in Universities:

- 41% (11/27 respondents) were working at NZ Universities at the time of the survey
- 30% (8/27) were at overseas Universities
- 7% (2/27) were at CRIs
- 7% (2/27) were at overseas research institutions
- 4% (1/27) was at a NZ research institution
- 11% (3/27) were at other types of workplaces overseas (government department/private company/educational institute other than a university)

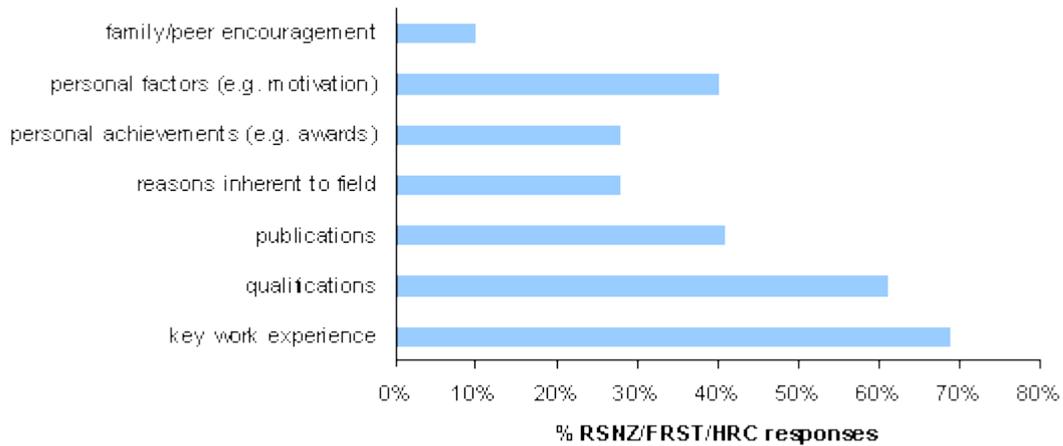
Current place of work



We asked about factors that had supported their careers and factors that had a constraining effect. The most important factors that helped fellows to gain employment in their preferred area of expertise (total RSNZ/FRST/ HRC population) were:

- key work experience (69%)
- qualifications (61%)
- peer reviewed publications (41%)
- personal factors, e.g. intrinsic motivation (40%)
- reasons inherent to the field, e.g. interesting research results (28%)
- personal achievements, e.g. awards/recognition for excellence (28%)
- family/peer encouragement (10%)

Factors that helped fellows gain preferred employment



The

main factors that had constrained careers (total RSNZ/FRST/HRC population) were:

- inadequate research funding (48%)
- lack of job opportunities (47%)
- inadequate financial rewards (46%)
- management style and culture (26%)
- organisational structure, e.g. mobility/flexibility (27%)
- lack of opportunities to network and keep up to date (18%)
- personal factors (18%)
- fellows' own limited experience (14%)



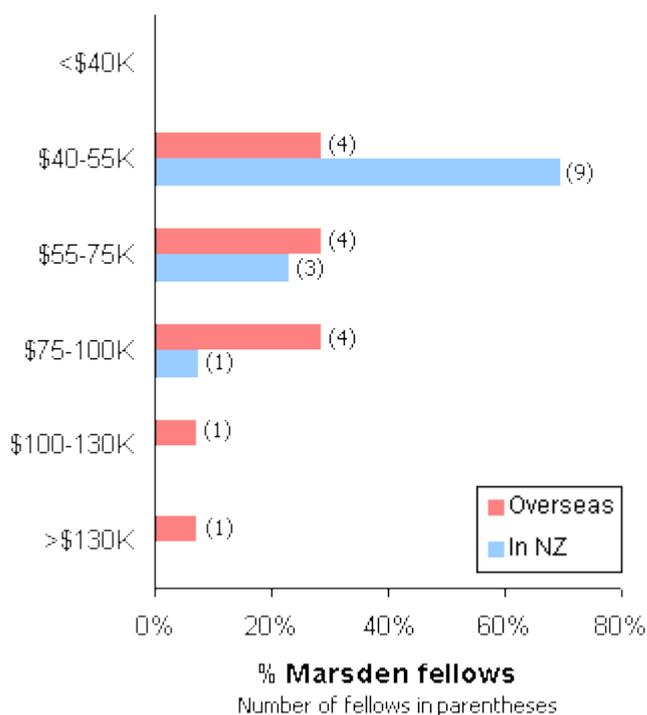
Dissatisfaction with their career progress was expressed by 22% of respondents. The main reasons given were job insecurity, funding difficulties/insecurities, and a lack of suitable employment opportunities. Of those who were satisfied with their career progress, the most commonly given reasons were that they were engaged in satisfying research, they had gained suitable employment, and they had received good mentoring.

Salaries

Lack of financial rewards was one of the most commonly specified career-constraining factors.

Most former Marsden-funded fellows who are working in New Zealand are earning within the \$40-\$55,000 salary bracket. A smaller number earn over \$55,000 (see graph below). This contrasts with those working overseas, most of whom earn more than (the equivalent of) \$55,000 NZD. Although the number of respondents is too low for this finding to be statistically significant, it is in accordance with findings for FRST postdocs (<http://www.frst.govt.nz/About/evaluation/TrackingSurvey.cfm>). Formerly HRC-funded postdocs earned more, on average, possibly due to the clinical nature of their work, and due to the fact that the HRC fellows tended to be older.

Salaries of former Marsden-funded fellows



The average New Zealand wage in 2001 was around \$35,000 before tax (Statistics New Zealand quarterly employment survey). Former postdoctoral fellows are therefore earning above this wage. However, it must be remembered that they have completed at least seven years of tertiary study, followed by at least three years of postdoctoral training and thus will compare their salaries to professions that require similar amounts of training (e.g. medicine, law). Only 3.2% of New Zealanders aged 15 years or over had a higher degree in 2001 (Census, 2001)

Perceptions of Scheme's effectiveness

Ten Fellows out of 24 (42%) said that their Marsden Fellowship had influenced their career plans. The finding that most felt it had not affected their plans may reflect a tendency for postdoctoral fellows to be already quite sure of their career plans. In their first positions after completion of their Marsden-funded fellowship, 90% built on expertise developed during the fellowship. In subsequent positions 78% were still building on this expertise.

Overseas Respondents:

Within the total RSNZ/FRST/HRC population, just under 30% were overseas at the time of the survey. Within the Marsden group, 50% (15) were overseas. This reflects the relatively high proportion of Marsden

postdoctoral fellows who are non-New Zealand nationals, and it may also reflect the internationally competitive nature of Marsden-funded research.

Overseas Marsden fellows were asked if they wanted to return to New Zealand.

- 20% said that they wanted to return to New Zealand
- 13% said that they did not want to return to New Zealand
- 66% were unsure

These proportions are in accordance with figures from the total RSNZ/FRST/HRC population. The large percentage of respondents who were unsure suggests that there is scope for initiatives to attract these people back to New Zealand.

When asked what factors would influence them to return, the most common factors given (by the total RSNZ/FRST/HRC population) were:

- a job offer/employment opportunities (29%)
- a *desirable* job offer (29%)
- personal/family reasons (24%)
- availability of research funding (17%)