



Supervisor of the year award: a Slovenian Good Practice

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Supervision of doctoral candidates in Slovenia

- Two-tier system:
 - „Young researchers“ funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (including supervisor bonus)
 - Doctoral candidates funded from other sources
- Being a supervisor is an important criterion for the appointment in faculty ranks (habilitation)
- Training on good supervising practices exists at some institutions but it is not compulsory
- No evaluation of the quality of supervision





Supervisor of the year award („Mentor leta“)

- Aimed to combat poor supervising practices, which can leave deep scars and strongly influence researchers at the beginning of their careers
- Good supervisors can act as role models for their colleagues
- Inspired by [Nature's Mentoring Awards](#)

Mentoring award 2006

Last year we inaugurated the *Nature*/NESTA awards for creative mentoring in science, co-sponsored by Britain's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. This year we are pleased to announce that *Nature* will be sponsoring awards for high-achieving mentors in two regions: the United Kingdom, again co-sponsored by NESTA, and, later this year, Australasia.

The UK awards are now open for nominations. The closing date is 19 June.

In each region, two prizes will be awarded: one for a lifetime's

achievement in mentoring, and another to an individual in the middle of his or her career. Every nominee has to be nominated by five individuals who between them were mentored over different periods of the mentor's career.

The prizes are intended to celebrate a scientific activity that otherwise tends to be taken for granted. There are many heads of labs whose students have turned into outstanding scientists, but all too often such cases have exemplified survival of the fittest rather than being the product of deliberate nurturing. *Nature* has chosen to favour the latter approach.

Nomination forms and details of the awards can be found at www.nature.com/nature/nestaawards. ■



Who can be nominated for the award?

- The call is published each year on the Young Academy's website at least 3 weeks before the deadline
- The nominees are supervisors or co-supervisors of doctoral candidates
- Each proposer can nominate only one person in the given year





Nomination form (1/2)

1. Describe how your supervisor contributed to your most important research-related achievements (e.g., Scientific articles, awards, scholarships...)
2. Have you, together with your supervisor, created a clear work plan that led to your thesis as a coherent and rounded whole? Has your supervisor emphasized your research and professional development? Has your supervisor responded to your requests for meetings and help? How would you describe your communication?
3. Has your supervisor enabled you to pursue your own wishes and ideas within your research activities? Has your supervisor been open to your preferred style of work (e.g., more independent vs. more guided)?
4. Has your supervisor enabled networking – cooperation with researchers from other laboratories and institutions, including international experience (e.g., active participation in international conferences, summer schools, workshops, projects, research visits)?



Nomination form (2/2)

5. How would you rate your employment options when compared to your colleagues who work in the same research field or in a similar one? How did your supervisor contribute? Has your supervisor prepared you for the career after your PhD (e.g., by introducing you to potential new employers and/or enabling educational courses outside the mandatory curriculum)?
6. Has your supervisor respected your private life – have you been enabled enough rest, vacations and free weekends? Has overtime been more an exception than a rule? Has your supervisor respected any special life circumstances that occurred during your PhD (e.g., a wedding, a birth of a child, a death in the family, a serious illness)?
7. Do you consider your supervisor also as your role model for personal characteristics that are not directly related to your research? Would you like to mention anything else about your supervisor?



Selection criteria and process

- Each application is evaluated and ranked by at least two evaluators
- Evaluators are doctoral candidates or PhD graduates (their number depends on the number of received applications)
- A five-member committee gathers evaluator's recommendations and selects five finalists for the award and one of them for the supervisor of the year (by voting)
- Issues:
 - Objectivity (small-world problem)
 - Representation of different fields and institutions





Award recipients

	Nominations	Nominees	Supervisor of the year
2009	32	26	Janko Kos (Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Ljubljana)
2010	37	27	Domen Leštan (Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana)
2011	?	?	Igor Muševič (Jožef Stefan Institute)
2012	74	54	Boris Žemva (Jožef Stefan Institute)
2013	82	60	Zdravko Kutnjak (Jožef Stefan Institute)
2014	110	63	Marko Bajec (Faculty of Computer and Information Science, Uni Lj)
2015	52	27	Barbara Simončič (Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, Uni Lj)
2016	155	101	Mario Poljak (Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana)
2017	124	94	Primož Zihlerl (Jožef Stefan Institute)
2018	66	50	Barbara Koroušič Seljak (Jožef Stefan Institute)
2019	78	59	Kristina Sepčič (Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana)
2020	96	79	Emil Erjavec (Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana)



Presentation of the award

- Special ceremony sponsored by the Slovenian Research Agency
- For the jubilee ([2018](#)) was sponsored by the President of the Republic of Slovenia and hosted in the presidential palace
- The last two editions ([2019](#)) and ([2020](#)) were online due to the pandemic situation





Response

- In general the award is well received in the academic community
 - Supervisors are happy to be nominated
 - Institutions are proud of their nominees
- Media attention (supervisor of the year usually interviewed by different media and nominated for the person of the week on national radio)
- Visibility of our association





Feedback from nominators (doctoral candidates or PhD graduates)

- Supervisors treated them as equals, and trusted in their abilities
- They allowed them to explore their own ideas and develop their full potential
- They provided support and honest feedback
- Encouraged them to present their work at an international level and allowed them to visit institutions in other countries
- Enabled them to expand their knowledge and establish connections with their peers worldwide
- Were understanding when it came to finding a good work-life balance, both by providing support and setting a good example themselves



Feedback from nominees (supervisors)

- They see being a supervisor as a privilege that allows them to bridge between two generations of researchers, and share their knowledge
- They see supervision as a relationship based on mutual respect, trust, accountability, and co-operation
- They perceive their role to be primarily to monitor, motivate, support, and encourage the candidate – aiming to ensure that their research progresses steadily and is recognised internationally
- Most of the awarded supervisors pointed out that they themselves were mentored by exceptional supervisors, who inspired them with their supervising practices
- They believe good relations between candidates and their supervisors are not only important for the candidate but also for the supervisor

Thank you for your attention!

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