

Title	Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network
Sponsor	Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and PdOC Society

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to update the Human Resources Committee on how the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the PdOC Society are collaborating to increase postdoctoral representation within departments and across the University more generally.

The OPdA and the PdOC Society have established a University wide “*Departmental Postdoc Committees Chairs Network*”. The network consists of a number of existing, established departmental postdoc committees in addition to a large number of new committees formed with the encouragement, support and training of the OPdA and PdOC Society. The network is chaired by the PdOC Society and provides a wide ranging, representative postdoc ‘voice’ to prioritise needs and contribute to the University wide strategy for postdocs.

Decision / Action Required

That the HR committee recognise of the Department Postdoc Chairs Network Committee.

That the HR committee agree to accept periodic reports from the Chairs committee.

Timing

This is an on-going project which was launched in May 2014. The project will continue, supported by the OPdA and the PdOC Society, to develop and expand over the next year. Full details of the objectives of the project and plans for development and expansion are detailed in the background section below.

Resource Requirement

The existing support and resources of the OPdA and PdOC Society are sufficient for the development and expansion of the network. Financial support for associated training activities will be sought via the Researcher Development Committee.

Equality and Diversity Impact

The Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network is open to all representatives from departmental postdoc committees within Cambridge regardless of race, gender and ability. This network will provide a voice for all researchers and will increase postdoc engagement and ultimately enhance the personal and professional lives of the postdoc community.

Communications Required

We are using webpages on the OPdA and PdOC Society websites to promote the network, disseminate information and encourage postdocs to initiate new postdoc committees. In addition, a mailing list of Departmental Postdoc committee chairs and Cam Tools site has been set up to enable and encourage postdoc committee chairs to share information and good practice.

Background / Content

When the OPdA was established in late 2013 one of the key goals was to 'promote an expansion of the number of departmental postdoc committees' as outlined in the October 2013 HR paper. As a result the OPdA and the PdOC Society are working collaboratively to encourage and assist postdocs and departments in establishing departmental postdoc committees.

A departmental postdoc committee is a group of postdocs working together to represent the views of postdocs on a range of issues. The issues will relate directly to the experiences and professional development of postdocs within the context of their Department or University Partner Institution (UPI). This group is also very likely to organise networking and training events for postdocs.

An active, integrated Postdoc Committee will benefit both the local postdoc community and the individual Department by

- Increasing postdoc engagement.
- Facilitating communication between the postdoc community and department.
- Providing representatives to sit on other departmental committees.
- Providing practical support for postdocs.
- Exploring the professional development needs of the local postdoc community.
- Implementing Concordat principles and/or Athena Swan agenda

In October 2013 there were a small number of existing postdoc groups across the University and UPIs. We had been closely involved with two and planned to roll out another four by the end of 2014. These groups varied in terms of how the committee is designed, integration into Departmental structures and available funding. However all the groups shared the same common goal to enhance the experience and opportunities for postdocs in their department.

Over the last year we have visited over 20 Departments and UPIs to engage with the postdoc community and their embryonic postdoc committees. We have used the experiences of the more established committees to provide guidelines for postdocs in establishing a new committee in other departments. To support these new committees we have provided training courses on leadership and strategy and how to chair a committee. As a result we now have over 20 departmental postdoc committees, in various stages of development, as listed in Appendix 1.

Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network

The OPdA and PdOC Society have established a University-wide network of postdoc committees, consisting of established committees and newly seeded ones. This cross department representative group is chaired by the Policy and Representation Officer of the PdOC Society and reports directly to the OPdA Management Committee and PdOC Society Committee.

The Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network now meets termly to

- provide a wide ranging, representative postdoc 'voice' to prioritise needs and contribute to the University wide strategy for postdocs.
- share best practice, ideas and experiences between departments.

- provide face to face advice, support, training for postdocs who are members of a departmental postdoc committee
- provide guidance and support for postdocs and departments who wish to set up a departmental postdoc committee
- establish and engage in training opportunities for chairing and managing committees.

The network was launched in May 2013 and is chaired by Dr Tariq Masood, the PdOC Policy and Representation Officer. The initial focus of the network is to identify, and explore the key priorities of the postdoc community. As a result the network has developed a list of postdoc priorities as identified by representatives of the various departmental postdoc committees, see appendix 2. The top four priorities are to ensure that

- (i) postdocs have the opportunity to achieve research excellence and recognition*
- (ii) postdocs have support for their strategic career plan and progression*
- (iii) postdocs have leadership and teaching opportunities*
- (iv) postdocs are represented at a departmental and University level*

Each of the identified priorities will be explored in depth at the termly Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network and the outcomes reported to the OPdA Management Committee, PdOC Society and any other relevant committee e.g. Researcher Development Committee.

Expansion and support for the network

The number of postdoc committees has increased rapidly since October 2013, from an initial target of 4 to over 20. At present the newly established committees are concentrated in the Schools of Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences and Technology, where the departmental postdoc communities tend to be larger. We plan to build on this success to target and encourage the formation of more postdoc committees in the Clinical School, Arts and Humanities and Humanities and Social Sciences. We are considering a range of approaches which may involve joining together smaller departments where there are existing departmental links e.g. via the CRASSH postdoc forum.

The status of these committees and the level of support they receive varies across the University. It is important that they are recognized by the senior management of their department, and get the opportunity for representation on other departmental committees. The host department should also provide some level of administrative and financial support to the committees. Examples of how postdoc committees can be effectively supported by their department are given in appendix 3. The OPdA and PdOC society is supporting these committees in the following ways:

- (i) providing administrative support through its Partner Volunteer Scheme where appropriate
- (ii) arranging for training for the members of the departmental postdoc committees.
- (iii) advising the committees on funding sources, e.g. Researcher Development Committee

It is a key aim that the postdoc committees, and their activities, are *sustainable*, *realistic* and are *engaging* postdocs. The OPdA and PdOC Society will collaborate

with these committees to provide guidance, share good practice and encourage continuity and sustainability in the context of a transient postdoc population.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that the Committee recognise the Department Postdoc Committee Chairs Network and agree to accept periodic reports from the Chairs Network.

Appendices

- 1. Current Known Departmental Postdoc Committees**
- 2. Identification and Prioritisation of Postdoc Needs**
- 3. Examples of Effective Departmental Support for Postdoc Committees**

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Version Number **1.0**

Date **9.1.15**

Appendix 1 - Current Known Departmental Postdoc Committees

The Chair or nominated representative of the following postdoc committees are members of the “*departmental postdoc committees chairs network*”.

Archaeology and Anthropology *
Babraham Institute
Biochemistry
Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute*
Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology*
Chemistry
CIMR
Clinical Neurosciences**
Computer Lab**
CRASSH
EMBL-EBI
Engineering*
Genetics*
Graduate Student and Postdoc forum (GRASP) committee
Gurdon Institute
Institute of Metabolic Science**
Institute of Public Health - Primary Care Unit *
Materials Science**
MRC Epidemiology**
Politics and International Studies**
Physics*
Physiology, Development and Neuroscience (PDN)
Psychology*
Sanger Institute
Social Anthropology
Stem Cell Institute*
Vet School*
Zoology *

* Newly established or reformatted in 2013/2014

** In process of being established

Appendix 2 - Identification and Prioritisation of Postdoc Needs

List of 13 postdoc needs* as identified and prioritised at the launch of the Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network, May 2014.

1	postdocs have the opportunity to achieve research excellence and recognition
2	postdocs have support for their strategic career plan and progression
3	postdocs have leadership and teaching opportunities
4	postdocs are represented at a departmental and University level
5	postdocs have access to appropriate and timely mentoring support
6	postdocs have a meaningful professional review e.g. with PI or line manager
7	postdocs have access to personal and professional development opportunities
8	postdocs are supported when moving to careers outside academia
9	postdocs have networking opportunities (both professionally and socially)
10	postdocs have a timely induction and are welcomed to Cambridge.
11	postdocs receive 'alumni' benefits on leaving Cambridge
12	postdocs have a centrally managed listing for all training opportunities
13	postdocs have access to Collegiate Cambridge i.e. College affiliation

* These broad themes were identified by the chairs of the departmental postdoc committees and combined with needs identified in a PdOC led survey on postdoc needs, April 2013. Consequently, these needs were prioritized by the postdocs attending the launch of the Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network, May 2014.

Appendix 3 – Examples of Effective Departmental Support for Postdoc Committees

Departmental postdoc committees will be most effective and sustainable if they are adequately supported and integrated into their host department. Examples of good practice identified by the Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network (October 2014) include:

- 1 A named academic champion who can provide
 - genuine support and guidance,
 - liaison with senior academic and administrative staff,
 - departmental knowledge, institutional memory,
 - continuity as the postdoc members join and leave the committee.
- 2 Recognition and a voice
 - postdoc committee is recognized and integrated into the departmental committee structure,
 - postdoc committee is consulted on issues relating to postdoc experiences and professional development,
 - visibility – postdoc committee should be known to postdocs and departmental staff.
- 3 A named administrative champion who can facilitate
 - a link with departmental HR,
 - event administration (including purchasing) support,
 - access to postdoc committee pages on the department's website,
 - continuity as the postdoc members join and leave the committee.
- 4 Communication mechanisms
 - creation and maintenance of a mailing list of current postdoc staff,
 - provision of postdoc specific pages on the department's website and physical notice boards,
 - inclusion of information about the postdoc committee and their activities in departmental induction sessions and welcome packs for new postdocs.
- 5 Support for Researcher Development and networking activities
 - collaboration between the postdoc committee and departmental planning and delivery of researcher development activities,
 - funding for a number of postdoc led researcher development and networking activities.