

Report on Departmental Postdoc Committee Project

Background

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 events for postdocs.

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

- increasing postdoc engagement, postdoc well-being and ultimately productivity.
- 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 / Athena Swan agenda

Identifying and learning from existing Postdoc Committees

There are a significant number of existing Postdoc Committees¹ across the University and UPIs. These vary in terms of how the committee is structured, integration into Departmental structures and available funding. However all the groups share the same common goal; to enhance the experience and opportunities for postdocs in their department.

The OPdA is creating a database of existing committees and consulting with each group with the aim of sharing best practice. The experiences of the existing committees are being used to provide a guide for postdocs on how to establish a new committee in their department. It is a key aim that the postdoc committees, and their activities, are sustainable, realistic and engage postdocs.

The OPdA has been in consultation with committees; both established and newly formed, in the following departments. This is not a complete list of all existing departmental groups but only those who have been consulted. It is planned to consult will all existing groups.

C.I.M.R.

The Primary Care Unit, Department of Public Health and Primary Care

Department of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology*

Department of Engineering*

Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience

Department of Zoology

Wellcome Trust/Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute

Department of Biochemistry

GRASP (Graduate Student and Postdoc forum, Graduate School Life Sciences)

¹ Existing groups have a range of names including committee, association, peer-2-peer group.

Department of Chemistry
Department of Materials Science and Metallurgy*
CRASSH via the postdoc coordinators
The Gurdon Institute

* Newly or in process of being established with guidance from OPdA

In addition there is the potential for an committee to be set up in the near future in the Department of Genetics and the Department of Psychology

At present, the established committees are concentrated in the Schools of Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences and Technology, as the departmental postdoc communities tend to be larger. We are considering different approaches to providing postdoc committees in the Clinical School, Arts and Humanities and Humanities and Social Sciences where the numbers of postdocs in each department tend to be smaller. This may involve linking together departments where there are existing departmental links e.g. via CRASSH.

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 a department, and get the opportunity for representation on other departmental committees. Ideally the host department should also provide some level of administrative and financial support to the committees. The OPdA is looking to support these committees in the following ways:

- (i) providing administrative support through its Partner Volunteer Scheme where appropriate
- (ii) arranging for training for the chairs of the postdoc committees
- (iii) advising the committees on funding sources e.g. RDC

Bringing together the Postdoc voice

In addition to supporting postdocs in their own department, it is proposed that a representative from each Department Postdoc Committee will meet annually. This cross department representative group will be chaired by the PdOC Society and will report directly to the OPdA Management Committee. Thus a wide-ranging postdoc 'voice' can report into the University Committee structure.

