

PdOC Society and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network

Minutes of the meeting in The Postdoc Centre @ 16 Mill Lane
6.00pm Thursday 26 February 2015

1. Attendees

Tariq Masood (chair), welcomed attendees to the third Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network (DPCCN) meeting.

Department or Institute	Name	Contact
Chair of the DPCCN (PdOC committee)	Tariq Masood	tm487@cam.ac.uk
Vice Chair of the DPCCN (Archaeology and Anthropology)	Robyn Veal	rjv33@cam.ac.uk
Biochemistry	Neil Rzechorzek	njr48@cam.ac.uk
Chemical Engineering	Claire Michel	chmm2@cam.ac.uk
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Chemistry	Steve Driver	smd37@cam.ac.uk
Computer Lab	Sophie Van der Zee	sv361@cam.ac.uk
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Engineering	Pieter Desnerck	pieter.desnerck@eng.cam.ac.uk
PdOC committee and Engineering	Antonis Kanellopoulos	ak880@cam.ac.uk
Gurdon Institute	Przemyslaw Stempor	ps562@cam.ac.uk
IMS	Jacek Mokrosinski	jm972@medschl.cam.ac.uk
Judge Business School	Arjun Mahalingam	am2257@cam.ac.uk
MRC Epidemiology	Helen Brown	heb56@medschl.cam.ac.uk
PdOC committee and PDN	Natalia Bulgakova	nb390@cam.ac.uk
Philosophy	Natalja Deng	nmd24@cam.ac.uk
Physics	Chris Braithwaite	chb32@cam.ac.uk
Plant Sciences	Katrin Geisler	katring@msl.ubc.ca
Plant Sciences	Trisna Tungadi	tdt24@cam.ac.uk
Vice Chair of the DPCCN (Primary Care Unit)	Suzanna Forwood	sef26@cam.ac.uk
Psychology	Nicole Horst	nh382@cam.ac.uk
Sanger	Steven Williams	sw17@sanger.ac.uk
Vet school	Srishti Gupta	sg607@cam.ac.uk
Zoology	Alecia Carter	ac854@cam.ac.uk
Secretary	Joy Warde	Joy.warde@admin.cam.ac.uk
?	Melissa Koops	Melissa.koops@admin.cam.ac.uk

Note: a current list of the chair and other departmental committee reps can be found at

2. Introductions and Welcome

The chair outlined his role in the University as both Research Associate in the Institute for Manufacturing and also an elected University Policy and Representation Officer in the PdOC Society Management Committee.

The chair reminded attendees of the DPCCN aims, which are 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 chair updated the network on achievements so far with respect to the 13 postdoc needs identified and prioritised by the DPCCN at the inaugural meeting in May 2014 (listed in Appendix 1).

Papers outlining the aims and reach of the network have been presented to HR committee (Jan 2015), RDC committee (July 2014), OPdA management committee (Oct 2014). A Staff Review and Development working group was formed and reported to HR (Nov 2014). An outline of the DPCCN has been presented at the ERLDP finale (Sept 2014).

In addition the chair reported that a postdoc leavers package has been approved by the HR committee (Jan 2015) and there is likely to be a school wide mentoring pilot launched in 2015.

3. Teaching Opportunities for Postdocs

Suzannah Forwood, Research Associate and chair of the Peer-to-Peer group IPH, Primary Care Unit reported on the results of the postdoc teaching survey that was distributed to all Departmental Postdoc Committees. SF would like to thank everyone who completed the survey. The survey was completed by 21 departments and it should be noted that this is not a survey of all postdocs but rather a snapshot of data and opinions collected by the individual chairs of postdoc committees.

In summary:

- Involvement in teaching is variable by department.
- Postdocs are usually involved in supervising UGs and research projects, but not usually with lecturing or seminars.
- Postdocs want more teaching opportunities of all kinds, particularly lecturing, seminars, supervising grad students and research projects.
- Postdocs want to teach for two principle reasons: career progression (CVs and teaching appointments), and enjoyment.
- It is unclear how to get teaching opportunities, with the exception of supervising and research projects for UG.
- It is unclear what training is available or required.

A full summary of the survey results is included in Appendix 2.

The proposed outcome from the network is a paper that gives a strong message from the post-doc community of actions to improve support for postdocs in delivery of current teaching and gaining teaching experience within the constraints of the University.

The network then discussed the question:

“What **practical actions** could be adopted to improve support for post-docs in both **delivery of current teaching** and **gaining teaching experience** for career progression?”

A summary of the discussion is included in Appendix 3.

Action: Chair, SF, JW to draft paper to summarise the results of the teaching opportunities survey and suggestion practical actions.

4. Researcher Development Review (Melissa Koops)

The RDC has initiated a review to obtain a better understanding of the delivery of researcher development education. The RDC recognizes that postdocs are the largest staff group at the University and needs to review whether the staff development needs of this group are being met effectively.

First phase: Map delivery against OPdA 5 points

1. Induction and Orientation
2. Research Excellence and Management
3. Career Progression
4. Personal and Professional skills
5. Teaching

Second phase: Postdoc and PhD student focus groups to reflect on the relevance and effectiveness of the current delivery of researcher development education. This is ongoing work but the main key findings from the focus groups so far are:

1. Researcher development **vital to career advancement**
2. **“Soft transferable skills”** training deserved special attention
3. Postdocs need more **leverage in discussions with PIs**
4. Alternative **career pathways** need to be explicitly acknowledged
5. **Barriers** to participation
6. Confirmed interest in **grant writing, financial management, leadership and mentoring**

There was strong support for a formal structure that would promote continued professional development including a set of core competencies and means of reflection on how these could be effectively acquired and demonstrated. An **online tool** could support such a structure if it were to focus on providing an appropriate framework (as opposed to providing online training) and included mechanisms to engage and prompt the supervisor.

MK then led an open discussion on the review so far and it’s key findings. The following comments were forthcoming from members.

- Many reported a positive experience of the quality and relevance of RD courses they had

attended.

- Barrier faced when accessing RD courses. They are often fully booked when an individual receives the advertising materials. How is the over-demand for courses measured and catered for? MK encouraged postdocs to use the 'Register your interest' and 'add me to the waiting list' buttons. That will indicate the level of demand for a particular course and could be used to determine provision going forward.
- Some quality control is needed for an individual to assess "is my time well spent" attending this course. This could be achieved with more detail about the course included in the advertising and booking.
- A competency framework is required for a range of career paths, including non-academic. It was felt that the current provision doesn't meet the demands or requirements for non-academic careers. This framework needs to be developed with input from non-academic employers.
- It was proposed by several attendees that a standard recommended number of days RD development time be set for postdocs.
- It was felt there was competition for places with PhD students (who are entitled to 10 days RD training per year).
- How can University facilitate postdocs going outside of current provision to access more suitable employer focused training?
- Why should the University invest in postdocs who are temporary staff members and will leave University employment? The vast majority of attendees agreed that the University, as an educational establishment and an investor in people, should support and equip the large postdoc population to make the next career step.

If network members have any other comments or feedback please contact MK (Melissa.koops@admin.cam.ac.uk)

5. Vice Chair positions

At the last DPCCN meeting in October 2014 a call was made for expressions of interest in vice-chair position(s). The vice chair role will support the chair to

- prepare for network meetings;
- chair the network meetings;
- contribute to write papers from the network;
- disseminate outcomes and engage with other stakeholders e.g. OPdA, PPD, Careers; and
- provide information and support to new departmental committees.

The following postdocs have expressed their interest and were approved as vice-chairs:

- Robyn Veal (Arch and Anth) School of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Suzanna Forwood (Primary care unit) Clinical School
- Krishna C. Bulusu (Chemistry) School of Physical Sciences

6. AOB and next network meeting

Natalia Bulgakova invited members to the next PdOC 'Crossing the Barriers' lecture on Monday 23 March.

The next meeting of the DPCCN will be on Tuesday 19 May 12-2pm, Postdoc Centre @ 16 Mill Lane.

Appendix 1 - 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 2 – Teaching Opportunities for Postdocs – status and experiences

Although teaching is not perceived as one of the key duties of research associates, postdocs currently make a contribution to teaching: 9%¹ of hours booked on Camcours for supervisions are delivered by postdocs.

The next steps in the career paths of postdocs remaining within academia will likely require them to demonstrate teaching experience. Three in four institutions include teaching experience in their job specifications for lectureships², and interviews for lectureships frequently ask candidates to discuss teaching³.

The University of Cambridge generic role specification for a Research Associates includes ‘teaching and learning support as a main responsibility’⁴.

The University therefore has a duty of care to support teaching by post-docs, both by improving delivery of teaching offered within the University and supporting career development for post-docs of the University.

Personal and Professional Development offers a number of courses on teaching skills⁵ within the teaching and learning theme.

Experiences of teaching by the post-doc community

A survey was conducted to collect data on the post-doc experience of teaching within the University. Members of the Departmental Post-doc Committee Chairs Network were invited to collect their own data from their post-doc community and to reflect these views in their survey responses. The survey asked what teaching post-docs contribute to, what teaching post-docs want to do, how post-docs got involved in teaching, why post-docs wanted to teach, training and barriers.

Limitation: Respondents were mostly individuals who already take an interest in teaching. These findings therefore reflect the views of post-docs interested in or currently teaching, and not the views of a representative sample of post-docs.

Sample: A representative from 21 post-doc committees, all from non-overlapping departments or units or institutes, completed the survey. These were from across the university (8 Biological Sciences, 4 Technology, 3 Affiliated Institutes, 3 Clinical Sciences, 2 Physical Sciences, 1 Humanities or Social Sciences, 0 Arts and Humanities).

Findings

- Post-docs are usually involved in supervising undergraduates and research projects, but not usually with lecturing or seminars.
- Post-docs want more teaching opportunities of all kinds, particularly lecturing, seminars, supervising graduate students and research projects.

¹ Estimate as provided by PPD

² Based on Job specifications based on all UK lectureship posts advertised on jobs.ac.uk between 21-25 July 2014. Information collated and provided by PPD.

³ Informal qualitative data provided by the Careers Service

⁴ <http://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/pay-benefits/grading-and-job-evaluation/generic-role-profiles>

⁵ <http://www.ppd.admin.cam.ac.uk/information-postdocsresearch-staff/research-staff-core-programme-theme-0>

- Post-docs want to teach for two principle reasons: 95% cited career progression, and 52% cited enjoyment.
- It is unclear to post-docs how to get teaching opportunities, with the exception of supervising and research projects for undergraduates where post-docs are invited to take part.
- It is unclear to post-docs what training is available or required.
- Post-docs either want accreditation for teaching skills (38%) or don't know what this is (52%). 86% of responses agreed that even post-docs with an interest in teaching were not aware of the Teaching Associates Program (offering HEA accreditation of teaching skills).
- Post-docs cite a number of barriers to teaching: lack of opportunity, lack of time, departmental policies, cultural expectations, and the material being taught were the most frequently cited barriers.

Appendix 3 – Teaching Opportunities for Postdocs – Practical Actions

“What **practical actions** could be adopted to improve support for post-docs in both **delivery of current teaching** and **gaining teaching experience** for career progression?”

Note: Keep it Realistic, Specific and Visible (measurable outcome)

1. Ideas for the individual post-doc

- Provide information
 - about accreditation
 - to show where to find possible courses/ curriculum
 - in induction packs and on departmental websites
- Be proactive about looking for opportunities
 - Ask line manager or PI – make it clear that you are looking for teaching experience
 - Volunteer to take on some of the administration from course lecturer
 - University Reporter (note from JW – refers to lecture timetable)
- Know that there isn't a central system. Be proactive and take responsibility for finding teaching opportunities.

Blue Sky Idea:

Mandate to teach (minimum standard for all postdocs who are interested)

2. Ideas for the research-focused department

- Appoint a named teaching administrator to act as a mediator between the lecturer/course admin and postdoc/grad students who want to teach. (example Plant sciences recently appointed one). They act as a central hub.
- Vacancy listing (database) centralised information hub where Dept/Colleges/lecturers can list what they are looking for and vice versa i.e. postdocs can list the teaching areas they can offer.
- Transparency and clear expectations of what is possible and allowed when advertising /hiring/interviewing a postdoc candidate.

Blue Sky Idea:

Increase number of College affiliated positions for postdocs to gain further links to teaching.

3. Ideas for the teaching-focused department

- Widespread info about what courses are taught, which supervisions / demonstrations are needed through inductions, webpages etc. Inform the postdocs of the payment for teaching; in particular for undergrad research supervision. This can be shared outside of the department (i.e. you can teach outside of your department)
- Organise masterclasses and seminars run by postdocs for postgrad students (perhaps optional non-examined offer to undergrads). Needs explicit support and encouragement from department. Plus training in MRes part of the doctoral training programs
- Use postdocs to help with leave (maternity, sabbatical) or set aside 1-2 lectures per course for postdocs

Blue Sky Idea:

Give courses to postdocs from postdocs e.g. techniques etc. and get funding for it from Researcher Development

4. Ideas for central administration

- Run courses that are specific to postdocs (currently very competitive). Flexibility on course requirements and time frames (TAP requires a number of hours). 3700 postdocs sharing 48 places on the TAP course.
- Offer shorter variants on the ERLDP (current 25 places over a long time frame) which can have a greater participant numbers per year.
- Formal advertising lectures where lectures outside dept. ICE at Madingley Hall provides opportunities for postdocs to deliver lecture sets. Website forum for course coordinators.
- Action services to open opportunities for funding to ensure more training
 - PhD studentships come with training money
 - Postdocs have v. high overheads
- Create a certificate of teaching experience to rival accreditation (centrally set criteria and evidence. Formalised/verified by department. University to provide guidelines to departments on how to verify the teaching certificate.

Blue Sky Idea:

Implement on postdoc contracts to do teaching for X number of hours.

Formal acknowledgement of the advisor / co-supervisor role that postdocs routinely offer to graduate students .