

University of Cambridge
PdOC Society and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to update the Researcher Development 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. It is envisaged that this will aid the upcoming review and analysis on Researcher Development needs for the postdoctoral community.

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the PdOC Society have established a University wide “**departmental postdoc committees chairs network**”. The network consists of existing, well-established departmental postdoc committees and new committees formed with the encouragement, support and training of the OPdA and PdOC. The network is chaired by the PdOC Society and thus a wide-ranging postdoc ‘voice’ can report into the University Committee structure.

Recommendation 1: That the RDC includes the “network of departmental postdoc committees” in the review and analysis of Researcher Development provision for postdoctoral staff.

Recommendation 2: That the RDC encourages schools to put aside funding for these committees (and the development of new ones) as part of the annual RDC planning round and it be communicated to existing and new committees how they can access these funds.

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 designed, 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 and PdOC Society have established a University wide network of postdoc committees, consisting of established committees and newly seeded ones. The experiences of the well-established committees are being used to provide guidance and support for postdocs in establishing a new committee in other departments. It is a key aim that the postdoc committees, and their activities, are sustainable, realistic and are engaging postdocs.

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

Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network

In addition to supporting postdocs in their own department, representative from each Department Postdoc Committee will meet termly. 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.

The Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network will meet 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 first meeting of the network was held on the 29th of May in the Postdoc Centre at 16 Mill Lane. The network is chaired by Dr Tariq Masood on behalf of the PdOC Society. The Chairs or representatives of 17 departmental postdoc committees from across the University were present as listed in appendix 1. The primary focus of the meeting was on identifying and prioritising postdoc needs in the University and actions, which the departmental committees together with PdOC and OPdA can undertake to fulfil these needs. The participants agreed that 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*

Expansion and support for the network

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

Recommendation 1: That the RDC includes the “network of departmental postdoc committees” in the review and analysis of Researcher Development provision for postdoctoral staff.

Recommendation 2: That the RDC encourages schools to put aside funding for these committees (and the development of new ones) as part of the annual RDC planning round and it be communicated to existing and new committees how they can access these funds.

Dr Tariq Masood (PdOC Society and Chair of the Departmental Postdoc Committee Network)

Dr Joy Warde (Postdoctoral Research Staff Coordinator)

Karina Prasad (Head of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs)

Appendix 1

The Chairs or representatives of 17 departmental postdoc committees from the following departments are currently represented on the “*departmental postdoc committees chairs network*”.

Archaeology and Anthropology
Biochemistry
Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology*
Chemistry
CIMR **
Clinical Neurosciences *
CRASSH
EMBL-EBI **
Engineering *
Genetics *
GRASP committee
Gurdon Institute
Institute of Metabolic Science *
Materials Science *
Physics
Physiology, Development and Neuroscience
Primary Care Unit (IPH) *
Psychology *
Sanger
Social Anthropology**
Stem Cell Institute
Zoology **

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

** Members of the network but unable to attend on 29 May 2014