



Postdoc Chairs' Network

Quinquennial Report 2019



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Foreword



Dr Tariq Masood

Chair of the Postdoc
Chairs' Network

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*The postdoc population at the University of Cambridge has grown faster than ever before during the last one and a half decades. Now, more than 4,000 postdocs work at the University of Cambridge and its partner institutions. **Postdocs play a vital role in the University, driving research and innovation, delivering teaching, contributing to the academic community and transforming society.***

*The Postdoc Chairs' Network (PCN) was established in May 2014 as a joint venture between the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA) and Postdocs of Cambridge (PdOC) Society, originally named as Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs' Network (DPCCN). **Throughout our five-year history, we have seized opportunities to create a better future for postdocs.** Collaboratively with the University, we identify and advocate postdocs' needs, and propose solutions to address them.*

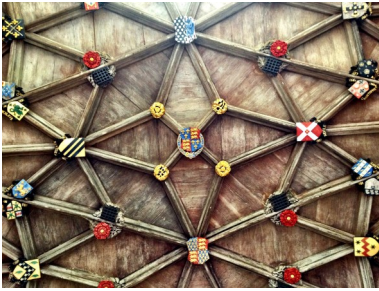
***The Network has become an influential voice for postdocs, by postdocs of Cambridge.** We have helped to develop existing, and establish new, postdoc committees. Our network is comprised of over 40 committees across the University. Until now, we held 16 termly meetings with chairs or representatives of departmental postdoc committees and key senior University leaders.*

***'Postdoc Revolution' changes the way early career researchers work and live.** It is vital that the transformation in support for postdocs keeps pace; in Cambridge, at national level and across borders. As Cambridge has one of the largest postdoc communities in the UK, our Postdoc Chairs' Network plays a vital role in responding to these changes through continuous adaptation of policies and improvements in everyday practices.*

*This report covers activities and achievements over the last five years, presents case studies of postdoc committees from across the University and sets out the outlook of the Postdoc Chairs' Network. **We will continue our efforts for the benefit of the postdoc community.***

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tariq Masood', written in a cursive style.

Tariq Masood



The University-wide **Postdoc Chairs' Network** (PCN) was established in 2014 with an overarching goal **to enable postdoctoral researchers to be represented and communicate their views** on a range of issues related to their experience of work, professional and personal development, and wellbeing.

Enhancing postdoctoral researchers' representation through an active, integrated Postdoc Committees structure benefits postdocs individually, their immediate workplace community as well as Departments, Institutes, Faculties, Schools and the University as a whole by:

- increasing **engagement** and **effectiveness**,
- improving **wellbeing** and stimulating **creativity**,
- facilitating **communication** between the postdoc community and department,
- providing **representatives** to sit on University, School and Departmental Committees,
- exploring the **professional development** needs of the local postdoc community,
- providing **practical support** for postdocs and creating **networking opportunities**,
- implementing **Concordat** principles and the **Athena Swan** agenda.

5 years of Postdoc Chairs' Network

One of PCN's strategic goals is to increase postdoctoral researchers' representation through the formation of new, and further development of the existing Postdoc Committees. We advocated and supported these processes through visits to departments, encouragement and training provided jointly with the OPdA.

As of 2019, there are over 40 Postdoc Committees, chairs or representatives who are constituent members of the PCN. These Committees provide a representation to over 80% of the Postdoc Community of the University and selected University Partner Institutions.

Dr Tariq Masood (School of Technology) has been the Founding Chair of the PCN since its launch in May 2014. His role is supported by a team of Vice Chairs, currently consisting of Dr Jacek Mokrosiński (School of Clinical Medicine) and Dr Katharina Greve (School of Technology). In the past, PCN's steering group also included Dr Robyn

Veal (School of Humanities and Social Sciences), Dr Pieter Desnerck (School of Technology), Dr Suzanna Forwood (School of Clinical Medicine) and Dr Krishna Bulusu (School of Physical Sciences).

The PCN is supported by the invaluable team of OPdA staff members and volunteers. We are especially grateful to Dr Joy Warde and Dr James Brown, former secretaries of the PCN, Veronica Egorova who facilitated our activities in the past and those currently supporting us, Hollie Godden and Liz Simmonds.

We would not have achieved it all without the support of the PCN champions, advocates and friends. We especially thank Professor Jeremy Sanders, former PVC for Institutional Affairs, Professor Chris Abell and Dr Rob Wallach, former Directors of Postdoctoral Affairs, Dr Maya Ghousaini, former President of PdOC Society and Karina Prasad, Head of OPdA for their enthusiasm, encouragement and indispensable support for the PCN.

Network activities

Chairs and representatives of every postdoc committee are invited to meetings taking place every academic term. Network meetings have three objectives:

- **to disseminate information** about most important initiatives and activities concerning postdoctoral researchers taking place at the University and nationally,
- **to learn, discuss and work** on specific recommendations and/or solutions,
- **to exchange best practices** and facilitate direct interaction between committees.

Main subjects of each meeting are communicated in advance and network members have an opportunity to discuss these matters and collect relevant data or feedback from their respective committees and local postdoc communities.

We invite senior University officials, including Pro-Vice-Chancellors, directors, heads and managers of various administrative divisions and services, to share their knowledge and engage in discussion with postdoc committee chairs and representatives. The expertise of our guest speakers provides first-hand and in-depth understanding of the subject matters. PCN members have a unique opportunity to hear from, discuss with and provide feedback directly to the most senior representatives of the University governance and management.

A total of 13 postdoc needs were formulated at the inaugural PCN meeting in May 2014. These broad themes, capturing unmet requirements and matters of importance for postdocs, were identified through a PdOC Society led survey in 2013 then further expanded and prioritised (as indicated by information on the next page) by the PCN members. An additional 14th need, concerning postdoc well-being and family support, was added in May 2016.

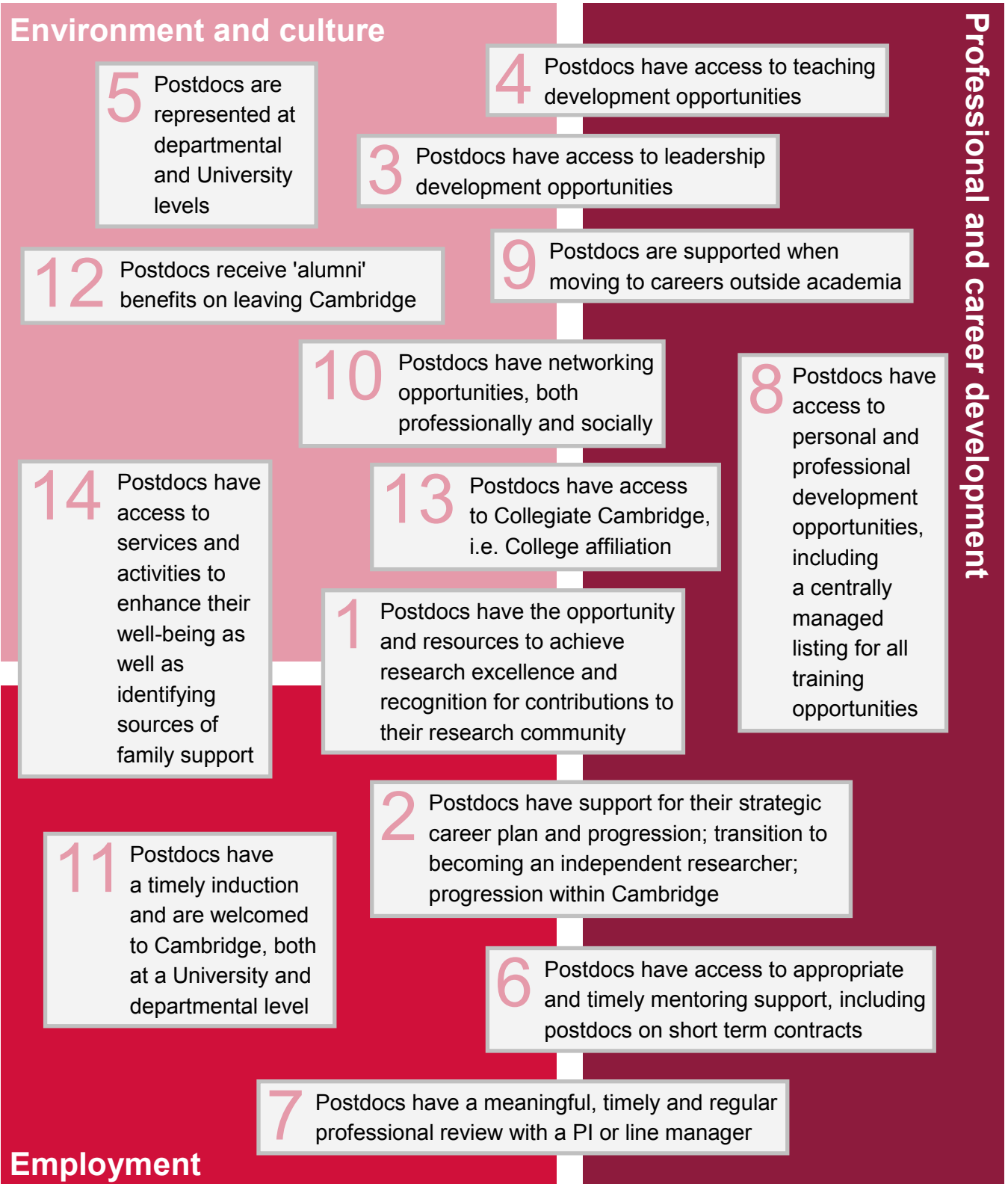
The **14 postdoc needs** are cornerstones of the PCN activities. At each meeting, we focus on addressing selected needs by analysing key issues and identifying ways in which these needs can be addressed and fulfilled. The postdoc needs were incorporated by the OPdA into its strategy and many of them have been addressed through specific initiatives and activities by the OPdA and others. Our collaboration with stakeholders within these key areas is bringing positive changes for the postdoc community and benefiting the University.



At every PCN meeting, members have opportunities to share the best practices from their departments, identify postdoc needs and collectively formulate community recommendations.

Postdoc needs

The **14 postdoc needs** are aligned with three main principles of the new **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers**, currently undergoing governance approval in the University. These needs require to ensure that:



PCN termly meetings



29 th May 2014	Inauguration of PCN* , prioritisation of the postdoc needs and discussion of the potential solutions - Prof Chris Abell, PVC Research, Karina Prasad, Head of OPdA
8 th October 2014	Effective departmental support for Postdoc Committees - Karina Prasad, Head of OPdA Consultation of the new staff review system - Sarah Botcherby, HR Business Manager
26 th February 2015	Teaching opportunities for postdocs - Dr Suzanna Forewood Researcher development review - Melissa Koops, Researcher Development Committee
19 th May 2015	Contribution Increment Scheme for Researchers - Sarah Botcherby, HR Business Manager Update on OPdA progress and vision - Karina Prasad, Head of OPdA Discussion of PCN priorities for 2015/16
22 nd October 2015	Mentoring – outline and consultation on University-wide pilot - Karina Prasad, Head of OPdA Access to Personal and Professional Development Opportunities - Dr Joy Warde, OPdA
17 th February 2016	Support for strategic career planning - Dr Tariq Masood and Dr Jacek Mokrosiński, PCN The Careers Service 10 years update - Dr Liz Simmonds, Careers Service
18 th May 2016	Leadership and Strategy Development - Dr Andy Wilson, former head of Professional Development, University of Loughborough
24 th October 2016	Consultation on 15-point development framework for Cambridge researchers - Dr Matt Lane, Hannah Clements, Dr Mary Beth Benbenek, Researcher Development Programme Sharing best practice - Dr Pieter Desnerck, Department of Engineering
23 rd February 2017	Research funding at University of Cambridge - Prof Chris Abell, PVC Research, Dr Peter Hedges, Head of Research Office Sharing good practice: Integration of your committee into your department - Dr Ana López Ramirez, PDN department
18 th May 2017	People management at University of Cambridge - Prof Eilís Ferran, PVC Institutional & International Relations, Emma Stone, Director of Human Resources
11 th October 2017	Strategic Career Plan & Progression at/beyond University of Cambridge - Prof Andy Neely, PVC Enterprise & Business Relations
21 st February 2018	Wellbeing and family support - Graeme Ross, Immigration and Compliance Manager, Sue Davis, Manager of Childcare Services, Jane Luzio, Director of Newcomers & Visiting Scholars, Dr Michael Ramage, Schools Gender Equality Champion Postdoc family survey - Dr Joanna Waldie, PdOC Society Welfare Officer
13 th June 2018	Payment for teaching & related activities - Dr Robert Prałat, Dr Olga Loblova, Dr Jacques Wels, Department of Sociology Network priorities and planning - Dr James Brown, PCN
28 th November 2018	'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' - Dr Jacek Mokrosiński, PCN Senior Researcher Promotions - Dr Rob Phaal, Director of Research, Institute for Manufacturing
6 th March 2019	Promotion and progression - Dr Jacek Mokrosiński and Dr James Brown, PCN Postdoc Awards and Prizes - Dr Tariq Masood, PCN
20 th May 2019	New Postdoc Awards at IfM - Dr Katharina Greve, Institute for Manufacturing 5-year review and planning of the future PCN activities - Dr Tariq Masood, PCN

Achievements

Since its inception, the PCN has been a role model in providing a wide-ranging, representative **postdoc voice** to prioritise needs and contribute to the University strategy for postdocs by reporting into the University Committee structure, i.e. Postdoctoral Matters Committee, Human Resources Committee, Researcher Development Committee and others.

Establishment and recognition of PCN

While setting up the PCN and during its initial phase, the network wrote several papers to achieve formal recognition by University committees. We also aimed at receiving necessary support in establishment and recognition of new postdoc committees where required, e.g.

- Paper to OPdA Management Committee: **Report on establishment of the DPCCN*** (February 2014)
- Paper to Researcher Development Committee: **Postdoctoral representation within departments and across the University** (July 2014)
- Paper to HR Committee: **Postdoctoral representation within departments and across the University** (January 2015)

New Departmental Committees

'Guide to establishing a postdoc committee' was developed in September 2015. The aim of this guide is to support and facilitate postdocs in establishing Departmental Postdoc Committees.

The guide is a starting point to help postdocs to get a new committee in their department up and running and includes advice on general principles of setting up a group but is not prescriptive. As the University is a complex organisation consisting of over 150 departments, one size does not fit all.

Personal and Professional Development for Researchers

The network has a very good understanding and strong interest in the subject of personal and professional development. This matter was the key priority of PCN activities in 2015/16 and remains in our focus through continuous engagement with providers and facilitators of researcher development from across the University.

The PCN is instrumental in providing a better understanding on how postdocs assess and meet their researcher development needs. Our members help identify and communicate ideas coming from the postdoctoral researchers' community on how the University can better support these needs.

In 2018/19, the PCN together with OPdA and PdOC Society ran the first Researcher Development Pitch Competition. The number and scope of submitted proposals showed great wealth of new ideas and potential for innovative approaches in personal and professional development led by researchers' needs and expectations.

Over the years, **40+ postdoc committees** contributed to the work of PCN. There are approx. **200 postdoc representatives** across the University at present.

Arts and Humanities

- Faculty of Music
- Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- Faculty of Divinity

Physical Sciences

- Institute of Astronomy
- Department of Materials Science and Metallurgy
- Department of Physics

Humanities and Social Sciences

- Department of Archaeology
- Faculty of History

Technology

- Department of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology
- Department of Computer Science and Technology
- Department of Engineering

Biological Sciences

- Department of Biochemistry
- Department of Genetics
- Graduate School of Life Sciences (GRASP)
- Department of Pathology
- Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience
- Department of Plant Sciences
- Department of Psychology
- Stem Cell Institute
- Department of Veterinary Medicine
- Department of Zoology

Clinical Medicine

- Clinical School
- Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute
- MRC Cancer Unit
- IMS - Metabolic Research Laboratories
- Department of Radiology
- Department of Psychiatry
- Postdoc Neuroscience Network

Partner Institutions

- Babraham Institute
- European Bioinformatics Institute (EMBL-EBI)
- Sanger Institute

* PCN initially operated and was known as *Departmental Postdoctoral Committees' Chairs' Network* (DPCCN)

Challenges

Academic Progression & Promotions

The recent consultation on the proposed **Academic Career Pathways (ACP)** model included proposals for the **recognition of early-career researcher development** in the University's system for academic progression and promotion. This is a welcome and innovative indication of its commitment to the development of the next generation of academic and research talent and the support of its postdoctoral research staff.

The consultation highlighted, however, the need for more detailed guidance and other steps to realise this commitment effectively. HR Committee has recently agreed the adoption of principles of the ACP and directed HR to undertake further policy work and the development of guidance to achieve its implementation. The PCN participated in these consultations and presented findings and recommendations to support this implementation. The outcomes of our discussion were summarised in the following paper:

- Paper to Postdoctoral Matters Committee (PMC): **Recognising & Evaluating Support for Researcher Development in Academic Progression & Promotions** (March 2018)

The PCN Chair, Dr Tariq Masood presented the paper to the PMC, where it was discussed by the University leadership, including PVC for Research, PVC for Institutional and International Relations and Director of HR. The paper was well received and forwarded with positive comments to the HR committee.

Postdoc Awards and Recognition

The University has a number of awards schemes for staff and students that recognise their contributions. However, postdocs are largely not eligible to apply for most of these schemes, and if eligible, postdocs' success is negligible compared to students and other staff categories. There is a consensus among the PCN members that an award scheme dedicated for postdocs is very much needed.

As a result of discussion initiated by the PCN Chair, Dr Tariq Masood with Prof Tim Minshall, head of the Institute for Manufacturing (IfM) on the matter of recognition and postdoc-dedicated awards, the following paper was prepared:

- Paper to PMC: **Postdoc Awards and Recognition** (March 2019)

Based on the comments received from the PMC, a pilot scheme of Postdoc Awards was arranged at the IfM with full support from Prof Tim Minshall. The lessons learned in this trial will be used in the future to extend and establish award schemes in other divisions, departments and schools.

Researcher Progression & Promotions

Following review of Academic Career Pathways by the University, our network is looking forward to engage in the review of Researcher Promotion processes.

We have been collecting information about the procedures and practices of Senior Research Associate promotions across departments and held a discussion on the subject of Senior Researcher Promotions (e.g. Principal Research Associate and Director of Research).

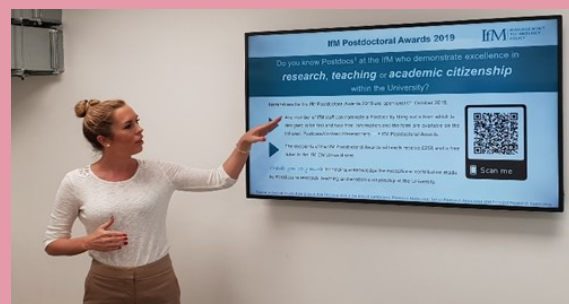
This initial review showed already, need and desire for changes in these procedures among postdocs. We plan to address these matters by writing papers to University committees in the near future.

Postdoc Awards Pilot Scheme at IfM

The IfM Postdoctoral Awards will be given to Postdocs who demonstrate exceptional excellence in **research, teaching and academic citizenship**.

The awards are managed by the IfM Awards Committee, which includes four members of staff from a variety of research teams and roles at IfM, excluding postdocs. The committee solicits and evaluates nominations, and selects the recipients of the IfM Postdoctoral Award on annual basis.

The IfM Postdoctoral Award recipient will receive £250 and a free ticket to the IfM Christmas dinner.



Dr Katharina Greve, PCN Vice-Chair presenting the IfM Postdoctoral Awards Scheme

Opportunities & future goals

The PCN provides a **representative voice** to the departmental postdoc communities. Over the last five years, we have built **strong and fruitful relations** with the University leadership, governing bodies and administration. Our **partnership and cooperation with OPdA and PdOC Society** benefits postdocs across the University.

The **14 postdoc needs** identified by the PCN members gave a clear direction and became a cornerstone for the OPdA strategy. Our network aspires to provide **inspiration and practical solutions** to fulfil these needs and improve postdoc experiences.

We will continue our efforts and strengthen our ties with stakeholders to assure that postdocs take the responsibility and play an active role in the vibrant life of the University, its management and development.

Regent House

Recent changes in the membership of the Regent House rules will allow a selected group of postdocs to participate in and contribute to the work of this University's principal governing body. We hope that this development will increase postdoc engagement in the University governance at all levels, not only in Regent House. Participation and contribution to the collegial decision making by postdocs will enhance their sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility for University matters.

New Concordat 2019

Since the inception of PCN, the **2008 UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** is a cornerstones of our activities. This agreement between funders and employers of research staff provides a framework and incentivises higher education and research institutions to improve the employment and support for researchers career development.

PCN contributed in organising the first National Postdoc Meeting 2017, which focused on the Concordat review. PCN also took part in the consultations and Dr Tariq Masood, PCN Chair was a member of the Concordat Writing Group.

The new Concordat was launched in September 2019. University academic community is working towards signing the new document through relevant governance and PCN anticipates that it will improve the **environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development** of researchers, which are new Concordat's three core principles.

The PCN is committed to raising postdoc awareness of the Concordat and contributes to putting its objectives into practice.

Wider Postdoc Representation

The network aims to increase 'representation of postdocs by postdocs' across the University of Cambridge, its NSIs and wider stakeholders. Postdoc engagement in governance is key for researchers professional development and creates a sense of belonging and responsibility for the University and academic community. The network members have been representing postdocs already on various national, University and department levels committees, e.g.:

National

- The UK Concordat Writing Group (CWG)
- CWG Professional & Career Development Working Group

University of Cambridge

- University Council
- Postdoctoral Matters Committee
- Advisory Group to the Vice Chancellor on Brexit Response
- HR Excellence in Research Award Internal Panel
- OPdA Leadership Review Committee
- Researcher Development Committee

- Postdoc Coordination Group
- Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Working Group
- Researcher Development Pitch Competition Review Panel

Schools

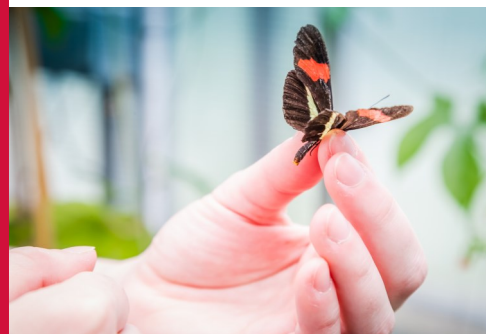
School of Clinical Medicine

- School Council
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Governance Group

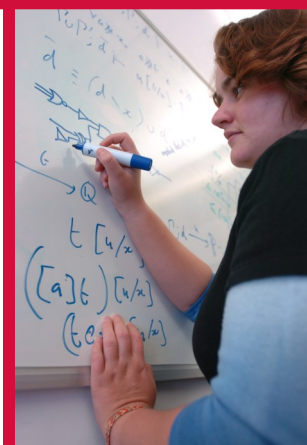
School of Technology

- Schmidt Science Fellowship Awards Selection Panel
- EPSRC Capital Awards for Early Career Researchers Review Panel

Postdoc Committees



A number of Postdoc Committees operate across the University contributing to **effective management**, **improved researcher development** and **wellbeing** in their departments, institutes, faculties and schools. Here, they share their **best practices** and highlight **key achievements** throughout the past years.



School of Clinical Medicine

Cancer Research UK Cambridge Institute

In late July 2014, driven by a general demand by scientists and postdocs in the Cambridge Institute (CI), the Cambridge Institute Scientists Society (CIS Soc) was formed with a mission to establish an 'identity' and give a voice to ALL Scientists within the CI, promote career development, facilitate more efficient and productive interactions within the CI and to foster external interactions and collaborations between the CI, the greater University of Cambridge and Cambridge Biomedical Campuses.

CIS Soc is complementing existing structures at the CI and the University of Cambridge and currently has 400 members, consisting of 100 postdocs and approximately 200 scientists and technicians, which makes it one of the largest societies in the University. In addition, CIS Soc **meets annually with the Scientific Advisory Board for the CRUK CI.**

Recent efforts include; Speaker engagement which initiated a **biannual guest speaker series** within the established CRUK CI Seminars in Cancer Series. **Career development** with career pathway talks, **mentoring scheme, training opportunities** and a **chalk talk series.** **Social engagement** that includes poster recycle event, Christmas mixer, formal dinner with Grad Soc, great debate, scientific speed data-ing, soapbox science, hosting social engagements with other institutes within the biomedical campus.



CIS Society

*Left to right, back row: Dr Ashley Sawle, Dr Elodie Thierion, Dr Cara Brodie, Dr Shalini V Rao,
front row: Dr Katherine Wickham Rahrmann, Dr Sankari Nagarajan, Dr Deanna Patmore, Dr Birgit Nimmervoll,
Dr Lauren Oliver and Dr Eric Rahrmann*

School of Clinical Medicine



Student and Postdoctoral Researchers of Obstetrics & Gynaecology

Left to right: Dr Francesca Gaccioli, Dr Sung Gong, Dr Irving Aye, Dr Ulla Sovio

Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology

The Postdoc & PhD student Committee at the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology was launched on the 8th of August 2017. This is a small department with a high turnover of research staff. At the time, there were no departmental meetings or meetings with Principal Investigators where the postdocs and PhD students would have a voice. Therefore, it was decided to include both postdocs and PhD students in the committee. One of the first goals was to achieve a platform where departmental level issues affecting all could be discussed. It was decided that the committee should have no fixed roles but chairing the meeting would be on a rotating schedule.

The Committee was named Student and Postdoctoral Researchers of Obs & Gynae (SPROG). The department was informed about SPROG and goals of the group. SPROG has met approximately quarterly since its launch. It has regularly sent a representative to the PCN meetings and updated its members about issues discussed there. SPROG has been in touch with the Head of the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology. After many twists and turns, the first **meeting between the HoD, PIs and two SPROG representatives** was organised in November 2018.

Some progress was made regarding issues such as **contract renewals**. SPROG also made the leadership aware of issues

such as **VISA costs and the improvements required in the lab spaces**. Due to several postdocs moving onto other jobs, there are currently only four active postdocs and one active PhD student member attending the SPROG meetings. In future, **SPROG** wants to make sure that voices of postdocs and PhD students will be heard when decisions are made about grants, papers, lab spaces and other things affecting all.

WT-MRC Institute of Metabolic Science - Metabolic Research Laboratories

There are **over 50 postdocs** based at the Institute of Metabolic Sciences – Metabolic Research Laboratories (IMS-MRL), which brings together scientists and clinicians from several departments of the Clinical School. IMS-MRL Postdoc Committee was **formed in 2016** with support from the senior management of IMS-MRL. Committee representatives were invited to sit at the MRL Management and General Purposes Committees.

The initial **Postdoc Survey** arranged by the Committee helped to identify the needs and expectations of research staff and define Committee's goals. Over the years, the Committee organised numerous meetings and events, including lunchtime information sessions and informal career seminar.

Thanks to a collaboration with Researcher Development Program, MRC Doctoral Training Programme and IMS-based Wellcome Trust PhD programme, postdocs were able to participate in a bespoke **lecturing training** in early 2018. This year, IMS-MRL postdocs got a possibility to develop their **teaching skills** by facilitating Peer Research Groups for postgraduate students at the Department of Biochemistry.

In the last three years, postdocs were involved in **PhD student interviews**. Postdocs are also offered to be **mentors** for the first year PhD students and each year get an opportunity to judge, jointly with an academic, student presentations at the IMS-MRL Student Symposium.

The Committee met with the IMS-MRL Scientific Advisory Board as part of their visit to the department in 2017. As a results of this discussion and thanks to support of IMS-MRL senior management, a '**postdoc collaborative grant**' scheme was launched with an annual budget of £10,000 to be allocated internally to projects proposed jointly by postdocs from at least two independent research groups.

Clinical School

A group of postdocs from various departments and institutes within the School of Clinical Medicine met for the first time in 2014 to discuss the needs of increasing population of non-clinical researchers based on the Addenbrooke's campus. With support from the OPdA as well as Clinical School representatives, a working group was formed, latter renamed as the Clinical School Postdoc Committee (CSPC).

The main objectives of the Committee are:

- **to establish a Community of Postdocs** in the Clinical School and other research institutes located within the Cambridge Biomedical Campus or affiliated with the Clinical School,
- **to increase the visibility and provide a representative voice** for the Clinical School Postdocs,
- to provide the **opportunity for interaction, encourage collaboration** and **facilitate researcher development** for Postdocs.

To enhance the communication within the postdoctoral community, CSPC set up its own website, Twitter account and a mailing list for all Clinical School based postdocs. Over the years, the Committee organized three editions of the **Clinical School Postdoc Day** in 2015, 2016 and 2017, gathering around 100 postdocs each year. Following the success of the first Postdoc Centre @ Mill Lane, our community strongly advocated for the need of dedicated space for postdocs at the Biomedical Campus. In 2016, a second **Postdoc Centre** was opened and became a hub for many postdoc-centred activities and events.

Formal representation of our community was noticed by the Clinical School and resulted in our representatives sitting on several Clinical School-wide committees, including observer role at the **Clinical School Council**. Members of CSPC were actively involved in the PCN work since its inception. Ample opportunities to interact with other postdoctoral committee members were always very fruitful for our own work.



Clinical School Postdoc Committee 2016

Left to right: Dr Hilda Mujcic, Dr Hannah West, Dr David Shorthouse, Dr Mae Goldgraben, Dr Jacek Mokrosiński, Dr Joanne Emery, Dr Claire King, Dr Carl Spickett

Missing from the photo: Dr Deanna Patmore, Dr Laura Towns

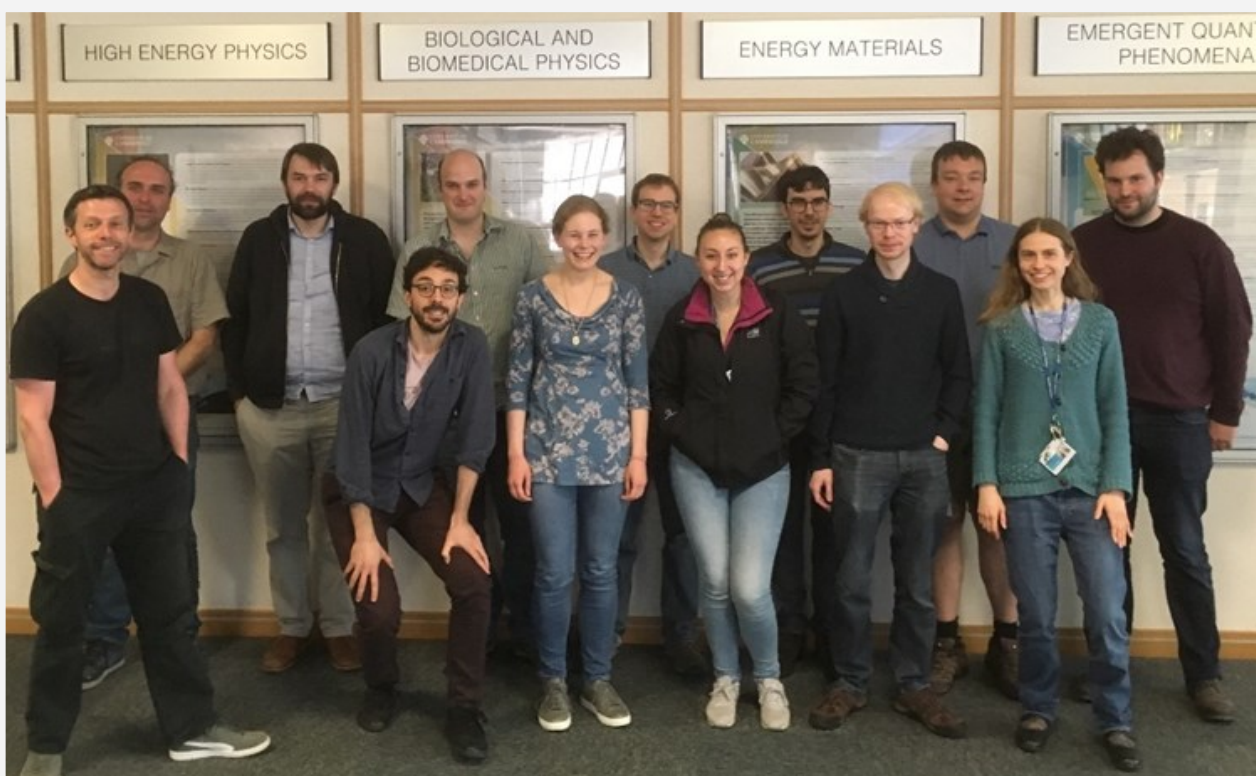
School of Physical Sciences

Department of Physics

The Cavendish Research Staff Committee (or otherwise named as the Physics Postdoc Committee) currently comprises fifteen postdocs/early-career fellows, each representing a research group within the Department of Physics. It seeks to **represent the interests of research staff** in the department and the University and to **organise events that will benefit researchers**. The department has over 200 research staff, spread across fifteen research groups and (at least) nine buildings. In such a big department, researchers often feel lack of connections/communications between research groups, which prevents collaborations and contributes to social isolation.

In May 2015, the Cavendish Research Staff Committee established **monthly 'Happy Hour' events**, where all staff and students could socialise over free pizza and cost-price beer and soft drinks. These have been so successful that the department has committed to sustaining the initiative, with funding and support from its Social Committee and Graduate Students' Committee. With inspiration from other postdoc committees, several **Cavendish Research Days** have been held, where all staff and students can find out about research from across the department and get together to seed collaborations. The most recent of these included a **panel discussion on The Future of Science Policy and Research Funding**, with panel members from the Research Councils, the UK Parliament and senior University leadership. This was attended by over 250 people from the department and University. The event was live-streamed (and archived) on You Tube.

In 2019/2020, the drive to bring people together and get them talking will continue with a series of **movie nights** and discussions on some of the ethical and philosophical issues we should all be asking ourselves and scientists. Also continuing will be the recently-established **termly research-staff Q&A** sessions with the Head of Department, themed around topics affecting early-career researchers.



Cavendish Research Staff Committee

Left to right, front row: Dr Paul Bennett, Dr Paolo Adrich, Dr Tiffany Harte, Dr Beth Tennyson, Dr Peter Newton, Dr Joanna Waldie, back row: Dr Adrian Ionescu, Dr Jan Girovsky, Dr Chris Thomas, Dr Jordan Baglo, Dr Bartomeu Monserrat, Dr David Ward, Dr James Perry

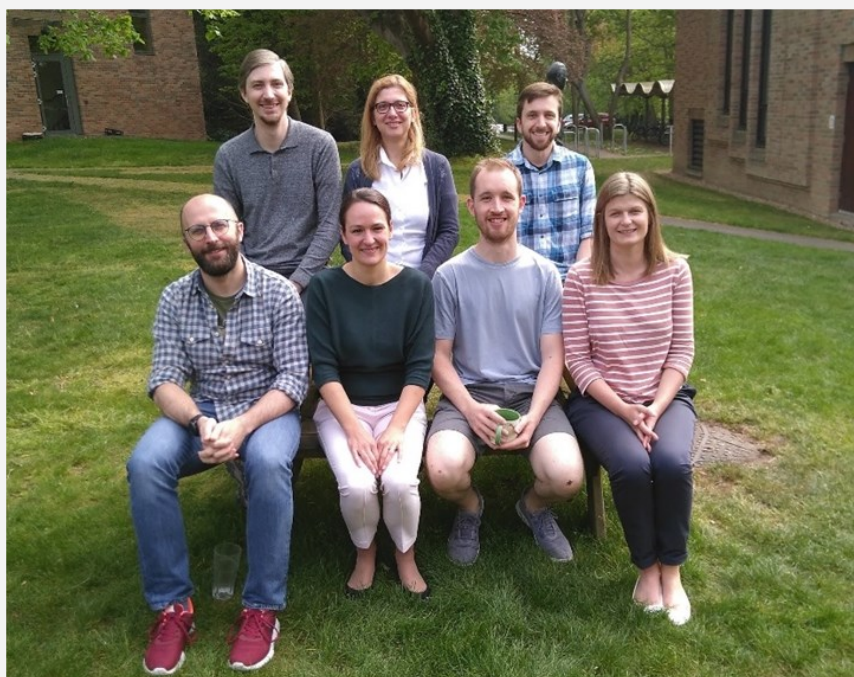
Missing from the photo: Dr Rohit Chikkraddy, Dr Kingsley Gale-Sides, Dr Eloy de Lera Acedo, Dr John Chapman

Institute of Astronomy

The Astro PostDoc committee was founded in 2016 with the main aim of acting as a voice for around 70 postdocs within the department. It consists of a varying group of ~10 people led by two co-chairs, with membership generally sought to reflect the various research groups, career stages and genders within the institute.

Over previous years, the committee has organised **regular cohort meetings** to solicit feedback from the postdoc cohort as well as allowing reporting back on ongoing and past activities. The committee has organised **a variety of talks spanning topics from managing stress and anxiety, career development or USS pensions**. In addition to the cohort meetings, **annual jamborees** have been organised that provided opportunities to get to know fellow postdocs and, since the PhD students are invited too, also encouraged more interactions across the various groups in the department.

The postdoc committee also acts as an important link with the faculty and management. One of the biggest achievements is that the postdoc committee is now **seen as a body that can actively be used to gather feedback** and whose **voice is being acknowledged**. Examples for this include meetings with a faculty representative, feedback on staff selection and most recently having the co-chairs being invited to staff meetings. Finally, the committee has also acted on a number of not necessarily postdoc specific matters that concerned **maintenance issues**.



Astro Postdoc Committee

*Left to right, front row: Dr Carlos Gonzalez-Fernandez (co-chair), Dr Catrina Diener,
Dr George Lansbury, Dr Clare Worley,
back row: Dr Colin DeGraf, Dr Giorgia Busso (co-chair), Dr Gareth Jones
Missing from the photo: Dr Martin Bourne*

School of Technology

Department of Engineering

The Engineering Department Postdoc Committee (EDPC) has strived to promote the interests of postdoctoral researchers in the Department of Engineering (CUED). Over the last 5 years, EDPC has aimed to facilitate communication between postdocs and the department.

To address the lack of a centralized feedback system for postdoc members, the committee initiated and conducted a **full-scale survey amongst postdocs** in CUED in 2017. The survey allowed a better insight in the current needs and visions on topics such as working environment conditions, work satisfaction, career and personal development and opportunities provided or needed from the department. The results were reported and communicated to the appropriate departmental committees and have since helped to facilitate the development and delivery of appropriate events and workshops to meet those needs. An example was the issue of **mentorship**, which was revealed as a priority in the survey. In this regard, the EDPC has setup and has been running a complimentary peer-to-peer mentoring system for postdocs across the department. The scheme, which is still running, offers matching between a mentee (postdoc) and a mentor (postdoc) drawn from the same division, but at different points of their careers, who can work together and create solutions and action plans for successful career progression and personal development.

Another recent success initiated by the EDPC committee has been the **new departmental policy scheme enabling postdocs to apply for small grants themselves as the named investigator**. The issue was first raised by a committee member during regular EDPC meetings and was found to be a common issue among postdocs. The CUED policy did not allow postdocs to apply for grants in the past (the normal route being the PI to apply on their behalf). However, some grants did not allow this, and a further issue of postdocs then not receiving credit for their successful grant proposal was also raised. Representatives of the EDPC committee sought the support of the Head of Department and Director of Research, leading to a new **more inclusive funding policy** which is in place now.



EDPC Committee

Left to right: Dr Katharina Greve (Div. E), Dr Yoanna Shams (Div. E), Dr Thanuja Galhena (Div. B) Dr Chrysoula Litina (Chair, Div. D), Dr Niamh Fox (Div. E), Dr Sue Jackson (CUED), Dr Michal Drewniak (Div. D)

Missing from the photo: Dr Molly Haugen (Div. A), Dr Julien Lepine (Div. C), Dr Devendra Namburi (Div. C), Dr Dhruva Raman (Div. F), Nick Northrop (CUED)

Institute for Manufacturing

The Institute for Manufacturing (IfM) is the Manufacturing and Management division of the Department of Engineering. More than 300 staff and students are based at the IfM, numbers which continue to grow. The IfM is home to over 60 postdocs who are represented by Dr Niamh Fox, Dr Yoanna Shams and Dr Katharina Greve.

The IfM postdoc representatives, often together with the IfM PhD representatives, organise regular **academic and social events**. In 2018/2019, a 'Publishing your Research' training event, a 'Graphic Design' workshop, a 'Systematic Literature Review' seminar and an event on 'Managing your online presence' were conducted. To keep the postdoc community up-to-date and gather their input, **Termly meetings with the Head of the IfM** are arranged. During these meetings, IfM internal matters such as career progression for IfM researchers but also wider university level topics such as the senior researcher promotions procedure and guidance are discussed. The termly meetings also serve as a useful sounding board for new ideas. For example, recently the **'IfM Research Marketplace'** got introduced at one of those meetings. The IfM Research Marketplace is a new internal platform connecting individuals offering research opportunities with those interested in them. Further, a new **'IfM Postdoctoral Awards'** pilot scheme was introduced during a termly meeting with postdocs.

The postdoc reps have a focus on wellbeing and have promoted and organised a number of events to tie this into broader initiatives such as Mental Health Awareness week and the Cambridge Festival of Wellbeing. Further, a **'Maternity Proposal'** and the **'Wellbeing Corner'** have been initiated recently.

During 2019/2020 year, more academic and social events are being planned, including a training on **'Pedagogy in teaching'**. Finally, a **'second Postdoc induction'** has also been planned for the upcoming year. Following the official university induction, postdocs will receive a second induction once they have settled into their role better. This will include a brief pitch by all research groups to give postdocs a better understanding of the breadth of activities taking place at the IfM. The second induction will also offer insights into other areas and activities at the IfM such as IfM Education and Consultancy Services (IfM ECS), which provides consultancy and executive and professional development services.



**Institute for Manufacturing
Postdoc Representatives**

Left to right: Dr Katharina Greve, Dr Niamh Fox, Dr Yoanna Shams

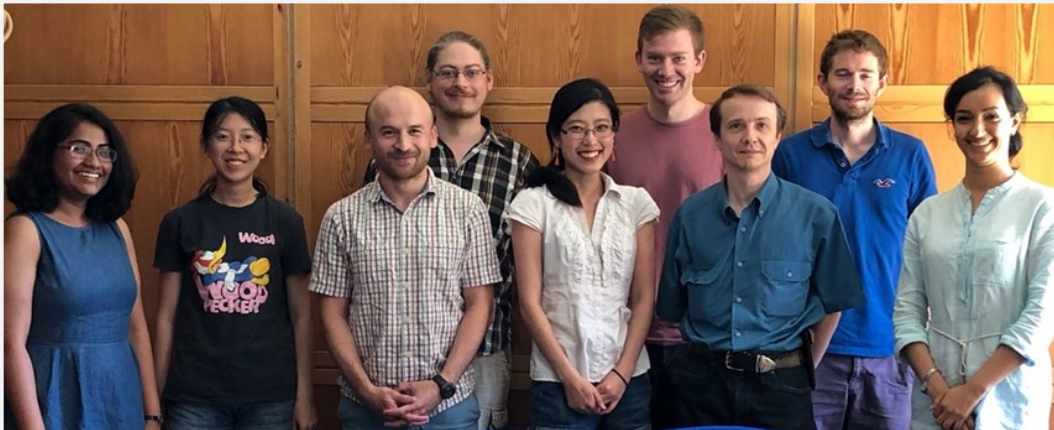
School of Technology

Department of Computer Science and Technology

The Research Staff Forum (formerly known as the Post Doc Forum) is a group that aims to establish a close networking platform between all researchers in the Department.

In November 2015, the Department of Computer Science and Technology Research Staff Forum discussed University changes to the procedure for the promotion of Research Associates (RA) to Senior Research Associates (SRA). In February 2016, it was agreed that a consensus view should be added to the **guidelines regarding the type of activities RAs should be undertaking in order to be considered for promotion**. The forum also thought to add some Computer Science-specific advice. In May 2016, after discussion and consideration, it was decided to remove the Computer Science-specific advice because it turned out not to be as helpful as hoped. Instead, it was replaced with a set of anonymised case studies.

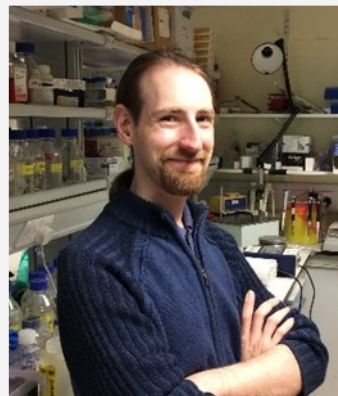
One of the forum members drafted a potential survey that was presented at the November 2016 meeting, and distributed by members of the forum afterwards. By the following July, four case studies were assembled which have since been available on the departmental webpage. Over the past couple of years, the forum has been made aware that this **SRA promotions guidance and the accompanying set of case studies** has become a resource for many RAs both within and outside of the Department of Computer Science and Technology.



Members and guests of the Computer Science and Technology Research Staff Forum

Department of Pathology

Dr Ben Skinner is currently representing the Department of Pathology within the DPCCN. In 2018 a **Pathology Postdoc and PhD Student Careers Event** was organised. When postdocs think about career progression, the grim prospect of getting a permanent position in academia stresses them out. The event was organised with the aim to help postdocs (and PhD students) with this issue. During this 1-day event, they had speakers who have spent time in the Department of Pathology (or the University more widely), either as PhD students or postdocs, to come back and talk about their career paths, why they moved out of academia, and how they found their positions. For those who were interested in academia, they also had Dr Candace Hassall from the Wellcome Trust speaking. She spoke about fellowship opportunities the Wellcome Trust provide. The event was a success. The speakers were pleased to hear very positive feedback from the attendees. The OPdA and the department helped cover the costs of the event, together with external sponsors.



*Department of Pathology
Postdoc Representative*

Dr Ben Skinner

Another success was obtaining **postdoc representation in departmental committees**. Following dissatisfaction raised by postdocs who felt they were excluded from the decision-making process within the department, they approached the departmental administration to discuss the increase of postdoc membership in the departmental governing committees. The request was welcomed, and the department invited postdoc representatives for the Teaching Tripos, Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing, Safety, Biological Safety, Energy Strategy, and Information and Resources Committees. They continue to raise voice to get postdoc representation in the Research Committee, giving its central role in deciding the department's research strategies and funding allocation.

Department of Plant Sciences

The Postdoc Committee of the Department of Plant Sciences started in 2014 under the leadership of Dr Katrin Geisler. Prior to this, postdocs were represented by a single representative to the department's staff committee. In recent years, the postdoc committee has grown, enabling diverse tasks to be tackled as a team with individual roles for each committee member.

One of the flagship events is the **annual postdoc retreat**. The Committee organises the retreat in collaboration with postdocs from two other Cambridge-based institutions of plant sciences (National Institute of Agricultural Botany and the Sainsbury Laboratory), facilitating the exchange of ideas and networking. During this event, people are invited from different scientific career paths to share their experiences.

An **annual postdoc survey** has also been established, to collect opinions on working conditions within the department. Feedback of results to the department, and issues raised are usually addressed in the following months. The survey allows the Committee to identify new areas to contribute, for example, recently appointing a postdoc representative responsible for welcoming new postdocs to the department. This year's survey results have just been circulated, and the department has rapidly responded to a **request for a baby changing facility**.

Also offered is a **plant science postdoc mentoring group**, which supplements the University-wide mentoring scheme by supporting postdocs in their search for an internal or external mentor. Moreover, the Committee organises **regular postdoc lunches** where members suggest topics for discussion, including college affiliation, open access publishing and funding opportunities. Additionally, postdocs in the Department of Plant Sciences have the opportunity to invite two external speakers per year for the **departmental seminar**, and the talks are organised by the Postdoc Committee.

In summary, the Postdoc Committee of the Department of Plant Sciences aims to **ensure that all postdocs in the department have the best possible experience** in their roles and will continue to do so in the future.

School of Biological Sciences

Department of Biochemistry

The Department of Biochemistry has over 130 postdocs spread across three buildings. Their research spans diverse topics, ranging from biophysics and structural biology to cancer and neurodegenerative diseases.

Despite the provision of an annual '**Postdoc Research Day**', there was still a perceived lack of interaction between postdocs, very limited collaboration, and minimal sharing of expertise across the department.

To counter these problems and bring the postdoc community together, the Departmental Postdoc Committee initiated a more regular series of events called the '**5-cubed mixers**'. Held at least once per academic term, every event features 5 postdocs each presenting short, 5-minute, 5-slide presentations to their departmental postdoc peers. The slides allow the speakers to introduce themselves and give an overview of their research. Crucially, the last slide of each presentation highlights the **potential for collaborations and the sharing of expertise**. Each presentation is followed by 5 minutes for questions, and the event ends with a further networking and discussion session afterwards. '5-cubed mixers' have now been run three times, and they have proven to be incredibly successful. Key to this was the provision of resources from the Researcher Development Pitch competition, which have enabled us to cater for the events and keep the networking discussions going.

Impact has been delivered in a number of ways: individuals seeking specific pieces of equipment have found others in the department who can lend it to them; several postdocs have **identified new ways of tackling experimental challenges** as a result of colleague advice; at least one new collaboration has been initiated; finally, there is an **increased sense of community** among the postdocs in the department, which should organically stimulate more examples of the above outputs.



Biochemistry Departmental Postdoc Committee

Left to right: Dr Neil Rzechorzek, Dr Rita Monson, Dr Matthew Watson, Dr Julie Bourseguin, Dr Kotryna Bloznelyte, Dr Amanda Chaplin

Department of Psychology

The Psychology Research Staff Committee was established in 2013 by Dr Nicole Horst, a postdoc who wanted to facilitate interactions between Psychology researchers. The need for action was reflected in the results of a staff survey that highlighted a lack of interaction and sense of community within the department. Since its inception, and largely due to Nicole's dogged persistence in the face of general departmental apathy, the Committee has successfully delivered a range of events, including **career planning and discussion panels, media/communications training and sessions on accessing University resources**, activities singled out in the feedback for the department's Athena SWAN application as examples of good practice.

The Psychology postdoc web portal was also commended by the PCN for collating in one place otherwise obscure, difficult to find information. The Committee has continued to lead by example, creating a **departmental newsletter and organising department-wide events** including monthly talks by members of staff.

The current focus is on organising **social events with the aim of fostering a sense of community** within the department (still a problem area) and welcoming newcomers. Recent events have included an International Bring & Share food event, a Bake-Off-style competition and a Pizza, Posters & Prosecco networking event – all of which were well attended. Event planning has, historically, been constrained by lack of funding; however, following the University's recent increased emphasis on employee wellbeing, the department has established a social events budget that has supported recent events organised by the Committee in collaboration with the department's administrative staff, graduate representatives, and Wellbeing, Equality and Diversity Committee.

Since January 2019, the Committee has been co-chaired by Dr Kaili Clackson and Dr Debra Spencer. Although member numbers have varied over the years, the committee typically consists of around six people. It is a constant challenge to recruit new members and engender enthusiasm for committee activities.



Psychology Research Staff Committee

*Left to right: Dr Kanad Mandke, Dr Debra Spencer (co-chair), Dr Carolin Sievers,
Dr Bronagh McCoy, Dr Kaili Clackson (co-chair) and Samuel Gibbon*

Missing from the photo: Dr Vasanti Jadva

School of Biological Sciences

Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience

The Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience (PDN) is one of the largest of the School of Biology. Formed by the merger in 2006 of the Anatomy and Physiology departments, its scientific fields and cultures are very diverse. The new PDN department appointed an academic as a Postdoc Liaison Officer, whose role was to liaise with the newly created postdoc branch of the Career Service and to facilitate postdoc support and activities in the department.

The first actions were to create a **postdoc-specific email list**, name postdoc representatives who could sit on Academic Staff meetings and initiate various activities such as a Postdoc Research Symposium. After a few years, the postdoc Symposium fused with the less-attended graduate Symposium to become the very successful **PDN Research Symposium**. This runs over 2 days, is organised by a committee of postdocs and PhD students and showcases PDN's research at all career levels.

Other initiatives included the **Postdoc Master Classes**, originally launched to give postdocs lecturing experience. This series has now outgrown its department boundaries and has become the very successful University-wide **Life Sciences Masterclass**. A **Career Stories series** has also been run, where academics at different career stages tell the story of their scientific journey. Recently, the PDN postdoc representatives launched the **Coffee Chalks**, with the aim to combine a social and scientific event together. The Coffee Chalks are weekly informal short talks (~20 minutes each, on Friday mornings at 10am during term time), accompanied by coffee/tea and fruit/pastries (paid for by the department). Speakers are encouraged to use a chalk board (hence the name) instead of slides to present their work. This is a successful event, with 20-30 people per week attending, and feedback from a survey was very positive and highlighted the benefits of exchanging with colleagues in a friendly atmosphere.

PDN Committee



*Dr Benedicte
Sanson*



*Dr Andrea
Dimitracopoulos*



Dr Audrey Hay



*Dr Muhammad
Arsalan Khan*



Dr Elena Scarpa

School of Arts and Humanities

Faculty of Divinity

The Faculty of Divinity is small, and currently only eight postdocs are employed by the Faculty. Therefore, all early career scholars (e.g. temporary teaching/research associates, College based Junior Research Fellows) are invited to participate in the **Early Career Scholar (ECS) Committee**, which was established in Michaelmas term 2016. The committee's current chair, Dr Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal, represents ECSs matters with **voting rights at the Faculty Board**.

With the Faculty's support, the committee organises different activities to foster a supportive work environment, for example, **annual receptions to welcome new early career scholars**. Since all staff are invited to these events, they provide an excellent opportunity for colleagues to get to know each other, thus fostering the ECSs fast integration into the Faculty. Furthermore, the ECSs meet for **lunch seminars to present their research** in an informal way and to receive peer feedback. These meetings usually take place once or twice per term. For instance, an ECS recently gave a mock lecture in order to prepare for a job interview. Moreover, the Faculty has a **postdoc officer** (currently in this role Dr Simeon Zahl), who collaborates with the ECS committee, for instance in making sure that every postdoc has a mentor.



*Early Career Scholar
Committee Representative
Dr Hjördis Becker-Lindenthal*

Faculty of Music

An Early Career **Researcher (ECR)** committee was set up in The Faculty of Music in 2014/2015 by Dr Ananay Aguilar and Dr Matthew Machin-Autenrieth. They designed a **welcome pack for new ECRs joining the Faculty**, this is still being used and updated on an annual basis by the committee of which Dr Francesca Vella and Dr Charlotte Bentley are the current representatives.

ECR representation in Faculty business has increased over the past 5 years; ECR representatives sit on the Faculty Board, the Colloquium committee, Library committee, Staff-Student committees (UG/PG). A **formal mentoring scheme for ECRs** has been introduced to make sure that all postdocs receive mentoring from senior colleagues. An ECR-PhD mentoring scheme has also been set up.

Development opportunities in the university have increased over the years in the Faculty. New ECRs are now offered an **induction on their arrival in Cambridge** from the current ECR representatives.

Early Career Researcher Committee Representatives



Dr Charlotte Bentley



Dr Francesca Vella

University Partner Institutions

Babraham Institute

The Babraham Postdoc Committee oversees the Postdoc Programme at Babraham Institute (BI) and meets four times a year to discuss all matters relating to postdocs. The committee discusses **postdoc training, career development and management of the BI Travel Fund**, which provides generous support for postdocs to attend scientific conferences. The committee is composed of 16 members including postdocs from all BI departments and non-postdoc members (group leaders, administration and HR representatives). The diverse membership bridges this committee to other BI committees, ensuring cohesive internal policies at BI. It also safeguards the continuity of the committee by minimizing the rotating participation of the postdoc members.

A recent achievement steered by members of the committee was the organization of a now **annual international postdoc retreat**. Despite representing a large part of the BI scientific community, few events were exclusively aimed at postdoctoral researchers. The postdoc committee thought it would be pertinent to fill this gap and that it would be particularly interesting to bring together an international community of postdocs. So, with the support of the BI Knowledge Exchange Committee (KEC) and the remaining members of the Postdoc Committee, Dr Claire Senner (Hemberger's lab), Dr Danika Hill (Linterman's lab) and Dr Clara Novo (Rugg-Gunn's lab) organized in 2017 the first postdoc international retreat as a platform for sharing scientific ideas and to network with international fellow postdoctoral researchers. Since then, another international postdoc retreat took place in 2018 and the next one will be held in 2020. The postdoc retreats bring an exciting and stimulating postdoctoral community together and inspire new ideas and interactions.



Babraham Institute Postdocs attending the first international Postdoc Retreat in Portugal, 2017

Postdoc Chairs' Network Quinquennial Report 2019

Tariq Masood, Jacek Mokrosiński, Katharina Greve, Hollie Godden, Liz Simmonds

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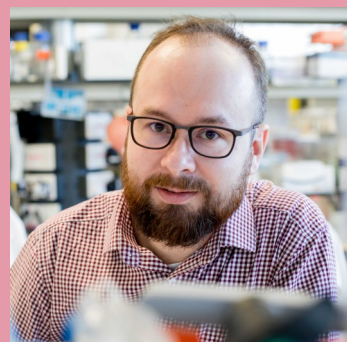


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