

Postdoc Code of Practice 2015/16

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Contents

1.2 Summary of commitments of postdocs, team leaders and the ICR.....	2
2.1 Managing the postdoctoral project	5
2.2 Research team and environment	6
2.3 Funding and resourcing research	7
2.4 Supervision and teaching.....	8
2.5 Publication and authorship.....	9
2.6 Researcher employment contracts, training and career development	9
2.7 Profile raising	11
2.8 Contribution to ICR community and governance.....	12
2.9 Planning ahead and leaving the ICR.....	12
2.10 References.....	14
3.1 Useful contacts	15

1

Introduction

A postdoctoral role is considered a transitional training period in a research career. Clarifying the responsibilities of the parties involved can help ensure a high-quality training experience for individuals and benefits for team leaders and research organisations. Field-standard guidance exists, such as the ‘Compact between postdoctoral appointees and their mentors’¹ published by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMCs), which defines the roles of postdocs and their supervisor or team leader. This document aims to clarify expectations and responsibilities for ICR postdocs and their team leaders during the postdoc contract, as well as support and resources provided by the ICR. It focuses specifically on nine key topics; 1) Managing the postdoctoral project, 2) Research team and environment, 3) Funding and resourcing research, 4) Supervision and teaching, 5) Publication and authorship, 6) Researcher employment contracts, training and career development, 7) Profile raising, 8) Contribution to ICR community and governance, 9) Planning ahead and leaving the ICR. 1.2 summarises the responsibilities of each party, while section 2 gives further detail on the nine areas described.

1.1 Terminology

- ‘Postdocs’ refers to postdoctoral training fellows or equivalent
- ‘Team leader’ refers to a line manager, Principle Investigator (PI) or supervisor.

1.2 Summary of commitments of postdocs, team leaders and the ICR

A postdoctoral appointment at the ICR is a trainee position in which scientists build on their technical skills and intellectual capabilities, and drive research forward towards clear objectives. This section summarises the broad commitments that would be expected of postdocs, their team leaders and the ICR (further detail follows in section 2).

1.2.1

Postdocs at the ICR commit to:

-
- performing research of the highest standard, with integrity, keeping complete and accurate records of data/outputs and serving as role models to junior scientists such as PhD students.
 - driving forward research projects to achieve agreed goals, and seeking opportunities to show their intellectual leadership, by developing hypotheses and approaches.
 - seeking opportunities to develop their skills, raising their profile and that of their research, and keeping abreast of the latest literature and technological developments in their field through reading, attending seminars and participating in training and conferences if appropriate/available.
 - seeking constructive feedback and challenge from team leader, colleagues and peers, and preparing for and participating in the annual appraisal/salary review system (SRS).
 - taking ownership of their own career, seeking input and advice from their team leader and colleagues and reflecting on their own strengths, skills and interests.

1.2.2

Team leaders at the ICR commit to:

- seeking to develop the intellectual independence of postdocs, who are distinct from other researchers at the ICR such as SO grade staff or PhD students, and acknowledging that a postdoctoral position is a trainee role that may lead to a more a senior research role.
- providing time, the right environment and advice to help postdocs build on their technical skills and scientific knowledge to become experts in their field.
- encouraging postdocs to grow progressively more independent and take on extra responsibilities such as managing staff or budgets, to provide exposure to the additional aspects of a research team leader role.
- defining mutually agreed objectives for the postdoc's projects and articulating expectations on the individual at induction, in one-to-one meetings and in the annual appraisal.
- providing constructive feedback, for example in one-to-one meetings and the annual appraisal, to help postdocs assess their

track record and potential in pursuing a future career, whether academic independence or other roles (along with additional mentors and sources of advice from within or outside the ICR).

1.2.3

The ICR commits to:

- providing opportunity for postdocs to perform research of the highest quality, through provision of lab space, infrastructure and core services to facilitate research excellence.
- encouraging a positive and productive working environment and culture, and supporting both team leaders and their team.
- supplementing the career development support from a team leader with central activities and contacts including training, careers events, staff associations and networks.
- supporting academic career progression of postdocs, both through the team or division, and centrally e.g. via the Learning & Development (L&D) team and University of London careers advisors.
- providing clear and timely information on the terms and conditions of a postdoctoral position, advice on HR issues such as induction, probation, appraisal and end of contract, and seeking to implement the principles of the 'Concordat to support the career development of researchers'².

2

Commitments of postdocs, team leaders and the ICR

2.1 Managing the postdoctoral project

A postdoc position often involves working both independently with little day-to-day management from the team leader and operating collaboratively as part of a team.

Postdocs are expected to take ownership of their project(s). They should ensure they have clarified and agreed priorities and expectations in terms of research outputs and management of the project with their team leader. They should drive their own academic advancement e.g. reading published literature in the field, keeping technical skills and expertise up to date, attending seminars, meetings and conferences (where opportunities/funding exist) and seeking opportunity to raise the profile of their work and gather feedback on it (subject to confidentiality limitations). Although guided by their team leader, with experience postdocs will formulate their own hypotheses and steer the direction of the research, showing considerable signs of intellectual progress and development. In some disciplines (e.g. in drug discovery), there is a strong emphasis on team science and postdocs work as part of a multidisciplinary team directed by the strategy of the centre or unit. Collaborations and expertise from external research groups may also be identified by a postdoc.

Team leaders play an important role in mentoring postdocs and helping to provide direction for the research, particularly at the early stages of the postdoc position. They help refine research skills by providing regular feedback on performance and encouraging their postdocs in academic pursuits e.g. writing papers, attending training. Where appropriate to the lab or project, team leaders will provide intellectual freedom for postdocs to formulate hypotheses, and design and lead projects either individually or as part of a multidisciplinary team. It is useful for team leaders and postdocs to agree frequency and modality of progress/project meetings at an early stage of the postdoctoral tenure so that the postdoc receives feedback on a regular basis. Formal routes such as appraisal also provide an opportunity for discussions.

The ICR supports postdocs in developing research skills, accessing technical expertise and facilities, developing communication, project and people management skills, and building networks across the organisation and externally. The PostDoc Association Committee (PDAC) represents postdocs across the ICR and works with Learning and Development (L&D) to provide training and careers support. The ICR is a college of the University of London and postdocs may be able to access training from other colleges or London universities in addition to internal support. Training is available for team leaders in aspects such as managing a team and running effective appraisal meetings.

2.2 Research team and environment

The ICR is a research-intensive institute with a culture of focus, collaboration and excellence. Cross-discipline projects are common, and postdocs are committed to driving their research forward at the highest standard.

Postdocs are considered role models for junior researchers, and they often play a role in training colleagues. Opportunities to formally mentor a junior researcher or be an associate supervisor to a student may be available. They may have practical or administrative responsibilities such as managing a piece of equipment or as a room supervisor. All researchers are responsible for carrying out work with integrity (details are provided in the Good Research Practice Guidelines). It is essential to keep complete and accurate laboratory note books, and ensure appropriate annotation, storage and archive of all materials, data and databases, ensuring these are retrievable by colleagues. Internal and external legal and ethical regulations such as Home Office licences and the Human Tissue Act must be adhered to.

Team leaders will encourage a culture of openness, communication and integrity within the team, and provide an environment supportive of the demands of academic research, where junior researchers are free to test ideas and discuss these

with colleagues. Expectation regarding the work ethic and culture of the lab should be discussed early on (e.g. during recruitment and in early meetings), and work practices within the team be clearly articulated (e.g. data handling, format of team meetings, supervisory structures and conference attendance). Team leaders may find it useful to access support through L&D on leading and managing a team.

The ICR expects transparency and research with the highest integrity. There is an emphasis on collaborative, interdisciplinary research. Good Research Practice guidelines are published on the intranet and there is a regular Research Integrity workshop that researchers are encouraged to attend. The ICR seeks to provide the facilities and environment conducive to the demands of scientific research. The ICR is fully engaged with the Athena SWAN Charter, which aims to enable researchers to reach their potential regardless of personal circumstance or gender, by promoting mentoring, flexible working and other equality issues

2.3 Funding and resourcing research

A successful research career requires an understanding of how research is funded, and identifying and securing funding for future research.

Postdocs keen to pursue the academic path should be aware of the research funding landscape and how they are currently funded. They should consider opportunities to obtain funding from external sources, for example travel bursaries, and familiarise themselves with funders who might be relevant to their future career e.g. for career development fellowships. They should seek sources of advice such as their team leader, Research Support Unit and their current funder. Other postdocs may wish to pursue research careers in the commercial sector and will have a different set of needs/drivers such as knowledge of the commercial landscape. Discussion with appropriate ICR team leaders and industry professionals may help identify these needs.

Team leaders may share information about the funding structure of the lab and encourage postdocs to gain experience in seeking funding. They should acknowledge the contribution of postdocs to funding applications where appropriate, and provide guidance to postdocs preparing funding applications e.g. by reviewing the applications and running mock interviews. The details of commercial collaborations, licencing agreements or material transfer agreements (MTAs) may also be of interest to postdocs, particularly if they are considering moving to the commercial sector.

The ICR encourages postdocs to source external funding where available. The Research Support Unit publishes sources of funding on the intranet and can offer advice to postdocs seeking funding opportunities. There are regular workshops on obtaining fellowship funding, collaborations with industry and achieving academic independence.

2.4 Supervision and teaching

The ICR is predominantly research-focused and because it is a postgraduate-only college it can provide only limited teaching opportunities to postdocs.

Postdocs will be aware that they may need to seek opportunities to gain teaching experience for future jobs. Opportunities to do this include mentoring or training a junior colleague, supervising a summer vacation student, participating in outreach activities e.g. STEM Ambassador scheme, or volunteering to teach a technical seminar within the division or via the L&D team. Evening or part-time lecturing may also be available at other London universities.

Team leaders will support postdocs in gaining teaching experience and consider opportunities for postdocs to gain experience in mentoring junior researchers, such as a vacation student.

The ICR acknowledges that it may be important for postdocs to gain teaching experience. The organisation endorses the STEM Ambassador scheme and other outreach activities (see section 3

for contacts) and postdocs are able to apply to supervise a vacation student. Further information on developing these skills can be sought from the L&D team, who can also advise on introductory training in teaching/lecturing.

2.5 Publication and authorship

Researchers are largely judged on the quality of their research outputs, particularly their publications and any patents they have filed, and it is important that postdocs can meet these goals.

Postdocs are encouraged to consider a publication strategy early on and to discuss this with the team leader regularly. If the postdoc is a lead or contributing author on a paper, the postdoc will have contributed to it through writing drafts of part or all of the manuscript, preparation of figures or data analysis. They will be involved in submitting the manuscript, and viewing and responding to reviewer comments, with the support of their team leader.

Team leaders will discuss authorship of manuscripts/patents with those involved, particularly the lead author. They will seek contribution from the postdoc in the preparation of the manuscript or patent application and appreciate that this offers a useful development opportunity for postdocs. They will provide opportunity for postdocs to be involved in the submission and review process, seeing and responding to reviewer comments and helping draft responses.

The ICR publishes guidelines on publication and authorship and encourages open discussion between team leaders and their team members. Support with scientific writing or English Language for non-native speakers can be accessed via L&D. The Enterprise Unit can provide advice on the protection of intellectual property.

2.6 Researcher employment contracts, training and career development

The ICR has a workforce agreement³ which means that individuals can work on postdoctoral training fellow (PDTF) contracts for a maximum of 7 years at the ICR (or up to 10 years including

equivalent positions outside of the ICR). All PDTF contracts are fixed-term, after which postdocs may pursue another research role in academia or the commercial sector, or non-research roles related or unrelated to science. A number of ICR postdocs will become independent academics and set up their own team.

Postdocs should seek feedback from their team leader on their performance and future career options, for example during one-to-one meetings and appraisal reviews. Talking to colleagues within or outside the immediate team can provide alternative perspectives on progress and future careers, as can developing professional networks. Postdocs should also review their skills and seek out information on different career paths through careers advisors, L&D, the PostDoc Association and former ICR scientists (see section 3). They are encouraged to talk to their team leader well in advance of their contract end date to establish steps they can take to prepare for the next move.

Team leaders play a key role in supporting postdocs' career development in the demanding and uncertain environment of academic research. They have a breadth of experience and contacts to share with postdocs. Discussions during one-to-one meetings and the annual appraisal provide an opportunity for team leaders to help postdocs review progress, develop a career plan, recommend development activities and encourage postdocs to take advantage of appropriate support available outside the team (e.g. L&D, other London universities). They also encourage postdocs to talk about their research and seek mentorship/input from others outside of the team (e.g. other team leaders). As a postdoc gains experience, team leaders may delegate more responsibilities e.g. budget management, supervision and training and involvement in recruiting new team members. Resources and training to support the development of staff can be accessed via the ICR training website or by contacting L&D.

The ICR's Human Resources team notifies team leaders when appraisals are due and contacts individuals and their managers when contract end dates are approaching to prompt discussion

between both parties. Guidance on the process and contract terms and conditions can be found on the intranet and HR advisors are available to give advice or run information sessions specifically for postdocs or managers if requested. The ICR supports the continued development of postdocs and the L&D team provides a broad development programme to supplement the training and expertise of the team, as well as support in finding a job. Preparing postdocs for their next career move, particularly supporting progress on the academic career path, is a key priority of the Athena SWAN Charter. The ICR provides a number of platforms for postdocs to develop mentoring relationships in addition to their current team leader, for example through networking events, socials, collaborative initiatives with other universities and initiatives from the PostDoc Association. A 'career health check for researchers' workshop is available for postdocs to review their career progression and plan for the future, and one-to-one appointments with impartial careers advisors are also offered (contact L&D or visit the website for details).

2.7 Profile raising

An important part of success in research involves creating a scientific niche and gaining recognition for findings across the global research community.

Postdocs will be mindful of the importance of raising their profile and communicating achievements and research interests to others inside and outside the ICR. If opportunities are available (and subject to confidentiality limitations), presenting at conferences and talking to other experts in the field are good ways to do this. Developing a network of peers and collaborators is key to a successful research career. Postdocs may also want to get involved in communicating their research to non-scientific audiences, through public engagement work or contributing to the ICR's website.

Team leaders will champion the work of their postdocs and acknowledge their contribution when presenting their work. They support postdocs to raise their own profile (e.g. within the ICR and

externally, e.g. at conferences if possible). They may help postdocs engage in the wider research community by providing contacts/collaborators, opportunity to contribute to grant writing or peer review of manuscripts, or by writing review articles.

The ICR is a leading cancer research centre globally and postdocs play a key role in championing the work of ICR. Training and support is available, for example with presenting at a research conference, managing research collaborations or communicating with the media. There are opportunities to write blog articles or give talks to a lay audience e.g. to donors.

2.8 Contribution to ICR community and governance

Opportunities to engage in the wider ICR community can allow the development of new skills relevant to future careers, whether in academia or outside.

Postdocs can contribute to the community of the ICR through running committee meetings and organising events such as the Postdoc Away Day. Opportunities can be accessed through the PostDoc Association.

Team leaders should be supportive of postdocs contributing to the wider ICR community as this can help develop skills important for their future career.

The ICR recognises that the postdoc body represents a highly skilled, knowledgeable and valuable group within the ICR workforce. The ICR is committed to consultation with the postdoc body on key initiatives via the PostDoc Association and welcomes postdoc reps on key ICR committees such as Academic Board, Chief Executive Advisory Forum, Athena SWAN working groups and Equality Steering Group. Occasionally ICR committee posts will be advertised on the intranet and (where appropriate) postdocs are encouraged to gain experience of management by applying.

2.9 Planning ahead and leaving the ICR

The majority of postdocs will not pursue their career in the long term at the ICR and after their postdoctoral tenure will leave the organisation. It is important to discuss the end of a postdoctoral position at the outset so that expectations are clear to both the team leader and the postdoc. Closer to the time (but in advance of the contract end date), it is essential to ensure lab notebooks are complete and accurate, and useful to create a plan to ensure research continuity and mutual understanding of what happens to the project after the postdoc leaves the ICR.

Postdocs may find when leaving the ICR that there are still outstanding publications to complete and it may be necessary to maintain communication with their former team leader or colleagues. It is useful to discuss how this communication will work before leaving the ICR and agree a project plan and milestone timeline together. In some cases a postdoc may have the opportunity to take aspects of their work with them to start their own research team. It is important to remember that all research conducted at the ICR is the property of the ICR and discussions must be initiated early on between the postdoc, team leader and any other stakeholders e.g. collaborators, if there is the potential to take aspects of the work to a new lab. In some cases the nature of the work may not be conducive to this (e.g. proprietary research, which is defined at recruitment). The Enterprise Unit can provide advice in these situations.

Team leaders' wealth of experience places them in a strong position to give advice to postdocs on possible next career moves. The further level of involvement of the team leader may vary depending on the next career step of the postdoc and team leaders may wish to draw a postdoc's attention to other support available (e.g. careers advisors, L&D courses and events). A full list of resources available to postdocs can be found in section 3. Team leaders should ensure at the very early stages of the postdoctoral appointment that it is clear whether there may be scope for the postdoc to take aspects of their project with them to start their own team, as this may not be feasible in some situations.

The ICR provides a range of resources for postdocs to help explore their career options, make useful contacts and networks, and transition out of the ICR, including impartial advice from trained careers advisors. There is a strong focus on training for academic independence with various initiatives such as Pathway to Independence, support with applying for fellowships, and access to senior academics and funders to give advice and guidance. Information on many other careers and useful contacts can also be accessed through L&D and the University of London careers service. The ICR's Enterprise Unit is a good source of expertise in intellectual property and confidentiality issues that might be raised when a postdoc leaves the ICR. All original research lab-books and data remain the property of the ICR and must stay at the ICR; postdocs taking aspects of research with them will be permitted to take copies. It may also be necessary to discuss IP issues with the new institution and the Enterprise Unit can facilitate this with support of the postdoc. A number of ICR team leaders also have strong links with industry, as does the Enterprise Unit.

2.10 References

1. Compact between postdoctoral appointees and their mentors; Association of American Medical Colleges, December 2006:
<https://members.aamc.org/eweb/upload/Compact%20Between%20Postdoctoral%202006.pdf>
2. Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers; 2008: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/vitae-concordat-vitae-2011.pdf>
3. Workforce Agreement for Fixed-Term Contracts:
<http://ispace.icr.ac.uk/corporate/departments/hr/Human%20Resources%20IADL/Fixed-Term%20Contracts%20-%20Workforce%20Agreements.pdf>

3

Useful resources and contacts for ICR postdocs

The ICR intranet contains details of the contacts that you may need during the postdoctoral time at ICR (see “Life at ICR – New Starters” pages). The table below identifies some of the key contacts. If you are unable to find what you are looking for on the intranet or the table below, contact your HR advisor.

3.1 Useful contacts

	Topic	Further support from	Contact information
1	The PostDoc Association, postdoc representation at ICR, socials, mentoring, postdoc travel/training bursaries	ICR PostDoc Association Committee	Postdoc-committee@icr.ac.uk Postdoc Intranet pages ‘New postdocs – what you need to know’ – induction session to attend during your first year at ICR
2	Postdoc training, career development	Learning & Development team	Ex 4037 hrtraining@icr.ac.uk http://training.icr.ac.uk
3	Health and safety induction training	Local rules will be available in your team, Healthy and Safety department for all training and additional advice.	Sutton call ex 4250 Chelsea call ex 5135
4	Site issues e.g. building access, car parking, porters, meeting rooms	Site management	Sutton call ex 4148 Chelsea call ex 5217
5	Ordering/Agrosso,	Purchasing	Purchasing-

	expenses claims, travel arrangements	department	Sutton@icr.ac.uk Purchasing-Fulham@icr.ac.uk
6	Budget queries, grants and finance management	Finance	Breast Cancer Research and Cancer Biology: ex 5194 Cancer Therapeutics and Clinical Studies: ex 5424 Molecular Pathology, Structural Biology, Genetics and Epidemiology and Radiotherapy and Imaging: ex 5382
7	IT accounts, email, hardware or software installation, Facnet (room booking) account	IT Helpdesk	Tel: 4444 Email: ithelpdesk@icr.ac.uk
8	Employment process e.g. probation, appraisal, contracts, sickness absence, parental leave, recruitment	HR team	Sutton: ex 4045 Chelsea: ex 5110
9	Gender and equality issues; family and work-life balance; Athena SWAN project	Athena SWAN Coordinator	Athena SWAN coordinator Ex 4129
10	Pensions	Pensions team	Pension-enquiries@icr.ac.uk Ex 5406

11	Pay, season ticket loans, staff discounts	Payroll	payroll@icr.ac.uk , Ext 5373 and ext 5199
12	Funding opportunities, grant writing, outreach schemes	Research Support Unit	Research Information Officer, ex 5459
13	Information on summer vacation student scheme	Research Support Unit	Research Information Officer, ex 5459
14	Library services	Library	library@icr.ac.uk ex 4230
15	Union	Staffside	Staff-side-chairman@icr.ac.uk
16	Former ICR researchers through LinkedIN (postdoc alumni group)	Established by the Postdoc Association	https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&id=7424326&trk=my_groups-tile-grp
17	Intellectual property, patents, commercialisation, industrial collaborations, MTAs	ICR Enterprise Unit	enterprise@icr.ac.uk
18	Core facilities	Core facility managers and staff	Outlined on the intranet
19	Scientific computing support	Scientific Computing User Forum	Contact hrtraining@icr.ac.uk to join the mailing list.

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Related documentation

Much of the useful documentation and guidance for new staff can be accessed via the “new starters” pages on the ICR’s intranet. The following are a few specific documents relevant to postdocs.

Contracts, terms and conditions of employment

[Fixed Term Contracts – Managers’ Guidance](#)

Career Development Guidance for postdocs

Researcher Development Framework:

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/Vitae-Researcher-Development-Framework.pdf>

The annual SRS/appraisal:

<http://ispace.icr.ac.uk/corporate/departments/hr/supportformanagers/Pages/AppraisalSRS.aspx>

[Making the Right Moves; a practical guide to scientific management for postdocs and new faculty](#) – Burroughs Wellcome

Fund and Howard Hughes Medical Institute (copies available from L&D)

[At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator](#) by Kathy Barker (copies available from L&D)

Good Research Practice Guidelines

<http://ispace.icr.ac.uk/LifeatICR/new-starters/Pages/GoodResearchPractice.aspx>

Other codes of practice

ICR [Student codes of practice](#)

The Institute of Education ‘[Good Practice in Leading and Supporting a Research Team; A Guide for Research Staff and Project Managers](#)’

University of Edinburgh ‘[Code of Practice for the Management of Research Staff](#)’

University of Bath ‘[Code of Practice for the employment of research staff](#)’

[End of Postdoc Code of Practice]

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