

Postdoc Career Development & Training

Learning &
Development and
the PostDoc
Association

Workshops,
resources,
networks and
support for postdoc
career development
at ICR



“It is vital for the long term success of the ICR that we continue to prepare our researchers to succeed in the highly competitive field of academic research.”

**Professor Paul Workman,
Chief Executive, ICR**

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Foreword from the Postdoc Association Chair

Welcome to postdoc life at the ICR!

Being a postdoc at the ICR is both challenging and rewarding. With around 150 postdocs at the ICR, we represent approximately a quarter of the ICR's research workforce and cover a diverse range of scientific disciplines. The ICR is a unique organisation with a culture of hard work and collaboration, and I'm sure you'll find your time here stimulating and memorable.

There is no denying that being a postdoc is a challenging career step. The environment is competitive, hours are long, expectations are high and it can feel like you're competing against the clock – to get papers, patents, funding and so on. However, here at the ICR, there are many opportunities to develop your skills and make contacts to help you pursue the future career you're aiming for, whatever that might be.

I'd urge you to make the most of the opportunities available to you. Don't leave things to the last minute either. It's tempting to wait until the final months to decide what to do next in a career, but it's worth thinking right from the start about how you'll use your time here to enhance your CV both in your research, but also outside. Whether it's developing new technical or computing skills, gaining confidence in giving talks, helping organise events or refining your scientific writing, there is plenty of support to help you on the way. The following pages outline some of that support, coordinated together with the Learning & Development team.

Getting involved in the Postdoc Association is a fantastic way to find out about the opportunities and support available to you, as well as getting to know other postdocs you might never have met otherwise. We meet on a monthly basis at lunch time, so feel free to drop in and find out what we're all about.

Enjoy your time at the ICR and good luck!

Holly Barker, Chair, Postdoc Association Committee

Email: pdac-chair@icr.ac.uk

Learning & Development team

Who are we and what do we do?

The ICR's Learning & Development team focusses on supporting the career development and skills training of research staff and students. This includes organising and running workshops, offering bespoke individual and team development opportunities, supporting networking initiatives and organising events. Our team works closely with staff via the staff associations and with team leaders/managers to ensure all support is bespoke. The team facilitates sharing of expertise across the ICR, with team leaders, careers advisors and other experts involved in training programmes.

Team members

Dr Amy Moore, Researcher Development Advisor

Amy completed her PhD under the mentorship of Professor Chris Paraskeva at the University of Bristol. Whilst writing her thesis she spent six months teaching in the Physiology and Pharmacology department before joining the ICR's Section of Paediatric Oncology as a Postdoc. During this time Amy took an active role in the ICR's Postdoc Association, and discovered a real enthusiasm for the training and career development of scientists. Amy joined the Learning & Development team in 2010. She coordinates a programme of training and careers support for the ICR's scientists, with a particular focus on postdoc development. She regularly delivers training and works with the Postdoc Association to tailor training support to scientists. Amy also provides individual careers coaching, and is accredited in psychometric testing by the BPS. Amy led in the development of the Pathway to Independence programme in collaboration with colleagues at BBSRC and The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, and is now exploring how the ICR can support career development of clinical scientists.

Dr Elise Glen, Researcher Development Coordinator

Elise joined the ICR in February 2013 having been a Postdoc at Newcastle University working on a number of exome sequencing projects. Before that she completed her PhD in pharmacogenetics in collaboration with AstraZeneca. During her time in Newcastle Elise was involved in leading seminars and lectures for undergraduate medical and pharmacology students and was involved in her institute's public engagement committee. In her role at the ICR Elise works predominantly with the students and scientific officers to coordinate and develop the training offered. She also coordinates central training in computing and bioinformatics, working closely with the ICR's scientific computing user forum (SCUF).

Mr Neil Walford, Head of Organisational Development

Neil established the ICR Learning & Development function. Previous roles include career development talent management and recruitment at BT, Learning and Organisational Development at

CDC Capital Partners, as well as developing the MBA Career Development programmes. He graduated from the University of London (Birkbeck College) with an MSc in Organisational Behaviour, and additional accreditations include psychometric testing (BPS), coaching (ILM) and mediation (ACAS). Neil is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Advisory Faculty, a Visiting Lecturer in Strategic Human Resources and partner in a HR consultancy organisation.

Who do we work with?

The following groups/organisations are involved in the ICR's researcher training and career development programme

Staff Associations (Postdoc, Scientific Officers, student committee, CDF network)

The Academic Dean's Team and Academic Services including Registry and the Research Support Unit

Team leaders, including the Chief Executive and Director of Research

Scientific Computing team and the scientific computing user forum (SCUF)

External collaborators such as C2 Careers Advisors (University of London), Imperial College, UCL, The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, the BBSRC, CRUK and the Babraham Institute Vitae (a national body that champions career development of researchers)

Contacting us

You can find out more about the activities of the team by visiting the training website. The website includes a link to download the training catalogue which summarises all the courses available.

<http://training.icr.ac.uk>

If you have a specific question or suggestion, the team always welcomes your input. Email hrtraining@icr.ac.uk and you'll be put in touch with the relevant team member.

Classroom workshops

The full range of classroom workshops available to ICR postdocs is outlined in the training catalogue. Below are some courses specifically of interest to postdocs (visit training.icr.ac.uk).

Fellowships – An Introduction

Writing for Publication – an introduction to publishing research

Science Communication

Presenting at a Research Conference

Statistics support including 6 module introductory course, SPSS,

GraphPad Prism, Stats in Oncology

Research Integrity

New postdocs – what you need to know

Scientific computing modules e.g. R, Linux and HPC, MATLAB, Photoshop, Illustrator. MS Office modules are also regularly held.

From Postdoc to PI – collaborative event with Imperial College

Careers Health Check for Researchers

One-to-one with a careers advisor

Networking for scientists

English Language (for non-native speakers)

Introduction to Bioinformatics (under development)

Technical seminars including Chemistry for Non Chemists, Bioassays in Drug Development, Introduction to Structural Biology, RNAi Screens, Practical Flow Cytometry, introduction to tissue culture.

Project Management

Effective Research Degree Supervision

There are a small number of mandatory courses that all staff must complete before their 6 month probation end. These are:

- Equality Excellence seminar
- Bullying and Harassment (classroom or online)
- Health, Safety & Environment Induction training
- Online modules (visit <http://training.icr.ac.uk> for the links)

Postdoc Association Committee

The ICR aims to encourage careers in science through promotion of networking, professional and personal development and increasing opportunities in science for postdocs.

Postdocs at the ICR play a pivotal role in both the day-to-day practice of research and to the discovery of new knowledge across virtually every field of Cancer Research. For many, the postdoc experience is a unique and critical juncture in their professional career.

With this in mind, the Postdoc Association (PDA) is dedicated to supporting postdocs both professionally and pastorally throughout their time at the ICR. The PDA focuses on the provision of networking opportunities, personal and professional training, and encouraging both scientific discussion and interaction within and outside the ICR.

You can contact the PDA committee by emailing postdoc-committee@icr.ac.uk.

Aims of the PDA

- assist postdocs in their career development
- provide a scientific forum for postdocs
- provide postdocs with learning and development opportunities
- promote interaction and networking between postdocs and other scientists (at the ICR as well as at other Institutions)
- provide postdoc representation and perspective in key initiatives within the ICR.

iSpace Pages

A central source for information on the activities of the PDA is our iSpace page (find under "Science and Research"). The PDA uses this web space to upload all committee meeting agendas and minutes, information on events and initiatives that the PDA is involved in. A number of presentations and recordings from previous careers conferences can also be accessed.

<http://ispace.icr.ac.uk/ScienceResearch/Postdoc/>.

Meetings

The PDA Committee (PDAC) meets for one hour at the end of every month in order to discuss the organization of activities and events, the participation at various boards and committees, and any other relevant business. These meetings are open to all postdocs. The meetings are video linked between Sutton and Chelsea and the times and dates can be found on the Postdoc Association iSpace page.

Internal and external involvement on boards and in committees

The PDA has representatives on several boards and committees, with the aim of providing feedback and promoting the PDA agenda. Current boards and committees on/in which the PDA has a representative include the following:

- Academic Board
- Equality Steering Group
- Athena SWAN Silver Steering Group
- Library Committee
- Chief Executive's Advisory Forum
- Common room committee (Chelsea)
- The Ups Club Committee (Sutton)

A full list of committee positions available can be found on the PDA intranet pages.

Travel bursaries

The Postdoc Association (PDA) is able to offer a small number of travel grants (up to £200) to support postdocs traveling to upcoming national or international conferences and training courses. Applications are judged anonymously by members of the PostDoc Association Committee (PDAC) and the Learning and Development team. Preference is given to those presenting their own research and who have not received funding from other sources. Postdocs are notified by email when the call for applications is launched.

Postdoc and student seminar series

Organised jointly by the PDA committee and the student committee, this provides both groups the opportunity to present their work (whatever stage it may be at) in an informal environment for discussion and feedback. You may want to practice giving talks, prepare for a job interview, want to raise the profile of your work and seek collaboration, or feel stuck with an experiment or technique and want advice or suggestions. Whatever the reason, come along and get involved.

“Make contacts with relevant people – speak with them, network. You'll be surprised how many contacts will turn out to be useful –directly or indirectly - at the end of your contract.” former PDA Committee member

Events organised by the PDAC

The PDAC organises social events to facilitate networking and interactions amongst postdocs and scientists at the ICR and other institutions. The events regularly organized by the PDAC include:

Coffee Afternoons

These events are organized on a monthly basis, alternating between Chelsea and Sutton. The PDA Coffee Afternoons are a regular and informal opportunity to meet fellow postdocs, have a chat, network and raise issues with members of the Postdoc Association.

Expanding Networks: scientific discussions between Postdocs and PIs

This initiative was developed by the PDAC to bring postdocs and team leaders together to discuss pertinent scientific issues in an informal environment. The format can vary, but it will typically involve a couple of short talks or panel discussions, followed by informal Q&A and networking sessions over drinks and nibbles.

Postdoc Away Day / Careers Conference

These events are organized biennially and aim to provide career information and networking opportunities. The Postdoc Away Day is a more relaxed event focusing on social activities that promote team building and networking. The Careers Conferences aims to highlight career paths and routes from external speakers who have pursued various career paths since being a scientist. The event often hosts workshops as part of the day that offer advice and guidance for individuals to help achieve career goals.

Summer Parties

These parties are normally organized in July, often with a specific theme. Past themes include the Olympic Games, the Circus and the Tropics. There are two such events organized every year, one at each site and they have been very successful. More recently these gatherings have been organized together with the Scientific Officers Association.

Autumn Cheese and Wine evening

These events provide an opportunity to interact in a relaxed and informal evening. This is a particularly good opportunity to meet newly appointed postdocs. There are two such events organised every year, usually in November, one each site.

All postdoc socials are primarily promoted via email, so keep an eye out for these and if you don't receive them, contact the IT helpdesk to ask to be added to the mailing list.

How else can I develop my skills and career at the ICR?

“I wish I'd realised earlier that there are plenty of opportunities for public engagement science writing at the ICR - for example contributing to the ICR blog. But you have to go and find the opportunities; they won't just fall into your lap.” – Former PDAC member

Opportunities for postdocs

There are a number of other initiatives and opportunities for you to get involved in which will enhance your CV and hopefully add to your ICR experience:

Scientific Computing User Forum

With recent advances in technology such as next generation sequencing, more and more researchers are facing the challenge of storing and manipulating large data files, often requiring knowledge of computer programming. As this is a constantly evolving field, it can often be useful to share expertise and discuss issues with others involved in this kind of work (whether a biologist, chemist or physicist). The Scientific Computing User Forum (SCUF) has been developed to provide researchers the opportunity to meet others across the ICR in the scientific computing field, bring along any issues you have and to provide a forum for sharing expertise and knowledge. This is also a great opportunity to make links and initiate collaborative work with other labs. To join the SCUF mailing list, contact hrtraining@icr.ac.uk.

Teaching opportunities

Given the lack of teaching opportunities at the ICR compared with other universities, the PDA seeks to provide opportunities for postdocs to develop teaching skills where they can. A number of postdocs provide short training seminars in key techniques or topics in their field of expertise. These seminars are opened ICR-wide and are supported by the L&D team. Topics include Introduction to Tissue Culture, Chemistry for Non Chemists, Introduction to Linux. Postdocs who are interested in providing a training seminar on a topic of interest can contact Learning & Development.

ICR also participates in the STEM Ambassador scheme which provides opportunities for researchers in STEM subjects to give talks or lessons in schools and participate in outreach events. Details can be found on iSpace.

Writing opportunities

If you'd like to refine your scientific writing skills, there are many opportunities to do this at ICR. There is the annual Mel Greaves science writing prize, the chance to write for the ICR science blog, and to contribute to the online Skills website which provides information for students on all aspects of life in research.

Science Communication

If you'd like to practice presenting research to a lay audience, the Bench to Bedside series of talks for corporate services staff are a great opportunity. Contact hrtraining@icr.ac.uk to volunteer.

Careers support for postdocs

Members of the L&D team are trained in running careers one-to-ones and discussions, giving CV feedback and arranging mock panel interviews. You can contact the team at any time to arrange these or discuss your options (hrtraining@icr.ac.uk). Members of the team are qualified in psychometrics such as Myers Briggs and coaching, this may be available (email to enquire).

C2 Careers consultants

The ICR also provides access to external, impartial careers advisors from the University of London careers consultancy, C2 Careers. The careers advisors who work at ICR either have backgrounds in scientific research or have worked with a number of similar organisations such as CRUK and EMBO. They visit both sites on a regular basis to provide one-to-ones and careers skills workshops. Look out for these on the training website. Topics include:

- Networking skills for scientists
- Creating Killer CVs
- Careers Health Check for Researchers
- Making the most of careers conferences and fairs
- Creating prize-winning scientific posters
- Intelligent job hunting

Careers Cafés

Running approximately once per term, these short, informal sessions give students and postdocs opportunities to hear from external speakers who have pursued different career paths. The sessions are held in a relaxed environment over coffee and biscuits with ample opportunity to ask questions. Topics to date include science communication, consultancy, patent law, project management and genetic counselling.

ICR postdoc LinkedIn group

The PDAC has created a postdoc and postdoc alumni LinkedIn group to facilitate networking between current and former postdocs. This is a great way to see where former postdocs have gone in their careers after leaving ICR. You can request to join, as long as you have a LinkedIn profile.

Careers webinars

It's not always convenient to attend workshops during the working day so L&D have commissioned C2 careers advisors to run webinars on career topics. These webinars have been recorded and are available on iSpace under Learning>Podcasts.

Aiming for an independent academic position

“Work hard and learn fast. 4-5 years go really fast. Design your approaches to give you straight answers.” – recently recruited junior PI

Pathway to Independence

Many Postdocs face numerous challenges when they are looking to make the transition to independent team leader. In 2013 the PDA committee worked with ICR’s Learning & Development and collaborators from the BBSRC (major UK funder) and The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute to develop a programme of support for top Postdocs hoping to make that career step. Speakers included eminent UK scientists (for example Prof Chris Marshall and Prof Paul Workman from ICR) and junior team leaders who recently made the transition who shared their experiences. The ICR plans to repeat this programme on a biennial basis. Information on the programme can be found on the website: <http://training.icr.ac.uk/pathway>.

From Postdoc to PI: A Collaboration with Imperial College

It’s difficult to know what it takes to make it as an independent academic, either in a research institute or in a university. This collaborative event brings recently recruited PIs from the ICR and Imperial College to give honest and open accounts of their experiences – in preparing a research proposal, applying for funding (both successful and unsuccessful), the recruitment and negotiation process, and other aspects of life as a PI. The event also brings senior researchers to describe what they look for when recruiting new junior team leaders, and funders to talk about schemes and opportunities available from them.

Advice from a junior ICR team leader

We asked our newly recruited career development faculty (CDF) for their advice on successfully navigating a postdoc career and establishing as an independent researcher. One responded with the following:

“My success as a postdoc and the establishment of a scientific career was essentially based on the following premises:

- 1) Enter a top lab/ institution with a very helpful supervisor. My supervisor was always available for discussion and to provide feedback. He encouraged me to try other approaches and use all the resources available.
- 2) Determine my scientific question and the experimental approaches very early on during my postdoc (within the 1st year). You need to find your niche and get familiar with the previous approaches and results. Optimize the approaches you think should be essential to assess the biological/ clinical relevance of your setting/hypotheses.
- 3) Be global. I used alternative approaches, novel views from other cancer related topics (bioinformatics, biophysics, etc...). Maximize your outputs by considering new tools. Feed from fellow postdocs.
- 4) Work hard and learn fast. 4-5 years go really fast. Design your approaches to give you straight answers.
- 5) Have contingency plans set up throughout your postdoc. Try to start with 2-3 projects that could interconnect if necessary. If the

priority project works fine, you will be able to follow other projects further down your career. In order to decide which project to follow at any given time, follow your instinct but feed it with multiple opinions.

- 6) Find quality time with your supervisor. Try to use that time accordingly – prepare it in advance, especially the things that worry you. Think global, not just the current/next experiment but also 6 months down the line.
- 7) Engage in scientific discussions with your fellows – either within your lab or from other labs. Participate in any event that would allow your scientific reasoning to be developed – seminars, talks, conferences...”

External support available to postdocs

Across London there are a number of universities and colleges which also provide training and career development opportunities. The bigger universities may run a wider selection of courses or run them more frequently.

- Royal Marsden Hospital
RMH runs a number of courses for corporate and other staff which ICR staff can access for free. To view courses available, log in to the RMH intranet via the link on iSpace and visit the HRFirstpoint > Learning and Development pages or email askHR@rmh.nhs.uk.

- Imperial College Postdoc Development Centre
www.imperial.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/postdocs1

Imperial run a number of courses and events for postdocs, including an “Introduction to Teaching and Learning” and an annual fellowships event.

- King’s College London researcher development programme:
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/pg/school/RDP>

- UCL staff development
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/od/research>

- Vitae (a national organisation that champions the career development of researchers)
www.Vitae.ac.uk

Vitae host a website providing a large source of career development information for researchers in academia. They also hold regular events that are often free to attend.

Commercial training providers (most provide ~50% discount for charities)

Reed Learning: www.reedlearning.com

Kaplan Hawksmere: www.hawksmere.kaplan.co.uk

GBS Corporate: www.gbscorporate.com

