

Postdoc Code of Practice

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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 to help clarify those expectations.

1.1 Terminology

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

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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). Postdocs 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. Postdocs might identify and suggest opportunities for collaboration with other research teams to enhance the outputs of their research project.

Team leaders play an important role in mentoring postdocs and helping to provide direction for the research, particularly at the early stages. Team leaders support postdocs by providing regular feedback on performance and encouraging academic pursuits; e.g. writing papers, attending training. It is useful for team leaders and postdocs to agree frequency and modality of the feedback early on in the postdoctoral project. Where appropriate, 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. Team leaders are expected to conduct annual appraisals for their staff and use this opportunity to provide structured feedback on progress and guidance on future plans, including encouraging postdocs to think about future research, in academia or non-academia, they may want to undertake after their time at ICR.

The ICR has a culture of idea and skill exchange driven by the research divisions and a central training team, the Learning and Development (L&D) team, to support staff and students in developing skills (e.g. technical, communication, project and people management skills) and to promote networks across the organisation and externally. The PostDoc Association Committee (PDAC) represents postdocs across the ICR and works with L&D to provide tailored 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 centrally for team leaders in aspects such as managing a team and running effective appraisal meetings. HR is available to support managers and employees with issues that may arise.

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 (e.g. MD/MSc/PhD students and Clinical Fellows), and often play a role in training colleagues. Opportunities to formally mentor a junior researcher or be as 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 and postdocs are encouraged to attend the Research Integrity training provided. 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 postdocs are encouraged to attend the Research Integrity training available. Work practices within the team should 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 seeks to provide the facilities and environment conducive to research of the highest quality and integrity and has a strong emphasis on collaborative, interdisciplinary research. Good Research Practice guidelines are published on the intranet and regular Research Integrity workshops are provided. The ICR is fully committed to creating a culture of equality for all and has a number of networks to support staff (BAME and LGBT+) as well as committing to the Athena SWAN Charter for gender equality.

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. Postdocs 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. Postdocs 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 should be encouraged to help identify these needs.

Team leaders may share information about the funding structure of the lab to help familiarise postdocs with the process of gaining 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 and training on these topics is provided centrally.

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 as well as providing a regular email newsletter on 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 having teaching experience is necessary for certain academic paths (e.g. lecturing). As such 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 and participating in outreach activities e.g. STEM Ambassador scheme. More formally, Postdocs may volunteer to deliver a technical seminar or training workshop in an area of expertise through the L&D team to promote internal skills-sharing. 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 runs [a vacation student scheme](#) that can provide supervisory opportunities for Postdocs. The L&D team can support postdocs to deliver technical seminars or workshops that can be incorporated in the central training provision.

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 in their training and to discuss this with the team leader on a regular basis. If the postdoc is a lead, co-lead or contributing author on a paper, the postdoc will have contributed to it through writing all or part of the manuscript, preparation of figures or data analysis. Postdocs 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. Team leaders 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. There is a strong provision of scientific writing skills training and English Language classes are available for non-native speakers via L&D. The Enterprise Unit can provide advice on the protection of intellectual property.

2.6 Profile raising & career development

An important part of success in research involves creating a scientific niche and gaining recognition across the global research community as well as building skills needed for career progression.

Postdocs should be aware of the importance of raising their profile within the scientific community, both inside and outside ICR and take steps to communicate their achievements and building their networks. Publishing their work, presenting at conferences, talking to experts in the field and using social media (e.g. LinkedIn; Twitter) are useful ways to achieve this. Communicating to non-scientific audiences are also considered important by research funders and postdocs can take part in ICR public engagement work and write for the ICR website or blog. Postdocs should seek feedback on performance from their team leader and colleagues and take steps to 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). Postdocs are encouraged to join the Postdoc Alumni LinkedIn group.

Team leaders will support postdocs in raising their profiles inside and outside the ICR through acknowledging their contributions (e.g. at conferences) and by enabling networks through their contacts and collaborators. Team leaders will also provide opportunities for postdocs to contribute to the writing of grants, scientific papers and reviews. Team leaders play a key role in supporting the broader career development of 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). Team leaders should 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 recognises postdocs play a key role in championing the work of ICR and provides opportunities for postdocs to raise their profile such as writing for the ICR blog, giving talks to donors or public engagement work (see section 3). Training on presenting at research conferences, managing collaborations, communicating with the media and using social media are also offered centrally. Preparing postdocs for their next career move is a key priority of the ICR and of the Athena SWAN Charter. The ICR provides a range of career development workshops (e.g. CV and interview skills) and regular 1-2-1 appointments with impartial careers advisors through the L&D team. Postdoc leavers can access ICR careers support for up to 1yr after they leave the ICR.

2.7 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 ICR community and governance by becoming active members of the PostDoc Association in order to represent postdocs at various ICR committees and organise events that benefit the ICR community (e.g ICR conference, Postdoc Away Day & Postdoc Careers Conference).

Team leaders should be supportive of postdocs contributing to the wider ICR community, such as being a member of the PostDoc Association, as this can help develop skills important for their future career (e.g. project management skills for those involved in organising events), enhances the postdoctoral experience and contributes to the benefit of the wider ICR.

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.

2.8 Employment contracts & planning ahead for leaving the ICR

The ICR has a workforce agreement³ with postdoc contracts being fixed-term for a maximum of 7 yrs (or 10 yrs for those with prior postdoctoral experience elsewhere). After that time, most postdocs will leave the ICR. A small minority of postdocs may transition to an alternative role within the ICR (e.g. HSO) but this is not a standard route of progression and postdocs should not expect this transition to always be available to them. As such, it is important to prepare for leaving the ICR from the beginning of a postdoctoral post. HR advisors are available to give advice or run information sessions specifically for postdocs and managers around contracts, appraisals and end-of-contracts if requested.

Postdocs are encouraged to continually discuss career progression and end-of-contract with their team leader. Before leaving the ICR, it is essential to ensure lab notebooks are complete and accurate and to clarify the expectations around what happens to the project and any outstanding publications after the postdoc leaves. Establishing a communication plan, a project plan

and a milestone timeline between postdoc and team leader is key where there is outstanding work. In some cases, a postdoc may be able to take aspects of their work with them to start their own research team at the discretion of the team leader. 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. Postdocs are expected to share their career progression with the ICR for statistical purposes.

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. Where possible, team leaders will guide and support postdocs to develop their own research niche.

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.

2.9 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:
<https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Tasks/DispForm.aspx?ID=429>

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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. 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Postdoc-committee@icr.ac.uk· Intranet pages for Postdoc Association· Intranet pages for new postdocs· Induction session to attend during your first year at ICR: 'New postdocs – what you need to know'
2	Postdoc training, career development	Learning & Development team	Ex 4557 or x4564 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,	Site management	Sutton call ex 4148 Chelsea call ex 5217

	porters, meeting rooms		
5	Ordering/Agresso , expenses claims, travel arrangements	Purchasing department	Purchasing-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;	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager Ex 4129

	Athena SWAN project		
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/7424326
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 ICR's intranet. The following are a few specific documents relevant to postdocs.

Contracts, terms and conditions of employment

[Fixed-Term Contracts - 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:

[Appraisals, development and promotions \(employees\)](#)

Guidance for managers of postdocs

[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

<https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Tasks/DispForm.aspx?ID=288>

Other codes of practice

ICR [Student codes of practice](#)

University of Edinburgh '[Code of Practice - Management and Career Development 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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