



Minutes of the meeting of the Post-Doc Forum held at 12noon on Monday 14 November 2016, in Room GC22, William Gates Building

Present: David Chisnall (Chair)
Claire Chapman (Secretary)
Daniel Bates
Salvator Galea
Alice Hutchings
Andrea Kells
Pietro Lio'
Laura Rimell
Caroline Stewart
Noa Zilberman

1. Apologies

Stephen Kell
Ekaterina Kochmar
Marwa Mahmoud

2. Minutes of last minutes

The minutes from the last meeting held on Monday 9 May 2016 were approved.

3. Report on actions from last meeting

- i. **Social Tea – plea for new mentors to be sent out with invitation to tea**
Two emails have been circulated to lab-ras and lab-sras with an invitation to attend the social tea on Thursday 17 November.
- ii. **Mentoring Scheme call out for volunteers update**
13 mentors were assigned mentees. However, 2 mentors have now left the Department and the number has decreased to 11. It was noted that current post docs have not been sent the mentor form to complete. CS will ask Joanne McNeely to circulate it. Discussion took place that a more emphatic approach of assigning mentors to new starters should be taken. The consensus view was that all new researchers should automatically be assigned a mentor prior to arrival, with an opt out option if requested. Mentees are usually assigned a mentor for 6 months.

Action: Caroline Stewart

- iii. **Cambridge University Technical Services – providing info in induction guidelines**

Addendum: Information on CUTS has already been provided in the Induction

Guidelines.

iv. **Anonymous case studies of RAs – potential questions to ask**

It was agreed to ask other members of the Forum to complete the questions CS had drafted and to feedback any comments.

It was questioned whether applicants can apply to be a Research Associate without a PhD. It was reported that it is not the normal route and each application would need to be reviewed centrally by Human Resources.

Action: Claire Chapman

A proposal was put forward to create an equivalent post to what commercial research organisations call a Research Programmer, which would be a career progression path for postdocs that didn't want to move towards research leadership, but did want to remain in research. This would then be available for projects that involved large amounts of engineering work.

It was agreed that each research group who shared this resource would need to partly fund the post by costing this in their initial grant application. It was agreed to ask the HoD or other senior members of the Lab for their view. If appropriate this could be discussed at Faculty Board. It was also noted that the minutes of these meetings should go to Faculty Board.

Action: Caroline Stewart

v. **Probation Meeting – identify ways to improve the process**

Further work still needs to be done. However, more emphasis has been made on the importance of new starters having regular probation meetings and for this to be a two way process. Information will be re-sent to PIs who employ staff.

Action: Caroline Stewart

vi. **Committee Membership – new members to represent each research group**

Marwa Mahmoud from the Rainbow Group has been recruited. Further post docs still need to be found to represent AI and the DTG. PL agreed to think about an AI rep.

Action: Pietro Lio' and David Chisnall

vii. **Committee Leadership and Strategy Development Training**

As this was workshop based, nothing to report.

viii. **Departmental Postdoc Committee Chairs Network**

AH gave a report. The following post docs needs have been addressed:

- The Steering Group is now overseen by the Post Doc Matters Committee.

- Continued access to RDP (Researcher Development Programme).
- Two new Researcher Development consultants for post docs have been appointed.
- A mentoring pilot scheme is in process.
- A mandatory introduction session is now held for all new post docs (note; concerns about the availability of the sessions was raised).
- A College affiliation funding scheme has been launched.
- A new post doc centre has opened at the Cambridge Biomedical Campus.
- There will be a Post doc Centre in Mill Lane until 2019
- Travel subsistence to attend conferences was discussed.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to provide a bespoke course for post-docs on leadership, running a research group and writing grant applications. It was agreed that an event away from Cambridge would be the most beneficial. ARK reported that it was unlikely the Lab would be able to fund such an event but sponsors could be sought, giving them the opportunity to speak at the event. It was agreed to gain post doc views for their views and discuss suggestions for speakers at the social tea. NZ felt there should be some caution regarding the speakers. It would be important that this didn't turn into a recruitment event, being taken over by the speaker's company.

It was reported that Simon Moore had circulated an email on research grants to SRAs but when asked to circulate it to RAs had declined and said it was only relevant for SRAs. It was decided it would still be helpful for RAs to have the opportunity to attend. CS will ask Simon Moore if this would be possible.

Action: Caroline Stewart

ix. Travel Funds for RAs update

The Industrial Supporters Club fund used to support research students travel has overspent. Given this, it seemed unlikely that there would be the opportunity to support post-docs from this fund but this could be re-looked at.

Discussion took place on how much scrutiny is given on grant application for travel requests. It was reported that the conferences which are costed in applications are not usually specified in great detail.

Action: Andrea Kells

4. Departmental policy on salary differential for SRAs applying for fellowships

It was reported that for SRAs who apply for Research Fellowships, such as Royal Society, RAEng etc. are having difficulty in applying because their starting salary falls above the funded amount (more apparent if they have had increments). HR have agreed to resolve this by allowing an SRA to resign from their current post, should a Fellowship application be successful, however this would result in a pay cut. There was a feeling that this was not satisfactory and the question whether the University, School or Department would agree to top up Fellowships was raised. It was felt that the University should be encouraging SRAs to apply for

fellowships so that they can set up their own research group.

CS reiterated that the Department has considered this and will not be able to fund the difference in salary. The Department also had concerns that any matching funds would mean the Department would need to evaluate and rank applications which it did not feel was appropriate. However, any PI could use their own funds to make any necessary top ups. AH agreed to contact PdOC to discover if this occurs in other Departments. CS and ARK will contact other Departments to ask how/if they resolve this issue. CS would also speak to the School of Technology office.

Action: Alice Hutchings/Caroline Stewart/Andrea Kells

- 5. Any other business**
Nothing to report.
- 6. Date of next meeting**
To be held in Lent Term