

POST-DOC SURVEY DEC 2018: Public Summary

General comments

- 39 out of 70 postdocs in the department (approx. 56%) responded, which is very slightly increased compared to the 2017 survey (48%).

Thank you to everyone for taking the time to contribute your views!

- Whilst much of the survey was similar between 2017 and 2018, the remit was expanded to include non-technical support issues and feedback on the 2018 Postdoc Retreat

Section 1: PERSONAL

- The postdoc population of the department remains roughly equally divided between recent postdocs (<3 years experience 36%), mid-career postdocs (3-5 years, 26%) and longer-term postdocs (> 5 years, 38%). The proportion of more experienced postdocs has increased slightly from 2017.
- The majority of respondents (68%) have been in the department for less than 3 years, and most have less than 1 year (36%) or 2 years (41%) remaining on their current contracts.
- 44% of respondents would definitely like to stay in the department if possible, 41% were unsure and 15% do not wish to remain after their current contract.

Suggested actions arising:

- At the next survey a question could be included to find out what has made postdocs decide they do not wish to stay in the department, with an eye to improving any issues identified.

Section 2: INDUCTION

- A third of the postdocs who took the survey started working in the department less than one year ago and they all feel they received an adequate introduction to the department.
- However, half of the new starters were not contacted/welcome by a member of the postdoc committee, and a third were not made aware of the postdoc support available on the department intranet. Results are roughly the same as previous years.
- Suggestions on how to improve this included making sure that visitors to the department are highlighted for the postdoc committee greeting rep and welcoming new starters in person at a meeting/social gathering of some kind.
- **27% of respondents were not made aware of the postdoc section of the departmental website.**
- The majority of new starters in the last year (63%) attended the university-wide postdoc induction event organised by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA). Of 7 attendees, 5 felt that it had been a positive experience (71%).

Suggested actions arising:

- All new starters at post-doc level researchers should be greeted by a postdoc committee rep. Visiting scientist are not automatically listed in the postdoc mailing list, **PI consent is needed**. Could this be changed?
PI consent is not needed, Catherine Butler (Department Administrator) ensures that Helen adds visitors to the mailing list.
- The postdoc section of the department website could be publicized/made use of more widely.
- Feedback on induction has been provided to the Office for Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA).

Section 3: TECHNICAL SUPPORT

- Of the postdoc respondents, 50% were satisfied with the level of technical support in the department and 39% were neutral, but 11% were dissatisfied.
- Concerns were raised about a lack of support staff for specific technical applications widely used by postdocs within the department, specifically computing/bioinformatics and microscopy.
The ACAC is discussing potential solutions for improving bioinformatics support. Microscopy trainers in all research groups have set up meeting and they are working together to find solutions to these issues.
- Concerns were raised about the availability of PGF space as a major limiting factor for experimental success. **This concern has been fed back to the Chair of the PGF Committee.**
If users experience problems Nigel Boulding and Ian Henderson can be contacted for help to solve the issue.
- **The current support staff were hugely praised by respondents for their work and help in keeping services running**, and the hiring of an additional staff member was recognized as having improved the level of departmental support.
The Department is considering hiring another facilities apprentice when the current one finishes their 2-year apprenticeship as this has been a success.
- Some concern was raised about procedures in place for reporting/fixing equipment failure out of hours, and more generally the department's continuing capacity limits to fix equipment problems.
- There was one suggestion for a biannual meeting in the department to identify potential issues and discuss them.

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback on these issues has been forwarded to the Academic Staff Committee.

Section 4: NON-TECHNICAL SUPPORT

- 65% of respondents were satisfied with the level of non-technical support provided by the University, but 35% were not satisfied.
- The following areas for improvement were highlighted:
 - A lack of support for mothers in the Department, e.g. Baby-changing facilities.
 - A lack of capacity for bike parking and bike security, e.g. lighting. **Marcus Jarman has raised this issue at the Downing/New Museums Site Committee.**

- More support for commuting by public transport was requested, e.g. bus ticket discounts and/or shuttle services.
- Requests were made for the provision of healthier snack options and/or a sandwich service.
- A need for greater mentorship to enable postdocs to achieve independence was highlighted.

Suggested actions arising:

- In response to comments received through the Postdoc Survey, the Department has instituted a dedicated baby-changing space.
- The other suggestions for improving non-technical support have been passed on.

Section 5: STAFF APPRAISALS

- 53% of respondents had an appraisal within the last year, but many respondents had been in post for less than one year.
- Of those who had had an appraisal, 89% found the process useful. **In several responses PIs were praised for their pro-active approach.** In others, postdocs had to push the process along and felt it would have benefited from more participation/responsiveness from their PI as to the postdoc's concerns/aims.

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback on the appraisal process has been submitted to the Academic Staff Committee.
- Postdoc survey questions should be amended to better identify if appraisals are not taking place in a timely fashion.

Section 6: TRAINING

- Postdocs were polled as to their awareness of training sources within the university. Training providers had the following recognition amongst the department postdoc community:

- Careers Service:	91.18%
- Research Development Program (RPD):	61.76%
- Personal and Professional Development (PPD):	50.00%
- University Information Services (IT courses):	44.12%
- Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA):	88.24%

- 82% of respondents felt that they were adequately informed about training opportunities within the University.
- One major source of information about training courses was identified as emails sent within the department (74%), something recommended in the 2017 survey.
- Other major sources were identified as the departmental newsletter (76%) and word of mouth (50%).
- **The problem of getting places on bioinformatics training courses was highlighted repeatedly. The Head of Department has raised the problem with the School.**
An email has been circulated to invite people to flag difficulties in getting places, this would help us to identify the scale of the problem and identify if we have high demand on a specific training course

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback has been provided to training providers.
- An opt-in mailing list was suggested for those interested in regular updates of training opportunities within the University across training providers.

Section 7: MENTORING

- 38% of respondents identified having a mentor (other than their PI), and the proportion of post-docs with more than one mentor within the department has increased compared to 2016 and 2017.
- Another 32% of respondents wanted to have a mentor.
- Reasons for not taking up mentorship included a lack of clarity as to the benefits (43%), being unsure about how to enroll in mentorship schemes (14%), not knowing they were available (14%) and no appropriate mentors being available (14%).
- Awareness of the department mentorship scheme and the university-wide OPdA mentoring scheme was high (74% and 76%, respectively).

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback from the survey has been passed to organizers of the department and university mentorship schemes.

Section 8: POSTDOC COMMITTEE

- Awareness of the postdoc committee within the department is high (94%).
- Postdoc respondents want the committee to represent them across a broad range of issues, including representing them on departmental issues and non-technical support, career progression (particularly independent funding opportunities) and acting as a communications/networking hub.
- 41% of total respondents would be interested in participating in the postdoc committee (but do they know of the opportunities available?).

Suggested actions arising:

- Increase Postdoc committee activity on postdoc funding opportunities and career progression.
- Better advertising of the ways that postdocs can participate in committee/departmental activities.

Section 9: POSTDOC LUNCHES

- From the data supplied, the majority of postdocs attended at least one postdoc lunch.
- Many postdocs seem to be keen on attending a postdoc lunch which would cover information about research initiatives the department is involved in (e.g. OpenPlant), work/life balance and teaching.
- Several people also suggested lunches on aspects of Fellowships/funding opportunities for ERC, gender equality, how to avoid unconscious bias at work and mental health.

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback has been forwarded to the postdoc rep(s) responsible for organizing postdoc lunches.

Section 10: POSTDOC RETREAT

- 55% of respondents attended the postdoc retreat
- Many of those respondents who didn't attend were either not yet working at the department at the time or had other commitments. 29% were too busy, whilst 7% were not interested. One commented that they were not informed about the retreat.
- Of those who attended, feedback on the Postdoc Retreat was very positive and >90% would attend a future Retreat.
- Respondents highlighted topics they would like to see at a future retreat, including careers inside and outside of academia, funding opportunities and activities to increase collaboration between the participating institutes (Plant Sciences, SLCU and NIAB).

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback on the 2018 Postdoc Retreat was provided to the organizing committee and used in the planning of the 2019 Postdoc Retreat. **The Department will continue to provide funding for the retreat on an annual basis.**

Section 11: CambPlants

- 53% of responding postdocs were aware of the CambPlantsHub initiative.
- However, 60% of those who responded (30% of total survey-takers) reported not feeling represented by the initiative at the postdoc level.
- Respondents generally wanted to engage with the Cambplants initiative to help improve their career progression, but were unsure as to the precise role of the initiative or how to engage with it.

Suggested actions arising:

- Feedback from the survey has been provided to the Cambplants Hub organizer. **After a period of turnover in staff supporting CambPlants, awareness of the Hub should now increase.**

Section 12: Any Other Comments

- Comments in this section emphasized issues raised elsewhere in the survey, including:
 - PGF space.
 - The ratio of research staff to available support services/facilities.
 - Non-technical support for mothers and minorities within the wider University.

THANK YOU AGAIN TO EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED THEIR VOICE TO THIS SURVEY