Research Assistant (Mrsic-Flogel Laboratory)
Information for Candidates
Vacancy Reference: 1668200

Job Title: Research Assistant

Department: Sainsbury Wellcome Centre

Salary: £30,316 - £31,967 per annum inclusive of London Allowance.

Grade: 6

Hours: 36.5 per week (full-time, 1.00 FTE)

Reports to: Professor Tom Mrsic-Flogel, Director

About the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre

The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre (SWC) commenced research operations in Spring 2016 bringing together world-leading scientists to investigate how brain circuits process information to generate perception, form memories and guide behaviour. Developed through the vision and partnership of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and Wellcome, and with substantial investment from these partners, the mission of the SWC is to generate and test experimentally tractable theories of brain function.

The Centre will comprise around 14 highly interdisciplinary experimental research groups accommodated in a new, purpose-designed building, offering an outstanding and unparalleled research environment through its provision of state-of-the-art research laboratories, cutting-edge scientific equipment, and technologically advanced prototyping and fabrication laboratories. Neuroscientists working in the Centre will use the latest advanced molecular and cellular biology, imaging, electrophysiology and behavioural techniques. The full complement of scientists in the Centre is expected to reach around 150 together with circa 50 dedicated support staff.

As well as providing an award-winning work environment, the Centre offers the full range of UCL staff benefits, including a generous annual leave entitlement, occupational pension schemes, excellent family-friendly policies such as occupational shared parental pay, a work-life balance policy, and a range of financial benefits such as a season ticket loan scheme and staff discounts. Further information can be found online: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/benefits/employee_benefits.php.

Background, Mission and Research Environment

Neuroscience is entering a new and exciting period in which it will be possible to decipher the neural codes underlying perception, cognition and action. The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour is positioned at the heart of this development.

The Centre, located within University College London (UCL) and close to its main campus in central London, fosters a culture of bold, innovative research and collaboration. Experimental groups will have the benefit of interacting with the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit located within the Centre, facilitating collaborations in data analysis, computational modelling and theory.

SWC staff will interface closely with academic staff within the Faculties of Life Sciences and Brain Sciences and be part of the UCL Neuroscience Domain which brings together over 450 principal investigators and offers extensive opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The Centre will offer additional opportunities for collaboration, networking and intellectual stimulation through its visitor programme, regular seminar series and the hosting of world-class scientific conferences and workshops.
The Centre will provide extensive conceptual and methodological bridges between areas of existing neuroscience strength at UCL, from which existing strengths it will directly benefit. Existing work at UCL is closely interwoven via the cross-cutting themes of development, behaviour and plasticity, and with creation and use of transgenic models. A strong culture of close interaction between experimental and theoretical approaches will be a thread running through the Centre, tying together complex phenomena at different levels of description, by linking informational and computational concepts to their circuit and cellular counterparts, all in relation to model behaviours.

Further details about the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk/swc.

Further details about UCL can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk.

Sainsbury Wellcome Centre Scientific and Administrative Support

The Centre and its staff are provided with significant administrative, technical and scientific support, including a Centre Manager responsible for overseeing local management of staff responsible for estates, health and safety, IT, finance, HR, research and student administration, and ensuring compliance with UCL policies and statutory requirements.

In addition, there are dedicated managers for the Centre’s scientific support services, including for its state-of-the-art prototype and fabrication laboratories, animal facilities and high-end computing facilities, and on-site managers responsible for the building, its maintenance, facilities and services.

About Tom Mrsic-Flogel’s Laboratory

The Mrsic-Flogel lab aims to understand the fundamental principles of neural circuit organization and how this organization relates to the computations that support sensory and behavioural function. The lab approaches this by recording activity in identified neurons in large ensembles to uncover the computations taking place during sensory processing and sensory-guided behaviours, and understanding how these computations arise from the neural hardware: from the synaptic interactions between identified cell types that differ in the patterns of input and output connectivity.

For this purpose, the lab focuses on sensory processing in visual cortex and connected brain areas of the mouse using a combination of methods, including two-photon calcium imaging in anesthetized and behaving mice, in vitro whole-cell recordings, in vivo whole-cell and extracellular recordings, optogenetics, genetic labelling and anatomical tracing, single-cell transcriptional profiling, visual behavioural tasks, and computational modelling.

The Role of Research Assistant

You will provide specific expertise in computational analyses of networks, and carry out research in modelling neural activity, leading to one or more projects within the overall research programme of the group. This will include designing and collaborating on experiments in consultation with the Principal Investigator and analysing and writing up results for publication in prestigious journals. Key areas of focus will include computational modelling of networks and applications of control theory. You will also be responsible for assisting other Mrsic-Flogel laboratory staff and students with experiments and analyses.

You will be expected to play a major role in the work of the research group, through the conduct of research, management of resources, support and training of others, introduction of new ideas and dissemination of research results.
You will have experience and knowledge of programming (preferably MATLAB or Python), applied mathematics, and engineering. Experience of resource management and in providing technical support is desirable.

This role is funded for one year in the first instance.

**Main Duties and Responsibilities**

**Core Duties**

- To contribute to the design of experiments, in consultation with the Principal Investigator.
- To contribute to the overall activities of the research team and the department as appropriate.
- To set up and run experiments, ensuring that they are appropriately supervised and supported.
- To record, analyse and write up the results of experiments, maintaining a permanent record of the methodologies.
- To prepare and present findings of research activity to colleagues on a weekly basis and at scientific meetings.
- To contribute to the writing, submission and revision of papers to be submitted to appropriate peer reviewed journals.
- To contribute to the induction and direction of other research staff and students if so requested by the Principal Investigator.
- Maintain lab equipment connected to the research to ensure it functions at the correct levels.
- Adhere to good laboratory practice at all times and observe all required health and safety procedures.
- Observe all ethical and legal requirements in relation to the use of animal models in research.
- Observe all required Data Protection and Security requirements.

The above description is not exhaustive and the post-holder will be required to undertake any other duties as may reasonably be requested within the scope, spirit and purpose of the post. Job descriptions are reviewed on a regular basis including at the annual appraisal. As duties and responsibilities change, the job description may be amended in consultation with the post-holder.

The post-holder will be expected to actively follow all UCL policies and procedures including Equal Opportunities, maintain an awareness of Fire and Health & Safety Regulations, attend management meetings and undertake such training and development as may be required for the post.

All staff are required to act professionally, co-operatively and flexibly in line with the requirements of the post.
**Selection Criteria**

The selection criteria outline the skills, knowledge and experience you need to have in order to perform this role. Applicants will be selected based on how well they demonstrate that they meet the essential, and if appropriate, desirable criteria for this particular role.

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<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
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<tr>
<td>A Master’s degree in Neuroscience, mathematics, engineering or a related field.</td>
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<th>Knowledge, experience and achievement</th>
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<td>Independent research experience, with evidence of achievement within the appropriate subject area. The candidate should also show evidence of completed research e.g. presented posters, given research talks. He/she should show ability to contribute to various research projects in the laboratory.</td>
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<td>A high level of proficiency in mathematics and modelling complex systems.</td>
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<td>Competence in modern neuroscience analyses including but not limited to control theory, graph theory, topological analyses, etc.</td>
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<td>Proficiency in relevant programming languages (MATLAB, Python, other)</td>
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<td>A proven track record of effective research and independent achievement.</td>
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<td>Experience in engineering and building lab equipment.</td>
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<td>Experience of resource management.</td>
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<td>Experience of providing technical support in a laboratory setting.</td>
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<th>Skills</th>
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<td>Strong written and oral communication skills, with the ability to present complex information effectively.</td>
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<td>Able to prioritise, manage your own time, and multi-task and integrate the demands of a range of different activities and deadlines in parallel.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>The ability to conduct research so that the results obtained can be reproduced easily by others.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<th>Personal attributes</th>
<th>Essential</th>
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<td>Able to work effectively alone, but also contribute and work well as part of a team.</td>
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<td>Accountable, reliable and resourceful.</td>
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<td>Works ethically, legally and with integrity.</td>
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<th>Other Requirements</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
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<td>An understanding and appreciation of the mission and research environment of the SWC, and a commitment to the establishment of the SWC as a world-leading research centre.</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Able and willing to work flexibly to meet the needs of the Centre.</td>
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Contact Us

If you have any queries relating to the vacancy or how to apply please contact the SWC HR team, swc.hr@ucl.ac.uk, +44 (0)20 3108 8011.

Applying for the Role

To begin the online application process, please access the advertisement by searching for it on the UCL vacancy search page (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/jobs/) using the vacancy reference number, and click on the “Apply Now” button at the bottom of the vacancy advertisement.

Please complete the online application form, and use the supporting statement section to outline how you meet the selection criteria. Applications will be shortlisted based on the strength of the examples used to demonstrate that the applicant meets the selection criteria.

Please note that there is a limit of 2,500 words to explain how you meet the essential criteria, and a limit of 2,500 words to explain how you meet the desirable criteria.

In addition to completing the online application form please also upload the following supporting documents to your application:

- A current CV
- Any supporting documents that you wish to include as evidence of completed research

All candidates will be notified of the outcome of their application.
**Pre-employment Checks**
Confirmation of appointment will be subject to receipt of satisfactory references, verification of proof of right to work in the UK and to satisfactory pre-employment health and security screening. The Centre will provide overseas candidates who may require sponsorship with support in seeking an appropriate visa.

**Salary**
Starting salary will be on the Grade 6 scale according to relevant skills, knowledge, experience and achievement. Cost of living pay awards are negotiated nationally and are normally effective from 1 August each year.

**Pension**
Post-holders will be eligible to join the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), subject to the Scheme’s rules and eligibility conditions.

**Conditions of Service**
Conditions of Service for Research and Professional Services Staff can be found at: [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/salary_scales/Support_Research_tcs.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/salary_scales/Support_Research_tcs.php).

**Probation**
Appointments are subject to a probationary period of 9 months.

**Hours of Work and Overtime**
Appointments will be full time. UCL’s weekly hours of work for a full-time post are an annual average of 36.5 hours.

**Annual Leave**
Staff are entitled to 27 days annual leave per year (pro rata for part-time staff). In addition, staff are entitled to 8 days public and statutory holidays, and 6 UCL closure days with pay per year.

**Location**
The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre is located in the heart of London around five minutes’ walk from the main UCL campus. The mainline railway stations at Euston, King’s Cross, St Pancras, Marylebone and Paddington are within easy reach as are the London Underground stations located at Warren Street and Goodge Street.

**Equal Opportunities**
UCL’s equal opportunity policy is that in the recruitment, selection, education and assessment of students, and in the recruitment, selection, training, appraisal, development and promotion of staff, the only consideration must be that the individual meets, or is likely to meet the requirements of the programme or course or post. The requirements being met, no student or employee will be discriminated against on the basis of their sex, sexual orientation, race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, disability, marital or civil partnership status, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, caring or parental responsibilities, age, or beliefs on matters such as religion and politics.

UCL is committed to providing a learning, working and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its members are respected, and which is free from discrimination, prejudice, intimidation and all forms of harassment including bullying. This Policy means that all students and employees of UCL have the right to study or work in an environment free from discrimination, prejudice and all forms of harassment or bullying. UCL is committed to a programme of action to ensure that this and other equalities policies are implemented and monitored at an organisational and individual level.
Background Information

The Gatsby Charitable Foundation (www.gatsby.org.uk)

Gatsby is a Trust set up by David Sainsbury to realise his charitable objectives.

We focus our support on a limited number of areas:

- Plant science research
- Neuroscience research
- Science and engineering education
- Economic development in Africa
- Public policy research and advice
- The Arts

We are proactive in devising projects to achieve our aims.

We are enthusiastic about supporting innovation.

We are analytical as we believe it is important to understand the opportunities and problems we tackle.

We take a long-term view as we do not think much can be achieved by short, one-off projects.

We are always eager to form partnerships with organisations who share our goals.

Gatsby Neuroscience

“Supporting world-class theoretical and experimental research on neural circuits and behaviour, and activities which further enhance our investments in this area.”

Gatsby’s pioneering investment in neuroscience began in the 90s with the establishment of the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit (GCNU) at UCL. A small number of research projects and meetings were supported across the UK over the following years until in 2007 the Trustees made the decision to expand Gatsby’s efforts, specifically to link the GCNU with experimental neuroscience. For this new endeavour Gatsby has continued to be bold and innovative. In a funding partnership with Wellcome it has developed a new research institute, the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre (SWC) for Neural Circuits and Behaviour at UCL. As part of this new initiative the Foundation has invested in a number of innovative collaborative research programmes in the broad area of neural circuits and behaviour around the world. These programmes reflect the types of research we envision in the SWC and the people we support bring a wealth of expertise to help our thinking and development of the scientific focus.
Wellcome (www.wellcome.ac.uk)

Wellcome is the largest medical charity in the United Kingdom and presently, after the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the second largest such charity in the world. It funds a wide variety of biomedical science, including research in developing countries, with its mission being to achieve extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. In pursuit of this the Trust supports the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities.

Wellcome funds a significant portfolio of neuroscience and mental health research - ranging from studies of molecular and cellular components to work on cognition and higher systems. It also has strong interests in applied clinical research on neurological and mental health disorders and support activities that explore historical, ethical, social and artistic perspectives on the mind and mental health. Current major investments include Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging at UCL, the Wellcome Trust Centre for Mitochondrial Research at Newcastle University, the Oxford Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour and the Behavioural and Clinical Neurosciences Institute at the University of Cambridge.

Wellcome has several grant schemes including Investigator Awards and numerous prestigious Fellowship schemes ranging from the most senior Principal Research Fellowships for world-class scientists through to the new Henry Wellcome Fellowship scheme for recent PhD graduates. These Awards and Fellowships are awarded competitively and judged by peer review through the Neuroscience Expert Review Groups.
The Neuroscience Environment at UCL

UCL is a powerhouse in neuroscience, whether measured by published output, citations, grant income, or prizes and honours. UCL Neuroscience currently includes 26 Fellows of the Royal Society and 60 Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences. It has over 480 neuroscience PIs from some 30 academic departments and is ranked first in Europe (and second worldwide) for ISI citations in Neuroscience and Behaviour. UCL has an existing cadre of internationally competitive research groups in the fields of neural circuits and behaviour, and numerous strengths in related aspects of neuroscience, plus allied fields such as physics, chemistry and nanotechnology. UCL is the only institution in the UK – and one of the few in the world – with sufficient concentration and infrastructure in neuroscience and related disciplines to support the ambitious goals of the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre.

The environment at UCL will be further enhanced by the development of the Francis Crick Institute and its integration with UCL and other academic institutions including Imperial College and King’s College.

UCL provides an environment of excellence for training future generations of interdisciplinary researchers in neuroscience. Graduate training programmes include; the 4-year Wellcome Neuroscience programme; two further related 4-year Wellcome programmes; the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit’s 4-year programme; the BBSRC London Interdisciplinary Biosciences PhD Consortium (a 4-year programme led by UCL) and the CoMPLEX PhD programme.

These surrounding strengths show UCL’s capacity for bringing neuroscientists together with other biomedical scientists, plus mathematicians, physical scientists, computer scientists and engineers, to tackle the most challenging multidisciplinary problems. At the same time, UCL’s unique clinical links via its major postgraduate institutes and partner hospitals facilitate eventual translation to new treatments for neural disorders.

Further details of UCL Neuroscience can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk/neuroscience

The UCL School of Life and Medical Sciences (SLMS) brings together four UCL Faculties to create one of the largest and most prestigious aggregations of academics in biomedical, life and population health sciences worldwide. The School has a global reputation for teaching, informed by cutting-edge research. A full profile of the School can be found at: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slms/about-us. The School is structured into four Faculties: Brain Sciences; Life Sciences; Medical Sciences; and Population Health Sciences.

The School coordinates nine Research Domains (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slms/domains), which are networks that bring together researchers regardless of their host Faculty. Colleagues engage with as many of the Domains as are relevant to their area of research activity, encouraging interdisciplinarity across the School and beyond.

The UCL Faculty of Life Sciences (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lifesciences-faculty/) combines the strengths of UCL’s basic biological and preclinical sciences. Some of the constituent departments have long and distinguished histories that can be traced back to the early nineteenth century and the foundation of UCL. The Faculty has been associated with six Nobel Laureates. It presents an unrivalled environment for students and researchers in life science disciplines, ranging from neuroscience to the biology of molecules, cells and organisms. The Faculty provides outstanding opportunities for research-led and research-based study. The Faculty is home for over 500 graduate students studying on some of the UK’s most prestigious PhD programmes.
The UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/brain-sciences/) undertakes world-leading research and teaching in neurology and neural pathways, neuroscience, language, cognition, psychology and psychiatry. It takes an integrative approach to the study of mind and brain by focusing on the determinants of human perception, cognition, emotion and behaviour. The Faculty and its component parts create an outstanding and vibrant environment for study and research.

In order to make use of basic science discoveries, UCL works closely with major Hospital Trust partners to develop further its outstanding academic health science environment. UCL Partners is an academic health science partnership that brings together UCL with four of its NHS partner Trust organisations (Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust (GOSH); Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust; University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust) in order to create Europe’s leading health research powerhouse; see http://www.uclpartners.com/. The intention is to deliver real improvements in health for patients in London, and around the world. UCL Partners will support over 3,500 scientists, senior researchers and consultants, with a combined annual turnover of around £2 billion. By pooling resources and expertise, UCL Partners, which together treat over 1.5 million patients every year, is able to produce world-class research in key areas, each of which poses a major health challenge. These include the nervous system, children’s health, heart disease, transplantation, immunology, ophthalmology, deafness and hearing impairment, dental and oral disease, cancer and women’s health.

The Francis Crick Institute is one of the most significant developments in UK biomedical science for a generation, and will be located close to UCL. The Institute is a consortium of six of the UK’s most successful scientific and academic organisations; the Medical Research Council, Cancer Research UK, Wellcome, UCL, Imperial College London and King’s College London. The principal focus will be on fundamental biological processes underlying human health and disease, with a particular emphasis on genetics, cell biology, stem cells and regenerative medicine, infections and the immune systems, organ function and whole-animal physiology, and neurons and the nervous system. The Institute will promote inter- and multidisciplinary approaches to biomedical research, drawing input from the physical sciences.

Taken together, these exciting developments provide a concentration of biomedical science unequalled in Europe. The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour is critical to the ambition of UCL to enhance its international leadership in neuroscience. It will deliver the conceptual and technological focus necessary for providing a causal account of how specific patterns of activity in neural circuits process information to direct behaviour, to transform understanding of brain function.

UCL

UCL is one of the world’s premier universities. It is a world-class research and teaching institution based in London; its staff and students have included 28 Nobel Prize winners. Founded in 1826, UCL was the only university in England at that time which admitted students regardless of race or religion. It was also the first to admit women on equal terms with men. Today UCL is a friendly university in which to work and study and it continues to thrive on the diversity and creativity of its community.

UCL is in practice a university in its own right, whilst a constituent college within the federal University of London. With an annual turnover of over £800 million, it is financially and managerially independent of the University of London.

UCL currently employs some 5,000 academic and research staff, including 920 professors - the second highest number of any university in the UK. It also has the joint highest number of female professors. The university includes academic units as diverse as the Slade School of Fine Art, the Bartlett School of Architecture and the Institute of Child Health (which is associated with Great Ormond Street Hospital). In total, there are 68 academic departments and institutes, whose activities span the following: arts and humanities, social and historical sciences, law, architecture and the built environment, engineering sciences, mathematical and physical sciences, life sciences, and biomedical sciences and medicine. UCL’s academic
and research staff are a truly international community, with more than a quarter coming from 84 countries outside the UK.

The UCL student community comprises 29,000 students from 150 countries. UCL currently offers 275 undergraduate programmes and more than 220 taught postgraduate programmes as well as the opportunity to carry out postgraduate research in all of its subjects.

In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, which evaluates research performance in all UK universities, UCL achieved the best result in London and third in the UK overall.

UCL is consistently rated among the top five universities in the UK (alongside Cambridge, Imperial College and Oxford) and in the top 25 universities in the world. The 2013 QS global rankings placed UCL fourth among the world’s top ten universities.