



Athena SWAN Fact Sheet 2: Support for Early Career Researchers

Athena SWAN requires applicants to identify the 'key career transition points' for women in their departments. This means identifying the 'leak' in the academic career pipeline where the proportion of women starts to decrease. For many departments, this key transition point is between post doctoral research positions to established academic posts.

As a result, a large proportion of UCL departments have a number of initiatives in place to support their early career researchers (ECRs) - ensuring that all ECRs have access to career advice and support networks.



Early Career Researcher Networks

To ensure ECRs have access to networking opportunities, peer support, and information on career development, departments have established ECR Networks (PALS, ICH, IEHC, LMCB, IoO, EI, C, CI, P&A). Many departments also use these forums to gain feedback which is reviewed by the SAT. Some examples of these networks are include:

- The LMCB post doc committee organise events such as 'from post doc to PI' or 'how to get grant funding'. They also run 'LMCB role models' events where post docs meet with senior LMCB staff.
- EI, PALS, IGH and IoN encourage their post docs to join Early Career Networks that span a number of departments – enabling networking outside their usual department
- The CI and EI encourage PhD students and Post Docs to present at 'work in progress' meetings – these provide opportunities to practice presentations and receive feedback from peers.

Similar networks have been organised for students (please see Fact Sheet 4)

There are two active early career networks that cut across a number of UCL departments – the Population and Lifelong Health Research Domain Early Careers Network, and the Neuroscience Research Domain Careers Network.

These networks encourage and enable communication across different departments and research groups, and organise seminars and workshops aimed at supporting career development. For example, sessions on grant applications, how to build a research group, work life balance and alternative careers. More practical workshops are also held on interview skills and grant writing. PhD students, Post Docs and PIs are invited to attend.

The Neuroscience network has achieved a 50/50 gender balance of speakers.

Career Events

Following feedback from the post doctoral community, a large number of UCL departments have established annual careers events aimed at ECRs (MPB, CE, EI, ICH, DoM, I&I, DoS, IoO, LMCB, CI, ICS, P&A, SoP). Predominantly, these events focus on academic careers, but some include information on careers in industry. Topics covered in these events have included:

- Funding opportunities and writing grant or fellowship applications (MPB, CE, EI, ICH, DoM, DoS, IoO, CI, ICS, SoP). Some departments invited speakers from funding bodies to outline their funding opportunities and processes, and others signposted funding for female academics or those with opportunities for flexible working.
- Writing a good CV and advice for job applications (ICH, DoS, IoO)
- Presentations from female academics in the department on their own career development and advice (DoM, I&I, IoO, ICH, CI, P&A)
- Publicising Athena SWAN initiatives e.g. mentoring / networking opportunities (ICH, DoS, IoO, I&I, DoM, CI)
- Preparing and submitting papers for publication (CE, SoP)
- Presentation skills (CE)
- Careers outside of academia (P&A, LMCB)

Other organised events to support post docs include:

- The ICS run 'career advice surgeries' for post docs - these offer the opportunity for targeted career consultations with senior members of staff
- The CI hold grant/manuscript clinics and mock interviews – these are individually tailored support sessions for grant applications and interviews. The clinics include a 20 minute presentation followed by discussion with the panel; who are selected by the presenter.

Similar events have been organised for students (please see Fact Sheet 4)

For information on mentoring schemes aimed at supporting early career researchers, please see Fact Sheet 1

Funding

The requirement to move between a number of short term research posts before applying for a lecturer position is often cited as a key issue for female academics. Post Docs at UCL are employed on 'open ended with funding end date' contracts. This means they have access to all the same benefits and entitlements as other UCL staff on 'open ended' contracts. When funding is coming to an end PIs are reminded to discuss opportunities with their Post Docs, and they are added to the UCL redeployment register.

Departments have taken different approaches to support researchers in attaining a new contract and developing their CV. These have included:

- Provision of bridge funding: This is to enable post docs extra time to write fellowship applications when their original contract comes to an end. For example I&I have allocated £100,000 to the 'Robin Weiss fund' for short-term extensions for the most competitive junior scientists to help them secure independent funding, while the ICH publicise the opportunities for bridge funding in their departmental newsletter.
- Inclusion of Post Docs in funding applications as Co-Investigators (CE, ICH, EDI, IGH)
- Include post docs in writing grant applications to give them experience of the process (EDI, ICH)
- IoO have a research administrator who supports staff at all levels with grant and fellowship applications. They have also produced a chart listing fellowship schemes, eligibility criteria and closing dates.
- Externally publicise opportunities to take up a fellowship within the department (rather than waiting for fellowship holders to ask for sponsorship) (ICH, LM CB)
- IEHC send alert emails to PIs one year before a post doc's funding is due to come to an end and prompts them to discuss career options and funding opportunities.

CV Development

To help develop the CVs of early career researchers, departments offer additional opportunities and support. For example:

- In PALS, new lecturers are allocated a teaching partner – the pair observe each other's teaching and provide feedback on good practice and any improvements that could be made.
- LM CB post docs are invited to chair sessions or present at the LM CB retreat
- Several departments encourage post docs to supervise MSc or PhD students, or contribute to department teaching (M, EDI, C)

