

Postdoctoral Development Centre: activity report 2021-22

The aim of this report is to communicate the main initiatives and projects provided by the Postdoctoral Development Centre to postdocs and research staff at Queen's over the academic year 2021-22. It also includes programmes ran by other departments when they are highly relevant to this cohort and are advertised as core research staff provision on the PDC website. For transparency, we are including satisfaction elements such as attendance data, ratings and representative feedback when available.

The PDC's objectives for each year are for the most part aligned to Queen's institutional '[Researcher Development Concordat](#)' action plan. This plan was developed in consultation with research staff and revealed in October 2021. Thanks to this ambitious action plan and previous work supporting research staff, Queen's has been able to retain its [HR Excellence in Research Award](#) (European Award) after external review this year.

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Establishment of the PDC

The institutional Postdoctoral Development Centre was officially launched in October 2021, after a 3-year pilot in the MHLS Faculty. This marked the strong commitment of the university to support the career development of research staff, and extended support to all university postdocs and research staff.

The establishment of the new PDC notably involved the development of a branded identity, and the launch of an extensive [website](#) regrouping information, training opportunities, support programmes, external signposting, advice, and policies of specific relevance to research staff, as well as the recruitment of Ms Erin Davidson, who notably coordinates the organisation of events and courses.



"In line with Strategy 2030 and our Research Culture Action Plan, we, as a University, take seriously our responsibility to ensure that, at this exciting and challenging transition stage in their careers, postdocs are equipped with the support and guidance to enable them to fulfil their potential and achieve success in their career, whether that is here at Queen's, elsewhere in academia, or beyond higher education."

Prof Emma Flynn, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Enterprise

Relevant Learning & Development internal provision and external resources were mapped and regrouped on the website's [development pages](#), aligned to six main themes: [Methodologies and practices](#), [Research dissemination](#), [Impact and partnerships](#), [Leadership and vision](#), [Teaching and supervision](#), and [Career development](#).

Additional resources were collated in other sections, such as [Information](#), [Funding](#), [Policy & guidance](#), [Recognition](#), and [Representation](#).

PDC Representatives' Network

The PDC Representatives' Network was established in January 2022 and is composed of School and Centre representatives across the three Faculties ([List of current representatives](#)). This includes both postdoc and academic representatives, with representation and numbers varying between Schools. The network meets every other month and members input on initiatives and events undertaken by the PDC, share good practice between different Schools and Faculties, and run local initiatives.

Priorities

The members of the network contribute to specific concordat priority projects for the year as part of working groups (See ['ongoing work and progress' page](#) and other relevant sections of this report).

For 2021-22, the working groups were focused around:

- **Career options:** multiple career exploration interviews were organised and hosted by members (More in the ['Career interview series'](#) section)
- **Leadership:** a new Postdoctoral Leadership Programme was designed with the members, who also took part in the selection of participants (More in the ['PDC workshops'](#) section)
- **National Postdoc Appreciation Week:** postdoc members have organised a Postdoc Showcase (More in the ['Postdoc Showcase 2022'](#) section)
- **Supervision:** after consultation of schools and postdocs, members drafted recommendations for Schools (More in the ['Focus on supervision'](#) section)
- **Work-life balance:** a draft web page has been drafted with input from members and relevant departments (More in the ['Focus on work-life balance'](#) section)

Local events

Postdoc and academic representatives have also been involved in organising a range of activities locally, such as research symposia or seminars with postdocs presenting their work, informal gatherings (e.g. coffee mornings), career events, welcoming/buddy schemes for new postdocs, surveys or other feedback mechanisms to reflect local experience, provision of updates at local committees etc.

Key projects

Focus on welcoming new postdocs



One of the PDC's focus this year was to increase support to welcome those new to Queen's and/or new to a postdoc role, enabling them to settle in and make the best of their position. The PDC developed the [New Postdoc Welcome Booklet](#), packed with useful information, provided a stand at the two all-staff welcoming events, and introduced a [new postdoc induction](#) session for postdocs and research staff. It ran twice (March and May), including once in person, and received very positive feedback. We aim to organise inductions every other month from September 2022.

Local representatives have been providing (or are planning to introduce) welcoming/buddy schemes or other initiatives in their school.

Feedback:

	Attendees	Rating	Recommended by
New Postdoc Induction (2 sessions: March and May 2022)	23	5/5 (11 respondents)	100%

“very informative and really engaging. Both Alice and Erin seem very approachable”

Induction participant, 2022

Focus on supervision

A working group from the PDC Representatives' Network aimed at identifying means of enabling and recognising contributions of postdocs to the supervision of undergraduate and master taught students, in a way that is consistent across the university. The group conducted an initial scoping of current practices and opinions across schools as well as a survey of postdocs, and developed recommendations. Further consultation with relevant groups and committees is taking place, with approval and plans for implementation expected to start by the end of 2022.



In 2021-22, the PDC also processed 43 Assistant Supervisor appointments (13 in MHLS, 20 in EPS and 10 in AHSS), recognising significant contributions to the supervision of PhD students. It was the first year this initiative was available in the EPS and AHSS Faculties, and the third year in MHLS (which reached a total of 82 appointments). Following an update of Qsis (university students' system) adding the 'Assistant Supervisor' option, the PDC recorded all appointments on the system and are now working with relevant departments to enable the information to also feed into Pure, the research information system.

Focus on work-life balance



Some members of the PDC Representatives' Network were involved in identifying the main issues that may affect the work-life balance of postdocs, and sharing recommendations, advice, and examples of good practice for postdocs and their managers. These, as well as signposting to relevant university policies, have been drafted and,

following ongoing consultation with People & Culture, will be released as a webpage on the PDC website (expected by the end of 2022).

Workshops and courses

A gap analysis of the internal workshop provision was carried out in summer 2021 and new core workshops were introduced to fill these gaps. While some workshops are provided specifically to research staff by the PDC, most of the core workshops are organised by Organisational Development (OD) in People and Culture.

Gap identified	New workshop(s) introduced
Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Postdoctoral Leadership Programme</u> (PDC)
Career progression (Academic or not)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Lectureships: Ready, Set, Go!</u> (PDC) • <u>Defining your career: Pathways for success</u> (OD)
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Supervising skills for Assistant Supervisors and postdocs</u> (PDC)



The design of the Postdoctoral Leadership Programme involved members of the representatives' network, who provided input on the content, format, application process, as well as selected participants. Feedback from the first cohort has been very positive (see below). Notably, all

respondents felt that learning from the course could be applied to their current and future roles, and potentially even other aspects of life.

“An excellent course delivered by a highly capable and empathetic trainer. The Discovery Insights tool was particularly informative. [...] Thank you. Would highly recommend.”

Participant, ‘Postdoctoral Leadership Programme’ 2022

PDC workshops

Workshop	Attendees	Rating	Recommended by
Supervising Skills for Assistant Supervisors and Postdocs (January 2022)	47	4.8/5 (16 respondents)	100%
Lectureships: Ready, Set, Go! (March 2022)	22	4.7/5 (14 respondents)	100%
Postdoctoral Leadership Programme (June-July 2022)	20	4.6/5 (9 respondents)	100%

“Really informative session which gave me a lot to think about. The resources shared were really helpful and I will definitely use them going forward. I really enjoyed the session and would recommend to colleagues.”

*Participant, ‘Supervising skills for Assistant Supervisors and Postdocs’
2022*

“This is one of the most useful career development workshops I have participated and feel like I could have had gone through this before. Very useful and highly recommended to all post docs and early career researchers at Queen’s or elsewhere. The Facilitator (Karen) - she was fantastic! Thanks a lot PDC Team for organizing this.”

Participant, ‘Lectureships: Ready, Set, Go!’ 2022

Organisational Development (OD, P&C) workshops

Workshop	Attendees
The strategic researcher (September 2021)	42
Writing for publication (x 2) (September 2021 and February 2022)	11
Developing your research career (x 2) (October 2021 and April 2022)	23
Project management in a research environment (October 2021)	11
Developing your CV for researchers (x 2) (October 2021 and May 2022)	23
Preparing for interviews for researchers (x 2) (October 2021 and May 2022)	18
Developing resilience in a research environment (x 2) (November 2021 and May 2022)	19
Virtual writing retreats (x 4) (November 2021)	17
Effective use of voice (x 2) (November 2021 and May 2022)	23
Researcher writing retreat (x 2) (November 2022, January 2022)	21
How to become a research social media influencer (December 2021)	12
Networking and profile building for researchers (4 sessions) (January – March 2022)	23
Turbocharge your writing (February 2022)	56
Defining your career: pathways to success (April 2022)	10

Feedback data wasn't included as most OD courses didn't receive any feedback from participants or for just a few individuals, which couldn't be considered as representative.

"The first and last sessions were exciting and enthralling. I entered the programme to get creative about developing my career and receive some advice and reassurance to take decisions about it. These two sessions provided me with such inspiration"

Developing your research career programme Participant, 2021-22

Additional Research & Enterprise workshops and programmes

Innovation programmes (Commercial Development team)

The past academic year, the Commercial Development team organised [multiple innovation programmes](#) for a range of research themes and audiences, including 11 cohorts mainly targeted at postdocs and research staff, which accommodated a total of 26 Queen's teams, all led by a research staff. Programmes included for example the Lean Launch Programme, DigiSpark, Transforming Construction, EIT Seedbed, BBSRC Lean Launch Programme, ICURe and BBSRC ICURe. While most of the work is still ongoing, one of the ICURe teams already received further funding to develop a spin-out company, and two were recommended to license their research.

The licensing programme was very interactive, and I have gained a lot of exposure to IP, with valuable information and resources that I can apply going forward. The contents I have learnt from the programme will be significant to the results of our team's future commercial negotiations.

Participant, ICURe 2021

Fellowship workshops (Research Development Team)

Workshop	Attendees	Feedback
Fellowship application support: Transition to Independence (December 2021)	102	Rated 'good' or 'excellent' by all respondents 91.7% respondents 'very' or 'extremely likely' to recommend the workshop (12 respondents)
Fellowship application support: Transition to Leadership (February 2022)	45	Not available

Career events

Career interview series

A series of online interviews of former postdocs or PhDs with a range of careers (in and out of academia) was provided, with three of them organised and hosted by members of the PDC Representatives' Network career working group. They were well-received, with an average rating of 4.7/5 and 100 attendees overall.



The events were recorded and edited by the PDC, leading to the addition of 7 episodes to its career podcast, '[The theory of the postdoc evolution](#)' (available on the PDC website, Apple podcasts, Spotify and Google podcasts).

Event	Attendees	Rating	Recommended by
Careers in Almac: Dr Cheryl McFarlane's journey and upcoming openings (November 2021)	31	4.9/5 (14 respondents)	100%
Career insight interview: Dr Edel Hyland & Dr Jocelyn Tillner (March 2022)	19	4.3/5 (9 respondents)	100%
Career insight interview: Exploring entrepreneurship as a postdoc (May 2022)	24	4.5/5 (12 respondents)	92% (all respondents but 1)
Career insight interview: Dr Delphine Wagner & Dr Elaine O'Reilly (May 2022)	11	4.8/5 (5 respondents)	100%
Career insight interview: Dr Sheila McCartan & Dr Kyle Matchett (June 2022)	15	5/5 (5 respondents)	100%

“This was a wonderful session, I would definitely attend similar sessions if organised in the future.”

“It was extremely useful listening to their insights and will help me seek out the right career for me.”

Attendees, various ‘Career insight interviews’ 2022

ECRday 2022

This 2-day online event for AHSS research staff and students was organised by Dr Alison Garden (UKRI Future Leader Fellow and PDC Representative), with the support from the School of Arts, English and Languages, the PDC and the Research Culture Seed Fund. Alison’s programme included 25 speakers on topics related to careers in and out of academia.



Recordings are now available on the [ECRday2022 page](#).

Feedback:

	Attendees	Rating	Recommended by
ECRday2022 (May 2022)	37-166 (depending on the session; attendees from 22 countries)	4.7/5 (53 respondents)	100%

‘The best event of its kind, really. I’ve done others, and always come away from them so depressed about the state of things. This one manages to be realistic, honest, and yet full of care, in addition to being truly useful.’

Attendee, ‘ECRday 2022’

Information and networking events

Event	Attendees	Rating	Recommended by
Becoming a STEM Ambassador (November 2021)	19	Not collected	Not collected
Introduction to the PDC (March 2022)	6	5/5 (4 respondents)	100%

Postdoc Networking Event: Ice cream Summer Social (June 2022)	~50 (including a few 'guests' like colleagues and family members)	4.8/5 (17 respondents)	100%
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“Great! A wonderful socializing opportunity not only for postdocs but also for their families and friends.”

Attendee, Summer Social 2022

Personal support

PDC 1:1 support

In 2021-22, the PDC has spent approximately 60 hours personally supporting research staff, in 36 instances. These included feedback on CVs and job applications, interview preparation or other topics, and was provided via meetings, mock interview panels, or by email. For mock interview panels, postdocs outside the candidates also got the opportunity to learn about the recruitment process by volunteering as panellists.

Feedback demonstrates that such support is helpful, with 100% of respondents having received interview preparation feeling more prepared to attend their real interview, and 100% of respondents having received support with their CV or application feeling it was improved as a result.

Support type	Beneficiaries*	Rating	Recommended by
Interview preparation	15	5/5 (7 respondents)	100%
Job application feedback	12	5/5 (7 respondents)	100%
Other topic/ support	9	4/5 (1 respondent only)	100%
Mock interview panellist	8	5/5 (5 respondents)	100%

*note: when the same individual has received support on separate occasions in the year (different kinds of support or for different positions), they are here counted several times



“Alice’s support made all the difference to how confident and prepared I felt approaching the presentation and interview. I would - and do! - advise all postdoctoral colleagues to consult her before applications or interviews. Her guidance is so valuable.”

Interview preparation support beneficiary, 2022

“Alice was quick to reply to my request for one-to-one support and I was able to significantly strengthen and tailor my CV for the specific job application through her brilliant advice and guidance. Moreover, this service was particularly useful for converting an academic CV into a skills-based CV suitable for non-academic and industry roles.”

Job application support beneficiary, 2022

“It was a great experience to be part of the interview panel and learnt a lot from the interview.”

Mock interview panellist, 2022

While we do not have outcome data for all the individuals we supported, we are delighted to report that at least 9 individuals we helped with application and/or interview were offered the job they applied for (including 6 lectureships).

Other 1:1 support

External career support (via OD programme)

The ‘Developing your research career’ programme of workshops, organised by the Organisational Development (OD) team, included a 1:1 career session with an external consultant for each participant. Over the academic year, 24 individuals benefited from these sessions.

Fellowship and funding support (Research Development team)

The Research Development team supported 106 Fellowship and Early Career Award applications in 2021-22, from postdoctoral researchers and eligible early academics. This included feedback on draft proposals as well as 12 mock interviews, in addition to early-stage discussions to identify the appropriate course of action for prospective applicants. Out of these proposals, 18 were funded, 71 declined, including 2 after interview. The rest are either awaiting an answer or have not yet been submitted.

Mentoring

The [Postdoc Group Mentoring Scheme](#), led by academic staff in all faculties, accommodated 11 groups this year, with 38 postdocs participating as mentees. Discussions within groups mainly focused on career planning, management and leadership development, and work life balance

Mentees were asked for feedback on their experience of the programme, with the majority (6 out of 7 respondents) rating the programme as very good or good, and recommending it to colleagues. The majority (6) took time to review and plan their career development as part of the mentoring process, and most of the respondents (5) now have a career development plan.

“It was good to get another perspective on career development. Usually you might only have your supervisor to help with that so having more options is quite useful”

“Mentor gave insights in to the behind the scenes of the academic landscape (e.g. what actually happens in funding processes, how university structure and direction is presented)”

“Increased my professional confidence even facing doubts about my professional plans”

Multiple mentoring participants, 2022

National Postdoc Appreciation Week (NPAW)

As [National Postdoc Appreciation Week](#) takes place in September, we here provide some information on the September 2021 iteration (part of the academic year), but also indication of the 2022 iteration, since most of the planning and organisation has taken place in the academic year 2021-22. Post-event information will be included in the 2022-23 report.

NPAW and Postdoc Awards 2021

In September 2021, NPAW was celebrated online.

While no Queen's specific event was organised, the PDC actively contributed to the organisation of two collaborative national online events taking place as part of NPAW: 'Celebrating successes - exploring diverse careers in the Postdoc afterlife' (online career panel discussion), and the 'National PostDoc Conference' 2021 (NPDC21), as member of the steering group and chair of individual sessions.

The PDC again coordinated the Postdoc Awards, funded by individual Faculties in categories recognising contributions to research, support of students and group, and citizenship and outreach. A total of 93 nominations were received (79 in MHLS, 12 in EPS, 2 in AHSS) and 8 awards and 10 commendations were granted and announced on Twitter.

Postdoc Showcase 2022



A one-day postdoc showcase is being organised by a group of postdocs from the PDC Representatives' Network, with support from the PDC. They have invited guest speakers on the theme 'Resilience and Innovation' and are scheduling lightning talks and posters by postdocs carrying out research across Queen's five

strategic research areas. There will be prizes for participants and plenty of opportunities to network, including during an happy hour at the end of the day. The event will take place during NPAW and the PDC Postdoc Awards will be awarded at this occasion.

Information about individual researchers is being collected (for those interested) as part of the registration process and profiles will be created and shared on social media during NPAW, as well as displayed in the poster room during the Showcase.

Postdoc Awards 2022

Similarly to 2021, Postdoc Awards are to be awarded during NPAW 2022, and will be presented in person at the Postdoc Showcase. A total of 88 nominations were received (59 in MHLS, 16 in EPS, 13 in AHSS), including some of them submitted on behalf of multiple individuals.

