

This guide, assembled by PDRA Champions for PDRA Champions, provides practical guidance (1) for PDRA Champions and key resources (2). It includes relevant contact information (3) and an appendix with details on setting up a mentoring scheme (4a) and a template welcome message for new research staff (4b).

### 1) PDRA Champion Role Guidelines

As a PDRA Champion, your primary responsibility is to foster a community among post-docs within your School, and facilitate communication with stakeholders. The primary challenges include effectively communicating with the post-doc community and encouraging their participation in initiatives. Do not be discouraged if only a few post-docs attend an event, even after considerable effort, or if many seem to overlook messages and actions. Assisting even a small number of post-docs is a significant accomplishment.

#### *Community Engagement:*

Actively collaborate with PDRA representatives and motivated PDRAs to build and maintain a strong community. If a post-doc society exists in your school, engage regularly through informal meetings. If not, advocate and support the creation of such a society.

#### *Communication and Awareness:*

Develop an effective mechanism to be notified of new PDRA joiners and offer them the opportunity meet with you or their institute representative (this can be done in groups if there are significant numbers of PDRAs). Promote available resources like the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) and the Research Staff Hub.

#### *Representation and Advocacy:*

Ensure PDRA representation at relevant school or institute meetings, leveraging senior colleagues for support. If PDRA participation in meetings is not in current terms of reference, advocate for this at strategy meetings. Work towards establishing smaller PDRA communities within each institute (if applicable).

#### *Infrastructure:*

Use or establish email lists to facilitate communication with PDRAs and try to establish mechanisms to keep these up-to-date. Support the setting of community events such as coffee or lunch meetings to listen to and identify common concerns or needs.

#### *Action and Advocacy:*

Address actionable items promptly and ensure PDRAs are informed of your efforts. For issues beyond your control, escalate them to school/centre leadership and make them part of long-term strategies.

#### *Mentoring Programme:*

Evaluate current mentoring opportunities for post-docs and ensure they meet PDRA needs. If necessary, develop new mentoring programmes that complement existing resources.

#### *Leadership Interaction:*

Establish contacts within your school/institute's management to address high-level concerns and to seek resources to support the post-doc society such as budget for events and admin support for mailing lists etc. Consider arranging regular meetings with leadership to discuss PDRA issues and initiatives.

#### *Supporting the post-doc society:*

Create and help maintain a Teams page for post-docs with regular updates on diverse topics. Support research, career, and networking events to connect post-docs across the school.

## 2) Key resources for PDRA Champions at the national, university and college level

<b>National Level</b>	
<a href="#"><u>Postdoc career development in the UK</u></a>	A great resource for postdoc career development led by the University of Liverpool
<a href="#"><u>UK Postdoc Appreciation Week</u></a>	Originally an initiative from the National Postdoc Association in the USA, it is now celebrated in the UK every September
<b>University Level</b>	
<a href="#"><u>IAD Research Staff support</u></a>	Tailored workshops, advice, and other opportunities for academic research staff, includes IAD's training brochure
<a href="#"><u>The Research Staff Hub</u></a>	Information from across the University to support research staff in their roles and career development
<a href="#"><u>Research Staff Societies</u></a>	List of active researcher and research staff contacts for research staff societies in different Schools
<a href="#"><u>UoE PDRA Champions</u></a>	List of current PDRA Champions within CSE and other colleges
<a href="#"><u>Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers</u></a>	Information about the Concordat, progress updates, and opportunities to get involved
<a href="#"><u>The Concordat Implementation Group (CIG)</u></a>	Implementation group to support development of a two-year action plan. IAD welcome suggestions for future plans. Contact Nicola Cuthbert to find out how to get involved with the CIG.
<a href="#"><u>The 10 Days Professional Development</u></a>	PDRAs are entitled to 10 days of training a year
<a href="#"><u>Professional development for researchers</u></a>	University level support for teaching, learning, and researcher development
UoE PDRA Champions Teams	A network to share best practices, ask questions, and promote networking sessions run by IAD
<b>College Level</b>	
<a href="#"><u>PDRA Champion Role Descriptor</u></a>	A broad overview of the role, including examples of initiatives across the College
CSE PDRA Forum meeting	Quarterly meetings chaired by Prof Jane Hillston (Dean of Research Culture and REF)

### 3) Contact details

- For queries relating to the IAD and the CIG, please contact Nicola Cuthbert ([n.cuthbert@ed.ac.uk](mailto:n.cuthbert@ed.ac.uk)).
- For queries relating to CSE including cross-school research culture activities, please contact the CSE College Research Office ([CSE.CRO@ed.ac.uk](mailto:CSE.CRO@ed.ac.uk)).

### 4) Appendix

- Appendix a) SBS Template for Welcome Message
- Appendix b) SBS Mentoring scheme

## Welcome to the School of Biological Sciences!

As a post-doc starting a position within the School, you will already have been in touch with your line manager / principal investigator and they should have arranged an induction meeting with you.

There are also some on-line resources and some contacts who can help you settle in and offer advice: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/biology/about/key-contacts>

There is a website designed specifically to offer advice and guidance to post-docs as they join the school, which you can find here: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/biology/groups/school-of-biological-sciences-postdoctoral-research>

The School has six 'post-doc advisors' – one based in each of our institutes. The advisors are available for meetings at email request and can offer impartial advice and guidance on career development or any issues or concerns you have during time as a post-doc here. Your institute post-doc advisor should be in touch soon, but we strongly recommend you get in touch with them and arrange a meeting within your first month. They can tell you more about career development and mentoring opportunities available to you, and can help orient you within your institute. Details of the post-doc advisors can be found here: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/biology/groups/school-of-biological-sciences-postdoctoral-research/postdoc-advisors>

The school has a society for post-docs ("BioDocSoc") which arranges social and career development events and represents post-docs' interests across the school. They have a Teams page ("SBS postdocs") which you can join. Many people post useful / interesting information on courses, opportunities and events on this Teams page. You can access it in Microsoft Teams by going to "Join or create Team" and entering the code **ggv1185**. Feel free to post the sort of content you would like to see on the relevant channels. Feedback and suggestions are welcome. You can also meet some members of the BioDocSoc committee and discuss what BioDocSoc can do for you, as well as socialise with other SBS postdocs, at the monthly BioDocSoc Open meetings. Everyone is welcome. The BioDocSoc Committee can also be reached by email: [biodocsoc-committee@mlist.is.ed.ac.uk](mailto:biodocsoc-committee@mlist.is.ed.ac.uk).

The university's Researcher Hub website offers a wide range of resources and support for research staff, and you are strongly advised to take a look and make use of it: [Support for Researchers | The University of Edinburgh](#)

Institute of Academic Development (IAD) also offers a wide range of useful resources and courses to support the career development of research staff – more information: [http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Research\\_staff/2022\\_RS\\_Brochure\\_final.pdf](http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Research_staff/2022_RS_Brochure_final.pdf)

Please also note that the University of Edinburgh is a signatory of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (more info: [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#)) and is committed to supporting your career development in research or in other lines of work. It is strongly recommended you read the concordat. Under the concordat, your line manager should *"provide opportunities, structured support, encouragement and time for researchers to engage in a minimum of 10 days professional development pro rata per year, recognising that researchers will pursue careers across a wide range of employment sectors."*

In addition, the University recently published a new code of practice on management and career development of research staff, which you can find here: [Code of Practice on Management and Career Development of Research Staff](#)

[http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Research\\_staff/CoP\\_FinalVersion\\_Updated\\_July22.pdf](http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Researchers/Research_staff/CoP_FinalVersion_Updated_July22.pdf)

If you feel you are not being supported or line managed in accordance with the concordat or the code of practice guidelines, you should contact a post-doc advisor or the school's Director of Career Development ([SBSDirector.CareerDev@ed.ac.uk](mailto:SBSDirector.CareerDev@ed.ac.uk)) to discuss this.

Also to note the School runs welcome events for new starts and there sound be one in the coming months, please do look out for an email and if possible attend.

We really hope you enjoy your time here and hope to meet you soon,

SBS Post-doc Advisors & BioDocSoc Committee.

## SBS post-doc mentoring scheme – guidance for mentees

**The SBS post-doc mentoring scheme is a new initiative to provide mentors to any post-doc that wants one.** Below is some brief guidance that should hopefully give you a sense of what to expect and what might be expected of you were you to join this scheme. This is an opt-in scheme and you will only be assigned a mentor if you request one and engage with the process of finding a suitable mentor. If you are keen to be assigned a mentor, please complete the form at the end of this document and send it to your institute PDA.

**What is a mentor?** Broadly it is someone who provides support and guidance to another person, but the role can be performed very effectively in many different ways and contexts. In the context of a formal academic career mentoring scheme like the one proposed, we suggest a mentor should be someone who provides the regular opportunity for a (typically more junior) colleague to have positive conversations about topics related to their career and professional development, offering advice and experiences where appropriate.

**How does this mentoring scheme work?** Having indicated you wish to be assigned a mentor and submitted the form at the end of this document, one of the scheme's organisers (see above) will contact you and arrange a meeting to discuss the kind of person and relationship you are looking for. Based on this, they will suggest one or several possible mentors from within your own or a different institute's mentor pool. You should indicate if you are happy to be assigned one of these suggestions: this should be a positive choice on your part. You can and should request other options if you feel concerned or worried about mentors who are suggested. It is important that you feel comfortable with the mentor you chose, and that your mentor is not someone with whom you already are working with closely or someone who might be required to undertake any meaningful form of professional assessment of your work (e.g. line managers, teaching program organisers). Once you have agreed on a potential mentor, a scheme organiser will contact them and introduce you both and suggest you arrange an initial meeting.

We are suggesting that you set up an initial meeting ASAP after this introduction with your mentor. This 'trial' meeting should be mainly to get to know one another a bit and to check that you feel comfortable with the proposed mentor. *After the first meeting you should contact the scheme organiser to confirm whether or not you are happy to proceed with the mentoring relationship, or would prefer to be assigned another mentor.* It is also the opportunity to start laying the groundwork for your ongoing relationship: what do you both see as the purpose of the relationship? What kinds of topics the mentee is most keen to discuss? How often and how do you want to meet and communicate? Discuss the level of confidentiality you both expect with respect to your discussions and make a plan for a follow up meeting. We suggest you arrange a second meeting within 2-3 weeks. Ahead of that second meeting, think about the sorts of issues or challenges you face professionally in order of priority that you would like to discuss with your mentor. You can present a list to your mentor via email, and this will help guide your initial meetings and discussions.

**A mentoring agreement / contract.** We strongly recommend that after your first or second meeting, you prepare a written agreement or 'mentoring contract' with your mentor which briefly lays out the following:

- What you each expect from the other in this relationship
- What your main work-related objectives are at the moment
- How often you expect to meet
- How you will contact with each other
- An agreement on confidentiality of anything discussed in meetings

As you move forward, you can review and modify this agreement – it may be useful to reflect on your stated objectives, how you are progressing towards them and if/how these have evolved or changed after each meeting you have.

We suggest you aim to meet 3-4 times per year with your mentor – with occasional extra meetings if required if you feel you need extra support at certain times. We also suggest that initially each mentoring

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relationship would be set up to run for 2 years. At end of the 2 year period, the formal mentoring relationship would end unless both parties indicated they wanted it to continue.

**How can I get the most out of mentoring?** This scheme is set up to be driven by the mentee and you will get out of it only as much as you put in. We suggest you arrive at meetings with an agenda or list of ideas / topics you would like to discuss in some order of priority. Ideally, you could send this list to your mentor ahead of the meeting. Try to be as open and honest as you can with your mentor, as this will help them to understand your situation and concerns and offer the best guidance. You will also need to remain open minded and open to feedback from your mentor – their advice and feedback should help you gain perspective and understanding of your own situation, but you will need to engage openly with any feedback. It is crucial that you, as the mentee, set the agenda and objectives of your discussions with your mentor and that you feel listened to and supported by your mentor.

It is important to recognise that few of the people involved in this scheme will have much experience of formal mentoring, and that it is to be expected that some mentoring relationships will not work through no fault of any party. Ending mentoring relationships that are not working in a swift and amicable way is going to be crucial to the success of the scheme. If you have concerns about how your mentoring relationship is going, you should speak to a scheme organiser or your Head of Institute about this, and they will advise you.

## SBS post-doc mentoring scheme – guidance for mentees

Post-doc mentoring information form – please complete and send back to your institute post-doc advisor.

Name	
Institute	
How long have you been a post-doc?	
How long have you been in your current role in Edinburgh?	
What do you hope to gain from this mentoring partnership? <i>e.g. Are there particular aspects of your current job you would be looking for guidance in? Particular kinds of career development advice? Advice on work/life balance?</i>	
Would you prefer your mentor to come from your own institute or a different one?	
Do you have any preference for the gender or career stage that your mentor would come from?	
Other there other factors you would like us to consider when suggesting possible mentors?	