

Case Study 1: Pathway to Independence; Developing Future Scientific Leaders

The ICR has been providing careers support for research degree and postdoctoral researchers for a number of years, utilising the expertise of its own Learning & Development team, as well as impartial careers advisors from the University of London Careers Group. There is high turnover of these junior researchers but uptake of central careers support was noted as low. Following a review of student careers support, the ICR significantly altered the careers programme, introducing a new “Careers Café” initiative to enable access to professionals from different career paths, and short, bespoke workshops such as “maintaining momentum during a PhD” and “Going Global; Getting a Postdoc Abroad”. The number of students engaging with careers support increased markedly. However, postdoc careers workshops continued to be poorly attended.

Consultation with the Postdoc Association revealed possible reasons for the lack of engagement of postdocs. Careers events were perceived as i) aimed for those wanting to leave academia, ii) a distraction from the day job, iii) not encouraged by the team leader. The Association indicated that the majority of postdocs had ambitions to become research leaders, therefore support in achieving this goal was most attractive to the group. At the same time, the L&D team started to engage with its junior, non-tenured team leaders (career development fellows; CDF). This group highlighted the significant challenges in moving from a postdoc to a team leader, the pressures of finding yourself ‘on the clock’ with 5-6 years to prove yourself. Many of the biggest challenges had not been anticipated by the new CDF before moving in to the role, such as recruiting the right team.

Given the ICR’s strategic goals include “To educate and train the next generation of cancer researchers and clinicians”, the L&D team, in partnership with the Postdoc Association, decided to develop a programme of careers support specifically aimed at those wanting to transition into research leaders. Not only would this provide the opportunity to help postdocs prepare for the challenges ahead, but also provide an opportunity to collaborate with peer organisations to enhance networking opportunities, and to gain buy-in from the ICR’s senior leadership team who consider the number of new team leaders emerging from the ICR’s cohort as key.

ICR partnered with the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute and the BBSRC through existing networks, and successfully won a project grant from the Leadership Foundation, who acknowledged that with the growing emphasis on mobility for researchers, we may be failing to prepare our postdoctoral researchers for leadership in other organisations. The programme ran with 24 delegates from six organisations, and further speakers from other HEIs across the UK. This included the ICR’s senior leadership team (the Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of Research). Details of the programme and speakers can be found [online](#)¹. Furthermore, the Research Directorate was responsible for selecting the delegates from applications, helping raise the profile of the applicants and their achievements to date.

The programme has been evaluated and the ICR has committed to running it biennially, fully funding places. Furthermore, small “Pathway to Independence Dean’s awards” will be advertised alongside this, which aim to provide a small pot of money to enable postdocs to gather preliminary data to include in their applications for independent funding.

The delegates who attended the programme reported feeling valued by their organisation, with the opportunity to network with key decision-makers in the sector, gain valuable input in to their research proposals, and receive advice from junior team leaders who very recently

made the transition. We are tracking the careers of the delegates who went through the pilot, and inviting some back to give advice on the 2015 programme, which is now being organised. To ensure ongoing support to the cohort, coaching has been offered to all ICR attendees, and a follow-up event was held 8 months after the core residential programme, to further explore key topics. Furthermore, the ICR Chief Executive has requested a tailored version is developed for clinical researchers aiming for academic independence.

Case Study 2: Scientific Officer Training and Development Summary (2014)

Scientific officers make up approximately 45% of the scientific staff employed at the ICR and are predominantly viewed as support or lab management roles rather than being on the academic career track (e.g. postdocs, career development faculty and team leaders). In response to the Robert's agenda, the training and careers support offered at the ICR was predominantly aimed at PhD students and postdocs on themes around fellowships, thesis writing and career planning. One SO reflected that "pre-2011, SOs were a bit of a forgotten group. There have always been events for students and postdocs but no equivalent for us". The creation of a dedicated association in 2011 helped to raise the profile of scientific officers within the organisation and improve the range of training available to them. A current SO committee member commented: "being on the committee has helped me know more people at the ICR through networking and made me get involved in the Athena Swan programme, which I find personally rewarding". Despite widespread support for starting a dedicated association, input was needed at its outset to encourage leadership in the form of 121 coaching to support the chairperson in their new role. Three years on, the association has 10 formal roles which include SO reps on a number of ICR-wide committees including the CEO Advisory Forum. The committee is also responsible for a range of initiatives including monthly coffee mornings to welcome new SOs starting at the ICR and a promotions mentoring scheme where 8 individuals have so far been matched with someone who has recently been through the promotions process for advice and input on how to complete the application. A recent applicant said "without the SOA I am not sure I would have found such an appropriate mentor to help me through my promotion application". The SOA also offers travel bursaries of up to £200 to help SOs attend courses, training and conferences as these can be difficult to obtain if you are not a PhD student or postdoc. The value of this initiative was emphasised by a quote from the annual SO training review "having a travel bursary specifically for Scientific Officers is a really valuable resource as otherwise it is really difficult to find funding to attend meetings".

The SOA has also resulted in a number of benefits to the ICR including valuable end-user input on the training and support offered including initiation of lunchtime training sessions as well as access to a pool of 15 highly experienced scientists who have been encouraged to provide technical training to others at the ICR including a "train the technical trainer" one day workshop piloted in early 2014 and well received. The SOA have also initiated an annual technical conference to give SOs opportunities to present to their peers, share expertise and network across different divisions. In the last 2 years conference attendance has increased 40% (from 57 to 80, representing 30% of the total SO grade workforce), and has been extended from a half to a full day to include a career development session delivered by C2 careers at the University of London. All three technical conferences have been strongly endorsed by Management Executive with sessions chaired by the CEO or other senior members of faculty. "I am very supportive personally of the Scientific Officer Technical

Conference, as is the senior leadership of ICR” – Prof Paul Workman, Chief Executive of the ICR.

References:

1. <http://training.icr.ac.uk/pathway/>