We have built it, why don’t they come?

Dr Liz Elvidge, Head,
Postdoc Development Centre
Background: Our mission statement

Imperial College London embodies and delivers world class scholarship, education and research in science, engineering, medicine and business, with particular regard to their application in industry, commerce and healthcare.
Research strategy

• To undertake research of the highest international quality within an intellectually challenging and inspiring environment.
• To extend the frontiers of knowledge within and beyond existing research disciplines.
• To bring together research expertise within and beyond the College to address science challenges of today and the future.
Our people

**Students**
15,290 full-time (2014-15)
- 9,054 – undergraduate
- 3,263 – taught postgraduate
- 2,973 – research postgraduate

**Staff**
3,535 academic and research staff
2,400 Postdocs and Fellows
3,736 support staff

**An international institution**
Students from 126 countries
Top non-UK country (students): China
64% of full-time students non-UK nationals
39% of staff non-UK nationals
Our Principles

• Being a postdoc is not a career

• Imperial does not want any researcher to leave the college unemployed unless they want to be

• Our programme is bespoke and tailored to what postdocs need rather than what they want (i.e. a permanent academic job)
What does this mean for our postdocs?

- Since 2009 - Stand alone centre dedicated to supporting postdocs and fellows
- The only such centre at any UK university
- Our mission: The Postdoc Development Centre is dedicated to providing support and development opportunities for postdocs and fellows at Imperial
- Unique: 10 days training per year in the contracts
What do we do?

Development and support for all aspects of a postdocs’ careers

• Courses & workshops
• One to one support
• Mock interviews
• Departmental reps network
• Publications/website
We offer an extensive programme of professional skills and career development courses, including:-

• Aiming for a lectureship
• Preparing successful fellowship applications
• Taking charge of your career – career development programme
• Planning your career. What next?
• Voice projection and pronunciation courses
• Writing skills programme
• Pop-ups
Mock interviews

- Provided for any postdoc who has been invited to an interview
- Interview with a panel of other postdocs (349 volunteers)
- Interview based on an analysis of the applicant and the job
- Takes 1.5 hours
Mock interviews: some data

• Academic year 2014-15: **93**

• Jobs range: lectureships, fellowships, non-academic positions

• Success rate: **47%**
I wanted to say how impressed I was with the mock interview process. x was my first (and only) application for a lectureship. I think it is incredible that a mock was able to be arranged to include people from Aeronautics, Physics and Maths…. the feedback, ….was really superb. A number of similar questions from the mock came up in the real interview, and I felt confident and assured in giving my answers.
One-to-one support

Topics that can be discussed include:-

• Tailored CV advice
• Job searching and applications
• Fellowship applications
• Moving on from academia
• Issues related to the working environment
• Personal and professional development opportunities
One-to-one support

- Academic year 2014-15: 316
- Subject range: CV, career planning, problems with PI, Fellowship/job applications, time management
- Most common - CV and reviewing job/fellowship applications
Pop-ups

- Short briefings - 1 hour

- ‘just in time’ i.e. announcement of new fellowships - specific guidance on the scheme, common mistakes

- Average turnout - 50
Departmental Reps Network

- Postdoc reps in every department, at every campus
- Run events in partnership with the departments
- A voice for the postdocs
Communication and Publications

- Email list (2,400 postdocs), twitter, website, reps, monthly newsletter, postcard
- A successful career begins at Imperial
- Postdoc handbook
- How to be successful at fellowship interviews: Advice from fellowship holders and panel members
- Course directory
- Good practice guidelines
Our challenges: destination data

• Very difficult to get destination data
• New initiative is an exit survey with a prize draw.
• Results so far….emailed 80, 25 replies
• 40% lecturer, 8% Fellowship, 27% Postdoc
• 25% outside academia- NHS, industry
Reflections on supporting postdocs

• Common themes and challenges......
  • Academic excellence but.....
  • Priority of research over career
  • Not thinking long term- 5 year plan/10 year plan
  • Need for networking skills

• Not taking opportunities
• The ability to ask!
To discuss

• No postdoc ever takes up their 10 days training and development a year- why not?

• Why don’t more postdocs take up the offer of reviewing draft job applications, participating in a mock interview?

• Despite widespread and varied publicity, why do we still encounter postdocs who have never heard of us?

• Is there something missing in what we offer?

• We have built it- why don’t they come?
We have built it, why don’t they come?

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