

**Minutes from the ECR Liaison Forum (Online - Combined Campuses)**

**Wednesday 20 May 2020 via MS Teams**

**09.30 am – 11.30 am**

**Attendees:**

- Mr Daniel Adanza Dopazo, ECR (CEMPS, KTP Associate) Exeter
- Dr Arely Cruz-Santiago, ECR (SSIS) Exeter
- Dr Colleen Deane, ECR (CLES, Sport and Health Sciences) Exeter
- Dr George De Ath, ECR (CEMPS, Computer Science) Exeter
- Dr Jacquelyn Eales, ECR (College of Med & Health) Cornwall
- Dr Helen Eyles, ECR (CLES, Biosciences) Exeter
- Kate Foster (Careers Coach)
- Dr Ben Gardner, ECR (CEMPS, Physics) Exeter
- Dr Jo Garrett, ECR (on behalf of Dr Jacqui Eales and Dr Sarah Bell, College of Med & Health) Cornwall
- Dr Jamie Harrison, ECR (CLES, Medicine) Exeter
- Dr Yolanda Hill, ECR (CEMPS, Maths) Exeter
- Charlotte Juggins, Doctoral College (RDRC PGR & ECR Experience Officer)
- Dr Adeline Loh, ECR (CEMPS, Renewables) Cornwall
- Dr Pablo Martinez Pancorbo (CEMPS, Physics & Astronomy) Exeter
- Prof Andrew McRae (Dean of the DC)
- Dr Ajit Pillai, ECR (CEMPS, Engineering) Cornwall
- Dr Erik Postma (CLES, Biosciences) Cornwall
- Dr Alejandro Roman Gonzalez, ECR (CLES, Geography) Cornwall
- Dr M D Sharma, ECR (CLES, Biosciences) Cornwall
- Dr Clemens Ullman, ECR (CEMPS, CSM) Cornwall
- Dr Bryony Williams (CLES, Biosciences) Exeter
- Juliet White, Doctoral College (RDRC - Administrator) – Secretary to the meeting
- Dr Chris Wood - Doctoral College (RDRC Manager) - Chair
- Dr Rebecca Wyatt, ECR (UEMS, Institute of Biomedical & Clinical Science Research) Exeter
- Dr Chris Yeomans, ECR (CEMPS, CSM) Cornwall

**Apologies:**

Dr Janice Atkins; Dr Sarah Bell, Mr Jamie Cranston, Dr Jonathan Doney, Dr Nadira Faber, Dr Oscar Fitch-Roy, Alexandra Gardner, Dr Zoltan Gombos, Dr Anna Harper, Dr Annie Knight, Ms Vikki Reid, Dr Emma Roberts, Dr David Ross, Dr Jemma Shipton, Dr Charlotte Tupman, Dr Sarah Walker, Dr Rebecca Wheeler, Drs Astrid Wissenburg.

1 **Welcome & Introductions**

Dr Chris Wood welcomed everyone to this first ever virtual ECR LF combining both Exeter and Cornwall campuses. Discussions from today will feed into the RIEG (Research Impact and Executive Group) meeting due to be held 29.5.20. Chris reminded those attending that the meeting is being recorded for Minute-taking purposes only and shared the Agenda in the chat box. Chris briefly touched upon the good work that had continued during lockdown with regards PGRs/ECRs, with a strong focus on training provision that would be particularly beneficial and timely to the cohort (eg, dedicated virtual workshops around things you can do from home). All Webinars have been well attended to date. Virtual Research Showcase ran successfully (w/c 11.5.20).

**Feedback - on how the University should be supporting you as researchers in non-training related areas and what your immediate concerns are, both individually and within your research groups in light of COVID-19 (to be taken by the reps to RIEG on 29<sup>th</sup> May)**

The primary purpose of this meeting is to focus on the needs of ECRs now and going forward in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and related 'lock-down' issues.

Dr Jacquelyn Eales stated that she did not appear to have received the dedicated COVID-19 comms updates. Dr Wood highlighted the dates they were sent (3 April; 23 April and 11 May) and that all editions are on the dedicated DC COVID-19 website. This issue with coms for Dr Eales has now been resolved.

Dr Adeline Loh from Penryn had asked her Network for feedback for potential training provision. Feedback received which can be taken to RIEG is clarification on projects based on European grants and also PGR researchers not funded through UKRI and where they stand as they have not heard re: any opportunities for extended funding? Other responses included setting out things with more certainty, opt-in emails re: topics of interest, backing up data/exchanging hard drives, using printers, info on how labs on campus can be accessed. Prof Andrew McRae stated that funding announcements are due later today. Yesterday's VC all staff talk covered returning to campuses.

Dr Chris Yeomans asked about PhD funding/extensions. Many ECRs/PGRs had lost 2+ months of fieldwork time so an extension with extra funding may not mean that there is anything to report against. Andrew McRae stated that this is discussed weekly at RIEG and is very much high on the agenda, not only at Exeter but nationally. The Government has announced £100m funding to Universities for Research (much smaller amount than applied for) however Sir Steve Smith is positive about the future and UKRI are on board too. PGR extensions have been responded to very quickly. Projects are being looked at on an individual basis and Pl's and Research Services are joining up to look at where extensions are needed; a complex process which has an associated lag time.

Dr Colleen Deane talked about the impact COVID-19 has had on clinical testing and asked if it was too late to request Furlough. She has been in touch with Dr Nick Church regarding furlough whose response was to stay off furlough and to change objectives however this may not be feasible. She had spoken with MRC at the beginning of lockdown who recommended she document everything that has impacted her fellowship so far. Ideally, nobody's aims and objectives should be compromised as a result of the pandemic however in some cases this may happen. It is critical that the correct support is provided. It was discussed that Furlough options are HR related, but any ongoing issues should be raised via the Doctoral College.

Dr Rebecca Wyatt spoke about grants for charity funding and rumours circulating re. the University will not allow charity funding due to overhead funds. Prof. McRae said that he had not heard this and it certainly is not a University policy.

Dr Chris Wood asked for general feelings around the University's recruitment freeze/lack of contract extension.

Dr MD Sharma asked that this be taken to RIEG however asked if it would be more beneficial to speak directly to HR for clarification. He proposed a line diagram of how recruitment decisions are going to be taken in light of COVID-19, might be helpful. Dr Chris Yeomans followed on by asking about concerns around future employability of post-docs if no extension is granted or if fewer papers had been written and posts becoming more competitive it may leave individuals' disadvantaged by your University. Dr Helen Eyles reported that there is evidence appearing that women's research is hit harder and is linked to those who have carer/parenting responsibilities and would like to see a clear policy going forward to recognise these types of constraints when assessing suitability to a job role. MD suggested that a paragraph be added to CV's explaining the impact of COVID-19; in his situation he will use it as an opportunity to self-promote (eg, used the time to help colleagues with their research). To request/discuss that a focus be put on 'nurturing existing talent' in order to ensure our own post-docs are not disadvantaged for future job market as a result of COVID-19. Andrew McRae suggested that some discussion is had with Clive Betts around adding a section, for example, on the application form along the lines of 'Do you consider your career was affected by COVID-19?' **ACTION: Discussion points for RIEG.**

Further to this discussion, Dr Yolanda Hill asked that consideration be given to ensure that internal review processes be re-worked so that fellowship applications be given equal standing and that ECRs who are not part of a big visible group are not 'swept aside' as they may be not be considered to align with those who are doing the internal review. Charlotte Juggins suggested the possibility of opening applications for 2 weeks to internal candidates before being thrown out more widely to external candidates. Dr Ben Gardner – suggested the University create a 'talent pool' which records skill-sets of individuals for consideration when positions become available. MD reported that this structure already exists within the Temporary Staff Bank (TSB) so could be easily adapted for Researchers. Chris Wood reiterated that the TR5 situation works in a similar way; matching skills with opportunities. **ACTION: Discussion points for RIEG.**

Dr Yolanda Hill asked if DC 'hang-outs' might be useful platform for support. Dr Wood stated that this had not been very popular in the past but it could be resurrected if enough interest. It was felt that individual networks/colleges had organised more localised support system. It was agreed that details of these forums be collected and added to the DC website.

3 **Proposals for further training provision - particularly those that will help during the current situation and are in addition to the training already put in place at the start of the pandemic.**

Dr Adelaine Loh requested job market on academia and outside; utilisation of platforms on remote working (zoom/VPN/Teams); well-being training; how to be productive; structure their day; staying healthy. She stated that she is really happy with current webinars.

Dr Chris Wood reported that progression has been made around extra well-being support and working with GW4 on a dedicated career specific event across Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter Universities. Kate Foster stated that a webinar entitled 'Resilient Career Planning in difficult times' is taking place on 2.6.20 (11.30 am – 1.30 pm) and is open to PGRs/ECRs. Jo Garrett stated that training around careers, non-academic CVs, etc would be helpful.

Dr Chris Yeomans reported that there is a large demand from people wanting stats courses in Exeter and that they are struggling with meeting that demand and would like more people to help. There are complexities around remuneration for ECRs who facilitate which will hopefully be clarified in the future. Jo Garrett echoed training for statistics (advance modelling such as structural modelling in R, general additive models, mixed effects, etc).

Dr Yolanda Hill suggested Agile Methodology (software engineering/IT space) – suggested training course for the future.

Dr Wood detailed that an Extraordinary Meeting will be convened in the summer that would take in to account the above suggestions as well as any other that come from outside of the current meeting. He further encouraged members to contact him about any other training ideas, especially those that could be done easily from home.

4 **Dr Enda Clarke - Ethics aspects of the new Research Management System (RMS).**

Enda joined the meeting to provide a brief overview of the above and asked if the ECR population might like to engage with this project and sit on a working group to input their ideas/feedback. Enda answered questions.

5 **Any Other Business**

It was agreed that the MS Teams Chat be left open for those who wished to add to the conversation. The Chat will be monitored by RDRC staff on a regular basis.

6 **Close of Meeting** (date of next meeting: Summer Extraordinary Meeting – date to be confirmed)

The meeting closed at 11.22 am.

**Exeter ECR Liaison Forum - Action Points Summary**

<b>Item No</b>	<b>Action Point</b>	<b>Assigned to</b>	<b>Completed</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Discussion about how contracts and extensions would be considered in relation to COVID-19 and concerns around nurturing existing talent to be taken to and discussed at RIEG.</b>	<b>CW/ECR Reps</b>	<b>20.5.20</b>