ACTIVITIES IN CAMBRIDGE TO BOOST YOUR CAREER

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Activities in Cambridge to boost your career

Contents of this guide

1. Starting out; advice from one postdoc to another 2
2. Outreach, research communication and policy 3
3. Business awareness 6
4. Improving your academic profile 9
5. College involvement 11
6. Teaching and research supervision 13
7. Professional development 15
8. Personal development 15

This guide provides suggestions and information about a variety of activities that you can get involved in outside your day to day research. It was compiled with input from current Cambridge postdocs, and includes their experiences and feedback about different activities.

Manage your time carefully, and pick activities which you enjoy, and which you think will be most useful to you in your future career. Many of the activities are a great way to try out different things to see if you like them, or test whether you have the ability to do them as part of your career. We are not suggesting that you should try to do all of the activities listed here!

If you would like help deciding which activities would be most appropriate for your career plans, you can come and talk to the Postdoc Careers Service and we can advise you.

The Careers Service also has an email service called CamCareers which is useful for finding out about opportunities beyond those described in this booklet. You tell us which areas you’re interested in, and we’ll email you about those topics. To sign up, go to:

http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Emails.aspx

We would like to thank all the postdocs who have contributed to this booklet by telling us about their activities during their time at Cambridge.
1. Starting out: advice from one postdoc to another

“GET INVOLVED. Yes it feels like there is a lot to do with work, but this is Cambridge – people will certainly push you to work as hard as possible. Try things one month at a time.”

“Know what you want to get out of your postdoc.”

“Talk to the Postdoc Careers Service as soon as possible and take advantage of the many excellent events and courses that they run, as well as their one-to-one advice. Another good group to get in touch with is Postdocs of Cambridge, as well as postdocs in your own research group/department.”

“If I could start over, there would be less lab time and more time devoted to developing other aspects of my career.”

“I’d definitely join up to the Postdoc Careers Service emailing list and the PdOC list.”

“Talk to people in your group and department about things other than work. Look out for useful local tips, e.g. nice places to eat out, but also lifestyle hints, especially if you are not originally from the UK. If you do not know something, go ahead and ask someone who has been here longer. It is never too early to start – you can get in touch even before you arrive. And try to maintain some balance between work and leisure. Make friends with other postdocs! This may sound trivial, but it will help you keep going.”

“Attend the seminars offered by the Postdoc Careers Service as they are very helpful.”

“Cambridge is a great place to work in and being part of this very special environment is a great opportunity for your personal and professional growth. First of all, because of the great network you have the possibility to create here. It’s a very interdisciplinary and dynamic environment. The secret is that it’s just up to you: with minimal time spent looking, you can find tens of activities which could help to improve your career, and hundreds of new people to collaborate with.”
2. Outreach, research communication and policy

What is it?
Any activity in which you are communicating your research to a wider audience. This might be through activities in schools or with school children, public events and festivals, writing for popular magazines or newspapers, appearing in or supporting broadcast programmes, or doing media interviews.

Find out more and get involved
If your department has an outreach co-ordinator, they are a good place to start. Details can usually be found on your department website. If there is no department co-ordinator, contact the University’s Communications Office, who are always keen to hear from postdocs who would like to communicate their research to the public. You could also come to the annual Careers Service Comms & Creative event (in Lent term) – our main media information event – to speak to science communicators in person. See the Careers Service website for attendees at previous events.

Gain experience in an organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Communications Office</th>
<th><a href="http://www.communications.cam.ac.uk">www.communications.cam.ac.uk</a></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research communications, digital communications and public engagement teams</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Research Communications team supports researchers communicating their research through the media</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Public Engagement team does many things including coordinating the University’s two research-led festivals - Cambridge Science Festival (March) and Festival of Ideas (October) as well as the Open Cambridge weekend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>See <a href="http://www.sciencefestival.cam.ac.uk">www.sciencefestival.cam.ac.uk</a>, <a href="http://www.festivalofideas.cam.ac.uk">www.festivalofideas.cam.ac.uk</a>, <a href="http://www.opencambridge.cam.ac.uk">www.opencambridge.cam.ac.uk</a> or follow them @camuniengage</td>
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BlueSci - www.bluesci.org.uk
Cambridge University Science Magazine - science writing

The Naked Scientists - www.thenakedscientists.com
Radio and podcasts for the general public on all areas of science

British Science Association Media Fellowships (work placements) - www.britishscienceassociation.org

Royal Society - www.royalsociety.org
Training courses and pairing schemes with MPs and Civil Servants
In addition to the Centre for Science and Policy, there are other learned and professional societies you might consider, such as the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Institute of Physics.

**Other ways to gain experience**

- Sign up for CamCareers emails (www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Emails.aspx) - select the media categories
- Register with a local radio or TV as a subject expert
- Develop your online presence through blogging or tweeting about your research
- Help at your department Open Day
- Vice Chancellor Awards (www.research-strategy.admin.cam.ac.uk/vice-chancellors-awards) - the University runs two sets of parallel awards to recognise the achievements in the areas of Impact and Public Engagement with Research.

**Likely time commitment**

It depends on your level of involvement. It’s very easy to be involved at a minimal level, perhaps just one activity per year. However, if you are thinking of developing a career in publishing, policy or science communication you will need to develop strong skills in this area, so you need to be involved on a more regular basis.

**Benefits to a career in academia**

The majority of funding bodies look upon outreach as an essential part of disseminating research findings and ensuring impact. In lectureship applications, panels look favourably upon candidates who have been involved with outreach, because it demonstrates willingness to contribute to the life of a department and the wider academic community. However, research and teaching will still be the major elements on which you will be assessed, so be careful that your outreach activity does not detract from these areas.

**Benefits to a career outside academia**

Outreach is a way to demonstrate that you have developed the good communication skills that many employers seek. If you are thinking about a career in any area of communication (publishing, journalism, policy etc), this is essential experience to have on your CV. But the ability to explain complex research to different audiences in an engaging way is a skill also highly valued in industry and other commercial environments where you are likely to come into contact with customers, or to work in interdisciplinary teams.
What postdocs say about it

“It is so good to see that the general public is genuinely interested in current research, provided that you can explain it to them on the appropriate level – and that is a precious skill in itself.”

“I've done quite a lot of outreach: something like 30-50 public conferences and demonstrations, and public observing (I am an astronomer). I have also been involved in writing two film scripts, some acting, and science advising for a series of sci-fi novels. I also provide commentary on discoveries to a number of newspapers and was doing some commentary on television (in Canada). I now have a lot of material ready for outreach so I don't spend too much time doing it per week, but I keep thinking about avenues of disseminating recent scientific discoveries properly.”

“The ability to explain complex science and engineering to people who do not have an engineering degree is invaluable.”

“I did the Royal Society MP-Scientist Pairing Scheme – this is a fantastic scheme. For people interested in a career outside academia the benefits of this scheme are obvious, but for people interested in an academic career it’s also very good as a way of understanding the perspectives and priorities of politicians, and learning how to communicate effectively with them. Benefits to those interested in entrepreneurship / business / innovation are probably obvious, but I think it is also interesting in a broader way as it provides some understanding of how science is perceived outside academia, and as a way of becoming familiar with the language of innovation, wealth creation and so on, and how these may be linked to research. This is becoming increasingly important in securing funding for research.”

“I’ve done some outreach activities in the Prep Primary School (Cambridge) for four classes of 9-year-old children as part of the Prep Science Week. With a couple of PhD students from my research group, we organized some activities/games related to optics. It took about three days to plan and prepare the activities. Working with the children has been an amazing experience, which makes you think in more detail about your everyday area of work, how to explain it in easy words. In addition to this, children can sometimes ask you great/interesting questions you would have never thought about, forcing you to see things from a totally different perspective.”
3. Business awareness

What is it?
Commercial awareness is an awareness of what affects profit, why it does so, and how. It includes basic business concepts e.g. the relationship between sales, costs and profit; and the concept that goods and services need a market. A basic level of business awareness is crucial for any job in a commercial context.

Find out more and get involved
Cambridge is full of activities that provide you with a taster of working in a commercial environment. There are structured lectures, workshops and programmes to help you to develop commercial and entrepreneurial skills, as well as societies to join.

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<tr>
<th>Activities to raise your business awareness</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The University Enterprise Network</strong> - <a href="http://www.enterprisenetwork.group.cam.ac.uk">www.enterprisenetwork.group.cam.ac.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A good place to start – from this website you can find the different ways to get involved in entrepreneurial activities in Cambridge.</td>
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<td><strong>Entrepreneurial Postdocs of Cambridge (EPoC)</strong> – <a href="http://www.epoc.group.cam.ac.uk">www.epoc.group.cam.ac.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops initiatives to support postdocs pursuing business and entrepreneurial ventures</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Entrepreneurship Centre</strong> - <a href="http://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/entrepreneurship">www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/entrepreneurship</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Based in the Judge Business School, runs a variety of lectures and programmes designed to introduce Cambridge researchers to the local entrepreneurial community, and to develop business skills. These range from one hour lectures to one week residencies as well as the EnterpriseTECH PhD+ programme.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>i-Teams</strong> – <a href="http://www.iteamsonline.org">www.iteamsonline.org</a></td>
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<td>A termly activity in which teams of researchers learn about taking real technologies to market</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>postdocs to innovators (p2i)</strong> - <a href="http://www.p2i-network.eu">www.p2i-network.eu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>A network of European higher education institutions and global enterprises which supports entrepreneurial activities for postdocs (events, courses, fairs)</td>
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<td><strong>Cambridge University Technology and Enterprise Club</strong> - <a href="http://www.cutec.org">www.cutec.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cambridge University Entrepreneurs</strong> - <a href="http://www.cue.org.uk">www.cue.org.uk</a></td>
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Activities to raise your business awareness

**Impulse (Maxwell Centre)** – www.maxwell.cam.ac.uk/prograames/impulse
*Has an entrepreneurship programme which includes skills development, networking and collaboration*

**Cambridge Enterprise** – www.enterprise.cam.ac.uk
*Offers postdocs advice on providing expert consultancy services and runs an annual postdoc business plan competition together with EPoC*

**Biotechnology Young Entrepreneurs Scheme (YES)**
*Organised by the BBSRC and University of Nottingham*

Other activities postdocs have done to develop business awareness

- Sat on an industrial advisory group
- Found industrial funding for their research
- Had their own consultancy company related to their research
- Did the Royal Society ‘Innovation and the Business of Science’ training course
- Worked remotely for a patent abstracting company

In addition, your department may offer opportunities to meet companies. Keep an eye open for industry forum days, and be proactive in seeking out small competitions for research funding or in initiating collaborations with industry. You can also develop commercial awareness by taking on roles such as treasurer for a society or club, or through raising funds for research or other activities.

Likely time commitment

In order to really develop useful commercial skills that will be convincing on your CV, many of the activities can be quite time-consuming, e.g. a week-long residential session, or weekly sessions over the course of a term.

Benefits to a career in academia

Having an awareness of how research can be commercialised is looked upon favourably.

Benefits to a career outside academia

Many commercial employers – industry, consulting, finance – consider, sometimes wrongly, that people from academic backgrounds have no commercial awareness or business skills. Having this kind of experience on your CV will be very attractive to them, and will go a long way to getting you noticed for these kinds of roles. For those who are not seeking
employment in these sectors, many of the opportunities are still useful in developing a range of skills sought in many different jobs, such as communication, teamwork and leadership skills.

### What postdocs say about it

“I set up my own ltd company and have undertaken consultancy work for the aerospace industry. This is well paid, has raised my profile in the industry, and will provide an alternative income stream if I am made redundant. This was probably the most valuable extra-curricular activity that I have undertaken in my time as a postdoc.”

“i-Teams was an ideal introduction to the commercialisation of research as well as a great way to make contacts and meet interesting people from many different backgrounds.”

“I recently entered the postdoc business plan competition run by EPOC and Cambridge Enterprise. This was a much bigger time commitment than I expected (it ate a good 1-2 days a week during the month-long mentoring stage) and the resulting start-up is still a big draw on my time – but it’s been a really interesting learning curve and it’s been fun getting connected to the entrepreneurial scene in Cambridge.”

“Three or four hours a week teleworking for a patent abstracting company can be interesting because the range of topics is very diverse. A common perception of research engineers is that they are mono-skilled, and so broader skills can stand out.”

“Apart from my research I created a first spin-out this year, Immaterial Labs, to commercialise some of the materials developed in my research group. We have won several business competitions (1st prize RSC Emerging technologies 2015, CUE 1k, Cambridge Enterprise postdoc competition, etc.). This has been very rewarding and I expect it to have huge impact in the next years. Now I am discussing with Cambridge Enterprise the possibility of a second spin-out company, and to work as a consultant as well. I found the support from the Judge Business School invaluable.”

“One thing that helped me tremendously, and has also helped me in my current job, was initiating a collaborative project with industry. If you find that some of the technology necessary for your research is not commercially available, then depending on the particular importance of your field (social impact, multi-disciplinary applications etc...), trying to start a collaborative project to commercially develop that technology with an interested industrial partner can be tremendously enriching.”
4. Improving your academic profile

Become known within the academic community
The academic community relies on the involvement of its members in order to function. Examples of the ways in which academics contribute to their communities include editorial work for journals, peer review of articles/grant applications, conference organisation, examination of PhDs and involvement with Learned and Professional Societies.

How to get started
You could start within your department by organising seminars for your group or for PhD students. Inviting speakers from other universities to seminars you are organising is a good way to meet people. You could contact the editorial office of journals you publish in to ask if they are interested in your expertise as a peer reviewer. You could also volunteer as a member of a committee in your department or get involved with the Postdocs of Cambridge Society (PdOC).

Likely time commitment
The time commitment could be anything, depending on how much and what you choose to do.

Benefits to a career in academia
In order to progress your academic career you need to demonstrate that your research is of interest not only to yourself, but also that it will have impact in the wider community. Crucially, you will need to persuade other researchers that your work is worthwhile in order to win funding. To achieve this you need to get to know other academics in your field, understand how your work fits with theirs, and understand the wider significance of your work to your field. Getting involved early in some of the activities outlined above will provide you with many opportunities to get to know academics in your field and their work, and for them to get to know you and your work. It may lead to ideas for collaborations and new projects. It will also show that you are serious about an academic career and committed to research.

Benefits to a career outside academia
Some activities will be more beneficial to a career outside academia than others, and which activities you choose will depend on what you want to do. For example, if you are interested in a career in publishing, getting involved with peer review will be helpful. If you are seeking to demonstrate team work and organisational skills, volunteering to organise a conference could be a useful activity.
What postdocs say about it

“I have tried to ensure that my ‘extra-curricular’ activities raise my profile outside the department.”

“You can volunteer for publishing roles such as newsletters, or be a representative on local activities. These roles give you the authority to start inviting the leading players in the field to advertise and promote themselves. Develop a research network.”

“These experiences can help you develop and improve transferrable skills alongside teaching skills, such as time management, leadership and the ability to work both independently and within a team.”

“For a career in academia, being the seminar organiser can be especially valuable – it is a very good networking opportunity and means that you spend time talking with visiting researchers, learning about their work and their institutions in more detail. It can lead to a reciprocal invitation since the visitor finds out about you. It is also genuinely interesting and you can use it as an opportunity to learn about developments in your field more broadly.”

“For committees, seek out opportunities – speak to members of committees that you would like to join, and make it known that you are interested. Sitting on committees within the department served several purposes: (a) get to know more people within the department (b) understand mechanisms within the department and (c) show off your abilities.”

“I sit on the health and safety committee. This takes up a few hours every few months, plus ongoing work coordinating H&S stuff in the group.”
5. College involvement

What is it?
There are different ways to get involved in life at one of the Cambridge Colleges. There are a limited number of extremely competitive Junior Research Fellowships (JRFs), and some teaching posts (College Teaching Officers, or CTOs). However, there are other ways you can become affiliated with a College, e.g. by becoming a college Research Associate. It is worth noting that not all academics in Cambridge University departments are linked to Colleges, even those in established posts, and it is not necessary to be part of a College in order to get involved in many aspects of Cambridge life.

Where to find out more
The Postdocs of Cambridge Society has a guide to College affiliations at www.pdoc.cam.ac.uk/guides. For individual College websites, see www.map.cam.ac.uk/colleges

How to get involved
You could talk to your PI or other contacts in your department to see what opportunities might be available. Sign up to the PdOC newsletter – among other news it advertises opportunities to get involved with Colleges.

Likely time commitment
If you want reap the benefits of being involved in College life, then you will have to put quite some time and effort into developing your activity there.

Benefits to a career in academia
If you are successful in obtaining a JRF, this is useful evidence of your independent research profile and your ability to attract funding. Beyond that, the primary benefit comes in the networking opportunity provided by being part of the academic community in Cambridge beyond your department.

Benefits to a career outside academia
Few employers outside academia are likely to recognise College involvement per se. However, the networking opportunities can be very useful, as well as the opportunity to get involved in wider College activity – e.g. seminars, mentoring – which could help you to develop a broad range of skills applicable outside academia.
What postdocs say about it

“To get a connection with a College, getting yourself appointed as a College Research Associate (RA) is a good route. Of course becoming a research fellow is better, but this is very difficult even for the non-stipendiary roles and will involve a lot of work for probably no return.”

“Affiliation with a College enables you to meet people from outside your field and enjoy your time at Cambridge to the fullest.”

“Being a member of a College has been a valuable experience in the sense that it gave me the opportunity to meet other students and colleagues and enrich my social life.”

“I’ve found my College Fellowship to be a valuable way of meeting people and getting cheaper accommodation, and also a way to get experience on committees, budgeting etc if you want to.”

“Through the College, I had access to many facilities and social contacts outside my immediate research area, which were both very helpful.”

“Being a College tutor gives a new perspective and a level of responsibility.”

“I suggest that new postdocs wishing to join a College should start their search as soon as possible. I managed to join a college as Visiting Scholar and it has been a great academic and personal experience.”

“I am partially involved in a College, as a director of studies. It came about because I went to alumni dinners at the college after I graduated and kept in contact with members of staff there. This meant that when an opening appeared, I was made aware of it.”

“I have found being part of a College to be a fantastic source of mentorship and career advice from some of the mid-career science fellows (not directly in my area, but facing similar challenges). It’s also a great way to meet people outside of your discipline in a semi-social, semi-academic setting, which I found really helpful when I arrived – it meant I knew people outside of my lab! The food’s also great.”
6. Teaching and research supervision

Sources of information / how to get involved
Talk to your PI about opportunities to teach on their course or in their College, or for opportunities to mentor/informally supervise project students, Part III students or PhD students. Ask around in your department about opportunities to get involved in lab demonstrating. Check the PdOC resources on teaching (www.pdoc.cam.ac.uk/guides/pdocteaching)

Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL)
Teaching Associates’ Programme (TAP) aimed at early career academics
www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/support-and-training/programmes

ECR Teach, Institute of Continuing Education
Course designed for postdoc early career researchers to learn course design, teaching, assessment and evaluation
www.ice.cam.ac.uk/course/ecr-teach

Likely time commitment
This depends on how many students you supervise. Taught supervisions are usually one hour long, and you will typically have 2-3 students per group, weekly or fortnightly. You will need to do a substantial amount of preparation for each supervision. Lab sessions can last from 2-6 hours, and there will also be preparation to do, and possibly marking afterwards. Supervising a student doing a research project or PhD is a more on-going commitment, and the time commitment will fluctuate.

Benefits for a career in academia
Academic selection panels for lectureship positions will expect applicants to demonstrate some experience in, as well as enthusiasm for, teaching and research supervision. You may be asked interview questions about examples of when you have taught and supervised students. Even if you are not the formal, named supervisor of a research student, you can use the experience of informally supervising/managing/directing a student’s research in applications and interviews. If you want to develop teaching experience for an academic career it is worth getting a variety of experience, not just doing the same type of teaching again and again. Also, keep an eye out for opportunities to experience aspects of teaching that are less commonly available to postdocs, such as lecturing and course design. These will help you to stand out from other candidates.

Benefits for a career outside academia
Nearly all employers say they are seeking people with good communication skills. Teaching is an excellent way to demonstrate that you
are able to explain complex concepts to an audience less specialised than yourself. It also helps to develop organisational skills, and shows that you can mentor and motivate people.

**What postdocs say about it**

“Teach. Ideally a different subject to the one you are researching. Broaden your expertise. Refresh your knowledge of the basics in the field. Technical interviews will seldom focus on your area of specialism because you know far more than the interviewer. The ability to explain complex science and engineering to people who do not have an engineering degree is invaluable.”

“Volunteering to do supervisions is useful teaching experience and is also a good way to learn new topics yourself: if you want to make sure that you learn a particular topic, supervising it will ensure that you do!”

“Involvement with supervision of masters/PhD students is perhaps the most worthwhile.”

“In the majority of cases College supervising does not really lead anywhere in terms of longer-term positions with the College.”

“These days I am writing teaching statements and I wish I had taught more during my postdoc in Cambridge.”

“I found lab demonstrating enjoyable and a good way to further develop science communication skills and build confidence, as well as to improve my own subject knowledge.”

“As a supervisor, you not only teach the students expertise; at the same time, you can also develop your way of thinking through organising and reorganising the knowledge that you learnt from books and even from the students.”

“For supervisions it’s important to seek out the lecturer and specific Directors of Studies in subjects that you would want to teach in. Supervising confirmed my appreciation for wanting to stay in academia.”

“I’ve done undergrad and postgrad research supervision (6 students in total). The experience has been absolutely great overall. I helped organise a summer course once and often host colloquium/seminar speakers.”
7. Professional development

Researcher Development Programme (RDP)
*The University’s central provider of the Researcher Development for postdocs delivers a programme of activities and online resources.*

www.rdp.cam.ac.uk/postdocs

This is a good place to look for other Researcher Development provision in the University. Look at their training offerings which include courses on personal effectiveness (including resilience and assertiveness) and leadership development.

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA)
*Offers a developmental mentoring scheme for postdocs whereby individuals are matched with a mentor drawn from outside their core research area.*

www.opda.cam.ac.uk/further-support/mentoring

There are many other training courses and opportunities offered by providers around the University – explore and ask around to find out what may be interesting to you in developing your research identity and professional skills (e.g. the Cambridge Digital Humanities (CDH) learning programme; developing IT skills in training on the functionality of Microsoft Project).

8. Personal development

In addition to the things mentioned above, do not forget to make time for some fun along the way! Here are some suggestions from previous postdocs of more general activities that they would recommend:

- Do a language course at the university Language Centre
- Sport
- Organise department/group pub visit!
- Be the trustee of a charity
- Volunteer for a charity (www.do-it.org)