

# Supporting Early Career Lecturers

a briefing note from Early Career Lecturers in Biosciences forum (ECLBio),  
an advisory group to the Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS).

The [Early Career Lecturers in Biosciences forum \(ECLBio\)](#) was established in 2017 as an advisory group to the [Heads of University Biosciences \(HUBS\)](#). This briefing note reports on the first substantive work of the HUBS ECLBio, which explored the challenges early career bioscience lecturers face when navigating the sometimes-difficult transition into their first academic lecturer post.

This briefing note is based on an online survey of 91 UK early career biosciences lecturers of their perceptions of career barriers, work anxiety, social opportunities, and examples of 'good practice' they had encountered. The survey was disseminated between the 24th January and 14th April 2018 by email through the HUBS and the Heads of University Centres of Biomedical Sciences network (HUCBMS) networks, and via the ECLBio twitter account.

Within the survey, participants highlighted the difficulties managing the broad variety of elements that make up the early career lecturer role (a.k.a. 'role-conflict'). There was also concern over the difficulties in breaking through the initial inertia required to have a successful career (in both teaching and research roles). The final common theme was related to social and professional integration into their institution, with a particular need for better induction procedures.

The rest of this briefing note outlines specific recommended actions to support early career lecturers entering their first academic post. These actions have been designed based on both the 'good practice' highlighted by the survey of early career bioscience lecturers as well as existing best practice from the available literature. In brief, activities perceived as beneficial primarily support staff to settle into the diverse and evolving roles of a lectureship and to manage any conflict between these demands. Best practice includes mentoring, networking, training, and perceived equitable distribution of administrative duties. Importantly, these actions can be easily implemented by all stakeholders including the community of early career lecturers, academic managers, institutional leaders and professional bodies; helping to improve the academic working environment for all.

Individual(s)	Induction (first weeks in post)	Within 1 – 6 months	Ongoing
<p><b>Early career lecturers</b></p>	<p><b>Key tasks for Early Career Lecturers revolve around learning university procedures, developing a local network, and creating an informed career progression map from day one.</b></p>		
	<p>Meet with your line manager to discuss the short- and medium-term expectations in your role (this may or may not be part of a formal paperwork process). During the meeting ask your line manager to introduce you to your department (e.g., administrative staff, research groups, teaching and learning groups). Find out what the mandatory institutional induction activities are, so you can try to complete these as soon as possible.</p> <p>Early networking can help you learn how the institution functions, which is a common issue for early career lecturers. Find and join any relevant, regular research groups, lab meetings, or teaching discussions. Shadow established lecturers. Invite other people (including admin and professional services staff) to coffee to introduce yourself and get some idea of who you can go to when you get stuck.</p> <p>Create a calendar of key dates for your personal activities (e.g. lectures, marking, research deadlines, conferences, etc.). This should be paired with an institutional calendar of key events (e.g., exam boards, administrative deadlines, etc.). Adding structure to an otherwise blank calendar is important for effective time management.</p>	<p>Seek support and training with aspects of your role that are new or different in each institution, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic tuition (pastoral care), processes for dealing with or raising complaints, and University support and counselling</li> <li>• Formal teaching qualifications or continuing professional development (CPD) sessions</li> <li>• Research leadership, management, and development</li> <li>• Institutional processes (e.g. funding acquisition, grant submission, module leadership)</li> </ul> <p>Ask to join a formal mentoring scheme. Your mentor should be someone who can provide strategic career support and guidance, separate from your line manager. Having multiple mentors for different elements of the academic role can be helpful so don't stop there, ask someone to become an informal mentor for you too.</p> <p>Give an internal seminar on your previous work to your department / academic unit. This can help find collaborators or teaching-gaps that you can help fill with your specific expertise (note: always discuss taking on new roles with your line manager and mentor before agreeing).</p>	<p><a href="#">Seek advice on how to best manage your time</a>. You will get many requests to be involved in projects/tasks inside and outside of the institution. Learning how to evaluate what aligns with career goals and how to say <b>no</b> are integral skills at this stage of academia.</p> <p>Familiarise yourself with your promotion criteria (and employment benefits), University strategy and the key performance indicators [KPIs] for your department and how these data are recorded (e.g. NSS, REF, TEF). Set aside 15 mins a month to write down everything you have done that aligns with promotion and departmental KPIs. Keeping a record will make yearly appraisals, promotion applications, and awards nominations much easier.</p> <p>There are lots of institutional and national awards for all kinds of academic activities (e.g. <a href="#">RSB Teacher of the Year</a> or <a href="#">Outreach and Engagement Awards</a>). These open doors and look great on promotion applications – do not give in to the imposter syndrome! Nominate yourself or ask your mentor/line-manager to nominate you.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Line managers and/or departments</b></p>	<p><b>Line managers and departments can support Early Career Lecturers in developing institutional knowledge and networks.</b></p>		
	<p>Support integration of new staff into the department and institution via: Face-to-face, departmental newsletter or email introductions. Meet with new staff to set expectations and workload for the year. Consider how these will align with promotion criteria in the future.</p> <p>Actively seek to understand what institutional induction support is available and how to signpost staff to these opportunities.</p> <p>Provide guidance for new staff where formal activities do not exist, e.g. departmental procedures and teaching- or research-related admin.</p>	<p>Provide practical support and guidance for new staff by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating for reduced teaching load for new staff.</li> <li>• Signposting to or offering start-up funds for new research groups, formal training opportunities and internal/external conferences.</li> <li>• Inviting new staff to give a welcome talk or join regular informal meetings (coffee mornings) and relevant research or teaching groups.</li> </ul> <p>Help early career lecturers find a mentor if formal mentoring schemes do not exist.</p>	<p>Schedule regular progress discussions where both parties agree to targets, career goals and workload.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mentors</b></p>	<p><b>A mentor is an individual who may offer support, advice, or guidance for the mentee. Mentorship can be formal or informal but should be led by the mentee. You may choose to have different mentors for different things.</b></p>		
	<p>Mentors can support the integration of new staff into the institution by providing guidance on how to navigate university processes and offering advice on short-term goals. This could include agreeing clear objectives and expectations with the mentee.</p>	<p>Link new staff with existing teaching or research activities within the department or institution.</p> <p>Provide guidance on how to collaborate with other staff, e.g. as co-applicant on a grant or to obtain relevant teaching experience.</p>	<p>Mentoring role should be specific, with a clear focus, aims, and objectives as agreed by mentor and mentee, and could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance with regards to university processes</li> <li>• Strategic career advice and support, including managing competing roles (e.g. admin and teaching)</li> <li>• Signposting to relevant funding opportunities or support with award nominations</li> </ul>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback on grant or promotion applications</li> </ul>
<b>Institutions</b>	<p><b>Institutions should provide comprehensive induction programmes that support lecturers' transition to the university and job role.</b></p>		
	<p>Comprehensive face-to-face, group-based induction programmes, should be offered for all lecturers irrespective of contract length, and provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University procedure and job training (e.g. delivering high-quality lectures, introduction to the virtual learning environment [VLE, such as Moodle or Blackboard], or guidance on the academic tutoring system).</li> <li>• A clear outline key dates in the academic calendar and major meetings that new staff are expected to attend.</li> <li>• Access to training for technology that will enhance their productivity (e.g. email calendars, VLEs, key software packages).</li> <li>• Opportunity for new staff to meet others new to the institution.</li> </ul>	<p>All staff with teaching-related duties should be enrolled on a group-based teaching training programme with a focus on both institutional teaching processes (e.g. navigating the VLE) and practical teaching best practice (e.g. efficient marking/feedback). New staff should have a reduced teaching load and an appropriate workload should be allocated for mandatory teaching training.</p> <p>Institutions must provide training for mentors and allocate (or support new staff in finding) a formal mentor.</p> <p>Institutional funding should be available for new research groups, formal training opportunities and internal/external conferences.</p>	<p>Institutions must support, advertise, and promote: local informal and formal networking opportunities (e.g. coffee mornings, away days); continuing professional development (CPD) training and internal funding opportunities.</p> <p>Institutions must display genuine commitment to equality and diversity practices. <b>Anonymous</b> well-advertised reporting procedures for instances of discrimination, bullying, racism, and other forms of unfair treatment (at all levels).</p> <p>There should be open publication of promotion criteria which are clear and specific about expectations of staff on different career pathways. Criteria should be linked to the management process.</p> <p>There should be regular review of workload allocation models and its impact on staff.</p>
<b>Professional bodies</b>	<p><b>Professional bodies provide cross-institutional networks and opportunities which are valuable for Early Career Lecturers.</b></p>		
	<p>Highlight online resources to support teaching, research, and career development.</p>	<p>Highlight opportunities to engage with early career groups, which should include events for teaching-focused staff.</p>	<p>Provide specific early career lecturers support and training, such as 'new to teaching' workshops, which provide</p>

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	<p>Share diverse diaries or stories early career lecturers so that new starters have some idea of what the job might consist of.</p>	<p>Offer events specific to study discipline (e.g. the Heads of University Biosciences Early Career Forum).</p> <p>Provide opportunities for early career lecturers to generate collaborations and reduce social isolation.</p>	<p>opportunities for early career lecturers to form cross-institutional networks.</p> <p>Work in partnership with universities to provide regular localised events for academics. For example, holding smaller-scale early career lecturers -focused conferences.</p> <p>Provide research and teaching funding opportunities for which early career lecturers are eligible.</p>