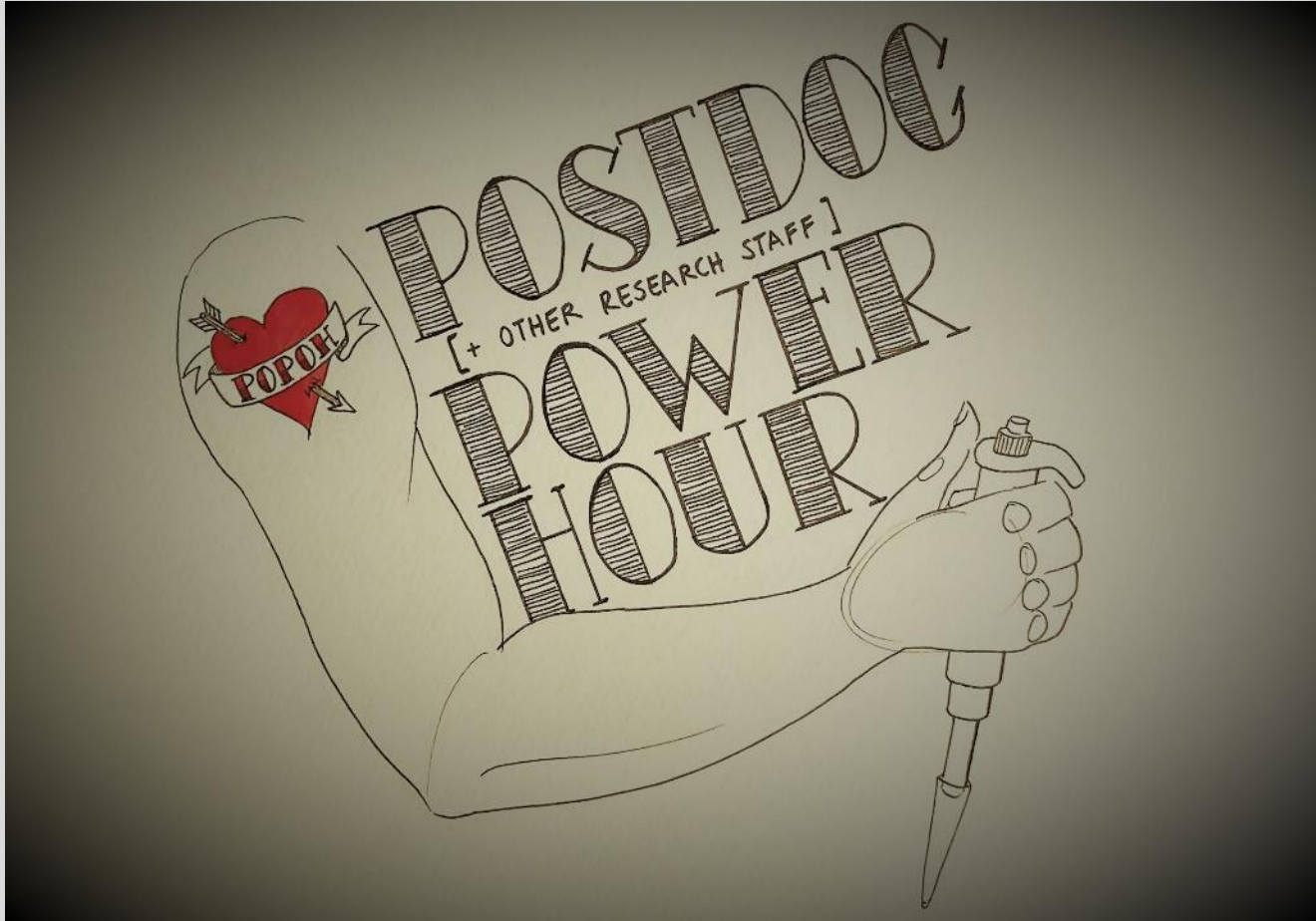


The Postdoc Power Hour: Hooking researchers with monthly taster sessions

Anne Wolfes

September 2023





(our official logo)

What you'll find in this file:

- Why we set up the Postdoc Power Hour (PoPoH)
- How it works
- An overview of topics since the launch of the PoPoH
- Setting up a space in which researchers can connect
- Upscaling signposting
- Raising awareness around career-planning and mental health at work
- Data on attendance and feedback
- How to set up a PoPoH at your institution

Our 'why'

We wanted to offer **short, engaging taster sessions** on topics of interest that research staff are either too busy to attend as longer workshops or otherwise don't hear about.

We also wanted to create **a space in which researchers can connect** with others outside of their research groups, to feel less 'alone', exchange ideas, and even connect beyond the PoPoH.

Lastly, we wanted to **upscale our signposting** and inform researchers that they are **entitled to at least 10 days of professional development** every year – a key point from the Researcher Development Concordat.

Running short, engaging taster sessions

- Every first Friday of the month, the same link takes researchers to a one-hour lunchtime Teams meeting that they can simply join without registering (to minimise barriers)
- Each PoPoH meeting features a 30-minute talk on topics relevant to postdocs and other research staff; see next slide for an overview of topics so far
- Speakers are internal and give talks at no cost
- Where we run longer workshops on a related topic, we advertise these during the PoPoH session

Overview of topics

Topic	Month
Key career tips	April
Time management tips & tricks	May
Key tips for writing a scientific publication	June
How business & innovation could boost your research career	July
Work/life balance hacks	August
Innovation thinking (and how to really understand a problem)	September
Writing a narrative CV	October
Applying for grant funding	November
Experimental Design	December
Why you should set up a Lab Handbook in your group	January 2024
How to find (and work with) a good mentor	February 2024
Presentation Skills crash course	March 2024
Navigating the translational research pathway	May 2024

A space in which researchers can connect

- After the 30-minute talk, we present some tips for researchers on how to advance their careers and protect their mental health (takes 5 min). This is followed by a 10-minute breakout room where researchers are put together in groups of three and are asked to tell each other one thing they will do for their career in the next month, and one thing they will do to protect/improve their mental health in the next month.
- Researchers don't need the full 10 minutes but are free to chat about anything else they would like to share, and encouraged to connect with each other.

“Feels good to be reminded that we're not alone once in a while.”

(feedback from attending researcher)

Upscaling signposting

- At the beginning of the PoPoH (before the 30-minute talk), we highlight useful resources and support for postdocs and other research staff. We also introduce the Skills Training team with photos and contact details for any questions or comments.
- We share our slides at the end of each PoPoH, so that embedded links are available to those who want to explore any of these resources.
- We also refer to other support services at our institution to increase their visibility, e.g. the Careers Service, who many of our research staff do not know about.

Raising awareness

- To raise awareness that planning your career and protecting your mental health is key for researchers, and give practical tips on how to achieve this, we show a slide with examples, such as:

Mental health

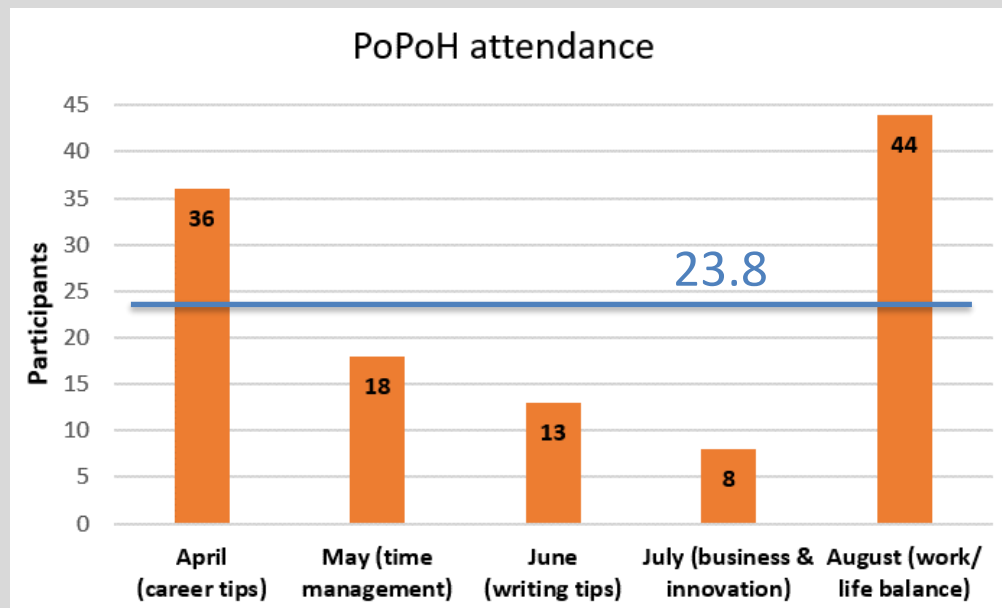
- Taking breaks (25/5 min)
- Sleep, drink water, move, eat
- Help colleagues, socialise
- Try 'The Happiness Lab' podcast
- Daily habits of happiness:
 - Exercise (e.g. 30 min walking)
 - Reflect on something positive of the last 24 h (2 min) or on three things you're grateful for (2 min)

Career

- Book a Careers Service appointment
- Update your (narrative) CV/LinkedIn
- Draw a timeline: career milestones for the next 6-12 months
- Assess your skills, e.g. using the Vitae Researcher Development Framework
- Find a mentor and build your relationship
- Get involved (postdoc rep, EDI, ...)

Attendance and feedback

Attendance patterns fluctuated (possibly depending on the topic and/or the summer break) and averaged 24 participants. We hope to gain more visibility over time, too.



Attendance and feedback

To understand how helpful the PoPoH is, we have asked attendants to fill in a short, anonymous survey after each session so far. Our main findings are:

- We get a mix of primarily postdocs in their first year and research staff in their 5th year or beyond – only few in between
- Researchers found the resources and practical tips helpful, and liked that the sessions were compact and fit into their busy schedules
- Researchers mostly said that nothing was missing, although some asked for longer sessions and recordings of the sessions

Attendance and feedback

Other topics that researchers wanted to see in the future:

- Project management
- People management
- Dealing with short contracts in academia
- How to develop independence as a researcher
- Leadership skills
- How to use your professional development days
- Coping with stress and feeling overwhelmed
- Networking/building collaborations
- How to negotiate with colleagues / setting boundaries

How to set up a PoPoH at your institution

The basics you'll need

- Speakers! Ask your colleagues and make sure the first few speakers are really good so the ball gets rolling
- An online space to advertise each session – see our very simple web setup on [Oxford Talks](#)
- A monthly recurrent online meeting and a host who can run the session and introduce the speaker
- A Comms plan; we advertise each session in a monthly newsletter (about 3-4 weeks before it takes place) and tweet about each session a few days before it takes place. We sometimes also use our research staff representative network

How to set up a PoPoH at your institution

Some more things to consider

- Ensure your slides are accessible and inclusive. Your institution will have guidance on this, but a simple starting point is an accessibility checker (integrated into PowerPoint, for example).
- If you want to run a survey, make sure you have data protection forms in place. Setting up a survey next is easy; we use Microsoft Teams forms.
- If you want to record your sessions, you'll need data protection in place, and will need to inform everyone (when advertising and at the beginning of each PoPoH) about this. It can be a pain to set this up (we're currently in the process) but it will be worth it for those who can't attend a session but want to see the content.

Other points

- We initially set the PoPoH up within the Medical Sciences Division, but have had researchers join from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Mathematics, Physics, and Life Sciences divisions, too. We will soon officially open this up to any research staff across the entire university!

By the way, feel free to use the term “Postdoc Power Hour” (just acknowledge us)! We found this title engaging – but remember to ensure other research staff also feel included if this is your target group.

Thank you for reading this content!

If you have any comments or questions, please feel free to leave these on our [Padlet](#) (QR code below), or get in touch via [email](#)!

