'Embracing the Journey'- Navigating challenges as an ECR
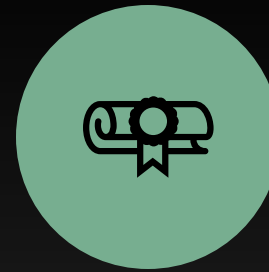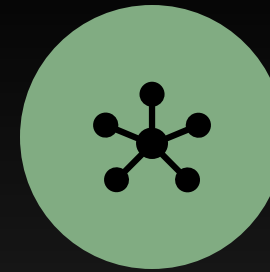
FIONA BRIGHT

Topics to cover

EXPERIENCES IN ENGAGING WITH ECR INITIATIVES AT VARIOUS UNIVERSITIES

MENTORSHIP

INDEPENDENCE AS AN ECR (FELLOWSHIP/SMALL GRANT FUNDING)

BUILDING YOUR NETWORKS

NOTE: these are my own personal views
Experiences in academia vary, do what is best for YOU!!

Journey to Research in STEMM

PhD 2013-2016   **Postdoc Fellowship** 2017-2018

PhD Research Fellowship 2014-2016
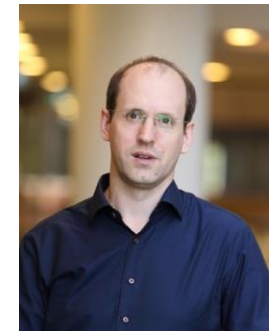
**Prof Hannah Kinney
Dr David Paterson**

Prof Roger Byard, Prof Robert Vink, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Neuropathology, Human Brain tissue

Postdoc 2018-2020

x2 Postdoc Fellowships 2020-current

Prof Jillian Kril, Frontotemporal Dementia, Neuropathology, Human Brain tissue

Prof Lars Ittner, Dementia Research Centre, Neurodegenerative Diseases, Molecular Biology, Transgenic mouse models, Human stem cells & brain organoids

Early career researchers

Superhero's who are expected to....

- ❑ Be in the lab 24/7
- ❑ Publish, then publish more
- ❑ Present at lab meeting/ department seminars
- ❑ Run overnight/weekend experiments
- ❑ Know every experimental procedure/equipment
- ❑ Write grants
- ❑ Help mentor HDR students
- ❑ Mark undergraduate assessments
- ❑ Join ECR committees

- ❑ Teach + supervise- tutes, pracs, lectures
- ❑ Compete against colleagues for limited funding opportunities
- ❑ Be superstar of STEM & a tall poppy
- ❑ Manage personal life & work life
- ❑ Build social media/LinkedIn profiles
- ❑ Engage in community
- ❑ Get a DECRA then an Ideas grant
- ❑ Bring in $1 million in research funding

Early-career researchers in Australia are miserable at work

Heavy workloads, bullying and a lack of support add to falling job satisfaction for postdocs, junior faculty members and other young scientists.

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

bioRxiv THE PREPRINT SERVER FOR BIOLOGY

New Results

🔔 Follow this preprint

The Australian academic STEMM workplace post-COVID: a picture of disarray

Katherine Christian, Jo-ann Larkins, Michael R. Doran
doi: https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.12.06.519378

https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2022.12.06.519378v1
https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-00193-z

ECRs almost unanimously declared a "love of research", however, many reported **frequent bullying and questionable research practices** (QRPs), and that they intended to leave because of **poor career stability.**

Job satisfaction declined (62% versus 57%), workload concerns increased (48.6% versus 60.6%), more indicated **"now is a poor time to commence a research career"** (65% versus 76%) from 2019 to 2022, and roughly half reported experiencing bullying.
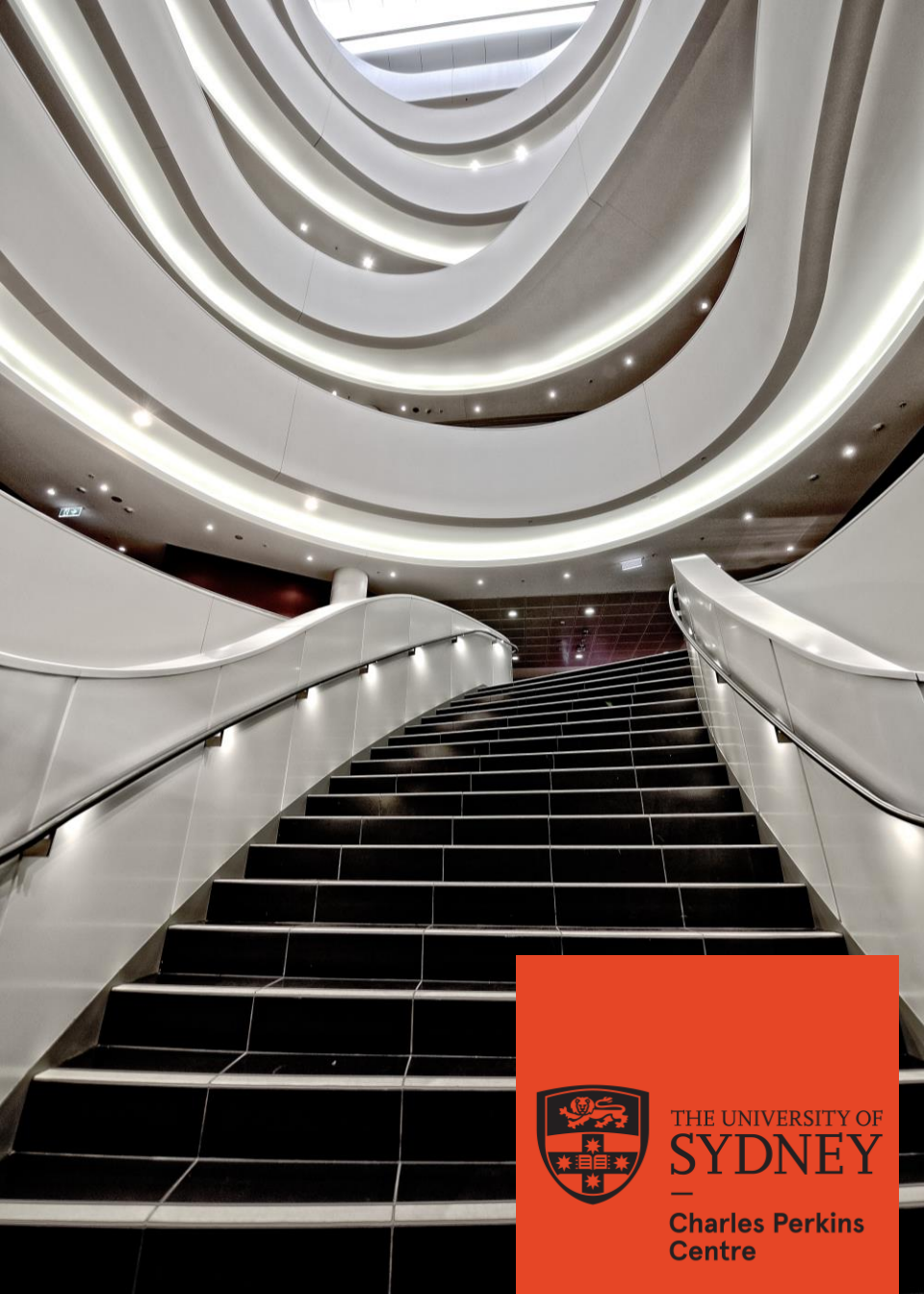
"Most of the pressure I have felt to fabricate data or rush studies has come from the need to publish for grants and to publish before my contract runs out"

"Working 60–70 hours a week is normalized and expected; if you don't do it then you're not a good researcher,"

"I have often been subjected to sexist comments, and doubts over the quality of my work because of my age and gender"

"I have been micromanaged earlier in my career and that was stressful/ undermined my autonomy. As an ECR, you can feel powerless and it is difficult to know how/whether to speak out"

"The impact of this was depression and a few suicidal attempts"

Annual Operating budget: ~$30,000
- Steering Committee 10-15 members, 2 chairs
- Representing ~500 EMCRs
- EMCR representation on steering committees/Executive Board
- EMCR Research Symposium
- Honours, HDR Welcome event
- Travel Grants
- Seed funding
- Career Development workshops
- Social- trivia nights, networking

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
Charles Perkins Centre

**CPC EMCR
Travel Funding 2019
Applications now open!**

Do you need funding for attending conferences, workshops, or fieldwork?

Our travel awards are open to CPC HDR students (Masters and PhD) and Level A postdocs

Application guide and marking rubric can be found on SharePoint

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Where can your research take you?

Applications close
5PM Tuesday 30th April 2019

Annual operating budget $10,000

Represent ~200 ECRs

- Faculty ECR Research Symposium
- ECR Retreat
- ECR publication awards
- 'Spirit of EnCouRage Awards'
- Mentoring Program
- Annual meeting with Faculty Dean
- ECR representation on all Faculty Boards/Committees
- ECR representation on University wide ECR NAG
- ECR Forum/Harmony Week
- Social events: Trivia Night, etc...

Key challenges identified for ECRs in FMHHS at MQ University:

- Lack of mentorship
- Address challenges with work/life balance
- Need for a focus on wellbeing
- Address internal job security challenges (12-month contracts, restrictions on applying for internal grant schemes)
- Need for more opportunities for ERCs within FMHHS to showcase research, access grant funding, grant writing support

Mentorship

❑ Mentorship is well-established in the literature as **fostering scientific identity and career pathways** for underrepresented minorities in STEM

❑ Mentoring, at its core, is the opportunity for academics to **learn from one another** and enable those with more experience to guide & support ECRs

Various forms of mentorship:

o Official mentoring programs

o Unofficial 1:1 mentoring relationships

o Peer mentoring

o Mentoring workshops

Speed mentoring 2023

o Built a portfolio of mentors (Level C-E), online mentor profiles (~40 across 6 departments)
o Matched mentors & mentees based on surveying both prior to event
o Organised time slots for mentor/mentee pairs to meet
o Had mentor profiles for any ECR attenting to view
o Drop in sessions, flexible timeframe
o Surveyed mentors & mentees post event

ECR Retreat 2023

Mentorship panel session
- Examples of successful mentor/mentee pairings
- Mentors with experience in official programs
- Experiences positive and negative with mentor/mentee relationships

- Respect & trust are essential
- Good, consistent communication is crucial
- Upfront goal setting, intentions, xxxx
- If it's not working, don't be afraid to step away
- Mentorship comes in different shapes & sizes and may be sporadic in nature depending on the career stage/needs of the mentee
- Likely that ECRs need various mentors across different facets of career development
- Don't discount the benefits of peer mentoring
- Workshops/programs for developing mentors are highly beneficial

Focused on Wellbeing & Mentorship

Join us for the 2023 EnCouRage…

FREE event!
Opt in/out for any of the sessions across the day

Format of the day:
- 9:30-10 am **Coffee/ Tea**
- 10-11am **Yoga for stress**
- 11-12:30pm **Self-Compassion**
- 12:30-1:30pm **Lunch**
- 1:30- 3pm **Mentorship Panel**
- 3-4pm **Networking drinks**

More details to come!
Register here:

**Tuesday June 13th, 9:30am-3pm
On campus- location TBA**

Questions, please don't hesitate to email: o365-group-

But beware! With independence comes more responsibility & accountability

Building independence takes times & your investment, be careful no to loose sight of what you need to achieve day to day to stay in 'the game' of academia

- o Important to establish your own identity in academia
- o Build your own 'brand'
- o Continue to build your own CV
- o Develop your writing skills by writing papers/small grants early in your PhD/postdoc
- o Reviewing journals
- o Reading the literature widely
- o Supervising students/guests in lab
- o Engage in leadership & community outreach
- o Engaging in ECR events internal & external
- o Say 'yes' to opportunities to put yourself out there

First 5 years in academia, post PhD are crucial

Years 1-2
Publish!!!

Years 2-3
Publish!!!
Small grants & awards
Community engagement
Conferences

Years 3-5
Publish!!!
More small grants & awards
Build leadership & community engagement
Engage networks
Conferences

PhD
- Draft all my own papers/letters to sponsors etc
- Set up meetings with collaborators
- Joined HDR committee
- Volunteered at conferences (stalls, setting up)
- Attended HDR workshops

Postdoc
- Started applying for small ECR grants, seed funding
- After started to build a track record for grants/funding next went on to bigger endevours- ECR fellowships
- Requested that my supervisor send papers to review
- Joined ECR committees, Faculty iniatives
- Started saying 'yes' to opoortunities as they arose
- Volunteered to review internal & external grants
- Reached out to collabrators, started building own networks
- Submit own papers/corresponding author
- Started to build own small research arm within lab

Career planning (with guidance from your supervisor/mentor is essential at all stages
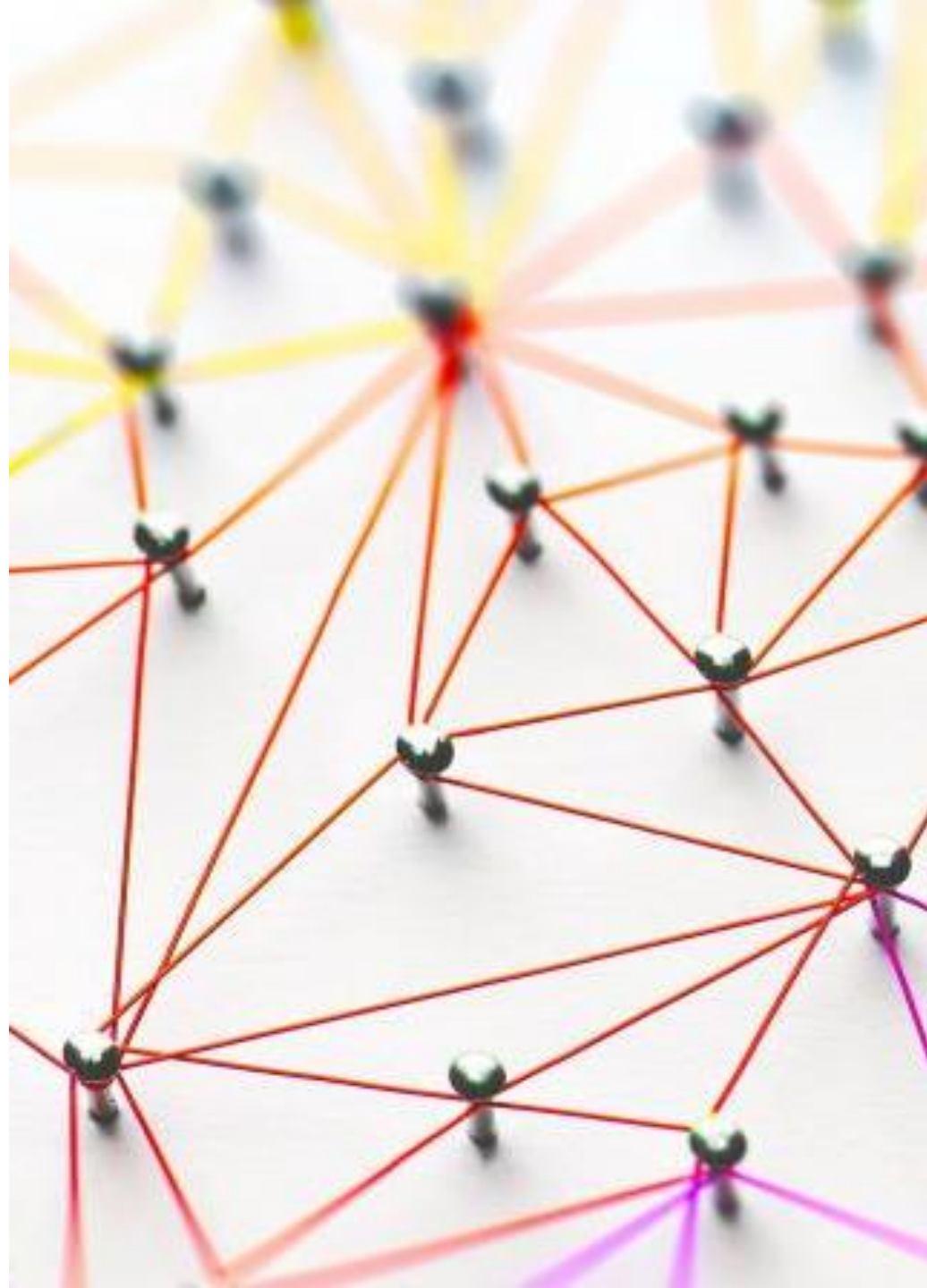
- ❑ Social media
- ❑ Blogs
- ❑ Committees
- ❑ LinkedIn
- ❑ ORCID
- ❑ Research Gate

Show up, showcase, and show off!

Set networking goals!

Building networks

- ❑ Franklin Women
- ❑ Australian Academy of Science (EMCR Forum)
- ❑ Superstars of STEM
- ❑ Young Tall Poppies
- ❑ Pint of Science
- ❑ 3MT, Visualise your thesis
- ❑ ECR Showcases
- ❑ Attend conferences (local, national, international)
- ❑ Workshops, seminars

- Surround yourself with support
- Reach out for help
- Identify when you need time away from work
- Be honest with yourself & others
- Make changes when you need to
- Engage with your peers
- Check on others
- Make a career plan
- Time management (eughh) is important
- Be aware of your surroundings & the academic environment
- Know the playing field
- Collaborate!

Do what is right for you!

Thank you

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Twitter: @DrFionaBright