

The ICS Early Career Seminar

Finishing a PhD in a classical subject – as in all arts and humanities subjects – is the first step towards an academic career. However, for most early career researchers today, it is a step into the unknown. While early career researchers are registered as PhD students, they are well catered for in many ways. Not only do they have library access, electronic resources and supervision, they are also, as students, fully part of a department. They are encouraged to present their work at departmental seminars, at designated and funded postgraduate conferences, they can apply for travel bursaries at most other conferences, and are eligible for bursaries towards the cost of conferences from university graduate funds. In London, graduate students in classical studies have the weekly term-time seminar, the Postgraduate Work-in-Progress seminar, funded by the ICS and run by postgraduates. These weekly national seminars give postgraduates the chance to present their research to a wider community of postgraduate researchers - many speakers come from outside London (the ICS funds travel) and this makes the seminar an excellent opportunity for networking with new people. For those based in or near London, regular attendance allows them to form a real support network of other student researchers, which is hugely helpful, especially for those based at smaller universities or whose field is less mainstream. Many London-based PhDs also take advantage of the other seminars run by the ICS, such as the ancient history, literature, philosophy and archaeology seminars, which allow graduates to listen to and meet a huge range of established academics.

Once a researcher gains employment as a tenured academic, they become part of a Classics department, and can contribute to its various seminars. They are part of the departmental team, who they will interact and collaborate with on a regular basis. The position grants them access to research funds from within their institution, and they also become eligible to apply for external funds for other activities. Some are invited to conferences as Keynote speakers, and others present their research at national seminars, such as the ICS Ancient History seminar. Since academic departments expect new entrants to have already completed a substantial body of published research, there is a gap between completing a PhD and establishing the minimum published research required for an academic post. Hence, early career researchers frequently find themselves falling between the two groups, thus making the beginning of their academic career the most challenging period. The lucky ones hold a temporary post as a junior researcher: for them, there are at least similar networks within their departments to those they had as graduate students. They are eligible to apply for departmental and other research funds. However, recent reductions in available research funds nationally have reduced the number of such posts available. The jobs available are often teaching only, temporary, and even hourly paid, without full access to the research resources available to academics. For classicists working with material cultures, the situation is no better, since museums have experienced substantial reduction in public funding. Many volunteer in order to keep their expertise

and develop some work experience, but as volunteers they have no access to any resources available to curatorial staff. Hourly paid teachers and volunteers are in a particularly unenviable position, as they are disadvantaged in the following ways:

- They have limited access to libraries and electronic resources, which often disappears entirely over the summer. Unless they live near London, or are graduates of Oxbridge and are near those centres, they may find themselves without any library access other than public libraries, which, as well as being inadequate for academic study in general, are unlikely to have even the most basic texts for classical studies.
- They have no departmental community to support them as they try to rework their thesis or develop their first publications, and therefore also no regular contact with other researchers.
- They have no research funds to draw on and they are not eligible to apply for grants to support conference attendance. In addition, they are no longer able to apply for graduate travel bursaries from conferences. This is even more of a problem when considered alongside the financial situation of an early career researcher who is an hourly paid teacher or volunteer, spending a proportion of their time earning a living in another job.
- These researchers often do not have a base in the institution at which they are teaching or volunteering, because the institutions lack space and facilities for them. It's hard for them to keep momentum when they are literally and physically isolated from the academic world. For instance, it is by no means the same to undertake volunteer work remotely for a museum as it is to go into the museum even on a weekly basis.
- Perhaps most seriously, those who are hourly paid or volunteers do not even technically have the right to institutional affiliation. The label 'independent scholar', which lacks the legitimisation of university affiliation, makes it more difficult even to be accepted to give papers at conferences, but much harder to publish, especially in research journals, who require university affiliation to be given on the submission page to Scholar-One.

Networks for early career researchers are already in place in other disciplines: historians, for example, have the 'History Lab Plus', which is for those who have moved outside the remit of the graduate 'History Lab'. Therefore, to support early career researchers in Classical Studies, the ICS has established the Early Career Seminar, which is a new venture for the year 2013-2014. The seminar runs in the same way as all the other regular seminars funded by the ICS, with the exception that it is devoted to giving presentational slots to those who have finished their PhDs within the last five years, and do not hold permanent

employment, and we aim to give particular support to those who lack proper institutional affiliation. We have accepted papers from proposals in all fields of Classical Studies and the ancient world (broadly defined). Thus, ECRs have the opportunity to present a substantial piece of work (each paper is 45 minutes long) based around their new projects following their doctoral work. We hope that the timing of late Friday afternoon allows some researchers the chance to use the many libraries in close proximity to the ICS earlier in the day, which may otherwise be difficult for those not based in central London. We have also arranged the Friday slot to avoid clashing with the numerous other seminars which the ICS runs. This regularity of meetings in term time will, we hope, help to establish a community of ECRs, both locally and nationally - which will be able to provide peer support, particularly for those ECRs who lack institutional support.

In addition to the seminar, we have created a web-site dedicated to the seminar, at <http://postdocsem.hypotheses.org/about>. This is part of the European hypotheses platform, which hosts a series of academic and scholarly blogs from Europe and internationally. Here, we are posting details of the seminar programmes, and abstracts of the papers each week. We are also creating links with other early career sites, so that this site can become the hub for linking to other blogs by early career classicists.

In the future, we would like to develop workshops in addition to the seminar itself, where ECRs can receive training and support in all the essential tasks: publishing, writing post-doc proposals, and finding research grants which they may be eligible to apply for. It's worth observing here that the hub of research grants online, researchprofessional.com, is only fully accessible from a computer on a subscribing university's network - something which many ECRs may not have access to. While we can't make the process of gaining permanent employment easier, we hope at least to establish a support network which will ease feelings of isolation among ECRs, and help them gain the connections, confidence and momentum needed to further their research.

The seminar is open to all, and we warmly welcome all interested classicists to attend. Please see our blog for further details: <http://postdocsem.hypotheses.org/about>

Frances Foster, University of Cambridge