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D4.5

Report on the Research Career Support in Neural Cell Biology 1



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation Acronym	Definition
D	Deliverable
IBMC	Institute for Molecular and Cell Biology
M	Month
WP	Work package
NCBio	Neural Cell Biology
SBG	Synapse Biology Group

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Executive Summary

The Career Development Office (CDO) of the IBMC/i3S supports early-career scientists by helping them develop a career plan tailored to their individual strengths and skills, such that their professional aspirations and ambitions can be met once they are ready to take the next step in their career. The ERA Chair Holder (Dr. Matthew Holt) is expected to support the CDO by capitalizing on his network of contacts with research organizations and research-driven businesses in the Neural Cell Biology field.

Indeed, this has been the case. Following a first contact between Dr. Holt and the CDO, where Dr. Holt became aware of the CDO's goals, activities and approaches, strategies have been put into place to capitalize on Dr. Holt's international network of contacts. Those strategies include an open-door policy or the "Story Behind the PI" initiative organized by the institute's PhD students where Dr. Holt gave an overview of his career path while also answering to the student's questions and giving them advice on how to attain a leadership role in academia.

Dr. Holt has also supported the CDO's work by leveraging on his network of contacts by inviting international, renowned scientists or entrepreneurs to give career seminars in addition to their talks within the NCBio ERA Chair Seminar Series. Thus far, the career seminars given by Prof. Dr. Adrian Liston (Brabham Institute and University of Cambridge) and by Dr. Nachiket Kashikar (CEO and co-founder of the European Spatial Biology Center) were very well received, encouraging us to continue this initiative throughout the NCBio ERA Chair action.

1. Career Support Within the Synapse Biology Group

Since the recruitment of the ERA Chair Team (two senior research technicians; one junior post-doc and two PhD candidates), Dr. Holt has prioritized setting up the lab and guiding the lab members into kick-starting their projects as smoothly and efficiently as possible. The strengths and weaknesses of each lab member will be assessed individually with Dr. Holt and a career plan will be drawn as part of their career development. This career development plan will evolve over time and will count with the input and support of the CDO as well.

Dr. Stéphanie Castaldo (senior research lab technician) was nominated by Dr. Holt to attend the course “Building and Leading Research Teams”¹ organized by the CDO (and which the NCBio ERA Chair sponsored). This training aimed at giving researchers the tools to effectively build, manage and inspire a research group in the academic enterprise. It counted with a Consultancy Service in Work Psychology from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto. The course was organized in 4 sessions totaling 28 hours and covered the following topics: 1) current work context and skills for the future; 2) culture and alignment: vision, mission and objectives; 3) Leadership; 4) team management; 5) communication and 6) negotiation and problem solving.



Dr. Maria Joana Pinto is a junior post-doctoral researcher who is building a profile towards a leadership position in academia. Dr. Holt has encouraged Dr. Pinto to expand her supervision and leadership skills by taking up two master students who are helping her set up the proximity labelling systems in cell culture-based systems. Additionally, Dr. Holt will integrate Dr. Pinto in training activities, which includes giving lectures at the University of Porto starting from 2024.

João Guimarães is a PhD candidate who was encouraged by Dr. Holt to apply for the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds² which awards stipends up to 3.5 years to outstanding young graduate scientists performing basic biomedical research in an internationally leading laboratory. Despite currently being funded by the NCBio ERA Chair project, a successful application to the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds marks a milestone in his career because it demonstrates his capacity to write and fund his

¹ <https://www.i3s.up.pt/training-detail.php?v=272>

² <https://www.bifonds.de/fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships.html>

own project, a fundamental asset to attain a sustainable and competitive research career in the long term. Mr. Guimarães is currently preparing his application with continuous feedback from Dr. Holt.

2. Career Support within the IBMC/i3S

2.1. Open Door Policy

Since settling at the IBMC/i3S, Dr. Holt has implemented an open-door policy to foster openness and encouraging early-career scientists (pre- and post-docs) to come over whenever they need counsel regarding their career.

Clive Janbangwe is a PhD candidate in the Neuro & Skeletal Circuits Group, led by Dr. Meriem Lamghari at the i3S. At Mr. Janbangwe's request, Dr. Holt has helped him prepare for an interview for a post-doctoral position at the University of Nottingham. Dr. Holt later learned that Mr. Janbangwe was offered—and accepted—the position.

Dr. Márcia Liz is an Assistant Researcher in the Nerve Regeneration Group, led by Dr. Mónica Sousa (also Project Coordinator of NCBio ERA Chair). Dr. Liz sought Dr. Holt for general career advice, including improving presentation skills and how to pitch her research project.

2.2. The Story Behind the PI

On March 13, Dr. Holt was invited by the PhD student community to participate in "The Story Behind the PI", where a group leader is invited to talk about his/her experiences in getting a leadership role in academia. The event occurred in an informal setting and counted with about 15 students. Dr. Holt briefly resumed his academic career path, shared tips and advice followed by Q&A by the students.

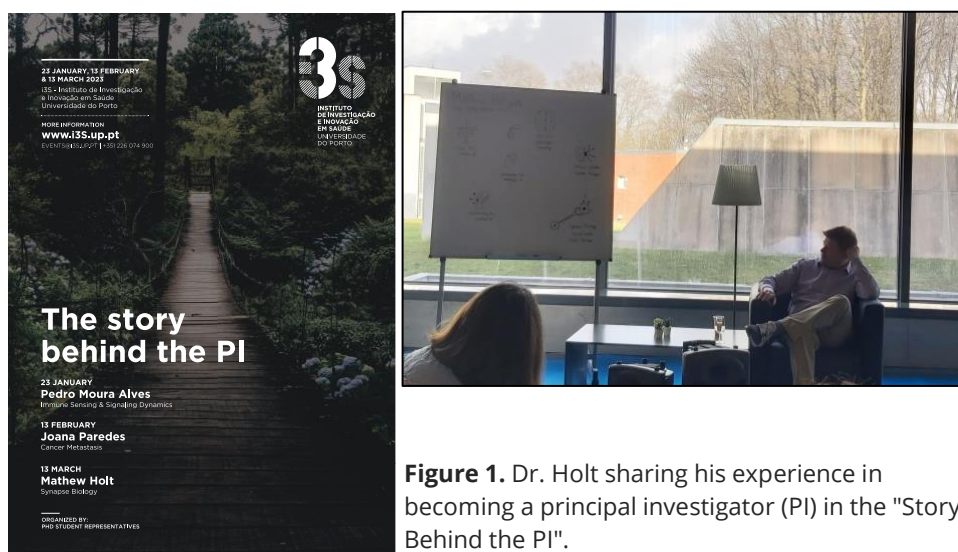


Figure 1. Dr. Holt sharing his experience in becoming a principal investigator (PI) in the "Story Behind the PI".

2.3. i3S Annual Meeting

Dr. Holt was invited by the organizing committee of the i3S Annual Meeting (November 17, 2023) to interact with early career scientists (pre-doc and post-doc) who specifically chose him to receive feedback on their research projects:

- c.1) Tiago Silva, junior researcher in the Neurolipid Biology Group;
- c.2) Miguel Silva, a master student in the Stem Cells and Neurogenesis Group;
- c.3) Sandra Braz, a junior researcher in the Nerve Regeneration Group;
- c.4) Miguel Aroso, a junior researcher in the Neuroengineering and Computational Neuroscience.

This was also an opportunity to interact on a one-to-one basis with young scientists and share career advice as they progress forward in their careers.

2.4. Career Seminars

When we organize ERA Chair seminars, we offer our guest speakers the opportunity to give an additional seminar for early career scientists—PhD students and postdocs—where they share their own experience (as well as tips and advice) towards a leadership position inside or outside academia. Importantly, we design these career sessions to prioritize interaction with the guest speaker and reserve ample time for Q&A from the young scientists.

On February 17, 2023 we invited Prof. Dr. Adrian Liston (University of Cambridge) for the NCBio ERA Chair Seminar Series. Dr. Liston is a Senior Group Leader at the Babraham Institute and a Senior Research Fellow at Churchill College, University of Cambridge. Together with Dr. Holt, he is the co-founder of the spin-off company Aila Biotech³. Dr. Liston talked about his career in a seminar entitled "An n=1 science career".



Figure 2. Left: Prof. Dr. Adrian Liston. **Right:** Dr. Liston giving a career seminar.



On May 17, 2023 we invited Dr. Nachiket Kashikar, who is CEO and co-founder of the European Spatial Biology Center⁴ (ESBC) for a satellite seminar at the IBMC/i3S. Dr. Kashikar preferred to interact with the young scientists in a round table to share his unique perspective of transitioning from academia to industry.

Figure 3. Dr. Nachiket Kashikar.

³ <https://www.ailabiotech.com/>

⁴ <https://www.esbc.science/>