

# CASCA Postdoc Committee Report

*4th December 2020 - 29th April 2021*

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## Membership

1. Toby Brown (Chair)
  2. Nienke Van der Marel (Vice-Chair)
  3. Sam Lawler (voting member)
  4. Tyrone Woods (voting member)
  5. Locke Spencer (voting member)
  6. Ismaël Moumen (voting member)
  7. Gwendolyn Eadie (voting member)
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## Activities during reporting period

### CANVAS Talks For Canadian ECRs

In January the committee took over the organization of the Canadian Virtual Astronomy Seminar (CANVAS) series. These monthly seminars are primarily given by Canadian postdocs although senior graduate students and junior faculty (or equivalent) are also eligible. The goal is to provide an online colloquium series that highlights the impressive research done by postdocs in Canada and by Canadian postdocs elsewhere in the world. The committee would like to thank Dennis Crabtree for his support and help as we took over CANVAS. For the three talks so far, attendance has grown each time with the last seminar attracting approximately 25 viewers. In the coming months we will begin hosting the recorded sessions (likely on YouTube) and track viewings after the initial seminar. Given the competing time zones and busy schedules of the CANVAS series' national audience we expect there will be demand for asynchronous viewing and this also provides a permanent record of the presenter's talk should they want to share their work at a later date. Any suggestions for how to grow and improve the CANVAS series are welcome.

### Poster at CASCA2021

The committee was accepted for a poster presentation at CASCA2021. The poster will highlight the committee's recent activities (e.g., COVID-19 Impact Statement, CANVAS talk series) and future plans (e.g., postdoc database, networking opportunities). It will also serve as a call to all

postdocs and senior graduate students in Canada who wish to become involved in the work of the committee, either as a member or supporter.

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## Updates

- Should the ad-hoc Postdoc Committee be converted to a standing committee, vice-Chair Nienke Van der Marel and voting member Gwen Eadie will rotate off due to other commitments. The committee is therefore seeking two new voting members. We will open this call with the CASCA2021 poster and an email on the CASCA distribution list. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of roles, we will hold elections for each position.
- At CASCA2021, the current Chair, Toby Brown, will step down and remain a voting member. Committee member Tyrone Woods will assume the role of Chair.
- The position of vice-Chair has not yet been filled. The Chair will update the CASCA Vice President when this happens.
- Our future plans are to develop a database of all postdocs in Canada, create networking opportunities for postdocs, and help boost the visibility and increase community support for postdocs in Canada as they transition to permanent positions in academia and industry.
- The committee continues to meet once a month and regularly interacts via email and slack

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## Justification for conversion to standing committee

The Canadian Astronomy Long Range Plan 2020 - 2030 (LRP) recommends CASCA establish a standing committee to represent and advocate for astronomy postdoctoral researchers in Canada. The basis for this recommendation is that while postdocs are important and valued members of Canada's astronomy workforce, there are major issues affecting opportunities and outcomes for Canadian postdocs (e.g., precarious employment, inequity, uncompetitive salaries) that impact the whole of Canadian astronomy<sup>1</sup>. We stress that there are no other CASCA committees that would fulfil this role and provide support to the postdoc community as part of their remit. A standing postdoc committee would also serve as a point of contact to liaise with graduate student activities at the CASCA AGM (and by request throughout the year), ensuring that CASCA's activities related to highly qualified personnel are coordinated.

The Postdoc Committee's future plans are deliberately aligned with the LRP recommendation. We are in the early stages of developing a database of astronomy postdocs in Canada. The goals of this database are to i) provide a networking resource for new and current PDFs, ii) compile information for those looking to contact current PDFs, and iii) track the career

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 7 of the Canadian Astronomy Long Range Plan 2020 - 2030

progression inside and outside of astronomy of PDFs in the database. We also plan to provide networking opportunities for Canadian postdocs. The first initiative on this front has been the CANadian Virtual Astronomy Seminars (CANVAS) series which showcases the research of Canadian postdocs to the community. Since February, each CANVAS talk was attended by approximately 25 astronomers, the majority of which are at the postdoc or faculty level. We believe these talks provide excellent and growing professional exposure for Canadian postdocs.

In total, the LRP report makes nine recommendations that are specifically designed to improve the postdoc ecosystem in Canada (see Chapter 7) with additional postdoc-related recommendations made elsewhere for CITA Fellowships, NSERC Postdoctoral Fellowships, education and public outreach, and equity and inclusion. **We agree strongly with the LRP report that a standing CASCA Postdoc committee would play an important role in helping to develop the guidelines and standards proposed in these recommendations.**

## Interface with the LRP Community Recommendation Implementation Committee

If the Postdoc Committee is granted standing committee status, we suggest that the Chair have observer status on the LRP Community Recommendation Implementation Committee (LCRIC). We suggest that where LRP recommendations relate to postdocs, a formal level of joint initiative status with LCRIC could be advantageous to ensuring their implementation. Given the anticipated workload and requirement for work-life balance, we ask that this be permitted to be delegated to another committee member should the Chair decide this. The committee would be happy to discuss voting status on LCRIC should the CASCA board deem this desirable but we recognise that is not in this committee's jurisdiction.

LCRIC has a significant amount of work to do in the wake of the LRP and we suggest that having a dedicated committee observer/member paying attention to the postdoc portfolio is likely to be of benefit. We are open to discussion with CASCA about any suggested modifications or improvements to the proposed structure, especially with respect to areas involving other committees and/or interactions with external parties. Lastly, we stress that postdocs have a vested interest in the long-term progress of astronomy in Canada and likely bring a unique perspective to areas where they are included and consulted.

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## Questions

- Are there areas or initiatives related to postdocs in Canada (e.g., networking and mentoring opportunities, a postdoc database) the board would like to be prioritised in the coming year?
- Does the board have feedback on our proposed interfaces with LCRIC?