Sainsbury Wellcome Centre

Sainsbury Wellcome Centre Group Leader
Information for Candidates

Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour at UCL

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Job Title: Sainsbury Wellcome Centre Group Leader

Salary: Competitive according to relevant skills, knowledge, experience and achievement

Hours: Full-time, 36.5 per week

Reports to: Director or Associate Director of the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre

Responsible for: Laboratory staff

About the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre

The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre (SWC) brings together world-leading scientists to investigate how brain circuits process information to generate perception, form memories and guide behaviour. Developed through the vision and partnership of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and Wellcome, and with substantial investment from these partners, the mission of the SWC is to generate experimentally testable theories of brain function.

The Centre will comprise around 14 highly interdisciplinary experimental research groups accommodated in a new, purpose-designed building, offering an outstanding and unparalleled research environment. SWC scientists use a broad spectrum of the latest advances in molecular and cellular biology, imaging, electrophysiology and behavioural techniques and enjoy state-of-the-art research laboratories, cutting-edge scientific equipment, technologically advanced prototyping and fabrication laboratories and custom in-house high-performance computing facilities.

Background, Mission and Research Environment

Neuroscience is entering a new and exciting period in which it will be possible to decipher the neural codes underlying perception, cognition and action. The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour is positioned at the heart of this development.

The Centre, located within University College London (UCL) and close to its main campus in central London, fosters a culture of bold, innovative research and collaboration. Experimental groups benefit from interaction with the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit located within the Centre, facilitating collaborations in data analysis, computational modelling and theory.

SWC staff interface closely with academic staff within the Faculties of Life Sciences and Brain Sciences and are part of the UCL Neuroscience Domain, which brings together over 450 principal investigators and offers extensive opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The Centre offers additional opportunities for collaboration, networking and intellectual stimulation through its visitor programme, regular seminar series and the hosting of world-class scientific conferences and workshops.

The Centre provides extensive conceptual and methodological bridges between areas of existing neuroscience strength at UCL, from which it directly benefits. Existing work at UCL is closely interwoven via the cross-cutting themes of development, behaviour and plasticity, and with the creation and use of transgenic models. A strong culture of close interaction between experimental and theoretical approaches is a thread running through the Centre, tying together complex phenomena at different levels of description, by linking informational and computational concepts to their circuit and cellular counterparts, all in relation to model behaviours.

Scientific and Administrative Support

The Centre and its staff are provided with significant administrative, technical and scientific support, including local management of estates, health and safety, IT, finance, HR, research and student administration, in compliance with UCL policies and statutory requirements.

In addition, there are dedicated managers for the Centre's scientific support services, including for its state-of-the-art prototype and fabrication laboratories, animal facilities and high-end imaging and computing facilities, and on-site managers responsible for the building, its maintenance, facilities and services.

Work Environment

The SWC offers staff an award-winning work environment in the heart of Fitzrovia with an on-site brasserie, secure bicycle storage, and access to pleasant outdoor spaces. The Centre also offers the full range of UCL staff benefits, including a generous annual leave entitlement, occupational pension schemes, excellent family-friendly policies such as occupational shared parental pay, a work-life balance policy, and a range of financial benefits such as a season ticket loan scheme and staff discounts.

The Role of the Group Leader

The Centre is recruiting an outstanding Group Leader with a background in neuroscience or related areas, with exciting research plans, who are keen to participate in collaborative, interdisciplinary science.

We are particularly interested in scientists with innovative experimental and theoretical approaches. A shared goal of SWC group leaders is to generate experimentally testable theories of brain function in a culture that encourages bold research, innovation, and collaboration.

Bridging Animal and Human Systems Neuroscience.

We are seeking an exceptional scientist to lead a transformative initiative that will extend our mechanistic understanding of neural computation from animal models to the human brain.

This position represents a unique opportunity to pioneer the application of systems neuroscience approaches, particularly single-unit neural recordings to address fundamental questions about human cognition and behaviour.

The successful candidate will demonstrate excellence in systems neuroscience research and will bring proven expertise in human neural recording techniques, positioning them to translate circuit-level insights from animal models into mechanistic understanding of human brain function.

This role encompasses scientific leadership at multiple levels. You will establish and direct a research program that bridges species and scales, from cellular mechanisms to algorithmic principles of neural computation. You will spearhead a collaborative London-based effort, working across UCL, UCL Hospitals (UCLH), and the Francis Crick Institute, to build infrastructure and protocols that facilitate cutting-edge neural recordings in human subjects.

Beyond your own research program, you will serve as a catalyst for the broader field, leading partnerships with international institutions to advance the development of next-generation technologies for human neural recording. This is an opportunity to shape the future of human systems neuroscience while embedded within an institute recognised for its innovation in mechanistic and computational approaches to understanding brain function.

SWC group leaders run independent research teams and receive generous core funds, including tailored research budgets, customised laboratory space, and staffing allowances. SWC scientists are supported by state-of-the-art facilities including prototyping and fabrication, imaging, virology, histology and in-house high-performance computing facilities, accommodated in a purpose-designed building. Students enrolled in the SWC PhD programme and the Joint SWC-GCNU PhD programme may join group leaders' labs.

Salaries will be competitive and offered as appropriate to experience and achievement. In addition, tailored research space and research budgets, a staffing allowance, and generous relocation and recruitment packages will be offered.

Formal teaching commitments will be minimal allowing scientists to focus on their research. Successful candidates will be supported in applying for fellowships and other forms of research support from the relevant funding bodies.

Appointments are funded until 31 October 2030 in the first instance. The Centre is externally funded with funding awarded in five-year tranches subject to periodic funder review. Subject to successful grant renewal, it is anticipated that posts will be extended in line with successive funding periods.

Main Duties and Responsibilities

- To conduct outstanding, creative and innovative research and deliver breakthroughs in circuit-level understanding of brain function and behaviour, with particular focus on translating mechanistic insights from animal models to human neural recordings.
- Generate and pursue independent and original research ideas, designing and conducting a successful programme of investigation and developing innovative, world-class research with other scientists in the area of neural circuits and behaviour, with emphasis on bridging animal and human systems neuroscience.
- Establish and lead a collaborative infrastructure for human neural recordings across UCL, UCLH, and partner institutions including the Francis Crick Institute, developing protocols and facilities that enable cutting-edge single-unit recording studies in human subjects.
- Lead partnerships with international institutions to advance the development of next-generation technologies for human neural recording, positioning London as a global centre for human systems neuroscience.
- Publish (as senior author) related research in high quality peer-reviewed national and international journals.
- Raise the profile of SWC through the presentation of research at national and international conferences, workshops and other scientific meetings.
- Interact successfully with other scientists and researchers within the Centre, within UCL and with external research institutions.
- Develop research networks locally, nationally and internationally in support of the research programme.
- Participate in Centre activities aimed at sharing research outcomes and building interdisciplinary collaboration within and outside the Centre.
- Lead and manage a team of research staff.
- Contribute to the training and supervision of PhD students.
- Secure funding from UK research councils, charities or other funding agencies during this appointment.
- Take part in knowledge transfer and public engagement activities.
- Be a member of the SWC faculty team and undertake enabling/academic leadership activities as required.
- Maintain continuing professional development, including participation in staff development and review procedures in accordance with UCL guidelines, including annual formal appraisal.
- Ensure observance of relevant statutory regulations and ethical and other research governance procedures.
- Senior Group Leader applicants should evidence a substantial contribution to science in their field through publications of international significance, and through appropriate measures of academic recognition and esteem e.g. editorship of journals, organisation of conferences, speaker invitations, awards and prizes.

The above description is not exhaustive, and the post-holder will be required to undertake any other duties as may reasonably be requested within the scope, spirit and purpose of the post. Job descriptions are reviewed on a regular basis including at the annual appraisal. As duties and responsibilities change, the job description may be amended in consultation with the post-holder.

The post-holder will be expected to actively follow all UCL policies and procedures including Equal Opportunities, maintain an awareness of Fire and Health & Safety Regulations, attend management meetings and undertake such training and development as may be required for the post.

All staff are required to act professionally, co-operatively and flexibly in line with the requirements of the post.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria outline the skills, knowledge and experience required in order to perform this role. Applicants will be selected based on how well they demonstrate that they meet the essential, and if appropriate, desirable criteria for this particular role.

Essential Criteria	**Assessment method** **Application, Interview, Presentation**
Qualifications, experience and knowledge	
A PhD in neuroscience or a related physical and biological science.	A
Proven track-record of scientific publication in quality journals.	A
Postdoctoral-level research experience in neuroscience or related areas.	A/I/P
Excellence in research in the proposed areas of interest, or a closely related area.	A/I/P
Evidence of successful research conducted in a team-based scientific research environment.	A/I/P
Understanding of ethical and legal requirements in relation to the use of animal models in research.	A
Skills and abilities	
Proven capacity to provide effective leadership, mentorship, and direction to research teams.	A/I
The ability to plan and conduct a creative and influential high-quality research programme that bridges animal and human systems neuroscience and produce related high impact publications.	A/I
The ability to establish and lead infrastructure development initiatives for advanced neural recording technologies.	A/I/P
The ability to collaborate effectively with other SWC research groups, within UCL and externally.	A
The ability to manage own time and work to deadlines.	A/I
Experience contributing to teaching, training and/or supervision of MSc/PhD students and research staff.	A/I
Other requirements	

An understanding and appreciation of the mission and research environment of the SWC, and a commitment to the establishment of the SWC as a world-leading research centre in both animal and human systems neuroscience.	A/I/P
Able and willing to work flexibly to meet the needs of the Centre and coordinate activities across multiple institutional partners.	A
Desirable Criteria	
Experience establishing or contributing to clinical research infrastructure for neural recordings in human subjects.	A
Evidence of leadership in technology development for neural recording or related methodologies.	A

Contact Us

For further enquiries, please contact the Chair of the Search Committee, Director Professor Tom Mrsic-Flogel (t.mrsic-flogel@ucl.ac.uk).

Any other queries relating to the vacancy or how to apply should be directed to the SWC HR team, swc.hr@ucl.ac.uk

How to Apply

Please visit UCL Jobs and search for vacancy reference number: **B02-10140** and select 'Apply Now.'

Please upload the following documents:

- Your CV.
- A cover letter explaining your interest in joining SWC and your suitability for this position.
- A research proposal outlining your research that bridges animal and human neuroscience.
- The names and contact details of three referees.

Please submit your application by 31st March 2026.

All candidates will be notified of the outcome of their application.

Interviews are expected to take place in May 2026.

Shortlisted candidates will be asked to deliver a presentation about their research to members of the UCL neuroscience community at SWC, followed by a chalk talk with a search committee.

Pre-employment Checks

Confirmation of appointment will be subject to receipt of satisfactory references, verification of proof of right to work in the UK and to satisfactory pre-employment health and security screening. The Centre will provide overseas candidates who may require sponsorship with support in seeking an appropriate visa.

Salary

Starting salary will be negotiated according to relevant skills, knowledge, experience and achievement. Cost of living pay awards are negotiated nationally and are normally effective from 1 August each year.

Pension

Post-holders will be eligible to join the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), subject to the Scheme's rules and eligibility conditions.

Conditions of Service

Conditions of Service for Research, Teaching and Professional Services Staff can be found online here.

Probation

Appointments are subject to a probationary period of 9 months.

Hours of Work and Overtime

UCL's full time working week is 36.5 hours per week. SWC is willing to consider flexible-working arrangements, subject to discussion and agreement with your line manager.

Pre-agreed overtime will be offered as equivalent time off in lieu.

Annual Leave

Staff are entitled to 27 days annual leave per year (pro rata for part-time staff). In addition, staff are entitled to 8 days public and statutory holidays, and around 6 UCL closure days with pay per year.

Location

The Sainsbury Wellcome Centre is located in the heart of London around five minutes' walk from the main UCL campus. The mainline railway stations at Euston, King's Cross, St Pancras, Marylebone and Paddington are within easy reach as are the London Underground stations located at Warren Street and Goodge Street.

Equal Opportunities

SWC is committed to the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion for its staff, students and visitors and is fully supportive of UCL's policy; the full equality policy statement is available online.

SWC holds an Athena SWAN Bronze award.

Background Information

The Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Gatsby is a Trust set up by David Sainsbury to realise his charitable objectives.

We focus our support on a limited number of areas:

- Plant science research
- Neuroscience research
- Science and engineering education
- Economic development in Africa
- Public policy research and advice
- The Arts

We are proactive in devising projects to achieve our aims.

We are enthusiastic about supporting innovation.

We are analytical as we believe it is important to understand the opportunities and problems we tackle.

We take a long-term view as we do not think much can be achieved by short, one-off projects.

We are always eager to form partnerships with organisations who share our goals.

Gatsby Neuroscience

"Supporting world-class theoretical and experimental research on neural circuits and behaviour, and activities which further enhance our investments in this area."

Gatsby's pioneering investment in neuroscience began in the 90s with the establishment of the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit (GCNU) at UCL. A small number of research projects and meetings were supported across the UK over the following years until in 2007 the Trustees made the decision to expand Gatsby's efforts, specifically to link the GCNU with experimental neuroscience. For this new endeavour Gatsby has continued to be bold and innovative. In a funding partnership with Wellcome it has developed a new research institute, the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre (SWC) for Neural Circuits and Behaviour at UCL. As part of this new initiative the Foundation has invested in a number of innovative collaborative research programmes in the broad area of neural circuits and behaviour around the world. These programmes reflect the types of research we envision in the SWC and the people we support bring a wealth of expertise to help our thinking and development of the scientific focus.

Wellcome

Wellcome is the largest medical charity in the United Kingdom and presently, after the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the second largest such charity in the world. It funds a wide variety of biomedical science, including research in developing countries, with its mission being to achieve extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. In pursuit of this the Trust supports the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities.

Wellcome funds a significant portfolio of neuroscience and mental health research - ranging from studies of molecular and cellular components to work on cognition and higher systems. It also has strong interests in applied clinical research on neurological and mental health disorders and support activities that explore historical, ethical, social and artistic perspectives on the mind and mental health. Current major investments include Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging at UCL, the Wellcome Trust Centre for Mitochondrial Research at Newcastle University, the Oxford Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour and the Behavioural and Clinical Neurosciences Institute at the University of Cambridge.

Wellcome has several grant schemes including Investigator Awards and numerous prestigious Fellowship schemes ranging from the most senior Principal Research Fellowships for world-class scientists through to the new Henry Wellcome Fellowship scheme for recent PhD graduates. These Awards and Fellowships are awarded competitively and judged by peer review through the Neuroscience Expert Review Groups.

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The Neuroscience Environment at UCL

The UCL student community comprises 29,000 students from 150 countries. UCL currently offers 275 undergraduate programmes and more than 220 taught postgraduate programmes as well as the opportunity to carry out postgraduate research in all of its subjects.

In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, which evaluates research performance in all UK universities, UCL was ranked the top higher education institution for research strength.

UCL is consistently rated among the top five universities in the UK (alongside Cambridge, Imperial College and Oxford) and in the top 25 universities in the world. The 2018 QS global rankings placed UCL seventh among the world's top ten universities.

UCL is a powerhouse in neuroscience, whether measured by published output, citations, grant income, or prizes and honours. UCL Neuroscience currently includes 26 Fellows of the Royal Society and 60 Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences. It has over 480 neuroscience PIs from some 30 academic departments and is ranked first in Europe (and second worldwide) for ISI citations in Neuroscience and Behaviour. UCL has an existing cadre of internationally competitive research groups in the fields of neural circuits and behaviour, and numerous strengths in related aspects of neuroscience, plus allied fields such as physics, chemistry and nanotechnology. UCL is the only institution in the UK – and one of the few in the world – with sufficient concentration and infrastructure in neuroscience and related disciplines to support the ambitious goals of the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre.

The environment at UCL will be further enhanced by the development of the Francis Crick Institute and its integration with UCL and other academic institutions including Imperial College and King's College.

UCL provides an environment of excellence for training future generations of interdisciplinary researchers in neuroscience. Graduate training programmes include; the 4-year Wellcome Neuroscience programme; two further related 4-year Wellcome programmes; the Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit's 4-year programme; the BBSRC London Interdisciplinary Biosciences PhD Consortium (a 4-year programme led by UCL) and the CoMPLEX PhD programme.

These surrounding strengths show UCL's capacity for bringing neuroscientists together with other biomedical scientists, plus mathematicians, physical scientists, computer scientists and engineers, to tackle the most challenging multidisciplinary problems. At the same time, UCL's unique clinical links via its major postgraduate institutes and partner hospitals facilitate eventual translation to new treatments for neural disorders.

Further details of UCL Neuroscience can be found at online here.

The UCL School of Life and Medical Sciences (SLMS) brings together four UCL Faculties to create one of the largest and most prestigious aggregations of academics in biomedical, life and population health sciences worldwide. The School has a global reputation for teaching, informed by cutting-edge research. A full profile of the School can be found online here. The School is structured into four Faculties: Brain Sciences; Life Sciences; Medical Sciences; and Population Health Sciences.

The School coordinates nine Research Domains, which are networks that bring together researchers regardless of their host Faculty. Colleagues engage with as many of the Domains as are relevant to their area of research activity, encouraging interdisciplinarity across the School and beyond.

The UCL Faculty of Life Sciences

The Faculty of Life Sciences combines the strengths of UCL's basic biological and preclinical sciences. Some of the constituent departments have long and distinguished histories that can be traced back to the early nineteenth century and the foundation of UCL. There are nine Nobel Prize winners associated with Life Sciences at UCL. It presents an unrivalled environment for students and researchers in life science disciplines, ranging from neuroscience to the biology of molecules, cells and organisms. The Faculty provides outstanding opportunities for research-led and research-based study. The

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Faculty is home for over 500 graduate students studying on some of the UK's most prestigious PhD programmes.

The UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences

The Faculty of Brain Sciences undertakes world-leading research and teaching in neurology and neural pathways, neuroscience, language, cognition, psychology and psychiatry. It takes an integrative approach to the study of mind and brain by focusing on the determinants of human perception, cognition, emotion and behaviour. The Faculty and its component parts create an outstanding and vibrant environment for study and research.

In order to make use of basic science discoveries, UCL works closely with major Hospital Trust partners to develop further its outstanding academic health science environment. UCL Partners is an academic health science partnership that brings together UCL with four of its NHS partner Trust organisations (Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust (GOSH); Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust; University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust) in order to create Europe's leading health research powerhouse; see http://www.uclpartners.com/ The intention is to deliver real improvements in health for patients in London, and around the world. UCL Partners will support over 3,500 scientists, senior researchers and consultants, with a combined annual turnover of around £2 billion. By pooling resources and expertise, UCL Partners, which together treat over 1.5 million patients every year, is able to produce world-class research in key areas, each of which poses a major health challenge. These include the nervous system, children's health, heart disease, transplantation, immunology, ophthalmology, deafness and hearing impairment, dental and oral disease, cancer and women's health.

SWC is critical to the ambition of UCL to enhance its international leadership in neuroscience. It will deliver the conceptual and technological focus necessary for providing a casual account of how specific patterns of activity in neural circuits process information to direct behaviour to transform understanding of brain function.