

Researcher Career Development (Bridging) Scheme

Helping to address job insecurity of externally funded research staff

Rationale

Job insecurity is a significant issue for externally funded research only staff.

Researchers can be engaged on their current research project with limited time to focus on their professional and career development to enhance their employment prospects.

Up to the end of 25/26 the scheme has supported:



More researchers have been offered, but circumstances changed and it was no longer needed,

What we did

The Researcher Career Development (Bridging) Scheme has been in place at Lancaster from 2023 as an institutional initiative. It typically provides a contract extension of up to 3 months.

Applicants need to detail:

- their professional and career development plans;
- how they will contribute to enhancing research culture;
- the likelihood of being retained at Lancaster.

The scheme is funded through the Enhancing Research Culture (ERC) budget.

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Case studies of some of those supported have been put together demonstrating the value of the scheme:

“As a researcher there is always a conflict between conducting research and finding time for bid writing. The scheme provided me with this time as well as the space to develop the Giving Hope CIC and to secure consultancy work with Adoption England.”

“The precarity of research funding had led me to explore opportunities in industry and I was offered a position. However, I very much wanted to remain in Lancaster and receiving the Researcher Career Development Scheme funding was part of my decision to stay.”

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IMPACT

Stability

Provided short-term extensions that eased job insecurity and allowed researchers to plan confidently.

Equity

The need to ensure that the diversity of those being offered funding is reflective of those eligible to apply

Retention

Encouraged talented researchers to stay at Lancaster, protecting skills, expertise, and research continuity.

Fairness

A transparent, panel-based selection process boosted confidence and collaboration

Evidence

Systematic data collection and case studies built a strong evidence base for long-term sustainability.

Next Steps

The scheme will operate again in 2026/27, informed by the experience gained and lessons learnt in the previous three years. It will once again be funded through the Enhancing Research Culture (ERC) budget.

Broader Reach

Job insecurity of researchers is a sector wide issue. This scheme is one measure that can be taken to support researchers against the precarity of contracts. Lancaster is keen to share its expertise with other institutions wishing to run a similar scheme, to benefit researchers across the sector.

Challenges

Uncertainty about the future – piloting the scheme through the budget has allowed an evidence base of impact and costs to be built up, providing a convincing case for consideration of long-term sustainable funding.

Get in Touch and Find Out More



The Researcher Career Development (Bridging) Scheme is operated out of the Research Culture Team, within Research and Enterprise Services (RES) at Lancaster University:

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