

UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships

Overview of the scheme

1 Objectives of the Future Leaders Fellowships

The UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowships (FLF) scheme will support early career researchers and innovators with outstanding potential in universities, UK registered businesses, and other research and user environments including Research Councils' institutes and laboratories¹. The support of the institution will be critical component of all fellowships which will enable the fellow to transition to or establish their research/innovation independence in any area supported by UKRI. The objectives of the scheme are:

- To develop, retain, attract and sustain research and innovation talent in the UK
- To foster new research and innovation career paths including those at the academic/business and interdisciplinary boundaries, and facilitate movement of people between sectors
- To provide sustained funding and resources for the best early career researchers and innovators
- To provide long-term, flexible funding to tackle difficult and novel challenges, and support adventurous, ambitious programmes.

These Fellowships support applicants from diverse career paths, including those returning from a career break or following time in other roles. We also encourage applications from those wishing to work part-time in order to combine the fellowship with personal responsibilities. Review panels will take into account time spent outside an active research or innovation environment, whether through career breaks, flexible working or as a consequence of working in other roles.

The support offered will be long-term and flexible, with seven years of support available on a 4+3 model, with a review in year 4. The case for support should make clear the long-term aims of the programme, and why they matter – while providing more specific plans and costings for the first four years. For business applicants, those in the user community or other applicants four years' support may be sufficient and there is no need to apply for a further three years of funding if this is not required. Successful applicants will have the intellectual and financial freedom to develop and change direction over this period.

There will be six calls for these fellowships; two calls per year between 2018/19 and 2020/21 (financial years). Submission deadlines and panel meetings will be published on the UKRI FLF web page. The resources requested should reflect the needs of the research/innovation project proposed. Applications exceeding £1.2m (over the first four years) should ensure they have a discussion with UKRI office staff prior to submission.

¹ Research and innovation in non-academic organisations be considered in its fullest sense including business, creative and cultural sectors and service and knowledge based sectors.

2 Who can apply?

This scheme aims to support excellent and high potential future research and innovation leaders. Applicants must demonstrate within their application how the UKRI FLF award will support and enable their long-term career goals and clearly demonstrate that their skills and experience at the time of application match those expected (see below).

2.1 Applicant eligibility

1. Applicants are expected to hold a doctorate by the start date of the fellowship or to be able to demonstrate equivalent research experience and/or training.
2. These fellowships are for early career academics and innovators who are transitioning to / establishing independence. Senior academics and innovators are not permitted to apply. There are no eligibility rules based on years since PhD or whether the applicant currently holds a permanent/open-ended academic position or job role². Applicants should use the person specification (below) to assess and justify their suitability for the scheme with reference to the objectives of the programme.
3. Applicants must have significant support from their hosting organisation(s), described below in section 3. Host organisations are also encouraged to use the scheme to bring outstanding individuals to the UK from abroad.
4. Applications are welcome from those returning to research or innovation from a career break or following time in other roles; there are no time limits in respect of time spent outside a research or innovation environment.
5. Fellowships may be held on a part-time basis in order to combine research/innovation with personal responsibilities. Applicants can propose to hold a fellowship on a part-time basis for four years or can choose to request a part-time fellowship over a longer time-period which would have equated to four years full-time as they wish; job shares are also possible.
6. It is expected that fellows' full working time will be committed to these fellowships or activities related to the fellowship from the start of the award. Therefore, those with substantial ongoing research commitments as a result of participation in other grants are ineligible to apply. Awardees will have the flexibility to develop a breadth of experience and partnerships, and secure further research/innovation funding later in the award, but should ensure that these other activities do not compromise their focus, or achievement of the aims of the fellowship.

2.2 Person specification

FLF applicants should:

- Demonstrate broad knowledge of the area of interest, and offer a compelling vision for the excellence and importance of the proposed research or innovation.
- Take advantage of the long-term and flexible support offered, justify how the proposal would have wider influence in the field
- Have their own original and ambitious plans / ideas, which do not significantly overlap with their proposed collaborators, or former supervisors'
- Demonstrate the suitability of the proposed environment(s) for their research or innovation and its impact

² The permanent/open-ended position would need to be relinquished for the duration of the fellowship.

- Provide an approach to maximising the impact and influence of the proposed work, in the short and/or long-term. This may involve co-production of knowledge and implementation of this knowledge with the business, public sector, civil society sector or the wider community
- Be capable of leading and developing a team or taking a leading role in their field; and show an ability to identify and maximise potential in others
- For business applicants, have secured the backing of the business that employs them. For academic applicants, have secured the backing of an institution that is prepared to host them and commit to an open-ended position for the individual at the end of the fellowship
- Demonstrate the ability to choose and develop appropriate collaborations and networks nationally, internationally or across disciplines

Experience and potential:

- Applicants must have the necessary level of skills, knowledge and experience to take forward the proposed project / programme
- Have a track record of producing challenging, original and productive research and/or innovation outputs that stands out in their field
- Demonstrate flexibility to adapt to opportunity and embrace new directions

Personal development:

- Have identified and proposed opportunities for their own development as impactful and influential research or innovation leaders. This could include time for work in other environments, international links etc., development of new skills (e.g. in policy impact or commercialisation)
- Have identified opportunities to access career development support, e.g. mentoring and professional training and development, and relevant training courses that will underpin their future career ambitions and learning. A clear programme of skills development is an essential component of this training fellowship

Skills:

- Have strong communication and interpersonal skills and aim to develop these through engagement with different audiences
- Demonstrate how the outcomes of the Fellowship will be communicated and used within and outside their immediate community.

2.3 Responsibilities of the applicant

UKRI expects all the researchers and innovators it funds to adopt the highest achievable standards in the conduct of their work. This means exhibiting impeccable integrity and following the principles of good research practice detailed in the RCUK Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct.

The decision to submit an application rests with the applicant/host organisation. Due to anticipated demands UKRI will not be able to provide advice to individual applicants on their eligibility for this scheme.

3 Host organisation eligibility

1. UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships can be held at any UK-based organisation currently registered as eligible to apply to the Research Councils (e.g. Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), Research Council Institutes and eligible Independent Research Organisations (IROs)) or Innovate UK. Cross-sector and organisation links and research and innovation collaborations in the UK and internationally are encouraged.
2. Companies or other privately owned research organisations may host these fellowships if they can provide an innovation and/or research environment of international standing. Such organisations should note:
 - Fellowships in these contexts will be expected to comprise a self-contained project above and beyond the normal research or innovation activity of the host. This could include entering a new sector, developing a new technology or taking the business in a new direction.
 - Fellowships are not restricted to work that would be seen as formal research in their area, but can also lead and develop innovation. Innovation is defined as the practical translation of disruptive ideas into novel, relevant and valued products, services, processes, systems or business models, making them readily available to markets, government and society. Innovation means creating economic and/or social value from ideas.

Organisations may be funded at differing levels. For academic organisations, funding will be at 80% of the full economic cost of the Fellowship, see Annex 2 of the 'completing the application form' for advice. For businesses, this will depend on company size and, therefore, the requirements of EU State Aid Rules. Further guidance is available in Annex 1 of 'completing the application form'.

Note that, while academic/business collaborations are welcomed, to comply with EU State Aid rules academically hosted Fellowships cannot include funding for company partners. There is no barrier to business hosted fellowships including academic costs.

3. Other organisations are welcome to be collaborating organisations for these fellowships, in conjunction with a hosting organisation of a type listed above. Such organisations could include:
 - Charities
 - Government departments
 - Community groups
 - Non-UK based HEIs, companies and research organisations
 - Companies on academically hosted Fellowships

Such organisations should be listed as project partners on the fellowship application, their role and contribution must be clearly set out in an accompanying letter of support. Companies based outside the UK are also eligible as partners or collaborators, but their role will be considered carefully to ensure this does not conflict with the competitiveness of UK-based companies.

Organisations are advised to refer to the organisational funding rules prior to applying and ensure they self-register on the Je-S system well in advance of submission of the final application. If the fellow is shortlisted for interview, then the host organisation will need to undertake the assurance processes explained in 'How to Apply' section 2.3 of completing the application form'.

3.1 Responsibilities of host organisations

These highly prestigious fellowships will be a partnership between UKRI and the hosting institutions, and require commitments from both parties.

Host organisation	Term applied for in application	Commitment to Fellowship from host organisation
Academic	4 years	Tapered salary commitment from year 3 (see Table 3.1.2). Open-ended position during or at end of Fellowship. Applied for based on Full Economic Costing model (typically 80% FEC)
Catapults	4 years	Tapered salary commitment from year 3. Organisation not contributing to total costs of the Fellowship aside from the salary support
Large business³	4 years	50% contribution to total cost of Fellowship (see Annex 1 of completing the application form guidance)
SME	4 years	30% contribution to total cost of Fellowship (see Annex 1 of completing the application form guidance)

3.2 Academic host organisations

Academic host organisations should carefully consider whether applicants' interests align with their institutional strengths and longer-term strategies before submitting an application. Academic host organisations will also be expected to demonstrate that they are providing a supportive research/innovation environment for the Fellow, including not only basic provision of office/laboratory space as required, but also relevant training, mentoring and support and, for example, access to specialist research facilities.

The academic host organisation is expected to have an annual review process in place to assess the Fellow's progress. The organisation is expected to administer this process in accordance with its relevant policies. The outcome of the review may result in a Fellow failing to progress at any point during the fellowship and, following due process, the HEI terminating their contract of employment. In the event of an organisation terminating an award early, UKRI must be informed. This outcome will be captured in wider monitoring of FLF outcomes by institution.

The award will be structured as 4+3 years, with commitment required from the academic host organisation for tapering salary support for the Fellow from year 3. All other costs associated with the project apart from the Fellow's salary will be supported by UKRI for the term of the award.

All applications based in academic organisations must include a clear commitment to an open-ended UK-based independent research or innovation position for the fellow. For the majority of fellows this is likely to be at the end of the 4+3 fellowship period, however for certain applicants the host organisation may pre-agree, and should indicate at the time of application, that this commitment will be in place during or before the end of the first 4-year funding period.

³ In certifying your organisation status please pay particular attention to organisation ownership. Make sure you follow the European Commission (EC) [small to medium enterprise \(SME\) definition](#) when establishing your organisation size.

UKRI will review progress during year 4 of the award to determine whether a further three further years of funding is offered. This review will assess the quality and significance of the Fellow's work and achievements to date, and will involve the host organisation and the Fellow. Fellows securing the second period of funding would be expected to progress into an open-ended post at the end of the fellowship.

Fellows' progress will be monitored and hosts which do not provide the expected support, or where Fellows are not progressing (if remaining in academia) to open-ended positions may not be awarded further Fellowships, in the absence of an acceptable justification.

The application must include a letter of support signed by both the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research (or equivalent) and relevant Dean/Director/Head of Department, confirming commitment to supporting the tapering salary and a route to an open-ended academic appointment.

If the Fellow wishes to move institution during the tenure of the award, UKRI approval will be needed, and the new host institution must as a minimum meet the commitments to salary and post support made by the current institution.

3.3 Business host organisations

Business host organisations should carefully consider whether applicants' interests align with their organisational strategies and interests before submitting a proposal. Organisations will also be expected to demonstrate that they are providing an appropriate working environment for the Fellow, including not only basic provision of office/laboratory space as applicable, but also relevant training, mentoring and support and, for example, access to specialist facilities as dictated by the project.

The host organisation is required to commit to meeting 50% of the full cost of the Fellowship if a large company (using the EU definition) or 30% if an SME, as required by the EU State Aid Rules in Annex 1 and complete the business costing template provided to confirm the company's status. The proposal must include a letter (or letters) of support signed by the senior business representative holding budgetary authority, stating that the business will support the financial commitment for the duration of the Fellowship and acknowledge that these commitments are a condition of award. Applications without appropriate letters of support will not be considered.

The host organisation is expected to have an annual review process in place to assess the Fellow's progression. The organisation is expected to administer this process in accordance with its relevant policies, and the outcome of the review may result in a Fellow failing to progress at any point during the fellowship and the business terminating their contract of employment. In the event of an organisation terminating an award early, UKRI must be informed and this outcome will be captured in wider monitoring of FLF outcomes by organisation.

Fellows' progress will be monitored and host organisations not delivering on their commitments to individuals may be refused any future awards.

Should the business wish to end the fellowship early they will be expected to support the fellow to relocate and ensure that the new organisation undertakes to meet all on-going commitments to the Fellow. Fellows may ask to move organisation during the tenure of the award, and continue their work elsewhere: if no mutually acceptable transfer can be agreed the award will typically be terminated. UKRI should be consulted under all these scenarios.