

Bristol University Vice-Chancellor's Fellowship Handbook

Overview

This scheme offers an exciting opportunity for exceptional early-career researchers to advance their research careers and gives them a real opportunity to become future research leaders in their field.

The objectives of the scheme are:

- to attract, develop and sustain research talent.
- to provide funding for the best early career researchers to tackle difficult and novel challenges, and enable adventurous, ambitious research that supports our strategic priorities.
- to provide the development and support that enables these early career researchers to establish an independent position by the end of the Fellowship, be that either a permanent lectureship or be competitive for an externally funded Fellowship.

Fellows benefit from a competitive salary, tailored training programme, one-to-one coaching and are developed together as a supportive cohort. Fellows have access to support to develop across the full spectrum of an academic role, including teaching, public engagement, impact development and innovation.

Start-up funds

Fellows have access to start-up funds. For Fellows appointed within the Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine and Mathematics (STEMM) disciplines the value is £10,000 per year, for Fellows appointed within the Humanities Arts and Social Science (HASS) disciplines it is £5,000 per year. These funds are allocated at the start of each academic year and cannot be transferred over if not spent within the year. If candidates require more funding to undertake their research this would need to be negotiated with the host school or applied for outside of the scheme. These funds may be used in such a manner as to best carry out the research and in line with University policies such as the Travel, Subsistence and Expenses Policy.

These Fellowships are offered on a fixed term contract. They are non-progressible and we are unable to offer proleptic appointments. These appointments are also subject to Terms and Conditions of Employment www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/terms/ and the University of Bristol's policies, procedures and guidance.

Eligibility

This scheme supports early career researchers with outstanding potential. By early career we mean researchers who have *normally* 0-3 years post PhD research experience for those in HASS disciplines and *normally* 3-7 years post PhD research experience for those in STEMM disciplines.

We say *normally* regarding length of research experience to enable us to be inclusive of a variety of career trajectories. These Fellowships support applicants from diverse career paths, including those returning from a career break due to maternity, paternity, adoption leave, illness or other

exceptional circumstances or following time in other roles. Review panels will take into account time spent outside active research. We also welcome applications from internal and external candidates both from the UK and overseas. Individuals should use the person specification to assess and justify their suitability for the scheme but for guidance suitable candidates are expected to have:

- a PhD in a relevant field or equivalent;
- started to establish a reputation for top quality research;
- a demonstrable upwards career trajectory;
- strong leadership qualities and an enthusiasm for developing skills in teaching, leadership, impact development and engagement;
- excellent interpersonal and communication skills.

Preference will be given to candidates whose career trajectory demonstrates their suitability for this scheme and who are yet to be considered independent researchers but are on track to gain this through the support and training that this Fellowship opportunity offers. Candidates who have already demonstrated research independence, though a track-record of winning external post-doctoral Fellowships (e.g. EPSRC Early Career Fellowship, BBSRC David Phillips Fellowship, NIHR fellowships, Sir Henry Wellcome Trust Postdoctoral Fellowships, Leverhulme Early Career Fellowships) and grant funding, are not likely to be successful. Candidates with an existing permanent academic position are considered to have achieved the aims of the scheme and will not be eligible to apply. Such candidates should contact the relevant school to discuss other opportunities.

Applicants who wish to discuss their suitability to this scheme are encouraged to contact vc-fellowships@bristol.ac.uk for further guidance.

Length of support and extensions

This Fellowship is offered on a full-time contract basis and the length of the Fellowship varies from 2-4 years depending on disciplinary area. We can consider requests for part time working but are not normally able to extend the duration of the contract. Individual schools and faculties may have the financial capability to offer extensions and any request should be directed through the relevant Head of School for consideration.

Maternity/Paternity leave/Sick leave

After a Fellowship has started, the duration may be extended to cover maternity leave, paternity leave, adoption leave, shared parental leave, extended jury service or paid sick leave for a Fellow in line with the terms and conditions of employment.

If requested, consideration will be given to allowing a Fellowship to be placed in abeyance during the absence of the Fellow for parental leave, and the period of the Fellowship extended by the period of leave. Consideration will be given to requests to continue the Fellowship on a flexible or part-time basis to allow the Fellow to meet caring responsibilities.

Fellows are entitled to take sick leave in accordance with the University of Bristol's terms and conditions of employment. If requested, consideration will be given to allowing a Fellowship to be placed in abeyance during the absence of the Fellow due to sick leave, and the period of the Fellowship extended by the period of sick leave. The additional salary costs for the Fellow (pro rata to their percentage FTE on the Fellowship) would need to be covered by the host school.

Delayed start to Fellowship

Delayed or deferred starts are not encouraged as part of this scheme. If offered a VC Fellowship candidates may request a deferred start date and the request will be considered by the PVC Research and Enterprise. In this scenario, the fellowship may be offered to a reserve candidate who is able to take up the fellowship straight away, but if there is no suitable reserve candidate, then a deferral will be considered. However, it cannot be guaranteed that the length of fellowship will remain the same.

Applications

VC Fellowships are supported as a partnership with the academic schools at Bristol. Applicants should discuss any potential application with the most relevant Head of School and a sponsor at an early stage, as strong evidence of support for the proposed Fellow's research and personal development is required as part of the application process. The Head of School will also advise of any internal school deadlines for review of applications before the official close date of the scheme.

Applications to the scheme will be welcomed for research in any subject area but should show alignment to the university's strategic research priorities, which will be specified as part of any call for applications.

To be eligible for a HASS Fellowship, applicants need a sponsor from one of the Schools in either the Faculty of Arts or Social Sciences and Law. To be eligible for a STEMM Fellowship, applicants need a sponsor from one of the Schools in the Faculty of Engineering, Science, Health or Life Sciences.

Each application must be supported by a sponsor who is a permanent member of staff within the University of Bristol, with a track record as a Principal Investigator. Sponsors are expected to only sponsor one Fellow per cohort. Where an interdisciplinary project is proposed, it is possible to include additional sponsors, but there is a requirement for a single lead sponsor. Co-sponsors are permitted and can be from another School or Faculty, or from an institution other than Bristol, but it should be clear in the application why they are required to achieve the research aims. Honorary members of staff are not eligible to be Sponsors.

An individual can only submit one application per call and cannot re-apply until the outcome of any earlier application is known. Applicants resubmitting to the scheme are required to demonstrate within their Proposal Cover Letter that they have made substantive change / development from the original submission, addressing any feedback they have received.



Selection process and criteria

Once the vacancy has closed all applications will be assessed to make sure they contain a fully completed research proposal proforma, a letter of support signed by a sponsor and the relevant Head of School, an academic CV and a covering letter. We will not be able to shortlist any applications missing these documents.

Following these initial checks, Heads of School will review all applications within their school and identify their top three applications. The top three applications in each school will subsequently be assessed by cognate faculty shortlisting panels, which will consist of academic experts and Faculty Research Directors. These Faculty shortlisting panels will review the applications and score them against the following criteria:

1. Research track record relevant to the call
2. Quality of research proposal
3. Strategic alignment to the Universities research priorities
4. Potential for independent research (likelihood that they will secure an externally funded Fellowship or permanent lectureship/assistant professorship within 3 years)
5. A publication track record consistent with research excellence

Shortlisted candidates will then be invited to interview, and the review panel will take up academic references before interview. After the interviews, the review panels will make a recommendation to a Super Panel, comprising all faculty panellists and the PVC Research and Enterprise (Chair), who will then decide upon the final appointment and salary offer. The decision of the Super Panel is final.

It is anticipated that successful candidates start their Fellowships in November.

Conflicts of interest on panels

Panel members making decisions about offering fellowships who are also the sponsor of an applicant or have a close personal or familial relationship with an applicant or an applicant's family should declare a conflict of interest. Where there are conflicts of interest, panellists will not be involved in the selection process for the applicant(s) in question. In practice, this means they will be asked not to provide comments or score them within shortlisting panels and will be asked to leave the room in shortlisting or interview panels whilst the applicant is discussed or is presenting.

Responsibilities of the applicant

The University of Bristol expects all VC Fellows 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 and the University of Bristol [Research Governance and Integrity Policy](#).



Changes to the Research Project

The PVC Research and Enterprise must be consulted in the event of any major change in the proposed research, including failure to gain access to research facilities and services, or to gain ethical committee approval for the research, particularly those which make it unlikely that the objectives of the research can be achieved. If appropriate, revised proposals may be required.

Fellowship Progress Review

Fellows are expected to take part in annual reviews of their progress with their sponsor as part of the Staff Review and Development process. They are also expected to keep PURE, the University's research information system and repository of scholarly works, up to date. Finally, they will be expected to provide a poster outlining their achievements to date at the annual induction event for new fellows and to complete an End of Fellowship report.

Responsibility of the host School/Sponsor

The sponsor, in collaboration with the Head of School, must carefully consider and review prospective applicants' proposals to ascertain if their interests align with the institutional strengths and longer-term strategies before sponsoring an application. Sponsors are then required to provide a statement of support for the candidate's suitability for a Vice-Chancellor's Fellowship. They must indicate how the proposed research project aligns with the one or more of the priority areas as defined on the VC Fellowships' website and outline what support will be offered by the School/Research Group. Heads of School can decide not to support candidates they don't consider appropriate by not signing a letter of support. Sponsors are not obliged to accept a request for support. If they choose not to support a potential applicant, it is at the sponsor's discretion if they choose to give feedback.

When hosting a successful Vice-Chancellor's Fellow, the school is 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 mentoring and support and, for example, access to specialist research facilities. They should ensure the Fellow is fully integrated within the school and its research activities, whilst ensuring that he or she is able to maintain independence and focus on their personal research programme.

The role of a sponsor is primarily to provide guidance to the Fellow, we are expecting the Fellows to act as the Principle Investigator on their own research and be independent. We expect sponsors to be involved in supporting the successful Fellows, with applying for additional sources of funding to build their research programme, supporting them with career development including conducting their annual staff review, and being up to date on their progress.

By accepting a Vice-Chancellor's Fellow schools are expected to:

- Recognise that the Fellowship is to promote the growth and research independence of the Fellow and increase their opportunities in securing a permanent academic appointment or



successfully apply for external funding. (This includes mentorship activities and contributions to career development as well as appropriate assignation of authorship).

- Understand that the funding provided to Fellows does not fund the full economic cost of research, only the directly incurred costs of the research project will be covered.
- Ensure that, before any research funded by the Fellowship commences and during the full fellowship period, all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and all the necessary licences and approvals have been obtained.
- Understand that Fellowships are available for a fixed term period and any requests for extensions are for the school to take under consideration.
- Undertake the statutory obligations of ending a fixed term contract which include support with redeployment or the funding of any redundancy costs.

Changing sponsor

If a Fellow wishes to discuss the possibility of changing their sponsor this should be undertaken with the appropriate Faculty Research Director to identify what might be needed from a new sponsor, and if there is someone in mind.

Activities outside of the Fellowship

This Fellowship scheme is in place to allow Fellows protected time, with no obligatory teaching or administration, to fully concentrate on their research, training and development and establish a competitive position by the end of the Fellowship. Fellows may spend limited time, up to 6 hours a week (pro-rated for part-time Fellows), on all other commitments (e.g. teaching, administrative duties, peer-review, other professional and/or research duties, other funded projects or business-related activities).

In exceptional circumstances, existing Fellows wishing to dedicate over 6 hours a week to non-Fellowship activities must contact vc-Fellows@bristol.ac.uk to request permission, which will be considered by the PVC Research and Enterprise, prior to making any commitment.

If a request to take on non-Fellowship activities that exceed 6 hours is granted, then an extension of the Fellowship will not normally be granted, except for in exceptional circumstances as defined by the PVC Research and Enterprise.

Teaching

Teaching is a very useful development opportunity and Fellows are therefore encouraged to get some experience of such activities.

To protect research time, we have a specific [teaching policy](#) for those who are 100% funded to conduct research, within which we clearly state teaching activities should not exceed 6 hours per week averaged across the calendar year (including all preparation, assessment, feedback and office hours). The amount of teaching committed to must be considered alongside other commitments outside of the fellowship.



The University of Bristol does not pay extra for any teaching that Fellows undertake as we cannot pay for more than 100% FTE. Any teaching agreed to by the Fellow should be fitted into their current contractual obligations.

If Fellows do decide to take on a teaching role, they must first attend Teaching@Bristol for research staff.

Fellows who decide to take on a significant amount of teaching responsibilities (e.g lectures, academic tutorials, seminars, lab demonstrating) have the opportunity to access CREATE, the University of Bristol's Continuing Professional Development scheme for academic staff. Fellows will need to complete a minimum of 15 teaching contact hours whilst undertaking Level 1 of CREATE. This scheme offers our Fellows the opportunity to engage in and gain recognition for any university level teaching alongside research and leadership activities. Upon completing the CREATE Fellow route participants will be awarded Fellow HEA - this is the sector standard qualification in university teaching which stays with our Fellows for life as part of their academic CV.

Applying for other funding

VC Fellowships are springboards to independent research and research leadership, so making grant applications is important. Fellows are encouraged to develop a breadth of experience, to develop partnerships, and to secure further research/innovation funding. There is no internal restriction on Fellows applying to be a Principle Investigator on an external grant as long as it is within the external funders guidelines.

Any application for a grant that extends beyond the period of the Fellowship needs the express approval of the relevant Head of School, irrespective of what the funder requires. If an application is approved then the provision of a letter from the Head of School may be required by the funder stating that, should the application be successful, the individual will be given a contract to the end of the grant covering at least that fraction of their time needed to deliver the grant. It is the responsibility of the Fellow to seek the approval and any required paperwork well in advance of any application. In general funders require assurance that the applicant's salary will be covered by the Institution for the duration of the award (if individuals are not in permanent positions and are applying for awards where they can't request salary costs or the salary costs won't cover all of their time on the award). This assurance will need to be given on a case by case basis by the Head of School and provided in a letter of support to accompany the application.

Being awarded an external fellowship or lectureship

Upon an award, Fellows will need to discuss with their Head of School if they can take up the offer at the end of their fellowship or if it needs to be taken up immediately. In the event that a permanent role has been offered to a Fellow, any decisions to continue the fellowship need to be approved by the PVC Research and Enterprise.