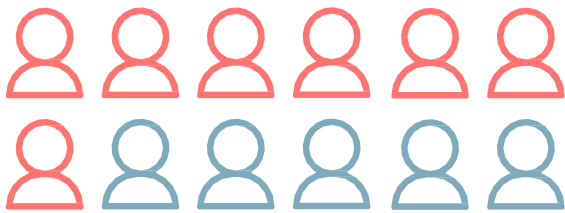


Helping to address job insecurity of externally funded research staff.

Rationale

Job insecurity is a significant issue for externally funded research only staff. The precarity of research contracts can impact more on female than male researchers; typically, there are a greater number of female staff on fixed term/indefinite with end date contracts and caring responsibilities may make female research staff less likely to seek job opportunities elsewhere than their male counterparts.

The scheme has supported 12 staff members so far, including seven women and five men.



In addition to directly benefiting the researchers involved, it also provides benefits to the institution—such as talent retention and helping to improve the research culture within the department or faculty.



Ensuring Fair and Transparent Selection

When applications exceeded the number that could be supported, fairness and transparency in the selection process became paramount. A panel was convened in 2024/25, comprising representatives from RES, POE, and each faculty to address this.

Cultural Change



Value
Establishing a clearer evidence base to track progress and guide action.



Understanding
Enhancing recognition of gender equality work across Lancaster.



Development
Increasing understanding of gender patterns and priorities.



Leadership
Positioned Lancaster as a sector leader, inspiring others to collaborate on researcher precarity.

What we did

The Researcher Career Development (Bridging) Scheme has been in place from 2023 as an institutional initiative. It typically provides a contract extension of up to 3 months, during which time the researcher can enhance their job prospects through engaging in professional and career development. The scheme is funded through the Enhancing Research Culture (ERC) budget.

Applicants need to demonstrate the likelihood of being retained at Lancaster and how they will contribute to enhancing research culture. The scheme is administered by the Research Culture Team in Research and Enterprise Services (RES), with input from People and Organisational Effectiveness (POE) and the Faculties.

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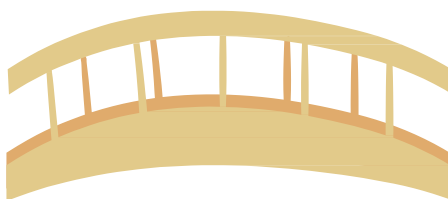
Case studies of some of those supported have been put together demonstrating the value to researchers on the scheme:

“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



What Worked Well

Stability

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

Equity

Supported more women, addressing gendered impacts of precarity and enabling flexibility for caregivers.

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 across RES, POE, and Faculties.

Evidence

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

Next Steps

The scheme will operate again in 2025/26, informed by the experience gained and lessons learnt in the previous two years. It will once again be funded through the 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. Most institutions are not known to operate such a scheme and Lancaster intends to share its expertise in the hope that other institutions will choose to run something similar, to benefit researchers across the sector.

Challenges

- Complexity of external research funding - The Research Culture Team has collaborated with colleagues to understand how fixed-term and indefinite contracts with end dates are managed within POE and Faculties/ Departments.
- Uncertainty about the future - The continuation of the scheme is uncertain beyond this 2025/26 as the ERC budget is externally funded by Research England. Evidence on its impact and costs is regularly gathered for potential institutional consideration of long-term sustainable funding to allow the scheme to become part of normal business activities should external funding cease.

Find Out More



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



researchculture@lancaster.ac.uk

