# Recruiting Contract Research Staff & Supporting their Career Development

# Guidance Notes for Principal Investigators

## 1. Background.

In line with our *five and fifty* strategic plan the University wishes to recruit the best researchers from national and international markets. This document is intended to provide guidance for Principal Investigators when recruiting contract research staff. This document is intended to supplement the University's Recruitment and Selection Policy.

The document also forms part of our commitment to enhancing the career develop of our contract research staff in line with our European Union - HR Excellence in Research Award.

This guidance document deals specifically with the following issues.

- Contract research grades.
- Named Investigators on grant proposals.
- Working with People and Culture to initiate the recruitment exercise.
- Advertising Guidelines.
- Vacancies of 4 months or less – The Researcher Pool.
- Two stage recruitment.
- Salary scales and starting salaries.
- Supporting contract research staff to apply for promotion through the annual promotion cycle and on becoming independent researchers.

**NOTE: all Principal Investigators must attend the University's recruitment and selection training course and where appropriate attend refresher training at least once every five years.**

## 2. Contract Research Grades.

Where a research grant allows you to recruit new contract research staff you must first determine the volume of work required (i.e. full-time or part-time) and the level of the work (i.e. Research Assistant, Research Associate, Research Fellow or Senior Research Fellow).

The grading of the post is determined <u>solely</u> by the level of the responsibilities which the post-holder will be required to undertake. If for example you have the budget available to support a Research Fellow, but the duties required are at the level of Research Associate, then the post should be filled at the Associate level. Similarly, if you require duties at the Research Assistant level but, the appointee previously worked as a Research Fellow the post must be filled at the Assistant level i.e. the grade is determined by the nature of the duties rather than the career history of the appointee. Detailed guidance on the levels of responsibility for the various grades is available on the People and Culture section of the University's website. If you require further guidance please contact your nominated Resourcing Partner (contact details are available at www.ulster.ac.uk/hr/recruitment).

The salary scales for each of the research grades are also available on the People and Culture section of the University's website. It is recommended that you aim to secure funding to allow for appointment at any point in the relevant scale for the grade in question however, it is recognised that some research funding bodies impose a maximum salary which is lower than the University's maximum for the given grade.

Your grant proposal should include the full economic cost of the salary, i.e. gross salary plus employer National Insurance contribution, plus employer's pension contribution. The Research Development team, within the Research and Impact Directorate, will be happy to offer assistance with the costing of a grant proposal (contact details are available at https://www.ulster.ac.uk/departments/research-and-impact).

**Note: all Principal Investigators must complete and submit a Research Application Authorisation Form (RIGO1) that has been appropriately authorised in advance of undertaking the recruitment of Contract Research staff.**

### 3. Named Investigators.

'Named Investigators' refers to situations where a current contract researcher is named on a grant application. If the grant application is successful, employment is offered to the 'named investigator' without the need for normal competitive recruitment.

Current employees can be included on a grant proposal as a 'named researcher' in the following circumstances.

- The researcher is an employee of the University on the date that the grant application is submitted.
- The researcher must only be included on the grant application at their current grade i.e. it is not appropriate for a researcher to gain promotion just because they have been named on a grant (promotions can only be obtained via the annual promotion process or a competitive recruitment exercise).
- If the external funders allow a 'named researchers' approach to recruitment. Many funders insist on normal competitive recruitment and will not release funding unless there is evidence of an open, systematic and objective recruitment exercise. The Research Development Team, within Research and Impact, will be happy to guide you on whether the terms of any particular grant allow for appointments to be made without normal competitive recruitment.
- There may be situations where a 'named researcher' is employed by the University on the date that the grant application is submitted, but their employment ends before we receive confirmation that the grant application has been successful or before the funding is received. In such situations the 'named researcher' should ask to have their name added to a 'pool of named researchers' held by the People and Culture Directorate. When the funding is received it may be possible to re-engage the 'named researcher' without normal competitive recruitment.

### 4. Working with People and Culture to initiate the recruitment exercise.

When the Principal Investigator receives confirmation that the grant proposal has been successful and the formal 'letter of offer' is received and formally accepted by the University, the recruitment process can be initiated. The Principal Investigator should forward the following documentation to their Associate Dean for Research and Impact (ADRI) who will authorise the recruitment request on behalf of the Faculty and process it through to the the relevant department in People and Culture .

- A completed and appropriately authorised Recruitment Requisition (available from the People and Culture section of the University's website).
- A Confirmation of Funding certificate from the Department for Research and Impact indicating that funding for the post is available as per the details in the associated Recruitment Requisition.
- A Job Description and Personnel Specification.

**5. Advertising Guidelines.**

The Resourcing team within the People and Culture Directorate can offer you advice on a range of approaches to job advertising. Increasingly we are using online job-boards and social media recruitment to source applicants, rather than conventional advertisements in newspapers. Some grant funders do however still insist on job advertisements in newspapers, particularly some of the grants administered by SEUPB. The Research Development team, within Research and Impact, will advise you if this is the case.

You should also be aware that if you wish to attract applicants from outside Europe, it is necessary to advertise for at least 28 days in newspapers and/or job-boards specified by the UKVI (the UK Visa and Immigration Service). You should also be aware that after Brexit the UKVI are likely to issue new regulation on the recruitment of people who are not 'settled' in the UK.

When making the grant application the PI should ensure that the budget includes the cost of advertising the vacancy. The cost will vary depending on which publication and/or job-board is used and the number of words used in the advertisement (as a rough approximation a small advertisement in the Belfast Telegraph will cost £1,000 to £1,500 plus VAT and a typical premium job-board will cost circa £250 plus VAT).

If the funders do not make provision for funding the job advertisement, the Principal Investigator should seek alternative sources of funding before making the grant application (e.g. the Research Director or the School).

**6. Vacancies of less than four months duration – <u>The Researcher Pool</u>**

The University has established a pool of researchers who may be used to fill short-term research positions. The purpose in establishing this pool is mainly to enhance the employability of students who have recently been awarded a PhD. It also creates an agile and timely method of filling short-term vacancies. Details of the Researcher Pool are available from the People and Culture section of the University's website or by contacting your Resourcing Partner.

**7. Two Stage recruitment.**

In order to avoid possible redundancies all vacancies, other than posts suitable for the Researcher Pool, are in the first instance restricted to employees on the University's Redeployment Register.

If no appointment is made via the Redeployment Register trawl the vacancy can be advertised externally.

## 8. Salary Scales and Starting Salaries.

The University has determined salary scales for each of the contract research staff grades which include a minimum and maximum rate of pay for the grade. The University is also aware that some research funders will stipulate a maximum starting salary which is lower than the maximum set by the University.

When advertising a research vacancy, the advertisement will stipulate the salary range available. This will be either the full range appropriate to the grade (i.e. the range determined by the University) or a range between the minimum stipulated by the University for that grade and the maximum stipulated by the funders. The preference is to use the full University scale for the grade in question however, it is recognised that this is not always possible.

In determining a 'starting salary' for a new employee, incremental credit can be given based on years of comparable work up to the maximum salary advertised e.g. if a Research Associate has three years working experience as a Research Associate in another University, three years incremental credit can be awarded. To ensure consistency across the University 'years of comparable service' is the only factor considered in determining the level of incremental credit.

## 9. Supporting the Career Progression of Contract Research Staff

The University values the significant contribution made by our contract research staff and we wish to do all that we can to improve their career progression. Principal Investigators have an important role to play in this regard. You should meet regularly with your contract research staff to discuss their career planning and development needs.

Details of the annual promotion cycle are available on the People and Culture section of the University website. The Principal Investigator should discuss promotion plans with the contract researcher at their induction, at appraisal meetings and on a regular basis throughout their employment.

Principal Investigators should also encourage contract research staff to become **<u>independent researchers</u>**.

The University wishes to support the development of the next generation of independent researchers. The latest REF guidelines define an independent researcher as 'an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme' and notes the following indicators of independence:

- *leading or acting as Principal Investigator or equivalent on an externally funded research project;*

- *holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement;*

- *leading a research group or a substantial or specialised work package.*

The University has put in place a range of programmes to support researchers on the journey towards research independence. A guide to these programmes is available at www.ulster.ac.uk/researchsupport .

The programmes include RIGOUR (**R**esearch **I**ncome & **G**rant **O**pportunities for **U**lster **R**esearchers (RIGOUR) and SOARING (**S**ignificance and **O**riginality in **A**cademic **R**esearch: **I**nterpreting **N**ew **G**uidance).

RIGOUR is primarily designed to help academic researchers enhance and improve on the success rate of grant applications to external funding bodies and includes Personal Skills Development. The RIGOUR programme has been designed specifically for Ulster University academics and researchers who are either currently developing proposals, or are simply thinking about future proposals, with the intention of applying for an external, competitive grant. The programme should help give staff a more competitive edge by working with attendees to reflect on the key principles of how to write a successful grant application and to recognise exactly what the different funding panels are looking for when they review applications.

SOARING supports our researchers to further strengthen research outputs. The programme delivers a series of interactive panels, seminars and workshops to provide our researchers with a better understanding of what it means to produce internationally excellent and world-leading outputs. SOARING is not about the dissemination process, but rather is focused on making sure that Ulster University's research outputs are of the highest quality.

In addition, a new **Research Mentoring Programme** has recently been launched to support academic and Contract Research staff to help them to build their research capacity and capability. Full details can be found at https://www.ulster.ac.uk/internal/research/mentoring. In the first instance, it is expected that the relevant PI will act as a Mentor for the Contract Research staff Mentees that they manage and that this will be facilitated via the formal Research Mentoring Programme process. However, an additional Mentor may be appointed for a member of Contract Research staff if this is deemed appropriate by both the Mentee and the PI.

**If Principal Investigators require any further support with the development of contract research staff, please contact our Research Performance team – contact details are available at https://www.ulster.ac.uk/departments/research-and-impact/research-performance**

**Further advice in relation to recruitment is available from the Resourcing Team in the People and Culture Department - contact details are available at https://www.ulster.ac.uk/hr/recruitment**