



UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Fellowship and career progress: departmental support (and beyond)

Monica D'Onofrio

Head of Research, Physics

2026 PDRAs & Research Fellows Half-Away Day,
20/10/2026



Where to start

As a postdoc, you soon start to ask yourself what can be the next step

There are many options, so the first step is to understand what to target

Choose the fellowship schemes that are suitable for your career stage.

The support to seek will depend on that

- If you are **just starting** (ie. 0-2/3 yrs), or **have one postdoc** but you would like to develop benefiting from the close support of established researchers, junior fellowships are the most appropriate. Some examples: **Newton Fellowship, Marie-Curie Fellowships, others UKRI, Leverhulme ECR(*)**
- (*) Leverhulme requires match funding from the university as it supports one year in full and two years at 50% - **still waiting to know if this is supported or not (it wasn't last year...)**

Where to start

As a postdoc, you soon start to ask yourself what can be the next step

There are many options, so the first step is to understand what to target

Choose the fellowship schemes that are suitable for your career stage.

The support to seek will depend on that

- If you are **just starting** (ie. 0-2/3 yrs), or **have one postdoc** but you would like to develop benefiting from the close support of established researchers, junior fellowships are the most appropriate. Some examples: **Newton Fellowship**, **Marie-Curie Fellowships**, others **UKRI**, **Leverhulme ECR(*)**
- From ~3-4 yrs post-PhD, start planning for the transition to independence. Depending on your track record and career path, this might include **Ernest Rutherford Fellowship** (Physics, Theory); **Royal Society URF** and **UKRI Future Leadership Fellowship** (Physics, Math, Chemistry); **EPSRC Open Fellowship** (Physics, Chemistry), **ERC Starting Grant** (all), **University Tenured Track ...**

Support for junior fellowships

- Junior fellowships focus on work to be carried out under supervision and mentoring of an experienced researcher
- Best support comes then from the academic supervisors and researcher(s) you are approaching, and members of their group (i.e. in physics, we have particle, nuclear, condensed matter, accelerator science groups)
- Make sure that your academic supervisor/lead-contact asks a couple of people in the research area group to review the application
- Of course, reach out Head of Research and Head of Department for any request for which you might need help:
 - E.g. statement about strategic fit within the department, mentoring and tutoring, or if you want an independent assessment – we can find someone to review the application
- There is no mandatory internal procedure for junior fellowships from a departmental perspective – liaise with cluster / research leads in your area ☺

Support for independent-researchers fellowships

- The process for an independent-researchers fellowship application might differ significantly depending on the scheme. Among the main UK ones:
 - **ERF**: there is a maximum number of applications per department possible, hence a selection must be done earlier on
 - **URF**: there is no quota
 - **FLF**: there is a university quota and an institutional process which selects (and further support) candidates that are going to final submission
 - **University TTF**: last year → specific topics – oriented to Frontiers / not clear for this year
- Once you decide to apply, there is a **mandatory departmental management review process**: this is done to ensure submission of high-quality proposals that are fit well within departmental strategy (*) long-term
 - Successful candidates would be offered a permanent post at the end of the Fellowship, subject to criteria being met, for schemes like the ones listed above

(*) this does not mean it has to be something we already do, but something that we can support you in doing ...

Example of Physics

- Interested candidate contacts the department emailing the dedicated mailing list **Fellowship Physics@liverpool.ac.uk** that include Head of Department, Head of Research and Heads of each research area to express interest and discuss fit to the Department Research strategy (in doubt, email me).
- Minimum requirement is a **CV plus a draft research plan**
 - Depending on scheme, use relevant forms, ie we have used mainly STFC form “Expression of Interest” for ERF and URF; for FLF, we follow the format of the institution demand management
- For popular schemes, such as FLF, ERF, URF, a full panel is established (chaired by HoR or HoD), with additional members depending on scheme and number of applications
- This year ERF/URF: 3 reviewers (+CL+HoR&HoD) read and comment each proposal, with at least 2 reviewers from the same research area and 1 not. Cluster/research leaders are also requested to review and score all candidates in their research area
 - **ERF:** sift meeting in July to discuss all candidates with one introducer per proposal (as in the STFC panel) → ranked list defined
 - **URF (but also FLF):** support or not (for FLF, followed by Institutional review)

Example of Physics – how to

- Once a decision is taken, this is communicated to the candidate with general and detailed comments
- In case of **positive decision**, candidates are closely followed by their academic sponsor/ “mentor”/cluster leader and HoR/HoD. In particular, **we help in:**
 - Host Institution statements, administrative procedure, RSO costings, request for studentships, IP and commercialisation, Data management plan — see also tips in sharepoint
 - Informing on available infrastructure, potential collaborators and synergies, strengthening of strategy fit.
- *Note:* if requested, the new draft is reviewed a second time by the reviewers
- In case of **negative decision**, we ensure to discuss with candidate about reasons, usually:
 - **Too early career stage and consequent lack of competitiveness**
 - Project not mature / not advanced enough
 - (rarer) lack of strategic fit, i.e. the department cannot support candidate research in long term
- Feedback in this case include redirecting applicant to a different, more suitable scheme, and/or encouragement to plan for the next fellowship, i.e. using the time to fill gaps (in skills, in project planning etc)

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/chemistry/research/fellowships/>

Fellowships in the Department of Chemistry

Research fellows are an integral part of the Department of Chemistry research community. We encourage applications from outstanding individuals who would like to develop their research careers at Liverpool. We offer extensive support and mentoring for new fellowship candidates or candidates wishing to move an existing fellowship.

The Department has hosted fellowships funded by ERC, EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Royal Society, UKRI etc. We have a strong record of recruiting independent fellows into Faculty positions.

The University has recently launched a new [University of Liverpool Research Fellowship scheme](#).

Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants should contact the academic supervisor they are interested in working with, who will provide appropriate support.

Independent Fellowship applicants should send an expression of interest to the theme lead of the area most closely aligned with their proposed research programme:

Chemical Models, AI and Automation

[Professor Alessandro Troisi](#)

Chemistry of World Health

[Professor Paul O'Neill](#)

Chemistry at the Interface

[Professor Richard Nichols](#)

Materials Chemistry

[Professor Frederic Blanc](#)

Synthesis and Sustainable Catalysis

[Professor John Bower](#)

- ▶ Pre-application Support
- ▶ Post-award Support
- ▶ Career Development
- ▶ Potential Funding Sources
- ▶ Independent Fellowship Case Studies

Procedure

- Information on website (left)
- Potential applicant contacts Head of Department (or acting HOD)
- Minimum requirement CV + 2-page research plan
- Considered by HOD + Chemistry Research Director + Cluster Leader and/or other expert reviewer(s).
- Yes/No?
- Proceed with support (blended departmental/RPI):

Math department

Martin Gorbhan (Math/Theory)

- ▶ We ask for Expression of Interest for Fellowships in TP
 - ▶ Advertised on <https://inspirehep.net/>
 - ▶ field: hep-lat, hep-ph, hep-th
 - ▶ By email: CV, research statement (max 3 A4), publications
- ▶ Fellowships:
 - ▶ STFC ERF,
 - ▶ Royal Society (URF / Dorothy Hodgkin),
 - ▶ EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie, ERC starting grant
- ▶ TP Panel (3 academic staff):
 - ▶ will shortlist & match with staff that support application

Schemes are often very popular - this year for ERF there were more than 60 expressions of interest, reviewed in a process from long- to short-lists

UoL match studentships: how to

- For a 5 year fellowships and significant/strategic bids, you can request a Faculty funded 1x 3.5 year UK PhD studentship (stipend and fees at UKRI rates) + £5k for student travel, training/consumables. See Faculty PGR webpages for forms etc
- Intended to improve bid chances and commitment. Only awarded if successful.
- To apply, complete a short online form no less than 15 working days before the application submission deadline.(ref. UoL faculty intranet page). DO THIS ASAP
- If approved, confirmation email from Prof. James Cooper. Then you can write studentship into your application as UoL support:

RESEARCH SUPPORT OFFICE (RSO)

- Research Support provide costings, internal/funder approvals.
Mandatory to go through RSO for all research grant applications
- Approach asap as usually need a few iterations of budget, before agreed
- HoD/HoR signs off all costings/applications in RSO system.
- RSO and HOD also sign off applications in funder systems for most (UKRI included), and will not approve a bid, unless it's been through the RSO process/approvals internally.
- Main RSO homepage: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/intranet/research-support-office/>
- RSO Contacts per department/funder:
<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/intranet/research-support-office/staff/>
- Email your relevant RSO person to ask what they need from you but now there are tools that can be used easily to start costs (open IRIS, create a project and use COCOA to play with costings..)

Additional support – Institution: Peer Review Team

- Peer review team provides support for several fellowship schemes. We have now coordinated their voluntary process with the department review process.

The institutional Peer Review College

The institutional Peer Review College (PRC) supports the University of Liverpool's research community to submit high-quality, competitive research funding applications.

The University of Liverpool's PRC is managed and supported by a small team based centrally in Research and Partnerships. We collaborate with colleagues to coordinate a range of peer review activities such as demand management, supportive peer review and mock interviews for specific schemes.



Peer review @ UoL

Read more about the principles behind peer review processes at UoL.

FUNDER IN FOCUS

Schemes coordinated by the Peer Review College

Explore the range of calls supported by the PRC and find information about upcoming deadlines.



Demand Management

Find out what demand management is and how it works at UoL.



Peer Review Resources

Our online resources support both applicants and research-enabling PS staff to navigate peer review at the pre-award stage.



Get involved

Find out more about how you can get involved with both internal UoL peer review exercises and external funder opportunities.

<https://staff.liverpool.ac.uk/research/research-funding-and-outputs-hub/peer-review-college/>

Support from Faculty: ERF

Since 2024, faculty support team provides a 2-day workshop for candidates that have been selected to submit for ERF (Physics, Maths). Provide also feedback from previous successful applicants and panel members

- 1) Details of the scheme, advice and answers to queries & signposting
- 2) Internal funds to support on offer
- 3) Detailed run through of proposal sections and recommendations, including Narrative CV
- 4) Past awardees & Panel chairs/members speaking
- 5) Lay review and sign
- 6) Timeline clarifications and reminders + Teams group

very good feedback overall

(Charles Evans, Faculty Support Office)

Horizon Europe

- ERC starter grants are your potentially natural target
 - Support from department is on a case-by-case basis
 - Support from institution organized by the Horizon Team, with specific deadlines depending on the scheme
 - Watch out for emails from horizon.europe@liverpool.ac.uk
- Reviews are organised centrally by Horizon Team – mainly get back to us and ask for a list ...
- Opportunities in collaborative bids are possible
 - E.g.: Pump-prime funding sponsored by the British Academy, for diverse career stages

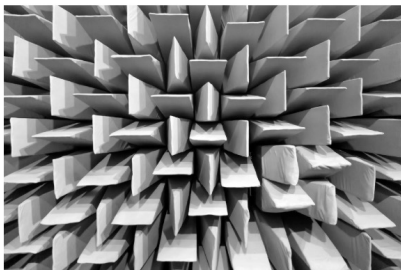
Some tips...

- When you start thinking of a fellowship, make sure to give it sufficient time: developing a coherent and balanced projects, with some technical aspects as well as the big picture is key
- You want to explain **why you and why now, as well as how**
 - A neat set of WPs, Milestones, Deliverables, Objectives might be needed for most fellowships: 5 years are a long time to plan!
 - Risks and mitigation plans must be part of it
- On the CV/capability to deliver, ensure you explain clearly what you have done, and how important that was in your field – do not assume people know! If you have led a group, state how big it was and what you achieved in your role
- **Plan it in advance: there are opportunities for small grants or awards, interdisciplinary activities, or collaborative grants → highly valued in panel**
- When it comes to plan the future for your team, or describe your public engagement plans, make sure to be concrete, again, plan it
- Be aware of what the university can offer in terms of facilities...

AMBITIOUS
INSPIRING
SPIRITED
CHALLENGING
INSPIRING
AMBITIOUS
SPIRITED
INSPIRING
CHALLENGING
AMBITIOUS
SPIRITED
CHALLENGING

Facilities

- <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/research/facilities/>



Acoustic Research Unit

Home to state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and software for sound and vibration research and testing.



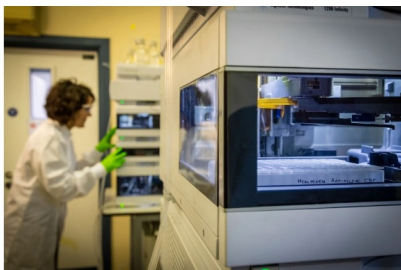
Digital Innovation Facility

Featuring some of the most advanced development laboratories in Europe, dedicated to maximising the possibilities of emerging technologies.



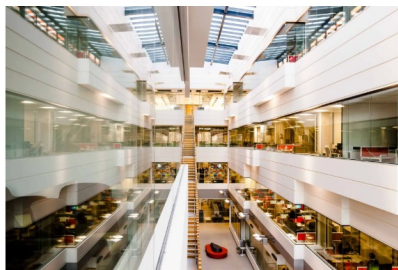
Liverpool Human Ingestive Behaviour Laboratory

One of the largest facilities in Europe dedicated to the study of appetite and ingestive behaviour.



Liverpool Shared Research Facilities (LIV-SRF)

LIV-SRF offer flexible access to world-class equipment and facilities to support research programmes and maximise impact.



Materials Innovation Factory

Exploit cutting edge technology and world class expertise in materials chemistry and formulation, on your own terms.



Virtual Engineering Centre

Our digital laboratories are a state of the art facility where collaborative exploration of emerging research and digital technologies help accelerate innovation.

Statistics

Years after PhD

ERF (STFC):

ERF round	0–3 yrs	4–6 yrs	7–9 yrs	≥10 yrs	Average
2019	0	4	6	0	6.6 yrs
2020	0	5	3	2	7.2 yrs
2021	0	7	3	0	6.0 yrs
2022	0	5	5	0	6.6 yrs
2023	0	4	3	3	7.6 yrs
2024	1	4	2	0	5.3 yrs
2025	0	1	4	2	8.7 yrs

Best estimate:

URF (RS):

PhD	Fellowship start/award	Approx. post-PhD
2020	2024	4 yr
2020	2024/25	4–5 yr
2018	2024	~6 yr
2018	2024	~6 yr
2019	2024/25	5–6 yr
2019	2024/25	5–6 yr
2014	2024/25	10–11 yr*

Awarded
in 2024

Years after PhD/research experience	Royal Society URF	STFC ERF
0–2	Very unusual / generally too early	Very unusual
3	Possible	Uncommon
4	Common	Possible
5	Very common	Common
6	Very common	Very common
7	Common	Very common
8	Eligible/competitive	Common
9+	Usually eligibility becomes the issue*	Increasingly common in recent ERF rounds

What about the years in between?

- Not everyone will be competitive for an independent fellowship immediately, and the statistics show that this is normal.
- For many researchers, the 2–5(..) year post-PhD period is about **building the evidence for independence while employed on larger grants/projects**: developing your own research direction, leading work packages or analyses, supervising students, building collaborations, applying for smaller grants and awards, and becoming a co-I where possible.
- The aim is to use that period deliberately to build the track record that makes the next application competitive.

Conclusion

- It is not easy nor straightforward to prepare for the next steps in your career, but it is also exciting as it allows you to bring forward YOUR ideas. It is YOUR project!
- Opportunities exist, and support is provided
 - We can always do more, so we are here to listen

Best of luck and happy grants preparation 😊