

The University of Limerick Research Career Development & Employment Framework

Background

The Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework is an initiative of the Irish Universities Association to develop a coherent national policy on structured career development and progression for researchers.

Further details can be found on the IUA website at <https://www.iua.ie/for-researchers/researcher-career-framework/>.

The Executive Committee of the University of Limerick have agreed to adopt the IUA Researcher Career Development & Employment Framework.

IUA Framework Overarching Principles

A small number of overarching principles underpin the [IUA framework](#) as follows:

- The Framework covers, recruitment, training, mobile career development and employment, including future employment opportunities.
- The publicly funded research system and HEIs in particular need to maintain a position at the forefront of discovery. The ongoing renewal of the researcher pipeline through the provision of development opportunities is intrinsic to this.
- In furtherance of the objectives of the European Charter for Researchers, and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, this framework recognises that nationally and internationally the majority of HEI researchers will ultimately continue their careers outside the HEI¹. Its' purpose therefore is to prepare those entering the framework for a variety of careers in the public and private sector in research and non-research roles.
- The Career Development Framework is based on an Employee Life Cycle model recognising the significance of HR tools such as job descriptions and competency models from prerecruitment through to development stages, and recognising the need to incorporate the Open, transparent and merit-based recruitment (OTM-R) principles of the Charter and Code in the recruitment of researchers.
- The framework recognises that the research career is predominantly a competitive one and that competition for funding and employment contracts is intrinsic to it. It therefore contains key stages of progression where certain standards must be reached in order to progress further. In this context, tenured positions in academia represent the minority outcome for those who commence as post-doctoral researchers.
- In consequence of this, the framework has a strong competence development component aimed at providing postdoctoral researchers with the skills necessary to advance their careers both within and outside of academia.
- The overall approach to competence development and employment recognises that there is currently a gender imbalance in research and academic employment generally, and this will be tackled in the first instance through progression towards Athena SWAN certification, and through the measures in relation to grading, pay determination, funding of social employment costs, and development proposed within the employment and careers framework. It is recognised that HEIs and funding agencies are taking actions to promote gender equality, and this Framework seeks to complement gender equality objectives.
- Within the HEI setting, teaching and research are primary components of the academic mission, and are therefore intrinsically linked. The European Charter regards Teaching as an essential means for the structuring and dissemination of knowledge and therefore considers it a valuable option within the researchers' career paths. Reference to teaching within the framework is subject to the overarching principle of offering researchers development opportunities, mindful that teaching responsibilities should not be excessive and should not prevent researchers from carrying out their research activities.

¹ A) "The Scientific Century: Securing our future prosperity", The Royal Society, UK, 2010. https://royalsociety.org/~media/Royal_Society_Content/policy/publications/2010/4294970126.pdf B) "What do researchers want to do? The career intentions of doctoral researchers", VITAE, UK (2012).

The University of Limerick's implementation of the Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework operates under the following guiding principles:

- Entry to the Framework and progression to higher levels is by way of open competition.
- Researchers can apply at the appropriate level for posts when advertised commensurate with their qualifications and experience.
- Recruitment and selection to all the appropriate levels is completed in line with University policy. The process is open, competitive, transparent, merit-based (OTM-R) and in line with best practice. In line with the European Commission's [Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers](#) *“postdoctoral status should be transitional, with the primary purpose of providing additional professional development opportunities for a research career in the context of long-term career prospects”*.
- Vacancies at the three levels require funding to be in place prior to advertising. The Principal Investigator (PI)/Hiring Manager will ensure that the contract duration matches the funding available.
- Normally, researchers who have a contract of less than one year may not initially be part of the Framework. However, any subsequent renewal normally requires their participation in the Framework.
- All research staff will undergo a probationary period in their first year of employment with UL to ascertain their suitability for continued employment.
- All research staff will complete an annual performance review through the Performance Development and Review Scheme (PDRS).
- All Research Staff will take part in the University's Researcher Career Development Programme.
- Eligibility to apply for progression from PD1 to PD2 requires that internal applicants have successfully completed their probationary period and/or a 12-month performance review thereafter.

The Research Career Development Framework involves three defined levels that structure the researcher career path with continuous professional development at each level:

- **Post-Doctoral Researcher (PD1 & PD2)**
- **Research Fellow**
- **Senior Research Fellow**

These roles equate to levels 2-4 of the European Commission Framework for Research Careers and are also consistent with the IUA Researcher Career Development & Employment Framework. The UL Researcher Career Development Framework is primarily focussed on Post-Doctoral Researcher and Research Fellow roles, and to a lesser extent Senior Research Fellows. A summary of the Employment levels covered under this Framework is outlined in the table below.

Job Title	Grading Structure
Post-Doctoral Researcher	<p>PD1 & PD2 roles reflect the EU Framework Level 2 role of 'Recognised Researcher'</p> <p>Post-Doctoral Researchers will be employed on a Specific Purpose Contract with a maximum term to meet the objectives of the scheme (the expected duration of the PD1/PD2 phase is up to 6 years in duration with a maximum of 4 years spent at PD1 or PD2)</p>
PD1	<p>Purpose of Role: to conduct a specified programme of research under supervision of a PI while developing skills and competencies with respect to the role and future career options.</p>
PD2	<p>Purpose of Role: to conduct a specified programme of research under supervision of a PI while also providing day-to-day advice, support, mentoring, and assistance to PhD students and PD1s. Continuing to develop skills and competencies with respect to the role and future career options.</p>
Research Fellow	<p>This role reflects the EU Framework Level 3 role of 'Established Researcher'</p> <p>Purpose of Role: Design & implement a specific research programme/s in association with a PI. This role is a prestigious role which represents a step change from Post-Doctoral researcher roles.</p>
Senior Research Fellow	<p>Purpose of Role: This role reflects the EU Framework Level 4 role of 'Leading Researcher', which is described as: "a researcher leading their research area or field. It would include the team leader of a research group or head of an industry R&D laboratory". In particular disciplines as an exception, leading researchers may include individuals who operate as lone researchers".</p>

Post-Doctoral Researchers and Research Fellows roles under the Framework are considered as advanced research training roles and as such researchers will have dual goals in terms of the research project and their own career development. The training and development relevant to this position will be completed within the period of the contract (via the Researcher Career Development Programme) in which time the researcher will continue to develop skills and competencies with respect to the role and their future career options.

It is a legitimate objective of the University to provide Post-doctoral Research training opportunities which are of limited duration. This will allow for the progression over many years, of post-doctoral researchers through the Researcher Career Development Programme as part of the University's Employment & Career Development Framework for Researchers providing intergenerational training in the methods and practice of research and scholarship.

Progression between Research Staff Grades

Progression within the researcher careers framework will normally be through open competition.

However, progression from PD1 to PD2 without open competition may occur where a Post Doctoral Researcher is on a contract supported by 3–4-year funding. In that instance, they may be eligible to apply for PD2 after 2 years' service, subject to performance and funding. Such applications will be considered through the HEI's internal progression process (See HR website for link to application for Progression from PD1 to PD2).

Progression from PD1/PD2 to Research Fellow will be by way of open competition or merit based internal progression.

Merit based internal progression refers to instances where a researcher has secured independent research funding in their own right following a competitive peer reviewed process (e.g. Marie Curie Fellowship). In this situation a researcher may be considered to have completed their post-doctoral development objectives and may be appointed as a Research Fellow for the duration of the fellowship/grant, subject to the UL's internal appointment process.

Achievement of the expected progression within PD 1 and PD 2 is transferable between the Irish Higher Education Institutions. As such, this will be reviewed for all appointments as part of the recruitment process at UL where the Researcher has previously completed a stage of the IUA Career Framework at another Irish University. This can be reflected in the starting pay of a Post-Doctoral researcher. Similarly, as the professional development scheme is an intergenerational training scheme, completion of PD1 or PD 2 levels in another Irish Higher Educational Institution will normally render that researcher ineligible for appointment at a similar level in the University of Limerick.

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