

National Postdoc Conference 2021

Additional Q&A arising from the Keynote

Question	Response from Prof Dame Ottoline Leyser
<p>Are the 21/22 figures expenditure or commitment (legacy or future plans)</p>	<p>It is not well known that we operate with annual budgets. We are allocated an annual budget by BEIS and each year we are required to spend to within 1% of that budget. No funds can be carried over into the next year, and spend means spend, not pass on to someone else to spend.</p> <p>Most of our investments are multiyear, so we enter each year with a significant proportion of our annual budget already committed, with some headroom for new investments. Since most of our investments involve open competitions which take time to run, many of these competitions have started in the year before, but some will start and allocate funds within a single financial year. Only the funds actually spent this year are included in this year's budget.</p> <p>This is all quite challenging to manage, but the scale and diversity of UKRI investments, combined with a skillful finance function mean that it is usually possible to hit the 1% target while ensuring our investments provide good value for money.</p> <p>So the answer to your question is that the 21/22 figures are a combination of legacy commitments made in previous years and projected new commitments that will be both made and spent this year.</p>
<p>I am curious to understand how UKRI / university salary levels may inhibit the movement of people around the system in the squiggly way that you suggest (which is a good thing). Is there flexibility in the system/peer review to accommodate and acknowledge different forms of knowledge and experience?</p>	<p>People have different priorities and aspirations and will be differently motivated by issues such as salary, location, job security, pension building etc, as well as their research and innovation goals. There is considerable variation in all these things in different sectors/roles. People often imagine that job security and salary are low in academia in comparison to business, but this is not straightforwardly the case. There is a lot of variation in both these things in both sectors.</p> <p>Key to supporting the kinds of flexible careers I think we need is recognising and valuing different forms of knowledge, skills and experience. There are many ways to contribute to research and innovation excellence and these can be evidenced in an equally wide range of ways. To try to capture this, UKRI is working with others in the system to roll out narrative form CVs, in particular the Resume for Researchers, based on a model developed by the Royal Society. This format provides the opportunity to set out, using any evidence available, how someone has contributed to knowledge, training and mentoring others, the wider health of the research and innovation system, and engagement with other stakeholders.</p>

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<p>The idea of a "free" path of a Researcher life is very interesting. But the eligibility criteria to access research funding should reflect that freedom.</p> <p>Even a little diversion from the "typical" path, like been lucky and getting a permanent position shortly after finishing the PhD, immediately limits the possibility of accessing funds. Do you think that the institutions will be willing to be less rigid about the eligibility criteria to apply for funds?</p>	<p>I am not sure quite sure what sort of eligibility criteria are being referenced here. However, clearly we need a portfolio of funding opportunities to support a diversity of people and ideas. It is important that this portfolio works to support diverse career paths and career stages. There is a balance to be struck between very flexible open schemes that will result in the need to compare very different people and projects, and more targeted schemes where the applicant pool will be more straightforwardly comparable. Both approaches have merit if the selection criteria are well designed.</p>
<p>Thanks for the great talk Ottoline, I love the idea of people moving around freely, but how will this work in practice, based on current metrics. For example, how (and why) will someone in industry come back and 'secure' a Postdoc position if they haven't had recent (or any) publications. Will there be special funding opportunities for entry/re-entry (and exit to go elsewhere for that matter)?</p>	<p>Key to supporting the kinds of flexible careers I think we need is recognising and valuing different forms of knowledge, skills and experience. There are many ways to contribute to research and innovation excellence and these can be evidenced in an equally wide range of ways. To try to capture this, UKRI is working with others in the system to roll out narrative form CVs, in particular the Resume for Researchers, based on a model developed by the Royal Society. This format provides the opportunity to set out, using any evidence available, how someone has contributed to knowledge, training and mentoring others, the wider health of the research and innovation system, and engagement with other stakeholders.</p> <p>Funding schemes that catalyse this kind of movement also have a role to play, be they short internships as part of a PhD, as is the case for some UKRI doctoral training partnerships, or substantial fellowships that bridge sectors, as is the case for some UKRI Future Leadership Fellowships.</p>
<p>Do you think part of the problem in getting people from industry to do a post-doc could be leaving permanent jobs and all the security that brings (being able to get mortgages etc) for a 2 year post with no security beyond that? Similarly, once a person has built up some time in universities maybe doing 3 post-docs (and therefore having the job securities that working in an institute for certain amounts of time</p>	<p>People have different priorities and aspirations and will be differently motivated by issues such as salary, location, job security, pension building etc, as well as their research and innovation goals. There is considerable variation in all these things in different sectors/roles. People often imagine that job security and salary are low in academia in comparison to business, but this is not straightforwardly the case. There is a lot of variation in both these things in both sectors.</p> <p>Funding schemes that catalyse this kind of movement also have a role to play, be they short internships as part of a PhD, as is the case for some UKRI doctoral training partnerships, or substantial fellowships that bridge sectors, as is the case for some UKRI Future Leadership Fellowships.</p>

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<p>brings) maybe reluctant to leave (even between different Universities for example) because they have worked so hard for that security. Could career diversity could be better encouraged by including secondments (to industry) in research grants and better incentivising academia to those working in industry?</p>	
<p>What a brilliant start for the day!! Great talk Dr. Ottoline Leyser. You identified that “The rules of winning are perceived to be disproportionately focused on a small number of measures proposed!” As a policy maker now, what are the measures you have considered to bring the balance in the current system? In other terms, what kind of policy changes are required at this point?</p>	<p>Key to supporting the kinds of flexible careers I think we need is recognising and valuing different forms of knowledge, skills and experience. There are many ways to contribute to research and innovation excellence and these can be evidenced in an equally wide range of ways. To try to capture this, UKRI is working with others in the system to roll out narrative form CVs, in particular the Resume for Researchers, based on a model developed by the Royal Society. This format provides the opportunity to set out, using any evidence available, how someone has contributed to knowledge, training and mentoring others, the wider health of the research and innovation system, and engagement with other stakeholders.</p> <p>We are also conducting a review of the Research Excellence Framework. This is an important opportunity to ensure it incentivises the kind of research and innovation system the UK needs.</p>
<p>Does UKRI hold any data on how universities use their block grants, particularly in relation to post-doctoral career development pathways? And if it does, how are those data used?</p>	<p>There is an important debate to be had about how best to incentivise good practice in career development and support for post-docs.</p> <p>QR funding is used by higher education providers for multiple purposes including underpinning the development of researchers. Research England’s Terms and Conditions set out an expectation that providers in receipt of funding adopt the principles, standards and good practice for the management of research staff set out in the 2019 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Individual providers have reported to Research England that QR funding underpins support for early-career researchers, tailored to the university’s objectives and strategic need.</p> <p>QR is awarded on the basis of the outcome of the REF, which includes universities setting out how they build a high quality research environment. The REF is currently under review with a key consideration being the incentives, intended and otherwise, it currently creates for universities.</p>

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<p>Thank you for the interesting talk, Prof Dame Leyser! I have great memories from your biology lectures at York years ago and I've stuck with the academic research path. I'm glad that you are working towards improving the system. Are there any examples of grants that support long-term collaborative research for huge goals e.g. prevent cancer that translate to government policy/lead to real change?</p>	<p>This kind of approach is very much under discussion at present. At UKRI we have been running this sort of project through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund. Building on this, as part of the Government's Innovation Strategy, there is an ambition to define some specific missions as areas of focus for research and innovation.</p> <p>This a valuable component in a portfolio of funding mechanisms.</p>
<p>What are UKRI doing to improve Psychological safety within research culture especially with regards to Principal Investigators?</p>	<p>Psychological safety comes from a work culture of mutual respect, in which people feel free to share ideas and to accept and receive constructive criticism. Key to achieving this is a generally positive research culture, which requires valuing the full range of activities needed for high quality research. UKRI has a substantial programme of work to support inclusive and supportive research culture ranging from the 101 jobs that change the world project, through to the introduction of the Resume for Researchers and a variety of fora for the development and sharing of good practice.</p> <p>Another crucial element is good leadership. Embedding leadership training, for example for UKRI Future Leader Fellows, is an important initiative to drive the changes needed.</p>
<p>Very interested in your comments on tackling insecurity and providing more stable post-doc careers (outside of fellowship-lecturer pathway). How might UKRI stimulate this? Stipulation of a proportion of QR funding for dual funding (or bridging between contracts)?</p>	<p>There is an important debate to be had about how best to incentivise good practice in career development and support for post-docs. This could include REF reform and/or hypothecation of the QR block grant. This latter option would effectively relieve hypothecated funding associated with the 2002 Roberts Review.</p>
<p>I can see the value for fixed-term post-docs within the system but is there any value/desire to have more permanent research roles (maybe at later career stages) without 'forcing' individuals to teach?</p>	<p>Universities have teaching as a core element of their mission, and in most universities teaching income exceeds research income. For researchers who do not want to teach, research institutes are a good choice.</p> <p>There are some permanent research-only roles in universities. Their prevalence varies across disciplines. Many are associated with running major facilities, which provide a stable income source. A small number can be funded from QR, or QR can provide a source of bridging funding for those funded by competitive awards.</p>

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<p>Increasing the value the whole research system places on mentoring the next generation is crucial. How can we raise this up the agenda? What's your personal view?</p>	<p>Key to supporting the kinds of flexible careers I think we need is recognising and valuing different forms of knowledge, skills and experience. There are many ways to contribute to research and innovation excellence and these can be evidenced in an equally wide range of ways. To try to capture this, UKRI is working with others in the system to roll out narrative form CVs, in particular the Resume for Researchers, based on a model developed by the Royal Society. This format provides the opportunity to set out, using any evidence available, how someone has contributed to knowledge, training and mentoring others, the wider health of the research and innovation system, and engagement with other stakeholders.</p> <p>Another crucial element is good leadership. Embedding leadership training, for example for UKRI Future Leader Fellows, is an important initiative to drive the changes needed.</p>
<p>Do you think the REF (in its current form) should be abolished?</p>	<p>We are currently conducting a review of the Research Excellence Framework. This is an important opportunity to ensure it incentivises the kind of research and innovation system the UK needs.</p>