



# Applying for a Post-Doc (after a Doctorate)

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[ulster.ac.uk](http://ulster.ac.uk)

# To be or not to be

- What are your options after a PhD? Is a post-doc the best option?
- Are all post-doc the same?
- When should you start thinking about applying?
- The ABC of the process

# What is a post doc?

- A Post-doc is a post-doctoral research position (typically 2 or 3 years)
- It can be a position as a research associate connected to a grant held by an established PI on any topic
- It may be a position on a grant that you write with your supervisor or other established researchers you have connections to
- It can also be an independent fellowship (in this case you are the PI of the fellowship but you will have a mentor)

# Why do one?

- You want to pursue an academic career or you are not entirely sure about what you want to do next, but need more time as a researcher to figure it out
- You want to have some more years to do research full time, and in particular to publish your research more widely
- You need time to establish yourself as an independent researcher
- And, you need to gain some teaching experience whilst also enhancing your research record

# Finding one

To find one keep an eye on:

- [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)
- Times Higher Education Supplement
- [www.findapostdoc.com](http://www.findapostdoc.com)
- [www.academicjobseu.com](http://www.academicjobseu.com)
- Naturejobs.com, Science Careers and New Scientist for postdocs in science
- Some disciplines have their own platforms: e.g. linguistlist

**→ But networking is also key. At some point I was going to apply one in the Netherlands with someone I met at a conference...**

## The must haves...

- For any post-doc, you will need a very well written CV, so get your draft CV seen by your supervisor early on
- A research statement/covering letter
- A sample of work you would be happy to have read by specialists
- A track record of publications, conference presentations and ideally other services to the research community (e.g. reviewing, conference organisation, editorial work)
- A coherent and convincing career development plan

## The must haves...

- And of course: a research proposal, whether or not you are applying for an independent fellowship

# Part I

Applying for a research associate/research fellow position on someone else's grant

## Research Associate/Fellow on a grant

- You are essentially working on someone else's grant
- You can expect to be part of the research team and therefore normally be named on the publications
- It allows you to expand on your research focus and make new connections and contacts
- These positions come up at different times in the year so they may suit your timing better
- They are typically competitive and you will have to demonstrate some level of research independence
- And some publication record

## Research Associate/Fellow on a grant

- They tend to be competitive so you need to apply to many to get one
- Don't rule out things too quickly: flexibility is crucial and new skills can be acquired
- Don't use the same application for all positions: make sure you tailor your application each time
- Remember that you often address different audiences (your readers will be researchers but will not necessarily have interests close to your work - if they don't understand you, it's your fault not theirs)
- If you get an interview you need to prepare well for the interview, substantiating everything you say with examples

# Part I- b

Applying for a grant with your supervisor to be an RA or a Research Fellow



## Research Associate/Fellow on a grant

- You may also decide with your supervisor to submit a grant to continue your work
- In this case you may collaborate with your supervisor to write the proposal
- You may be named on the grant as a research associate/fellow and can expect to take up the position if the grant is awarded
- In the final year of your PhD as you are writing up start to think about the stuff you wish you had time to do but didn't

# Research Associate/Fellow on a grant

- Preparation: The interview is key so you need to study well the research track record of the PI
- Interview: Questions are in large part predictable, so practice for the interview with your supervisor
- Plan your answers to make sure you demonstrate your knowledge
- Prepare a clear presentation of your own research plans for the future

# Research Associate/Fellow on a grant

- Try to make connections between what you have done and what the grant aims to do
- You will be asked how your research to date equips you for the position so prepare this well by also considering gaps in your knowledge you may need to fill
- You will be asked about your track record so make sure you submit any paper you may be close to finishing before you apply/interview

# Part II

Applying for a Fellowship



## A post doctoral fellowship

- A number of research councils (e.g. British Academy, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/british-academy-postdoctoral-fellowships> or the Irish Research Council <http://research.ie/funding/goipd/>)
- Some Universities (e.g. University of Edinburgh, <https://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/postdoctoral-fellowships-2020-21>)
- Marie Curie fellowships <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/marie-sklodowska-curie-actions>
- Several colleges in Oxford or Cambridge

# A post doctoral fellowship

- These are **very** competitive (e.g. the BA ones have a less than 10% success rate)
- Application deadlines are once a year
- Normally you cannot have had another fellowship to be eligible
- They can only be applied for early in your career (typically within three/five years of the PhD award)
- The application is demanding
- They will give you research freedom (with its costs and benefits)
- They will require a mentor in the host institution- this is important as fit with institution/mentor is a crucial factor

## A post doctoral fellowship

- **These applications require you to have a clear idea of what comes next in your research endeavours**
- **You will need a track record to be successful: conference presentations, research awards, publications, and some evidence of your commitment to the field**

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

- Three years with a contract as a lecturer in a UK university of your choice (plus some research expenses)
- Fully integrated as a full-time member of staff in a department/school
- You are given the chance to do some teaching (the amount is normally decided by you and the head of department) to improve your teaching portfolio
- You have three years to establish yourself as a researcher

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

- Applicants must be within three years of the award of a doctorate
- Applicants must be a UK or EEA national, or have completed a doctorate at a UK university
- Any field of study within the Humanities or Social Sciences
- Applicants must be supported by one self-nominated referee
- The referee should normally be the external examiner **so the choice of your external examiner is very important**
- The competition is fierce (last year they awarded 55) but if you don't play you don't win!

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

- It's a two-stage process: normally the calls open in August and submission is by October
- If you get through the first stage, you are then asked to submit a piece of work for further evaluation
- Second stage (open normally to 15-20% of submission) is normally Jan-Feb with final results in June
- You need to have had your viva by April of the year you want to apply
- You chose the institution where you want to carry out the project, but it is important to demonstrate that the relevance of this choice

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

- The host institution will have to write to write in support of the application
- The outline stage proposal is read by specialist assessors
- but if it gets through the first stage, it is then read by BA research award committee so it needs to be understandable and of interest to academic leaders in fields others than yours
- It's not the kind of thing you whip up in a day or two

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

- A clear proposal which is original, timely and innovative
- It should relate to your PhD as the assessors will be asked whether you have the right skills set to carry out the research
- But it needs to show it will go beyond it
- The proposal needs to be feasible
- You will also be judged on your record to date (e.g. publication record)
- The good news is that you can apply within three years of completing so you have time to write things up...

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

- I had one back in 2002-2005 at the University of Cambridge so here are my tips:
- Try to choose with your supervisors a PhD external that will carry weight externally
- Think about a proposal that extends what you have done in a new direction
- Think well about your choice of institution: the choice needs to make sense in terms of where you work intends to go next

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

And a tip:

- Read some of the summaries of recent awards and see with your supervisors if you can find a successful one you know to perhaps ask for advice

# The one I held: a BA Post Doctoral Fellowship

In summary, you need:

- A clear idea about a project that connects to your PhD but goes beyond
- In other words you want to use your PhD as a proof of concept and show in your application where you want to go next
- Adding a new methodological strand is also probably a good thing- I did that and that enhanced my academic profile
- An external examiner that is enthusiastic about your work
- Some publications...

# What if you don't have time to publish much during the PhD?

- Don't apply too soon if you have no publication at all. Most Universities these days have some kind of researcher pools
- Or else check out the next option...

# Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Post Doctoral fellowships

- Fellowships must be within 5 years of completing a PhD
- One resubmission is allowed
- Application deadline is normally in October/November with results announced in May
- You will need a mentor in an Irish institution of choice and 2 referees
- Open to applicants from any countries with a main residence in Ireland during the fellowship

# Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Post Doctoral fellowships

- One year fellowships: to prepare a doctoral dissertation for publication through a variety of high quality published academic outputs
- Two year fellowships: to develop either a new research project or a research project that demonstrates a significant development of the subject of the doctorate through a variety of published outputs
- A training and career development plan forms an important part of the assessment process

# Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Post Doctoral fellowships

- There are four categories for the scoring:
  - Applicant (and their suitability to carry out the project)
  - Project
  - Career Development Plan
  - Fit with the host institution

# Cambridge and Oxford College Fellowships

- A number of colleges in Oxford (<https://gazette.web.ox.ac.uk/home>) and Cambridge (<https://www.reporter.admin.cam.ac.uk>) offer Junior Research Fellowships
- They are tenable normally for 3 years
- Some of them are non-stipendiary and hence may be combined with other fellowships like a British Academy Post Doc (I had a non-stipendiary one in Fitzwilliam College)
- They provide accommodation, dining rights, research expenses and a great environment to flourish as a

## And dulcis in fundo:

- A bit of luck!

----- But But then again read this

**More than lucky? Exploring self-leadership in the development and articulation of research independence**

[https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.656897!/file/Guccioni2016.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.656897!/file/Guccioni2016.pdf)

An insight into ‘the components of gaining a fellowship award that were attributable to the abilities, attitudes and actions of the research fellows themselves’

## Guccione 2016

- A research study of twenty five fellowship stories from research fellows across eight Russell Group universities
- Starting point: fellowship award success is often largely attributed to luck, both by award holders themselves and also by aspiring fellows
- But it is unlikely that success is due to luck alone
- Individual ability to “make it happen” is a driver for academic career development
- A key finding is the interplay between each research fellow’s social situation, their actions, and their understanding of their role in the success they has

experienced

# Guccione 2016

- Five areas of active development:

(1) Developing awareness of career opportunities and constraints;

(2) Developing the confidence to apply and to do the project;

(3) Developing and negotiating ownership of research ideas;

(4) Developing application skills (writing and interviews);

(5) Developing resilience and maintaining momentum

## Guccione 2016

- Crucially though on top of all this, the research shows that

Developing and utilising professional networks was key to success- the fellows' networks played a huge role in the development of the researcher's confidence and ability to apply.