Prosper postdoc career development pilot cohort PI consultation

# About Prosper

Prosper [link] is The Academy’s new career development approach aimed at preparing postdocs for the wide range of careers available to them. Prosper gives postdocs the chance to expand how they view themselves and the opportunities available to them. The project’s ultimate goal is to open up the huge talent pool that exists within the postdoc community, to the benefit of postdocs themselves, Principal Investigators, employers and the wider UK economy.

PIs are central to empowering postdocs to take action that benefits their career development. It’s part of Prosper’s role to collaborate with PIs, working with them to develop the resources they need to bring out the very best in their postdocs.

We launched our first set of resources for postdocs and PIs via the Prosper portal [link] in June. As we look to the second phase of our work, we are seeking your feedback and input.

# Phase 2

Phase 2 of Prosper brings together a pilot cohort of around 50 University of Liverpool postdocs who will engage in a period of intensive career development activity designed to enable them to explore multiple career pathways. The cohort will begin in April 2021. The second half of the pilot cohort will extend participation to 50 postdocs from our partners, the University of Manchester and Lancaster, in 2022.

Central to this pilot cohort is the broad range of postdocs we aim to recruit. Our learnings from this phase will inform further iterations of Prosper and through engaging with a diverse representation of the postdoc community at this early stage, we can ensure that we create an approach that addresses traditional barriers to development and is truly accessible to all postdocs when it is rolled-out across the sector in 2023.

## What are the benefits of joining the cohort for postdocs?

Phase 2 is centred around a series of career clusters. Co-created with our employer partners, these clusters will allow postdocs to take a broader view of their future career trajectory that focuses on not only their backgrounds in academic research, but also the transferable skills prized by employers that this experience gives them. This will be combined with interventions that will allow postdocs to consider careers that not only utilise their skills, but that also align with their values, interests and personal attributes.

By the end of the cohort, participants will have:

* Worked independently, with the wider cohort and with a dedicated career coach to understand their aspirations, values and attributes to create a broader context on which careers are the best ‘fit’ for them, overcome challenges and be equipped to pursue their individual goals
* Undertaken a range of targeted development activities that have been created in partnership with employers, are specific to individual career clusters, and will equip postdocs with the skills, knowledge, mindsets and networks to thrive in a range of careers they have identified to be of interest
* Use these insights to explore several career areas in-depth and gain direct access to employers working in these areas
* Developed a living CV that they are confident in using to apply for roles beyond academia
* Contributed towards the evolution of Prosper before it is rolled-out across the sector in 2023

## What are the benefits of this phase to me as a PI?

The benefits of postdocs undertaking this career development activity are numerous, including the upskilling of postdocs in a rounded, holistic way as well as

the new opportunities and networks that are opened up to PIs, when postdocs explore avenues beyond academia.

Prosper also gives you the opportunity to actively engage with and contribute to the current change agenda to re-imagine UK HE research culture. By supporting your postdoc’s (or postdocs’) participation, you are fulfilling your own and the university’s commitments on research staff development as detailed by The Concordat to [support the career development of researchers](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat/full) [link] and the University’s own Statement [of Expectations for Principal Investigators](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/hr-excellence-in-research-badge/commitment-researchers/) [link].

## How will postdocs engage with this opportunity alongside their research roles?

Time for this targeted work will come from a 10% contract extension, giving postdocs the space they need to truly benefit from these development interventions. It is initially proposed that cohort participation will ideally be for 12 months, with a minimum commitment of 6 months.

To allow postdocs to fully engage without impacting on the progress on their research projects, the cost of this 10% contract extension will be met by Prosper’s funding budget.

The Prosper team is engaging directly with Human Resources, the Research Support Office and funders to develop the contract extension process over the coming months.

Democratisation of access is central to Prosper and as part of this commitment, we are also exploring the implications of joining the pilot cohort for postdocs who have less than 6 months remaining of their current contracts from the beginning of the pilot in April 2021. Our aim is to develop a flexible model for postdoc participation that speaks to the complexities inherent in the postdoc employment landscape.

## What does the application and selection process look like?

We intend to run an open recruitment campaign beginning this December, advertising the opportunity to all University of Liverpool postdocs. Applications will be via an online form, as part of which postdocs are asked to submit a supporting statement outlining their interest in joining the cohort and why now is the right time for them to engage with targeted development.

Postdocs will be selected by a diverse panel with a breadth of experience in both the HE and other employment sectors. We will make more information available on the make-up of the panel and detailed selection criteria on the Prosper webpages [link] in due course.

## Is my postdoc eligible to take part?

This phase of Prosper is open to postdocs who:

* have completed their PhD AND
* are employed by the University of Liverpool on a research-only contract

We do not currently expect to accept applications from those on independent or tenure-track fellowships.

## How we will make sure that participation reflects the diverse research community?

Our broad aims for Prosper include creating an approach to postdoc career development that address traditional barriers to access and that is open and appealing to all postdocs.

To help us achieve this in Phase 2, we aim to reach the following targets for participation across the pilot as a whole:

* 20% representation from each of the three University of Liverpool faculties
* A broad equal gender split, with the following nuances across disciplines:
  + Biomedical and Biological Sciences - 50% female/50% male
  + Physical and Environmental Sciences and Engineering - 30% female/70% male
  + Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences - 60% female/ 40% male
* 25% representation from BAME postdocs

At the end of the project, we are seeking to have developed a model that will ultimately be accessible to all and that addresses previous barriers individuals may have faced when engaging with development activities. To ensure we achieve this, we will also encourage applications from postdocs with other protected characteristics and/or circumstances that may have hindered their access to development previously.

## Your input

As we develop this phase of Prosper, we’re seeking your input. We’re particularly interested to hear from you on the following:

* What opportunities could this phase offer you and your postdoc(s)?
* How could you promote this opportunity to your postdocs, particularly those who you feel may not normally engage with development opportunities, and what materials would help you to do this?
* Do you manage a researcher who you think should be eligible to apply but doesn’t meet our definition of a postdoc?
* What questions does Phase 2 raise for you or for your postdocs?
* How do envisage your postdoc’s participation could work alongside your research project and its deliverables?
* Do you have any other comments or feedback?

## How will we use your feedback?

We’ll use your responses to inform how we structure this phase of Prosper, in particular with relation to the 10% postdoc contract extension.

You can respond to the above questions either by completing our short online form [link] or by emailing the team directly at prosper.postdoc@liverpool.ac.uk [link] by **Friday 13 November.**

# Opportunities to engage further with Prosper

## Stakeholder Engagement Panel

We are actively co-creating Prosper with all our stakeholders, including PIs. If you are interested in engaging with us further or more frequently, we are looking for new members to join our Stakeholder Engagement Panel. The panel is made up of key stakeholders who are committed to the aims of Prosper and who act as both critical friends and advocates as it evolves.

If you are interested in joining the panel, please contact [name] at [email address].

## PI network

In September, we established the Prosper PI network, a space where PIs and managers of researchers can come together to share and evolve best practice in supporting postdocs and their career development.

More information on upcoming meetings of the network can be found here [link].