Prosper postdoc career development pilot cohort Postdoc 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.

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 co-created with a range of employers and 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?

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 that uncovers the value and potential in their background in academic research and the transferable skills prized by employers that this experience gives them. This will include development activities such as workshops, panel discussions and facilitated conversations. These and other activities will allow postdocs to consider careers that not only utilise their existing skills, but to also develop the additional competencies, networks and know-how that will empower them to succeed in careers that align with their interests and values.

Our employer stakeholders represent a broad range of sectors, from life sciences and pharmaceuticals to technology and creative and cultural industries. To date, 42 employers - including IBM, Unilever, ViiV Healthcare, the Environment Agency and Tate - have engaged in the development of Prosper and we are continuously expanding and developing our pool of employer partners.

Participation in the cohort will ideally be for 12 months, with a minimum commitment of six months.

Cohort journey

After initial orientation activities, including a welcome lecture and meeting career coaches and others on the cohort, the pilot comprises of a foundation stage, followed by the more intensive career cluster stage.

The foundational stage is aimed at helping postdocs to reflect on not only their career to date, but also their wider values and aspirations to allow them to benefit fully from intensive work during the career cluster stage. During this stage, postdocs will also have the opportunity to explore a range of skill sets within a broad context.

The career cluster stage is an opportunity for postdocs to harness insights and learning from the foundational stage and use these to engage with 2 or 3 career clusters that will enable them to develop the skills, mindsets and networks needed to thrive in a selected range of professional functions or sectors. Activities within this stage will be co-created with employers, drawing on an understanding of their specific needs for highly skilled individuals who can contribute to their continued success.

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
* Use these insights to explore several career areas in-depth and gain direct access to employers working in these areas
* 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
* 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

## Feedback and evaluation

Iterative evaluation and co-creation are central to Prosper. To help us achieve this, participants will commit to giving us feedback throughout their time on the cohort in several ways, ranging from online questionnaires to reflective journaling. Time spent on feedback activities will be factored in the 10% of postdocs’ time dedicated to engaging with the cohort and won’t represent an additional time commitment.

Cohort participants’ feedback will be key in helping us understand what works and what needs improvement so that we can ultimately create a development approach that meets the needs of a wide variety of postdocs. Participants’ feedback and input is essential for us to test the effectiveness of our development approach and will form the basis upon which we tailor our provision to make it as responsive to postdocs’ needs as possible.

We are also interested in the longer-term impact that participation in the Prosper cohort will have in postdocs’ future careers and ongoing development. This is why we will also ask cohort participants to commit to keeping in touch with the Prosper team, providing us with information regarding their employment aspirations and career destinations beyond the end of the cohort. This will take place mostly via completion of Prosper alumni online surveys.

## Which postdocs are eligible?

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 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.

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.

## 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?
* What questions do you have about the phase and how it would work alongside your research role?
* How could we best promote this opportunity to you and other postdocs?
* 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 20 November.**