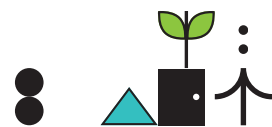


September 2023 - September 2026





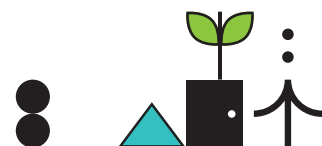
Contents

In September 2023, Prosper secured £450,005 from UKRI to accelerate a UK-wide rollout across higher education and research institutions through to September 2026. This booklet contains a total of seven implementation highlights and nine case studies collected from higher education institutions between September 2024 and July 2026.

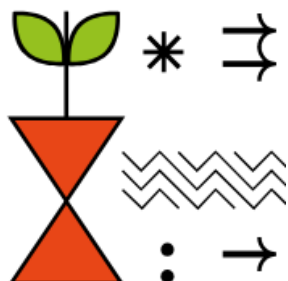
The case studies capture stories and experiences of institutions who have implemented Prosper in some way, showing Prosper's value as a resource for institutions and the researchers they support. We hope to also illustrate the flexibility of Prosper as something which can be adapted and added to existing career development provision to suit the unique needs of different institutions.

Institutional case studies	
<u>Prosper snapshots - implementation highlights from seven higher education institutions</u>	3 - 6
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Prosper Snapshots



There are all sorts of different ways to use Prosper and the Portal to enhance postdoc career development at your institution.

We've compiled a selection of examples to illustrate the diverse ways Prosper has been used and to spark ideas for future practice.

Lancaster University

Lancaster University ran a Careers Day for research-only staff on 19 November 2025 and wanted to embed Prosper. Via the [Prosper Exchange](#), they requested Prosper tailor and deliver two back-to-back sessions focused on resources and skills for those seeking careers beyond academia.



The first was an interactive session looking at tips and best practice for non-academic CVs.

Attendees were asked to send their CVs in advance and bring along printed copies, then split into groups of four to five people to swap and mutually review/refine.

The second session looked at strategies for career exploration, featuring a panel of former postdocs now employed in a variety of careers beyond academia.



Photo from the Lancaster University Career Day session, delivered by Prosper.





University of Manchester

As both a partner in the original RED-funded pilot phase and an early adopter of Prosper, the University of Manchester has made continual use of Prosper data and reporting (via the [Prosper Exchange](#)) to inform its implementation.



The institution regularly tracks usage of the Prosper Portal among its research staff to see what resources and pages are most popular.

It then uses this intelligence as part of its feedback loop to tailor the focus of its Prosper programmes (both in regards to its cohorts and beyond). The data is regularly shared with senior leadership to demonstrate impact.

University of Dundee

The University of Dundee has enhanced its Researcher Advancement Programme by collaborating with the Prosper team (through the [Prosper Exchange](#)) to identify and map relevant resources across its programme of sessions.



University
of Dundee

The Prosper team reviewed the themes which the Programme aimed to address and the objectives of each part the Researcher Advancement Programme. They then identified activities on the Prosper Portal which aligned well with the topics explored.

The team at the University of Dundee will either recommend these resources as follow-on activities to be used post session, or refer to them during their session facilitation.





Durham University

To raise awareness of Prosper among Durham postdocs ahead of launching its first cohort, the institution hosted a Prosper showcase day in June 2025.

Attendees heard from a panel of Prosper alumni from other HEIs, learned about the Prosper Portal, and undertook group exercises based on selected Portal resources.

The institution worked with the Prosper team (through the Prosper Exchange) to help plan the event – drawing on communications and branding support and having a member of the Prosper team attend to give a talk.



Photo of the Durham University Prosper showcase event.

Heriot-Watt University

During September 2025, Heriot-Watt University invited the Prosper team (via the Prosper Exchange) to deliver a Portal tour – with a difference.

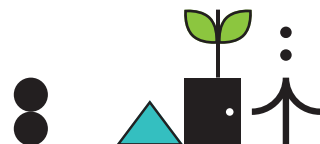
Herriot-Watt proposed opening the session across Scotland, leading promotion of the event to the national researcher development network through various channels.

The session attracted 54 registrations, with 40 attending from five Scottish HEIs (plus two attendees from Italy and Portugal respectively). Attendees included 24 PGRs, 12 postdoctoral researchers, and four professional services staff and technicians. The session was followed by a 'watch party' at the University of Dundee.



This example shows a collective approach to career development by expanding access beyond a single institution, creating efficiencies for the researcher development teams as well as increasing Prosper's visibility across Scotland.





Queen's University Belfast

In January 2024, Queen's University Belfast delivered a workshop for postdoctoral researchers from both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, titled Career Audit: Skills for the Future. The workshop drew in part on [Prosper materials](#) and was attended by a small group of six participants.



Delivered in person from 9:30 to 15:30, the session combined group discussions and interactive exercises, encouraging participants to reflect on their own skills and those of their peers. The workshop was highly successful, generating lively discussion and strong participant engagement.

The University has since run more Prosper-inspired workshops for both research staff at both HEIs.

Cardiff University

Cardiff University was part of the REF2029 People, Culture and Environment (PCE) pilot, for which engagement with Prosper formed part of its reporting.

The institution undertook extensive promotion of the Prosper Portal and its resources ([mode one](#)). It ran blogs for research staff looking at how you can use different areas and functions on the Portal to boost your career development, along with mailers pointing to specific resources, and updates on the Institution's Viva Engage platform.



It signposted the Portal in multiple internal newsletters and made use of Prosper's digital flyers to encourage research staff to sign up to Prosper's [Employer Insight](#) and [PI Network](#) sessions.





Heriot-Watt University

Context and background

Heriot-Watt University is a research-intensive institution specialising in Science, Technology, Engineering, Business and Design, attracting researchers from across the world to its campuses in Scotland, Dubai and Malaysia.

It addresses crucial world issues through its interdisciplinary approach and close collaboration with industry and business, exemplified by its Global Research Institutes in Robotics and AI, addressing Net Zero, and Health and Care Engineering.

The University has around 2000 staff - including around 250 research staff (postdocs, research associates and fellows), as well as approximately 1000 postgraduate researchers (PGRs).

How was Prosper used?

There was large demand among Heriot-Watt's research staff for information and insight regarding career opportunities beyond academia - one of the key focuses of Prosper and its resources.

The University wanted to ensure staff at its numerous overseas campuses could fully participate - necessitating a fully online approach. Given the University's considerable PGR population and the crossover of relevant resources, participation was opened up to PGRs as well as postdocs.

Heriot-Watt opted for Mode two Prosper delivery (facilitated activities, but not a formal cohort). They ran a series of five online sessions, each covering key areas and topics along the Prosper Reflect, Explore and Act journey, with specific topics selected in response to a request from Research Staff representatives.

Mode of delivery

2

Cost + resource

£1750
(for facilitation costs)

0.1 FTE

Key stats

43

Attendees

5

Sessions

90

Minutes each



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Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

- **Session 1, Reflect: Skills and the STAR method**
- **Session 2, Reflect: Personality and values**
- **Session 3, Explore: Career connections and where to find roles**
- **Session 4, Act: CVs, covering letters and applications**
- **Session 5, Act: Interviews and LinkedIn**

The sessions were designed as a series, and participants were encouraged to attend all five - however this wasn't mandatory, and sessions were also intended to work as standalone.

To deliver the series, Heriot-Watt brought an external facilitator (a career coach who had previously worked with the University). Each session was 90 minutes long, and involved a mixture of Prosper resources and the facilitator's own expertise.

During the sessions, participants were invited to register/login to the Prosper Portal and carry out specific activities - after which participants had an opportunity to discuss any questions with the facilitator and the other participants.

The total cost for all five sessions was £1750.

Impact and Evaluation

The series was a success, with 43 participants attending at least one session (17 postdocs and 26 PGRs). The sessions were well-received, with the Reflect sessions in particular garnering strong engagement - a testament to the demand among postdocs/PGRs for structured guidance on the 'big questions' of personal motivation, values and career direction.

Heriot-Watt took a relatively light touch approach to evaluation - for the most part using Prosper's own ready-made evaluation materials (available on the [Institution's](#) section of the Prosper Portal). 100% of those who completed the feedback form stated they found the series 'very useful'.

Thanks in part to the way the Prosper Portal was integrated into the series, usage of the Portal has increased significantly at Heriot-Watt, rising from two users before the start of the series to 40 active users at the time of writing.



"The series introduced me to Prosper, which is a fantastic resource for any postdoc.

The sessions allowed me to reflect on various aspects of my career and academic journey. It forced me to document my achievements, experiences and skills developed to date.

I was able to better understand how to identify strengths as well as weaknesses, and articulate my values. The skills audit provided a method for structuring an answer in an interview or written proposal."

– Attendee feedback



"The Prosper resources are useful for me as I can always refer back to them when needed."

– Attendee feedback



"The Reflect sessions on skills, STAR, personality and values helped me understand my skillset and focus my mind on what job roles I might excel at."

– Attendee feedback



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Unlocking postdoc
career potential

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"Prosper was so useful. We were able to put together an engaging and well-structured series that research staff and PGRs really benefitted from, with minimal time and cost, thanks to all the ready-made materials that were already available."

– Dr Gabriele Anderson, Researcher Development Consultant, Heriot-Watt University



"The series gave me some fundamental hints about building my own career path, as well as suggestions of which types of people to follow on social media (mostly LinkedIn), to aim for a particular position in the career, or at least to form a better understanding about the major roles in that area."

– Attendee feedback



"All parts of the series were equally very useful. I would say the session on skills, personality and values particularly so because the most important part of applying for jobs and building a career is to first recognise and evaluate yourself."

– Attendee feedback



"The personality and values section [was particularly useful] as it incentivises you to deeply understand your personal needs and eventually keep those aligned with current/future work."

– Attendee feedback



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Newcastle University



Context and background

A founding member of the Russell Group, Newcastle University is a global top 130 university, with three campuses in Newcastle, Singapore and Malaysia.

As a research-intensive institution, it employs approximately 950 postdocs spread across its three faculties (Medical Sciences, Science Agriculture and Engineering and Humanities and Social Sciences).

How was Prosper used?

The Organisational Development team at Newcastle felt there was a gap in their provision for postdocs who might want to explore roles beyond academia. While there was existing resource via their career service and various sessions, they felt like more could be done to join this activity up into something more holistic and tailored to the postdoc audience.

Having seen the success of the Prosper pilots, the team felt the Prosper cohort model would be ideal for this.

The cohort ran over three-and-a-half months from 16 April to 3 July 2024. The University ran a light-touch recruitment process based on expression of interest and a short statement regarding what applicants wanted to get out of it (similar to Prosper's cohorts at the University of Liverpool).

15 postdocs ended up taking part, with five from each of the University's three faculties. As well as being diverse in terms of disciplinary backgrounds, participants represented a diverse mix in terms of gender and ethnicity.

Mode of delivery

3

Cost + resource



1 FTE

Key stats

15
Postdocs

9
Workshops

4
Coaching sessions





The cohort was structured around nine workshops and four coaching sessions, as well as an additional induction. It followed Prosper's Reflect, Explore, and Act model in even thirds, with sessions including self-reflection, broadening career horizons and exploring other career paths beyond academia, entrepreneurial skills, leadership, networking and interview skills.

The team drew heavily on resources from the Prosper Portal to create the sessions, while weaving in their own expertise, content from previously-run sessions, and materials from their careers service. The aim of the cohort was in part to join the dots and draw from what they knew had worked piecemeal elsewhere.

For some of the sessions, the team brought in academics from the University that had switched between industry and academia in their own careers to talk through their experience and provide direct insight.

The sessions had built-in group discussion and community elements. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the session content and discuss their learnings amongst themselves, applying the ideas to the context of their own career journeys and aspirations - connecting over shared experiences.

Partly due to this desire to create a tangible community, sessions were mostly in-person, and often combined with group coaching on the same day, with a group lunch in between (everyone loves free food!). The group coaching was done in two groups of seven and eight, and was kept consistent throughout the cohort.

"Prosper was fantastic because while we've historically offered a lot of training and standalone sessions, this was the first opportunity we've had to run a programme just for postdocs where everything is joined up in a holistic way, with a real community element. That space to create connections with peers from other disciplines, especially in our hybrid working era, was incredibly powerful."

– Chris Emmerson, Organisational Development Lead, Newcastle University



"I was thoroughly grateful for the time to reflect on my career progression with my peers.

It was great to get to know other postdocs from different faculties and discover that our experiences were surprisingly similar, and to receive sympathetic and understanding ears to the challenges we face as postdocs.

Prosper has made me feel more certain in my desired career path and more focused on my goals.

I would highly recommend Prosper, as valuable time to grow, reflect, and focus on what you want to do after your PhD."

– Cohort member



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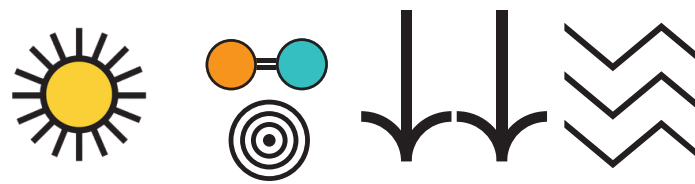


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Impact and Evaluation

The cohort was a success - and the organisers found that the group and community element was really valuable for the postdocs that participated.

The team took a light-touch approach to formal evaluation - with participants filling in a simple feedback form after each module (i.e., Reflect, Explore and Act). Feedback was very positive for each - participants found that there was a lot in the sessions that they could relate to, that there was a good spread of content, and that the content was very useful for sparking thoughts and discussions relating to their own career journeys.

Participants also stated that the cohort had a real impact on their own career perspectives and aspirations - one stated that thanks to the Explore sessions, they are now considering a career in professional services.

The cohort was an exploratory pilot - one of its main aims was to get the programme up and running, and to find out what works and what doesn't to inform the design of the next iteration. The team was able to get useful insights for this purpose; for example, participants responded well to the more focused and condensed day sessions, so this is being factored into the design of the next cohort

Future plans

The Organisational Development team is planning a second, expanded Prosper cohort to run between April and June 2025 - with the team aiming to recruit 18 postdocs.

The team are adapting the structure based on the feedback from the first cohort. Instead of having smaller sessions spread out on different days, they will be running three full-day sessions (one each for Reflect, Explore and Act).



"Prosper gave me the opportunity to focus on my career from a different perspective, allowing me to reflect on the skills and values I would like to see reflected in my own career path.

All the activities were a moment of reflection on our future moves. One of the strongest assets of Prosper is the collaborative and supportive environment that was created.

Everyone was willing to share their stories, as well as carefully listening without competitiveness."

– Cohort member





University of Bristol



Context and background

The University of Bristol is a research-intensive institution with global reach and a strong interdisciplinary reputation. The University hosts approximately 1500 postdocs across its faculties, contributing significantly to its research outputs and research culture.

This case study focuses on Early Career Researchers—primarily Pathway 2 academics (postdocs on fixed-funding)—interested in exploring careers beyond academia.

How was Prosper used?

The University of Bristol opted for Mode three Prosper delivery (<https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/institution-resources/boosting-the-career-development-of-postdocs-with-prosper/choose-your-mode-of-delivery/>) by running a cohort.

Many researchers at Bristol who want to explore careers outside of academia often don't get the chance to talk about it with colleagues and may feel unable to tell their supervisors. Over the last two years, there had been three full-day career development programmes which ran over a three-week period. It was felt that a cohort model over a longer period of time would benefit researchers at Bristol.

The University's People and Development Partner had the experience and expertise to deliver the cohort internally. They consulted with several other Researcher Developers at other universities who led Prosper cohorts in the past to inform their mode of delivery.

Bristol's Prosper cohort was titled 'Get Clear on Your Career' and targeted Pathway 2 researchers interested in exploring non-academic careers. Communications were sent directly to this group via email and in monthly Bristol Clear bulletins.

Mode of delivery

3

Cost + resource



Built into workload of a full-time People Development Partner

Key stats

1

Cohort

20

Postdocs

4

Online workshops



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Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

The cohort ran across four, monthly online workshops (each 150 minutes long) between November 2025 and February 2026:

- **Reflect part 1: Sharing career stories, exploring values and motivations**
- **Reflect part 2: Identifying skills and strengths, and potential career goals**
- **Explore part 1: Networking and research opportunities**
- **Explore part 2: Specific career pathways, sector research, sustained progress**

During the workshops, participants worked in breakout groups which were formed around shared sector interests. Participants also had priority access to 1:1 coaching appointments.

Explore sessions part 1 and 2 included 2 - 3 guests who joined for the first 30 minutes of the sessions. The guests comprised of University colleagues who had worked in industry partnership roles and external employers in relevant sectors. Participants had the opportunity to join breakouts with the guests for more detailed discussion.

Impact and Evaluation

A strong peer support culture emerged from the Prosper cohort, with researchers supporting each other's reflections and sector explorations. 18/19 participants remained engaged by the end of the cohort.

Questionnaires were administered during workshops one (response rate 18) and four (response rate 12). The post-questionnaire outcomes are:

- **Net promoter score (likelihood to recommend):** Average = 7
- **Plans to stay in touch after the cohort:** Yes = 8, No=3
- **Would attend a 3-month follow-up workshop:** Yes=9; No = 2

Across the cohort, participants' confidence in setting a career goal doubled (0.8 to 1.6), and there was a tilt towards considering roles beyond academia. This was reflected both in aspirations and an increase in applications to non-academic roles, while the rate of no applications decreased. These changes are based on different sample sizes, so the shifts have been interpreted as directional rather than strictly like-for-like.



"Engaging with the career planning task over three months kept me engaged with the topic and gave me time to reflect between sessions."

– Anonymous participant



"The opportunities to talk to people in various industrial positions...and the chance for self-reflection on our careers/career directions."

– Anonymous participant

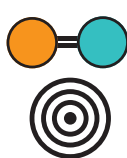


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Future plans



Bristol plans to run a second Prosper cohort from April to June 2026, running across three online workshops (themed around Reflect, Explore and Act) with shorter sessions supported by pre-work.

Recruitment will prioritise those who missed out previously and be broadened to include Pathway 3 staff (early career academics in teaching roles). More flexible peer support will be provided through groups that are more mixed in disciplines and career interests. There will also be a new career resource area ‘Develop’ which includes Prosper-linked materials.

The refined programme will increase accessibility and strengthen participants’ readiness to act on their career plans. Bristol will continue exploring further integration of Prosper across career development work done by the People Development team.



“It was a privilege to get to know the cohort...I was impressed by their commitment to support each other and engage with the sessions.”

– Rachel Hogg (Organiser)





University of Edinburgh



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Context and background

The University of Edinburgh has about 2140 research staff and employs two part-time Research Staff Career Consultants to support their career development. They provide one-on-one career development consultations and offer various career development workshops.

The University chose Prosper because it fits in with their existing careers provision and deemed it an excellent resource for researchers to be aware of, particularly for providing access to self-guided resources.

How was Prosper used?

The University of Edinburgh opted for Mode one Prosper delivery (<https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/institution-resources/boosting-the-career-development-of-postdocs-with-prosper/choose-your-mode-of-delivery/>) by promoting Prosper as an excellent career development resource.

The University’s Research Staff Career Consultants adopted a light-touch approach to raising awareness of the Prosper Portal through various channels. They promoted Prosper in 1:1 career development consultations, sent direct emails about specific Prosper resources, and promoted key events via University LinkedIn pages.

In June 2025, the University of Edinburgh delivered a programme for Careers Month which explored different career topics with a focus on alternative roles beyond academia. Researchers engaged with the programme online and in-person, and some of the activities on offer included:

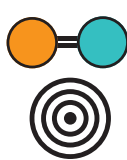
- A panel talk on working in the Life Sciences sector
- Two, one-hour sessions on career anxiety and narrative CVs
- A morning of short Quick Query appointments

Mode of delivery



Key stats





The University of Edinburgh asked the Prosper team to deliver an online session on how to get the most of the Prosper portal for the programme. A member of the Prosper team facilitated this session, sharing practical insights and tips on using the portal's resources effectively. The session also highlighted key areas of the portal for researchers to be aware of, including features that are not commonly known about.

Prosper resources were used as a basis for creating other career development sessions, including a briefing session on employment sectors - a new addition to the University's Researcher Development Careers Development Programme in October 2025. In the following year in March 2026, Prosper resources were used again to design and run a session on growing your entrepreneurial thinking.

Impact and Evaluation

The 'How to Get the Most out of the Prosper Portal' session was well-received and attracted 20 researcher attendees. The session received top scores for feedback (5-star ratings) and participants "strongly agreed" that they would recommend the workshop to colleagues and peers.

The October 2025 briefing session on employment sectors was the highest attended session of the year with 35 participants.

Thanks in part to the frequent promotion of Prosper, usage of the Prosper Portal by those at the University of Edinburgh has significantly increased. Rising from 37 active users in June 2025 to 68 active users at the time of writing.

Future plans

The University of Edinburgh plans to run another briefing session on employment sectors in the next academic year.

The University will continue to raise awareness of the Prosper Portal and its resources through 1:1 consultations and LinkedIn. They intend on maintaining engagement with the Portal due to its value as a key resource.





University of Huddersfield

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals

Context and background

The University of Huddersfield, established in 1992, serves as a vital anchor institution within the Leeds City region. The university is comprised of five academic schools: Applied Sciences, Arts & Humanities, Business, Education & Law, Computing & Engineering, and Human & Health Sciences.

While the University has achieved TEF Gold status for its teaching and learning, it is also actively focused on growing its research activity. UoH currently has approximately 540 full-time equivalent (FTE) academic and research staff, with around 80 FTE dedicated to research-only contracts and 460 FTE on teaching and research contracts.

How was Prosper used?

The University of Huddersfield opted for Mode one Prosper delivery (<https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/institution-resources/boosting-the-career-development-of-postdocs-with-prosper/choose-your-mode-of-delivery/>) by promoting Prosper at the institution.

Alison Monkhouse is Academic Researcher Development Manager at the University, working within Research Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (RIKE), a central service providing cross-institutional support for research development and funding, managing the research environment (including staff training and development), ensuring research governance, and fostering strategic partnerships and business development.

RIKE's researcher development activities are structured around five core themes: research practice, leadership, identity, career, and impact. Alison first learned about Prosper during its launch to the wider sector in September 2023, at Vitae conference. Having recently started her role, Alison was exploring new avenues for research staff career development at Huddersfield.

Prosper immediately stood out as a potentially valuable resource, one that fit with RIKE's 'your research career' theme.

Mode of delivery

1

Key stats

2
Prosper
sessions

20
Portal
promotions





While Huddersfield didn't have the immediate capacity to run a Prosper cohort, Alison was keen to promote the Prosper Portal as a self-directed resource for their research staff. Through Alison, Huddersfield got involved with the Prosper Early Adopters focus group – a network of HEIs working together to shape Prosper and share practice.

Prosper Introduction session

In an early example of the [Prosper Exchange](#), Prosper collaborated with Huddersfield to deliver an online hour-long 'Unlocking Postdoctoral Career Potential with Prosper' session for university staff on 19 March, 2024.

11 attendees received an introduction to the Prosper model and a comprehensive walkthrough of the resources and functionalities available on the Portal. Feedback was very positive – some quotes from attendees can be seen on the right.

Promoting Prosper

Following this successful introductory session, Alison has continued to signpost to Prosper on an ongoing basis, weaving it into broader development communications:

- Prosper is now a dedicated block on the researcher development pages within the RIKE staff channel.
- Alison has been building a community for Huddersfield researchers called 'Researcher Connect', which has a dedicated Microsoft Teams space where researchers can connect with each other, the RIKE team, and learn about development opportunities. At the start of the 2024-25 academic year this was used to promote Prosper and the Portal.
- Alison promoted Prosper via a mailshot to RIKE Associate Deans in June 2024, and has featured Prosper in the RIKE newsletter. Prosper was featured in the March 2025 edition of Huddersfield's 'Training Collective' newsletter.
- In 2024 RIKE piloted an ECR mentoring scheme, which is running again in 2025. Prosper was signposted to those on the programme.
- Alison has also promoted Prosper's PI Network sessions to Managers of Researchers at Huddersfield.



"I'm impressed with the purpose of Prosper and the magnitude of the resource."

– Prosper Introduction session attendee feedback



"Great to have this resource. It's useful to be able to have some independence with my development, but also to know what areas are going to be useful to spend time on."

– Prosper Introduction session attendee feedback



"One of the main benefits of Prosper for us is that it's there as a resource that people can tap into in their own space and time."

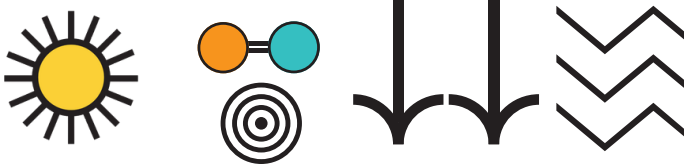
I've heard from postdocs here that they like having independence in terms of their own development - and that it's great having the Portal as a reliable source of information for them to explore."

– Alison Monkhouse,
Academic Researcher
Development Manager,
University of Huddersfield



Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential



Collage of Prosper promotion at the University of Huddersfield

Incorporating Portal resources

Alison has also actively incorporated Prosper resources into other existing staff development sessions.

Every month, Alison runs a ‘Reflections for Researchers’ session where Huddersfield researchers are encouraged to connect and engage with development exercises.

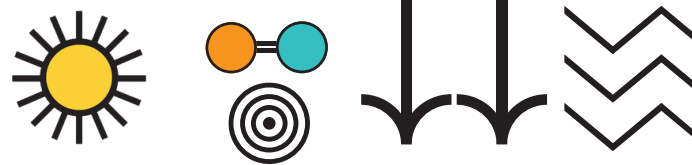
In June 2024, she used a Prosper Portal resource on emotional timelines to inform an exercise for that month’s session:

»

“The Prosper Portal looks widely applicable indeed and I’ll share it with my line manager and other postdoc colleagues.”

–University of Huddersfield ECR mentoring scheme member





Today's exercise - career timeline

University of HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals

School

???

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your former self at each stage?

For example:

Undergraduate

Master's

Working in coffee shop

PhD

Teaching Italian

Postdoc

???

Keep an open mind about working outside academia. Keep trying new things to find out what you enjoy.

Prosper.

Emotional timeline

University of HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals

For example:

Highs

Time

Lows

Highs

Time

Lows

What was it about each event or experience that made it feel like a high/low point? What have you learned from it?

Prosper.

Prosper exercise as part of June 2024's Reflections for Researchers session

Future plans

Huddersfield's initial approach has focused on promoting Prosper and the Portal to raise awareness and encourage self-directed engagement among research staff. Future plans aim to build upon this by integrating Prosper resources into regular development sessions, in a similar vein to the 'Reflections for Researchers' session in June 2024.

Alison will explore integrating Prosper and the Portal further into its ECR mentoring programme, drawing on the benefits of peer-to-peer and face-to face mutual development.





University of Liverpool



UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Context and background

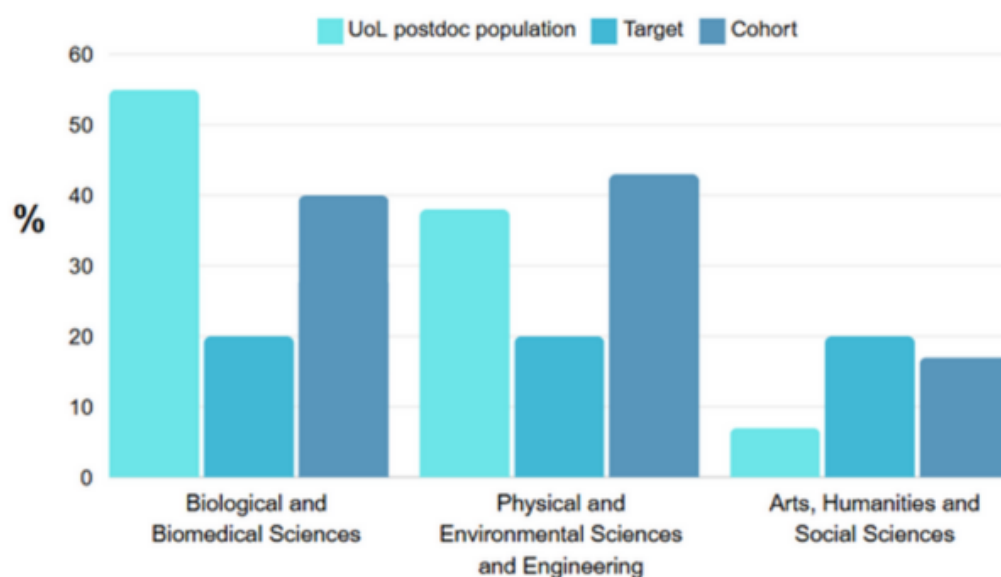
Dubbed 'the original redbrick', the University of Liverpool is a founding member of the Russell group and internationally-renowned centre of research, with a postdoc population of around 900 spread across its three faculties of Health and Life Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering.

It is also the 'home' of Prosper, which sits within the University's Leadership, Organisational, Professional & Academic Development Academy.

How was Prosper used?

Given the success of the cohort model during the pilots, the Prosper team opted to continue with this approach, recruiting a cohort of 30 postdocs - keeping the application process as simple and inclusive as possible, and aiming to recruit a diverse group in terms of discipline, gender and ethnicity (see figures below).

Cohort makeup by disciplinary area:



Mode of delivery

3

Cost + resource



£9000
(for career coaching, session facilitation and catering - NB costs for facilitation higher than for other HEIs due to requirement for open access resources on the Portal)



1 FTE

Key stats

30

Postdocs

13

Sessions

28

Development hours per postdoc

6.5

Hours group coaching per postdoc

83

% would recommend Prosper

6

Months

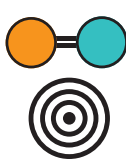


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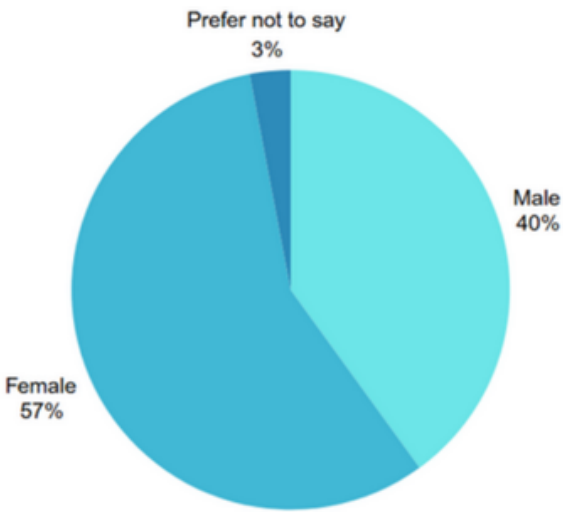
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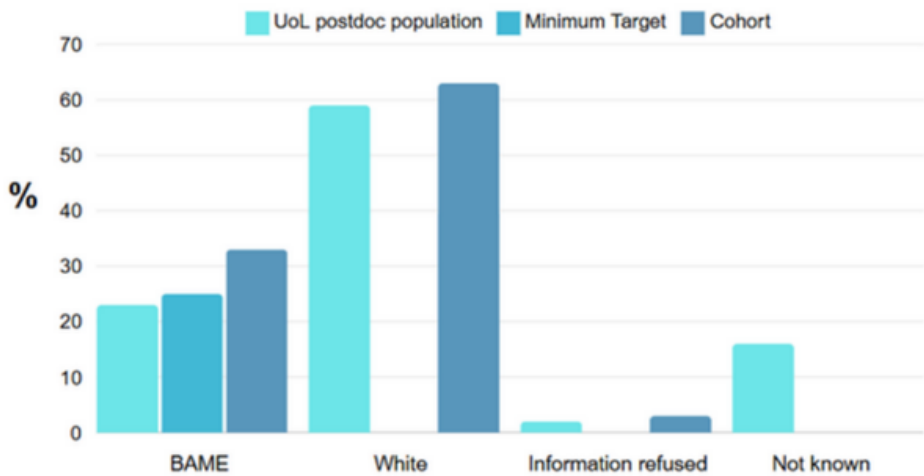




Cohort makeup by gender:



Cohort makeup by gender:



In addition to the above, 57% of the cohort were the first in their family to graduate from University.

Prosper opted for a six-month cohort, running between February and July 2024. This duration was decided on after consultation with professional career coaches who had worked with the pilot cohorts. The timing within the academic year was chosen so as to avoid the summer break (August) and start of academic year (September/October).



“Sessions were well thought out and well-delivered - the range of topics was excellent.”

- Cohort member



“The social and buddy group aspect really helped as I didn’t have lots of other departmental friends at similar decision points in their career.”

- Cohort member



“ I have learned a lot about how to appraise what I actually want from my career - and my life outside of it - and the steps I need to take to get there. I’ve learned how to take those skills and experiences that we often take for granted as postdocs, and recognise the value they offer to employers. I’ve also learnt valuable strategies for finding new career options and making connections.”

- Cohort member



“Thanks to Prosper, I am more confident about my skills and strengths.”

- Cohort member





Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

Some sessions were exclusively open to the cohort, with others being open to postdocs across the University. Most sessions were delivered by the Prosper team, with the exception of three that were delivered by external facilitators:

Reflect

- **Cohort induction** (Cohort only, in-person)
- **Skills audit and values** (Open, online)
- **Career decision making** (Open, externally-facilitated, online)
- **Career identity** (Cohort only, online)

Explore

- **How to explore a range of career options** (Open, online)
- **Sunk-cost fallacy** (Cohort only, in-person)
- **Harnessing AI for job-hunting** (Open, externally-facilitated, online)
- **Knowing when you've done enough research** (Cohort only, online)

Act

- **Facing setbacks** (Open, externally-facilitated, online)
- **Intelligence-sharing and job boards** (Cohort only, online)
- **Becoming a STAR** (Open, in-person)
- **Maintaining your career development momentum** (Cohort only, in-person)
- **Optional drop-in** on career/time planning

The ability to hold in-person sessions was a major (and welcome!) change from the pilots, which had unfortunately coincided with the Covid pandemic (below is a photo from the cohort induction session).



"When I joined Prosper, I gained clarity on my career path. I now focus on my strengths and what gives me energy. I only apply for jobs that align with my values. Although I am still uncertain whether to stay in academia, I'm more intentional about my work. My job satisfaction has increased since I joined Prosper."

– Cohort member



"I haven't shifted from my previous path - but I feel more comfortable with the idea that I might need to search beyond academia - and now I think I have tools to help me survive such a shift."

– Cohort member



"Prosper definitely helped me with looking at the bigger picture in terms of what I want from a career and the things I value most."

– Cohort member

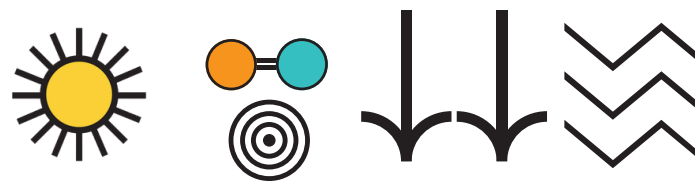


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Sessions were scheduled for no more than one per week to fit with busy workloads. External facilitators were brought into delivery sessions that matched a particular demand and to address newly emerging topics such as using AI as part of your job-hunting strategy.

In addition to the development sessions, cohort members had access to group coaching, run by professional career coaches, in three groups of ten. These groups met once per month and enhanced the community element of the cohort - providing a space in which postdocs could connect with peers from other disciplines to share their thoughts, concerns, and learnings, and engage in career development on a mutual basis.

Cohort members each had half-an-hour one-to-ones with their group coaches at the start, to establish a rapport and explore what the member wanted to get out of the cohort and coaching.

Prosper additionally set up a buddy scheme to run through the cohort, on an opt-in basis. Participants were randomly sorted into groups of three - five, with the expectation that they meet for at least half an hour each month for the purposes of peer accountability, for three months (at which point the groups were randomly re-mixed for the next three months).

Impact and evaluation

The cohort was a success - with a majority of postdocs (83%) saying they would recommend Prosper to other postdocs.

Cohort members filled out entrance and exit surveys in order to track shifts in key metrics around confidence and ability relating to careers planning and development, measured according to a five-point Likert scale.

This measure demonstrated an average improvement in confidence across every metric (see chart on the next page for more details).

The cohort was designed so that the overall time spent by each cohort member would fall within the 10-days minimum pro rata mandated by The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers (of which the University is a signatory). Data collected in the exit survey showed that participants spent an average of 28 hours in total engaging with Prosper over the course of six months.



“Prosper really boosted my confidence in my communication skills.”

– Cohort member



“The early self-reflection activities were incredibly useful for helping me determine what type of career I want, and what matters the most for me.”

– Cohort member



“As a senior postdoc, I started the cohort ready to take the next step in my career, but lacked confidence and clarity in making a decision. Working with Prosper and allocating time to meaningfully consider my options gave me the nudge I needed to take the next steps.”

– Cohort member





Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

The cohort entry and exit surveys asked respondents to rate their confidence across a number of questions on a 1 to 5 scale:



“Having the headspace to reflect further and by being given information on how to structure CVs, identify strengths, weaknesses and transferable skills, means i’m more confident applying for jobs outside of academia.”

– Cohort member



“Prosper helped me realise that I’m doing a lot of things just because I feel the need to do them, rather than focusing on my strengths and long-term goals.”

– Cohort member



“I cannot undersell the importance of protected time to reflect and plan your own career development and reflect on achievements and strengths moving forward.”

– Cohort member



The exit survey also gave participants the opportunity to give open text feedback on the cohort - some of which can be seen in the bar on the right. Overall, cohort members found the experience to be a positive and useful one - with participants particularly finding value in the group coaching and community element that the cohort sought to foster.

Those who opted to participate in the buddy scheme (21 out of 30) were also asked for feedback about this element - which was positive on the whole. To quote a cohort member, “the buddy group aspect really helped as I didn’t have lots of other departmental friends at similar decision points in their career.”

As part of the evaluation, cohort members were asked to choose three words to summarise their experience - a word cloud of these responses can be seen on the next page:

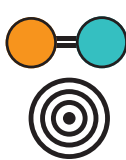


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Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

Three words to describe your experience of Prosper:



In addition to the surveys, Prosper held an informal in-person focus group session midway through the cohort, to get a sense of how the cohort was going, and make any possible adjustments based on feedback.

“Prosper is an ongoing process in trying to find the right balance and mix activities for postdoc career development - we created a lot of great materials during the pilots but we are always looking to improve and incorporate postdoc voices and we work to embed it as a living and sustainable resource at the University.”

– Dr Stefania Silvestri, Researcher Developer, University of Liverpool

Future plans

Prosper is running another iteration of the cohort between February and July 2025 and is (at the time of writing) in the process of recruiting over 30 participants.

The cohort will run along the same lines as the 2024 iteration - with some planned changes in response to feedback collected during the formal evaluation and informal focus group (more detail on the next page). The plan is to continue running these cohorts on an annual basis for the foreseeable future, in order to embed Prosper as a standard benefit for postdocs at the University.



“The buddy scheme was great - we plan on still keeping in contact and finding out how job prospects, interviews and careers go.”

– Cohort member



“My confidence in my skills has increased and so has my self-awareness resulting in having a clearer idea of where I would and wouldn’t work based on my values.”

– Cohort member



“The buddy scheme provided an active space for co-creating community - being able to discuss any topic and meet in informal settings created the space to feel truly connected.”

– Cohort member





University of Manchester



Context and background

The University of Manchester is a research powerhouse, ranked first in Europe and second in the world for social and environmental impact (Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2024). As such, it has a relatively high population of postdocs - around 1800 across its three faculties.

It was closely involved with Prosper from the start, and one of Prosper’s three partner institutions during its development phase - 41 of the 75 postdocs on Prosper’s second pilot cohort hailed from the University.

The University wanted to build on the success of the pilot cohorts and ensure that research staff at Manchester had access to Prosper cohorts and resources on an ongoing basis.

Dr Anne Marie Sowerbutts, who had previously worked as a researcher and internal coach at the University, was brought into the Researcher Development team with a specific remit to embed Prosper as business-as-usual across the institution.

How was Prosper used?

Given the success of Prosper’s pilot cohorts, the University adopted a similar cohort model for its ongoing Prosper provision.

The University ran its Prosper cohort in two parts. The first ran between October and December 2023, and was built around Prosper’s Reflect theme, focusing on self-understanding, discovering skills and strengths, and encouraging participants to reflect on their career aims. It had an online group coaching session following the first session and then three other 90-minute in-person sessions, ending with an optional half-hour of one-to-one coaching.

Mode of delivery



Cost + resource



Key stats





Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

The second part, which began in January 2024 and ran till March, was built around Prosper's Explore and Act themes, and similarly involved four 90-minute in-person sessions. The first two Explore sessions focused on Prosper's Career Clusters, the breadth of opportunities open to postdocs beyond academia, and developing networking skills. The second two Act sessions were focused around CV tailoring and interview techniques. The sessions were built around a mix of Prosper Portal resources and Anne Marie's own expertise as a facilitator and coach - with a mix of delivery and group work.

Participants of the first cohort had the option to take part in the second without having to re-apply. The reason for splitting the cohort in this way was two-fold, firstly, to minimise drop-off and ensure a manageable commitment (postdocs only signed up to the first four sessions in the first instance), secondly, because of the different focuses - with Reflect being much more of an introspective journey, and Explore/Act being more outward-focused on career opportunities and job application skills. Different postdocs at different stages of their career journey might have need of one more than the other, and the split accommodated this.

The University took a light touch approach to the recruitment process. Applicants simply had to write a 100-word statement on why they wanted to join and what they wanted to get out of the process, and complete a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test, for use in the Reflect sessions. Applicants were then admitted on a first-come-first-serve basis. This was partly due to not wanting to add to postdocs' already heavy workloads, and partly for reasons of inclusivity:

"We wanted to ensure that researchers didn't think of Prosper as yet another programme just for rising stars, difficult to get on. We wanted to ensure it was for everyone, especially anyone who might be struggling or felt stuck in their careers."

– Dr Anne Marie Sowerbutts, Researcher Developer, University of Manchester

A total of 35 postdocs participated in the two cohorts (with some doing one part and not the other).



"Prosper really made me think about the direction I wanted to go in - to ask the difficult questions, and answer them."

– Cohort member



"The community element led to some very good/useful conversations with other group members that I wouldn't otherwise have had."

– Cohort member



"Really good facilitation and Prosper has lots of excellent resources online for follow-up work."

– Cohort member

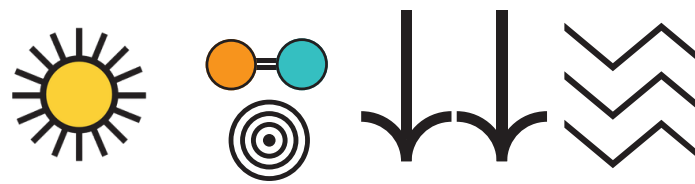


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Beyond the cohorts, the University also heavily promoted the Prosper Portal to research staff as a resource to be used in a self-directed manner.

Impact and evaluation

The cohorts went well - with the Reflect part in particular serving to create a safe space for postdocs from different disciplines to connect. One of the commonalities that emerged in the group coaching was that many participants felt quite stuck in their career - and welcomed the opportunity to share their worries, concerns, challenges and reflections with other researchers in a similar position.

The University gathered a mix of qualitative and quantitative feedback via Qualtrics, with participants scoring statements on a five-point Likert scale in addition to open questions. Anne Marie also interviewed six participants in-person afterwards to get a deeper sense of their experience (two participants who had done part one only, two had done part two only, and two who had done both parts). Some of this feedback can be seen on the right. 100% of participants rated the cohort experience as “good” or “excellent”.

To capture before and after, participants were asked the following questions:

- “Before the Prosper cohort, I felt stuck and could not move my career forward.”
- “After the Prosper cohort, I felt stuck and could not move my career forward.”

All of the participants reported feeling less stuck after participating in the cohort.

A standout feature of the feedback is that in a number of cases, participants joined the cohort uncertain about whether they wanted to pursue a career in academia or beyond, and that Prosper helped them make that decision, one way or the other, giving them the confidence to take the next step.

Another theme that emerged is that the sessions helped participants narrow down where to focus their attentions regarding career development, in a practical, structured way.



“Before the cohort, I felt extremely stuck. Prosper has helped focus my mind on where I need to invest my time.”

– Cohort member



“The cohort was a supportive environment where we were really encouraged to reflect on our goals, targets, strengths and areas for improvement.”

– Cohort member



“The sessions really helped me to become more confident.”

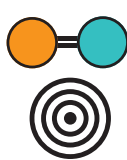
– Cohort member



“Anne Marie created a friendly environment tfor us to share out experiences and thoughts.”

– Cohort member





Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

Future plans

The University will be running another iteration of the same two-part cohort, beginning in October 2024 and running through till March 2025.

In addition - acknowledging that different staff prefer different ways of engaging with career development - the University will be building on this with alternative formats:

- A more in-depth single cohort, involving eight sessions with cohort members participating in action learning sets in between, planned for January 2025.
- A two-day intensive version of the above.

Across all these, the University is planning to integrate Prosper usage more directly into the sessions.

“The cohorts went very well, and Prosper’s model is a great basis for giving research staff much needed structure and guidance when it comes to career development. We look forward to building the cohort with a wider range of formats going forward, so as to maximise its impact and enhance the University’s commitment to a positive, inclusive research culture.”

– Dr Anne Marie Sowerbutts, Researcher Developer, University of Manchester



“By making it a safe space and allowing people to open up and be vulnerable, it really set the best tone and added value to the experience.”

– Cohort member



“Prosper really helped with confidence boosting, horizon broadening and a sense of community.”

– Cohort member



“Sessions were structure very well, with good use of group work that pushed me out of my comfort zone in a good way.”

– Cohort member





University of Southampton



Context and background



The University of Southampton is one of the world's top research universities. A founding member of the Russell Group, it is ranked 7th in the UK for research impact, and 92% of its research is categorised as world leading and internationally excellent. The University employs research staff across 5 faculties (Arts and Humanities; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Environmental and Life Sciences; Medicine; and Social Sciences).

Following Prosper's launch to the sector, the University established a dedicated role for its implementation. In November 2023, Dr Curie Scott joined as Senior Teaching Fellow (Academic Developer) within the Research, Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (RKEE) team at the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP) – with a mandate to embed Prosper across the institution.

Curie brought to the role over 20 years' experience in higher education (including leading delivery of the PG Cert in Education at Bournemouth University), encompassing coaching and consultancy roles at various HEIs and the NHS. Curie's unique credentials and skillset have played a significant part in shaping the implementation of Prosper at the University.

How was Prosper used?



Curie's initial months focused on understanding the university's researcher developer culture and identifying key influencers. She worked closely with the university's Concordat Champions, a group dedicated to the Researcher Concordat, to introduce Prosper.

The University's implementation of Prosper encompasses all three of its modes of delivery:

- Promoting Prosper's resources and the online portal on relevant university pages (Mode one).

Mode of delivery

1

2

3

Key stats

285

Registered portal users

2

Cohorts (8-week programme)

3

Cohorts (3-day programme)

87

Participants across all programmes

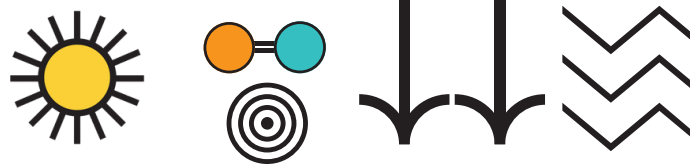


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- Conducting outreach by attending faculty events and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions (Mode two). These engagements, typically 10-minute to one-hour slots, served as ‘taster’ sessions where Curie would introduce Prosper and incorporate an activity using one of its tools.
- Actively seeking invitations from champions who were already organising career development, mentoring, or women-in-research events, leveraging existing faculty interest. These activities directly correlated with ‘spikes’ in registration numbers on the Prosper portal, demonstrating their effectiveness.
- Following this, a decision was made to launch a cohort-based Prosper programme (Mode three).

The pilot cohort focused on research staff (not exclusively postdocs), encompassing individuals with PhDs, those in progress, and those without a PhD but on research contracts. The first cohort had 19 participants, representing four out of the five university faculties.

The pilot consisted of eight weekly, in-person sessions, each lasting two hours, with an additional preceding hour for lunch and informal networking. The sessions ran from January to February 2025. The content of the sessions were designed to cover personal career perspectives, the wider career landscape, and how to bridge the two. Following the eight-week programme, participants were offered a one-to-one coaching session with Curie to embed practices and discuss individual progress.

Since then, there has been a second eight-week cohort in 2025/26 and three shorter, more condensed “Prosper Catalyst” programmes which have taken place in person. The following changes were made to subsequent cohorts after the pilot:

- **Content enhancement:** more resilience strategies were integrated into the core programme based on participant feedback. Sessions integrated suggestions on the use of AI for career development.
- **Prosper Teams channel:** has now been established with separate chats for each cohort. The use of chat was proactively integrated into the Prosper sessions. This has paid dividends with ongoing conversations between sessions and thereafter.



“Curie [Dr Curie Scott, who runs Prosper at Southampton] said at the start, this might feel a little bit like being in kindergarten. And it does – but that’s a positive thing in many ways. When we’re young and in school we have conversations about what we want to be when we grow up... but then often we stop having these discussions and thoughts in adulthood... but we shouldn’t.

The cohort format, with the community, is really relaxed and positive – it’s a great escape for a few hours from your office or lab. It was a good mix of younger ECRs like myself and some more senior members further along in their careers, which meant we could draw on their experience. I was able to develop a number of skills.”

– Zaihao Tian, cohort member





Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

- **Engagement and completion:** of the 19 participants who started the pilot, 18 completed, demonstrating strong commitment. Most attendees achieved attendance of 6 out of 8 sessions.
- **Metrics improvement:** evaluation results showed an increase in participants' self-reported metrics across various areas, particularly a big jump in 'understanding diverse careers'.
- **Positive feedback scores:** session design, usefulness, sense of belonging, and willingness to recommend were consistently rated highly (4s to mid-4s on a scale).
- **Diverse participation:** the cohort successfully attracted a good gender split and a range of job experience levels (including a Senior Manager at Level 7 with 20 years' experience), extending beyond typical early career researchers. Only two participants had brief experiences outside of academia, highlighting the programme's value for those predominantly within academia.
- **Empowerment and confidence:** participants reported a significant increase in confidence to take action regarding their careers. Examples include reaching out on LinkedIn, receiving job offers (academic and non-academic), and even starting a business. The one-to-one coaching sessions revealed the 'richness and depth' of this internal change, with quiet participants boldly pursuing new avenues.



Dr Curie Scott with members of the pilot Prosper cohort at the University of Southampton.



"If I could sum it up in three words they would be: supportive, interactive and practical."

The practical aspect was key. I've been in a lot of career development sessions previously where the content wasn't really actionable – just explaining things I already know, and narrowly focused on traditional academic career pathways.

I needed something more down to earth and realistic, and the content of the Prosper cohort was very much designed with that in mind.

For example – we had a session on showcasing your skills on your LinkedIn profile. This was something I could immediately put into practice."

– Dr Shunqi Zhang,
cohort member



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Prosper.

Unlocking postdoc career potential

- **Community and support:** A key takeaway was the powerful effect of being part of a group and realising “you’re not alone”, especially when facing challenges like multiple job rejections.
- **Value of the coached approach:** The integration of Curie’s coaching expertise was highly valued, offering inclusive practice by providing free coaching to individuals who might not otherwise have access to such high-level support. Participants found the sessions “really fun” and appreciated the focus on their personal development. Feedback like “You nailed it” and “How has two hours gone? We have done this work” underscored the engaging and effective nature of the sessions.
- **Demand for more:** Participants expressed a desire for longer or more frequent sessions, indicating the high perceived value of the programme. They also specifically requested that resilience strategies be introduced earlier in the curriculum.
- **Participant-led Initiatives:** The programme inspired participants to take initiative, such as one individual running a national BAME researcher network session based on the confidence-building activities from Prosper, and others expressing interest in becoming ‘Prosper champions’.



Dr Curie Scott with members of the second Prosper cohort at the University of Southampton.



“When you’ve been within academia for so long it’s a bit like being in Plato’s cave. The way we think about skills and accomplishments is very particular to academic career progression. We don’t really know what employers outside academia value, or how to showcase our abilities to them. Some of them we don’t really think of as distinct skills at all.

But when you start to think about your skills in this language of transferable skills, suddenly you realise just how much you can do. It can be very broad like the ability to think analytically or strategically, or something as specific as report writing, data preparation, or presentation.

It’s like a new language that unlocks all sorts of possibilities.”

– Dr Shunqi Zhang,
cohort member



Future plans



Following the success of the Prosper rollout, the University of Southampton will continue to reflect on opportunities for further embedding of Prosper and what this might look like within a ‘business-as-usual’ context.





White Rose University Consortium



Context and background

The White Rose University Consortium is a strategic partnership between the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield, and York. It collaborates with institutional, regional and national partners to drive positive change and create sustained impact across its partner universities.

In December 2023, Karen Hinxman was appointed Head of the consortium. All three institutions within the consortium had seen the success of the Prosper pilots, but none had the bandwidth at the time to run Prosper cohorts of their own - so Karen saw a joint, cross-institutional Prosper cohort as a distinct way for White Rose to add value and provide support to research staff.

In October 2024, the consortium re-launched with a new focus on people, talent and skills - with Prosper as one of its flagship offerings.

Mode of delivery

3

Cost + resource



£650 (per postdoc)

Key stats

2

Cohorts

3

Days per cohort

54

Postdocs



Members of the first, White Rose Prosper cohort.



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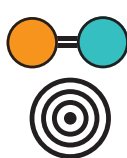


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How was Prosper used?



The 2024-25 White Rose Prosper cohorts were designed and led by Karen Hinxman and Emma Williams, both of whom have an extensive background in researcher development. Using the resources on the Prosper Portal for inspiration, they built a cohort based on Prosper’s Reflect, Explore and Act model.

Each cohort consisted of three, full, in-person days (10:00 - 16:00, with lunch provided) spread out over three months. Each day corresponded to one of Prosper’s three areas, and took place in Leeds, York and Sheffield respectively - with White Rose covering travel expenses for journeying postdocs.

The application process was relatively light - White Rose hosted an introductory webinar for potential applicants, and applicants had to write a few words on why they wanted to join, and their aspirations.

Due to high demand (106 postdocs applied), Karen and Emma opted to run two cohorts back-to-back. 24 postdocs participated in the first cohort, 30 in the second. By design, each contained an equal number of postdocs from each of the White Rose partner institutions.

Day 1 - Reflect (Leeds)

Participants explored their career journeys, values, strengths and influences. Activities included career timelines, group work on values, and a powerful strengths-identification exercise where peers provided feedback.

The day also addressed psychological barriers like the sunk-cost fallacy and featured a guest speaker from the Future Leader Fellowships (FLF) programme. It concluded with MBTI personality profiling and action planning, including buddy check-ins to support goal-setting between days.



“I think the most important thing that I got from Prosper, that really helped me understand my career goals, was a question that one of the facilitators asked about what we get satisfaction from.

It gave me the vocabulary and the confidence to then go to my supervisor and say, I don’t think this is the role for me, this is what I’m looking for.

Once the department understood that, using the frameworks that I’d been taught through Prosper, they were actually able to help me then find those roles.

I’ve transitioned from research to teaching because I’ve realised that’s what I love most and that’s okay. In your academic journey, there’s a lot of pressure to be this professor with publications and books, and that just wasn’t really for me.

Having people at Prosper say that’s fine - that teaching is incredibly important, and for them to then help me with the application...I can’t explain the difference I’ve felt since, really appreciating the things that I want in my career and having that permission to do it.”

– Dr Rhiannon Griffiths,
University of York



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Day 2 of the White Rose Prosper cohort in York.

Day 2 - Explore (York)

The morning focused on academic career pathways using the narrative CV format. In the afternoon, participants examined non-academic roles by researching and discussing job adverts.

They learned about informational interviews using the RASA method, and participated in networking and LinkedIn profile enhancement activities. The day ended with a speaker from York and a homework task: preparing for an application for one of three randomly assigned roles.

Day 3 - Act (Sheffield)

Participants brought completed applications and engaged in mock recruitment exercises, including scoring, interviewing and feedback. They reflected on their learning and compiled top tips for future applicants. A speaker who had transitioned from academia to a non-academic role shared their journey, and the day closed with action planning and a creative feedback activity - writing postcards to future Prosper applications.



"Meeting postdocs from different fields and institutions was very fun, important and helpful. It was great to meet people that are at different stages of their career, meeting people that you can share your doubts and insecurities with, but also engaging with the activities together and finding some tasks more difficult than others.

I think the most important thing was to see different perspectives and learn to see things from different angles, and really keep an open mind about what to do next.

I would tell all postdocs to join Prosper regardless of whether you're sure that you want to stay in or leave academia.

But even if they are totally undecided, or ages away from having to make that choice, I think it's the importance of finding the space to reflect, explore and talk to others and really that will give you the tools to be able to act on your career whenever the time comes."

– Dr Francesca De Faveri,
University of Sheffield



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Impact and evaluation

The cohorts were met with high engagement and enthusiasm. Participants consistently reported increased confidence and clarity regarding their career paths. One standout success story involved a postdoc who secured a role in Science Communication with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), thanks in part to coaching support that helped her recognise and articulate her transferable skills.

Many cohort members shared in one-to-ones that the programme gave them the courage to pursue opportunities that they might have previously dismissed. They shifted towards a skills-based mindset, gaining the ability to better articulate their strengths and career aspirations.

Evaluation was conducted through pre- and post-cohort surveys, which showed significant improvements in participants' confidence, awareness of career pathways, and understanding of job application processes. Nearly all participants said they would recommend the programme to fellow postdocs.

The cross-institutional nature of the cohort was particularly impactful, offering insights into different institutional cultures and helping participants distinguish between universal and localised experiences within academia.

"We know from experience that a great deal of learning happens through conversations with peers. By bringing together a diverse group of individuals from across the region, we're exposing our postdocs to a wide range of perspectives. This not only helps them understand what's unique about their own institution, but also highlights the common threads that run across the sector."

What's particularly valuable is the regional network we're building for them – something many may not have had access to before. Visiting different campuses gives them a real sense of each institution and helps them envision possible regional career paths they may want to explore."

– Karen Hinxman, Head of the White Rose University Consortium



"Those tasks where we've been encouraged to challenge our existing thinking have been particularly helpful, for instance, unpacking long-held beliefs about ourselves or unveiling those skills that we take for granted that are helpful for others."

I've also been thinking much more about the values-led career planning since exploring this during the first session.

It has been particularly useful to spend time with participants from other disciplines, particularly STEM, and from other universities; I'm very much in the minority within the Prosper cohort as an arts researcher, and stepping out of the arts silo is surprisingly refreshing. The accountability buddies are useful for looking in at one's situation from entirely different perspectives.

Postdoc-ing can be a lonely and uncertain business, so the collegiality of being in a room alongside others is invaluable, for sharing experiences, boosting confidence and camaraderie."

– Dr Clare Danek,
University of Leeds

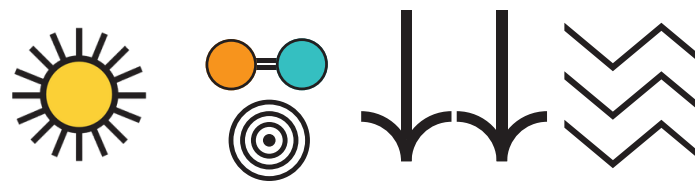


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Organisers received heartfelt feedback, with many participants expressing how transformative the experience had been - and how it had given them real clarity and illumination regarding future career planning and next steps.

One memorable comment encapsulated the programme’s value: “I didn’t know what I wanted, and I still don’t know, but I now know that’s okay. And I’ve now got the tools to move things forwards in a way that’s meaningful, as opposed to drift”.

Career tracking continues via the LinkedIn group and planned check-ins at 6, 12 and 18 months post-cohort.

Future plans

Building on the success of the two initial cohorts, the White Rose University Consortium plan to run two further cohorts in the 2025-26 academic year. The first will take place in October to December 2025, and the second in February to April 2026.

The core structure and ethos will remain consistent, with minor refinements based on feedback and learning from previous iterations.



“The Reflect part of the programme was particularly interesting to me – many of the activities that we did throughout that day were different to anything I’d done before. It helped me to both challenge some of the pre-existing ideas I had in my head about my career, while also identifying what was really important for me to prioritise in my future career.

I’d previously been rather focused on one career path and timeline, which was quite stressful as there were no guarantees it’d go to plan! The programme has helped me both identify multiple pathways towards that goal, as well as allow myself to also seriously consider opportunities beyond that which could lead to equally fulfilling careers.

I also feel more confident in mapping my existing skill set to a diverse range of opportunities if the need arises.”

– Dr Chelsea Edmonds,
University of Sheffield



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