

RSE Fellowship

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(Note this is my opinion only, and is not in any way
official EPSRC information or policy)

What is a Fellowship?

- Postdoctoral
 - (e.g. Leverhulme, Newton)
- Early Career / Leadership
 - (e.g. EPSRC, Royal Society, ERF)
- Established Career / Senior
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Person profiles for what EPSRC consider is needed for each stage are here;
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- Personal research in an existing group (pathway to independence) ←

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Establish new, independent research group. Expected to lead to permanent position
- Established Career / Senior
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What is an EPSRC Fellowship?

- A **Fellowship** is a personal award, designed to provide the recipient with the necessary support to establish or further develop themselves as a **leader of the future**. This type of award enables you to **devote most of your time** to a program of activities to deliver **your proposed research vision**.
- An EPSRC Fellowship is aimed to **position** yourself and **your research topic within the wider academic field**, to develop your leadership by **establishing or extending your research group**, and to act as an advocate for the STEM disciplines in general and EPSRC specifically.

Academic Independence

- Fellows are required to have **academic independence**
 - Can apply for and raise their own research income
 - Can employ their own postdocs and should have an expectation of being awarded PhD students
 - Set their own agenda and manage their own research budget, their own time, and their own internal and external commitments, subject to academic oversight that they are on course to meet their Fellowship commitments
 - Are free to move themselves and their research income to another University

Host organisation requirements are summarised here;

<https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/skills/fellows/hostorganisationobligations/briefingro/>

Low Risk – Outsourced Hiring

- Low risk for the University. However, there is a strong expectation that Leadership Fellows will transition to a permanent academic position at the end of the Fellowship. Universities that have a poor track record of doing so gain a reputation that hurts their chances of winning more fellowships.
- In many Universities, a Fellowship is almost a pre-requisite to a permanent academic position
- **Universities effectively outsource their hiring decisions to Fellowship committees...!**

Quoting host organisation briefing: “In the case of applicants not holding an academic position, the host organisation must be prepared to give the individual all the support normal for an academic member of staff and put in place appropriate mentoring mechanisms to enable them transition to an academic position.”

Why are they valued?

- Leadership Fellowships allow Universities to hire new staff to explore new research directions
- *Good Universities* will pair up Fellows with academic mentors and existing networks, who will include them on larger grants, enabling more senior (and busier) academics to multiply their research income.
- They are legally *researchers* meaning that they can help steer where research funds are spent (the *Haldane Principle*).
- They can be put forward for REF, meaning they could help bring in HEFCE income.
- Fellows therefore are a significant asset in helping a University obtain income, and to help shape future funding calls.

RSE Fellowship...

- ...is valued because it is a Leadership Fellowship.
- EPSRC RSE Fellowship == EPSRC Fellowship
- Because of the Fellowship...
 - Universities now have to provide academic RSE career pathways to provide permanent jobs for their RSE Fellows
 - Heads of Department are motivated to find ways to value software outputs in REF, so that they can maximise the income from their Fellows
 - RSEs are now Co-Is and PIs on a range of successful grant applications, hiring new RSEs, bringing in indirects and all encouraged by Heads of Department who want to maximise research income
 - RSEs have a voice – we are now seen as a growing source of income, rather than a cost

EPSRC RSE Fellowship Call

- Why did the call require the offer of a permanent RSE job? (or a well-defined process to such a position)
 - All Leadership Fellowships have an expectation of a permanent position, with a proper review process in place that is transparent and easy for the Research Council and Fellow to understand. The call reminded Universities that RSE Fellowship == Fellowship, and that this requirement still holds. As processes for evaluating Software Outputs are still being developed, the call made it more explicit that a permanent position is required.
 - In addition, EPSRC want the permanent positions to be permanent Academic RSE positions, to push the development of an Academic RSE Career Pathway. They want to discourage traditional academics using the RSE Fellowship as a stepping stone to a normal Academic career.

EPSRC RSE Fellowship Call

- Why was there a focus of providing evidence of “transforming RSE provision”, the “vision for the role” and providing evidence of “RSE Leadership”?
 - Applicants to this call are likely to come from less traditional backgrounds, and have produced few, if any, traditional academic outputs.
 - The track record explicitly asks for evidence of skills in software development, including contributions to specific pieces of software, and of providing software engineering leadership to a community
 - Aim is to judge applicants on their software, their vision for what an RSE should be, and their potential to enact change in their University and Nationally. EPSRC want to fund people who will transform RSE provision and RSE Careers in the UK.
 - They explicitly want a new cohort of RSE Leaders and Ambassadors.

EPSRC RSE Fellowship Call

- Why limit to two applications per University?
 - Last time there were hundreds of applications, which was too many for the EPSRC to process, so there was a strong drive to find mechanisms to reduce numbers.
 - Last time it was clear that few applicants had actually talked to their University about setting up an Academic RSE Career pathway (or indeed about anything!). Requiring two applications per University forces Universities to engage with the applicants before submission, with, in the best case, Universities working out what they really want from Academic RSEs, how they would be evaluated, and how successful candidates would be supported with their application. Some Universities got this right. Some Universities didn't.

EPSRC RSE Fellowship Call

- Why was there the “Geographic Restriction”?
 - The restriction was not about punishing success.
 - An RSE Fellow is expected to start a new, independent RSE Group at a University, forcing the creation of an Academic Career path for RSEs.
 - It was important to ensure that an applicant from a University that already had an RSE Fellow made contact with them, and worked out how their Independent RSE Research Group would complement the Independent RSE Research Group of the existing Fellow.
 - It was also important to remind Universities that RSE Fellows are Independent Academics, and should not be employed to work for or within an existing RSE Fellows RSE Group.