

# Postdoctoral Careers in Europe: UK







## Introduction

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Whether you are in the final stages of your doctorate or have just finished, you will probably be planning your next career move. One of the questions you will be asking yourself is whether to stay in your native country or embark on an academic career abroad. If you decide on the latter, Europe will almost certainly be on your shortlist of possible destinations. This eBook is for postdocs interested in starting or continuing their academic career in the UK.

The UK is home to some of the world's oldest and most prestigious universities. It is one of the most popular destinations for foreign academics, who are attracted by the diverse academic infrastructure and a leading research tradition that stretches back centuries.

In this eBook, you will find out about the different higher education systems, and gain valuable insights into funding options, career advancement, the job market in each country and practical ways to get a foot in the door.

## Contents

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- [The Higher Education System](#)
- [Research and Funding](#)
- [Career Progression](#)
- [Salaries](#)
- [The Job Market](#)
- [Job Application Process](#)
- [Work Permits](#)
- [About this ebook](#)





## Research and Funding

One of the world's top research nations, the UK has seven research councils who fund a multi-discipline spectrum of activities and fall under the strategic partnership of [Research Councils UK](#). The seven councils invest around £3 billion (\$3.9 billion) in research each year and work closely with the four higher education funding councils, business, government, and charitable organisations. Two thirds of university research is carried out in [Russell Group Universities](#), a group of 24 research-led, top tier institutions which have an economic output of around £32 billion each year. The UK also has a complex array of non-university research institutes which include non-profit organisations, publicly appointed bodies and private research institutes across all sectors.

The quality and impact of research in UK higher education institutions is measured by the [Research Excellence Framework \(REF\)](#). The REF is, indirectly, the UK government's accountability exercise to assess the quality and quantity of research being subsidised with public money and its outcome can affect university funding.

## Career Progression

British higher education currently employs nearly 200,000 academics and researchers, with around 25% being from outside the UK. There is no legal tenure-track system in the UK, and jobs become permanent after a probationary period of around three years. Most postdocs start an academic career by taking up one or more short-term or fixed term research positions, which may or may not involve teaching. Many early career researchers complete a number of postdoc positions before gaining a permanent role. The next step would be a permanent lectureship - equivalent to Assistant Professor – or can be in the form of a teaching-only role, offered in some UK universities. New lecturers have a three-year probationary period, and are appraised on their teaching skills alongside a steady output of published independent and/or group research. After around five years, a research pathway lecturer would move up the ladder to permanent Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor), followed by full Professor.

Another, less common route, would be to secure a 'personal' postdoctoral fellowship, funded by the seven research councils or by large charities and organisations such as the [Leverhulme Trust](#).

## The Higher Education System

The UK has around 160 universities and colleges with degree-awarding powers, the highest ranking and oldest being the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. All UK universities are public, and higher education is funded through tuition fees, state contributions, research grants, charities and industry. Funding is allocated to higher education through [four separate public bodies: Hefce \(England\); SFC \(Scotland\); Hefcw\(Wales\) and DELNI \(Northern Ireland\)](#), who are responsible for allocating funding.

Types of institutions range from campus to city universities, which offer a broad and specialised choice of programmes. Undergraduate or Bachelor's degrees take around three years to complete – four in Scotland – and a Master's from one to two years. Tuition fees vary, but in England and Wales, local students are required to pay annual fees of up to £9,000 (\$11,643) and up to £3575 (\$4,626) per year in Northern Ireland (tuition in Scotland is currently free for Scottish students and non-UK EU students). Those from outside the EU pay around £11,987 (\$17,860) to up to £34,800 (\$51,850) per year across the UK. PhDs take around three to four years to complete and fees vary, but scholarships and loans are widely available for all types of degree course.





# Salaries

There is a nationally agreed single-pay structure in place for academic salaries in the UK, set by the [University and College Union](#). However, salaries can vary between universities and depend on achievements, experience and duties.

## Average academic salaries in the United Kingdom (gross monthly salary):

- Postdoc researcher: £2,280 (\$2,950)
- Lecturer £3,240 (\$4,195)
- Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor: £3,950 (\$5,115)
- Professor: £4,690 (\$6,073)

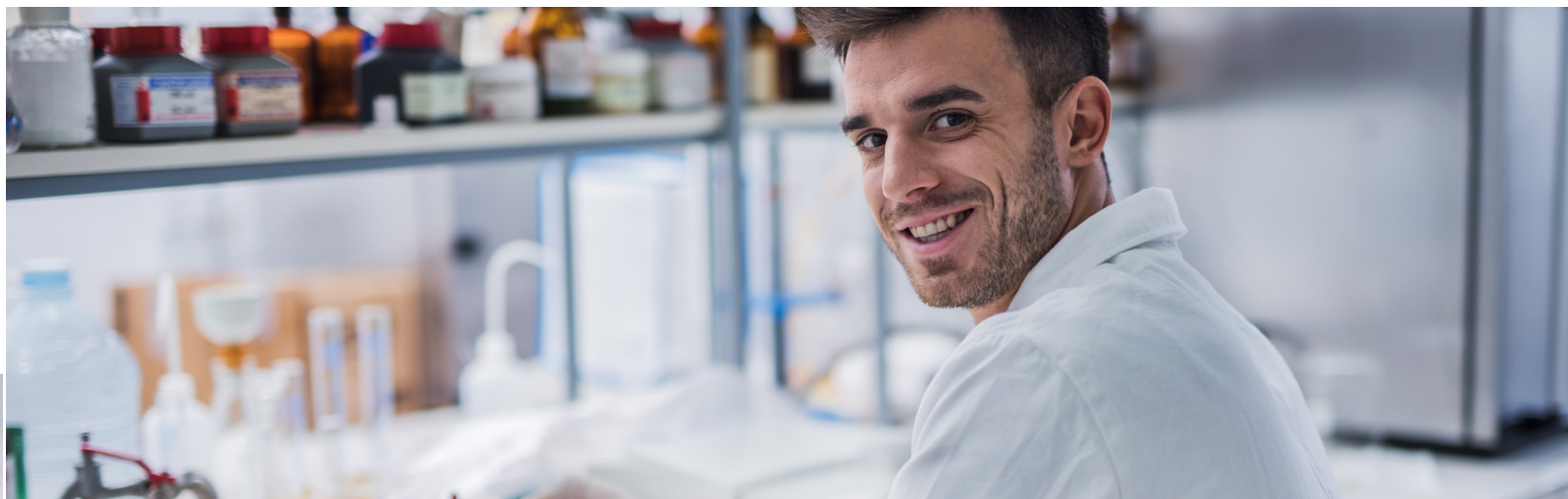
The cost of living in the UK is one of the highest in Europe, particularly in London and the south of England, so this needs to be taken into account before applying.

You can find out more about living and working in the UK [here](#).

# The Job Market

The academic job market is highly competitive and although universities are open to hiring international researchers, the lack of permanent positions and competition for funding can be a barrier to advancement. Most early career researchers apply for temporary research posts or part-time teaching positions while waiting for the right job to come up. Having a good grasp of English, a flawless academic record and some publications to your name would greatly enhance your chances of breaking into British academia. Networking is also key to success in applying for jobs in the UK. With vacancies attracting hundreds of applications and intense competition, it's a good idea to network with colleagues and gain the support of your supervisor or employer before applying. For those interested in pursuing a career outside higher education, the UK offers a multitude of opportunities across industry, with particular emphasis on science and engineering research in pharmaceutical, IT, manufacturing, engineering and biotechnology companies.

The best place to start your search is UK-based [jobs.ac.uk](#), which contains details of hundreds of research and academic job opportunities from all over the world, as well as careers advice, forums and guides to help you get the best out of your search.



# Job Application Process

Applying for an academic job in the UK is less time consuming than preparing a 'job packet,' often required in the States. There is no centralised application process, but you will generally be asked to complete an online application form and include a detailed personal statement. A statement of your approach to teaching (which is a usual part of a US job packet) is not normally requested in the UK. However, this approach would be discussed in detail if you are invited to interview.

Even if not requested, always include a two-page CV/resume and a cover letter detailing your interest and why your expertise fits the role. Ensure you also include a teaching record and publication list. If you make the shortlist, you will be asked to attend an interview where you would usually give a presentation (similar to a conference paper, around 20 minutes) before a panel of three or more senior Faculty staff. You may then be asked back for a second interview or offered the job.

**Application Tips:** Before considering a job in the UK, you should fully understand the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which measures the 'output' and impact of UK research. Showing a lack of knowledge about the REF would be detrimental to your application and/or interview, as it features significantly in British academic life. For a more detailed look at application procedures, check out our [How to Apply for an Academic Job eBook](#).





## Work Permit

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Immigration laws in the UK are strictly enforced, and it is imperative you have all the necessary documents arranged well before your move. You may need a work permit, which should be arranged through your British employer. You must first have received an offer of employment from a UK employer before completing your work permit application. To find out more about UK visa/work permit eligibility, consult [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

## About this ebook

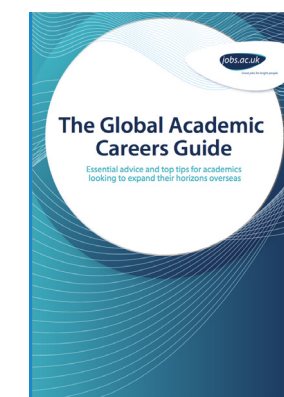
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'Postdoctoral Careers in the UK' has been compiled by jobs.ac.uk as part of the 'Postdoctoral Careers in Europe' series, helping you take your first step into the European academic world.

Europe is one of the most popular destinations for freshly-minted doctorates. Ancient and prestigious universities, excellent funding opportunities and diverse research networks attract thousands of international students, postdocs and academics to Europe each year. Add to this the prevalent use of English as a working language and a commitment to international cooperation in research which is unparalleled worldwide, Europe has much to offer aspiring academics.

There is a strong tradition of cross-border collaboration, providing a unique research perspective, as well as offering ample opportunities to work with colleagues across the continent. Whether you choose a job in a European university, research institute or company, you will experience fantastic research facilities, generous funding and progressive working conditions.

## Recommended reading:



### The Global Academic Careers Guide

Essential advice and top tips for academics looking to expand their horizons overseas. This ebook will tell you more about the scale of the new global market, help you consider the pros and cons of seeking employment outside your nation of origin, and give you important information that will improve your success rate if you do decide to give working abroad a try.





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