



Future Research Leader Award

Guidance Notes
October 2025

www.ulster.ac.uk/awards/research-excellence-awards

FUTURE RESEARCH LEADER AWARD CATEGORY

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of its strategy for supporting research excellence, Ulster University wishes to recognise promising and outstanding researchers at the early stages of their independent researcher career and to assist in the development of these staff as excellent researchers. This indicator of recognition is in the form of an annual *Future Research Leader Award*.

2. ELIGIBILITY

Any member of staff within 5 years of their first Academic/Research appointment e.g. Lecturer/Research Fellow (including any relevant prior employment) who is actively involved in leading an independent programme of research.

3. CRITERIA/SCORING

The Future Research Leader Award is intended to recognise an emerging leader in research whose record of achievements reflects ongoing and exceptional growth in their contribution to research. The Future Research Leader Award is a competitive process and the criteria/scoring that will be used in the selection process for successful applicants are as follows:

a) Outputs/Publications (60%)

Exceptional early and ongoing achievements that have made significant and demonstrable contributions to research resulting in positive outcomes in outputs/publications;

b) Potential for Impact (20%)

Contributions that are having a positive impact on the institution and/or broader society by way of civic impact;

c) Additional Indicators (any two of the following 20%)

Active contributions/achievements in any two of the following:

- Research Funding
- PhD/staff supervision
- Networking and interdisciplinary research
- Embedding research into the curriculum
- Engagement with Industry/Technology Transfer/Intellectual Property
- Supported the development of a rich [Research Culture environment at Ulster](#)
Some examples but not limited to include – completion of research integrity training, engaging with learning and training and CPD development; application of open research and responsible research practices, data management plans, networking and engaging with colleague and other disciplines; engaging with support programmes across the university and within your area.

- d) In assessing submissions, the Panel/Awards Committee will take account of any situation where the nominee has lost time in their career through family commitments, illness, late entry into higher education, part-time status or other individual staff circumstances. In the event of such circumstances being pertinent, the application should highlight that they wish special circumstances to be considered and include details of the time period(s) that the individual was away from the University.

Additional Notes:

- **Academic/Research appointment** – is defined as from Lecturer/Research Fellow level, and has a contract of employment, either full-time or part-time, within a HEI or closely related organisation, whether in the UK or overseas which lists research as a primary function.
- **Actively involved in leading an independent programme of research** – is an independent researcher, defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme.
- **Eligibility Number of years** - Any member of staff within 5 years of their first Academic/Research appointment e.g. Lecturer/Research Fellow (including any relevant prior employment) at the closing date for receipt of applications/nominations.
- Applicants can only submit an application to one of the individual Awards categories, so it is important to review the eligibility criteria as set out in the Guidance Notes for each category and choose the most appropriate category.
- Previous Faculty winners can re-apply, but previous Champion winners (in this category and the formerly named the Early Career Research Excellence Award) cannot be a Champion winner again in the same category.

4. APPLICATION/NOMINATION PROCESS

1. Nominations may be initiated by peers or line managers and self-nominations are also permitted. In the case of a peer-initiated nomination, the nominator must notify the candidate and secure his/her approval prior to the submission of the application.
2. The following forms/supporting documentation must be submitted to the relevant Associate Dean (Research & Innovation) **by 12 noon on Friday 16 January 2026.**

Future Research Leader Award 2025/26 Application Form which includes:

- a) *A Statement of Nomination and Research Contributions (maximum 1000 words)* describing the nature and significance of the nominee's research accomplishments, and a brief statement on how the nominee, if successful, would use the Award to further his/her research;
- b) *Information and evidence to meet criteria a) to c) and if appropriate, the special circumstances section, as detailed in section 3 above (maximum 1500 words);*
- c) *A supporting statement* from the Research Director who will be asked to endorse the evidence provided on the nominee's research and scholarly accomplishments

and to indicate that the nominee's achievements in relation to the criteria are at a level commensurate with the discipline.

Please note: There are various elements to this application form i.e. Research Director Statement and Statement of Nomination - so please allow sufficient time to complete these prior to the deadline for submissions.

All forms and guidelines can be downloaded here <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/awards/research-excellence-awards>

5. ASSESSMENT PANEL FOR FACULTY AND CHAMPION AWARDS

Faculty Award

- a) The Associate Dean for Research & Innovation will convene a panel comprising a number of Research Directors and/or other senior academic staff (at the discretion of the ADRI) to review all the applications received by the Faculty. Panel members will receive the reports on the nominee's research outputs, grants and PhD supervision, by the Department for Research & Innovation. Applicants will be ranked based on criteria a) to c) as described in section 3, with consideration given to responses on any special circumstances, as appropriate.
- b) A scoring matrix will be used by the panel; and all applicants scored against each of the essential criteria. The criteria will carry the following weightings: outputs/publications (60%), potential for impact (20%), and additional indicators (20%). A score of zero in any category for any applicant will eliminate them from that year's competition.
- c) The details of the highest-ranking Faculty applicant will be conveyed to the PVC Research, as a recipient of the Faculty Award and further consideration for the overall Champion Award.
- d) The decision of the Associate Dean for Research & Innovation pertaining to the highest-ranking Faculty nominee as the recipient of the Faculty Award will be final.

Champion Award

- a) An Awards Committee will be appointed annually with the PVC Research serving as the non-voting Chair. The Awards Committee will receive details of each of the Faculty Award winner nominations (from all 4 faculties) for selection of the overall Future Research Leader Award Champion. The Awards voting membership of the Committee will be comprised of Associate Deans (Research & Innovation). To recognise the role of the Awards scheme in the development of staff as excellent researchers, a representative from People and Culture will also be a non-voting member of the Awards Committee.
- a) Members of the Awards Committee will receive all documentation from the four faculty winner nominees. In addition, they will receive the data report on the nominee's research outputs, grants and PhD supervision, by the Department for Research & Innovation.

- b) A scoring matrix will be used by which Awards Committee members (with the exception of the Chair and the other non-voting members in attendance) will score applicants against each of the essential criteria. The criteria will carry the following weightings: outputs/publications (60%), potential for impact (20%), and additional indicators (20%). A score of zero in any category for any applicant will eliminate them from that year's competition.

In making its decisions the Panel/Awards Committee will take account of the material presented to it and judge it solely on the quality and volume of the contributions made. The Panel/Committee will also give significance to the nominee's statement on how they would use the Award to further their research work. As appropriate, certified achievements attained at any relevant previous employment prior to joining Ulster University will be taken into account when assessing nominees in keeping with the eligibility criteria.

The Panel and Awards Committee will take into account any situations where the nominee has lost time in their career through family commitments, illness, late entry into higher education, part-time status or other individual staff circumstances. In the event of such circumstances being pertinent, the applicant has been asked to highlight the case in which special circumstances should be taken into account and to quantify the time period(s) that they were away from the University.

6. NOTIFICATION

All nominees will be informed of the outcome in Spring 2026. The winners will be honoured at the Research Excellence Awards ceremony in May 2026.



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