

School of the Humanities and Social Sciences: Resource Committee

Non-University Employee Eligibility as Principal Investigators - Policy

Background

The University Research Policy Committee (RPC) requires each School to set up a formal oversight process by which the eligibility of non-University Employees (NUE) to become Principal Investigator (PI) on research grants is assessed at the University of Cambridge (RPC 929, 5 October 2017).¹ Non-University Employees holding grants are posing challenges to the University because they are not allowed to line manage University staff, including any postdoc or other staff on their grant. Furthermore, since they are not tied into the University framework as employees it is more difficult to hold them accountable for their work as well as obligations to the external funder. The purpose of the policy is therefore to ensure that risks are appropriately considered by the Department and where necessary the School. This policy only applies where a PI is not an employee at the University when holding grants by an external funder, i.e. if the PI is paid for through the grant this policy does not apply. College Teaching Officers holding grants through the University are also not covered under this policy. NUE-PIs in the arts, humanities and social sciences are relatively rare. They are possible, for example, in cases where a former employee has retired and would some years after retirement want to apply for a grant through Cambridge or where a PI is directly paid through a third party but wanting to hold grants through the University.

Criteria for Consideration by the Head of Department

The Head of Department should assess that the suitability of the individual who is applying to become a potential NUE-PI at Cambridge and their project proposal in the light of the department's research strategy, advancement, leadership and funding landscape.² Criteria to be considered:

- establishing a strategy for the maintenance of current and development of future research projects;
- contributing to the strategic direction of the department, anticipating future demands, opportunities, constraints;
- pro-actively contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the research subject;
- leading significant group (or equivalent) research activity;
- leading and monitoring progress on large research projects;
- maintaining an exceptionally successful programme of funding from external sources.

The nature of the proposed research should fulfil the following criteria:

- pursuing major research within his/her specialist subject area, for example where gaps in knowledge exist;
- carrying out analysis that will be original and innovative.

¹ For clarification, this policy applies to non-University Employees who will not hold a University employment contract for the duration of the research grant. For retiring staff over the course of a research grant please see the extension of employment policy and voluntary research charter.

² The criteria are taken from the role description for Directors of Research at the University of Cambridge, 11 December 2017.

Specific criteria regarding the potential NUE-PI

- The individual concerned is the only person able to attract specific and significant funding;

The Head of Department should assure him or herself that the potential NUE-PI will be able to fulfil the following duties for their research grant among others³:

- managing the use of research resources and ensure that effective use is made of them;
- not directly line managing staff (which is counter to University HR policy). Staff management on the project should be organised through other arrangements at the Department. Please ensure that the NUE PI
- manage/monitor research budgets;
- carrying out duties in a way that supports the University values. This responsibility includes actions in relation to (for example) colleagues, students, and people in other organisations.

General criteria

All applicants are legally required to demonstrate the right to work/permission to work in the UK when holding grants. The Department should assure itself that a strong case can be made to satisfy immigration conditions.

Process

If a NUE is eligible, based on funder criteria, to hold a research grant at the University of Cambridge, the Head of Department that is interested in hosting the potential NUE PI and her/his grant must seek agreement from the Council of the School. The HoD is asked to provide a written case and outline the reasoning for the recommendation, based on the criteria above, normally for consideration and approval by the Head of School on behalf of the Council. The written case should be submitted to HSSRGA@admin.cam.ac.uk at the latest by Thursday in order to be considered at the School Office meeting on the following Tuesday. Submission to the Head of School should be at the latest 14 calendar days before the funder deadline. School approval does not constitute any right for employment at Cambridge for the potential NUE employee should the grant be successful or otherwise.

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³ The criteria are derived from University of Cambridge HR 'Extension of Employment' criteria: <https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/1-retirement-policy/7-procedure-university-officers-continue-employment>, 11 December 2017)