



## Research Contract Management Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the rationale for this approach?

It is expected that this approach to Research Contract Management will benefit the University, Principal Investigators (PIs), and the Researchers themselves.

This approach means that the contract duration is less constrained by the immediate funding situation and can now be determined based on reasonable expectations of future funding.

The contract duration should now mean that Principal Investigators are in a position to attract a very strong calibre of researchers to UL as the term of the contract will be longer. These researchers can then fully contribute to research outputs, including grant applications, publications, patents, etc.

Researchers themselves will have greater certainty of the length of their employment, and can better plan for their future careers.

On the whole, it is expected that this approach will help to increase the University's research profile by establishing a more stable research community whose contracts allow them to fully contribute to research at every stage: providing input to research grants, delivering on the research, and contributing to research outputs.

### 2. How does this align with the Hunt report on Research Career Management?

We believe that this will be a positive change. While the contracts cannot be renewed, they can be issued for a significant duration. This should help PIs to deliver on research projects. Postdoctoral researchers need to be thinking about their future careers. International research shows that approximately 15% of PhD graduates end up working in academia and, given the current environment, we would expect a very small percentage of researchers to be successful for academic posts at UL.

Work is underway to develop a Research Careers and Development Framework and it is expected that this will be finalised early this year.

### 3. What if I have funding for the short-term, but expect longer-term funding to stem from current work?

In this instance, a recruitment competition can be held for a longer fixed term contract or a specific purpose contract.

### 4. What happens if a five-year contract issues and funding runs out after two years?

Due consideration will need to be given to the contract type at the outset. In the very exceptional circumstances where this might arise, every effort will be made to redeploy the researcher. Failing this, and if absolutely necessary, the contract can end with one month's notice. The pattern to date is that research contracts have lasted for a number

of years beyond the initial funding period and so it is not expected that this will be a common occurrence.

**5. If a specific purpose contract is offered, how can we be sure that this purpose will hold?**

It is the responsibility of the research PI to ensure that the work of the researcher is consistent with the specific purpose contract. If there is a question about this at the outset, a fixed term contract should be issued.

**6. In research, a “one size fits all” approach doesn’t work. The needs of research differ depending on the context (e.g., Institutes compared to individual projects at departmental level).**

A contract can issue for any duration up to five years, but does not have to be for five years. If it is certain that no future funding will be available, then it makes sense to only issue a contract for the duration of the current funding or, alternatively, to issue a specific purpose contract. However, this approach provides flexibility in case a PI deems it appropriate for the contract to be issued beyond that date.

**7. What are other Universities doing?**

In Ireland, UCD have led the way with the implementation of their Research Careers and Development Framework. They are proposing a two-tiered postdoctoral contract (“Postdoc Level 1” and “Postdoc Level 2”). Each of these would be for a maximum period of two years. We believe that UL’s approach is better due to the longer term contracts that can be issued.

The other universities in Ireland are currently looking at solutions. International comparisons have to take account of the differences between the national contexts and differences at institutional level which, together, mean that comparisons are not always directly applicable to Ireland.

**8. What is different about this approach, compared to what is currently in place?**

- Researchers will have more clarity and certainty on their contract duration.
- It will now be possible to offer a contract for a longer duration than current funding availability, based on reasonable expectations of future funding.
- The contract will issue on the basis that it will not be subject to renewal.

The PI will continue to determine the appropriate contract duration, and will decide whether a fixed-term or specific-purpose contract is available.