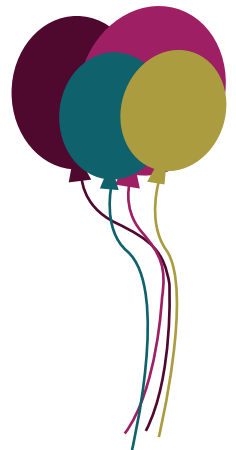


# Seven Suggestions for Managing staff on short-term funding

The short-term nature of research contracts presents the challenge of getting people into post and up to speed as part of a constantly shifting team. In recent years there has been much more recognition of the value of researchers doing contract work and significant efforts to support them at this challenging time in their careers. As a manager of someone on short-term funding you have a vital role in supporting their development whilst making sure the demands of the project are met.

## 1 Balance competing demands

When you employ a researcher to work on a project there is always a need to balance your needs for the project with their needs to develop their own career. These are not entirely incompatible; the success of the project will bring benefit to the researcher too but they will also need to be developing their own portfolio. If you can negotiate and offer either time or opportunities to support your researcher's portfolio you will likely have a more engaged and motivated person working with you. You still have a right to ask for the project work to be delivered. There is a saying that "everybody needs to leave the party with a balloon." If you don't have a balloon then you won't be happy, if they don't have a balloon they won't be happy. And unhappy people don't give their best work.



## 2 Review performance from the beginning

All new staff are required to complete an [Initial Service Review \(ISR\)](#). This is a review about how things have gone in the first 6 or 12 months in post (6 months for grades A-I, 12 for grade J upwards) and provides an opportunity for you to part company elegantly if the person is not up to the job. However you can't just wait until the ISR to spring this news on somebody. You need to have set clear expectations and reviewed these at regular meetings along the way (and kept the notes). ISR is an important aspect of reviewing performance and your [Human Resources Manager](#) can help you navigate it well. It's not all about safeguarding against poor performance; it is best used to help get someone off to a good start by explaining what success in the role will look like and supporting them to achieve it.

## 3 Take an interest in each individual

It can be hard to get to know people when there is a lot of turnover but it is very important to treat each person as an individual and not just a resource. Get to know each unique person and what their interests, passions and future plans are. Not only does this create a more meaningful working relationship, it also builds foundations for future collaborations when this person moves on to new things. Where possible give the person the project work most in line with their interests and aspirations and they will be far more motivated to do it well.

"There is always a way to be honest without being brutal." Arthur Dobrin

## 4 Be honest and open about progression opportunities

Be honest from the start about what this job requires and where it may lead. You do not have to make sure that there is another job following this contract. Do your best to make this a rewarding work experience where the person learns, achieves, makes contacts, broadens networks and takes responsibility for their own career. Don't parent the researcher or be tempted to bluff about progression opportunities with you or the department. If there is ambiguity about the future then say so. There are complex rules that affect whether you can give someone a job if they have been named on a bid. If this is something that you want to do, talk to your [Human Resources Manager](#) who can advise you on the best way to go about it.

## 5 Hold regular meetings

Regular meetings are an important means of staying in touch with how work is progressing and how the researcher is getting on. It's important to make time to catch up one-to-one so that people can talk more freely about problems, aspirations and ideas without being inhibited by a group. It can be a good idea to ask the other person to coordinate the agenda for these meetings and tell you what they want to talk about. This ensures that they think in advance about what they need to discuss with you rather than sit there passively. In addition, group meetings where everyone has time to give an update on their work help to bring people together with a sense of common purpose.

## 6 Beware of isolation

Life as a researcher on short-term contracts can be lonely and isolating. Do what you can to create a working culture that is inclusive and welcoming. For example you might encourage people to talk in a language that everyone understands to prevent others feeling excluded. Make sure that the social gatherings you organise to bring people together are accessible to everybody. Some people can't drink alcohol and others can't do evenings so think about alternatives to the pub for getting people together. Signpost the support networks available for researchers. [Research staff representatives](#) act as a friendly contact for all researchers whilst the [international staff advisors](#) offer specific advice for staff from overseas. [Staff Development](#) offer many development courses for researchers which also provide an opportunity to meet others in similar roles in the University.

## 7 Be honest and clear

There will be times when you know that a current researcher is not a good fit for your future project, yet you know they hope to stay on with you. Being dishonest about this stops other plans being made and stifles creativity about other options. The important thing is to be very specific – if the person is not producing work of a high enough quality, then break down exactly what it is about the work that is below standard so they have a chance to improve (see the Seven Suggestions for Giving Feedback for tips on how to do this). If the person's career ambitions are not really compatible with the work of the project then could you be honest about this and instead help them to open up new opportunities?