



British Philosophical Association

PROPOSAL FOR A SUCCESSOR TO THE AHRC RESEARCH LEAVE SCHEME

Prof. Helen Beebee, University of Birmingham, August 2008

On behalf of the British Philosophical Association

Overview

The RLS would be replaced by several 'Single-Author Research' schemes (or one scheme with several strands). These would have considerably more flexibility than the RLS, primarily through (a) not being tied to institutional leave, and (b) allowing applicants to apply both for different lengths of award and for different proportions of salary buy-out.

AHRC Single-Author Research Scheme (SARS): basic features

- Applicants apply to the scheme for between one term and one year.
- No linking of scheme to institutional leave.
- Applicants, with agreement from their HEI, apply for a proportion of their salary (plus FEC) to be 'bought out' by the AHRC, between (say) 30% and 100%.

Reasons for applying for less than 100% might include:

- The fact that the institution already pays a proportion of the applicant's salary to conduct research; there is no need for the AHRC to cover this proportion. (This would reduce the amount of money available to hire a temporary replacement; however in fact many RLS grant-holders are replaced with part-time casual teaching in any case, with the HEI keeping the rest of the money for other purposes. So this proposal would ensure that a greater proportion of the AHRC's contribution is actually spent effectively supporting the research project.)
- The applicant may have teaching or administrative duties that cannot easily be replaced by a short-term temporary member of staff. This applies to, for example, more senior staff, whose administrative roles cannot be reallocated, to staff with PhD students who cannot be reallocated to another supervisor with appropriate expertise, and to staff in small departments who have some teaching commitments that are hard to reallocate.
- The applicant is on a teaching-only contract.
- The applicant already has a proportion of their salary paid by an outside body, e.g. they are already part of an AHRC-funded research project.

- The applicant is at the early-career stage, and certain specific teaching or other responsibilities are important for their career development (e.g. teaching a specific postgraduate module on their research area).
- As part of the application process, institutions must explain exactly what commitments the applicant will be relieved of, and which they will retain. These should be in line with the % of time is being requested from the AHRC.
- At the completion of the project, the institution must confirm that the duties of the applicant have in fact been as specified in the application (with appropriate sanctions being imposed by the AHRC if this requirement is not met).
- The period of time between end of funding and reporting could be increased from 3 months to (say) 9 months. This would allow the researcher to make up for any time lost on unexpected problems with the project, and would thus increase the rate of successful completion.

Specific RF schemes (or strands within a single scheme)

Early Career Route

- Available to all academic staff between (say) 2 and 5 years into their first permanent appointment. (The requirement of a permanent appointment will act as a quality filter; it will also not disadvantage staff who have spent several years on temporary contracts with a high teaching load whose research has suffered as a result. Also, since in many cases 'early' career would in practice mean that the applicant is at least 2, and sometimes more, years out of PhD, the AHRC could expect awards not to be granted for working up chapters of the PhD into a monograph or papers – this would encourage the applicant to move on from their PhD.)
- The application can include a limited amount of additional funding to enhance career development, e.g. setting up research networks via funding for travel and/or organising a conference on the topic of the proposal.
- The institution must agree to provide a named 'mentor' to the applicant, as with current ESRC early career grants.
- Commitments that would reduce the level of AHRC contribution (aside from the % of salary already paid by the institution for research) must have a clear career development purpose, to reduce risk of exploitation by institution (e.g. teaching a specific PG or upper-level UG module related to area of research expertise).
- Allowed 'outputs' can include (but should not be restricted to) the submission of a collaborative grant application.
- If run simply as a strand of one overall scheme (i.e. assessed alongside 'standard route' applications), there should be a mechanism to ensure that the success rate is at least as great as for the standard route (since typically non-early-career researchers will have a stronger track record and they should not crowd out early-career applications).

Exploratory Route

- Specifically for non-early-career researchers who wish to change direction in their research; this is something that requires an extended period of relatively unproductive (output-wise) research.
- The criteria for acceptable 'outputs' would be relaxed, e.g. they may focus on conference presentations, book reviews, and the organisation of workshops to develop research links, as opposed to published articles or monographs.

Standard Route

Roughly as per the current RLS, except for (a) the general constraints outlined above, and (b) early-career researchers are excluded (since they apply through the early-career route).

Benefits over the current Research Leave Scheme

- Flexibility increases eligibility across a broader range of academics, e.g. those on teaching-only contracts, those whose institutions are less generous with research leave, those who cannot apply to the RLS because of institutional or other commitments (e.g. supervision of PhD students, existing AHRC projects, administrative responsibilities).
- Flexibility also considerably reduces costs. Most applicants will be funded at considerably less than 100% of their time, allowing for a higher success rate than the current RLS.
- Focus on career development for early-career awards makes this route particularly distinctive. In addition, allowing a collaborative grant application to count as an output would link this route into the AHRC's strategic priority of funding collaborative research.
- Exploratory-route awards reduce the current unintended consequence of the RLS that it encourages researchers to keep on with research areas in which they already have a track record; while a conception of 'output' specific to this route ensures that success is still measurable.
- Separate consideration of early-career researchers ensures that a reasonable proportion of them get funded (they are not crowded out by more experienced researchers, as tends to happen with the RLS).
- SARS draws a clear line between QR and AHRC funding. In particular, the AHRC will not be effectively funding research that would have been funded by QR money anyway, by not funding that proportion of salary that the HEI would already have been paying the applicant for research purposes. Other distinctive features include the possibility of funding staff on teaching-only contracts.

Other miscellaneous suggestions

Definition of early-career: A definition of early-career based on time since completion of PhD is unfair on those staff who have had a succession of temporary jobs (sometimes on teaching-only contracts) since completing their PhD.

A very straightforward way to determine eligibility would be simply to restrict 'early career' to junior lecturers on permanent contracts. This would give 'slow-burners' who take a long time to move on after completing their PhD an opportunity that they do not currently have, since they tend not to succeed with RLS applications.

It would also advantage candidates from institutions who are slow to promote, since they will not be competing against similarly-qualified candidates who have been promoted and so are ineligible for the early-career awards.

(A possible problem with this would be that most institutions promote to SL on the basis of other criteria as well as research, and some promote to SL without requiring research criteria to be met at all. However this is a fairly isolated problem in that the overwhelming majority of staff at SL level are required to have met research criteria for promotion. In addition, since it is up to academics themselves whether or not they apply for promotion, someone whose promotion would render them ineligible for an early-career award has the choice of delaying application for the sake of their research prospects.)

Sanctions for failure to complete: The current ban on AHRC applications for non-successful-completers in the RLS should **not** be rolled out to departments as a whole. This could seriously jeopardise departmental relationships and place an even greater burden of responsibility on the member of staff concerned. One option would be to impose financial sanctions, e.g. clawing back some proportion of the funding. This would have a less 'personal' effect on collegial relations.

Perhaps more appropriately, the length of the ban on the individual could simply be extended from (say) two to four years. However increasing the length of time between the end of funding and reporting may dramatically improve completion rates on its own.