THE FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FUTURE LEADERS PROGRAMME 2027

See the bigger picture. Shape what comes next.

An exceptional year of access, insight and connection for emerging leaders in UK science, technology and innovation.



FOREWORD

A welcome from our Chair



The Rt Hon Lord Willetts FRS
Chair, Foundation for Science and Technology

Science and technology are central to the UK's future prosperity and wellbeing. From economic growth and national security to healthcare, energy and the environment, many of the challenges and opportunities facing our country depend on scientific knowledge and technological innovation.

But scientific excellence alone is not enough. Our ability to make the most of that knowledge depends on effective relationships between universities, industry, government, Parliament and the wider research community.

Understanding how these different parts of the system work together is increasingly important for those who will lead them in the years ahead.

For almost 50 years, the Foundation for Science and Technology has brought these communities together, providing an independent space for informed discussion and the exchange of ideas. Our Future Leaders Programme builds on that tradition, offering emerging leaders an opportunity to broaden their perspectives, engage with influential institutions and individuals, and establish relationships across organisational and sectoral boundaries.

What makes the programme particularly valuable is its breadth. Participants have opportunities to explore leading research facilities, engage directly with senior figures, contribute to important policy conversations and learn alongside colleagues whose professional experiences may be very different from their own.

The programme is also shaped by those taking part. Each cohort brings different interests, experiences and ambitions, helping to determine the conversations and opportunities that form their year together.

I believe that the relationships developed through Future Leaders can be just as valuable as the knowledge gained. As participants progress through their careers, those connections can help strengthen collaboration and understanding across the UK's science and technology system.

I warmly encourage organisations to support their emerging leaders in taking part and look forward to welcoming the 2027 cohort.

See the bigger picture

A different kind of leadership development

The most effective leaders in science and technology understand more than their own organisations, disciplines or sectors.

They understand how decisions are made, how research informs policy, how innovation happens and how relationships across institutions create opportunities for progress.

Established in 2019, the Foundation Future Leaders Programme brings together professionals from across the UK's science, technology and innovation community for a distinctive year of learning, connection and development. Each year, just 30 participants are selected from government, academia, industry and the wider research community.

Over 12 months, participants gain access to leading institutions, engage with senior decision-makers, benefit from experienced mentors and build lasting relationships with peers.

The programme offers something difficult to replicate within a single organisation: the opportunity to step beyond professional boundaries and develop a deeper understanding of the wider science and technology landscape.

Five experiences that set Future Leaders apart

01

Go behind the scenes
Gain access to leading research facilities, major industrial organisations, universities and the institutions at the heart of policymaking.

02

Take your seat at the table
Join the Foundation's evening discussions and dinners, with opportunities to exchange perspectives with senior figures from across science, technology and public policy.

03

Find your voice
Contribute to the Foundation's Big Questions webinar series, with further opportunities to publish in the FST Journal and appear on the Foundation's podcast.

04

Develop as a leader
Learn through mentoring, fortnightly cohort conversations, peer exchange and direct engagement with experienced leaders.

05

Build a network that lasts
Develop meaningful relationships with 29 other emerging leaders from across academia, industry and government, and connect with the Foundation's wider community.



"The FST Future Leaders Fellowship was transformative for me. Visiting real working scientific infrastructure, hearing how policy works on the ground and getting facetime with senior figures really pushed me to aim higher myself. These experiences led to me breaking into the space policy world and joining government to put what I'd learned on the fellowship into practice. I'd recommend the experience to anyone looking to level-up in science and technology policy."

Dr Billy Bryan
Senior Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT) Manager, DSIT

GO BEHIND THE SCENES

Access to extraordinary institutions

One of the defining features of the Future Leaders Programme is the opportunity to experience some of the organisations and institutions shaping the future of science, technology and innovation.

Through the Foundation's extensive network, participants gain access to leading research facilities, universities, major industrial organisations and institutions at the heart of policymaking.

These are more than visits.

They are opportunities to engage with the people working within these organisations, explore the challenges and decisions they face, and understand how their work connects to the wider science and technology landscape. For many participants, they provide an insight into organisations, facilities and professional environments that would otherwise be difficult to experience.



A programme shaped by its participants

No two Future Leaders programmes are identical. Rather than following a fixed itinerary, we work with each cohort to understand their professional interests, development priorities and the questions they want to explore.

These insights help shape the organisations we approach, the visits we arrange and the conversations that form the programme.

The result is an experience designed to broaden participants' horizons, challenge assumptions and provide insights that can be taken back into their own organisations.

The 2027 itinerary will be developed in consultation with the cohort, with visits subject to arrangements with host institutions.



"The Future Leaders Scheme has provided a unique opportunity to explore the breadth of the UK's science and technology landscape, offering insights and experiences rarely found in other professional development programmes, all while building great connections with an inspiring cohort."

Dr Victoria Honour
Senior Policy Adviser, Net Zero Innovation

THE 2026 EXPERIENCE

From Parliament to CERN

The breadth of the programme is illustrated by the experiences of our 2026 cohort, whose visits included:



UK Parliament

Exploring the relationship between scientific evidence, parliamentary scrutiny and public policy, and gaining a deeper understanding of how science and technology feature in parliamentary decisions.



University College London

Engaging with a leading research university and exploring how academic research connects with innovation, policy and wider societal challenges.



National Physical Laboratory

Discovering the role of national measurement science and research infrastructure in underpinning scientific progress, industrial innovation and technological development.



Rolls-Royce

Gaining insight into industrial research and innovation, and the opportunities and challenges involved in translating scientific and technological advances into real-world applications.



Harwell Science and Innovation Campus

Exploring the contribution of major national research facilities and the importance of collaboration between research organisations, universities and industry.



CERN

Experiencing one of the world's foremost scientific research centres and exploring the importance of international collaboration and large-scale scientific infrastructure.

Conversations at the highest levels

Conversations that rarely happen in the everyday workplace

For almost 50 years, the Foundation has brought together influential figures from across science, technology, Parliament, government, academia and industry.

As a Future Leader, you'll have opportunities to become part of those conversations.

Throughout the year, participants are invited to the Foundation's regular evening discussions, often held at the Royal Society in London.

These events bring together senior figures to explore some of the most important questions facing UK science and technology, from research investment and innovation policy to emerging technologies and the relationship between science and government.
But the experience goes beyond listening to presentations and panel discussions.

From the discussion to the dinner table

At the dinners that follow, Future Leaders have opportunities to meet and exchange perspectives with people including university vice-chancellors, government Chief Scientific Advisers, parliamentarians, research leaders and senior industry executives.

These are opportunities to ask questions, exchange ideas and gain insight into the experiences and thinking of people helping shape decisions at the highest levels. Just as importantly, they allow emerging leaders to contribute their own knowledge and perspectives to the conversation.

The opportunity to sit at the same table, exchange ideas and build relationships across different levels of leadership is one of the most distinctive aspects of the Future Leaders experience.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Develop as a leader

Alongside these experiences, the programme offers regular opportunities for professional and leadership development.

Mentoring
Participants can engage with experienced mentors who bring insight from across the science and technology community, offering different perspectives and supporting reflection on professional ambitions and leadership challenges.

Fortnightly cohort conversations
Future Leaders meet online every two weeks to share experiences, explore common challenges and learn from one another. The agenda is shaped by the cohort, providing space for the issues and interests that matter most to participants.

Learning across boundaries
By working alongside peers from different institutions and sectors, participants encounter alternative approaches to leadership, organisational decision-making and professional challenges.

Together, these experiences help develop the confidence, professional judgement and understanding needed to work effectively across a complex and interconnected system.



"The future leaders scheme was formative in my development into senior UKRI roles, exposing me to a huge breadth of science and technology challenges, policy and leaders, and building my network of peers across academia, industry, and the public sector."
Dr Neil Robinson
Deputy Director, Quantum Technologies and Advanced Connectivity Technologies, EPSRC, UKRI

A network that lasts

The value of the programme does not end after 12 months.
Participants become part of a wider community of Future Leaders and alumni working across government, academia, industry and the research sector.
These relationships create opportunities for continued professional connection, collaboration and the exchange of ideas as participants progress through their careers.



"The FST Future Leaders Programme offered a fantastic opportunity to step outside the academic world, gain a better understanding of how science informs policy and decision-making, and engage with an inspiring group of leaders from across sectors."
Dr Claudia Lindner
Senior Research Fellow and Sir Henry Dale Fellow, The University of Manchester

Find your voice. Shape the conversation.

From participant to contributor

Leadership is not only about understanding the decisions that shape science and technology. It is also about developing the confidence, knowledge and opportunities to contribute to them.

The Future Leaders Programme encourages participants to move beyond observing discussions and become active contributors to the wider science and technology conversation.

Through the Foundation's established platforms, participants can develop their communication and influencing skills while sharing their expertise with audiences beyond their own organisations.

Develop your professional voice

Together, these opportunities help participants develop confidence in presenting ideas, communicating with different audiences and engaging in informed debate.

They also provide opportunities for employing organisations to raise the visibility of their people and contribute perspectives from their own sectors to wider discussions.

Big Questions: take your place on the panel

The Foundation's Big Questions webinar series provides Future Leaders with opportunities to appear as panellists, sharing their insights on important questions at the intersection of science, technology and public policy. These conversations bring together different perspectives and encourage informed discussion on issues affecting the science and technology community. Participating as a panellist provides practical experience of communicating complex ideas, responding to questions and engaging constructively with other viewpoints.

Join the conversation on our podcast

The Foundation's podcast offers further opportunities for Future Leaders to share their insights and take part in conversations about science, technology and public policy. Podcast participation allows contributors to explore issues in greater depth, exchange perspectives and communicate with audiences across the Foundation's wider community.
Participation is subject to programme and editorial planning.

Share your expertise in the FST Journal

Future Leaders are encouraged to explore opportunities to contribute to the FST Journal, sharing their knowledge, experiences and professional perspectives with the Foundation's wider readership. Writing for the Journal offers an opportunity to develop ideas, communicate them to a cross-sector audience and contribute to discussion beyond an individual's immediate professional network.
Publication is subject to the Journal's normal editorial processes.



FOR EMPLOYERS

An investment in your organisation

Developing leaders who understand the bigger picture

Supporting a place on the Future Leaders Programme is an investment not only in an individual, but in the knowledge, perspectives and relationships they can bring back to their organisation. The programme provides an opportunity for employers to develop people who are better equipped to understand the wider science and technology landscape and work across the boundaries that can sometimes separate its institutions.

What participating organisations gain

- **Broader strategic understanding**
  Participants develop a stronger appreciation of the policy, research and innovation environment, helping them understand how their organisation fits into the wider system.

- **New relationships and opportunities for collaboration**
  The programme connects professionals across universities, government, industry and research organisations, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and future collaboration.

- **Leadership development**
  Mentoring, peer learning and engagement with senior figures support the development of professional judgement, confidence and an understanding of leadership in different organisational contexts.

- **Communication and influence**
  Opportunities to contribute to panel discussions, publish articles, participate in podcasts and engage with senior figures help strengthen participants' ability to communicate with different audiences and perspectives.

- **Fresh ideas and perspectives**
  Experiencing different organisational approaches and professional environments allows participants to bring new insights into their own work and teams.



Why NPL invests in Future Leaders

"At NPL, our ability to deliver impact depends not only on our scientific and technical expertise, but on how effectively we work with government, industry and the wider research community. Developing people who understand that landscape, and can build relationships across it, is therefore hugely important to us.

The Foundation Future Leaders Programme gives our colleagues perspectives and connections that would be difficult to gain through their day-to-day roles. They develop a better understanding of how policy decisions are made, the priorities of other organisations and where opportunities for collaboration exist. We've supported three colleagues to participate in the 2026 programme because we see this as an investment in NPL's own capability. The value isn't simply in their individual development, but in bringing new insights, relationships and a broader strategic perspective back into the organisation.

For NPL, that's what makes Future Leaders such a valuable opportunity: developing people who can connect our work to the wider system and help us achieve greater impact."

***Dr James Claverley** · Head of Government Relations and Partnerships, National Physical Laboratory*

JOIN THE 2027 COHORT

Who should apply?

We welcome applications from emerging leaders who are curious about the wider science and technology system and want to develop their understanding of how its different parts connect.

The programme is particularly suited to early- and mid-career professionals who have established experience in their field and are interested in taking on greater responsibility, broadening their perspectives or strengthening their ability to work across organisational boundaries.

We are looking for people who will actively contribute to the cohort, share their experiences, learn from others and engage with perspectives beyond their own.

A balanced, diverse cohort

We aim to create a balanced cohort with a diversity of professional backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.

The Foundation particularly encourages applications from groups currently under-represented in science and technology leadership. There is no single route into leadership, and we recognise that career paths and individual circumstances differ.

Three sectors. One cohort.



Government and the wider public sector

Including civil servants, parliamentary staff, public sector research establishments and other public bodies.



Universities and the research community

Including university researchers, national facilities, research institutes, learned societies, Royal Colleges, research charities, research councils and Catapult centres.



Industry and innovation

Including large companies, SMEs, independent research and technology organisations and other businesses working in science, technology and innovation.

Programme at a glance

Duration
12 months, beginning in early 2027.

Places
30, selected to create a balanced cross-sector cohort.

Format
In-person institutional visits, meetings with senior figures, fortnightly online cohort sessions, mentoring and opportunities to participate in Foundation events and activities.

Time commitment
Approximately seven working days for the principal programme activities, alongside fortnightly online meetings (1 hour) and optional opportunities to participate in the wider Foundation programme. Exact arrangements will depend on the cohort's programme.

Programme fee
£2,000 + VAT (£2,400 including VAT).

Travel and accommodation
Travel, accommodation and other personal expenses associated with programme activities are additional and are the responsibility of participants or their employing organisations.

Employer support
Applicants must have the support of their employing organisation, including confirmation of funding and the time needed to participate.

How to apply

Scholarships

The Foundation is committed to ensuring that financial barriers do not unnecessarily prevent talented emerging leaders from accessing the programme.

For 2027, up to five partial scholarships will be available, each providing a 50% reduction in the programme fee. Successful scholarship applicants will therefore pay **£1,000 + VAT**, rather than the standard fee of £2,000 + VAT.

Scholarships are intended for applicants whose organisations would otherwise be unable to meet the full programme fee. Applicants requesting a scholarship must demonstrate that:

- They have the potential to benefit from and contribute to the programme.
- Their organisation is unable to meet the full programme fee from its available professional development funding.
- A scholarship would enable them to participate.

Applicants will be asked to provide a short explanation of their circumstances through the online application form. Scholarship requests will be assessed alongside applications to the programme. The Foundation reserves the right to award fewer than five scholarships where applications do not meet the criteria.

All participants, including scholarship recipients, must have the support of their employing organisation. Travel and accommodation remain additional.

The Foundation is committed to making the programme accessible and welcomes confidential discussions about reasonable adjustments and individual support needs.

Applying for 2027

Applications for the 2027 Future Leaders Programme will be submitted through our online application form.

Applicants will be asked to provide information about their current role and professional background, their reasons for applying, what they hope to contribute and gain, and how they expect participation to benefit their organisation.

Applicants must also upload:

- A current CV of no more than two pages.
- A completed employer confirmation form, signed by an authorised representative of their organisation, confirming funding and support for participation.
  Applicants seeking a scholarship should indicate this within the online application. Their employer confirmation form may be completed on the basis of the reduced fee, subject to a scholarship being awarded.

Applications will be assessed on individual merit, motivation and potential contribution, alongside the aim of creating a balanced and diverse cohort.

Application deadline
14th December 2026

Programme begins
March 2027

Apply online: https://www.foundation.org.uk/Blog/Future-Leaders-2027
For more information or an informal conversation about whether the programme is appropriate for you or your organisation, contact Dr Alex Rhys OBE, the Foundations' CEO at **alex.rhys@foundation.org.uk**



AN EXPERIENCE THAT STAYS WITH YOU

"Participating in the FST Future Leaders Scheme in 2024 enabled me to develop a stronger understanding of how UK policies are shaped and implemented in the Science and Technology sector. Two years on, I still retain a lot of the confidence I built and continue to appreciate how my work as a Systems Engineer within the Catapult Network contributes to the UK's wider research and innovation ecosystem."

Sam Islam
Senior Systems Engineer, Energy Systems Catapult

Broaden your perspective. Build lasting connections. Help shape what comes next.

THE FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

FOUNDATION FUTURE LEADERS PROGRAMME 2027
The Foundation for Science and Technology
Foundation.org.uk
alex.rhys@foundation.org.uk

Charity number: 274727