

**The Foundation Future Leaders Programme 2026**

1. Future leaders in science, technology, research and innovation need not only knowledge of the sector they are in – be it higher education, industry, the civil service or elsewhere – but also an understanding of the other parts of the UK’s research and innovation system. The Foundation Future Leaders Programme, launched in 2019, seeks to support the leaders of tomorrow in building the links and knowledge that they will need.
2. The programme brings together a cohort of 35 mid-career professionals over the course of a 12-month period, with approximately 10-12 representatives each from the research community, industry, and the civil service and wider public sector. Over the course of the year, the group will meet and discuss with senior figures from government, parliament, universities, large industry, SMEs, research charities and others. They will also present their own expertise to the group. In November 2026 they will organise a conference for a wider group of mid-career future leaders in science, technology, research and innovation.
3. The programme will consist of:
* Main meetings – These meetings, some half-days, some full days, will provide the opportunity to meet and question senior figures from science and technology across government, Parliament, industry, universities, academies and charities. There will be five such meetings during the year. These meetings will be a mixture of online and in-person (with the opportunity to join online).
* Visits – There will be a minimum of three visits, which could include the UK Parliament in London, the Harwell research campus in Oxfordshire, and a UK university. Other possible visits include research facilities for companies, national laboratories such as NPL, international science facilities such as CERN and devolved bodies such as the Scottish Government.
* Drop-in sessions – There will be fortnightly online drop-in sessions of one hour, with talks/presentations from both members of the group to each other and invited guest speakers. The Future Leader Cohort will determine themselves the priorities for these sessions.
* One-day conference – In November 2026, the Foundation Future Leaders will organise a one-day conference (supported by the Foundation for Science and Technology). The Future Leaders themselves will determine the themes of the conference, and the Foundation will provide the administrative support. A physical conference might be for around 120 - 150 attendees, or 300 for an online conference.
1. In addition to the main programme, all Foundation Future leaders will be invited to every evening discussion event run by the Foundation. These are usually held in the Royal Society in London and often include speaker presentations and two extended periods of Q&A, either side of dinner. Participation for the first part of the event is also possible online.
2. There are a small number of training videos recorded by the Foundation available to Foundation Future Leaders as introductions to certain subjects. These can be viewed at any time throughout the year.
3. There are additional opportunities for Foundation Future Leaders which the Foundation for the Science and Technology can support. These include individual mentoring, publishing blogs, recording podcasts, networking within the group and organising of additional events which the cohort may wish to pursue. It might also include forming sub-groups of the cohort interested in specific issues. The programme is geared to provide opportunities for the cohort to take forward themselves.

**Should I apply?**

1. If you are interested in applying, we would love to hear from you. The Foundation actively encourages applications from under-represented groups in science, technology, research and innovation leadership. We would particularly welcome applications from minority ethic candidates, those with disabilities, and applicants who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. We aim for a 50:50 ratio between male and female participants on the scheme.
2. All buildings in which we hold physical meetings will be accessible. It is possible that a tour of an external partner’s facilities may have access issues which we will identify at the time. We will make all reasonable adjustments to allow people to fully participate in Future Leader activities. Some additional funds may be available to support this (see below).
3. If you are wondering whether this scheme is for you, or would like to find out more about the programme before applying, or to discuss any individual circumstances, please email Gavin Costigan (gavin.costigan@foundation.org.uk) to set up an informal conversation.

**Time Commitment**

1. The minimum time commitment is approximately 7 days over the course of the year – 5 main meetings (some half-days), 3 external visits, and the conference. However, many Future Leaders will wish to attend the fortnightly drop-in sessions, join the FST evening discussion events, or participate in sub-groups or other activities.
2. We aim to ensure that all in-person meetings (except tours) will also allow remote participation and be recorded to allow those not available to attend that day to engage with the material later. Occasionally technology, security issues or specific requests from external speakers prevents this.

**Costs**

1. There is a cost of £1000 (+VAT) to participate in the scheme. In addition, participants will be responsible for their own travel costs to attend in-person meetings. Applicants are asked to show evidence that they have confirmation from a budget holder in their organisation that this funding is available. The FST is delighted to provide further information to finance or HR teams if that would be helpful.
2. The Foundation for Science and Technology is able to cover additional costs to promote the widest possible participation, such as additional childcare costs or costs associated with making meetings fully accessible. Applicants can discuss specific circumstances (in confidence) with Gavin Costigan (gavin.costigan@foundation.org.uk).

**Scholarships**

1. The FST may award a maximum of 5 scholarships in 2026 allowing participation in the scheme without paying the £1000 fee. Priority for these places will be given to disabled applicants and those who have applied in previous years. Scholarship participants will still need to fund their own travel to attend events, although if eligible they may also apply for funding from the [Silman Fund](https://www.foundation.org.uk/About/The-Silman-Fund).

**Who should apply?**

1. The scheme is targeted at people in the early part of their “mid-career”. As individual circumstances vary the following is provided as helpful guidance, but there are no set rules. If you think that this scheme would be beneficial to you, please apply.
2. In general, applicants should be beyond any graduate training scheme but not have reached senior management levels. Examples might include:
* In the civil service, staff at Grade 7 or Grade 6.
* For university researchers, those at Lecturer/Assistant Professor or Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor
* From industry, those approximately 5-10 years into their career (excluding career breaks).
1. The Foundation Future Leaders scheme will particularly suit those who wish to make links with and understand how science, research and innovation are used in government, parliament, industry and universities, and how research and industry can support policy development.

**Application Process and deadlines**

1. Applicants should complete the application form, the diversity monitoring questionnaire, and the confirmation of funding form, and send them with a CV (2 pages max) to office@foundation.org.uk by 12:00 noon on 25th November 2025.
2. All applicants will need to specify that they fall into one of three categories:
* Civil servants, parliamentary servants or the wider public sector (including Public Sector Research Establishments, PSREs)
* Employees from universities, national facilities or similar (including from Catapult Centres, Research Council Institutes or Research Charities)
* Applicants from industry (including from independent not-for-profit Research & Technology Organisations, RTOs)
1. It is recognised that some roles could be in more than one of these categories; please select the one which you feel is most applicable. All applications will be treated equally, but the final aim is to have 10-12 participants from each category.
2. If you do not fall into (or nearly into) any of these descriptions then it is possible that the scheme is not best suited for you, but do feel free to discuss individual circumstances with Gavin Costigan (gavin.costigan@foundation.org.uk).
3. A panel will assess all the applications and decide before Christmas 2025. The panel will include Gavin Costigan (Chief Executive, Foundation for Science and Technology) and Jane Gate (Executive Director, AIRTO), with other selection panel members currently being recruited.
4. All applicants will be informed of the decision by Christmas 2025, and the first meeting of the 2026 Future Leaders will be online in late January 2026.