



## **Grant-funded work!**

### **FUURT's policy for good grant practices in universities (2024)**

The position of grant-funded researchers in universities has long been a topic of discourse among academics. Practical challenges and concerns have arisen from the variability and lack of clarity concerning grant-funded research practices between and within individual universities. Although grant-based work is more common during the early stages of a research career, i.e. during doctoral and postdoc research, grant-funded research work remains a typical and significant form of work at all career stages, as shown by FUURT's member surveys (most recently Puhakka 2023, particularly 177–184). At the same time, knowledge within the universities about the amount and importance of grants and the diversity of working condition practices may be vague and deficient. As indicated by the report commissioned by Universities Finland UNIFI and the Association of Finnish Foundations (Siekkinen et al. 2021), few universities systematically collect information about their organisation's grant-funded researchers, their projects, and funding. As a result, the scientific and societal impact of this grant-funded research is easily overlooked.

During 2023, FUURT's Early Career Researchers' Committee examined the current practices of different universities concerning their grant-funded researchers. Current issues have included the practices of part-time employment offered during a grant period, as well as other solutions aimed at improving the working conditions of grant-funded researchers. It is encouraging that different universities have initiated such activities in recent years. However, there is still a need for further monitoring and improvements.

*The earnings of grant-funded researchers are often lower than for those in employment relationships. The amount of grant funding that is tax-exempt has been increased in recent years, but there is still a ways to go to reach the level sought by the Union, which amounts to EUR 30,000 per year.*



It is, however, a positive step that some funding sources have also increased the size of their grants, especially in light of the general increase in costs. The amount of grants varies significantly depending on the grant provider. This may lead to situations where different researchers within the same research project may have different earnings depending on the source of their individual funding. The development of a researcher's earnings may also be reversed: even though their work experience and scientific merits may increase, the level of earnings may decrease as they shift from employment to grant-funding or from one grant provider to another. The potentially low level of a grant, coupled with the fixed-term nature and uncertainty of the funding and potential deficiencies in social security coverage, continue to raise financial concerns for many researchers.

We have previously presented our position on grant-funded researchers as part of the [Policies of the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers \(FUURT\) intended to support the work and well-being of early career researchers](#). These policies are still valid but, in addition, we provide a summary here of some of the current themes related to grant-based work, which we hope universities, researchers, research financiers, and the scientific community will consider more closely in the future. Our focus is on the situation of grant-funded researchers especially in universities. Grant-funded researchers also work in other research organisations and, in these situations, our policies and recommendations can be utilised as appropriate.

### **Resource agreement (or similar) between a grant-funded researcher and a university and the securing of appropriate working conditions**

A resource (or similar) agreement between a grant-funded researcher and a university is a good and practical way to clarify for both parties how the working conditions will be arranged on a practical level for a grant-funded researcher who is affiliated to a university. The resource agreement should be seen as

part of the University's open and equal practices regarding the kind of working tools and other prerequisites the university guarantees and arranges for grant-funded researchers. Clear guidelines and communications support this.

The university should have one common template for the resource agreement of grant-funded researchers that guarantees a basic level of working conditions for all grant-funded researchers affiliated to that university, such as a university e-mail address and access to other relevant electronic systems, workspaces and related access rights, as well as other relevant tools and equipment. In addition to these, the university-level template should include, for example, special considerations concerning workspaces or other similar issues specific to an individual discipline or research group, if the grant-funded researcher's work includes, for example, laboratory work or other special facilities and tools.

The official affiliation and resource agreement with the university strengthens the position of the researcher, also in relation to the grant provider. In a grant application, grant providers often value or even require the researcher to prove that they are part of a wider research environment and that they have access to the necessary facilities and tools for the research, even if the researcher's project is independent and not directly linked to a larger research group.

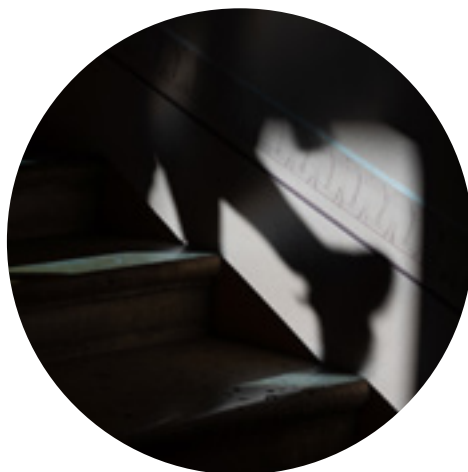
*We strongly feel that, within the framework of the affiliation and resource agreement, universities should not charge grant-funded researchers rent for workspaces. This applies to researchers at all stages of their career.*

The contributions of grant-funded researchers to the results and impact of universities in the form of doctoral degrees, research publications, and societal interaction is sufficient compensation for the use of the university's facilities and tools. Therefore, we urge universities to improve the collection of data concerning grant-funded research in order to provide increased visibility and recognition for such research. It would also support the universities' internal development work and decision-making.

Finally, it should be noted that the university should provide the grant-funded researcher with all the necessary working conditions through a resource agreement



without the researcher being required to simultaneously have an employment relationship with the university. A resource agreement also does not give the university managerial rights over the grant-funded researcher. The researcher must also have the opportunity to refuse a resource agreement if they do not consider it necessary to work in the facilities offered by the university.



### **Affiliation to a university after graduation or the completion of research work**

Grant-funded work is always fixed-term in nature. For this reason, there may occasionally be interruptions between funding periods. At the end of one grant period, it is important for the researcher to have the opportunity, if desired, to maintain their affiliation to the university and access to the university's electronic systems, such as e-mail and various material services, for a reasonable period. A reasonable period may be, for example, six months from the end of the previous funding period or from graduation. This practice supports the researcher's possibilities to apply for further funding for their work and to finalise the tasks and co-operation requirements of the completed project. Good project management and further funding applications are also in the University's interest.

### **Voting rights in university elections**

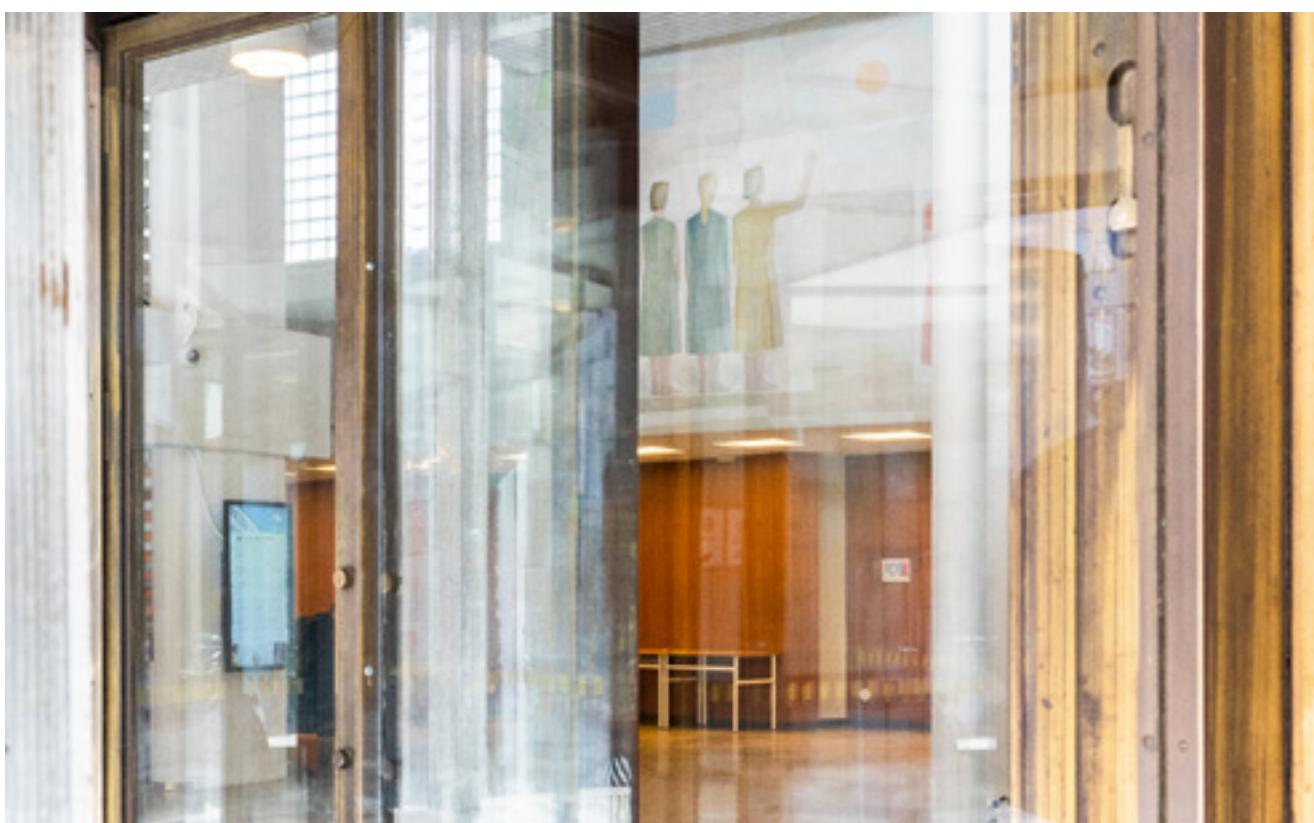
Participation in the university community amounts to much more than just an access card and e-mail address. Our position is that universities should recognise affiliated grant-funded researchers as an equal part of the university community. As proof of this, affiliated grant-funded researchers should be guaranteed the right to vote in university elections. There is currently a lot of variation in and obscurity on voting rights between universities. We strongly encourage universities to extend voting rights to grant-funded researchers and to communicate clearly about it.

## **Right and possibility of grant-funded researcher to participate in personnel and other similar training**

A researcher's career and working life skills are advanced through a wide range of activities and experience. One drawback of grant-based work is that the researcher may be unable to gain experience, for example, in teaching positions or does not have the opportunity to participate in training that would be useful in different recruitment situations.

*We strongly recommend that universities offer grant-funded researchers the opportunity to participate in pedagogical and other personnel training as well as personnel mobility programmes.*

We urge universities to ensure that, in addition to the theoretical possibility, grant-funded researchers also have a practical opportunity to participate in training courses. The fact that there are too few courses and paid employees are automatically prioritised for participation does not, on a practical level, provide realistic access to training.



## **Proper pay for different work tasks alongside grant-funded research**

If the grant-funded researcher carries out work at the university or research institute that falls outside the sphere of the grant-funded research, such as teaching or administrative duties, these must be agreed on separately by means of an employment contract and wages shall be paid for them as compensation. In this situation, the researcher may be offered a part-time or hourly-paid contract with the university. Teaching or other tasks that fall outside the sphere of grant-funded research cannot be required in exchange for the use of workspaces and remuneration for such cannot consist of only credits.

It is important that willing grant-funded researchers be given the possibility to carry out teaching duties. This will allow them to gain the necessary work experience and competence, while the university will be able to expand its course offering and increase its supervisory resources.

## **Part-time employment contract alongside grant funding**

It is good that, in recent years, different universities have developed the possibility for part-time employment contract practices alongside grant funding. There have been different practices in place earlier, within a particular discipline or institution, but the possibility for part-time work has been limited to a relatively small number of researchers. Within current development work, it is important for universities to endeavour to create equal and transparent practices for organising part-time work for grant-funded researchers. When entering into a part-time employment relationship, the instructions and conditions of the grant provider must also be followed if, for example, they have specified an upper limit for other work during the grant period.

*In the future, we call for attention to be paid to the complexity and content of tasks under part-time employment contracts in order to ensure that they are balanced and can be performed within the defined working hours.*

Work plans for part-time employment must be realistic. Fair and equal treatment in terms of workload and tasks is in the interest of researchers and their financiers (grant providers) and demonstrates a fair HR policy at universities.

In addition, universities should consider how to handle the normal elements of employment relationships, such as development discussions and salary

adjustments, with grant-funded researchers. Drawing up a work plan for the grant-funded researcher's part-time work is a good starting point for examining the workload and tasks and for equal distribution.

It should also be noted that an individual researcher's situation regarding their grant, employment relationship, and so-called co-financing or part-time employment may change often and in many directions. This should not cause the researcher any harm or financial loss, for example, as a result of the loss of accumulated holiday pay due to changes in the working hours covered by the employment relationship. Both the researcher and their employer should be aware of the impact of part-time work on an individual's social security. For example, in the case of unemployment security, grant-based work or the financial level of the grant are not taken into account when paying earnings-related unemployment security or Kela's basic unemployment allowance, even though the grant-based work extends the review period of the employment condition for unemployment benefits.

### **Access to occupational health services and support for well-being**

Generally, grant-funded researchers have the right and opportunity to choose their work community. Universities looking to strengthen their appeal also offer health and well-being services to grant-funded researchers.

*We encourage universities to invest in preventive care and support that promotes the well-being of the whole community regardless of the individual's situation, i.e. whether they are a student, a member of the personnel, or working on the basis of a grant.*



As part of health services and well-being support, psychosocial loading should also be taken into account. In addition, we urge you to note that access to occupational health care should be retained, even if the working situation changes from, for example, a full-time employment relationship to a combination of grant-funding and a part-time employment relationship.

## **Grant-funded researchers are also entitled to a holiday and recovery**

A grant does not constitute an employment relationship with a university or the grant provider. Therefore, the grant-funded researcher does not have an employer who has the right to supervise the work for which the grant was provided or to monitor working hours. A university's resource agreement (or similar) does not change this situation. Thus, grant-funded researchers have a lot of freedom but also responsibility for the planning and utilisation of working hours. Grant-funded researchers must have sufficient time and the opportunity to take a holiday and recover. Research financiers, universities, supervisors, and research groups can promote a healthy working culture and sustainable well-being by reminding grant-funded researchers of the importance of holidays and recovery and also by supporting them in their recovery from work.

See also [Policies of the Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers \(FUURT\) intended to support the work and well-being of early career researchers.](#)

### **References**

Puhakka, Antero. *Consecutive, parallel and overlapping (Peräkkäin, rinnan ja päällekkäin, in Finnish) FUURT's membership survey 2022*. Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers 2023.

Siekinen Taru, Emmi-Niina Kujala, Elias Pekkola & Jussi Välimaa. *Grant-funded researchers. Report on the practices concerning grant-funded researchers at Finnish universities (Selvitys suomalaisten yliopistojen käytänteistä liittyen apurahatutkijoihin, in Finnish)*. University of Jyväskylä, 2021.