

Job Description

Research Associate

Salary:	Grade 7
Contract:	Full time, fixed term for 36 months
School/Department:	School of Social Sciences
Location:	Canterbury Campus
Responsible to:	Professor Joy Y. Zhang

Job purpose

To contribute to the Advanced Research-Invention Agency funded project, *Futuring Biological Commons*. This project aims to advance the UK's governing approach on synthetic plants, to foster a sustainable research and industrial ecosystem, and promote meaningful public deliberation.

The postholder will work closely with Professor Joy Y. Zhang and a transdisciplinary research team, comprising experts from the social sciences, synthetic biology, industrial biotechnology, and civil society. Their role will be to advance an empirically grounded, forward-looking approach to relational plant ethics, incorporating care for technolifeforms and 'symbiodiversity' while identifying actionable strategies to overcome structural and cultural barriers in the responsible development and adoption of synthetic plant technologies.

This role is based at the School of Social Sciences and the university-level research centre, the Centre for Global Science and Epistemic Justice (GSEJ). The School has been ranked 3rd in the UK for overall research quality, with 100% of its environment classified as world-leading in the latest Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021). GSEJ serves as a hub for transdisciplinary and international collaboration on major research programmes. It has co-hosted a G20 India-UK dialogue on science diplomacy, and its policy recommendations on global biodata governance were included in the formal Think 7 communiqué to the G7 presidency in 2024. The Centre currently hosts three major socio-ethical research programmes on engineering biology, focusing on its applications in critical minerals, biomedicine, and agri-environmental sustainability.

Key accountabilities

- Ensure the successful and timely delivery of the *Futuring Biological Commons* project, fostering a collaborative, collegial, and interdisciplinary research environment.
- Actively contribute to the research culture and intellectual community of the Centre for Global Science and Epistemic Justice and the School of Social Sciences, engaging in knowledge exchange and academic development initiatives.

Key duties

The following are the main duties for the job. Other duties, commensurate with the grading of the job, may also be assigned from time to time.

- Conduct in-depth media, policy, and secondary data analysis, synthesising findings to generate meaningful insights for the project.
- Co-lead the implementation of focus groups across the UK, ensuring methodological rigour and effective participant engagement.
- Co-design and execute stakeholder surveys, contributing to the refinement of research methodologies and data analysis.

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- Contribute to the planning and coordination of project-related online workshop and in-person conferences, fostering academic, industry and public engagement.
- Contribute to developing training materials for early career scientists and science communicators.
- Produce high-impact academic publications that contribute to scholarly discourse and advance knowledge in the field.
- Present research findings at national and international conferences and contribute to maximising the project's impact through culturally sensitive engagement with diverse stakeholders and communities.

Internal & external relationships

Internal: Working closely with Prof. Joy Zhang, you will liaise with Prof. Mark Smales from the School of Biosciences, who is also a member of the Centre for Global Science and Epistemic Justice.

External: The research team to facilitate partnerships with external stakeholders across the UK.

Health, safety & wellbeing considerations

This job involves undertaking duties which include the following health, safety and wellbeing considerations:

- Regular use of Screen Display Equipment
- Pressure to meet important deadlines such as might be inherent in high profile projects
- There may be a requirement to work evenings and weekends
- Ability to travel in a timely and efficient manner

Person specification

The person specification details the necessary skills, qualifications, experience or other attributes needed to carry out the job. Applications will be measured against the criteria published below.

Selection panels will be looking for clear evidence and examples in an application, or cover letter (where applicable), which back-up any assertions made in relation to each criterion.

Essential Criteria:

- PhD or equivalent in a relevant field within the social studies of science, such as sociology, anthropology, environmental politics, environmental or plant ethics, science communication, or a related discipline (A)
- Proven ability to independently design and conduct rigorous empirical social research, demonstrating methodological excellence (A,I)

- Strong research track record, evidenced by publications in internationally recognised peer-reviewed journals and presentations at academic conferences (A,I)
- Comprehensive knowledge of emerging applications in engineering biology and their socio-environmental implications, particularly in areas such as agriculture, food systems, and ecological sustainability (I)
- Experience in collaborative research and interdisciplinary teamwork, with a demonstrated ability to engage diverse stakeholders across academic, policy, industry and public sectors (A,I)
- Strong organisational and project management skills, with experience in planning and coordinating academic and public events (I)
- Strong verbal and written communication skills, with the ability to convey complex information clearly to diverse audiences (I,T)
- Firm commitment to achieving the University's vision and values, with a passion for a transformative student experience and multidisciplinary, impactful research (I)
- Commitment to deliver and promote equality, diversity and inclusivity in the day to day work of the role (I)

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Desirable Criteria:

- Experience in public engagement and/or science communication, with the ability to effectively translate research findings for diverse audiences (A,I)
- Familiarity with farming communities and/or the biotechnology industry, particularly in relation to agricultural and environmental applications of engineering biology (I)

Assessment stage: A - Application; I - Interview; T - Test/presentation at interview stage