

## FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

### Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Interdisciplinary Science or Philosophy

Future of Humanity Institute, James Martin 21st Century School

Protocol reference number: HUM/08036F/E

*Grade 7: £28,839 - £38,757 per annum (at 1 October 2008)*

*Fixed-term for two years from date of appointment*



#### The post

1. Applications are invited for a full-time Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Interdisciplinary Science or Philosophy within the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University.
2. The post is fixed-term for two years from the date of appointment, with excellent opportunities for career advancement.
3. The Future of Humanity Institute (FHI) is a unique multidisciplinary research institute at the University of Oxford, and is directed by Professor Nick Bostrom. The Institute's mission is to bring excellent scholarship to bear on big-picture questions for humanity. FHI is part of the James Martin 21<sup>st</sup> Century School, and is hosted by the Oxford Faculty of Philosophy.
4. The Institute's work centres on developments that may affect the human condition in fundamental ways – and how we can better understand, evaluate, and respond to radical change. The Institute currently pursues research in four areas:
  - *Global catastrophic risks*: What are the biggest threats to global civilization and human well-being? How can the human species survive the 21st century?
  - *Applied epistemology and rationality*: How can we make better decisions under conditions of profound uncertainty and high stakes? How can we reduce bias and human error in our decision making?
  - *Human enhancement*: How can medicine and technology be used to enhance basic biological capacities, such as cognition and lifespan? Can such enhancement be justified?
  - *Future technologies*: What would be the impacts of potentially transformative technologies such as advanced nanotechnology and artificial intelligence?
5. The postholder will be expected to work independently to develop and implement a programme of research. The area of specialization is open, but the candidate must show that his or her research interests are directly related to one or more of the Institute's focus areas. Examples of potentially relevant academic backgrounds and research directions include – *but are not limited to* – the following:
  - *Bayesian probability theory*—e.g. observation selection effects; sophisticated probabilistic evaluation of various forms of relevant uncertainty
  - *Applied ethics*—e.g. human enhancement ethics; questions of prioritization among world problems
  - *Cognitive psychology or evolutionary psychology*—e.g. human cognitive biases; evaluative attitudes to technology, global risks, or human enhancement
  - *Neuroscience*—e.g. neurological bases of biases and epistemic performance; neuro-enhancement

- *Economic history or economic growth theory*— can we model the impacts of various hypothetical technological breakthroughs?
  - *Econometrics*—finding data and using econometric methods to estimate the impact of various factors and events that might have a significant global influence
  - *Moral philosophy*—e.g. fundamental moral uncertainty; population ethics; axiological questions related to “posthuman” modes of being
  - *Computer science*—e.g. likelihood and timing of machine superintelligence; friendly AI
  - *Foundations of physics or cosmology*—e.g. anthropic reasoning; the Fermi paradox
  - *Applied epistemology*—e.g. methods and criteria for judging the probability of futuristic scenarios and hypotheses
  - *Philosophy of technology*—e.g. frameworks for analyzing and evaluating future technological possibilities;
  - *Risk analysis*—assessment of global catastrophic risks; assessment of dual-use technologies; risk-risk analysis
  - *Technology assessment*—assessment of capabilities of potential future transformative technologies
  - *Sociology or philosophy of science*—e.g. developing paradigms for how the kinds of “big picture questions” that FHI is interested in could be investigated more fruitfully by the academic community; effects of possible rise of a “transparent society” through surveillance technologies.
6. The postholder will also be expected to provide research assistance to the Institute’s Director, Professor Nick Bostrom, and to contribute in other ways to the Institute’s activities. This may include, for example: communicating with policy makers and representing the Institute to various constituencies; engaging in public outreach efforts; developing grant applications; engaging in collaborations with external researchers; organising conferences and other events (with the help of dedicated administrative staff).
7. The postholder may also be required to perform some occasional duties for the Faculty of Philosophy, such as examining. He or she may have the opportunity to undertake some limited amount of lecturing, tutorial teaching, and graduate supervision.
8. The salary offered for this post will be on the University’s Grade 7, which at 1 October 2008 is £28,839 - £38,757 *per annum*. Some funding would be provided for research expenditures.
9. This position offers excellent opportunities for career advancement. All previous holders of comparable positions within the Institute have gone on directly to permanent academic posts at universities in the UK and abroad. There might also be additional opportunities within the Institute itself.

### **Eligibility and selection criteria**

9. The successful candidate must demonstrate:

#### *Essential*

- (i) a record of, or evidence of potential for producing exceptional academic research, including the capacity to produce works fit for publication in leading academic journals in his or her field;
- (ii) outstanding intellectual calibre, including the ability to engage insightfully across the range of the Institute’s focus areas;
- (iii) expertise in at least one academic area relevant to the Institute’s mission (see paragraph 4 above)
- (iv) excellent English writing skills;
- (v) ability and willingness to undertake administration for the FHI and the Philosophy Faculty.
- (vi) by the date of appointment, candidates should have received (or be close to completion of) the degree of PhD (or equivalent), or attained a comparable level of publications.

*Desirable*

- (vii) experience of managing academic research programmes and in writing or contributing to successful grant applications;
10. This post might be suitable for somebody who has already completed a first postdoctoral position or who is at an early- to mid-level stage of their career.

**How to apply**

11. Applications must reach the James Martin Projects Officer, Mrs Nancy Patel, by post or email **no later than midnight on 14 October 2009.**

Suite 8, Littlegate House, Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford, 16-17 St Ebbes Street, Oxford, OX1 1PT. UK

Tel: + 44 1865 286279

Email: [fhi@philosophy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:fhi@philosophy.ox.ac.uk)

12. Applications must consist of the following materials:
- (a) a curriculum vitae and a list of publications;
  - (b) a covering letter explaining how the candidate meets the eligibility and selection criteria for the scheme;
  - (c) an application cover sheet.
13. (a) Following the initial application stage, some candidates will be asked to provide samples of written work, and the names and contact details of two academic referees (at least one of whom should be from outside Oxford University). This request will follow at a later date, and will be made by the James Martin Projects Officer.
- (b) Interviews will be held as soon as possible after the closing date. All reasonable interview expenses will be reimbursed. Candidates shortlisted for interview will be asked to give a short presentation as part of the assessment process. Full details will be made available to short-listed candidates.
14. All data supplied by applicants will be used only for the purposes of determining their suitability for the post and will be held in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's Data Protection Policy.
15. Applications for this post will be considered by a selection committee containing representatives of the Future of Humanity Institute and the Faculty of Philosophy. The selection committee is responsible for conducting all aspects of the recruitment and selection process; it does not, however, have the authority to make the final decision as to who should be appointed. The final decision will be made by the Philosophy Faculty Board on the basis of a recommendation made by the selection committee (this does not imply that the applicant must have a philosophy background).

**The Future of Humanity Institute**

16. Founded in 2005, the Future of Humanity Institute is a unique multidisciplinary research institute at the University of Oxford. Its mission is to bring excellent scholarship to bear on big-picture questions for humanity. The Institute is hosted by the Faculty of Philosophy and is part of the James Martin 21<sup>st</sup> Century School.
17. The Institute's research staff is recruited from a variety of fields, including physics, neuroscience, economics, computer science, and philosophy. Several have an academic background in more than

one discipline. Although its primary activity is research, the Institute also maintains a number of open discussion forums and works to promote public understanding and engagement. Its staff is frequently asked to advise governments and other public bodies, businesses, and NGOs, and regularly provide commentary in the media.

18. FHI is an intellectually very stimulating environment. The postholder will be a valued member of small, dedicated, highly dynamic group of researchers with close links to numerous other departments and research groups within Oxford University. FHI's research has been published in the very best journals in several fields (*Nature*; *Physical Review*; *Lancet*; *Ethics*; *Journal of Philosophy*, etc.) The post may appeal especially to those who wish to engage with grand questions or make a difference to the world; and to those who, while capable of performing to the highest standards within a narrow academic discipline, have intellectual interests that transcend some traditional academic specialization.
19. Candidates are encouraged to visit the websites of the Institute ([www.fhi.ox.ac.uk](http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk)) and of its director, Professor Nick Bostrom ([www.nickbostrom.com](http://www.nickbostrom.com)) where further information about the Institute's work and topics of investigation can be found.

### **The James Martin 21<sup>st</sup> Century School**

20. The James Martin 21<sup>st</sup> Century School fosters innovative thinking, deep scholarship, and collaborative activity to address the most pressing risks and to harvest new opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was founded at the University of Oxford in 2005 with a US\$100 million endowment from internet entrepreneur James Martin. In March 2009, the School launched a new \$50 million matched funding campaign called the James Martin 21st Century Challenge Fund.
21. The School's fifteen Institutes are home to interdisciplinary research teams from across the University. They work on a wide range of topics of global significance in the fields of health, climate change and other frontiers of science and society. By stimulating cutting-edge research, intellectual exchange and public debate, the School aims to enhance the management of systemic risks and to leverage the opportunities arising from technological and social innovations. A key aim of the School's work is to ensure that research findings and outputs reach significant audiences, influence policy and effect positive change.
22. The 21st Century School is designed along a hub and spokes model, where the central 'hub', led by Dr Ian Goldin, provides strategic guidance, leadership and support — as well as outreach and administration — for the research institute 'spokes'. The School also hosts the Policy Foresight Programme, led by Sir Crispin Tickell. The Programme organises seminars and special meetings on issues of science, technology, and the environment to identify leverage points in current policy that could have significant long-term benefits for civilization.

### **The Faculty of Philosophy**

23. The Philosophy Faculty has over 125 academic members, all of whom are undertaking teaching and/or research in Philosophy at Oxford. Of these, around 55 hold permanent posts within the Faculty; many distinguished philosophers hold posts elsewhere in the University. Oxford thus contains the largest group of philosophers in the UK, and one of the largest in the world. It has a vigorous research culture: the results of the 2008 RAE show that in Philosophy Oxford had more than twice as much research activity at the highest quality level (4\*) as any other department in the UK. Each year, many distinguished philosophers from around the world visit Oxford to give lectures and seminars. There are approximately 1,200 students studying Philosophy at undergraduate level, always in combination with at least one other subject. The courses available are: Philosophy, Politics, and

Economics (PPE); Literae Humaniores (Philosophy, Classical Languages and Literature, and Ancient History); Psychology and Philosophy; Philosophy and Theology; Philosophy and Modern Languages; Mathematics and Philosophy; and Physics and Philosophy. There are approximately 115 graduate students in Philosophy, of whom around half are studying for the two-year BPhil or one-year MSts, and the rest for the DPhil. A list of current Faculty members and their research interests can be found on the Philosophy Faculty website at: <http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk>.

24. The Philosophy Faculty Centre at 10 Merton Street houses the Philosophy Library, which is managed by the Bodleian Library. The Philosophy Library houses over 25,000 volumes and has an extensive collection of periodicals and on-line access to many philosophical databases. The University's central library, the Bodleian, is one of five copyright libraries in the UK. It holds 6,500,000 volumes and offers a unique research facility to members of the University.

### **Professional and career development**

25. A mentor for the postholder will be appointed from amongst the senior academic staff of the Philosophy Faculty. The mentor will provide advice and guidance to the postholder on the direction and focus of his or her research, and where appropriate on lecturing skills, on tutorial teaching, and on relevant Faculty practices. The mentor will also be in a position to provide advice to the postholder at the stage when he or she is applying for permanent academic posts.
26. The postholder will have the opportunity to meet with a professional development adviser from the University's Oxford Learning Institute and to make use of the Learning Institute's well-developed programme of courses for academic and research staff and fellows.
27. The postholder will also have access to career development advice via the University Careers Service, including one-to-one sessions with a careers adviser specialising in the career needs of academic and research staff, career planning and interview skills workshops, and access to information resources.

### **Terms and conditions**

28. The postholder will be an employee of the University of Oxford. The salary offered will be on the University's Grade 7, which at 1 October 2008 is £28,839 - £38,757 *per annum*. The starting point on the scale will reflect qualifications and experience. The postholder will be eligible to join the Universities Superannuation Scheme. Subject to the Statement of Pensions Policy, each appointee will be deemed to be in membership of the above pension scheme until such time as he or she gives notice in writing to exercise the right not to be a member of the scheme.
29. The postholder will be entitled to 38 days of paid leave in a full leave year (which runs from 1 October), but will not be entitled to apply for sabbatical leave.
30. The University encourages links with industry and other outside bodies. Although the holding of outside appointments such as consultancies must be approved by the head of department or equivalent, no limit as such is set on the amount of money individuals may receive in this way. The criterion is the amount of time such appointments take up: a maximum of 30 days *per annum* may be spent on such activities before any salary deduction is considered.
31. The *Statutes and Regulations* of the University record the extent of the University's claims to intellectual property, and the proportions in which exploitation revenues are shared with researchers. Copies of the relevant extracts are available on request.
32. The University has three nurseries providing 150 places for the children of staff and students. The University also subsidises places for its staff at some other nurseries in Oxford. For more information and an application form, contact the childcare team at the University Offices, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD, tel: 01865 270238, email [childcare@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:childcare@admin.ox.ac.uk). Further details can be found on the University website at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/child/chc.html>.

33. For school-aged children, the University has an arrangement with a local playscheme that offers discounted prices for staff and students. The playscheme runs every school holiday including half-terms. For details of this and other childcare facilities in Oxfordshire contact the childcare team as above.
34. The appointment will be subject to satisfactory completion of a medical questionnaire and the provision of proof of the right to work in the UK. Applicants who would need work visas if appointed to the post are asked to note that under the UK's new points-based migration system they will need to demonstrate that they have sufficient points, and in particular that:
- (a) they have sufficient English language skills (evidenced by having passed a test in basic English, or coming from a majority English-speaking country, or having taken a degree taught in English); and
  - (b) that they have sufficient funds to maintain themselves and any dependents until they receive their first salary payment.

Further information is available from the Home Office website at:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/tier2/generalarrangements/eligibility/>

35. The policy and practice of the University of Oxford require that all members of staff are offered equal opportunities within employment and that entry into employment with the University and progression within employment will be determined only by personal merit and the application of criteria which are related to the duties of each particular post and the relevant salary structure. In all cases, ability to perform the job will be the primary consideration. Subject to statutory provisions, no applicant or member of staff will be treated less favourably than another because of his or her gender, marital or civil partnership status, sexual orientation, religion or belief, racial group, age or disability.

Where suitably qualified individuals are available, selection committees will contain at least one member of each sex.

## **Further information**

36. Further information about the University and the colleges can be found on the University's web site, <http://www.ox.ac.uk>. The University's Human Resources Strategy is also available on the web site at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/ps>. Information about the James Martin 21<sup>st</sup> Century School can be found at <http://www.21school.ox.ac.uk/>, and the Future of Humanity Institute can be found at: <http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/home>.