University of Reading

Human Resources

Job Description

Title	Details
Job title	Research Fellow (on rights of nature and governance of ecosystem engineering)
Department/Unit	School of Law
Job Type	Full-time, fixed-term
Grade	Grade 6
Accountable to	Marzia Briel
Vacancy reference	SRF54730

Purpose

We seek a motivated a research fellow to contribute to the Ethics and Social Responsibility platform for the "Accelerated Adaptation" programme funded by the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA). We are seeking to look beyond governance approaches that are based on a misplaced sense of human exceptionalism and, instead, are rooted in attitudes of deep care and reverence for nature. The project aims to embed a plural-value governance approach across the entire programme developing nature-centric governance approaches that treat nature itself as a stakeholder when assessing systemic risks in novel conservation and ecological engineering projects could introduce - from unintended ecological harm to eroded public trust. Underpinned by environmental law and nature-centric governance, the role involves developing transdisciplinary ethics and social responsibility methodologies, working with domain experts in novel environmental technologies (such as immunisation of trees against bacterial infection, genetic engineering of bacteria to defend against fungal diseases and seed priming to engineer early drought-tolerance).

Team Structure

Reporting to Marzia Briel (University of Reading, School of Law) and Dr Joanna Smallwood (University of Sussex, School of Law), you will be working with a cross-disciplinary team of social change practitioners and academics (from diverse disciplines including ecology, law, ethics, biotech regulation and governance) to embed 'nature-centric' approaches to govern environmental solutions. You will also be part of a project team of Adrian Ely (University of Sussex) and Tom Oliver (University of Reading) and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. You will collaborate closely with another researcher who will be hired in parallel at Sussex, focusing on the regulation and systemic risk assessment of the approaches being pioneered in the programme.

Main duties and responsibilities

©University of Reading 2026

The post-holder will:

- Collaborate with ARIA and the funded project teams working on novel conservation approaches, social change practitioners and academics (from diverse disciplines) to embed successful 'nature-centric' ways to govern into the programme.
- Translate conceptual research into practical approaches, critically engaging scientific terminology and literature relating to genetic engineering, gene editing and ecological adaptation.
- Work confidently with technical research teams, identify questions relevant to ecological risk and uncertainty, and translate scientific evidence into governance considerations.
- Produce high-quality research outputs for publication in monographs or recognised high-quality journals, or performance/exhibition, as appropriate, and contribute to the School's REF submission at acceptable levels of volume and academic excellence, communicating project outputs for academic and other audiences.
- Assist with day-to-day project organisation to assist in co-ordinating this public facing project, report writing and project scoping.
- Assist in planning immersive nature-governance and risk assessment workshops, where you will identify and contact participants, synthesise literature in preparation for these, and help coordinate the events.
- Assist in developing funding applications for the next phase of this project.
- Build an exciting network of international contacts in this pioneering field as well as contributing to public outreach work (e.g. attending conferences).

Supervision received

The post is line managed by Marzia Briel, with collaboration from Dr Joanna Smallwood (University of Sussex). The University of Reading runs mentorship schemes and has a wide range of training options for continued professional development.

Contact

It is expected that the post holder will collaborate with project partners on the ARIA Accelerated Adaptation progamme.

Terms and conditions

Full time, 21-month position. Start date 1st January 2027. Some weekend working may be necessary to achieve objectives prior to important project milestones.

Some travel for workshops, to project stakeholders and ARIA programme meetings required.

The post-holder will be employed at the School of Law on the Whiteknights campus of the University of Reading. Flexible working arrangements considered, but we expect the Research Associate to be present at the University of Reading or the University of Sussex for at least 50% of the time.

This document outlines the duties required for the time being of the post to indicate the level of responsibility. It is not a comprehensive or exhaustive list and the line manager may vary duties from time to time which do not change the general character of the job or the level of responsibility entailed.

Date assessed: October 2026

©University of Reading 2026

Person Specification

Job Title	School/Department
Research Fellow (on rights of nature and governance of ecosystem engineering)	**School of Law**

Which stage these Criteria be assessed
A = Application
I = Interview
P = Sample writing to be shared

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Skills Required	• Literature synthesis and writing (A & I) • Ability to conduct desk-based research (A) • Team working (I)	• Events planning (A & I) • Science communication (A & I) • Project management (A & I) • Capable of working with diverse experts working as a translator between highly technical academic fields (e.g., conservation biology, environmental law) and practical actors (science innovators) (I)
Attainment	• PhD (or near PhD completion*) or equivalent experience in biodiversity and ecological restoration, conservation genetics, applied ethics or a closely related discipline (A & I)	
Knowledge	• Experience in Environmental law and regulation (A & I) • Interdisciplinary experience - e.g. work experience, interdisciplinary doctoral research, previous scientific training or relevant research experience (A & I)	• Experience in nature-centric governance (A & I) • Systems thinking (I)
Relevant Experience	• Working in a team project towards a common goal (I) • Report writing (A & I)	• Working with multiple types of stakeholder or participatory processes (A & I) • Interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary project experience (A & I)

©University of Reading 2026

Other	• Highly motivated (I) • Good organisation (I) • Able to work independently and in a team (A & I)	

Completed by: Marzia Briel

Date: 22 October 2026