



Policy on Postdoctoral Fellows

Classification:	Research & Human Resources
Responsible Authority:	Associate Vice-President, Research Graduate and Professional Studies (AVPRGPS)
Executive Sponsor:	Academic Vice-President and Provost (AVP)
Approval Authority:	Academic Vice-President and Provost
Date First Approved:	January 28, 2026
Date Last Reviewed:	N/A
Mandatory Review Date:	January 28, 2029

PURPOSE

As part of its efforts to advance research, scholarship and creative activity, St. Francis Xavier University ("StFX" or the "University") encourages opportunities for faculty members and academic departments to host Postdoctoral Fellows (PDFs). They are advanced research colleagues that should be given every opportunity to participate in the academic life of their Department and Faculty.

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures surrounding the appointment of Postdoctoral Fellows who will receive payment through the University, through a faculty member's research grant, or who are being paid by external funding sources (e.g., fellowships).

SCOPE

This Policy applies to Postdoctoral Fellows (as defined below) and hosting faculty members.

Should there be a conflict between this document and a Collective Agreement between the University and one of its employee groups the applicable Collective Agreement will govern. Where the policies of agencies funding externally funded PDFs conflict with this Policy, the policies of the external agency will govern.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Policy, the following definitions will apply:

Postdoctoral Fellows	A Postdoctoral Fellow (PDF) is an individual who has completed a doctoral degree, normally within the previous five (5) years and has been awarded support in the form of a fellowship provided by an external agency (externally funded) or through research grants or contracts held by StFX faculty members (internally funded). The duration of the postdoctoral fellowship is for a limited period and, normally, will not exceed a period of three (3) years. Postdoctoral fellowships are intended to provide an opportunity for researchers to carry on their individual research with StFX
----------------------	---

	faculty members, to participate in research, teaching, and supervisory activities carried out at StFX, and to strengthen their publication and teaching records, thereby enhancing their future opportunities for research and teaching.
Externally Funded Postdoctoral Fellows	Externally funded PDFs are those who have secured funding from an external funding organization or a fellowship program which is external to the University and whose salary is paid wholly from such funding. External PDFs do not have an employment relationship with the University, unless they are teaching under a separate contract. They work independently under the mentorship of a supervising faculty member at StFX. They will have the option to opt into University health benefits.
Internally Funded Postdoctoral Fellows	Internally funded PDFs are those who are paid in whole or in part either from funds held by a University faculty member or from the University's financial resources or a combination of the two. An internally funded PDF is an employee of the University and will have access to University health benefits to be paid out of the internal funds. This includes instances where financial support for the PDF comes from a combination of internal and external sources.
Supervisor	The faculty member (or other University employee) who is providing direct oversight to the PDF. For internally funded PDFs, this will generally be the faculty member holding the research fund(s).

POLICY

StFX considers Postdoctoral Fellows to be an integral part of the University and its mission. To recognize their contributions, the University offers PDFs services and benefits intended to meet their needs and enhance their experience. The University expects in return that PDFs will acknowledge their affiliation with the University in their publications and in their participation in scholarly meetings and endeavors.

1. PDFs must be hosted by a StFX employee (the Supervisor) who will be responsible for providing mentorship and supervision. Applicants for PDF positions must contact a researcher who shares their research interests.
2. Where a Supervisor wishes to recruit a PDF but does not already have a candidate, the Supervisor is required to fill the vacancy through open competition consistent with the University's *Fair Hiring Policy*.
3. Appointments for PDFs must be approved by the Office of the Associate Vice-President, Research, Graduate and Professional Studies ("AVPRGPS"). Appointment letters are issued by the AVPRGPS.
Appointment letters shall comply with the templates established by People and Culture and will contain conditions of the appointment, including the effective dates, payment of stipends or other costs, and any special duties associated with the position.
4. PDFs are required to adhere to all applicable St. Francis Xavier University policies and procedures including but not limited to research, financial services, procurement, ethical compliance and research integrity policies.

5. Internally funded PDFs are considered employees of the University. The minimum terms and conditions of employment for internally funded PDFs will be established by the Office of the AVPRGPS in consultation with People and Culture. The minimum terms and conditions are included in this Policy as Appendix A. Terms and conditions of employment may be amended from time to time and such amendments will automatically apply to internally funded PDFs.
6. Externally funded PDFs are not considered to be employees of the University, unless they are teaching under a separate contract. The terms and conditions of appointment are included in this Policy as Appendix B. These terms and conditions may be amended from time to time and such amendments will automatically apply to externally funded PDFs.
7. Discipline or termination of internally funded PDFs will follow standard University practices for employees. Terminations must be compliant with the *Labour Standards Code*. Discipline or termination of internally funded PDFs requires prior approval from the AVPRGPS and People and Culture.
8. Termination of externally funded PDFs may occur at any time and requires approval from the AVPRGPS.

APPOINTMENT OF NON-CANADIANS/PERMANENT RESIDENTS

Postdoctoral Fellows who are not Canadian Citizens or Permanent Residents must obtain legal authorization to work in Canada no later than the start date of their appointment and maintain such status for the duration of their Postdoctoral Fellowship in accordance with the immigration laws of Canada as contained in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*. It is the sole responsibility of the PDF to meet all immigration requirements. Should there be delays in obtaining the appropriate legal authorizations, PDFs may request a deferral to their start date subject to the approval of the PDF Supervisor and the AVPGPS.

Supervisors hosting non-Canadian/Permanent Resident Postdoctoral Fellows will contact People and Culture no later than three months prior to the arrival of the PDF to ensure time for immigration processing. For internally funded PDFs, the Supervisor will be responsible for the Employer Compliance Fee charged as part of the immigration process and may be responsible for additional fees related to resolving legal or compliance costs related to the immigration process. For externally funded PDFs, the University will be responsible for the Employer Compliance Fee charged as part of the immigration process and may be responsible for additional fees related to resolving legal or compliance costs related to the immigration process, subject to approval by the AVPRGPS.

PROCEDURES

PRIOR TO OFFER OF APPOINTMENT

A Supervisor wishing to facilitate the appointment of a PDF must first consult with their Department Chair, Dean, and the AVPRGPS in order to discuss the nature of the research project, the resources to be made available to the PDF (e.g., office and laboratory space, travel funds, etc.), stipend or salary payments, and any other special requirements. Following approval from the Dean, the Supervisor must submit the [Request to Appoint a Postdoctoral Fellow form](#) to the Office of the AVPRGPS.

Funding for PDFs is normally provided from sources other than StFX's operating budget. PDFs are normally funded from grants or contracts held by StFX faculty members, from external sources, or from competitive fellowship programs, including NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR or national research funding agencies in other countries.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT – ALL PDFs

1. Appointment Letters for any PDFs will be issued by the AVPGPS (even if they are paid from a faculty research grant). This letter will clearly outline the terms of appointment, financial terms, and specific benefits offered to the PDF, as well as information on the PDF's rights and responsibilities. A copy of this Policy must be enclosed with the Appointment Letter and the prospective PDF must be advised that the Policy in its entirety applies to their appointment.
2. For Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents:
 - a. Acceptance of the appointment in writing by the PDF must be received by the University one month prior to the commencement of the PDF's term.
 - b. Before taking up the appointment, the PDF must submit the required personal information to People and Culture including their Social Insurance Number.
3. For Non-Canadians/Permanent Residents:
 - a. PDFs may be awarded to non-Canadians/Permanent Residents. Acceptance of the appointment in writing by the PDF must be received at least three months prior to the commencement of the PDF's term.
 - b. People and Culture will submit the required paperwork to IRCC to allow the PDF to apply for a Work Permit. The PDF must supply the required information to support their application along with their signed offer letter.
 - c. Before commencing their appointment, the PDF must submit the required personal information to People and Culture (including Social Insurance Number and Work Permit) and ensure all immigration documentation is in place. The PDF is not permitted to begin work until a Work Permit is issued by IRCC.
 - d. PDFs may request up to two deferrals of their start dates based on Visa or Work Permit delays subject to the approval of the Supervisor and the AVPRGPS.
4. Though a completed doctoral degree is required before PDFs may take up their positions, a conditional Offer of Appointment may be sent to candidates who are able to demonstrate that they are able to submit their dissertation in time for a successful defence to take place prior to the commencement of their appointment. In such cases, evidence of submission (before the offer may be sent) and evidence of a successful defence (before the taking up of the position) will be required; non-compliance will result in the withdrawal of the Offer of Appointment.
5. A PDF who is a holder of an external funding award is normally directly responsible to a faculty member who has agreed to act as Supervisor.
6. The Supervisor(s) should give reasonable notice (normally 3 months) to a PDF of the intention to renew or not renew an appointment in cases where the initial appointment offer was for a period of less than three (3) years. Supervisors must arrange any extension to initial PDF appointments through the Office of the AVPRGPS. A renewal appointment letter will be issued by the AVPRGPS on approval.
7. StFX retains the right to terminate with or without cause at its discretion. For internally funded PDFs, entitlements on termination will be limited to those outlined in the *Labour Standards Code* and their employment agreement. Normal costs related to termination of a PDF will be charged to the Supervisor(s) research account(s).
8. The Office of the AVPRGPS is responsible for providing information to Departments/Faculties and to PDFs on institutional policies and procedures.
9. A registry of PDFs will be established by the Office of the AVPRGPS. All appropriate documentation (Offer of Appointment Letter; C.V.; S.I.N.; employment authorization for non-Canadian PDFs; and any other relevant information) should be submitted to and maintained by People and Culture.

TEACHING

It may be possible for PDFs to teach on a part-time basis at either the undergraduate or graduate levels. Employment as a Part-Time Academic Instructor is governed by the Collective Agreement between the University and the St. Francis Xavier Association of University Teachers (StFX AUT). Normally the maximum teaching load will be the equivalent of one (1) 3 credit course subject to the University's Secondary Appointment Policy. PDFs who teach on a part-time basis for the University will be subject to a separate contract as any other Part-Time Academic Instructor.

GRIEVANCES AND COMPLAINTS

The University is committed to resolving PDFs' concerns, problems and/or disagreements quickly and fairly. This process is intended to provide an orderly and standard administrative process by which employees may seek resolution of differences that may arise concerning their terms and conditions of employment or other work-related matters.

- **Informal Resolution:** A PDF should first discuss the concern with their Supervisor as soon as possible following the incident/concern. The Supervisor shall respond in writing within seven (7) business days.
- **Formal Resolution**
 - **Step 1:** Within ten (10) business days of the Informal Resolution response, the PDF may submit the matter to the Department Chair (or the Dean, if the PDF is responsible to the Chair) in writing. The Chair/Dean will hold a meeting with the PDF and the Supervisor. A representative of People and Culture may attend at the request of any participant to assist in resolving the dispute. The Chair/Dean will then reply in writing within ten (10) business days of the meeting.
 - **Step 2:** Within ten (10) business days of the decision in Step 1, the PDF may submit the concern in writing to the AVPRGPS. The AVPRGPS will review the situation and may, if they deem it necessary, meet with the involved parties. The AVPRGPS will issue their decision regarding the matter within fifteen (15) business days. The AVPRGPS' decision is final.

The above dispute resolution process does not apply in cases of:

- discipline and/or termination of employment;
- harassment or discrimination;
- sexual violence; or,
- where a PDF decides to take separate legal action related to the matter.

Nothing in this process precludes an PDF from discussing problems, personal or job related, with their Supervisor, Chair, Dean, AVPRGPS, People and Culture or Human Rights and Equity as appropriate.

CERTIFICATIONS

PDFs must ensure that any human and/or animal research is covered under the appropriate StFX guidelines and that appropriate certification approvals are obtained.

AUTHORSHIP AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Academic achievement is measured by the publication of one's research and/or the transfer and commercialization of research discoveries. PDFs are to receive credit and recognition for the publication of their research and/or credit and appropriate recognition for the transfer and commercialization of research discoveries. Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the individual PDF and the University, PDFs will retain ownership of all intellectual property rights in their work (solely when the PDF has created it individually and jointly when it has been created by the joint efforts of the PDF and one or more members of the University), except for certain specific cases such as, for example, where a PDF is working under a University research contract in which intellectual property is otherwise stipulated. The University shall have a non-exclusive, royalty-free right to the internal use of all such intellectual property.

The AVPRGPS will act as a resource and attempt to resolve disputes regarding authorship and intellectual property rights. Disputes regarding Intellectual Property rights not involving StFX AUT members will be addressed via the dispute resolution process above. Disputes involving StFX AUT members will be addressed pursuant to Article 2.11:4.0 – 4.4 of the Collective Agreement.

RELATED POLICIES

- [StFX Research Integrity Policy](#)
- [StFX Travel Policy](#)
- [StFX Fair Hiring Policy](#)

RELATED MATERIALS

Other University policies consulted in the preparation of this policy:

University of New Brunswick; University of Guelph; McMaster University.

APPENDIX A: TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT FOR INTERNALLY FUNDED POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

MINIMUM STIPEND AND TERM LIMIT

1. The University will strive for consistency regarding the minimum and maximum stipends for PDFs, which will be established by office of AVPGRS and reviewed at least every 3 years. Supervisors are free to negotiate a stipend amount for their PDF position.
2. In cases where the level or conditions of the award differ markedly from those of the Tri-Agencies, a written rationale and explanation must be provided and approved by the AVPRGPS.
3. The maximum length of appointment for a PDF is three (3) years.
4. PDFs will be paid bi-weekly via the StFX payroll system. Payroll and hiring forms associated with the appointment letter must be submitted prior to the start of the appointment.
5. Employer costs for statutory deductions (including EI and CPP) and any other benefits will be charged to the Supervisor's research account.

HOURS OF WORK

1. Due to the nature of PDF work, the hours of work must be flexible. The normal work week for a Postdoctoral Fellow employed on a full-time basis will be 37.5 hours per week. Supervisors and PDFs are required to work together to establish a work plan which is reasonable and can be accomplished while maintaining a reasonable work-life balance.
2. PDFs are entitled to overtime and breaks in accordance with the *Labour Standards Code*. All overtime must be approved by the Supervisor in advance. Overtime is normally taken as time in lieu during the term of an appointment. Payment of unused overtime at the end of an appointment will be charged to the Supervisor's research account(s).
3. Normally PDFs will be paid on a full-time basis, although part-time appointments may be made if approved in advance by the AVPRGPS or AVP.

BENEFITS

1. PDFs employed on contracts of more than twelve (12) months are entitled to participate in the University's benefit plans subject to plan eligibility. PDFs will be eligible for Long Term Disability and the Pension Plan following two years of consecutive employment.
2. PDFs employed on contracts of less than twelve (12) months are not eligible for benefits or pension unless they have consecutive appointments that extend beyond twelve (12) months.
3. Eligible Non-Canadian/Permanent Resident PDFs are required to obtain medical coverage through Nova Scotia's MSI program. For MSI eligibility information, visit [MSI Eligibility | novascotia.ca](https://www.novascotia.ca/msi).

PDFs not eligible for MSI coverage must obtain alternate coverage through a third-party insurance provider. Information on options for third-party medical insurance providers is available from People and Culture. Verification of coverage must be provided to People and Culture. The cost of third-party insurance is the responsibility of the PDF (though can be covered by the Supervisor).

VACATION

1. PDFs employed for more than twelve consecutive (12) months (or on renewal beyond an initial twelve-month term) are entitled to fifteen (15) days of vacation per vacation year (July to June). These vacation days are accrued at a rate of 1.25 days per month but are available in full as of July 1 each year. Vacation entitlements will be prorated based on the start date and for appointments of less than 12 months per year. No vacation carryover is permitted.
2. Should an employee leave the University's employment having taken more vacation time than earned in that vacation year, the overage amount will be withheld on the final pay.
3. While employed at the University, there will be no payout of vacation accrual or pay in lieu of vacation entitlement not used.
4. PDFs employed for less than twelve (12) months will receive vacation pay in accordance with the *Labour Standards Code*.

HOLIDAYS

1. PDFs will be entitled to paid holidays in accordance with the University's holiday schedule for Managerial and Professional Employees.
2. PDFs will also receive additional designated days off with pay to coincide with the University's December/January closure period to provide uninterrupted time off. PDFs scheduled to work on these days will be granted a day off with pay at some other time.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE

1. Sick Leave
 - a. PDFs employed for twelve (12) or more consecutive months are entitled to accrue sick leave at a rate of one and one-half (1.5) days per month of employment.
 - b. PDFs employed for less than twelve (12) consecutive months are entitled to unpaid sick leave pursuant to the *Labour Standards Code*.
2. Other Leaves
 - a. PDFs are entitled to other leaves in accordance with the *Labour Standards Code* including pregnancy and parental leave, compassionate care leave, domestic violence leave, and bereavement leave.

PROBATIONARY PERIOD, WORK PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

The University requires each PDF to complete a probationary period of three (3) months. The probationary period allows the University and the PDF to assess the ongoing relationship. At the end of the probationary period, the Supervisor will conduct a performance evaluation.

Supervisors will, at the start of the PDF appointment, determine a work plan with the PDF. The work plan should outline the expected outcomes the PDF is intended to meet, the support provided by the Supervisor and should be focused on the PDF's development as a researcher. The plan must be provided to the PDF in writing, with a copy provided to the AVPRGPS's office

Supervisors will conduct, prior to July 1 each year, a performance review to provide feedback to the PDF on their performance and development as a researcher. A copy of the performance review must be provided to the PDF in writing, with a copy provided to the AVPRGPS's office

In the rare instance where unsolvable conflicts may arise between a PDF and a Supervisor, the PDF may request a change in Supervisor to the AVPRGPS. If the AVPRGPS is unable to mediate the dispute between PDF and Supervisor, every reasonable effort will be made to place the PDF under another Supervisor without disrupting the PDF's funding. This will involve, but is not limited to, establishing 1) a clear specification of the remaining required research to be completed 2) a revised schedule for the completion of these requirements 3) new funding arrangements, when applicable and possible, and 4) intellectual property and publication authorship arrangements when the research is connected to the former Supervisor's ongoing program of research. Any changes to the supervision of externally funded fellowships will follow any relevant policies (e.g., Tri-Council policies).

TERMINATION

A PDF wishing to resign from the University should give at least four weeks' notice to their Supervisor. The University will calculate and pay the earned but unused vacation and overtime accrued to the last day of employment.

The University may terminate the employment of a PDF without cause by providing such notice and entitlements as may be required by the *Labour Standards Code*.

Supervisors proposing to discipline or terminate a PDF (with or without cause) must discuss this with People and Culture and the AVPRGPS prior to taking any action.

APPENDIX B: TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT FOR EXTERNALLY FUNDED POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

REMUNERATION

Externally Funded PDFs are eligible for participation in the University's benefit subject to review and approval of the AVPRGPS and subject to meeting the terms and conditions of the applicable plan. Externally funded PDFs are not eligible for pension or long-term disability insurance.

TERMINATION

A PDF wishing to resign from the University should give at least four weeks' notice to their Supervisor. The University may terminate an Externally Funded PDF appointment without notice. Departments or Supervisors proposing to terminate a PDF appointment must discuss this with the AVPRGPS prior to taking any action.