

# Janet Fisher

**Chancellor's Fellow  
School of GeoSciences**



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## Being a Chancellor's Fellow

I am a Chancellor's Fellow in the School of GeoSciences. This is largely a research-oriented role, particularly in the early years of the Fellowship, and I have gradually taken on other areas of responsibility over the two and a half years that I have been in post. My current areas of responsibility can be summarised as follows:

1. Contributions as a Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator to 4 grants.
2. Supervising five PhD students (as 2nd supervisor) and co-supervising two postdoctoral researchers.
3. Convening a Masters level module and making contributions to about four undergraduate modules in the School.
4. Supervising dissertation research at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
5. Personal tutoring of around 20 pre-honours undergraduates.

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## A typical week

In a typical week, I will spend about up to six hours teaching, in a range of different interactions: lectures, tutorials, and workshops. I will typically have meetings about the progression of research work, with colleagues in Edinburgh and over Skype with collaborators elsewhere. I will also have research supervision meetings with postdoctoral researchers, research students and dissertation students. The rest of the time I work on various different research themes, writing, undertaking empirical research, planning next stages, and reading literature.

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## My career journey

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| <b>Oct 2013 – date</b>     | Chancellor's Fellow (GeoSciences, University of Edinburgh)   |
| <b>Jun 2012 – Sep 2013</b> | Lecturer – Environmental Social Science (Environment and Sustainability Institute, University of Exeter) |
| <b>Feb 2011 – Mar 2012</b> | Postdoctoral Research Associate (GeoSciences, University of Edinburgh)                                   |
| <b>2011</b>                | PhD in International Development (University of East Anglia)   |
| <b>2007</b>                | MSc Environment and International Development (Distinction, University of East Anglia)                   |
- During these three years between my undergraduate degree and the start of my Masters programme in 2006, I worked as an outdoors instructor in the Scottish Highlands.
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| <b>2003</b> | BSc Biology and Geography within the Natural Sciences programme (First Class; University of Durham) |
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## What has helped me progress

I think the following things have been influential in my career path:

1. I work in a topical area of research, and an area that has received relatively high levels of UK government support and funding.
  2. My networks have been quite important in getting jobs (my lectureship position held at Exeter University, and then this Chancellor's Fellowship I am now in), and securing research funding in collaborative grants with more senior collaborators.
  3. A couple of key successes were useful, I think, in securing jobs as a very early career researcher – these were an award for my masters, and the publication of a paper based on my masters thesis.
  4. I did my Masters and PhD in a department that is highly regarded in my field and this enabled me to establish good networks and supportive collaborations with well known people in the field.
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## Supportive people

I have had a lot of support from more senior colleagues. The following things have been particularly important:

1. One of my PhD supervisors, in particular, is very highly regarded in our field, and I think this has helped me a lot, in networks, and in recognition of work.
  2. More senior colleagues/collaborators have helped me to secure a lectureship and then a fellowship, through references, recommendations and advice on the application process.
  3. Senior colleagues have been willing to partner with me on grants, to secure research funding.
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## Personal qualities needed for success

I think real determination is required to achieve a PhD, and this is an important test. I think that being able to cultivate good networks, particularly so that more senior people can vouch for the quality of your work is very important. I think the reality for most people is that you need to be prepared to work very long hours at times, in most disciplines. In terms of attitudes, I think that being able to demonstrate that you are fully taking responsibility for your work is important, so that others have confidence in it. The ability to think about things in novel and creative ways is also important.

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## The rewards

I find teaching extremely rewarding, particularly when (occasionally) a student tells you that they learnt something from you, or you changed the way they think about something. I find supervising research students very rewarding as it is possible to detect real progression over a number of years, and to see postgrads growing in confidence in their work is really heartening. I find research projects particularly rewarding when you see a change as a result of work you were involved in. I still also get excited to see a new paper out that I have contributed to.

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## The challenges

I sometimes find it hard to achieve a work/life balance. I am continually trying to learn how to manage my time better. As an early career researcher/lecturer, I think you often have to make a transition from being quite focused on one research area, to having to multitask more, across different grants, across research themes, and across teaching, research and admin. How to do this effectively, and still be able to focus sometimes in depth on one thing, is quite a skill, which I am only really starting to develop. I think there are also challenges in effectively strategising, knowing what to focus on next and what balance of grant writing (to develop new work), and grant delivery would be best.



## Taking the next steps

I am quite focused at the moment on the review I will have later this year as a Chancellor's Fellow, hoping to move into a permanent position at Edinburgh. If that goes smoothly, then I will hopefully be able to consolidate my portfolio of research and teaching and to think about some new research directions.

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## Supporting others

Being a research student and postdoc are quite fresh in my memory, so I hope I am reasonably attentive to this. I think there are a number of practical things to do here:

1. Ensure authorship is attributed fairly, and that students and postdocs get to lead-author work.
2. Encourage those I supervise to work on things they could usefully improve on, and help them to find opportunities to do so.
3. Help those I supervise to manage their time effectively to prioritise key things that will enable their career progression.
4. Use review processes to help those I supervise think about career paths and how they want to progress.
5. Make available research networks and introductions to those I supervise.
6. Offer honest advice about experience of careers, to help people to think in more detail about career progression and next stages.

