

Candidate Information

Position:	Research Fellow - Climate Adaptation & Horticulture
School/Department:	School of Biological Sciences
Reference:	26/113292
Closing Date:	Monday 18 May 2026
Salary:	£41,519 per annum
Anticipated Interview Date:	Thursday 28 May 2026
Duration:	Fixed term for 12 months or until 30 November 2027, whichever is soonest.

JOB PURPOSE:

To lead the initial development of a report and evidence portfolio that will help to inform a Horticultural Strategy for Northern Ireland as part of the Maximising UK Adaptation to Climate Change (MACC) Hub, funded by NERC and DEFRA.

The post holder will design and facilitate a structured programme of stakeholder engagement across Northern Ireland's horticultural sector, drawing on the Three Horizons framework to identify shared visions, barriers, and transition pathways for climate-adapted food production.

The post is hosted within the Co-Centre for Climate, Biodiversity and Water at Queen's University Belfast and will work in close partnership with the Climate NI Team at Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) and the MACC Hub coordination team, contributing to climate adaptation-focused knowledge sprints across all four jurisdictions of the UK.

The following describes the main responsibilities of this post. The post holder is expected to exercise initiative and professional judgement in discharging these duties, and to contribute flexibly to the broader objectives of the MACC Hub and the Co-Centre.

MAJOR DUTIES:

1. Design and deliver a structured programme of participatory stakeholder workshops using the Three Horizons framework, engaging with a minimum of four distinct stakeholder groups across Northern Ireland: small-scale growers and market gardeners; community-owned enterprises and social horticulture initiatives; supply chain experts, wholesalers and processors; and field-scale farmers, with particular attention to the differing agricultural, infrastructural and socioeconomic contexts across Northern Ireland.
2. Synthesise evidence from stakeholder engagement to identify shared visions, systemic barriers, leverage points, and priority actions for a climate-adapted horticultural sector in Northern Ireland, contributing to the development of a co-designed evidence portfolio that can inform a Horticultural Strategy for NI.
3. Contribute to the MACC Hub's programme of knowledge sprints in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, working closely with the Climate NI team at NIEL, the MACC Hub coordination team, and regional partners in all four jurisdictions to share learning on climate adaptation in the food and farming sector.
4. Produce high-quality written outputs including workshop reports, stakeholder syntheses, policy briefings and contributions to academic and grey literature, ensuring that findings are accessible to diverse audiences including farmers, community enterprises, supply chain actors and government.
5. Present progress and research findings to project partners, including the MACC Hub teams, Co-Centre partners, and external audiences, including policy stakeholders, third-sector organisations, and farming bodies.
6. Maintain close working relationships with the MACC Hub Team in Northern Ireland in NIEL, the Co-Centre team at Queen's University Belfast, contributing to the MACC Hub's wider research and engagement programme while ensuring clarity about the distinct MACC funding context and project mandate.
7. Assist the principal investigator and project team in reporting to NERC and DEFRA as required, including timely completion of project documentation, financial record-keeping, risk assessment, and progress reporting in line with funder requirements.

8. Maintain awareness of relevant academic literature, policy developments and sector practice in areas including climate adaptation, agroecology, horticulture, rural community development, just transition, and community wealth building.
9. Undertake occasional supervision or mentoring of students within the post holder's area of expertise, under the guidance of a senior academic.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA:

1. Have or be about to obtain* a relevant PhD in a discipline related to food systems, agri-food geography, rural sociology, environmental science, ecology, agriculture, horticulture or closely related field (*must be obtained within 3 months of commencement of employment).
2. Demonstrable experience of planning and delivering participatory or stakeholder engagement research, including workshop facilitation with diverse groups.
3. Experience of applying qualitative or mixed methods research approaches to food systems, agricultural transition, community development, or environmental management.
4. Ability to synthesise complex, multisource evidence into clear, policy-relevant outputs.
5. Willingness to contribute occasional undergraduate supervision or teaching within area of expertise.
6. Ability to manage own workload across multiple concurrent activities, including workshop scheduling, stakeholder coordination, travel, and reporting obligations
7. Demonstrable commitment to community engagement, public benefit, and knowledge exchange beyond academia.
8. Sound understanding of climate adaptation principles and their application in food, farming and land-use contexts.
9. Working knowledge of horticulture, market gardening, or field-scale vegetable production, including the practical realities facing growers and farmers.
10. Understanding of just transition frameworks, community wealth building, and the social dimensions of agricultural change, particularly in rural and post-industrial communities.
11. Ability to work constructively across political, cultural and sectoral divides, demonstrating sensitivity to the particular context of Northern Ireland.
12. Excellent written and oral communication skills, with the ability to convey complex evidence clearly and accessibly to diverse audiences including farmers, community groups, policymakers and academics.
13. Proven ability to design and facilitate group processes, including workshops, focus groups, or deliberative sessions, in ways that are inclusive, productive and sensitive to group dynamics.
14. Demonstrable intellectual curiosity and the ability to work across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries.
15. High degree of personal organisation, reliability and ability to work independently while remaining a collaborative and constructive team member.
16. Empathy and interpersonal sensitivity, particularly in engaging with farming communities, small-scale growers and community enterprises who may be experiencing economic pressure and uncertainty.
17. Commitment to the principles of climate justice, community resilience and the maintenance of rural livelihoods.
18. Holds a full and current driving licence with access to a suitable vehicle for travel throughout Northern Ireland, including rural and remote locations. This is an essential requirement of the post.
19. Willingness and ability to work flexibly, including evenings and occasional weekends, to accommodate the availability of farmers, growers and community stakeholders.
20. Willingness and ability to travel to England, Wales and Scotland as required to contribute to MACC Hub knowledge sprints and cross-jurisdictional activities (typically several times per year).

DESIRABLE CRITERIA:

1. Postgraduate training in participatory or qualitative research methods, facilitation, systems thinking, or stakeholder engagement.
2. Experience of using the Three Horizons framework or comparable fore-sighting and transition planning methodologies.
3. Familiarity with the Northern Ireland agrifood sector, rural community structures, or cross-jurisdictional policy environments.
4. Track record of contributing to peer-reviewed publications or equivalent knowledge products.
5. Some prior experience of undergraduate teaching, demonstrating, or postgraduate supervision.
6. Experience of contributing to funded research project administration, including budget monitoring, risk assessment, or funder reporting.
7. Involvement in community organisations, voluntary or third-sector groups, cooperative enterprises or similar.
8. Knowledge of relevant policy frameworks including the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework, NAP3 and NICCAP climate adaptation programmes, the Just Transition Fund for agriculture, and DAERA environmental programmes.
9. Familiarity with supply chain structures, cooperative business models, or community-owned food enterprises.

10. Experience of engaging stakeholders in challenging conversations on controversial issues.
11. Experience of producing policy briefings, plain-language summaries, or media communications.
12. Experience presenting at academic conferences or professional events.
13. Demonstrated interest in or connection with the Northern Ireland food, farming or natural environment sector.
14. Knowledge of Irish or Ulster Scots language or cultural context.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Informal enquiries may be directed to: Alex McMeekin at a.mcmeekin@qub.ac.uk