

JOB DESCRIPTION

Vacancy reference:	SRF36837
Post Title:	Research Officer [Farm Business Survey]
Grade:	5
School/Department:	Agriculture and Food Investigation Team (AFIT) School of Agriculture, Policy and Development (SAPD)
Reports to:	Richard Crane (Head of AFIT)

Purpose

Help realise the aims and objectives of the annual AFIT Workload Schedule with particular responsibility for actively managing farmers and growers who participate in the Farm Business Survey (FBS). The FBS is widely recognised as the most authoritative research survey on the financial position and business performance of farmers and growers. To assist with other Ad hoc studies undertaken periodically, and with operational tasks on an 'as required basis' and discharging delegated responsibilities, with a strong emphasis on actively assisting the *management and operations* more generally. There will also be the opportunity to be involved with some teaching activities, under the guidance of academic colleagues.

Main duties and responsibilities

The job will focus on the following key areas of work:

- The Farm Business Survey (FBS)
- Ad hoc studies
- Other support activities

Main Activities:

FBS

- Manage a sample of farmers and growers participating with the University of Reading in the FBS
- Collect, analyse, process farm business information and approve the results in consultation with the participating farmer or grower. This includes visiting farmers and growers at their businesses as well as other forms of contact
- Complete electronic spreadsheet returns for onward transmission to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- Write feedback reports to farmers and growers, providing benchmarking results to co-operators
- Assist with summarising aspects of the results of the annual FBS at year end
- Telephone canvassing of farmers and growers to join the FBS
- Help the team meet the range of other demands linked to challenging workload targets, to enable the delivery of contracts associated with the FBS and other studies undertaken

Ad hoc enquiries and studies

- Undertake farm level case study work
- Conduct telephone interviews
- Assist with responding to enquiries from internal and external sources as directed [E.g. colleagues within SAPD and more widely within the University, together with other land based stakeholders]

Other Support Activities

- IT activities; Access, Excel, Word and PowerPoint tasks
- Supporting academic colleagues in teaching activities
- Miscellaneous tasks and delegated responsibilities

You may find these Web addresses of interest:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/AFIT/>

<http://www.farmbusinesssurvey.co.uk/>

Supervision received

ROs report formally to the Head of AFIT.

Contact

Farmers and growers in South East, Central Southern England and the West Midlands, various stakeholders of the agricultural industry and colleagues within AFIT, SAPD & the University of Reading.

Terms and conditions

The employment contract specifies the hours to be worked each week, although in practice there should be a willingness in this post to embrace fully the need to work flexibly as demanded on occasions, by the irregular demands of the post. Time off in lieu (TOIL) is taken to offset extra hours worked during busy periods. Travel expenses will be paid at normal University mileage rates when undertaking farm visiting using own car; hired-in cars are used when deemed to be more cost effective.

Annual Leave is as follows:

Up to five years service: 21 days

Over five years service 25 days

University Closure Days and Bank Holidays amount to six and eight days respectively.

Date assessed: 31st August 2021

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Job Title	School/Department
Research Officer [Farm Business Survey]	Agriculture and Food Investigation Team (AFIT), Department of Applied Economics and Marketing, School of Agriculture, Policy and Development (SAPD)

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Skills Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong communication skills (oral and written) • High level of accuracy and numeracy • Sound administrative and organisational competencies • Very good knowledge of MS Excel and Word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aptitude for financial accounts • Knowledge of MS Access and PowerPoint • Knowledge of writing macros
Attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educated to HND or degree level, or other qualification supported by suitable experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc in Agriculture or related subject • Business related modules at undergraduate level
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very good general knowledge of British farming systems • Good knowledge of farm business management • Sound understanding of British accounting principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of UK Agricultural Policy
Relevant Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis using spreadsheets • Practical farming experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of working with farm accounts
Disposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to establish and maintain a good working relationship with the wide variety of people who make up the farming community • Ability to work independently from the team for prolonged periods when travelling and completing case studies for the FBS and Ad hoc Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aptitude and interest in promoting the FBS by way of presentations and outreach activities

Disposition <i>(continued)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident, discrete, enthusiastic, engaging and patient with the ability to work under pressure • Empathetic in traumatic situations (for example, farmers suffering from major animal disease breakdowns, such as bovine TB) 	
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To drive to businesses to undertake visits and meet with farmers and client groups in a variety of locations in the south east, central southern and the west midland regions of England, and occasionally throughout the UK • Willingness to embrace the need to work flexibly as demanded by the seasonal requirements of the post • Be prepared to stay away overnight when circumstances demand 	

Completed by: Richard Crane

Date: 31/8/2021

Further Particulars

The appointment of a Research Officer [Farm Business Survey] is in the Agriculture and Food Investigation Team (AFIT) in the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development (SAPD). The team comprises the Head of AFIT, to whom the successful applicants will report, eight Research Officers ROs, and one Administrator, together with Contractors and some casual staff with one specialising in IT.

AFIT is primarily involved with work undertaken on a contract basis for the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This work principally involves the collection, analysis and processing of farm financial data for the Farm Business Survey (FBS). The geographical area covered by AFIT includes the counties of Avon, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, part of Greater London, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Isle of Wight, Kent Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Sussex, Surrey, Warwickshire, the metropolitan county of the West Midlands, Worcestershire and Wiltshire. The information gathered from these surveys is used for policy purposes by DEFRA and is widely used in research. In addition it is used for farm business management advisory work, teaching and research purposes. Universities and Colleges in England and Wales have been associated with this work in one form or another for 80 years. ROs will from time to time also become involved with other activities outside their normal core responsibilities. In the main these involve assistance with other farm based contracts.

There will also be the opportunity to be involved in some teaching activities, under the guidance of academic colleagues, for those candidates who would like to pursue this avenue. This may involve accompanying students on farm visits as well as preparing and presenting some farm management lectures. There may also be the possibility to study further, although the priority will be to deliver the Farm Business Survey.

A significant amount of travelling is involved, in the range of 3,000 to 7,000 miles annually. Applicants must have the means [clean driving licence] to travel in order to meet with farmers and client groups in a variety of locations.

Farmers and growers co-operate with the University on a voluntary basis. ROs therefore, need strong communication skills and the ability to establish and maintain a good impression and working relationship with the wide variety of types who make up the farming community. An ability to relate effectively with those engaged in the agriculture industry with its wide range of systems and economic performance. In addition to the fieldwork element of the role ROs are expected to quickly become proficient in Farm Business Analysis by processing the information collected from farmers and growers to produce Profit and Loss Accounts and Balance Sheets at the farm level for the FBS. The production of Gross and Net Margins results for a high proportion of the farms participating in the FBS is also required. Another very important element of the post is report writing, particularly providing feedback to farmers and growers on the performance of their businesses, and contributing to reports published in hardcopy and on the web that are read by a wide cross-section of the farming community and policy makers alike.

The induction programme for the new ROs will be based on a concentrated period of training in the unique requirements of the FBS during the first six to nine months in post. Thereafter an experienced RO is assigned as mentor to the newly appointed RO with further specialist training undertaken on an as required basis during the second year. More general training needs, as part of the University's Continued Professional Development (CPD programme) are met by in-house training sessions and the University's Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD).

The appointed candidates must be able to work effectively as part of a team and be able to meet the strict deadlines set internally to meet the demanding specifications of the DEFRA contracts. The tasks are challenging, but do provide the appointed person with an opportunity to join a centre of excellence in teaching, farm business analysis and research in agriculture and to develop a deep understanding of the agricultural economy of the south east, central southern and the west midland regions of England.

The appointment is in the first instance, for a fixed period to January 2023, with a six months probationary period. There is the expectation that the post will be extended.

Competencies and Qualifications: Applicants are expected to have an HND or degree, preferably in Agriculture or a related subject, though qualifications in other subjects may be considered. IT is used in almost every aspect of the RO role and candidates are expected to have a very good knowledge of all Microsoft Office Programmes, particularly Excel.

Experience: Relevant post college/university work experience

Automatic entry to the University of Reading Pension Scheme (URPS) (opting out is possible).

August 2021