Applying for Fellowships

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Outline

- 1.30–2 pm: Overview of applying for funding
- 2.00–2.30 pm: Coffee + Questions
- 2.30–4 pm: Small group review of proposals
Available types of funding

- Cambridge/Oxford Junior Research Fellowships (JRFs, 3–4 years)
- Leverhulme Early-Career fellowships (3 year at 50 %)
- Marie Curie Intra-European/Outgoing/Incoming Fellowships (2 years):
  - Royal Society University Research Fellowships (URFs, 5+3 years)
  - Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowships (DHF, 5 years)
- EPSRC/NERC/STFC/BBSRC/UKRI Fellowships (2 to 7 years)
- ERC starting grants (something to aspire to later!)
- Others:
  - Charities and other organizations (Royal Commission for the Exhibition 1851, Herchel-Smith, RAE, . . .)
  - AXA postdoctoral fellowships (18-24 months)
  - Many EU countries have similar fellowship schemes: (CNRS fellowships in France, Humboldt fellowships in Germany, Juan de la Cierva / Ramon y Cajal fellowships in Spain, . . .)
Applying for Fellowships

A typical/generic fellowship application and selection process:

1. **Application**
   - Usual stuff: cover letter, CV, list of publications, two/three references, . . .
   - Description of current research
     (technical, understandable to a nonspecialist, or both)
   - Description of proposed future research
     (technical, understandable to a nonspecialist, or both)
   - Impact statement

2. **Internal selection / Unacceptable candidates rejected**

3. **Ask for references, longlist**

4. **Ask for major piece of work** (e.g. thesis draft) and externally assess (JRF)

5. **Interview**
Before you start writing!

- **Who is your target audience?**
  - external expert reviewers
  - assessment panel (rarely all – or any! – specialists in your specific field)
  - general public (e.g. “lay summary” section)

- **What are they looking for?**
  - different emphasis for different Fellowships (e.g. Royal Society focused on you and your research; EPSRC want evidence of impact, contribution to UK, outreach)
  - rarely research excellence alone
  - wider **impact** of your research
  - ability to communicate importance of research

- **Who are you competing against?**
  - Rarely just others in your field
  - Other applicants in your general area
  - Often applicants across all sciences

- *Don’t* pay only lip service to **non-research sections**!
  - even if you don’t think it’s important, they’re looking for any criteria that will help them whittle down to a handful of accepted applications
The research proposal

- Why is your research area important?
  
  *evidence:* international interest, academic groups at major universities, wide range of funding (academic, industrial, government), high-profile conferences, dedicated journals, widely-recognised significant papers...

- Why is the proposal timely?
  
  - major recent progress
  - major new questions needing answering

- Why are you the best person to carry it out?
  
  - previous success
  - unique skills you’ll bring to it

- Clear statement of proposed research
  
  - taking target audience into account

- What is innovative about it? Which gaps in current knowledge does it fill?
  
  - New problems? New methods and approaches? New interdisciplinary collaborations?

- What impact will it have?
  
  - Research impact (open up new areas, solve open problems)
  - Impact outside the field (e.g. in industry, medicine, public outreach)
Curriculum Vitae — CV

Unlike a job interview, the CV is much less important for fellowship applications.

Most advice for a standard CV also holds (see Careers Service advice).

Take your normal CV and tailor it to the fellowship application:

- Cut out as much as possible (esp. if it’s already on your application form).
- Use the CV to emphasize impressive things that aren't on your application form.

Length:

- Too long, and the impressive bits might not be noticed.
- Too short, and it looks like you’ve not done much.
- A rough guide for UK CVs: 1-2 page of A4 (excluding publications). (US CVs are very different.)
Supporting references

Typically asked for two or three referees:

- One reference probably has to be current supervisor. CHECK rules around choosing referees carefully. E.g., Referees cannot be at your proposed institution/PhD supervisor etc.
- International referees look good.
- Referees outside your field (e.g. in biology) look good.
- All references should know you personally:
  - It helps if getting the fellowship would also help them: e.g. ongoing collaborations.

Getting good references needs work before applying:

- Get to know the other researchers in your field, not just their work.
- Get known at conferences. Ask questions, talk to others outside presentations. Don’t just present and disappear.
- Collaborate with other researchers, ideally internationally.
- Apply for travel grants to visit for a week or two.
Submission of work for assessment

This is particularly for Cambridge JRF applications

- This is the part where your technical expertise is assessed.

- Typically, a significant amount of work is requested (a draft thesis, several papers – 15,000 words)

- This isn’t a thesis: make sure you emphasize the many different ways your work will continue to progress, in a technically sensible way.

- Externally assessed by an expert. Again, the assessment should be glowing. It helps if you “happen” to know the person who ends up assessing your work.

- Useful to have something published, or on arXiv.
Fellowship interviews - JRF

Specific to a JRF interview:

- 30 minutes long
- It’s highly unlikely the whole panel understand your work
- Lead interviewer ("specialist") may not be closely related to your field (e.g. someone from DPMMS or Engineering)
- Talk broadly about your work, with relatable examples e.g. graph theory example used spread of fake news through social media network.
- Make clear how your previous research was novel/groundbreaking
- Don’t need a full research plan for the fellowship but you must show you have independent research ideas.
- Good to name drop well-known people in your field that you know/have collaborated with/will collaborate with if successful
Fellowship interviews - EPSRC

Specific to an EPSRC interview:

- 45 minutes long
- 10 minute presentation (with slides) - very strict time limit
- Might include 1 or 2 specialists in your field
- Research proposal (very important here) has already been assessed, so they're judging you on your presentation/interpersonal/leadership skills
- Possible questions:
  - How will you project manage?
  - Why here?
  - How will you influence future research directions?
  - What if you get stuck?
  - What competition is there in your field?
  - Where do you see yourself in 10 years and what steps will you take to get there?
Review of successful applications

Each grant proposal asks for different things

▶ College RF applications
  ▶ Short
  ▶ References important
  ▶ Submit work for assessment at longlist stage

▶ EPSRC Fellowship applications
  ▶ Long
  ▶ If it applies, letters of support from project partners helpful (international impact plus monetary commitment)
  ▶ Lots of important non-academic sections (eg impact, dissemination)
  ▶ Variety of expert/non-expert audience sections