

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