

The Glasgow Guide to Fellowships

Overview

This guide has been written to help talented researchers who are planning to apply for fellowship funding to boost their careers. At Glasgow University we offer a great environment for leading researchers and we've put this guide together to help you build a compelling case for receiving funding and for developing your career and your research.

The guide will help you to:

- locate and target appropriate fellowship opportunities
- create well-written fellowship applications
- understand how best to prepare and sell yourself at interview.

How the Guide works

This guide was written by Shinton Consulting Ltd and is based on a series of workshops that runs in Glasgow throughout the academic year. They have developed the guide into a web-based resource so that researchers planning to apply for fellowships can benefit from the workshop materials and approach at any time of the year. It also gives access to researchers who are currently outside Glasgow. As the workshop is highly interactive, the guide also gives you regular prompts to reflect on your own situation, check details of your application and think about the material you need to collect and present to make a more compelling case for funding.



These prompts are marked with a pencil icon:

Clarifying some terms

Fellowship funding covers many different kinds of awards, but this guide is written with a specific class of funding in mind. These are the career development awards given to individuals near the start of their academic careers. These awards allow people to develop their independent research vision, to start building a research group and to position themselves to secure a permanent academic contract. Some have a particular focus on career development and may give you access to other networks and training opportunities. These awards are very prestigious and highly competitive.



What does your potential funder mean by fellowship? Does this match your current profile?

Applying for a Fellowship at Glasgow

The University of Glasgow is investing over £10M in another round of the prestigious Lord Kelvin Adam Smith Fellowship scheme. We are also offering attractive packages for individuals with an external fellowship who wish to bring their research to Glasgow as Leadership Fellows. We can provide support and mentoring for individuals who wish to apply for external fellowship funding.

Successful Fellowship applicants will benefit from:

- The University's peer group mentorship programme for fellows
- The possibility of an additional year of funding and / or the opportunity to be transferred to an open ended lecturing contract, subject to performance and strategic fit

If you are interested in applying for a fellowship and intend to undertake your research at Glasgow, please send a CV plus a short statement about your research interests to leadershipfellows@glasgow.ac.uk

Strategies for Identifying Fellowship Funding

Most fellowship schemes are only available once a year, so it is important that you are clear when the deadlines are, and that you leave plenty of time for proposal preparation. Typically deadlines fall in the first quarter of the academic year, although some schemes have two per year. Some also require preliminary applications before approval is given to apply in full. The fundamental lesson is that you should **always** check the dates and administrative arrangements for the schemes you are approaching, as details and systems are subject to change.

It is important to also examine the level of postdoctoral experience expected: most fellowships are aimed at candidates with 3 to 10 years of post-doctoral experience. However, there are a few that will accept candidates that have just finished a PhD, and others that have a cut-off point of just 6 or 7 years post-PhD. Some fellowships are aimed at staff who haven't secured a permanent position (most of those below fall into this category) whereas others carry different restrictions.

As the list below demonstrates, many funding schemes are restricted to a relatively narrow range of subjects, in the same way that other research grants are. A good way to find potential awards for your research area is to approach local experts – at Glasgow, the Grants Team and the EU Team within the research support office will be familiar with the schemes that tie in with the institution's research profile. You can use funding databases such as RDInfo and ResearchResearch. You should also look at the backgrounds of staff in your field – most university staff have a webpage with biographical details which would include details of any such awards.

The following are examples of fellowships from major funding bodies, charities and foundations – this is by no means an exhaustive list and you should ask senior staff in your research area for any specific awards. An up to date list can also be found on the University webpages:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/research/lordkelvinadamsmithfellowshipsandleadershipfellows/applyingforexternal/funding/fellowshipschemes/>

Royal Society URF (5-10 years):

<http://royalsociety.org/University-Research-Fellowships/>

Leverhulme <http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/funding/ECF/ECF.cfm>

STFC –Ernest Rutherford fellowship (5 years):

<http://stfc.ac.uk/Funding+and+Grants/509.aspx>

AHRC Fellowships for Early Career Researchers

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/Fellowshipserc.aspx>

NERC (3 or 5 years): <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/fellowships/>

BBSRC David Phillips (5 years):

<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/fellowships/index.html>

EPSRC Fellowships (5 years):

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/fellows/Pages/epsrcfellowships.aspx>

Wellcome Trust (many different programmes):

<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Biomedical-science/Funding-schemes/Fellowships/index.htm>

MRC (5 years): <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Fundingopportunities/Fellowships/index.htm>

Royal Academy of Engineering Research Fellowships

<http://www.raeng.org.uk/research/researcher/postdoc/>

CSO Postdoctoral Fellowships (Health Services and Health of the Public Research in Scotland)

<http://www.cso.scot.nhs.uk/ApplyingForFunding/HSHPR%20Personal%20Awards/PostDoctoral.htm>

NIHR Research Fellowship (NHS National Institute for Health Research)

<http://www.nihrtcc.nhs.uk/nihrfellow/pdf>

Royal Society of Edinburgh (a range of awards, many in partnership with other organisations)

http://www.rse.org.uk/180_FundingAwards.html

Some schemes are specifically aimed at improving diversity, by supporting scientists who have interrupted their careers or need flexibility for family reasons.

Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowships (4 years):

<http://royalsociety.org/grants/schemes/dorothy-hodgkin/>

Daphne Jackson Fellowship

<http://www.daphnejackson.org/fellowships/>

The Research Councils also offer 'return to research' bursaries for people who have taken career breaks.

It is essential to contact your prospective School or Research Institute as soon as possible. They are likely to be able to support your application with information on their institutional strengths and will want to meet you in order to give the best possible recommendation in their parts of the application process. This guide will give you some ideas about the strengths of Glasgow University but this can be tailored for specific applications.

Eligibility for non-EU nationals:

A number of the schemes above are open to citizens of any country. Others are open to EU/EEA citizens or others with a relevant connection to the EU/EEA, generally established through working/gaining a PhD here (such as the Royal Society). You must check eligibility conditions carefully before investing time and effort in an application.

There are also postdoctoral fellowships specifically for international mobility:

The EU Marie Curie FP7 programme provides 2-3 year fellowships: IEF (for residents of other EU/EEA states) and IIF (for residents of non-EU/EEA states). The Marie Curie Programme is open to any nationality though there are residency and mobility requirements.

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/people/home_en.html

There are various other funding schemes under FP7, including Cooperation and ERC Grants. CORDIS (the Community Research and Development Information Service) has produced a guide to what it describes as the "maze" of European funding which provides a good starting point:

http://cordis.europa.eu/eu-funding-guide/finding-sources_en.html

The University also has a dedicated EU Team who are happy to discuss your individual situation and what funding scheme might be best. Kindly contact Jill Robertson on jill.robertson@glasgow.ac.uk for further information.



Which funding providers are allied to your research interests? What are their long term visions?

Some questions to consider as you investigate and contact funding bodies:

- What are the current trends in funding? Are their funds for research in other areas?
- What are the current limitations and restrictions? Are their schemes for researchers at different career stages? Are there schemes for smaller scale projects?
- What subject areas were awarded funding last year? Who was awarded funding – what was their career stage?
- What are the future plans of the funder? What does their strategic plan say?
- Who are the decision-makers/assessors? Are there any in my home institution I could approach for general advice?
- What review processes do they follow? Do I have a chance to respond to reviewers before the decision is made?
- What are the deadlines for submission? How much time will it take me to get internal signatures or to get help to cost the project?
- How long will the process take? Do I have time to do it properly?
- What is the proper way to approach? Is it initially with an outline proposal?
- How many people apply each year and what percentage are awarded grants? How have previous years' budgets been allocated?

Once you have a clear idea about the eligibility for the scheme and the expectations of the funder there are a few additional questions to ask yourself:



Am I keen to develop a research group and develop into a research leader?

Do I want my career to follow the path that these schemes support and promote?

Does my publication record and my achievements to date meet the required standard?

Do senior colleagues support my application?

By now you are probably all too aware of how competitive the application process for fellowships is. Some schemes have success rates of less than 10%, so you need to feel confident that you are in this top 10%.

The fellowship application process looks for outstanding people, planning really exciting and important projects and working in the right places.

Three 'P's – Person; Project; Place

These “Three P's” are at the heart of the fellowship, so we'll look at them in turn.

Person – make sure your proposal convincingly argues:

- Why the funder should support you and why the award should come now
- Why you are the very best in your field at your stage of career
 - Emphasise your achievements
 - Include the Specifics – Where have you published? What has been the outcome of your research?
 - Highlight your seminal contributions to your field
 - Show you have already done something quite special and will do something special again
 - Include the “nitty-gritty” – include citation index/rankings of journals/paper downloads
 - Describe why you are important to your chosen field
 - Describe how your appointment will benefit your host institution
 - Make sure your CV makes you stand out. In many fields the primary indicator is your publications and the panel will be looking for first and last author papers in top journals. In some fields, the expectation will be at least 50% first author and they may look for journals with wider readership.
- Your potential as a research leader
 - Give evidence that you are becoming a PI (principal investigator) and provide evidence you can manage a team and mentor others



Your notes in response to these points:

Project – fellowship projects must deliver more than research. They have to benefit and build your career. When you describe the project at the heart of your proposal:

- Make it exciting
 - Your proposed work must be novel and different from the work of previous supervisors or PIs. The panel want to fund the best work in your field – can you convince them you are doing it?
- Make it specific to you (weak applications often read like an extension to current work)
 - Build on the variety of skills and experiences you have and describe something that only you can do – develop a project which shows real development of your career
 - Ensure the proposal isn't closely related to previous supervisors or current PIs – independence is at the heart of fellowship funding and intellectual dependency on someone else (even if unfairly perceived) will kill an application
- Balance the safe and risky elements of your proposal
 - Good risk is something exciting and different which might not work, but could mean a future Nobel prize!
 - Bad risk is seen when the perception is that there is no chance of a project working – always counter this with pilot data or evidence of collaborators who will boost the project's chances of success
 - Send out to three or four people for feedback to check this balance is right
- Make it a pleasure to read (drop jargon/abbreviations)
 - Be aware that the panel may be very diverse and that concepts and terms can mean different things outside your topic
- Have fall back/contingency plans
 - If there is a 'bad' risk, build in a safety net. Recognise the risks and have alternative plans - if things go wrong early, there are still avenues to explore in subsequent years. Major reason for rejection is the 100% faith in things working
- Include milestones
 - Clear time points - "in six months we'll have done this, which will enable us to do this..."
- Management plans (who will do the work and when?)



Your notes in response to these points:

Place – Your objective here is to convince potential funders that Glasgow is the best, the ONLY place you can do this work

- Why Glasgow and why a particular group?
 - Questions you should ask yourself...
 - *How is the choice of Glasgow a reflection of my ambition?*
 - *Why is this the best place for my project and my work?*
 - Be aware that access to data or samples is not a good enough selection criteria in itself, but if you contact us, we can help define the benefits more clearly.

We feel that Glasgow offers a great environment for ambitious researchers. We are a leading partner in many local initiatives, a member of key international networks (such as Universitas 21 and IRUN) and have a strong track record in research assessment.

- Include evidence you will broaden your horizons and build good networks.
- Emphasise the part you will play in the institution's future success
 - Are you the next leader of research there and are your referees willing to state this?
- Collaborators: If you plan to work with researchers in other institutions and sectors make their contributions to the work and success of the project clear
 - This could be really important - if you and they are committed to a transfer of knowledge between partners and institutions the project could provide a really interesting opportunity to build unique skills



Your notes in response to these points:

Review, review, review your application.

Ask as many people as possible to give you feedback and insights into the process.

If you are invited for a research fellowship interview, we will help by arranging a mock interview with senior university staff. This is a rigorous and challenging way to test your preparedness for the big day. Speak to your School, to ask whether a mock interview can be arranged.

Example fellowship questions – no mock questions can really prepare you for the scrutiny and pressure of the day, but these questions should help you to prepare your thinking in advance.

PERSON

Why do you deserve this fellowship?

What impact have you had in your professional community?

If successful, what would the fellowship enable you to do? (career objectives)

Whose work has influenced your research interests?

Where do you hope to be in ten years?

Tell me about your approach to managing research projects.

PROJECT

What is the importance of this project?

What has changed in your field since your application?

Why does your approach to this problem deserve this award?

Convince me your project is feasible

If you could only do one experiment/study, which is key?

What will you do if your hypothesis is proved wrong?

What would the ideal outcome of this project be? (research objectives)

Who are your main competitors? Can you compete with them?

PLACE

Why have you chosen that department for your fellowship?

How will you complement the existing departmental strengths?

What value will you add to the department and institution?

If you are staying in the same place

‘Why are you staying in department X to do this project?’

‘How will you ensure your independence?’

Many researchers who have attended the workshop have provided us with their own questions from a range of interviews:

Tell me about your approach to managing people.

Why should this fellowship be awarded to you when other researchers are evidencing success with other alternative approaches?

Your department has no history of doing research into this approach – why should we take this chance on you?

Looking at your publication record, your papers are dominated by your lead PI. How have you shown independence in the past and how can we be sure you will become independent in the future?

Your application focuses on expanding your expertise into new areas. How can we be sure that you can pick up these skills?

How will you compete with other researchers in your field?

Can this research progress without this funding?

How do you feel about your publication record?
Why do you deserve this fellowship?
What impact have you had in your professional community?
What makes you different from the other candidates?
How will this fellowship allow you to develop your career?
What are your career intentions?



Which questions caused you the most difficulty?

Some general advice on answering questions:

Taken from the advice to applicants to the Fulbright programme (a prestigious scheme for US students to study in foreign countries)

“A basic starting point in preparing for any interview is self-assessment - think about yourself in a specific setting and reflect on your abilities to be successful in that setting. What experience, knowledge, skills, or special training do you have to make you confident in your ability to pursue your project? What aptitudes, experience, or personal traits do you have to make you confident in your ability to navigate a new cultural environment?”

This advice is equally relevant to fellowship interviews. Think about the interview as an opportunity to put across the information that the panel must have in order to give you the award.

What do you really want to get across?
What kinds of questions would allow you to do this?
Which scenarios convey this information?

If you have thought this through in advance, as you are asked questions you will be more likely to recognise opportunities to present vital information.

Waffle in interviews is one of your worst enemies. Time will be very tight, so think about the very best selling points – we’ll call these your cherries. If the interview is a cake, don’t have too much dough! Short, informative answers will give a better impression. For practical advice in framing responses one acronym to remember is STAR – outline the Scenario, describe the Task that led to your Achievement and positive outcome or Result.

When answering, talk to the whole panel although focusing on the person who asked the question. Be aware that people have different body language, which doesn’t necessarily reflect their thinking! The “smilers and noddors” on the panel may build your confidence, but be sure to engage even the most negative looking people.

There will be questions you can’t anticipate, but the focus of the interview will be on ensuring they find the candidate who meets the funding body’s criteria. Be clear on these and don’t hesitate to ask for clarification if a question isn’t clear. You should also take a moment to consider your answer – the panel will understand your need to think, as long as you aren’t too slow!

Finally, say thank you – whatever the outcome, the experience will be one you will learn a huge amount from and the panels are made up of very busy people. It is important they hear your appreciation for the time they have given up to develop your career.

Good luck and we hope to welcome you to Glasgow soon!