



A Brief Guide to Fellowships and Funding for Postdocs and Early Career Researchers in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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Overview of eligibility for standard funding schemes

The overview is just indicative. In any case please check the eligibility criteria of each scheme.

Please note that there might be additional subject-specific funding schemes in your area.

schemes	Years since PhD																
	pre-submission	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	>15
BA Postdoctoral Fellowship*																	
Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship* ²																	
Wellcome Trust Research Fellowship ²																	
Wellcome Trust New Investigator Award* ³																	
AHRC fellowship-early career route* ¹																	
Junior Research Fellowships																	
Marie-Curie Fellowships																	
BA Mid-Career Fellowship*																	
AHRC fellowship																	
Leverhulme Research Fellowship																	
Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship ³																	
ESRC Professorial Fellowship																	
BA/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowship																	
ESRC Future Research Leaders Grant*																	
ESRC Standard Grant** ³																	
AHRC Standard Grant** ³																	
ERC Starting Investigator Grant																	
AHRC Standard Grant - early career route*																	
ERC Consolidator Grant																	
ERC Advanced Investigator Grant																	
BA Small Grants scheme																	
Wellcome Trust Small Grants scheme																	
	There is no fixed minimum time since PhD in the scheme and display is just indicative.																
	more suitable for early career researchers to be Co-I with established academic.																

* career breaks such as maternity cover and illness or time outside of academia can be taken into account.

¹ normally at least one year at the university; two years of post-doctoral experience; eight years of award of PhD or within six years of first academic appointment.

² only unestablished staff can apply (without permanent contract)

³ only established staff can apply (or with commitment of University to employment over course of grant plus 3-6 months)

Contents

Introduction	p.3
Section A Postdoctoral Fellowships – Annual or Rolling Programmes	p.6
Section B Fellowships – Individual institutions (including JRFs)	p.9
Section C Research Grants	p.10
Section D Small grants: some suggestions	p.12
Section E Other sources of funding: some suggestions	p.14
Appendix 1 ESRC Guidance on Writing a Good Funding Application	p.15
Appendix 2 How to Write a Successful Research Proposal by Dr Eleanor Robson	p.19
Appendix 3 European Commission Marie Curie Fellowships	p.21
Appendix 4 Notes from UK Research Office briefing on European Research Council Starting Investigator Grants	p.22
Appendix 5 Thoughts on Applying for British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships	p.24

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Introduction

This guide is a general introduction to postdoctoral fellowships and research funding opportunities for early-career researchers in arts, social sciences and humanities. The information on the various schemes outlined here has been mostly gathered from the funding institutions' websites, and is intended to be a starting point for your own research on the topic. Funders often change their eligibility criteria, application processes and deadlines, and even well-established annual competitions may be changed or even discontinued. Given this, we would advise you in all instances to check the relevant institution's website if you are intending to make an application.

Fellowships and grant funding require institutional support, which means that you will need to talk to your head of faculty/department at an early stage, in order to discuss the type of support the faculty/department can provide. It is important to make sure that whoever is hosting you is aware of what kind of support the funder is expecting the host institution to provide. This is especially important in the case of replacement teaching (which must be discussed and agreed with your head of faculty/department before the application is made) or where a financial contribution of the university is required.

This guide also gives a basic indication as to whether the fellowship or grant is intended to cover all the research project's costs (this is usually labelled 'full economic costing' – FEC), or whether it will only cover them in part (such as the Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship, which funds up to 50% of salary costs).¹ Of similar importance is the information relating to the level of overheads that can be expected from the different schemes. If your head of faculty/department is in any way unsure about the financial implications of grants, he or she is advised to contact the University's Research Office, whose staff would be happy to explain these implications on a case-by-case basis.

Fellowship or grant?

This guide focuses on postdoctoral fellowships and research grants. Postdoctoral fellowships are often thought of as short-term posts designed to help with the development of an academic career. In the case of research grants, the focus is on the research project, although several of the schemes listed here are designed to give early career researchers their first opportunity to play a role in research leadership. Another possible option is to link up with an established researcher and apply as a named researcher on his or her grant. You could be named as either a Co-Investigator, Research Associate or Project Coordinator. This would open up funding avenues that are only usually available to those on permanent contracts. In addition to the experience gained while working on such funding applications, you might also be able to substantially shape the project and enhance the chances of funding success. This can be of considerable mutual benefit.

The type of post or grant which will be best for you depends on your needs and priorities. Do you want a year or two to write up your PhD and begin establishing a publication record? Are you ready to develop a new research project? Do you want experience leading a team of other researchers? Given that competition is fierce, it is always advisable to keep several options open and not only to apply to a single scheme.

Subject-specific

This guide focuses on some of the major fellowship and funding competitions, but is by no means exhaustive. The research website for the arts, humanities and social sciences provides a growing resource of background information about funding opportunities, schemes and available support [www.ahssresearch.group.cam.ac.uk]. One specific source of information about opportunities in your subject area is the *Research Professional*² database of funding opportunities that is freely available on campus (off campus only after registration on the website). The database allows subject-specific searches for funding options and schemes (such as grants or fellowships), as well

¹ Full Economic Costing is explained at: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/cam-only/univ/fec/>

² <http://www.researchprofessional.com/>

as funding for conferences and travel. Each faculty has set up their own subject-specific email funding newsletter which can be accessed via your Departmental Administrator. Other sources of information may include subject-specific email lists and discussion groups in your research area that link researchers nationally, as well as through networking at academic conferences.

It is also worth looking for smaller amounts of funding which can cover research expenses, conference or seminar costs, or short-term visits to archives and libraries abroad. *Research Professional* is a very useful tool for finding these which is intuitive and easy to use. Online training is available through the website and also by your Departmental Administrator or Research Grant Administrator on how to use the database.

General guidance and support

Apart from formal applications for funding, many job and research opportunities can emerge through personal contacts. Apart from participation in academic conferences and workshops, it is therefore useful to build up a network of people at Cambridge. Possible avenues for sharing research ideas are CRASSH fora, reading groups, seminars and lectures in faculties, research centres and colleges. Initial information on seminars and similar activities can usually be found either via your Faculty/Departmental Administrator or through the university website. Informal networking with peers and senior colleagues should not be underestimated and is a common way of exchanging ideas at Cambridge. These avenues can often help you develop new research ideas, broaden your research perspective and agenda, as well as germinate new collaboration and funding ideas.

When you have decided which funding schemes you would like to apply to, then there are a range of support structures that can be of help to you. The research website for the arts, humanities and social sciences is building up a growing repository of useful information for applicants. Advice is also available from the School Research Facilitators. They can offer information on the funding bodies and their schemes and can provide support with writing applications and offer feedback on draft applications. Whenever possible, they can also provide examples of successful applications. Although they work primarily on large grant applications they can, depending on capacity, also advise on postdoctoral fellowship applications (when the prospective host institution is Cambridge)

In terms of more general advice on how to approach writing your application, the ESRC has developed a helpful guide on how to go about funding applications (see Appendix 1). See also the comments by an experienced researcher on how to write a successful application (Appendix 2).

Each faculty/department also has dedicated Research Grant and Departmental Administrators whom you should contact. They are there to offer expert help and advice with the financial/budgetary aspects of applications. All funding applications need final clearance from the Research Office Operations team. Their role is to check issues of eligibility, as well as the financial and contractual side of your application. Should you need guidance on contractual arrangements, for example as a College Teaching Officer, please contact your subject-relevant contact at the Research Office.

For large grant applications and particular funding schemes, the University operates an informal peer review process composed of members of staff sitting on official peer review panels. This peer review is currently in place for the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Peer review of your application takes, at the longest, four weeks, but is often quicker. If you have a well-developed draft of your application and would like to submit it to the peer review panel, please contact the Research Facilitators.

If you would like to know how a postdoctoral fellowship or research grant might fit within your overall career plan, or even whether either option is the right one for you, then you may want to consult the Careers Service. Dr Steve Joy is the dedicated Careers Adviser for research staff in the arts, humanities and social sciences, offering information and guidance whatever your career aspirations.

Timeline:

- Consult research website for arts, humanities and social sciences for background information about schemes and applications, the subject-specific funding newsletter sent from your faculty/department, and *Research Professional* for funding options. Also discuss your ideas with peers/mentor.
- See the Research Operations Office web for further information on research grants:
 - o <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/research/default.aspx>
 - o <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/research/applying/default.aspx>
- Please see your Departmental Administrator as your first point of contact when applying for research funding.
- Discuss funding schemes and potential project plans with the Schools' Research Facilitators. As mentioned above, the Research Facilitators can also offer comments on draft applications
- Approach your supervisor or mentor in your subject area to ask for subject-specific feedback on your application.
- Contact your Research Grant Administrator and/or Departmental Administrator for advice on the financial side of your application.
- Seek internal peer review either informally by approaching individuals or by using the formal peer review structures where applicable. Contact Research Facilitators about use of the university's peer review procedures (for AHRC and ESRC only).
- Research Office Operations requires one week for checking your application. Please contact them well before the deadline for the scheme that you are applying to, particularly in cases where you are either unsure about your eligibility or where the scheme requests supporting documents from the university.
- For a list of all the relevant contacts mentioned above please consult the research website for arts, humanities and social sciences [www.ahssresearch.group.cam.ac.uk].

Section A

Postdoctoral Fellowships – Annual or rolling programmes

AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council)

Scheme title: Fellowships – route for early career researchers

Discipline: Arts and Humanities

Timetable: No fixed dates

Duration: 6-24 months

Costing: between £50,000 and £250,000 at full economic costing.

Eligibility: At the time of application, applicants must

- have been employed by the submitting University for at least one year
- have a contract that lasts until at least the end of the proposed fellowship activities
- have at least two years of post-doctoral experience; and
- be within eight years of the award of your PhD or equivalent professional training or be within six years of your first academic appointment (either full-time or part-time which lists research and/or teaching as the primary function). Career breaks such as maternity leave will be taken into account.

Purpose: Early Career Fellowships are aimed at supporting applicants in taking forward new avenues of research which they have developed since completion of their PhD, or to pursue new research directions which have evolved from their PhD research. They are not designed, though, to write up doctoral theses for publication. Alongside the individual research, the applicant is supposed to develop collaborative activities with the potential for having a 'transformative impact on their subject area and beyond'. The idea is that these activities will develop the fellow's capacity to become a research leader in the arts and humanities. Strong evidence of institutional support for the proposed fellow's career and leadership development before, during and after the award is required from the university.

Scheme website: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Fellowships-Scheme-Early-Career/Pages/Fellowships-Scheme-Early-Career.aspx>

British Academy

Scheme title: Postdoctoral Fellowships

Discipline: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Timetable: Annual Competition.

Deadline for submission of outline proposals: Early October

Results of outline stage expected: January (invitation to submit full application)

Research beginning on or after: 1 September.

Please check the website for the yearly deadlines.

Duration: 3 years

Costing: full economic costing

Eligibility: Applicants have to be within three years of the award of their doctorate.

Number of fellowships: Up to 45 awards to be made for research starting in 2013.

Purpose: This scheme is designed to enable outstanding early career researchers to strengthen their experience of research and teaching in a university environment, which will develop their CV and improve their prospects of obtaining permanent lecturing posts by the end of the Fellowship. Applicants are expected to be at an early stage of their academic career.

Scheme website: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/funding/guide/pdfells.cfm>

Leverhulme Trust

Scheme title: Early Career Fellowships

Timetable: Annual Competition for all disciplines

Deadline is in early March of each year. Application materials can be accessed from the Trust's website from January. The Trust will report results to applicants by the end of May.

(Note: for Cambridge-based applications, there is a pre-selection competition run by the Isaac Newton Trust, which will provide the matching funding for successful applicants. You must apply to the Newton Trust before submitting your application to the Leverhulme Trust, and you need to secure the support of a host department before approaching the Newton Trust. The Newton Trust deadline for applications is in January and potential applicants are strongly advised to check details with the Newton Trust³ directly.)

Duration: three years (may be held part-time)

Costing: The Trust will contribute 50% of each fellow's total salary costs up to a maximum of £23,000 per annum, with the balance to be paid by the host institution. Given the prestige of the awards each fellow may request annual research expenses of up to £6,000 to further his or her research activities.

Eligibility: Applications are invited from those with a doctorate who had their doctoral viva not more than 5 years before the application closing date. Career breaks will be taken into account. They may not currently hold, or have already held, a full-time established (i.e. permanent) academic position in a UK university or comparable institution in the UK.

Number of fellowships: There are approximately 80 fellowships available in 2013.

Purpose: Early Career Fellowships aim to provide career development opportunities for those who are at a relatively early stage of their academic careers but with a proven record of research. It is anticipated that a Fellowship will lead to a more permanent academic position. Fellowships can be held at universities or at other institutions of higher education in the UK.

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

Wellcome Trust Research Fellowships - 'Medical Humanities' and 'Society and Ethics'

Discipline: The Wellcome Trust funds research in the humanities and social sciences particularly in relation to the areas [Medical Humanities](#) and [Society and Ethics](#). Please also read the [Wellcome Trust Strategic Plan](#) for further information.

Duration and Costing: Up to 3 years full-time (under exceptional circumstances also part-time) providing research expenses and a salary (plus employer's contributions).

Timetable: Biannual Competition with deadline for submission of outline proposals in late June and early December. Deadlines for full applications are in early August and early February respectively. Please check the website for the yearly deadlines.

Number of Fellowships: around 12 awards per annum

Purpose: To support researchers at all stages of their career to conduct a period of research.

Eligibility: Applicants must not be in an established academic post (i.e. not be in an open-ended contract) and must hold a PhD.

Scheme websites:

<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Society-and-ethics/funding-schemes/Research-fellowships/index.htm>

<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Medical-humanities/Funding-schemes/Fellowships/WTD003793.htm>

³ <http://www.newtontrust.cam.ac.uk/contact/LECF.html>

Wellcome Trust New Investigator Awards - 'Medical Humanities' and 'Society and Ethics'

Discipline: The Wellcome Trust funds research in the humanities and social sciences particularly in relation to the areas [Medical Humanities](#) and [Society and Ethics](#). Please also read the [Wellcome Trust Strategic Plan](#) for further information.

Eligibility: Applicants must be in an established academic post (i.e. in an open-ended contract) and be no more than five years from appointment of their first established academic post at the date of submission (career breaks will be taken into account). Candidates are expected to have a strong, internationally competitive track record with publications that make a significant intellectual contribution to research.

Duration and Costing: Up to 5 years full-time providing research expenses of between £100,000 and £200,000 per year. The award covers research expenses (including research assistance), travel and subsistence and funding for collaborative activity, capacity-building initiatives, public engagement initiatives and research leave, symposia and dissemination activities. Salary costs are **not** included.

Timetable: The annual deadline for applications is in early September. The Wellcome Trust encourages to discuss eligibility and project suitability before making an application (deadline for these CV detail checks is mid-July). The application must be accompanied by a statement of commitment of the University. Shortlisted applicants will be invited for interviews in late January of the following year. Number of Fellowships: around 8 awards per annum

Purpose: To support leading early career researchers to follow a compelling long-term vision for their research.

Scheme websites:

<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Medical-humanities/Funding-schemes/Investigator-Awards/WTDV031437.htm>

<http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Society-and-ethics/funding-schemes/Investigator-awards/WTDV031466.htm>

European Commission

Scheme title: Marie Curie Fellowships [For more details on this scheme see Appendix 2]

Discipline: All disciplines

Costing: Full Economic Costing

Timetable: After the Call has been published, the researcher and the host organisation have 3 months to prepare and submit a proposal (deadline: in early August). A panel of experts will evaluate the proposals (usually second half of October). Applicants whose proposals have been successfully evaluated will be invited by the EC to negotiate (average: 2-3 months). Note: there are no interviews. If the negotiation with the EC is successful, it will take another 2-3 months to prepare the contract. Start of the project will be autumn of the following year.

Purpose: The Marie-Curie Fellowship scheme, currently operated through FP7 and to be continued in Horizon2020, enables a researcher to travel to another country, either within the European Research Area or to/from a Third Country.⁴ Two of the fellowships should be of interest to people currently in Cambridge: Intra-European and International Outgoing Fellowships (IEFs and IOFs). A third type, International Incoming Fellowships (IIFs), brings researchers and their knowledge and experience from a Third Country (e.g. USA, Australia etc) to the EU (Cambridge).

IEFs and IOFs are training fellowships. IIFs are more knowledge transfer opportunities. If IIFs are used for training purposes applications will not be successful, irrespective of the quality of the proposal. MC Fellowships are highly competitive so that obtaining one complements any CV. With a yearly gross income/ living allowance of €58,500 (+ mobility allowance) for an experienced researcher they are worth applying for. The financial support takes the form of a grant covering up to 100% of the budget.

Scheme website: <http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/>

⁴ Third Countries are those which are neither an EU Member State nor an Associated Country to FP7.

Section B

Postdoctoral Fellowships – Individual institutions (including Junior Research Fellowships – JRFs)

Postdoctoral Fellowships funded by individual institutions including universities, colleges and specialist research centres are also available. Some are linked to broad subject areas or disciplines, others are more specialised. Institutions will advertise through websites such as www.jobs.ac.uk, the media (*The Guardian*, *Times Higher Education Supplement* etc), and their own websites.

Cambridge and Oxford Colleges regularly advertise Junior Research Fellowships (JRFs) in a range of subjects for varying numbers of years. They are advertised in *The Reporter*⁵ as well as in some instances on jobs.ac.uk. They vary from college to college as to subject area, number offered, number of years of tenure, pay, obligations, and method and timing of application; but some colleges now share an online application system. Timing of the announcements also varies from college to college and year to year, so it is difficult to predict exactly when they will be advertised. For good information and advice from current JRFs about the nature of such fellowships and applying for them, see <http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/pdocAHSS/welcome.asp>.

⁵ C:\Users\sj232\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.Outlook\VEET1NQU\www.admin.cam.ac.uk\reporter

Section C Research Grants

ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council)

Scheme title: Future Research Leaders

Limit of funding: Grants up to £312,500 at 100% full economic costs.

Duration: up to three years

Timetable: deadline is in early October with final funding decisions in June and project start from October.

Eligibility: Applicants should not have more than four years of post-doctoral experience. Applicants can apply from anywhere in the world but need the agreement of a UK university to host them. Only 60% of the applicant's time is eligible under this grant. The matching funding at the University of Cambridge will be provided by the Isaac Newton Trust for up to ten awards. An internal selection procedure applies that is announced when the official call from the ESRC is released. Please liaise with your potential mentor at the University (not normally your former PhD supervisor) and the relevant department that you want to be hosted at for their support of your application and approval.

Number of awards: ESRC aims to make around 70 awards.

Applications can be for 'blue sky', strategic or applied research. The applications will be assessed on the base of:

- originality and potential contribution to knowledge of the project
- research design and methods, appropriateness of collaboration including multidisciplinary and international links
- outputs, dissemination and impact
- organisational support such as skills development plan, appropriateness and commitment of mentor, commitment of the host institution to contribute to applicant's career development.

Strong evidence of institutional support for the applicant's career and leadership development before, during and after the award is required from the university.

Scheme website: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/15938/future-research-leaders.aspx>

ESRC

Scheme title: Standard Grants

Limit of funding: Grants range from £200,000 to £2.0m at 100% full economic costs (fEC).

Duration: up to five years

Timetable: Applications may be submitted at any time – allowing time for processing. The majority of decisions are announced within 26 weeks of submission.

Eligibility: Applications can be for 'blue sky', strategic or applied research, and the ESRC is keen to encourage fresh ideas from new researchers. At the time of application, applicant PIs must either have a contract of employment with their research organisation in place for the duration of the award, or an assurance from the submitting institution that, *if the proposal is successful*, a contract of employment will be given that covers the period of the award plus an additional 3-6 months. This scheme lends itself for un-established researchers particularly to apply as co-investigator.

Scheme website: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/3717/research-grants.aspx>

AHRC Standard Grants – route for early career researchers

Limit of funding: Grants range from £50,000 to £250,000 at 100% full economic costs (fEC)

Duration: up to five years.

Timetable: Applications may be submitted at any time – allowing time for processing. The majority of decisions are announced within 30 weeks of submission.

Eligibility: The scheme is for any type of 'blue-sky' or applied research. At the time of application,

applicants cannot have been a principal investigator on an AHRC funded project.⁶ They must have either a contract of employment with their research organisation in place for the duration of the award, or an assurance from the submitting institution that, if the proposal is successful, a contract of employment will be given that covers the period of the award plus an additional 3-6 months.

You need to be:

- either within eight years of the award of your PhD or equivalent professional training; or
- within six years of your first academic appointment (either full-time or part-time which lists research and/or teaching as the primary function).

Career breaks such as maternity leave will be taken into account.

Scheme website: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Research-Grants-Early-Career/Pages/Research-Grants-Early-Career.aspx>

AHRC Standard Grant

Limit of funding: Grants range from £50,000 to £1million at 100% full economic cost (fEC)

Duration: up to five years.

Timetable: Applications may be submitted at any time – allowing time for processing. The majority of decisions are announced within 30 weeks of submission.

Eligibility: Applications is for any type of 'blue-sky' or applied research. At the time of application, applicant PIs must have either a contract of employment with their research organisation in place for the duration of the award, or an assurance from the submitting institution that, *if the proposal is successful*, a contract of employment will be given that covers the period of the award plus an additional 3-6 months. This scheme in particular lends itself to un-established researchers to apply as co-investigator.

Scheme website: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Research-Grants-Standard/Pages/Research-Grants-Standard.aspx>

European Research Council

Scheme title: ERC Starting Investigator Grant

- Candidates can be any age and of any nationality, though must have obtained their PhD more than two years but less than seven years prior to the opening date of the relevant call for proposals. The ERC operate a similar scheme for those seven to twelve years post-PhD, called the Consolidator Grant scheme.
- Host organisation: legally recognised public or private research organisation situated in an EU Member State or an Associated Country
- Funding: up to €1.5M per grant (up to €2M for Consolidators)
- Duration: up to 5 years
- Calls for proposals: the next call for Starting Grants will be announced in spring 2014 (exact dates are currently unknown). Calls for Consolidator Grants will then be announced in early summer 2014.

Purpose: ERC Starting Grants are designed to support outstanding early-career researchers in all disciplines who are beginning to create their own independent research team or programme. The aim is to fund projects carried out by individual teams which are headed by a single Principal Investigator (PI) and, as necessary, include additional team-members. The constitution of the research team is flexible

A competitive Starting Grant Principal Investigator must have already shown the potential for research independence. For example, it is expected that applicants will have produced at least one important publication without the participation of their PhD supervisor. Applicants should also be able to demonstrate a promising track-record of early achievements appropriate to their research field and career stage, including significant publications (as main author) in major international peer-reviewed

⁶ Exempt from this clause in 2012/13 were RGPLA/Small Grants, Research Leave, Early Career Fellowships, Fellowships in Creative and Performing Arts and the Research Networks and Workshops scheme.

multidisciplinary scientific journals, or in the leading international peer-reviewed journals of their respective field. They may also demonstrate a record of invited presentations in well-established international conferences, granted patents, awards, prizes etc.

Scheme website: <http://erc.europa.eu/starting-grants>

Section D Small grants – some suggestions

Many of the small grants schemes that formerly existed with Research Councils have now ceased to exist. Some examples of funding schemes are below, but please check Research Professional for relevant schemes in your subject area that are usually less competitive and therefore offer a better chance of success.

British Academy Small Grants Scheme

Funding: £500-£10,000

Duration: up to two years

Eligibility: You need to have completed your PhD but do not need to be presently in employment at a University. Applications can be for funding of individual or collaborative research projects but not exclusively for conference organisation or attendance.

Timetable: There are two rounds each year with deadlines in early April and early November.

Scheme website: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/funding/guide/srg.cfm>

Wellcome Trust Small Grants Scheme

Note: The Wellcome Trust funds research in the humanities and social sciences particularly in relation to the areas [Medical Humanities](#) and [Society and Ethics](#). Please also read the [Wellcome Trust Strategic Plan](#).

Purpose: The scheme funds research activities such as

- scoping exercises
- small research projects
- field research (e.g. visits to libraries or archives) including transport, accommodation, subsistence and photocopying costs
- financial support for conferences, symposia, seminar series, etc. including catering, conference pack publication and associated expenses; attendance at workshops, symposia and overseas conferences are normally excluded
- overseas visits.

Limits of funding and duration: up to £5,000 for one year

Eligibility: You need to have completed your PhD but do not need to be presently in employment at a University.

Timetable: Applications are received throughout the year.

Scheme website: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Society-and-ethics/funding-schemes/Small-grants/index.htm>

Cambridge Humanities Grant Scheme

Funding: £1,000-£20,000

Duration: 10 months (with most research expected to take place in the Easter and Long vacations)

Eligibility: all Cambridge staff on research contract (including Senior Research Associates, CTO, JRF but not visiting or other affiliated researchers)

Costs: not for PIs' own salary or indirect costs, though can include travel, consumables, research assistance, match-funding to support research where sponsors are unable to meet full costs, e.g. website assistance for dissemination, support for charity research, activities specifically designed to enhance impact or outreach. It can include conference support where it demonstrably supports the activities specified above.

Timetable: deadline 30 September 2012 (advertised yearly during Easter term)

The objective is to enable researchers to conduct small-scale research activities of the highest quality, that enable them to bid successfully for larger-scale funding, and/or to generate publications, and/or to contribute materially in other ways towards the research objectives of their home institution. You are asked to note in particular that an individual project may not be submitted both to this Scheme and the Isaac Newton Trust in the same year, whether successful or otherwise.

The British Academy Skills Acquisition Award

This pilot awards scheme aims to develop and enhance the quantitative skills of support career development of early-career scholars by enabling them to spend time with a mentor at a specialist centre in the field. The aim of the funding is to support specific skills acquisition, benefit outstanding researchers and encourage the development of networks and future partnerships.

Applicants must be within 10 years of receiving their doctorate and must be in an established academic post at a UK university. Unaffiliated researchers and short-term contract or fellowship holders may not apply. Mentors may be based abroad.

Eligible costs include travel, accommodation and subsistence; teaching relief for the applicant; and the time of the mentor. Funding of up to £10,000 is available, although the average award value is expected to be significantly lower. Approximately 20 awards will be made.

- Awards are for a research visit of normally 1 - 4 months to be spent attached to one or more of the 22 ECAF field-centres in Asia.
- Fellowships will enable researchers to pursue their own personal research in Southeast Asia, build wider networks, and contribute to the academic life of the centre.
- The scheme is open to any scholar holding a PhD and currently attached to a UK higher education institution, who has not previously had substantial contact with the field centres.
- Each fellowship is to a maximum of £5,000 to cover personal travel, accommodation and research expenses; 10% of the value of the award will be paid to the ECAF centre (via the ECAF Secretariat in Paris) as a contribution to operating costs and to meet the costs of services provided. (The 10% will not cover the cost of any residential accommodation where this may be offered by the centre).

Scheme website: <http://aseasuk.org.uk/v2/grants>

British Academy-ASEASUK-ECAF Visiting Fellowships 2012-13

ASEASUK and The British Academy provide funding for fellowships to enable scholars to make research visits to field-centres operated by the European Consortium for Asian Field Study (ECAF). The purpose of the fellowships will be to advance the scholar's personal research in Southeast Asia, build his/her wider networks and enable scholars to contribute to the academic life of the centres. Awards are for a research visit of normally 1 - 4 months to be spent attached to one or more of the 22 ECAF field-centres in Asia.

- Fellowships will enable researchers to pursue their own personal research in Southeast Asia, build wider networks, and contribute to the academic life of the centre.

- The scheme is open to any scholar holding a PhD and currently attached to a UK higher education institution, who has not previously had substantial contact with the field centres.
- Each fellowship is to a maximum of £5,000 to cover personal travel, accommodation and research expenses; 10% of the value of the award will be paid to the ECAF centre (via the ECAF Secretariat in Paris) as a contribution to operating costs and to meet the costs of services provided. (The 10% will not cover the cost of any residential accommodation where this may be offered by the centre).

Scheme website: <http://aseasuk.org.uk/v2/grants>

Section E Other sources of funding – some suggestions

Here are a few examples of government and other charity funding. This is not an exhaustive list.

Government departments

Department for International Development

Research for Development <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/>

Research portal for DFID. DFID does not accept speculative proposals, but issues research calls inviting proposals.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/funding/>

Research portal for DEFRA. DEFRA does not accept speculative proposals, but issues research calls inviting proposals and also has an email newsletter with funding calls.

Charities and foundations

Nuffield Foundation

Children and Families, Law in Society, Education and Open Door research on topics, which support the Foundation's objectives to 'improve social wellbeing'. Relevance to policy and practice would be desirable.

More details: <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/>

On Research funding opportunities see <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/children-and-families-law-society-education-and-open-door>

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

£30 million annually towards work principally in the arts, education and learning, the environment, and enabling disadvantaged people to participate fully in society.

<http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk/about-us.html>

The Gerda Henkel Foundation

Gerda Henkel offer funding for Research Projects and Research Scholarships in the historical humanities (History; Prehistory and Early History; Archaeology; Art History; Historic Islamic Studies; Legal History; History of Science). They also have thematic calls that have recently focused on Islam and Security and the State

http://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/content.php?nav_id=360

ESRC guidance on writing a good proposal

Version February 2012

1. Allow yourself time

Preparing a draft proposal and consulting on it, preparing the project costings and getting advice on these, as well as reading the regulations of the grants scheme to learn what is and what is not permissible, are all time-consuming parts of the process of application.

2. Study your funding source

All funding agencies will have their own criteria for deciding on allocation of their resources. It is worth while taking time to familiarise yourself with these and ensuring that your proposal clearly addresses your targeted source of support.

The ESRC is an agency funded by the government and its mission is "to promote and support by any means, high quality, basic, strategic and applied research and related postgraduate training in the social sciences; to advance knowledge and provide trained social scientists which meets the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the UK, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and the quality of life; and, to provide advice on, and disseminate knowledge and promote public understanding of, the social sciences".

Four characteristics of all successful ESRC research grants are constant. They must:

- promise excellent research
- be of value to potential users outside or within the research community
- convince of the ability to deliver research
- demonstrate value for money (not necessarily the same as cheapness).

3. Read the rules

...and the guidance notes attached to the application form which are designed to help you through the 'filling in' process. This cannot be over-stressed; familiarising yourself with the content of the [ESRC Research Funding Guide](#) may seem tedious but will help you to avoid basic mistakes which at best will require clarification with office staff and at worst may prejudice chances of success. Make sure you are using the current versions of the application form and Research Funding Guidelines. If in doubt check with the office staff at the Council. (More information on [electronic applications](#) to the ESRC.)

4. Discuss your proposal

...with peer groups, colleagues and, if you are a relatively new researcher, with senior and more experienced researchers. Experienced collaboration or supervision rarely goes amiss. If you have never sent in a proposal to the ESRC before try to get the advice of someone who has already been successful. Contact the people you intend to nominate as referees and make sure they know what you are doing. It is not uncommon for nominated referees to be unaware of the substance of the work they are asked to comment on, have little knowledge of the applicant or his/her work, or give a very poor grading. Some have even been known to decline to comment!

5. Justify your costings

...which should be considered with care and close reference to the [ESRC Research Funding Guide](#). A maximum of 2 sides of A4 is allowed on the compulsory justification attachment to the application. Be realistic - lavish costings are unlikely to find favour with Panel Members and a proposal which promises the earth at remarkably low expense will be regarded with caution. Applicants should think carefully about the time and resources needed to complete the research successfully within the specified period. Awards will be based on the eligible costings included in proposals and will be subject to standard indexation and cash limited at the time of announcement so it is important to get costings right when applying. A well thought out financial plan helps to create confidence in the proposal generally. Give as detailed a breakdown of costs as possible so that the Panel can properly assess the case for support. Do make sure that what you are asking for is allowed within the regulations. Bear in mind that ESRC is looking for value for money.

6. Content and Presentation

The research proposal is the means by which you will be trying to convince the Panel that your proposal is worth funding so think carefully about what information you are going to give and how it is presented. Make sure you think your plan through and cover all stages.

Ask yourself the following questions.

- Have I clearly formulated the problem, have I put it in context of contemporary scientific and theoretical debates, demonstrated the way in which my work will build on existing research and make a contribution to the area? Is there a clear and convincingly argued analytical framework? What will the research do, to whom or to what, and why?
- Have I established appropriate aims and objectives? Are they clear and concise, do they reflect intellectual aims and practical, attainable objectives?
- Have I provided a well-thought out research design in which there is a reasoned explanation of the scale, timing and resources necessary? Am I being realistic about these? Am I using the most relevant approach and the most appropriate methods? How will it relate to and deliver the objectives?
- What will my research design allow me to say in the interpretation of anticipated results?
- Have I given a full and detailed description of the proposed research methods? Is there any innovation in the methodology I am planning to use? Am I developing any new methods or using established methods innovatively?
- If I am using data collection have I considered already existing data resources? Have I contacted the ESRC Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS)? Am I sure that access will be given where necessary, and do I have written confirmation of this? Am I convinced of its quality, validity, reliability and relevance? Have I considered the costs of cataloguing and preparing data for archiving?
- Have I demonstrated a clear and systematic approach to the analysis of data and how this fits into the research design?
- Have I thought about the ethics of what I am planning to do? Are there any sensitive issues or potential problems which need to be addressed? Have I fully consulted on these issues and obtained the approval of an ethical committee where required.
- Have I recognised and planned for the skills and competencies that will be required to bring the work to a satisfactory conclusion?
- Have I anticipated potential difficulties? Have I shown that I recognise these and discussed how they would be handled?
- Have I provided a bibliography? This will be used in the selection of referees and will indicate your familiarity with the theoretical grounding and current state of the art of your subject. Where there is genuinely little or no relevant literature, explain this fully. Panel members and referees will not assume your erudition, they want evidence.
- This proposal will be subject to the critical appraisal of my peers. Am I satisfied that I have fully defended my chosen research design and made it clear why others are not appropriate?
- Have I identified potential users of this research outside of the academic community; have I involved/consulted them in my planning? Have I arranged for their continuing involvement in the research process in an appropriate way?
- Have I considered the possibility of co-funding of the research, with ESRC being asked to provide only a proportion of the project funding?
- Have I provided a clear dissemination strategy for the research demonstrating how the research outcomes will be communicated to all interested parties including potential users of the research outside of the academic community?

Convey to the Panel your genuine interest, understanding and enthusiasm for the work. Keep the following questions in mind as you plan:

- what is the story you are telling?
- who is the audience?
- why does it matter?
- why now?
- why you?

On proposals under £1 million, 6 sides of A4 for the case for support are allowed (12 sides of A4 for proposals over £1 million). It is also important to make sure that you devote enough space in the proposal to describing the research you intend to conduct and the research design and methods - the Panels find it very frustrating when applicants devote pages to explaining why their proposed research is exciting but then provide only a short and inadequate explanation of how they propose to explore this in practice.

Write in plain English. Your proposal is likely to be seen by many people, including some who will not be familiar with your particular specialisation. Detail and specification may necessitate the use of disciplinary or technical terminology and this will be clear to peer reviewers, but the ideas you wish to convey and your reasons for doing so should be apparent to a wide audience. By the same token, do take the trouble to check spelling, grammar and punctuation. These are all part of the quality of presentation and presentation matters!

7. Dissemination and Impact

Our mission places emphasis on ensuring that researchers engage as fully as possible with the users of research outcomes. These may be other academics, government departments, public bodies, businesses, voluntary organisations or other interested parties. Try to consult with and involve people who could make a valuable contribution to the research and who could provide support and interest.

In line with the common position on Excellence with Impact adopted by RCUK, the ESRC expects that the researchers it funds will have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impacts of their research. Applicants should actively consider how these can be maximised and developed through the Pathways to Impact document (formerly known as Impact Plan) in their application. This will form part of the peer review and assessment process. Opportunities for making an impact may arise, and should be taken, at any stage during or after the life-course of the research. It is important that researchers have in place a robust strategy for maximising the likelihood of such opportunities arising and their own capacity for taking advantage of these.

8. Check the details

Once you have completed the application form make sure that all the required information is provided. Some of the most common omissions and problem areas are:

- an unrealistic start date
- missing details of previous/current proposals with reports on current projects or end-of-award reports where required. We will not process new proposals if an End of Award Report is overdue
- a proposal not limited to 6 sides of A4 (or 12 sides in the case of applications over £1 million)
- no covering letter in the case of resubmissions

9. What happens next?

For the Research Grants scheme:

Proposals receiving an average score of **at least 4** (out of 6) from **external academic reviewers** are forwarded to the Panel Members (Introducers) for a funding recommendation. Proposals receiving a **lower average score are rejected** as not meeting the requisite scientific standard. In this case, the referee comments may offer some helpful guidance but you really need to think carefully about the quality and value of the work you have proposed.

Proposals receiving an average **Panel Introducer** score of **greater than 4** (out of 10) are forwarded for consideration at the Panel meetings. Proposals receiving an average score of **4 or below** from the Panel Introducers are not forwarded to the full Panel meetings and are **rejected** at this stage.

At the **full Panel** meetings a **proportion of proposals** will be recommended for funding, or unsuccessful due to lack of funds, or in some cases due to not meeting the requisite scientific standard. This is stiff competition by anyone's standards! A ranked list of recommendations is then considered by the Grants Delivery Group for a final funding decision.

Anonymous comments will be sent with your decision letter, and the feedback may be helpful if you submit a new proposal in the future.

We have amended our resubmissions policy to accept **only invited resubmissions**. We no longer allow the resubmission of any previously unsuccessful proposals, unless applicants have been specifically invited to do so.

10. If you are successful...

Congratulations, and we hope your project goes well.

However, if difficulties arise such as delays in recruitment, staff illness, replacements, or changes to the work plan then please let us know immediately. Under the Research Funding Guide rules you will not need to notify us of movements of funds between headings and no supplementation will be allowed

We hope you have found these notes useful and wish you success with your proposal.

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/guidance/applicants/application1.aspx>

version February 2012

Appendix 2

How to Write a Successful Research Proposal: Ten Golden Rules

By Dr Eleanor Robson

0. Shop around

- The big funding bodies' themed calls usually have fewer applicants than open ones; can you target your application to one of those?
- Ask a trusted permanently employed colleague if she will act as your nominal PI within schemes you are not eligible to apply for yourself.
- Look beyond the big funding bodies, especially for smaller grants: subject- or area-specific learned societies, British Academy country-specific agreements, etc.

1. Sell your proposal

- Surprisingly enough, your fascinating research topic isn't self-evidently interesting. Above all, you will need to justify why anyone else should care about it.
- Explain the topic. Why is it interesting? Why is it novel? Why does it matter? Imagine you are addressing a reader who's constantly asking, 'So what?'
- A useful strategy is to present it as a case study, or a way into examining a much bigger issue, so that your project becomes about much more than just itself.

2. Focus on research

- For funding bodies research means activity that will lead to the creation of new knowledge. Assembling primary data, editing books, and organising conferences may all be valuable stages in the research process but should not be presented as ends in themselves.
- Formulate the project around a particular question or problem that you want the answer to, not around a body of material you want to work on.
- Limit yourself to a single project! We all have side-projects on the go, but don't give the impression you're spreading yourself too thin to fulfil your core commitments.

3. Explain yourself

- Choose a clear and engaging title that says what the project is going to accomplish.
- Jargon and technical terminology are part of the rhetoric of persuasion and authority — but so is the ability to explain that jargon succinctly and unpatronisingly.
- Write for an intelligent but non-expert readership, and try out drafts on non-expert friends. Rewrite until they get what you're on about!

4. Sound convincing

- A research proposal is not a legally binding document; it doesn't matter if you change your mind between now and the end of the research project. In other words it doesn't have to be *true* but it does have to be *plausible*.
- What approach(es) will you take to the subject and why is it/are they appropriate? Do you have the requisite skills (e.g., languages, statistics) already; and if not how will you acquire them?
- Be as concrete as you can. Examples are good; quantification is good; relevant pictures are good.

5. Situate your work

- Who has worked on the topic before? Are there any good articles or books you can draw on—or bad ones you can kick against? Are there useful approaches, theories, methodologies from other subjects or disciplines that you can apply to it?
- What sources and resources will you need, and where are they located? If appropriate, do you have permission to work on them and are there any extra costs involved?
- Why work in the place you have chosen? Facilities, infrastructure, research groups, individual colleagues?

6. Plan appropriate output(s)

- The funding body will expect something to show for your research. Who will want to know about it? Explain who your audiences will be, both academic and non-academic.
- How will you communicate your results most effectively to them: through conferences, articles, a monograph, online publication, websites, and/or other media?

- Address the current hot issues of impact and outreach proportionately.

7. Justify your time and costs

- Can you show that this is an appropriately-sized topic and not just an undergraduate supervision essay—or an entire lifetime's work?
- You may have to budget for equipment, support staff and/or travel. Be reasonable but realistic—don't skimp on time allocation in particular! Work takes longer than we like to think ...
- Consider applying to other funders for conference grants, etc., and make a virtue of it if you do.

8. Follow the guidelines

- Read, reread and highlight the guidelines and follow them to the letter. Make sure you use the recommended headings in the project description, for instance, in the right order.
- If you are not explicitly asked to follow a particular structure, the British Academy's old instructions to applicants for their Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme are sensible ones to follow: *the proposal should clearly specify the context and research objectives of the study, describe the methodology to be used, and set out a realistic research programme for the duration of the fellowship.*
- Respect the rules about what is an eligible expense and what is not.

9. Look professional

- Write to the word limit. You want plausible detail, but no-one expects you to have done exhaustive research at this stage. Nor should you bore your readers with unnecessary waffle.
- Show that you have given serious consideration to ethical issues (e.g., interview consent) and data preservation (if appropriate) and are working within recognised disciplinary standards.
- Pay attention to the appearance of the proposal on the page or screen. Proofread repeatedly and ask others to proofread too: few writers catch all of their own typos.

10. Ask for help

- Don't just ask your supervisor, referees and/or immediate colleagues to read through the proposal but try it out on friends and family too.
- Use your departmental/school grants administrator effectively: book her time in advance, and plan ahead for internal committee and submission deadlines.
- Ask the funding body's support staff for advice on eligibility, handling online applications, etc. This *cannot* disadvantage you!

3.xi.2010

European Commission Marie Curie Fellowships

Tips for a successful proposal

Do not be put off by the appearance of the online 'form' and application requirements. The research environment section will need to be completed with the help of the Host Institution. However text must not be copied and pasted from web sites. Identical text must not be submitted in different applications so any information provided by the potential host should be carefully edited/reworded.

Intra-European Fellowship (IEF)	International Outgoing Fellowship (IOF)
<p>Intra-European Fellowships (IEF) aim to help experienced researchers (those with a PhD or at least 4 years of research experience full time) enhance their career by providing financial support for an individual project of 12 to 24 months. The goal is to support researchers in attaining a leading independent position, e.g. principal investigator, professor or other senior position in education or enterprise. The IEF may also assist researchers to resume a career in research after a break. Applicants can be of any nationality, but they must move from one Member State or Associated State to another, e.g. UK to France, UK to Slovakia. The IEF follows a bottom-up approach, i.e. the research topic is freely chosen by the researcher in collaboration with the host institution. The IEF is cross-cutting, i.e. any scientific field can be funded.</p>	<p>These fellowships are for people to be trained and acquire new knowledge in a third country high level research organisation. The researcher then returns with the acquired knowledge and experience to a European organisation, in a Member State or an Associated Country. It may, but does not have to, be the country/institution of origin. Researchers must be nationals of a Member State or an Associated Country. The IOF consists of financial support to 2- phase mobility projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 1st phase is for about 24 months in a partner organisation in a Third Country. - The 2nd phase must be spent at a return host organisation in a Member State or Associated Country. This phase of reintegration has duration of 12 months and is mandatory.

Remember:

- IEFs and IOFs are training fellowships. They are viewed as a means through which European Excellence and Competitiveness (key words) can be enhanced.
- The assessors have to ignore any background knowledge they may have of the institutions etc. An application can only be judged on the information presented. There is absolutely no use in thinking 'well everyone knows that'.

Tips for a successful IEF proposal

- Demonstrate that you, the participants and goals of your project are the very best in Europe. This will include providing details of your major achievements so far. These are not necessarily publications, but can include thus-far-unpublished key subject-changing results from your PhD. If you have been part of a team which has made a significant discovery describe your role in that team.
- Explain the contribution to science⁷ which your project is expected to make. Your proposed project must be innovative and original.
- Demonstrate the expertise of the host institution as well as the expertise of the scientist in charge in the field of research you want to explore.
- Consider the impact of the project – there is an impact section in the application:
 - Outline the benefit that will be gained from undertaking the project at the Community level and how it will contribute to enhance the European scientific excellence.
 - Describe how this project will contribute to your own career

Additional tips for a successful IOF proposal

- Demonstrate that you are the best and most promising (Young) European researcher in your area. This will include providing details of your major achievements so far.
- Demonstrate the expertise of the partner organisation and the return host institution as well as the expertise of the scientist in charge in the field of research you want to explore.
- Describe the ways in which you, the European Research Area and the European Scientific community will benefit from the knowledge which you have gained while working in the Third Country.

⁷ Note: The term 'science' includes the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Notes from UK Research Office briefing on European Research Council Starting Investigator Grants

These notes are based on attendance at a briefing organised by the UK Research Office at the University of London on 17 September 2010 and should be read in conjunction with the slides for the presentation which are available at <http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/pdocAHSS/ERC-grant-proposal.pdf> (requires Raven login). You can find further information on the UK Research Office <http://www.ukro.ac.uk/>. You may have to access the subscribers' section of the website from within the University.

General points

- Do not be put off by the references to "science" – applications can come from any area of scholarship, not just from the sciences.
- The current funding regime is in place until 2013, when it is likely to be replaced by a similar scheme, although the details have not been released yet. The budget available is projected to increase considerably until 2013 (unlike many UK funding sources).
- This scheme specifically wants the PI to direct a team in which they will play the leading role. It is designed to give early career researchers the opportunity to build their own research teams. If the proposed team includes colleagues with more experience and/or academic seniority than the proposed PI, then those team members would still be under the PI's direction. The ERC prefers to see teams concentrated in single institutions for this reason – the thinking here is that PIs who are new to managing will find it difficult to deal with the challenges of a multi-site team.
- The success rate for the 2011 scheme was 12.1% (however, the Cambridge success rate for the same scheme was around 37%).
- The scheme funds 'frontier research', so the application must demonstrate the cutting-edge nature of the proposed project. Thus the scheme is potentially a good place to apply for:
 - Interdisciplinary proposals
 - Proposals in new and emerging fields
 - Proposals which develop new techniques
 - Proposals which are 'high risk / high gain'

You must demonstrate that your project will have a significant impact on your academic field (*not* on policy)

Eligibility criteria

- 2-7 years post PhD. This period can be extended if you have previously taken maternity leave.
- Applicants do not need to be in a current employment relationship with the proposed host institution, but the host institution needs to provide a commitment to hosting you for the duration of the project. The host can be any legal entity, not just a Higher Education Institution.

Costing

- Up to 100% of salary can be funded.
- 4-5 years is the general length of grants and the overall figure is pro-rata with 5 years as the baseline.
- Social Sciences / Humanities proposals are typically €0.7m - €1m
- You are expected to write at least half a page of text to explain Part B2 Section 2(c). (Justification of costs)
- Don't forget to budget for inflation in your salary
- Include audit costs

Submission and evaluation

- This is a single stage application, but peer reviewers will look at different parts at separate stages. Part B1 of the form will be assessed at stage one. Part B1 and B2 will be looked at during stage two.

- The timing of the deadline is always 1700 Brussels time (i.e. 1600 UK time)
- The ERC has set up peer review panels which will now judge submissions on alternate years.
- Do NOT leave it until the last minute to dig out your PhD certificate. You cannot apply without it.
- 50% of the assessment judges the quality of the project, 50% the quality of the PI.

Your track record

- Show that you are recognised by others as an excellent researcher (are you a peer reviewer or consultant, for example? Who noticed your publications?)
- Don't just write a list of your achievements – add explanations. You don't have to list all your publications, you could include a link to your webpage.
- Assessors do look at personal websites – make sure yours has nothing on it you wouldn't want the panel to see.
- Use the ERC's own language (by using 'science' in the broad sense meaning scholarship, as they do).
- Make sure to explain how your work relates to the state-of-the-art in the expanded synopsis.

Thoughts on Applying for British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships

By a British Academy Assessor in 2010

Postdoctoral Fellowships (PDFs) are increasingly seen as a stage on the normal career-path of academics. The young academic now tends to go from PhD to Postdoc and then (hopefully) into a permanent academic position. The trouble is that there are not enough PDFs to go round. Still, any PhD who has a chance of an academic career nowadays should be able to make a credible application for a PDF.

The following notes focus on one part of this process, namely how British Academy PDFs are assessed. They focus specifically on the experience of one assessor, who has been involved in making assessments for a number of years. What do I look for? What makes me assess a proposal highly? Understanding this bit of the process may be helpful in shaping your application by showing you the elements to highlight. But always bear in mind that there are no tricks or sleight of hand that can turn a weak proposal into a strong one. There is no way you can give a proposal substance simply by slick presentation. However, I've grieved too often over potentially strong proposals that were ruined by being poorly argued. I would stress that this little paper represents the views of only one assessor. Although all assessors work to a standard pro-forma, and in my experience are very conscientious, there is inevitably an element of subjectivity. You might get a slightly different picture from another assessor. I am always impressed, however, by the degree of consensus that emerges from the assessment, which does suggest the system has integrity.

I look for the following absolute basics in an application, which it has to meet if it is to get off first base:

(1) The proposal has to be clearly set out, and argue a good case. "Argue" is important here. I need to be convinced that it is worth doing, and that means that it adds in a useful way to the sum of human knowledge. There are all sorts of things that can be researched that haven't been researched before, but that in itself doesn't make them worth doing. I've seen too many proposals which offered to rescue some thinker from well-deserved obscurity, or which were the academic equivalent of train-spotting (candidates for an Ig Nobel Prize), or which proposed some clever bit of intellectual gymnastics which left me thinking, "So what?" The emphasis on the wider usefulness of research and its wider impact is being increasingly stressed, and I believe rightly so. After all, we're spending tax-payers' money, and society has a right to expect some sort of payback.

Don't try to be clever or complicated or try too hard to "scintillate" or to "blind the assessors with science". Avoid jargon, however fashionable. If I read an application which I struggle to understand, I don't think that's because I'm dense. I think that the applicant has fallen down on the job of making themselves clear to me, and suspect they don't really know themselves what they're talking about. The single most important factor for me is the quality of the proposal: it over-rides all other considerations (e.g. ambivalent references, PhD still not examined, poor institutional statement, lack of publications). Tell me a good story which explains exactly what you are going to do, convinces me it is well worth doing, and shows me exactly how you will get to the desired goal, and I'll give you a second hearing.

(2) The proposal has to go beyond the PhD. It's a balancing act. If the proposal looks too close to the PhD then I mark it down. It is instant death if it looks like you are applying for a PDF simply to revise your doctorate for publication. This, by the way, doesn't apply to all PDFs. Some are actually intended to support you to write up your doctorate for publication, but the British Academy PDFs are meant to help you move beyond your doctoral research, to find your next research topic. One comment I've heard again and again from assessors when discussing a proposal is: "It looks too like the doctorate". In my experience the biggest challenge an early career researcher faces is finding a fruitful and viable research subject beyond the doctorate. On the other hand I've seen proposals that were so far away from the doctorate that I'm left wondering how the candidate thinks they are qualified and trained to tackle the topic. I'm looking on the one hand for an organic link, yet at the same time a clear push into new fields.

(3) There has to be a good institutional match. In other words I need to be convinced that the candidate is going to hold the PDF at an institution that can support well their particular line of research. Believe me, I have absolutely no prior disposition in favour of particular HEIs, but I need to see a case made that the institution chosen is a good place to do the research. HEIs are very keen to have PDFs because they contribute to their research profile (as well as subsidize their teaching). A candidate with a real chance of an award can, to a degree, pick and choose where they go, so it is important to choose somewhere where your research will be well supported. I am sometimes surprised where candidates choose to study particular subjects. I can think of much better places (e.g. where there would be senior colleagues working in cognate fields, or where the library resources are much better in the chosen field of research).

Assessors have to grade applications on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high) on a proforma, which has the following fields:

(1) Scholarly importance: this covers the intrinsic merit of the topic and its potential impact on the immediate and cognate fields. It is not just a question of the assessor recognizing the importance: they may or may not. You've got to demonstrate it.

(2) Ability: this relates to the applicant's ability to carry out the proposed research. It has to be clear that your previous study and research have thoroughly equipped you to do the work you propose. Note in this regard the section on the application "Language competence (if applicable)". This is not just for decoration. I have seen applications in which candidates proposed detailed exegesis of texts in a foreign language which they didn't seem to know!

(3) Feasibility: is the programme feasible both in terms of its methodology and its timescale? As far as I am concerned you don't have to have a sophisticated methodology, only one that is sound, appropriate and able to deliver the results. Early career researchers sometimes seem to think that they can give greater credibility to their research by grabbing some fashionable methodology and applying it to their topic. These methodologies may indeed be useful, but don't drag them in uncritically or for effect. "Timescale" comes down to whether you can do what you propose to do in the time allotted. There is a tendency to promise too much, perhaps in a desire to impress -- to give good value for money! And some applicants produce over-detailed work-plans which would have them working like automata nine hours a day for the duration of the fellowship. Nobody works like that! It is a balancing act: some proposals promise too little, others too much. It might be useful to get a senior colleague to cast an experienced eye over this part of the application.

(4) Specificity: how well defined is the proposed research programme? This is common sense. You have to have a very clearly defined research topic, which is original and important, which you are qualified to do, and which you can complete with substantial outcomes in the time allotted. All the bits have to fit together to argue the case.

(5) Publication record: This is glossed: "Is the applicant's publication record to date appropriate to their current stage of career development?" I find this a tricky one. Applications in my experience differ widely on the number of publications cited, from a major monograph and a few articles in ranking journals at one end of the spectrum to maybe a book review and an article submitted for publication at the other. Each may be appropriate to the stage of career development! So how does this criterion work? Let me make two points. First there is a growing trend towards early publication for early career researchers. Increasingly doctoral students are being encouraged to try and get something published or accepted for publication before they have finished the doctorate: it might be a few book reviews, or a short article (maybe in a middle-ranking journal, or in a conference proceedings), and more and more seem to be achieving this.

Second, publication tends to weigh with me in marginal situations. Say I am pondering two proposals which are very much on a par, substantial publication may tilt the balance. The same goes for completed v. uncompleted doctorate. This strikes me as completely logical. An applicant with a completed doctorate and a monograph with a major academic press has had their work validated by experts in a way that one with an uncompleted doctorate and no publications has not. Promise is not enough. I have seen immensely promising students who never realized their potential.

(6) Academic quality. This is glossed: "Please indicate if the applicant has demonstrated clear knowledge of how their research fits into their field, and how original and innovative it is". Knowledge of the relationship of your research to the wider field in which you work is a long-standing criterion for most doctorates, which will often be probed in the viva. It becomes even more important at post-doctoral level. So make sure you show you can see the bigger picture. Originality is obvious: you've got to be saying something new. "Innovative" is more tricky. For me this relates fundamentally to methodology: the application of new techniques of analysis. I feel I can't demand innovation. Splendid work can be done with very traditional methodologies, but a really innovative methodology (provided it is sound!) may indicate that the research has potentially wide impact across its field, and even beyond (see under (1) above).

(7) Intended outputs/outcomes. Glossed: "Is the applicant's intended output(s) appropriate? Please include a characterisation of this as unrealistic, weak, plausible, strong, or outstanding." Here I would recall the point made under (3) above about not promising too much or too little. There is another point, however, to bear in mind. In my particular field the obvious outcome is academic publication (a monograph and/or articles). This is fine, but it becomes a bit predictable, and it may be worth thinking of "non-standard" ways of disseminating your results (popular talks, websites, workshops, the media etc). Bear in mind the growing emphasis within universities and academia on "knowledge transfer". Don't drag in non-standard dissemination needlessly, just to tick a box: only propose it if it is appropriate; but it's worth thinking about, since it might make this part of your application stand out.

Assessors are asked to assess applications in each of these fields on the 1-7 scale, with comments justifying their scores. Then they are asked to give an overall grade again on the scale 1-7. This is not an average of the other grades, but a fresh judgement in the light of scores for the various fields. A final box on the pro- forma allows them to add any other comments that might clarify their assessment. Filling in PDF applications can be a time-consuming and stressful business (as can assessing them!), but if you aim for an academic career it is a fact of life, and I would argue it is a valuable exercise, because it is all about achieving clarity of thought and clarity of purpose. A good proposal is the key, but don't forget the other parts of the application. In my experience, most applicants under-work these. And remember these are not official pronouncements but personal reflections of an "old hand".

Good luck!