Introduction to grant writing

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Content:

- Overview of funding routes

- Application process from research idea to grant proposal

- Typical funders in social sciences

- How to apply with Oxford

- Q&A

Funding routes

There are at least four routes to gaining research funding that are not mutually exclusive:

1) Applying for Fellowships.

2) Applying for larger funding for research projects in your own name.

3) Being named as researchers/Co-Is on other academics' applications and projects.

4) Applying for researcher positions.

Types of Research Grants

By size:

- Small Research Grants (<£50K)

- Fellowships (full salary + research costs, ca £300K)

- Standard Project Grants (£300K - £2m)

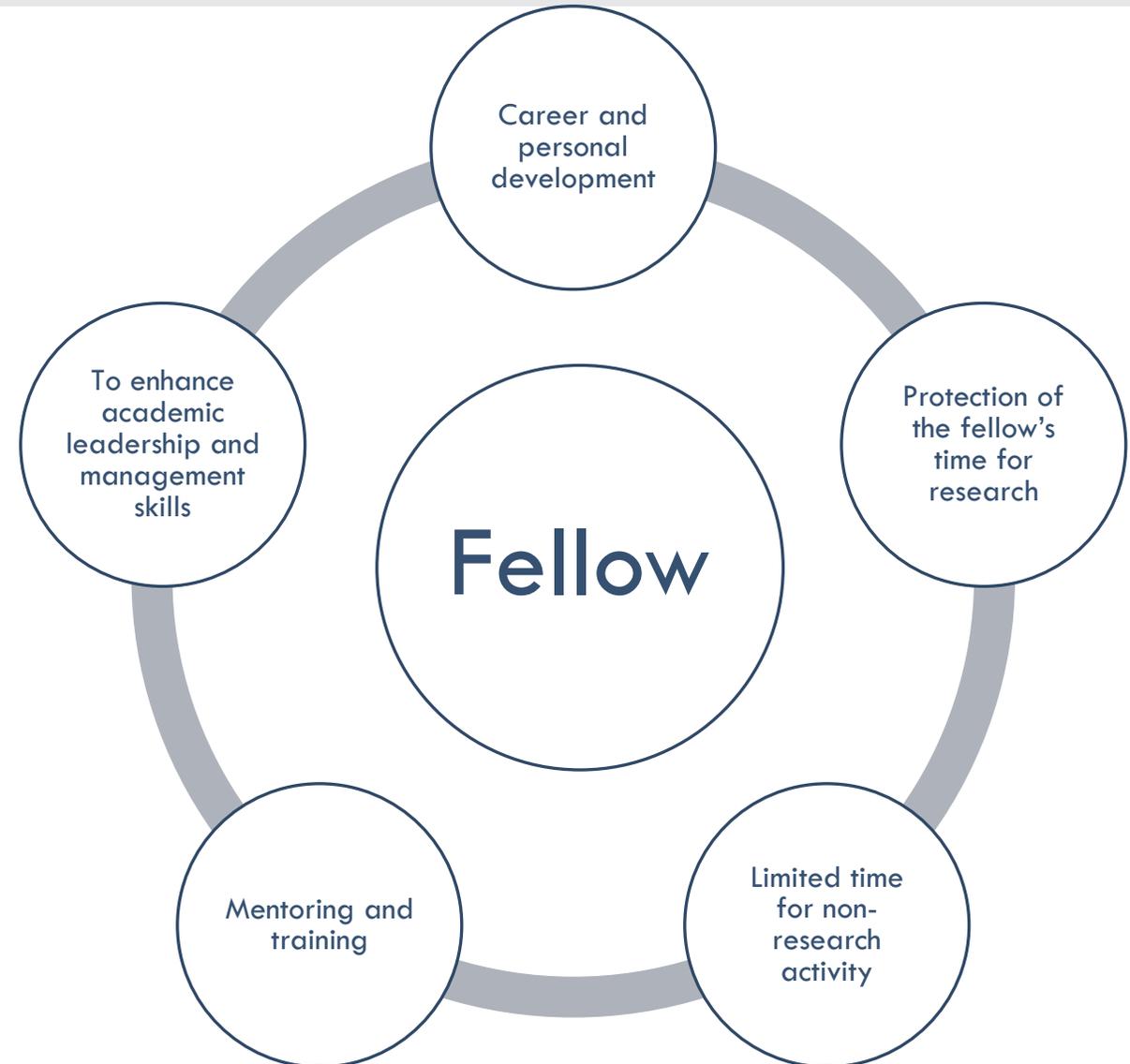- Large Collaborative Research Grants or Centre Grants (ca £10m)

By source:

- HE Institutional Internal Funding

- External funding sources

By purpose:

- Seed funding (for pilot study or capacity building)

- Fellowships for academic career development and leadership and research independence

- Projects focused on building Impact case, developing cross-sector collaborations, networking, policy engagement etc.

- Large collaborative grants for developing a research centre to focus on a specific global challenge or research aspect to be addressed by interdisciplinary consortium of academics.
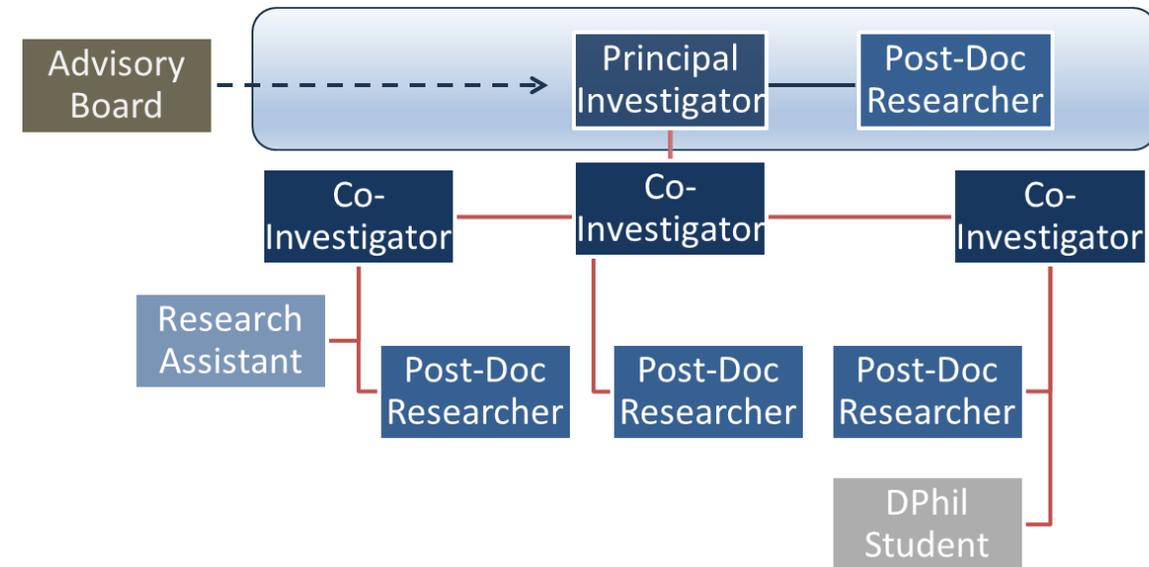
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When choose fellowship?

- *personal* award
- significant *time for research (usually 80-100%)*
- *training* and *development* of the Fellow
- *mentoring* programme
- Fellow's *career development* is central
- Skill and capacity building: academic *leadership* + *management*
- Some specific Fellowships: time buyout for finishing a piece of research or book

Career and personal development

Protection of the fellow's time for research

Limited time for non-research activity

Mentoring and training

To enhance academic leadership and management skills

Fellow

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- Focused on *project* and *outcomes*
- Emphasis on *deliverables* and *outputs*
- Encouraged diversity within research *team led* by PI
- Contribution of Co-Is, **collaborators**, partners etc.
- *Flexible PI's time* commitment to project (30-40%)
- Often *interdisciplinary* and cross-institutional

Example of Collaborative Project model

Application stages - timeline

Planning stage
develop idea and identify funding

- Start 6 months in advance of deadline

- Or: 12 months prior to estimated start date of project

Preparation
work on proposal and get peer review

- Once call opens / up to 3 months before deadline, longer for fellowships

Completing application form
forms, budget, approvals, attachments

- Start: 4 – 6 weeks prior to deadline

- Complete for internal review: 1 week prior to deadline

- Submit to funder: 24 hours prior to deadline

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Take time: a rushed application is very unlikely to be a good one

Factor in:

• Incorporating feedback and comments

• Collaborators' input and budget

• Receiving letters of support and other supporting documentation

• Meeting internal deadlines:

    • Department: 4 weeks before deadline

    • Oxford Research Services: 10 working days before deadline

Planning

- **Develop an idea and discuss it with colleagues**

- **Find suitable funding opportunity and get in touch with Research Facilitation Team**

- **Read the Funding Guidelines!**

What to look for in the guidance:

- Funder's remit and priorities

- Scheme's scope: requirements and limitations

- Eligibility criteria

- Deadline & required start date

- Application route and required documentation

- Funding model, eligible costs
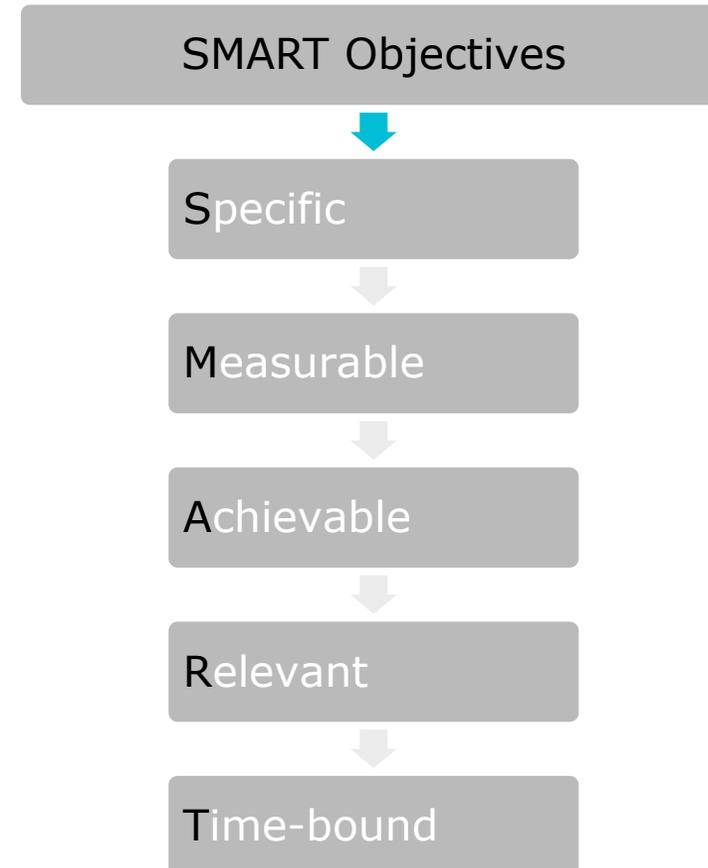
What's in the application?

- **Application form**

- **Case for support**

- **Budget and justification of resources**

- **Letters of support**

- **CVs and publications**

- *Data management plan*

- *Impact statement*

- *Leadership development*

- *Ethics self assessment*

Simple applications

Detailed applications

Case for Support

- Research Challenge
- Clear Objectives and Goals
- Research Question and Context
- Research Data and Methods
- Expected Outcome
- Planned Outputs and Dissemination
- Societal benefit: Research Impact

- Research Team and Skillset
- Delivery Timeline
- Justified Budget

- Teamwork: Applicant + input from colleagues

- Project Management plan
- Data Management Plan
- Leadership and Development Plan
- Letters of Support

SMART Objectives

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-bound

Common cost categories:

- Staff Costs
- Travel and conferences
- Data collection and purchase
- Computing
- Workshops
- Training costs
- Other Project costs
- Publications and Open Access
- Overheads

CHECK:

BUDGET LIMITS

ELIGIBLE COSTS

FUNDING MODEL

Justification for resources :

- What do you need?
- Why these resources are necessary?
- Be specific (basis for calculations)
- Be methodical
- How did you calculate your costs: be clear and accurate
- If requesting standard items (not specific to project e.g. laptops), explain why they must be claimed from project budget

CV

- Show your unique selling points

- Your capacity / capability to deliver

- Your network / connections / relevant experience

Traditional CV Format (2-3 pages)

Narrative CV – focus on 'contributions'
Contains 4 sections:

- New ideas, tools, methodologies or knowledge

- Development of others

- Wider research and innovation community

- Broader research / societal benefit

Select key pieces of information

- Education, training, prizes, memberships

- Academic responsibilities

- Collaborations

- Key Publications

- Include examples beyond academic

- Create and Oxford-activated ORCID

- Use 'records of impact' on Symplectic Elements to keep track of your activities

Other attachments that might be required

- Letters of support from applicants' institutions, partners, collaborators etc.

- Data Management Plan

- Statement on Ethical Compliance, EDI etc.

- Suppliers quotes

ESRC: *Excellence* and *impact*
research in ***economic, social, behavioural and human data science*** to drive ***change***, make a ***difference*** to our lives, improving outcomes for ***individuals, society and the economy***
Key: *value for money *outputs *dissemination *societal impact
Proposals evaluation peer review ⊳ consideration and decision by Grant Assessment Panel.

BA*: Excellence* of the person and project ⊳ ***academic merit***
Key: *humanities and social sciences *policy and research work for public benefit and social wellbeing
Proposals evaluation: BA Fellows

LT: ***Excellence***, ***Originality***, ***quality***, ***significance*** of research.
Key: *crossing disciplinary boundaries *merit: quality and suitability of PI, institution and methodology, *not interested in policy-driven research, don't fund medical research
Proposals evaluation: peer-review ⊳ decision by Board of Trustees (Unilever executives)

WT: ***Curiosity*** driven research on important questions relating to ***life***, ***health***, and ***wellbeing***
Key: *excellence, *creative approach that *push boundaries and *inspire ground-breaking discoveries *support for creating a thriving, inclusive research culture
Proposals evaluation: peer-review ⊳Trust Committee decide on funding distribution.

ERC: ***Excellence*** is the sole criterion of evaluation of the project and the PI.
Within the excellence a 'blue-sky science' encouraged, any subject any discipline
Key: *ground-breaking *high-risk ⊳ high-reward
Proposals evaluation: Commission evaluation panels split into well defined categories.

A close up on selected funding opportunities for early career researchers in education and related topics:

Early career research opportunities

Postgraduate fellowships: -

- **British Academy post-doctoral fellowship**

  - 3 years full-time scholarship and £6,000 research expenses.
  - Two stage application.
  - To be eligible: expected to have completed their Viva Voce examination between 1st April 2023 to 1st April 2026
  - Deadline: 1st October 2025
  - Postdoctoral Fellowships | The British Academy

Early career research opportunities
Postgraduate fellowships: -

- **ESRC (Grand Union) postdoctoral Fellowships**
  - 1-year full-time - £4,000 for mentor costs and £6,000 for research expenses.
  - 2 stage application.
  - Eligibility:
    - Completed PhD at a UK institution and have less than 12 months postdoc experience at 1 FTE.
    - Research organisation must be part of a Doctoral Training Partnership.
  - Deadline: 1st stage - 20th Jan, 2nd stage – 25 March
  - ESRC postdoctoral fellowships – UKRI
  - Postdoctoral Fellowships | Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership

- **Leverhulme Trust – Early Career Fellowships**

- 3 years full-time and £6,000 in research expenses

- Leverhulme only contribute up to a maximum of £56,000 for year 1 and then 50% in years 2 and 3 up to a maximum of £28,000.

- This means that the burden on a university is bigger, thus not all universities can support it, and this is more competitive.

- **Eligibility: must not yet have held a full-time permanent academic post in a UK university or comparable UK or non-UK institution** and have submitted their doctoral thesis by the deadline and not more than 4 years prior to the funder deadline.

- **Deadline: 19 February 2026, 4pm**

- Early Career Fellowships | The Leverhulme Trust

Wellcome Trust - Early-Career Awards

- **5 years covering Fellow's salary and up to £400,000 for research expenses.**
- **Not eligible to apply if** You have an existing tenured (salaried) post for the duration of the award (unless based in a low- or middle-income country).
- You must have completed a PHD or had 4 years research experience but no more than three years post-doc experience at the application deadline.
- Deadlines: 22nd May 2025, 30th September 2025, 17th February 2026
- Early-Career Awards – Funding for Early-Career Researchers | Research Funding | Wellcome

ESRC - New Investigator Award

- Full Economic Cost can be from £100,000 up to £350,000.

- Duration of up to 5 years.

- Eligible for early career researchers with or without a permanent academic post but must be based at an organisation eligible for ESRC funding.

- Will fund your salary.

- Mentor is required and funded by the host university.

- Deadline: rolling.

- ESRC responsive mode: new investigator grants round two – UKRI

Huo Foundation - Huo early-career fellowships

- Up to three years, up to £130k/$169k per annum
- Tackling key questions on a broad topic this year it is "**Effects of the Usage of Digital Technology on Brain Development, Social Behaviours and Mental Health in Children and Young People**"
- Eligibility: within four years of completing PhD and without first permanent position.
- Fellows should have a sponsor, who has a permanent position at the host institution.
- Deadline: 24 March 2025 - annual
- Huo Early-Career Fellowships – Huo Family Foundation

The British Educational Research Association (BERA)

Early Career Researcher Career Development Fund
- Up to £2,000 in the first years after completing doctorate for financial support for training, conferences, work placements, writing retreats etc.
- Early Career Researcher Career Development Fund | BERA

BERA Small Grants Fund
- Up to £5,000 for a project - key output is a final report of between 2,000-3,000 words to be published by BERA.
- BERA Small Grants Fund | BERA

BJET Fellowships
- *£5,000 for* the most compelling proposal for a piece of research in the field of educational technology.
- BJET Fellowship | BERA

Other Funders to Consider

- The Nuffield Foundation
- EEF
- Department for Education (DFE)
- MRC
- NIHR
- ERC
- Spencer Foundation
- Leverhulme/British Academy Small Awards

Oxford Approval Process

Identify Funding

Expression of interest (EOI)

Draft for dept. approval

...incl. costing

Develop academic content

First review by Facilitation Team

...incl. budget

Peer review + Dept. approvals

Facilitation Team handles RS' approval

...final costing + copy of application

RS log application

RS formal review of application

...they liaise with dept. or PI if any issues.

Final amendments

RS approve application

...and acts on behalf of University

RS green light to submit

Application submitted to funder by PI or RS

...depending on the funder and their online submission system

Action by PI

Action by Dept.

Action by RS

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Where to find a suitable opportunity?

- Funders' websites and newsletters – sign up to get regular updates

- Social media – follow funders and institutions you would like to apply with

- Professional networks – talk to your colleagues, look up for funding credits in publications from research

Summary: your focus during the application process...

Time	Clarity	Feasibility
• Give **yourself (and others)** enough time to develop ideas and write a proposal • Input may be required from others (partners, stakeholders, etc.) • Some applications can take months to develop and may require building on networks, partnerships, creating new ones. • Count in time for approvals • Consider a seed fund or pilot project to begin with. • Oxford deadlines are ALWAYS earlier than the funders.	• Write as **clearly** and **concisely** as possible. Avoid jargon! • Present and justify your methodology • Even if you are writing for a **non-specialist** audience, they are **very experienced** at reading proposals • What are your goals? How will you achieve them? • Who are your partners? How will they contribute? • Who are the key stakeholders and beneficiaries? How specific can you be?	• Why are you the best person to deliver the research? • Why at Oxford? • Is your budget suitable? • What are the risks/challenges and how you will control them? • No vague statements or general claims - have a clear plan and contingency plans • Adapt your proposal to what the funders ask* • Avoid overclaiming Impact and overpromising what you deliver! Ambitious and feasible must coexist.

*Always read and follow the official funder guidelines!

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Questions?