

## CMVM Research Manager's advice to the Chancellor's Fellowships applicants

### Introduction

This document draws together the collective experience of Research Managers across the University of Edinburgh's College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM) in advising fellowship applicants. It is tailored to the University of Edinburgh Chancellor's Fellowships (CF) call specifically and is intended as a support resource to applicants. This document is intended for all applicants and we welcome the sharing of this document with prospective applicants who are currently outside the University.

A disclaimer: we are not involved in the operational aspects of the CF call itself so please refer to the [CMVM call page](#) and the [University's Chancellor's Fellowship call announcement](#) for formal guidance and application requirements.

### Top tips

There are plenty of resources available online on grant writing and how to write a good fellowship application, all with very similar advice. We won't duplicate these but do recommend looking these up, especially if you are new to fellowships and grant writing in general. The below are specific tips reflecting the nature of the CF call:

1. **Get on the (future) boss's radar** – If you haven't already, request an informal chat with the host Head of Centre to discuss your plans and how these would complement existing activities in the Centre. This would normally be a two-way discussion that will help refine your proposal and pitch, and not a review of your written application, so doing this early is best.
2. **Pitch to a non-specialist audience** – these are College-wide calls and, at various stages in the process, your application will be reviewed by senior academics who are not experts in your specific field. Ensure that the need for, and importance of, what you are proposing comes across to a lay reader. Asking someone outside of your discipline to review your application can help.
3. **Show your potential** – for many applicants, you'll be applying for your first independent role to set up a research group of your own. Reflect on your application materials and think about how to pitch these differently than what you'd submit for a postdoctoral position within someone else's group. Further to the person specification in the job description, the [MRC Skills & Experience needed to win support](#) page can help you decide what skills & experience you want to foreground.
4. **Consider all elements of the submission** – Further to the guidance on the research plan, review the job description to remind yourself of essential and desirable criteria you need to address. You only have 2 pages for your outline but you'll also be submitting a CV and cover letter and each document provides opportunities to get across your personal case for the fellowship. Cover letters should never be used to extend a research plan, but are the ideal place to sell yourself - summarise your strengths as an applicant and the strategic case for your proposal.

5. **Write for impact** – you only have a short submission in which to get your case across so every word counts. Please see the below resources to help with writing your application.
  - a. [George Orwell's 6 rules for writing](#) - from the 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*, these are many people's go-to principles for writing clear and concise text.
  - b. [Hemmingway app](#) – this is a freely accessible text editor that highlights words/passages that decrease the overall readability and/or impact of your text (including some things covered by Orwell's 6 rules, above), and suggests ways you can improve this.
  - c. [Get Coleman](#) – Joe Coleman is a copywriter whose CV went viral some years ago. Click and you'll see why, and possibly have a giggle. The section of the CV that's most informative is the mid-way point; as you slide the cursor to the right (i.e. towards 'more hard sell'), see how small changes can increase the text's impact.
6. **Reward yourself for getting this far** – a lot of hard work goes into a fellowship application and you are likely to have stepped out of your comfort zone at various points along the way. Too often, we wait in hope of a positive outcome to celebrate all the work that's gone into something. In whatever way works for you, make time to reward yourself for getting your application in and doing a lot of the groundwork that will apply to this and any future applications.

### **Advice for the Chancellor's Fellowship scheme**

The CF scheme aims to support researchers to transition to independence. Much of the advice widely available online for how to write a fellowship application will therefore apply, but you should be mindful that the level of funding available to you as you start the post is significantly different. A typical CF will come with salary support for the fellow (i.e. you) and a start-up package to help initiate your own programme of research; this is in contrast to equivalent external fellowships that provide not only your personal salary, but also the full research costs required to deliver a programme of research of several years' duration, including staff costs (e.g. a PDRA or technician post).

One way to look at the CFs is that these provide a world-class environment and platform from which you can apply for external funding *as an independent/principal investigator* to realise your ideas. As a CF applicant, it's good to have a clear idea for how you would leverage your track record and existing expertise/knowledge, combined with the CF start-up funding, to attract substantial external funding to deliver your exciting programme of research. Don't be shy about putting across bold and exciting ideas in your application, but back up those plans with a funding strategy. Think about what funders and schemes you would apply to and when, and about what collaborative and pilot activities you would undertake early on to enhance the competitiveness of external applications. External applications may include responsive mode grants (e.g. New Investigator Research Grants offered by UKRI councils) and directed calls, or other external fellowships (e.g. UKRI FFL, MRC CDA, Wellcome CDA).

The CF support package is designed to help set fellows up for a successful transition to independence, and the panel will look for a research plan of a scale that's compatible with achieving that goal within the duration of the post. There's a balance to be struck between being ambitious, and being realistic in what you can achieve in that time. Be sure to demonstrate that the scope of your proposal is feasible, remembering that it's better to be explicit than implicit in doing so. A succinct and direct statement is much more effective than relying on reviewers to connect the dots between different elements of your submission.

Remember that CF posts are proleptic and a key vehicle through which host Centres and the University of Edinburgh seek to appoint early career researchers who will contribute to the realisation of their organisational goals and ambitions over the mid- and longer-term. Your application will focus on the first few years of the transition to independence but it's good to have a clear vision extending beyond that period. What unique strand of research will you develop and lead, and how will it complement existing and planned activities within your host Centre and perhaps the wider University?

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