



Dear Higher Education Institutions,

September 2020 - Update following Future Leaders Fellowships Round 4

As Round 4 of the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships scheme concludes, we want to share some information to help prospective HEI/IRO host organisations that are supporting applications to Rounds 6. Additional information for prospective business host organisations can be found on our website. Thank you for your continued support.

Future Rounds: Future Leaders Fellowships is established as an important part of the UK's research and innovation funding landscape. The recently published R&D Roadmap underlines the importance of skilled people and a healthy research culture and the commitment from Government to raise public R&D spend to £22bn to help deliver this. We are committed to continuing to support early career researchers and innovators through schemes like the Future Leaders Fellowships. We will be able to share further information on future rounds following the Spending Review.

Number of Applications: There was a >50% increase in applications to Round 5, compared to previous rounds. The success rate for Round 5 is therefore likely to be lower than previous rounds (dropping to c.15% from 25%).

We are asking all organisation to consider quality, competitiveness and fit to scheme, particularly for those organisations that put forward multiple candidates. All candidates should have your firm support and have a strong and timely case for a Fellowship.

We hope that we can work in partnership with research organisations to result in fewer – but higher-quality – applications, supporting early career individuals, who are not already established and independent, and with outstanding potential who will benefit most from this Fellowship scheme. We want to reduce the amount of unproductive effort for the applicants, the researchers reviewing proposals and the research offices.

Host selection process: We have flagged previously a lower than anticipated diversity of candidates applying to the scheme. Discussions with Research Offices highlight the significance of decisions made at a departmental or equivalent level in internal selection processes (potentially 'gatekeeping'). The FLF scheme is set up to encourage, be accessible to, and fairly assess applications from all applicants regardless of their background. You have a critical role in ensuring that all potential applicants have a fair chance of being put forward for the scheme and are encouraged and supported through a transparent selection process based on ability and potential.

Eligibility: We have deliberately not restricted the definition of 'early career' to a simple set of criteria to ensure that the scheme is open to candidates from non-traditional backgrounds and is accessible from a diversity of career paths and experiences within the R&I system. We have always stated that applicants who have already achieved research/innovation independence will not be competitive and that senior academics and innovators are not eligible for the scheme.

Becoming established and independent does not happen at a fixed point. We have noted that candidates who are further towards being established and independent have become less competitive as the scheme has progressed.

Disciplinary split of applications: There are significantly more applications from STEM subjects compared to the Arts, Humanities, and the Social Sciences. We do not see a difference in the award rates between applicants from different disciplines and we welcome and encourage applicants from



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the Arts, Humanities, and the Social Sciences. We currently support ambitious awards that range in financial magnitude from £300k to over £1.5m.

Host Support: Host support requirements remain unchanged. For full information on these commitments, please see the scheme guidance and associated FAQs. Beyond the minimum requirements on salaries/open-ended roles, there is no 'standard' offering for Fellows and our assessment of the commitment from the host will take this into account.

Research Culture: In the Round 4 interviews, we asked candidates a question on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, to gain insights into their ability to inspire and lead others, develop new relationships and influence across multiple disciplines and sectors. Our interview panel members were concerned that the commitments around EDI and Research Culture at an institutional level were perhaps not understood by FLF interviewees. We would encourage you to talk to all your early career staff (and wider) about these issues in preparation for future rounds and interviews.

The deadline for Round 6 outline proposals is Tuesday 19th January 2021 with the mandatory outline submission deadline the 10th December 2020.

The guidance for Round 6 has now been published on our website <https://www.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/future-leaders-fellowships/how-to-apply/> The updates are minor clarifications and a table outlining the differences to previous rounds is outlined at the top of the document.

We are holding an on-line engagement even for host organisations (not applicants) on Wednesday 7th October. This is a repeat of the webinars held earlier this month and is primarily aimed at potential academic host organisations; webinars aimed at potential business host organisations will be held at a later date.

The webinars will be an opportunity to:

- Find out more about the Future Leaders Fellowships scheme, including updates from Rounds 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the scheme
- Discuss some of the most commonly asked questions
- Ask questions to UKRI staff about the scheme

To register please go to https://ukri.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_sMaGLUu3TrG9z9_vqpVPAQ

Renewal point for awards: We have drafted the application and assessment process for continuation of funding beyond the first phase of the fellowship i.e. the four-year (pro-rata) point. We have already taken some sounding within the community and would welcome further feedback; further details will be published on our website in coming weeks.

Thank you for your ongoing engagement with this scheme, and all the support that you provide potential fellows including helping with applications, PI responses, and interviews. If you have any questions or feedback please email fellows@ukri.org.

Best Wishes,
Kirsty Grainger
Director, Future Leaders Fellowships