

Candidate

- Why are you right person to do this project?
- How is this fellowship going to enable you to become an independent researcher/leader in your field [dependent on fellowship level]?
- Why do you want to undertake a fellowship, rather than a postdoc?
- Where do you see your research / yourself in 5 years' time?
- If you were given unlimited amount of funding for 5-10 years, what would you do with it?

Importance & Impact

- How would you explain to a non-scientist what you do and why it is important?
- What are your plans to ensure that your research will have its maximum impact?

Research Environment

- What does King's offer to your research/training that other places do not?
- Why are you staying at King's for this fellowship?

Resources and Management

- What is the most risky element of your proposal? What will you do if it does not succeed?
- What is the role of your collaborators? How do you expect to manage such a varied set of collaborations?
- What if your collaborator/sponsor moves abroad and because of other priorities cannot commit to your project anymore. How would this impact on the success of your research?
- How would you find the PDRA/technician you are looking for?
- How are you going to manage the group?
- How do you assign people to projects? How do you monitor their progress?
- After the first year, you realise that one of your research staff/students is not up to the task you have set to them. What do you do?
- What are your past students/RAs doing now?

Miscellaneous

- How does the proposed research relate to your past work/proposals?
- Who are your competitors and what are they doing?
- Why is this research project a fellowship? Why can't it be done via one (or more) standard research grants?
- If we could award a single fellowship, why should we give it to you?
- What will you do if you are not awarded this fellowship?
- What would the title of your first paper be?
- What would the title of your next fellowship application be?
- How do you see your research changing the national/international agenda for research in [your research field]?
- Could you give an example of one thing you might do to raise the profile of your area outside of your immediate research community?

For further questions contact Dr Ying Chen ying.chen@kcl.ac.uk

Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience

Research & Innovation Committee

Fellowship Interview Guidance

Compiled by Dr Matteo Cella & Dr Clarissa Edwards

Outstanding candidates...

1. Are enthusiastic about their project and have a clear vision of what it will deliver.
2. Project confidence (body language and voice) and knowledge of their field (including competitors, potential collaborators and their work).
3. Give succinct answers, which are straight to the point.
4. Articulate how this fellowship will make them a leader in their field, and will contribute to advancing that field.
5. Are passionate, capable and motivated to succeed.

Resources

Arrange a mock interview at the IoPPN - contact Ying Chen ying.chen@kcl.ac.uk

MRC mock interview film - <http://www.insight.mrc.ac.uk/2016/09/27/interview-day-whats-it-like-to-face-a-fellowship-panel/>

Common mistakes

Presentations

It should be a funding interview presentation and not a scientific presentation. The former is more high level and about defining the importance of the question, why the candidate is the one to carry out this research, and what the funder will get at the end of the project.

Timing. A common issue is not adhering to time and rushing the end of the talk, which is often important as this defines the outcomes.

Crowded slides with tiny figures and no labels. Also avoid too much text and animation.

Key elements of the project

Not being able to convince the panel that you are ready to be Independent. You need to have something (an area of research, new techniques or methodology) that you will be identified for and ideally that you will eventually be leading the field with, not just continuing work from a postdoc.

Not making it clear that you are driving the research project and the question yourselves. This is most important for fellowships/personal awards.

Not knowing the potential risks in their research project and how to mitigate against these. Occasionally Committees may ask about a plan B: "What if experiment A doesn't work or disproves your hypothesis, what is your next step....". All proposals have an element of risk and failure but it's the ability to turn that unexpected outcome to an advantage and determine whether the avenue is still worth pursuing within the flexibility of the funding.

Interviews may fail because either a candidate adamantly sticks to their guns without acknowledging potential problems or offering mitigation; doesn't convince the committee that the whole proposal doesn't rely on one experiment; or hasn't thought of a plan B at all.

Undertaking a new methodology which either is not proven and poses a risk, or the candidate has no experience with the technique.

No pilot data.

Not understanding / appreciating how the research fits into the 'bigger picture'.

Interview style

Giving very long answers or not being able to sum-up the research proposal succinctly.

Interviews are often short and it is likely that a panel may have up to 10 points they wish to address with you. Long winded answers can eat into the time and prevent all concerns from being addressed purely due to there being no time left for additional questions. If the question is a complex one, you can give a succinct (3-4 point) answer and note that you have answered the question, but can give further details if more information is needed. Prepare an elevator pitch, even if you have been asked to give a presentation in the interview.

Being overly technical. Be aware that most Committees are comprised of academics from a broad scientific background. and in certain cases like charity funders, patient representatives. You are most likely to be asked questions from 2 (maybe 3) panel members. Check the expertise of all panel members as part of preparation and try to anticipate questions from their point of view/ field of expertise.

Being nervous is acceptable. Committees understand that there will be some nerves. Practising can help.

Not answering the question that was asked.

Not making eye contact with the Committee.

Becoming defensive or not showing willingness to learn.

Question examples

Research

Expect technical questions on your specific research proposal. If you have seen peer reviewers' comments, expect to be asked to address any concerns they raised. Go through your proposal (and get colleagues to do so), identify any weaknesses and prepare clear, concise answers to pre-empt any questions from the panel. Other general questions about the research:

- What is novel / unique about the research?
- Why should we fund this (meaning, why is it important?)
- What are the main technical challenges?
- How will this work advance the field?
- Let's move forward 5 years to the end of your fellowship. Everything has worked fine. What is your greatest success?