



Induction Guide for Discovery Research Committee members

2023



Wellcome's strategy

Wellcome supports science to solve the urgent health challenges facing everyone. We support discovery research into life, health and wellbeing, and we're taking on three worldwide health challenges: mental health, infectious disease, and climate and health.

At the heart of our new strategy is the recognition that advances in health often come from unexpected sources, and that curiosity-driven discovery research is vital to understanding how life works.

Discovery research is therefore a key part of the Wellcome strategy, delivering the bold and creative ideas that will change the way we understand life, health and wellbeing. It will give researchers the time and resources to be ambitious and apply innovative approaches to tackle difficult problems. It is truly open to diverse disciplines, teamwork and collaboration, as we think that a diversity of people and approaches will be needed. Our support for discovery research is agnostic to discipline and is not directed towards Wellcome's Health Challenges.

Supporting Discovery Research

Our Discovery Research [remit](#) is broad, covering:

- the fundamental processes that underpin biology, to understand more about how human life works
- the complexities of human health and disease, including clinical and population-based approaches
- the development of methodologies, conceptual frameworks, technologies, tools or techniques that could benefit health-related research
- the needs, values and priorities of the people and communities affected by disease and health disparities
- the social, ethical, cultural, political, economic and historical contexts of human health and disease

Research can involve observational, experimental or theoretical approaches. It can be carried out in the laboratory, office, clinic or field. It can be from a broad range of disciplines, and we particularly welcome applications that bring together different disciplines to tackle problems creatively and with new perspectives.

The remit excludes activities that are not grounded in discovery research. This includes:

- large clinical trials and population interventions where the main purpose is to develop, test or implement a drug, product or intervention. Intervention designs can be used if they bring understanding of biological and/or social mechanisms of health and disease
- compounds, tools, technologies or methodologies predominantly to be used for diagnosis, treatment or improving clinical care.
- proposals involving primarily implementation science
- the study of animal diseases, including in food production animals, that are not transmissible to humans or not considered a model for human disease

Our three Discovery Research schemes are designed to enable researchers to carry out research of the highest quality by giving them time and resources to make discoveries. We want Wellcome-funded research to be bold and creative, field-shaping and field-opening and we want our schemes to be instrumental in promoting a positive and inclusive research culture.

The schemes are designed to support researchers at different career stages:

Wellcome Early-Career Awards – for early-career researchers who are ready to develop their research identity. Through innovative projects, they will deliver shifts in understanding that could improve human life, health and wellbeing. By the end of the [award](#), they will be ready to lead their own independent research programme and will have advanced their understanding of how to promote a positive research culture.

Wellcome Career Development Awards – for mid-career researchers who have the potential to be international research leaders. They will develop their research capabilities, drive innovative programmes of work and deliver significant shifts in understanding that could improve human life, health and wellbeing. By the end of the [award](#), they will have made key contributions to the field and begun to train the next generation of researchers, promoting a positive research culture and supporting trainees to do the same.

Wellcome Discovery Awards – for established researchers and teams who want to pursue bold and creative research ideas to deliver significant shifts in understanding that could improve human life, health and wellbeing. By the end of the [award](#), they will have made major contributions to their research field by generating significant shifts in understanding, or developing methodologies, frameworks, tools or techniques that could benefit health-related research. Award holders should actively promote a positive and inclusive research culture, supporting trainees to do the same.

Building a positive research culture

As well as funding research, we work to foster a supportive and progressive research environment:

- We're committed to diversity, equity and inclusion by removing barriers people may face when they apply for our funding. We want research careers to be open to anyone with a great idea.
- We promote the development of positive and inclusive research cultures that support personal development, good management and leadership.
- We recognise that the outputs of research are varied; they include original research articles and monographs, data, reagents, software, intellectual property, and policy changes. We've [signed the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#), and prioritise the content and quality of research outputs rather than the number of research articles or the impact factor of the journal in which they are published.
- We recognise and make allowances for different career paths when assessing grant applications.
- We support [flexible research careers](#), and can provide support to enable those with a disability or long-term health condition to [apply for funding](#) and [carry out their research](#).
- We support researchers in their [professional development](#), and are signatories to the UK [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#).

In return, we expect our funded researchers to:

- Maintain the highest standards of research quality and integrity.
- Work to diversify their research teams and promote inclusive cultures in their environments. Everyone delivering the research should benefit from supportive professional relationships and development.
- Make all Wellcome-funded research outputs – from articles to reagents and tools – openly available.
- Participate in teaching, training and mentoring others.
- Work to ensure their research is inclusive in both design and practice, to help drive better science and more equitable health outcomes.

How Wellcome makes funding decisions

We are committed to transparency and inclusivity in our review and assessment processes. This begins with our application forms, which are designed to capture only the information we need to make funding decisions or to understand the people and research we have funded. We use a narrative form for applicants to provide information about their experience and the range of contributions they have made to research because we believe this will drive inclusive decision-making and a more positive research culture.

We rely on the expertise and impartiality of our advisory committees to help us make the best possible funding decisions. Our assessment processes are designed to be inclusive and equitable while ensuring we fund the best research. They include:

Initial review

When applications are received, Wellcome staff check whether each is eligible for the scheme and fits within the Discovery Research remit. Applications are also checked for compliance with our funding policies. We do not assess the quality or competitiveness of the proposals.

Shortlisting

Applications are reviewed by our [Advisory Groups](#), which select the strongest applications to be taken forward for further consideration.

We have ten Discovery Advisory Groups that shortlist applications for Discovery Awards and Career Development Awards. There are six Early-Career Advisory Groups which shortlist applications for the Early-Career Award scheme. While these Advisory Groups are subject-focussed, they will consider a breadth of applications within a research area.

Members of our Advisory Groups provide a high-level evaluation of the proposals, considering:

- the ambition and quality of the proposed research, and its potential to make significant advances in its field

- whether the applicants have the experience, skills and potential to deliver the research
- whether the research environment is appropriate and will support and develop the applicant, and how the applicant will contribute to a positive research culture

We provide Advisory Group members with copies of the applications, detailed assessment criteria, and instructions on how to score applications prior to each meeting.

Advisory Group members are asked to read a subset of the applications closely, lead the discussion of those at the meeting and provide a score and a written review. They are also expected to participate in the assessment and discussion of a range of additional applications, providing scores for those.

At the end of each meeting, members' scores will be collated to produce a ranked list. As a whole, the Advisory Group will make a recommendation to Wellcome on which applications should be taken forward to interview.

The written reviews will be used by Wellcome staff to support preparation of written summaries of the discussions from the meeting. These are shared with the Interview Committees who will consider shortlisted applications, or with unsuccessful applicants to help them understand the reasons for the decision.

Through our Committees we want to obtain a breadth of perspectives on the applications being considered. It is important that meetings permit constructive debate so that all members can give their views. We also want to ensure that applications are considered in a fair and inclusive way. We ask that members focus on the content of the proposals, looking past the way that the applicants' experience, ideas and plans are presented, understanding that this will be influenced by differences in English fluency as well as the institutional support and guidance available to applicants from diverse backgrounds

and locations. When reviewing applications, Advisory Group members should:

- refer to the assessment criteria and scoring guidance, focussing on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, and basing critiques on evidence
- provide a balanced assessment, considering the impact of any career breaks or other disruption
- be mindful of the diversity of applicants' backgrounds, opportunities and the institutional support available to them in developing their proposals, and how this may affect the presentation of their ideas
- engage in the discussion of all applications, even if they are outside the member's field, appreciating that potentially significant advances can come from across the breadth of our remit
- recognise and manage any unconscious biases that they may have

Written expert review

Shortlisted applications are sent for written review by external experts, who will review only the research proposal and advise us on whether the research:

- is likely to generate new insights or tools that will significantly advance existing knowledge or techniques
- will develop and test new concepts, methods or technologies, or combine existing ideas and approaches in a novel way
- is well-designed to address the research questions and deliver the anticipated outcomes

Wellcome staff select external expert reviewers for their close subject-matter knowledge of the research and/or techniques proposed. The written expert reviews are shared with the Interview Committees and with applicants, in advance of their interview.

Interview

The final assessment stage for all applications is a committee interview. We have three Interview Committees, one for each of our three schemes. Each committee is subdivided into four sub-panels, and the applications considered by each will cover a broad range of topics.

The interview can cover all aspects of the application but will usually focus on the research proposal and research environment. Interview Committee members will need to draw evidence from the application forms, Advisory Group reviews, written expert reviews and the interview when making final assessments.

Interview Committee members will be asked to consider the following aspects, with some differences according to scheme and career stage:

Research Proposal:

- is likely to generate new insights or tools that will significantly advance existing knowledge or techniques
- will develop and test new concepts, methods or technologies, or combine existing ideas and approaches in a novel way
- is well-designed to address the research questions and deliver the anticipated outcomes

Applicant:

- previous research outputs and contributions to the generation of knowledge provide confidence that they can deliver the proposed research
- their potential to develop into, or continue to be, an international research leader

Research Environment:

- how the chosen environment will support the applicant to deliver the programme of research
- how the applicant will contribute to the development and maintenance of a positive and inclusive research culture

The Committee Manager will send detailed scheme-specific guidance and assessment criteria ahead of each meeting.

Interviews begin with a brief presentation by the applicants. Two members of the committee are assigned to lead the questioning of candidates, but all members will have the opportunity to ask questions.

An interview can be a daunting experience for any applicant, and it is important that we give them the best possible opportunity to make their case. To this end, it is important that Interview Committee members:

- give all applicants their full attention
- are succinct and focussed in their questioning, and avoid multi-part questions
- remain respectful in the way they ask questions, no matter how challenging they are
- focus on the content of the presentation and applicants' responses to their questions, being sensitive to language and cultural differences, and the impact of any disabilities or health conditions
- are mindful of the diversity of applicants' backgrounds, opportunities and institutional support available in preparing for the interview

After the Q&A session with the candidates, there will be a brief discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the application with the rest of the Committee. As with the Advisory Group discussions, it is important that these discussions are based on evidence, are open and fair, and that all members are included.

Interview Committee members will score each application, and at the end of the meeting all members' scores will be collated to produce a ranked list. As a group the Committee will make a recommendation to Wellcome on which applications should be considered for funding.

Wellcome staff prepare written summaries of the discussions from the meeting which are shared with unsuccessful applicants to help them understand the reasons for the decision.

Final funding decision

Final decisions are made by the Director of Discovery Research at Wellcome, using the advice provided by Advisory and Interview Committees and taking account of Wellcome's strategic priorities and budget considerations.

Making fair decisions

Confidentiality

Wellcome is committed to transparency in our assessment processes, but confidentiality is required to protect personal data and to ensure that all applicants have access to the same information about the assessment process.

Our committee members are required to take steps to ensure the security and confidentiality of the data shared with them. It's also important that the content of committee discussions is kept confidential: Wellcome staff will provide applicants with information about the outcome of their application.

We will provide committee members with information on their obligations around confidentiality and data security when they are appointed. More information is available in the [Grants Privacy Notice](#) and [Privacy and Terms](#) outlined on our website.

Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest are a normal part of being a committee member, but it is important for members to tell us if they think they may have a conflict that might influence their assessment of any proposal or might be perceived to do so.

Before they receive the committee paperwork, we send a summary list of the applications to be considered for committee members to review. We will identify obvious conflicts, for example if they work in the same department as an applicant, but if they have any other connection with an applicant, they should tell the Committee Manager as soon as possible.

If committee members have a conflict of interest with an application, we may manage it by recusing them from the discussion and/or decision on whether to recommend that application, or the

entire meeting. We may not use them as a Lead Reviewer, even if they have the expertise. If they are the committee Chair, we may replace them as Chair for that application or meeting. To find out more, please see our [Conflicts of Interest policy](#).

Avoiding bias

Wellcome is committed to becoming an inclusive funder. Our [goal](#) is for people funded by Wellcome to be more representative of the global population. We are actively working to fund a more diverse range of researchers than we currently do.

We have changed aspects of our applications to acknowledge the varied researcher activities related to research culture and inclusion; however, we recognise that this does not remove our biases in the decisions we make.

We want committee members to feel empowered to understand their own biases, as well as challenge biases that may become clear during our meetings. That's why we will offer training for committee members and the staff who support those committees as a step to enhance inclusive decision making for our committees. Members of Wellcome staff will be available to discuss any issues of bias committee members encounter during the meeting.

Speaking up

If committee members are concerned that behaviours within a committee meeting may have led to an unfair outcome or may have discomfited or upset an applicant (or anyone else), they should talk to the Committee Manager or the Chair.

If committee members have any concerns about research misconduct, they should not bring these up during the meeting; they should discuss them privately with the Committee Manager.

Coming to Wellcome

All committee meetings are held at our [offices](#): the Gibbs Building, 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, UK.

The building is wheelchair-accessible with step-free access throughout and accessible toilets on every floor. We have two parking spaces for Blue Badge holders in our underground car park; these can be booked in advance. There is a fixed induction loop at our reception on the ground floor and portable induction loops are available. If committee members need someone to travel with them to support a disability or health condition, they should let us know as we may meet the cost of their travel and accommodation. Assistance animals are welcome.

Wellcome has all-gender toilets on most floors, a multi-faith prayer room and a quiet room that can be used by breastfeeding mothers. If you have specific dietary requirements, our catering team will provide suitable food.

If attendance at a Wellcome committee means committee members will incur costs over and above their usual costs for the care of dependants, they should contact us as they may be able to claim these expenses from Wellcome.

For details of any of the options noted here, or if any other support is needed to attend a Wellcome committee meeting, committee members should contact their Committee Manager or Committee Liaison Officer, who will be able to help.

Help us to improve

We want to improve our processes to ensure we make the best and most equitable decisions. We also want committee members' experiences to be rewarding. So, their comments, suggestions, and criticisms matter to us. Committee members are encouraged to share any concerns or feedback they have with our staff at meetings or by email at any time.

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