

Group Leader Fellowships in the Division of Biosciences: Information and Guidance for Potential Applicants

A. Overview

The Division of Biosciences is strongly committed to recruiting and supporting the most promising early-career researchers who choose to secure a Group Leader Fellowship as their route to becoming a PI. This policy applies to fellowships that support the establishment of an independent research group such as **Wellcome Trust Henry Dale, MRC CDA, BBSRC David Phillips, NERC IRF, UKRI FLF, Royal Society URF, CRUK, or ERC Starting Grants** and equivalent fellowships.

Our goal is to provide fellows with a world-class environment for their research. Recipients of such fellowships are integrated into departments with equal standing to full members of our academic staff. Our expectation is that the Fellow will transition to a permanent position at the end of the fellowship. Our commitment to Fellows starts with academic and administrative support at the application stage and continues throughout the tenure of the fellowship, with career mentoring, academic leadership and teaching guidance, and an appraisal process that aims to place the fellow in the best possible position for a permanent PI position (appendix 1). In line with this ethos, in the last 5 years the majority of our Group Leader Fellowship holders have progressed to permanent PI positions at UCL or elsewhere.

We are happy to receive expressions of interest to hold a Group Leader Fellowship within the Division of Biosciences either through our Fellowship Recruitment Calls or through direct application to **Fellowship coordinators** in our associated Research Departments. We are strongly committed to equality of opportunity and welcome applications from candidates irrespective of gender, ethnicity or disability to create the best possible cultural diversity. Information on Fellowship coordinators can be found on the relevant web pages for each Research Department:

[Cell and Developmental Biology](#)

[Genetics, Evolution and Environment](#)

[Neuroscience, Physiology and Pharmacology](#)

[Structural and Molecular Biology](#)

B. Selection and pre-award support

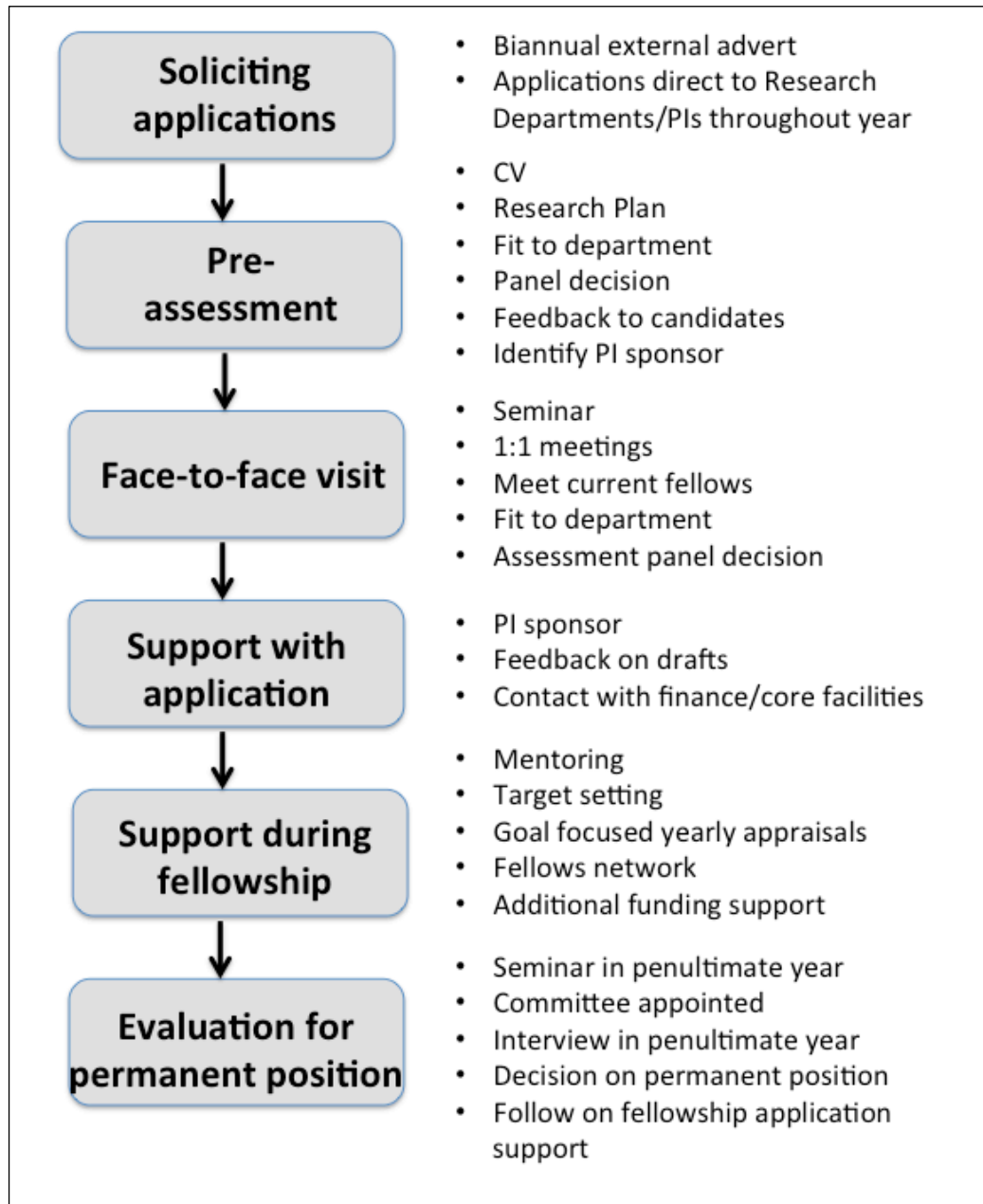
1. Initial pre-assessment

After receiving your expression of interest, you will be sent a letter providing further details of the application process and our support for applicants. You will also be invited to provide a **full CV with names of referees, an outline of your fellowship application, and a cover letter** that explains the suitability of your research for the fellowship scheme(s) you are interested in; the timeline for application; how you see your research programme/yourself fitting into the Research Department in which you will work. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Fellowship coordinators within each Research Department.

We assess all expressions of interest to establish the candidate's academic quality in view of the fellowship competition and their likelihood of success, the suitability of the fellow as a member of one of the Bioscience departments, how they align with current and future departmental research strategy, and how they align with the teaching portfolio and our capacity to ultimately absorb new Fellows as permanent members of staff.

2. Face-to-face meeting and research seminar

For potential applicants who pass the pre-assessment, we will arrange a departmental visit and research seminar to further assess your suitability as a fellowship candidate. At the same time, the visit also allows you to discover the environment and facilities we provide, get to know the departmental staff, research portfolio and culture, and better understand the 'package' of support we offer.



Your seminar will be open to the entire Research Department (all staff and students) and should present your recent work and fellowship plans. One-to-one meetings will be arranged with the Head of Research Department (HoRD), Fellowship coordinators, relevant PIs and Centre Directors (where appropriate). We will also arrange meetings with current fellows from different career stages and a tour of relevant facilities. If a visit in person is not possible, one-to-one conversations and a research talk will be conducted over Skype/Zoom.

After your visit, a decision will be made on whether we will commit to sponsoring you to apply for a Group Leader Fellowship.

3. Support for preparation of fellowship application

Following a decision to support your application, the departmental Fellowship coordinator will direct you to the necessary administrative contacts (e.g. finance office), and ensure that any documentation accompanying your application is provided (e.g. institutional commitment or departmental letters of support).

To provide assistance with the scientific aspects of your application, a PI within the department will be identified as your sponsor. This person will be close to your research field and be responsible for supporting you throughout the application process. They will assist you with developing and preparing your application, including giving feedback on draft proposals and put you in contact with specialist core facilities.

For candidates who are shortlisted for interview, we will hold mock interviews with a panel of 3-4 PIs with relevant specialist and generalist expertise of the research area and previous membership of Research Council Fellowship Panels. In these practice sessions, feedback on presentations will be provided, and questions will be asked that are similar to those that candidates may encounter, or in our experience tend to feature in fellowship interviews. General advice on preparation and interview technique will also be provided.

C. Post-award support

From the outset, we endeavour to provide Group Leader Fellows with the guidance and support required to maximise your potential and thus obtain a permanent position. All Group Leader Fellows will be appointed at Grade 8 on the UCL salary scale, with annual increments and consideration for promotion following the same regulations as other members of academic staff.

1. Membership of the Biosciences Fellowship Network:

Upon arriving at UCL, you will be welcomed into the Biosciences Fellows' Network. This Fellow-led community provides peer support and mentoring for fellows at each stage in their career through social events (where fellows can discuss any aspect of academic life or research), research talks and workshops to aid career development (e.g. lab management, communication, teaching, public engagement, engagement with industry or career paths).

2. Mentoring and guidance

New Fellows will be integrated into the Division-wide mentoring scheme for early-career researchers and assigned a more senior member of staff to guide them through the challenges of establishing themselves as independent researchers. Mentors will focus primarily on helping fellows to think about their career development and scientific strategy, rather than the specifics of the fellow's research.

Through regular meetings with your mentor and HoRD, you will be provided with specific guidance with regard to the pathway and activities that fellows should engage in to help secure a permanent position. The assessment criteria that will be used to judge success will be explained (e.g. research outputs, contributions to education, external engagement and departmental/divisional citizenship, as set out in the [UCL Academic Careers Framework](#)). Progress within the context of these expectations and criteria will be formally appraised once a year in your annual appraisal/staff review and one-to-one meetings with the HoRD. A mid-term review will usually be carried out at the end of the third year of your Fellowship.

The Division is committed to providing Fellows with the time and support needed for their professional development through a comprehensive range of training programmes and development opportunities. New starters should complete the online welcome package and core mandatory training. Fellows are encouraged to join Personal Development and Leadership Programmes catering to individuals at all levels.

3. Additional support for research

The UCL Wellcome Institutional Strategic Support Fund and other Faculty/Division funds can provide strategic support for the establishment of new research groups, programmes and/or laboratories. Newly recruited fellows will be helped by their mentor and HoRD to apply for these funds to complement their fellowship resources where applicable, e.g. by purchasing essential equipment, recruiting additional research staff, maintaining animal lines, or providing access to core facilities. Importantly, these funds can not only help ensure the goals of your fellowship are reached, but also help fellows explore new avenues of research which may form the basis of additional grant applications and thus ensure long term success.

4. Supervising PhD, Masters and undergraduate students

Fellows are able to apply for PhD students to join their labs through the different PhD programmes available at UCL, or through externally funded PhD programmes. They need to complete relevant training for supervisors and work within a supervisory team that includes more senior members of their Department. They can also supervise Masters and undergraduate projects.

5. Additional funding support beyond the end of fellowship

Fellows are encouraged to apply for Research Council grants during the tenure of their fellowship. In general, we are happy to support applications for grant funding which fall within the period of the Fellowship. If the awarded grant runs beyond the end date of the fellowship, you must discuss your application and obtain approval from your HoRD. It would be typical that grants **start earlier than one year** before the end of the current Fellowship and last for a **maximum of two years** beyond the Fellowship end date. Any such grant application would require some, or all, of your salary to be underwritten for the period beyond the end of your current Fellowship and this financial commitment requires Divisional review and approval. Note that when costing grants that run beyond the end of a Fellowship, there is usually some flexibility in the amount of PI salary that can be requested from the funder, but this contribution varies across funders.

D. Securing a permanent position at UCL

All Group Leader Fellows are reviewed in the penultimate year or earlier (15-9 months before the end date) of their Fellowship to establish whether they have met the expectations set in order to transition to a permanent academic position. To ensure a fair, transparent and consistent review process, Fellows are assessed on criteria set out in the UCL Academic Careers Framework. Achievements will be judged according to level of seniority and duration of the fellowship at the point of assessment. While it is recognized that the emphasis of the effort will be on Research, fellows are expected to have developed meaningful Education, Enterprise and External Engagement, Institutional Citizenship activities, and commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion.

1. Appointment of a review panel

The Fellow will be reviewed by a panel appointed by the Divisional Director in consultation with the Fellow's HoRD. The panel will normally include the Director of the Division, the HoRD, the FLS Vice Dean for Research and up to two other senior members of the Division (or three if HoRD or Vice-Dean are not attending due to conflict of interest). Members from outside the Division will be appointed if expertise is not available in the Division. Candidates will be asked to follow [UCL promotion guidance](#) and submit a personal statement, CV and publication list (using UCL's templates). Documents should be submitted two months in advance to the review panel to allow for academic references to be taken up.

2. Research talk

As part of the review, the Fellow will be asked to give a talk to their Research Department (open to all members of the Division of Biosciences). The talk should cover research achievements during the course of the fellowship, as well as plans for future research directions. Academic staff will be solicited for feedback to the review panel about the suitability of the Fellowship holder progressing to a permanent post.

3. References

The Fellowship holder will provide the names of at least three external referees (including at least one from outside the UK) who can provide evidence of the standing of the fellow in the scientific community, their scientific achievements, and their suitability for a permanent position at UCL (consistent with an application for promotion). The HoRD will request references using this list and additional referees.

4. Candidate interview

The final stage of the review consists of an interview with the panel. The Fellow will make a short presentation (about 15 minutes) of no more than seven slides, for example:

Slide 1: CV and professional history

Slide 2: Background to research area

Slides 3 and 4: Major research accomplishments during fellowship

Slide 5: Plans for future, including fellowship/grant application(s)

Slide 6: Vision for long-term scientific goals

Slide 7: Other contributions to the Division during fellowship

The presentation will be followed by an interview which will cover the Fellow's research contributions as well as their involvement in departmental teaching and training, external engagement and institutional citizenship. Based on the review documents submitted by the Fellow, feedback from the research talk, references and the interview, the panel will recommend one of the decisions below:

A) If expectations have been met, the Division will offer a proleptic appointment. It is expected that, where possible, further applications are made for full salary support.

B) If it is considered that expectations have not yet been fully met, the review period is extended and the assessment decision is postponed. Fellows can expect a proleptic appointment from the Division if expectations are met during the extension period.

C) The Division does not support the further employment of the Fellow within the Division, beyond the current fellowship.

5. Post-interview support

In all cases, the Division will mentor and support Fellowship holders in the preparation of further applications, or in finding another position at a different institution and in considering contingency plans for unsuccessful applications.

It is noted that any proleptic appointment is subject to continued appraisal and review according to the expectations for that academic post.