



## Briefing note for Wellcome Trust Senior Interviewees: Investigator Award, Senior and Principal Research Fellowships

### Interview format

- Interviews are scheduled for 45 minutes which will include a closed discussion of the Interview Panel.
- You will be told the Panel composition a few days in advance of the interview. The people in the room on the day will normally include about 10 Panel members, who can be permanent members of the [Science Interview Panel](#) or seconded members for a particular round (to ensure appropriate expertise), plus about 5 Wellcome Trust staff members.
- You will be asked to stand near (for your presentation) or sit at (for questions) a separate desk and chair at the front of the room. The Panel will be sitting at a large U-shape table.
- The presentation screen is quite small and colour definition is poor
- Candidates will be asked to give a 10 minute presentation involving no more than three slides without animation or movies. There is no timer on view but the chair will often give a warning i.e. one minute left.

### Preparing your presentation

#### Key messages

- Two people will have been designated to read the application and lead questioning: however **the whole Panel scores the application** and may ask questions when the lead members have finished.
- **The aim of the presentation is to capture the attention of, and win over, the whole Panel, many of whom will not be experts in your field** and may not have read your application.
- It is therefore important to ensure that your presentation “tells a story” and captures the interest of everyone in the room – even (especially) non-experts. A strong presentation should include the following messages:
  - What is the problem that your research will address
  - Why is this research programme important
  - Why is now a good time to do it
  - Why are you the right person to undertake this research
  - How is the proposal taking your own research interests in a new direction
  - What exciting things will it deliver

***“You need to convey your ability, expertise, excitement and deliverables”  
– Alan Thompson***

#### Tips for presentation content

Below are some suggestions for things you may wish to consider or include in your 10 minute presentation (advice to include these things is often given in mock interviews).

- Start by introducing yourself and the title of your project (this gives you 10 seconds to get into presentation mode!)
- Set the scene: do not be afraid to start quite simply.
- The slides should present key concepts and emphasise high level messages regarding:
  - Why is the research important (why it needs to be undertaken and why now).
  - Why are you the right person to do this research
- Highlight how your own recent findings have led to this proposal
- Clearly state your research questions / hypotheses / aims

- If your research is changing direction, you will need to convince the Panel that you have the capability and appropriate expertise for this, plus the ability to lead and move this research forward.
- If you use an example (e.g. a disease, model or diagram), it can help to use this throughout the presentation to maintain continuity
- Especially with modelling / computational experiments, including specific predictions can make the project more concrete and the presentation easier to understand
- Peer review comments are sent to you about a week prior to the interview and may form part of the discussion at interview. Often they are received too late to include a response in the slides however:
  - You might wish to address some simple comments in the verbal presentation where it is quick and easy to do so (e.g. concentration of substance used)
  - For comments requiring more detailed responses it can be a good idea to leave these to the discussion. This way you don't use time in your presentation tackling "negatives", and you leave the Panel something to ask: if you answer all the obvious questions upfront, they will be left with time to ask you more unpredictable ones!
- It can help to provide a summary of the expected outcomes of your proposal and their relevance to health (given Wellcome Trust's mission to improve health) at the end of the last slide. The last slide will be left on-screen during the questions so it can act as an aide memoire for the Panel with regards to your anticipated outcomes

### Tips for slide formatting

- The interview rooms are light, long and narrow with a small screen with only moderate contrast / resolution. As such:
  - Don't use small fonts that cannot be read from a distance
  - Use high contrast colours / box items to deliver a key message or partition slides
  - Label all axes and diagrams clearly
  - Dark images with small colour points (e.g. fluorescently labelled markers in cells) should be enhanced and should be large enough to distinguish from a distance
- Graphics (images, simple diagrams, cartoons) rather than words tend to be more effective: the panel should be listening to you and watching you take them through the slides rather than trying to read text. If they are reading text, they are not listening to you.
- Only include things on your slides that you talk about. If you don't mention it, don't include it.
- A brief statement (verbal or graphical) can outline why you are the right person to undertake this research: CV-level information is not needed on slides as it is in your application.
- Try not to use specialist abbreviations on slides, and if you do, define them.

### General Interview Technique

- Dress code is up to you, though smart clothes are recommended.
- Talk to the whole room and make eye contact
- During your presentation: modulate your voice (tone, speed); use rhetorical questions (why do I want to do this?) and pauses. Show your enthusiasm for the project.
- Consider your body language whilst giving the presentation and whilst answering questions
- Clarify any questions you haven't understood (rephrase if necessary and seek confirmation)
- In response to questions, structure your answer in two parts:
  1. State the answer simply in one or two clear, short sentences.
  2. Go on to explain your answer succinctly. That way, if the reviewer cuts you off part-way through your answer, you will already have given the key message.
- Expect to be challenged during your interview, but the questions are not there to trip you up.
- Know your application inside out (so if they concentrate on one experiment or the time allocation of one post / what an RA's role will be etc., you can answer this easily)
- Be ready to explain how your research findings can relate to the bigger picture (impact on health and society)
- Remember: the panel will be assessing your application against many others on the day, and it is your job to convince them why your proposal is important and absolutely must be funded!

- **Post interview:** don't read too much into the tone or atmosphere of the interview: it is not a predictor of likelihood of funding!

#### **Making the most of mock interviews**

- The [SLMS Facilitation Team](#) can assist with arranging mock interviews and can provide examples of successful applications and slide-sets
- Please keep some days free in the two weeks before your interview to allow for mocks to be arranged
- Come to your first interview with slides and 10 minute talk fully prepared
- The first mock interview will most likely concentrate on your presentation and slides rather than questions
- Any suggestions for mock interviewers are gratefully received

*This briefing has been developed from information gained from mock interviews, real interviews (following feedback from successful candidates), insights from previous and current Wellcome Panel members and prior experience of the UCL Strategic Research Facilitators. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed.*