



University  
of Glasgow

# Guide to Fellowship Applications

WHERE  
**INSPIRING  
PEOPLE**  
FLOURISH



### The guide will help you to:

- locate and target appropriate fellowship opportunities
- create well-written fellowship applications
- understand how best to prepare and sell your skills at interview.

This guide was written by Shinton Consulting Ltd in 2010, based on a series of workshops run in Glasgow throughout the academic year, with subsequent additions and updating being carried out by the Research Strategy and Innovation Office in 2014.

### Clarifying some terms

Fellowship funding covers many different kinds of awards, but this guide is written with a specific class of funding in mind. These are the career development awards given to individuals near the start of their academic careers. These awards allow people to develop their independent research vision, to start building a research group and to position themselves to secure a permanent academic contract. Some have a particular focus on career development and may give you access to other networks and training opportunities. These awards are very prestigious and highly competitive.

### Applying for a Fellowship at Glasgow

Glasgow offers generous packages to support individuals with externally funded fellowships who wish to bring their research to Glasgow.

Successful Fellowship applicants will benefit from:

- The University's peer group mentorship programme for fellows
- The possibility of an additional year of funding and / or the opportunity to be transferred to an open ended lecturing contract, subject to performance and strategic fit.

For external applicants: If you are interested in applying for a Fellowship and intend to undertake your research at Glasgow, send a CV plus a short statement about your research interests to [leadershipfellows@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:leadershipfellows@glasgow.ac.uk)



## Strategies for Identifying Fellowship Funding

### Planning ahead

Most Fellowship deadlines are only available once a year, so it is important that you are clear when the deadlines are and leave plenty of time for proposal preparation. Think ahead, even from the first year of your postdoc, to ensure that you are ready to apply to these schemes when the time comes.

Some schemes require preliminary applications before approval is given to apply in full or institutions may be limited to putting forward a certain number of applications.

It is essential to contact your prospective School or Research Institute as soon as possible. They are likely to be able to support your application with information on their institutional strengths and will want to meet you in order to give the best possible recommendation in their parts of the application process.

### Where to look and choosing a scheme that suits your subject/career stage

Start by looking at the webpages for staff in your field to see common types of Fellowships that people have applied for. You must check eligibility conditions carefully before investing time and effort in an application.

Most fellowships are aimed at candidates with 3 to 10 years of post-doctoral experience. However, there are a few that will accept candidates that have just finished a PhD, and others that have a cut-off point of just 6 or 7 years post-PhD. Many schemes are restricted to a relatively narrow range of subjects, in the same way that other research grants are.

Some schemes are specifically aimed at improving diversity, by supporting scientists who have interrupted their careers or need flexibility for family reasons (e.g. Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowships or Daphne Jackson Fellowships) and the Research Councils offer 'return to research' bursaries for people who have taken career breaks.

Some schemes are open to citizens of any country, whilst others are open to EU/EEA citizens or others with a relevant connection to the EU/EEA, generally established through working/gaining a PhD here (such as the Royal Society).

The University maintains a **list of Fellowship Funding opportunities**. The **Research Support Office** produce a monthly newsletter detailing funding schemes and events and provide access to Research Professional, a database of funding opportunities.

### EU Funding

**Marie Skłodowska Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships** are specifically designed for international mobility. This would be appropriate for someone from another country to apply to take up a Fellowship at Glasgow or for someone from Glasgow wishing to move elsewhere. For other **EU funding**, such as **ERC Starter Grants**, The University has a dedicated **EU Funding Team** who run regular workshops and are happy to discuss your individual application. The diagram below sets out some of the schemes that are relevant to different career stages.



## EU funding schemes

EU grant type						
ERC	Advanced					●
	Consolidator				●	
	Starter			●		
Marie Curie	IF		●	●	●	●
	ITN	●				
<b>Research career progression</b>		PhD student	PDRA	PI new	PI mid	PI exp

### Understanding your Funder

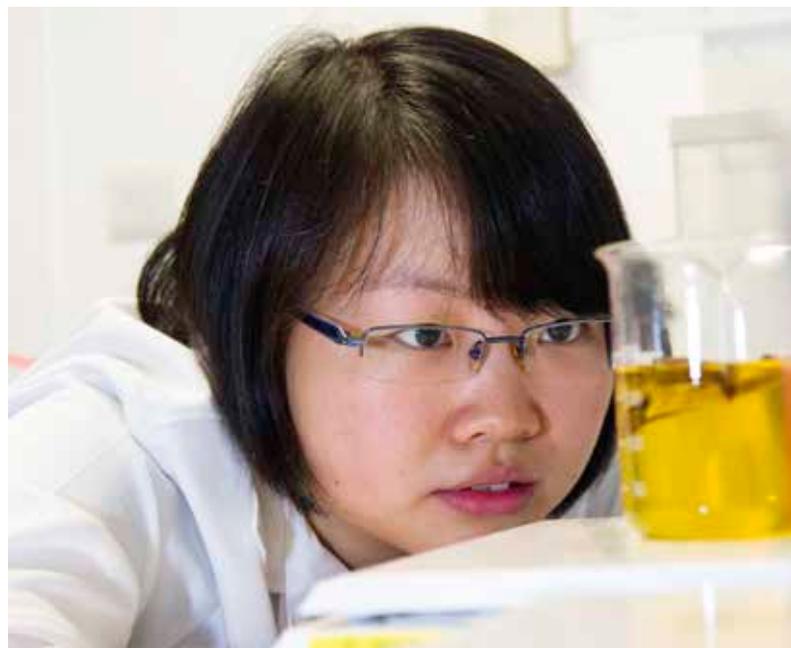
Some questions to consider as you investigate and contact funding bodies:

- What are the current trends in funding? Are there funds for research in other areas?
- What are the current limitations and restrictions? Are there schemes for researchers at different career stages? Are there schemes for smaller scale projects?
- What subject areas were awarded funding last year? Who was awarded funding – what was their career stage?
- What are the future plans of the funder? What does their strategic plan say?
- Who are the decision-makers/assessors? Are there any in my home institution I could approach for general advice?
- What review processes do they follow? Do I have a chance to respond to reviewers before the decision is made?
- What are the deadlines for submission? How much time will it take me to get internal signatures or to get help to cost the project?
- How long will the process take? Do I have time to do it properly?
- What is the proper way to approach? Is it initially with an outline proposal?
- How many people apply each year and what percentage are awarded grants? How have previous years' budgets been allocated?

Once you have a clear idea about the eligibility for the scheme and the expectations of the funder there are a few additional questions to ask yourself:

- Am I keen to develop a research group and develop into a research leader?
- Do I want my career to follow the path that these schemes support and promote?
- Does my publication record and my achievements to date meet the required standard?
- Do senior colleagues support my application?

By now you are probably all too aware of how competitive the application process for fellowships is. Some schemes have success rates of less than 10%, so you need to feel confident that you are in this top 10%



## The application

The application process looks for outstanding people, planning exciting and important projects and working in the right places. It is important that you get the narrative right in your application. You are telling the story of why this is the right time in your career to go for this and demonstrating that you are ready for research independence.

**Three 'P's – Person; Project; Place are at the heart of any application.**

### Person

Make sure your proposal convincingly argues:

- Why the funder should support you and why the award should come now
- Why you are the very best in your field at your stage of career
  - Emphasise your achievements
- Include the Specifics – Where have you published? What has been the outcome of your research?
  - Highlight your seminal contributions to your field
- Show you have already done something quite special and will do something special again
- Include the “nitty-gritty” – include citation index/rankings of journals/paper downloads / invited conference talks or invitations to work with industrial partners, policy makers etc (if these are relevant to the application).
  - Describe how your appointment will benefit your host institution
  - Make sure your CV makes you stand out. In many fields the primary indicator is your publications and the panel will be looking for first and last author papers in top journals. In some fields, the expectation will be at least 50% first author and they may look for journals with wider readership.
- Your potential as a research leader
  - Give evidence that you are becoming a PI (principal investigator) and provide evidence you can manage a team and mentor others.
  - Describe how you are driving things forward in your field. Give evidence of where you have been invited to contribute to professional bodies, taken a lead on conference organisation, review boards etc. Be careful of passive language (e.g. saying that you are a member of something won't demonstrate your contribution). How will this Fellowship help you to further develop your research independence? What new responsibilities will you take on?

People often find it difficult to talk about themselves in leadership terms. It's useful to remember that the panel will be looking for you to provide evidence as much as possible, rather than filling the application with adjectives (like 'world leading') or vague statements.

### Project

Fellowship projects must deliver more than research. They have to benefit and build your career. When you describe the project:

- Set an exciting and ambitious vision
  - Your proposed work must be novel and different from the work of previous supervisors or PIs. The panel want to fund the best work in your field – can you convince them you are doing it? Why has no-one else done this and why is now the right time?
- Make it specific to you (weak applications often read like an extension to current work)
  - Build on the variety of skills and experiences you have and describe something that only you can do – develop a project which shows real development of your career
  - Ensure the proposal isn't closely related to previous supervisors or current PIs – independence is at the heart of fellowship funding and intellectual dependency on someone else (even if unfairly perceived) will kill an application
  - Balance the safe and risky elements of your proposal
  - Good risk is something exciting and different which might not work, but could mean a future Nobel prize!
  - Bad risk is seen when the perception is that there is no chance of a project working – always counter this with pilot data or evidence of collaborators who will boost the project's chances of success
  - Send out to three or four people for feedback to check this balance is right
- Make it a pleasure to read (drop jargon/abbreviations)
  - Be aware that the panel may be very diverse and that concepts and terms can mean different things outside your topic. Don't let the key messages get lost within jargon.
- Have fall back/contingency plans
  - If there is a 'bad' risk, build in a safety net. Recognise the risks and have alternative plans - if things go wrong early, there are still avenues to explore in subsequent years. Major reason for rejection is the 100% faith in things working
- Include milestones
  - Clear time points - “in six months we'll have done this, which will enable us to do this...”
- Management plans (who will do the work and when?)

## Place

Your objective here is to convince potential funders that Glasgow is the best for you to do this work. Why Glasgow and why a particular research group? Be aware that access to data or samples is not a good enough selection criteria in itself. Discussion with your School can help define the benefits more clearly.

- How is the choice of Glasgow a reflection of my ambition?
- Include evidence you will broaden your horizons and build good networks.
- Emphasise the part you will play in the institution's future success
- Are you the next leader of research there and are your referees willing to state this?
- Collaborators: If you plan to work with researchers in other institutions and sectors make their contributions to the work and success of the project clear.

We feel that Glasgow offers a great environment for ambitious researchers. We are a leading partner in many local initiatives, a member of key international networks (such as Universitas 21 and IRUN) and have a strong track record in research assessment. In many applications, you will be asked about training, mentoring and leadership development opportunities offered by your prospective institution. For further information on the training environment, please take a look at the **Staff Development Service** or contact **Elizabeth Adams**.

## Writing a Data Management Plan

If your application requires a data management plan, the University webpages have information on how to think about this. It is important that you understand and adhere to what your funder requires. Training courses on data management are also offered through the Staff Development Service.



## Writing an impact plan

Increasingly, Fellowship applications are asking for applicants to explain how they will enable the potential economic or societal benefits of their research to be realised. This means that you need to be specific about potential beneficiaries, as well as what steps you will take in order to facilitate this. The Staff Development Service run courses on planning your research impact. You may also find the University's annual research staff conference or Knowledge Exchange conferences useful for helping you to think more broadly about potential impact. Some College specific advice and contacts can be found below.

College of Science and Engineering  
[www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/scienceengineering/staff/research](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/scienceengineering/staff/research)

College of Social Sciences  
[www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/research/impact](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/research/impact)

School of Social and Political Sciences  
[www.glasgow.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/ppke/pathwaystoimpact](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/ppke/pathwaystoimpact)

College of Arts  
[www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/arts/knowledge-exchange](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/arts/knowledge-exchange)

MVLS  
[www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/mvls/researchimpact](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/colleges/mvls/researchimpact)

## Finally

Review, review, review your application. Ask as many people as possible to give you feedback and insights into the process, including people from outside of your immediate field, at different career stages and of both genders (being aware of any possible unconscious bias in the terminology you use to describe yourself in your application / cover letter).

Get someone to do a final proof-reading. Although it's tempting to believe that things like layout, formatting and spelling don't matter, any reviewer will tell you that they have limited time to read a huge volume of applications. Setting something out well, in a way that is easy to read and without any errors or typos is extremely important. Don't waffle and use bullets or sub-headings as appropriate. Match your writing style to what your funder / discipline expects. Figures or images may also be helpful.

Have a look round the University's webpages to find others who have previously been successful with this funder and might be willing to read your application or offer advice.

## The interview

If you are invited for a research fellowship interview, the University will help by arranging a mock interview with senior staff. This is a rigorous and challenging way to test your preparedness for the big day. Speak to your School, to ask whether a mock interview can be arranged.

No mock questions can really prepare you for the scrutiny and pressure of the day, but these questions should help you to prepare your thinking in advance.

### Person

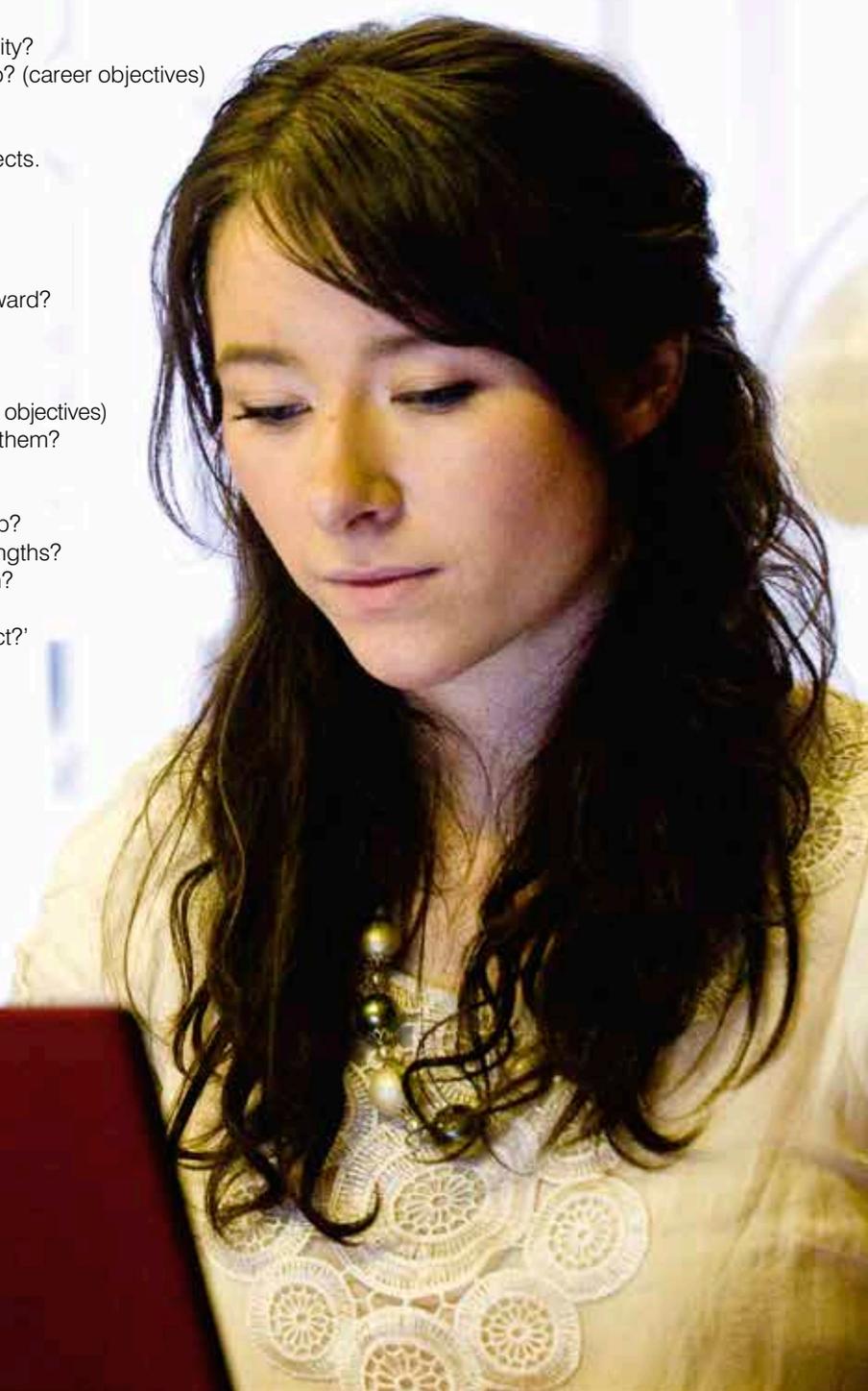
- Why do you deserve this fellowship?
- What impact have you had in your professional community?
- If successful, what would the fellowship enable you to do? (career objectives)
- Whose work has influenced your research interests?
- Where do you hope to be in ten years?
- Tell me about your approach to managing research projects.

### Project

- What is the importance of this project?
- What has changed in your field since your application?
- Why does your approach to this problem deserve this award?
- Convince me your project is feasible
- If you could only do one experiment/study, which is key?
- What will you do if your hypothesis is proved wrong?
- What would the ideal outcome of this project be? (research objectives)
- Who are your main competitors? Can you compete with them?

### Place

- Why have you chosen that department for your fellowship?
- How will you complement the existing departmental strengths?
- What value will you add to the department and institution?
- If you are staying in the same place
  - 'Why are you staying in department X to do this project?'
  - 'How will you ensure your independence?'



Researchers from Glasgow have provided us with their own questions from a range of interviews:

- Tell me about your approach to managing people.
- Why should this fellowship be awarded to you when other researchers are evidencing success with other alternative approaches?
- Your department has no history of doing research into this approach – why should we take this chance on you?
- Looking at your publication record, your papers are dominated by your lead PI. How have you shown independence in the past and how can we be sure you will become independent in the future?
- Your application focuses on expanding your expertise into new areas. How can we be sure that you can pick up these skills?
- What do you anticipate might be the longer term societal or economic impacts of your work and how will you help to realise these impacts?
- How long before this work becomes obsolete?
- What did you learn from the process of your last research project, that you will apply in the next project?
- How will you compete with other researchers in your field? Who are your main competitors?
- Can this research progress without this funding?
- How do you feel about your publication record?
- Why do you deserve this fellowship?
- What impact have you had in your professional community?
- What makes you different from the other candidates?
- How will this fellowship allow you to develop your career?
- What are your career intentions?
- What motivates you to get up in the morning?
- Explain to a lay person why this work is more important than (topical science subject inserted)
- Would you need any specialist equipment?

You should also check whether the post might involve teaching and consider whether they are likely to ask you about this (e.g. your teaching experience, use of new technologies, ability to engage large numbers of Undergraduates in a lecture theatre).

### Some general advice on answering questions

From the advice to applicants to the Fulbright programme (a prestigious scheme for US students to study in foreign countries)

*“ A basic starting point in preparing for any interview is self-assessment - think about yourself in a specific setting and reflect on your abilities to be successful in that setting. What experience, knowledge, skills, or special training do you have to make you confident in your ability to pursue your project? What aptitudes, experience, or personal traits do you have to make you confident in your ability to navigate a new cultural environment? ”*

This advice is equally relevant to Fellowship interviews. Think about the interview as an opportunity to put across the information that the panel must have in order to give you the award.

What do you really want to get across?  
What kinds of questions would allow you to do this?  
Which scenarios convey this information?

If you have thought this through in advance, as you are asked questions you will be more likely to recognise opportunities to present vital information.

Waffle in interviews is one of your worst enemies. Time will be tight, so think about the very best selling points. Short, informative answers will give a better impression. For practical advice in framing responses one acronym to remember is STAR – outline the Scenario, describe the Task that led to your Achievement and positive outcome or Result. The Careers Service and Careers Adviser for Researchers (Katrina Gardner) can give you advice on structuring interview questions (for Fellowships and other types of jobs). Contact Katrina if you would like to book an appointment ([Katrina.gardner@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Katrina.gardner@glasgow.ac.uk)).

When answering, talk to the whole panel although focusing on the person who asked the question. Be aware that people have different body language, which doesn't necessarily reflect their thinking! The “smilers and noddors” on the panel may build your confidence, but be sure to engage even the most negative looking people.

There will be questions you can't anticipate, but the focus of the interview will be on ensuring they find the candidate who meets the funding body's criteria. Be clear on these and don't hesitate to ask for clarification if a question isn't clear. You should also take a moment to consider your answer – the panel will understand your need to think, as long as you aren't too slow!

### A quick note on presentations

Running over time in a presentation can lead to panel members scoring you negatively. Talk to others in your field about who might be likely to be on the panel (e.g. will there be an industry representative or people from other fields) and pitch your language accordingly. You should practice your presentation to others in your School, prior to the interview. You may also wish to sign up to one of the University's 'presenting with impact' workshops, which cover how you control your breathing and body language to give a more confident presentation.

Finally, say thank you – whatever the outcome, the experience will be one you will learn a huge amount from and the panels are made up of very busy people.

# Guide to Fellowship Applications

## Quick Checklist

### One to two years into your Postdoc

- Identify suitable opportunities and deadlines, as far in advance as possible
- Speak to your School and PI
- Attend any relevant training (e.g. presenting, Fellowship workshops, careers interviews, writing an impact statement). Keep an eye on Research Funding news from the Research Support Office as there are sometimes workshops on a particular funder (e.g. Royal Society)

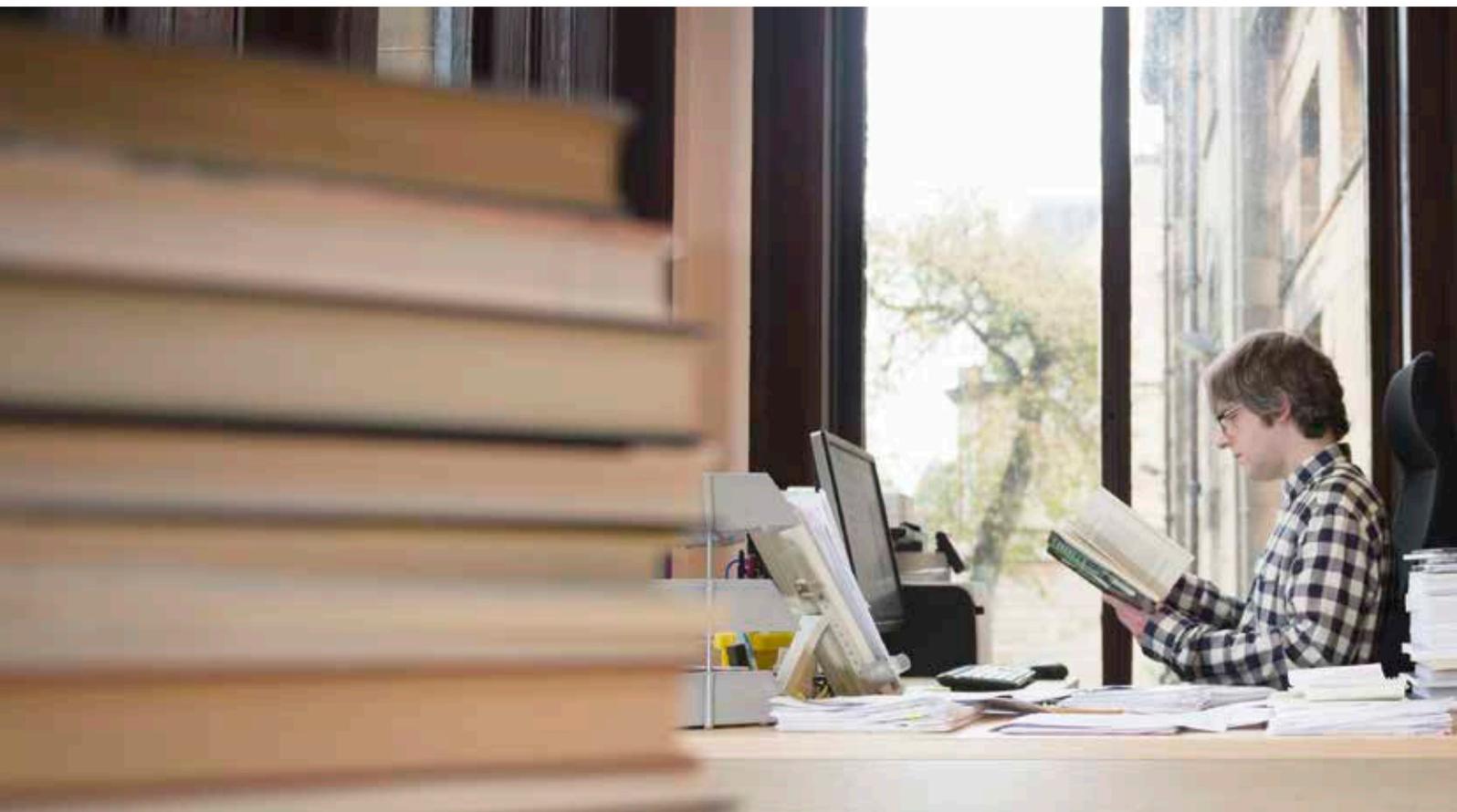
### Putting together your application

- Ensure you have addressed the 3 Ps in your application.
- Find out if anyone locally has secured this type of funding in the past and might be willing to advise.
- If you would like feedback or proof-reading, give people as much warning as possible

### Just before application

- Contact the Grants Team, within the Research Support Office, as early as possible to discuss justification of costs/costing and submission of application.

**Good luck and we hope to welcome you to Glasgow soon!**







[www.glasgow.ac.uk/research](http://www.glasgow.ac.uk/research)

Design: cactushq.com. The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401.