



NH&MRC Fellowships

“Getting in, staying in and climbing the ladder”

Ian Smith

Deputy Dean Research

Where am I coming from?

- NHMRC Fellow through 5 rounds (Program, Institute and Feral)
- Research Institute, Industry and University experience
- Continual funding since 1984 - NHMRC, NHF, ARC, START etc. (Program, Institute & project).
- Experience with project grant writing and refereeing (National and International)
- NH&MRC GRP panel member (Biochemistry) five years (3 as chairman)
- 2005, chairman NH&MRC Special Initiative for Glucosamine trial
- 2007 Deputy chair project grant committee
- 2008 Chair GRP and assessor selection panels

Aims of the Research Fellowships Scheme

Be familiar with the specific award aims

- Develop and support highly productive Australian biomedical and health research scientists
- Provide researchers with a career structure
- Foster an intellectual environment supporting training
- Encourage translation of research outcomes into health practice
- Facilitate interaction with industry

Aims of the Practitioner Fellowships Scheme

Be familiar with the specific award aims

- Strengthen clinical and public health by:
- Providing opportunity to combine research with professional career
- Facilitate translation of research outcomes into practice
- Contribute to evidence-based practice and policy development



Research Fellowships/Research Careers:

Its all about TRACK RECORD!



TRACK RECORD: Relative to opportunity!

Things to consider & work on!

Publications

Grants

Peer Recognition

Prizes & Awards

Research Translation

Clinical Activities/Public Health

Research Training

Professional Activities

Local Activities



NH&MRC Fellowships:

- 1) Plan ahead (years not days!)
- 2) Write the Application
- 3) Identify Assessors
- 4) Read, re-read and read again, ask colleagues to read
- 5) Submit
- 6) Applications go out for review
- 7) NH&MRC nominates appropriate fellowship panel
- 8) 1sp, 2sp, panel and chair read reports
- 9) Panel meets to rank applications

Position Classification Statements

- Lists which set out broad outlines of baseline activities, attributes and achievements
- Definitions are provided for each of the 4 levels of the scheme
- Considered relative to opportunity
- Includes activities and attributes required of a Fellow
- Stronger applications will show breadth over wider range of the descriptors - but not all of them
- ***You don't just MEET these guidelines, you need to be HIGHLY COMPETITIVE within them***
 - *note that all interviewees already "meet" the guidelines*

Review the Research or Practitioner Fellowships Funding Policy:
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/fellows/apply/granttype/career/index.htm>



Are you Competitive? If so at what level?

Decide which level to apply for (SRF A, SRF B, PRF, SPRF)
n.b. If initial entry you will only be considered for the level applied for (exception SRF A/B). Renewal normally 5th year, if unsuccessful an extra year is granted, if again unsuccessful. Grant in Aid awarded for 7th year)

Read other successful applications (submitted at the same level)

Leave yourself plenty of time

Make a list of career/research highlights to help formulate executive summary and overall pitch:

A Good Executive Summary is Crucial!

Track Record, Scholarship, Contributions to the Field

(Remember it is relative to opportunity)

Publications:

(highlight seminal contributions, specialist contributions, contributions to the discipline, quote citations, if Impact factor low, is the journal best in field?)

Grants:

(local (easy to forget), university national, international, biotech, pharma etc.)

Peer recognition (important!):

*(Invitations to speak- plenary, invited session, specialist meetings, seminars, education etc.) Editorial boards, Committees (local national and international), advisory boards), impact on national /international policy, consultancies.
Use travel budgets smartly, put yourself around!!!!*



Track Record, Scholarship, Contributions to the Field

(Remember it is relative to opportunity)

Prizes Awards:

(International, national, state and institutional)

Research Translation:

Commercialisation, collaborations (pharma, biotech etc), consultancies, patents, involvement in start ups/spin outs, clinical translation.

Clinical Activities:

Leadership roles, Participation in College, society or health care facility committees; profile in health policy forums.



Track Record, Scholarship, Contributions to the Field

(Remember it is relative to opportunity)

Public health:

Leadership or key role in design, conduct, publication and advocacy for policy and practice of seminal research; key responsibility for changes in concept, practice or priority of research etc.

Research training:

PhD supervision, teaching, post doc supervision, (how have your students progressed?)

Professional activities:

Peer review committees, grant reviews, professional societies, office bearing positions, meeting organisation etc.

Local activities

Seminar programs, training initiatives, special events, committees,

Identify Assessors

This is very important as the NH&MRC will use these guys!

Chose senior scientists, your internationals should be at professorial level and/or Directors of institutes (the panel will probably not have heard of these folk!). You want someone who knows how to write a good reference! As a courtesy let the potential assessor know that they could be approached and highlight the areas that are important for their report (your international standing!!).

Chose local assessors as above, it helps if they are familiar with the NH&MRC fellowship scheme (they will know what to say!).

Promotion

Promotion is usually requested in synchrony with a request for renewal. Alternatively, Fellows may apply for a promotion out of synchrony in years 2 or 3 during the course of an existing five year Research Fellowship. Promotions will not be considered in years 1 or 4 of an existing Fellowship.

Competitive applications for Promotion out of Synchrony will be assessed and ranked with applicants for Initial Appointment, Renewal and Renewal with Promotion. To gain promotion, the applicant must be ranked above the funding cut-off for that year.

Applicants who seek promotion from SRFA to PRF may be considered for promotion to the SRFB level if not competitive for the higher level. This process applies to both Renewals with Promotion and Promotion out of Synchrony.



NH&MRC Fellowships:

The Process:

Peer-Review Process

- Applications are assigned to one of three Peer Review Advisory Panels - PRAPs (65-70 per panel)
- Only competitive applicants proceed to interview (cull)
- Panels seek external assessors
- Interviews (~50 interviews per panel over 3 days)
- Ranking:
 - Outstanding (top 5%)
 - Excellent (top 10%)
 - Very Good (but not top 10% internationally)
 - Good (some reservations)
 - Fair (major reservations)
- Funding available to Outstanding and ~45% of Excellent

The Interview Process

(Who Gets To Interview?)

- Initial Applicants: High cull rate up to 45%. Only those remaining are interviewed.
- Renewal: All applicants.
- Promotion (out-of-synchrony with renewal): All applicants.
- SPRF (Initial appointment or Promotion): Considered akin to "Personal Chairs" and are treated as a professorial appointment. Separate interview late in the week (Thurs) by the RFC itself, not interviewed by the PRAPs.
- SPRF Renewal: Interviewed by the PRAPs, as all other candidates.

Review the Research or Practitioner Fellowships Funding Policy:
<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/fellows/apply/granttype/career/index.htm>

The Interview Process

The Panels:

- Three PRAPs + one RFC panel.
 - PRAPS (Peer Review Advisory Panels)
- RFC (Research Fellowships Committee).
 - Consists of Professorial Level or SPRF appointees.
 - Make all final rankings decisions
 - A member of the RFC chairs each of the three PRAPS as well
 - RFC interviews SPRF applicants (but not SPRF renewals)

The Interview Process

The three PRAPS cover a broad number of research fields.

Some basic science applicants whose research involves "humans" may be assigned to Panel C, whether clinical or not.

	Research Fields	Broad Research Area
Panel A	Biochemistry, Immunology, Virology, Oncology, Parasitology, Infectious Diseases and Genetics	Basic Science
Panel B	Physiology, Neuroscience, Pharmacology and Endocrinology, (Reproduction)	Basic Science
Panel C	Epidemiology, Health Innovation, Applied Statistics, Clinical Sciences and Practitioner Fellowships	Public Health, Clinical Medicine & Science, Preventive Medicine, Health Services

The Interview Process

(What Are The Questions Seeking?)

- When invited to speak freely (eg opening statement), you should:
 - Attempt to present your best case
 - Avoid going back to repeat anything already covered verbally
 - Avoid generic/stereotype answers - do not over-rehearse answers
- When asked a question by a Panel member:
 - Listen carefully to ensure you understand it
 - Ask, if not clear what they want
 - Get to the point *quickly*. eg, answer first, then explain briefly
 - Avoid going too far beyond the question
 - Use the question, after answering clearly, to bring out further strengths you might have in that area they may have overlooked, but be brief. This can sometimes turn the conversation your way.
 - Address your answer to ALL panel members - never speak to only one.

How to Rank A Research Fellow

Fellows are: Leading Scientists *and* Scientific Leaders

Panels must balance distinct criteria:

- Excellence of the Body of Scientific Contribution
 - Contribution to science or medicine is significant and *sustained*
- What is, and how you will maintain or expand your competitive edge?
- Evidence of Recognition by Peers
 - National / International (perhaps higher emphasis); prizes, plenaries, reviews, commentaries.
- Strong Plan/Vision for Research Growth
 - Not simply "more of the same"! Know where you are going.
- Service to the Discipline / Training / Mentoring



The Interview

The Tough Questions!

- Some questions from the Panel may throw you off balance:
 - Is your publication rate declining?
 - Is the quality of journal in which you publish adequate?
 - Are you the real "driver" or too dependent on collaborator/mentor X?
 - Have you over-extended yourself/not focussed enough?
 - Whats your plan to build your team?
 - Whats your strategy to increase your grant income?
 - How are you contributing to Science Policy?
- Do not despair. Even the "biggest" names get these questions!
- The Panel wants to see how you respond to perceived or real weaknesses.
- You cannot excel in all areas. Answer the question first, and highlight strengths in other areas, or *acknowledge* you need to do more in that area.
- Think these issues through before interview!

The Interview

Honesty and Sincerity

- Be honest and truthful - your body language gives you away. Not what the panel wants to hear, but what you know is true.
- Avoid self-inflation - you did not get an interview if you were not already seen as very good.
- Don't expose yourself - no one can meet all the criteria.
- Your role in a team:
 - If at SRF: Don't talk down your mentor
 - If at PRF/SPRF: acknowledge contribution of team/postdocs
 - Give credit where due - this reflects on you
- Don't under-sell yourself either. Many scientists have difficulty talking about themselves.

More Information

NH&MRC Career Info:

<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/fellows/apply/granttype/career/index.htm>

ARC Career Info:

http://www.arc.gov.au/applicants/researcher_fellowships.htm



Good Luck!

