

# My Intermediate fellowship interview experience: blood, sweat and tears...

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## Congratulations on getting to interview



- Majority of applications are not short listed for interview
  - Overall success rate at intermediate level is <20%
- Average success rate at interview is about 30-50%
- If you have got this far, you are in a very good position to be successful, so you **MUST** prepare and take the interview process seriously
- You are on a level playing field, you will now be ranked on interview performance

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## **Read the instructions on the interview email carefully**

- Most will ask you to acknowledge / accept the invitation to attend for interview
  - Check the deadline for this acceptance and the required documents and respond
- They will give instructions about the format of the interview
  - Read this carefully
- Read the responses from Reviewers

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## **Reviewers' feedback from funder**

- Most funders will provide Reviewers' comments prior to interview
  - Some may ask for a brief written response prior to interview
  - Some (most) will expect you to address the comments at interview
- When reviewing a Fellowship, funders (especially NIHR and MRC) specifically ask their Reviewers for points that should be raised and asked at interview
- Any points that are highlighted to you in the Reviewers' feedback are there for a reason
  - The aim of this is to allow you to prepare for the interview
  - You will be asked about the points raised by reviewers
  - You **MUST** prepare sound answers to the points raised, do **NOT** ignore any feedback

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## **Do not be put off by negative comments**

- If the Reviewers' feedback raises lots of negative points, do not let that put you off
- You have been shortlisted for a reason, the panel like you and your project
- Just prepare robust answers to the points raised
- Often negative feedback is because
  - You haven't addressed the Reviewer's pet subject
  - The Reviewer hasn't understood what you were trying to say
  - They are trying to help improve the project
- If the feedback is positive, do not get complacent and think "it's in the bag"
  - You are still going to be assessed on a level playing field to others at interview

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## **Go back to the application and know it inside out...**

- Make yourself read the whole application
  - Be critical, if you think there are parts that are weak, think about how you might make them stronger – discuss your concerns with your supervisor
  - Put in context with any recent publications
  - Put it in context with any of your own recent results/data
- Know what you have written inside out and back to front
- Don't just read the bits that relate to Reviewers comments
- You must know exactly what you have written in every section, and be able to defend every word
- If you spot errors, be prepared to explain them if you are asked about them

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## Other general preparation

- Check members of interview panel
  - Check specifically if there are any lay members (NIHR will have lay members)
- Will help to work out who will be leading on questions for you
  - Usually about 15 people on the panel
  - 3 plus Chair will usually ask questions
  - Lay member will ask questions if present (NIHR)
  - They will have read your application and the Reviewers' feedback in detail
- The remainder of the panel will know nothing about your area, may have read your abstract, or maybe just the title...
- You have to keep them ALL engaged
- They will all score you

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## Presentation

- MRC and NIHR ask for a presentation at the start of the interview
- Usually very strictly timed (3-5 minutes)
- They give a brief about what you should include – read it and do what they say...
- The presentation is a “Dragon’s Den pitch”
  - This is your chance to shine and win over the whole panel
  - Make them see why your research is so important
  - Make them see why YOU are the person to invest in
  - Make them see why you need this Fellowship
- Do not use jargon, keep the language scientific, but as simple as possible

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## Presentation

- Keep your slides simple
  - They are a visual aid - they should not “take over”
  - You should remain centre stage
- Include responses to the Reviewers
  - Address the points raised even before the panel have a chance to grill you
  - Tackle the issues “head on”
  - Include any important new preliminary data / publications (from you)
- Include the importance of the Fellowship for your training
  - Incorporate training and development and why you need this fellowship
  - They are investing in you as much (sometimes more) than your science
- Keep to time and PRACTICE+++
  - The first sentence you say will make or break it, say it again and again until you know it inside out

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## 5 key messages – for presentation

- What is the problem?
- Why is it important?
- What is the gap in knowledge?
- How you are going to address the gap
- Why you are the right person to invest in to do this work

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## Mock interviews

- You **MUST** arrange mock interviews
  - Plan as soon as you hear the outcome
  - Allow plenty of time to form a panel (n=3 members)
  - Allow time for you to improve after feedback and have another interview
- At least 2
  - With people you do not know and are not in your field
  - With people who have been through the process
- Make sure your supervisor helps to arrange interviews
  - Discuss with CATO office
  - Research Strategy Office – Faculty of Medicine
  - Kimberley Trim – Research Strategy Coordinator
- Each Dept in FoM will have a grants administrator
  - NHLI – Alun Owen

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## Why you need them (funder) and they need you...

- Fellowships invest in you as a researcher
- The funder needs to know why they should pay your salary
- What you will gain

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## My Rocky Road...

### 1. British Lung Foundation Research Fellowship (1 year)

- After my MD I had sound research skills and knowledge
- MD was in humans – histology and descriptive
- I needed to answer mechanistic questions and needed the skills for this
- I applied for this Fellowship to develop a murine model and generate preliminary data for a more substantial Intermediate Fellowship
- Gap in training in vivo work

### 2. Wellcome Intermediate Clinical Fellowship

- Demonstrated I could do animal work
- Had developed preliminary data
- Needed significant new mechanistic / lab / basic science skills
- Needed more substantial funding to progress to independence
- Gap in training mechanistic lab bench skills

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### 3. NIHR Career Development Fellowship

- I had developed significant mechanistic expertise
- I had collected observational data from paediatric airway samples
- I had generated questions which needed to be translated in an interventional study
- To become a “full” Clinician Scientist, I needed expertise in clinical trials
- Gap in clinical trials expertise

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