

Unlocking Potential: Navigating Round 11 of the Future Leaders Fellowships – Q&A

Authors/Contributors: Sara Shinton, Arifa Choudhury, Joanna Bullivant, Steve Meader

Can you share examples of successful FLF proposals?

There are no official sample proposals distributed by UKRI, but you *can* access information about funded fellows. The [FLF Development Network - Future Leaders Fellows Development Network](#) provides profiles of all funded fellows. You can cross-match these with UKRI's Gateway to Research, which holds additional details on their awards. Some FLFs have voluntarily offered to share their applications; they are often generous and open to being approached directly, especially those in similar disciplines. Many fellows also give talks on their projects and application experiences.

Should I ask existing FLFs for advice or feedback?

Yes. Many applicants speak to current FLFs for guidance, mentoring or feedback. Starting early gives more opportunity to get your application reviewed multiple times before submission.

Can I reapply if previously unsuccessful?

Yes, absolutely. Around 200 applicants are invited to interview and most of them are judged fundable, so it's common for applicants to reapply. You must show what has changed since your last submission. Panels expect progress, so if the application looks identical, reviewers may question why it should be reconsidered. Typical gaps between rounds mean at least two years have passed, so there should be evidence of new research, outputs, or partnerships. Institutions often encourage resubmission, but you should justify clearly how your proposal has developed.

Do New Investigator Awards affect UKRI FLF eligibility?

Having a New Investigator Award does not automatically exclude you. Some FLF holders have previously held such awards. Panels look at the case you make: How the FLF would take you further/what new potential and opportunities it unlocks. Ultimately, it's about your narrative of independence and leadership potential.

If Co-Investigators can't be costed, how do we pay for people who will do the work?

You should cost Research Assistants (RAs) and technical staff into your proposal. Co-Investigator salaries and overheads can no longer be costed because some institutions misused this in earlier rounds. The FLF is designed to support your transition into research leadership, so the expectation is that RAs/technicians not you nor Co-I's will carry out most of the day-to-day research. You *may* still collaborate with Co-Is; they just cannot have their salary and indirect costs charged to your FLF budget. Exceptionally, UKRI may allow discussions about special cases, but this is rare.

Can I cost students (e.g., PhD students) on my FLF application?

No. You **cannot** cost studentships on an FLF application. Students must be funded through other routes (e.g., doctoral training programmes). You *can* have PhD students in your group if supported by the university or other funding sources. This rule exists because UKRI wants students to receive structured training.

How do interdisciplinary collaborations fit into the FLF if partners can't be Co-Is?

Interdisciplinary collaboration is encouraged, but collaborators must appear as: project partners, training providers, secondment hosts, non-costed Co-I's (they can contribute intellectually and help shape work packages, but the FLF fellow must remain the research lead and cannot cost their Co-I's academic salaries).

Does lack of institutional match funding affect my application?

No. Panels are briefed on common funding realities and will not penalise applicants for limited institutional resources.

Will Round 11 have caps for clinical or technical applicants?

Yes, for clinicians; no separate caps for technical professionals. Institutions receive extra clinical slots because the MRC provides additional funding. Large universities may receive two clinical places; smaller ones usually receive one. This applies only to applicants who are clinically active in an MRC-relevant field. Research technical professionals count toward the main institutional cap; there is *no* separate technical quota.

How seriously is EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) taken in the assessment process?

EDI is taken very seriously, both at panel and UKRI level. A designated Rover (observer) attends all panels to ensure proper handling of EDI, peer review and behaviours. Early issues

(e.g., bias against career breaks or assumptions about leadership pathways) have significantly reduced; panels now self-police strongly. Generic answers about EDI (e.g., “I’ll follow university guidelines”) score poorly in interviews. UKRI wants FLFs to represent the future of research leadership, which must be inclusive.

Panels consider:

- Career breaks and part-time working (flagged at the start of discussions)
- Output gaps caused by personal circumstances
- Reasonable adjustment needs at interview
- The use of positive action, in rare cases, to correct statistical disparities

What reasonable adjustments are available for applicants with disabilities or additional needs?

UKRI offers tailored reasonable adjustments support process.

Examples include extra time at interview, support from a third-party advisor for application preparation, permission for a companion to join the interview, adjustments for hearing impairments, anxiety, autism spectrum conditions, etc. Applicants must notify UKRI early to arrange appropriate accommodations.

Can I be a Co-Investigator on other grants and still apply?

Yes, but it depends on scale. If you are Co-I on a large infrastructure grant (e.g., £5M with major work packages), panels may see you as already established. If you are Co-I on a smaller grant or a minor work package, this is unlikely to affect eligibility. Panels assess whether the FLF would be transformative for your independence and leadership trajectory.

Can associate professors or more senior researchers apply?

Yes. Eligibility is based on early career researcher (ECR) status relative to your trajectory, not strict years post-PhD or job title. Applicants should demonstrate potential for leadership and transformative research. Each career path is considered individually and the onus is on the applicant to make the case for their ECR status.

What does ‘Early Career Researcher’ mean in the FLF scheme?

There is no rigid definition. It’s about your trajectory and leadership potential, not job titles. You could be an assistant professor with rapid research progress, or an associate professor whose career has been teaching-heavy but is now building research momentum. Panels do not rely on job titles, as institutions use them differently. STEM careers often involve long postdoctoral phases, while social sciences may involve teaching-heavy roles before full-time research. Applicants must define for themselves why they are still early career and how the FLF would transform their trajectory.

What counts as ECR status?

Panels assess whether you are at a stage where the fellowship could significantly enhance independence, leadership, and research impact, not whether you fit a strict time frame post-PhD.

Do I need a dedicated mentor?

Not strictly but demonstrating strong institutional support and mentorship improves your application. Mentors can be internal or external; the key is having guidance for both research and career development. If you can't find a mentor for a specific aspect of your work, remember that the FLF Development Network will offer this support if you are successful and you could refer to taking up this offer in your application to show you appreciate the need for this support.

Should industrial or charity partners be expected to contribute 'in kind'?

Not necessarily. If you are working with a small company or charity, their contribution is recommended to be costed rather than assumed in kind. What matters is that the partner's role is project-specific and justified. Always consider intellectual property (IP): IP arising from the project belongs to the host organisation, businesses cannot automatically claim IP; they may purchase rights at fair market value and be mindful of subsidy rules when involving businesses.

What does 'Research and Innovation Excellence' mean?

It refers primarily to the quality of the proposed research project: Importance of the work, Novelty and originality and Feasibility of the plan. Reviewers also consider your ability to deliver the project, judged relative to your career stage.

How is research excellence evaluated?

Panels consider both the proposed research and your ability to deliver it. The narrative CV is used to showcase contributions, leadership, and potential, rather than relying solely on high-profile publications.

What if I haven't yet published world-class papers?

Panels assess your trajectory relative to career stage. You can highlight potential, expertise, and capability to execute transformative research. Narrative CV allows storytelling beyond conventional metrics.

How should I present my skills in a narrative CV?

Clearly evidence your experience, don't just list skills. Explain where and how you acquired them and highlight collaborations and support that strengthen your credibility. There's a lot

of advice online about writing a narrative CV.

Could you submit a traditional CV?

You do not submit a traditional CV; instead, you provide a narrative CV. Evidence your skills and experience. Tell the story of your career trajectory, including barriers and achievements. Highlight impact even if outputs look 'low-impact' on paper – it's your opportunity to talk about how important they have been to those who engage with them and you.

Does fundamental research count, or is FLF only for applied/technology projects?

Both are eligible. FLF funds everything from basic research to high-technology projects. Impact does not have to be a new medicine or policy. It can mean influencing thinking, methods, or practice within and beyond your field. The key is to show how your work will have reach and significance, even if indirect.

Does research need to have immediate societal impact?

No. FLF supports fundamental and applied research. Impact is measured in terms of influence, reach, and contribution to your field, not only immediate commercial or policy outcomes.