



Australasian Wound & Tissue Repair Society

So, you would like a career in academia... ...tips on how to find, and apply for a fellowship

By Dr Zlatko Kopecki and Dr Brooke Farrugia
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So, you have decided you are enjoying your doctoral experience and you think a career in academia might be the right path for you, so the question you may ask is how can I make this a reality? The truth is this... academia is quite a competitive career path, but one of the best ways to start your career as an academic and independent research is by being awarded a fellowship. There are a number of difference fellowships that are available, and we will go through them in more detail below but here are few tips that are applicable for any fellowship you have decided to apply for



MAKE SURE THAT YOU READ THROUGH THE FUNDING RULES CAREFULLY!!! Each funding agency will have slightly different funding rules and conditions for their grants and fellowships. Make sure that you read them carefully, after spending time preparing your application the last thing you want is for it to be ineligible because of a technicality.

Get started on your application as early as possible! Ideally you have put some thought into your research project before deciding that you would like to apply for a fellowship, as it is extremely helpful if you have some preliminary data to include to help show that your project is feasible.

Get as many people as you can to read through your application. The more feedback you can get the better. This includes people that are not familiar with your project or are from a different field. It is important to remember there are people on the panel who will be reading (and judging) your application that are also not from your field, you need to make sure that they going to be able to understand your project.

You need to make your application sound like you are, and give proof that you are, the best researcher out there (without sounding too arrogant). The reality is that as every other applicant that you will be competing against will also be saying that they are the most appropriate candidate for the fellowship as well.

How good is your track record? Different fellowships will weight this category differently, but your track record will count for a substantial amount no matter which fellowship you apply for. If your track record is not going to be competitive should you wait a year



and focus on getting publications out and applying for smaller seed grants to build up your profile and being more competitive with other applicants.



APPLY, APPLY, APPLY!!! Unless you try you will never get there!

With Australia there are two main government funding bodies, the National Health and Medical Research Council ([NHMRC](#)) and the Australian Research Council ([ARC](#)). Within these two funding bodies there are a number of difference fellowships that are awarded each year to early career researchers. The eligibility for each fellowship available between the two funding bodies varies, and the while the rules tend to stay the same there are often changes to these rules vary from year to year.



Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

There is a guide that is put out by the NHMRC - [ECF - guide](#). This guide, as well as annual guidelines released, provide the basic info on how to prepare the fellowship applications. One tip we can advise is that you start your RGMS profile as soon as possible as learning your way around it can also be a challenge!

There two main fellowship streams for the Early Career researchers in the NHMRC system – namely Early Career Fellowship and Career Development Fellowship (level 1 and level 2). NHMRC also offers fellowships for the more senior researchers however here we are focusing on the Early Career researchers. Early Career Fellowships can be a) Full time Australian based, b) Full time overseas based (2 years overseas, 2 years Australia) and c) Part time Australian Based. Career Development Fellowships have more categories but generally Full time Australian based – R.D. Wright Biomedical, or Industry and Part time Australian Based Clinical, Population Health or Part time employment. There are also some awards available advertised through the NHMRC website. Only one application can be applied at each level at any round. There are also time restrictions which apply for applicants to be eligible: 0-2 years post PhD conferral (4 yrs for Clinical and no limit for Health Professional) (Early Career Fellowship); 2-7 years post PhD conferral (Career Development Fellowship Level 1) and 7-12 years post PhD conferral (Career Development Fellowship Level 2).

Early Career Fellowship	Career Development Fellowship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published approximately 11 peer reviewed journal articles 50% of their publications were first author Presented at 5 national meetings and 3 international meetings Contributed to their research community more than once (e.g. as a journal reviewer, committee member) 10% have received NHMRC funding as a named Chief Investigator 19% have received an NHMRC postgraduate scholarship 25% had career disruptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published approximately 17 peer reviewed journal articles (taking into account first authorship and quality) Published approximately 2 review articles or book chapters (taking into account first authorship and quality) Presented at international meetings at least twice Obtained research funding as a first-named CI in a competitive granting scheme Has international postdoctoral experience Has led their own (small) research group

Common question by the young researchers is – Am I good enough to be considered or successful? Our advice is based on the successful applicants in 2014 and table below summarised some of the requirements or profile of the typical successful applicant for 2014.

Applications are submitted for the NHRMC using the RGMS system online, where applicants must create and complete a profile and CV, and parts A and B of the application online as well as upload following documents: proposed research, evidence of PhD conferral, Academic transcript, and Referee Reports.

To enable the applicants to develop their careers, recently the rules have been changed in the NHMRC stating that it is no longer required to change the research team, however for the Career Development Fellowship international postdoctoral experience is favourable. If the applicant is not changing the research team, they must provide a statement of why this is beneficial for their training, give details of the program plan to develop the breadth of their research career and have this statement authorised by their supervisor.

Unlike the ARC, the NHMRC fellowships have a stronger focus on the applicant itself and scoring is more reflective on the applicant achievements followed by research proposal and institution/supervisor standing. For detail information regarding scoring please check the annual guidelines before you write your application. It is also useful to read the assessors guidelines to get an idea of what the assessors are looking for. One recent change in the NHRMC ECR fellowship scheme is that all applications are scored by panels but only top 50% are discussed by panels at the teleconference meeting therefore following the guidelines you need to make sure to have the best chance of being in the top 50% and hopefully being a successful applicant. Depending on the funding available each year the success rate is around 20% so the schemes are very competitive and prestigious.

Application dates for both of these fellowships open on 04/02/15 and close on 01/04/15 for funding in 2016. For more information on the NHMRC fellowships can be found at following links:

Early Career Fellowships

[Early Career Fellowships | National Health and Medical Research Council](#)

Career Development Fellowships

[Career Development Fellowships | National Health and Medical Research Council](#)



Australian Government

Australian Research Council

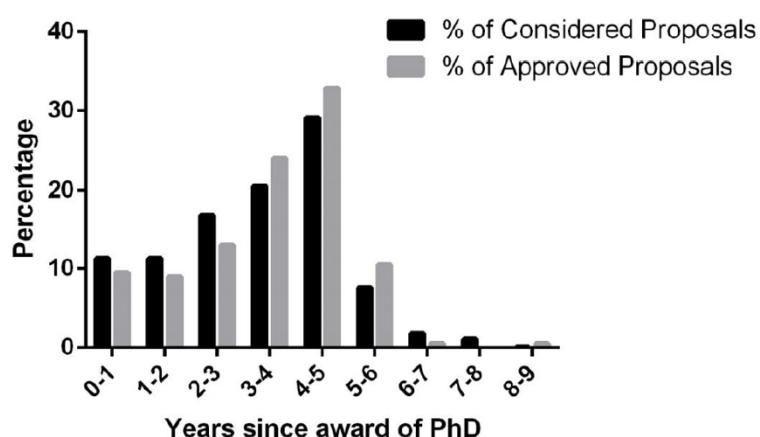
As well as the ECR fellowships offered by the NHMRC the main fellowship awarded by the ARC is the Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) researchers 0 – 5 years post PhD conferral. One difference between this fellowship and those offered by the NHMRC is that these fellowships are based on the discovery program and also including project funding as well as your salary. As such a lot of the weighting of the DECRA is based on the project, rather than the individual applying for the fellowship. For fellowships that were recently award for 2015 funding the selection criteria for applicants were as follows:

Proposals will be assessed and ranked using the following selection criteria:

- Project Quality and Innovation 40%
 - Does the research address a significant problem?
 - Is the conceptual/theoretical framework innovative and original?

- What is the potential for the research to contribute to the Strategic Research Priorities?
- Will the aims, concepts, methods and results advance knowledge?
- DECRA Candidate 35%
 - Research opportunity and performance evidence (ROPE); and
 - Time and capacity to undertake the proposed research.
- Research Environment 15%
 - Is there a supportive and collaborative research environment for the project?
 - Will the Project provide the DECRA Candidate with the capacity and opportunity to develop an independent record of innovative, high quality research?
 - Are the necessary facilities available to complete the Project?
 - Are there adequate strategies to encourage dissemination, commercialisation, if appropriate, and promotion of research outcomes?
- Feasibility and Benefit 10%
 - Are the design of the project and the expertise of the participants sufficient to ensure the project can be completed with the proposed budget and timeframe?
 - Will the completed Project produce innovative economic, environmental, social and/or cultural benefit to the Australian and international community?
 - Will the proposed research be cost-effective and value for money?

If you are interested in applying for a DECRA another aspect to take into consideration is that while the fellowships are open for researchers 0 – 5 years post PhD conferral you are only allowed to submit two applications over the time period that you are eligible. Additionally there are only 200 of these fellowships awarded, the success rate for 2015 funding was 14.3%, making them highly competitive. Statistics released by the ARC following the announcement of the outcome for funding commencing in 2015 detailed the percentage of applications that were considered and awarded based on the number of years since the applicant has been awarded their PhD. As shown in the figure below the majority of applications that were considered for a DECRA and were also successful where 3 – 5 years after they had completed their PhD. This is not surprising as 75% of a DECRA application is assessed based on the



research project that is proposed and the applicant's track record, applicants need time to develop their own research projects and track record.

The rules for 2016 applicants have not as yet been release nor have the opening and closing dates, but further information on the DECRA fellowships can be found through the link below:

<http://www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/decra.htm>

Society and Agency Money

If the field that you work in or your project is quite specific you may be associated with or familiar with a society or agency that awards fellowships or small grant funds. Depending on the society or agency these pots of money may not be as large as the two main funding bodies

but as an ECR they are definitely worth considering applying for. Being awarded this type of fellowship or grant will also help boost your track record for perhaps applying for a more prestigious fellowship in the future.

Overseas Fellowships

Do you want to stay in Australia? Would you like to see the world? There a number of different fellowships open to researchers who may not be citizens of the country where the fellowships are offered as a way of encouraging the transfer of knowledge. Two examples of foundations that offer these fellowships are below:

- [Marie Curie](#)

- [Humbolt fellowship](#)

University Fellowships

Another option if you would like to continue your career in Australia and know the research group that you would like to join are Vice Chancellor fellowships that are offered through Universities. A number of Australian universities that offer VC fellowships are listed below, or look through to see if the university where you would like to go have similar fellowships on offer. As with any fellowship make sure you read the rules before applying as they often are different between universities.