**Sir Henry Wellcome Postdoctoral Fellowship**

**Introduction**

Wellcome has evolved its approach to research careers and reviewed the use of time-post qualification as an eligibility criterion. Time based eligibility criteria do not always accurately reflect research maturity and stage of independence, particularly when researchers have moved fields or had career breaks. In order to provide greater flexibility and clarity, we have removed years of post-doctoral experience as an eligibility criterion. We will look at your research plans, vision and competitiveness relative to your career stage when assessing your application.

**What is the aim of Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship?**

The aim of this scheme is to provide support for you in the early years of your postdoctoral research career to consolidate your research skills and explore new research areas or environments. This fellowship is not about doing more of the same or about building your own group but about broadening your research horizons and learning the new research skills and techniques you will need to establish yourself as an independent researcher leader in the future. The fellowship enables you to develop your own ideas, answer your own research questions and establish your own network of collaborators, independently of your PhD supervisor or current Principal Investigator (PI). To achieve this, you can work with the leading scientists in your field who will guide your research and support your professional development.

**What is an early-career researcher?**

You can apply for a Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship if you are in the final year of your PhD or are an early-career post-doctoral researcher with some initial but limited postdoctoral research experience. At this career stage researchers are expected to have started to make important contributions to research. This may include anything from publications and patents, to software development, impact on health policy, practice, technology or product discovery and development. They will be starting to drive their own research (usually evidenced by publications) but they still require more time to consolidate their existing skills and explore new scientific areas, under the guidance of an experienced research sponsor. They will be able to articulate and drive their own research ideas and form collaborations but are not yet ready to lead their own independent research group.

**Do I need to move away from my current lab or spend time abroad?**

The aim of the Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship is to broaden your research horizons. This is not necessarily about moving geographically but about gaining new research experience, learning new skills and developing your independence. However, you should consider whether this will be possible to achieve if you remain in the same environment with the same researchers. You should develop your research vision and identify the researchers and environments that will provide the most appropriate training, resources and experience to enable you to mature as a researcher and answer your research questions. This could involve staying at the same host institution or moving to a new location in the UK or elsewhere. This could also include working in industry. During the Fellowship you can work in more than one location, as driven by your research, so that you can maximise your opportunities.

**I’ve got 4 years post-doctoral experience. Should I apply for a Sir Henry Wellcome or a Sir Henry Dale Fellowship?**

With 4 years post-doctoral experience we would usually expect you to be ready for a Sir Henry Dale Fellowship, however, we recognise that career paths may not always be linear and that not everyone progresses in the same way. This may be particularly applicable if you have changed fields, disciplines or worked in different sectors. Therefore, to determine the most appropriate fellowship you need to establish which career stage most accurately describes your experience. Early-career researchers should apply for a Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship while early-independent (intermediate) researchers should apply for a Sir Henry Dale Fellowship.

See the definition of an early-career researcher above to see if it describes your experience. Alternatively early-independent (intermediate) stage researches will have significant postdoctoral experience and be ready to lead their own independent programme of research. They will have already made significant research contributions. This may include anything from publications and patents, to software development, impact on health policy, practice, technology or product discovery and development. They will clearly be driving the work (usually evidenced by publications) and will be starting to lead their own research (e.g. developing collaborations and networks independently of their current Principal Investigator/Supervisor or publishing as the senior author). They will have the research maturity to independently design, manage and lead a creative and innovative research programme and will be starting to develop an international reputation for excellence in their field (eg invitations to provide expert peer reviews or present their work).

**Will more years post-doctoral experience make me more competitive for a Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship?**

Not necessarily. You should apply for the fellowship that most closely matches your experience. It is expected that if you have more years of post-doctoral experience you will have more achievements (e.g. important publications, awards, invitations to present), be more independent and have a more developed research vision. Therefore, we will always assess your track record relative to your experience. However, we will take career-breaks, changes of discipline or area and part-time working into account when assessing your progress. Particular attention will be given to your most recent outputs and achievements to evaluate your career momentum and trajectory.

**Examples of successful Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship applicants**

1. AB is a final year PhD student who expects to have his *Viva* in the next 6 months. His PhD has gone very well and he has already published some papers where he made a significant contribution. The most important work from his PhD has just been accepted for publication. He successfully applied for a travel grant and this will enable him to present this exciting data at a forthcoming international meeting. For his Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship, AB wishes to change his scientific direction. This will build on his existing experience but will require working with new models and learning specialised new techniques. He will spend the first two years in a new lab in the UK but will then move to the USA to complete his fellowship.
2. CD is a postdoctoral researcher who finished her PhD 18 months ago. Her PhD was

very successful, during which she published an important, highly cited, first author publication and some additional papers where she made a significant contribution. During her PhD she had the opportunity to present her work at a scientific meeting and won a prize for “Best Poster”. She learnt some of the key skills required in her field but to gain additional experience she undertook a one year post-doctoral position in a different lab. During her post-doc she learned new techniques, worked with new collaborators and experienced a different way of approaching the key questions in her field. She also had the opportunity to supervise an undergraduate project and publish another important paper.

CD decided that although she wished to continue her career in the same field, her own research questions differed from that of her postdoctoral PI and previous PhD supervisor and would require her to gain additional technical and analytical skills. She identified the key researchers in these areas and arranged to spend time in their laboratories as part of her Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship.

1. EF completed a PhD in mathematics and during her first two years as a post doc, she worked closely with biologists on large team projects. She published several important collaborative papers. Her vision for her future lab is to work across disciplines, bridging mathematics and biology, therefore, she undertook another one year post-doc. She continued to develop her mathematical skills but for the first time learned how to generate her own raw data in a “wet” lab and published an important paper as the first author. To further develop her skills, her Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship will involve working in two excellent but very different labs in the UK where she will expand her experimental skills and work with statisticians at the forefront of her field.
2. GH completed a very successful PhD in the UK resulting in several important papers including a first author paper that received a lot of interest and featured on the cover of the journal and in the editor’s commentary. He moved to work in a large lab in the USA and undertook a very challenging project. This work took longer than expected but after three years his important and exciting work was published. His work suggested new areas of research that his PI doesn’t wish to follow therefore GH will apply his hypotheses to a new field as part of his Sir Henry Wellcome Fellowship. GH will undertake this work both in the UK and in Germany.