

# 2025 Sanger Excellence Fellowship

## Candidate Information and FAQ

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## Candidate eligibility

This Fellowship is open to people who satisfy all of the follow criteria:

- Self-identify as being from a Black heritage background, including a mixed heritage background. For example, Black African; Black Caribbean; Black Other; Mixed background (to include Black African, Black Caribbean or Black Other Backgrounds).
- Have an Undergraduate degree and PhD awarded from institutions within the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Isle of Man or the Channel Islands (the common travel area)
- Are seeking a period of early career research and development training at the Postdoctoral level

Candidates fulfilling the above criteria who have experienced career breaks or gaps due to e.g. maternity, parental leave, other caring responsibilities, volunteering activities, part-time working or illness are welcome to apply. Candidates will be evaluated based on the applicant's merits as a whole. This list is not exhaustive.

## Fellowship purpose

The Fellowship was designed to attract research excellence and will provide Fellows with training, mentorship and support to drive their careers forward. At Sanger, we pride ourselves in offering a first-class and well-resourced learning environment to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills they will need for a successful leadership career in science. Our Postdocs can access a comprehensive training and development programme designed to equip individuals with the skills they need to further their career – whatever they may go on to do.

## Fellowship duration

Sanger Excellence Fellowships are fully funded for three years and can be worked full-time, part-time or flexibly. It may be possible to extend the Fellowship up to a maximum of 5 years at the discretion of the Supervisor and/or if the Fellow receives complementary third party funding.

## Fellowship start date

There is flexibility with the start date, but Fellows should be able to start from January 2026 onwards.

## Fellowship salary and costs

Sanger Excellence Fellows are embedded within Sanger's [Postdoc Programme](#) and are paid in line with this pay scale (£38,000 - £44,712), depending on skills and experience. They are also included in Sanger's Annual Pay Review process, which can lead to progression up this pay scale throughout the Fellowship based upon the breadth and impact of contributions made.

The Fellowship also includes:

- Research consumables of up to £18,000 per annum, dependant on the nature of the project
- Up to £1,500 per annum to attend conferences and training

These costs are provided to the Fellow's Supervisor and ring-fenced specifically for the Fellow. Underspent annual costs cannot be transferred between financial years.

## Application process

We will support applicants through the application process, which is outlined in the following table. More info on some of the stages is also included below.

**Candidates can contact us with questions about all stages of the application process at any time on: [sangerexcellence@sanger.ac.uk](mailto:sangerexcellence@sanger.ac.uk) noting that this will not affect or feed into any of the subsequent decision-making process.**

### Overview

	Apply for a pre-defined project	Apply to co-develop a project
<b>Stage 1: Expression of Interest</b>	<b>Eol Deadline: Sun 7 Sep</b> Complete the Eol to confirm eligibility to participate in the call.	<b>Eol Deadline: Sun 7 Sep</b> Complete the Eol to confirm eligibility to participate in the call and provide details of project idea and any preferred Supervisors.
<b>Stage 2: Full application</b>	<b>Full App Deadline: Sun 14 Sep</b> On passing the Eol stage, candidates receive the full application form to complete.  In the stage 2 application form, candidates will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State which pre-defined project they are applying for</li> <li>• Discuss "Person, Project, Place" – why they are the <b>best candidate</b> for that <b>specific project</b> at <b>Sanger</b></li> <li>• Share their motivations for applying specifically to the Excellence Fellowship Scheme</li> <li>• Provide a narrative CV</li> </ul>	<b>Full App Deadline: Sun 14 Sep</b> On passing the Eol stage, candidates receive the full application form and the "co-developed project" template to complete, but first: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Talent Acquisition (TA) team will arrange an exploratory call(s) between candidate and a preferred Supervisor(s) to discuss scientific alignment. <b>Candidates will receive some questions in advance to help them prepare.</b> The Supervisor will receive relevant anonymised info from their Eol.</li> <li>• If good scientific alignment is confirmed, the candidate will co-develop their project idea with the Supervisor</li> <li>• If not, the TA team will provide feedback. Where appropriate and possible, we will try to match candidates with another Supervisor.</li> </ul> Candidates should note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may not always be possible to find a match with a Supervisor due to lack of scientific alignment, or limited capacity</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is essential to apply early if candidates have a specific Supervisor in mind</li> </ul> <p>In the stage 2 application form, candidates will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upload their co-developed project using the project template</li> <li>Discuss “Person, Project, Place” – why they are the <b>best candidate</b> for that <b>specific project</b> at <b>Sanger</b></li> <li>Share their motivations for applying specifically to the Excellence Fellowship Scheme</li> <li>Provide a narrative CV</li> </ul>
<b>Supervisor triage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anonymised applications for pre-defined projects will be triaged by the lead Supervisor, who will identify their ‘Top 2’ candidates to put forward to the Review Panel</li> <li>As part of this process, The Talent Acquisition team may arrange an exploratory call(s) between the candidate and Supervisor to discuss scientific alignment. <b>They will receive some questions in advance to help them prepare.</b></li> <li>Feedback will be provided if a candidate’s application does not pass Supervisor triage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While we expect most applicants with co-developed projects to progress through to the Review Panel stage, we reserve the right to implement a Supervisor triage process in the event of a large volume of applications via the co-development route.</li> </ul>
<b>Review Panel shortlisting and interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Review Panel will consider anonymised applications across the entire pool of pre-defined and co-developed projects and shortlist up to 8 candidates for interview.</li> <li>Candidates invited for interview will be sent information on how to prepare, incl. questions, in advance. They will also be invited to the <b>candidate information day on Wed 5 November 2025</b>, taking place in person on the Wellcome Genome Campus.</li> <li><b>Virtual interviews will take place on Thu 20 and Fri 21 November 2025</b></li> <li>Feedback will be provided to candidates who are not selected for interview, and who are unsuccessful at interview</li> </ul> <p><b>We kindly ask that all candidates hold all dates in their calendars.</b></p>	

## Stage 1: Expression of Interest (Eoi)

The Eoi stage has 2 purposes:

- 1) To confirm candidate eligibility to participate in the call
- 2) And for candidates interested in co-developing a project, to start an initial exploration of how well their idea is aligned with Sanger science and any Supervisor(s) of interest

Eois will be reviewed by the Talent Acquisition Team, who will then contact candidates with details of next steps.

## Stage 2: Full Application Form

This stage is aimed at drawing out candidates' previous experience, motivations and contributions so that Supervisors and/or the Review Panel can identify who to progress to interview. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, we are keen to learn more about each candidate.

**Candidates will be asked to refrain from including any identifiable information such as names of organisations or people they have worked with. Any remaining identifiable information will be removed as part of the anonymising process.**

The full application form comprises the following sections:

<b>Section 1: Project, Person, Place</b>	<p>This section will ask candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which pre-defined project they are applying to, if applicable</li> <li>• To upload their co-developed project, if applicable</li> <li>• Why they feel they are the most suitable candidate for this project</li> <li>• Why they feel Sanger is a good base for this project</li> <li>• Why they applying specifically to the Sanger Excellence Fellowship</li> </ul>
<b>Section 2: Narrative CV</b>	<p>In the following questions, candidates will be asked to include their motivation for, and the impact of, the contributions they discuss.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have you contributed to the generation of knowledge? (200 words max) <i>Here candidates will provide up to two examples of contributions to the generation and/or dissemination of new knowledge, ideas or hypotheses. For example:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>A relevant output (e.g. data sets, software, code, publications, products, etc.), with details of its relevance to knowledge generation and what your precise contribution was</i></li> <li>○ <i>Key technical skills you have used to develop ideas and test hypotheses</i></li> <li>○ <i>Examples of how you have communicated your ideas and research results</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• How have you contributed to the development of individuals? (200 words max) <i>Here candidates will provide up to two examples of contributions to the development and/or success of individuals. For example:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Formal or informal line management</i></li> <li>○ <i>Teaching and mentoring activities</i></li> <li>○ <i>Collaborative contributions</i></li> <li>○ <i>Times where you have exhibited strategic leadership to drive a project or direction of a team/group/organisation</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• How have you contributed to the wider research community? (200 words max) <i>Here candidates will provide up to two examples of when they have engaged in activity that supports the wider research community or</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>promotes a positive research culture/environment. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Good citizenship commitments (editing, reviewing, refereeing, committee work)</i></li> <li>○ <i>The organisation of events</i></li> <li>○ <i>Contributions to increasing research integrity and improving research culture/environment (gender equality, diversity, (social-)mobility of researchers, reward and recognition of researchers' activities)</i></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>How have you contributed to broader society? (200 words max)</b> <i>Here candidates will provide up to two examples of societal engagement and knowledge exchange. For example:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Engagement with industry, or the private &amp; public sectors</i></li> <li>○ <i>Engagement with the public/broader society</i></li> <li>○ <i>Positive stakeholder feedback, inclusion of patients in processes and clinical trials</i></li> <li>○ <i>Efforts to advise policy-makers at local, national or international level and provide information through the press and on social media</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## Co-developing a project

If candidates are co-developing a project:

- On completing and passing the EoI stage, they will be sent a link to the full application form AND the project template, which must be submitted during 'Stage 2: Full application'.
- However, before candidates can complete this project template, they will participate in an exploratory meeting(s) with their preferred Sanger Supervisor(s), which will be arranged by the Talent Acquisition Team.
- The meeting will explore scientific alignment of their idea and skills, and encompass the following questions:
  - What is your scientific motivation for this particular project?
  - What has been your biggest achievement in your scientific career and why?
  - What have been your biggest challenges in science and why?
  - How do you work collaboratively with a range of people – for example, how do you manage and resolve conflict when working within multidisciplinary teams?
- If the meeting indicates:
  - *Good scientific alignment* - then candidates will go on to co-develop a project with this Supervisor and their team
  - *Poor scientific alignment* - then the TA team will provide feedback. Where appropriate and possible, we will also try to match candidates with another Supervisor. Candidates should note it may not always be possible to find a match with a Supervisor due to lack of scientific alignment, or limited capacity and it is essential to apply early if candidates have a specific Supervisor in mind
- For co-development, we anticipate stakeholders spending 4-6 hours collaborating on this process, likely through virtual meetings. However, it is the candidate who is responsible for completing and submitting the final project proposal using the form and template provided.

## Supervisor triage

- Supervisors will be asked to triage applicants to pre-defined projects, recommending their top 2 to progress to review panel shortlisting.
- Anonymised applications and a scoring matrix will be provided to all Supervisors to assist the triage process. Supervisors will rank applications based upon the following criteria:
  - Past training and research experience
  - Strength of motivation and career trajectory
  - Strength of contributions discussed in narrative CV
  - Alignment with the ethos of the Sanger Institute, e.g. [behavioural competency framework](#)
- Feedback will be provided to candidates who do not progress through triage.
- While we expect most applicants with co-developed projects to progress through to the Review Panel stage, we reserve the right to implement a Supervisor triage process in the event of a large volume of applications via the co-development route.

## Review Panel shortlisting

- The Review Panel will consider anonymised applications across the entire pool of pre-defined and co-developed projects and shortlist up to 8 candidates for interview based upon the following criteria:
  - Past training and research experience
  - Strength of motivation and career trajectory
  - Strength of contributions discussed in narrative CV
  - Alignment with the ethos of the Sanger Institute, e.g. [behavioural competency framework](#)
- Feedback will be provided to candidates who are not selected for interview

## Candidate information day

*This is not part of the interview process*

If you are shortlisted for an interview, you will also be invited to an optional ‘**candidate information day**’ on the Wellcome Genome Campus on **Wed 5 Nov**. Reasonable travel and accommodation expenses will be covered by the Institute.

This will include opportunities to meet your potential Supervisor and their team, network with current Excellence Fellows and the wider Postdoc community, and participate in an interview skills workshop. During the meet & greet, your Supervisor and team may, for example, include you in team/project meetings, show you around their lab and/or offer you the opportunity of a pre-interview practice presentation. A full agenda will be provided in advance.

**The day is about connection and network-building, regardless of the final interview outcome.**

## Review Panel interview

Interviews will take place virtually on either Thu 20 or Fri 21 Nov.

Candidates will:

- Give short presentations, before being asked a series of scientific questions inspired by their presentation
- Answer some BCF-based competency to explore alignment with the ethos of the Institute. These questions will be shared in advance to aid preparation and the workshop on the candidate information day will explore how to approach these questions.
- Receive feedback if they are unsuccessful at the interview stage.

The Review Panel will make the final decisions on which 4 candidates to appoint, and we hope to be able to communicate outcomes by the end of December 2025.



## Sanger Excellence Fellowship - Q&A

### Why is the Fellowship only open to people from Black backgrounds?

People from Black backgrounds are under-represented in Higher Education and in the Biological Sciences, compared to the wider UK population.<sup>1,2</sup> We recognise that persistent racial inequalities disadvantage people from Black backgrounds in all walks of life, including Academia and this is propagated along the academic pipeline - from degree awarding gaps at undergraduate level, through to fewer numbers at postgraduate and professoriate levels, and lower success rates with funding councils and granting agencies.<sup>3,4</sup>

We have extensively examined our staff data and this pattern is reflected within our own demography. Therefore, we have designed this particular Fellowship programme to bring in excellence that may otherwise be lost to science and to stimulate and catalyse change along the academic pipeline. Our [Race Equity strategy](#) is supported by our holistic [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy](#), which aims to ensure that we draw on as wide a pool of talent as possible. Scientific excellence is strengthened by the diversity of skills, knowledge and experience and we are committed to fostering an inclusive culture where all our staff and students are welcomed, feel that they belong and can thrive. Our activities include focussed interventions on many aspects of equity and inclusion.

### Can I still apply if I have not yet completed my PhD?

Yes, you are eligible to apply during the final stages of their PhD, bearing in mind that the successful Fellows will be expected to take up the Fellowship position at the Sanger Institute from January 2026. It is a requirement of all Postdoc positions that the post holder has been awarded their PhD, or will be awarded within the first 6 months.

### Can I still apply if I haven't yet published any papers?

Yes, you can still apply for the Fellowship even if you haven't published any papers yet.

### Can I choose which scientific Programme area to apply to?

Yes – details of our Sanger science programme areas are [here](#). Candidates can either:

- Apply to one of the pre-defined projects submitted by Group Leaders from across our scientific programmes
- Co-develop a project with a Sanger Group Leader

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/2018-06-ECU\\_HE-stats-report\\_students\\_v5-compressed.pdf](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/2018-06-ECU_HE-stats-report_students_v5-compressed.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.rsc.org/new-perspectives/talent/inclusion-and-diversity/resources/black-representation-in-uk-academic-chemistry/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://leadingroutes.org/launch-the-broken-pipeline-report>

<sup>4</sup> <https://wellcome.org/reports/grant-funding-data-2018-2019>

To apply via this route, you must complete the Expression of Interest (EoI) at the earliest possible opportunity, ideally by the end of July 2025, so that you have time to participate in project co-development. You can select up to three areas that you are interested in and also up to three Faculty who you would be interested in working with. Information about our Faculty can be found [here](#). We will then send your application to the relevant research lead for shortlisting onto the next stage of the application process (co-creation of a research project). If you are not sure which programme area to apply to, please indicate this in your expression of interest and we can arrange a call to discuss further.

### How many fellowships are awarded per year?

We will be awarding 4 Fellowships this year.

### Do I have to be a UK national to apply?

No, you do not have to be a UK national to apply but there is a requirement to have an Undergraduate and PhD (or equivalent) awarded from institutions from within the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands (the common travel area). If successful for this Fellowship, we offer [in-house expert guidance](#) on visa sponsorship to support you in your journey to becoming a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute.

### Can the Fellowship be administered elsewhere?

No, the Fellowship is a Postdoc opportunity within the Sanger Institute, so cannot be administered by another institution.

### The application guidance says “identifiable institutions/people/information will be removed as part of the anonymising process”, do I have to anonymise the information myself?

No, you do not need to anonymise the information yourself. As far as possible, you will be asked to refrain from including any identifiable information such as names of organisations or people you have worked with. However, any remaining identifiable information will be removed by the Talent Acquisition team as part of the anonymising process.

### Do I need to have experience writing research proposals to co-develop a project?

No, you do not need to have experience of writing research proposals independently. If you are invited to co-develop a research proposal, this will be done in collaboration with your Supervisor and their team, and 4-6 hours of support, likely via virtual meetings, will be given as part of this process.

## How is a Fellow's salary set?

We set salaries in accordance with our Postdoctoral Fellow pay scale, (£38,000-£49,156 in 2025), taking into consideration your skills and experience, and parity with other Postdoctoral Fellows at the Institute.

## What mentoring is available to the Fellows?

We run an internal mentoring scheme, which is designed to provide additional career and job development support to all staff. The Campus and the local Cambridge area has a rich research and innovation ecosystem, providing access to many potential mentors. Our Postdocs are encouraged to attend Campus and other local networking events (where necessary supported through a local travel scheme) to foster their own mentoring relationships. More formally, our ties to the University of Cambridge, also give our Postdocs access to their Postdoc Academy's Mentoring Scheme, which runs annually, and matches Postdocs with mentors from Academia and beyond.

## What are the career pathways for the Fellows?

Postdoc roles are fixed term training posts, not designed for long term employment.

- ~75% of Postdocs will leave the Institute at the end of their term, taking their skills and knowledge to research roles (and other roles!) around the globe in academia, industry, biotech and government/public health.
- ~25% of Postdocs do stay at the Institute moving into, for example, Career Development Fellow roles, (Senior) Staff Scientist roles, (Senior) Bioinformatician roles, Technical Specialist roles and Research enabling roles. Sometimes, this is within the Postdoc's current research group, for example, if there is a business need to retain their talent longer term. On other occasions, Postdocs apply for open roles across the Institute and are often attractive candidates because of their familiarity with Sanger life.

You can visit the [Postdoc Programme webpage](#) to explore some alumni case studies of former Students and Postdocs.