Gaining Research Funding:
A Few Reflections

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Is the most exciting word in research 'Eureka'?
(Isaac Asimov)

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Alternatively, what about the words:

1. **Your work will be published (e.g. in a good journal or by an excellent publisher)?** 😂
2. **Your research grant has been approved?** 😂

Adapted from John Alejandro King, a.k.a. The Covert Comic (www.covertcomic.com)

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Have a good idea(s) to research, then to publish!
Many good research ideas are first noted on tablecloths, beer mats etc.
(After *Iggy's Rule Of Scientific Advances*)
(e.g. in Melbourne that has lots of great bars and cafés in its famous laneways!)

What are the 'secrets' of winning a research grant?

There are no 'secrets'! 😃

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There are some General Expectations?

To research a topic best, understand it before you start. Do 'homework'!

Show evidence of preliminary, pilot or preparatory research.

Allow plenty of time to draft, check, revise etc., repeatedly!

Genius is 1% inspiration; 99% perspiration (hard work).

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What are assessors' typical 'prejudices'?

Consistent research questions pave the way to great answers/findings.

Which *concepts*, drawn from which *theories* will you use?

Assessors tend to prefer to see:

✓links to theory & practice

✓demonstrable & measurable outcomes

✓ research that is clearly important & innovative

✓specific propositions or hypotheses, aims & objectives

✓to award grants to people who already have a record of publishing & winning grants!

Rather like banks that prefer to lend money to people who already have plenty of money!

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What else do assessors like to see? ☺

A clear abstract/summary

A well-framed narrative! Excite the assessors/readers.

What can we learn from Donald Trump?

Which new insights flow from the research?

Why are these are significant and valuable?

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What else do assessors like to see in applications? ☺

Literature review: Identifies a 'gap'.

How have predecessors scoped the field? How do we align ourselves: critic or companion?

Who *will* benefit from the research?

What obstacles will you meet; how will you overcome them?

Which 'politics,' practical or ethical challenges might you get caught up in?

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What else do assessors prefer to see in applications? ☺

'Excellent' argument & presentation; no 'micro-specialist' jargon: generalists are making the decisions, not specialists!

Define any specialist terms & abbreviations.

Give credit generously; cite bibliographical details.

Those you *should* cite might be selected as referees, so cite them!

Specify dissemination & *impact* pathways.

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Research impact

"an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life beyond academia". (Higher Education Funding Council For England 2011: 26)

"The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy ...[including] ... all the diverse ways that research-related skills benefit individual, organisations and nations: (ESRC 2012: 1)

What are the pathways to impact: education, theory & practical/policy?

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Discuss the Methodology Well ☺

• Why this methodology?

• Justify the methodology.

• The methods should be shown to be reliable (they can be replicated) and valid.

• What will you do?

• How will you get access [if it were necessary]?

• How will you collect & analyse the data?

• When/how will you do each stage?

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Budget: Justify your costings ☺

Costing – salaries, travel & overhead costs – can use a web-based costing system: Project Financial, Accounting & Costing Tool **(pFACT)** - a costing tool, used by many University Research Offices

Explain sources of costs e.g. travel, subsist. etc.

Show good 'value for money'

Check everything: In costings, the figure most obviously correct, beyond all need of checking, is the mistake!

Always proofread carefully to see if you any words out.

Check spelling, grammar, bibliography etc. carefully, several times?

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What do assessors generally dislike? ☹

"Fishing expeditions"

Any vagueness; waffle; padding

Over-estimates e.g. of costs e.g. staff, travel, subsistence etc.

Awarding grants to people who have not already produced publications from earlier grants!

Also the opposites of what assessors generally like….?

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Get Help with Grant Applications ☺

Review – successful applications for the scheme you are aiming at.

Teamwork – include in your team colleagues with good records of success with grants & research output e.g. publications & impact; also good methodologists!

Electronic submission – may need to set up an account, e.g. for UK Research Councils: Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system

Follow the rules – Study your funding source: What is it seeking? Regurgitate its language!

Address the criteria -- precisely & concisely; space limits & font sizes etc. e.g.: Arial 11; not Arial narrow! Get advice if possible from a good contact person at the funding source, but only once (or twice at the most)!

Show your draft to *experienced* others to critique 🎓

　　　Ask: "Is it worth doing?" If so: "How could this draft be improved?"

Approval – internal to your University; seek it in advance, not at the last minute!

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Lots of Guides on Drafting Good Proposals

- Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)
- http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/howtoapply/preparing
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtowin.asp

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- http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/how-to-write-a-good-research-grant-proposal/

Watch: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EnvA4Wh6-8&feature=youtu.be

Advice and guidance from the ESRC's Professor Kathy Rastle and Professor Richard Smith, 2016

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There are other grant sources e.g. British Academy

Examples
- British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Senior Research Fellowships and Thank-Offering to Britain Fellowship
- British Academy Research Development Award Scheme (BARDAs)
- British Academy Wolfson Research Professorships
- Conference Support
- Country-specific Agreements
- International Partnerships
- Mid-Career Fellowships
- Overseas Conference Grants
- Postdoctoral Fellowships
- Small Research Grants
- Special Funds
- UK-Latin America and the Caribbean Link Scheme
- Visiting Scholars

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"Poppleton University Business School (Pubs)" Recent Research Funding Success Rates (data from a real management school)

Funder Type	No. of apps	% of apps	Successful	Unsuccessful	Unknown	% Successful
Research Councils, British Academy etc.	115	55%	28	75	12	24%
UK Based Charities	46	22%	12	27	7	26%
UK Government	12	6%	8	1	3	67%
UK Industry, Commerce	3	1%	2	1		67%
EU	23	11%	12	10	1	52%
Overseas & Other	10	5%	6	3	1	60%
Total	209		68	117	24	33%

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Exercise

Take 10 minutes with your group; develop 4 'burning' questions about submitting research grant applications ready to discuss with the panel. In doing so, think about e.g.:
- Research problematics
- Research questions
- Contribution to knowledge
- Conceptual framework
- Sampling criteria
- Methodology justification
- Methods
- Access strategies to get data
- Forms of analysis proposed
- Key theories being drawn on

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