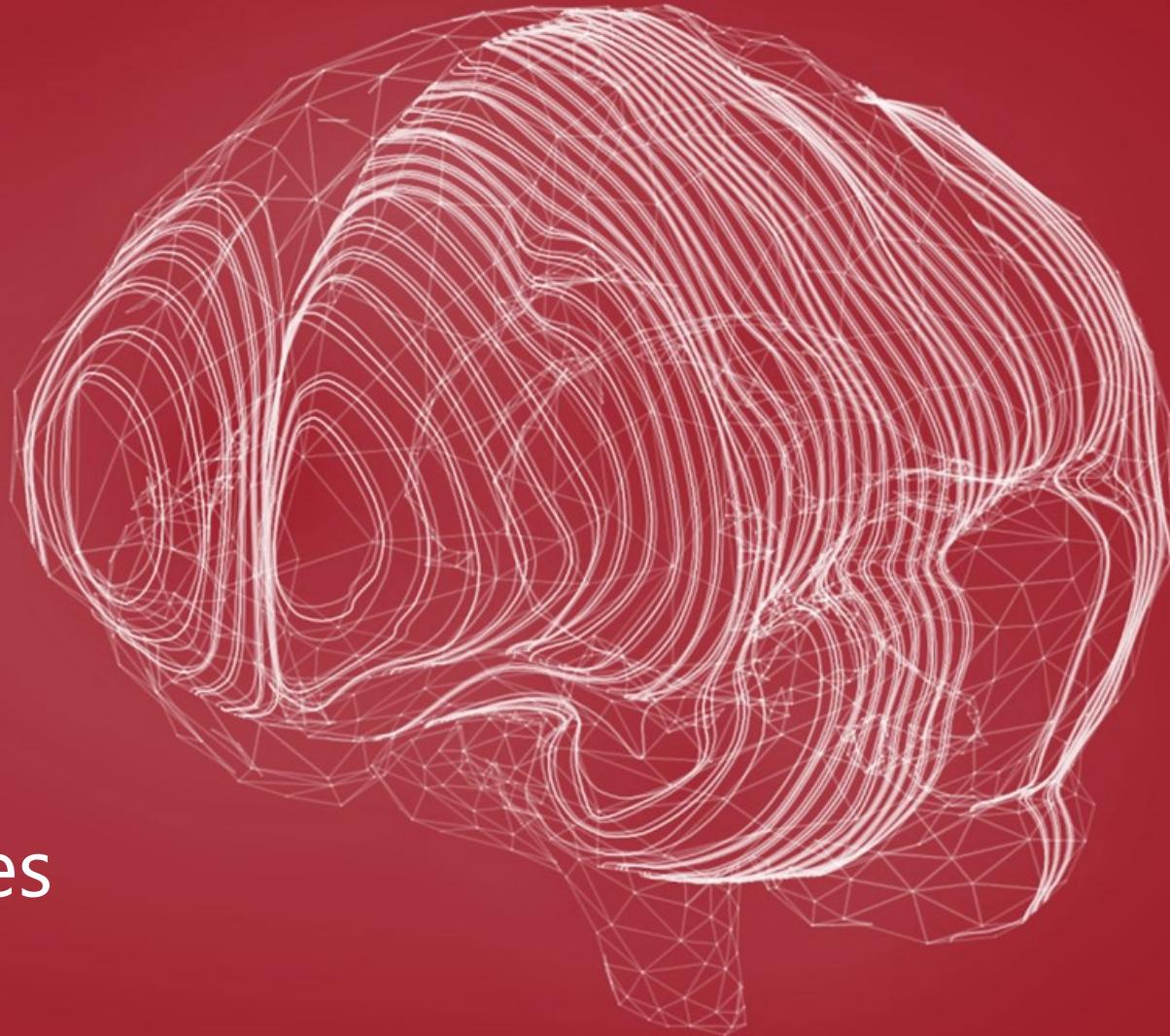




British  
Neuroscience  
**Academy**

## Applying for Fellowships: Tips, Tricks, and Techniques

Prof Tara Spires-Jones, BNA president



# Outline - Tips, Tricks, and Techniques

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Fellowships can be hugely influential in an academic career

While there are no guarantees in this competitive environment, this session aims to help you avoid common pitfalls in the application and interview process

**Tips for writing  
the application**

**Overview of the  
peer review  
process**

**Interview tips**

**Open discussion/  
practice  
interview!**



# Question for You

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Have you applied for a fellowship?



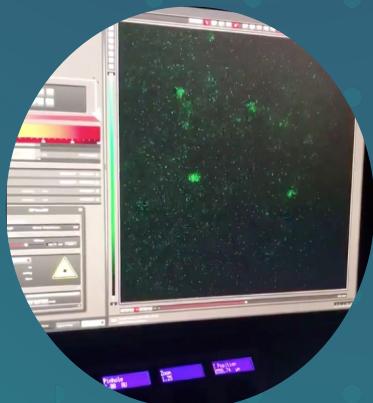
## On zoom

- Please raise your hand if you have applied for a fellowship before
- If you're willing to share, in the chat, please let us know who you applied to (e.g. Wellcome Trust, Alzheimer's Research UK, etc)

# The three “Ps” - pillars of a successful fellowship

## Project

- Strong idea
- Feasible experimental design
- Within scope of the funder



## Person

- Track record of experience
- Potential as a future independent scientist/leader in the field



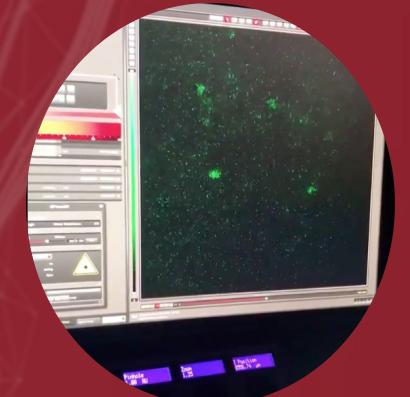
## Place

- Supportive environment
- Provision of necessary space and equipment
- Career development and training





# Writing a strong Project



# Key Question

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## Tip

**Send a 1-page summary of your hypothesis, aims and rational to ANY scientist willing to read it**

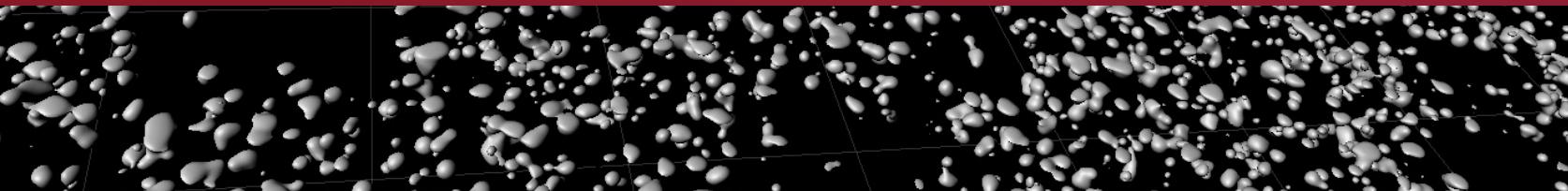
- Do this months in advance of any deadline
- Send to supervisors, mentors, colleagues, scientists in other fields
- Ask for brutal input at this stage (much better than re-writing a full application)



# Title & Abstract

Capture the imagination of panel and reviewers

- Title: Easy to understand to a scientist outside of your subfield
- Abstract: Needs to convey importance, outline methods, and highlight potential impacts of the work. Keep it simple!



# Lay Abstract

- **Can be very influential in reviewing**
- **Be sure to make this fully accessible to non-scientists**

*Tip: Ask friends and relatives to read and comment – your press office also useful!*

# Aims/Objectives

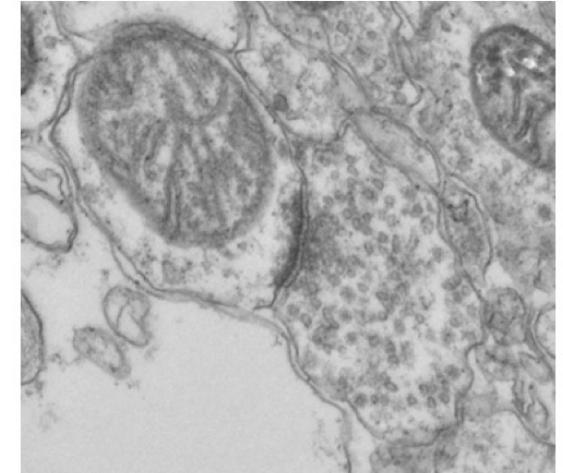
## Typically 2 or 3 in a study:

- All related to the key question
- Typically summarize the main aim and a sentence of how it will be achieved (model system, main method)

## Common pitfall:

*Proposing aims that are too interlinked (if Aim 1 doesn't work the rest falls apart)*

## Feasibility of Aims:



## Common pitfall:

*Proposing a decade of work for a 3 year fellowship.*

# Rationale

Why is this project important?

**Importance**

**Knowledge gap**

**Key work leading up to the study**

# Scope

- Check funding call
- Are you eligible?
- What types of project have they funded in the past?

*Why is this project important to the funder?*

# Justify model systems and methods

## Model systems

- Are you using a mouse model/iPSC/cell line/human subjects?
- Why is this the most appropriate model for your question?
- What alternatives are available?
- What are the *LIMITATIONS* of your model system?

## Choice of approach

- Provide **pilot data** of key techniques *in your hands* if possible
- Justify why your chosen method is best to answer your question

## Caveats/ Backup plans

- What will you do if the model does not perform as expected or the method doesn't work?
- Discuss alternative methods that could be used if something goes wrong

# Credible experimental design

*Ensure your data will be robust*

**Power  
appropriately**

**Sex as a  
biological  
variable**

**Controls,  
controls,  
controls**

**Specify your  
stats plan**

**Data  
management  
and sharing  
plans**

BNA Credibility Toolkits  
<https://www.bnacredibility.org.uk/toolkits>



NC3Rs Experimental Design Assistant  
<https://eda.nc3rs.org.uk/>



# Budgets - My least favourite part

*Tip: Contact your finance person EARLY*

- Find out guidelines from funder about what can be in budget (consumables, travel, animals, publication charges...)
- Clearly justify the costs in your application – often a separate document
- Work closely with mentor and finance team to get things in on time and look for ways to “add value” (free access to equipment, etc)

Resource Summary				
Summary funding heading	Funding heading	Cost to HEI (fEC)	Cost to Funder (Submission costs)	Price to Funder (Funder Contribution)
<b>Directly Incurred</b>				
Staff		215,504.39	215,504.39	215,504.39
Travel and Subsistence		10,631.30	10,000.00	10,000.00
Equipment		0.00	0.00	0.00
Other Costs		201,994.48	190,000.01	190,000.01
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>428,130.17</b>	<b>415,504.40</b>	<b>415,504.40</b>
<b>Directly Allocated</b>				
Principal Investigator		22,568.33	0.00	0.00
Co-Investigator		8,034.55	0.00	0.00
Estate Costs		119,285.26	0.00	0.00
Infrastructure Technician Costs		7,795.93	0.00	0.00
Other Directly Allocated		0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>157,684.07</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>

ACC CODE	£
PURCHASES	3895
MAINTENANCE	3896
TECHNICAL SERVICES	3899
funding available to assign y to BVS monthly invoices)	<b>SUB TOTAL</b>
	<b>£10,891.87</b>
HOME OFFICE PIL FEES	3889
	<b>£951.00</b>
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT (MINUS fEC)</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>£11,842.87</b>
BVS fEC EQUIPMENT	3897
BVS fEC ESTATES	3898
<b>GRAND TOTAL (inc fEC)</b>	<b>£17,649.06</b>

# Person

## Convincing the panel and reviewers to invest in You

- Track record – papers, relevant experience, academic performance
- Trajectory – evidence of potential leadership in designing and conducting research

*Tip: A preprint link is much more convincing than "in prep" or "in review"*



# Training

## As well as the project, incorporate development ideas

- Could plan to learn new techniques, new collaborations etc
- Be sure strong mentorship is in place
- Your institution likely has boiler plate info about development
- BNA training can also help!!

# Your Research Vision

**As well as funding one grant, a fellowship aims to invest in a career**

- Demonstrate a strong *understanding of the field* and how you plan to contribute with this project and in future work
- *INDEPENDENCE* It needs to be clear that these are your research ideas and not a continuation of your sponsor's work
- A commitment to the *research community* through teaching, mentoring, collaboration is important

*Common pitfall: Not showing independence from PhD/postdoc supervisor*



*Trick: Involvement in BNA is a great way to show leadership/community!*

**BNA**

# Place

## Is your host institution supportive

- What opportunities will you have for career development?
- Will this fellowship enter you on tenure track?
- Who will your mentors/supporters be?
- What space and equipment are available?

*Tip: Write a draft of  
your letters of  
support/collaboration  
and send them early*

## Letters of support

- **Need to have strong letters of support**
- **Try to involve collaborators from another institution**



## Think about the review panel members when writing



### Inspire

Panel members are not necessarily experts in your sub-field

You need to convince them of the importance of your work and your ability to succeed



### Compete

Panel budgets are limited

Your project, person, and place need to stand out

*Tip: If you get the chance, observe a grant panel in action, several schemes exist*



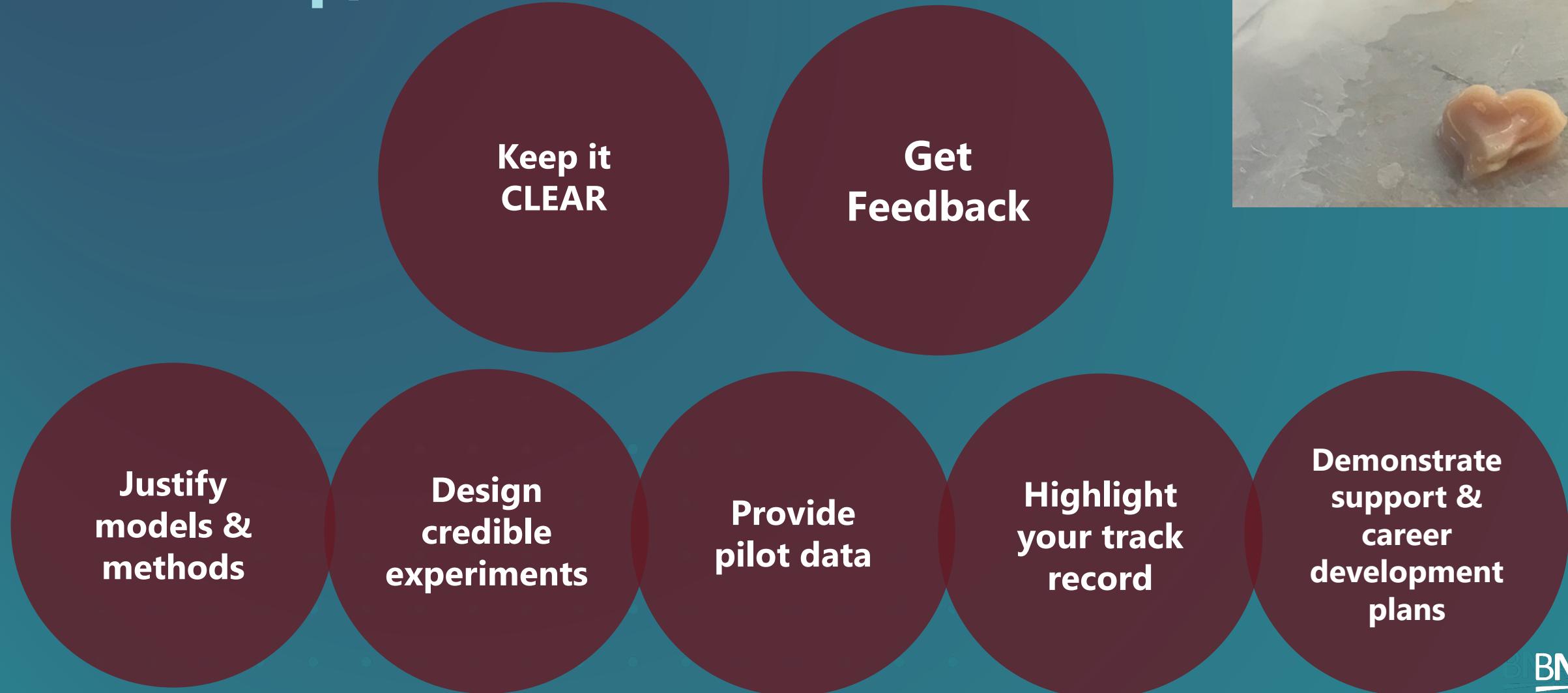
### Convince

Need the panel member presenting your grant to convince the rest that your project is amazing.

*Tip: bold, colour, or italicise key phrases that you want the presenting panel member to read out*

**Panel members have read dozens of these applications – make it CLEAR**

# Top Tips for Writing your Fellowship/Grant



# Typical Review Process



March for Science  
Twitter



# Interviews

## Many fellowships require interviews

- Take the win – if you are invited to interview, it's a great sign that your project is fundable even if ultimately not funded



*Technique: Mock interviews are key to success, plan for at least two rounds.*

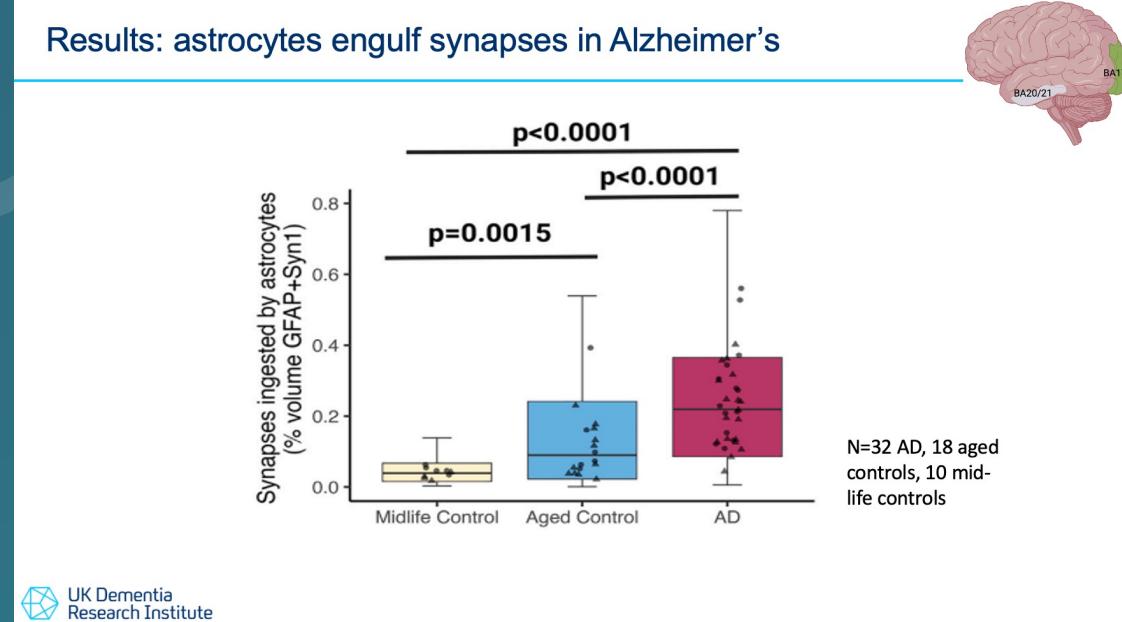
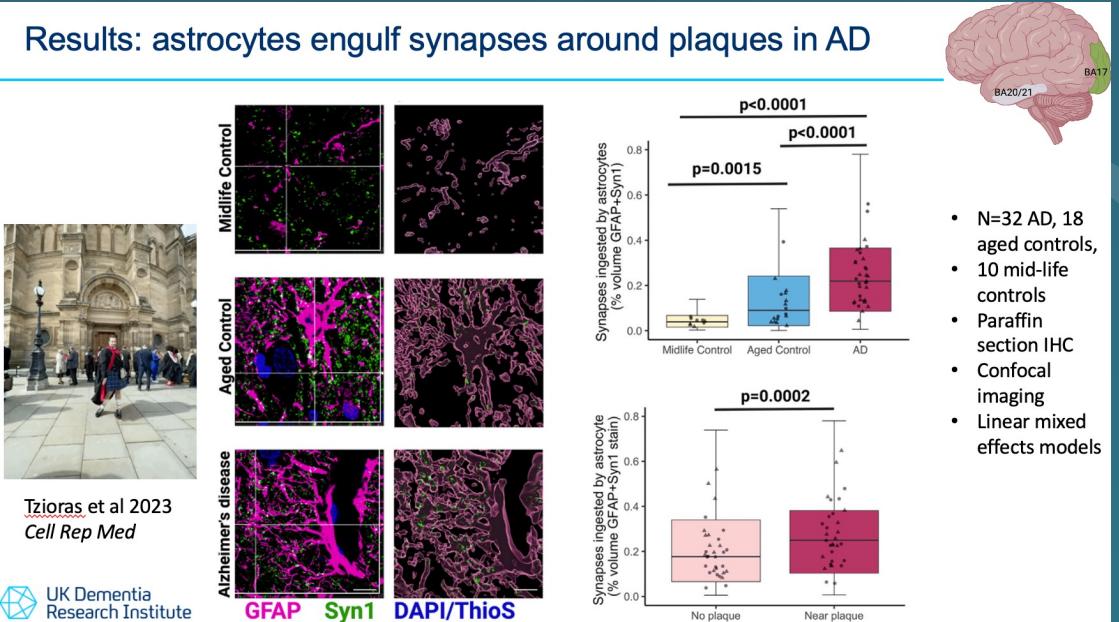
## Typical format

- Short presentation of your project
- Questions about your science
- Questions about career development
- Timing is critical – the panel wants to get through all of the questions for all candidates

# Presentation during interview

- Slide design – easy to read colours and font sizes
- Have an effective title
- Minimize text, maximize illustrations

*Tip: Get feedback on your slides as well as your presentation delivery*



# Presentation delivery tips

## DO

1. Practice, Practice, Practice
2. Speak slowly and clearly
3. Keep to time
4. Pause between slides to take a breath
5. Look at the audience
6. Describe every figure you show (including axes and what they mean)

## DON'T

1. Read a script
2. Rush
3. Go over time
4. Spend most of the time on one slide
5. Include lots of data or text on slides that you don't talk about

# Q&A Tips for Interview

## Don't panic

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- Listen carefully to questions
- Don't interrupt!
- SHORT answers (30 seconds to 1 min)
- It's OK to think before answering
- Practice in mock interviews
- Prepare answers to common questions





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Tips, Tricks, and Techniques



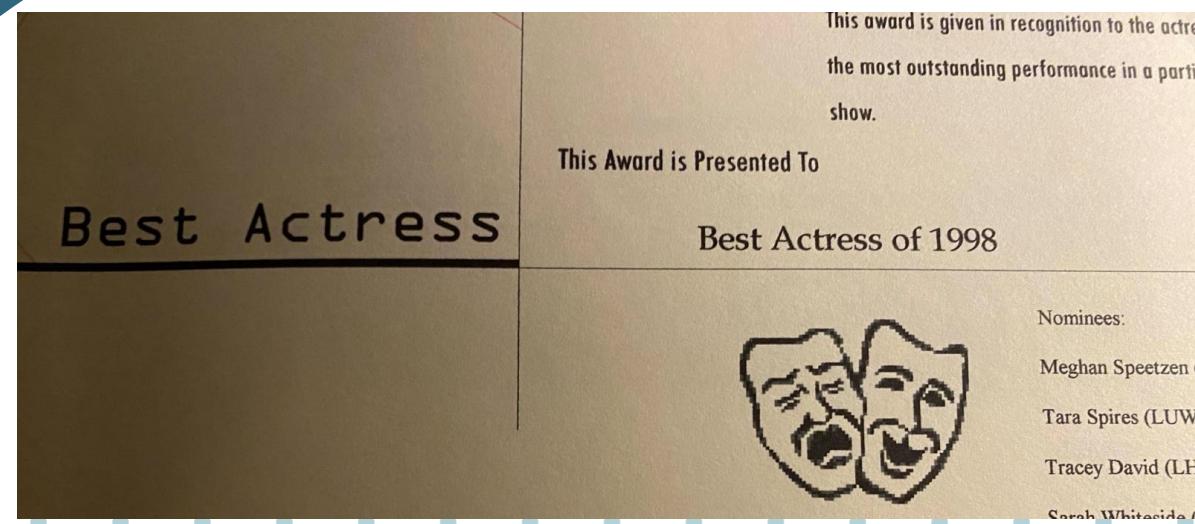
*Here endeth the formal training – time for  
questions and interactive practice!*

# Practice time!

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Shout out the questions you've had in interviews or put in the chat and I'll try to demonstrate good and poor answers

Typical interview questions to prepare for follow. Anyone brave enough to share answers???



# Question 1

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What will you do at the end of this fellowship?

## Question 2

Why are you the best person for this fellowship?

# Question 3

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Equity, diversity, and inclusion are important to our organization. How will you enhance EDI during your fellowship?

## Question 4

Please describe a time when you faced an obstacle in your research and how you overcame it?

# Question 5

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Can you tell us about a paper in your field that you read recently and why it was exciting?

# Question 5 flipped

Can you tell us about a paper in your field that you read recently that you thought was flawed and why?

## Question 6

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Who are the main competitors in your field and how will you stand out?

## Question 7

What are your plans for funding your research in the future?

# Question 8

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What is your strategy for building  
your research team?

# Question 9

Do you have any questions for the panel?

# Comments?

- How can BNA help you?
- What would you like to see in our training programme going forward
- Would you be willing to participate in training – e.g. mock interviews for other members?

## NEXT STEPS



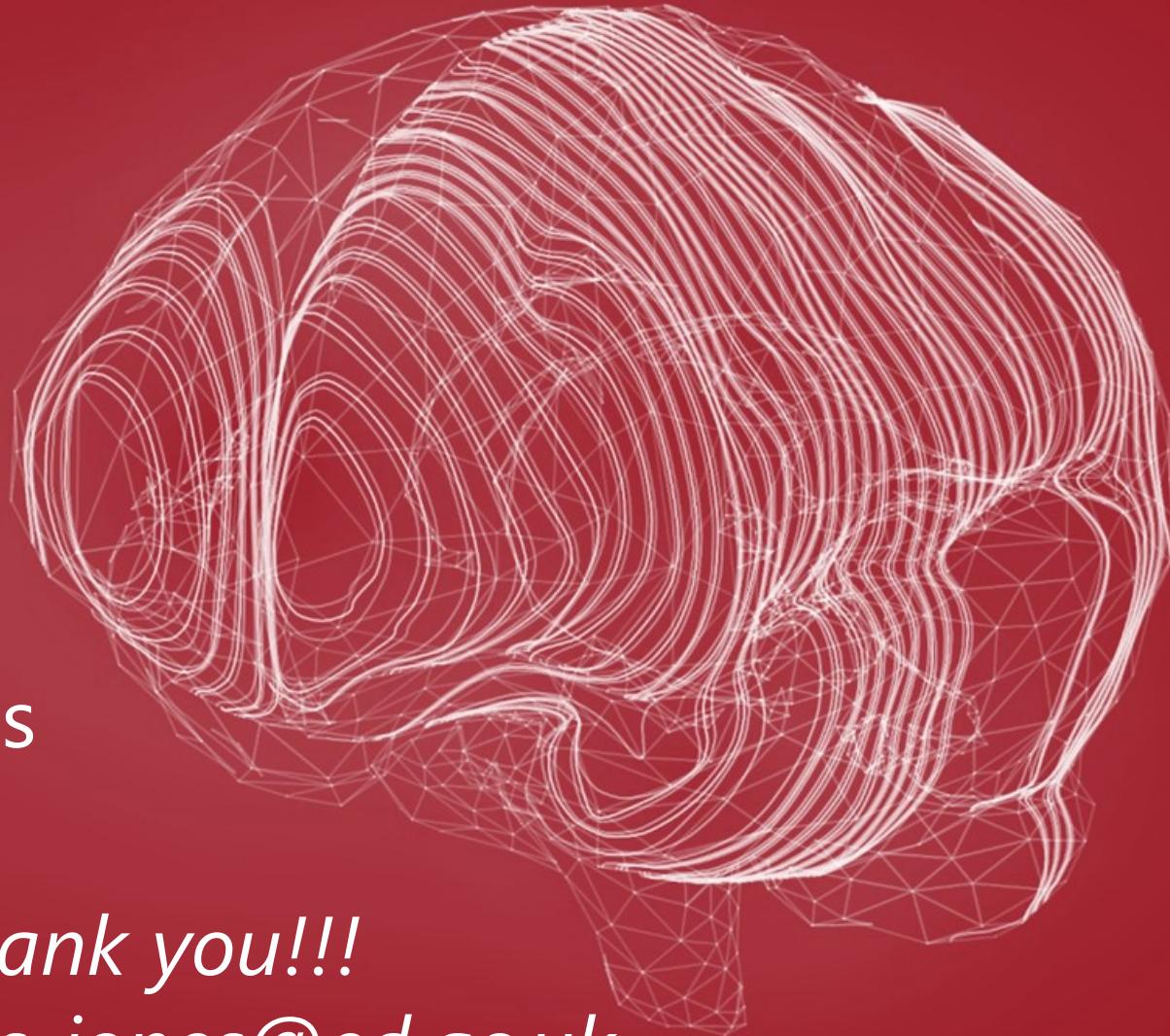
Careers and  
Recruitment  
Fair





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*Thank you!!!*

*Tara.spires-jones@ed.ac.uk*