
The Leverhulme Trust

A Letter to Potential Applicants

The Leverhulme Trust has since the time of its first awards in 1933 been recognised as a constructive and sympathetic partner for those involved in the conduct of research in British universities. It is a central concern of the Trustees to ensure that this partnership can be sustained.

Emphasis is placed on **responsive support, i.e.**, where the choice of topic lies with the applicant. The door is open to **all disciplines**. However where other research support agencies specialize in particular disciplines, as for example in case of medicine, then applicants are advised to consider whether applications to these agencies would be more appropriate. The flexibility of operation acknowledges that, in activity as demanding as research, the **problem itself must set the rules**. These all make the Trust an attractive partner for those seeking support for their research ambitions.

Since there is the wish to avoid arbitrary rules as a mechanism for the selection of eligible proposals, it becomes important **to identify the character of proposal which is best suited to the Trust**. Applicants can then review, in the light of their intentions, the source of potential funding best suited to their research ambition.

The Trustees have given thought to this issue and have sought to define more sharply the criteria by which they believe applications to the Trust should be judged. They are set out in the following paragraphs.

On behalf of the Trustees

Richard Brook, Director

Criteria used by the Trust in assessing applications

The instruction given for the establishment of the Trust in the Will of the first Viscount is both succinct – in defining the purpose – and generous – in allowing for changes to fit the times. In directing that the resources be used to provide ‘scholarships for such purposes of research and education as my Trustees in their discretion may direct’, the instruction defines the purpose of the Trust and accounts for its particular character.

The Will itself places no restriction on the disciplines that are to form the context of the research or education. The Trustees have recognised the great opportunity that lies in this absence of the traditional disciplinary boundaries. A further aspect is that the absence of disciplinary definition emphasises the *responsive* element; the choice of theme is, with few exceptions, a matter for the applicant.

This freedom in respect to disciplinary or organisational matters makes it appropriate to offer guidance concerning the character of the Trust so that those proposals are put to it which indeed best correspond to its aims.

Any attempt to provide such guidance must recognise the variety of activities which the Trust supports. These include research projects, research fellowships and studentships, bursaries for advanced training, and prizes as recognition of research achievement. The description of the criteria applied by the Trust in judging proposals is accordingly given in general rather than in specific terms. Nonetheless, the Trust does often ask applicants to state their reasons for approaching this Trust rather than considering other sources of support. It is therefore important for them to understand the considerations which are likely to be applied.

The overall criterion for all the schemes of the Trust is that the applicant should have outstanding personal talent and should be seeking support which can allow that talent to be applied or developed in a way which promises to bring benefit to the wider community. Within this overall criterion, a number of aspects can be identified, each of which will apply to a greater or lesser extent to each of the schemes of the Trust.

For **research activity** there are the established criteria:

- the **originality** of the work, i.e., the extent to which the proposal moves beyond incremental development within a single discipline;
- the **significance** of the work, i.e., the ability of the central theme or hypothesis to engage and excite those working at some distance from the immediate subject area;
- the outstanding **levels of competence** reflected in the proposed methods, researchers and institution for the intended work;
- the taking of appropriate degrees of **risk** in tackling research challenges of high significance;
- the extent to which the outcomes of the research can contribute to wider **cultural well-being**.

In addition, there are criteria which are more specific to the Trust. These include:

- the role of **one individual’s vision or aspiration** in shaping the design of the research;
- the ability of the research to reflect a refreshing **departure from established working patterns** of the individual;
- the extent to which this personal aspiration is driven by practical or intellectual **curiosity**;
- the opportunity provided by the proposed research for the **personal development** of those involved.

For **fellowships, studentships and prizes**, many of the aspects reflected in the above listings will also apply. The main emphasis will, however, be on the ability of the individual to realise a personal talent either in the pursuit of a research objective or in the acquisition of advanced training or in career progression. The receipt of an award should lead to a major advance in the ability of the individual to contribute to the cultural life of the community.