The Leverhulme Trust

Professor Gordon Marshall
Director

University of Reading, March 2014
…. scholarships for such purposes of research and education…as my Trustees may in their discretion direct.

Annual expenditure of circa £70 millions across some 15 funding schemes, largely funding research in the UK higher education sector.
The Trust Board

- Comprises eight former members of Unilever senior management, from diverse international backgrounds
- Governs an independent and autonomous charity
- Meets four times each year for decisive discussion
- Has experience of identifying potential and quality
- Is resistant to academic fashion
- Makes awards competitively
- Relies on expert peer review
The resource

- £2.5 billion endowment (mostly Unilever shares)
- Up to £70 millions distributed as grants each year
- More than 4,000 applications received each year
- Approximately 1,500 live awards at any time
- Office staff of 14 persons
The awards

- **Research Programmes**: up to £1.75M (including ‘Tipping Points’, ‘Value’, ‘Resilience’)
- **Research Project Grants**: up to £500k
- **Fellowships**: Early Career, Major Research, Research, Emeritus, and Academy
- **Collaboration**: International Networks, Visiting Professorships, International Academic Fellowships and Study Abroad Studentships
- **Philip Leverhulme Prizes**: approximately 30 annually, spanning 6 rotating subject areas, each prize worth £100k
- **Arts Portfolio** (Fine and Performing Arts): Scholarships, Innovative Teaching, Artists in Residence
- **Occasional exceptional awards**
Distribution of funds in 2012

- Research Project Grants and Networks
- Research Leadership Awards
- Arts Scholarships/Bursaries
- Research Awards Advisory Committee
- Exceptional Awards
- Major Research Fellowships
- Research Programme Grants
- Philip Leverhulme Prizes
- Visiting Professors/Fellows
- Academy Fellowships

Percentage
Total applications (N) and success rates (%) in principal award schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<td>Research Project Grants &amp; International Networks</td>
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Number of grants awarded by field of study

- Humanities
- Social Sciences
- Sciences
How to apply for an award

- A two-stage process for Research Project Grants, International Networks, Arts Portfolio awards: more than 1000 Outline Applications received annually; all taken to Stage 1 peer review (approx. 12 weeks)
- Positive recommendation (Approximately 50%) leads to invitation to submit a Detailed Application (3 deadlines per annum)
- Detailed Applications then submitted to Stage 2 peer review and decision by Trust Board (success rate approximately 40%)
- All other schemes have a one-stage application process, normally annual call and deadline, with decisions delegated to expert panels and subject to due scrutiny by the Trust Board; success rates typically 15-35%
The Trust supports…

- **High quality scholarship** (based on an excellent project, having a sound methodology, clearly expressed)

- **The responsive mode** (the choice of topic lies with the applicant in almost all our schemes)

- **Robust peer review** by the global academic community

- **All disciplines**, although the Trust avoids assuming the tasks of other specialist agencies such as Government (including Research Councils), the Wellcome Trust (medicine), and projects originating in countries with a well-developed research infrastructure
Particular weight is given to...

- **The originality** of the proposed work, beyond incremental development, and beyond the immediate subject
- The **removal of barriers** between traditional disciplines
- **Intellectual curiosity** and willingness to take appropriate risks
- **Fresh directions** and departures from existing approaches
- The justification offered for the **choice of the Trust** as the source of funds
We do not fund…

- **Medical research** which is of direct relevance to clinicians, health professionals and/or the pharmaceutical industry

- Policy-driven research where the principal objective is to assemble an evidence base for immediate policy initiatives

- Research of which **advocacy** forms an explicit component

- Research which is aimed principally at **an immediate commercial application**

- Applications in which the **balance between assembling a data bank** or data base and the related subsequent research is heavily inclined to the former

- Applications in which the **main focus** is on **capacity building, networking**, or the **development of the skills** of those involved
To sum up...

- The Board comprises private-sector business executives but does not encourage a utilitarian approach to the pursuit of knowledge.

- The Trust has a distinctive and keen appetite for higher-risk research proposals.

- A large proportion of our awards therefore support basic (fundamental or ‘blue-skies’) and cross-disciplinary (or multi-disciplinary) projects.

- We have no capacity for generating onerous administrative or reporting requirements.

- The Board respects expert peer review but derides obfuscation and the unnecessary use of jargon.
Common errors in applications

- An overly-detailed review of the literature – accompanied by an under-specified research design (failure to state how the problem will be addressed and the work will be done)
- Claims to scholarship, quality or significance, measured purely in terms of metrics, impact, or institutional standing
- The supposition of a hidden agenda or quota system in Trust grant-making
- Failure to write in transparent terminology, where requested to do so
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