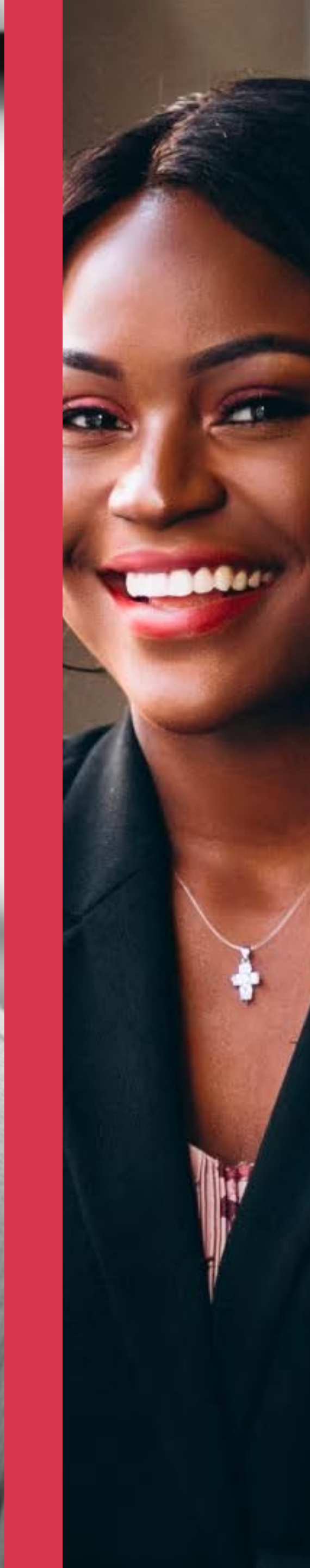




NEXUS
EVALUATION
LTD

SANGER EXCELLENCE FELLOWSHIP REVIEW

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, FEBRUARY 2023



INTRODUCTION

In December 2021 the [Wellcome Sanger Institute](#) launched the [Excellence Fellowship](#), a pioneering initiative to enable Black academics to develop their research portfolio and thrive in the field of UK genomics.

The Sanger Institute commissioned [Nexus Evaluation LTD](#) to review of the Fellowship. The aim was to better understand what worked well **and to identify opportunities to make improvements in the next call.**

A total of

25 interviews were conducted with:

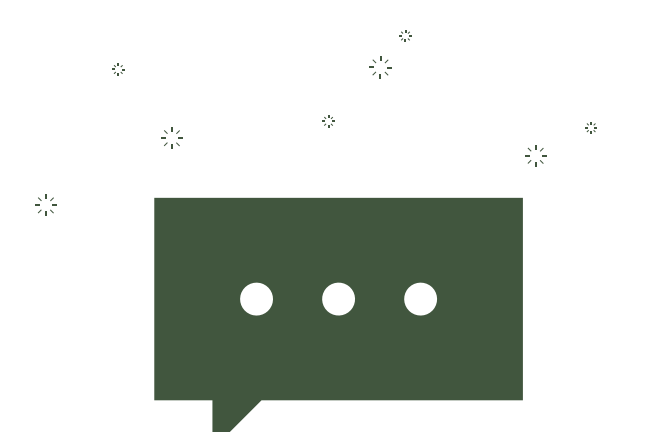
- Both successful and unsuccessful candidates.
- Sanger Institute stakeholders, such as the fellowship leadership team and faculty members.
- External stakeholders involved in the process as members of the steering and/or advisory group, scientific review and/or interview panel.

Key lines of inquiry:

- Uniqueness & potential impact of the fellowship.
- Equitable access by all Black academics in the field of genomics.
- Relevance and impact of support provided during the process.
- Equity, diversity and inclusiveness of the overall process, with a focus on transparency, panel interview dynamics & decision-making criteria.
- What worked well and what could be improved and why.

A semi-structured topic guide was used and expanded after a few interviews, to cross-examine high-level themes emerging organically from interviews. These were framed as factors of success and are:

- Leadership behaviours and their role in the programme.
- The pool of candidates and whether initiatives like this are focused on working within the small pool of candidates, could increase reach within the pool or indeed have the potential to expand it.
- Scale and nature of the effort, length and level of investment.
- Communication styles and support offered to a diverse range of candidates.
- Process: time/effort investment needed, diversity of those involved and potential for scalability.



All interviews were confidential and anonymised - unique IDs were created for each and used against quotes included in the report.



HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Overall, most interviewees (including candidates, both successful and unsuccessful) felt positive about the initiative and thought it was a **success**. Most also felt the process was **inclusive and equitable** and many specifically commended the Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at The Sanger Institute for the vision, care and ability to make this happen.

All interviewees felt that the Excellence Fellowship was **unique** either in intention or process:

- Being a **positive action** initiative in the field of genomics for Black academics at the post-doctoral career stage is unique for the Sanger Institute and the sector.
- Unique in its **process** for a) having a strong sense of caring and support for candidates throughout the process - most candidates specifically mentioned feeling well supported through the process, b) testing new approaches and c) for its use of targeted promotion to attract high calibre candidates.

For most candidates, what felt unique and motivated them to apply was the area of specialisation and the feeling that it was not easy to pursue it in other UK institutions. Some candidates were also attracted by The Sanger Institute's reputation in genomics, in conducting large-scale projects and the perceived good reputation it has worldwide.

Most interviewees talked about the **potential and emerging impact** of the fellowship in terms of:

- **The system:** opportunities and funding for Black students and the potential to address the lack of Black academics and role models in the sector.
- **Reputational impact for The Sanger Institute:** many mentioned that The Sanger Institute was seen as a role model and that this initiative might help others follow suit.
- **Positive personal impact:** those involved in the process reported a sense of personal pride, to be involved in the scheme.

It is worth noting that candidates talked about a lack of career models in academia, which could increase their confidence otherwise. At the same time, they mentioned that there is more pull to go into industry.



Over half of all interviewees (including candidates) felt the process was **time-consuming**. The required time and effort may not be well- suited to those candidates with full-time jobs and/or families. Therefore, it is recommended to review the process to make it nimbler for all.

Candidates felt the people they met were **not very diverse**. The process did not have good Black representation and principal investigators (PIs) and their teams were predominantly white and male.

Interviewees feel there is a **big risk** that people misunderstand recruiting/funding Black candidates as the solution to a problem that is systemic and long-term. They believe too much responsibility is often placed on the few successful candidates to represent their entire group in exceptional ways. Work needs to continue within organisations to transform governance, working practices and culture to adequately support more diverse, equitable and inclusive environments.

There is the opportunity for leadership visibility to improve over time to make this a genuine organisational commitment to EDI. This should be part of a broader conversation at the corporate level and continue to link with other relevant policies and activities at The Sanger Institute.

The focus of this effort was on finding the best candidates within the existing pool and on trying different approaches to assess scientific excellence. Expanding the pool would be key in the long term.

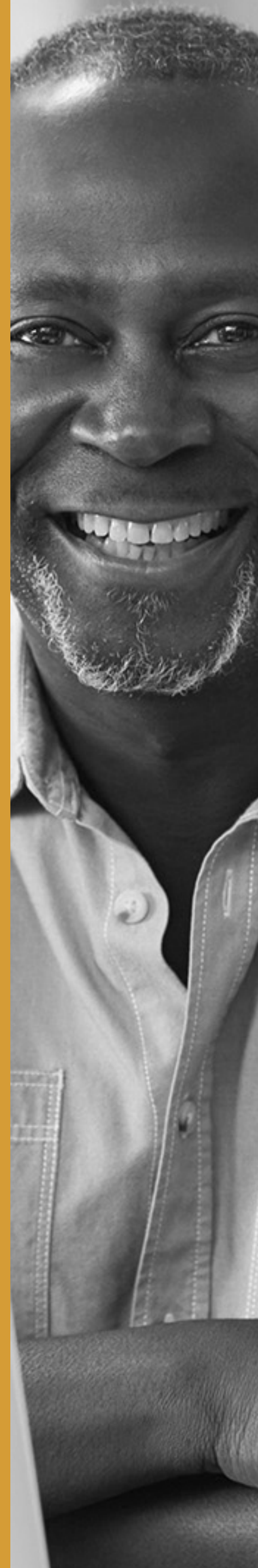




IMPLEMENTATION - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Promotional efforts were **successful** at attracting high-calibre candidates. Most candidates did not hear about this opportunity through the usual routes, and many were contacted directly by Diverse (a recruitment agency involved in the process), or someone they knew. The programme might need to do more physical and face-to-face promotion to increase reach.

There is a high likelihood that the project mainly attracted Black candidates with high levels of confidence, already in academia, who could see themselves working at a place like The Sanger Institute. Communications can play a role in enticing people to join, demystifying The Sanger Institute and its high reputation to boost inclusiveness and diversity.



The majority of candidates felt that the **informal calls** with the Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion were particularly useful to clarify the process, encourage applications and get support early on.

The use of **narrative CVs**, while welcomed as a way to reduce bias, needs more guidance and support around it. The focus should be on providing clarity, to both Faculty assessors and candidates, on what is being assessed or what was important for the process.

It was unclear whether the **redacted applications** effectively allowed reviewers to assess performance based on opportunity.

The **visit to The Sanger Institute** was a highlight for most candidates. It seemed to have increased motivation and desire for the fellowship. It also allowed candidates to see a more diverse set of stakeholders otherwise not encountered before that point. Suitable alternatives might need to be offered to cater for those that are not able to do this trip.

It was also not clear what **level of seniority** was being looked for - those with **leadership potential**, or to help establish independence and step into leadership roles. This needs to be clearer to potential applicants.



The majority of candidates felt that the opportunity to **co-create a project** worked well, enforcing the care and support model that makes this fellowship unique.

“ Typically, the candidate is the driver force but [Sanger’s] Principal Investigator (PI) partnership felt more supportive. I felt the PI was equally vested in the project as opposed to feeling alone or having an impersonal experience. C¹ ”



Many would appreciate **more clarity** around roles, responsibilities and key steps during the process. For example, some PIs were keen for candidates to demonstrate leadership behaviours, even though this was not made clear to candidates nor acknowledged as assessment criteria.

The introduction of an additional stage, the **scientific review** panel, was unexpected for candidates. Some interviewees wondered why there were two panels with different memberships. Moreover, there were concerns about bias based on the area of interest since some Heads of Programmes at were scoring proposals that were part of their programme. The latter can be addressed by inviting external reviewers to broaden out the expert knowledge.

The majority of candidates interviewed felt that **pre-interview** conversations worked well - they gave them a sense of what to expect and how to prepare. The candidates appreciated seeing interview questions, however they felt that more notice time could have been given.

Most of those that reached the **interview** stage, reported feeling the panel was constructive, fair and supportive. This is in contrast to how other processes feel.

Most candidates reported that communication was mainly around decisions made and the **feedback** could be improved to include further mentorship and training plans, particularly if given in writing.

A few candidates felt positive about the **follow-up** received after the process concluded, however most reported not having talked to their PIs since the process ended. And some PIs were unclear about the next steps and whether they could hire unsuccessful candidates for something else. Further clarification on this in future rounds would be helpful.

Pay scale decisions for successful candidates were tricky because details typically found in CVs are used as criteria and these were not available for this fellowship. Ensuring that the recruitment team is involved from the outset with these discussions will be helpful going forwards.





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