

# THE WOLFSON FOUNDATION

Chief executive **PAUL RAMSBOTTOM** explains how the foundation supports excellence in science, health, education and the arts

**The Wolfson Foundation was established in 1955 by Sir Isaac Wolfson.** His wealth was created through the retail conglomerate Great Universal Stores. Sir Isaac, his wife Edith and son Leonard (later Lord Wolfson of Marylebone) were the original founder trustees. Following Lord Wolfson's death in 2010, his daughter Dame Janet Wolfson de Botton took over as chair, but the trustee board has always comprised of independent experts as well as family members.

**The foundation predominantly still funds capital projects that support and promote excellence in the fields of science, health, education and the arts and humanities.** We aim to make organisations more sustainable, support them to make strategic changes and help talent flourish. As well as capital projects, we work with a number of partner organisations to provide bursaries and scholarships to outstanding individuals as we also recognise that buildings need to be filled with talented people.

**We award over £30m each year.**

By our 60th anniversary in 2015, we had awarded over £800m in grants. Over 10,000 diverse projects have been funded since the foundation was set up. Each year we fund between 300-400 projects.

**We don't directly fund capital projects where the project costs are less than £15,000, although we do fund less via some of our partner programmes.** There are no maximum grants. In 2011 we awarded our largest ever grant of £20m to the



University College London to help create the UK's only clinical research facility dedicated to bringing together clinical and scientific knowledge to combat dementia and other diseases. This was, however, an exceptional award.

Alongside large research infrastructure awards, we remain committed to funding grassroots organisations too. We have a rigorous decision making process based around expert external review, and we hope an organisation can use our grant award to also leverage further support from other funders.

**We are fairly relaxed with organisations and individuals after they receive an award from us.** We do ask for six-monthly progress reports and a final report, but we know that capital work can be workload-heavy so we generally let organisations get on with things.

We have only recently had a dedicated communications function, so we are now

also actively engaging with our grant holders via social media and other channels as well.

**We have a two-stage application process.** The first stage assesses both eligibility and financial viability. It is very light touch – we don't want to waste the time of applicants. Organisations may then be invited to submit second-stage applications which undergo a careful review process by experts in the relevant field who provide an impartial opinion. Recommended applications are then passed to our expert panels and finally to our trustee board. The process takes a minimum of six months, but can vary accordingly. We get around 1,000 applications annually, but people also apply directly to our partners.

**We ask that applicants read the guidance on our website, but if in doubt, to call members of our grants team who are more than happy to explain if an organisation is likely to be eligible.**

We pride ourselves on being accessible and transparent. We know fundraisers are often very busy and we do not want people to apply unnecessarily. At the same time, we also want to encourage organisations that may be deemed "excellent" to apply, but are unsure if this is the case. We are also always seeking applications from under-represented regions.

Although we are based in London, we are emphatically not London-centric, and really encourage applications not just from outside the South East, but also from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. ☒

**£800M**

awarded over 60 years

**300-400**

projects funded each year

**£20M**

largest ever single grant