

# Facilitating a collective living knowledge: narrative CV support and a model for future change

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## Introduction

The introduction of narrative CVs (NCV) by research funders has brought a more flexible, qualitative approach to assessing academic careers. Researchers are now required to discuss a wider range of career contributions in a narrative format compared with the traditional "category-based list" CV.<sup>1</sup> This represents a marked shift in the way research careers are presented and thought about in funding decisions.

At the University of Liverpool, we, as Research Development Facilitators, have led an effective programme to support colleagues through this transition. Through this programme, we have drawn on our community's experiences to facilitate an **inclusive and accessible collective living knowledge**.



Research Development Facilitators deliver workshop, May 2023

## A consultative approach

In late 2022, we consulted with researchers at the University who had applied for NCV pilot schemes, which highlighted many challenges, including:

- **limited guidance on writing** from funders
- **limited guidance on assessment and unclear approaches to peer review** from funders
- increased **workload**
- **reduced primacy of outputs**: more focus on context and relevance, less focus on quantitative measures
- **reprioritisation** of collegiate and impact-related contributions
- **new approach to team CVs** for UKRI schemes
- **constraining word counts**
- **strategic choice of contributions** rather than CV encapsulating an entire career
- coinciding with **wider changes at UKRI** with the introduction of The Funding Service.

We combined findings from this internal consultation process with a sector scoping exercise to generate the first iteration of our **Narrative CV Best Practice Guide**.

However, as the use of NCVs increased and the format evolved our community faced new challenges. It became clear a set of static resources was insufficient to navigate these continual changes; we needed to broaden our methods of engagement.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Julian Hamann, Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner, 'Biographical representation, from narrative to list: The evolution of curricula vitae in the humanities, 1950 to 2010', *Research Evaluation* 31, no. 4 (2022): 438–451, <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvab040>



"It was great to get your insight and expertise and I feel like I've got a much better grasp... I also found the advice online with the examples really helpful too. So much support - thank you!"

Successful UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship applicant Round 9 and clinic attendee 2024

## A practice-led approach

Our interactive sessions have created a **two-way learning opportunity** where we hear about new challenges, co-create solutions and see first-hand the innovative approaches that the flexible NCV format enables. What began as a response to calls for practical support has developed into a **practice-led approach to the co-production of knowledge**, informed by the breadth of our community but requiring no sustained time commitment from them.

In addition, through ongoing consultation with institutional Peer Review College members who **review NCVs for funders**, we have gained essential insights on a diversity of approaches to NCVs across a range of schemes.

This ongoing collection of learnings from events and clinics, feedback on resources, and consultation represents a **sustained feedback loop**, allowing us to continually adapt our support in response to funder changes, but also to the nuanced cultural changes at play. As such we are **facilitating a collective living knowledge** about NCVs that is both a product of and for our community.

"I am so happy I attended [the workshop] and that support was out there. I was able to answer the PI questions and queries confidently..."

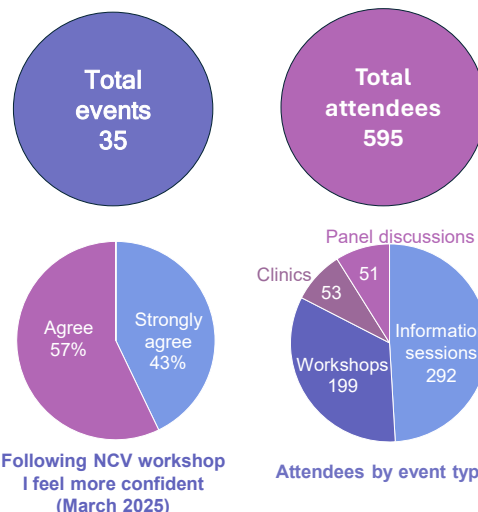
Research-enabling workshop attendee (2023)

## Responsive practical support

Consultations revealed a need for tailored practical support and guidance to help our community develop skills and build confidence. As such, we developed:

- A series of **information sessions** to raise awareness of the introduction of NCVs and our new support offer.
- **Panel discussions** exploring panellists' experiences writing and assessing narrative CVs on funder panels.
- **Workshops** for different audiences including:
  - An **interactive individual NCV workshop for researchers** focussed on gathering and presenting material.
  - A **team NCV workshop** addressing the challenges of writing a combined team CV, using a fictionalised NCV for discussion on good practice and pitfalls.
  - A **workshop for PS research-enabling colleagues** focussing on how to review and give constructive feedback on NCV drafts.
- **Clinics** to provide 1-2-1 feedback on draft NCVs to individual researchers.
- **Video content** and recordings of information and panel sessions to enhance our resources.

## NCV events: Sept 2022 - Aug 2025



## Reflections

Our approach has increased **confidence** in writing NCVs through the development of an **agile support offer that is responsive** to both funder and cultural shifts. This, in turn, has contributed to an institutional culture more at ease with the new format.

As the use of NCVs becomes increasingly common across the sector, we expect our community's need for interactive support to wane. We will continue to run clinics and train-the-trainer sessions to ensure sustained support and **maintain an evolving living knowledge**. Crucially, this work will be underpinned by the culture shift created by our early interventions.

Beyond narrative CVs, as research communities we face a host of challenges, new and old. The benefits of facilitating a **collective living knowledge** are two-fold, not only does it create a dynamic basis for skill development, but it is also a **model to help our community navigate future cultural change**.