

Analysis of Using the Narrative CV for CRUK Funding

Summary of findings –
Autumn 2023 Funding Round

**Together we are
beating cancer**



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Note: Information in this document can be used but must be credited to Cancer Research UK.

Introduction

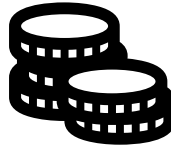
- The [narrative CV](#) has been in use for almost all of CRUK's funding schemes since the Autumn 2022 funding round, and was an evolution of our approach to broadening research outputs as we previously requested 3–5 key research achievements
- CRUK is part of the [Joint Funders Group](#) that shares practice with one another on how narrative CVs are implemented in research funding
- To understand its reception and identify areas for improvement, we surveyed applicants and reviewers for the Autumn 2023 funding call
- Good sampling rate: responses from 52 applicants and 54 reviewers
- [Questions on the narrative CV](#), as well as [diversity questions](#) were taken from cross-sector question sets to ensure comparability between organisations' evaluation
- In most questions, a Likert scale was used to define approval or satisfaction with elements of the narrative CV

Who responded?

Applicants and reviewers - personal characteristics



40–50% aged 40–49



Reviewers more likely to grow up with family working professional / managerial job



70% and 54% men



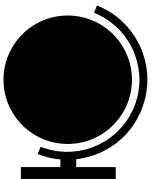
1 in 5 have taken career break in last 6 months



76% and 57% speak English as first language



2% identify as 'disabled'; 11% have some or substantial barriers due to a long-term condition



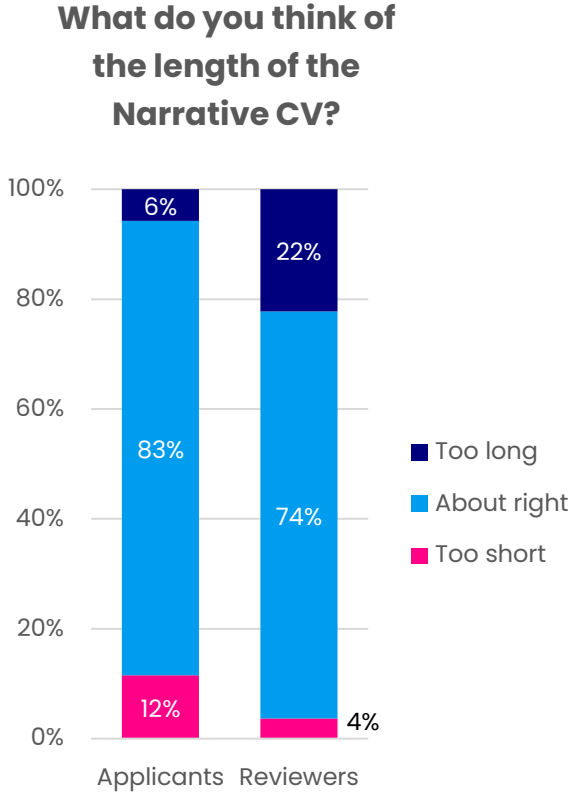
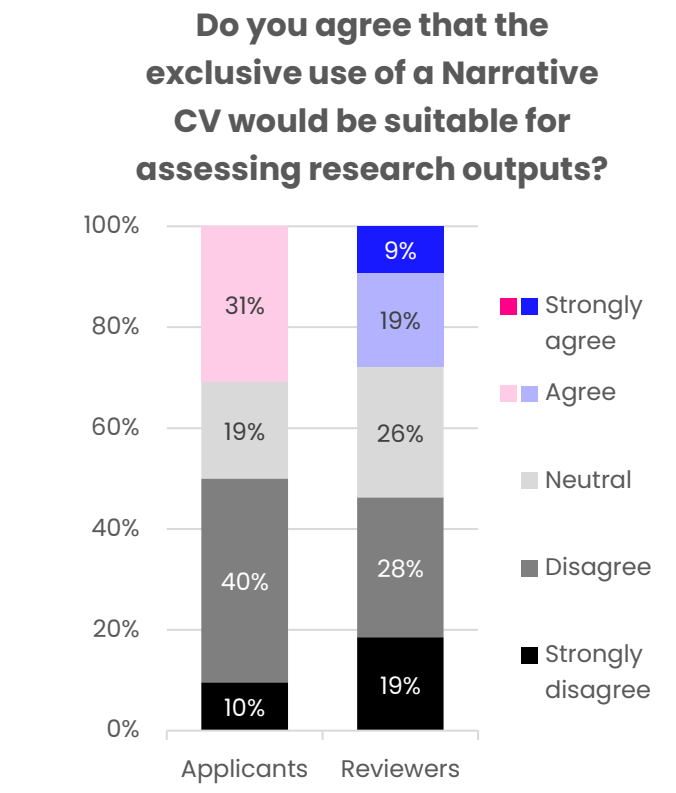
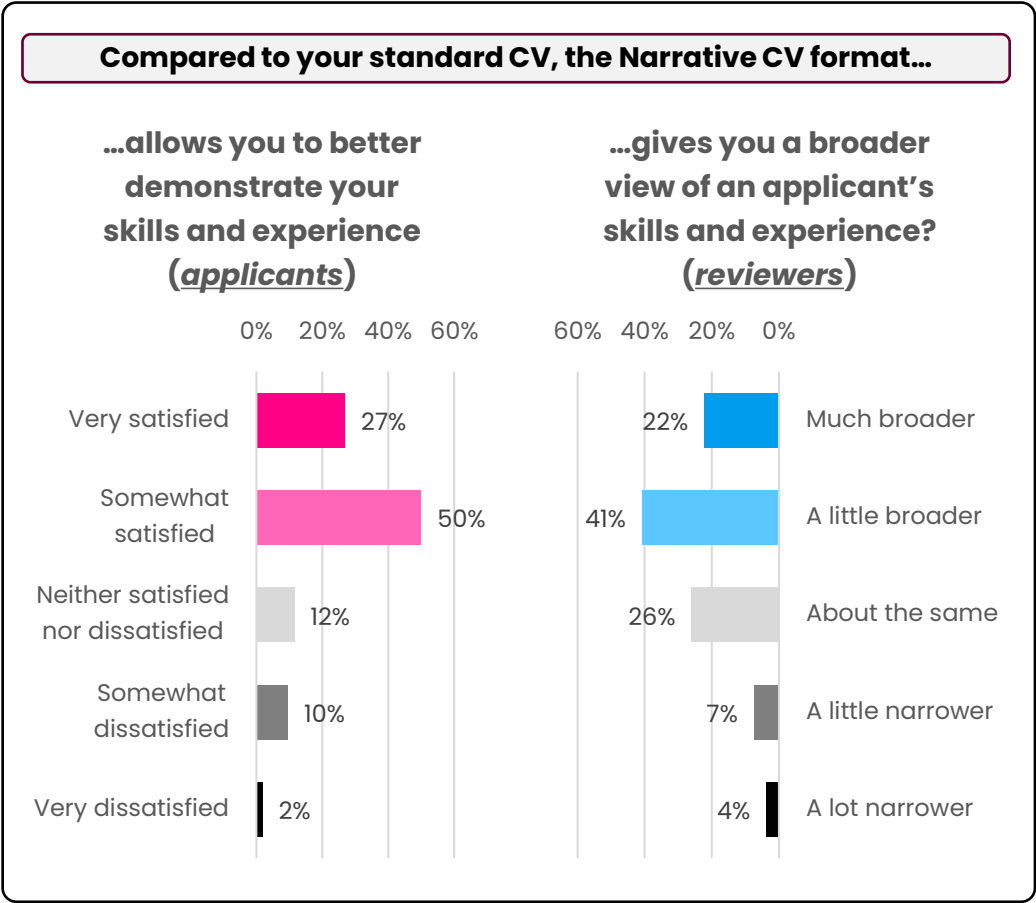
15% and 13% are from an ethnic minority



96% working in academic sector

● Applicants
● Reviewers

Value and feasibility of using the narrative CV



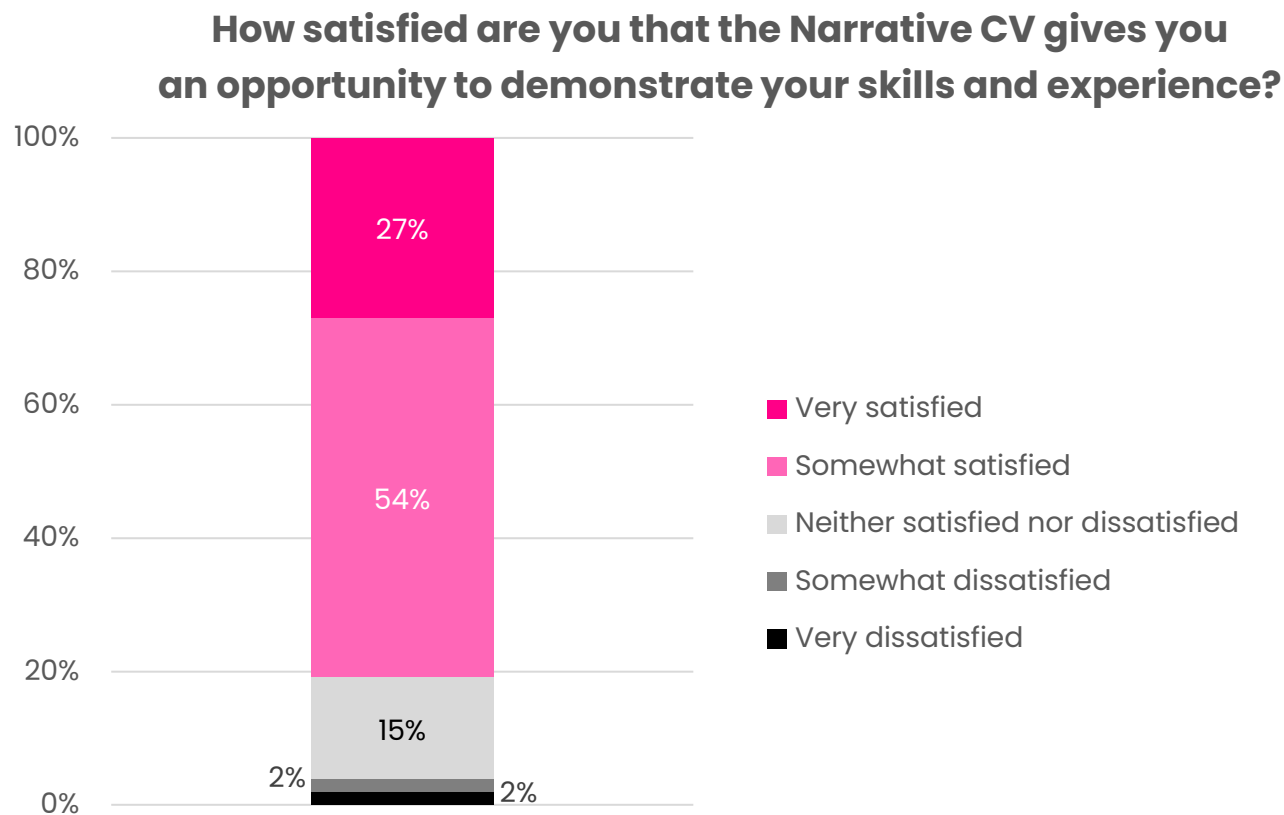
Only 1 in 8 applicants and reviewers feel that the format is inferior to the traditional CV

Just under a third of respondents feel it could be used exclusively to assess outputs

The large majority believe it is the right length

Value and feasibility of using the narrative CV

Applicants only

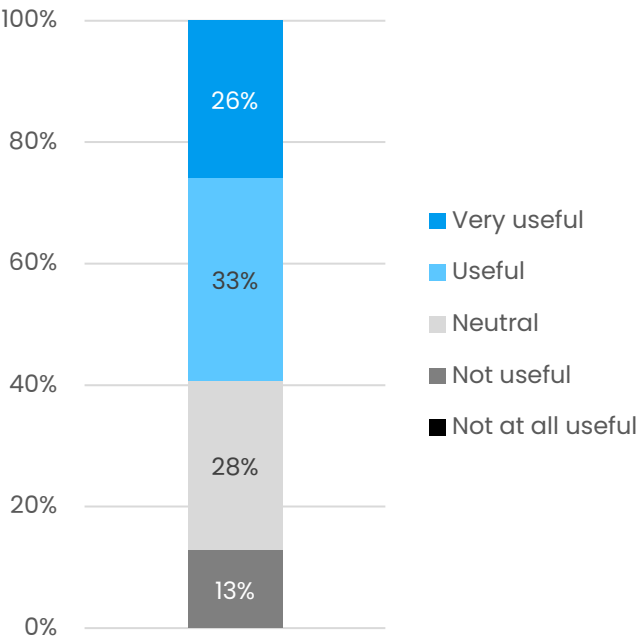


Applicants are very positive that the format allows them to evidence their accomplishments and abilities well

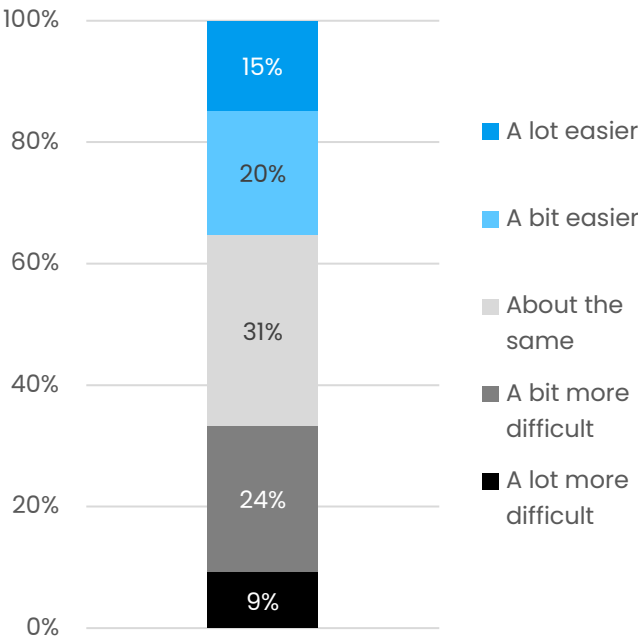
Value and feasibility of using the narrative CV

Reviewers only

How useful was the Narrative CV in providing you with the information you needed to make a well-informed decision?



Compared to reviewing an application with a traditional, do you feel the Narrative CV is more or less difficult to assess?



What added value does the narrative CV offer? (# responses)



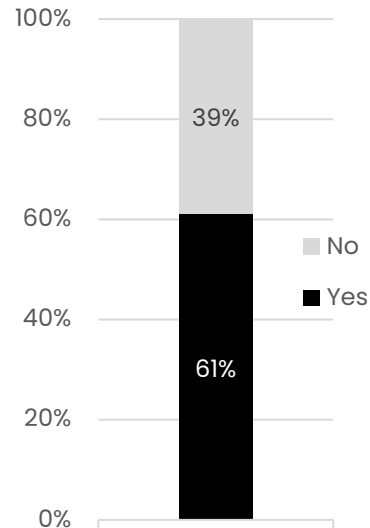
Reviewers feel it was useful in supporting their assessment, but a third also report that it was more difficult to use than the traditional CV format

Only one in eight reviewers feel it has no added value

Value and feasibility of using the narrative CV

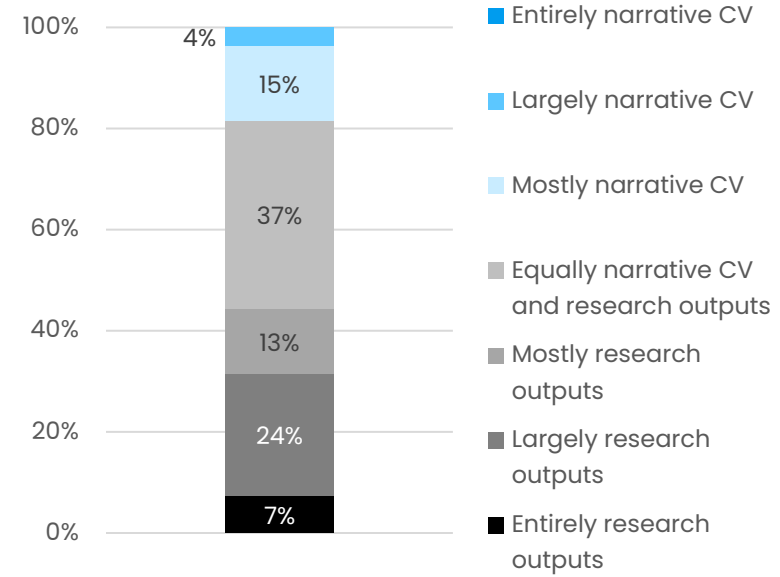
Reviewers only

Was this your first experience assessing a Narrative CV?



For the majority, this was their first experience assessing applications using the format

What assessment of the applicants' track record was based upon



Many reviewers still favour research outputs to assess track record but over half used the narrative CV equally- or more in their assessment

CRUK-provided guidance and organisational support

Applicants only

Applicant guidelines

Application form

Website

Narrative CVs

CVs are an important tool in assessing grant applications but conventional formats can be limiting.

To address this, we're introducing narrative CVs in our funding applications to give applicants the opportunity to evidence a wider range of skills and experience and showcase their broader contributions in research. This change will help ensure we're drawing on a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences to help best cancer.

What is a narrative CV?

A narrative CV encourages you to describe contributions and achievements that showcase a wide range of experiences and skills. It's set up flexibly so you can provide context to explain the broader relevance and impact of your contributions.

Our narrative CV is based on the [Royal Society's Résumé for Researchers](#) and asks 3 core questions:

- How have you contributed to the generation of knowledge?
- How have you contributed to the development of others?
- How have you contributed to the wider research community?

You'll also be asked to include any further information relevant to your application such as career breaks, part-time working, time taken out of active research to pursue training or other relevant experience. These details will be used by our reviewers to make appropriate adjustments when assessing your track record, outputs and career progression.

Why introduce narrative CVs?

We've adopted narrative CVs to help us attract and retain the most promising cancer research talent. Traditional academic CVs often have a narrow focus and lack information beyond education history, publications and grant funding.

A narrative CV gives you the opportunity to:

- highlight essential skills (such as managing teams or collaborations) as well as outputs
- put skills and experience into context to help expert reviewers who may be unfamiliar with the discipline or sector understand the full significance and impact of your contributions
- demonstrate the holistic contributions you've made as an individual to the research and innovation community
- focus on the quality and impact of your contributions
- describe any varied career paths you may have taken

Narrative CVs also aim to use a structured, standardised template, reducing burden and bureaucracy with an aligned approach across funders.

How should I complete the narrative CV?

What changes will I see in your grant application forms?

How will expert reviewers assess my narrative CV?

What are other funders doing?

Where can I find useful resources?

Contact us

As we roll out this new narrative CV over the coming months, we'll continue to work with our applicants and reviewers to seek feedback, review and further develop our approach.

If you have any feedback, please get in touch at polices@cruc.org.uk

Develop your research career

We're committed to supporting the next generation of cancer researchers and we have opportunities for you wherever you are in your career.

Explore opportunities

Have your say on narrative CVs

We want to hear your thoughts and experiences around narrative CVs as well as any changes you think might be useful to support their use moving forward.

Share your insights

Observing funding panels and committees

We're offering early- to mid-career researchers the opportunity to observe our panel and committee meetings across our funding remit.

Find out more about eligibility and how to apply

Equality, diversity and inclusion in research

We're taking steps to develop a more diverse and inclusive research community and tackle systemic issues like underrepresentation and racial bias.

How we're prioritising equality, diversity and inclusion

3.2.3. NARRATIVE CV UPLOAD

The Narrative CV enables you to highlight your achievements and contributions of particular relevance to your application.

You can write up to two pages across the 3 questions. In the examples you provide, you should be specific about your contribution to each. You should provide enough detail that allows our expert reviewers to understand what you have discovered/developed and what its impact and influence has been in your field.

Guidance on the types of activities you may include are provided below each question in the form template. The lists are non-exhaustive, so you can include other examples of relevance to your application. You do not necessarily need to provide an example for every activity. Please note that **each Lead Applicant, including Joint Lead Applicants**, named on the application will each need to complete their own separate Narrative CV form and organise for their separate form to be uploaded with their respective name included in the header or footer on all relevant pages.

CRUK Narrative CV

The CRUK Narrative CV is a flexible template where you can highlight your achievements and contributions of particular relevance to your application. When providing examples please describe your specific contribution to each. Please refer to the scheme application guidelines for additional information on how to complete this form.

Lead/Joint Lead Applicant Name _____

Maximum of 2 pages for the first three questions. Examples below are non-exhaustive.

1. How have you contributed to the generation of knowledge?

Describe how you have contributed to the generation of new ideas, tools or techniques and your most important research outputs. Outputs may include for example: preprints, training delivered, contribution to consortia, community outreach, patents, open datasets, software, novel assays, reagents and publications. Describe what you have discovered/developed, your specific contribution to each, why it is important and what its impact and influence have been in your field.

2. How have you contributed to the development of others?

Describe your achievements and development critical to the success of others, either within a team, part of a collaboration, or through mentorship. This may include, for example:

- mentoring and supervision of students and colleagues, or mentoring others in your field;
- examples of strategic leadership, how you shaped the direction of a team, organisation, company or institution; and your involvement in establishing collaborations.

3. How have you contributed to the wider research community?

Describe your contributions and engagement with the local and international research community. This may include, for example:

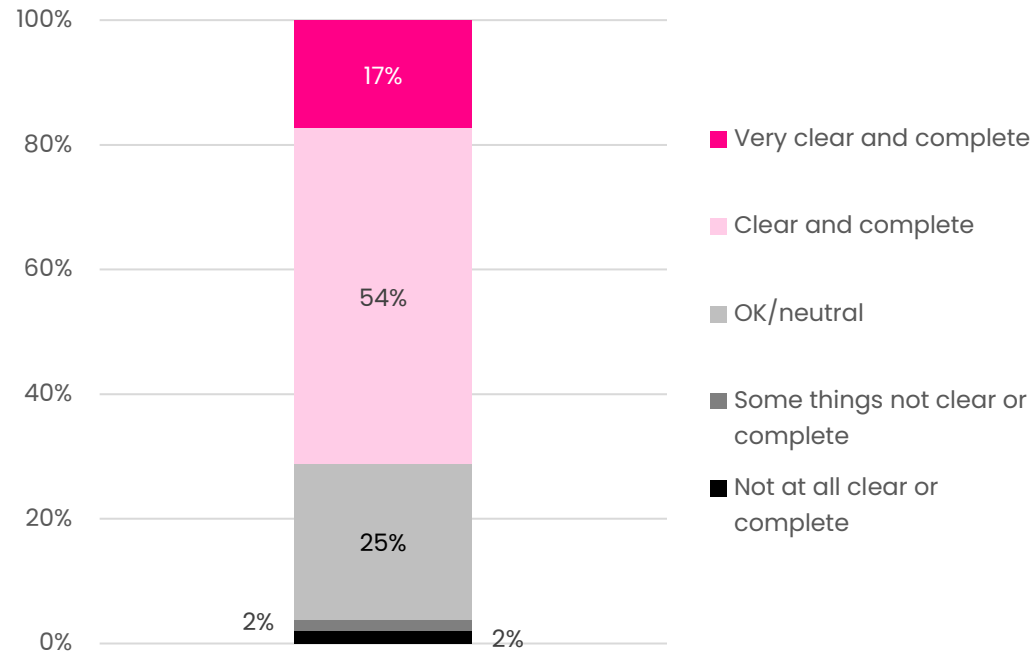
- editing, reviewing, refereeing, and your contributions to the evaluation of researchers and research projects;
- organisation of conferences or knowledge sharing activities;
- contributions to improving research culture (research integrity, equality, diversity and inclusion, mobility of researchers, reward and recognition of researchers' various activities), and appointments to positions of responsibility within your department, institution or organisation.

Applicants (and reviewers) receive guidance in three locations online around using the narrative CV. These explain the rationale for its use as well as how you could complete it.

CRUK-provided guidance and organisational support

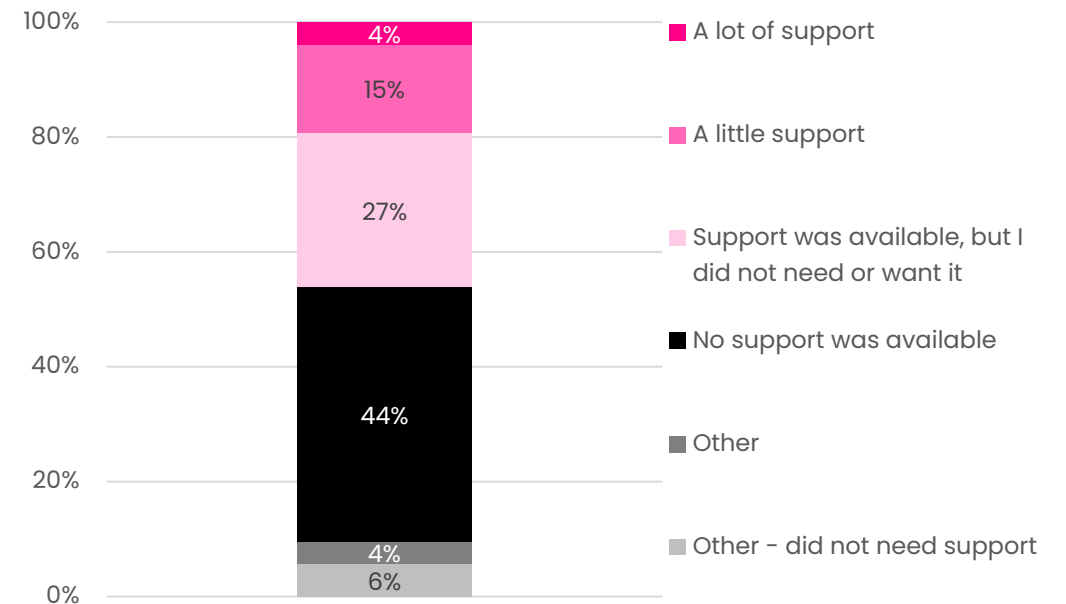
Applicants only

How clear and complete was the guidance from CRUK for filling out the Narrative CV?
(applicants)



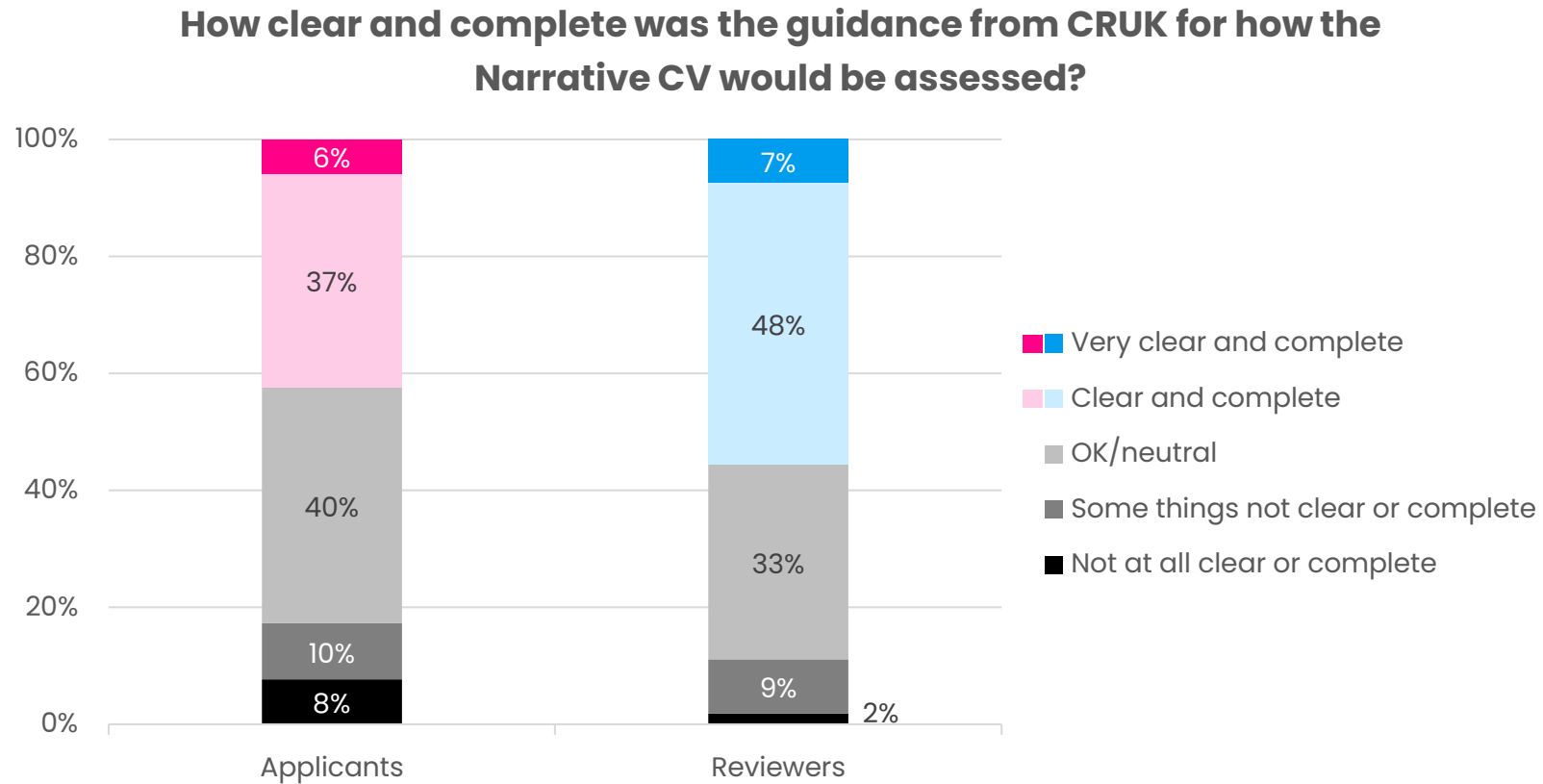
Applicants were very positive about the guidance to complete the narrative CV

Did you receive support when completing the Narrative CV from your host/employing organisation?
(applicants)



However, large amounts of applicants described a lack of support to prepare

CRUK-provided guidance on assessment

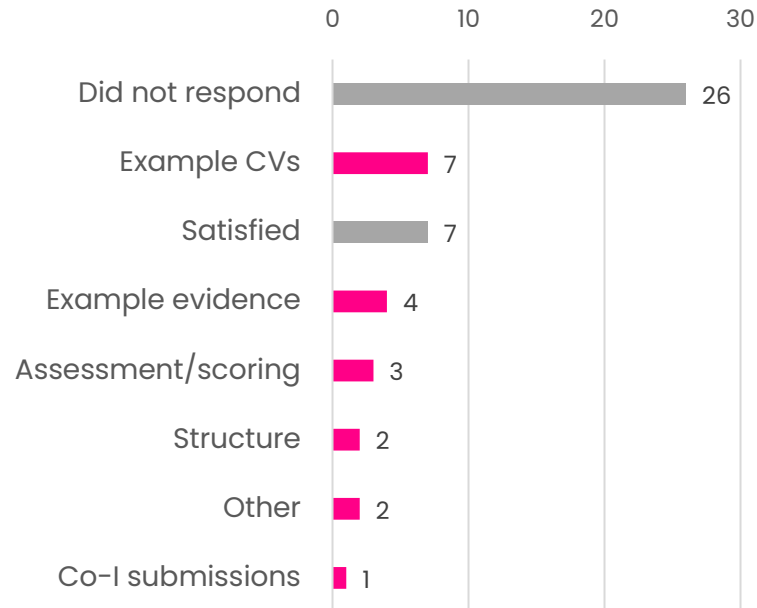


Applicants (18%) are more frequently unsure about how the narrative CV is assessed compared to reviewers (11%)

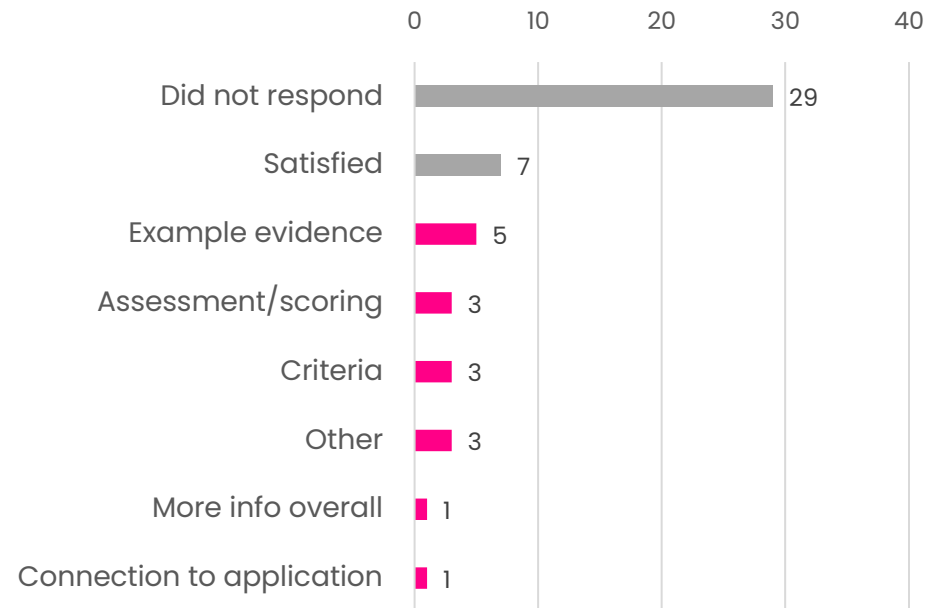
Additional guidance and information requested

Applicants only

**Additional guidance requested
(# responses)**



**Additional information on assessment
requested (# responses)**

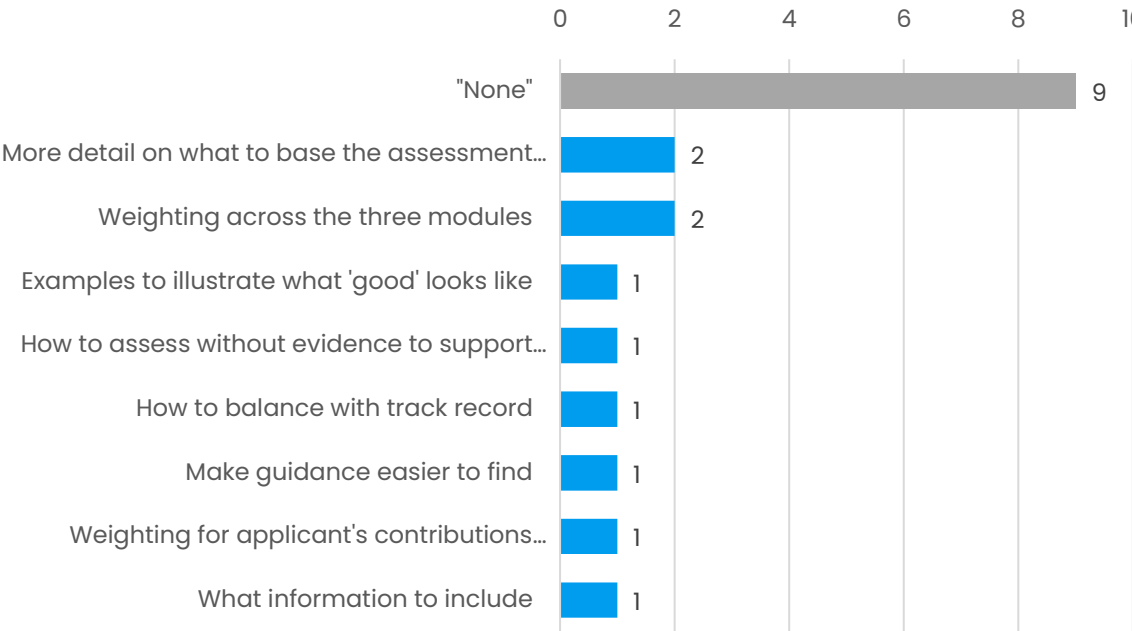


Applicants largely seek example evidence as additional guidance, as well as more detail on how narrative CVs are scored during assessment. The vast majority do not propose additional guidance.

Additional guidance requested and perceptions of assessment

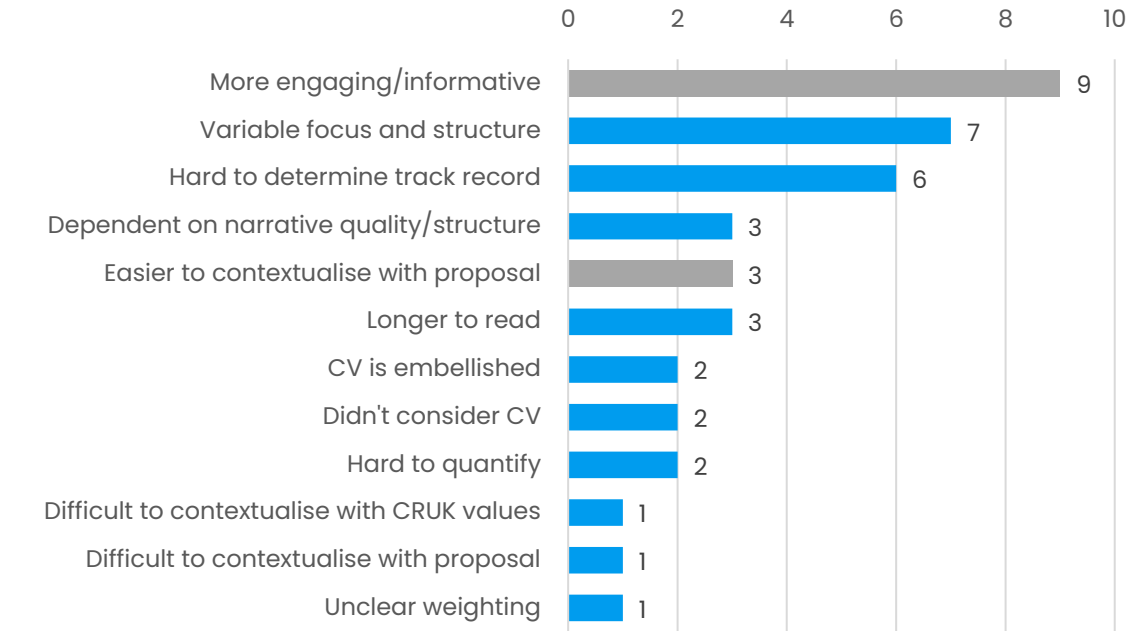
Reviewers only

Additional guidance requested
(# responses)



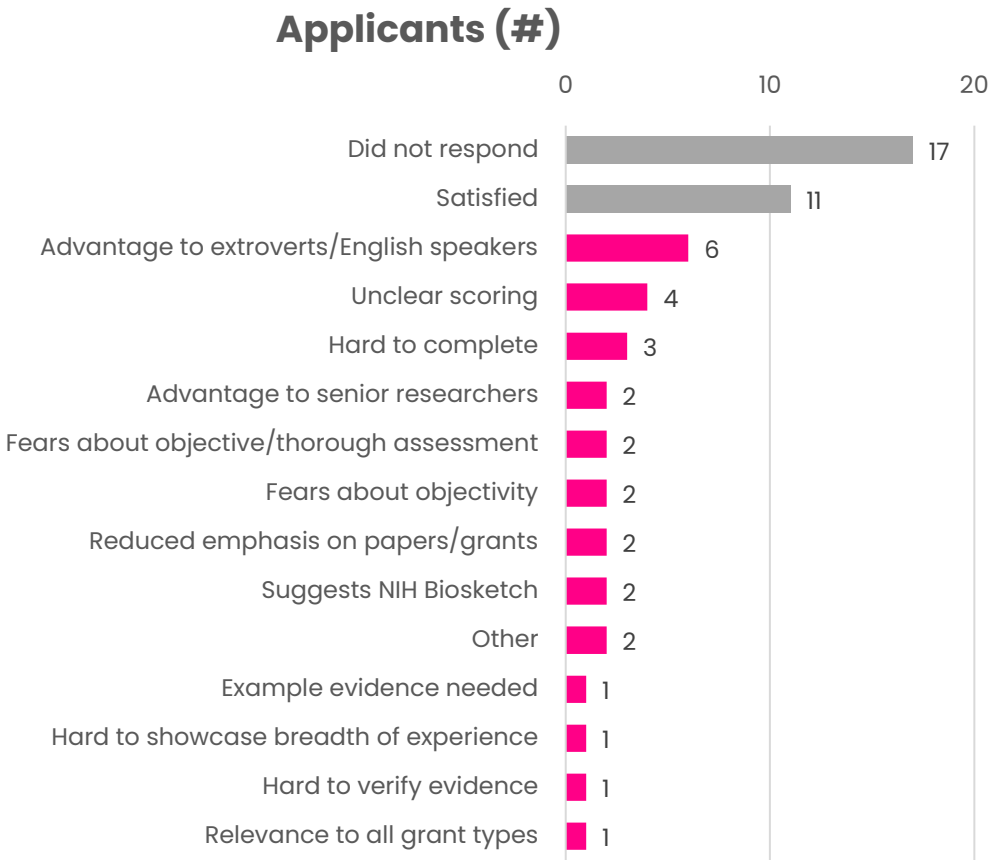
Reviewers largely have few suggestions for additional guidance.

Comments on assessment
(# responses)



Whilst many feel the format is more engaging, it can also be more difficult to determine applicants' track record, largely due to the variable focus and structure of the narratives.

Concerns of using the Narrative CV



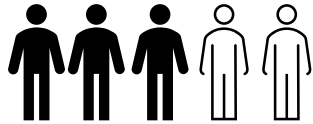
Over half of applicants had no concerns; the main concerns relate to perceived bias, how it is scored, and it being difficult to complete.



Reviewers' main concerns relate to it being challenging to review over a traditional CV, that applicants could exaggerate, and that it did not challenge existing perceived bias

Perceptions of the narrative CV by population

- **Gender:** women users appreciate it more than men but seek more support in preparing their CV



57% of women applicants did not have support available to prepare the CV (men: 38%)

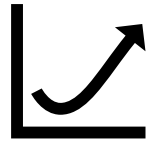
- **Age:** users feel more comfortable with the format with increasing age, suggesting they are confident in drafting and reviewing career narratives



100% of applicants aged 60+ were satisfied the CV gave them an opportunity to demonstrate skills and experience

Perceptions of the narrative CV by population

- **Ethnic group:** ethnic minorities are less convinced of its value over the traditional CV format compared to both White British and White non-British respondents



57% of applicants from an ethnic minority background thought it was an improvement over the traditional CV to demonstrate their experience, compared to 83% of White applicants

- **English first language:** non-native English speakers are overall more positive about its use but less likely to have support in preparing



None of the 12 non-native English speaker applicants found the guidance on how the CV would be assessed to be unclear

Perceptions of the narrative CV by population

- **Health condition:** those experiencing 'substantial barriers' may find the format problematic (small sample size), though those experiencing 'minor barriers' were generally positive

Summary of findings

- Initial perceptions of the narrative CV were generally positive and those entirely opposed to its use were in a small minority (~4% applicants and ~7% reviewers)
- **Applicants seek:** (1) more examples of activities to include; (2) detail on how assessment is made; (3) addressing perceived advantage to fluent writers
- **Reviewers seek:** (1) a less variable structure; (2) to retain research outputs in the application to assess track record
- Nearly 1 in 3 users overall felt it could be used exclusively to assess research outputs
- Outside of the application process itself, there was a general lack of support available for preparing a CV, confirmed by 44% of respondents

Get in touch

For questions, contact the CRUK Funding
Policy and Governance team

policies@cancer.org.uk

Mathew Tata, Funding Policy and Governance Manager

mathew.tata@cancer.org.uk

Read our blog:

[Research careers – changing the narrative for CVs](#)