UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Research and Commercial Services

Fact Sheet

Applying for funding to the Medical Research Council

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Remit

The MRC supports high-quality basic, strategic and applied research and related postgraduate training in the biomedical and other sciences. The council wants to advance knowledge and technology and provide trained researchers to contribute to human health, the economic competitiveness of the UK, and the quality of life. It also aims to provide advice on research in the biomedical sciences and to promote the public understanding of that research.

Research Boards

Research that the MRC funds is divided into five broad scientific areas, each of which is represented by an MRC research board under the following headings:

- Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board
- Population and Systems Medicine Board
- Infections and Immunity Research Board
- Neurosciences and Mental Health Board

Submission deadlines and research board meeting dates for MRC grant applications and annual competitions can be found here.

Current planning priorities

The MRC's current planning priorities for training/capacity building are:

- work using mouse models of disease;
- informatics, including bioinformatics, neuroinformatics, health Informatics, e-science, computational biology;
- mathematical skills relevant to biomedical research;
- health economics;
- stem cells, tissue engineering and regenerative medicine;
- intracellular imaging and dynamics;
- integrative biology in relation to cardiovascular disease;
- radiotherapy and radiobiology;
- clinical neurology;
- primary care;
- dementia;
- stroke;
- diabetes (clinical and translational);
- mental health research;
- clinical infection

Sample of Available Awards

Research grants

- Research Grants. A Research Grant may be awarded for any period of up to five years. The duration will depend on the needs of the research being supported. MRC's expectation is that most applications will be for three or five year support. Research Grants for two years or less are for proof of principle or pilot work only

  Success rate 2008/09: 20%

- Programme Grants. Programme grants provide larger, longer term (five years) and renewable programme funding. They aim to help the medical science community to 'think bigger'. A programme is defined as a coordinated and coherent group of related projects, which may be to answer an inter-related set of questions across a broad scientific area. The expectation is that not all the questions will necessarily be answered within the tenure of the award. The programme may well be a continuation of current activity.

- Trial Grants. Provide support for trials to provide high quality evidence on the efficacy and effectiveness of interventions in medicine and health services

  Success rate 2008/09: 64%

- New Investigator Research Grant. Provide project focused support for clinical and non-clinical researchers in their first steps towards establishing themselves as independent principal investigators. Applicants will be at

the start of their first academic appointment, or in a senior post doctoral position.

Success rate 2008/09: 20%

- Discipline Hopping Awards. Discipline Hopping Awards provide short term support to pump prime new collaborations between Engineers and Physical Scientists with Life Scientists, with the aim of fostering long-term interaction. This scheme allows researchers who have a track record in their own field in the physical sciences to apply for funding to investigate and develop ideas, skills and collaborations in the areas of biological, clinical, health services and public health research. Alternatively, Life Science researchers can apply for funding to develop ideas, skills and collaborations with physical scientists.

  Success rate 2008/09: 38%

- Industry Collaboration Award supports the translation of research into healthcare improvements and the enhancement of economic prosperity which are both key MRC priorities and central to their mission. Applications can be submitted to any of the MRC's funding schemes (Programme Grants, Research Grants, Development Pathway Funding Scheme Calls etc) for which the lead applicant, who must be an academic partner, is eligible.
- Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme. This **new scheme** will support the development of novel therapies, interventions and diagnostics, and the research tools used in the development of therapies, interventions or diagnostics. Projects should target significant and unmet health needs. Projects supported under this scheme must have clearly defined milestones, outcomes and future value. These will help maximise success and enable the project to attract required downstream funding, whether from public or private sources, along the path to meet its clinical aims.
- Partnership grants aims to provide support for collaborative activities that add value to existing research or helps galvanise researchers in a particular field, or complementary fields, to address important issues that cannot be addressed through other funding arrangements.

Fellowships

The MRC provides support for high calibre researchers who want to make a career in medical research through a comprehensive portfolio of fellowship schemes tailored for different stages of the clinical or non-clinical research career pathway:

Clinical

- Clinical research training fellowship provide up to 3 years support for clinically qualified, active professionals to undertake specialised or further research training.
- Clinical Scientist Fellowships support those moving on from post-doctoral research towards an independent research career, but who do not yet have a tenured position. Up to a year of the fellowship may be taken overseas or in industry.

  Award rate: 2008/09: 27%

- The MRC Senior Clinical Fellowships aim to develop outstanding medically and other clinically qualified professionals such tht they become research leaders. Applicants should normally hold a PhD/DPhil and have at least three years post doctoral research experience.

  Award rate: 2008/09: 22%

- The National Institute for Health Research clinical scientist award provides up to five years'[funding with access to academic mentorship and career development together with clinical specialist training where appropriate.
- The Jointly funded clinical research training fellowship provides opportunities for additional clinical research training fellowships through collaborations with Royal Colleges and Charity funders.
- Population health scientist fellowship is a new fellowship which continues the MRC's commitment to Health of the Public research and will support research for up to four years at pre- or post-doctoral entry level.

  ***Award rate 2008/09*:** 34%

Non-clinical

- Career Development Award supports those with at least three years post-doctoral experience moving towards an independent research career. Awards are for up to four years of which a year may be spent overseas or in industry.

  Award rate: 2008/09: 15%

- People Exchange Programme aims to stimulate collaborative research across industry and academica, develop skills and transfer knowledge.
- Senior Non-Clinical Fellowships support those qualified for an academic career (usually with at least six years post-doctoral experience) who do not yet have a tenured post, for five years extendable to ten.

  Award rate: 2008/09: 12%

- Population health scientist fellowship is a new fellowship which continues the MRC's commitment to Health of the Public research and will support research for up to four years at pre- or post-doctoral entry level.

  Award rate 2008/09: 34%

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Specialist

- Career Development Award in Biostatistics is a postdoctoral fellowship to support individuals working in, or who wish to move into, health related research. It provides four years of support for development and investigation of innovative statistical methods and their application in clinical research.

  Award rate: 2008/09: 38%

- Economics of health is supported by the MRC through three new strands each with additional funds and provide a major initiative to boost research capacity in economic health. They are early-career post-doctoral fellowships, masters and training placements (shortly available).

  Award rate 2008/09: 40%

- ESRC/MRC interdisciplinary post-doctoral fellowships provides funding for interdisciplinary research students and post-doctoral fellows whose research is of interest to both councils and which requires the combined approaches of both the medical and social sciences. This scheme is administered by the ESRC.

  Award rate 2009/08: 15%

- Methodology research fellowship, a new fellowship, is aimed at developing the methodological research leaders of tomorrow. The scheme provides a significant career development opportunity for promising researchers for a period of concentrated methods research activity and development.

  Award rate 2008/09: 20%

- Special training fellowship in bioinformatics, neuroinformatics, health informatics and computational biology aimed at creating a research workforce able to take forward new developments in these fields. Can be awarded at pre or post-doctoral entry level.

  Award rate 2008/09: 31%

Research Professorships and Readerships

These awards provide an expectation of long-term continuity of personal support for selected clinical and non-clinical scientists of exceptional ability working in areas of strategic value to the MRC. There is no annual competition and calls for nominations are made via Vice-Chancellors from time to time. Anyone interested in receiving support though this scheme should speak with the programme manager responsible for management of the existing or new programme grant in the first instance.

Strategic initiatives

These run as a separate source of funding and are announced via the MRC website. At the current time such initiatives are around:

- Addiction research strategy
- Methodology research programme

The Council also provides highlight notices to alert researchers to areas of biomedical science that are currently a high priority for the MRC i.e.

Refereeing process

- All proposals are peer-reviewed by independent scientific advisers.
- Each research proposal is scrutinised by at least three independent experts before consideration by the appropriate Research Board/Panel.

Details of the criteria used by the reviewers can be found here.

Board and Panel Scoring

In assessing an application the following is taken into account by the Boards/Panels

- **Importance (***How important are the questions, or gaps in knowledge, that are being addressed?)*
- **Scientific Potential (***What are the prospects for good scientific progress?)*
- **Justification of resources (***Are the funds requested essential for the work, and do the importance and scientific potential justify funding on the scale requested?)*
- **Ethical and Other Implications**
- **Risks of research Misuse**
- **Public understanding of science**
- **Commercial exploitation**
- **Dissemination of research results**

Details of the Board and Panel scoring criteria can be found here.

Eligibility

Eligibility for all of the above schemes is available via the MRC website.

Further Information

An Applicants Handbook covering who can apply for grants etc together with the application process and what support researchers receive is available. Further information on what is available from the MRC is available via their website at http://www.mrc.ac.uk/

Tips for inclusion

The following are a list of tips which are useful to consider when making an application. A dedicated guide to "Writing a Successful Grant Application" is also available.

- Always good to talk with MRC before you write your application (sometimes mandatory).
- Read and follow the instructions and adhere to guidelines.
- It is key to have a hypothesis driven research proposal which actually tests the hypothesis in a clean way.
- Ensure that what you want to achieve is clear and is included in the first two sentences of the application.
- Make the proposal clear and simple, keeping to the point. Make the plan concise but highlight such things as cell types of tissue to be used etc.
- Don't use too many abbreviations and don't make the application dense – space it out.
- Including preliminary data is an essential.
- Show that you have a track record of delivering and publishing quality work.
- Help to make the job of the reviewer easier as much as you can – think about what would make it easy for you if you were reading an application outside of your field.
- Don't be tempted to underfund – if it is going to take 5 years, apply for 5 years funding and justify it, **DON'T** be tempted to try and fit it into 3 years. Equally don't overfund.
- Get your application reviewed internally; get a second opinion, get it proof read and carry out a spell check.

Application process

- Currently applications are made through the MRC's own electronic application and assessment (EAA) system.
- All the Research Councils are moving towards having harmonised Services, systems and processes

  Joint Electronic submission (JES)

  New Generation Back Office (NGBO)

  Shared Service Centre (SSC)
- This will be launched end of 2009 / early 2010, with an initial two month pilot, followed by a phased transition by Council or function.
- It is currently thought the MRC will move over mid-2010, but this is yet to be confirmed.
- This will benefit universities by giving a single point of contact, with harmonised processes, screens and interfaces.

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