

Early Career Researcher Grant



Guidance Notes

[July 2026]

If you have any queries, email us at applications@medicalresearchscotland.org

- Early Career Researcher Grants help recently appointed Early Career Researchers further develop their established own independent programme of research. They can be used for new research projects, critical pilot studies, critical replications, proof-of-concept work or to supplement other research programmes, whether funded by other grants or not.
- Early Career Researchers who have started a recently-awarded independent research position and have received other funding, as principal investigator, to start their own independent research programme are eligible. To be eligible, applicants must meet all of the below requirements:
 - ❖ Must hold an eligible early career research position which includes, *inter alia*, a lectureship or other tenured/tenure-track position, or wholly independent postdoctoral Fellowship (an “eligible position”) at a Scottish University or Scottish Research Institute.
 - ❖ Must have started their “eligible position” at the closing date for applications.
 - ❖ Must be within the first two years of taking up their “eligible position” at the closing date for applications.
 - ❖ If the “eligible position” is fixed term, the early career researcher must have two years or more of their eligible position remaining at the closing date for applications.
 - ❖ Must be able to provide evidence that they have already developed their own independent programme of research.
 - ❖ Must have obtained funding, as principal investigator, from funding sources other than Medical Research Scotland to support the research expenses/consumables of their independent programme of research which extends beyond salary costs.
 - ❖ Must not be working for a higher degree at the closing date for applications.
 - ❖ If the application is successful, the Early Career Researcher must not be working for a higher degree at the time the MRS Early Career Researcher award will be active.
- It is expected that applicants will hold a PhD and the Early Career Researcher’s contract has a substantial amount of time dedicated to research.
- Clinical lecturers/early career researchers may apply if they have access to research facilities, have contracts which dedicate a substantial amount of time to research and can provide evidence of having established their own independent research programme.
- Applicants must be based at a Scottish University or Scottish Research Institute and applications must come from within a Scottish University or Scottish Research Institute.
- If you are in doubt on your eligibility, please contact applications@medicalresearchscotland.org.
- There is no requirement or restriction on the subject or nature of the research, provided it addresses a question relevant to human health – the causation, prevention, diagnosis

or treatment of illness or the development of medical or surgical appliances. If a new device is being developed, there must be a clear plan for meeting regulatory standards.

- Only one successful application is permitted per Early Career Researcher.
- Unsuccessful applicants can reapply in a future round of applications.
- Researchers can apply for/hold an award for more than one of MRS's different funding streams (eg an Early Career Researcher Grant and a PhD Studentship), and the awards can run simultaneously, but the same costs cannot be claimed under multiple awards.
- The maximum value of each award is £25,000.
- Awards are for immediate use from the agreed start date and will normally be of 12 to 24 month duration. Projects must be completed and invoices must be submitted within 36 months of the agreed start date of the Early Career Researcher Grant.
- Applications will initially be assessed on their eligibility, based on criteria including:
 - ❖ All sections of the Application Form have been completed;
 - ❖ the Application has been submitted in the prescribed format;
 - ❖ the applicant meets the above eligibility criteria;
 - ❖ only one application per Early Career Researcher has been submitted per call;
 - ❖ the application has been submitted by a Scottish University or Scottish Research Institute;
 - ❖ the proposed project and application fit with the objectives of Medical Research Scotland; and
 - ❖ the lay summary is clear and has been written in plain, non-technical terms.
- Eligible applications will be assessed on:
 - ❖ the career development potential for the applicant;
 - ❖ the relevance and quality of the research;
 - ❖ the clarity of the description of the research to be conducted; and
 - ❖ the potential impact of the project
- Applications will be reviewed by at least two experienced scientific and/or medical experts.
- Reviewers of applications submitted to Medical Research Scotland must agree to [Medical Research Scotland's Code of Conduct \(including Conflicts of Interest Policy\) for Reviewers](#). Where a reviewer declares a conflict, they shall not have access to any papers relating to the application nor be party to any discussions or decisions in relation to that application.
- A Set-up Report **must** be submitted within 3 months of the agreed start date of the project and a Final Report on the project **must** be submitted within 3 months of the agreed end date of the project. The reports must be submitted on the approved Report Forms. The Final Report should describe the scientific outcomes, impact or pathway to impact, consequential further awards and personal development benefits of the award.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

- **All correspondence from Medical Research Scotland relating to the application will be addressed only to the Early Career Researcher** and it is their responsibility to ensure that all the other parties to the application are suitably informed.
- These Guidance Notes and their conditions constitute part of the application. The Application Form can be downloaded from <https://medicalresearchscotland.org.uk/early-career-researcher-grant>.
- All sections of the Application Form must be completed. If a particular section is not applicable state so, or select the *Not Applicable* option from the drop-down menu.
Consideration of your application will be delayed if information is missing or if you

have not included the required signatures.

- Please be concise and be aware of the need for clarity to non-specialist reviewers. Many of the fields on the Application Form are character-limited.
- **The application must be submitted as a pdf.** The Application Form must **EITHER** be printed, signed, scanned and saved as a pdf **OR** the Word document can be converted to pdf and electronically signed. The final pdf should be emailed as an attachment to **applications@medicalresearchscotland.org**
- An image or a table can be included using the *Early Career Researcher Grant Appendix* available at <https://medicalresearchscotland.org.uk/early-career-researcher-grant>. **The combined file size of all parts of the application must be less 5MB.**

NOTES TO ASSIST IN COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

Sections which are self-explanatory have not been expanded on in these Notes.

1. INSTITUTION AND INVESTIGATOR DETAILS

Provide full details, as requested.

2. FINANCIAL SUPPORT REQUESTED

The grants can be used for laboratory consumables, equipment, computer hardware and software, purchase of time on shared facilities, purchase of specialised services (such as statistical analysis), travel for specific research related work.

If equipment is funded by the Early Career Researcher Grant the researcher must ensure that it is purchased in accordance with the Administering Institution's procurement procedures in a manner that delivers value for money, is used for the research as described in the application. Maintenance and insurance are the responsibility of the grant holder.

Should the Early Career Researcher move to another institution within Scotland during the tenure of the award, Medical Research Scotland reserves the right to require that the equipment be transferred with the Early Career Researcher after discussion, if necessary, with the Institutions concerned. After the Early Career Researcher Grant has ended, the Administering Institution is free to use the equipment without reference to Medical Research Scotland. Medical Research Scotland expects it to be used in research for as long as practicable.

The grants cannot be used for salary costs or *ad hoc* payments to students or maintenance costs for equipment.

Publication costs should not be included. Medical Research Scotland encourages open access publication and has limited funds available to support this. An application for open access publication costs can be made at the time of publication. Medical Research Scotland does not provide funding for publication via non-open access routes.

Costs must be met initially by the Administering Institution, which should submit fully itemised quarterly invoices in arrears to Medical Research Scotland for reimbursement.

Projects must be completed and invoices must be submitted within 36 months of the agreed start date of the Early Career Researcher Grant. Invoices will not be accepted for payment if they are submitted more than 36 months after the agreed start date of the Early Career Researcher Grant.

If the applicant has, or subsequently obtains, funding for an awarded Early Career Researcher Grant project while the Grant is in progress, the Administering Institution must send a copy of Condition 13.4 to such additional funders (see Conditions 13 of the *Early Career Researcher Grant Standard Conditions of Award*).

3. RESEARCH PROJECT DETAILS

Project Title – no more than 25 words, it should succinctly detail the proposed research.

Project Type – Medical Research Scotland is willing to fund any of the project types indicated in the Application Form, but it is helpful to know which one your project is to assist in assessing your application and for auditing purposes.

Lay Summary – This should be no more than 200 words and clearly and succinctly describe the aims of the project to which the application relates. This summary should be written in plain English so that Medical Research Scotland Trustees with no scientific or medical background can understand the application and decide on the importance of funding the work. Further, it should be noted that Medical Research Scotland distributes publicity material, including online publication, on work it has supported, which includes the Lay Summary and details of awardees.

Anticipated start date Projects should start as soon as practically possible after notification of an award. Medical Research Scotland anticipates notifying applicants 3 months after the closing date for applications.

Planned date for project outcome – indicate the time period over which the funds provided will be used. Medical Research Scotland appreciates that Early Career Researcher Grants may include different sorts of project with varying durations. While the full outcome may not be known for some time, Medical Research Scotland requests an expected date for the outcome of Medical Research Scotland's contribution.

Detailed Project Description – please use the following headings, noting the word limits in several of the sections. The written description may be augmented with **one** image *or* **one** table, but only if essential to the application.

- **Background** in no more than 300 words. This should provide sufficient background information to the project to enable a reviewer to understand the proposal.
- **Aims, Objectives & Expected Impact** in no more than 250 words. This can be presented as a bullet point list. If creating a new device, please explain how it will meet regulatory standards.
- **Explain how the equipment, consumables and other resources requested will help meet the Aims, Objectives & Expected Impact** in no more than 250 words. This can be presented as a bullet point list.
- **Experimental Design and Methods** in no more than 650 words. What will you do and how will these methods enable you to meet the aims, objectives and impact of the project?
- **Statistical Information** in no more than 300 words. Medical Research Scotland expects the experimental design and data analysis for any project to include statistical consideration. Brief statistical information of the project design and analysis, if possible with power calculations for any proposed sample sizes, should be included. Please justify if your proposal does not include statistical information.
- **Facilities:** *if facilities, including, but not limited to, access to equipment, samples, cell lines, biological (or other) materials or data, are required for the project, but are not available at the Administering Institution, please provide details. Written consent to provision of the facilities from an authorised individual must accompany your application.*
- **References** in the text should appear as numbers and cited in this section.

4. ETHICS & REGULATORY ISSUES – every section must be completed.

If the proposed project requires ethical approval, please check with your local Ethics Committee before submitting this application that your ethics application can be reviewed and considered within an appropriate time frame. If ethical approval is required any funding awarded will be contingent on gaining the appropriate approval.

- **Ethical Approval:** Research projects requiring approval of the appropriate Ethics Committee (for example, Departmental, University, Multicentre) must be obtained for research involving *inter alia* volunteer human participants, NHS patients, staff, fetal material or IVF involving

NHS patients, the recently deceased, access to patients' records or the use of NHS premises or facilities.

- **Animals:** Medical Research Scotland will fund projects involving the appropriate use of animal models, however, wherever possible, procedures should be used which do not involve live animals. When it is essential to do experiments involving animals, the requirements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 must be scrupulously observed. There must be proper care, limitation of pain and use of the minimum number of animals to give valid results. Research proposals which involve the use of animals must implement the principles in the cross-funder guidance 'Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Bioscience Research' (<http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/responsibility-use-animals-bioscience-research>). Research proposals which involve the use of non-human primates must comply with the NC3Rs guidelines 'Primate Accommodation, Care and Use' (<http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/non-human-primate-accommodation-care-and-use>). The species of animals to be used, the numbers to be used and whether any genetically modified animals will be used or created must be specified.

Researchers using animals must hold the necessary licences (Project and Personal) from the Home Office and the project must have Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) approval.

If you are intending to use animals in your proposed research you should consider using the [NC3Rs Experimental Design Assistant](#). Please also see **Section 8** below for useful websites to consult when planning and conducting research involving animals:

- **Genetic modification:** Research proposals which involve genetic modification of organisms must have written authority from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The use of gene therapy in patients must have written approval from the appropriate Ethics Committee.
- **New medicines:** The trial of new medicines must have authority from the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).
- **Stem cells:** Research proposals which involve the use of stem cells must have written authority from the UK Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority (<https://www.hfea.gov.uk/>).
- **Use of Human Tissue in Research:** In all studies where human tissue (irrespective of origin) is used, the Codes of Practice of the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) (<http://www.hta.gov.uk>) must be followed.
- **Personal and/or Anonymised Data:** Where personal data (e.g. patient, study participant or general public) are to be used, the guidelines of the **Information Services Division Scotland** (<http://www.isdscotland.org/About-ISD/Confidentiality/>) must be followed.

6. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY & DISSEMINATION

As a charity, Medical Research Scotland is obliged to ensure that the useful results of work it funds are applied for the public good. Medical Research Scotland expects grant holders to play an active role in ensuring the protection and exploitation of any Intellectual Property arising out of the research that we fund. The Administering Institution must develop and implement appropriate strategies and procedures for the identification, protection and exploitation of all Intellectual Property created or acquired in connection with Medical Research Scotland funded activity. Where partners outside the Administering Institution are involved in the research described in this Application, they should agree an Intellectual Property collaboration agreement **before** submitting this application. You must let us know if any Intellectual Property derives from your work but we are not seeking any stake in this – IP remains with those creating it and decisions about dissemination are theirs.

Any publications that arise from the research, in any medium, must acknowledge the support given by Medical Research Scotland and quote the date and grant number.

7. USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TOOLS

Applicants and their host organisations are responsible and accountable for the content of their applications for funding submitted to Medical Research Scotland and must:

- protect confidential information and personal data by not inputting it into generative AI tools or into tools that may be used to train public models.
- consider the risks of using generative AI tools with unpublished research, original intellectual property, commercially sensitive findings, and where intellectual property belongs to someone else.
- take appropriate human advice before using any generative AI tools where any of the above are applicable.
- consider the risk of bias and ensure the outputs from generative AI tools used in applications are valid. This includes removing any false, misleading or hallucinated information.
- maintain scrupulous oversight and use human judgement when using AI tools.
- ensure compliance with Medical Research Scotland's grant Standard Conditions, Declarations and Authorisations and Guidance Notes.

Administering Institutions that administer awards made by Medical Research Scotland must provide guidance to their staff on how to use AI responsibly.

Applicants should be aware that reviewers of their applications submitted to Medical Research Scotland must:

- Not input any content of applications into generative AI tools.
- Not use generative AI tools, other than surface-level proofreading and mechanical error correction tools (eg spelling and grammar edits) that do not analyse or generate substantive content, to assist with the evaluation of applications or the preparation of review content.
- Not use generative AI tools that breach the **Duty of Confidentiality** or **Secure Handling of Information** requirements [see [Medical Research Scotland Code of Conduct \(including Conflicts of Interest Policy\) for Reviewers](#)].
- Not take into account, or speculate within the review/assessment process of applications, whether generative AI has been used to create the application or allow this to influence judgement of the quality of the application.

Medical Research Scotland does not use AI tools in its review process or when deciding whether to award funding.

8. DECLARATIONS, AUTHORISATIONS & SIGNATURES

The Application Form must be signed by:

- The Early Career Researcher
- The Head of Department/Division (or Equivalent) in which the research will be accommodated
- The Finance Director/Officer who will be responsible for administering the grant awarded
- NHS R&D Director, if applicable

Please ensure that all signatories to the application provide all contact details (full name, job title, email and telephone number) and have read and understood Medical Research Scotland's Privacy Policy, these Guidance Notes, the Declarations and Authorisations in the Application Form and the *Early Career Researcher Grant Standard Conditions of Award*, and agree to abide by them, before signing the Application Form.

9. USEFUL WEBSITES FOR PLANNING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH INVOLVING ANIMALS

The following websites are useful sites to consult when planning and conducting research involving animals:

RAT (Research Animal Training) <https://researchanimaltraining.com/>

NC3Rs Experimental Design Assistant
<https://nc3rs.org.uk/our-portfolio/experimental-design-assistant-eda>

PREPARE (P**l**anning R**e**search and E**x**perimental P**ro**cedures on A**n**imals: R**e**commendations for E**x**cellence) <https://norecopa.no/prepare>

ARRRIVE Guidelines <https://nc3rs.org.uk/arrive-guidelines>

Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research <https://nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/responsibility-use-animals-bioscience-research>

Non-human primate accommodation, care and use guidelines
<https://nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/non-human-primate-accommodation-care-and-use-guidelines>

Replacing Animal Research's Replacement Checklist
<https://replacinganimalresearch.org.uk/resources/replacement-checklist/>