Funding Opportunities from MRC

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MRC Programme Manager, Neuroscience and Mental Health Board

Early Career Neuroscientists’ Day

At Bristol, 21 September 2015
Content

• About the MRC
  • Mission
  • Strategy
  • Remit

• MRC funding schemes
  • Studentships
  • Fellowships
  • Grants

• Applying for funding
  • Peer-review
  • What makes a good proposal?
Leading & partnering research

Dedicated to improving human health through the best scientific research.

- Established 1913
- Funded by UK taxpayers
- One of seven Research Councils
MRC mission

- Encourage and support high-quality research with the aim of improving human health.
- Produce skilled researchers.
- Advance and disseminate knowledge and technology to improve the quality of life and economic competitiveness in the UK and worldwide.
- Promote dialogue with the public about medical research.
Delivering MRC strategy

- **New frontiers**
  - Stratified medicine
  - Regenerative medicine
  - Systems medicine

- **Living a long and healthy life**
  - Mental health & wellbeing
  - Lifestyle behaviours and health

- **Global and population health**
  - E-health
  - Infections

- **Safeguarding the UK skills base**
  - Training the next generation of biomedical researchers
  - Providing a world-class research environment

**MRC Fellowship Priorities**

- Supporting skills in strategic interdisciplinary areas such as experimental medicine and bioinformatics, across interfaces (academic / clinical / industry / disciplinary / regulatory)

- Promoting diversity of our research base, ensuring enhanced career support and mentorship

- Streamlining support mechanisms to ensure funding is flexibility in supporting key career stages and transitions
MRC remit and partners

- **MRC: basic research to early clinical trials**
  - Underpinning and aetiological
  - Prevention
  - Detection and diagnosis
  - Treatment development & evaluation
  - Phase 1 & 2 trials

- **Other funders/partners**
  - Government departments, especially Health
  - Other Research Councils
  - Medical Charities
  - Industry
  - Technology Strategy Board

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Basic research > Discovery > Preclinical > Early Clinical > Late Clinical > HTA

MRC
BBSRC
NIHR
Medical Charities
Innovate UK
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MRC support at different career stages

**EDUCATION**
- Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies through systematic instruction

**TRAINING**
- Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies, technical and transferrable through original research

**CONSOLIDATION**
- Consolidation of research skills and confirmation of medical research as personal career choice

**EXPLORATION**
- Exploration of personal capacity and aptitude for independence

**PROGRESSION**
- Leading independent research plans and establishment of research team

**INDEPENDENCE**
- Leadership and management of own programme, team and resource

**LEADERSHIP**
- Setting strategic direction, leadership and management of multiple programmes, teams and resources
MRC support at different career stages

MRC Units and Institutes
- **Post-docs on grants**
- **New investigator grants**
- **Grant support**
- **MRC intermediate Fellow: “Transition to Independence”**
- **MRC Senior Fellow “Transition to Leadership”**

**Skills Development Fellowships**
- **Acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies through systematic instruction**
- **Consolidation of research skills and confirmation of medical research as personal career choice**
- **Exploration of personal capacity and aptitude for independence**
- **Leading independent research plans and establishment of research team**
- **Leadership and management of own programme, team and resource**
- **Setting strategic direction, leadership and management of multiple programmes, teams and resources**
Interactive Framework (map)

Interactive career framework - explore your career options

This new online resource is an interactive tool that signposts a range of career options available at any stage of a biomedical research career. Please note, the career options displayed here are illustrative and not exhaustive. This is version one of the interactive career framework, and we would like to develop it further based on your feedback. We recommend using this version on a desktop computer.
Supporting flexible careers

Existing flexible funding policies

- No age limits
- Return from a career break
- Awards can be held P/T
- Support for parental/sick leave
- Mentoring, induction workshops, Annual Symposium,

Increased support for flexible careers

- Time since PhD eligibility criteria removed
- Impact of career breaks
- Increased support for career re-entry scheme
- Supporting transitions
MRC Studentships
MRC PhD Studentship: Opportunities

http://www.mrc.ac.uk/skills-careers/studentships/for-current-mrc-students/

- **MRC/AMS policy internship**
  - How research can impact policy - 3 month extension to stipend for 3\textsuperscript{rd} or 4\textsuperscript{th} year MRC students via DTP supplements
  - Deadline: annual autumn deadline

- **Biotechnology YES competition**
  - Annual competition to learn about commercialisation – ‘Dragon’s Den’ style
  - Deadline: Annually in late Spring/Summer

- **Max Perutz Writing Award**
  - Annual competition to communicate ‘why your research matters’
  - Deadline: Annually July

- **Working with Industry**
  - Not only for ‘CASE’ students. University can convert studentships to ‘CASE’. Must include at least 3 month placement and contribution from industry partner.
MRC Fellowship Schemes
MRC Research Fellows

Fellowships
- The person
- The project
- The ‘place’

Grants
- The project / programme
- The people
- The ‘place (s)’

“The thing I enjoy so much is that my work has direct application to people…”

MRC/Academy of Medical Sciences Clinician Scientist
Fellowships: More than just a grant!

Great opportunities

- Resources
- Protected time
- Connections, networks
- Potential to establish competitive position

Outstanding researchers

- Route to independence
- Recognition
- Influence

“My fellowship led directly to more opportunities and collaborations...”

MRC Clinician Scientist Fellow
• Training at early post-doctoral career stage or enable changes in discipline
• Focussed on priority areas requiring capacity building at this level

**Quantitative Expertise:** mathematics, statistics, computation and informatics applicable to any biomedical or health related data sources, from molecular to population level.

**Expertise at Social Science interface:** with a focus on areas of health economics and/or mixed methods research.

• Applicants should hold a PhD (or equivalent)
• No eligibility rules based on time since PhD completion
• 3 years support: full personal salary costs, together with support for consumables expenses, travel costs and capital equipment
• Support a period of research overseas, at a second UK institution, or within industry
Career Development Award:
Transition to Independence

- For post-doctoral researchers who are ready to make the transition to independent investigators
- No eligibility rules based on time since PhD completion
- Up to 5 years support
- Includes an option of 12 months research training (outside the UK, in UK industry, or at another UK research centre)
- The average cost per award is approximately £1m.
Senior Non-Clinical Fellowship: Transition to Leadership

- Enable independent researchers to make the transition to research leadership
- No eligibility rules based on time since PhD completion
- 7 years funding
- Stewardship visit in year 4 / 5
- Up to 1 year at a second centre encouraged
- The average cost per award is approximately £2m.

Only 6% CDA and 6% SNCF were academic researchers without tenure
New Investigator Research Grants

- **Support**: flexible, for high quality investigator-initiated research (clinical or non-clinical)
- **Eligibility**: UK Universities or NHS Trusts
- **Duration**: Up to 5 years - depends on the needs of the research being supported
  - 2 years or less only for proof of principle/pilot work
  - Support the full range of research needs
- **Funding**: no pre-set limits – subject to peer review of ‘value for money’

“MRC wants to boost the success rates of young researchers applying for grants”
Sir John Savill, MRC CEO
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Winning MRC Funding

The Process:

Peer Review

↓

Shortlisting/
Triage

↓

Panel Interview/
Board Assessment
Right idea? Right funder?

- Get involved in grant writing, even as observer
- Create a collaborative network
- Be on top of the literature (but not buried by it)

- Identify the funder’s remit & priorities – if in doubt, ask early!
- Consider suitability criteria
- Submission deadlines

- **Plan ahead, everything takes longer than you think!**
# Fellowship Applicants – Right scheme?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and experience</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Early career</th>
<th>Transition to independence</th>
<th>Transition to leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant scheme(s)</td>
<td>Clinical Research Training Fellowships</td>
<td>Skills Development Fellowships</td>
<td>Career Development Award Clinician Scientist Fellowships</td>
<td>Senior Non-Clinical Fellowship Senior Clinical Fellowship</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Research vision</td>
<td>Individuals should: Have a clear understanding of how their research project will progress knowledge within the field and an understanding of the project’s relevance to human health.</td>
<td>Individuals should: Have a clear understanding of the contribution of their research to their field. Be able to demonstrate independent research ideas, show an awareness of research in other fields, and an appreciation of the importance of working across disciplinary boundaries. Be starting to establish a network(s) of research contacts independent of their current group leader/supervisor.</td>
<td>Individuals should: Have their own research plans / ideas, independent of their current group leader, and describe how their research plans fit into an international context. Have a network of research contacts, independent of their current group leader, including appropriate collaborations nationally, internationally and across disciplines. Be able to explain plans to establish their own research team that will enable them to become an independent research leader.</td>
<td>Individuals should: Be able to demonstrate an effective track record of internationally competitive independent research including through international collaborations and between / across disciplines where required. Be looking to develop the breadth of their research career with ambitious and credible ideas for developing themselves as research leaders.</td>
</tr>
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Elements of successful proposals

- A clear rationale for the research
  - Background
  - Hypothesis
  - Aims
- Preliminary data
- Methodology
- Plan B (risks are inevitable)
- People, environment, training for fellowships
- Resources well justified
- Write clearly for non-experts
An application may fail because

- Unfocused, overambitious project
- Unoriginal, pedestrian approach
- No clear hypothesis, or not hypothesis-driven
- Methodology not sufficiently detailed
- Project not intellectually challenging
- RO has no international standing in research area
- Lack of infrastructure/facilities
- Training element incomplete/unclear; poor training environment
- Right person - wrong project! And vice versa!!
Sources of advice ...

- **Funder**
  - Website, helpline
  - Named contact

- **University Grants office**
  - University requirements
  - Costing software
  - Assistance in preparing grant applications
    - Writing workshops
    - Helpdesk

- **Experienced colleagues and collaborators**
  - Past evaluation committee members
  - Successful grant applicants