

# Wellcome Discovery Awards

Wellcome [Discovery Research remit](#) (see Wellcome webpages for more information)

Applications can present research from any discipline as long as it has the potential to improve human life, health and wellbeing, and aligns with Wellcome's funding remit. Applications for awards under Wellcome's Discovery Research remit do not need to be within their health challenge programmes (mental health, climate and health, and infectious disease).

Wellcome will particularly welcome applications that bring together different disciplines to tackle problems creatively and with new perspectives. Applicants must think boldly and with ambition, asking challenging questions with the potential for real impact.

Wellcome have provided [guidance on writing applications](#) and using [Wellcome Grant Tracker](#).

Wellcome [Discovery Award](#) (see Wellcome webpages for more information)

Awards usually last for 8 years, but this can be shorter if appropriate to the discipline, or longer if the award is to be held part time.

A researcher can hold one Discovery Award as lead applicant and be a coapplicant on up to two concurrent Discovery Awards. Current holders of Investigator Awards, Collaborative Awards and Senior Research Fellowships cannot be a lead applicant on a Discovery Award, but may be a coapplicant on up to two Discovery Awards. Researchers cannot be a coapplicant on more than two Discovery Awards (regardless of whether they are a lead applicant on a third Award).

## Key eligibility criteria

(See the ['Eligibility and Suitability'](#) section of the Discovery Award webpages for more information):

Team size will depend on the proposed research. It will usually range from two to eight applicants, including the lead applicant. Wellcome encourage lead applicants to put together diverse teams.

As a Lead Applicant on a Discovery Award:

- You must have international standing as a research leader in your field, experience of leading innovative and creative research and a track record of managing and training others.
- If you are the lead applicant for a team, you must be able to demonstrate that you can drive and lead a substantial collaborative research programme.
- You must be able to contribute at least 20% of your research time to the programme.
- At the point of application you should have a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract, or the guarantee of one. The contract should not be conditional on receiving this award.
- Your salary must be paid by your host organisation for the duration of the award.
- If you have less than three years remaining on your contract at the point of application, you must have secured your next position at an eligible organisation and provide a letter of support from them.
- If you are approaching [Employer Justified Retirement Age](#) (EJRA), the Discovery Award should be planned to end on or before your EJRA

Coapplicants on a Discovery Award:

- Can be at any career stage and based anywhere in the world, apart from mainland China.

- Must make a significant and essential contribution to the research proposal, for example designing the research, writing the application and/or managing the programme. They must be able to contribute at least 20% of their research time to the programme.
- Must be based at an eligible organisation that can sign up to Wellcome's [grant conditions](#).
- Do not need to have a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract. They may be employed on another grant or ask for their salary on this application.
- Must receive a confirmation from their employing host organisation that their space and salary support (if they can't get it from other sources) is guaranteed for the period of time that the coapplicant is working on the grant.
- Can be based in the same or in different organisations as the Lead Applicant, and come from any discipline, but the added value of the team approach must be clear.
- May be retired, provided that their host department will guarantee the space and facilities for them to fulfil a key role on the project.

You are not eligible to apply as a Lead Applicant if:

- You have applied as the lead applicant for another of Wellcome's schemes and are awaiting a decision (you can only submit one application to Wellcome at a time).
- Your proposed research will require transfer of grant funds into mainland China.

### Resubmissions

If you are unsuccessful in applying to this scheme you can submit one more full application for the same project with significant changes. You do not need to contact Wellcome first.

If you have been unsuccessful with a full application for an Investigator Award in Science or a Collaborative Award in Science, you must wait 12 months after receiving Wellcome's decision before you apply for a Discovery Award with the same or a similar project. You can apply at any time if you are proposing a different project.

### Level of Funding

The level and duration of funding must be justified by the research programme. Wellcome do not specify a minimum or maximum funding amount. You cannot apply to carry out activities that involve the transfer of grant funds into mainland China. **You must seek advice and assistance from your departmental Grants team and/or Research Facilitator** when preparing the application costing.

You can apply for the following costs to support your research (see the ['What We Offer'](#) section of the Discovery Award webpages for more information):

- Salaries for any coapplicants employed on your grant who hold a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract which states that they must get their salary from external grant funding. They must contribute at least 20% of their research time to this programme and the host organisation must confirm that the coapplicant must get salary recovery from external grant funding and agree to underwrite their salary and post for the period of time that the person will be working on the grant.
- Salaries for all staff, full or part-time, who will work on your grant which may include research assistants or technicians, specialist service staff (e.g. data analysis, fieldwork and clinical studies), project managers, or support staff for the applicant or any staff employed on the grant if they are disabled or have a long-term condition.
- Studentships are not provided on this award, but if a pre-doctoral research assistant is employed on the grant, you can ask Wellcome to cover their PhD fees (home student fees, or international fees for students from LMICs only). Each applicant can ask for PhD fees for one research assistant at a time on the grant.
- Continuing professional development and training costs
- Materials and consumables, Animals, Equipment, Access Charges (e.g. for facilities)

- Travel and subsistence for conferences and collaborative travel where justified (with a limit for conferences of £2,000 per year for the lead applicant and Coapplicants, and £1,000 per year for each staff member employed on the grant). Note Wellcome's [carbon offset policy](#)
- Clinical Research costs according to AcoRD principles
- Public engagement and patient involvement costs
- Outsourcing work to contract research organisations
- A list of other allowed costs (see website, under 'What we offer')
- Inflation Allowance according to a set scale
- Overheads in limited specific cases only

A Discovery Award does not include salary costs for the lead applicant.

### Preparing an application

All applications are submitted through Wellcome Grant Tracker. You must **consult your Department's grants team** for advice on local deadlines and submit your application for **Research Services review** at least 5 working days before the Wellcome deadline.

A template [application form](#) (PDF) is available for download.

Letters of support for a Discovery Award application are required for the lead applicant and separately for each coapplicant from:

1. A senior member of the host organisation – this will typically be the Head of Department, or in exceptional circumstances (e.g. if the lead applicant is a Head of Department) from the Head of Division
2. Finance Director if overheads are claimed (likely to be not applicable for the University)

Content must be completed directly into Wellcome Grant Tracker by:

1. Lead Applicant
2. All Coapplicants
3. Authorised Organisational Approver – this will be a representative of Research Services

### For the Lead Applicant and the Coapplicants

Completing the application form sections "Lead applicant research contributions" and "Lead applicant research environment details"

Completing the application form section "Coapplicant details"

The application form includes a number of questions about your research environment and promoting a positive research culture. Below are some suggestions on what to include in these sections. Answers should include examples wherever possible. Your application need not cover every point below.

*Q. How have you contributed to the development of others? (300 words max)*

- Give specific examples of how you have helped staff and students to develop their skills in the past.
- You can describe successful outcomes for previous staff and students that resulted from your support, but do not give names.
- In addition to your previous staff's research achievements, also consider how you have developed their broader skills and capabilities. Include any transferable skills that may have assisted staff to obtain positions outside academia.
- You could include examples of training/induction that you have identified or provided, mentorship, how you have provided recognition or reward for good work, how you model good academic leadership, collaboration/networks/visits to other institutions/industry engagement that you have identified or encouraged.

Q. *Describe how your research contributes to the strategic aims of your organisation (300 words max)*

- The University of Oxford's [Strategic Plan for 2018-2024](#) includes broad statements about research: to which does the project best align?
- How does the project complement other activity in the unit/department, and how will it be more effective to do the project here than at another institution?
- Are there Networks, Research Centres/Institutes, or other wider groupings at Oxford from which this research will benefit and to which it will contribute? (There is a [list of networks](#) in Medical Sciences listed on the MSD webpages)
- If the research may ultimately lead to new approaches that will benefit human health or wellbeing, how might that draw on other strengths and capabilities at the University, including existing collaborations?
- If the project will be developing techniques and methodologies, what other research in the University might ultimately benefit from them?
- What will you do during the award to maximise the effectiveness of any such synergies?

Q. *Describe your approach to developing and supporting a positive and inclusive research culture (500 words max)*

- How do you ensure that every member of the group feels valued?
- How do you recognise/reward work of those around you?
- How do you encourage those around you to have a good work life balance?
- How do you support the development of leadership skills for those in your group?
- Do you discuss career routes and opportunities (including outside of academia) with the staff you line-manage? (if applicable)
- Do you currently mentor anyone/have a mentor? What types of mentoring are there on offer?
- What do you do to reduce the impact of academic competition and the pressure to publish on colleagues' well-being?
- What is your management style?
- How will you promote diversity in recruitment?
- How do you promote equality, diversity and inclusion in your group/department/field of research?
- How do you promote research integrity? Have all staff completed the University's Research Integrity training?
- How do you induct new staff?
- How do you manage any conflicts of interest?
- What do you do to promote collaboration?
- Do you encourage your early career researchers to engage with industry? How do you support them to expand their networks?

Remember that research culture covers everyone in the group, including technicians and support roles as well as postdocs and students. Wellcome recommend [this set of examples of actions to improve research culture](#), but you should use them to prompt your own ideas appropriate to your research group.

Q. *Your organisation will give you and the staff employed on your grant a minimum of 10 days a year to undertake training and continuing professional development. Explain how you will use this time. (300 words max)*

- List any courses that you or your staff will attend.
- Think about what training/development will help you and the staff on the grant develop to the next stage in their career.
- Are there courses in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) that you and other staff on the grant may not yet have taken?
- What training might be useful for working outside academia, whether alongside an academic career or as a different career direction?

- Will you encourage staff to visit other groups/institutions to develop new skills? Where will they go, and who will support them there?
- How will you ensure that staff on the grant develop their 'soft skills', not just their technical skills? What about your own management and leadership skills?
- You can ask for costs to cover training for the *technical and research skills* needed to deliver your proposed research for yourself and also for staff employed on the grant for at least 12 months at 50% FTE.
- You can ask for up to £500 per year per staff member for *career development training* where the university does not provide it for yourself and also for staff employed on the grant for at least 12 months at 50% FTE.

For the Lead Applicant, Coapplicants, and Senior members of the host organisations for all Lead Applicants and Coapplicants: providing a Letter of Support

**Q. Upload a letter of support from a senior member of your organisation**

- This letter will typically come from the Head of Department, or in exceptional circumstances (e.g. if the lead applicant or coapplicant is a Head of Department) from the Head of Division. The letter should show clearly the person's name, position and address.
- Discuss with the Senior member of the organisation if they will write the letter, or if they want the lead applicant/coapplicant to write the first draft and send it to them for editing.
- Essential points to cover in all letters of support are:
  - A guarantee that the space and resources needed have been agreed and will be available for the duration of the grant
  - Confirmation that they will give award holders, and any staff employed on the grant, 10 days a year (pro rata if part-time) to undertake training and continuing professional development (CPD) in line with the Concordat. This should include the responsible conduct of research, research leadership, people management, diversity and inclusion, and the promotion of a healthy research culture.
  - Confirmation that they will provide a system of induction including onboarding, embedding and planning for the award holder when they join the organisation and/or start the award.
  - Confirmation that they will provide the applicant with the status and benefits of other academic staff of similar seniority.
  - Confirmation that if teaching buyout is being requested, the applicant will retain at least 10% of their teaching time and that teaching buyout for the applicant is not being provided by other grants for the same period it is requested on this grant.
- Additional essential points to cover letters of support for **Lead Applicants** are:
  - Confirmation that the lead applicant has a permanent, open-ended or long-term rolling contract, or the guarantee of one which is not conditional on receiving this award. If less than three years remain on the contract at the point of application, confirm that their next position at an eligible organisation has been secured.
  - Confirmation that the lead applicant's salary will be paid by the host organisation for the duration of the award.
- Additional essential points in letters of support for **Coapplicants** are:
  - If the coapplicant is retired, confirm that they fulfil a key role on the project and that space and facilities will be provided for them to fulfil this role
  - If the coapplicant's salary is being requested from the grant, confirm that they hold a contract which states that they must get their salary from external grant funding. Also confirm that the organisation will underwrite their salary and post for the period of time that the person will be working on the grant.
- Recommended points to cover in all letters of support are:
  - The strengths of the applicant, including their key research outputs, contributions to the research community, and leadership and management skills
  - The strengths of the proposed team

- Why Oxford is the ideal location for this programme of research and how the research environment (infrastructure, co-located teams and institutes, etc.) will help to ensure the success of the programme

### Input from the Medical Sciences Division

Applicants from departments within the Medical Sciences Division should notify the Medical Sciences Divisional Office ([research@medsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:research@medsci.ox.ac.uk)) that they are preparing a Discovery Award application to a given round.

The Divisional Office will:

1. Review the sections of the application form **“Your Research Environment details”** if the Lead Applicant is based in Oxford
2. Review the Research Environment questions in the **“Coapplicants Details”** for Oxford-based Coapplicants, whether the Lead Applicant is based in Oxford or elsewhere
3. Review the letter of support from the Senior Member of the Organisation for the Lead Applicant if the applicant is based in Oxford and the letter is being written by the Head of Department.
4. In exceptional circumstances provide a letter of support from the Head of Division. If a letter from the Head of Division is required, the applicant must submit a draft letter of support to the Divisional Office for editing, and then arranging the Head of Division’s signature.

The Divisional Office will review these sections of the application with the aim of ensuring consistency across applications being submitted from MSD.

Draft content must be sent by email to [research@medsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:research@medsci.ox.ac.uk) by a deadline which will be communicated at the start of each round. The deadline will be pegged to the Wellcome application deadlines for both the Career Development Awards and the Discovery Awards rounds, and will commonly be three to four weeks before the Wellcome submission deadline.

MSD will review the content and offer feedback as necessary; the team will aim to return comments at least one week before the Research Services submission deadline for the relevant scheme.

### Shortlisting and Interview

If you are shortlisted you will be invited for an interview. External expert review will be sought on shortlisted applications. Reviewers will be chosen based on expertise and not on their level of seniority. Unattributed comments will be sent to the applicant before interview.

Shortly before interview you will be asked to provide a pre-recorded presentation which the Committee will watch before you enter the interview room (there is no requirement for a further presentation at the interview). The interviewers will aim to assess a set of criteria, rather than one specific aspect of the proposal.

Final funding decisions will be made by the Discovery Research Decision Board. Applicants will be informed of the funding decision by email. Written feedback will be provided to all unsuccessful applicants including the basis of the decision.

### Authors/Reviewers of this Guidance

Emma Nagel-Smith (Research Services)  
Pamela Reid (Department of Psychiatry)  
Michele Warren (MSDO)  
Adelyn Wise (MSDO)