

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

Awards usually last for 5 years, but this can be shorter if appropriate to the discipline, or longer if the award is to be held part time. You can only hold one Early Career Award and it cannot be renewed.

## Key eligibility criteria

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

- You will be an early career researcher who is ready to design, plan and deliver your own innovative research project and build their own independent research identity
- You must have completed a substantive period of research training relevant to your discipline (i.e. a PhD in the life sciences, or at least four years' equivalent research experience in the humanities or social sciences).
- You may have some post-doctoral experience but generally less than 3 years allowing for part-time working, career breaks, clinical training, change of research discipline, etc. Wellcome have indicated that there is a little flexibility around the three years, but they are not able to offer infinite flexibility.

You are not eligible to apply if:

- You hold a current salaried post for the duration of the award
- 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).
- You hold, or have held, an equivalent fellowship at this career stage. An equivalent fellowship does not include short-term funding (see below).
- Your proposed research will require transfer of grant funds into mainland China.

**Short term funding:** Wellcome allow 'short-term funding' from your host organisation or a learned society that supported your transition from doctoral to post-doctoral research. You can have more than one period of short-term funding but the combined duration cannot be more than three years. This short-term funding can include funding for, e.g. developing new research ideas (rather than a substantive research project, career progression, networking, travel or residencies after your PhD

## 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.

## Level of Funding

You can apply for your salary plus up to £400,000 for research expenses. The level and duration of funding must be justified by the research programme. You can not 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 Early Career Award webpages for more information):

- A basic salary for the Applicant
- Salaries for staff up to the equivalent of a 36 month full time post (which can be split across several posts working full or part time)
- Staff costs in addition to these 3 FTE staff members can be requested for specialist service staff (e.g. data analysis, fieldwork, clinical studies) 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.
- 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 £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

## 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 five working days before the Wellcome deadline.

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

Letters of support for an Early Career Award application are required from:

1. The applicant’s current Supervisor
2. Supervisor of Clinical Training (if applicable)
3. 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. Sponsor – this will typically be the applicant’s Head of Department. They must have authority to make commitments to the applicant from the University and describe how the applicant’s research contributes to the University’s strategic aims (more information below)
3. Additional Sponsor(s) if the applicant is spending >3 months working away from Oxford
4. Authorised Organisational Approver – this will be a representative of Research Services

## Sponsor and Mentor:

The **Sponsor** (typically the Head of Department) must:

- Confirm workload expectations with the applicant: you should not spend more than 20% of your time on non-research related activities, for example clinical duties, teaching or

administration. If you're based in a clinical craft specialty, you may spend up to 40% of your time on clinical duties.

- Ensure the research environment will support you to complete your programme.
- Organise a discussion about your future at the organisation beyond the award.

In the application form in Wellcome Grant Tracker the Sponsor must:

1. Describe how they have developed or contributed to the career development of students or researchers in their group or elsewhere – more information below.
2. Confirm via tick-box in Grant Tracker that:
  - the space and resources needed will be available for the duration of the grant
  - You will have the status and benefits of other academic staff of similar seniority.
  - You and any staff employed on the grant will have 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.
  - Induction will be arranged including onboarding, embedding and planning for the award holder when they join the organisation and/or start the award.
3. Outline other support the University will provide during the award – more information below
4. Describe their approach to developing and supporting a positive and inclusive research culture – more information below.

If your proposal involves work for more than three months outside your host organisation you must have an **Additional Sponsor** at that location who can guarantee the space and resources needed during the visit. Additional Sponsor(s) must confirm in Grant Tracker their support for the applicant and that their organisation will allocate space and resources for the duration of the award.

You must name a **Mentor** with a track record in training and mentorship. This individual will support you for the period of the award and give guidance on how to:

- manage your application
- develop your research career
- progress with your personal development
- manage the processes and regulations at your host organisation (although they do not need to be based at your host organisation).

The Sponsor and Mentor can be the same individual.

[For the Applicant: Completing the application form section “Your Research Environment 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. What considerations led you to choose this research environment and sponsor(s) for your research? How will this setting help you to develop your research identity and explore your research questions, and be ready to lead your own independent research programme at the end of the award? (300 words max)*

- Why is the University and your Department the best place for this project? Who will help stimulate, challenge and inspire you as you develop your own research questions?
- Why is the physical infrastructure here well suited for the project? Are there facilities you will have access to that don't exist elsewhere?
- Who beyond your immediate unit, institute, or department would you like to collaborate with more than you do now? Consider collaborations beyond Oxford as well as within it, and both academic and non-academic partners.

- How will this environment help your research to find the most important audiences and stakeholders, e.g. for further development?
- How will you engage with any mechanisms available to help you develop, beyond training courses (as they are covered in a separate section)? Are there mentors or role models you would like to talk to?
- Be especially careful with this section if the programme of research in the application will take place in the same place as you are now: why is this still the best environment and how will you use it to develop your independence? What will change from the way you work now?

Q. *How will you contribute to a positive and inclusive research culture? This could include, for example, plans for collaborative activities, people management or research integrity training, diversity and inclusion activities. (300 words max)*

- Consider what is important to you in a positive research culture and how you will lead your research group as you move towards independence, for example:
  - How can you ensure that every member of the group feels valued?
  - How can you recognise/reward work of those around you?
  - How can you encourage those around you to have a good work life balance?
  - How can 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?
- How can you 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 can you promote equality, diversity and inclusion in your group/department/field of research?
- How can you promote research integrity? Have all staff completed the University's Research Integrity training?
- How will you induct new staff?
- How can you manage any conflicts of interest?
- What can you do to promote collaboration?
- Will 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 Sponsor: Completing the application form section “Your Sponsors”

Q. *Describe how you have developed or contributed to the career development of students or researchers. These may be in your group or elsewhere. Include the positions they held and their current position. (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 name researchers other than the applicant.
- 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 in 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. *What additional support will you provide to the applicant? (200 words max)*

- Wellcome suggest referring to how you will support the applicant to develop leadership and management skills and their research capabilities.
- If your Department has a particular development programme for researchers at this career stage, you could outline it.
- Are there collaborations or partnerships that you can help them to develop?
- If the Mentor will be someone other than you, you might outline why they have been chosen and any distinctive support they will bring, as the application form does not allow any space for that elsewhere.

Q. *Describe your approach to developing and supporting a positive and inclusive research culture.*

- 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.

### For the Supervisor: Providing a Letter of Support

*Q. Upload a letter of support from your current supervisor (500 words max)*

- This should be someone that knows you and your work well. It could be your supervisor, group leader, head of centre/unit or equivalent. The letter should show clearly the person's name, position and address.
- They should indicate why you are ready for the award, with reference to Wellcome's '[Eligibility and Suitability](#)' criteria for the Award. They should describe the qualities of your current and/or former work that make you suitable for the Award at this point in your career.
- Discuss with your current Supervisor if they will write the letter, or if they want you to write the first draft and send it to them for editing
- If your current Supervisor is not in a position to make such a recommendation (e.g. because you have only recently joined the department), then you can ask an alternative Supervisor from your most recent previous employer.

### Input from the Medical Sciences Division

The Medical Sciences Divisional Office will not be providing letters of support from the Head of Division for applications for Early Career Awards and does not need to review any sections of the application prior to submission.

### 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)