BEACON Applicant Guidance and FAQs

Introduction

This document provides guidance for prospective applicants to the MRC BEACON Award. It should be read alongside the Applicant Guidance, Call Specification and Application Form.

The FAQs are intended to answer common questions about eligibility, developing your application, eligible costs and the assessment process.

If you are unsure whether your proposed project or circumstances are eligible, please contact the BEACON team before submitting an application.

About the MRC BEACON Award

What is the MRC BEACON Award?

- The MRC BEACON Award provides protected research time for all registered healthcare professionals to develop their clinical academic careers through research within the Medical Research Council (MRC) remit.
- The Award is intended to help individuals maintain or re-establish research momentum and strengthen their competitiveness for future externally funded fellowships and research awards.

What funding is available?

- Applicants may request funding equivalent to up to 50% protected research time over a 12-month period.
- Funding is intended to release applicants from clinical duties to undertake research and associated career development activities, up to £50,000 total award value
- Awards are expected to commence within six months of the award being confirmed.

Eligibility

Who is the BEACON Award intended for?

- The BEACON Award has been designed to support all registered healthcare professionals (Doctors, Dentists, Nurses, Allied Health Professionals, Pharmacists and Healthcare Scientists) with research doctorates (PhDs & MDs), at two key career transition points, where individuals are at greatest risk of leaving the clinical academic pathway.
- If you are in doubt about your eligibility based on your professional background you should seek advice from either your centre lead or the central BEACON team

- **Doctors and dentists returning to academic training following completion of a PhD/MD**
    - The Award aims to support doctors and dentists who have completed doctoral research and are returning to clinical training, helping them maintain research momentum while progressing towards the next stage of their clinical academic career.

- **Registered healthcare professionals returning to research after time away**
    - The Award also supports registered healthcare professionals who have completed a PhD and are returning to research following a period away from research. The scheme provides protected research time to help re-establish research activity and prepare for future fellowship or grant applications.

- Applicants should clearly demonstrate how the BEACON Award will help them progress through one of these career transition points. The specific value that a BEACON award will offer to your career development, that is not offered by other schemes or programmes will be a key element of the assessment process.

Who can apply?

Applicants must:

- be a registered healthcare professional;
- hold a PhD or MD;
- be proposing research that falls within MRC remit;
- be supported through a participating BEACON partner HEI; and
- have appropriate academic and clinical support in place.

Do I need to be employed by a BEACON partner HEI?

- No. Applicants may be employed by NHS organisations, including primary care, mental health or specialist trusts, provided:
    - the application is developed with a participating BEACON partner HEI;
    - the relevant BEACON HEI Lead approves the application prior to submission; and
    - appropriate academic and employer support is in place.

Can primary care clinicians apply?

- Yes. Applications from primary care and other NHS settings are welcomed, provided the eligibility requirements above are met.

Can collaborators come from outside the BEACON consortium?

- Yes. Collaborators from outside the consortium, including NHS organisations, universities, charities and industry, may be included where they strengthen the proposed research activity.

Developing your Application

Applications should demonstrate:

- a clear and achievable programme of research;
- strong alignment with MRC remit;
- clear career development objectives;
- appropriate academic and clinical support;
- how the Award will contribute to future clinical academic progression.
- Planning outlining release from teaching/clinical duties for dedicated research time

Applications should include:

- Completed application form
- Resume for Research (Narrative CV)
- Academic letter of support

- Clinical letter confirming release from clinical duties
- Any additional documentation requested within the Applicant Guidance.

Does my application require institutional approval?

- Yes. Applications must be reviewed and approved by the relevant BEACON Centre Lead before submission to the NHRP Academy.
- Applicants are encouraged to contact their Centre Lead as early as possible to allow sufficient time for local review and approvals.

Costs

What costs can I request?

- The Award is primarily intended to fund protected research time. A modest consumables and research costs budget may also be requested where these costs are essential to delivery of the proposed research.

Can I request salary costs?

- Yes. Applicants may request funding equivalent to up to 50% protected research time over a 12-month period (subject to a maximum award value of £50,000).
- The Award funds the cost of releasing applicants from clinical duties to undertake research.

Can I request funding for consumables?

- Yes. Applicants may request a modest amount of consumable funding where these costs are directly related to the proposed research, although the MRC requires that the majority of funding be used for salary support
- Major research costs should normally be supported through institutional resources or matched funding where available.

Can I request equipment?

- Routine equipment and major infrastructure costs would not normally be expected through the BEACON Award.
- Applicants with exceptional requirements are encouraged to discuss these with the BEACON team before submitting an application.

Assessment

How will applications be assessed?

- Applications will be reviewed by the BEACON Funding Panel against the published assessment criteria.

Assessment will consider:

- applicant potential and career development need;
- quality and feasibility of the proposed research;
- alignment with MRC remit;
- value for money;
- institutional support;
- potential to of a BEACON Award to support future clinical academic progression.

What if I am unsure whether my research falls within MRC remit?

Applicants are encouraged to seek advice before submitting an application and visit the MRC website for further information on remits

Timeline

When do applications open?

- Applications open on 1 September 2026 for round 1 of funding

When is the application deadline?

- Applications close on 23 October 2026 @4pm.

When will applicants be notified?

- Applications will be assessed during November 2026, with applicants informed shortly afterwards.

When can Awards start?

- Successful applicants will normally be expected to commence their Award within six months of the funding decision.

Support

Who should I contact if I have questions?

- For questions relating to eligibility, remit or the application process, please contact your BEACON HEI lead or the central BEACON team: nhrp.academy@newcastle.ac.uk

- Applicants must discuss their proposal and have approval from their local BEACON HEI Lead before submitting an application.

The BEACON programme will provide:

- an applicant webinar;
- application development clinics;
- advice from the programme team;
- support through your local BEACON Centre Lead.

General Questions

- ***Can I apply if I work less than full-time?***

Yes. We would encourage applicants who are working part-time to apply as part of our commitment to inclusive practices**.**

- ***Can I apply if I am on maternity, adoption or shared parental leave?***

We would strongly advise against taking up what is a very intensive award whilst on maternity, adoption or shared parental leave. If you were to apply, you would need to provide a very strong rationale as to why you are applying for this while on leave, and indicate how you employer was supporting you doing this while on leave.

- ***Can I hold another fellowship or award at the same time?***

We would strongly advise against you applying for this award whilst holding another award, unless your current fellowship or award would be finished before you intend to commence your BEACON award. If you hold an ACL, you may be able to apply for consumables, but your salary would be ineligible. You would need to be clear how this award is needed beyond your ACL.

- ***If I am unsuccessful, can I resubmit Can I submit more than one application?***

Yes. While this is a pilot, we would be expecting a maximum of resubmission per candidate. To be successful, a resubmission must materially address issues identified by the panel at the first application.

- ***Will unsuccessful applicants receive feedback?***

Yes, applicants will receive feedback.

- ***What happens if my planned Award start date changes?***

BEACON has been established in such a way as to be as flexible as possible and we will endeavour to help with changes to planned start date. Applicants should make every endeavour to identify a start date that is deliverable in practice, within the 6 month timeframe.

- ***What constitutes a strong Academic Mentor statement?***

An academic mentor statement must include

- The details of the academic capacity and capabilities of the mentor, and the strengths of the HEI in the area of proposed research
- Details of how the academic mentor will support the candidate
- Details of how the academic mentor and mentee will work together
- Any additional details of other support offered by the mentor or the HEI

- ***What should be included in the Clinical Line Manager letter of support?***

Evidence of support by the clinical host organisation is critically important to a successful application. A clinical letter of support must include

- The details of the Trust or Care organisation, including their research strengths and priorities, including in the area of proposed research
- How the Trust/Care Organisation will support the candidate in practice
- Details of the line manager of the candidate
- Details of the candidate's current job plan, explicit details of what will happen during the award for back fill and a commitment to ensuring that this is done through the award

- ***Are Professional Doctorates allowed***

No. Applicants must hold research doctorate. Professional or practice-based doctorates are not eligible qualifying doctorates for the BEACON Award.

BEACON is specifically designed to address two career transition points: doctors and dentists returning to clinical training following a research doctorate, and registered healthcare professionals with a research doctorate returning to research following time away.

The Award therefore supports individuals who have completed substantive doctoral research training and require protected research time to maintain or re-establish their research trajectory.