Medical Research Council

Supporting research careers: MRC fellowships, opportunities and beyond

Nicola Faramarzi – Programme Manager
David Pan – Head of Programme, Training & Careers
Joanna Robinson – Director, Talent, Skills & Careers

Overview

- About the MRC
- Training & Careers Team
- Securing the future of clinical researchers
- Support for research careers – refreshed priorities
- What makes a good application?
- Q&A

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What we do

MRC funds world-leading discovery and translational research to accelerate diagnosis, advance treatment and prevent human illness.

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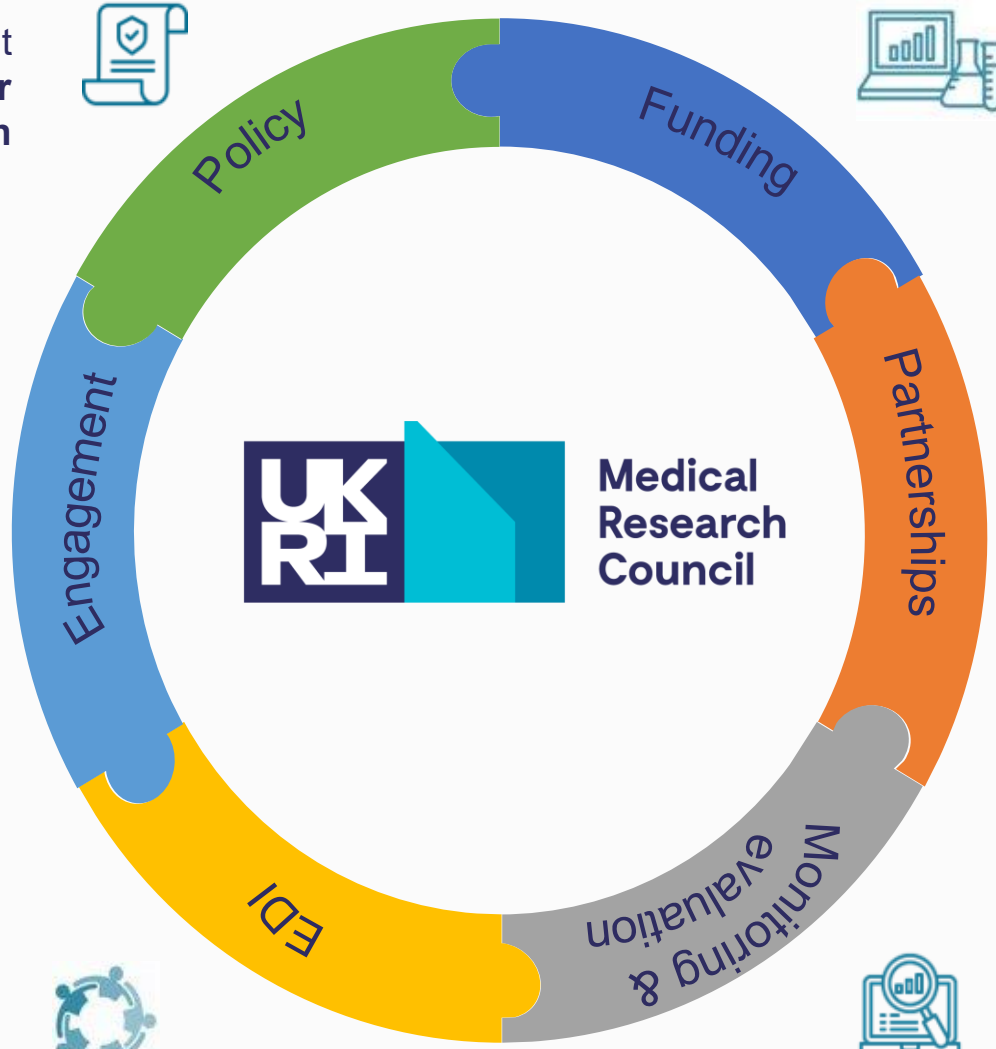
What we do

Developing policies that **support researchers** and **our mission**

Supporting **research**, **training and careers** and **national infrastructure**

Engaging with **academia**, **industry**, **government**, and **charities** and encouraging and supporting **public engagement and involvement**.

Working with **international, industry** and **charity partners** to deliver impact and fund research



Core consideration in all of our activities

Understanding impact to **inform learning** for policy and strategy development

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MRC Remit – *where we fit in*

*We aim to improve human health and drive economic growth through **a mechanistic understanding of biology and disease** enabling earlier diagnosis, advanced therapies, and precision prevention.*

Before writing a research proposal, you can contact MRC to ask if your research is within its remit.
It's a good idea to do this if your research is not clearly within MRC's research areas.

https://www.ukri.org/councils/mrc/remit-programmes-and-priorities/

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Training & Careers Team

MRC Training & Careers Team

Joanna Robinson
DIRECTOR
TRAINING & CAREERS

David Pan
HEAD OF PROGRAMME
TRAINING & CAREERS

PROGRAMME MANAGERS

Tom Beattie
STUDENTSHIPS
TRANSITION SUPPORT

Nassim El Achi
CLINICAL CAREERS

Nicola Faramarzi
CLINICAL CAREERS
RACR & UKRI FLF

Ezat Sajedi
NON-CLINICAL
CAREERS

Jude Hancock
NON-CLINICAL
CAREERS

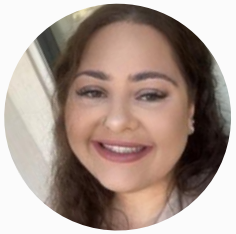
PANEL MANAGERS

Annie McKeown
STUDENTSHIPS
RACR & UKRI FLF

Zoe Walker
CLINICAL
FELLOWSHIPS

Jess Rivers
NON-CLINICAL
FELLOWSHIPS

PANEL OFFICERS & ADMINISTRATORS



Megan Hodges
NON-CLINICAL
FELLOWSHIPS

Julia Harbour-Vines
CLINICAL
FELLOWSHIPS

Rebecca Turner

Nelly Pugh

Chaye Dawson
** maternity leave*

Training & Careers – refreshed priorities

- Principles:
  - **Embed & Enhance**: support **people and teams** through in all we do
  - **Incentivise**: encourage & de-risk **clear, attractive** and **fluid career paths**
  - **Coherent offer**: **flexible** support for **key transitions**

1. Prioritise early career transitions

- Seek to maintain PhD numbers & drive best practice for wider benefit
- Increase support & flexibility for clinical researchers
- Shift MRC Fellowships to support 'early independence'
  - ➢ MRC offer complementary to UKRI FLF

2. Target skill & career pathway gaps

- Address skills gaps:
  - Targeted co-funding of Focal awards
  - Embed capacity building in future strategic initiatives
- Incentivise & value diverse careers:
  - Widen fellowship eligibility to future methodological & technical leaders
  - Evaluate research grant team support
  - De-risk technical careers by trialling tapered salaries on infrastructure

3. Enable mobility

- De-risk inter-sector mobility:
  - embed flexibility in future large investments
- Support academic re-entry:
  - Localised flexible support for clinicians to enable research re-entry

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Securing the future of clinical researchers

Clinical researchers: reversing the decline

- **OSCHR Task and Finish Group:** UK-wide - Funders, Devolved Nations, NHS, Universities, Industry, Trainees
- Evaluate current situation & causes:

System drivers

REF — Previous REF

£ — University finance

NHS pressures

Disincentives

Dual Track

Training Duration

Clinical training research opportunities

New pressures

£ — Personal finance

Career uncertainty & expectations

- Coordinated action across stakeholders to implement recommendations:
  - Medics (30 January 2025),
  - Nurses, Midwives & Allied Health Professionals (1 July 2025)
  - Dental (coming soon)

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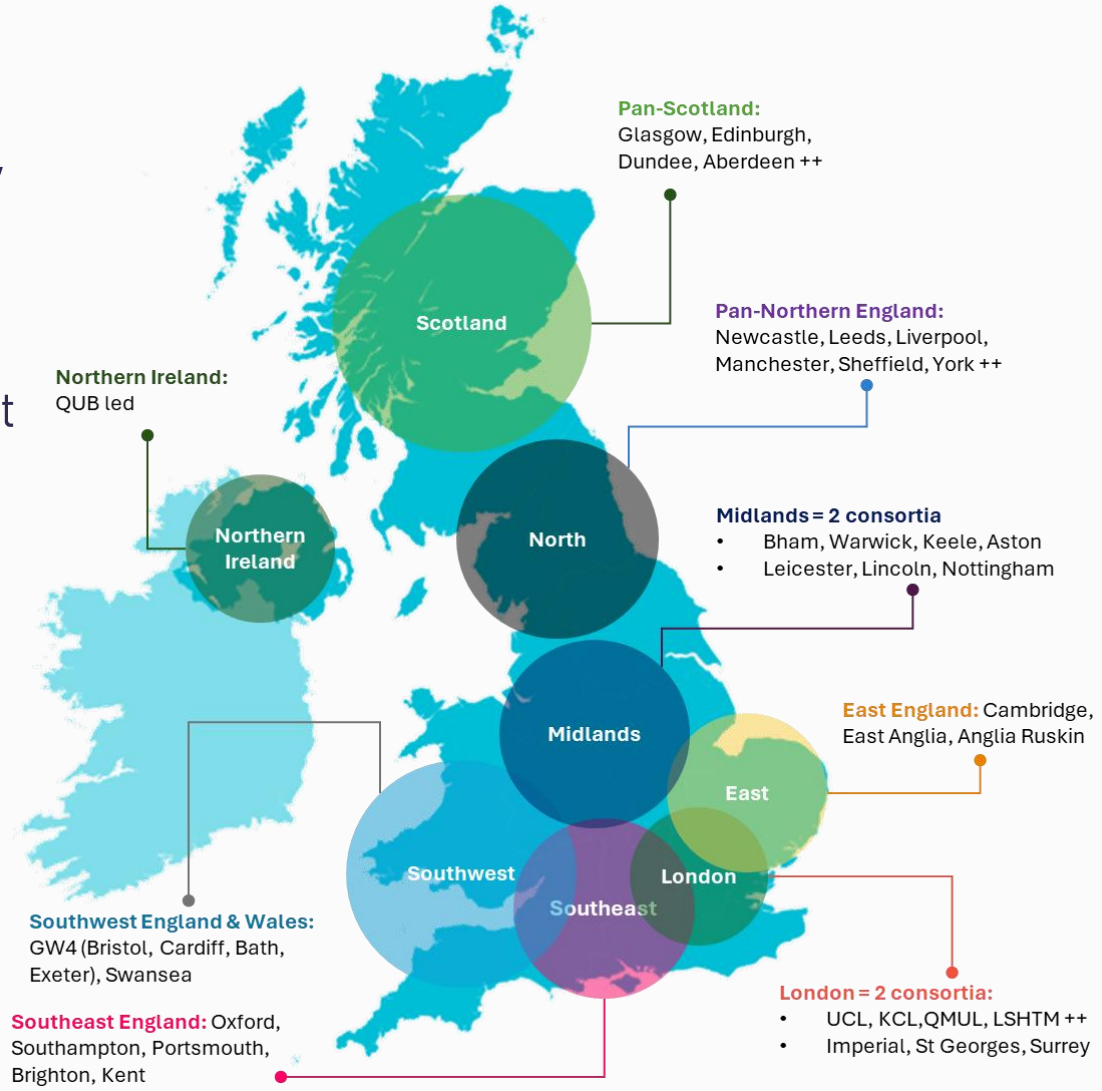
Securing the future of clinical researchers

In response to OSCHR reports, we have:

- Created National clinical research career pathway hosted by Clinical academic training and careers hub (CATCH).

- Regional Accounts for Clinical Researchers (RACR) pilot: local flexible support model to (i) provide support at the right time, (ii) encourage best practice, (iii) ensure local support for long term success.

- MRC 'Clinical Future Leader Fellowships': Supporting more clinical researchers into secure research posts
  - UKRI Future Leader Fellowships (FLF) model: 7-year tapered award with a University/NHS partnership agreeing to tenure.
  - Additional nominations for clinicians and up to £5m additional award p.a.



RACR 4 year cross-UK investment of £9.7m

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The Clinical Academic Training & Careers Hub (CATCH)

- Clinical academic careers play a crucial role in driving innovation and strengthening NHS care. However, the pathways into these careers can be complex and difficult to navigate.
- CATCH has been developed to address this challenge by providing a single, trusted source of information on clinical academic careers.
- It is a free, national hub designed for multiple professions and career stages.
- Explore more at www.catch.ac.uk

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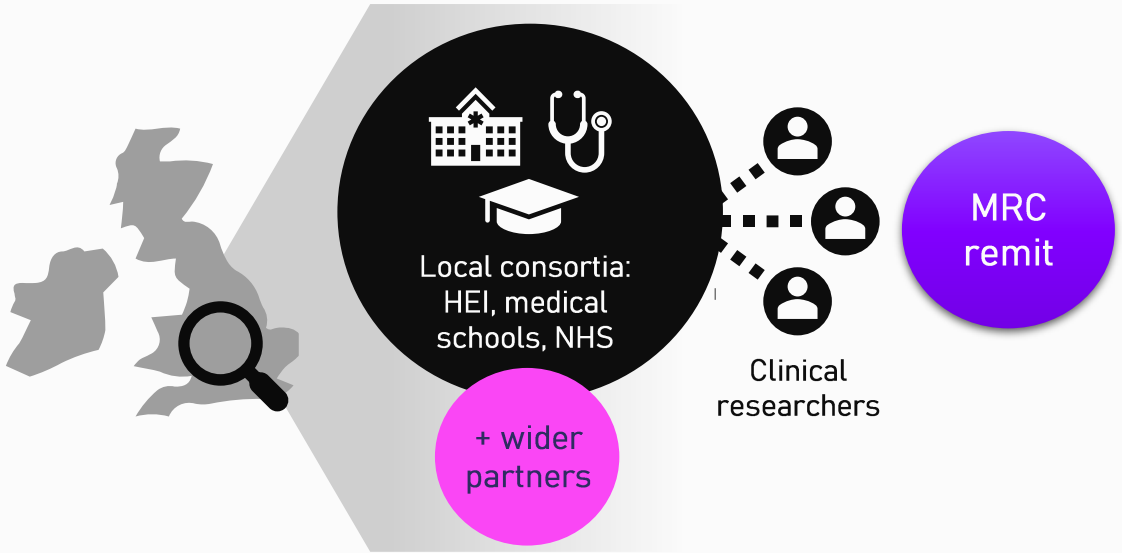
Regional Accounts for Clinical Researchers (RACR)



Flexible funding at local level: salary, time 'buy out', direct costs etc

Varied activities: preliminary data, training, industry placements... etc

Monitoring key metrics: e.g. follow on fellowship apps, grant CoI etc

Key aims:

- address gaps in support for clinical researchers at critical career pinch points
- provide flexible opportunities across UK to enable individuals' long-term success

Expectations:

- Strong collaborative partnerships (universities and trusts)
- Clear NHS buy in for long-term success
- Best practice sharing beyond current strong centres
- Engagement with MRC

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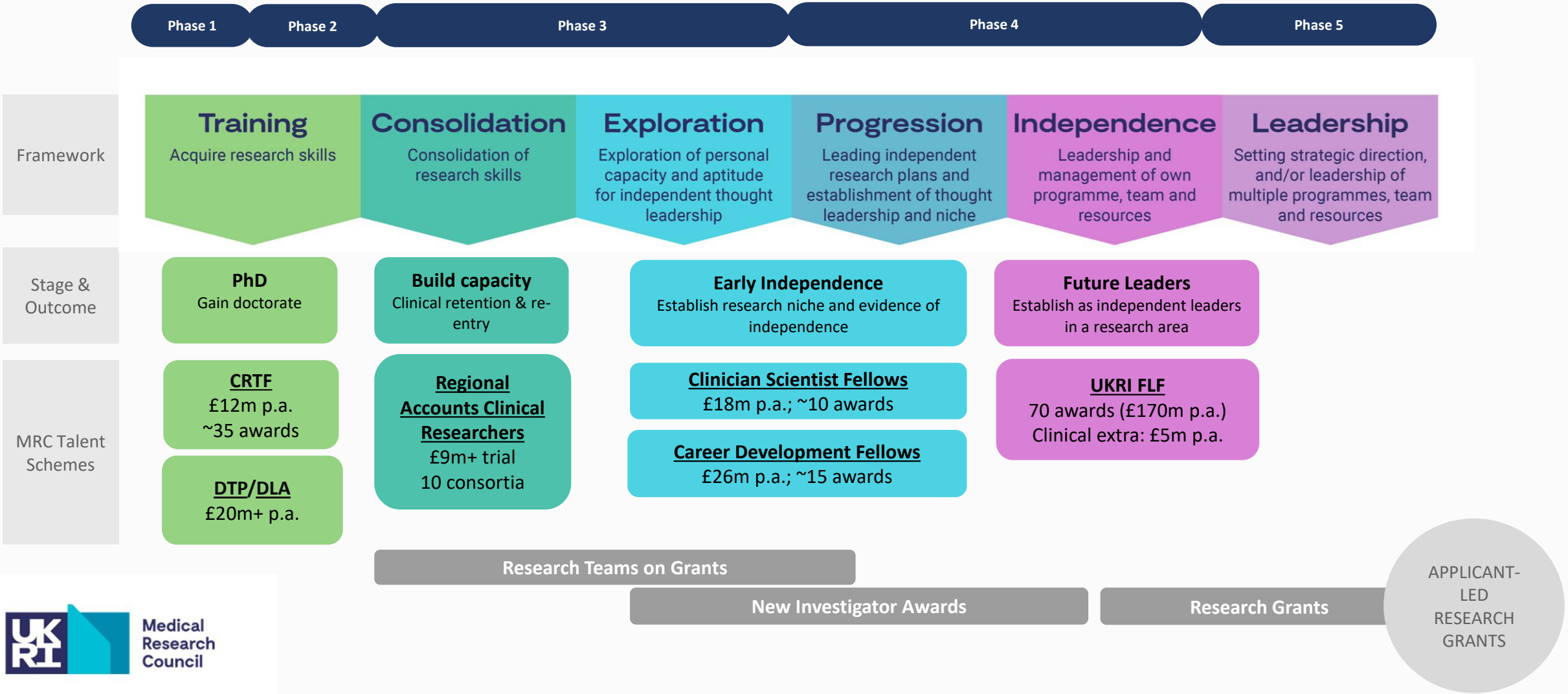
Support for research careers – MRC fellowships

MRC's training and careers support

Offer aligned to UKRI doctoral framework and fellowship framework + cross-funder clinical researcher pathway



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Transition to Independence: NIA or Fellowship

New Investigator Awards

- Via Applicant-Led
- Project grant
- Combined with other commitments
- Normally up to 50% contracted working time
- Research organisation to cover remaining salary
- Can have Co-Is
- Tenure 3+ years

Fellowship

- Via fellowship panel
- Personal award
- Protected research time
- Expectation that 100% of time spent on award
- No Co-Is
- Tenure 5 years

[Early independence: career development fellowship – UKRI]

[Early independence: clinician scientist fellowship – UKRI]

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A new approach to MRC curiosity-driven research

- **MRC's applicant-led funding opportunities,** including experimental medicine, **are open for applications**
- Applicant-led funding opportunities will remain **always open**, in line with other councils in UKRI
- Applications will be **assessed using a new single college of experts.**
- Following assessment of written applications, **shortlisted applicants will now be invited to an in-person panel interview,** giving them the best possible opportunity to make their case.
- **First shortlisting took place in July 2026,** decisions planned for December 2026

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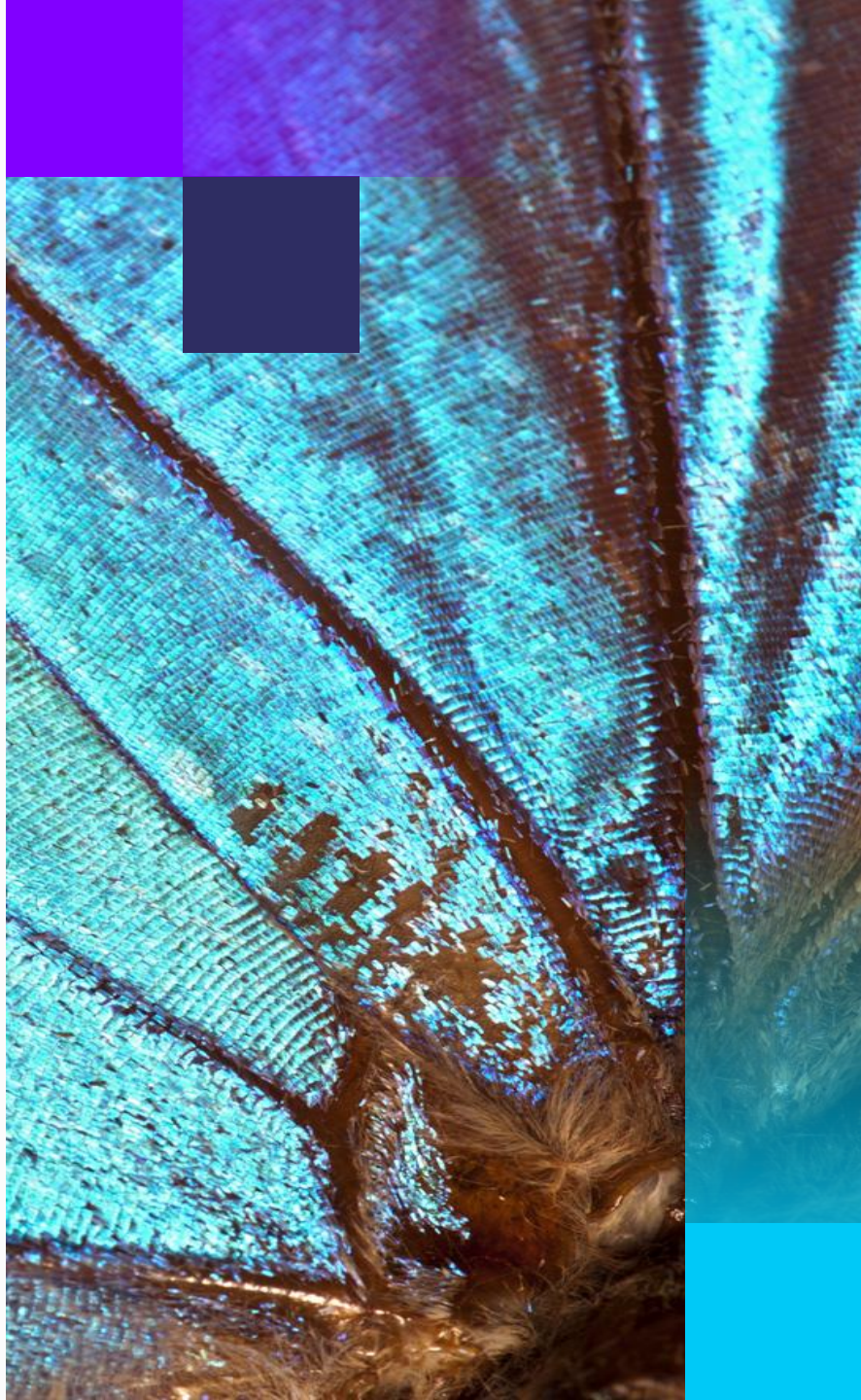

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What makes a good application?

What we look for in Fellowships: The Concept of the Three Ps

Person, place, project

- Potential of the individual
- Quality of the environment
- Quality of the project proposed
- Relevance / value of any proposed period overseas or in industry or in a 2nd UK centre

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Before applying

Get advice

- research office
- research network – collaborators, mentors, etc
- other researchers – grant applicants, funding committee members
- funders

Check the funder's remit and scheme objectives

- is the funding relevant to your research?
- is the funding relevant to you?
- do you meet the eligibility criteria?

Check what is required – read the guidance

- page limits, font sizes, attachments
- costings
- deadline and timelines

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Start early!

Everything takes longer than you think!

Assessment process

1. Examination of applications
To ensure they meet the eligibility criteria and scope.

2. Expert review
We will invite independent experts to review your application.

3. Shortlisting
We will review the comments and scores for each application. Shortlisted applications will go to an interview panel who will make a funding recommendation.

4. Interview
An expert interview panel will conduct interviews with applicants after which the panel will make a funding recommendation.

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We aim to complete the assessment process within six months of receiving your application.

Find out more about the MRC fellowship assessment process see:

- expert review
- MRC fellowship assessment process
- MRC research priorities
- MRC place framework

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Thanks and question welcomed.

fellows@mrc.ukri.org