



**Medical
Research
Council**

HRfH Grant Writing Retreat

10 July 2025

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Who are we?



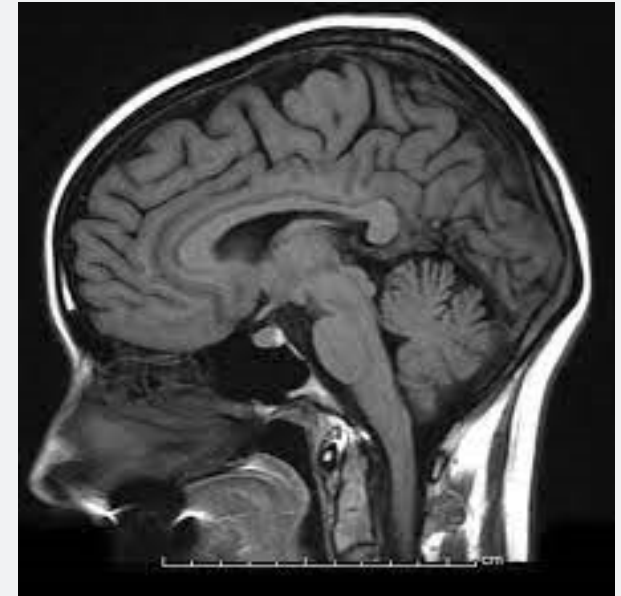
Medical Research Council – *our mission*

We **aim** to improve human health and promote economic growth through world leading biomedical research and innovation

Discover biological & pathological mechanisms underpinning human disease

- Enabling Early Diagnosis
- Advanced Treatments
- Precision Prevention

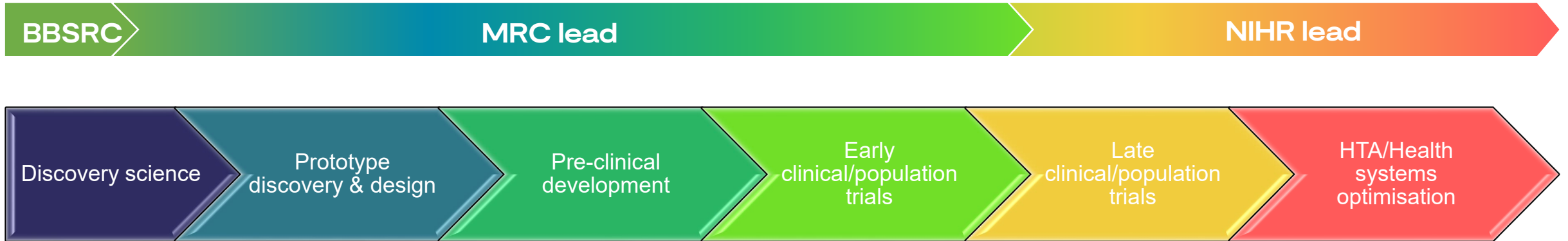
Improve human health and promote economic growth



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Remit:

MRC funding spans from early discovery to early clinical trials, across the biomedical sciences



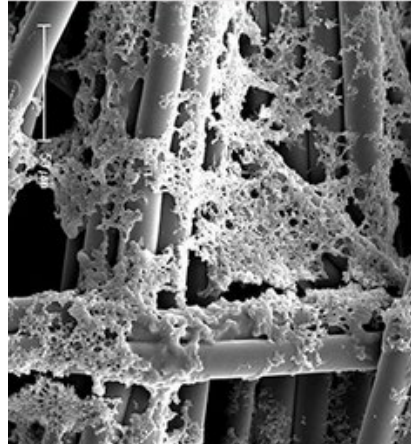
Before writing a research proposal, you can contact MRC to ask if your research is within its remit. It's a good idea to do this if your research is not clearly within MRC's research areas.

MRC Research Boards

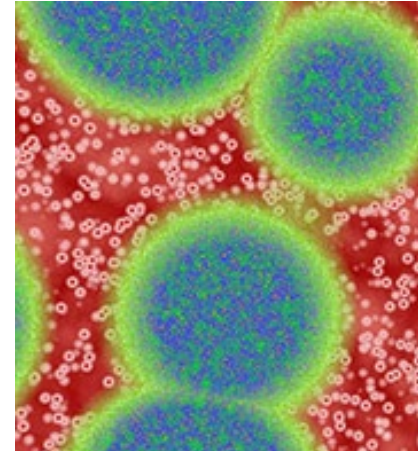
MRC remit is divided across four broad scientific areas:



**Population and
Systems Medicine
Board**



**Molecular and
Cellular Medicine
Board**



**Infections and
Immunity Board**



**Neuroscience and
Mental Health Board**

In parallel, MRC has a number of funding panels with a mandate to support particular *types of award* across science areas



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Research Boards Peer Review Process



Research Board – Peer Review Process





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What makes a good application?



Before applying (to any scheme)

Get advice early

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

Check the funder's remit and scheme objectives

- right Research Council? Right Board or Panel?
- is the funding scheme relevant to your research?
- is the funding scheme relevant to you?
- are you eligible to apply?

Check what is required – read the guidance

- format: page/word limits, font sizes etc
- what information/documents are required? (e.g. ICF, SoECAT, animal forms/NC3Rs review, etc)
- costings

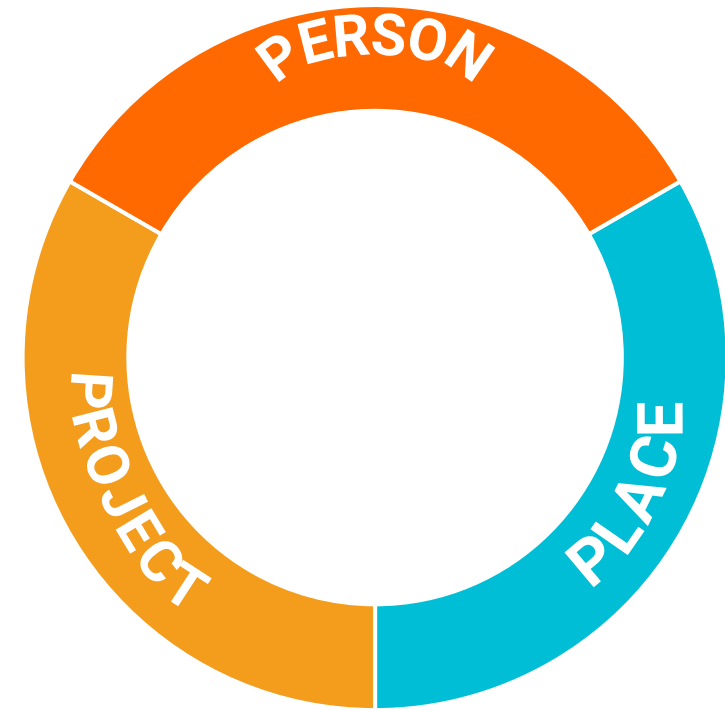
Deadlines – RO timeline!



What we look for in Applications

Person/team, Place, Project

- Potential of the individual and/or team
- Quality of the research and training environment
- Quality of the project proposed



PERSON/TEAM

You should clearly articulate the following:

- Why you are the appropriate person/team to deliver this proposal?
- That you have assembled the best core team/collaborators for this proposal
- That the team has all necessary expertise
- ECRs: You own the project and research ideas – show distinction from mentor's research.
- How this opportunity is a step change for your career

PLACE

Demonstrate the following:

- How the proposed research environment will enable you to deliver your project
- That you have good links to national/international places of excellence for your topic
- How the host institute will support you:
 - ✓ detailed and personalised letter of support
 - ✓ opportunities for development (personal training plan, mentoring, access to PhD students)
 - ✓ access to resources, networks and support
 - ✓ providing post-award opportunities and/or commitment to support

PROJECT

Your application should clearly highlight:

- A clear rationale for the research (importance – what is the gap/need?)
- Tell a compelling story – have a USP
- Coherence: Background – Hypothesis – Aims - Expected outcomes
- That the research outcomes will address your key questions
- Preliminary data (that supports your proposal)
- A clear logical plan – easy to read Understandable to researchers outside the field
- Well justified methods and design.
- Good plan for analysis of the data generated
- Risk management - have a plan B
- Resources well justified; VfM

Tips for writing an application

- Tell a compelling story – **be focused and clear**
- Consider the **impact** of the research – **balance ambition and feasibility**
- Include relevant (supportive) **preliminary data**
- Identify and **mitigate the risks**
- Justify your **design** and **methods**
- Make sure requested **resources are adequate and fully justified**
- Summary/vision – sets the scene; **write it last**
- **Invite tough criticism from peers & mentors before you submit**

Top tips on the MRC website:

<https://www.ukri.org/blog/12-top-tips-for-writing-a-grant-application/>

Tips for responding to reviewer comments

- A **measured** response that **addresses important concerns** can make all the difference
- Stick to the **key issues**
- Politely refer to parts of the application which may address concerns and **expand if necessary**
- Use **references** where appropriate
- **Opportunity** to add in extra data, publications etc. (**within reason**) to reassure



Common application pitfalls

Scope and importance

- poorly written (rushed), unfocused, overambitious project
- unoriginal approach/lack of innovation or novelty (incremental)

Clarity of research question(s) and how they will be answered

- no clear hypothesis or not hypothesis-driven
- methodology not sufficiently detailed, not consistent with hypothesis
- unlikely to address key questions

Feasibility

- project dependent on first step (with no plan B)
- unlikely to deliver in timeframe
- lack of preliminary data/key risks not considered/mitigated
- lack of particular expertise or track record in research area
- lack of right infrastructure/facilities
- failure to fully address reviewer concerns

Career progression

- training element incomplete / unclear; poor training environment
- unclear how application will support your career progression
- lack of ownership of the project
- right person, wrong project & vice versa! Or wrong supervisory team
- insufficient RO support



Online resources

- MRC science areas and contacts:
[Remit, programme and priorities - Medical Research Council](#)
- Gateway to Research – UKRI funded research:
 - [GtR](#)
- MRC peer review process:
[Guidance for Applicants](#)
- MRC advice on grant writing:
 - [12 top tips for writing a grant application – UKRI](#)
 - [Grant application checklist](#)
- NIRG Scheme guidance and short video:
 - [New Investigator Grant – UKRI](#)
- Guidance for applicants
 - [Guidance for applicants – MRC – UKRI](#)
 - [Guidance for fellowship applicants – UKRI](#)



Online resources

- Developing people and skills – MRC
 - [Developing people and skills – MRC – UKRI](#)
 - [Skills and experience needed to win support – UKRI](#)
- [Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings UKRI guidance](#)
- UKRI funding finder
 - [Opportunities – UKRI](#)
- Videos – including a mock fellowship interview
 - <https://www.youtube.com/c/medicalresearchcouncil>
 - [How to find an opportunity in the Funding Finder \(YouTube\)](#)
 - [Completing an application in the Funding Service \(YouTube\)](#)
 - [MRC responsive mode research boards - transition to the new Funding Service webinar \(YouTube\)](#)
- FAQs [TFS-Question-and-Answer-Session.pdf \(ukri.org\)](#)





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Thank you