

# **MS Society PhD Fellowship Awards**

## **Applicant guidance**

You should use this guidance document with the 'help' sections on our online application system CC Grant Tracker.

March 2024

**Let's stop MS together**

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We try to make sure that the information in this guidance is accurate. But changes are possible and the most up-to-date guidance is available on our website.

**If you have any questions, you can [email us at research@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk) or call us on 020 8438 0822.**

## 1. Introduction

We're the largest charitable funder of MS research in the UK. We welcome applications for projects that will increase understanding of the cause and find new effective treatments or prevention strategies for MS. And projects improving care and services for people affected by MS too.

We don't make any decisions on the scientific quality and relevance of applications. These are made by independent peer and lay reviewers. As members of the Association of Medical Research Charities we adhere to the Principles of Peer Review.

You should use this guidance document with the "Help" sections in the application forms on our online application system CC Grant Tracker.

- > [Log into Grant Tracker.](#)

## 2. PhD Fellowship Awards Purpose and Scope

PhD Fellowship Awards are one of our Career Development Awards. They are designed to encourage the best graduates to embark on a research career in MS. These awards provide practical research training leading to a doctorate, under the supervision of an experienced researcher.

Support is provided over a 3-year period. PhD Fellowship Awards are typically around £100,000. We'll fund PhD stipends in accordance with MRC guidelines, up to £7,000 per year towards tuition fees and a maximum of £15,000 per year in running costs. We'll also fund up to £3,000 in conference costs.

All funding recommendations come from review panels drawn from The Expert Review Network (TERN). TERN is our independent group of experienced researchers, health care professionals and people living with MS. We may also invite experts from outside of TERN where necessary or appropriate. For example, if we need additional expertise or there are conflicts of interest.

- > [Read more about our approach to reviewing applications on our website.](#)
- > [Read more about The Expert Review Network \(TERN\) on our website.](#)

### 2.1 Our Research and Organisational Strategies

Your application should fit with our Research Strategy. And you must explain how the project helps us to achieve these aims. We also have an organisational strategy to guide our work from 2020-2024. You should read and strongly consider these documents when writing your application.

- > [Download our 2023-2024 Research Strategy Extension from our website.](#)
- > [Read our 2020-2024 Organisational Strategy on our website.](#)

### 2.2 James Lind Alliance Partnership (JLA) research priorities

In 2013 we completed a James Lind Alliance Partnership (JLA) to identify research priorities that are important to people affected by MS and healthcare professionals.

- > [Read about our JLA research priorities on our website.](#)

We don't exclusively restrict our funding to these priorities. We continue to support research into the causes of MS, and all aspects of treatment and care for people affected by MS. However, we do favour applications that specifically address these priorities. You will need to outline which, if any, of the JLA priorities your application addresses.

### 3. Award Conditions and Policies

You should also read our Award Conditions and Policies. This document contains our:

- **Open Access Policy:** We're committed to open and unrestricted access to the results of our funded research. We require any research papers based on our funded research to be published in an open access environment.
- **Grant Award Conditions:** The Award Conditions, together with the Award Letter and the Policies, set out the terms and conditions on which we make Awards.
- **Intellectual Property Policy:** This Intellectual Property (IP) Policy document sets out principles that we're guided by when considering questions relating to intellectual property and research matters.

- > [Download our Award Conditions and Policies from our website.](#)
- > [Read more about how to manage an MS Society Research Award](#)

#### 3.1 Our position on researcher leave

We strongly believe that researchers should be supported to take periods of leave when they need to. And part-time opportunities should be available for early career researchers to give more people the chance to progress their careers. As part of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan for MS Society research we're sharing our position on leave for our funded researchers.

We're supportive of our funded researchers taking leave. For example, family leave (maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental leave) and sick leave. This includes PhD students working on research we fund.

This is our position on researcher leave. It outlines our viewpoint and our expectations, but it's not a policy. Researchers working on our funded projects aren't our employees. So you should check and follow the relevant leave policies at your institution.

- > [Read more about our position on researcher leave on our website.](#)
- > [Read more about our work to improve EDI in MS research.](#)

#### 3.2 Our position on generative AI in research

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could bring benefits to MS research. But there are risks associated with their use, particularly in research funding and application review. We support the Research Funders Policy Group's joint statement on the use of generative AI in funding applications and assessment.

You should note:

- If using generative AI tools in developing your application, you must use them responsibly. And in line with relevant legal and ethical standards where these exist or as they develop.
- You must acknowledge any outputs from generative AI tools in funding applications.

We're committed to maintaining confidentiality in our research funding processes. As this is essential for safeguarding the sharing of scientific opinions and assessments. It's not clear whether anything put into generative AI tools remains confidential. So, our applicants, reviewers and panel members must not put any part of any application under review into these tools. This includes for the purposes of review assessment, applicant responses or other purposes.

- > [Read the Research Funders Policy Group's joint statement on the use of generative AI in funding applications and assessment.](#)

## 4. Key Terms and Definitions

### **Lead applicant/supervisor**

The named lead applicant is the project leader. For PhD Fellowships, the lead applicant is considered the main supervisor for the PhD Fellow. As lead applicant, you:

- Are the contact person for all correspondence relating to the application.
- Have overall responsibility for the award and must actively engage in its direction.

### **Adviser**

- Advisers don't need to be actively involved in the project.
- They can view and edit the application, and provide comments.
- Advisers' CVs are included in the application PDF and seen by reviewers.
- They need to confirm their participation. But don't need to approve the application.

### **Co-applicant**

- A co-applicant is a researcher who'll be actively involved in the project should the funding application be successful.
- Co-applicants can view and edit applications.
- Co-applicants have to approve applications before they can be submitted.

### **Finance officer**

- A member of your institution who's responsible for confirming and approving financial details of applications.
- They act as **FINAL SIGNATORY** for application submission. Your application won't be accepted if it's not approved by the Finance Officer before the funding deadline.
- They'll be responsible for administering the grant if it is awarded.

### **Public engagement**

Where information and knowledge about research is provided and disseminated.

Examples of engagement are:

- science festivals open to the public
- open days at a research centre
- raising awareness in the media
- > [Read more about public engagement on the National Centre for Co-ordinating Public Engagement's website.](#)

### **Public involvement (PPI)**

Where members of the public are actively involved in research projects and in research organisations. Examples of involvement include when people affected by MS:

- are involved in identifying research priorities
- are members of a project steering group
- comment on patient information materials
- > [Read more about involvement on the NIHR website.](#)

### **Public participation**

Where people take part in a research study. Examples of participation include:

- people being recruited to a clinical trial or other study
- people completing a questionnaire as part of a study.
- > [Read more about participation in trials on the NHS website.](#)

### **Research Network**

The Research Network are a passionate group of people living with MS or caring for someone with MS. They're not required to have specialist scientific knowledge, but are trained to use their personal experiences of MS to review applications, ensuring that the research we fund is of the highest importance to people affected by MS.

## 5. Submitting your application

Your application should be carefully considered and show a high level of grantsmanship. You should thoroughly review it before submission and ask any co-applicants to do the same.

Your application must be submitted through CC Grant Tracker. You must complete all sections of the application form. If sections aren't completed properly, we'll return your application. Or it might not be validated for review.

- > [Log into Grant Tracker.](#)
- > [Download guidance on how to use Grant Tracker from our website.](#)

### 5.1 Who's eligible to apply?

PhD Fellowships are awarded to the prospective supervisor of the project (Lead Applicant). You're responsible for identifying a suitable student. You don't need to name them when making your application.

You're expected to have a contract (fixed-term or tenure) which covers the proposed duration of the grant. You must be based at an UK university or NHS institution and be the Principal Investigator of the project.

The Lead Applicant can invite Co-Applicants and Advisers to join the application as Participants. For all applications the Lead Applicant **must** invite a Finance Officer who approves the application from the host institution and acts as the Final Signatory for application submission.

### 5.2 Patient and public involvement (PPI) in your research

Patient and public involvement (PPI) in research is when people with personal experience of health conditions work in active partnership with researchers or research funders like us.

Involvement isn't the same as recruiting participants to your study or sharing information with people through public engagement events. Involvement is about working in partnership with people affected by MS to shape, design and oversee a project.

- > [Read the NIHR's guide to public involvement in funding applications on their website.](#)
- > [Read 'A practical guide to patient and public involvement in lab-based research' online.](#)
- > [Find more resources on NIHR's Learning for Involvement website](#)

In your application you need to describe:

1. How people affected by MS have been involved in the development of your proposal (pre-application involvement)
2. How do you plan to involve people affected in your ongoing study, if funded.

#### **Pre-application involvement**

Before applying, we encourage you to involve people affected by MS in the development of your proposal. This helps to ensure:

- Your research questions are relevant to their experiences

- Your lay summary is accessible and understandable to our lay reviewers
- Your study design considers the needs of people affected by MS

### **Involvement in your ongoing study**

As well as working with people to develop your application, you should also plan for how you will continue to involve people affected by MS throughout the project. For example, people affected by MS could:

- Join an advisory group to provide their perspective throughout the course of a project - advising on challenges as they arise
- Review participant information materials such as leaflets, posters, webpages, questionnaires (for clinical projects)
- Advise on the best ways to communicate and disseminate your findings
- Work as a peer researcher in your team to be involved throughout the life course of the project (if appropriate)

### **Budgeting for involvement**

Involving people in research requires time and money. It's important to account for the costs of involvement when setting your budget. As without an adequate budget you'll struggle to involve people effectively.

You should include the costs for any planned PPI activities in your application. For example, you should consider:

#### a. Expenses

You must cover any expenses that people will incur by getting involved in PPI activities. People should never be out-of-pocket. This may include, for example, travel, subsistence (including the cost of carers / PA to also attend face-to-face meetings), broadband and childcare costs for online meetings.

#### b. Training and support

Training and induction sessions may be required so that people affected by MS are supported to carry out their role well. There are many free resources available online, but you should consider whether any paid training is required. You may also wish for your PPI contributors to join you at conferences and events.

#### c. Payment

It is best practice to offer payment for members of the public who get involved in your work, in recognition of their time, skills and expertise. How much to budget depends on several factors, for example how often they are going to be involved and what level of responsibility they will have.

- > [Read the INVOLVE guidelines for payment and recognition for public involvement on the NIHR website.](#)

We recommend you read and work through the NIHR's payment guidance for researchers. This includes information on budgeting and example payment rates for different activities.

**We can support you to plan and budget for your public involvement, connect you with people affected by MS and to carry out activities. [Get in touch with us by emailing researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk)**



## 5.3 Support writing your lay summary and involvement plan

### Writing your lay summary

You need to write a clear lay summary for your proposal. People affected by MS will review your application alongside experts in your field. Our funding panels also include researchers without direct expertise in your area of research.

If your lay summary is too brief or too complex, it'll be difficult for them to comment on and score your application. And this will affect whether it might be funded.

We encourage you to use Plain English when writing your lay summary. This will make your writing as accessible as possible to all panel members. You can [read about how we use plain English to be more accessible on our website](#).

- > [Read more about Plain English and see some examples on the Plain English Campaign's website.](#)
- > [Read our 'Tips for writing a good lay summary'](#)

### Our Lay Summary Development scheme

Our optional Lay Summary Development scheme can help you to write a high quality and accessible lay summary and involvement plan. People affected by MS from our Research Network can give feedback on your draft before you submit.

They can comment on:

- how well you have communicated your research proposal
- the importance of the topic to people affected by MS
- How well you have thought through and communicated your involvement plans

You don't have to complete Lay Summary Development if you don't want to. You can still apply without it. It's not part of our review process but can help you to improve your lay summary.

If you'd like to go through Lay Summary Development, you'll need to submit a completed Lay Summary Development request form. This needs to be submitted before the scheme closes. You'll get feedback on your summary around four weeks before the grant application submission deadline.

- > [Find more information about the Lay Summary Development scheme, including the guidance notes and request form on our website.](#)
- > [You can find the Lay Summary Development scheme closing date on our Funding page.](#)

For all enquiries about involving people affected by MS in any stage of your research, [you can email our Public Involvement team on researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk).

## 5.4 NHS Excess Treatment Costs and the SoECAT

Excess Treatment Costs (ETCs) occur when patient care or treatment costs in a research study are higher than in routine care. For example, a research participant is given a new drug to see how it compares with the standard drug prescribed. If the new drug is more expensive than the one usually prescribed then it is an 'excess treatment cost'. For non-commercial research studies (those not funded by pharmaceutical companies for commercial ends), ETCs are paid by the NHS.

Since 2018, researchers across the UK have used the Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Tool (SoECAT) to estimate ETCs. The SoECAT makes sure that site-level

costs are appropriately assigned in line with AcoRD principles. Doing this when applying for funding means that site-level Research Costs can be met.

From 1 April 2023, you'll need to complete the SoECAT online. The NIHR have released guidance for using the new online tool, which we've outlined below. You should read their guidance in full.

- > [Log into the NIHR Central Portfolio Management System \(CPMS\) to complete an online SoECAT](#)

To create a SoECAT, you'll need to create a CPMS account and log in to activate it. [You can read guidance for creating and logging into CPMS on the NIHR website.](#) You'll find guidance for completing the SoECAT in the online tool. [You can find further information on the Online SoECAT Guidance page on the NIHR website.](#) You must get your SoECAT signed off by an AcoRD specialist for HRA approval and NIHR portfolio status.

### **Applying to us**

If you're applying for funding from us to carry out clinical research in the NHS, you'll need a SoECAT. You'll need to factor in the time to complete it and have an AcoRD Specialist sign it before the deadline. You must upload the Funder Export from your approved online SoECAT to your application form.

Our research awards don't include NHS support and/or treatment costs. NHS support costs are funded through Clinical Research Networks. NHS treatment costs, including any ETCs and/or savings, are funded by the NHS through normal patient care commissioning arrangements. You shouldn't include these costs in your application's budget.

## 5.5 Finance and Costs

You should work with finance offices, clinical trials units, local NHS trusts and the local NIHR CRN network to ensure that all costs of research have been identified and appropriately paid for.

This table includes our list of acceptable and unacceptable costs. **You should read it carefully, including the notes column.** [You can request the costs guidance table in an alternative format by emailing research@mssociety.org.uk.](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk)

Category	What can you include?	What can't you include?	Notes
PhD Fellowship costs	<p><b><u>PhD Stipends</u></b>            Outside London:            Year 1: £19,237            Year 2: £19,718            Year 3: £20,210</p> <p>Inside London:            Year 1: £21,237            Year 2: £21,718            Year 3: £22,210</p> <p><b><u>PhD tuition fees</u></b>            Maximum of £7,000 per year.</p> <p><b><u>Running costs</u></b>            Maximum of £15,000 per year.</p> <p>Running costs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumables</li> <li>- Equipment</li> <li>- Animals</li> <li>- Human tissue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You shouldn't calculate tuition fees or conference costs into the annual £15,000 running costs total.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We calculate our stipends in line with UKRI rates. Stipends are tax-free and include a 2.5% inflationary increase each year.</li> <li>- Awarded grants will include the host institution's tuition fees at home student rates.</li> <li>- We won't increase the award budget to reflect increased research costs or fees once an award has been made. You should seek advice from your institution when estimating the future level of fees for your application.</li> </ul>

Category	What can you include?	What can't you include?	Notes
Consumables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Laboratory chemicals and materials (e.g. reagents, isotopes, peptides, enzymes, antibodies, gases, proteins, cell/tissue/ bacterial culture).</li> <li>- Data collection materials, if specific to the project.</li> <li>- Where justified, personal computing costs for named individuals engaged to work specifically on the grant.</li> <li>- Patient and public involvement (PPI) costs. This includes recruitment, reasonable travel and refreshment costs.</li> <li>- Consultant costs or staff time at other institutions for specific project work packages, such as specialist statistical analysis. This should be included as a non-salary "Consultant" cost.</li> <li>- Equipment use costs where usage of shared/core equipment, services or research facilities is essential to the project. <b>These must be stated as cost per sample/time period otherwise they will be removed.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You can't include bench fees or annual access fees for shared facilities, equipment or infrastructure.</li> <li>- Funding for computer equipment or software is only allowed if absolutely essential for the project. These costs shouldn't be more than £1,000 for each item unless absolutely necessary. You'll need to provide a strong justification for their inclusion.</li> <li>- You can't include annual software licencing fees.</li> <li>- We won't cover article publishing or open access costs.</li> <li>- Regulatory licences and fees, such as those associated with ethical approval can't be included.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You can find further guidance on PPI costs on the <a href="#">NIHR INVOLVE website</a>.</li> <li>- You should break consumables down as itemised costs, rather than giving an overall estimated cost.</li> <li>- A full justification is required for all consumables. If you haven't sufficiently justified a consumables cost, we'll remove it from the award budget.</li> </ul>
Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equipment that is specific to the grant and greater than £1000 in value (excluding VAT) should be listed here.</li> <li>- Costs may include purchase, delivery and installation of scientific</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equipment cannot be requested for routine or service use.</li> <li>- Equipment becomes the responsibility of the host institution, which must be responsible for its accommodation, operating and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All equipment should be entered net of VAT.</li> <li>- Any single piece of equipment costing in excess of £1000 and funded by the Award is our property.</li> </ul>

Category	What can you include?	What can't you include?	Notes
Animals	<p>equipment where that equipment is specific and essential for carrying out the project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each piece of equipment should be fully justified.</li> </ul>	<p>servicing costs, and for any insurance that may be necessary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You can't include routine operating and servicing costs for any piece of equipment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equipment less than £1000 in value may be classed as a consumable, and listed accordingly.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Animal purchase and transportation costs, maintenance (including food) and experimentation costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You can't include costs relating to Home Office Licences and animal handling training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The species and number of animals to be used must be stated. A full justification for their use must be provided in the project details section of the application.</li> <li>- See the 'Use of animals' section below.</li> </ul>
Human Tissue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cost for the provision of human tissue. This includes costs charged by tissue banks for the preparation of samples, administration requests and postage.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If human tissue from the MS Society Tissue Bank is to be used in the grant, please include an estimate of the costs according to the tariff found on the Tissue Bank <a href="#">website</a>.</li> <li>- See the 'Use of human tissue' section below.</li> </ul>
Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conference costs can cover a maximum of £1,000 for each grant year for the PhD student. <b>These costs are pro rata (see notes).</b></li> <li>- Conference costs can be used to cover travel, registration fee and/or accommodation for meetings/conferences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You can't include conference costs for the lead applicant as you're not a salaried member of staff on the grant.</li> <li>- You can't include costs above standard class travel or accommodation.</li> <li>- You shouldn't include travel and accommodation to visit collaborators under conference costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conferences costs are pro rata i.e. if the PhD student is 50% part time, they can claim up to £500 of fees in one year.</li> <li>- These costs can only be used for meetings/conferences directly related to the funded research.</li> </ul>

Category	What can you include?	What can't you include?	Notes
Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excess treatment costs</li> <li>- Institutional overheads</li> <li>- Financial services</li> <li>- Personnel services</li> <li>- Recruitment costs</li> <li>- Public relations</li> <li>- General institution libraries</li> <li>- Departmental services (administration, secretarial, printing, photocopying)</li> <li>- Telephone charges and postage or courier services</li> <li>- Journal subscriptions</li> <li>- Furniture</li> <li>- Standard per unit IT charges.</li> <li>- Phone/computer accessories (drivers, cases, chargers, batteries).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The NHS should fund excess treatment costs (ETCs):</li> <li>- If you're applying for a clinical research grants, you'll need to complete a Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT). This will allow your grant to be eligible for the NIHR portfolio and the support this provides, including ETCs.</li> <li>- You'll need to factor in the time to complete a SoECAT and have an AcoRD Specialist sign it so that you can upload it as part of your application.</li> </ul>

**We may reduce excessive costs if you haven't provided sufficient justification. We will remove ineligible costs.** We also won't pay for things that aren't included in the applicant budget when the award is made.

If you believe that any of the 'unacceptable costs' above should be seen as direct costs for your project you must provide full and detailed justification for this in your application.

## Increase in costs

We won't be responsible for any increase in the costs of research (whether caused by increased consumables costs, increased personnel costs or otherwise). We won't increase the award to reflect increased research costs, once the award has been made.

## Types of costs

Your institution's finance team should be able to provide further guidance on costings. If you are unsure please get in touch with us. Including ineligible costs may delay application submission or approval of award.

We won't fund the full economic costs of research (fECs), or a fixed proportion of these. We'll only pay for the Directly Incurred costs related specifically to the planned research to be undertaken in this grant. As a member of the AMRC we support their position statement on supporting research in universities outlining what charities pay for and why.

- > [Read the position statement on charities supporting research in universities on the AMRC website.](#)

### 1. Directly incurred costs

These include the familiar direct costs of research such as:

- Staff (e.g. research assistant salaries)
- Travel and subsistence
- Consumables and Equipment (or specific access to equipment)

We'll pay these costs, but you'll need to justify why they're needed for the research.

### 2. Directly allocated costs

These are shared costs, based on estimates and don't represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis. As such we will not pay these costs. They were previously included as 'indirect costs' heading. They include:

- The costing of the time spent by the applicant and co-applicants
- Estates: the way these are calculated may vary between institutions. Different categories of space will be costed differently, for example laboratory space will be different to office-based costs.
- Other Directly Allocated: these include the costs of shared resources, such as staff and equipment.

### 3. Indirect costs

These costs are necessary for underpinning research but can't be allocated to individual projects. These include things like computing and information support, central services, general maintenance and other infrastructure costs. They'll be calculated separately by each Higher Education Institution (HEI), according to TRAC methodology. We won't cover Indirect Costs or any other non-attributable overhead costs in your budget. However, such costs may be eligible under the Charity Research Support Fund.

## 5.6 Co-funding applications

We're open to co-funding applications with other funders. You should provide full details of the co-funder and amount they would be contributing.

## 5.7 Use of animals

If your research project uses animals, you must complete the Justification for Animal Use section of the application form.

- > [You should review our policy on animal research on our website.](#)
- > [Read the AMRC's statement on animal research on their website.](#) We fully support this statement.

We won't support the use of animals in research unless there's no alternative. And our reviewers carefully consider animal use procedures. We'll only support research using animals if:

- All animal use falls within the regulations laid down by Government, including the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
- All relevant Home Office licences are held for the duration of the intended projects. You and your institution are responsible for these being in place.
- Any research conducted outside of the UK using animals meets the EU directive 2010/63/EU minimum standards for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. You're responsible for making sure any international collaborators are following these standards. [Read the 2010/63/EU directive on the EUR-lex website.](#)

### The 3Rs of animal research

You must address the 3Rs in the Project Details section of the application. You're required to explain how you've considered each of the following:

- **Reducing** the number of animals used to the minimum necessary for a valid result
  - **Refining** experiments to minimise any pain, suffering or distress
  - **Replacing** animal experiments with alternatives wherever possible.
- > [Explore the NC3Rs library of resources for implementing the 3Rs in your research.](#)
  - > [Read the NC3Rs experimental design guidance for animal studies on their website.](#)

### Justifications

You must clearly state and justify the following in your application:

- The relevance to humans and why there is no alternative to the use of animals
- The species and number of any animals that could potentially be used
- Any refinement procedures to minimise any pain or distress
- Measures taken to avoid bias (e.g. blinding, randomisation)
- Number of experimental and control groups and sample size per group
- How the sample size was calculated, showing power calculations and including justification of effect size
- Overview of the planned statistical analyses in relation to the primary outcomes to be assessed
- Frequency of measurements/interventions to be used
- If necessary, circumstances in which power calculations aren't appropriate to determine sample size

**If these aren't addressed, we'll return your application.**

### Considerations

You should also consider that we support the AMRC's signing of the Concordat on Openness in Animal Research. This encourages grant holders to be open about their use of animals in research.

- > [Read the Concordat on Openness in Animal Research on the Understanding Animal Research website.](#)



The ARRIVE (Animal Research: Reporting In Vivo Experiments) guidelines have been developed by the NC3Rs to improve how *in vivo* studies are reported. They ensure that data from animal experiments can be fully evaluated and used by other researchers. We fully endorse these guidelines. We expect our researchers to comply with them designing your experiments and reporting your research.

- > [Read the ARRIVE guidelines 2.0 on the ARRIVE website.](#)

For further help in planning your experiments you should consider use of the PREPARE Guidelines (Planning Research and Experimental Procedures on Animals: Recommendations for Excellence). These guidelines include checklists which can help with improving reproducibility, reducing waste and promoting alternatives in animal research through better planning and communication.

- > [Read the PREPARE guidelines on the Norecopa website.](#)

## 5.8 Use of human tissue

Donated human tissue is a vital and precious resource, therefore you must justify why human tissue will be used in your research. If your research uses human tissue, you must confirm that you will comply with the appropriate legislation and follow the relevant Codes of Practice issued by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA). The type of tissue and quantity must be fully justified in your application.

## 5.9 Use of the UK MS Register

If you plan to use the UK MS Register in your project, you must contact the Register team as early as possible. All projects that will use the MS Register must be reviewed and approved by the UK MS Register's Scientific Steering Committee (SSC).

You're responsible for obtaining SSC approval **before** you submit your application to us. Confirmation of SSC approval must be attached to your application. This allows us to verify that your project is feasible and can be supported by the Register. Getting SSC approval can take time, so make sure you factor this in when working towards our application submission deadline. You can find out more about the SSC approval process, and SSC meeting dates and deadlines, on the MS Register website.

- > [Read more about using the MS Register in your research on our website.](#)
- > [Learn more about the SSC approvals process, including meeting dates and deadlines, on the MS Register website.](#)

## 5.10 References

You should cite all essential references relevant to your proposal. Please enter all references in the following format:

1st Author: Year: Title: Journal: Volume: Pages

Copies of in-press or submitted publications relevant to the proposal should accompany the application, please add these in the "Attachments" section.

## 6. Criteria for review

Your application will be scored on the quality of science and relevance to MS. The research environment and quality of the training provided will also be key considerations for review of PhD Fellowship Awards. Our Early Career Researcher Assessment Framework (Appendix 1) lists the competencies we believe early career researchers need to develop to support their careers. In the application form you'll be asked to consider how these competencies will be developed by the PhD Fellow when describing the training your student will be undertaking.

Applications will be reviewed and scored by both external peer and lay reviewers. And by The Expert Review Network (TERN) in our review panel meetings. Our panels are made up of TERN members with different expertise. Not everyone on the panel is an expert in your field. So, it's important to consider this when writing your application. We recommend writing in Plain English throughout your application as this improves accessibility. And means that all panel members can fully engage with and understand your proposal.

> [Read more about TERN on our website.](#)

You can also suggest up to three potential peer reviewers for your application in the "Project Details" section of the online application form. And tell us any reviewers you don't want to review your application, with justification.

- Once you've submitted your application, we validate it to make sure it fits the PhD Fellowships remit. And to check that all sections of the form have been completed adequately.
- If your application is eligible, we send it for independent, external review by members of the research community with relevant expertise and members of our Research Network.
- Based on the external review scores, applications go through a shortlisting process:
  - o This involves the TERN Review Panel Chair discussing the review scores and comments. It can also include a Vice Chair and a lay panel member, depending on the applications being considered.
  - o They'll recommend a shortlist of the highest quality and most relevant applications for further review. These will have the best chances of being fundable in this round.
  - o The remaining applications will be rejected (triaged)
  - o We'll tell all applicants the triage outcomes around a month before funding outcomes are announced.
- If your application is shortlisted, you're invited to provide a rebuttal to the reviewers' comments. You'll have 14 days to submit this and we'll advise you of the rebuttal dates in advance.
- Shortlisted applications are considered by invited TERN members at the Career Development Awards TERN Review Panel meeting.
- The TERN Review Panel provides a recommendation to us about which applications should be funded.
- Our Board of Trustees then considers their recommendations for funding.
- Following approval by the Board, we'll communicate official funding offers, awards are made and projects start.

The scoring guidance used by our reviewers is found on the next page. [You can request the scoring guidance for reviewers table in an alternative format by emailing \[research@mssociety.org.uk\]\(mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk\).](#)

## PhD Fellowship Awards Scoring Guidance for reviewers

Generic criteria	PhD Fellowship Award specific	Rating	Score		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research question(s) are likely to result in significant benefit for people affected by MS and/or advancement in our scientific understanding of MS</li> <li>Research team is very strong, containing all relevant disciplines to deliver project outcomes</li> <li>Very good value for money</li> <li>Proposal is clear and well written</li> <li>People affected by MS are actively involved and influencing project at all relevant stages (PPI)</li> <li>Proposal has a clear and realistic pathway to impact. Potential impact is highly significant and appropriate to grant type.</li> <li>Research design is excellent, appropriate and highly feasible for the Award type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excellent training and educational environment, with clear plans to help Fellow develop ECR competencies (see Appendix 1). The supervisory team are well placed to support student in their career development</li> <li>The proposed design, methods and analyses are well developed.</li> <li>The work is highly appropriate for a PhD project and achievable within the timeframe.</li> </ul>	Exceptional	<b>5</b>	Highly fundable	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research question(s) are likely to result in benefit for people affected by MS or some advancement in the scientific understanding of MS</li> <li>Research team has relevant experience and contains most of the relevant disciplines to deliver project outcomes</li> <li>Acceptable value for money</li> <li>Some elements of involving people affected by MS, where appropriate, but not well integrated or well supported</li> <li>Elements of the application are unclear</li> <li>Project would only be fundable with some changes</li> <li>Proposal has a reasonable pathway to impact. Potential impact is significant and mostly appropriate to grant type.</li> <li>Research design is acceptable for the Award type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acceptable training and educational environment, with some plans to help Fellow develop ECR competencies. The supervisory team are able to support the student in their career development.</li> <li>The proposed research design, methods and analyses are acceptable but require some further explanation.</li> <li>The work is reasonably appropriate for a PhD and probably achievable within the timeframe.</li> </ul>	High quality	<b>4.5</b>		Potentially fundable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research question(s) are irrelevant with no tangible benefit to people affected by MS.</li> <li>Key skills missing from the research team</li> <li>Poor value for money</li> <li>Unclear application</li> <li>Involvement of people affected by MS inappropriate or limited/ lacking</li> <li>Pathway to impact is unclear and/or unrealistic. Little or no potential impact or poorly described/not appropriate to grant type.</li> <li>Research design is unsuitable for the Award type.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor training environment and educational environment, with no plans to help Fellow develop ECR competencies. The supervisory team can't support the student's career development</li> <li>There are serious scientific concerns about the proposed research (it is poor/ flawed/ duplicative)</li> <li>The proposed research design, methods and analyses are not well developed.</li> <li>The work is not appropriate or achievable within the timeframe of a PhD.</li> </ul>	Good	<b>4</b>		
Above average	<b>3.5</b>	Acceptable	<b>3.5</b>		
Borderline acceptable	<b>2.5</b>	Below acceptable	<b>2</b>		
Serious scientific weaknesses or other major concerns	<b>1.5</b>	Not fundable	<b>1</b>		

## 7. Resubmission Policy

Unless you're explicitly invited, we only allow **one** resubmission of any previously unsuccessful application. If you are resubmitting an application, you should indicate this in the 'Other Support' section of the application form. And complete the text box according to the guidance.

### **Why do we only allow one resubmission?**

Over the past five years, less than 10% of resubmissions have been successful.

Our resubmission policy aims to promote a culture of high-quality submissions and high-quality reviews that will benefit you, our reviewers and us alike. And the MS community by helping us select and fund high quality and relevant research that has an impact on people affected by MS.

### **What do we consider as a resubmission?**

A resubmission is any application that was previously submitted to our Grant Rounds. This includes if you submit the same application under a different name. Or if you submit the same application under a different funding stream (e.g. changing a PhD Fellowship to a Catalyst Award).

### **Exceptions to our resubmission rule**

We may invite a small number of further resubmissions if there is compelling evidence from peer review. And if advised by the TERN Review Panels.

### **Preparing a resubmission:**

If you're preparing a resubmission, you must:

- Indicate this in the 'Other Support' section of the application form.
- Make sure that previous comments or considerations have been adequately responded to. This includes written review comments and/or panel feedback. Reviewers will have access to your previous application and review comments.
- Include a summary of any substantial changes to the application

If you don't include these, your application won't be eligible for re-review. And we'll automatically reject it.

### **What constitutes sufficient change to qualify as a new submission?**

We'll only qualify applications as a new submission if they contain major changes. It's not sufficient to include only minor changes or considering reviewer comments as a new submission.

### **Consequences of an Uninvited Resubmission:**

If we feel that a new application is a resubmission, or if you submit an uninvited resubmission that has already been submitted twice, then we'll automatically reject it.

## 8. Contact us

Please let us know if you have any questions or need help.

Email us at: [research@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk) or call us on 020 8438 0822.

**Thank you for your interest in our research funding.**

## Appendix 1: Early Career Researcher Assessment Framework

This Assessment Framework outlines the competencies we believe early career researchers need to develop to support their careers. In the application form you'll be asked to consider how these competencies will be developed by the PhD fellow when describing the training your student will be undertaking.

Key competencies	You should:
<b>Research vision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate a high commitment to MS research with a clear understanding of how your research contributes to our Research Strategy.</li> <li>• Demonstrate independent research ideas that are likely to result in significant benefits for people affected by MS. These could include, but aren't limited to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ addressing fundamental gaps in our knowledge of MS pathophysiology</li> <li>○ development and implementation of new treatments</li> <li>○ risk factors and prevention</li> <li>○ improved care and services for people affected by MS.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Be able to describe the long term plans for your research. This includes a route to implement your findings for the benefit for people affected by MS.</li> <li>• Have an awareness of research in other fields and embrace opportunities for collaborative and interdisciplinary working.</li> </ul>
<b>Research experience and potential</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have prior experience in MS research or personal motivation to work in MS. Or you should have evidence of work in a related and relevant research field.</li> <li>• Hold a PhD if you're a non-clinical researcher, or be able to demonstrate equivalent research experience.</li> <li>• Have delivered previous research project(s) and show evidence of impactful outputs.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These could include first author publications or critical contributions to multi-author publications, conference presentations or policy outputs.</li> <li>○ They could also include but aren't limited to: preprints, contribution to consortia, patents, key datasets, software, novel assays and reagents and publications.</li> <li>○ When considering research publications, our reviewers will recognise that the content of a scientific paper and its influence in the field holds more significance than publication metrics or where it was published.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Actively be adding to your "tool-box" of skills. These'll serve as a strong basis for future independent research activity. And allow you to be recognised for your specialist expertise.</li> <li>• Be establishing and able to demonstrate your own network(s) of research contacts independent of your group leader/supervisor (e.g. through multicentre collaborations)</li> </ul>
<b>Personal development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how you've designed your proposal to include research and credible plans for a training and educational</li> </ul>

	<p>programme. This should support your further career development and networking with peers and superiors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate appropriate selection of supervisor(s) and project team that will enable you to gain the specific skills needed to deliver your current and future research plans.</li> <li>• Have identified and be pursuing opportunities to access career development support, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mentoring</li> <li>○ Learning new skills</li> <li>○ Spending time in or collaborating closely with other research groups or settings, either within the UK or overseas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• These opportunities can either be within the research institution the Fellow has worked in, or through multicentre collaborations.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show evidence of leading and inspiring. For example through organisation of peer activities, workshops, journal clubs. Or supporting individuals at earlier career stages such as Masters and PhD level students or clinical trainees.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication and engagement skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have excellent communication and interpersonal skills across different audiences, including academic and public. These could be demonstrated, for example, through presentations at scientific conferences and involvement at public meetings (for example, those organised by us or one of our local groups).</li> <li>• Demonstrate enthusiasm for active involvement (PPI) of people with MS in the development of your specific project and wider research plans.</li> <li>• Show how your research outcomes will be communicated and disseminated within and outside the research community</li> <li>• Be prepared to demonstrate how your research aligns with our mission and our promise to people with MS.</li> </ul>
<b>Profile and influence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a strong, practical sense of how you'll develop your career to become a leading independent researcher.</li> <li>• Be supportive of the wider research agenda through, for example, peer review activity, providing lectures/seminars, teaching/clinical duties and participation in internal committees.</li> </ul>

We're the MS Society.  
Our community is here for you  
through the highs, lows and  
everything in between.  
We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

[mssociety.org.uk](http://mssociety.org.uk)



### Contact us

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▶ Let's stop MS together