



ECR Skills Development Awards applicant guidance

Updated January 2025

Our ambition is to attract and retain excellent researchers in MS. We want to do this by helping ECRs develop their skills to become future leaders in the field. Our Skills Development Awards are designed to support you with your career in MS research.

What are Skills Development Awards?

ECR Skills Development Awards are designed to enhance your skill set and advance your professional development as a researcher. They can be used for any career-related activity that helps you progress in your career in MS research. Such as specialist training courses or placements in a different research group to learn a new technique.

These Awards are intended to help develop you as a researcher. And you'll need to justify how the proposed activity will allow you to remain committed to MS research. But we'd like you to consider what support you need to advance your career and use these Awards to help you achieve your goals.

If you have an idea for funding but aren't sure whether it's eligible, you can email us at ECRNetwork@mssociety.org.uk.

- [Read our blog about how other ECRs have used their Skills Development Awards](#)

Who's eligible to apply?

These Awards are open to any early career researchers working in an MS-related field. And clinicians or allied healthcare professionals looking to gain additional research skills alongside their clinical work.

You must be the person doing the activity that you're applying for. You can't apply for a Skills Development Award to support someone else. And you must be based at a UK higher education or NHS institution.

What can I apply for?

You can apply for up to £2,000. You'll need to provide a breakdown of what the funding is being used for as well as justification for all costs. You can include reasonable travel and accommodation costs associated with your activity. In exceptional circumstances, where strong justification is provided, we'll consider budgets over £2,000. You should contact us before submitting your application if you'd like to apply for more than £2,000.

You can't use these Awards to request funding for conference registration or travel, laboratory consumables, salary support or publication costs. They also can't be used to replace training that should be offered by your institution or as bridging funding. You can request funding for workshop attendance but you need to clearly outline what skills you'll be developing from the workshop beyond networking.

Key dates and information

We offer three Skills Development Award rounds each year. You must use the funds within 12 months of the award being made.

Round 1:

- Applications open: Tuesday 14 January 2025
- Applications close: 12 noon on Tuesday 18 February 2025
- Funding period: 1 April 2025 – 30 March 2026

Round 2:

- Applications open: Tuesday 22 April 2025
- Applications close: 12 noon on Tuesday 17 June 2025
- Funding period starts: 1 August 2025 – 31 July 2026

Round 3:

- Applications open: Tuesday 26 August 2025
- Applications close: 12 noon on Tuesday 21 October 2025
- Funding period starts: 1 December 2025 – 30 November 2026

You **can't** use these awards for activities that have already taken place. Or for activities that happen before the funding period starts. You should check our funding dates align with your proposed activity before you apply. Unfortunately we can't consider applications outside these funding rounds.

You'll have to submit a short report (approx. 500 words) on how the funding was used and the impact it has had on your career. You may also be asked to write a blog about your experience and career plans for our ECR Hub.

How will my application be assessed?

Your application is reviewed internally with input from The Expert Review Network and a person affected by MS from our Research Network.

We look at the following criteria:

- The quality of the writing
- A clear, concise and relevant case for support for undertaking the activity
 - For example, have you explained how the proposed activity is going to help develop you as a researcher?
- There is clear benefit to the applicant in how the proposed activity will further their career in both the short- and long-term
 - For example, have you explained how the activity and this funding is going to support your career progression?
- The proposed activity will enable the applicant to stay committed to MS research
 - For example, have you outlined your future ambitions to have an impact for people affected by MS and how this funding will help you achieve those?
- Full and reasonable costings are provided

If any sections aren't completed with sufficient information, we may return your application. And this may affect your chances of being funded.

How do I complete my application?

Your application must be submitted using our online grants management system, [Symplectic Grant Tracker](#). You'll need to upload your CV (max 2 sides) and a letter of support from your manager/Principal Investigator. If you're planning to do a placement in a different research group, you'll also need to include a letter of support from the host group too.

Completing the application form

- The main purpose of these awards is to help you develop the skills you need to be successful in a research career. As such, the emphasis in your application should be on your personal development and career progression, rather than your research ideas.
- As the application form will be assessed by a person affected by MS, you **must** write it [using Plain English](#). This isn't the same as writing a lay summary but makes your application accessible to those without specialist knowledge.
- You have to explain the proposed activity in detail, how it'll help you develop as a researcher and allow you to stay committed to MS research. You should highlight the skill or knowledge gap you're trying to fill and explain how the activity will help do that.
- You should talk about your future ambitions to have an impact for people affected by MS and how the proposed activity will help you achieve those.
- You should focus as much as possible on your own career progression and how the funding will help you. While you can contextualise it to the activities of your lab or PI, you should emphasise how your career will be supported by the grant. Why is the proposed activity important at this stage of your career?
- You should highlight the short-term learning you'll gain from the activity and its effectiveness. And the longer-term impact of the activity on your career plans.
- There is a section for you to add any other information you think might be relevant to the application.
- You need to provide a full budget breakdown of costs involved with the activity. You should provide exact costings and shouldn't apply for more than you need.

Contact us

You can get in touch if you have any questions or need help. You can email us at ECRNetwork@mssociety.org.uk or research@mssociety.org.uk. Or call us on 020 8438 0822.

Thank you for your interest in our ECR Skills Development awards.

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

Contact us

MS National Centre 020 8438 0700
info@mssociety.org.uk
MS Helpline Freephone 0808 800 8000
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Multiple Sclerosis Society

Registered charity nos. 1139257 / SCO41990
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