

MRC Transition Support Award 2020 – Guidance and Assessment

Applications will be assessed in a two-step process. On submission the applications will be reviewed by the expertise of the Clinical and Non-Clinical Training and Career Panels. The applications will then be assessed further by a sub-group of these panels at a meeting to take place on 24th February 2021, where a funding decision will be made. There will be no external peer review. Announcements of the final decisions will be made in March 2021.

Scheme Objectives:

- facilitate the transition of MRC fellows into secure posts beyond their fellowship,
- maximise MRC's investment in current intermediate fellowships (Career Development Awards – CDA and Clinician Scientist Fellowships – CSF),
- increase the number of individuals establishing substantive research programmes in the period following their fellowship by supporting progressive career planning by fellows and institutions.

Who are we looking to support?

This scheme will provide short-term support of up to two years to intermediate MRC fellows who have made extensive progress and demonstrated productivity but have not yet achieved the outputs that will enable them to meet their full potential or be in a position to secure their next position. Eligible MRC fellows (CDA or CSF award holders) will be in the final 12-18 months of their fellowship.

The Transition Support award is specifically designed for fellows whose research momentum has been impacted by multiple issues that have affected their productivity and subsequent outputs. They will have progressed their research and met many of the criteria for research leadership already (see assessment criteria), however due to genuine mitigating circumstances they will not yet be competitive for the next funding stage.

Financially, the MRC will support 50% of the fellows' salary, salary costs of key staff members and a small consumables budget for the duration of the award; the expectation is that most of the consumable and animal costs required could be absorbed by underspend of their fellowship incurred by delays. The host research organisation will need to provide the other 50% salary commitment for the duration of the award. This reflects our expectation of a commitment from research organisations to support talented researchers at this level. The expectation remains that 100% of the fellow's contracted working time is focussed on their research, training and development, as per MRC's standard fellowship terms and conditions.

Candidates will need to **demonstrate the added value** that a Transition Support award will offer them, providing evidence of their research potential, clearly articulating how their proposed plans for the resources and time requested would provide a platform towards research leadership.

The MRC already has a [Post-Award Amendment \(PAA\)](#) mechanism which allows costed or no-cost extensions to existing MRC awards. In addition to covering statutory requirements such as parental leave and sick leave, this mechanism supports requests for non-recruitment of staff and to cover exceptional unforeseen delays which were out with the control of the fellow. The PAA route tends to provide like-for-like no-cost extensions for discrete delays and in exceptional circumstances additional funding. Candidates who have previously had a PAA are still eligible to apply for Transition Support, but candidates should highlight why this

support was insufficient and demonstrate why additional support via a Transition Support award is required.

Beyond a like-for-like extension, candidates should evidence the added value of a Transition Support award in regaining their research momentum, including factors such as research continuity (e.g. retention of key staff, job security).

Who is the scheme NOT aimed at?

A Transition Support award is NOT, in isolation, seed funding for new research projects or outputs not related to the overall aims of the MRC Fellowship award. Individuals who have already achieved the outputs required for being competitive in applying for the next funding stage, are unlikely to be successful.

Candidates whose delays could be directly addressed by the [Post-Award Amendment \(PAA\)](#) process are unlikely to be competitive and candidates may be redirected to the PAA process.

A Transition Support award is not intended to cover delays or impacts solely due to COVID-19. Candidates should ask their research organisation about access to the [UKRI COVID-19 grant extension allocation](#) instead.

Post Award Amendment Process

The PAA process allows MRC award holders to extend their award if their objectives of the research are in jeopardy if a costed or non-costed extension is not provided. For example, the PAA process allows for statutory requirements which include maternity/paternity leave, sickness and recruitment delays.

MRC does not routinely extend awards outwith statutory requirements, unless there have been exceptional delays or if a shortfall has seriously threatened the delivery of a significant proportion of the science outlined in the original application. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that delays could not have been anticipated, delays were outside their control, and that every effort has already been made to mitigate them. Examples of such requests would include delays caused by unexpected building works, laboratory moves or failure of equipment resulting in delays to the research. Extensions will not be considered in order to use up funds, to attend seminars or conferences that fall outside the original dates of the grant or for writing up results.

Transition Support Assessment Criteria

1. Research achievements

- Has the fellow clearly made progress with their fellowship against the key deliverables and objectives of their intermediate award?
 - For example, does the current research delivery and outputs provide evidence that the fellow's career trajectory is on the path towards research leadership?
 - All achievements and outputs should be considered in evaluating the fellow's productivity, for example; *Innovative collaborations and/or networks; an ability to identify and maximise potential in others; invitations to*

seminar/conferences; opportunities to access career development support, such as mentoring and professional training development, and relevant training courses; presentation at scientific conferences and public science fairs; influence their research field e.g. participation in peer review, committee membership, contribution to publications.

- Is there clear evidence the fellow has been unable to consolidate their fellowship due to mitigating circumstances?
 - Has the fellow evidenced their productivity to date and any mitigating strategies to counter these circumstances;
 - Are these circumstances distinct from those covered by the current [Post Award Amendment](#) route for additional support?
- Has the fellow made a strong case that without a Transition Support award they will not be able to fully establish themselves as an independent researcher and be competitive at the next funding stage?
- Does the application provide evidence that additional funding will enable the fellow to maximise their potential and competitiveness by consolidating and expanding existing work?
- Can outputs be achieved within the time frame requested?

2. Leadership, profile and influence

Has the fellow clearly articulated and evidenced their research leadership potential? For example:

- Has the fellow established their research niche?
- Is there evidence of building collaborations and networks and recognition of their research in the community and on an international level?
- Is there evidence the fellow has learnt new skills or spent time within industry or in a second research centre, as described in the original award?
- Has the fellow demonstrated awareness of their research field, providing evidence of how they have/are influencing the field and the wider agenda?
- Have they clearly demonstrated they have been maximising potential of staff employed on their award?

3. Institutional support

- Is there evidence of institutional support?

For example:

- A strong letter of support outlining how they have supported the fellow to date;
- Is the RO committed to supporting the fellow to become a research leader, continuing to provide the appropriate support and mentorship?

- Is the fellow's research time protected to allow 100% of their contracted working time for research, training and development;
- Confirmation of the commitment to salary, providing 50% commitment for the duration of the award;
- Commitment to a secure position at the end of the award in line with their institutional policies. Where an open-ended position is not appropriate, (for example preventing applications to other funders) a justification should be provided.