

Early Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme Guidance



Contents

Aim	3
Remit.....	3
Eligibility and Requirements	3
Part Time Applications	4
Filling in the form	5
Participants	5
Section One - Application Summary	5
Host Organisation	5
Plain English (Lay) Summary	5
Start Date	5
End Date	6
Previous Submission	6
Section Two - Applicant Information	6
Clinical Application.....	6
Experience	6
PhD Details	6
Other Qualifications	6
Other Commitments.....	7
Section Three - Proposed Research Plan	7
UK CRC Health Research Classification System	7
Scientific Abstract	7
Detailed Research Plan	7
Letters of Support	8
Section Four – PPI, Patient Benefit, Dissemination, and Impact.....	8
Describe how patients/service users, carers and the public have been involved in developing this proposal	9
Dissemination, Outputs and Anticipated Impact	9
Section Five – Finance	10
Starting Salary	11
NHS Costs	11
Section Six – Support.....	11

Supervisor	11
Head of Department	11
Section Seven – Ethical Declarations	12
Section Eight - Reviewers	12
Section Nine – Applicant Declaration	12
Section Ten – Grantee Declaration.....	12
Assessment of Applications	14
Outcome of the Assessment	14
Assessment Criteria.....	14

Aim

This scheme is designed to build health research capacity in Scotland across a number of areas. As such, it provides the opportunity for both clinical professionals and health researchers to develop their research following successful completion of a PhD.

The scheme will be aiming to support the best candidates from a diverse range of career backgrounds and pathways.

Remit

All research funded as part of this award must fall with CSO's overall remit of early translational (experimental medicine), clinical and applied health research, and social care. The proposals must have clear potential for directly benefiting patients/service users, carers, and the public in Scotland.

CSO does not support basic research and projects for this scheme cannot involve work on animals. As part of the application process, you will be required to assess your proposal and classify it according to the Health Research Classification System: [UK CRC Health Research Classification system](#).

If your proposed project aligns with the Research Activity code '1. Underpinning research,' your project will not be eligible for this scheme.

If you are unclear if your proposed project fits within CSO's remit you are welcome to discuss this before you submit. Please contact csofellowships@gov.scot for any queries.

Eligibility and Requirements

The scheme invites applications from early career researchers and clinical academics. The applicant must hold a relevant PhD (or MD/Clinical Doctorate) but should have **no more than 2 years** postdoctoral research experience.

This experience should be calculated **from** the date on the letter/email where the University officially awards the degree **to** the closing date of applications to this

scheme **and** should be calculated on an FTE basis - time away from work on long term leave need not be counted.

If medical candidates have built up more than 2 years post PhD research experience before completing their CCT due to for example, holding a NES/CSO Postdoctoral Clinical Lectureship, please contact CSO for us to advise on eligibility. In most instances you will be able to apply for the first round where you would be able to take up the fellowship in the window 1 Aug – 1 Jan following your completion of training.

Candidates may apply before their PhD is completed but they should be expecting to have completed their viva and only have minor changes to be made to the thesis before the interviews for this scheme in June. The current supervisor will be expected to send in a reference to confirm this is the expectation.

We do not expect to receive applications from people who already hold permanent research or lectureship positions in a university. If you are already currently employed by the University where you would like to hold this CSO postdoctoral fellowship, you will be required to explain the effect the fellowship would have on your career, how it would be clear that you have changed roles, and your status at the end of the Fellowship.

Part Time Applications

If you only wish to work part time, then a part time application is acceptable – you will still be able to use 20% of the Fellowship time for other career development commitments. A part time application made on this basis can run for longer than 3 years until 3 years FTE has been funded.

If you wish to make a part time application for the Fellowship to fit with another paid role, for example, paid clinical sessions or a paid teaching role, then the Fellowship needs to be the main focus of your working week, and no further time can be taken out of the Fellowship for other activities. A part time application made on this basis can only run for 3 years.

Filling in the form

The application should be made via the application form on the application portal of the CSO Flexigrant System: cso.flexigrant.com

Please check your application very carefully before submitting it to us to make sure that all sections are filled in correctly.

Participants

You will need to invite a Grantee and Finance Officer to complete or assist in completing certain sections of the application. Please use the participants tab to do this. If you are unsure who you should invite, please contact your Research Office. Participants will need to mark their contribution as complete for the system to register their input.

Section One - Application Summary

Host Organisation

The grant will be awarded to the host organisation which must be a Scottish HEI. In most cases the HEI will be the employer. Should the fellow wish to retain employment by another institution then both these institutions must be prepared to work together to agree a secondment arrangement that ensures you are paid the correct salary for the duration on the award.

Plain English (Lay) Summary

This should be a clear explanation of your research understandable to someone without a scientific background. Many reviewers will use this summary to inform their view of your research as they will not necessarily be experts in your topic area. If your application is successful, this summary will be placed on the CSO website. You may find it helpful to involve patients or members of the public in developing this summary to ensure it is appropriately written.

Start Date

Please state your intended start date – this should always be on the first of the

month. Successful fellowships can start between 1 September and 1 January. If you are successful and cannot start between these dates, your offer may be rescinded so please take this into consideration and apply for the correct round of the scheme.

End Date

This should be three years' worth of time from your start date and should always fall on the last day of the month.

Previous Submission

You are allowed to apply for this scheme a maximum of two times. If you are applying for the second time, you are required to outline the changes you have made to your application in response to feedback from your initial application.

Section Two - Applicant Information

Clinical Application

Please state if this is a Clinical Fellowship application – If this is a Clinical application then the 20% time that can be used for other commitments in this fellowship should be used for clinical time.

Experience

Please list all roles since completing your PhD, including research and non-research, making sure you cover all the time. You need to state how much actual research time you have had from award of the PhD to the closing date of the scheme. This should be in months and worked out WTE not including any non-research time or periods of extended leave.

PhD Details

Please give the details of your PhD, if your PhD has not yet been awarded, please provide expected submission/viva dates.

Other Qualifications

Please provide details of all relevant qualifications and degrees.

Other Commitments

Please indicate what other commitments you will have during the fellowship and how these relate to the research being proposed or your career. You may allocate up to 20% of your time to these other commitments. If this fellowship would sit alongside other paid commitments, you will also need to demonstrate that focus of your time will be on research.

Section Three - Proposed Research Plan

Please make sure your research plan is within remit.

- Must be clinical and applied health research or social care research
- Must have clear potential for directly benefiting patients/service users, carers or the public
- No basic research or work involving animals

UK CRC Health Research Classification System

You must code your project with the [UK CRC Health Research Classification system](#). The strategic aim of coding using the Health Research Classification System is to capture the **main objective of the research taking place during the lifetime of the award** and not the background or future potential downstream applications of the research. Every research project is classified using the two dimensions of the coding system, both [Research Activity Codes](#) and [Health Categories](#) use the minimum number of codes to reflect the main focus of the research. If your proposed project aligns with the Research Activity code '1. Underpinning research,' your project will **not** be eligible for this scheme.

Scientific Abstract

This should be a clear and concise scientific summary of the detailed research plan.

Detailed Research Plan

This section forms the core of your application and must be submitted as a Word document. It should present a clear, well-structured, and compelling research

proposal. The below headings should be used, and the text should not exceed the total word limit of 5000 (excluding references). You should also ensure this section includes your plans to involve patients and the public.

- **Outline** – provide a clear explanation of the problem to be addressed and the impact on patients and how this research will fill an evidence gap.
- **Why the research is important** – clearly identify the health need and outline the value this study will provide. Does the existing literature support this proposal?
- **Research Questions/Aims and Objectives** – please summarise the research questions.
- **Project Plan** - provide an expert description of the project plan of investigation plus any additional points required to support statements made in the previous sections, and include any key references required to justify the points made (e.g. in the use of particular outcome measures or methods of analysis). You should include, where applicable, study design, justification of sample size, selection and exclusion criteria, methods of data collection and analysis, and justification for your choice of methodology.
- **Project Management** – outline the processes put in place to ensure the research will be well managed.
- **Success Criteria** – please set out measures of success you intend to use, the key risks to delivering this research, and what contingencies you will put in place to deal with them.

Letters of Support

Other letters of support are not required. If you wish to submit other letters of support, they must be included here.

Section Four – PPI, Patient Benefit, Dissemination, and Impact

Public involvement refers to an active partnership between researchers and members of the public in the research process rather than the use of people as 'subjects' of research. This means involving patients, carers or family members with lived experience of the topic you are studying – in other words, collaborating **with** those who may be directly affected by the outcomes of your research.

Examples of public involvement include:

- Involvement in identifying research priorities
- Assisting in the design and management of a research project
- Participating in specific research activities
- Serving on project advisory or steering groups
- Helping disseminate research findings

While Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) should be addressed in your detailed research plan, this section provides space to expand on your approach or offer additional context. You may cross-reference the research plan if needed. If active involvement of patients, service users, carers, or the public is not considered appropriate or meaningful for your proposed research, please use this section to justify that decision. If you have not had PPI training, please include this in the training and development programme for the fellowship. For help and resources with PPI please see the [UK PPI Standards website](#) and [NHS Research Scotland PPI](#) webpages.

Describe how patients/service users, carers and the public have been involved in developing this proposal

You should describe:

- Who was involved and why their input was relevant
- What role(s) they have they played
- How their involvement influenced the proposal

Describe the ways in which patients/service users, carers and the public will be actively involved in the proposed research

This section should detail your plans to involve patients/public throughout the duration of the project.

Dissemination, Outputs and Anticipated Impact

Use this section to describe the anticipated outputs of your research, how you plan to share them, and the expected impact. Please consider the following questions when completing this section:

- What do you intend to produce from your research?
- How will you inform and engage the public?
- How will your outputs enter our health and care system or society?
- What will be the impact of your research for patients?

Section Five – Finance

Please note that the CSO financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March and required costs must be split by financial year. Please fill in all relevant boxes in this section and ensure it is signed by the finance officer.

Funding will be provided at 80% FEC and will normally cover:

- Reimbursement of the basic personal salary (not out-of-hours bands) of the award holder (including superannuation and national insurance), with increments, based on an appropriate point for the individual on a relevant pay scale. Request for salaries should be based on actual costs at the time of application, increases for inflation should not be included. Please note that when making requests for salaries that this is an early postdoctoral scheme, and we expect salaries to be in the lowest appropriate band. There will be an opportunity to apply for overspends resulting from pay rises in the final reconciliation of the project.
- Consumable costs up to £30,000 over three years (i.e. up to £10,000 per annum for three years or pro-rata for part-time awards) to cover the costs of the research. This budget is intended to cover any laboratory costs, fieldwork expenses, PPI expenses, minor equipment costs (e.g., computer software), printing, postage, travel, and stationery. Please note that computers (desktops or laptops) are not allowable. If appropriate, these costs can include training courses required to complete your research effectively.
- Research training costs up to £3000 where appropriate. Training in clinical skills, even where related to the proposed research, will not be funded. PPI training should be included unless this has already been completed by the applicant.

These costs must be fully itemised and justified.

Open Access and conference fees should not be included in your application budget. CSO fellows may apply separately for Open Access funding of up to £8,000 within

18 months of completing the award, and for conference support of up to £6,000 over the lifetime of the fellowship.

Starting Salary

The starting grade should be stated. If the candidate is not clinical then this should be in the range of National Spine point 30 to 33 depending on 0 to 2 years' experience. If this is not the case, then justification needs to be included. If the candidate is Clinical then the appropriate Clinical Academic Scale should be used. If your proposed starting salary is outwith these ranges, you will need to include justification for why your salary request is not in line with the guidance.

NHS Costs

NHS Service Support Costs will also need to be estimated separately and stated within the application. In line with other UK funders, all fellowship applications submitted to CSO which include NHS costs will now be expected to have worked with the R&D office of the lead Scottish Health Board to complete a Schedule of Event Cost Attribution Tool (SoECAT). For non-commercial studies, it is important that there is clarity for participating NHS/HSC organisations about how the costs associated with participating in a study are attributed. Completing a SoECAT is the standard practice employed by UK funders to ensure that NHS costs are appropriately identified in grant applications. If the fellowship application includes NHS research costs, the SoECAT needs to be reviewed and approved by an "Acord Specialist" within the R&D office of the lead Scottish Health Board. Please allow enough time for this to be processed ahead of the application deadline date. The completed SoECAT does not need to be submitted as part of the grant application or shared with CSO at a later stage.

Section Six – Support

Supervisor

All named supervisors must complete the form and sign to show they have agreed to take on this role. It should be clearly shown that supervisor support addresses all areas of the proposed work.

Head of Department

The prospective host institution's Head of Department must complete the form and sign to indicate their formal approval of the application, their willingness to offer an appointment to the individual (if successful) for the tenure of the award subject to their normal employment practices, their approval of the salaries sought, and the acceptance of the terms and conditions associated with a CSO postdoctoral fellowship

Section Seven – Ethical Declarations

This must be completed to show ethical considerations have been taken into account and all the relevant approvals have been sought. No payments can be made for research projects until all ethical approvals are in place. The following link provides helpful guidance on ethics to help you work out what your project requires: [What approvals and decisions do I need? - Health Research Authority \(hra.nhs.uk\)](http://hra.nhs.uk)

Section Eight - Reviewers

At least six potential people must be suggested for CSO to approach to obtain a peer review on your application. They should be people that can appropriately review either the clinical area of your research or the proposed methodology. Suggested reviewers should not be employed at the institution you are intending to do your research. They should also not be current collaborators of any of your supervisors. Suggested reviewers should **not** be contacted by the applicant. They may be from outside of Scotland provided they have a command of English sufficient enough to enable them to complete a review.

Section Nine – Applicant Declaration

By signing the form, applicants are confirming that CSO may hold and process, by computer or otherwise, all personal information supplied with the application.

Section Ten – Grantee Declaration

Contact information for administration of a successful award must be given. This should not be your supervisor.

Assessment of Applications

All applications are assessed by a process of peer review and assessment by a Panel assembled by CSO. Comments from the expert referees from the peer review process assist the Panel in reaching a decision in the shortlisting process.

Candidates who are shortlisted will be invited to an interview held by the Panel.

Outcome of the Assessment

Applicants will be informed as soon as a final decision has been taken on their application. Candidates who are interviewed will usually be notified of the decision as soon as possible after funding arrangements have been confirmed. The decision of the Panel is final, and no appeals will be considered.

Assessment Criteria

The selection panel will use the following assessment criteria when reviewing your application:

- **The Applicant**

The Panel will look for evidence of commitment to a research career. Supporting evidence will include productivity, e.g. any publications from previous research and proof of skill e.g. prizes. The Panel will also look for evidence that the applicant has the potential to become a leader in their field and to lead a research team.

- **The Project**

The Panel will wish to fund high quality applications both in terms of the individual and the project. The Panel will seek to judge the scientific merit of the research taking into account its originality and importance and judging the extent to which it will increase knowledge relevant to improving health. The factors they will be considering include:

- Has the candidate been the major force in the writing and design of the project?
- Has PPI been used in the development of the project and is it a continued thread throughout the project?

- Is the methodology appropriate?
- Is the work achievable, feasible and deliverable within the timeframe?
- How will the research benefit patients?

- **Supervision and Research Centre**

The panel will look for confirmation that the supervision for the candidate and the research is of high quality and is able to cover all aspects of the supervisory requirements of the individual. They will also judge the standing of the proposed research centre in the field.