

Springboard scheme – FAQs for applicants, Springboard Champions and Research Offices: *Round 10*

This document summarises our responses to frequently asked questions. Should you have any questions that are not covered in this document, please contact the Springboard team (Springboard@acmedsci.ac.uk)

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1. Eligibility

To be eligible to apply applicants have to:

- Hold an academic post that incorporates research.
- Be in their first independent (salaried) position (i.e. group-leader level, line managed not supervised) and
 - Be within **five years (FTE)** of appointment to this position.
 - Have sufficient time remaining in their current post to complete the proposed Springboard project.
- Be based within one of the eligible higher education institutions (HEIs).

And they must **not**:

- Hold a clinical contract. Please see [section 1.6](#) for details.
- Be in receipt of substantial research funding as the Principal or Co- Investigator exceeding **£150,000** for the two year Springboard award (excluding their personal salary, overhead and indirect costs). Please see [section 1.7](#) for details.

1.1 What qualifies as a ‘first independent position’?

We appreciate that independence is a difficult term to define. For purposes of this scheme, we consider candidates who are within their first salaried, group-leader position, where they are line-managed rather than supervised. As such, Research Fellows may be eligible depending on the nature of their position. If you are employed as a Research Fellow on a grant in the name of another PI, you cannot be considered to be fully independent. Research Associates are not eligible for the scheme as they are still under someone’s supervision. Applicants having already secured a promotion onto a second independent post are also not eligible for the scheme (this does not include proleptic appointments). Candidates who are able to prove their second position is a side-ways step, and **not** a promotion, may still be considered eligible. Please contact the office if you are unsure whether you meet this eligibility criteria.

1.1.1 How does the Academy evaluate independence?

The Academy uses a series of questions to evaluate if a candidate is eligible for the Springboard scheme. The following are used both to check if the candidate is currently in their first independent post but also to evaluate if they were independent in any of their previous positions. These questions should be considered for both the candidates’ present and previous positions to check their eligibility.

1. **Are they line-managed or supervised?** We would expect the candidate to be line-managed in an independent position.
2. **Do they have a salaried position? Is their salary derived from a grant in another PI's name?** We would expect independent candidates to be in a salaried group-leader position (their first). Their salary should not be derived from another PI's funding.
3. **Are they able to supervise students or other members of staff?** We would expect candidates to be able to supervise/manage students and staff in an independent position.
Are they able to apply for funding as the PI? We would expect the candidate to be able to apply for funding in their own name in an independent position.

1.2 How is the five years within current post calculated?

The applicant should be no more than five years (FTE) into their first independent research post *by the application deadline, which for round 10 is 5 June 2024*. For round 10, the earliest eligible appointment start date for a researcher working full-time is **June 2019**. Time taken out for career breaks such as parental or sickness leave does not count towards the time already in post; periods of part-time working should be counted *pro rata*.

1.3 What is the latest possible appointment start date?

Applicants must be in post by the Panel date at the latest. For round 10, the latest eligible appointment start date is **14 November 2024**. If a selected applicant will not yet be in post by the application deadline, they should provide an official letter from their institution confirming their start date along with their application form.

1.4 What are the eligible award start and end dates?

Outcomes for round 10 are due to be released by end of February 2025. Awardees must start their award within six months of the award letter (1 March – 1 September 2025). Applicants will confirm the award start date through the submission of a Grant Acceptance Form if successful.

Springboard awards have a duration of two years FTE and as such are expected to end two years after the start date given by the applicant in the application form. Any changes to the original start date through the Grant Acceptance Form will result in a shift in the award end date, such that the award duration remains at two years. Applicants must have guaranteed salary support (which may come from the institution or a personal fellowship) that will cover the duration of their Springboard award. Their appointment end date, if they have one, should not fall before the earliest possible award end date.

1.5 What if my current appointment does not cover the duration of the award?

If the applicant's current contract ends before the expected end date of the award, the host institution must extend their position accordingly. The contract extension must occur regardless of the outcome of the application and *must be confirmed before the application deadline (for round 10: 5 June 2024)*. The Academy also expects any further

change to the start date after acceptance of the award will result in an appropriate additional extension to cover two years FTE.

1.6 Are certain types of clinical contracts permitted?

Researchers holding a clinical contract of any kind, including honorary contracts, are not eligible for the scheme – this is a non-clinical scheme. Clinically-qualified researchers who do not hold a clinical contract, and who would not take up such a contract during their award, are eligible.

Researchers who hold an [NHS Research Passport](#) or Letter of Access **are eligible** for the Springboard scheme as these are not clinical contracts.

1.7 What counts towards the substantial research funding limit?

The limit of £150,000 over two years is applied to the funding that the applicant has already secured and that they are projected to receive over the two year award period. For the purposes of determining eligibility for round 10, these dates are March 2025 to February 2027. Please do not include any funding that is not secured or will have expired before the start of a Springboard award.

- The applicant's personal salary *should not* be included.
- Overhead and indirect costs *should not* be included.
- Staff salaries, PhD student stipends and consumables *should* be included. However, overheads or PhD student fees *should not* be included.
- If the applicant is a co-investigator on a grant or co-supervisor studentship, please count their projected % share of the grant minus overheads and indirect costs.

We calculate funding secured over the two year Springboard project via the following:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 \text{total funding} & & & & & & \text{funding value} \\
 \text{received excluding} & * & \text{\% share} & * & \text{duration SB award overlaps} & = & \text{secured over} \\
 \text{salary, overheads} & & \text{of grant} & & \text{with other grant / other} & & \text{two year SB} \\
 \text{etc.} & & & & \text{grant duration} & & \text{award}
 \end{array}$$

1.7.1 Spirit of the Springboard scheme

The Springboard scheme provides a 'springboard' for early career researchers establishing their first research group and their independent career. For this reason candidates must not have already secured significant funding. However, some candidates may be under the £150,000 limit at the point of application, and thus eligible for the scheme, but have been in receipt of significant funding in the past. The Springboard Selection Panel consider the Person, the Project and the Place when making funding decisions. When evaluating the Person they will also assess the candidate's need and the difference the funding would make to their career. Therefore, these candidates, whilst they will still be assessed, may be deemed as not in the spirit of the scheme as their need is less significant when compared to other candidates. This should be carefully considered when submitting an application to the scheme.

1.8 Allocated research time

While there is no minimum protected research time criteria, the Panel do take into account whether the candidate has sufficient protected research time to deliver the proposal as part of their evaluation. If a candidate's institution intends to increase their protected research time in the event of a successful Springboard application, this should be made clear in the application.

1.9 How do pending applications count towards the substantial research funding limit?

Only funds that have already been secured will be considered when determining whether a candidate is above/below the substantive funding limit. Before the Panel meeting, the Academy will ask applicants to provide an update on funding received since the Springboard application submission. If an applicant has now secured funds exceeding the £150,000 limit, they will be deemed ineligible.

1.10 Do I already hold a fellowship that makes me ineligible for the Springboard award?

Springboard is targeted at those who are in the early stages of their first independent post and have limited funding. Candidates who have already secured significant fellowships are not considered to be in the spirit of the scheme. Therefore, if you hold the following fellowships/awards or equivalent you will be deemed ineligible:

- Cancer Research UK (CRUK) Career Development Fellowship
- CRUK Career Establishment Award
- Medical Research Council (MRC) - Career Development Award
- MRC New Investigator Research Grant
- The Royal Society University Research Fellowship
- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Future Leaders Fellowship
- Wellcome Trust Royal Society Sir Henry Dale Fellowship
- Wellcome Trust Seed Award

If you are unsure about your eligibility, please contact the office to seek confirmation.

2. Reapplication

2.1 Under what circumstances is a second application permitted?

Unsuccessful applicants are limited to one resubmission in any future round, provided that they are once again shortlisted by their institution and continue to meet all eligibility criteria (including time constraints and substantive funding limits). Each resubmission counts towards the institution's four selected applications. Successful applicants cannot reapply.

The first application to the scheme is the candidate's first application that was successful in internal triage and nominated by their HEI to the Academy. Where a candidate applies

to their host institution, but is not nominated by the host to the Academy, we would not consider this as their first application.

The Panel may recommend specific applications for resubmission but this is not an assurance that these applications will be funded upon resubmission, nor does this imply that it discourages resubmissions from other unsuccessful applicants.

2.2 How will resubmitted applications be assessed?

Applicants who resubmit an application must complete an additional section detailing how the application has been adapted in response to feedback and how this application differs from their first application. Panel members and peer reviewers will be asked to consider this section when assessing the new application. The office will endeavour to receive comments from previous assessors however, we cannot guarantee that proposals will be reviewed by the same individuals.

Personalised feedback is provided to all applicants and will be shared with their Springboard Champions.

3. Research remit

3.1 What types of projects fall within the remit of the scheme?

The scheme welcomes applications from a broad range of research fields and supports both experimental and theoretical approaches; the key criterion is that the proposed project must demonstrate clear relevance to human health.

4. What is offered?

4.1 How much can applicants request?

The maximum amount available is £125,000 (there is a minimum of £50,000) over two years. These funds can be used towards research costs and professional development.

4.2 What project durations are permitted?

Springboard awards are two years long; it is not possible to apply for any other duration.

4.3 What can/can't be included in the budget?

Springboard awards offer flexible funding which can be used for support staff (PhD students, postdoctoral staff, technicians, etc.), technical support, laboratory consumables, equipment, animal costs, publications, training and travel. 'Technical support' refers to staff/facilities available to you (e.g. access fees to use microscopy facilities, fees for bioinformatics support). Fees associated with hiring staff (promotional costs) and advertising studentships are also eligible costs. Funds cannot be used to pay for the applicant's personal salary costs or overheads.

Awardees are permitted use part of their travel budget to cover travel and accommodation costs to attend the Springboard Induction event, which is usually held in the summer following their successful application.

4.4 Is it possible to request funds for a PhD student?

Yes - applicants may request PhD student stipends, tuition fees (up to the value of home student rate) and consumables in their budget for the two year award period. Stipends should be in line with the studentships provided by your institution. Furthermore, we require that the host institution commits to financially support those PhD students after the end of the award if other funds are not available to the applicant to cover the remainder of the student's PhD.

5. Career development programme

5.1 What career development programmes will be offered?

Career development support include access to the Academy's one-to-one mentoring scheme and a programme of events and activities developed for the benefit of newly-independent researchers. Activities will include training events and meetings where researchers can share their research and network. Successful applicants will also be given access to PILLAR, our community-focussed programme that provides on-going career support to the Academy's grant awardees and programme participants.

5.2 Who will career development support be open to?

Some of the career development support elements are open to awardees only, some to both awardees and selected applicants put forward by each institution, and some are open more widely to all biomedical researchers at that career stage. All applicants (those selected by their institutions to submit a full application) will be invited to participate in the Academy's one-to-one mentoring scheme regardless of the outcome of their application. Whenever possible, events and activities will be open more widely to biomedical researchers.

6. Application process

6.1 Can HEIs nominate a new candidate if one (or more) is deemed ineligible after the formal nomination?

No, once the HEI has nominated their top candidates (for round 10 this is up to 4 candidates by **26 April 2024, 12:00**) they cannot nominate any further candidates, irrespective of whether their nominated candidates are found to be eligible or not.

6.2 How do I invite nominated individuals to contribute to my application and upload statements of support?

The candidate's Head of Department, Springboard Champion and a Finance Officer must all contribute to the application. These individuals can be invited to contribute at any

time once the application is created; the Academy recommends doing this as early as possible to avoid delays.

To invite a contributor, the candidate must toggle to the 'Participants' tab, next to the 'Application' tab within the main application; here the candidate can send the contributor an automated email invitation to contribute. Email invitations expire after 14 days.

Please note that the contributors FlexiGrant® account must be created with the **same** email address as that used to invite them to contribute.

If the contributor already has an existing FlexiGrant® account the applicant should invite them using the email address that their account is already linked to.

6.3 Do collaborator letters of support need to be on letter headed paper?

Yes, all letters of support must be on letter headed paper with appropriate signatures.

6.4 Do I need letters of support from all collaborators listed in my application?

Yes, all collaborations described in the application must have a supporting letter, on letter headed paper with appropriate signatures.

6.5 Who cannot be suggested as a peer reviewer of my application?

Suggested peer reviewers must be of appropriate seniority (Professorship level) and an expert in the candidate's field. They must **not be**:

- A previous supervisor
- A previous collaborator or colleague
- Someone the candidate has published with
- From the same institution as the candidate