Springboard scheme – FAQs for applicants, Springboard Champions and Research Offices: *Round 12*

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)

Contents

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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) (Section 1.1) and
  - Be within **five years (FTE)** of appointment to this position (Section 1.2).
  - 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 (Section 1.6).
- 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) (Section 1.7).

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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 fully independent. Research Associates are not eligible for the scheme as they are still under someone's supervision. Applicants who have 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 criterion.

1.1.1 How does the Academy evaluate independence?

The Academy uses a series of questions to evaluate whether 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 (by the Head of Department, or equivalent) in an independent position. Those who are supervised by another PI cannot be considered independent.

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.

4. **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 11 is **3 June 2026**. This means that, for round 12, the earliest eligible appointment start date for a researcher working full-time is **June 2021**.

Please note that 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*.

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1.3 What is the latest possible appointment start date?

Applicants must be in post <u>by the Panel meeting date</u> at the latest. For round 11, the latest eligible appointment start date is **20 November 2026**. 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 12 are due to be released by the end of February 2027. Awardees must start their award within six months of the award letter (1 March – 1 September 2027). Successful applicants will confirm the award start date through the submission of an Award Acceptance Form.

Springboard awards have a duration of two years FTE and 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 Award Acceptance Form will result in a shift in the award end date, so the award duration remains two years. Applicants must have guaranteed salary support (which may come from the institution or a personal fellowship) tocover 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 12, this is 3 June 2026). 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. However, 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 12, these dates are March 2027 to February 2029.

Please do not include any funding that is not secured or that will have expired before the start of a Springboard award.

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- 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:

$$\text{total funding received excluding salary, overheads etc.} * \text{\% share of grant} * \frac{\text{duration SB award overlaps with other grant}}{\text{other grant duration}} = \text{funding value secured over two-year SB award}$$

A full worked example of calculating the amount of funding secured over the award period can be found in the downloads section of our [webpage](#).

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 also assess the applicant's need and the difference the funding would make to their career. For example, an applicant's need could be perceived to be less compelling if they have a proven record of securing substantial funding (albeit within eligibility funding limits).

1.8 Allocated research time

There is no minimum protected research time. However the Panel do take into account whether the candidate has sufficient protected research time to deliver the proposal and so we encourage institutions to consider this. In instances where an applicant's protected research time is increased if their Springboard application is successful, this should be made clear in the application and included in their supporting letters.

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

Only funding that have already been secured will be considered when determining whether a candidate is above/below the substantive funding limit.

Applicants are asked to inform the Academy of any additional funding they secure whilst their application is under review. If an applicant has **secured funding that exceeds the £150,000 limit, the application is ineligible** and will be withdrawn.

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The Academy will invite candidates who have been shortlisted for pre-Panel review to provide any updates to their application in October. Additional funding secured after the Panel (mid-November) does not affect the applicant's application.

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 Career Development Fellowship
- CRUK Career Establishment Award
- Medical Research Council - Career Development Award
- Medical Research Council New Investigator Research Grant
- The Royal Society University Research Fellowship
- UK Research and Innovation 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.

1.11 What is the role of the Springboard Champion

Every eligible higher education institution (HEI) has a nominated a Springboard Champion. Springboard Champions are senior academics who are tasked with overseeing the HEI-led selection of Springboard candidates. Each HEI is limited to four candidates per award round. Champions also perform a crucial role of supporting and mentoring prospective applicants and awardees. You can find your institution's Springboard Champion on our webpage.

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.

It is *not* considered a resubmission if:

- a candidate applies to their host institution but is not nominated by the HEI to the Academy
- a nominated candidate does not complete a full Springboard application to the Academy

Applicants may choose to resubmit with the same proposal or a new one. If an applicant chooses to submit a second application with a completely new project, this would still be considered a resubmission and any further applications would not be accepted.

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The Panel can 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.

If the resubmitted application is on the same research topic as the first application, the Academy staff will aim to secure a review from both the previous peer reviewers (provided expertise is still appropriate) alongside a new peer reviewer. Springboard peer reviewers take up the role voluntarily and therefore it is not possible to guarantee the same reviewers will agree to submit a review the second time.

Resubmitted applications are **not** judged against the applicant's previous submission: addressing the reviewers' feedback does not guarantee that the second application will be funded. Resubmitted applications must be sufficiently competitive within the current round.

Success rates are similar for new applications and resubmitted applications: a recent evaluation of the scheme found that 34% of resubmissions were successful compared to 30% across all applications.

3. Research remit

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

The Academy of Medical Sciences embraces the broad diversity of biomedical research and its non-clinical fellows represent the breadth of the field. We encourage Springboard applicants from molecular, cellular and structural biology to anatomical, physiological, psychological, epidemiological and public health research areas. You may use experimental or theoretical approaches and be undertaking basic laboratory research through clinical application to healthcare delivery, but your work must reflect the Academy's vision of good health for all supported by the best research and evidence.

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 is the payment schedule for a Springboard award?

Successful applicants will receive the award funds via two payments:

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Payment	Timeline	Value
1	Beginning of year 1	£62,500
2	Beginning of year 2	Remaining balance

4.4 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 to use part of their travel budget to cover travel and accommodation costs to attend the Springboard Induction event.

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

Yes - applicants may request PhD student stipends, tuition fees (up to the value of the 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.

Please note that the host institution **must** commit to **underwriting PhD studentships that are supported through the award**. Any PhD students funded on the award must be financially supported for the remaining time after the end of the award period. Confirmation of this should be provided in the Head of Department's statement of support within the application form (see Section 7.2).

5. Career development programme

5.1 What career development programmes will be offered?

Career development support is offered to all applicants, irrespective of the outcome of their application, including 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.

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. Activities include training events and meetings where researchers can share their research and develop their network.

When reaching the end of their award, as an Academy alum, awardees are eligible to join our HIVE Community. HIVE aims to support the Academy's alumni network in a virtual setting. This online platform allows you to register for career development events, access event recordings and resources, sign up for wider opportunities and network with our community of grant awardees, programme participants, alumni, and Academy staff.

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5.2 Who will career development support be open to?

Some of the career development support elements are open to awardees only and some to all applicants put forward by each institution. 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. Assessment process

6.1 How is my application assessed?

Springboard runs one round per year. Each eligible HEI may submit up to four applications, selected through an HEI-led selection process overseen by the Springboard Champion, before nominated candidates submit their application to the Academy in May–June.

All eligible applications undergo a thorough review process; a graphic of the process can be seen on our webpage.

6.1.1 Peer review
All eligible applications will undergo expert peer review between July-September. External peer reviewers are selected for their proven expertise of the proposal's research field and/or the proposed techniques. Peer reviewers must be established independent researchers.

We aim for each submission to receive at least two expert peer reviews. If this is not achieved despite best efforts, the application undergoes additional scrutiny at later stages to maintain assessment rigour. Reviewer comments and scores are used by the Springboard Selection Panel when deciding funding recommendations.

6.1.2 Pre-Panel Review Triage
After the peer review stage, the scheme's Chair and Deputy Chair, supported by Academy staff, decide which applications progress to the pre-Panel review stage. Approximately 50% of applications are not taken forward at this point.

Applicants unsuccessful at this stage are notified of the outcome in October. Additional information on application feedback is provided in [Section 8](#).

6.1.3 Panel Review
Applications that progress are then reviewed and scored by two Panel members, who also recommend whether each application should be funded, discussed further at the Panel meeting, or rejected.

6.1.4 Panel meeting
The Springboard Panel meeting typically takes place over two days in mid- or end-November. Panel members are appointed based on their scientific merit and relevant expertise and may be Academy Fellows or Springboard scheme alumni. You can refer to our current Panel member list on our [webpage](#) in the Selection Panel tab.

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The Panel makes final funding recommendations to the Academy based on the available funding.

6.2 Springboard assessment criteria

The key assessment criteria that will be considered are in three areas:

- The applicant:
    - Your academic track record
    - The potential benefit of the project to your career
    - The clarity of plans for obtaining further funding
    - Your career aspirations

When providing their review, peer reviewers and Panel members are asked to take into account the applicant's specific circumstances (e.g. number of years in current post, any career gaps, impact of COVID-19 etc) and consider the applicant's answer to how they will contribute to a positive and inclusive research culture.

- Research quality:
    - The importance and relevance of the research question
    - The quality and appropriateness of the research methodology
    - The degree of innovation

- Research environment and support:
    - The quality of the research environment and availability of appropriate support
    - The quality of Data Management and Sharing plans
    - Satisfactory statements of support from your Head of Department and Springboard Champion

7. Application process

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

No, once the HEI has nominated their candidates, they cannot nominate any further candidates, irrespective of whether their nominated candidates are then found to be ineligible.

Similarly, once the deadline for nominating candidates has passed, HEIs that submitted fewer than four candidates are not permitted to nominate any further candidates.

For round 12, the deadline to nominate up to four candidates is **12.00 noon (BST) on 24 April 2026.**

7.2 How do I invite contributors to my application to complete the 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.

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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 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.

7.3 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.

7.4 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.

7.5 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

8. Award outcomes and Feedback

8.1. When will all outcomes be released?

Outcomes for round 12 are due to be released by the end of February 2027. Applicants who will not progress past the Pre-Panel triage stage will be notified in October 2026 (see more in Section 6.1)

Successful applicants will need to confirm the award start date through the submission of an Award Acceptance Form.

8.2 Can I get feedback on my application?

All Springboard applicants receive individualised feedback in February following their application submission. Feedback includes minimally redacted expert peer review comments. Applications that progress past the pre-Panel triage stage also receive a summary of the Selection Panel meeting discussion. The Academy cannot provide additional feedback beyond what is included in these documents.

The Springboard Champion is expected to meet with both successful and unsuccessful applicants to discuss the feedback they have received and support them with moving forward in their research career.

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