

SUSTAIN programme round 12 – application guidelines

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1. Introduction

SUSTAIN is a programme designed to develop the skills that are important to enable female researchers to thrive in their independent research careers.

Supported by the Academy of Medical Sciences (the Academy), the Royal Society, and the Royal Academy of Engineering, we are offering places to 24 women on the twelfth cohort of the programme.

Clinicians, scientists and engineers from all disciplines are eligible to join SUSTAIN, provided they currently hold a qualifying award or fellowship from one of the funding organisations.

In line with our organisational values and [EDI Strategy 2023-26](#), the Academy is committed to working towards **equity, diversity and inclusion** and we welcome and encourage applications from under-represented backgrounds including ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation.



2. Programme content

SUSTAIN is part of the Academy's portfolio of activities aimed at supporting the next generation of researchers and it will include the following:

Events and workshops

In person launch event – 18-19 November 2025

The launch will offer an opportunity to meet other SUSTAIN participants and take part in training for the mentoring and co-coaching aspects of the programme, as well as on broader career development topics.

Virtual mentor speed-meeting – 26 November 2025

The mentor speed-meeting is an opportunity to meet some of the mentors for the SUSTAIN cohort. You will be in a group with 2-3 other SUSTAIN participants moving between breakout rooms. You will learn more about the speed-meeting at the launch.

Please note that to take up an offer of a place on the programme, you must be able to attend both the launch event and mentoring speed-meeting.

Other workshops throughout the year

The launch will be followed by a series of career development workshops spaced out throughout the year. Each session will be tailored to support participants through the challenges of combining research, teaching, clinical practice, and caring and other responsibilities where relevant. Previous sessions have included topics on:

- Media training
- Career development
- Researcher resilience
- Setting up a research team for success
- Developing your leadership style

The content will be developed in the coming months and will be tailored to the needs of the participants. The information you provide in your application form regarding areas that you are interested in covering will also feed into the content of the sessions.

A peer support network

The group will be matched in peer-coaching triads to enable ongoing peer support and discussion of issues/challenges. Small group work in these triads at each workshop will help to embed learning and make the sessions more practical.

One-to-one mentoring

For SUSTAIN rounds 1 to 11, each participant was mentored by an **Academy Fellow**.

Following recommendations from our [2022 evaluation](#) and feedback from participants and alumni, we are keen to explore new ways in which we can involve alumni in the Academy's work and in the programme.

For SUSTAIN round 12, we are introducing a new mentoring system. As in previous rounds, participants will be by default paired with an Academy Fellow. However, if a participant prefers not to be paired with an Academy Fellow, they will have the option of being paired with a SUSTAIN alum only. We are also trialling a new process where all participants will have the option to have an additional mentor, a SUSTAIN alum, should they wish to take advantage of this opportunity. Bespoke training and ongoing support will be provided to both mentees and mentors over the course of the programme.

We promote a **developmental model of mentoring** to enable mentees to make critical career decisions.

Participants are asked to:

- 1) Attend an afternoon virtual mentoring workshop on 26 November 2025.
- 2) Commit to meet their mentor regularly over the period of one year (meetings may be virtual).
- 3) Complete short feedback surveys at key points during the programme.

Time commitment

In addition to the workshops planned throughout the year, you will be paired with a mentor and grouped into peer-coaching triads. The frequency of your meetings with your mentor and your triad should be decided and agreed upon amongst yourselves, but we encourage participants to meet with their mentors and peer-coaching triads every six to eight weeks.

3. Who can apply

The programme is open to female scientists and engineers (including both clinical and non-clinical researchers) who hold an active award or fellowship from one of the partner organisations.

To be eligible to apply you must hold one of the following awards:

The Royal Society	Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship
	Sir Henry Dale Fellowship
	University Research Fellowship
	Career Development Fellowship
Academy of Medical Sciences	Springboard Award
	Starter Grant Award for Clinical Lecturers
Royal Academy of Engineering	Research Fellow
	Engineering for Development Research Fellow

This award must be active at the time of your application. All applicants must be available to participate in the career development workshops. For the media training workshop, groups will be coordinated depending on participants' availability. Please see 'key dates' section of this document for more details.

4. Key dates

Date	
30 July 2025	Applications open.
11 September 2025	Applications close.
w/c 22 September 2025	Applicants are notified about the outcome of the selection process.
18-19 November 2025	Residential launch at Academy of Medical Sciences' building, 41 Portland Place, London. This will include career development workshops and networking opportunities with other SUSTAIN participants and senior researchers.
26 November 2025	Virtual mentor meeting – during this workshop, you will meet the SUSTAIN round 12 mentors to help you nominate your preferred choices.
3, 11, 19 March 2026	Media training workshop in London (full day event) – cohort split into three groups across different dates.
June 2026	Virtual career development workshop (two half days).
October 2026	Career development workshop and conclusion – location outside London to be confirmed closer to the time (full day event).

The full agenda for each event will be sent to participants closer to the time.

5. Accommodation, travel and childcare

For any in-person events, reasonable travel expenses will be covered, and hotel accommodation will be offered to all participants. This will typically be for the night before subsequent workshops, to help participants to avoid rush hour travel.

Childcare support, when additional care is required above normal provision, is available to support your attendance at the workshops. Participants can claim reasonable costs of childcare support by completing an expenses claim form and providing appropriate receipts to the Academy.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Feedback from participants will help us to assess the impact of SUSTAIN and inform future developments. **We expect participants to maintain close contact with the Academy and to complete our feedback surveys after each workshop to support the development of the programme.**

The SUSTAIN programme is periodically evaluated by external contractors, and participants may be asked to complete surveys during or after the programme. You may also be asked to provide further detail on your experience of SUSTAIN through interviews or case studies.

7. Governance

The programme is overseen by a reference group. The role of this group is to advise the Academy on the development of SUSTAIN and oversee the application process as well as the evaluation of the programme.

Reference group members:

- Professor Christine Harrison FMedSci, Professor of Childhood Cancer Cytogenetics, Newcastle University (chair).
- Professor Jim Smith FRS FMedSci, Director of Science, Wellcome and Visiting Group Leader, Francis Crick Institute.
- Professor Elizabeth Sapey, Director of the Institute of Inflammation and Ageing, University of Birmingham and FLIER round two participant.
- Dr Zania Stamataki, Senior Lecturer in Liver Immunology, University of Birmingham and SUSTAIN round one participant.

8. Selection process

Background

The selection process for the SUSTAIN programme is randomised, while ensuring a minimum number of places go to those who are from under-represented backgrounds. We seek and celebrate diversity in all its forms, confident in the knowledge that our differences can only strengthen medical science. We strive to ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged on any ground including age, caring responsibilities, disability, gender reassignment, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief.

Our EDI work expands beyond protected characteristics to include geography, research subject and sector, clinical and non-clinical specialties, career stage, and socio-economic background.

The process has been developed in consultation with the Academy's Senior Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Vivien Kintu, and alongside all programme funders. The steps to the selection process include:

- A short question asking applicants to tick a box if they are from an under-represented background in line with our EDI Strategy 2023-26. Completion of this section of the form is optional.
- We will first select one third of the available places from the pool of applicants with protected characteristics (stratifying by funder). The number of places this equates to for each funder is as follows:
 - Academy of Medical Sciences: two places
 - Royal Society: six places
 - Royal Academy of Engineering: one place
- Any unselected participants from this group will go back into the general applicant pool. We will then randomly select from this general pool for the remaining number of places.

A total of 24 places are available for SUSTAIN round 12. The selection process will be overseen by the SUSTAIN reference group chair, Professor Christine Harrison FMedSci. The decision of the Academy is final.

Notification of decisions regarding SUSTAIN applications will be made week commencing 22 September 2025.

9. Guidance notes for completing the application form

Please complete and submit an online application by **16:00 BST on Thursday 11 September 2025** through our **[Flexi-Grant portal](#)**. If you have not used Flexi-Grant before, you will need to register and create a new user account.

This section guides you through completing the online application form for the SUSTAIN programme. Some notes on completing the form are integrated into the form itself.

Save and resume

Once you have started a section, you can click save at the bottom and log out of Flexi-Grant; your responses in that section will be saved. To return to your application log in to <https://acmedsci.flexigrant.com/>, click on 'My Account' in the top right corner, and select 'My Applications' to resume.

Submitting your application

When you have completed all sections of the application form, a 'Submit application' button will become available at the top of the summary page which you will need to click to finalise the application. Once your application has been submitted, you will be able to view your application and its current status, but you will not be able to modify it. You can also download your form as a PDF at any point to keep for your records.

Each applicant should provide the following:

Getting started – EDI Monitoring. These questions provide data to ensure equity, diversity and inclusion is embedded into all our work streams. Your answers help us monitor the diversity of our audiences and understand who we are reaching and who we are not. Any information you provide will be collected, stored and used under the terms detailed in our [privacy policy](#).

Section 1

- Your personal information: name, contact details, institution and job title.
- The applicable researcher category. This information will be used to stratify applications.
- Your current research award. Your award must be active at the time of applying to the programme.
- You will also have the option to let us know if you identify as having some specific protected characteristics. We will use this information to increase the proportion of researchers from underrepresented groups taking part in SUSTAIN. Tick the box if you identify as having protected characteristics and would like this information to be used during the selection process to ensure equity and inclusion in the selection process for SUSTAIN. Please note that by ticking the box **you are giving us permission to use this information in our selection process**. Please note that completion of this section of the form is optional.
- Your mentoring preferences – Academy Fellow, SUSTAIN alum, Both (Academy Fellow and SUSTAIN alum)

- Information about why you are interested in SUSTAIN and any particular areas of career development you would like us to cover. **Your answer does not affect the selection process.** The information from selected participants is used to help us to further develop and tailor the programme of activities during the year.

Section 2 – Applicant declaration. Please read and complete the Data Protection Statement so that we can process your application.

Section 3 – Marketing feedback. On this page we request marketing information. Please note that marketing information is requested to help us monitor the effectiveness of our marketing activities. This information is not used in the application review process.

If you have any questions or would like to highlight any specific information with respect to your application, please contact us at SUSTAIN@acmedsci.ac.uk.

Academy of Medical Sciences

We are the independent, expert voice of biomedical and health research in the UK. Our vision is good health for all supported by the best research and evidence. Our mission is to help create an open and progressive research sector to improve the health of people everywhere. Find out more: www.acmedsci.ac.uk

The Royal Society

The Royal Society is a Fellowship of many of the world's most eminent scientists and is the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence. The Society's fundamental purpose, reflected in its founding Charters of the 1660s, is to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity. Find out more: www.royalsociety.org

The Royal Academy of Engineering

RAEng are a charity delivering public benefit, a National Academy providing progressive leadership, and a Fellowship bringing together an unrivalled community of leaders from every part of engineering and technology. Their 2020-2025 strategy is Engineering for a sustainable society and inclusive economy. Find out more: www.raeng.org.uk/