

Versus Arthritis Bridging Fellowship Application guidance

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1 Introduction

We want to bring about more accurate and faster diagnosis and more timely, effective and targeted treatments, tailored to individuals, taking into consideration not just their genes but also the environment they live in.

Our Better Lives Today, Better Lives Tomorrow [Research Strategy 2022-2026](#) focusses our investment and influence on four priority areas over the next four years. It is striving to bring ground-breaking scientific discoveries to people with arthritis at pace and with precision.

Versus Arthritis is committed to building a world-class workforce by supporting research careers and building skills within the UK arthritis research community. As part of our research strategy, we are aiming to facilitate the establishment of a cohort of highly skilled and established experts who will lead talented, multidisciplinary teams and attract, train and help nurture the next generation of researchers in the UK.

Our Bridging Fellowship scheme provides final year Versus Arthritis fellows with additional financial support to bridge them to their next fellowship application or academic post, providing them with the opportunity to continue the development of an independent research career and progression towards higher-level appointments.

2 Eligibility criteria

Versus Arthritis research awards may only be held in universities, hospitals or recognised academic research institutes in the UK.

Only current Versus Arthritis Fellows who are in the final year of their fellowship are eligible to apply.

The current Versus Arthritis fellowship holders are eligible for this scheme:

- Clinical research fellowships
- Foundation fellowships
- Career development fellowships

We will consider applications from fellows who have recently completed their fellowship. Please contact the office before starting an application.

Applicants will need to provide a strong case for why the additional financial support is needed and clear plans for what the fellowship will be bridging the applicant towards, such as specific funding schemes or academic positions.

Applicants can apply for up to 2 years funding for their salary, expenses and animal costs can be requested.

There are two funding options:

- Up to 1 year of funding with no host institution buy-in required. A maximum of £80,000 can be requested by foundation and clinical research fellowship holders and £100,000 for career development fellows.
- Up to 2 years of funding with the host institution contributing 50% of salary costs. A maximum of £100,000 can be requested by foundation and clinical research fellows and £150,000 for career development fellows.

Projects must demonstrate a clear relevance to Versus Arthritis. We want research to make arthritis preventable, manageable and treatable. While fellowship proposals do need to align with our [research principles](#), they do not need to align with the four priority areas set out in our [2022-2026 Research Strategy](#) to be considered eligible for funding.

Please find a list of the [diseases and disorders that are eligible for research funding \(PDF 75.8 KB\)](#)

There are no nationality or age restrictions for applicants.

3 Clinical trials within fellowships

Versus Arthritis does not support the funding of a major or substantial clinical trial as a fellowship. Trials should be funded through the appropriate Versus Arthritis grant scheme which has a reviewing panel with the right expertise to assess clinical trial application content. It is not considered that running a trial from within a fellowship in a trial manager role represents good training.

Trials are supported within fellowships in a junior principal investigator role only to support learning of methodology and recruitment and assist protocol development; there should be sufficient fellowship content that is non-trial.

It is considered suitable for a fellowship to contain methodological development work or supplementary analysis as bolt on activity to an established or proposed trial.

It is considered suitable to conduct a feasibility/pilot clinical study within a fellowship where studies are expected to be recruiting in small numbers.

Versus Arthritis is supportive of fellowship applications as an add on to a clinical trial that has been supported by Versus Arthritis, or elsewhere, where the fellowship component is contributing to scientific training.

4 Multiple and previous applications

We will not accept overlapping applications of the same research proposal to more than one Versus Arthritis funding scheme. We will accept an application that has been submitted to another funding body, however, please check the eligibility criteria of the other funding body before making an application.

Researchers can reapply for the Bridging Fellowship. It is expected that the new proposal would be significantly different from a previous proposal and any feedback from the Fellowship Expert Committee would have been addressed. If an application is a resubmission, a letter (maximum 1 page of A4) should be attached detailing how the application has been altered in response to the feedback received from the original submission.

5 Note on the language

We recognise that specialist language will be required to accurately convey the detail of your proposal and, as such, sections that require technical detail will be labelled accordingly.

In addition to scientific review, applications will also be reviewed by Versus Arthritis Research Partners (people with lived experience of arthritis). They assess the quality of the patient involvement

plan, the project's relevance to the charity and its potential for patient benefit. The application summary and involvement sections should be written in non-technical language, as well as specific sections of the scientific summary. These are important parts of the application and require careful consideration.

For more information on how to write a clear and informative lay summary please use the following resources:

- [INVOLVE plain English summaries](#)
- [The Plain English Campaign](#)

If you have further enquiries on the use of appropriate language, please email the Patient Involvement Team at researchinvolvement@versusarthritis.org

6 How to apply

All applications for Versus Arthritis funding must be received through our online grant management system, [Grant Tracker](#).

The deadline for submission of applications is 16:00 on the stated deadline in the call document/webpage. This deadline relates to the time Versus Arthritis receives the application.

Once submitted by the Principal Applicant, an automated email will be sent to the Finance officer for approval and once they have approved the application a second email will be sent to the Head of Department. **It is only upon Head of Department's approval that the application is finally submitted to Versus Arthritis.** This must all be completed by the 16:00 deadline so we strongly recommend that applicants allow sufficient time for submission before the deadline in order to obtain the necessary approvals. No applications received after the deadline will be accepted.

For further enquiries on any aspect of your application, please email the Awards office at awards@versusarthritis.org or phone us on 0300 7900 403.

7 The assessment process

The fellowship application is a single submission process – a full application should be submitted by the deadline. Bridging Fellowship applications are reviewed by the Versus Arthritis Fellowship Expert Committee.

There are three stages to the assessment process:

1. **Internal triage:** applications will be reviewed by Versus Arthritis to check for eligibility and suitability for the scheme.
2. **Peer review:** Applications are sent for lay and external peer review by experts from the UK and abroad and of international standing in the field of the proposal.
3. **Written rebuttal:** Applicants are given the opportunity to respond to written review comments.
4. **Decision meeting:** Applications, written reviews and rebuttals are assessed by the Fellowship Expert Committee and funding decision are made.

Awards are typically made 5-6 months after the deadline date.

All unsuccessful applications receive written feedback outlining why they were not recommended for funding.

Further information and FAQs about applying for fellowships, are available here: [Applying for a fellowship | Versus Arthritis](#)

8 Scoring criteria

At all stages of the review process, the funding panel and external reviewers are asked to consider:

- Person: The candidate's track record and future potential
- Project: The research design, scientific quality, feasibility
- Place: Suitability of the host organisation and the support being provided to the candidate
- Patient and Public Involvement: The quality of plans for involvement of patients and the public, and potential patient benefit

9 Guidance for completion of the application form


Grant Tracker profile

Before creating a new application, please ensure that your CV is up to date in your Grant Tracker profile. Lead and sponsors will need to do this.

Application form

Please complete all the sections in the application form.

Help icon

Additional information and guidance is also provided within the form for specific questions, this can be accessed by clicking on this button 

Additional guidance for specific sections of the application form can be found below.

Involvement and engagement

This section will be reviewed by **Research Partners and scientific experts**, please complete this section in non-technical language. Further guidance on writing for a lay audience is provided above.

Meaningful engagement/involvement of people with arthritis could include activities such as:

- identifying and prioritising the research question
- helping design study protocols and patient information
- inputting into the application and/or ethics approval
- helping carry out elements of the study, rather than simply participating as a subject
- evaluating the research findings
- dissemination and implementation of outputs and outcomes
- consultation on the relevance of the outcome measures to the specific condition being studied

To find out more on how to plan and carry out meaningful patient involvement please use the links below or contact researchinvolvement@versusarthritis.org

- [Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement \(PPIE\) | Versus Arthritis](#)
- [Involving people with arthritis \(versusarthritis.org\)](#)
- [How to involve people in research | INVOLVE](#)
- [Plain English summaries | NIHR](#)
- [Ways that people can be involved in the research cycle | INVOLVE](#)
- [Resources: Learning for Involvement](#)
- [NIHR Race Equality Framework](#)

To best address the below questions, it would be strongly advisable to consult people affected by the disorder(s) you are researching to ensure the workplan is as meaningful and impactful as possible.

- **How have people living with arthritis inputted into the design of the research?**
Explain how people with arthritis, especially from under-served groups, have taken part and informed this application: This could include: identifying and prioritising the research question, helping to design the study protocol and patient information, providing input into the application and ethics approvals. This section has a limit of 300 words.
- **Describe the plan to involve people with arthritis as partners throughout the various stages of your project**
Explain how people with arthritis, especially from under-served groups, will input into the conduct of the research. This could include helping to carry out elements of the research, participation in oversight structures, evaluation of research findings, disseminating and implementing outputs and outcomes. This section has a limit of 300 words.
- **Describe how the outcomes of the research are relevant for, or are meeting, an unmet need for people living with arthritis**
Explain how the chosen endpoints or outcomes of the work are relevant to or address unmet needs for people living with arthritis. This could include the design of the research responding to unmet needs or specific areas of importance for those living with arthritis. For earlier stage research, this could reflect how the outcomes of the proposal have current, or a future pathway to, importance for people living with arthritis. This section has a limit of 300 words.
- **How will results of the research be fed back to those participating and other people living with arthritis?**
Outline your plans to disseminate the results of the research to participants of the research and the wider population of people with the conditions being researched. This section has a limit of 300 words.

Research involving animals

Versus Arthritis is a signatory to the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research and supports the principle of the 3Rs. We are committed to the principles of reduction, replacement and refinement in animal studies.

Versus Arthritis is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities and has signed up to their position on animal research ([Position statement on the use of animals in research](#) |

[Association of Medical Research Charities \(amrc.org.uk\)](http://amrc.org.uk)). Before completing this section, please read the AMRC statement.

Use the [ARRIVE guidelines](#) when designing and describing your experiments.

There should be sufficient information to allow for a robust review of any applications involving animals. Further guidance is available from the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) <http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/responsibility-use-animals-bioscience-research>, including an online experimental design assistant to guide researchers through the design of animal experiments: <http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/experimental-design-assistant-eda>.

Replacement, reduction and refinement (3Rs) of animal experiments: Indicate how the proposed research will employ the 3Rs (replacement, refinement or reduction in the use of animals) and how it will do this.

- Replacement - methods which avoid or replace the use of animals.
- Reduction - methods which minimise the number of animals used per experiment.
- Refinement - methods which minimise animal suffering and improve welfare.

Further information on the 3Rs is available from the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) <https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs>. These guidelines should be thoroughly consulted before developing the plan to ensure the 3Rs are employed to their fullest.

Lead applicant

The lead applicant is the individual who will lead the work on the award and be responsible to Versus Arthritis to ensure the conditions of award are met. They must be based in a UK university, hospital or recognised academic research institute in the UK.

The lead applicant must open the application form on Grant Tracker and add the other key personnel who can then add information. Before creating a new application, please ensure that your CV is up to date in your Grant Tracker profile. Lead applicant and sponsors will need to do this.

The details displayed in the application form for the lead applicant are those that are stored on Grant Tracker. To amend them, please save and close the application form and visit the 'Manage My Details' section on the Grant Tracker Versus Arthritis homepage.

Sponsor(s)

The Sponsor:

- Must hold a tenured position at the host institution, or in the case of an NHS employee, an honorary academic appointment, with tenure beyond the duration of the proposed fellowship
- should give an undertaking that if an award is made, they will negotiate with the host institution to ensure that the fellow is granted status and prerogatives of other academic staff of similar seniority
- are also encouraged to view their support and mentorship of the fellow as part of the longer-term committee to assist the fellow to realise their future career aspirations in research

- does not need to be the head of department.

A sponsor is directly responsible for providing support for yourself and the project. They are likely to be involved in the project on a day to day basis and should hold an established post at the host institution. They are also responsible for guaranteeing facilities and resources for the tenure of an award.

You do not need to include the head of your department as a sponsor (unless they have a significant involvement/role in day to day support of the fellowship).

You can have multiple sponsors and they can be based in different institutions however you should have a main sponsor situated at your host institution.

You cannot cost sponsor's time into your fellowship.

You will be asked to provide the name of the sponsors(s) associated with the fellowship, if the sponsor is already on our GrantTracker system, their contact details will appear and an automatic message will be generated to allow you to notify them and provide a link to the application for them to confirm their role. If the sponsor does not have a GrantTracker account, you will be asked to enter their contact details so that a registration request can be sent. Sponsors will have to register for a GrantTracker account if they do not have one.

The sponsor(s) basic information, degrees and qualifications and employment record will be populated to their CV automatically based on the information that is stored in their GrantTracker account. To amend these details, the sponsor will need to save and close the application form and visit the 'Manage My Details' section on the GrantTracker Versus Arthritis homepage following the same instructions highlighted in the lead applicant CV section.

Grants and publications must be added to the CV by each individual sponsor via the Relevant Grants and Publications section later in the form.

Relevant grants and publications

Before adding relevant grants and publications to this application, the lead applicant and sponsors should ensure that their entire profile is up to date in their Grant Tracker account as follows:

Research grants and fellowships

Go to 'Manage My Details' section followed by "Update CV" to check or amend the list of grants and fellowships held.

Publications

Go to "My Research Outputs" to check or amend the list of publications held.

Please refer to the [guidance document](#) for full instructions on how to use the Research Outputs section.


Once the profiles are up to date, each participant can then add their own relevant grants and publications in the **Relevant grants and publications** section of the application form.

This section allows the participants to choose which grants and publications to list as part of their CV. The participants can each choose to list up to a maximum of ten grants and ten publications that are


most relevant to the application. This section will appear different to each individual filling it in and only the individual's own publications and awards as listed in Grant Tracker will be visible to that user.

The participants must individually complete this section before the form can be submitted.

To add a grant

Use the  button to add a new field then select a grant from the drop-down menu. If the grant you wish to add is not listed in the drop-down menu, you can add it to your CV in the Manage My Details section of Grant Tracker.

To add a publication

Use the  button to add a new field then select a publication from the drop-down menu. If the publication you wish to add is not listed in the drop-down menu, you can add it to the My Research Outputs section of Grant Tracker.

There is a link to additional online guidance within this section of the application form in Grant Tracker.

Other roles in the application

Collaborators

Collaborators are individuals who are named in the body of the application who supply research materials, specific expertise or access to patients, but will not be involved in the day-to-day execution of the research.

To enter a collaborator select add collaboration and enter the name of the collaborator, their institution and a detailed description of the collaboration.

You do not need to provide a letter of support in your application, but you may be asked to provide them at the point of award.

Award administrators

Award administrators can access and edit the application form; however, their details will not appear explicitly on the completed form.

Mentors

It is not obligatory for a fellowship applicant to include mentors in their application: however, we do encourage our fellows to have mentors as we believe they are very beneficial for career development. Information on your proposed mentors should be uploaded as an attachment to your application in the attachments section of the online form.

Finance and costs

Further details on costing your Fellowship are available [here](#).

Full economic costing

In line with other UK medical charities, Versus Arthritis does not provide funds for administrative costs or overheads, and thus only funds directly incurred costs. Ineligible costs include directly allocated costs and indirect costs:

Directly Allocated Costs – shared costs, based on estimates and do not represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis, such as:

- estates
- the costs of shared resources, such as staff and equipment

Indirect Costs – necessary for underpinning research but cannot be allocated to individual projects, and cover computing and information support, central services, general maintenance and other infrastructure costs.

Eligible costs within a bridging fellowship application:

- The fellow's salary
- Any additional salaries/staff time (e.g. statistician/data manager/trial manager) should be costed as a consultancy under expenses and not as a salary. These costs will be considered by the panel
- Access charges for use of specialist equipment may be applied for within expenses
- Any requests for computers must be fully justified and integral to the success of the research proposal
- Costs to cover travel and accommodation (if required) to a collaborating institution can be requested
- Training courses for the professional development of the fellow can be applied for. These should be relevant to the aims of the fellowship and justified within the application
- Costs associated with patient and public involvement/engagement can be applied for. Please see [NIHR Involvement Payment Guidance](#) on how to cost these activities appropriately
- Reasonable costs associated with carrying out a pilot clinical or feasibility study can be applied for.

Further details on eligible and ineligible costs for fellowships can be found on our [fellowships webpages](#).

Staff members (salaries)

For the bridging fellowship application, the only staff member salary included should be that of the fellow. No other salaries will be accepted in this section. Please provide the following information for your salary:

- Select the closest description for position from the dropdown list.
- Describe the role of the staff member. This section is a maximum of 100 words
- Confirm the % inflation applied to the costing
- Input the costs broken down by basic salary, employer contributions and London weighting if applicable
- Input the full time equivalent (FTE) as a percentage (1-100), the total will auto-complete.

Further information on carrying out fellowships part-time is available on the [fellowships pages](#) on our website.

- Requested salary costs should be based on a recognised pay model or the host institution's local salary scale, including London weighting if appropriate. We must be advised of the pay model used and, where a local pay model is to be applied, a copy of the appropriate scale must be attached
- Annual increments must be included which should be based on the host institution's own salary scale, including London weighting if appropriate
- London Weighting allowance will be payable at the rate appropriate to each host institution
- The percentage of inflation used must be included in the application and be in line with the most recent pay award agreed by the Institution and no more than 2% (reviewed February and this will be periodically reviewed).

If the host institution is contributing towards salary expenses, please indicate this on the form.

Please note that 24 month bridging fellowship awards can only be requested if the host institution is contributing a minimum of 50% of the applicant's salary costs.

Animals

We require the costs associated with animal use to be separated by species and strain. Please provide the following information (multiple can be added):

- Input species, strain and price per animal
- Input the number of animals to be purchased for each year, the total purchase cost will auto-complete
- Input the weekly maintenance cost. Please contact the office if the costs vary between years
- Input the number of animals to be maintained and number of weeks required for each year, the total will auto-complete.

Expenses/Consumables

Reasonable research expenses directly related to your proposal can be applied for. Items and their cost should be listed. Running costs should be broken down into suitable categories, providing full justification so that sufficient information is provided for review.

Equipment

Fully justified items of equipment of up to £30,000 can be requested, requests for items of equipment included in applications with a cost greater than £5,000 must be supported by an estimate. Input a description of the equipment, its use and total cost.

Attributing the costs of health and social care Research and Development (AcoRD):

Applications that propose research conducted with human subjects within a health or social care setting should be formulated in line with Department of Health Guidance "[Attributing the costs of health and social care Research & Development \(AcoRD\)](#)". Versus Arthritis will only fund Directly Incurred Research Costs and applicants should ensure that they have consulted their local NIHR CRN, where appropriate, to discuss NHS Support Costs and NHS Trust Management to discuss Treatment Costs before submission.

If your planned project includes the recruitment of participants, your application should be accompanied with the Funder Export from the online Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT), obtainable via the NIHR [Central Portfolio Management System \(CPMS\)](#).

To create a SoECAT, you will need to create an account in CPMS. After creating the account, you will need to login to CPMS to activate this account. If any assistance is required in creating the account, please refer to the [user guide](#). Once your account has been created and is active, you can proceed.

Guidance for the completion of the SoECAT by the applicant is available in the online tool to assist at each page and stage of the application process and further details can be found on the [Online SoECAT Guidance page](#).

There is also an [Online SoECAT Guidance Module](#) which includes video tutorials and linked resources (an NIHR Learn account is required to access and enrol onto the module) and a helpful [Study Representative - Online SoECAT Top Tips](#) infographic.

Signatories

Enter the details of the signatories required to sign-off the application. The head of department and finance officer details should be completed. Before submitting your application to Versus Arthritis, you must obtain the necessary signatories prior to the deadline. A workflow diagram can be found [here](#).

Attachments

Only text can be added to the fields of the online application form. Where additional files (e.g. data figures) are required they can be uploaded in this section.

The maximum size per attachment is 10 MB

The following documents should be included as attachments where relevant:

- Resubmission cover letter (maximum 1 page of A4)
- SoECAT Funder Export
- Letter from Mentor (maximum 1 page of A4)

You do not need to provide the following documents in your application but you may be asked by the Versus Arthritis office to provide them at the point of award:

- Letters of support from collaborators
- Ethical approval
- Animal licence(s)
- Salary scales
- Quotes for pieces of equipment over £5,000 in value

Disease category

In this section, we ask you to provide some research classification information on your application. This will be used by Versus Arthritis to categorise the applications it receives and the work that it funds. Please select all relevant disease classification using the dropdown list.

Validation summary

Submitting your application. To complete the application process, the final steps are listed below.

1. Validate your form

Click the Revalidate button on the left. This will check that you have completed all of the sections within the application, and that your sponsors have confirmed and approved their role(s). Any incomplete sections will be listed with a description of the issue.

2. Click Save and Close

This will return you to the details page of your application. The Submit button on the right hand side of the page should be available.

3. Click View/Print

Download a PDF version of your application and check that all the content appears as you expect.

4. DECLARATION

Please confirm that you have downloaded a PDF version of your application and checked that the sponsor(s) on the application have each completed the Relevant grants and publications section. Acknowledging that failure to do so may cause your application to be rejected.

5. Click Submit

Once you have submitted your application an automated email will be sent firstly to your finance officer, once they have approved the application a second email will be sent to your Head of Department. It is only upon your Head of Department's approval that the application is finally submitted to Versus Arthritis. **This must be completed by 16:00.**

6. Receipt of your application will be acknowledged by email

Contact us

For further enquiries on any aspect of your application, or any issues relating to the submission of your application, please email the Research Directorate at awards@versusarthritis.org or phone us on 0300 7900 403.