

MRC Board and Panel Observer Scheme - Webinar for applicants Questions and Answers

This document addresses both the frequently asked and unanswered questions from the webinar.

General

Q/Do you consider this initiative a path through which you can identify and cultivate future reviewers for MRC/UKRI?

A/ It's not the primary aim of the scheme, although we hope those who observe a meeting will be more likely to provide review in the future, having had additional insight into how important quality peer review is to our schemes and decision-making process.

Funding meetings

Q/ Are there certain meetings which are more/less popular within the scheme?

A/ This is the second time we've run this scheme so don't have a lot of data, but applications were fairly evenly spread across the boards and panels and the available meetings in 2024.

Q/ Are the general locations of the in-person meetings known?

A/ We don't always know the location of the in-person meetings in advance and they can sometimes be subject to change - most of our in-person meetings will be held in central London. There will always be the option to dial in to an in person meeting if that is your preference.

Q/ Are the specific dates of different panels available in advance of application?

A/ Where dates are known they are listed on the application timeline: [Application timelines – MRC – UKRI](#), specifically the earlier dates will be listed but this may not be possible for some of the later meetings which have not been finalised. Please see below the projected dates for the meetings in 2025. These may be subject to change.

Equipment panel	9 to 10 April
Applied global health research board	13 to 14 May 18 to 19 November TBC
Developmental pathway funding scheme panel	14 to 15 May 17 to 18 September
Neurosciences and mental health board	17 to 18 June 12 to 13 November
Population and systems medicine board	24 to 25 June 12 to 13 November
Experimental medicine panel	24 to 25 June 3 to 4 December

Molecular and cellular medicine board	25 to 26 June 11 to 12 November
Infections and immunity board	8 to 9 July 18 to 19 November

Eligibility

If you have specific eligibility questions not covered below, please email the RFPD@mrc.ukri.org mailbox to discuss. If you meet the eligibility criteria but your job role is not listed, please select 'other' and describe your role.

Q/ Are we eligible to apply to the Observer Scheme if we plan to apply one of MRC funding schemes in 2025?

A/ You can still apply to the scheme but please don't apply to observe the funding meeting you intend to submit an application to. The survey will ask you if you intend to submit an application to the board/panel meeting you are requesting to observe. Please ensure you select no and select meeting/s your application will not go to.

Q/ Are Senior Lecturer's eligible?

A/ The role does not exclude you from applying but you would need to meet the rest of the criteria regarding career stage.

Q/ Are research associates eligible?

A/ We would consider research associates to be in line with a post doc role, and whether you are eligible to apply is dependent on whether your skills and experiences align with the 'transitioning to independence' career stage. A research associate or post-doc role does not necessarily exclude you from applying. [Skills and experience needed to win support – UKRI](#)

Q/ How do clinical academics fit into eligibility/ the career framework?

A/ If you are a clinical academic, the focus for this scheme should be the stage of your academic career rather than the stage of clinical training, to be eligible, clinical academics would need to be post-doctoral and likely at the Clinical Scientist Fellowship stage or a clinical lecturer. You would need to ensure that your academic skills and experience are consistent with those expected for the career stage 'transitioning to independence' stage, as outlined here: [Skills and experience needed to win support – UKRI](#).

Q/ I'm planning to apply for a fellowship or NIRG this year, am I eligible?

A/It's likely that you are eligible. Please check the webpage: [Skills and experience needed to win support – UKRI](#) or email the RFPD@mrc.ukri.org mailbox to discuss your specific eligibility.

Q/Are research offices eligible to apply?

A/No, research office staff are not eligible to apply to the scheme currently. We recognise the potential wide reaching impact support staff could have but are prioritising researchers who will be applying for funding. We will re-consider this before the scheme is launched again in 2026.

Q/ Are senior postdoc/ scientist staff eligible to apply?

A/ Yes, they are eligible to apply.

Q/ What do you consider the threshold difference between postdoc and senior postdoc?

A/ We would consider senior post docs those further along in their career and who have the skill set to be actively transitioning to independence.

Q/ How do you define a "senior postdoc"?

A/ A senior post doc would demonstrate a high degree of independence in their research and be expected to lead their own projects and contribute significantly to the strategic direction of their research group. The career framework document may be helpful here.

Q/ Given that post-docs are at a career stage that are likely to be looking next to transition to academic independence, could you provide some details into the decision to exclude them from this scheme?

A/ Due to a limited number of spaces, we have narrowed down the eligibility criteria for this scheme. Earlier stage post docs were identified as being too early in their careers and could apply later down the line.

Post docs who are actively transitioning to independence are eligible to apply. If you are a post doc who meets the eligibility criteria, but your job role is not listed, please select 'other' and describe how you're transitioning to independence.

Application

Q/ As a technical specialist interested in observing (and applying) for the equipment panel, when asked to 'list key areas of expertise' should I focus on myself or the research my (being set up) facility would support?

A/ Please focus on yourself but we're also happy for you to put information about the research your facility would support.

Associates scheme

Q/ Is the Observer scheme separate from the MRC Board and Panel Associates Scheme/ What is the associates scheme?

A/ Yes, the MRC board and panel associate scheme is separate from the observer scheme.

The associate scheme is a much more involved 2-year programme, where successful associates have the opportunity to gain experience of serving on an MRC funding board or panel and benefit from mentorship and training. The scheme is aimed at those from groups under-represented in biomedical science and who are likely to be at a later stage in their career than those applying to the observer scheme.

More information on the associate scheme can be found here:

<https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/mrc/mrc-board-and-panel-associates-scheme>.

Will the associate scheme be running this year?

A/ Yes. We are planning to relaunch the associate's scheme later this year, expected to be July 2025.