

### Guidance for all applicants

Please refer to our standard Terms and Conditions and [Research Strategy](#) when completing your application. These, along with information about the call, can be downloaded from the Help – Support Documents quick link on the online application portal homepage, or from the Help – Support Documents drop-down item in the top right-hand corner of any webpage when you are logged in to Smart Simple.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Team at [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).

To apply you should:

1. Please let us know of your intention to apply for a programme grant by emailing us at [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org). Whilst it is not imperative that you get in touch, we are happy to meet with you to discuss the remit of the grant scheme and to ensure that your plans aligns with the call.
2. Submit an application using our online application form, by **3pm on Thursday 3 October 2024**.
3. Submit a Letter of Support from your Dean of Research (or equivalent) in your application. See later for details of what we expect to see included in this letter.
4. Send us a signed copy of the scientific application by email to [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org), which can arrive up to three weeks after the submission deadline.
  - a. We prefer that you scan wet signatures, but we understand that this is not always possible and will accept electronic signatures when necessary.
  - b. If the size of the scanned document is problematic, we will accept the signature page only provided you annotate the page with the grant reference.

**Applications will not be accepted after the submission deadline.**

**The following points should be considered when submitting your application:**

- We particularly encourage proposals that focus on innovative research challenges that will lead to significant shifts for people living with muscle wasting and weakening conditions. Through these awards we want to facilitate collaboration and strengthen the impact of research and innovation for the community.
- Only one Strategic Programme Grant may be submitted per institution.
- Applicants must have sufficient seniority to support a strategic application, with a good track record in neuromuscular research and ongoing projects in the field.
- The host university must have a clear strategy for neuromuscular research. A letter from your Dean of Research (or equivalent) is required to articulate the host university's strategy and how this grant would enhance this. In addition, there must be a significant financial or 'in kind' commitment from the university as part of the planned partnership with Muscular Dystrophy UK. For example, in their letter of support, the Dean of Research should outline how the university will support the work e.g. through the provision of posts, other key elements of the programme, or seek additional support from other sources, e.g. industry etc.
- Muscular Dystrophy UK welcomes applications that will have a benefit for individuals with any of the muscular dystrophies or related neuromuscular conditions within our remit. We are looking to support research across the breadth of conditions supported by the charity, and welcome applications for rare and very-rare conditions as well as the more common ones. Please refer to the list of [conditions supported by Muscular Dystrophy UK](#). Applications may be strengthened by a focus on multiple conditions, but this is not a prerequisite for the application to be considered for funding. If a specific neuromuscular condition does not appear in this list and you want to make a research application related to that condition, please contact our grant helpline for guidance ([researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org)).
- Applications must demonstrate relevance to Muscular Dystrophy UK's [Research Strategy](#) and must benefit the wider UK neuromuscular community
- Applicants must clearly articulate how the project would build on existing Muscular Dystrophy UK or other support for research into neuromuscular conditions to add value to these investments.

- The grant should support researchers with a shared interest in neuromuscular conditions to collaborate and deliver world-leading research and high-impact translation that will benefit patients.
- Strong applications will demonstrate how the applicants will collaborate with relevant national (and where appropriate, international) teams.
- The proposal must have clear research goals, milestones and strong leadership
- Applications with a clinical focus or element must demonstrate how people with lived experience of neuromuscular conditions will be engaged. In such cases, applications would be strengthened if you can demonstrate the people with lived experience of relevant neuromuscular conditions have been involved in designing the planned work.
- We will invest in research that increases our understanding of neuromuscular conditions and that promotes the development of potential treatments. Applications for this strategic funding can cover a range of basic, pre-clinical and clinical projects, but must demonstrate a coherent theme.
- In the development of diagnostic tools, there must be clear evidence of the exploitation route and pathway to adoption.
- Research to develop animal models must demonstrate a clear route to a therapeutic application. We will only fund the creation and phenotyping of new animal models when there is no alternative available.
- Research projects collecting data from people with lived experience, patient reported outcome measures, and/or natural history data should be multi-centre and of sufficient duration and size to collect relevant and useful data. It is important that there is a harmonised approach across the field and applications should include international communication and/or collaboration. They should include multiple outcome measures (and where possible include multi-system measures) to be of maximum value to researchers and funders. The application should include a plan for financial sustainability in the longer term.
- The Principal Applicant must hold a contract that extends beyond the duration of the grant at a UK institution approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK. For this strategic Programme Grant call, Muscular Dystrophy UK will only fund UK-based research although international collaboration is encouraged.

- If you currently hold a Muscular Dystrophy UK-funded project or studentship grant, you may still apply.
- Each applicant can submit one application only for this call.

## When completing the online form

- All applications should be submitted through our online grants-management system, Smart Simple (<https://mduk.smartsimpleuk.com/>). **Note that there is a short delay in getting the form online. The form should be available from 17 June 2024.** If you do not have an existing profile on Smart Simple you must create one. If you do not work in an institution that is already listed on our system, you may need to contact us to help you create the profile.
- Complete all sections of the application form. Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk.
- You may find it easier to draft the questions offline and copy and paste them into the online form when complete. Please note that when copying and pasting from Word, formatting (such as italics, bold, underlining) will be lost, but paragraphs will be kept.
- Word limits must be adhered to.
- Uploaded documents must be in pdf format.
- You can save your application at any time and come back to complete it later. You can also download a pdf of your application at any point.

If you still have questions, please contact the Research Team at [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).

## Guidance for completing an online Programme Grant application form

In Smart Simple, please go to My Profile and complete the required fields. This information will then be used to auto-populate the relevant fields in your grant application(s). Submissions cannot be completed unless the required fields in your profile are complete. For future grant calls you will be prompted to review your My Profile information to ensure it is up to date.

The following guidance relates to sections and questions within the form. Ensure you follow the guidance when answering each question

## People section

General guidance on who can apply for a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant

- Principal Applicants must hold a contract at an Institution approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK. We are only able to fund research within the UK at the present time, although international collaborations are encouraged.
- We welcome applications from Principal Applicants who have sufficient seniority to support a strategic application, with a good track record in neuromuscular research and ongoing projects in the field.
- We encourage Principal Applicants to consider how they would include early career researchers in the development and implementation of their programme.
- Clinical researchers should demonstrate significant experience with trial procedures, conducting research and monitoring its progress or other expertise relevant to the application.

### Principal Applicant

In this section we want to understand the track record of the Principal Applicant.

The Principal Applicant should have a contract of sufficient duration to cover the length of the proposed project. This is what we aim to understand when we ask the questions regarding “The length of the Principal Applicant’s contract with the employing Institution” and “Where does the funding for the Principal Applicant’s salary come from?”

### Co-applicant details

To add a Co-applicant the Principal Applicant (the Applicant) must have the Co-applicant’s PIN. To get a PIN, the Co-applicant must create a profile in [Smart Simple](#). The PIN can be found on the co-applicant’s profile page. The Principal Applicant should request the PIN from the co-applicant and enter it on the application form to assign the Co-applicant to the grant application. The Co-applicant will be able to view the application and make changes, but only the Principal Applicant can submit the form.

Co-applicants can view the application by selecting the Grants and Applications tab from the home page and selecting the Associated Applications tab in the Draft Applications section.

Please ensure you enter the number of hours the Co-applicant will be dedicating to the project.

### Collaborators

Strong applications will demonstrate excellent collaborative networks, both within the UK and internationally.

Please enter the details of all collaborators in the table provided; a letter of collaboration is required from each one. Please use the filename format, 'Letter-of-collaboration-[FirstInitial-surname]' to name the files and upload them in pdf format. The letters can be uploaded using the upload buttons. Note that the number of collaborator letters must match the number of collaborators in order for your application to be submitted.

### Proposed researcher

The proposed researcher category should cover the person/persons undertaking the day-to-day activities of the programme (for example a PhD student, postdoctoral researcher or clinical fellow, a technician or RA working under supervision and a project manager if justified). If the proposed researcher is known, please enter their details. There is an option to add multiple researchers. If you do not know the name of the researcher now that doesn't matter.

## **Project Summary section**

### Expected start date

You will receive the outcome of your grant application in late March 2025. The expected start date of the project should therefore not be before April 2025.

The expected start date is merely a guide. It will appear on your award letter should you be successful in gaining an MDUK grant, but it is not binding. Please refer to our Terms and Conditions which sets out the expectations with regards to project start dates after the award is made.

The Programme Grant should start within six months of the award date. If you are awarded a Muscular Dystrophy UK grant and experience delays that mean you cannot start within six months, please contact us at [Researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:Researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).

### Project title

Please use a descriptive title and, if possible, add the name of the condition(s) to be studied. We ask this because we submit titles to the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) annual data collection (a requirement of our membership), which is then used in the UK Health Research Analysis. A descriptive

title will ensure that the condition you study is reflected in the analysis and gets due recognition.

### Project length

Programme grants of up to 60 months in duration are available.

### Abstract

As with the title please make this descriptive and include the full name of the condition(s) to be studied. As described above we share this data with the AMRC. If you consider the contents of the abstract to be sensitive please add the word CONFIDENTIAL in upper case at the beginning of the abstract.

### Condition

Please select the single most relevant condition for your application as the primary condition.

You should select the overarching group name for the condition, following which you will be given the option to select the exact condition. For example, if you are looking for Duchenne muscular dystrophy you should select, 'muscular dystrophy' and then 'Duchenne muscular dystrophy'.

When you select the group heading, if there are additional condition sub-types, e.g. Duchenne muscular dystrophy, myotonic dystrophy type 1, they will appear in the sub-type, drop down menu.

You will then be able to select other relevant conditions using the tick boxes. Please select the group heading and sub-type.

### Please define the relevance of your application to Muscular Dystrophy UK's Research Strategy

How does your application fit with our [Research Strategy](#).

### Submission to multiple funders

Muscular Dystrophy UK will only consider a Programme Grant application to cover the work outlined in the proposal if we are currently the only funder doing so. If your application is currently with another funder, we will not process your application. You are welcome to apply in future should your application elsewhere be unsuccessful.

If this application has previously been submitted elsewhere please tell us where the application was submitted and on what date.

Tell us if this application (or parts of it) are being submitted for funding elsewhere. If so, include details of the source of funding, the amount and the expected date of outcome.

## **The Proposal section**

### *Background to the proposal*

This is an application for strategic funding. This section should detail

- The need and rationale for funding in this area of research and why it requires strategic investment by Muscular Dystrophy UK at this time.
- How the proposed funding will build on existing research programmes focused on neuromuscular conditions. In particular, please highlight where the proposed work builds on research previously funded by Muscular Dystrophy UK.
- The framework/strategy for neuromuscular research within your institution
- The programme grant can cover a range of projects or work packages across the whole development pathway and may include basic, preclinical/translational and/or clinical research. List individual projects within the proposal and explain (1) the rationale for each and (2) how the projects/work packages integrate as a whole
- Describe the leadership team that will oversee this programme grant and give details of any governance structures (e.g. steering committees) and project management that will be put in place
- Describe any supporting collaborative networks that underpin this application

With regards to the description of individual projects or work packages that make up this Programme grant, you should provide sufficient background to give expert reviewers and members of the committee an understanding of the basis for your proposal and summarise any research that gives your proposal context. While expert reviewers will be selected for their expertise to cover aspects of the proposal, some members may not have relevant expertise to cover *all* aspects. Therefore, this section of the proposal will be important for them. When completing this section consider:



- If you have preliminary (or other relevant) data, refer to it in the text and upload it in the supplementary information section at the bottom of the Proposal tab.
- Formatting does not always pull through when pasting from Word documents. Please check that special characters are present in your pasted text (this also pertains to other sections below where you might use special characters).

*Describe the expected impact of the programme on the field, from research and clinical perspectives*

This is an opportunity for you to describe your vision of the impact of the programme grant on the research field in general.

*Hypothesis or reasoning*

This is an opportunity for you to make a clear, brief statement to outline the underlying scientific hypothesis for the entirety of the programme and/or individual projects/work packages making up your programme grant. If, for any reason this is not possible, please outline the reasoning that underpins your project.

*Describe plans for sustainability of your research beyond this programme grant*

What would be the immediate and long-term next steps after the grant ends? Where do you anticipate seeking funding/support for future phases of the work?

*Methods of research including overall study design*

This section allows you to include the specifics of your methods and any key elements of study design. If your programme grant application covers several individual projects or work packages please give sub-headings that clearly define which project/work package you are describing. This will be dependent on the nature of the work but please consider the following elements that are sometimes omitted from applications:

- This is a good place to ensure that any power calculations that underpin your study design have been included.

- If there are elements of the work that could be considered high-risk please include any plans you have for mitigation: what alternative plans would you put in place to make sure the programme succeeds?
- Make sure your study design aligns with the costings you have provided – do not leave out costings for any elements of the programme.
- If any parts of the programme involve clinical studies, describe how you are including people with lived experience of neuromuscular conditions in the trial design.

### Objectives, timescales and milestones

Please give us a list of objectives for your research. When doing so please ensure that **the objectives align perfectly with the ones you write in your plain English application**. It is important that the content of the scientific application and the plain English application do not differ.

In this section we also want you to detail the key milestones for your project. Expert reviewers and the research committee will review the milestones as part of the process of reviewing your proposal. In addition, should the project be funded, we will review progress of the project each year against these milestones to ensure that the programme is delivering its objectives and to help us work with you to make amendments as needed. It is, therefore, crucial that your milestones are clear and achievable.

Please ensure that milestones and timelines for your project match the Gantt chart provided in the next section.

### Gantt chart

Upload a clear and easily readable pdf version of a chart that shows the timelines and milestones as described in the section above.

### Citing and referencing published work

Citations: please ensure citations are clearly marked and separable when reading the text. Note that formatting does not carry over into the form.

References: Please use Vancouver referencing style (see [here](#) for guidance), but please expand author line to include up to 20 authors if the Principal Applicant, Co-Applicant(s) or collaborators are authors.

### Detailed justification of financial support

Please help us to understand how your request for support breaks down. Costs should be broken down into three categories as follows

#### 1. Staff costs.

- We will be willing to consider various types of staff within this grant scheme. This may include, but is not limited to
  - Named clinical fellows
  - Allied Healthcare Professionals
  - Postdoctoral researchers
  - Technicians/research assistants
  - PhD students (for a studentship that is coherent within the framework of the overall grant application)
  - Project managers
- Please provide a justification for each position listed
- The expected salary for each person on the grant and the percentage full-time equivalent (FTE). If FTE varies from year to year, please indicate and justify this.
- Salary scales can be uploaded as a pdf in the Finance tab
- Are there any rises in salary expected due to inflation alone. Please detail the percentage rise in salary each year.

#### 2. Consumables

- Please list likely types of consumables, approximate costs for categories of consumables and the year in which they are expected to be required (see also guidance on the Finance section below). Details of major consumables costs are also requested under the “finance” tab.
- For clinical studies, applicants are expected to include costs relating to participant reimbursement (e.g., travel costs).
- We will support costs for face-to-face meetings that are essential to the running/co-ordination of the programme grant (for example, meetings with collaborators and co-applicants at other sites)
- We will consider training costs if they are essential and specific to the programme.
- Software may be included if it is specific to, and essential for, the programme. This must be justified within the application

#### 3. Equipment

- Give type and costings for any equipment and make it clear what element of the project the equipment is for.
- For programme grants we support the purchase of computers/laptops for members of staff employed on the grant. Only one computer per member

of staff can be purchased and, for non-overlapping members of staff (where staff members are employed at different times in the project) our expectation is that computers will be reused. Additional IT equipment may be considered where it is fundamental to the project, e.g. bioinformatics software

All requested costs must be accompanied by a justification. A list of ineligible/excluded costs is available below in the instructions for the Finance section.

#### Patient involvement and public engagement

Are people with lived experience of a neuromuscular condition directly involved in your research (e.g. participants in a clinical study)? If so, describe any plans you have to involve people with lived experience in the design of the research. Much of the funding for Muscular Dystrophy UK's research programme comes from families and supporters of the charity. Please explain how you will engage people whose lives are affected, either directly or indirectly, by neuromuscular conditions during the course of your project. Describe any plans you have to engage with the public to disseminate the results of your work.

#### Supplementary information

Use this section to upload supplementary information or data relevant to the grant proposal, e.g. figures, tables, timescales. Files must be in pdf format and clearly readable.

### **Finance section**

The Summary of Financial Support Requested table should include all costs being requested from Muscular Dystrophy UK for this programme in each of the categories indicated.

You can apply for any combination of salary and consumables. Nationally awarded salary increases will only be allowed if they have been provided for in the grant application. Reasonable allowance for such increases whether known, pending or anticipated must be included and justified in the grant application.

Programme grants are limited to a total of £1,000,000 for a duration of up to 5 years (60 months).

#### Finance: Exclusions

- Salary for Principal Applicants will not be funded
- Maintenance costs for IT equipment
- Travel costs can only be requested if the travel is an integral part of the programme; this must be clearly demonstrated in the grant application.

- We do not cover the costs of attending scientific meetings or society membership and these should not be included in the application.
- We will not cover recruitment costs.
- We do not fund equipment costs unless integral to the project. We expect laboratories to provide and maintain equipment for general use and only under specific circumstances where specialist equipment is required will we consider providing funding.
- Generally, we do not provide equipment maintenance costs. However, we *may* provide maintenance costs for equipment if (1) it is specific to the programme, and (2) if without the requested funds the work would not proceed. If such funds are requested, please include them under “consumables” costs and provide a rationale for the requested funds in the “Detailed justification of financial support” section under “the proposal” tab.
- We will not cover publication costs.

Applicants are strongly advised to confirm with the Finance Office of their Institution that the amounts specified in their submission are accurate.

#### Excess treatment costs

For all clinical research that needs Health Research Authority (HRA) approval (refer to [criteria for HRA approval](#)), a [Schedule of Events Costs Attribution Template](#) (SoECAT) must be completed, approved and submitted with the grant application. Only clinical research needs HRA approval. For researchers carrying out clinical research outside of England, please contact our grants helpline at [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org) for guidance.

You will need the assistance of a local AcoRD specialist to complete and approve the SoECAT form. For further information see the [NIHR website](#).

**We strongly recommend that you contact your local AcoRD specialist as soon as you know you are planning a piece of clinical research, to allow sufficient time for completion and approval of SoECAT before the grant application deadline.**

Since 1 April 2023 applicants have been required to use the [online NIHR Central Portfolio Management System \(CPMS\)](#). In order to create a SoECAT, you will need to create and activate an account in CPMS. Please refer to the [user guide](#) for further guidance on creating an account.

Guidance for completion of the SoECAT is present in an online tool. Further details can be found on the [Online SoECAT Guidance page](#) and within the [Online SoECAT](#)

[Guidance Module](#), which includes video tutorials and linked resources (an NIHR Learn account is required to access and enrol onto this module).

Assistance with designing your research application is also available from the NIHR CRN and [Research Design Service](#).

Once the form has been completed and authorized, please save the 'study information' and 'summary' page of the 'Funder Export' form as a single PDF and upload it with your application in the Finance section of the application form. If the final form cannot be completed prior to submission of the application, you must contact us at [Researchgrants@muscular dystrophyuk.org](mailto:Researchgrants@muscular dystrophyuk.org) to explain the delay.

Please note that MDUK is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). You may find more useful information on the AMRC website [here](#).

## **Animal Research**

Please refer to the NC3Rs' [ARRIVE guidelines](#) when designing animal experiments and ensure you report animal-based studies in accordance with the ARRIVE guidelines. Grant holders are required to implement the principles found in the NC3Rs' guidance document, [Responsibility in the use of Animals in Bioscience Research](#). For more information and guidance about the use of animals in research see the [NC3Rs website](#).

If the research involves use of higher animals (cats, dogs, equines, pigs, non-human primates), the proposal will be sent to NC3Rs for specialist expert review. This will be in addition to the regular scientific expert reviews of the application. If non-human primates are being used, the grant holder must ensure compliance with the NC3Rs' [Guidelines for Primate Accommodation, Care and Use](#).

Any costs associated with animal research should be fully detailed in the Animal Costs Details table and included in the Summary of Financial Support Requested table in the Finance tab.

When completing the Animal Costs Details table please note that the Summary Totals table will automatically update with the totals from the tables below. Tables for animal purchase costs, animal maintenance costs and experimental procedures costs are given for each year of the grant, please use the '+' button to add rows as required.

Muscular Dystrophy UK supports the Association of Medical Research Charities' policy on animal research – please refer to our [position statement on animal research](#).

## Ethical Issues

If the grant is awarded, it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all necessary ethics approvals are in place **before** the start of the programme. If you wish to activate the programme before ethics approval is in place, please contact us at [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org) to discuss the issue further. The grant will not be activated until the Research Team are satisfied that lack of ethics approval will not impede the programme or influence timelines.

## Intellectual Property section (including confidentiality)

Please refer to our Terms and Conditions for information about intellectual property and ensure that the conditions are met if the proposed research is likely to lead to patentable or commercially exploitable results.

We use information from your main application and your plain English application in order to fundraise and to communicate about the work we fund. **In order not to create a prior disclosure that would damage chances of commercial development, we need to understand what elements of your proposal must be kept strictly confidential.**

Details of your application are shared in confidence with expert reviewers, members of our Medical Research Committee and Lay Research Committee and the Board of Trustees and, when relevant, charitable trusts and other donors.

## Application in plain English section

All grant applicants are required to complete an application in plain English which provides an overview of the proposed work. This will be assessed by members of Muscular Dystrophy UK's Lay Research Panel. For this grant scheme the Panel will receive the scientific application, but to enhance the understanding of the Lay Panel members the plain English application should act as a stand-alone piece that should accurately reflect the content and objectives of the scientific application. The plain English application will initially be assessed by members of the Muscular Dystrophy UK Research Team, and you may be asked to make changes should the scientific application and the plain English applications differ or if the latter is too technical.

The members of the Lay Research Panel do not have a scientific background so please do not use scientific terminology or jargon. Please also refrain from including references to material that is not available to the general public. Avoid the use of abbreviations where possible. You may find it helpful to ask a non-scientist friend or relative to read this application prior to submission to check readability. Please visit the [news section](#) of our website to see the level of plain

English we would expect you to use and refer to the [guidance](#) we have developed with the Lay Panel on writing your plain English application. Your application in plain English will be screened by the members of the Research Team. Failure to provide sufficient and understandable information in the plain English application could lead to rejection of the application.

The information contained in the plain English application will be treated as confidential. Further guidance on each section is given below. More useful resources and guidance to help you write your application in plain English can be found on the [NIHR website](#).

### Brief Summary in plain English

In 200 words or less please write a brief summary of your project in language suitable for non-scientists/non-clinicians. This summary may be used to describe your research to external funders and, as described above, we share this data with the AMRC. If you consider the contents of the abstract to be sensitive please add the word CONFIDENTIAL in upper case at the beginning of the summary.

### Background

What is the background to your application? Why is the research question that you are addressing important? Please put this in context of other ongoing research (particularly research that has been funded by Muscular Dystrophy UK) and describe the collaborations that will facilitate this research. Please consider adding the following where relevant

- What is the prevalence and/or incidence of the condition you are studying
- Any details of the condition that make a compelling case for your research

### Objectives

Please provide concise bullet points of the objectives of your research. The **objectives must align with those stated in the scientific application**. You may be asked to amend the application if they do not.

### Outcomes

Please give details of the expected outcomes of your research. How will this research project take us towards a treatment or clinical benefit for muscle disease either in the short or longer term?

### Experimental Plan

The Lay Panel will not be making a judgement on the strengths and weaknesses of the science, however, a general understanding of the research proposal is



helpful. Please give a brief overview, of what you plan to do. If applicable, this should include information about the experimental approaches to be employed, the types of samples to be analysed and how they will be sourced, rationale for the use of animal models, and how human subjects will be selected and recruited.

### Next Steps

If the project is successful, what are the next steps? Where will you apply for further funding?

### Impact on Participants

If this is a clinical study, what will the study involve for the participants? How many visits, what happens at each visit, are there risks and how are these mitigated?

## **Supporting Documentation section**

Please upload a letter of support from the Dean of Research or equivalent. The letter should detail

- how this application fits with the university's strategy on neuromuscular research and how the university will support the work. to articulate the host university's strategy and how this grant would enhance this.
- a significant financial or 'in kind' commitment from the university as part of the planned partnership with Muscular Dystrophy UK. For example, in their letter of support, the Dean of Research should outline how the university will support the work e.g. through the provision of posts or other key elements of the programme, or seek additional support from other sources, e.g. industry etc.

This section can be used for uploading additional documents that are relevant to your application, e.g. a letter of support from someone who is not a co-applicant or collaborator. Files must be in pdf format.

## **Further information**

Please indicate in this section if you would like to receive further correspondence from Muscular Dystrophy UK. GDPR UK requires that we have approval to keep your details for a specific purpose. For research and other mailings we may keep your details indefinitely for the purposes to which you agree. You can ask for your details to be removed at any time by contacting [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).

## Application Review

All applications are sent for external expert review prior to being reviewed by our Medical Research Committee. We would like you to suggest three reviewers to review your application. These reviewers should be **independent** experts who you or your co-applicant(s) have not published with in the past three years and who do not work at the same institute/university as any of the applicants. Please give their full names, the institutes at which they are based, their email addresses and a justification of why they are suitable to review your application.

## Departmental Support

This section *cannot* be completed online.

After submitting your application you will receive a pdf version of the application by email. Please send a copy of the signed form to [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).

- We prefer that you scan wet signatures, but we understand that this is not always possible and will accept electronic signatures when necessary.
- If the size of the scanned document is problematic, we will accept the signature page only, provided you annotate the page with the grant reference

The application must be signed by

- Your Head of Department in which the proposed research and training will be carried out, or an appropriate signatory e.g. Dean, if the applicant is Head of Department.
- The Principal Applicant
- An authorised member of your Research Office/Finance department

Please send the signed electronic copy of the application to [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org) *within three weeks* of the deadline for the call.

## What happens after submission?

Milestones for the selection process of your grant application are given below; *please note the dates given are approximate and for guidance only*. You will be contacted by email when your applicant response is due, or if there are any other actions you need to take; these will all be done via your online account.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
Submission deadline	3pm on Thursday 3 October 2024.
You will be invited to respond to the expert reviewers' comments.	Early December
Research Committee meeting	Late January/early February
Notification of outcome- you will be notified of the outcome of your application after our Finance Committee/Board of Trustees has met to make the final decision.	Mid-late March
Formal outcome letter - you will receive a formal letter (by email) with the outcome of your application and feedback from the Medical Research Committee and Lay Research Panel.	Late March

## **The decision-making process**

Programme grant applications will be reviewed by members of Muscular Dystrophy UK staff to ensure eligibility and that the proposal fits the remit of the call. Applications will then be sent to at least 5 reviewers who will be selected from the international research community, based on their relevant research experience and ability to comment on the proposal. Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to reviews.

The application will be considered by a panel of experts in the field of neuromuscular research and people with lived experience of muscle wasting and weakening conditions selected from our Medical Research Committee and our Lay Research Panel respectively. Additional experts may be co-opted onto the review committee as required. The panel will score applications and only applications that meet the minimum quality threshold will be considered for funding. The panel will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees and applicants will receive a decision letter in late March 2025.

## **Criteria for external expert review**

All reviewers are screened by our research team to ensure they do not have conflicts of interest (as defined by our Expert Reviewers' terms of reference). At minimum reviewers must not

- Have published with the applicant or co-applicant's in the last three years
- Be working at the same research institute as the applicant or co-applicants

Reviewers are asked to confirm that they do not have any other conflicts before they can proceed to a review

External expert reviewers are asked

- to identify any potential weaknesses in an application
- to comment on the relevance and accuracy of the background given
- whether objectives of the project can realistically be met within the project timeframe and with the resources listed in the application
- whether the requested funds are justified
- to assess the methodology
- to comment on the originality/uniqueness of the application
- to comment on the standing of the applicant in this field
- to comment on regulatory and ethical element of the application
- to rank the application within their personal experience of reviewing other applications

## **Scoring of applications by committees**

The reviewing committee will be aware of the scope of the call, i.e. that we are seeking proposals that focus on innovative research challenges that will lead to significant shifts for people living with neuromuscular conditions. In addition, the committee will be asked to assess the appropriateness of collaborations and likely impact of the programme for the neuromuscular community.

The reviewing committee scores applications between 1 and 6 where scores of 4-6 are fundable.

A fundable score is given where the consensus of external review and opinion of the committee is that the application: is original and innovative with strong/excellent leadership; will answer key/crucial scientific questions or address a gaps in knowledge; will be strategically important; will have potential for impact and will constitute excellent value for money. Moreover, a strong plain English application will contribute towards a good score.

Applications in the non-fundable range (score 1-3) may contain elements of a fundable application but the committee, with support from expert review comments, may identify issues with the leadership team, methodological flaws or under-resourcing/poor value for money of the project. The committee may consider the project unlikely to deliver a successful outcome. A poorly written plain English application may negatively influence the final score.

All applicants will be given feedback with which resubmitted applications may be improved.

## **Awards and terms and conditions**

Successful applicants will receive

- an outcome letter containing feedback from the committees
- an award letter containing financial details of the award, any exclusions or changes to the award and may contain special terms and conditions specific to the award
- a copy of the current terms and conditions

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Team at [researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org](mailto:researchgrants@musculardystrophyuk.org).