

## **Strategic Research Centre Award Guidelines**

<b>Career level</b>	Established independent researcher (Clinical and non-clinical researchers)
<b>Research area</b>	Research that addresses <a href="#">our research goals</a> , focused on the research priorities of people with CF.
<b>Preliminary submission (Expressions of interest) Final submission Committee review</b>	28 April 2025  September 2025 February 2026
<b>Funding period</b>	3 years (up to 4 years is permitted)
<b>Funding amount</b>	£700 ,000 - £800,000

### **What are they?**

The Trust aims to support a broad and balanced portfolio of excellent research that address [our research goals](#), focused on the research priorities of people with CF. We welcome both basic and clinical research applications.

Strategic Research Centres (SRCs) are designed to be virtual groups of inter-disciplinary experts coming together to work on projects that are important to people with CF. An SRC application must have at least three but may include up to six related workstreams that share a well-defined theme and overall objective.

The synergy between the workstreams and their contribution to the overall objective must be clearly articulated. Any inter-dependencies must be highlighted with risks and mitigations described. We have a portfolio of very different SRCs, some of which are described on our website:

- [GRAMPUS SRC](#)
- [PIPE CF SRC](#)
- [Goodchild SRC: CFTR Folding and Function](#)

**We strongly encourage applicants to contact staff in the Research Awards team of the Trust ahead of applying to this scheme: [researchgrants@cysticfibrosis.org.uk](mailto:researchgrants@cysticfibrosis.org.uk)**

### **Who can apply?**

We encourage collaborations with geographical and multi-disciplinary spread. International collaborations are welcome. The Principal Investigator (PI) and lead institution, however, must be based in the UK. We also encourage applications from those outside the field of CF. In these cases, the PI must be supported by a co-investigator who is a CF expert with a history of publications in CF.

**Please note:** If you applied for a SRC in the previous funding round and were unsuccessful

you cannot reapply for this year's funding round. New applications may be considered if differing significantly from any original proposal previously submitted. If you have previously applied for a SRC award and are looking to submit a completely new proposal please contact the Research Awards Team to discuss eligibility before applying.

## What will we fund?

We welcome applications that address [our research goals](#), focused on the research priorities of people with CF. Funding support (£700,000 to £800,000) over a period of 3 – 4 years is provided for:

- Salaries for early career researchers and technical staff – minimum of 3 early career researchers across the SRC. PhD student fees are also covered by the SRC.
- Running expenses
- Travel expenses relevant to the project

The following rates are the **minimum** levels for PhD stipends:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>Within London</b>	<b>£25,954</b>	<b>£26,572</b>	<b>£27,190</b>	<b>£27,808</b>
<b>Outside London</b>	<b>£23,955</b>	<b>£24,525</b>	<b>£25,096</b>	<b>£25,666</b>

The SRCs are intended to provide an environment that fosters interest and provides support for retaining PhD students, post docs, clinical fellows etc in CF research. Thus, the training element of an application is important.

Additional leverage funding is encouraged.

## What we do not cover

Indirect costs and overheads, salary costs of permanent staff, capital expenditure, apprenticeship levy's

## How to apply?

Applicants should complete an Expression of Interest initially and submit this by 5pm on Monday 28 April 2025. Following review, successful applicants will be invited in July 2025 to submit a full application in September 2025. Successful applicants from this stage will be notified in March 2026, for projects starting in or before October 2026.

## How will applications be assessed?

Expressions of interest are assessed on strategic fit and quality of the research programme by our Research Grants Review Committee (RGRC). Details of the RGRC membership can be found here: [Research Grant Review Committee \(cysticfibrosis.org.uk\)](https://cysticfibrosis.org.uk/research-grant-review-committee)

Importantly, please note that there are a number of CF Community members on the RGRC who represent the cystic fibrosis (CF) community, these are either people with cystic fibrosis or parents of children with cystic fibrosis. Therefore, it is in your best interests to ensure that your plain English summary is jargon-free and explains the potential impact of your application for people with CF.

The RGRC will decide which applications will be invited to submit a full application. Full applications are reviewed following a rigorous peer review by external scientists and clinicians before being considered by our RGRC, whom will recommend applications for funding.

Recommendations for funding will be judged on how well applications meet the five principles that guide our approach – our 'SCORE' objectives:

- **Strategic:** demonstrate exceptional relevance to one or more strategic priority.
- **Collaborative:** demonstrate the clear added-value of bringing a group of researchers together to tackle a major concern in cystic fibrosis.
- **Outcome-focused:** demonstrate a clear understanding of the potential impact of the programme of work on cystic fibrosis outcomes.
- **Risk-based:** demonstrate innovative and diverse, low and high-risk research approaches to achieve benefits for everyone with cystic fibrosis.
- **Excellence-driven:** scientifically excellent and conducted by an internationally leading research team

The scoring criteria, used for the expression of interest and full application stage are contained in Annex 1.

#### **Additional notes:**

- If any generative AI tools (eg Chat GPT) have been used to assist in the preparation and development of a research proposal the lead applicant should ensure that the challenges and ethical considerations, such as the potential for social biases, that arise in using AI are mitigated for. Cystic Fibrosis Trust supports the Research Funders Joint Policy group statement on the use of generative AI tools in funding applications and assessment ([AMRC agrees to joint approach on AI | Association of Medical Research Charities](#))
- Cystic Fibrosis Trust supports the MRC standards outlined in their embedding diversity in research design policy ([MRC embedding diversity in research design – UKRI](#)) For example if using animal cells it is expected that both sexes of animals, tissues or cells, will be used, unless a strong justification not to do so is given and consideration should be given regarding adequately addressing the characteristics of the population groups or subpopulations who could benefit from the research being proposed including any underserved groups in the community

**How will we measure success?**

Progress will be monitored through annual progress reports and will also be assessed for their wider impact. All reports and data will be monitored by our RGRC and reported to Trustees, donors and the CF community in the Trust's impact reports. As members of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) impact data from Trust-funded grants contributes their sector-wide reports.

We value the generation of new knowledge about CF, contributions to building the research landscape including new partnerships, collaborations and further funding and the training of the next generation of CF researchers.

## Annex 1 – Scoring criteria

Applications are scored against the following areas. Each area has a set of question prompts for the reviewers to consider:

### Scoring areas:

#### 1. Quality of Research Programme:

- Have the applicants presented a well-identified, important and challenging problem strategically relevant to cystic fibrosis? Consider relevance to Cystic Fibrosis Trust's [research goals](#), including the research priorities of the CF community.
- Is the proposed research innovative and at the cutting-edge of the research domain?
- Does the proposed research require a consortium or could the goals be achieved with a set of individual grants?
- Are the roles of the collaborators articulated and bringing added-value to the programme?
- What alternative research ideas compete with the application and what makes this proposal internationally competitive?

#### 2. Impact and Value to People with Cystic Fibrosis:

- Have the applicants presented a plausible description of the likely impact to benefit patients with cystic fibrosis?
- Is the proposed research likely to benefit cystic fibrosis at some point in the future?
- If successful, is the proposed research likely to lead to discoveries of international significance?
- Has Equity, Diversity and Inclusion been considered and addressed appropriately within the application?
- Does the proposal demonstrate potential for attracting further investments from sources outside the Cystic Fibrosis Trust?

#### 3. Quality of The Research Team

- Is this the best team that can be assembled to deliver the goals?
- Does the research team have the full skills/expertise necessary to achieve the research goals?
- Does the lead PI have the necessary experience, leadership and vision? *Please note: The lead PI must have the necessary leadership and vision to coordinate a Strategic Research Centre, however they do not necessarily need to have expertise in the field of CF as long as the 'deputy'/first co-applicant has the required CF expertise.*
- What is the synergy/added value of bringing this group of researchers together?
- What makes the proposal team competitive with respect to international competitors?

#### 4. Training And Career Development

- Is the project likely to provide graduate students and early career researchers with a good training opportunity and a stimulating research environment?
- Has the student/trainee/early career researcher got the potential, through this proposal, to develop advanced research and transferable skills?

- Is the project sufficiently challenging and feasible in the timeframe proposed?
- Are there mechanisms to instill in trainees a long-lasting interest in cystic fibrosis? What mechanisms are in place for the individual student/early career researcher to be involved in the wider picture of the Strategic Research Centre?
- Are there robust mentoring and feedback arrangements for graduate students and early career researchers?
- For graduate studentships: Is student education an integral component of the proposed Strategic Research Centre?
- For graduate studentships: Does the programme have the potential to lead to a good PhD within the time frame of the grant?

## **Budget and Leveraged Funds (for stage 2 applications only)**

- Is the budget appropriate/realistic?
- Are there components of the programme that could be removed without prejudicing the success of the goals?
- What mechanisms are proposed to ensure the project is managed as a complete entity rather than a collection of individual grants?

**Each criteria is scored out of 9 using the following scoring guidance:**

### **High**

- 1 - Exceptional -Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
- 2 - Outstanding -Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
- 3 - Excellent -Very strong with only some minor weaknesses

### **Medium**

- 4 -Very Good - Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
- 5 -Good -Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
- 6 -Satisfactory -Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses

### **Low**

- 7 -Fair -Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
- 8 - Marginal - A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
- 9 - Poor - Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

**Minor Weakness:** An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

**Moderate Weakness:** A weakness that lessens impact

**Major Weakness:** A weakness that severely limits impact