

Cancer Research UK - Clinical PhD Programme in Cancer Research at the ICR

Fellowship allocation process: Frequently asked questions

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1 Introduction and background

The CRUK Clinical Academic Training Programme is a joint endeavour between ICR and Imperial College London. This programme will equip clinical academics with the expertise to discover, develop and deliver the next generation of treatments, technologies and methodologies that will benefit cancer patients. Trainees will be supervised by world leading experts spanning the clinical, engineering and physical sciences. Notably, this programme is unique as trainees will benefit from the cutting-edge research culture and environment offered by both institutions.

All fellowship awards include tuition fees, research expenses, and a clinical salary.

The programme is administered by the ICR and Imperial College London and fellowships are awarded through competitive application.

Applicants from a range of specialties are invited to apply, including oncology, paediatrics, radiology, surgery, anaesthesia, pathology and haematology.

Throughout the application process, applicants should demonstrate ownership of their project and ambition to pursue a clinical academic career.

The most up-to-date information on the programme and broader information about the range of research and training opportunities available for clinicians at the ICR can be found on the ICR website at www.icr.ac.uk/clinicianopportunities.

2 Frequently asked questions

2.1 *What is the application and recruitment process for these fellowships?*

Applicants and supervisors make joint applications for fellowships based on a project developed together. In general, cohorts are recruited on an annual basis to start in October (see question 2.8). The process and timeline (based on a start date in October) is outlined briefly below. Note that the full list of deadlines is updated annually and published on the [ICR](#) and [Imperial](#) websites.

- **July - September:** a call is issued for expressions of interest from all ICR and Imperial Faculty and Honorary Faculty who wish to host a clinical fellow.

Expressions of interest should detail the supervisory team, a brief outline of the project area, and whether applicants from any specific clinical specialties are particularly encouraged to apply. After the deadline, both institutions checks that the proposed supervisory team is eligible as per the [MPhil/PhD Codes of Practice](#) at the ICR and the supervisor expectations at [Imperial](#).

- **September/October:** Supervisory teams and their project areas are advertised via the ICR and Imperial websites and the British Medical Journal in print and online. Supervisors who wish to advertise their project areas via additional routes should contact the Registry to discuss this (admissions@icr.ac.uk).

Candidates are asked to download an Initial Contact Form and Equal Opportunities Form (available on the [ICR website](#)) and, along with their CV, return their completed forms to the Registry team at admissions@icr.ac.uk.

Once received, candidates are sent additional project and supervisor information along with a Project Preference Form, which they are asked to complete and email to admissions@icr.ac.uk.

- **October-December:** Supervisors contact candidates who have indicated a preference for their project to arrange and conduct an introductory meeting. Once all introductory meetings are completed, supervisors decide which single candidate, if any, they would like to proceed to work with to develop a full application. The candidate/supervisor then submit a completed application form, which includes both candidate and project details to admissions@icr.ac.uk by the deadline.
- **December:** Applications are reviewed and shortlisted applicants are invited to interview.
- **February:**
 - Panel interviews held
 - The interview panel recommends the allocation of fellowships to the ICR's Executive Board and the Convergence Science Centre Executive Management Committee for ratification.
 - Candidates informed of outcomes, usually within two weeks after interview.

2.2 **How many fellowships are available?**

The CRUK Clinical Training Programme will fund four 3-year studentships.

Of the four CRUK-funded fellowships an overall split of 3:1 will be sought for projects based and registered at the ICR and Imperial College respectively over the period of funding (five intake years from 2019 to 2023). Flexibility will be maintained to vary the split year on year, and cross-institutional projects are also accepted.

2.3 **Who is on the interview panel?**

There are usually 6-8 panel members present at the interview. The panel is chaired by the one of the co-directors of the CRUK Clinical Academic Training Programme (Professors Iain McNeish or Nick Turner). The panel will also include the Deputy Dean and/or members of the Dean's team (such as senior tutors), members of the Clinical Academic Training Committee, which comprises ICR and Imperial academics.

The ICR Registrar or a delegated member of Academic Services, and the CRUK Convergence Science Centre training manager will also be present. An external clinical academic is also invited to join the panel. Any members of the panel with a conflict of interest, for example if they are a named member of the supervisory team, will declare this and will not be present for the relevant candidate interview. It is important to note that members of the panel will have diverse scientific backgrounds, and may be clinical or non-clinical. Candidates are encouraged to bear this in mind when preparing their presentation (see below).

2.4 *What will happen at the interview?*

The panel interview will last approximately 25 minutes. Candidates are asked to give a seven minute presentation without slides, followed by questions from the interview panel.

The candidates should use the presentation to briefly introduce themselves, and then spend the bulk of the time explaining the proposed project, and why they are a suitable candidate to undertake it. If the interviews are held in person, a whiteboard or flipchart will be available, but Powerpoint is not.

Candidates may bring material in with them, for example, a short handout or diagram.

The panel will spend the remaining time asking questions on the presentation and the submitted project. They will also ask about the candidate's career to date, research interest and experience, and their plans for developing their clinical academic career.

2.5 *What is the panel assessing?*

The panel is assessing a number of things in the interview, such as:

- Scientific merit of the proposed project & importance of the science.
- The candidate's understanding of the project, including details and limitations of the experimental approach, project risks, and impact on the field.
- The candidate's track record in their clinical career and research interest/potential e.g. academic training positions, publications, funding, prizes. NB if the candidate has participated in the ICR's MSc in Oncology, the results obtained to date are provided to the panel.
- The candidate's motivation and plans to develop as a clinical academic in the short and long-term e.g. awareness of training needs and plans to address them.

Through the application form and the interview, the panel will also assess the strategic fit of the project in the context of the ICR and Imperial CRUK Centres, together with the joint ICR-Imperial Convergence Science Centre, and alignment to one or more of the core research areas of focus for this Programme, which are:

- Understanding the molecular basis, evolution, and complexity of cancer.
- Increasing the precision of cancer treatments (including systemic therapies, radiotherapy, and surgery).
- Mechanisms of therapeutic action, resistance, and therapy monitoring.
- Decreasing the overall burden of cancer (including early detection approaches).
- Data-driven healthcare.

2.6 How should candidates prepare for the interview?

Successful candidates are able to demonstrate intellectual drive and ownership of the project. They are expected to have a strong understanding of the project and be familiar with the relevant literature. Given the short time within which to gain this understanding and ownership, candidates are strongly advised to dedicate time to prepare for the interview. Some of the ways to prepare include:

- spending time prior to the interview in the laboratory where the project will be based and/or with the team in which the project is based
- conducting some initial experiments or analysing data
- learning the basic principles underlying the techniques they will use
- attending lab meetings or journal clubs
- discussing the project with the wider team
- having mock interviews with colleagues both familiar with the project area, and with others in other disciplines

Strong candidates are able to demonstrate to the panel how they have worked with the supervisor to ensure the project is robust and deliverable. Candidates are expected to be aware of limitations of the proposed project and the risks, and have plans in place to mitigate the risks. Candidates may be asked about specific experimental approaches, and should be prepared to describe details of their plans for the first few months of the fellowship. Whilst the supervisory team is primarily responsible for helping the candidate prepare to defend the project at the interview, candidates also benefit from discussing the project widely with other clinical and nonclinical academic colleagues. Demonstrating that the project has been strengthened through input and perspective from both clinical and non-clinical colleagues is encouraged.

This fellowship programme is aimed at clinicians who strive to become the future clinical academic leaders in cancer research. Strong candidates have thought about their career path after the PhD, are aware of the challenges of clinical academic careers and can articulate how they plan to continue as clinical academics in the medium and long term.

2.7 What support or training is available?

A key source of support for applicants and supervisors, particularly during the development of the project proposal, comes from scientific and clinical colleagues, collaborators and the Division Head. Candidates preparing for panel interview will be supported by project the supervisor(s), and also benefit greatly from discussion of the project with other senior colleagues e.g. through mock interviews.

There are a number of resources also available online to assist preparation. For example, the funders provide a lot of general advice for how on apply for fellowship funding. These include:

- <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/skills-careers/fellowships/clinical-fellowships/clinicalresearch-training-fellowship-crtf/>
- <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/>

The MRC skills table gives a good overview of the types of skills funders expect you to be gaining during research training: <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/skills-careers/skillsneeded-to-win-support/>

The MRC has also developed a series of videos aimed at clinicians considering and applying for clinical research training fellowships. Video 4 may be particularly useful for applicants preparing for their panel interview.

- 1) [Why do a clinical Research Training Fellowship?](#)
- 2) [Preparing your proposal for a clinical research training fellowship](#)
- 3) [The 3P's criteria of a Clinical Research Training Fellowship](#)
- 4) [Preparing for an interview for a Clinical Research Training Fellowship](#)
- 5) [Mock Interview for a CRTF](#)

The RM-ICR BRC website also details helpful resources for clinicians preparing funding applications: <https://www.cancerbrc.org/brc-training-hub>

The applicant's current university or NHS Trust will often offer support with writing fellowship applications, preparing for panel interviews and presentation skills.

Candidates based at The ICR or The Royal Marsden can view training available at training.icr.ac.uk. Candidates based at Imperial can contact cato@imperial.ac.uk.

2.8 How flexible is the start date for the PhD?

We understand the pressures on the NHS and the critical need to fill clinical rotas, which may affect when a trainee can take time Out of Programme (OOP) to participate in protected research time. During the panel interview the candidate will be asked what is the earliest and latest time they can start the PhD. Interviews are held in January or February in order to provide maximal time for successful applicants to inform the Deanery of their intention to become OOP. Whilst it is preferable for candidates to start at the same time as each other and with the intake of non-clinical PhD students (i.e. in October), there is some flexibility in terms of start time, for example if a candidate enrolled on an ACF wishes to complete their research time in a block before enrolling on the PhD. Candidates are advised to talk to their clinical training programme directors prior to application.

Further questions can be sent to admissions@icr.ac.uk.