

Shortlisting assessment process

Through our applicant-led funding opportunities we are looking to support research with the strongest scientific ambition and the greatest potential for impact. We use shortlisting to identify early in the assessment process the applications that are best placed to meet these expectations that will be highly competitive for funding.

Submitted applications are first checked by MRC for remit and eligibility, then we assign applications to [MRC College of Experts members](#) to act as college assessors.

College assessors consider the application using the shortlisting assessment criteria and provide inputs to inform the consideration of the application at the next shortlisting panel.

The shortlisting panel uses the shortlisting assessment criteria and the input from college assessors to recommend if each application is shortlisted for further assessment, or unsuccessful at the shortlisting stage.

After shortlisting, a summary of the assessment is provided as feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Shortlisting assessment criteria

We use three assessment criteria based on the ambition, expected impact and deliverability of the application. Value for money and other criteria are not assessed at the shortlisting stage. All assessments are made in the context of the applicant's career stage.

To be shortlisted for further assessment, an application must:

- meet all expectations across the three assessment criteria, and
- demonstrate clear strengths in ambition, quality, and potential impact, with no material weaknesses

An application will be unsuccessful at the shortlisting stage if:

- one or more of the three criteria are not met, or
- there are concerns about feasibility, capability, or significance of the outcomes that cannot be offset by strengths elsewhere

An application may be of good quality but not shortlisted if it does not meet the required level of ambition, impact, and deliverability relative to others. Competition for funding is high, and shortlisting decisions reflect relative competitiveness and not simply an absolute judgement of scientific merit.

Ambition

Assessors are asked to consider these questions

- Does the research demonstrate strong scientific ambition?
- Is the research novel? If other teams (nationally or internationally) are already pursuing the same questions will the applicants be competitive?
- Is there clear potential for innovation within and beyond the research field(s) of focus?
- Are there high-risk/high-reward aspects and are these well designed and managed?

What we're looking for at shortlisting

- the application addresses an ambitious innovative and well-defined research question(s)
- the research is novel, with clear potential to generate important new insights, concepts, methods, or tools
- the work has the potential to shift thinking or practice within the field and, where relevant, beyond it
- where elements are high risk, these are scientifically credible and well justified and managed in relation to potential reward

Impact

Assessors are asked to consider these questions

- Does the research address an important biomedical or human health question?
- Is the need for the research persuasive and do the plans appear well placed to significantly advance or capitalise on our mechanistic understanding of health and disease?
- Could the project lead to real opportunities to reduce disease burden, or have wider economic and growth benefits?

What we're looking for at shortlisting

- proposed research has clear and credible potential to:
 - advance mechanistic understanding of human health and disease
 - unlock new pathways for future investigation
 - significantly reduce disease burden
 - or have wider economic and growth benefits
- potential significance of the outcomes is well articulated persuasive and realistic, proportionate to the scale of the award

Deliverability

Assessors are asked to consider these questions

- Does the research approach appear appropriate?
- Are the applicants well-placed to deliver the work? We assess the ambitions and deliverability in the context of the applicant's career stage – moderating expectations for early career researchers and [career breaks](#).
- Are the environment, partnerships and infrastructure suitable to deliver the research ambitions?

What we're looking for at shortlisting

- research plans appear coherent, well designed, and deliverable – underpinned by sound rationale and evidence
- methods and approaches appear appropriate and sufficiently justified
- risks are identified, and mitigation strategies are credible
- scientific uncertainty (high risk) is acceptable where the approach is sound and potential reward is high
- applicant(s) demonstrate the appropriate expertise, skills, and experience to deliver the proposed research, taking account of career stage
- evidence of potential for independent leadership (new investigator applications)
- research environment and infrastructure are appropriate and credible
- public, patients or those with lived experience have been involved in the development of the application, as appropriate