

Board Opportunities overview

1. Board Custodianship and the identification of Board Opportunities

The MRC's four research Boards have custodianship of the research portfolios within their respective remits. In meeting their custodianship responsibilities, each Board must ensure that it supports the highest quality research and that its portfolio captures both existing and emerging areas of scientific opportunity.

During the course of 2017 the Boards independently and collectively reviewed their portfolios and their fields, to identify areas of opportunity that they wish to nurture. These 'opportunities' are listed on the relevant Board [webpages](#).

To assist applicants in understanding how these opportunities will be used in reaching funding decisions, and to help them consider possible alignment with these opportunities, details of the Board Decision Making Process and Board Opportunities are provided below.

2. Board Decision Making Process

At the triage stage and in the initial evaluation of an application at Board, including scoring, only the intrinsic research quality of the submission, as determined using the MRC's Board and Panel assessment criteria, will be considered.

At the end of a Board meeting, all applications under review are ranked by their median score. A cumulative commitment line can then be drawn, to determine the median scoring categories in which all grants can be funded and the scoring category in which not all the applications can be supported, given the available budget. Additional consideration of the applications in the latter category is then used to determine which of those attaining the same score should be supported, and which not, taking into account quality, likely impact and fit to MRC's strategic priorities.

Applications that address either the MRC's longstanding commitment to New Investigators and/or an identified Board opportunity(ies) will be given special consideration in this process. While the special consideration will inform rather than direct final funding decisions, the Boards will be reviewing their portfolios on an annual basis to assess whether their collective decisions are delivering against their ambitions.

3. Summary of Board Opportunities

In addition to the New Investigator commitment, there are two opportunities that are common to all four Boards, and two opportunity themes that, while shared across the Boards, are exemplified in differing ways by each Board.

- **New Investigator Research Grant (NIRG)**

The [NIRG](#) is aimed at researchers who are capable of becoming independent Principal Investigators and who are now ready to take the next step towards that goal. You can apply across all areas of the MRC's remit.

Common Opportunities

- **Experimental medicine** is a broad term and refers to: "Investigation undertaken in humans, relating where appropriate to model systems, to identify mechanisms of pathophysiology or disease, or to demonstrate proof-of-concept evidence of the validity and importance of new

discoveries or treatments.” [Experimental medicine](#) studies provide the key bi-directional link between fundamental discovery and later stage testing of new treatments in patients.

- **Advanced therapeutics**, including cell, gene and oligonucleotide therapies, offer unprecedented promise for the long-term management and even cure of disease. For this promise to be secured, we need to better understand their mechanism of action, host response and safety profile. Submissions whose primary aim is to investigate these characteristics, particularly where they address generic issues of the proposed modality, should fit the remit of the associated Research Board. Where the primary aim of a study is the efficacy of an individual product, submissions should be made to our translational programme, the [Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme](#).

Shared Opportunity Themes

Integration across time

- immunity and infection through the life course (IIB)
- exposures, biological mechanisms and disease (MCMB)
- mental health (NMHB)
- neurodegeneration (NMHB)
- multi-morbidity (PSMB)
- integrated population health (PSMB)

Integration across scale

- data integration and systems approaches – from data to insight (IIB)
- understanding dynamic biological systems (MCMB)
- insight into the living human brain (NMHB)
- mechanisms and models of human diseases (PSMB)