Research Starter Grant 2026

Submission Information

Introduction

Our Research and Innovation Fund supports the development of the evidence-base for occupational therapy and the expansion of research capability and capacity within the profession.

The Research Starter Grant encourages the advancement of doctoral and post-doctoral occupational therapy researchers, with up to £20,000 available.

Examples of previous research funded includes:

* devising an assessment tool through action research methods
* investigating the changes to a service post-COVID through qualitative interviews with people who access services and occupational therapists providing those services
* understanding the acceptability of an intervention to the target population and the practicalities of delivering it
* supporting doctoral research.

We value the diversity of our membership, and we strongly encourage grant applications from all sections of our community, especially those from under-represented and minoritised groups. We are committed to improving the equity and inclusivity of our processes and all opportunities provided.

Application guidance

See below for guidance on the different sections in the application form and how to submit your application.

**Proposed research**

This section of the application needs to address the following:

* **Rationale for being a research priority area:** Please outline how the proposed research supports one or more of the [top 10 priorities for occupational therapy research](https://www.rcot.co.uk/top-10) in the UK.
* **Methodology:** Give sufficient information about the background to the project, including literature from low and middle income countries where appropriate. Describe the methodology and theoretical framework(s). Where relevant, we expect to see theoretical framework(s) included from various countries and cultures. Please describe the participant population, and how the perspectives of people from a diverse range of backgrounds will be included. If the funding is towards an element of a larger project, you must clearly identify the discrete activity that will be funded via the RCOT Research and Innovation Fund grant and the outcomes anticipated from this.
* **Ethical considerations:** Describe any ethical considerations in relation to your project, how they will be managed and whether ethical approval is required. You must comply with GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 and Research Governance Frameworks for Health and Social Care.
* **How diverse perspectives will be included:** Ensure you have described how perspectives from people with a diverse range of backgrounds will be included.
* **Public involvement and engagement:** Describe how people with lived experience and/or their families or carers, taking account of the perspectives of people from diverse backgrounds with multiple and intersecting identities[[1]](#footnote-2), have been involved in the design and will be involved in the execution of the project.
* **Dissemination**: Describe your dissemination plans including peer-reviewed journal article submissions, conference presentations, and how you plan to disseminate your findings to the public, any research participants and RCOT members.
* **Institutional support**: Outline the support from the host institution plus collaborating partners (who are not co-applicants) for the duration of the project.
* **Impact:** Describe what the impact of the project will be on occupational therapy outcomes, practice, service delivery and on people who access services and/or their families and carers.

**Timeline**

Projects must be completed within three years. When thinking about a start date, please note it is unlikely that a contract will be in place before August.

**Funding requested**

We expect the funding section of the application form to include actual costs related to undertaking the project – for example, staff time costs, administrative costs and materials. As a registered charity we do not expect to fund university overheads.

Ensure you are compensating people with lived experience at the [NIHR benchmark rates](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/payment-guidance-for-researchers-and-professionals/27392#payment-rates). If you are a doctoral student, your fees can be included. Inflation should be accounted for at your institution’s standard rate.

# Lead applicant

As the lead applicant, you must be a professional member of the British Association of Occupational Therapists (BAOT) at the time the proposal is submitted and throughout the duration of the funded project. You must be at the doctoral or post-doctoral stage of your research career. We expect you to demonstrate how you have developed research expertise in your subject area and how you intend to develop your career further as an occupational therapy researcher.

RCOT employees and current members of Council are not eligible for the Research Starter Grant.

# Co-applicants

At a post-doctoral level, you may wish to include co-applicants, or other researchers or people with lived experience who will be contributing to your project. Co-applicants who have an occupational therapy qualification and live in the UK must have BAOT membership. Co-applicants who are included because of their lived experience and/or background do not require BAOT membership even if they have an occupational therapy qualification.

# Completion and submission of proposals

* In sections where a word limit applies, please give the word count total for that section. The maximum word allowance stated is a fixed figure; it doesn’t include allowance of an additional 10%. Exceeding the stated word allowance may result in your application being disqualified.
* All cited references should be listed within section 10 of the proposal form, where no word count applies.
* CVs and other documents shouldn’t be appended to the proposal form as these will not be considered.
* You must have your proposal peer reviewed prior to submission. By peer review we mean that someone outside of the research team, but with research experience, has reviewed your application prior to its submission. Doctoral applicants must have their supervisor peer review the proposal. Note this does not need to be completed using RCOT’s reviewer form.
* You must submit the proposal form in Word format **(not PDF)**. The completed signature page may be submitted as a separate PDF.
* Submit completed proposals electronically to R&IFund@rcot.co.uk no later than 11.59pm on **Wednesday 25 February 2026**. Proposals received after this deadline won’t be considered.

# Potential for National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Research Delivery Network (RDN) support

We are an NIHR Non-commercial Partner, which means that if we fund your study and your research is based in England, you may be eligible to access NIHR RDN support (formerly NIHR Clinical Research Network).

The NIHR RDN supports researchers in planning, setting up and delivering high quality research to the agreed timelines and study recruitment target, for the benefit of patients and the NHS. It includes relevant research in public health and social care in England.

If your research is based in England, we encourage you to involve your local RDN team in discussions as early as possible (and before submitting your application) when planning your study to benefit from the support. You can find out more and how to apply [here](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/i-need-help-to-deliver-my-research/study-support-service).

# The review process

Grant proposals will be reviewed by members of the RCOT Research and Innovation Fund Panel and an external expert identified by us.

Proposals will be reviewed against the following criteria:

* ability to address one or more of the [top 10 research priorities for occupational therapy](https://www.rcot.co.uk/top-10) in the UK
* methodological rigour
* ethical soundness
* involvement of people who access services, and/or their families or carers in both the design and execution of the research,taking account of the perspective of people from diverse backgrounds with multiple and intersecting identities
* feasibility and value for money
* potential impact on practice
* institutional support
* contribution to development of research leadership
* track record of individual
* strength of collaborating partnerships (where relevant).

If your proposal is highly rated and has potential for funding, you may be invited to respond to reviewers’ comments or to attend the Panel meeting to inform the final decision. The Panel will make the final recommendation for funding, subject to ratification by the RCOT Chief Executive.

The Research and Innovation Fund Panel meets in early June and we aim to notify you of the outcome, via email, by Friday 12 June 2026. We’ll provide formal written feedback to all applicants.

# Project management, contractual deliverables and grant payments

As the successful grant holder, you’ll assume responsibility for the day-to-day management of your project and ensure that milestones are met.

The following contractual deliverables will apply:

* as the lead applicant, sharing your ORCID ID with us for the purposes of tracking the impact of the grant
* demonstration that the project undertaken has fulfilled the research activity outlined in the project proposal
* submission of progress and impact report(s) during the project
* submission of a final project report and an updated progress and impact report within one month of the project end date. The final project report will be available via the RCOT Digital Library six months after the project is signed off
* submission of an article from the research normally to the British Journal of Occupational Therapy or to an alternative and appropriate high-quality journal
* intention to submit an abstract directly related to the research to RCOT’s annual conference
* submission of a Summary of Key Findings for publication in the RCOT Digital Library and on the [RCOT website](https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/research-and-development#Funding%20for%20Research%20and%20Development)
* submission of impact reports 18 months and 3 years post-completion of the project.
* supporting the promotion of the Research and Innovation Fund, where reasonably practical. This may include contributing promotional content such as quotes or testimonials for use in social or attending online events.

We’ll pay the grant in instalments in line with the payment schedule set out in the grant contract. In most instances, we require evidence of ethical approval for the project before the release of any funding, though it is possible to request an exception for patient and public involvement support. Payment of the final instalment will normally be subject to sign off by us of all contractual deliverables, excluding the post-project impact reports and Research and Innovation Fund promotion.

**Further help and advice**

If you’d like to discuss your project proposal, particularly if you are unsure if it is the right time to submit a grant application or if you have a question about the application process, please contact Angie Thompson, RCOT R&D Officer, in the first instance at: angie.thompson@rcot.co.uk or telephone: 020 3141 4615.

You can find other funding opportunities through the R&D Bulletin and discuss research opportunities and issues with other RCOT members via Research Connect. You can find out how to access both [here](https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/research-and-development#research-networking).

1. Agner, J (2020) The Issue Is – Moving from cultural competence to cultural humility in occupational therapy: A paradigm shift. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74(4).*

Hammell K (2013) Occupation, well-being, and culture: Theory and cultural humility. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy 80(4).* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)