Guts UK Early Career Researcher Development Grants
Scheme Handbook

It is important that all those involved with the grant application take time to read this handbook and the Research Grants Terms and Conditions before completing the application form. The information and guidance provided are designed to help you meet the requirements of the funding call.

Applications will be rejected if they fall outside the scope of the grant call, do not meet the eligibility criteria, seek more funding than is offered or are not submitted by the deadline of Monday 29 June 2026, 12 noon.

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Scheme details and eligibility criteria

Purpose and scope This scheme provides funding for early career researchers (ECRs) to do proof-of-concept research in any area of gastroenterology (including pancreatology and hepatology).

The research project should generate proof-of-concept or pilot data that will enable a strong, competitive application for larger follow-on grants from major funders and help the researcher establish a pathway toward independent research.

Eligibility The scheme is open to ECRs who have recently completed their PhD or equivalent, with up to 10 years of postdoctoral research experience.

The principal applicant must be based at a recognised academic or clinical institution in the UK. They must be in a tenured position or hold a contract with the host institution that extends beyond the duration of the grant.

Allowance will be made for applicants with career interruptions arising from family or personal reasons. Please contact us at research@gutscharity.org.uk if you have any questions.

Budget and grant duration The maximum allowed budget is £20,000. Awards are provided for up to 24 months.

Permitted costs: Only the direct costs associated with the project will be funded. This includes research consumables, animal costs and other essential project running costs.

Non-permitted costs: This award does not cover salary costs for principal applicants or senior supervisory roles. The principal applicant's salary must be funded from other sources.

Overhead allocation, other indirect costs and capital costs will not be funded. Costs related to publications, open access and other external communications are also not eligible.

It should also be noted that ECR development grants are not intended to be used as 'top-up' funds to meet a shortfall in funding from another organisation.

Assessment process

Stage	Action
1. Application deadline	All applications must be submitted by **Monday 29 June 2026 at 12 noon.**
2. Triage	Administrative checks will be carried out to ensure applications meet purpose and scope and eligibility criteria of call.
3. Preliminary review	All eligible applications will be reviewed by a subset of the Guts UK Research Awards Committee (RAC) to assess whether they meet the remit of our Research Strategy and are fundable.
4. In-depth review	Shortlisted applications will then be reviewed by two expert reviewers. At the same time, the Experts by Experience (EBEs) panel will also review and score the shortlisted applications' Plain English summaries and PPIE information.
5. RAC Meeting	All shortlisted applications will be assessed and scored at the RAC meeting in **November 2026** with recommendations for funding taken to the Guts UK Board of Trustees for ratification.
6. Notification of outcome	All applicants will be notified of outcomes by **early December 2026.**

Assessment criteria

Applications will be assessed by the Guts UK RAC, EBEs panel and expert reviewers using the following criteria:

- Alignment with Guts UK's research strategy including its focus on neglected digestive conditions such as pancreatitis, upper gastrointestinal disease, diverticular disease, irritable bowel syndrome, other disorders of gut-brain interaction, stomach and oesophageal cancer and paediatric gut and liver conditions.
- Relevance to the Top 10 Research Priorities identified through recent Priority Setting Partnerships (PSPs).

  Alongside the priority areas, funding will be considered in areas such as other cancers, liver disease and inflammatory bowel disease where proposals are considered of outstanding quality.
- Meaningful patient and public involvement.
- Originality of the research question.
- Scientific merit of the approach:
  - quality of the supporting evidence
  - plausibility of the hypothesis
  - clarity of the research objectives
  - suitability and viability of the study design and of the research population and/or model.
- Appropriateness of the proposed timeline and budget. Consideration of the NC3Rs 'Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Bioscience Research'
- Strength of the research team and access to relevant expertise.
- Potential impact on people affected by digestive conditions.

- Potential to generate useful results to help secure larger follow-on grants.

Other considerations: Guts UK is keen that funded research starts as soon as possible after the grant is awarded. Ethical approval, along with any licenses required for animal research, must be obtained before the research grant begins.

Provided the study meets the NIHR definition of a research study, funded projects will be eligible for adoption onto the NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN) Portfolio and therefore eligible for NIHR support. For clinical research proposals, applicants are encouraged to contact their local NIHR RDN at an early stage for advice.

Completing the application form

- Please ensure all information provided is clear and avoid abbreviations unless fully explained.
- Please adhere to the stated word limits (text on diagrams/images is not included in the word count). Text boxes can be adjusted to accommodate all required text and any diagrams/images.
- To use the check boxes, double click on each tick box to open the dialogue box and select the option to mark it as checked (the default setting is unchecked). You may need to activate the Forms Toolbar, depending on your version of Microsoft Word. Email your completed application to research@gutscharity.org.uk (including any copies of supporting letters/emails).
- All applicants are required to complete the 'Guts UK Grant Round Applicants - Diversity Survey'. This is hyperlinked at the beginning of the application form, with data used to help ensure our funding processes are as inclusive as possible.

1a. About the Project

Project title Please provide a title that accurately describes the proposed study. Symbols and Greek characters must be written out in full.

Proposed start date and project duration (in months) The proposed start date is not binding but needs to be as realistic as possible. The actual start date must be within 6 months of the award date. Please inform Guts UK immediately if you become aware of any potential delays to the start date after you have submitted your application. Projects may be up to 24 months in duration.

Please state type of research proposed – discovery, translational or clinical? Please indicate the type of research proposed to assist internal classification and monitoring.

1b. Guts UK Research Priority Areas

Please mark the relevant box if the application covers any one of Guts UK's priority areas. Please also indicate if your application addresses one of the Top 10 research priorities from our recent PSPs. Alongside the priority areas, funding will be considered in areas such as other cancers, liver disease and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) where proposals are considered of outstanding quality.

2. Plain English Description *Please describe the research and objectives in simple terms, in a way that is accessible to a general audience. If awarded this information will be the basis of content for the Guts UK website and other communications (Max. 500 words)*

Plain English title: Please provide a short and easy to understand title describing the proposed research.

Plain English summary: This section – and section 3 - are extremely important and will be reviewed and scored by Guts UK EBEs. These are individuals who live with, or have cared for, someone with a digestive condition. Representatives from the EBEs will review shortlisted applications and attend the RAC meeting to feedback the panel's comments and scores.

Please provide a brief explanation of the research questions you are seeking to answer, a description of the methods you will use, and the main objectives of the work proposed. Clearly demonstrate how the study responds to a genuine patient need and provide details of how the proposed research could lead to patient benefit and the anticipated impact of this.

Ensure to write in a clear, accessible manner, without use of jargon, abbreviations, scientific references or puns/plays on words. To check the readability score of the Plain English section, visit the Hemingway App website. A grade 9 and below is recommended for better public understanding.

3. PPIE ***Describe how patients, carers or members of the public have been involved with the development and design of this application (Max. 500 words)***

Consulting with people affected by a digestive condition can better inform research design, identify areas of importance for those affected and ensure that anticipated outcomes are relevant. We expect researchers to involve people living with and affected by digestive conditions while designing their study, including consideration of reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can take part.

Please explain how you have involved people with digestive conditions in developing your application and highlight any changes that have been made because of their involvement. State plans for public involvement, and if your proposed research has several stages, demonstrate how Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) will be meaningfully considered at each stage of the research.

Please budget for the participation of individuals at different stages of your study. Use the National Institute for Health and Care Research's 'Payment guidance for researchers and professionals involving people in research' webpage for guidance around costings.

For support with PPIE, please contact the research team at research@gutscharity.org.uk.

4. Technical Summary ***Describe the research and objectives in a manner suitable for a specialist reader (Max. 500 words)***

Please provide a detailed summary of the proposed research and its intended objectives, written for expert reviewers who have some knowledge of the scientific area involved.

5. Beneficiaries ***Describe who will benefit from the research (Max. 500 words)***

Please outline how the proposed research will benefit stakeholders other than patients and carers. For example, how will the work benefit other researchers in the

field and other disciplines? Describe the actions you will take to ensure these groups are able to benefit from the findings?

6. Communications Plan ***Please outline your plans for engagement, communication and dissemination of your research and its outcomes including, where appropriate, with patients, carers and the general public. (Max. 500 words)***

Please outline how you will communicate your research to academic and non-academic audiences; stating any reasonable adjustments that will be made to ensure communications are accessible to disabled people.

7. Research Proposal ***(Max. 2 pages including figures)***

Please provide a self-contained description of the proposed research project including sections covering background, hypothesis and specific aims, preliminary results (if appropriate), study plan and methodology, timescales and milestones, potential risks and challenges, and references.

As research projects vary in complexity and scope, it is the applicants' responsibility to provide sufficient detail to allow the RAC to make a well-informed assessment of the proposal.

Please do not include URLs to external weblinks to extend this section.

8a. Research involving Human Participation

Please describe briefly any ethical issues arising from the involvement of people, human samples or personal data in the proposed research, and actions that will be taken to mitigate risk.

Please give the current status of ethical approval (if relevant).

If the proposed research involves the collection of personal data from study participants, please outline the safeguards in place/or that will be implemented to ensure compliance with UK data protection legislation.

8b. Justification of Human Participation ***Justify the use of human participants, human tissue and/or biological samples. Please include information on the numbers (and sexes) involved and/or the nature and quantity of human material to be used, where appropriate. (Max. 500 words)***

Please provide a justification for the use of human participants, human tissue and/or biological samples and outline why an alternative cannot be used.

9a. Research Involving the Use of Animals

All relevant licenses and approvals must be in place before applications are submitted. If experiments are to be carried out on animals outside the UK, they must be carried out to standards that align with the principles of UK Home Office legislation. The housing and care of animals must also meet standards consistent with the principles of UK legislation.

9b. Justification for Research Involving the Use of Animals ***Justify your use*** **of the species proposed and outline any proposed procedures which fall under the Animals Scientific Procedures Act, including** ***the severity level. Explain why no realistic non-animal alternatives exist. This should be in line with the principles in the NC3Rs 'Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Bioscience Research' (Max. 500 words)***

Please make sure that you have considered alternatives to the use of animals when designing your study. Please offer explanation as to i) why animal use over other

approaches is necessary ii) the species to be used is the most appropriate. This is especially important when an animal is being used as a model for a human physiological or pathological condition.

This section should include the case for the number of animals required to achieve significance and the factors that might affect this. The sample size calculations used to estimate the number of animals required in the proposed experimental design should be stated where appropriate

10. Reproducibility and Statistical Design ***Please explain the actions taken to ensure the reliability and robustness of the chosen methodology and experimental design. (Max. 500 words)***
Please provide additional information on reproducibility and explain the steps taken to ensure the reliability and robustness of the chosen methodology and experimental design, including justification of any sample size/s, plans to reduce potential biases and the planned statistical analyses.

11. Narrative Résumé ***(Max. 500 words, principal applicant details and table not counted in total)***
The Narrative Résumé should focus on evidencing your ability and potential to carry out the proposed research. Please refer to the UK Research and Innovation's 'Resume for Research and Guidance' for further information on what to cover in each section.

12a. Budget Requested
Only the direct costs associated with the research project will be funded.

All costs should be clearly listed and rounded to the nearest whole pound. If no costs have been requested for a specific budget category, please put "n/a" in the total column.

This award does not cover salary costs for principal applicants or senior supervisory roles. Overhead allocation, other indirect costs and capital costs will not be funded. Costs related to publications, open access and other external communications public are also not eligible.

i) Materials and consumables
Please provide a breakdown under clear headings, describing each item as it will be invoiced. Please provide a subtotal of all materials costs per year.

ii) Animals
For each item, please include species, number of animals to be used and cost category (purchase, transportation, maintenance, experimental costs). Please provide a subtotal of all animal costs per year.

iii) Other costs
Please detail any other allowed costs under this heading, e.g. access charges for use of equipment and facilities essential to the proposed project, patient and public involvement expenses. Please provide a subtotal of all other costs per year.

Computing equipment and software that are essential to the proposed project may be requested (e.g. required for data processing and not standard computer work such as data analysis, writing papers etc.). This must be well justified and requests for more than £2,000, and on applications less than 12 months in duration, will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

12b. NHS Costs ***If your proposal involves clinical research in the NHS, it is a mandatory requirement to complete a Schedule of Events Cost Attribution Template (SoECAT).***
Clinical research should be costed using AcoRD (refer to the Department of Health guidelines for Attributing the cost of health and social care Research and Development). Please contact your local NIHR Clinical Research Delivery Network as soon as possible for advice costing the research.

12c. Justification of Resources ***Outline funding rationale for the budgeted headlines (Max. 500 words)***
Please explain and justify why the requested budget is essential for the delivery of the proposed research.

It is not acceptable to state that costs are based on the average consumable expenses for a researcher in the host laboratory; the costs requested must be directly related to the proposed project.

13. Other Funding
Please declare (and give details) of any identical or similar application that has been submitted to another funder or is likely to be submitted elsewhere. Please provide details including funding body name and date of expected decision.

Please outline all current research funding held by the Principal Applicant, including funding that has been awarded but has not yet started. We use this section to confirm that the proposed research in your grant application has not already been funded.

14. Intellectual Property
Please outline if any applicants/supervisors have consultancies, or any equity holdings in, or directorships of companies or other organisation that might have an interest in the results of the proposed research. Refer to Guts UK Research Grants Terms and Conditions for more information.

Please address if:

- the research will use technology, materials or other inventions subject to patent or other intellectual property protection.
- the research is in whole, or partly, subject to agreement with a third party.
- the proposed research is likely to generate commercially exploitable results.
- consent has been gained where tissue derived from human participants may lead to potentially commercially exploitable results.

15. Declaration and Signatories
Data Protection Statement
Guts UK may contact Principal Applicants, co-applicants and their institutions by email, telephone or post about their applications or other related matters. Personal and other data on grant applications will be stored by Guts UK and used to process and administer the application, and for auditing, review, and evaluation purposes.

Summary information about successful grant applications, including the Project Title, the Principal Applicant's name and institution, the Plain English Description, the Technical Summary, and the value of the grant, may be published on Guts UK's website and into the public domain (e.g. publicly accessible databases).

All personal data will be stored and processed in accordance with UK data protection legislation (including the Data Protection Act 1998 (and any subsequent legislation and guidance relating to data protection, in particular the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018)).

All parties with whom this information is shared with (e.g. expert reviewers, potential co-funding partners and the Association of Medical Research Charities). will be required to keep it securely and in confidence.

Processing of personal data is necessary for the legitimate interests pursued by Guts UK and with other third parties as set out above and will be limited to that which is proportionate to those interests.

Further information as to how Guts UK uses and protects personal data is available in Guts UK's Privacy Policy.

Declarations and Signatories

All applications must be electronically signed by the Principal Applicant, the appropriate Head of Department of the prospective Administering Institution, and the Administering Authority (e.g., the institution's finance officer). In signing, the officials are indicating their formal approval of the application, their willingness to offer an appointment for the Principal Applicant for the tenure of the award subject to their normal employment practices, their approval of the salaries sought (if appropriate), and the acceptance of Guts UK Research Grants Terms and Conditions.

If you have any questions about the application process, please contact research@gutscharity.org.uk.