Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases

Supporting arthritis research, education and patient engagement

Grant Awarding Policy

Last updated September 2026

1. Our purpose

The Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases (BIRD) is an incorporated charity, the purpose of which is to support research and education into bone and joint diseases.

We support research primarily through funding for projects undertaken in or from Bath for THE benefit of patients worldwide.

Established in 1975 by the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases Foundation Trust (RNHRD) and the University of Bath, BIRD become an independent charity in 1981.

2. Our objectives - what we fund and our priorities

We fund research projects in rheumatic diseases which:

- help to promote and advance medical knowledge
- improve treatments for patients
- encourage collaboration between clinicians and research scientists

We look to award pump priming funding of small to medium-sized grants that would be ideally suited to pilot studies, preliminary research, tests of clinical effectiveness or would enable other grants to be made for the above research

Our guideline for grants applied for up to £20,000 but we may consider greater amounts, please contact the Executive Director before submission.

We encourage match funding where the applicant has secured funding from another source

3. How much we fund and for how long

Each year the Council of Management allocates a maximum total value of awards available for the following year. This is usually around £80,000 per annum.

Each grant awarded is normally in the region of £10,000, although the BIRD Research Committee may award as much as £20,000 for a single project without referring to the Council of Management. Exceptionally BIRD may accept applications for larger amounts. In this situation applicants should contact the Executive Director for further guidance before making an application.

A maximum total value to be awarded during each financial year is set by Council annually during the last quarter of the preceding financial year for the guidance of the BIRD Research Committee. Council may opt to reduce or increase this amount at any time during the year, either on its own or on the recommendation of the BIRD Research Committee.

BIRD may not award the full amount applied for. In these circumstances, the applicant will be asked to confirm whether they still wish to accept the award.

We encourage match-funding.

4. Principles and exclusions

We do not accept applications from commercial organisations or large national charities.

We accept co-applications from areas outside Bath if the lead partner is a rheumatic disease researcher at a research organisation based in Bath, including healthcare facilities or higher education.

In awarding any grant, BIRD does not assume the responsibility of employer.

Applicants must meet our terms and conditions below.

5. How to apply and deadlines

Details of what is required, including the time scales for reviewing applications, are available from the website www.birdbath.org.uk Applicants are encouraged to keep their application as short as possible. For items a - e below this should be a total maximum of 2,000 words.

Each application should consist of the following:

a. A clear research question and background to show this has not been answered previously in the published literature (maximum 500 words)

b. A proposed outline of research methodology with a study plan including start/end dates, time-lines, and key milestones, if appropriate. (maximum 500 words plus Gantt chart if appropriate)

c. A lay summary of the proposed project describing the planned project and its potential impact (maximum 200 words), this will be used for publicity, with further amendment, as required, and a lay project plan for assessment by a lay member of BIRD Research Committee (500 words).

d. Details of analyses to be performed (250 words)

e. Dissemination plan (250 words)

f. A clear statement of how the application relates to BIRD's charitable objectives with particular reference to rheumatic diseases. This should include how the application helps to promote and advance medical knowledge, improve treatments for patients, and encourages collaboration between clinicians and research scientists.

g. Clarification of whether the application is for a pilot study, a test of clinical effectiveness, or "other", and if the applicant is new to research. If "other" further details will be requested (maximum 50 words).

h. A statement regarding what will need to be in place prior to starting the study (maximum 200 words). This may include, for example, ethical approvals, consent forms, patient information sheets and questionnaires. Applicants will be requested to supply samples and / or evidence where relevant, e.g. notification of authorisation or approval from the appropriate ethics committee.

i. Whether or not matched funding from another source has been sought, and if so, from what source, to what amount and whether or not the funding has been secured (maximum 100 words)

j. A statement detailing your projects use of public/patient engagement involvement, if applicable (maximum 100 words)

k. Evidence of the individual's track record (if not new to research), a summary CV, and a brief outline of the employing organisation e.g., a web link. Applicants will be advised to include brief details of other relevant professionals who may be involved, e.g., the name and role of their advisor or research group leader (maximum 200 words).

l. Provide at least two names and contact details for external reviewers that BIRD will approach to review this application. BIRD will request the review in the first instance, from details provided in the application form, and will issue one follow up in the event of no response, informing the applicant. After that the applicant will be required to pursue the review or identify an alternative reviewer..

m. How the applicant will acknowledge BIRD's support and help promote BIRD's name and work (maximum 200 words).

n. Indicate whether an application has been submitted elsewhere and the status of that application

The whole application should fit onto six sides of A4, and should be accompanied by the proposed research Gantt chart referred to in (b) above, any reference list and relevant outcome measures, patient or clinician reported.

The application should be signed off by the authorised manager in the host institution. This could be, for example, a financial officer, the R&D Manager, or the head of department.

Not all of the above may be relevant to all applications. In such instances the applicant should state briefly why an element is not relevant.

The Research Assessment Group meets twice a year to make awards – the application deadlines are 30th April and 30th November.

6. Assessment

Each application will be reviewed and assessed by BIRD's Research Committee, a sub-group of the Council of Management, which includes patient representatives and lay representatives in a lay assessment capacity.

Applications for awards will be accepted at any point of the year and are kept on file until the next meeting of the BIRD Research Committee. Applications will be acknowledged and applicants advised of the date of the next committee meeting.

Each application is given a preliminary scrutiny on receipt to ensure it is relevant to BIRD's objectives and contains all the required elements, or an acceptable rationale for not doing so.

Decisions will be communicated by email.

The BIRD Research Committee will review and assess applications that pass the preliminary scrutiny twice a year, provisionally in May and November, with decisions communicated in July and January.

The applicant may be invited to introduce their application at the meeting and further information may be sought from the applicant at any point in the process of evaluation.

If an application falls outside the combined expertise of the committee, BIRD reserves the right to invite feedback from relevant specialists, e.g., a statistician or a health economist, as appropriate.

BIRD will provide a clear statement of what will not be funded, e.g., proposals of insufficient merit or not meeting the above charitable objectives.

7. Terms and conditions

All successful applicants will be given written confirmation of the charity's expectations in the form of the terms and conditions of the award. This will include, for example:

i) BIRD's expectations in terms of maternity leave or extended absence through ill-health;

ii) who owns any equipment purchased with BIRD funding;

iii) what happens if the terms of the grant are not adhered to, e.g., the award is not used as agreed, or milestones are not met;

iv) how BIRD's support should be acknowledged; and,

v) reporting requirements in the form of annual or when the work is completed (whichever is sooner) reports to Council and, at the end of the study, the annual report and publicity material as required. This may be done in writing or by email. It should be a one page summary with a 50 word summary in lay speak. Appendices may be included if necessary.

The agreement should be signed off by the host institution's authorised manager, e.g., head of department, financial officer, research group leader, etc.

Receipt of the signed agreement by BIRD will be taken as confirming acceptance of the award. Successfully applicants will need to arrange with BIRD how payment will be made, again in writing or by email. The expectation in most instances is that the host organisation will invoice BIRD quarterly in arrears. Any underspent monies, shall be returned to BIRD once the project has been completed.

Where an award covers employment costs, the money will be paid in arrears. In such cases, an agreement with the employer may be required. BIRD will not act as an employer. BIRD will not cover sick, maternity pay or other employment benefits, all of which are to be covered by the hosting institution.

Work not started and expenditure incurred within six months after the proposed start date will be withdrawn unless an extension is agreed in writing with the ED.

Failure to meet conditions will result in the termination of the award by BIRD, and recovery of any invoiced funding to be reimbursed from the host institution.

Publicity

The website will be updated throughout the year with news of each grant awarded, including its value, and brief details of the study. News of grants awarded will also be posted on social media and via a press release.

The availability and granting of awards will be publicised through -

i) the BIRD website;

ii) links to and from other web sites, relevant professional bodies, publications, other charities and so on, in keeping with BIRDs aims and strategic plans;

iii) information to local NHS R&D departments, Universities, etc., in keeping with BIRD's aims and strategic plans;

iv) relevant directories, the annual report etc;

v) local media, social media and so on.

Monitoring

Reports will be made to Council at the next meeting following a BIRD Research Committee meeting.

Details of amounts awarded and to whom, with a brief description of the studies, will be included in the Annual Report and Accounts.

8. Conflicts of interest

BIRD accepts the definition and principles in the Charity Commission's document Conflicts of Interest: A guide for Charity Trustees (CC29). This states that 'a conflict of interest is any situation in which a trustee's personal interests, or loyalties could , or could be seen to, prevent the trustee from making a decision only in the best interests of the charity' - www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-a-conflict-of-interest-in-your-charity

A register of interests will be kept and all trustees will make annual declarations. Interests which should be disclosed include personal investment in enterprises with involvement in pharmaceuticals or healthcare, and biotech. Third party investments (eg ISAs) are exempt.

If a member of the BIRD Research Committee knows the applicant or their work, they should make this known to the BIRD Research Committee. If a BIRD Research Committee member is more directly involved, e.g. as an advisor, they should not participate in the review process.

Where the Chair or Vice-Chair of BIRD Research Committee is an applicant or co-applicant they must declare an interest and should not be involved in that round of meetings.

Other members of the BIRD Research Committee may apply for funding, indeed it is encouraged as part of our charitable purpose to ensure research takes place. Members wishing to submit a grant application will abide by the guidelines governing submission of grant applications and their application will in no way receive any form of preferential consideration, being judged on merit alone.

All conflicts of interest arising from grant applications must be declared at or before the relevant meeting(s) where the application will be considered for support, and will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. A list of all conflicts of interest will be circulated with the papers prior to the meeting.

Direct interests: A member will be automatically excluded from participation in both discussion of an application and the funding decision in cases where that individual has a direct interest in the funding proposal under discussion. A direct interest applies to any of the following situations:

- the member concerned is the named lead applicant on the grant application
- the member is a named co-applicant on the grant application
- a relative of the member is the lead applicant or co-applicant
- a named applicant on the proposal is a business partner or research collaborator of the member
- a named applicant is a colleague within the same department and/or research group as the member concerned
- the member concerned has a formal relationship with the applicant charity/organisation (eg. as trustee, professional adviser, patron etc.)

Where a member is excluded from a funding decision on the basis of a direct interest, he/she will withdraw from the meeting whilst the application in question is being discussed and will not take part in the funding decision. He/she will not receive the application itself, or any related papers (including referees' reports and the relevant draft minute(s) of the discussion and/or decision).

Indirect interests: An indirect interest applies where a funding proposal is from the same host institution as that of the member, but is from a different department/school and/or the applicant(s) are not known personally to the member. In the case of an indirect interest, the member may receive the relevant papers and take part in the discussion if the interest has been declared prior to the meeting and the member's participation is deemed to be appropriate by the Committee Chair

Exclusion at BIRD's discretion: In certain other situations, a member may be excluded from discussion of a grant application at the Trust's discretion. Examples of such situations include:

i. the member concerned can be seen as a direct competitor of the applicant (eg. they are currently being funded, or are currently applying for funding, for a project of a similar nature to the proposal under discussion)
ii. the member has acted as an external referee, or on a funding panel/committee in respect of the proposal under discussion at a time when the proposal was being discussed by another funding body
iii. the member has collaborated or published with the lead applicant within the past three years
iv. the member is aware of any other issue that might reasonably be expected to give rise to a conflict of interest or its perception. In any of the above cases, the particular situation will be discussed by

the Chair of the BIRD Research Committee and the Executive Director, who will decide on one of the following options:

- the member will be allowed to participate fully in the funding decision; or
- the member may comment on the proposal, but not take part in the funding decision; or
- the member will absent him/herself from the meeting while the proposal is being discussed and a decision taken.

In cases where a member is uncertain whether a conflict of interest exists, he/she should report this to the Executive Director, who will in turn discuss the matter with the Chair of the BIRD Research Committee, and a decision will be taken based on the provisions set out above. If a member is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of the BIRD Research Committee, he/she should raise the matter with either the Executive Director or the Chair of the BIRD Research Committee, who will deal with the matter in line with the options set out above.

9. Competition and availability

BIRD receives more applications than it has funds to support. Even if a project fits within the criteria and priorities and a detailed assessment has been made, we may still be unable to provide a grant.

10. Contact

Please contact BIRD@birdbath.org.uk or 01225 336363.