



Fighting Blindness Emerging Researcher Award 2021

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

A key priority for Fighting Blindness is to support the next generation of vision researchers. We recognise that securing independent funding awards is very beneficial to the career development of early-stage researchers and clinicians.

With this in mind, we are pleased to announce the 'Fighting Blindness Emerging Researcher Award' for early-stage researchers and clinicians on the island of Ireland.

The aim of the award is to **support promising early-stage researchers and clinicians in exploring or developing novel, ambitious ideas, new research directions, or finishing projects with the goal of establishing their own record of independent research.**

The purpose of the award is to fund:

- the completion of a piece of vision research work (that would otherwise not be funded)
- commence a new vision research project
 - stand-alone nature
 - or
 - an initial study that could be expected to lead to a more extensive research proposal

1.2. Funding

The maximum total funding available for the award is €10,000 for a period of 12-24 months. The award will provide for consumables and dissemination.

The award is not intended to provide salary for the applicant. A very strong case must be made for salary as a cost.

1.3. Research Priorities

For this award we are inviting proposals that are relevant to the research priorities of Fighting Blindness.

Fighting Blindness is committed to the development of therapies that are accessible to all patients affected by sight loss and the wide spectrum of retinal degenerative disease through the pursuit and enablement of scientific medical research.

Research projects must align with one or more of the following research areas:

- Diagnostics
- Therapeutics
- Elucidating molecular mechanisms and/or protective pathways in retinal degenerations
- Understanding genetic modifiers of retinal disease severity and progression

1.4. Timelines

Application deadline	5pm 2nd February 2022
Review	Feb-March 2022
Interviews (Zoom)	March 2022

1.5. Host institution

The host institution is the organisation that receives and administers grant funding and is responsible for compliance with all general and specific terms and conditions of awards.

In order to be eligible to apply for funding, a proposed host institution must be a higher education institution on the island of Ireland.

Alternatively, the host institute may be a hospital on the island of Ireland. The hospital must have the capacity to receive and administer the grant funding. It will also be responsible for compliance with all general and specific terms and conditions of awards. A letter of support stating this will be required.

2. Eligibility Criteria

Applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be assessed. Therefore, we strongly recommend you read the following to be made aware of requirements:

Project:

- Funding must be to complete a research project (that would otherwise not be funded) or commence a new project
- The project must fall within Fighting Blindness research priorities (Section 1.2)

Academic applicants must:

- Be an untenured postdoctoral scientist (not be tenured for a lectureship position at the time of applying for the Emerging Researcher Award)
- Have a doctoral degree
- Have between a maximum five years* research experience following their doctoral degree (time since date of thesis submission)
- Have a strong commitment to progressing their career in vision research
- Have a contract in the host institute that covers the entire duration of the award

Clinical applicants must:

- Have a medical degree
- Must not be at consultant level
- Have previous experience undertaking research
- Have a strong commitment to undertaking vision research
- Have a contract in the host institute that covers the entire duration of the award

*Extended leave- Fighting Blindness recognises that applicants may have had to take a period of extended leave from their careers for a number of reasons including carers, maternity, paternity, adoptive, parental and medical leave. To ensure equity for those who have had to take extended leave in the past, where relevant, there will be an opportunity for applicants to extend their period of eligibility for this award or justify reasonable shortcomings in their application portfolio commensurate with these circumstances to the external reviewers. Please contact research@fightingblindness.ie for more information. Extended leave will also be taken into consideration during the assessment of applicants.

3. Mentor

A mentor is required for each application. A mentor should be an established senior researcher or clinician who will guide and support the early-stage researcher during the award.

The mentor must hold a post either permanent or on contract basis ideally at the proposed research institute or hospital that covers the entire duration of the award.

4. PPI

Patient and public involvement (PPI) is very important for Fighting Blindness. It can be a rewarding means of supporting and enhancing your research or advocacy activity. However, this may be a departure from conventional approaches.

Researchers should view PPI as a means of increasing the impact, quality and relevance of their studies. Some of the benefits include:

- New partnerships between researchers and patients
- Inclusion of an important perspective to research and advocacy activities

- Mutual empowerment between all stakeholders
- Providing greater outcomes for patients
- Fulfilment of requirements for funding requests

Fighting Blindness have a PPI toolkit available online. It is strongly recommended that applicants consult this toolkit before completing the PPI section of the application form.

<https://www.fightingblindness.ie/how-we-can-help/research/patient-and-public-involvement-in-research-and-development/ppi-for-researchers/ppi-toolkit/>

5. Application procedure

Applications should be made by completing the Emerging Researcher Award Application Form.

Outlined below are the sections in the application form.

Application details

- Project title
- Proposed Host Institute
- Start date (not before May 2022, must start in 2022)
- Duration (between 12-24 months)
- Keywords that describe the project (max 5 words)

Applicant details

- Applicant CV (using Fighting Blindness Applicant CV template)

Mentor Details

- Mentor CV (using Fighting Blindness Mentor CV template)
- Declaration of Support Mentor, outlining how the mentor will support the applicant (using Fighting Blindness Declaration of Support template)

Institutional Declaration of Support

- The host institute receives and administers grant funding and is responsible for compliance with all general and specific terms and conditions of awards.
- The Declaration of Support from the host institute must indicate that they are aware of and support the application and also that they can receive and administer the funding (using Fighting Blindness Declaration of Support template)

Project Details

Lay Summary (350 words max)

Please describe the proposed project in non-scientific language and how it fits with Fighting Blindness research priorities. In the summary please also explain how the award would aid with your career development

Please complete either section A or B.

A1 Complete a research project (500 words max)

If the funding is to be used to complete a research project, please provide the following information on the current project-

- Background information/existing literature
- The hypothesis and the objectives
- Methodologies used
- Results to date

Please detail how the funding will be used to complete the project (500 words max)

- Research plan to complete the project
 - Objectives including timelines
 - Methodology
- Any other sources of funding for this work

B1 Begin a new project (1000 words)

Project details-

If the funding is to be used to begin a new project, please provide the following information-

- Background information/existing literature
- Hypothesis
- Objectives including timelines
- Methodology
- Summary

B2 Sustainability plan (250 words max)

If the Emerging Researcher Award will not cover completion of the project, please detail the plans for continuing the project.

References

List any references in the application.

Research Images

A max of 5 research images can be submitted as part of the application.

Ethical Approval

Please indicate if the project requires ethical approval and if ethical approval has been gained. *Please note proof of ethical approval or application for approval will be required before the award commences.*

Career development (400 words max)

Please detail how this award would be beneficial to your career development. It is recommended to include information on your career plan, plans for applying to other awards and how receiving this award could help with future grant applications.

Dissemination (200 words max)

Please detail how you will disseminate the finding of the research to all stakeholders including the public audience and the scientific audience.

PPI activities (250 words max)

Involving patients and the public in research is very important to Fighting Blindness and researchers are strongly encouraged to become involved in PPI activities (see Section 4).

Please detail any PPI activities that you are currently involved in, along with any activities that you plan on being involved in over the duration of the award. Include information on any resources you avail/will avail of. Please note engagement activities are different to PPI activities (see Section 4).

Budget

Please detail the budget under the following categories. Please note the award is not intended to provide salary for the applicant. A very strong case must be made for salary as a cost.

Leave any sections blank that are not relevant. A breakdown under each category is required as is a justification of the cost.

- Consumables
- Dissemination
- Other (including salary)

6. Submission of Application

Completed application forms should be sent to research@fightingblindness.ie in **Word format** by **5pm 2nd February 2022**.

Checklist for submission-

- Application form
- Applicant CV (using Fighting Blindness applicant CV template)
- Mentor CV (using Fighting Blindness mentor CV template)
- Mentor Declaration of Support (using Fighting Blindness Declaration of Support template)
- Host Institute Declaration of Support (using Fighting Blindness Declaration of Support template)