

Scheme Guidelines

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The University of Melbourne's Early Career Researcher (ECR) Grants scheme aims to support early career researchers (ECRs) to undertake high-quality research projects and pilot studies, strengthen their track record, and build capability in competing for external funding. This scheme is a core part of the University's research development strategy under *Advancing Melbourne 2030*, which places a high priority on nurturing research careers.
- 1.2 The ECR Grants scheme is jointly funded by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (DVCR) strategic funding and faculties. The scheme is overseen by Chancellery (Research and Enterprise) and administered by the Researcher Development Schemes (RDS) team in Research, Innovation and Commercialisation (RIC), with input from faculties.
- 1.3 Grant funding for the 2025 scheme will be awarded for one year: 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025.

2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objectives of the ECR Grant scheme are to:
 - a) Support ECRs with strong research potential to establish and progress their research careers by providing competitive funding for high-quality ECR-led research projects and pilot studies that are strategically aligned with School and Faculty research priorities and the 'Discovery' theme of [Advancing Melbourne 2030](#);
 - b) Provide ECRs with practical experience in preparing a grant application for peer review;
 - c) Build ECRs' track profile and record to enhance their competitiveness in bidding for external research funds.

3 SUPPORTED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- 3.1 The scheme funds applications that support excellence in pure and applied research projects undertaken by individual researchers across all research fields.
 - a) *Pure research* is experimental, exploratory, or theoretical work undertaken to acquire new knowledge without necessarily looking for long-term application and impact other than the advancement of knowledge.
 - b) *Applied research* is original work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge with the objective of a specific application.
- 3.2 The scheme supports the creation or performance of a work of art only when it is primarily oriented towards research, which means:
 - a) It is accompanied by exegesis or other form of critical analysis;
 - b) It is open to peer review; and
 - c) It has an enduring form.

- 3.3 Applications that are not primarily oriented toward research will not be considered. Examples of such excluded projects are:
- a) Scholarly investigations that are not anticipated to lead to conceptual advances or discoveries, or novel practical outcomes and applications;
 - b) Projects such as uncritical bibliographical compilations, purely descriptive catalogues, and editions that do not involve original research;
 - c) Translations of an existing scholarly work into a different language, or production of communication materials describing existing research;
 - d) Activities that lead solely to the creation or performance of a work of art, including visual art, musical compositions, drama, dance, designs, or literary works (i.e. are not accompanied by an exegesis or other form of critical analysis, and/or are not in enduring form, and/or are not open to peer review);
 - e) Production of teaching materials (regardless of whether research may be required in their creation);
 - f) Development of research aids and tools, including computer programs, unless the application demonstrates how the development of these tools integrally contributes to research objectives and outcomes.

4 ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility requirements

- 4.1 To be eligible to apply for an ECR Grant, applicants must:
- a) Hold or have a confirmed future salaried (fixed-term or continuing) academic appointment of at least 0.5FTE at Level A, B, or C at the University of Melbourne, that begins 1 January 2025 or earlier;
- or**
- b) Hold or have a confirmed future salaried (fixed term or continuing) academic appointment of at least 0.5FTE at Level A, B, or C, with a Department/School of the University of Melbourne but be based at an affiliated medical research institute or a non-medical research institute, that begins 1 January 2025 or earlier;
- or**
- c) Be an honorary University of Melbourne staff member employed by a specified affiliated research institute at levels A, B, or C.¹ In these cases, the affiliated institute employing the ECR grant holder will be responsible for covering the portion of grant funding that is normally contributed by the Faculty.
- 4.2 To be eligible, applicants must hold or have a reasonable expectation (at the time of application) of holding an appointment until 31 December 2025. Where applicants who do not hold a continuing appointment, or a fixed-term contract appointment to 31 December 2025, their Head of Department/School must confirm salary support for a contract extension in the [Head of Department Certification](#).
- 4.3 For honorary staff applicants applying under s4.1(c), it is an expectation of ECR grant funding that publications arising from the ECR grant will be published with the University of Melbourne as the primary academic affiliation.
- 4.4 To be eligible, applicants must have been awarded a PhD within five years of the submission date of the ECR Grant (on or after 26 April 2019)².

¹ This includes: The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre; The Florey; The Bionics Institute; Baker Institute; Orygen/Centre for Youth Mental Health; and Melbourne Business School.

² The award of the PhD is defined as the date of the official notification letter or, for those awarded PhDs where the institution does not supply such letters, the date that the applicant has completed all the required steps to be eligible to graduate with a PhD (not the date of receiving the official testamur). Submission of a PhD for examination is not sufficient to claim the award of PhD.

- 4.5 Researchers are **not eligible** to apply for an ECR Grant if:
- a) They have previously been awarded an ECR Grant, and have drawn on the funding;
 - b) They are, or have been, the Chief Investigator or major beneficiary of an ARC or NHMRC grant (or a discipline-specific equivalent) since the award of their PhD (on the same or a distinct research proposal, on the basis that the ECR's track record is already being supported);
 - c) They hold a University of Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellowship, including a Melbourne, McKenzie, Mary Lugton, or Puzey Fellowship.
- 4.6 Applicants are limited to submitting one application for an ECR Grant under this scheme per year.

Eligibility Exemption Requests: purpose and process

- 4.7 Applicants who fall outside the eligibility criteria above may make an Eligibility Exemption Request (EER) in the relevant section of the application form.
- 4.8 The University recognises that significant interruptions to research and career opportunity or life experiences may affect a researcher's capacity, productivity, or contribution; and that the impact of any interruption may extend beyond the duration of a specific event. An EER may be submitted if:
- a) The applicant's PhD was awarded before 26 April 2019 and there have been demonstrable career interruption/s or disrupted capacity to undertake research or exceptional personal circumstances that have limited the applicant's scholarly research opportunity post-PhD³ to be effectively five years or less; or
 - b) the applicant does not meet one of the other eligibility criteria above and can demonstrate *exceptional* circumstances that justify their equitable consideration.
- 4.9 Interruptions that can be claimed when calculating the effective years of scholarly research opportunity post-PhD include:
- Disruption due to international relocation
 - Parental leave
 - Caring responsibilities (with reduced research fraction)
 - Disability
 - Disaster management and recovery
 - Medical or mental health conditions
 - Limited or no access to facilities and resources – such as through workplace interruptions
 - Unemployment
 - Part-time employment or fractional FTE
 - Employment that offered limited (i.e. less than 40% workload allocation) or no provision for research
 - Community obligations, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and protocols.
- 4.10 Where the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the impact of the constraint or interruption this can be documented as a contributing factor.
- 4.11 Submission of an EER does not guarantee an exemption and is at the determination of the EER sub-committee chaired by the DVCR's delegate.

³ 'Scholarly research opportunity post-PhD' at 4.8(a) is taken as holding a salaried appointment after the completion of a PhD degree that enabled the applicant to spend a minimum of 40% of their workload allocation on research. Applicants whose employment enabled them to spend 40% or more of their workload allocation on research at 1 FTE for five years or more, will not be considered for an Eligibility Exemption Request, unless other exceptional circumstances are present pursuant to 4.7(b).

- 4.12 If requesting EER on the grounds of career interruption, applicants should use the calculator available on the scheme webpage to calculate and map out any interruption/s, and upload this to the full application. Applicants will need to demonstrate how the total duration of the interruptions they experienced brings their 'effective years of scholarly research opportunity post-PhD' to within five years with the interruptions taken into account.
- 4.13 To assist the EER sub-committee in determining eligibility, applicants should attach supporting evidence to their EER application. Supporting evidence will remain confidential and will only be available to the EER Committee and scheme administrative staff as needed. In general, medical certificates in support of medical or mental health conditions are not required but will be accepted in place of detailed personal information. Supporting evidence can include, but is not limited to:
- Employment offer letters or position descriptions indicating the role and responsibilities of the position that excluded research time;
 - Testimonials from employers detailing how a position did not permit research to be conducted;
 - Letters from GPs or medical specialists confirming in general terms the existence, timeframe, and significance/severity of a medical or mental health condition experienced by an applicant.
- 4.14 For eligible applications with effectively less than five years of scholarly research opportunity, applicants will be able to describe their research track record relative to opportunity (percentage of workload available for research or otherwise) in Part E of the Application form.

5 APPLICATION PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS

- 5.1 The application form is divided into five parts, each serving a different purpose. These parts are as follows:
- Part A: Administrative Summary
 - Part B: Project Summary Education and Appointment Details (includes B-1 Eligibility Exemption Request)
 - Part C: Proposed Budget
 - Part D: Project Description
 - Part E: Researcher Track Record

Each part has specific information that needs to be filled out, and it is essential to complete all sections accurately and thoroughly. Prospective applicants should read and follow the ['Instructions to Applicants'](#) document when completing their application. Ineligible or incomplete applications will be excluded and not considered by the selection committee.

- 5.2 Applications must be submitted via the University of Melbourne's SmartyGrants application portal. The [Head of Department Certification form](#) is required on a separate document that must be uploaded as a PDF into the online application before submission. Signatures may be handwritten or in a verifiable digital format (including image files used with the explicit permission of the signatory).
- 5.3 Once the SmartyGrants application is complete, applicants must save a PDF copy of the SmartyGrants application and attach it to a Themis workbench submission. Details on how to submit a Themis workbench submission can be found [here](#). The status of the submission should indicate **'forwarded to HoD'** by the end of the submission day.
- 5.4 Selection committees will only be provided with application material that adheres to word or page limits.
- 5.5 Requested funding must adhere to the minimum and maximum amounts detailed in these Guidelines (at Part 7). An application that requests less than the minimum funding or more than the maximum funding available per project will be deemed ineligible.
- 5.6 Applications that request funds that duplicate or supplement another current internal University of Melbourne grants, external grants, or research contracts will be excluded from consideration. If an applicant already holds a grant in a related area, it is the applicant's responsibility to provide sufficient information to assure their Faculty ranking committee that the ECR grant is not being used to 'top-up'

another existing grant. Please refer to the '[Instructions to Applicants](#)' document for instructions on how to address this.

- 5.7 Applicants will need to adhere to any internal application preparation requirements of each Faculty and should see [the RIC webpage](#) for specific requirements.

6 BUDGET ITEMS

Budget items supported:

- 6.1 The total funding amounts applicants can apply for are outlined in 7.4. Items that directly support the research program may be funded, including:
- a) Personnel;
 - b) Relief from other duties;
 - c) Equipment;
 - d) Maintenance;
 - e) Travel;
 - f) Open access fees for publishing:
 - a. An article in a fully open access journal (to a maximum of \$5000). Note that in their application, applicants should name the fully open access journal they plan to publish in.
 - b. An open-access chapter or open access book (to a maximum of \$5,000)

Please refer to the '[Instructions to Applicants](#)' document for further guidance on supported budget items and budget justification. The Selection Committee reserves the right to make reasonable adjustments to the budget of an awarded project.

Budget items not supported:

- 6.2 Funding may not be sought or used to fund the ECR grant holder's salary and/or on-costs.
- 6.3 Funds will not be provided for the following purposes:
- a) Fees for international students or Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) or Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) liabilities;
 - b) Funding for postgraduate studies for the applicant;
 - c) Costs not directly related to research or the project;
 - d) Funds that duplicate or supplement another current internal University grant, external grant or research contract;
 - e) Non-specialist equipment available readily to University staff through Faculties, such as desktop computers or laptops;
 - f) Salaries for research collaborator(s). This does not include salaries for research support staff or technical support staff.
 - g) Fees for publishing open access in subscription (hybrid) journals, sometimes called Article Processing Charges (APCs). Please note that the University already covers open access fees for many journals through open access publishing agreements, and free repository open access pathways are also available. Applicants should contact their discipline's liaison librarians for further advice or refer to <https://library.unimelb.edu.au/openscholarship/open-access-publishing>.
 - h) Society membership fees.

7 SELECTION CRITERIA AND FUNDING STRUCTURE

7.1 All applications will be assessed and ranked by Faculty ranking committees. Thereafter, the application will be assessed and ranked for award by a central Selection Committee comprising senior academics from across disciplines and chaired by the delegate of the DVCR (normally, the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Research Capability). At both levels of committee assessment, the following selection criteria and strategic considerations will be applied:

a) Researcher development (40%)

- Career stage and positioning at early career stage to gain maximum advantage from an ECR grant, relative to opportunity;
- Likely impact on the ECR's career development and their competitiveness in securing future external funding, indicated by the applicant's stated plans to secure funding in the future.
- How the research project will allow the ECR to foster their own independent research activities
- Independence of the project from existing funded projects held by the ECR or their collaborators.

b) Research project quality (40%)

- Contribution to addressing a gap in knowledge;
- Research aims;
- Novelty/originality of research methods;
- Feasibility (including the capability of the researcher and team, and of the methods).

c) Impact and benefit (20%)

- What is the potential impact of the research, both within and beyond academia?
- What are the social/economic/cultural/environmental benefits of the research?
- Contribution to university priorities as outlined in [Advancing Melbourne 2030](#).

Applicants who identify their research project as Indigenous research or propose to engage with Indigenous Knowledge, people, or communities are required in the application to account for how their proposed project aligns with the advice provided by the [AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#), which provides relevant guidance on the application of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Applicants should also refer to the [University of Melbourne's Charter for Research with Indigenous Knowledge Holders](#).

7.2 DVCR strategic funding shall be allocated to the scheme as follows:

- 70% of this funding will be allocated to applications that Faculties support and have ranked in order of merit; the allocation of grants is following the 2024 block grant distributions and in line with the respective Faculty rankings.
- 30% of this funding will be allocated to supported applications from Faculties, to include consideration of the criteria at 7.1, and broader institutional and strategic considerations such as, but not limited to:
 - Supporting Indigenous knowledge and partnerships; interdisciplinary research; research collaboration;
 - diversity, inclusion, and equity considerations across the ranked ECR grant recipients;
 - A fair and equitable distribution across faculties and disciplines of the University, as determined by the Selection Committee.

7.3 Each grant awarded will comprise matched Chancellery and Faculty funds.

- 7.4 For applicants from all Faculties, grant funding will normally be awarded as follows, unless by prior approval (on a case-by-case basis) from the Chair of the Selection Committee:
- Minimum of \$5,000 and a maximum of \$25,000 for Architecture Building and Planning, Arts, Business and Economics, Education, Fine Arts and Music, and Law.
 - Minimum of \$5,000 and a maximum of \$40,000 for Engineering and Information Technology, Science, and Medicine Dentistry and Health Sciences.
- 7.5 Research-only staff whose salary is sourced from an externally funded project must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the relevant Faculty that the nature of their appointment means that they are allowed, and have the time available, to pursue additional research activities in the [Head of Department Certification form](#).
- 7.6 Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously received funding from any sources, however, applicants (other than those noted in 4.5) with some previous or current funding are eligible to apply and the significance and relevance of any previous funding held will be considered by the relevant faculty and central selection committees, in reference to the Scheme Guidelines and objectives.

8 EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 A committee established by each Faculty, chaired by the respective Associate Dean (Research) or equivalent, will initially assess applications on a competitive basis in accordance with the objectives of the scheme (Section 2 of this document) and the merit of applications against the selection criteria (Section 7 of this document), before consideration by the central Selection Committee. Faculty committees are asked to provide short justifications for their rankings and assessments.
- 8.3 The ECR Grants Selection Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) or delegate, will consider all applications ranked by Faculties and determine the final allocation of grants.
- 8.4 Applications are reviewed by a multi-disciplinary committee, so applicants should ensure that their application, including the project description, is clearly written and accessible to an expert in another discipline.
- 8.5 The ECR Grants Selection Committee reserves the right to discuss applications, on a confidential basis, with Deans, Associate Deans (Research), Heads of Department/Schools, Centre Directors, or other senior colleagues.
- 8.6 Application and assessment of applications should align with the University's Diversity and Inclusion strategy and underpinning principles, and the University's Performance Relative to Opportunity guidelines.

9 SCHEME TIMETABLE

4 March 2024	Applications Open via SmartyGrants & Release of Scheme Guidelines
Friday, 26 April 2024, 3 pm	Applications due to RIC
Monday, 27 May 2024	RIC provides eligible applications to Faculties
5 July 2024	Faculty Rankings are due to RIC
September 2024	ECR Grants Selection Committee meeting to decide on final allocations based on Faculty recommendations
October 2024	Outcomes announced
1 January 2025	2025 ECR Grants commence

31 December 2025

2025 ECR Grants expected to finish

31 May 2026

ECR (grant holder) to lodge final report (as per funding conditions)

Please note that some Faculties may have additional internal submission requirements before the final RIC submission date – please see [the RIC webpage](#) for details.

10 FUNDING CONDITIONS

- 10.1 Grant offers must be accepted by the ECR Grant holder and their Head of Department/School by means of a fully completed and signed Acceptance Form.
- 10.2 The ECR grant holder is responsible for the project, its concept, the strategic decisions called for in its pursuit, and for the communication of the results.
- 10.3 The ECR grant holder will be the contact person for all administrative matters to do with the project.
- 10.4 The ECR grant holder must ensure that the research is conducted in accordance with University policies, including compliance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)* and regulatory frameworks for human research ethics, animal experimentation ethics, requirements of the Office of Gene Technology Regulator, health and safety and intellectual property. No project may proceed unless the appropriate ethical or other required clearances have been obtained.
- 10.5 Where a funded ECR Grant project involves external collaboration, the University of Melbourne's interests should be appropriately clarified and secured. In some circumstances, the external collaborator's institution will be asked to enter into a letter of agreement with the University before the ECR Grant funds can be used for the collaborative aspects of the project. Details of planned collaboration(s) are required in the Acceptance Form. RIC will subsequently advise if a collaboration agreement is likely to be needed.
- 10.6 Applicants who are successful in obtaining ECR funding for 2025 and are subsequently awarded a McKenzie, Mary Lugton, or a Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellowship to commence in 2025 must relinquish one of the awards.
- 10.7 Applicants who are successful in obtaining ECR funding for 2025, and subsequently win an externally-funded competitive grant for funding of a distinct project in 2025, will be able to hold both awards.
- 10.8 Extensions for grant funds expenditure and completion may be considered under the following circumstances:
 - a) **Exceptional Circumstances**

A written request for an extension that details the exceptional circumstance(s) must be approved by the ECR grant holder's Head of Department/School, and submitted to res-devschemes@unimelb.edu.au, no later than 30 November 2025. The maximum extension considered will be completion by 30 June 2026. A pro forma extension form is available from [the RIC website](#).
 - b) **Parental Leave**

The completion date for the ECR Grant will be extended by the equivalent length of Parental Leave taken. Grant holders should advise both their Faculty and RIC when parental leave is approved.
 - c) **Prolonged personal leave (sick leave or caring leave)**

The completion date for the ECR Grant will be extended by the equivalent length of time of the approved personal leave.
- 10.9 Extensions will not normally be granted over six months except as outlined above. Variations requests that do not meet the above categories must be lodged formally through RIC and will be considered by Chancellery on a case-by-case basis, and will be assessed in line with scheme objectives, national legislation, and the University's workplace policies and staff entitlements under enterprise bargaining.

- 10.10 The ECR Grant holder must comply with any instructions and/or conditions in the Letter of Award relating to approved items of expenditure.
- 10.11 Unless special conditions are set down by the Selection Committee, the grant should be regarded as a 'one-line budget'. The ECR Grant holder is responsible for ensuring that the expenditure of the grant is broadly in accord with the budget presented in the application and consistent with the nature and aims of the specific project approved and the objectives of the scheme.
- 10.12 Should the ECR Grant holder's employment circumstances change (i.e. if the ECR Grant holder moves to a new Department/School/Faculty) they must contact both RIC and their Faculty ECR administrator immediately. Arrangements for the continuation of the ECR Grant will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Chair of the Selection Committee in conjunction with the relevant Faculty(s).
- 10.13 Should the ECR Grant holder's employment at the University of Melbourne cease during the grant-funded period, they must notify RIC and their Faculty ECR administrator immediately and relinquish any remaining ECR Grant funding. This is an internal grant to the University of Melbourne and is non-transferable.

Reporting requirements

- 10.14 The ECR Grant holder is required to provide a written report to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Capability) via RIC on the outcomes of the project by 31 May 2026 (unless there has been an approved extension to the project end date). The final report form is found at [Manage Your Grant](#). ECR Grant holders are expected to demonstrate how the ECR Grant built their research capability and contributed to broader research themes and linkages. Summaries of ECR Grant projects and final reports may be used externally or published by the University.
- 10.15 Unsatisfactory final reports will be referred to relevant Heads of Department/Schools and/or Associate Deans (Research) for comment or follow-up action. Please note that failure to provide this report by the deadline may result in future applications to the University of Melbourne's internal research programs being ruled ineligible.
- 10.16 In addition to a final report of project outcomes, the ECR Grant holder is required to provide a financial acquittal report. Any unspent DVCR strategic funds remaining after the grant period must be relinquished.
- 10.17 ECR Grant holders are expected to give appropriate acknowledgment of University support through this scheme when communicating their research outcomes.