INTRODUCTION

1.1 The University of Melbourne’s Early Career Research (ECR) Grants scheme aims to support early career researchers to undertake high quality projects and pilot studies, strengthen their track records, and enhance their profile for competitive external funding. This scheme is a core part of the University’s research development strategy, which places a high priority on supporting ECRs.

1.2 The ECR Grant Scheme is supported by strategic funding from Chancellery Research and Enterprise and matched funding from Academic Divisions. The scheme is administered by Research, Innovation and Commercialisation (RIC) in conjunction with Academic Divisions.

1.3 Grant funding for the 2022 Scheme will be awarded for a period of one year only: 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Scheme are to:

- Support early career researchers who demonstrate clear evidence of high research potential to progress their research careers;
- Encourage establishment of an early career researcher’s research program;
- Provide competitive funding for high quality research projects and pilot research projects;
- Provide early career researchers with experience in preparing a grant application for peer review;
- Build early career researchers’ track record in order to enhance competitiveness in bidding for external research funds;
- Provide research funding for projects that are strategically aligned with the University’s priorities:

RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED

3.1 The scheme funds applications that support excellence in pure and applied research projects undertaken by individual researchers across all research fields. 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. 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/has:
  - Accompanied by exegesis or other form of critical analysis;
  - An enduring form;
  - Open to peer review.

3.3 Applications that are not primarily oriented towards research will not be considered. The following, for example, will not be funded under the Scheme:
  a) Scholarly investigations that are not anticipated to lead to conceptual advances or discoveries, or to novel practical outcomes and applications.
• This includes projects such as uncritical bibliographical compilations, purely descriptive catalogues and editions that do not involve original research.

b) Activities that lead solely to the creation or performance of a work of art.
• This includes visual art, musical compositions, drama, dance, designs or literary works. To be eligible for funding under this scheme, such works would need to be accompanied by an exegesis or other form of critical analysis, in enduring form and be open to peer review.

c) Production of teaching materials.
• This is regardless of whether research may be required in their creation.

d) Development of research aids and tools, including computer programs.
• If the development of research aids and tools forms an integral part of the research project, the application needs to explicitly explain how the development of these tools contributes to the research objectives and outcomes.

4 FUNDING

4.1 Central funding shall be allocated to the scheme as follows:
• 70% of the central funding allocation will be allocated to applications that Academic Divisions support and have ranked in order of merit; the allocation of grants is in accordance with the 2022 block grant distributions and in line with the respective Academic Division rankings.
• 30% of the central funding allocation will be allocated to supported applications from Academic Divisions, to include consideration of:
  ○ Interdisciplinary research
  ○ Equity and diversity (e.g. Indigenous researchers and women in disciplines in which they are underrepresented)
  ○ A fair and equitable distribution across Academic Divisions, as determined by the central Committee.

4.2 Each grant awarded will comprise matched Chancellery and Academic Division funds.

4.3 For applicants from all Academic Divisions, grant funding will normally be awarded as follows:
• Minimum of $5,000 and a maximum of $40,000 for Engineering and Information Technology, Science, Medicine Dentistry and Health Sciences, and Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences.

Academic Divisions that wish to alter the maximum funding amounts may make a case for desired funding allocations and preferred candidates based on their own strategic priorities. Academic Divisions wishing to make a case must do so via their Associate Dean (Research), directly to the Chair of the Central Committee.

5 APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

5.1 Applicants must:

a) Hold or have a confirmed future appointment for a 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 2023 or earlier;
   or

b) Hold or have confirmed an appointment for a 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 based at an affiliated medical research institute or a non-medical research institute, that begins 1 January 2023 or earlier;
   or
c) Be an honorary staff based at an affiliated research institute whose grant is administered by the University, namely: the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health; the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre; the Bionics Institute of Australia; the Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute; or the Melbourne Business School. In these cases, the affiliated institute hosting the ECR grant recipient will be responsible for covering the portion of grant funding that is normally contributed by the Academic Division.

5.2 Applicants must hold or have reasonable expectation (at the time of application) of holding an appointment until 31 December 2023. Where applicants who do not hold a continuing appointment, or a fixed-term contract appointment to 31 December 2023, their Head of Department/School must confirm salary support for contract extension in the certification section of the application form.

5.3 This scheme targets early career researchers who have been awarded a PhD within the last 5 years (on or after 21 July 2017) and before submission of this ECR application.

However, applicants who have had career interruptions or who have worked in an academic research organisation for less than 5 years FTE and received their PhD before 21 July 2017 may submit an eligibility exemption request (EER).

Applications under the EER process should be able to clearly demonstrate that their research career has been significantly constrained or interrupted by circumstances such as serious or chronic illness, child bearing or child rearing, primary care-giving for a family member, or working with industry or outside the higher education sector where research was not the primary focus of the employment. Where the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the impact of the constraint or interruption this can documented as a contributing factor.

Applicants should note that applying for an eligibility exemption does not automatically grant an exemption and is at the determination of the scheme’s eligibility subcommittee.

5.4 An applicant may only ever be awarded one University of Melbourne ECR grant. Previous recipients of an ECR grant are not eligible to apply.

5.5 The applicant should demonstrate in their application that they have the time and basic infrastructure or resources to pursue the proposed project, within the context of existing research, teaching and higher degree supervision responsibilities.

5.6 Research-only staff whose salary is sourced from an externally funded project must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the relevant Academic Division that the nature of their appointment means that they are allowed, and have the time available, to pursue additional research activities (see Part A4 of the Application Form).

5.7 Applicants who are, or have been, the first named/lead CI or major beneficiary of an ARC or NHMRC grant (or a discipline-specific equivalent) since the award of their PhD are not eligible to apply for this scheme.

5.8 Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously received significant competitively-awarded funding for research costs.

5.9 Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously received funding from any sources, however applicants (other than those noted in 5.7) with some previous or current funding are eligible to apply and

---

1 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. Submission of a PhD for examination is not an indication that all steps have been completed.
the significance and relevance of any previous funding held will be considered by the relevant faculty or school selection and ranking committee, in reference to the scheme guidelines and aims.

5.10 Applicants are limited to submitting one application for an ECR grant under this scheme per year.

5.11 McKenzie and Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellows are ineligible to apply for an ECR grant, as these Fellowship Programs incorporate an allocation for project costs and enhance competitiveness in applying for external research funds. Applicants who are successful in obtaining ECR funding for 2023 and are subsequently awarded a McKenzie or a Melbourne Postdoctoral Fellowship to commence in 2023 must relinquish one of the awards.

6 APPLICATION ELIGIBILITY

6.1 Applications must be submitted via the University of Melbourne’s SmartyGrants application portal. Head of School/Department certification is required on a separate page that must be uploaded as a PDF into the online application before submission. Signatures may be handwritten, approved digital signatures, or image files used with explicit permission of the signatory.

6.2 Applications must be completed and formatted as outlined in Section 3 of the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document.

6.3 Selection committees will only assess application material that adheres to word or page limits. Any excess material will not be provided for review by selection committees.

6.4 Requested funding must adhere to the minimum and maximum amounts detailed in Section 4.3 of these Guidelines. An application that requests less than the minimum funding or more than the maximum funding available per project will be deemed ineligible.

6.5 Applications that request funds that duplicate or supplement another current internal University of Melbourne grant, external grant or research contract 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 Academic Division that the ECR grant is not being used to ‘top-up’ another existing grant. Please refer to Section 3 (A4) of the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document for instructions on how to address this.

6.6 Applicants who are successful in obtaining ECR funding for 2023, and subsequently win an external Australian Competitive Grant for funding in 2023, will be able to hold both awards.

7 APPLICATION PROCESS

7.1 Prospective applicants should read and follow the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document when completing their application.

7.2 Applications will not be checked after submission for completeness or eligibility; this is the responsibility of the applicant. Ineligible or incomplete applications will be excluded and not considered by the Committees.

7.3 Applicants will need to adhere to the particular internal submission requirements of each Academic Division, and should see the RIC website for specific requirements.

8 BUDGET ITEMS

8.1 Budget items supported
8.1.1 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) Other.

Please refer to Section 3 (Part C) of the ‘Instructions to Applicants’ document for further guidance on supported budget items and budget justification. The Central Committee reserves the right to made reasonable adjustments to the budget of an awarded project.

8.2 Budget items not supported

8.2.1 Funding may not be sought or used to fund Chief Investigator salaries and/or on-costs.

8.2.2 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) Staff seeking funding for their own postgraduate studies;
   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 Academic Divisions, 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) Article Processing Charges (APC - sometimes called open access fees) to make a work openly accessible where the University already has an institutional subscription to the journal (hybrid journals). Researchers who wish to publish in subscription journals can make their work openly accessible through the deposit of a copy of their work in the institutional repository, Minerva Access. Applicants should contact their local liaison librarians for further advice;
   h) Society membership fees.

9 SELECTION CRITERIA

9.1 All applications will be assessed by an Academic Division Research Committee and the ECR Grant Scheme Central Committee using the following selection criteria:

   a) Researcher development (40%)
      • How the project will contribute to the researcher’s career development and enhance their competitiveness in securing external funding in the future to support their research program. This includes a statement on applicant’s plans to secure funding in the future.
   b) The quality of the project (30%)
      • Significance of the project (including some consideration of the alignment with University and Academic Division strategies), and the extent to which the project is soundly conceived and planned.
   c) Feasibility (15%)
      • The extent to which the project is feasible given the timelines and budget, and the skills, experience and time commitment of the Chief Investigator and any collaborator(s).
   d) Resources (15%)
      • The extent to which the budget is justified and appropriate.

9.2 Consideration will also be given to the likelihood that the research proposed will lead to:
   • A demonstrable conceptual advance;
   • An important discovery, innovation or solution of an important practical problem;
• A contribution of economic or social benefit to Australia;
• Ongoing research collaboration with an external government organisation or industry.

10 EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

10.1 A committee established by each Academic Division, 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 selection criteria (Section 9 of this document), prior to consideration by the ECR Grant Scheme Central Committee.

Each Academic Division will rank and list which applications they will support for central funding consideration. Academic Divisions are asked to rank all applications based on the merit of the application, according to the objectives of the scheme and the selection criteria, and to provide short justifications for these rankings.

10.2 The ECR Grant Scheme Central Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) or delegate, will consider all applications ranked by Academic Divisions and determine final funding allocations.

10.3 The ECR Grant Scheme Central Committee reserves the right to discuss applications, on a confidential basis, with Deans, Associate Deans (Research), Heads of Department/School, Centre Directors or other senior colleagues.

10.4 Application and assessment of applications should align with the University’s Diversity and Inclusion strategy and underpinning principles.

11 TIMETABLE

Wednesday 20 April 2022 Release of Funding Guidelines
Wednesday 1 June 2022, 3pm Eligibility Exemption Requests (EERs) due to RIC
End of June 2022 Outcomes of EERs provided
Thursday 21 July 2022, 3pm Final applications due to RIC
2 August 2022 (on or before) RIC provides eligible applications to Academic Divisions
31 August 2022 (on or before) Academic Divisions provide rankings and funding amounts to RIC
September 2022 ECR Grant Scheme central committee meeting to decide on final allocations based on Academic Division recommendations
31 October 2022 Outcomes announced

Please note that some Academic Divisions may have additional internal submission requirements prior to the final RIC submission date – please see the RIC webpage for details.

12 APPEALS

12.1 In appropriate circumstances, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may establish an independent Appeals Committee.

12.2 Appeals will be heard only against the implementation or exercise of the selection procedures. Appeals will not be heard against Academic Division or ECR Grant Scheme committee rankings or comments as to the
academic merit of applications. An applicant may appeal only where there is clear evidence that the implementation or exercise of the selection procedures has contravened these Scheme Guidelines.

12.3 Applicants wishing to appeal against a decision must notify the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Capability) in writing within twenty-eight days of advice of the outcome of the application.

13 CONDITIONS OF GRANT

13.1 Grant offers must be accepted by the Chief Investigator and their Head of Department/School by means of a fully completed and signed Acceptance Form.

13.2 The Chief Investigator is responsible for the project, its concept, the strategic decisions called for in its pursuit, and for the communication of the results.

13.3 The Chief Investigator will be the contact person for all administrative matters to do with the project.

13.4 The Chief Investigator must ensure that the research is conducted in accordance with University policy, including compliance with the Code of Conduct for Research and policies on 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.

13.5 Regarding research that proposes to engage with Indigenous knowledges, people or communities, applicants should take account of the advice provided by the AITSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and the NHMRC Ethical Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

13.6 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 a collaboration agreement with the University before the ECR grant funds can be used for the collaborative aspects of the project.

In addition to completing relevant questions on the application form, applicants for ECR grants should liaise with RIC on a case-by-case basis (as soon as possible after the award of an ECR grant) to seek guidance on whether a collaboration agreement is likely to be needed.

13.7 Funding is for one year only, commencing 1 January 2023. Projects must be completed and funds expended by 31 December 2023.

13.8 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 Chief Investigator’s Head of Department/School, and submitted to res-devschemes@unimelb.edu.au, no later than 30 November 2023. The maximum extension considered will be completion by 30 June 2024. 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 the Parental Leave taken. Grant holders should advise both their Academic Division and RIC when parental leave is approved.
   c) Prolonged sick leave or serious illness
      • The completion date for the ECR grant will be extended by the equivalent length of time of the approved sick leave.
Extensions will not normally be granted over six months except in the case of b) approved parental leave or c) prolonged sick leave as above.

13.9 The Chief Investigator must comply with any instructions and/or conditions in the Offer of Grant relating to approved items of expenditure.

13.10 Unless special conditions are set down by the Central Committee, the grant should be regarded as a ‘one-line budget’. The Chief Investigator 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.

13.11 Should the Chief Investigator’s employment circumstances change (i.e. if the Chief Investigator moves to a new Department/School/Faculty) they must contact both RIC and their Academic Division 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 ECR Grant Scheme Central Committee in conjunction with the relevant Academic Division(s).

13.12 Should the Chief Investigator’s employment at the University of Melbourne cease during the grant-funded period, they must notify RIC and their Academic Division ECR administrator immediately and relinquish any remaining ECR funding. This is an internal grant to the University of Melbourne and is non-transferrable.

**Reporting requirements**

13.13 The Chief Investigator 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 2024 (unless there has been an approved extension to the project end date). The final report form is found at Manage Your Grant. ECR Chief Investigators 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.

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 University of Melbourne internal research programs being ruled ineligible.

13.14 In addition to a final report of project outcomes, the Chief Investigator is required to provide a financial acquittal report. Any unspent central funds remaining at the conclusion of the grant period must be relinquished.

13.15 Successful applicants are expected to provide appropriate acknowledgement of University support when communicating research outcomes.