

The Sir Jules Thorn Award for Biomedical Research

About the Sir Jules Thorn Award

For over 20 years, the Trust has supported world-leading translational research projects through the Sir Jules Thorn Award.

The Award provides a grant of up to £2 million to support a five-year programme of translational biomedical research selected following a competition among applicants sponsored by the UK's leading medical schools and NHS organisations.

UK universities and NHS organisations are invited to submit one application in each funding round, selected following an internal competition.

The Award is open to biomedical research in any discipline or disease area.

Eligibility - Organisations

Applications for the Sir Jules Thorn Award are welcome from UK universities and NHS organisations with only one application allowed per eligible institution/organisation.

The research must have a justifiable claim to be at the leading edge of international science and must be led by a clearly identified Principal Applicant.

Each organisation will have its own internal selection process to ensure that all eligible candidates are given the opportunity to participate and that potential applications are considered equitably.

The organisation must demonstrate:

a) a track record in internationally competitive, cutting-edge clinical translational research,

b) adequate infrastructure support

c) the commitment of internal resources to support the Principal Applicant and the proposed research programme

d) that the institution or an appropriate NHS partner will act as Sponsor, if the application is successful.

Eligibility – Principal Applicant

The Principal Applicant (PA or PI) should be of outstanding quality and in the early years of an established research and academic career.

The Trust is not prescriptive about how this is defined, but the focus of the Award means shortlisted candidates have typically:

- been in the early years of an established career
- held posts at Senior Lecturer or Reader level or, in some cases, have recently (within the past 12 months) been appointed to a first professorial post.
- established a strong track record of independent research, previously supported by competitive, peer-reviewed fellowships from funders such as Wellcome, the MRC or NIHR
- been PI for one or more research grants with a value <£500K - or been named as co-investigators on larger awards - from similarly prestigious funders.

There may only be one Principal Applicant per application.

The Trust will not use the Award to support senior researchers who are already well-established in a professorial post or candidates whose research programme has already secured substantial ongoing funding.

Process

1. Internal selection process: each organisation will select an application to put forward for the Sir Jules Thorn Award.
2. Preliminary applications: applications are submitted via an online form to the Sir Jules Thorn Trust.
3. Longlisted applications: the Trust's Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) review the preliminary applications and agree a long list of applications to progress to the next stage of the process.

Process

4. Full applications: longlisted applicants are invited to submit a full application. Once received, the Trust has the applications independently peer-reviewed, and MAC assesses the full applications and peer reviews to create a shortlist.

5. Interviews: Shortlisted applicants are invited to an interview in central London with MAC and other expert reviewers.

6. Award: MAC make a recommendation to the Trust's Board of Trustees.

Key Dates for the 2027 Award

Preliminary applications due: 21 December 2026

Full applications from longlisted candidates due: 21 May 2027

Interview invitations sent to shortlisted candidates: September 2027

Interview date: October/November 2027

Award date: November 2027

Time Commitment

The work set out in the proposal must be a major commitment for the Principal Applicant; comprising at least 50% of their overall time.

In its letter of support for the application, the institution will need to confirm that this time commitment is consistent with the terms of any existing grants held by the Principal Applicant.

Post Award

The Trust reimburses costs in arrears. Claims are normally submitted quarterly, but the timing is agreed between the Trust and the PI's organisation at the start of the Award.

An annual report is required at the end of each year of the Award. Payments may be withheld if the report is not submitted.

A final year report is due at the project completion.

The Trust reserves the right to request reports for five years after the completion date to gather impact data for the project.

Suggestions for applications

This slide provides general guidance only, but the proposals that have progressed to the later stages of the competitions for previous Awards have typically set out:

- A research programme that will be transformative and where the Trust's support has the potential to make a very distinctive contribution.
- A clear timescale and trajectory in terms of how the research will benefit patients
  – this can be longer than the 5 years that covered by the Award but the pathway must be clear.
- The project should address a defined unmet need in a clinical group for whom there will be a practical outcome.
- The Trust accepts proposals with an element of risk if it is well planned for, in order to reach ground-breaking outcomes. Risks, and the mitigations that will be put in place, should nevertheless be set out clearly in the application.

Applicants should avoid the following:

- A research programmes that focuses only on clinical application (i.e., a clinical trial) or only on mechanistic/pre-clinical work.

FAQs

What is the funding cap and how long is the Award?

Applications are permitted for up to £2 million of direct research costs over of a period of up to five years.

What institutional commitment is required?

The PI's institution is required to fund the PI's salary and cover indirect costs (overheads). In addition, there must be a visible strategic commitment to the research by the host institution.

What type of translational research does this Award fund?

This Award funds translational research at the experimental medicine/first-in-human stage. Applications that balance applied translational work with some mechanism-based research are more likely to progress to the later stages of the competition. Those that focus only on pre-clinical/mechanistic work or only on clinical application are less likely to progress.

FAQs

Can I submit a project that already has partial funding?

The Trust will not support applications to supplement an existing project supported by other funding bodies. Applications submitted concurrently to other funders will be accepted but progress to the shortlisting stage may be conditional upon any such applications being withdrawn, unless the Trust agrees otherwise. It is essential that any related applications are noted in the application form.

Can I apply for retrospective funding?

The Trust will not support applications to cover expenditure already incurred.

What is the Trust's position on testing on animals?

The Trust is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and supports AMRC's Position statement on the use of animals in research.

FAQs

What is the Trust's position on commercial partners?

The Trust recognises that large-scale translation may require future investment from industry, but our charitable status means we can only fund work for public benefit. We cannot make awards which might - directly or indirectly - contribute to a commercial profit for a company. Applications therefore cannot be considered if a commercial company is supplying a cash grant, equipment, materials, drugs etc. at no cost in return for commercial use of the findings of the project.

Any future commercialisation of the research will be covered in an IP Agreement with the PI's organisation, based on standard terms recommended by the AMRC.

For further questions about the Award, contact the Trust team at research@julesthorntrust.org.uk.