PhD Studentship Grants 2025
Call and Guidelines

RNID will be funding PhD studentships in 2025. Through our PhD Studentship grants, we aim to encourage the best students to become involved in hearing and tinnitus research in the UK.

The importance of hearing and tinnitus research

Hearing loss is a major public health issue, affecting over 12 million people in the UK – around one out of every five people. Globally, around 466 million people have disabling hearing loss, requiring rehabilitation to be able to hear well. Tinnitus affects over 7 million adults in the UK – or one out of every seven people.

Hearing loss can have a severe impact on people's quality of life and leads to isolation from friends and family. It is also associated with dementia, depression, and decreased physical wellbeing, and can hinder both education and employment.

Current medical interventions are largely limited to hearing aids and cochlear implants. While these devices benefit many, they do not reproduce the clarity and richness of natural hearing and can perform poorly when there is a high level of background noise, or when listening to music. There are currently no cures for tinnitus, only ways to manage the condition, which don't work for everyone affected.

There is an urgent need to improve existing technologies and find new interventions to prevent hearing loss, restore natural hearing, and silence tinnitus.

There is also a need to improve the way in which new and existing treatments are developed and tested, whether biological- or device-based. The field needs better diagnostics that can identify the site of damage in the auditory system more precisely to ensure that treatments are tested on and administered to the people most likely to benefit from them; it also needs better ways to measure if a

treatment is working to improve hearing or prevent hearing loss. There is also a need for improved experimental models that are more relevant to human hearing disorders to allow new treatment approaches to be developed more quickly and efficiently.

We therefore request research projects in the following areas:

1) Research to underpin the development of treatments for hearing disorders, including tinnitus

Any research that underpins the development of treatments, including but not limited to medical devices, pharmacological treatments, genetic or cellular therapies, will be considered under this category.

Treatments should aim to prevent hearing loss, restore auditory function or silence tinnitus.

Examples of research topics included in this category:
- identifying the causes of hearing loss, including central auditory processing disorders
- improving understanding of the molecular and/or cellular changes associated with different types of hearing disorders
- improving understanding of ear anatomy and how defects at the cell, tissue and organ level impact hearing
- improving the interface between a cochlear implant and the auditory nerve
- catalysing the development of novel medical devices to aid or restore auditory function
- contributing towards the development of therapies to prevent loss of auditory function
- identifying biological pathways that could be targeted to trigger the regeneration of damaged cell types in the auditory system
- advancing drug or gene-based approaches to restore hearing function or trigger cell regeneration
- advancing cell-based therapies to repair damage to the auditory system
- identifying the causes of tinnitus
- improving understanding of the biological basis of tinnitus
- contributing towards the development of treatments to silence or alleviate tinnitus

2) Research to improve how new treatments for hearing loss and tinnitus are developed and tested

Any research that improves how new treatments are developed or tested is encouraged under this category.

Improving measurement of auditory function or tinnitus

Research to improve how hearing or tinnitus is measured or monitored:
- to improve diagnosis or prognosis
- to identify the type and location of damage underlying a person's hearing difficulty or tinnitus
- to provide new and robust measures for use as clinical trial endpoints to evaluate interventions
- to allow for patient stratification into clinical trials
- to help select the most appropriate treatment

Such measures include, but are not limited to, genetic, anatomical, physiological, or behavioural approaches.

Developing models of human hearing disorders, including tinnitus

Research to develop models of human hearing disorders, including tinnitus, to allow for robust pre-clinical validation of treatments:
- *in vivo* animal models
- *in vitro* animal or human cellular models
- computer models of human hearing loss or tinnitus

Application procedure

- All applications should be submitted via our online grants management system, Flexi-Grant. There's guidance on Flexi-Grant about how to complete your application.

- All applications must be received on or before: **Wednesday 31st July 2024** (11:59 p.m.).

- For further details:

  E-mail: research@rnid.org.uk
  Web: www.rnid.org.uk/phd

Additional notes for applicants

- Applications must be submitted by the potential supervisor. It is not essential to include a named student at the time of application. However, the PhD Student CV Form must be completed and submitted once a suitable student has been recruited. The award will only be made if RNID is satisfied that a suitable student has been recruited.
- We encourage applications for co-funded PhD studentships. The application must describe the source (or expected source) of the remaining funding. This may be from the host institute or an external partner (i.e. another funding body, charity or company).
- Applications must explain how the project is focussed on outcomes that will contribute to benefitting people with hearing loss or tinnitus.
- **Resubmissions:** we accept resubmissions of previously unfunded projects through this scheme – no invitation to resubmit is required. The resubmission must be updated to take into account any feedback given (or to provide any additional data). **You may only resubmit a substantially similar application up to two times i.e. three submissions total**.
- **Please note that we do not fund social research, or research focussed on the design or evaluation of healthcare services.**
- A summary of our current terms and conditions is included on our website for your reference – please note that these are subject to change.

Timeline

Application deadline: Wednesday 31st July 2024 (11:59 p.m.)
Final decision: December 2024

About the award

Aim

It is hoped that students will continue to make a valuable contribution towards improving the lives of people with hearing loss or tinnitus through research after completing their PhD.

Assessment

- Each application will be peer reviewed by at least two experts in the field.

- These reviews and the original proposals are then considered by our Future Leaders Review Panel*. The panel members will discuss and rate each proposal against the aims of the PhD Studentship scheme.
- The top proposals will then be put forward to RNID for funding.
- Successful applicants will be notified of intention to offer funding in December 2024.

Eligibility

Supervisors and students must be based at recognised British universities or research institutes.

Grant

The Grant will be paid to the university, which will administer it in accordance with its usual procedures. The level of funding for PhD Studentships commencing in 2025 will be:

Item		Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)
Student stipend	London	21,237	22,391	23,545
	Outside London	19,237	20,391	21,545
University / College fees, conference & training allowance, consumables		10,086	10,086	10,086
Total	London	31,323	32,477	33,631
	Outside London	29,323	30,477	31,631

Duration

Continuation of funding each year will be conditional on evidence of satisfactory progress (see progress monitoring, below). Funding will be for the agreed duration only.

Reporting

Supervisors will submit a report detailing progress to date and future plans annually. A final report, giving a summary of the overall findings and future plans of the student, will be submitted following completion of the project. Students will be obliged to attend up to one or two events organised by RNID. Suitable notice will be given.

Progress monitoring

If the university's system for monitoring student and project progress differs from the standard requirements detailed below, RNID staff and the individual supervisor should discuss how to proceed in each case.

Student monitoring standard requirements

A full first year report will be the basis of an oral examination at the host university by two appropriate members of staff (at Lecturer level or more senior) nominated by the supervisor. The examiners will subsequently recommend that the student either completes the PhD training or conducts no further research and submits the project as an MSc (if allowable by the university). Copies of the examiners' reports including their final recommendation, plus any comments from the supervisor, should be submitted to RNID within one month of completion of this confirmation review.

Supervision and mentoring

The supervisor will actively manage and supervise the student and research project.

The student should be allocated a mentor to act as an additional source of objective advice for the student. The mentor should be based at a different department or work in a different discipline to the student but have experience of supervising graduate students. The student should have regular access to the mentor (at least 4 times per year).

*RNID Future Leaders review panel

- Professor Brian Moore, University of Cambridge (chair)
- Dr Dan Jagger, University College London
- Professor Walter Marcotti, University of Sheffield
- Dr Deborah Vickers, University of Cambridge
- Dr Morag Lewis, King's College London
- Dr Leila Abbas, University of Sheffield
- Dr Rebecca Dewey, University of Nottingham
- Dr Magdalena Sereda, University of Nottingham
- Dr Victoria Bajo Lorenzana, University of Oxford
- Dr Jennifer Bizley, University College London
- Dr Juan Fons, King's College London

Diagram of application process

2025 round

Application – open entry → **Applications submitted**
Deadline:
31 July 2024

Charity staff will check applications to ensure they are eligible → **Assessment by charity staff**

All eligible applications are sent for external peer review by 2-3 experts in the field → **Assessment by external peer review**

Applications and external reviews are considered by the Future Leaders Review Panel. The panel will make funding recommendations. → **Assessment by Future Leaders Review Panel**
Panel meeting November 2024

RNID Executive Group and Anatomical Society approve projects for funding → **Funding**
Applicants informed December 2024