Supporting people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus

RNID Fellowships

Call and guidelines – 2026 scheme

RNID funds research into hearing loss and tinnitus to speed up the discovery and development of new medical treatments to protect and restore hearing and silence tinnitus. We also fund research to improve current treatments for hearing loss, such as medical devices like hearing aids and cochlear implants. In addition, we support research to provide a better understanding of the link between hearing loss and dementia, to help us find better ways to treat and prevent both conditions.

Purpose of the Fellowship

The aim of the Fellowship scheme is to help talented early career researchers as they make the transition from a post-doctoral scientist to an independent investigator, able to lead their own programme of research, attract funding and build a new research team. In doing so, the scheme aims to build research capacity in hearing research, by supporting the early career development of the UK's most talented new investigators.

The Fellowship is designed to support post-doctoral researchers as they begin to make the transition towards establishing themselves as an independent researcher in the field, analogous to the MRC's Exploration career stage.

The Fellowship supports salary and project costs of up to **£225,000 over 3 years**. This allows Fellows to develop their own research interests and gather data needed to secure future funding, giving them the opportunity to demonstrate to future funders or employers that they are capable of independently leading a programme of research.

Call for applications

We request proposals for 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. This can include treating hearing loss within the context of dementia.

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 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
- identifying common biological mechanisms that underlie dementia and hearing loss, and how they lead to both conditions
- advancing our knowledge of any causal link between hearing loss and dementia
- leading to the development of interventions that can delay or prevent the progression of hearing loss and/or dementia, or prevent one condition from exacerbating the other

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, including in the context of dementia

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, 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

Summary of the fellowship

- **Value:** Up to £225,000
- **Duration:** Usually 36 months
- **Eligibility:** The applicant should be an early career investigator who has the desire and potential to become an independent scientist in the field of hearing research. They must hold a PhD and can be based at any UK university or research institute but must not be a permanent employee. The award should support progression towards an independent research career.
- **Deadline for applications:** Thursday 30 April 2026 (5pm)

Additional notes for applicants

- The applicant should be an early career investigator and not a permanent employee of the university or research institution.
- The application should be written by the prospective Fellow, not the sponsor.
- The sponsor will be asked to comment on how they and the institution will facilitate and support the career development towards scientific independence of the applicant.
- Projects must be defined pieces of research with clearly stated objectives, an experimental plan and expected outcomes.
- Applications must explain how the project is focussed on outcomes that will contribute to benefitting people with hearing loss or tinnitus.
- The remit of RNID funding covers all aspects of biomedical hearing research which has the potential to benefit people with hearing loss or tinnitus, including within the context of dementia. RNID does not fund social research, or research focussed on the design or evaluation of healthcare services.
- RNID is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities and as such, funded projects are eligible to receive a contribution to their full economic costs via the Charity Research Support Fund. This means that you should NOT include indirect costs in the application. Eligible costs can include salaries and direct project costs. As this funding stream is intended to support the career development of researchers, applications solely for capital equipment will not be considered.

Application and selection procedure

Applications must be submitted through our online grants management system Flexi-Grant before the deadline.

! **Please note that applications must be approved by an administrative authority from your institution, on Flexi-Grant, before you can submit – ensure you allow enough time for this before the deadline**.

! **Please check that all co-applicants have finished their contribution to your application on Flexi-Grant before the deadline.**

! You should invite both the administrative authority and co-applicants to the application via the 'Participants' tab on the Summary page of your application on Flexi-grant. You can also monitor the completion of these participant sections here. **If you have any queries about this, please contact us at least three working days before the deadline.**

Assessment:
Eligible proposals will be reviewed by at least two (ideally three) external referees in the field, who are asked to rate the scientific value and feasibility of the project. They are asked to assess the proposal against the following criteria:

- Relevance to people with hearing loss or tinnitus/potential to lead to significant benefit for people affected by hearing loss or tinnitus in the short- or long-term
- Novelty and originality/likelihood of leading to significant new understanding
- Quality of background information and preliminary data provided
- Appropriate project design, methodology, analysis and ethical considerations (for research involving people or animals)
- Feasibility – timescale and budget
- Proposed Fellow – expertise and resources, evidence that research idea is fellow's own and significantly different from sponsor's research interests
- Adequate justification of costs requested

All external peer reviewers must agree to abide by our code of conduct for conflicts of interest and confidentiality for peer-reviewers.

If necessary (depending on the number of applicants), the reviews and original proposals will then be considered by our Future Leaders Review Panel who will rank the proposals and shortlist candidates for interview.

Interviews for the Fellowship will take place in September 2026 – the final date will be confirmed with all applicants once it has been set. Short-listed candidates will be informed no less than 2 weeks before the interview date and given further instructions for the interview then. All applicants, whether successful in being invited for interview or not, will receive anonymised feedback from the external reviewers at this stage.

Interviews will be conducted by the Future Leaders Review Panel. All members of the panel must agree to abide by our code of conduct for conflicts of interest and confidentiality for panel members, at all stages of the assessment process.

Following the interviews, the panel will make funding recommendations to RNID. Applicants will be notified of the outcome as soon as possible following the final decision and feedback from the panel meeting will be provided.

For further details:
E-mail: research@rnid.org.uk

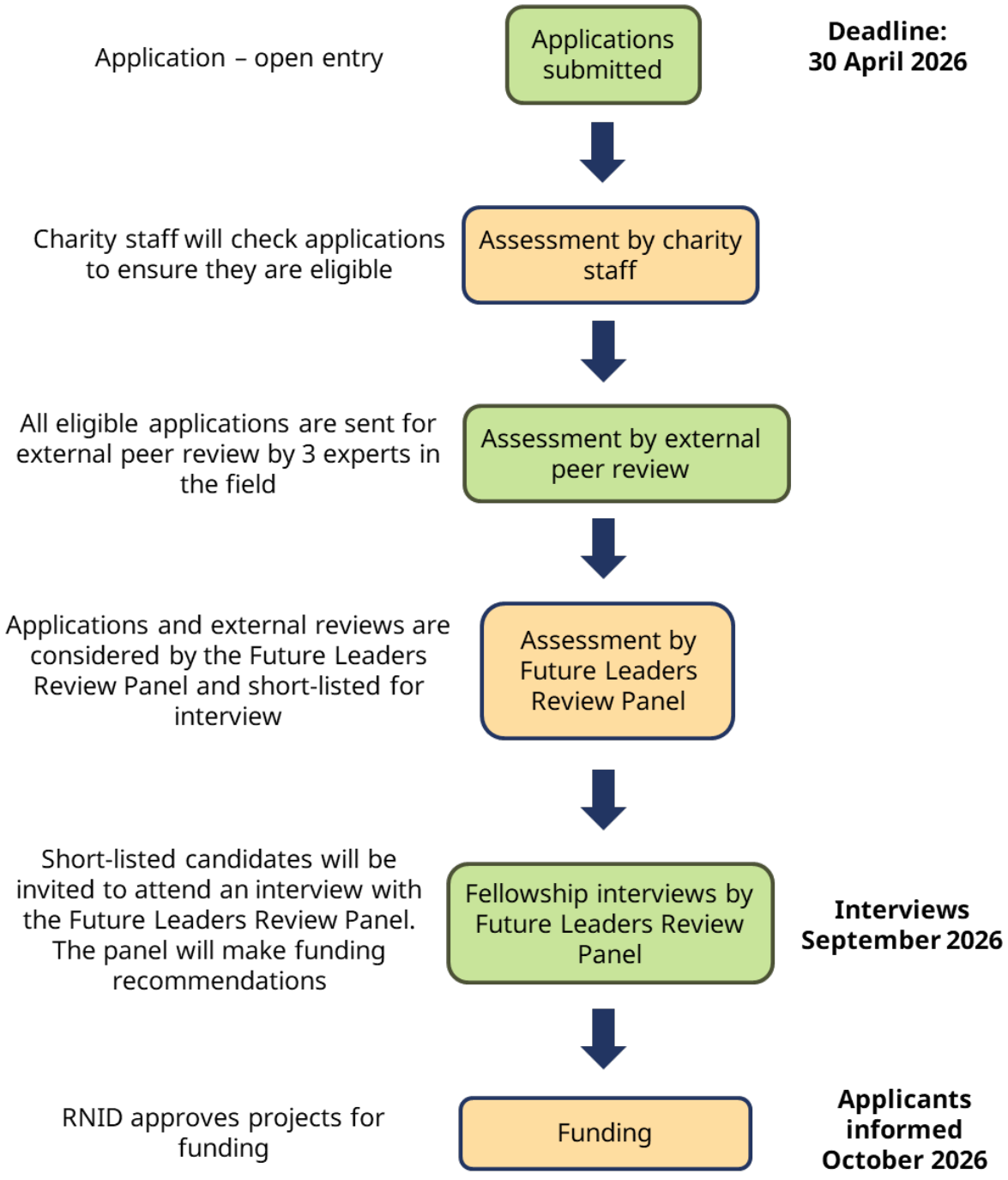
Timeline

Full applications: Thursday 30 April 2026
Invitation to interviews issued: August/September 2026
Interview date: September 2026
Final decision: October 2026

*RNID Future Leaders review panel

- Dr Rebecca Dewey, University of Nottingham
- Dr Leila Abbas, University of Sheffield/Rinri Therapeutics
- Professor Magdalena Sereda, University of Nottingham
- Dr Juan Fons, King's College London
- Professor Victoria Bajo Lorenzana, University of Oxford
- Professor Jennifer Bizley, University College London
- Four additional panel members to be confirmed

2026 round


Application – open entry
Applications submitted
Deadline: 30 April 2026
Charity staff will check applications to ensure they are eligible
Assessment by charity staff
All eligible applications are sent for external peer review by 3 experts in the field
Assessment by external peer review
Applications and external reviews are considered by the Future Leaders Review Panel and short-listed for interview
Assessment by Future Leaders Review Panel
Short-listed candidates will be invited to attend an interview with the Future Leaders Review Panel. The panel will make funding recommendations
Fellowship interviews by Future Leaders Review Panel
Interviews September 2026
RNID approves projects for funding
Funding
Applicants informed October 2026