

Career Development Fellowships 2026 – FAQs

This list is not exhaustive. You may be able to find the answer to your questions in the Scheme Notes for the round. **Please check all relevant documents before contacting the Grants Team.**

Applicant Eligibility

1. Q: Why is the scheme only open to researchers from Black heritage?

A: The scheme has been developed following cross-sector roundtables and [Royal Society-commissioned reports](#) which looked at trends across 11 years of Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) data and [benchmarked the Society's early career fellowships](#) against the eligible applicant pool. This process identified a need for interventions across the academic pipeline to support researchers from Black or Mixed Black African, Black Caribbean or other Black heritage backgrounds, particularly researchers making the transition from postgraduate to early postdoctoral stages. The scheme will initially run as a pilot to support researchers from Black heritage; evaluation of this pilot will inform potential extension of the scheme to include additional demographic groups that are also under-represented in STEM.

2. Q: I come from a mixed Black heritage background, am I still eligible for the Career Development Fellowship?

A: The pilot scheme is open to people who self-identify as being from Black heritage, including a mixed heritage background. For example, Black African; Black Caribbean; Black Other; Mixed background (to include Black African, Black Caribbean or Black Other backgrounds) according to the [England and Wales Census 2021](#). To be eligible for this round of the scheme, applicants must identify within these categories.

3. Q: I come from a different background as listed in Q2, am I still eligible for the Career Development Fellowship?

A: The complete list of ethnic groups included in the 2021 Census can be found online, at <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups#how-the-groups-were-chosen>. If you identify with one of the ethnic groups listed on the Census that does not appear in Q2, you would not be eligible for this scheme.

4. Q: Can I contact the Royal Society ahead of the deadline to confirm my eligibility for the scheme?

A: The scheme notes provide guidance regarding eligibility for the scheme based on actual research experience. You should only contact the Society if you:

- Are unsure if your work would be considered as actual research experience, for example, time spent in Industry.
- Have taken complex career breaks and are unable to calculate the time you have taken out of research since completing your PhD.

5. Q: If I have slightly more than 24 months of full-time post-doctoral research experience, can I still apply?

A: We do not allow flexibility in the less than 24 months full-time postdoctoral experience range (please note that we will review your career history and deduct any career breaks as outlined in the scheme notes). If unsure, please contact the CDF team (CDF@royalsociety.org) with the following information:

- date of your successful PhD examination/viva
- date of employment history and details of any research and non-research positions
- details of career breaks/periods of leave and any additional circumstances that may have affected your research career.

Please provide dates in the format of **DD/MM/YYYY** (days may be omitted if unknown).

- 6. Q: How is 'actual research experience post-PhD' calculated when considering eligibility?**
A: Career breaks and gaps between employment contracts are taken into account when calculating research experience. Part-time contracts are also considered, e.g. if you hold/have held a research contract at 0.5 FTE, your research experience will be pro-rated accordingly.
- 7. Q: Can I apply for other fellowships at the same time as the Career Development Fellowship?**
A: We understand that you might apply for other opportunities at the same time as the CDF. Please include any active fellowship applications in the 'Applicant Research Funding' section of the application form. If your applications are successful, you will be required to choose one fellowship as you will not be able to hold a CDF in conjunction with another fellowship.
- 8. Q: If I accept a permanent academic position or equivalent fellowship during the Career Development Fellowship assessment, how is my application affected?**
A: You must remain eligible until the time of the application deadline. If you accept a permanent post or equivalent fellowship after the application deadline, this will not preclude you from staying in the competition. If offered a CDF award, please note that you would be required to resign from the position or equivalent fellowship to be able to accept the CDF offer. We would not object to your offer of a permanent post being converted by your host organisation into a proleptic offer, any such offer should be discussed with the Royal Society.
- 9. Q: Do you allow resubmissions?**
A: Yes, as long as you satisfy the eligibility requirements as listed in the scheme notes of the round. Please note that future rounds of the pilot scheme will be confirmed in due course.
- 10. Q: How will the Royal Society consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my application?**
A: The Royal Society appreciates that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be complex and varied. As such, we have a specific question in the application form for applicants to outline the impact on their research.
- 11. Q: Is the scheme open to international researchers?**
A: The scheme is open to researchers who wish to conduct their research in the UK as long as they have completed part of their education in the UK through their Undergraduate, Master's or PhD degree studies or hold/have held a postdoctoral researcher position in the UK.
- 12. Q: Can I have more than one Sponsor? Can the Royal Society put me in touch with a suitable Sponsor?**
A: No, applicants must have only one Sponsor. All applicants must have identified a Sponsor at the point of application. The Sponsor will be required to complete some sections of the application form before submission can be completed. The Society is unable to help applicants identify a Sponsor for their application.

Completing the application form

- 13. Q: Do images and references need to be included within the three-page limit of the research proposal or are they in addition to?**
A: All images and references have to fit within the three-page limit of the research proposal document.
- 14. Q: I have completed all the sections and the application is at 100% but I cannot see a button to submit my application.**
A: All participants on the participants tab **must appear as 'complete'** in green before the submit button appears. If a participant appears in orange as 'incomplete' they need to login and

select 'Save & Submit' on the application form page or 'Submit your contribution' on the summary page – otherwise you will not be able to submit your application to your host institution for approval. Letters of support from the Head of Department and Nominated Referees are compulsory, while the Research Support is optional and can be revoked if no longer needed.

15. Q: Can I include my PhD supervisor as my nominated referee in the application form?

A: The primary consideration for a referee is that they are able to comment independently and authoritatively on your application. Your referee should be someone who has worked closely with you and is familiar with your research (for example, a PhD supervisor, mentor or prior collaborator). Please note that you cannot choose your PhD Supervisor if they are also acting as Sponsor for your application.

16. Q: Should I include named collaborators in my application?

A: If you have named collaborators in your research proposal, please provide letters of support. This information should be included in the 'Research Proposal' section of the application form, where there is further guidance. Please ensure the letters from your collaborators only confirm their commitment to collaborate on this project. The letters should provide information about their role in the project and their commitment to this.

FAQs for Research administrators

17. Q: Will award holders be expected to conduct teaching?

A: We appreciate Early Career Researchers need to conduct a moderate level of teaching as this is part of their training to establish an independent career; however, all our early career research fellowships, including the CDFs, require a primary focus on research activities.

FAQs for Host Organisations

18. Will the Society want to review how candidates are recruited?

A: No, candidates should be recruited through the standard university process.

19. Q: Is there an expectation that candidates will be offered a permanent position at the end of the 4 years?

A: No, there is no expectation or requirement for a permanent post at the end of the fellowship.