Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme: Outline Application Stage

Guidelines for applicants
Contents

Abbreviations .................................................................................................................................. 3

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 4
   1.1. Timeline of the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme .......................................................... 4
   1.2. Contact information .............................................................................................................. 4

2. Guidelines for the Outline Application Stage of the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme ..... 5
   2.1. Description of the process .................................................................................................... 5
   2.2. Funding .................................................................................................................................. 6
       2.2.1. Themes .......................................................................................................................... 6
       2.2.2. Eligibility ....................................................................................................................... 6
       2.2.3. Criteria .......................................................................................................................... 7
   2.3. Costs .................................................................................................................................... 8

3. Outline application form ............................................................................................................. 10
   3.1. Background Information ....................................................................................................... 10
   3.2. Additional information related to funding ............................................................................ 10
   3.3. Submission history of this application ................................................................................... 11
   3.4. Applicant Details .................................................................................................................. 11
   3.5. Research Proposal .................................................................................................................. 12
   3.6. Finance Summary .................................................................................................................. 12
   3.7. Appendices ............................................................................................................................ 12
   3.8. Acceptance of Regulations and Conditions ........................................................................... 12
   3.9. Validation Summary .............................................................................................................. 13

4. Advice from the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee .................................................... 14
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AcoRD:</td>
<td>Attributing the cost of health and social care Research and Development</td>
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<td>CRN:</td>
<td>Clinical Research Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTU:</td>
<td>Clinical Trials Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTE:</td>
<td>Full Time Equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBP:</td>
<td>Great British Pounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI:</td>
<td>UK Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRA:</td>
<td>Health Research Authority</td>
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<td>MND:</td>
<td>Motor Neurone Disease</td>
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<td>NHS:</td>
<td>National Health Service</td>
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<td>NIHR:</td>
<td>National Institute for Health Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>PeolcPSP:</td>
<td>Palliative and end of life care Priority Setting Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPI:</td>
<td>Patient and Public Involvement</td>
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<td>RDS:</td>
<td>Research Design Service</td>
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1. Introduction

Marie Curie, in partnership with the Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association and The Brain Tumour Charity, is making available £1.25million this year through the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme to fund high quality research that aims to improve care and support for people living with a terminal illness and their families, friends, carers and communities. Marie Curie is using an outline application stage in the application process followed by a full application stage for successful outline proposals.

1.1. Timeline of the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td>Launch of research call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th December 2018</td>
<td>Deadline for receiving outline applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>Outline application panel meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>Successful outline applicants invited to full application stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2019</td>
<td>Deadline for full applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 2019</td>
<td>Deadline for applicants to respond to peer reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 2019</td>
<td>Research Funding Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2019</td>
<td>Applicants notified of outcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2. Contact information

If you have any administrative and financial queries regarding your application, please contact Catherine Harvey at Research.Grants@mariecurie.org.uk.
2. Guidelines for the Outline Application Stage of the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme

This section provides guidelines for preparing your outline research proposal for the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme.

2.1. Description of the process

The outline stage of the application process involves the submission of an abstract, a lay abstract and a short form. The form will be available on the new Marie Curie Grants management system (Gems): https://researchgrants.mariecurie.org.uk

The form will assess the eligibility of applicant(s), the fit of the application with the scope of the funding scheme and how well an application addresses a number of funding criteria that are published with the call. The funding criteria are based on Marie Curie's strategic aims, as well as on advice given to applicants by the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee.

A finance summary will also be required, which does not, at this stage, have to be signed off by a University/National Health Service (NHS) Trust Research Office, but should reflect the required finances as accurately as possible.

Outline applications will be assessed by an Outline Application Panel, which includes the Chair and members of the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee, Marie Curie service users and members of Marie Curie staff.

As the panel includes service users, it is particularly important to tailor your lay abstract to a lay audience. Applicants are also encouraged to involve service users from the early stages of an application and as members of the research team if appropriate.

Marie Curie aims to provide feedback on all applications. However, applicants are reminded that the decisions of the Outline Application Panel are final and that it will not be possible to enter into any correspondence with regards to their feedback.

Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full application through Gems, and candidates should address the feedback when preparing their full application.

For previously unsuccessful applicants, whilst we do not prohibit resubmissions, it should be noted that the success rate for resubmissions is low. Furthermore, Marie Curie only considers amendments to previous proposals provided that they (1) fit with the research theme(s) of the call and (2) the feedback from the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee has been taken into account when preparing the amended proposal.
2.2. **Funding**

The 2018 call of the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme is a joint call where funding will be available from three sources:

- Marie Curie
- MND Association with Marie Curie
- The Brain Tumour Charity with Marie Curie.

### 2.2.1. Themes

Please read the *Themes of call* document, which is available for download from the Marie Curie website, for more information regarding the scope of the call.

It should be noted that proposals are not limited to palliative and end of life care in the context of cancer, but are applicable to the care of all people with terminal illnesses and their families, friends, carers and communities.

### 2.2.2. Eligibility

Outline applications are invited from lead applicants at recognised Universities, NHS hospitals, hospices or research institutes within the UK. The lead applicant must have a post which covers the entire duration of the proposed study. The Marie Curie Research Funding Committee discourages applications with commercial interests/applicants, unless fully justified. Host institutions must be in a position to comply with all clauses of the Marie Curie Terms and Conditions, which are available from the Marie Curie website. It is essential that applicants from hospices form links with an academic institution or NHS partner organisation to build collaborations and obtain support and guidance when preparing their applications, for instance with research governance issues.

Collaborative applications are welcome and named academic/clinical Joint Lead Applicants/Collaborators are permitted – although, if successful, the contracted grant (and associated funding arrangements) will be with the Lead Applicant's institution in the UK only. In addition, applications involving trials must involve a Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) from the outset. Applications from lone investigators are strongly discouraged to ensure that the research team has adequate expertise.

Applicants are strongly advised to determine if their proposal is ‘research’ as defined by the Research Ethics Service. Proposals focussing on pure service evaluation and audits will NOT be accepted. The HRA leaflet ‘Defining Research’ would be helpful to provide further guidance.

Public health research (e.g. epidemiology, health promotion, health education, community development, etc.) and implementation studies will be considered.

- To be eligible for MND Association joint funding, proposals must address the MND themes of the call and £200,000 is the maximum which any individual application can request.

- To be eligible for The Brain Tumour Charity joint funding, proposals must address the brain tumour themes of the call and £300,000 is the maximum which any individual application can request.
For the remainder of the funds provided by Marie Curie, Lead Applicants must address the themes of the call. £750,000 is the maximum which any individual application can request.

The figures provided above for each part of the scheme represent the upper limits of the funding available. However, applicants should keep the overall funding envelope in mind when applying to the scheme.

Applicants are strongly advised to enter ONE outline application per call, though a maximum of two applications per Lead Applicant may be considered.

2.2.3. Criteria

Applicants will also be expected to outline how their application will address the following funding criteria for this call (within the defined word limits):

1) The potential to improve care and support for people living with a terminal illness and their families, friends, carers and communities

2) Evidence of a demonstrable need for research in this area. Please highlight any relevant systematic reviews and/or all past/current trials, if applicable

3) A clear research plan and description of methodology to be employed. For feasibility studies, include the outcome measures and describe how and from whom the full trial could be funded (e.g. the National Institute for Health Research)

4) The suitability of the PI(s), research team and collaborators to carry out the proposed research, including their track record and expertise. Please also include the involvement of any Clinical Trials Unit(s), if applicable

5) The active engagement of Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) principles and processes in all stages of the research from planning through to dissemination

6) The potential of study results or interventions to be generalisable and applicable nationally and/or internationally.

7) A dissemination and knowledge transfer plan, including and beyond peer reviewed publications
2.3. **Costs**

Marie Curie will only pay the directly incurred costs of research.

Marie Curie will not pay either directly allocated (including estate costs) or indirect costs on individual research awards. Awards are provided on the understanding that the host institution will meet directly allocated and indirect costs (previously referred to as overhead costs) including, but not limited to, lighting, heating, central support staff salaries, costs of equipment maintenance, telephones, office furniture, use of library facilities and general laboratory and office equipment. Where institutions operate a policy of access charges to equipment, Marie Curie will consider payment of an access charge in lieu of consideration of maintenance costs.

2.3.1. **Staff salary**

Grant applications may include requests for the salaries of staff at post-doctoral, clinical or technical level. Costs for centrally pooled administrative staff should not be included. Staff salaries requested in an application should not be fully funded by another source. If Marie Curie funding for a post would result in it receiving funding for greater than 100% FTE, then it should not be included in the application. Costs for Co-Applicant and Collaborators’ salaries should not be included in the application.

Please note that requests for PhD studentships and Clinical Research Training Fellowships on project grants are **NOT** considered by the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee.

Consultancy costs will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where the individual’s expertise is essential for the project (e.g. health economists, statisticians etc.). Posts which have not been fully justified will be removed by the Marie Curie Office.

Applications are encouraged from early-career researchers and such applicants may request their own full or substantial salary (not small percentages as with regard to full economic costing), as long as they are within 8 years from obtaining their doctoral degree, or equivalent qualification, are not fully funded from another source and will spend the requested time on the project described in the application.

Funding is provided for salary, the employer’s national insurance contribution and an employer’s pension contribution which will be no higher than the rate used by the USS or NHS scheme and may not be used to offset any prior under-funding of the pension scheme. In addition, oncosts cannot be higher than 28%, unless fully justified. Costs of recruiting staff to posts will not be funded by Marie Curie. If the grant is awarded, the amount provided to fund each post will be stated in the Grant Award Letter and this amount should include provision for relevant increases in pay grade/scale/spine point and inflation if necessary. Marie Curie does not meet the cost of NHS merit awards or clinical excellence awards or any other supplement or enhancement earned in the course of providing patient care to NHS patients.

2.3.2. **Running expenses**

Running expenses may include contributions to the use of central facilities or charges for use of specialised equipment where these are required for the research project. In addition, computer costs should be capped at £600 per person over the duration of the grant, unless fully justified. Costs which have not been fully justified will be removed by the Marie Curie Office.

Requests for travel expenses to attend conferences and meetings will be considered as part of the grant application. Costs which have not been fully justified will be removed by the Marie Curie Office. Costs for travel forming an integral part of the proposed study (such as travel between collaborating centres or steering group meeting expenses) can also be included. Costs for staff training relating to the project will also be considered.
Costs for transcription are eligible, however, please ensure the justification includes the cost per minute and the expected duration. Costs which have not been fully justified will be removed by the Marie Curie Office.

Marie Curie expects that publications resulting from its research funding are made Open Access in accordance with its Open Access Policy. Therefore, Marie Curie will consider requests for Open Access publication fees within grant applications (either as article processing charges for fully Open Access journals, or fees paid to non-Open Access journals to make a particular article publicly available). Open Access costs should be capped at £4000 over the duration of the grant, unless fully justified. Costs which have not been fully justified will be removed by the Marie Curie Office.

2.3.3. Equipment

Marie Curie assumes a basic level of equipment provision by the host institution and applications should be limited to items required specifically for the research proposed. Applications should contain the equipment requirements for the full duration of the award at the time of application, since further equipment requests will not be considered in subsequent years of the award. Equipment requests in applications should not exceed £15,000, unless fully justified.

2.3.4. NHS Treatment and Support Costs

If your proposed research involves patients and/or will be conducted within the confines of the NHS, it is expected that the Department of Health/NHS will support the research by meeting associated patient care costs. Applicants should refer to ‘Attributing the cost of health and social care Research and Development’ (AcoRD) guidance when attributing costs payable by Marie Curie: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-attributing-the-costs-of-health-and-social-care-research. Only costs covered by Part A of Annex A are eligible. Ineligible costs will be removed by the Marie Curie Office.

In addition, grants that meet certain criteria may be eligible for additional support from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Clinical Research Network (CRN) Portfolio, part of the UKCRN Portfolio. Further information can be found here: https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-and-impact/nihr-clinical-research-network-portfolio/how-to-apply-for-nihr-crn-support.htm

If your outline application is successful and goes through to the full application stage, applicants have a duty to inform the relevant NHS Trust Research & Design office(s) of the possible NHS support implications of proposed research projects at the earliest opportunity and MUST indicate within the full application that the relevant provider(s) have been notified and provide an update on the status of such discussions within the full application.
3. Outline application form

The form will be available on the new Marie Curie Grants management system (Gems): https://researchgrants.mariecurie.org.uk. Once you have registered or logged in, the form is accessed on the homepage by clicking the blue hyperlink under ‘New Grant Application’ towards the bottom of the page.

Eligibility questions are asked before applicants can access the form. If you are unable to answer ‘yes’ to all of the questions, you are ineligible to apply for grants from the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme.

If eligible, please complete all mandatory questions marked by a red dot. Feel free to click on the blue question marks next to each question for guidance and to ensure you are supplying the required information.

3.1. Background Information

Please write the full project title, ensuring this title adequately reflects your project and its aims, and select the type(s) of project/study design that best describes the proposal.

Proposed start date: please note that the start date of your proposal should be after the conclusion of the full application stage (as outlined in Section 1.1 above). Please be realistic about your possible start date, taking into account the necessary contracting, staff recruitment etc. prior to the commencement of the project.

Proposed duration: funding can be requested for up to 36 months (apart from trials, where longer time frames will be considered). Ensure you include sufficient time to complete all aspects of the research including applications for regulatory approvals (where required).

The research abstract provides a succinct summary of the proposal (within the defined word limits), including, but not limited to, the background/scope of the study, its aim/research question(s), the methodology employed and its proposed findings. If your application for funding is successful, the abstract will be made public on the Marie Curie website to promote your award.

Marie Curie is increasing the involvement of patient and public representatives in the work of the charity and its research funding. Therefore, please include a paragraph providing a lay summary of your research proposal (within the defined word limits). This paragraph should summarise the research project in a manner that is understandable for the general public. Helpful guidance on writing in plain English is available on the NIHR website: http://www.invo.org.uk/makeitclear/.

Please list up to 6 keywords that best describes and categorises the proposed study.

3.2. Additional information related to funding

Research projects must align to the themes of the call. Consequently, please summarise and then explain in detail how the proposed study relates to the themes of the call and palliative and end of life care. In particular, please detail which highlighted research areas are being addressed by the proposal and how they are being addressed. Please refer to the associated Themes of Call document for more information.
3.3. Submission history of this application

Please complete this section if your application follows on from a previously funded Marie Curie award or is a resubmission in any part of a rejected application to Marie Curie. Whilst we do not prohibit resubmissions, it should be noted that the success rate for resubmissions is low. Furthermore, Marie Curie only considers amendments to previous proposals provided that they (1) fit with the research theme(s) of the call and (2) the feedback from the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee has been taken into account when preparing the amended proposal.

In this section of the application form, please also inform us if this or a similar proposal has been submitted to another organisation for consideration.

3.4. Applicant Details

Lead Applicants should ensure their details are fully updated in the "Manage My Details" section of Gems.

A Joint Lead Applicant can be added if required. The Joint Lead Applicant may only view / edit the application once they have confirmed their participation. Once participation is confirmed, the Joint Lead Applicant should ensure their details are fully updated in the "Manage My Details" section of Gems. Once again, it should be noted that if successful, the contracted grant (and associated funding arrangements) will be with the Lead Applicant's institution in the UK. The Joint Lead Applicant must then approve the application (and this can occur at any point after they have confirmed their participation).

Co-Applicants can be added if required. Co-Applicants may only view / edit the application once they have confirmed their participation. Once participation is confirmed, Co-Applicants should ensure their details are fully updated in the "Manage My Details" section of Gems. Once again, costs for Co-Applicant salaries should not be included in the application. Co-Applicants must then approve the application (and this can occur at any point after they have confirmed their participation).

Please note that CV details are only required for submission of a full application form and not at the outline stage. However, when registering/updating their details, PPI representatives should select ‘PPI Representative’ as their institution.

Please ensure further details are provided for the Lead Applicant, Joint-Lead Applicant and Co-Applicants in the section entitled “Please complete the following details for all Lead Applicant(s) and Co-Applicant(s) only”. For these roles, it is important for us to know whether your current employment covers the entire duration of the proposed study. Therefore, please answer 'yes' if your employment contract is permanent or ends after the end date of the proposed project, or 'no' if your employment contract ends before the end date of the proposed project. Please also let us know whether you are within 8 years of your PhD or equivalent qualification (see Section 2.4.1 above for more information). Should the application be successful to the full stage, a careers ambition form will need to be submitted.

Details of Collaborators, research staff and other members of the team should only be included in the "Additional Research Team Members" section.
3.5. **Research Proposal**

Marie Curie has a number of funding criteria (as outlined in Section 2.3 above), which are used to assess the strategic fit of an outline research proposal with the aims of the charity. Applicants MUST provide an explanation of how their proposal fits with each funding criteria (within the defined word limits).

3.6. **Finance Summary**

Please see Section 2.2 for the levels of funding available for each part of the scheme and Section 2.4 for detailed guidance regarding costs.

In this section, please provide a finance summary for the entire proposed duration of the project. This should include all staff costs, running expenses and equipment costs. All costs should be in British Pounds (£ GBP) and costs which have not been fully justified will be removed by the Marie Curie Office.

For staff costs, the appropriate percentage of full time equivalent (FTE) hours worked must be included. This is also the case for part time staff that are employed for only part of the year (e.g. a full-time post for 3 months should be entered as 25% FTE). It should then be made clear in the justification for support section that this staff post is only for part of the year, but at 100% FTE.

Where there is no cost for an item in any given year, please input '0' into the relevant box. You will not be able to submit your proposal until each box has been filled with either a figure or a “0”.

3.7. **Appendices**

Please upload an attachment that includes any references cited within the application. Give the citations in full, including the title and all authors. Shortened references will not be accepted. Please note that the references will not contribute to any stipulated word counts.

If this is a resubmission in any part of a rejected application to Marie Curie, please upload the associated feedback letter(s).

Please ensure all attachments are “portrait” orientated and are appropriately named (e.g. Reference list, Feedback letter etc.).

No other appendices are required at the outline stage.

3.8. **Acceptance of Regulations and Conditions**

The Lead Applicant must tick the box to confirm their acceptance of Marie Curie’s regulations and conditions. The Head of Department must also:

1) Confirm their participation in the proposal (and this can be done in the initial stages of the application process).

2) Approve the proposal (and this can be done at any point after they have confirmed their participation).
3) Confirm their acceptance of Marie Curie’s regulations and conditions (and this can only be done by ticking the box in this section of the application form).

3.9. Validation Summary

Please ensure all mandatory elements of the application form have been completed. Once completed, you may submit the application. To do so 'Save and Close' the application and then select “Submit” from the options displayed on the right-hand side of the screen.

Please note that any Joint Lead Applicants, Co-Applicants and Head of Departments must confirm their participation and approve the proposal in the initial stages of the process to enable the application to be submitted.
4. Advice from the Marie Curie Research Funding Committee

The Marie Curie Research Funding Committee has provided their feedback on a number of actions to improve the quality of research proposals submitted to the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme and has advised on how to avoid some of the weaknesses commonly seen in applications:

- Applications from lone investigators are strongly discouraged to ensure that the research team has adequate expertise.

- Early stage researchers are actively encouraged to apply to the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme. Early stage researchers are eligible to apply for their own full or substantial salary provided they are within 8 years from obtaining their doctoral degree, or equivalent qualification. See section 2.4.1 for more information.

- Applications are welcome from hospices providing they are able to comply with all clauses within the Marie Curie Terms and Conditions. In addition, it is essential that hospices form links with an academic institution or NHS partner organisation to build collaborations and obtain support and guidance when preparing their applications.

- A definitive research question should be proposed by the applicants within the outline application.

- Researchers who fail to make reference to the national and international literature in their chosen research area, including relevant systematic reviews and past/current clinical trials, are unlikely to be funded. Proposals must demonstrate that the lead applicant understands the background of research on which the proposal is built and is aware of other research going on both nationally and internationally in the general area of the application.

- Proposals should contain sufficient detail in the description of the research methods to convince the Committee that the project is appropriately designed and feasible. Methodological rigour is one of the criteria that the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme calls for and one of the criteria for decision-making by the Research Funding Committee.

- In particular, applications for a study that is qualitative and/or participatory in nature should have a clearly articulated methodology that takes account of the methodological complexity involved and that describes the data collection and analysis techniques/methods that are consistent with the chosen methodology.

- Applicants should pay particular attention to potential missing data and potential gatekeeping and detail how these issues are being addressed if appropriate.

- When an intervention is developed/proposed as part of a project, information should be provided on how data will be synthesised to inform said intervention and the potential next steps.

- Projects should have the potential to be generalisable and applicable to different settings across the UK. If a study claims to be a UK study then it should involve the countries of the
UK. If this is not possible/appropriate then strategies for ensuring applicability across the UK should be clearly explained.

- Applicants should consider whether their proposal represents value for money, particularly with respect to the impact and new knowledge their research project will contribute. Where relevant, they should consider the wider context of developing and implementing an intervention.

- Applicants are welcome to involve a relevant Clinical Studies Group / Grant writing group where appropriate.

- Applications for a clinical trial or study involving the recruitment of participants MUST demonstrate the close involvement of a Clinical Trials Unit. This involvement is expected to have started at the development phase of the proposal and to continue, as appropriate, throughout the duration of the proposed project. Trials without CTU involvement are likely to be rejected.

- Applications including a health economics component are encouraged. However, applicants should ensure that a suitably qualified co-investigator is included and their support and input into the health economics aspect of the project from the start is demonstrated, in the same way as for other methodologies where relevant, including statistics and qualitative methods.

- The NIHR Clinical Research Network (NIHR-CRN) provides infrastructure and supports researchers in developing, setting up and delivering high quality clinical research to time and target in the NHS in England. The following link might be useful for applicants to find out how the CRN can help:
  
  https://www.nihr.ac.uk/research-and-impact/nihr-clinical-research-network-portfolio/how-to-apply-for-nihr-crn-support.htm

- A very useful resource is the NIHR Research Design Service (RDS) that can be accessed by any researcher to develop and design high quality research proposals for submission to any peer reviewed funding scheme, such as the Marie Curie Research Grants Scheme. Contact details for your local RDS are available here:
  
  https://www.nihr.ac.uk/about-us/how-we-are-managed/our-structure/research/research-design-service/

- Applicants might find the guidance from the Medical Research Council on developing and evaluating complex interventions, and the accompanying British Medical Journal article, helpful when developing proposals:
  
  https://www.mrc.ac.uk/documents/pdf/complex-interventions-guidance/

  http://www.bmj.com/content/337/bmj.a1655.full