

University of Oxford Returning Carers' Fund: Guidance

Purpose of the fund

1. The University established the Returning Carers' Fund in 2014 to support academics and researchers who have taken a break for caring responsibilities to re-establish their research careers. These career breaks include maternity and shared parental leave, as well as breaks to care for disabled or elderly family members.
2. The purpose of the Fund is to:
 - a. Support those who have taken a break for caring responsibilities to re-establish their research careers.
 - b. Increase the visibility of the necessity to provide support for parents and carers, with a view to changing gendered perceptions of balancing a research or academic career with caring responsibilities.

Applying

3. Applications are invited from academic and research staff for funding to support the development of their research career following a break in their career or a period of leave for caring responsibilities. This can include maternity, adoption or shared parental leave, or leave to care for an ill, disabled or elderly family member.
4. Applications should be submitted to your divisional contact by Friday of 5th week (deadline dates are [updated and posted annually](#)).
 - *Humanities*: Amy Hinks (edi@humanities.ox.ac.uk)
 - *Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences*: Amy Hinks (amy.hinks@mpls.ox.ac.uk)
 - *Medical Sciences*: Katherine Corr (katherine.corr@medsci.ox.ac.uk)
 - *Social Sciences*: Catherine Goodwin (diversity@socsci.ox.ac.uk)
5. We encourage you to share your draft application in advance of the deadline with your divisional contact (see above) for an initial review to support and to avoid the application being returned to you for further detail, possibly delaying the award. Those who have had the chance to have a review have benefited from it.
6. Before submitting your application, please also share it with your Departmental or Faculty Administrator for their review and to request administration and finance details/codes for the application form.
7. The Returning Carers Fund Steering Panel is keen to ensure that any eligible applicants receive an award and will do its best to support you through the application process. The Steering Panel is comprised of the Policy Advisor for Gender Equality in the Equality and Diversity Unit, and the four academic divisional leads for the Returning Carers Fund.

Scope of the Fund

8. Funding can be requested for any legitimate purpose identified by the applicant that addresses a clearly identified barrier to return to research and demonstrates a link to career development in research. Support could include, but is not limited to:
 - teaching buy-out to enable you to concentrate on research;

- training, professional or personal development;
- short-term secondments to 'get up to speed' with recent research developments;
- conference attendance to enable you to re-establish your profile;
- short-term research or administrative assistance;
- small scale lab equipment purchase;
- visits to Oxford by your research collaborator(s).

* If your application falls outside of these examples, please get in touch with your divisional contact to check eligibility before applying.

9. Childcare-related expenses over and above a staff member's normal childcare costs are eligible if requested as part of an application for 'work-related training' (which includes conference attendance and research visits), including a family member to travel with you and your child. The existing financial limit will still apply. Please note that the payment of childcare expenses for reasons other than 'work related training' are considered by HMRC to be a taxable benefit and are therefore not eligible under this scheme.
10. The costs of providing a parental or carers' leave post or other support during the leave period are not permitted. These should be discussed with and considered by the applicant's department as part of the process of agreeing a maternity leave plan. Please refer to the [family leave for researchers and academics](#) for additional detail and guidance for line managers and Principal Investigators.

Funding

11. Award amounts are based on the amount of leave taken:
 - a. For leave periods of 3 to 6 months, awards of up to £3,000
 - b. For leave periods of 6 months+, awards of up to £6,000
12. Larger amounts may be awarded, up to an absolute maximum of £12,000, where it can be demonstrated that the costs of the proposed activity cannot be broken down or reduced without affecting the impact of the activity.
13. If you are requesting any staff costs or support, they must include the [full cost to the employer](#) (please check with your Departmental or Faculty Administrator if you have any questions about this). If the cost includes a college buyout, please ensure you receive the approval of the college in advance.
14. Applications may request funding for more than one activity, provided that you share how they will support your return to research and furthering your career
15. Retrospective payments are not permitted.
16. If your activity falls outside of the normal application deadlines, or if you wish to apply for funding for an activity requiring expenditure before the application deadline, please contact your divisional contact.
17. Awards are normally valid for a year. Applicants may apply for funding over a longer period or apply for an extension if the project is delayed (via an email to your divisional contact), but if such a request is not made any unspent funds will be reclaimed automatically at the end of the award period.
18. Awards are made for the purposes outlined in the application only. Any changes to the proposed use of the funds must be approved in advance, via a request to your divisional

contact. If the costs of the proposed activities are lower than outlined in your application, any unspent funds will be reclaimed and returned to the Fund.

19. Where possible, equipment and/or laboratory costs should first be met or part-met from other sources (such as grant funding or departmental sources), and details of any matched funding or other support being provided by your department should be supplied.
20. An application for a lower amount within the budget limit will not be looked upon more favourably. All applications are considered equally, regardless of the amount requested.

Eligibility

21. The scheme is open to all members of academic and research staff employed by the University, including those holding joint appointments, but excluding those who have achieved full professorial title or who hold statutory chairs. The scheme is not open to members of staff with college-only contracts.
22. The scheme is open to all those who, at the closing date for applications:
 - are currently on leave for a minimum of three months;
 - have returned from a break of at least three months within the last two years; or
 - have returned from two breaks each of at least three months within the last five years.

Notes:

- *A break may comprise of two or more discontinuous periods of leave totalling at least three months provided that they relate to a single life event (e.g. as part of a shared parental leave or carer's leave arrangement).*
- *The period of leave may have been taken at any institution.*

23. If you are concerned that you do not meet the eligibility criteria, please speak to your divisional contact.
24. Only one award may be granted per period of leave.
25. Those on a fixed-term contract should hold a contract of employment for a sufficient period beyond the date of their application to permit the grant to be spent and to support in securing a new contract. The application should provide details of a research career trajectory and clearly outline any future career plans; applicants may submit a supporting statement from their supervisor if they wish to do so.
26. Applications must be signed by the staff member's supervisor, Head of Department or Faculty Board Chair and by their Departmental or Faculty Administrator to confirm that a) the department/faculty supports the application, and b) the applicant is eligible for funding, as per the above criteria.
27. Applications for funding of college buy-outs must be discussed and agreed with the college before the application is submitted.

Administration

28. Please submit the attached application form to your divisional contact, who will confirm whether your bid is eligible for support, double-checking with your Departmental or Faculty Administrator as necessary.

29. The Steering Panel will make decisions on funding, ensuring consistency across Divisions. The Panel may approve a lesser amount if the case for funding is not deemed strong enough. Should the number of applications received be greater than the amount of funding available in the scheme, the priority list from each Division and the strength of individual applications for funding will be taken into account.
30. You can expect to receive a decision on your application within a month of the closing date. There will be no appeal against the Panel's decision. Applications will primarily be judged against the likelihood of delivering benefits that would enable the applicant to remain in an academic or research career, taking into account their career stage.
31. You will be required to produce a one-page report on your use of the funds within 12 months of receipt of the funds or on completion of the project. A template will be provided. The report will detail:
 - any research outputs, as evidenced by publications, presentation of papers, development of collaborations or submission of grant proposals;
 - any career development, as evidenced by attendance at conferences or participation in training or development; and
 - any other identified benefits to your career.