

## IMPRINT Fellowship Application Guidance

### Summary

The **vision** of the IMPRINT Network is the widespread implementation and uptake of safe and effective pregnancy and neonatal vaccination programmes that lead to improved long-term neonatal and maternal health, in all relevant settings.

The IMPRINT network **aims** to advance our understanding of fundamental scientific questions about vaccination in pregnancy and the neonatal period and to identify the best methods of assessing the efficacy, safety and acceptability of vaccines given in pregnancy and the neonatal period.

The fellowship scheme represents a significant investment for the network to galvanise the field, with a particular focus on developing expertise in LMIC. The resources are generous to widen accessibility, and will cover a postdoctoral salary, overseas living allowance, travel, conference attendance and consumables for up to 18 months to enable HIC/LMIC collaborations and mentorship, as needed for a specific project. When evaluating the applications, a balance will be struck between scientific excellence, career development needs at the post doc level and strategic fit for the network.

Four IMPRINT Network Fellowships of max. 18 months duration each for post doctoral candidates selected from LMIC will be available throughout the duration of this cycle of network funding. Potential candidates will develop a proposal that includes network partners from other institutions, including LMIC/HIC partnerships and provides a training opportunity around one of the scientific challenge areas.

The Fellowships will be advertised to members of the network via e-mail and intranet, clarifying eligibility and timelines. Applications will be screened for eligibility by the Network Manager, suitable applications will undergo peer review, possibly with the support of external reviewers, and will finally be reviewed for scientific and strategic fit by the IMPRINT Steering Group (SG), taking into account the track record of the applicant, scientific merit of the project, collaborative efforts involved and longer term career plans. Conflicted members of the SG will be excluded from the review panel (see below for examples of Conflicts of Interest). A shortlist of the best applicants will be prepared by the SG and approved by the IMPRINT Executive Committee (EXEC). Telephone interviews will be held and the best candidates chosen.

Fellowship applications are open to all IMPRINT members and their teams. The proposed work should be supported by at least two research sponsor(s) of which at least one should be an IMPRINT member at the time of submission. Collaborators are expected to apply for IMPRINT membership if not currently part of the network.

All awardees will be required to submit narrative and financial reports at 9 and 18 months. Awarded projects, with non-confidential abstracts, will be included in IMPRINT Network outcomes and publicity. All output needs to acknowledge the funding through IMPRINT. All fellowship awardees must agree to present work at an IMPRINT meeting. All successful applicants must commit to the MRC

data sharing policy: <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/data-sharing/>.

Please contact the Network Manager Claudia Schacht at [IMPRINT@LINQ-management.com](mailto:IMPRINT@LINQ-management.com) with any queries relating to the application process. All applications must be submitted to [applications@imprint-network.co.uk](mailto:applications@imprint-network.co.uk) by 4pm CET on the deadline for submission indicated on the IMPRINT website.

Please see the further details below about this award and how to apply.

## Details

### Funding eligibility

**Applicants:** Funding is for post-doctoral fellows with interest and connections to maternal/neonatal research in line with the main challenges of the IMPRINT Network (see below). Projects should include IMPRINT investigators as research sponsors from a **minimum of 2 institutions**. Postdoctoral candidates based at academic institutes, governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and industry are all eligible to apply. Fellows from LMIC partners are particularly welcomed and will be prioritised for funding; all projects are expected to be of relevance to LMICs.

In order to be given priority as a LMIC candidate, applicants should either: 1) Originate from and be resident in a LMIC and conduct their project between a HIC and a LMIC setting or 2) Originate from a LMIC and be currently resident in a HIC with the intent to use the fellowship for re-entry into LMIC in order to conduct the project; support of the LMIC institution must be demonstrated. Candidates from a HIC currently working in a LMIC are also eligible to apply, but if equally suitable applications are received from LMIC applicants, these would be given priority as the scheme aims to maximise capacity building in LMIC. A list of LMIC countries can be found here:

<http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>.

**Activities supported:** all projects must be within the scope of the IMPRINT network and its remit. For more details, see [www.imprint-network.co.uk](http://www.imprint-network.co.uk). The IMPRINT network seeks to address six scientific challenges.

### *Challenges 1-3 focus on immunobiology of vaccination in pregnancy and early life.*

- Challenge 1: Mechanism of production and transfer of maternal antibody via the placenta and breast milk
- Challenge 2: Effects of maternal immunisation on the subsequent development of immunity in the infant - beyond short-term serological outcomes
- Challenge 3: Impact of globally important co-factors on maternal and neonatal immunity such as prematurity and intrauterine growth restriction, malnutrition and co-infections, e.g. HIV and malaria

It is anticipated that fellowship projects focussing on challenges 1-3 will utilise datasets and sample collections that are available to IMPRINT investigators and collaborators, due to the short timescales of the fellowship opportunities. These samples and data are expected to have been collected with full ethical approval.

**Challenges 4-6 focus on implementation: on safety, efficacy and acceptability of vaccination in pregnancy and early life.**

- Challenge 4: Vaccine acceptancy and preparedness for maternal immunisation, including in emergencies
- Challenge 5: Vaccine safety monitoring in LMIC, given the absence of high-quality baseline data regarding pregnancy outcomes and perinatal complications and absence of globally applicable standards for assessment of safety
- Challenge 6: Development of comparable methodologies for assessing efficacy in clinical trials: standard definitions for correlates of protection and methodology for the development of assays to develop such correlates; agreeing clinical end-points for key vaccine preventable diseases

Challenges 4-6: Projects may focus on vaccine preparedness and risk and rumour management, while other projects are anticipated to address potential correlates of protection for vaccine-preventable infections, for example critically evaluating data from within the IMPRINT network to aid decision-making and licensure for current and future studies of maternal and infant vaccines. It is anticipated that fellowship projects focussing on challenge 5 will focus on standards and methods for assessment of vaccine safety in HIC and LMIC settings and on evaluating these outcomes.

**Activities not supported:** research outside the IMPRINT objectives and remit; projects not supported by at least two IMPRINT investigators as research sponsors; costs of industrial partners.

**Value of grant:** Fellowships will be funded to a maximum of £100,000/full year for a maximum of 18 months (at 100% Full Economic Costs [FEC]). Please note, LMIC applicants will be awarded 100% of project costs; non-LMIC applicants will be awarded 80% of costs and will be expected to have matched funding for the remaining 20% of their project costs, as needs to be documented in their letter of institutional support. For details on cost coverage of MRC institutions, please refer to point 3.8 of [the MRC guidance for applicants document](#).

**LMIC status:** To be considered for the LMIC funding level you must be resident in an LMIC country at the time of application or have a definitive plan to return to a LMIC with the conduct of the fellowship (re-entry fellowships also encouraged). A list of LMIC countries can be found here: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>.

### Application process

Four network fellowships of max. 18 months duration each for selected post doctoral candidates will be available throughout the duration of this cycle of network funding. Potential candidates will develop a proposal that includes network partners from at least two sponsoring institutions, including LMIC/HIC partnerships, and that provides a training opportunity around one of the six scientific IMPRINT challenge areas.

Deadlines will be advertised on the IMPRINT website and networks.

The application form and associated documents must be submitted by email by 4pm CET on the closing date to the Network Manager, Claudia Schacht at [applications@imprint-network.co.uk](mailto:applications@imprint-network.co.uk). You will receive acknowledgement of your application within three working days. If you don't receive an acknowledgement, contact us again to ensure your application has been received.

## Review

All applications received in the funding round go to the IMPRINT Network Manager to be screened for formal eligibility. Applications are then forwarded for review by three suitably qualified reviewers, which might include members of the IMPRINT steering group provided there is no conflict of interest (see below for details on conflicts of interest). The application will be scored using a standard template, based on the following evaluation criteria: track record of the applicant (25%), scientific merit of the project and its relevance to IMPRINT challenges (50%), collaborative efforts involved (15%) and longer term career plans (10%).

The scores will go back to the IMPRINT steering group and a ranking list will be provided to the management board for final selection. Telephone interviews will be held.

Applicants are encouraged to identify any persons on the IMPRINT boards with whom there is a conflict of interest. Applicants can suggest up to three external reviewers.

## Notification of Review Results

Successful candidates will be sent award letters confirming the funds available and for grantees to sign and return to the network manager. **Projects should start within three months of the date of the award letter, so it is advised that any contractual issues between partners are discussed prior to grant submission and resolved promptly upon award.**

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed promptly, and the Network Manager may pass on specific feedback if available.

## Post-award Administration

Imperial College London will issue a simple award letter contract for the awardee. Projects may not start until this contract has been fully executed. Projects must start within 3 months of the date on the award letter and the actual start date must be confirmed to the Network Manager.

Before a project can start, fellows and research sponsor partners must consider whether a collaboration agreement is required for the project. If required, collaboration agreements must be in place before the project starts.

It is expected that ethical approvals required will be either complete or in progress at the time of application.

Funds should be spent as detailed on the application. Awardees are required to submit narrative and financial reports at 9 and 18 months. These reports must be submitted to the Network Manager before the final 20% of the grant funds will be released.

On commencement of the project, 50% of the funds will be made available, 30% at 6 months and the final 20% on receipt of the final report.

IMPRINT does not require receipts to be submitted but these must be kept by the host institution as they may be required for possible future audits. The grantee's host institution must follow their standard procedures for financial accounts.

Awardees are encouraged to submit their project's results for publication in a peer-reviewed journal and possibly use the results for further fellowship applications to other funders. Final reports should be submitted a maximum of 3 months following completion of the project period. A non-confidential brief summary of the project's outcomes, taken from the final report, will be published on the IMPRINT website and in other publicity material.

All work arising from this grant must acknowledge the funding source as:

"This work was supported by the IMmunising PRegnant women and INfants neTwork (IMPRINT) funded by the GCRF Networks in Vaccines Research and Development which was co-funded by the MRC and BBSRC."

### **Publicity and Data Protection**

Awarded fellowship projects will be listed on the IMPRINT website and in other publicity material, with a non-confidential abstract outlining the work proposed. Copies of applications will be made available to the IMPRINT boards and external reviewers who will use information provided for reviewing the proposal and post-award administration. IMPRINT may choose to publish details of awards, awardees, and information about successful projects.

All funding comes from the BBSRC/MRC, so to meet the Research Councils' obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, non-confidential details of awards may also be made available on the Research Councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists. The BBSRC/MRC will use this information for research related activities, including but not limited to, statistical analysis in relation to the evaluation of MRC funding, study of trends and policy and strategy studies. Recipients of fellowship awards may be required to attend and contribute to BBSRC/MRC events within relevant areas at the request of the BBSRC/MRC.

### **MRC data sharing**

For information on good practice principles for sharing participant data from publicly funded clinical and trials and on how to manage your research data, please refer to: <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/data-sharing/>

### **MRC open access policy**

For MRC open access policy, guidance and FAQ, please refer to:

<https://www.mrc.ac.uk/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/open-access-policy/>

## Use of Animals

IMPRINT supports the principles of the 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement). Award holders are expected to abide by the core principles set out in the cross-funder guidance 'Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research: Expectations of the major research councils and charitable funding bodies' and GC2 of the RCUK Terms and Conditions.

The provisions of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 must be observed. All IMPRINT awards are made on the absolute condition that no work which is controlled by the act will begin until the necessary licences have been obtained from the Home Office (or equivalent body if work is outside the UK). Any recommendations arising from the MRC peer review process with regards to animal use must be followed. When animals are purchased from commercial suppliers, in-country suppliers should be used wherever possible, to minimise the risk of suffering during transport.

All research involving non-human primates must comply with the NC3Rs Guidelines: Primate accommodation, care and use.

For more details, please refer to:

<https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/4-proposals-involving-animal-use/>

## Use of Human Samples or Data

IMPRINT expects all research involving human participants to be undertaken in accordance with MRC policies and guidance available from:

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/#ethics>. These include:

- Good Research Practice (2012);
- Medical research involving adults who cannot consent (2007);
- Medical Research Involving Children (2004);
- Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in Research (2014);
- Personal Information in Medical Research (2000)

Independent Local Research Ethics Committee approval is required for research that involves human participants (whether patients or healthy volunteers) or records. Such approval is also required for certain studies of human tissues. It is anticipated that at the time of application, ethical approval has already been obtained or is being applied for.

In the case of social science research, IMPRINT recommends that award holders follow the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (revised 2015) which highlights the responsibility of the research organisation for ensuring that the research is subject to appropriate ethics review.

Research involving human participants in developing societies presents specific ethical challenges and the MRC guidelines Research Involving Human Participants in Developing Societies must be followed.

Award holders whose research involves the removal, use or storage of human tissue as specified in the relevant legislation must:

- comply with the appropriate legislation, i.e. the Human Tissue Act 2004 and/or the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006;

- follow the relevant standards and Codes of Practice issued by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) (the MRC Regulatory Support Centre has summarised these);
- follow the MRC guidance detailed in Human Tissue and Biological Samples for Use in medical Research (2014).

For research taking place outside the UK, local national guidelines and international best practice must be followed. All legal requirements for the import/export of biological materials must be adhered to.

### Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

National regulations and international best practice must be followed. Researchers who carry out genetic modification should be familiar with the legislative requirements and with the Scientific Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (Contained Use) guidance.

### Dangerous Pathogens

Research organisations accommodating projects involving the use of dangerous pathogens must comply with the safeguards recommended by the UK Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens in their guidance 'Infection at work: controlling the risk', 'Biological Agents: the principles, design and operation of containment in a level 4 facility' and 'Biological agents: Managing the risks in laboratories and healthcare premises', as well as local national regulations.

### Conflict of Interest

Members of the IMPRINT steering board will be excluded from the review process where this is a conflict of interest. Examples of a conflict of interest include:

- Actively involved in research collaborations with the applicant(s)
- Working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely in the last 4 years
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s)

### Useful Resources

UK Government information on ODA strategic objectives:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/official-development-assistance-oda--2>

List of LMIC countries: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm>

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact the Network Manager, Claudia Schacht, at [IMPRINT@LINQ-management.com](mailto:IMPRINT@LINQ-management.com).