**Returning Carers Scheme: Applicant Information Pack**

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# Objectives of the Returning Carers Scheme

The Returning Carers Scheme (RCS) is an annual fund designed to support all employees, including Professional Services Staff, who can evidence that their career / work-life:

* Has been, is being, or will be, disrupted owing to taking a break of at least three months or working part-time/reduced hours (equivalent to three months or more).
* This career break must have taken place within the last three years.
* Applicants must be able to show how funds provided through this scheme will support their career development or enhance their work opportunities.

# Terms and conditions

* All applications must address one or more of the objectives outlined above.
* Requests for funds should not exceed £10,000 in total, based on direct costs.
* All applications must include a comprehensive breakdown of costs.
* The cost of consumables requires detailed justification in an applicant’s proposal. There should be a strong justification as to why these costs cannot be covered by other sources of departmental funding or research grants. If a strong case is not made, the administrator of the RCS will contact the departments to ascertain why they cannot fund these internally.
* All applications must have sign-off from the respective Head of Institution or equivalent (or their nominee).
* Successful applicants must ensure that funding is spent withing twelve months of receipt of the award. Any unclaimed funds will be reclaimed automatically after this time and used to support future RCS applicants. Any requests for an extension must be sent to [ReturningCarers@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ReturningCarers@admin.cam.ac.uk) for consideration by the Chair of the panel. These will only be considered if an applicant has been unable to use to an award to due to external influence or unforeseen circumstances (for instance, a Research Assistant has been unable to start work at the scheduled time).
* Retrospective award payments can be applied for only if the nature of the request falls between the previous and current round of funding.
* Successful applicants are only permitted to use funds for the reasons specified on their application form and approved by the panel. Any changes to the proposed use of funds must be approved in advance of expenditure via a request to [ReturningCarers@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ReturningCarers@admin.cam.ac.uk). If the costs of the proposed changed activities are approved and these are lower than outlined in the application, any unspent funds will be reclaimed and returned to the fund.

# Eligibility Criteria

The Returning Carers Scheme is open all employees of the university, including Professional Services Staff. PhD Students and members of staff with college-only contracts are not eligible to apply.

**In 2020 the RCS was merged with the new Career Support Fund (CSF), designed to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 for staff. Please note that career breaks or disruption caused by the COVID Pandemic are no longer eligible for consideration.**

Applicants will be required to show evidence of one or more of the following on the application form:

* a return to work from a break in their career for at least three months for caring responsibilities in the last three years (at the closing date of the application).
* a current break in their career for caring responsibilities.
* are due to go on a break in their career for caring responsibilities.
* have been working part-time or reduced hours (equivalent to three months or more) because of caring responsibilities.

This can include, but is not restricted to:

* Family leave.
* Career break for family reasons.
* Leave to work part-time or reduced hours for family reasons under the University’s flexible working policy.
* Special leave to care for a dependent.

In ALL cases:

The disruption must have a meaningful adverse impact on an applicant’s career or work-life over the longer-term without additional support from the University. Reasons may include:

* Staff who may be at greater risk of not securing another contract,
* Staff who may have missed out on significant career advancement opportunities,
* Those who may demonstrate lost career momentum, or
* Staff who may feel they need extra support to maximise their performance at work.

Please note:

* Any break must have taken place, or be due to take place, while the applicant was/is [employed by the University of Cambridge](https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/hr-staff/information-staff/staff-guide/terms-employment).
* If an applicant has previously been awarded funding from the RCS/CSF, they cannot make another application if it concerns the same period of caring leave/career break as a previous successful award.
* Priority will be given to those who have not received previous funding from the RCS/CSF.
* Awards will be made only where it is clear that there is no other source of funding for the items requested (e.g., grant funding).
* Applicants must disclose if funding has been received from anywhere else that relates specifically to the terms of the application.
* 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.
* The scheme is not a general hardship fund. For information about university support available in this regard please see the [Employee Welfare Loan Scheme](https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/coronavirus-employee-welfare-loan).
* No support can be given for any expenditure after the expected end of employment, and only staff holding a university contract are eligible to apply.
* Those on a fixed-term contract should hold a contract of employment for a period of at least eighteen months beyond the date of their application to permit the grant to be spent and to support in securing a new contract. The application should clearly outline any future career plans or work opportunities.
* Successful applicants are expected to immediately inform the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Section if they receive additional funding, or other financial support that

reduces or eliminates their need for funding support from this scheme.

* Recipients will need to comply with the expenses regulations (e.g. subsidiary allowances) as found under the university finance regulation: [OUR POLICIES | Expenses Hub (cam.ac.uk)](https://www.expenses.admin.cam.ac.uk/our-policies)

**Examples of potential spend**

Examples of potential spend include:

* Training or professional development.
* Conference attendance (including in the UK, overseas and online) to enable applicants to re-establish their research/career profile.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Short-term research support, for example to generate preliminary data to support research grant applications.
* Travel and accommodation costs of research collaborators coming to Cambridge (to reduce the need for the returning employee to travel, thereby supporting work-life balance).
* Indirect childcare expenses, for example, the travel and accommodation expenses of the person looking after an accompanying child while the researcher/academic attends a conference overseas.
* Secondments or short-term research assignments (for example to an external laboratory).
* Support for assistance in grant writing.
* Equipment purchases to support independent research, including small scale critical equipment for research purposes.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* IT equipment including ergonomic equipment where not covered by the University’s homeworking expenses policy. Typically, the fund allows a maximum of £1200 to be claimed for a new computer, although this is at the discretion of the panel. Please note, all IT equipment is the property of the university and will have to be returned if/when the awardee leaves the university.

​This list is not exhaustive and applicants are encouraged to make requests for funding for items that will help build their research profile even if not included above. Applicants may request funding for more than one activity, provided they demonstrate how each will support a return to research and/or career/work development.

The CSF cannot be used to fund the following:

* Direct childcare or elder care costs.
* To request an extension of a contract of employment.
* Personal salary support.
* Rent/mortgage support on an applicant’s main place of residence.
* Routine costs of research which should be funded through grant (or other) funding.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Teaching substitution or teaching ‘buy-out’.

# Funding limitations

If successful, funding will be allocated to **a host institution and not directly to an individual.** Host institutions include **University Departments, Faculties or University Non-School Institutions.** Colleges are **not** eligible host institutions.

# Reporting requirements

Successful applicants will be required to submit a written report within twelve months of receiving funding from the RCS. A template will be provided. This must confirm that the funding was spent in accordance with the with the request(s) stipulated on the application form and approved by the panel. Receipts/evidence of expenditure should be kept as these will need to be submitted with the form. The form is also designed to evaluate and appraise how the award has impacted the successful applicant. The report will detail:

* + Any benefit to your career, work opportunities or to you on a personal level.
  + Any development, as evidenced by attendance at conferences or participation in training or development.
  + Any research outputs, as evidenced by publications, presentation of papers, development of collaborations or submission of grant proposals.
  + Any other identified benefits to your career or work-life.

# How to apply

Please complete the Application Form and send it as a **Word Document** to:

[ReturningCarers@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ReturningCarers@admin.cam.ac.uk).

The Application Form will require you to provide the following information:

* Section A: Contact details, job title and Institution.
* Section B: Reasons support is required and contextual information to support the application.
* Section C: Detailed financial breakdown of the support required.
* Section D: Head of Department / Institution (or nominated deputy’s) signature to confirm the application is in-line with the scheme’s criteria; name and email of Departmental Administrator; the **Department Code** and **Cost Centre Code** which the DA can provide.
* Section E: Equality Data that will be used for monitoring and reporting purposes only.

Please note:

In order for applications to be processed, Section D must be completed in full (with Head of Department’s signature, the DA’s name and email and the Department and Cost Centre Codes). Applications missing any of this information will be returned to the applicant to resolve, which may result in crucial deadlines being missed and the applicant missing out.

Information provided will be used to assess the application against the eligibility criteria. Applicants are therefore advised to ensure that all relevant information is included. The level of personal information requested is to enable the Panel to target support to those with the greatest need. It is not obligatory to provide this information but doing so will strengthen the application.

Once the application has been submitted, an acknowledgment e-mail will be sent to the applicant.

[Assessment](https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/career-support-fund" \l "accordion_field_collection_view-block_1-4)

All applications will be reviewed and eligibility verified by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Section. Applications up to £2,500 will be assessed by the Lead HR Business Partner of the applicant’s School, The Head of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Section and the Deputy Director of HR.

Applications for funding over £2500 will be decided by a Panel of eight, chaired by the Head of the EDI Department. It will include one of the University’s Equality Champions and a lead EDI representative from each of the six schools.

All applications are anonymised before being viewed by decision makers.

Please note that there is no appeals process against the panel’s decision.

Applicants and host institutions will be notified of the outcome approximately six weeks after the application deadline. Successful applicants will be informed of the funding amount, when funds will be released and advised on next steps.

1. If an application is approved for a conference that the applicant has already attended and/or paid for, they can claim this back with proof of receipt for any flights, accommodation etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Applicants may be required to get equipment costed out directly by their department and within departmental guidelines. All equipment is the property of the university and will have to be returned if/when the awardee leaves the university. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is expected that conferences and equipment essential to an applicant’s research will be funded by the sponsor paying the applicant’s salary or funding their research project.  Where such funding is not available, this should be explained in the application and confirmed in the Head of Department’s statement of support. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)