

# Guidelines

## for the Review of Proposals to Establish or Renew Clinical Research Units



Disclaimer: The English translation of this document is provided for informational purposes. In the event of a discrepancy between the English and the German versions, the German text takes precedence.

**Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft**

Kennedyallee 40 · 53175 Bonn · Postal address: 53170 Bonn, Germany  
Tel.: + 49 228 885-1 · Fax: + 49 228 885-2777 · [postmaster@dfg.de](mailto:postmaster@dfg.de) · [www.dfg.de](http://www.dfg.de)



## I Programme Information

Funding for a Clinical Research Unit enables outstanding researchers to collaborate closely on specific medium-term projects whose anticipated findings could not be achieved within individual grant programmes. The thematic focus of a Clinical Research Unit is on basic, disease-oriented or patient-oriented clinical research.

Funding should also contribute to improving clinical research by creating and strengthening research-oriented structures within university hospitals, establishing or enhancing training structures, supporting researchers in early career phases, enhancing the scientific profile of the department of medicine, and increasing cooperation between clinicians and scientists in the foundational disciplines of medicine.

A Clinical Research Unit typically has fewer than ten projects which are coordinated to enable work on a common research topic.

A Clinical Research Unit is primarily run by university hospitals and institutes at one location. It is made up of project leaders and project staff. One researcher assumes the role of spokesperson. This person should be a full-time university teacher. In addition, the Clinical Research Unit is headed by a research coordinator, who is either appointed to or currently holds a research professorship and who is responsible for the scientific and administrative management of the unit. This individual must meet particular requirements with regard to her/his scientific track record, experience in leading projects, and integration and leadership skills.

A draft proposal must first be submitted before a Clinical Research Unit may submit an establishment proposal. The DFG makes a recommendation on whether or not the establishment proposal should be submitted based on the review of the draft proposal.

The total duration of funding is generally eight years; the first funding period is usually four years. Continued funding may be applied for with a renewal proposal (see the Guidelines for Clinical Research Units – DFG form 50.08).

[www.dfg.de/formulare/50\\_08](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/50_08)

**Please note:**

General Guidelines for Reviews (DFG form 10.20) are available at:

[www.dfg.de/formulare/10\\_20](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/10_20)

The review should not exceed three pages in length.

Your written preliminary comments will help the DFG Head Office identify complex issues prior to the review meeting so as to arrive at an initial assessment. The actual assessment of the Clinical Research Unit takes place at the review meeting. You are again welcome to use the questions below as a guide for this purpose.

## II Structure of the Review (Clinical Research Unit as a Whole and Individual Projects)

1. How would you assess the **quality of the project**, especially with regard to originality and the anticipated contribution to knowledge gain?
  - For the Clinical Research Unit as a whole: Is the topic particularly relevant and topical (also in an international context), and does it focus on basic, disease-oriented or patient-oriented clinical research? Is funding as a group likely to produce a significant benefit compared to the funding of individual projects? Does the research question require a funding horizon of at least eight years?
  - For the individual projects: How does the project contribute to the overall research task of the Clinical Research Unit?
  - For renewal proposals: How has the quality of the project developed, also in relation to the development of the wider research field?
2. To what extent do the **objectives and work programme** of the unit as a whole as well as those of the individual projects convincingly reflect clear working hypotheses and an appropriately distinct topic? Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the planned investigations. Are the methods and the schedule as well as the concept for handling research data suitable?
  - For renewal proposals: What scientific progress has been achieved in the previous funding period?
3. How would you evaluate the soundness of the preliminary work, the quality of publications (please refer to the Guidelines for Publication Lists – DFG form 1.91) and the **qualifications of the applicants** – in general and in relation to the project as a whole and the specific individual projects?

[www.dfg.de/formulare/1\\_91](http://www.dfg.de/formulare/1_91)

- For the Clinical Research Unit as a whole: Please also comment on the extent to which both the spokesperson and, if known, the research coordinator designated for the research professorship meet the requirements in terms of their scientific track record, experience in leading projects, including third-party-funded projects, and integration and leadership skills.
4. How would you assess the **work and research environment**?
- Is the host institution suitable for the implementation of the project, particularly in terms of the necessary equipment and facilities and the necessary commitment?
  - Please also comment on the following aspects in relation to the Clinical Research Unit as a whole: Will the Clinical Research Unit strengthen the scientific profile of the university or medical department? Will research-oriented structures be established in the participating hospitals and clinics? Does the CRU contribute to intensifying cooperation between clinicians and scientists in basic research (also in non-university and international settings) and in what way is this cooperation organised?
5. For the Clinical Research Unit as a whole: How do you rate the **measures taken to promote** researchers in early career phases? Are there doctoral programmes for medical graduates within the department? Are there clinical scientist programmes or opportunities for clinicians engaged in research to profit from research time (temporary substitute positions)?
6. For the Clinical Research Unit as a whole: Are **diversity** and **equity in the research system** taken into account? What measures are envisaged to integrate women researchers and/or to provide funding opportunities for participating female researchers? What family-friendly provisions are available?
7. Please provide a **clear recommendation** as to whether the proposal should be approved. If you do vote in favour, please comment on whether the requested funds are justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed project, making recommendations for adjustments to the budget as necessary.

### **III List of Questions for the Assessment of the Research Coordinator of a Clinical Research Unit during the Review Meeting**

1. How do you assess the career of the envisioned research coordinator to date?
2. How do you rate the research coordinator's academic qualifications and credentials? How do you rate their publication record to date? Have they won other academic or other awards? Is the person internationally recognised?
3. Have they acquired the independence and competence required to manage the Clinical Research Unit? Does the potential research coordinator possess organisational talent?
4. Are they capable of representing the group of researchers internally and externally (assertiveness, communication skills, ability to contribute personal visions)? Does the research coordinator adopt an inclusive approach? Are they capable of motivating others?
5. Will the research coordinator have the opportunity to dedicate their expertise to teaching and training doctoral researchers?
6. If they are active in clinical work as well, is the research coordinator able to plausibly demonstrate how their commitment to patient care is compatible with research in terms of time and workload?
7. Does the specialist orientation of the research coordinator fit into the priority area of the university/clinic? Are they integrated in the university, or is it possible to envisage them being integrated in the near future?
8. Does the proposed research coordinator have the aptitude for appointment to the research professorship?