

British Acupuncture Council

Section I: Research Grants Criteria

1. Objectives

The BAcC has two primary goals in supporting research:

- To advance the general understanding of acupuncture as practised by its members
- To improve the outcomes of acupuncture interventions so as to maximise health benefits for patients.

The BAcC has developed a position paper “Towards a Research Strategy” which is available on the BAcC website at:

<http://www.acupuncture.org.uk/content/resources.html>

Within this framework, the BAcC is inviting applications for research grants that will inform acupuncture as a holistic medical practice. Successful applicants will receive up to £7,500 per annum for a maximum period of 24 months.

Research projects can be set in a range of contexts, for example with heterogeneous patient groups where different co-morbidities, ages, social expectations, environment and practitioner training are the ‘real world’ setting. Innovative research proposals with methodologies that address these characteristics will be viewed favourably in the award process. The aim should be to maximise generalisability of the results and to be relevant to acupuncture as it might be practised across a diverse population and in realistic treatment settings. In studies on effectiveness and outcome, the minimum standard should include individualised treatment protocols and diagnoses couched in oriental medical terms.

Novel or multidisciplinary approaches using, for example, observational studies and social science, psychosocial, comparative and mixed modality approaches will be received with interest. Similarly, outcomes would not necessarily be limited to symptom remission but encompass patient performance, family and interpersonal relationships, disability, health care resource use and quality of life.

The BAcC Research Committee will consider the following aspects of the application in order to judge the likelihood that the proposed research will have a substantial impact on the pursuit of these goals. Note that the application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have a major impact and thus deserve a high-priority score. For example, an investigator may propose to carry out important work that by its nature is not innovative, but is essential to move a field forward. Where the application is for seed funding or feasibility studies, the criteria below should be applied to the expected full-scale research project.

Applicants are asked to pay particular attention to the conditions of the award, specified in Part 5: Conditions of the Award later in this document.

2. Eligibility

Applications will only be accepted from full members of the British Acupuncture Council.

Exclusions

Please note that the BACc does not provide funding for the following:

- Undergraduate studies, or MSc studies/projects, or fees for PhD students
- Applications from colleges or universities
- Practice audits*
- Retrospective funding of work already completed or for support whilst writing up work
- Travel to conferences to disseminate research findings, or to attend presentations of research relating to the project area.

Reimbursement of Research Costs

The amount of funding available is strictly limited and is unlikely to be able to meet the full costs of research projects.

Primarily, awards may assist with:

- (a) Seed funding a pilot research project with the aim of demonstrating the viability of a larger project which may then be funded from other bodies assisting complementary health research.
- (b) Expenses in connection with a specific project, which may already be receiving some financial support from other institutions. For example additional staff time, travelling costs, materials for the project such as printing costs of questionnaires etc.
- (c) Specific items of equipment which are specialist in nature but essential for execution of the research.

Exclusions for Reimbursement of Research Costs

The BACc does not provide funding for the following:

- Capital expenditure on general office or laboratory environments (e.g. building work).
- Capital expenditure on general office equipment (e.g. PCs, printers, and photocopiers).
- BACc grants are not intended to replace existing resources. Grants might for example provide salaries for additional research or technical staff to work whole or part-time on the project, but will not provide funding for staff already in post.
- Costs of overheads. The BACc provides grants on the understanding that the host institution or practice meets the infrastructure costs. (This is also the policy of the Association of Medical Research Charities). Infrastructure costs include lighting, heating, central support staff salaries, e.g. secretarial support, costs of equipment maintenance (unless equipment purchased by the BACc), telephone charges and use of library facilities.

Animal Experimentation

The BACc does not fund research that involves animal experimentation.

3. Assessing Research Grant Applications

There are five criteria that the BACc will use in assessing applications for research funding, namely (1) Significance, (2) Approach, (3) Innovation, (4) Skills and (5) Environment.

The table below indicates the weighted scoring system used to evaluate each project proposal:

| CRITERIA | Score Given |
|---|-------------|
| <p>1. Significance: 30% How far will the study benefit acupuncture patients?</p> <p>Does this study address an important problem?</p> <p>If the aims of the application are achieved, how will current knowledge about acupuncture be advanced and disseminated?</p> <p>What effect will this study have on the concepts or methods that drive the practice and understanding of acupuncture in the West?</p> <p>Will the study enhance the professional and/or public understanding and reputation of the use of acupuncture in the West?</p> | |
| <p>2. Approach: 25%</p> <p>Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, ethical, and appropriate to the aims of the project?</p> <p>Are the research methodologies congruent with the patient-centred and holistic dimensions of the work of acupuncturists?</p> <p>Is the project plan realistic, achievable, and does it have measurable outcomes? Does it take into consideration potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics?</p> | |
| <p>3. Innovation: 10%</p> <p>Does the project employ novel concepts, approaches, or methods or are the aims original and innovative?</p> <p>Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>4. Skills: 15%</p> <p>Is the investigator appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work?</p> <p>Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the principal investigator and other researchers (if any)?</p> <p>Are there a number of investigators with appropriate skills collaborating to increase the size of the project?</p> <p>Are the appropriate supervisory and mentoring arrangements in place?</p> | |
| <p>5. Environment and collaboration 20%</p> <p>Does the environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success?</p> <p>Does the proposed study take advantage of unique features of the environment or employ useful collaborative arrangements?</p> <p>Is there evidence of institutional support?</p> <p>Are there academic or clinical collaborators who will help with the design, implementation and interpretation of the research?</p> | |
| <p>TOTAL</p> | |

4. Nature of Research Grants

Project Grants

Project grants are available for a defined piece of work with objectives that can be achieved in the time specified. An annual assessment of all outstanding bids for funding will take place. Based on the criteria above, the highest scoring projects will together receive up to a total of £7,500 per annum (the BACc's annual research grants budget) for a project lasting a maximum of 24 months. Applications for shorter time periods will be considered if this is more appropriate to the particular project. If there are insufficient funds to meet the full costs of research requested, an offer may be made to the applicant for a smaller amount with the proviso that the researcher can ensure that remaining monies will be sourced from elsewhere.

After assessment, high scoring project applications may be held over to the next year and re-assessed against any new bids for grants. This is to ensure that a particularly high-quality bid is not disadvantaged by being submitted during a year containing other high-quality proposals.

Applications for a new period of funding to follow on from an existing BACc grant

In exceptional circumstances a further period of funding following on from a current grant may be considered. Applicants who wish to apply for such a grant should submit an application as normal. In addition, a full report on the current project should be submitted in the Appendices (Part VI) of the application form. A further grant is unlikely to be forthcoming where the researchers' ability to manage or complete the project to timescale is in question.

***Note: Practice Audits**

Audit seeks to extend the knowledge of practitioners about their own practice rather than extend general clinical knowledge. BACc research funding is not intended to assist practitioners audit their own practice.

5. Deadline for Applications

The deadline for entries for the year 2004/2005 is **Wednesday, 15th September**, and assessment of applications will take place in **November 2004**.

Section II: Research Grants Application Guidance

Guidance for completing the application form

Responsibility for awarding grants rests with the Research Committee whose task it is to:

1. Evaluate the research proposal based on the five criteria of Significance, Approach, Innovation, Skills, and Environment
2. Communicate its decisions to applicants
3. Review the administration of the grants awarded.

Completed application forms should be sent to the Research Co-ordinator at the BACc. All monetary values should be rounded up to the nearest pound.

Please supply 8 copies of the application form and all attachments - printed single sided, not stapled and of a quality suitable for photocopying. Failure to submit the required number of copies may delay processing of your application.

Part 1 - Applicant Details

1. Surname and title of applicant who will be responsible for the administration of the grant.
2. Name and initials.
3. Current employment and position if within an institution detailed in 5.
4. BACc Membership number.
5. The correspondence address, whether the institution where the research is going to take place or the practice address where the research is practice based.
6. The name(s) of co-investigators/co-applicants, and their institution if different from 5. Letters confirming willingness to collaborate should be submitted with the collaborators CVs in the attachments.
7. A short project title - no more than 20 words
8. Full duration of project – up to 24 months
9. Proposed start date - should be the first day of any given month. The start date has important budgetary and contractual implications.

Part 2 – Project Proposal

The abstract should be 250 words maximum. It should describe the research question (and hypothesis if appropriate), the methodology, the significance to acupuncture and the expected accomplishments. An abstract should reflect the contents of the entire application. It should serve as a "stand alone" piece, and constitute a well-written, accurate summary of the entire proposal. Finally, the abstract must reflect the goals of BACc's research strategy (see <http://www.acupuncture.org.uk/content/Library/documents.html>) and a statement of significance.

Keywords: List 5 key words or phrases that describe the research area (e.g. inter-rater reliability, patient profiling, needle technique and outcome etc.)

Notes on Assessment Criteria

It is important that each section is answered in full.

1. Significance

Give a concise summary of the existing state of knowledge in the project field.

Describing the current body of knowledge should be a relevant and concise (not exhaustive) review of the literature. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate your understanding of your field by critically analysing the pertinent work of other investigators leading up to your proposed work. Once you have identified the pivotal work leading up to yours, state explicitly what questions other researchers have not yet answered about your field. The aim should be to identify the "gaps in our understanding".

Describe what the proposed project will bring to the specified area of research, and the overall field of acupuncture research.

This section should describe the purpose of the research and demonstrate how it will seek to plug the "gaps in our understanding" identified above. This is an important section for reviewers of the application – they will be looking at two aspects of the 'importance' of the research. Firstly, the impact that this research may have on the concepts and methods that are normally employed in acupuncture research. Secondly, they will be looking for the impact that the research will have on general public's understanding and knowledge of, and confidence in, acupuncture, once disseminated.

How will it benefit future patients?

Benefits may be direct, in terms of indicating relatively better treatment approaches for specific types of patients. Indirect benefits might include better access to information about acupuncture's philosophical outlook, as well as efficacy and safety.

2. Approach

State the research question(s) and, for experimental research, state the hypothesis.

Your research question needs to be well focussed and achievable. Describe the proposed research question and adequately justify why the chosen methodology or experimental design is suitable. Acknowledge and address where there may be difficulties.

In experimental research, a hypothesis is an educated prediction about the outcome of your study, and must be testable. The most powerful hypotheses are based on pilot studies. Omission of a hypothesis in experimental work is a major error in that your reviewers can criticise you for conducting a "fishing expedition".

The question often arises as to how many hypotheses are appropriate. One strong hypothesis is fine. Some investigators have a hypothesis underlying each aim. That is also fine. The question of how many hypotheses to include should be driven by the nature of the question(s) you seek to answer.

Outline the plan of investigation, and state the specific objectives that will need to be achieved in order to meet the aims of the project.

Provide a plan of how each objective will be achieved with timescales (preferably within a 3 monthly framework). Where there are significant milestones in the project, these should be given with expected completion dates. Progress reports will be assessed using this timetable.

Remember that the aims are “specific”: make sure they are exactly that - concise and to the point. Since your aims are a “to do” list, it helps to present them in active language, such as “to quantify”, “to determine”, etc. Avoid vague language that leaves your reviewer uncertain as to exactly what it is you are proposing to do. For example, do not write “to study” (it makes you sound like you are still a student, and the BACc does not fund student work!).

A milestone is a significant achievement that it is necessary to complete before the project can move on to the next stage. The approach of the reviewers of this section will be to assess that your overall plan is realistic and achievable and that the approach taken is appropriate to answer the stated research question.

3. Innovation

What is new about the proposed study in terms of methodology or concepts and subject matter being researched?

Although the application may score highly based on other criteria, research which seeks to repeat the work of other conventional studies either in terms of methodology or subject matter will not be awarded high marks in this area.

4. Skills

Describe the factors that will enable the applicants to achieve the research objectives.

Highlight the circumstances that make you and/or your team ideally placed to carry out the proposed research, e.g. successful pilot studies, etc. Attach your CV as an applicant, and any of your co-research workers. This should include qualifications, current position and posts held and any recent and relevant peer reviewed publications.

5. Environment and collaboration

Indicate the advantages and appropriateness of the environment for the type of research being carried out and whom you will collaborate with.

The environment chosen to conduct a piece of research can affect the outcome. For example, research on the treatment of agoraphobia conducted in an average NHS outpatient department might limit the types of patient participating in the study. Certain environmental settings will have advantages or disadvantages in terms of adequate patient numbers, facilities in place. It is important that you demonstrate that you have considered these factors in your application.

Bringing on board collaborators will be very useful to deepen the quality of the research. Outline whom you will be working with, and how they will help you achieve a successful outcome. Describe specific contributions from each collaborator.

Part 3 - Resources Required

Post 1 in this section should correspond to Post 1 in the first section of the application.

A. Salary/Staff Costs

For applications involving staff costs, please state for each post:

- Basic annual salary and the percentage of time allocated to the project (bear in mind some staff costs might change during the course of the project, for example due to annual salary increments)
- London Weighting if appropriate
- Employers' on-costs. Employers' contribution for Superannuation and National Insurance
- Total staff cost.

Where there are no staff costs, and the cost is for the time of individual acupuncturists, state the hourly rate and the estimated hours needed to complete the project.

Additional notes on staff costs:

Grants are not intended to replace existing resources but provide salaries for *additional* research or technical staff to work whole or part-time. We do not provide funding for projects already taking place or for staff already in post. For institutional positions, all staff details must be agreed with the personnel office of the institute or university where the worker will be employed. The applicant is responsible for ensuring that all staff appointed to the project are appropriately experienced and appointed at an appropriate salary scale.

B. Running Expenses

- Please list the running expenses, describing the consumables required. These may vary during the term of the project; any such anticipated variations should be clearly stated. Running expenses may include charges for use of specialised equipment where these are required for the research project.
- Maintenance costs for equipment purchased through a BAcC grant are permissible while the equipment is being used for approved BAcC work. However, the BAcC will not agree additional costs for maintenance, once a grant has been awarded, unless it was specified on the grant award letter.
- Travel expenses to attend meetings/conferences should not form part of the grant application, although the cost of travel (such as that between collaborating centres) which forms an integral part of the proposed study can be included under 'Exceptional Items'.

C. Equipment

Where equipment is required specifically for the purposes of the research, please indicate:

- Description
- Manufacturer's name
- Price quoted excluding VAT
- Installations and delivery costs where appropriate
- Maintenance costs for BAcC funded equipment will not be provided unless it is detailed on the application form.

Where the research is to be carried out in collaboration with an institution such as a university, VAT paid on equipment may be recoverable. Please determine whether this is the case in your circumstances, and state this clearly in the application.

The BACc assumes that a basic level of equipment will already be in place either in the host institution or the practice (e.g. photo-copiers, telephones, PCs) and will not expect to fund such items.

D. Exceptional Items

For research travel, such as travel for collecting patient data, please detail the costs for each year. Discretionary travel awards to conferences (for example to disseminate interim research findings, or to attend presentations of research which relate to your project area) will not be funded by a BACc grant.

Please take care over completing the financial section of the application form, as items not included at the outset will not be funded retrospectively.

E. Total Costs

Enter the total costs required for the entire project:

- A. Total Staff Costs
- B. Total Running Expenses
- C. Total Equipment
- D. Exceptional Items
- E. TOTAL=A+B+C+D for years 1-2

GRAND TOTAL - The total grant sought from The BACc

Payment will be reimbursed retrospectively, at 3 monthly intervals. Please keep copies of all relevant documentation (staff contracts, receipts, etc) as the BACc reserves the right to audit claims for payment.

Part 4 - Additional Information

A: Other funding sources

The BACc will not duplicate the support provided by another funding body, however the BACc accepts that researchers may wish to submit a proposal for consideration by more than one funding body and does not discriminate against applications that are also being considered elsewhere. But note that failure to disclose details of these other applications will be considered a breach of the BACc Conditions of Award. Please state whether the research proposal submitted is a continuation of work that is already being supported by another funding agency, or where matched funding is being sought.

B: Mentoring Arrangements

The BACc funds high quality research that is performed to an adequately rigorous academic standard. In many instances this will be achieved through the participation in the study of a "host" institution such a college or hospital. Where this is not the case, e.g. for practice based research, the BACc requires that the applicant be supported by a named mentor who has appropriate interest in or experience of research methodologies and can provide technical support to the project. It also requires that the mentoring arrangements be explicit in terms of the initial project design, the ongoing monitoring of the project and the final research conclusions. A letter from the research supervisor or mentor is required indicating that they are able to fulfil this role for the stated duration of the project.

C: Organisational Support

It is important to demonstrate that if a piece of research is to be conducted with support from a university or NHS department, that appropriate approval and co-operation from the relevant head of department is obtained, indicating that they fully understand the nature and duration of the proposed research. Similarly, research conducted outside of the practitioners' practice should be conducted in accordance with any terms and conditions of the premises used – for example, in some premises the use of moxa might be problematic. In such cases, informed consent should be obtained from the premises manager and should be demonstrated in the application.

Where research is conducted in association with a host organisation, there may be aspects of financial administration that require the agreement of the organisation's Bursar or Finance Officer.

D: Ethical Approval

For studies involving patients, a copy of the submission to the NHS Local Research Ethics Committee, or the related University Ethics Committee, and the letter of approval should be submitted with the application. If the submission is still under consideration please indicate the anticipated date when approval will be decided and forward the letter of approval as soon as it is available.

Where research is conducted outside the remit of an NHS or University / College environment, the BACc will consider the case for granting ethical approval based on the guidelines given at Appendix 1.

Monies will not be released until the BACc Research Committee receives proof of Ethics Committee approval.

E: Plans for Dissemination

Applicants should propose a plan for dissemination of their findings. This should list possible journals for publication, and conferences at which applicants might present their study.

Part 5 - Conditions of Award

The completed and signed form completes the grant application. Please take time to study the conditions under which BACc grants are awarded. These comprise the contract between the BACc, the host institution and the grant holder and must be adhered to by all parties. If a grant is awarded, the applicant(s) undertake to:

- Actively pursue the execution of the research outlined.
- Provide the BACc with any information relating to actual or envisaged variations in the scale, approach, setting or costs of the research project.
- Provide the BACc with progress reports every 6 months, with details of completed milestones as laid out in the application and details of any delays or difficulties with the project.
- Ensure that a detailed statement of account of expenditure is provided every 6 months.
- Acknowledge the role of the BACc in supporting the research during any presentation or publication of the research findings.
- Provide the BACc with a written report on completion of the project or within 6 months of the end of BACc funding, whichever is sooner.

The BACc reserves the right to terminate or vary the agreement for funding should the researcher(s) be unable to continue the specified research project within the timescale given in this grant application.

The BACc accepts no liability, financial or otherwise for any expenditure or liability arising out of the project, other than for which the fixed sum award has been made.

Processing applications

Receipt of the application will be acknowledged in writing. If there is a problem with the application or any of the required documents are missing, the application may be returned to you, in which case consideration of the application may be deferred to a later meeting. If certain documents, such as ethical approval for a patient survey or clinical trial, are not available at the time the application is submitted, it is recommended that you indicate when these will be available and forwarded to the BACc. No grant will be awarded until all the required conditions have been met and the necessary documentation received and approved by the BACc. Applications will be processed in the order they are received.

Revision/Resubmission of an Application

The BACc will only accept resubmission of a revised proposal if the Committee recommends this.

Applications for a new period of funding to follow on from an existing BACc grant -

The BACc grantees who wish to apply for a further period of funding (12-24 months) to follow on from their current grant should prepare an application as normal. In addition, a full report on the current project should be submitted as part of the application.

Attachments

Please attach:

- Curriculum vitae for main applicant and any co-investigators
- If the research is to be based in an institution, a letter of support from the Head of Department or institution describing the position of the applicant and the interest of the department in acupuncture research
- Abstracts of any applications pending which relate to your proposal
- Letters of support from research supervisor/ mentor
- Institutional salary scales where appropriate
- Ethics Committee approval, where applicable
- Where the project is ongoing BACc funded research, a report of current status.

Appendix 1: Guidelines for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects

Applicants should consider the following principles in connection with the ethical aspects of any research project. Investigators should feel free to contact the BAcC in order to obtain clarification, additional information or to discuss the ethical aspects of their research.

In general, the research should be conducted in a manner that protects the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all actual or potential research participants. The information provided by the investigator must address the following ethics issues:

1. Informed Consent

An individual should generally be accepted as a research subject only after she/he or, where necessary, the legally authorised guardian or next of kin has consented to participate in the research. The individual's right of free choice must be respected. This requires that the decision to participate be made in the light of adequate and accurate information. (Certain exceptions to this principle, noted in the next section, may be made). It also should be made clear that the individual has the right to withdraw consent without penalty at any time. The consent must be voluntary and no form of coercion, direct or indirect, explicit or implicit should be employed. The individual should understand the risks, if any, involved and, where appropriate, be aware that the research may not be of personal benefit. A good template for writing Patient Information Leaflets and Patient Consent Forms can be found on the Department of Health website.

2. Involvement of Individuals in Research in Which They Must Be Un-informed or Mis-informed

It is understood that some experiments, in order for the results to be meaningful or interpretable, require that the participants be unaware of the variables under investigation. Examples include the administration of sham electro-acupuncture or the covert observation of groups in society. The investigator must fully justify the use of such procedures and must ensure that the subjects are fully "debriefed" after the experiment. At the debriefing, subjects should be told the true purpose of the experiment, and the experimenter must take full responsibility for detecting and removing any stressful after-effects. This type of research will be carefully scrutinised, as well as that involving risks, keeping in mind the general question, "Is this study important enough to warrant the use of these procedures, especially if they may result in stress?"

3. Statement of Risks and Benefits

A participant in an experiment is considered to be "at risk" if any aspect of the research exposes him/her to physical, psychological, social or other hazards. The investigator should specify these risks and make it clear that the subjects are also to be fully informed. The steps taken to minimise risks and the reasons why they cannot be avoided should be indicated. Where risks are involved, the possible benefits accruing from the research that may offset the dangers also should be noted. It is realised, especially in the case of basic research, that this may have to be speculative.

4. Maintenance of Confidentiality

Every person has a right to privacy as regards most aspects of life, which only that person (or in certain cases a guardian or next of kin) can give permission to violate. When the possibility exists that others may have access to information gathered from research participants, it is required that this possibility, with the plans for protecting confidentiality, be explained to the participants as part of the procedure for obtaining informed consent. Similarly, statistical data must appear in publications in a manner that prevents individuals from being identified.