CANCER RESEARCH UK

Together we are beating cancer

POLICY ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN RESEARCH

1 Purpose

This policy sets out Cancer Research UK (CRUK)'s position on environmental sustainability in research. As a charity, we're committed to reducing our direct and indirect emissions (scopes 1, 2 and 3) by 50% by 2030, and reaching net zero by 2050.

At CRUK, we recognise the considerable impact research and innovation has on the environment, and recognise our role as a funder of research in driving a greener and more efficient research system to reduce the impact on the environment of the research we fund.

The requirements described in this policy are intended to complement existing and prospective activities to improve sustainability in research organisations we fund.

This article in *Cancer news* takes you through the new requirements in our policy and how this will affect your research and funding applications.

2 Scope

This policy applies to Lead or Joint Lead grant applicants to our response-mode funding schemes, to all Group Leaders, Senior Staff Scientists and Facilities at our core-funded CRUK Institutes, as well as setting requirements for all Host Institutions hosting researchers funded by CRUK

The policy also describes changes to allowable costs for those in receipt of CRUK funding, as well as broader changes that all researchers and staff engaged in cancer research are encouraged to adopt to be more sustainable.

This policy builds on our previous position statement to now set more specific requirements of those we fund.

3 Definitions

Core facilities: A centralised capability function accessible by research groups at a CRUK Institute.

CRUK Institute: CRUK Scotland Institute; CRUK Cambridge Institute; CRUK Manchester Institute; Francis Crick Institute, London.

Environmental sustainability in research: The act of reducing the environmental impact of research and innovation activities. This includes efforts to (i) reduce or eradicate greenhouse gas emissions, (ii) avoid the depletion or degradation of natural resources, and (iii) allowing for long-term environmental quality.

Host Institution: The university, institution or other organisation at which some or all of the research funded by CRUK will be carried out.

Junior Group Leader/Senior Group Leader (JGL/SGL): A formal appointment at one of the four CRUK Institutes, with responsibility for a research group.

Lead/Joint Lead applicants: The person(s) leading a CRUK grant application.

Senior Staff Scientist: A formal appointment at the CRUK Scotland Institute with responsibility for both a core facility and a research group.

4 Key Points

We expect all those involved in research we fund to consider, manage and where possible reduce the environmental impact of their work.

4.1 Requirements for CRUK funding applicants

To be eligible for CRUK response-mode grant funding, Lead and Joint Lead applicants must each:

- hold either the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) or the My Green Lab Certification at the Silver level for their research group(s) at the time of submission;
- either attach LEAF or My Green Lab Certification to their funding application or provide a link to a publicly available list of accredited research groups at their Host Institution(s).

This requirement will be enforced for Lead and Joint Lead Applicants submitting proposals to all relevant funding calls closing **from 1 January 2026 onwards** (see exclusions below) and applies to researchers applying from both UK and non-UK-based institutions. Applicants not able to evidence their accreditation at final grant application submission by this date will be considered ineligible.

4.1.1 Exclusions

The following individuals are not required to attain laboratory sustainability accreditation to be eligible for response-mode funding.

Lead or Joint Lead applicants:

- **to the following schemes**: any Bursary; Clinician- and Advanced Clinician Scientist Fellowships; Clinical Trial Fellowship; Career Development Fellowship; Career Establishment Award; any Primer award;
- **holding one of the following positions/job titles (or equivalent)**: PhD or MD/PhD student; postdoctoral research fellows/associates; clinical research fellows; research assistants/technicians; facility/technical specialists;
- whose **start date of their contract is fewer than 18 months** from the final CRUK grant application submission deadline;
- **whose research groups solely employ research techniques that are**: computational, such as bioinformatics, biostatistics, or data science; desk-based, such as qualitative analysis or policy-focused research.

Given not all Lead and Joint Lead Applicants will have the authority to acquire laboratory sustainability accreditation in their immediate research group/environment, we have excluded researchers holding an early career researcher position. In recognition of the time needed to attain accreditation for those leading their own research groups, we have also excluded Lead- or Joint Lead applicants who have only recently been appointed to their post.

Furthermore, the principles and priority areas covered by LEAF and My Green Lab accreditation are most relevant to 'wet lab' research settings, such as biomedical, clinical and chemical laboratories. Sustainability accreditations applicable to alternative research settings are currently in development but until these are

properly established, we have therefore excluded applicants performing solely 'non-laboratory' research methods and practices from this policy requirement.

4.2 Requirements for CRUK Institute Group Leaders

All Junior- and Senior Group Leaders (JGLs and SGLs), Senior Staff Scientists and core facilities based at CRUK Institutes must hold LEAF accreditation at the Silver level **by 1 January 2026**.

4.2.1 Exclusions

Given that achieving laboratory sustainability accreditation requires lead-in time, the following individuals or structures at our CRUK Institutes are not required to attain accreditation:

- JGLs, SGLs and Senior Staff Scientists within 18 months of their start date at a CRUK Institute;
- Core facilities established in the last 18 months.

However, JGLs, SGLs, Senior Staff Scientists and core facilities must have attained accreditation once they have progressed to 18 months since their start date or establishment.

4.3 Requirements for CRUK-funded Host Institutions

To help support CRUK-funded researchers embed environmental sustainability in their own research, we require that their Host Institutions demonstrate a strong organisational commitment.

UK-based Host Institutions of current and prospective CRUK grantholders (irrespective of grant application date to CRUK) must become a signatory to the Concordat for Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice no later than **1 January 2026**. This involves them developing an approach for ensuring sustainability is embedded in:

- Leadership, governance and strategy;
- Infrastructure, procurement, travel and collaborations/partnerships;
- Annual carbon emissions reporting (scopes 1, 2 and 3);

If a Host Institution is not yet a Concordat signatory by this date, CRUK retains the right to apply sanctions to the organisation, which may include discontinuing funding activities.

4.4 Expectations for all researchers and Host Institutions undertaking cancer research

CRUK expects all researchers and Host Institutions we fund to ensure that the research they conduct is environmentally sustainable. Researchers and Host Institutions should:

- **reduce** energy and water consumption, switching on equipment only when it is needed and sharing its use with others;
- **reuse** equipment, materials and consumables, using organisational schemes to facilitate sharing and avoid single use plastics if reusable alternatives are available and viable;
- **recycle** waste products through institutional facilities and limit using general waste;
- **reduce general wastage** in research by conducting research in an open and robust manner, specifically by following requirements set out in (for example) our Open Access-, Data Sharing and Management- and Research Integrity policies.

4.5 Costs guidance for CRUK funding

CRUK funds direct costs of research and encourages decision making around project-related costs that considers environmental sustainability when determining 'value for money', not just the upfront cost.

All costs requested must be justified in the grant application; see our Costs guidance for grants for full details. If allowable in our Costs Guidance, Grantholders can use their existing funds to cover these costs and do not need to ask CRUK to do this.

Allowable costs:

- **Consumables and materials**: Sustainable versions of materials and consumables, even if they are more expensive to purchase or dispose of;
- **Equipment**: Sustainable versions of equipment, even if they are more expensive to purchase, as well as second hand or refurbished equipment, or the maintenance of existing equipment as an alternative to purchasing new equipment;
- **Research data**: Repair of hardware, or replacing/updating hardware and software with more energy-efficient versions. Training and other support needed to develop more efficient code/algorithms, and training or services to support data curation/annotation for maximising its future use;
- **Training**: Under our Continuing Professional Development (CPD) policy, costs can be used for training on how to be more sustainable as a researcher and how to assess the sustainability of the research;
- **Travel**: CRUK expects research teams to undertake only essential travel for research activities and if a virtual/digital alternative for the purpose of the travel is not available. Costs associated with travel for research collaboration purposes directly related to the activity funded on the grant are eligible to be included in a grant application as per our Costs Guidance. Where travel is necessary, the decision on the form of travel should consider options with a lower environmental impact, primarily through lower emissions, even if this comes at a higher price.

4.4 Policy updates

Given the increasing risks posed by climate change, resource consumption and biodiversity loss, and as the R&I system builds capacity to achieve environmental sustainability in research, CRUK intends to monitor developments and evolve this policy from time to time as appropriate.

5 Support & Advice

For any queries about this policy please contact: policies@cancer.org.uk.

6 Related Documents

For more information, please see the following linked documents:

- Position Statement on Environmental Sustainability of Research (2022)
- Policies that affect your grant
- Conditions of your Grant
- Costs guidance for grants

Policy sponsor	Dr Iain Foulkes, Executive Director of Research & Innovation, CEO Cancer Research Horizons
Policy owner	Dan Burkwood, Director of Research Operations & Communications
Subject Matter Experts (SME)	Dr Mathew Tata, Funding Policy & Governance Manager
Executive Board or Council approval required?	Y – Scientific Executive Board
Date of last review	April 2024
Next review due	April 2026
Superseded documents	2022 Position statement on environmental sustainability of research