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KickCancer Clinical Investigator Grants 2026

GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

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Introduction

The Funder

KickCancer is a foundation of public interest, established in 2017, whose mission is to cure every child with cancer.

The foundation pursues this mission by:

- Supporting scientific, clinical and fundamental research on childhood cancers, at the Belgian and European levels;
- More generally, promoting and developing all activities in the field of curing childhood cancers and medical follow-up of treatments, before and after the remission.

At the European level, KickCancer co-founded FIGHT KIDS CANCER, a collaborative funding programme with four other NGOs. Thanks to a robust, independent selection process run with the European Science Foundation (ESF), the programme supports high-quality European research, essential for tackling rare paediatric cancers.

In Belgium, KickCancer works in close collaboration with the BSPHO, supporting the functioning of the collaboration and providing funding for clinical trials that the medical community wishes to implement in Belgium.

A new step is now being taken to further support the paediatric haemato-oncology (PHO) community in Belgium: a funding initiative launched in collaboration with the FNRS and FWO.

Objective of the call

The KickCancer Clinical Investigator Grants (KCIG) intend to allow clinicians to devote half of their working time to carry out research activities in paediatric haemato-oncology and provide a substitute to perform the clinical duties.

Eligible projects to a KCIG encompass:

- Basic (hypothesis-driven) research project;
- Translational research project;
- Participation in international clinical trials groups.

Main features of the grant

The KCIG will be granted to clinicians of any nationality working in an eligible organisation in Belgium to develop a research activity in the field of paediatric haemato-oncology.

- **Duration**:

KCIG duration is 2 years renewable 4 times max. upon the positive evaluation of a biennial progress report. Former fellows are entitled to reapply an unlimited number of times.

- **Financial provisions**:

The KCIG is intended to replace 50% of the grantee's clinical duties with a compensation up to a maximum of EUR 70,000/year intended to hire a substitute to perform the clinical duties.

This sum is reimbursed by KickCancer to the university hospital after it has submitted:

- Evidence of the recruitment of a paediatric haemato-oncologist for a part-time position (min. 5/11 FTE) in replacement of the grantee;
- A declaration (signed by the grantee, the director of the university hospital, and the head of the department concerned) confirming that the grantee has been released from their clinical duties to enable them to carry out research activities in the frame of the KCIG, and that they will be re-employed full time in their original position at the end of it;
- Should the applicant be a PhD student, this declaration additionally must be signed by the applicant's academic promotor at the eligible host organisation;
- The claim/invoice with supporting documents (monthly pay slips of the grantee).

In addition to the EUR 70,000/year, an amount of maximum EUR 10,000/year will be available as compensation for other costs (bench fees) associated with the grant.

- **Eligible expenses**:

Costs include salary costs but exclude on-call duties and overheads.

Bench fees can be used for the purchase and financing of all items that are directly related to the research activities of the KCIG holders (se annex 1 of the regulations).

- **Portability of the grant**:

The grantees can keep the benefit of the KCIG if they transfer their research activities to another eligible Belgian organisation. However, the KCIG cannot follow the beneficiaries if they transfer their research activities to a private company or abroad. (Inter)national mobility (e.g. a short research stay at a partner lab) is authorised in the frame of the grant provided that the grantee keeps their affiliation with the eligible institution.

Schedule of the call

- Opening of the call: Monday 1st December 2025
- Deadline of the call: Monday 2nd March 2026
- Panel meeting: Thursday 28th May 2026 (14.00-17.00 CEST)
- Start of the Grant: 2nd October 2026

The grant must effectively start max. 12 months after the official starting date set to 1st October 2026. The effective start of the grant corresponds to the hiring date of the grantee substitute. Should the KCIG not effectively start in the eligible period, it will be cancelled.

How to apply?

Application process

Applications must be submitted in English using the online application system no later than 2nd March 2026 (midnight CET). A PDF version of the application form is available here. This document only aims at providing an overview of the different sections. It should not be used to submit an application.

A « save and continue » module allows the applicants to quit the system and to come back working on their application at a later stage. Once the applicants quit the system, an automatic e-mail is sent to their e-mail address with a link to return to their application form.

Applications encompass:

- The application form (administrative and scientific* parts) completed, dated and signed;
- 5 main publications and/or achievements;
- The applicant CV and publication list;
- A letter of commitment[1];
- Any other relevant support material (e.g. a recommendation letter from an international/European clinical trial committee/promoter or any relevant person from the academic world).

*The scientific part will entail:

- Title of the project;
- Abstract of the project (max. 1500 characters without spaces);
- Main hypothesis and state of the art (max. 2 pages);
- Impact and clinical relevance of the proposed research (max. 2 pages);
- Preliminary data (max. 1 page);
- Core of the project: plan of the project over the first 2 terms (max. 5 pages) including a clear distribution of time between their research and clinical activities (Gantt chart or else);
- Methodology & design of the study (max. 2-3 pages);
- Contingency plan (max. 1 page);
- Assets of the research environment (max. 1 page);

[1] *The letter of commitment must consist in a three-party written guarantee (signed by the grantee, the director of the university hospital, and the head of the department concerned) stating that, in case the grant is awarded:*
- The grantee will be released from their clinical duties to enable them to carry research activities in the frame of the KCIG
- The grantee will be re-employed full time in their original position at the end of the KCIG.
Should the applicant be a PhD student, this letter of commitment additionally must be signed by the applicant's academic promotor at the eligible host organisation.

- Ethics and reliability of the project in term of data treatment and management (statistics, processing and storage of the data including compliance with the GDPR) (max. 1 page);
- Bibliography.

All fields except for the title and abstract are optional, and they should be completed insofar as they are relevant to the research activities the grantee intends to carry out. Applicants should aim to provide the panel members with sufficient and relevant information to support an accurate evaluation of their application. Applicants may submit a KCIG project proposal within a single overarching research line that can be developed into multiple distinct research projects with other international research teams.

The applicants are requested to certify that:

- The research project is original and does not duplicate any ongoing or past research activities;
- The research project will not benefit from overlapping funding.

The submission of an application is acknowledged via an automatic notification.

All applications will be double-checked to ensure that all eligibility criteria are met before being processed to the evaluation stage.

Eligibility criteria

Eligible applicants must comply with the following requirements:

Applicant eligibility criteria	**Deadline of the call**	**Official start of the KCIG**
Hold a recognised academic degree of Medical Doctor	x	
Be employed in one of the eligible organisations and commit to at least 80% FTE		x
Hold a specialty in haemato-oncology (ending with reference code #698 under the RIZIV/INAMI nomenclature of healthcare services) and/or be (or commit to become an) affiliated to the Belgian Society of Paediatric Haematology Oncology (BSPHO)		x

There is no PhD requirement, nor any age/seniority prerequisites.

Eligible organisations encompass any university hospital attached to a university in Belgium, provided they have a paediatric haemato-oncology department, as defined by the Royal Decree of April 2, 2014.

Research conducted in the frame of the KCIG must comply with the ethics-related legal provisions in force. The grantees will be required to provide an ethical clearance to KickCancer prior to starting the research activities should the research activities raise any.

The KCIG cannot be combined with the FWO senior clinical investigator fellowship nor with the FNRS clinical researchers' mandates even though it would be acceptable for researchers to apply for any of these instruments (in case of multiple funding, the applicant would then need to choose between the funding sources).

Evaluation process

Selection principles

The selection process will be designed to meet international standards in terms of fairness, transparency, impartiality, consistency, and independence to identify the most relevant beneficiaries (irrespective of their gender, age, social or physical status, beliefs, nationality, political or sexual orientation).

The procedure will be fully online and based on a two-step evaluation process encompassing a single blind remote evaluation phase followed by a panel meeting.

Evaluation process

The evaluation will be performed by a panel whose composition will be based on the following principles:

- Identification of a sufficient number and appropriate mix of experts to ensure that all submitted applications are covered by relevant experience and expertise, while also ensuring a balanced distribution of the workload;
- The panel will be composed of international experts only, considering gender balance and geographical coverage;
- Experts will be checked to ensure they have no conflict of interests and will have to abide to confidentiality and data protection regulations. Conflict of interest applies if a.o.:
    - The panel member may, in any way, benefit from the acceptance or the rejection of the proposal;
    - The panel member has an active collaboration with the applicant (i.e. co-authorship of a publication with the applicant – except for policy papers, having participated in the writing of the proposal, or being involved in the publication or implementation of the possible results of the proposal during the last 3 years);
    - The panel member holds (or has held during the last 3 years) a hierarchic or directly subordinate position with regard to the applicant;
    - The applicant is a close person (relative, close friend, etc.).

Panel members will be acting as:

- Rapporteurs: responsible for scoring and commenting applications prior to the panel meeting and introducing the application during the panel meeting;
- Reviewers: responsible for scoring the applications prior to the panel meeting and commenting the application during the panel meeting.

- Remote evaluation phase

Prior to the panel meeting, each application will be remotely scored by all panel members and further reviewed with written comments by two rapporteurs.

The remote evaluation is conducted in a simple blind format meaning that experts are aware of the applicants' identities but not of the identities of the other panel members.

- Panel meeting

The panel gathers online.

During the panel meeting, each application will be presented by its rapporteurs and collectively discussed during a tour de table, with a dual aim of identifying the beneficiaries and drafting the Evaluation Summary Reports.

The panel will make its decision preferably via consensus or, if consensus cannot be achieved, via a simple majority vote of the members present, with each expert having one vote.

Maximum 2 representatives of KickCancer may attend the panel meeting as observers.

- Feedback to applicants

All applicants will receive feedback on their application via an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR). These reports will contain comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their research project as well as an overall remark without any no references to the scores or rankings.

The purpose of the ESRs is to provide scientific feedback that can help applicants improve the quality of their research project with a view to reapply in a future call or seeking alternative funding.

No redress procedure is foreseen.

Evaluation criteria

To reflect on the specificities of the instrument and its applicants, the following evaluation criteria and weighting will be in force:

- Quality of the applicant - 30%:
  - track record (clinical papers, research articles, invited talks, poster presentations, …);
  - visibility in the field;
  - clinical practice experience;
  - academic and training excellence (academic honours, previous funding, fellowships and grants, international mobility/internships, …).
- Quality and relevance of the research environment – 30%.
- Quality and originality of the research project – 20%.
- Potential impact and clinical relevance (including synergy between the clinical activity and the proposed research project) – 20%.

Scoring scale

Each criterion will be scored using the following scale:

- score 5 – Excellent: The application successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion, with only minor shortcomings.
- score 4 - Very Good: The application addresses the criterion very well, though few minor shortcomings are present.
- score 3 – Good: The application addresses the criterion well, but several shortcomings are present.
- score 2 – Fair: The application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
- score 1 – Poor: The application does not adequately address the criterion, or it contains serious inherent weaknesses.
- score 0 – Irrelevant: The application fails to address the criterion.

The final score will be automatically calculated on basis of the weighted scores.

Final decision

The KCIG will be granted by KickCancer on basis of the international panel recommendations.

Independence

Panel members act in their own name and not as representatives of an organisation, country or any entity to which they are affiliated. In the evaluation, they shall not be influenced by any considerations other than the interest of science and the scientific merits of the application. Panel members must not use the services of third parties during the deliberations, nor in their preparation.

Research integrity

Research integrity is of utmost importance. All experts involved in the evaluation process will be notified and asked to pay specific attention to scientific misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of data.

Funded researchers are expected to strictly comply to all institutional rules and regulations that apply in terms of research integrity. In case of integrity breach suspicion or allegation, KickCancer will take the appropriate measures.

Ethics

Research projects may require prior consideration of ethical problems that might arise or that are inherent to the submitted research project. The possible ethical problems may relate to the use and storage of private data, the handling of substances that may cause environmental or biodiversity damage and the research on animals or human beings (non-exhaustive list).

It is the responsibility of the grant laureate to submit an ethical clearance provided by their local ethics committee to KickCancer (if the project raises any ethical issues). This process ensures that all research and innovation activities under the KCIG comply with ethics principles and relevant national and international legislation.

Failing to provide this required ethical clearance may result in the cancellation of the KCIG.

Open Science

The scientific outputs stemming from research supported by the KCIG should be valorised to maximise societal benefits.

To this end KickCancer supports the publication in Open Access, with a preference for the deposit requirement of publications resulting from the funded project (Green Open access).

The facilitation of the free access to these research outputs not only aims at the benefit of the scientific community but is also meant to increase both national and international visibility of the researchers.

Valorisation

The potential impact of the scientific output of research supported by the KCIG should be maximised through the implementation of a strong utilisation and valorisation strategy.

Contact

The KCIG is administrated by the **Fund for Scientific Research-FNRS and the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO)**. Incepted in 1928, their mission is to support basic research in Belgium. Among their manifold activities, they manage around 30 scientific instruments sponsored by private patrons.

For more information on the KCIG (application process, eligibility issues, follow-up of the application, etc.), feel free to contact:

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