

autistica

Science in the Service of Autism



مركز الأمير سلمان لأبحاث الإعاقة
Prince Salman Center For Disability Research
Science Benefiting People علم ينفع الناس

Autistica / Prince Salman Center Mentor Based Fellowships Inaugural 2010 Cycle

Autistica is dedicated to supporting high-quality peer reviewed research that will bring benefits to individuals and families affected by autism.

Autistica and the Prince Salman Center for Disability Research - PSCDR (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) both recognise the need to create training opportunities for young scientists at an early stage of their careers, in order to nurture and develop expertise and knowledge in the field of autism research.

Autistica is therefore delighted to announce a collaboration with the PSCDR to create a programme of Mentor Based Fellowships. This programme will identify mentors (UK based) who can provide strong professional guidance and research opportunities for young talented researchers holding Saudi nationality and thereby support early career development, foster the next generation of autism experts and strengthen the international research links between the UK and Saudi Arabia.

These Mentor Based Fellowships will allow talented young pre-doctoral and post doctoral researchers to undergo a three or two year training period under the guidance of experienced mentors in the UK. At the core of the fellowships is the desire for young researchers to receive robust training in autism research and gain experience of UK research environments. The application must be initiated by the mentor.

Mentors may already know of potential fellowship candidates (subject to meeting the eligibility requirements). In addition the PSCDR will be proactive in identifying and helping shape a pool of fellowship candidates.

It is Autistica's role to encourage applications from experienced UK based mentors and to manage the administrative aspects of the programme such as peer review and progress monitoring.

Call for Proposals

Autistica / Prince Salman Center Mentor Based Fellowship Awards 2010

1. Introduction

Autistica invites applications from researchers in the UK who are able to act as mentors with the aim of providing the fellows with strong professional guidance and an environment in which to receive robust training in autism research whilst based in the UK.

Autistica has identified as priorities the need to determine what causes autism and how that knowledge can be used to ease the burden for families; what are the specific characteristics of autism that are amenable and relevant to treatment; and how can early screening and diagnosis and understanding of how autism changes over time be used to achieve timely and appropriate intervention ([see Autistica's Science Strategy 2009-2014](#)). The type of research the fellows are expected to conduct can **include but is not limited to:** human brain function, language, behaviour and cognition; human studies involving early detection; studies on underrepresented populations; diagnosis; developmental trajectories; behavioural, psychosocial, medical, and pharmacological treatment; genes, genetics, pathways and biomarkers; clinical and biological phenotypes; epidemiological research; translational research; neurobiology; gene-environment interactions; environmental factors; molecular and cellular physiology; laboratory models.

2. Eligibility and Process

In the UK (Mentors): The application must be submitted by the mentor and Autistica invites applications from potential mentors who are established investigators holding appointments at academic, research or clinical institutions within the United Kingdom (see below for further details). The fellow (who must be a Saudi national) is expected to spend the majority of the training period in the UK. The UK mentor may already know of a candidate fellow and Autistica will accept applications from the mentor with a named candidate (provided the eligibility criteria in Section 5 are met). If the mentor does not know already of a candidate then he or she can select from the candidate pool described below. [Mentors should note in the first instance the pool is likely to include more pre-doctoral than post-doctoral candidates].

During the applications process, Autistica can offer advice regarding UK entry and visa requirements for Saudi nationals, but it will be the responsibility of the host institution to ensure that the appointed fellow satisfies the requirements for entry into the UK and any other criteria such as proficiency in written and spoken English or requirements relating to registration for a higher degree.

In Saudi Arabia: The PSCDR will identify a pool a number of talented candidate fellows. Such a pool is initially expected to include a number of young professionals who have limited research experience, but have substantial clinical and practical experience in delivering services to individuals with ASD and their families in Saudi Arabia. These individuals will have Arab specific cultural and linguistic experience as related to ASD. Speciality areas will be across a broad range of speciality areas such as genetics, special education, speech-language pathology, behaviour modification, to name a few. Candidates will be proficient in English and Arabic, will have a proven record of scientific writing abilities, and will be highly recommended by peers and seniors. They will also show a strong commitment to not only developing and contributing to the global landscape of ASD scientific progress, but also to adapting that knowledge to regional and local needs in the Middle-East. [In the first instance this pool is likely to include more pre-doctoral candidates than post-doctoral candidates].

3. Application process

Applications from UK mentors with **named fellowship candidates** should be made via submission of a Letter of Intent. The Letter of Intent will be evaluated by Autistica and a decision made as to whether to invite the applicant to progress to the stage of full proposal submission.

Applications from UK mentors with **no named candidate** should be made by submitting a Letter of Intent. Following receipt of the Letter of Intent, Autistica in consultation and endeavouring to meet the needs of all sides, will facilitate the identification of a mutually agreeable candidate fellow drawn from the pool identified by the PSCDR. Autistica will facilitate the matching of the candidate with mentor which may involve face-to-face meetings / interviews. On identification of a mutually acceptable candidate, the mentor will be invited to progress to the next stage by submitting a full proposal.

All Letters of Intent will be screened for fidelity to this Call for Proposals and to Autistica's Science Strategy 2009-2014.

Autistica / PSCDR Mentor Based Fellowship applications must satisfy the following requirements:

- Come from mentors based in the UK with demonstrable commitment to providing professional guidance and mentorship to pre-doctoral and post doctoral scientists. The mentor should be able to provide a research *group* environment in which the fellows can gain robust experience in autism research.
- Come from established investigators with a track record of expertise and experience in autism research.
- Employ innovative, novel and/or untested research, diagnostic or treatment approaches and/or new biomedical or clinical paradigms, which if successful, are likely to facilitate rapid advances and/or emerging or transforming areas of research to understand the causes, biological basis, diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.
- Pre-doctoral fellows are expected to engage in full time study over a 3-year period leading to a PhD or equivalent.

Note: The relevance of the proposed research to autism spectrum disorders and to the goals of capacity building opportunities must be explicitly stated in the Letter of Intent and full proposal.

4. Awards

It is anticipated a number of Mentor Based Fellowship awards will be made as determined by available financial resources.

The application process is for UK based mentors to apply to Autistica by submission of a Letter of Intent, Autistica will then review the Letters of Intent and make invitations to advance the next stage and submit a full proposal.

Awards for Mentor Based Fellowships (pre-doctoral) can include:

- i. Student stipend commensurate with the levels determined by the UK Research Councils (i.e. £15,290 annually for the academic year 2010/2011 plus the London Allowance of £2,000 if appropriate).
- ii. Fees associated with the registration for a higher degree commensurate with the fees charged by the host institution for non-UK/EU students.
- iii. Travel to scientific conferences and professional meetings – up to £2,000 annually.
- iv. Research costs up to £10,000 annually - which may comprise of research supplies, services and related expenses; publication and data analysis costs; purchase of essential equipment (not to exceed £5,000 per year and a vendor estimate is required for a single item of equipment costing more than £2,500).

Pre-doctoral fellowship awards will be for three years.

Awards for Mentor Based Fellowships (post-doctoral) can include:

- i. A stipend commensurate with the Royal Society International Fellowship scheme (i.e. £24,000 annually plus the London Allowance of £2,000 if appropriate) or directly incurred salary costs for the fellow commensurate with the host institution's pay scales.
- ii. Travel to scientific conferences and professional meetings – up to £2,000 annually.
- iii. Research costs up to £10,000 annually - which may comprise of research supplies, services and related expenses; publication and data analysis costs; purchase of essential equipment (not to exceed £5,000 per year and a vendor estimate is required for a single item of equipment costing more than £2,500).

Post-doctoral fellowship awards will be for a maximum total amount of £57,000 per year for a period of two years. Proposals for awards less than the maximum allowed will be considered and are encouraged.

Autistica does not support indirect costs. Halls of residence fees are not covered under this scheme.

5. Eligibility

5. 1 Eligibility: Mentors

- i. Mentors must be in receipt of salary funding for the duration of the grant requested. Mentors holding a full-time academic or research post (or equivalent) at accredited academic, medical or research institutions within the UK are eligible to apply. If you are in doubt please contact jenny.longmore@autistica.org.uk for advice.

Eligibility must be demonstrated at the time of submitting the Letter of Intent.

It is likely the host institution will have eligibility criteria relating to **immigration** and engagement of a Saudi national and therefore the applicant is encouraged to seek advice from their own institution prior to application.

- ii. Applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria above (e.g., postdoctoral fellows, clinical fellows, part-time faculty members, etc.) are eligible to apply only if clear documentation is provided by the host institution stating either that appointment to a full-time, faculty position will be in effect by the start date of the grant (with no undue delay to the start of the grant) or in the case of fixed term contracts of employment that the contract is in place throughout the duration of the proposed Fellowship.
- iii. Information pertaining to eligibility of the mentor must be provided in the Letter of Intent.
- iv. Information pertaining to the eligibility of the fellow (if already known to the mentor) must be provided in the Letter of Intent.
- v. Applications will NOT be accepted from individuals or from proprietary organisations to support the research and development of products for profit.
- vi. Applicants will be restricted to one Letter of Intent as mentor.
- vii. The fellow must complete the bulk of the training and the proposed research within the UK, although it is not ruled out that a proportion be conducted outside the UK as part of an international collaboration.
- viii. The start date is expected to be in the 2010-2011 academic year.

5.2 Eligibility: Fellows

- i. Fellows must be Saudi nationals
- ii. Fellows must be in the first or early stages of a research career and most likely aged 40 years or below.
- iii. Fellows must be proficient in written and spoken English and for a post-doctoral fellowship must either hold a PhD (or equivalent) or for a pre-doctoral fellow have the necessary educational qualification to be able to register for a PhD or equivalent at a UK university or other teaching institution.

6. Submission Requirements

6.1 General Guidelines:

- i. This Call for Proposals is being made by Autistica and the method of proposal submission is to download the [Letter of Intent](#) from the Autistica website and follow the instructions.
- ii. The initial application is by Letter of Intent. **Letters of Intent are due no later than 14th July 2010 (11:59pm UK time)**. The applicants will be notified of the decision regarding the acceptance of the Letter of Intent in July 2010 and the successful applicants will be advised of the next steps (e.g. candidate selection) in the application process. Submission of full proposals will open in August 2010. It is expected that peer review of the completed applications will be finalised by December 2010.

Autistica reserves the right to return without review any Letter of Intent or Proposal found to be not in compliance with the policies, procedures, and research priorities prescribed in the Call for Proposals or Autistica's Scientific Strategy 2009-2014 at any time during the application and review process. In addition, full proposals will be reviewed for fidelity to the intent of the current Call for Proposals and scientific merit. The Letter of Intent may also be subject to review for fidelity to the intent of this Call for Proposals and science merit.

- iii. Information and Formatting.
 - A4 page sizing applies.
 - Text should be 11 point Arial, single spaced, with 1" margins.
 - Applications with any sections that exceed the word or page limits will not be reviewed.

6.2 Letter of Intent Guidelines

The Letter of Intent must contain **Part 1 and Part 2** and should be specific enough to be screened for fidelity to this Call for Proposals and scientific merit.

Part 1 (not to exceed 3 pages) must include the following information:

- i. Whether the proposal relates to either a pre-doctoral or post-doctoral fellowship. Note in cases where the mentor intends to select from the pool of candidates identified by the PSCDR these are more likely to be pre-doctoral candidates and the proposal should be budgeted accordingly.
- ii. When the candidate is already known to the mentor, include the candidate's name and attach the CV at the end of the Letter of Intent (the candidate's CV does not count towards the page limitations).
- iii. A concise description of the proposed programme of professional guidance and training that will be provided by the mentor including a description of the autism specific education and the research environment in which the training will be delivered.
- iv. A concise description of the scientific aspects of the proposed research including: specific aims, methods and expected results.
- v. A clear justification for the relevance and potential significance of the research to understanding the causes, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

iv. Names, titles and institutional affiliations of active collaborators/co-investigators in addition to and including the mentor (excludes consultants, postdoctoral fellows, students and technicians)

Part 2 (one page maximum), must be a letter from the institution confirming the mentor's eligibility (refer to section 5 above) and for immigration purposes the ability of the host institution to accept a fellow of Saudi nationality under the scope of this fellowship training programme.

6.3 Submitting your Letter of Intent

The Letter of Intent should be submitted as a PDF by e-mail to jenny.longmore@autistica.org.uk. Shortly after submitting the Letter of Intent, the applicant will receive a confirmation e-mail. After review, Autistica will notify applicants by email of the acceptance or denial of the Letter of Intent. **The subsequent proposal cannot deviate significantly from the project description in its approved Letter of Intent.**

7. Submitting a full proposal

7.1 General Guidelines

[Note Autistica will introduce a new grants management system mid 2010 and the exact details of how to submit a full proposal will be provided then. The information given below is for general guidance].

At the request of Autistica applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal which must include:

A. Scientific Abstract (250 words max)

The abstract must describe:

- i. The proposed programme of professional guidance and training that will be provided including a description of the autism specific education;
- ii. Scientific project goal(s) and/or hypothesis, specific aims, research methods, expected results and significance/relevance.

B. Layperson Abstract (250 words max)

The layperson abstract must be easily intelligible to a knowledgeable lay person or non-expert.

C. Training Plan (4 pages max)

The training plan should address the evaluation criteria in section 9 and must include:

- i. A list of named training courses the fellow will attend;
- ii. A detailed description of the source of the autism specific education - for example will it be carried out in the mentor's (or co-investigators) laboratory, or available through courses and seminars? Specify whether the training will be over and above that which is generally available in the mentor's laboratory;
- iii. Specify whether the fellow will have to acquire training independently, through the mentor alone, or otherwise;
- iv. For pre-doctoral fellowships – justify that the proposed research will be of sufficient scope for the fellow to obtain a PhD and that this research can be realistically completed within the three year timeframe; describe how much of the third year will be dedicated to thesis writing (justifying why this is a reasonable proportion); include details, during this critical stage, on the accessibility of the mentor to the fellow.

D. Research Plan (6 pages max).

The research plan should address the evaluation criteria in section 9 and include sections on:

- **Impact and Relevance**
- **Research Strategy**
- **Investigators' Qualifications** – briefly describe (bio sketches must be provided – see J below)
- **Environment** – briefly describe (greater detail should be included in H described below).

You may include a maximum of two pages of relevant images, figures and graphics. This information will not be counted towards the 6 page maximum limit.

E. Bibliography

Include complete literature citations including titles and all authors.

F. Detailed budget for each year.

Applicants should ensure that their budget is in accordance with the Call for Proposals. Budgets which exceed the maximum amount will not be accepted. The budget items that may be included are given in Section 4.

G. Budget Justification (4 pages max).

The budget justification should detail each category requested for each year.

H. Resources and research environment (1 page max).

- i. Describe the resources and environment that will support the successful completion of the delivery of the mentorship programme and completion of the research project.
- ii. If the project will be utilizing existing samples and/or collecting samples, it should be specified how and when they will be used and shared with the autism community following the end of the project.

I. Letters of Collaboration, if needed.

J. Biographical Sketches of the Mentor (4 pages max).

Indicate education, qualifications, complete citations (including title) of publications relevant to the proposed research and briefly describe currently funded research projects

K. Current and pending grant support.

Indicate the source of funding, total amount of the award, duration of award (inclusive dates) and project title; clearly explain any overlap with the proposed research including the extent to which the projects are redundant or complementary

L. Exhibits or Appendices.

- i. Publications or other supporting files that are relevant to the application must be referenced in the research plan.
- ii. A maximum of 2 peer reviewed research publications (including manuscripts accepted for publication) will be accepted; however, manuscripts not yet accepted for review, review articles, book chapters, popular press articles and meeting abstracts will NOT be accepted.
- iii. Other publications may be provided as a courtesy to the reviewers who are under no obligation to read or consult them in their evaluation of the proposal.

7.2 Endorsing & Submitting the Proposal

Before the proposal can be formally submitted, it needs to be endorsed by a Responsible Official at your research institution (i.e. host institution). A Responsible Official (RO) is someone at the applicant organisation, other than the applicant/Principal Investigator or close colleague, who can endorse the proposal.

Before submitting your proposal you should ask the RO to review the budget and endorse the proposal. The following should be appended at the end of the proposal:

- i. The name and contact details (including e-mail address and phone number) for the RO.
- ii. A letter from the RO endorsing the proposal. This letter should state the applicants name and position, title of the proposal and be specific to this Call for Proposals and, for immigration purposes, state that the host institution can accept a fellow of Saudi nationality if the proposal is successful.

8. Updates & Additional Materials

One update up to two pages in length (e.g. to cite paper very recently accepted for publication) will be accepted on or before 20th October, 2010. This document may not redesign the application in any way. The document must be emailed to Jenny.Longmore@autistica.org.uk.

9. Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

Autistica is committed to efficient, fair and expert review and funding of meritorious proposals. The primary evaluation criteria relates to the ability to deliver a robust programme of mentorship based around a well structured programme of research. Peer review will be provided by a group of independent external reviewers and a Scientific Review Panel, with experience as mentors and expertise in the research areas of the proposal under review.

Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria:

A. Primary evaluation criteria: Mentorship and the fellow's training programme

- Is there documentary evidence demonstrating the commitment of the mentor in providing professional guidance to the fellow including the mentor's relevant prior experience; details of the training the mentor will make available to the fellow, and how, progressively, the candidate will be encouraged to work independently?
- Will the mentorship be delivered within a well structured programme of autism research? Does the proposed research provide broad experience and does this involve contributions to more than one research project?
- Is an outline of the key challenges the fellow will likely face included? (e.g. human research programmes requiring ethical approval, participant recruitment, obtaining permissions for working with animals, handling radioactivity and other hazards, sophisticated IT skills).
- What are the research training opportunities that will be provided to the fellow? Will these include experience in writing reports and papers for peer review and publication; networking and integration in the international research community; development of scientific leadership skills and awareness of general research issues (e.g. ethical considerations of working with humans and animals)?
- Have provisions been made to ensure the project commences and progresses in a timely fashion? Has access to necessary special research equipment or facilities been appropriately documented with letters of agreement?
- For pre-doctoral fellowships – will the proposed research be realistically completed within the three years of the fellowship and what are the provisions and support for ensuring a PhD thesis is written (and revised if necessary) and successfully examined? Is there documentary evidence the mentor will be available during the critical third year of the programme?
- How do the mentor and the sites where the work will be conducted contribute to the probability of success?

B. Secondary evaluation criteria: scientific merit

Impact and Relevance

- Does the research address an autism-specific problem?
- If successful, is the research likely to advance the goal(s) of understanding the causes, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders?

Research Strategy

- Are the experimental design, methods and analyses likely to achieve the desired aim(s) of the research? Are the overall strategy, milestones, and timeline well-reasoned, realistic, and appropriate to the aims of the proposed research?
- Are potential problem areas acknowledged, alternative tactics considered, and benchmarks for success presented?

Investigators' Qualifications

- Do the investigators have the appropriate training and experience to conduct the proposed research?
- Have they demonstrated satisfactory productivity, relative to stage of career, such as peer-reviewed publications and other benchmarks in the area of the proposed research?
- Have necessary collaborations been established and documented with letters of agreement?

Environment

- Is the scientific environment conducive to the work proposed, in terms of institutional support, physical resources, and intellectual rapport?
- Is the institutional support sufficient?

Ethics and Research Governance

- Is the work ethically acceptable?¹ Are the ethical review and research governance arrangements clear and acceptable?
- Are there any ethical issues that need separate consideration?
- For research involving the use of animals are the research criteria based on the adoption of the 3R principles and are they as described in 'Responsibility in the use of animals in bioscience research: [Expectations of the major research councils and charitable funding bodies](#)'

10. Submission & Notification Schedule (subject to change)

Letter of Intent due: 14th July 2010

Notification of acceptance of Letter of Intent: late July 2010

Full proposal due: 21st September 2010

Peer review panel: December 2010

Notifications: January 2011

Grant start date: February 2011

11. Miscellaneous

The host institution has responsibility to ensure that the appointed fellow satisfies requirements for entry into the UK (such as student or work visa) and other criteria such as eligibility to register for a PhD or equivalent or proficiency in written and spoken English language.

The host institution must ensure that, before the research funded by the grant commences and during the full grant period, all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and all the necessary licences and approvals have been obtained. Where any element of the research funded by the grant is to be conducted outside the United Kingdom, such legal and regulatory requirements, and such licences and approvals should include those applicable in the additional countries involved.

The Institution must ensure that it has in place formal written procedures for managing the process for obtaining any necessary or appropriate ethical approval for the research funded by the grant, and must accept full responsibility for ensuring that any such ethical approval is in place at all relevant times during the grant.

Research funded by the grant involving the use of animals and conducted outside the United Kingdom must, as a minimum standard, be conducted in accordance with the principles of UK legislation ([Animals \(Scientific Procedures\) Act 1986](#)).

Proposals using post mortem tissue must provide documentation that the necessary tissue is or will be available at the research site at the time of the award. Proposals without proper documentation will be returned without review. Investigators desiring to obtain tissue from the Brain Bank for Autism or Autism Tissue Program should go to atpportal.org for information, application instructions and due dates.

IMPORTANT: Research Ethics Committee certification and Home Office approval is NOT required to submit an application; however, these must be in place and the letter of confirmation by the host institution (as detailed above) be submitted to Autistica as soon as possible following official notification of an award. Autistica will NOT issue the first funding increment of a grant until this confirmation is received. There should be no undue delay because the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are not in place.

The first payment will be contingent upon receipt of the countersigned grant agreement letter, acceptance of the [Autistica's Terms and Conditions](#). Subsequent payments on multiyear grants will be paid annually and will be contingent upon receipt and approval of interim progress and financial reporting. Interim reports are due 10 months after the start of the grant.

Funded mentors and fellows also are required to submit or have submitted for them to the National Institutes of Health's PubMed Central database an electronic version of their final, peer-reviewed manuscripts and upon acceptance for publication, to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication.

Autistica reserves the right to make information about funded grants publicly available. Funded research projects may be subject to data and resource sharing requirements.

12. Contacts:

Please address questions about proposal submission to <mailto:Jenny.Longmore@autistica.org.uk>