



## Guidance for Applicants: Open Grant Round 2023 *PhD Studentships*

Sarcoma UK is the national charity for all types of sarcoma. Via our research programme, Sarcoma UK is committed to funding world-class science to understand sarcoma better, improve treatments and make a difference to the lives of sarcoma patients. Since 2009, we have funded over £5 million of research to a range of high-quality institutions and projects across the UK.

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### A. Call details and scope

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**Sarcoma UK's Open Grant Round provides support for research projects across the spectrum of sarcoma research, including laboratory and clinical research, and for PhD studentships.**

Sarcoma UK is committed to funding world-class science to understand sarcoma better, improve treatments and make a difference to the lives of sarcoma patients. Since 2009, we have funded over £5 million of research to a range of high-quality institutions and projects across the UK.

Sarcoma UK's strategic approach to research is flexible and broad, and the charity is open to supporting high-quality research across a number of scientific and clinical fields across all its funding calls. Areas of exploration that could be considered for funding include, but are not limited to, improving understanding of disease biology, improving diagnosis, developing new or better treatments, and improving quality of life.

Applications for funding will be assessed on both scientific quality and relevance to people affected by sarcoma. Therefore, successful applications will also have a pathway to impact for people affected by sarcoma; applicants should clearly justify this in their proposal.

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### B. Grant Types Available

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- **Small Grants, up to £50,000 in value.** These can be used to pump prime ideas for innovative, small studies, or fund additional research to a larger project already underway.
- **Large Grants, up to £150,000 in value.** These are to undertake a substantive piece of work; this type of application must support a member of staff as a directly incurred cost.
  - *Please refer to the relevant Guidance for Applicants and Application Form if you are applying for a small or large project grant via this funding stream.*
- **PhD studentships, up to £130,000 in value.** Sarcoma UK seeks to provide funding for new PhD studentships in lab-based science, with the aim of attracting high-calibre graduates who will go on to develop a career in sarcoma research. Our PhD studentships offer up to £130,000 in funding, comprising a stipend, fees and

research expenses. Funding is available for three and a half years, with thesis completion expected within four years of the start date.

**Call opens:** April 2023

**Call closes:** 12pm midday (BST), Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

**Applications received after this deadline will not be accepted.**

Please note that applicants will be invited to respond to their peer and lay review comments in January 2024 and final decisions on awards are expected in March 2024.

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## C. Eligibility

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### **Host institution:**

- The host institution for the project must be a UK-based higher education institution or the NHS.
- The host institution must be the employer of the grant holder.
- The host institution will be responsible for the entirety of the award, including all administration, liaison with third parties and ensuring compliance with conditions of award by other institutions where appropriate.
- Work on the project may take place at other institutions, which may be outside of the UK, but the host institution is responsible for any sub-contracting and payment of funds to other organisations.

### **The Main Supervisor (PI):**

- The Main Supervisor (PI) is responsible for the intellectual leadership of the research project and must be actively engaged in the overall management of the research.
- The PI should be able to demonstrate evidence of a strong research record, with experience to drive and lead a research project which addresses your proposed research questions. Demonstrable evidence could include publications, successful grant applications and an ability to lead teams. They must show evidence of supervising PhD students.
- The PI and the proposed project must be based in the UK at a Higher Education Institution (HEI), Research Institute or Clinical Institution. The principal investigator of the work must have a contract of employment within the host institution for the duration of the grant prior to application.
- Where the PI is on a fixed-term contract, their contract must extend at least one year beyond the lifetime of the project, or the host institution must demonstrate that it intends to award a permanent position at the end of the fixed term. In addition, a co-applicant with a permanent post at the host institution should be listed on the application.

### **Second and third supervisors**

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> supervisors must be appropriate to the needs of the project and have a level of commitment to both the research and the training and development of the PhD student.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Supervisor:** Should provide academic input and a second line of support for the student.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Supervisor** (if applicable): Should contribute to the student experience or provide a vital facet to the project.

### Other eligibility criteria

Applications will not be accepted:

- Where the primary intent of the grant is for purchase of equipment
- From commercial organisations.
- Where the PhD studentship is already underway.
- Where the application has been submitted to any of Sarcoma UK's funding calls on more than one previous occasion unless explicitly invited (see section E for further details on resubmission requirements).

If you are unsure about the eligibility of your application, please contact Sarcoma UK's research team by emailing [research@sarcoma.org.uk](mailto:research@sarcoma.org.uk).

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## D. Funding

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Sarcoma UK will fund a maximum of £130,000 over three and a half years, including:

- The stipend and fees of the student should be in line with [UK Research & Innovation](#) (UKRI) levels for UK home students, or host institution stipend levels. Please note that UKRI increased their minimum stipend rate in October 2022.
- Research expenses (directly incurred costs only)
- Funds towards attendance at appropriate scientific meetings
- Project or discipline-specific training (directly incurred costs only)

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## E. The student

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Students do not need to be from the UK, nor resident for any amount of time before the award begins.

A prospective student need not have been identified at the time of submitting the application. For any application where the student has been selected, a one-page CV should be included in the application. Students must have a minimum of a 2:1 degree.

We expect any institution hosting an application to show support through commitment to facilitate the research proposed, and provide a basic level of facilities, such as library access, computer equipment and PhD training programme.

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## F. How to Apply and Assessment Criteria

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Applications must be made by the Principal Investigator and submitted by the deadline advertised to [research@sarcoma.org.uk](mailto:research@sarcoma.org.uk). Applications should be submitted as one document in Word format.

Following submission, applications will undergo an administrative eligibility and triage check by Sarcoma UK's Research Team. Applications will not proceed to review if they are deemed out of remit for the call at this stage. Applications will then proceed to peer and lay review. Applicants are then given an opportunity to respond to comments made by peer and lay reviewers. Your application, its peer and lay reviews, and your response, will then be discussed by Sarcoma UK's Grant Review Panel, who make funding recommendations to Sarcoma UK's Board of Trustees.

Sarcoma UK's research programme is flexible and broad. Proposals will be assessed on scientific quality and relevance to people affected by sarcoma. Please note that Sarcoma UK incorporates a lay review of all applications into our funding process. Lay reviewers will receive the full text of your application but will be asked to specifically review the Lay Summary and 'potential benefit to sarcoma patients' sections. Lay representation is also included on our Grant Review Panel. Throughout the process, lay reviewers will not be assessing the quality of the science, but the relevance and potential impact of your proposal for people affected by sarcoma.

**Applications will be assessed on the following criteria by the Grant Review Panel, peer and lay reviewers:**

- **Scientific quality:** quality of the scientific rationale, approach and experimental methods and design
- **Pathway to impact:** likely contribution of the project in terms of advancing scientific knowledge or changing clinical practice
- **Team and environment:** track record and suitability of the investigators and research environment to carry out the proposed work. PhD studentship projects will additionally be assessed on the experience of the investigators as supervisors and the support offered to the student.
- **Requested resources:** appropriateness and justification of the requested budget in supporting the direct costs of the research and suitability of the proposed timelines for the project
- **Relevance to people affected by sarcoma:** overall value of the work for people affected by sarcoma, clarity of the lay summary and robustness and appropriateness of plans to involve people affected by sarcoma in the project (if applicable)
- **Relevance to Sarcoma UK's [Research Strategy](#)**

Feedback from the Grant Review Panel is provided to all applicants. Final decisions on awards are expected in March 2024.

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## G. Resubmissions

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For submissions of proposals across any Sarcoma UK grant rounds, we allow only one resubmission of a previously unsuccessful proposal, unless you have been **explicitly invited** to resubmit for a second time.

For all resubmissions, we require a full explanation of the revisions (additions, deletions and modifications) made to the proposal from its previous iteration, and responding to any concerns raised by reviewers or the Grant Review Panel. Please include this explanation as a maximum of 2 pages of A4 attached prior to your application form.

Resubmissions will be checked as part of our triaging process; applications which do not meet the above requirements will not be accepted.

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## H. Impact of COVID-19

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As a research funder, we would like to reassure the research community that we are acutely aware of the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on research activities. As part of this proposal, we welcome information outlining how COVID has impacted your or your team's research activities (for instance, increased clinical responsibilities, access to facilities, changes in personal circumstances) which may have affected the development of this proposal. Please note this is entirely optional and at your discretion. Please only disclose information that you are comfortable with being shared with our Grant Review Panel and external reviewers; any details which could identify other individuals will be redacted.

Please see the [full statement on our website](#) for more information.

## Application form sections

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### PART ONE – The Applicants

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**1. Investigators:** Please list all supervisor titles, names and posts held. Please indicate how many hours per week (hpw) will be spent on the project for each supervisor. Please refer to the guidance in section C for the type of support which should be provided by supervisors.

**2a. Administering Organisation:** This should be the employing organisation of the PI. Please provide the name and the business address. Any award made is to the Administering Organisation who will sub-contract to other organisations as appropriate.

**2b.** Provide your contact details and postal address if it is different to that of the host organisation.

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### PART TWO – The Student

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**3.** If you have a student identified for this project, please give their name at this point and include a one-page CV for them. If you will recruit a student on award of this project, state how you will recruit the best student for this project.

**4.** Please answer Y/N if your institution has a Doctoral School or Doctoral Training Programme.

**4a.** If yes, please provide name of the Head of the Doctoral School, their contact details and website address.

5. Please list what core modules and / or training is provided by the Doctoral School.

6. Please give the assessment or reporting points for Doctoral Students.

7. Please give the timeframe for completion and submission of the student's thesis in your institution.

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### **PART THREE – The Project**

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**8. Project Title:** Please list the full project title; when awarded this will be used in all correspondence and listed on our website.

**9. Expected start date and duration:** It is anticipated that awards will be announced in December 2023. With this in mind, please give a realistic start date for the project, factoring in contracting negotiations, ethical approval and staff recruitment. Give project duration in months.

**10a. Total Grant requested:** Please give this total in £s (Pound Sterling). The maximum project spend is £130,000.

**10b.** As a Medical Research charity, we do not pay fEC but wish to capture this information. As a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), we pay directly incurred costs and our awarded projects are eligible for QR funding. We are an NIHR partner charity.

**11. Additional funding available from the Sarah Burkeman Trust**

*Sarcoma UK is pleased to be working with the Sarah Burkeman Trust, a charitable foundation set up in memory of Sarah Burkeman, who sadly passed away from sarcoma. Sarah was a much-loved and highly talented documentary film-maker who was diagnosed with an undifferentiated uterine sarcoma in 2013. For more on Sarah's story, please visit [our website](#).*

*The Sarah Burkeman Trust is able to fund selected research projects submitted to Sarcoma UK's 2023 funding calls, up to a maximum total commitment of £200,000. Please note that this funding will not be provided in addition to the maximum funding available for your specified grant type; the purpose of this scheme is to allow the Sarah Burkeman Trust to fully- or co-fund applications submitted to Sarcoma UK's funding calls.*

*Applications for this funding are welcome for translational research projects in the following areas in adjacencies to Sarah's own cancer journey:*

- *Gynaecological sarcomas*
- *Sarcomas that can particularly affect young people*
- *Poorly differentiated sarcomas*
- *Research focussed on early diagnosis*
- *Immunotherapy*

*All applications made through Sarcoma UK's grant rounds will be subject to the same rigorous review process, administered by Sarcoma UK. All such applications will be*

*assessed and ranked alongside every other application Sarcoma UK receives for the round. Those deemed to be fundable will be shared with the Sarah Burkeman Trust, who will make the final decision on which projects to support with this funding, in partnership with their Scientific Advisory Panel.*

**11a.** If you wish to also be considered for this scheme, please indicate this in the relevant section on your application form.

**11b.** Please provide justification as to how your application is in scope for this funding.

**12. Subtype:** Please indicate the sarcoma subtype the project focusses on (if applicable). Please provide details if the project applies to multiple subtypes, or if relevant subtypes are not listed in the table.

**13. People affected by sarcoma:** Please indicate if your project requires people affected by sarcoma to participate directly in the study (e.g. attending clinic, providing samples, as members of a patient involvement panel).

Please also give details of the nature of this participation. **Please note that responses for this question will be reviewed by people affected by sarcoma.**

**14. Ethical approvals:** please indicate if the project needs ethical approval for working with human subjects and give an indicative date of approval (this should be factored into your start date). If already in place, please give the IRAS study number or include a copy of the approval letter with the application. If you haven't yet submitted an application, please share your planned submission date.

Any clinical trials or study funded by Sarcoma UK are eligible for inclusion on the NCRI Clinical Studies Group Portfolio. Please indicate this when completing your Ethical Approval submission.

Please note that awards will not activate until ethical approval is confirmed in writing.

**15. Additional assessments/referrals**

Dependant on the nature of your project, you may need to engage one of more of the following; please complete as appropriate:

**15a.** Has this application been reviewed for any Excess Treatment costs your Trust may need to claim? (For more information: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/researchers/collaborations-services-and-support-for-your-research/run-your-study/excess-treatment-costs.htm>)

**15b.** Has this application had any input from the Research Design service? (For more information: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/support/research-design-service.htm>)  
If Yes, please state which Research Design Service.

**15c.** Has this project involved discussion with a Clinical Trials Unit? (For more information: <https://www.ukcrc.org/research-infrastructure/clinical-trials-units/ukcrc-registered-ctus-website/>)

If Yes, please state which Unit.

**15d.** Does this study involve recruiting patients to a trial or a study? The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI), Sarcoma Clinical Studies Group (CSG) can provide input for applications and advise on recruitment to study, especially around any competing studies.

(For more information: <https://csg.ncri.org.uk/about-the-csgs/clinical-studies-groups/sarcoma/>)

## **16. Animal work**

*As a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities, Sarcoma UK supports their [statement](#) on animal research. We fully support measures which will replace, reduce or refine the use of animals in research, in line with legislation on the 3Rs (for further guidance, please visit the NC3R's website <https://www.nc3rs.org.uk/the-3rs>)*

Please state if any animal work is needed for your proposal. If yes, please provide details of the date of approval and the name of the Animal Licence holder for the project (this may be at an institutional level). Please state if the work is to be outsourced and where to (if known at application stage). Please state if the proposals require the use of animals from outside the UK.

Please provide details of the procedures involving animals that are to be used as part of this work. Please justify the use of animals in your research and whether there are any alternative experimental approaches for this work which do not require the use of animals. Please explain your choice of species or model as part of this work. Please provide details of and justify the number of animals to be used per experiment.

Please note that your application may be referred for additional expert review on these aspects if appropriate, in line with NC3Rs guidelines.

**17. Other sources of funding:** Sarcoma UK needs to know if the project is either supported or has been supported by another organisation. This will not affect the outcome of the charity's funding decision. However, please note that in order to receive funding from Sarcoma UK, the grant holder may not be in receipt of any funding or financial assistance from the same work. If you are under a confidentiality clause, please indicate yes and enter 'CONFIDENTIAL'.

- i. If the preliminary work (or very similar) has been previously externally funded, please supply the project details, including the title, funder and value of award.
- ii. If the project is being submitted elsewhere, please indicate where it is being submitted to and the anticipated outcome date.
- iii. If the project has been submitted to another funder in the last 12 months, please indicate where it was submitted to and the outcome.
- iv. If you already have partial external funding in place for this project or related work, please indicate this here and provide details of this funding.

**18. Exploitation:** Please state whether the project may have potential intellectual property (IP). List any IP which may be arising from the research (patents; questionnaires, copyrighted material etc.). Please identify how your host organisation makes decisions and manages its IP registration (this may be signposting to the host organisation) and the name of your IP / Technology Transfer manager.



**19. External reviewers:** Sarcoma UK is a member of AMRC and funds only high-quality research. External expert peer review is vital to this process. We request you identify up to three reviewers who may be suitable. Nominated reviewers should be experts in the field and should be able to provide an expert view on the value and benefits of the proposal. Reviewers may be based internationally.

Please note that suggested reviewers should **not** be provided where;

- The reviewer is based at your own organisation
- The reviewer is a collaborator or researcher with whom you have published in the last five years.
- The reviewer is a member of [Sarcoma UK's Grant Review Panel](#)
- Any possible conflict of interest may arise.

Sarcoma UK considers possible conflicts of interest when selecting experts to review a proposal and reviewers are asked to identify any conflicts of interest prior to commencing their review, or may decline if appropriate. Please be assured that this section will be removed from your application prior to review and will only be seen by members of Sarcoma UK's Research Team.

**20. Key words:** Please provide a list of up to 5 key words that best summarise the project. These will be used internally to assist with finding peer reviewers.

**21. Lay summary of the proposed project:** All research projects funded by Sarcoma UK must have relevance and importance to people affected by sarcoma and should have a clear pathway to impact for patient benefit. As part of Sarcoma UK's research grant application review process, your grant application will be reviewed and scored by people with personal experience of sarcoma. Your lay summary forms a key aspect of this review process. Lay Reviewers and Lay Members of Sarcoma UK's Grant Review Panel will primarily assess proposals on the relevance and importance of the proposed science to people affected by sarcoma.

Please ensure you write in **plain English** and that scientific concepts are explained for a non-expert audience (assume a maximum of a GCSE-level knowledge of science). Please ensure you write clearly and succinctly, using non-technical language, and avoid acronyms and jargon. Further guidance on how to write a good lay summary is available from the NIHR [here](#).

A maximum of 300 words should be used. As a guideline, the summary should cover:

- Background and rationale: why you are doing the study
- What you plan to do
- How you will go about it – experimental plan and intended outcomes
- The potential impact of the study for people affected by sarcoma

**22. Collaborators:** List any collaborators here. Please provide a project-specific supporting letter for each collaborator detailing what they contribute to the project in part 6.

**23. Declaration and institutional Approval:** To ensure good governance the application must be approved within the host institution by the PI's Head of Department / Division / School / Dean (as appropriate). The form must also be signed by the Head of the Doctoral

School (or equivalent) on behalf of the organisation which will manage the studentship. Those signing must have the authority to sign on behalf of the organisation. We accept electronic signatures, or a scanned page.

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## **PART FOUR - The Proposed Research Study**

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Please provide a full description of the proposed study, to a maximum length of 5 pages. Please use a minimum of 10-point size font. References and power calculations are not counted in this limit. Please ensure that references are provided in full, with all authors listed where appropriate. Please ensure that any images or figures included are of good quality and easily readable.

Please use the following headings; guidance is provided below with guidelines of what these sections should cover.

- **Title of the proposed research project**  
Please give the full title of your proposed project.
- **Project hypothesis** (if different from Title)  
What is your scientific question?
- **Academic Abstract**  
The academic abstract for the project proposed
- **Purpose of the Research**  
Please explain the need for the research in this area and the proposed objectives, expected outputs and rationale for particular lines of research planned.
- **Background and rationale for the project**  
Please provide any relevant developments in this area which will put this research proposal into context.
- **Plan of investigation and methods to be employed**  
Please give a detailed plan of your aims and the work planned to deliver these aims. This should include your methodologies and any experimental approaches or techniques. Please ensure that you list key milestones with timelines, and identify key risks and appropriate mitigations. Additional pages may be used for any power calculations if appropriate.
- **Pathway to impact for sarcoma patients**  
Please articulate the importance of this research in this context, and in particular how this research could lead to meaningful benefits for sarcoma patients. Please also explain how far this research is from clinical implementation and/or direct patient impact.  
*This section will form a fundamental part of our Lay Review assessment process, where applications are reviewed by people affected by sarcoma, who are not scientific experts. Please ensure you write in plain English and that scientific concepts are explained for a non-expert audience.*
- **Justification for the support requested**  
Justify your resources in terms of the project plan and achieving the proposal's objectives. (Please see allowed and disallowed costs outlined in section 3.)

- **Plans for dissemination**

Please detail where you would intend to share findings of the research.

## **References**

Please also provide a full list of references for this section; please note that this will not be included in your 5-page limit.

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## **PART FIVE – Details of Financial Support Requested**

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Sarcoma UK is an AMRC member charity. All our research is awarded through open, competitive calls and undergoes external peer and lay review. Funded projects are eligible for quality-related research funding through the Charity Research Support Fund.

Please give a full breakdown of the requested costs for the research. As is standard for medical research charities, Sarcoma UK will only pay Directly Incurred costs (DIC). These costs are explicitly identifiable as arising from the conduct of a project. Applications for funding should be based on estimated expenditure and all figures should be entered in GBP (Pound Sterling).

### **Allowed and disallowed costs**

The following list is not considered exhaustive. Sarcoma UK may query and/or remove any costs that are deemed to be outside the funding remit. For any queries, please email us at [research@sarcoma.org.uk](mailto:research@sarcoma.org.uk).

### **Stipends and fees**

Sarcoma UK will cover the standard UKRI rate as appropriate for the host institution (i.e. London weighting or outside of London). Please ensure

### **Example allowed costs include:**

- Consumables and materials directly attributable to the project.
- Animal costs (purchase, housing, husbandry, animal licence costs etc.)
- Equipment essential to the project (quotes must be obtained for items over £10k and included with the application)
- Software license(s) (if project specific)
- Dissemination costs per project. This should include any costs associated with project dissemination, including: publication charges, poster printing, media production.
- Project or discipline specific training for the PhD student, outside that covered by institutional doctoral training.
- Travel related to the research proposal such as participant expenses to travel to focus group meetings, interviews or assessments
- Access charges for shared equipment / facilities in "Other/Exceptional items"
- Statistician/consultancy costs included in "Other/Exceptional items"

### **Disallowed costs include:**

- Salary for the PI or supervisors
- Equipment maintenance and running costs
- Student recruitment costs

- General laboratory equipment including PC's for students; we expect a basic level of laboratory equipment to be available
- Full economic costs; directly allocated and indirect costs
- General office expenses such as photocopying, printing, postage etc. An exception may be made for admin assistance and printing costs if the project is epidemiological/questionnaire based
- Excess Treatment Costs

Questions on allowed and disallowed costs should be directed to Sarcoma UK's Research Team at [research@sarcoma.org.uk](mailto:research@sarcoma.org.uk).

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#### **PART FOUR - Investigators' CVs**

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Please provide a CV, which should include employment history and a list of research publications, for the PI and all co-investigators. This should be a **maximum of two pages** per individual.

Please include any collaborators' letters associated with the project.

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#### **Submission of Application**

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Please submit **one** Word document including an application form, CVs and any appendices, letters etc to [research@sarcoma.org.uk](mailto:research@sarcoma.org.uk) by 12pm on **Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023**.

If you have not received an acknowledgement within three working days contact us on 020 7250 8271.