HEIDELBERG
FACULTY OF
MEDICINE

ACTION

Advanced Clinician Translational Innovation

Career Development Programm of the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine

Bylaws

1. Objective of the Program

The Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine and Heidelberg University Hospital receive funding from the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) to establish an Advanced Clinician Scientist (ACS) Program. The goal of the program *"ACTION – Advanced Clinician Scientists in the Field of Translational Innovation"* is to qualify outstanding and internationally competitive medical doctors in translational research and thereby sustainably strengthen the development of innovative diagnostic, therapeutic, and technological solutions within the four research focus areas of the Medical Faculty Heidelberg: Cardiovascular Medicine, Neurosciences, Translational and Individualized Oncology and Infectious Diseases.

ACTION is a module within the structured career development programm for research-active medical specialists to support the progression of their scientific and clinical career. The participating Advanced Clinician Scientists are to be enabled to pursue a successful academic career toward a professorship or an equivalent clinical and scientific leadership position. The program aims to support the funded researchers in achieving international visibility as independent scientists. Clinically and scientifically distinguished medical specialists will be provided with protected research time as well as the opportunity to develop their own research group and scientific profile. The program includes an accompanying, individualized qualification curriculum with a focus on enhancing leadership skills. Admission to the program follows a competitive and transparent selection process. The Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine awards four Advanced Clinician Scientist positions in each application round, with one position allocated to each of the faculty's four research pillars (cardiovascular medicine, neurosciences, oncology and infectious disease medicine).

2. Funding Components

The Advanced Clinician Scientist Program consists of the following components:

a. A funding period of up to six years, including an interim evaluation in the third year to determine continuation of support at the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine. During the research phase, a clearly defined research project deemed excellent by the selection committee must be carried out.

b. In the clinical setting, the funded scientists are expected to continue their medical work and further develop and refine their professional profile. At the same time, a central element of the program is the provision of a 50% research release from routine clinical duties for the duration of the entire funding period. This protected research time is financed by the Faculty of Medicine, while the host department (clinic/institute) must cover the remaining 50% for the

clinical position. Advanced Clinician Scientists may also continue to participate in teaching activities in order to further qualify for a professorship.

c. The guaranteed 50% research time can be flexibly arranged, in accordance with regulatory and contractual provisions, depending on the needs of the research project and clinical responsibilities. For example, research time may be organized in blocks of up to one full year at 100% research effort or in smaller segments. This flexibility is intended to facilitate research stays at other institutions within Germany or abroad. Across the full duration of the program, however, a cumulative 50% research activity must be demonstrated.

d. An individually defined development plan outlining the candidate's intended professional profile, including key milestones in scientific and clinical development as well as accompanying training activities. This plan must be available at the time of application, though it may be adjusted during the course of the funding period.

e. A complementary qualification program (see Section 10 of these bylaws).

f. Complementary mentoring program (see Section 11 of these bylaws).

3. Eligible Applicants

Applications should be submitted after habilitation or an equivalent qualification and specialist certification. Please follow the guidelines instructions, templates, and leaflets provided under Medizinische Fakultät Heidelberg: ACTION-Advanced Clinician Scientist Programm (uni-heidelberg.de)

3.1 Mandatory requirements for an application are:

1. Specialist certification (max. 8 years after completion) and habilitation or equivalent achievements, or an associate professorship.
2. A clearly defined research project supported by the head of the hosting department, including written assurance of infrastructural and financial support. External applicants must follow the instructions in the leaflet "Information for Applicants Outside the Medical Faculty Heidelberg".
3. At least one last authorship in a recognized peer-reviewed scientific journal.
4. At least one competitively acquired external research grant (e.g., DFG, EKFS, German Cancer Aid) as Principal Investigator.
5. German medical license or recognized equivalent qualification.

3.2. Commitment of the Hosting Department (Clinic/Institute)

Applications must include a letter of acceptance from a research group based at Heidelberg University's Faculty of Medicine, as well as a description of a specific research profile for the maximum six-year funding period. The respective department (clinic/institute) commits to providing the necessary resources and infrastructure required for the implementation of the research project. Likewise, the institution in which the clinical activities are carried out must guarantee the applicant's involvement in patient care.

At the start of the funding period, the employment contract should have a minimum duration of three years. The candidate must be provided with a written guarantee of permanent employment ,pending a positive interim evaluation in the third year of the funding period.. Furthermore, a commitment to the 50% protected research time required for the project must be provided at the time of application. It must also be confirmed that, upon completion of the program, a senior physician position (*Oberarztstelle*) will be made available to the funded candidates. All commitments must be

documented in a binding letter of support from the respective department, clinic, or institute director responsible for the budget and personnel.

4. Funding Scope

The Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine funds up to six years the 50% position (protected research time) of the Advanced Clinician Scientist, the remaining 50% of the position must be financed by the respective clinic or institute. Initially, a three-year funding period is granted, and, an extension for an additional three years is planned, pending a successful mid-term evaluation. The guaranteed 50% research time can be arranged flexibly, in accordance with collective bargaining regulations (*Tarifverträge*) and depending on the requirements of the research project and clinical duties. For example, the research time may be taken in blocks of up to one year at 100% research effort or, alternatively, distributed over a longer period at a reduced intensity. The flexibility in structuring the protected research time is also intended to allow research stays at other institutions in Germany or abroad. Overall, however, a 50% research commitment must be demonstrated across the duration of the entire program

In addition to funding the ACS position, resources are available for personnel support within the research group as well as for consumables, travel expenses, commissioned work, investments, and other costs. In total, funding amounts to a **maximum of €135,000 per year** for a maximum duration of six years. Applicants must present a financial plan detailing the expenditure items required to conduct their project. The project may also be co-financed or supplemented with additional funding from the hosting institution.

5. Application Process

The funding program will be announced for the first time in 2026. Further calls for proposals are planned for 2027 and 2028. Up to four grants (one per research focus area) will be awarded annually, allowing for a total of up to 12 Advanced Clinician Scientists to be admitted to the ACTION program. The program is intended to continue beyond the funding period provided by the BMFTR.

5.1 Requirements for Potential Applicants

- **Outstanding acquisition of third-party funding:** independently acquired competitive third-party grants obtained through a peer-review process (e.g., DFG individual funding, EKFS, BMFTR, etc.)
- **Consistent high-level publications as responsible author:** at least one publication as *last author* in a respected journal within the candidate's specific research field
- **Advanced clinical expertise and completed specialist training** (board certification or equivalent)
- **Innovative, original, and competitive research concept**
- **Experience in medical teaching, mentoring, and training**, including supervision of students (Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral theses)
- **German medical license (Approbation)** or corresponding recognition of professional qualification
- **Habilitation or equivalent academic qualification**

5.2. Documents to be Submitted

The following documents must be submitted as **one single PDF file in English:**

(a) **A motivation letter,** signed by the applicant (maximum 1–2 pages). The letter should outline the applicant's profile, career objectives, and motivation for further development as a Clinician Scientist. Please refer to the program-specific objectives and indicate which of the Faculty's four research focus areas you are applying for.

(b) A **development plan** (see information sheet*) for the initial 3-year funding period of the program (maximum 3 pages), including an outlook for the possible additional three years of the funding program.
The development plan is to be jointly prepared by the applicant and the respective department head or clinic/institute director and must be signed by both parties. The development plan must be actively pursued and continuously updated during the funding period. By signing, both parties confirm that the applicant will receive active support in implementing the development plan. This written confirmation is a mandatory component of the application and will also be considered during the mid-term evaluation.

(c) A **project description** (maximum 5 pages; see template*) outlining the planned research project, including state of the art, hypothesis, objectives, preliminary work, and a detailed work plan, including timeline, budget plan and a milestone plan.
Additionally, the advanced scientific status of the project - compared with earlier research conducted during the postdoctoral or early clinical research phase - must be clearly highlighted, along with a description of possible translational aims of the project (in relation to the ACTION concept).
The project description must include a **financial plan** specifying the planned expenditures for the six-year funding period. A maximum of **€135,000 per year** is available per ACS position, which must cover, in addition to 50% of the ACS position, further personnel costs, investments > €800, contract research, consumables, and travel expenses (national and/or international).

(d) **Support letter** (see information sheet* and section 9, Department Obligations), including written confirmation that the hosting department (clinic/institute) will finance **50% of the ACS fellow's position** for the entire six-year project duration, as well as confirmation that a **workplace within the research group** will be provided.
The support letter must also guarantee **50% release from clinical duties** for the duration of the funding period. Furthermore, it must confirm that the **financial resources and infrastructure** required for the project are available, and that the candidate will be released from clinical duties in order to participate in the program's training modules. Additionally, it must be confirmed that, upon completion of the program, a **senior physician (*Oberarzt*) position** will be made available for the funded candidate. The support letter must be signed by the **department head responsible for budget and personnel**.

(e) A **proposal for the mentoring group** as described in section 6.

(f) Applicant's **tabular curriculum vitae** (see "CV template"*), including their five most important publications, acquired third-party funding, and activities reflecting the applicant's engagement within the respective research focus area of the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine.

(g) **Publication list:** The listed publications must have been **accepted for publication**. The following publication types are recognized:

- Published original research articles
- Accepted but not yet published original research articles (proof of acceptance must be included)

In exceptional cases, manuscripts that have not yet been accepted may be submitted if they have already been published on a preprint server. Review articles and book chapters should be listed separately (see template for publication list).

(h) **Specialist certification** obtained **within the last 8 years** (a specialist-equivalent qualification is also acceptable, e.g., clinical training obtained abroad that has been recognized in Germany or will be recognized in the near future).

(i) **German medical license (*Approbation*) as a physician** or equivalent recognition of professional qualification.

(j) **Additional documents** where applicable, such as the habilitation certificate, proof of postdoctoral training, etc.

Please refer to the guidelines, information sheets, and templates provided for the program. Applications must be submitted **as a single unrestricted PDF** to: Career.Development@med.uni-heidelberg.de.

If you do not receive a confirmation of receipt within three days after the deadline, please contact the Dean's Office for Research (*Forschungsdekanat*). **All documents must be prepared in Calibri, font size 11, with 1.15 line spacing** (the required templates and information sheets can be downloaded online at:) Medizinische Fakultät Heidelberg: ACTION-Advanced Clinician Scientist Programm (uni-heidelberg.de)

6. Selection Procedure

6.1 Selection Process

The selection of fellows takes place through a broad and transparent public call for applications for the available positions, a clearly defined application process with explicitly established eligibility criteria and application guidelines, and a rigorous, performance-based, and transparent selection procedure that promotes gender equality and ensures diversity. The ACTION concept provides eight ACS positions for internal applicants and four positions for external applicants. Candidate selection is based on scientific excellence. If a higher proportion of external applicants is deemed more qualified than internal applicants, the proportion of external fellows may be increased; however, increasing the number of internal fellows beyond the planned quota is not permitted. The Medical Faculty aims to award 50% of positions to women.Three application periods (2026, 2027, 2028) are designated for the ACS program. The positions will be publicly advertised in both English and German and disseminated throughout the network of UKHD departments. All clinical and non-clinical departments may nominate candidates who are consistent with the ACTION program profile.

In addition to the requirements listed under Section 5.1, the selection committee evaluates the application materials with regard to,

- the feasibility of the proposed research project — including the viability of the outlined financial plan,
- the potential impact of the proposed research project on advancing medical science (particularly with respect to the development of novel therapies and/or drugs, devices, or diagnostic tools) and its relevance to addressing current challenges,
- the potential impact of the planned research project on the applicant's individual career development as an Advanced Clinician Scientist.

among other factors.

6.2 Selection Committee

The selection committee shall be composed of the following voting members, with a gender balance to the extent possible:

- 2 non-medical representatives, e.g., from the life sciences with expertise in translation
- 2 representatives from non-university institutions (e.g., DKFZ/EMBL)
- 3 international advisors
- 4 high-ranking members of the departments (clinics/institutes) representing the four research priorities
- 1 equal opportunity officer
- 1 representative each from the Executive Board of the University Hospital and the Heidelberg Medical Faculty.

The selection committee ensures that the selection and interim evaluation of candidates comply with the criteria of gender equality and diversity, that time spent raising children and providing care is taken into account accordingly, and that equal opportunities are guaranteed for all applicants.

7. Governance

In addition to the selection committee described in Section 6, ACTION includes further bodies responsible for the implementation of the program.

7.1 Steering Committee

The Steering Committee consists of one representative from each of the three possible research areas, as well as the scientific coordinator (representing the fourth research area).

7.2 Management Board

The Management Board consists of the Steering Committee, the three international advisors to the Selection Committee, and two selected ACS fellows.
The Management Board

- evaluates the quality of the program, with a focus on the development of the research groups and, above all, the careers of the grant recipients,
- implements possible improvements, and
- addresses potential conflicts related to program requirements and funding.

7.3 Program Administration

The Deans Office for Research at the Faculty of Medicine Heidelberg is responsible for the administrative management of the program. The Deans Office for Research will appoint a coordinator for this purpose. Responsibilities include organizing the call for proposals and application process, the selection procedure, inviting speakers for the modules to be conducted, as well as assisting with the program's quality control and the interim evaluation of grant recipients. Program grant recipients are encouraged to participate in additional internal funding and financing programs offered by the Faculty and the University. The grantees are supported by the Deans Office for Research in applying to competitive national and international funding programs and research consortia. The Deans Office for Research strives to involve the program's grantees in faculty bodies and committees so that they can gain experience in academic self-governance.

8. Obligations of Grant Recipients

By accepting this grant, the grantees agree to:

- demonstrating **above-average dedication to their scientific and medical work**, with the goal of establishing their own research group,
- adhering to the **rules of good scientific practice**,
- participating in the **qualification program** organized by the Medical Faculty Heidelberg as well as in the accompanying mentoring,
- including the following **funding acknowledgement** in publications:
  "This work was carried out within the ACTION Program of the Medical Faculty Heidelberg, funded by the BMFTR."
- complying with the **corporate design guidelines** of the Medical Faculty Heidelberg or Heidelberg University Hospital in lectures and presentations and displaying the BMFTR logo with the wording *"Funded by"* prominently,
- actively participating in **national and international scientific conferences**,
- submitting a **written final report** no later than three months after the end of the funding period,
- participating in **evaluation measures for up to five years** after the funding has ended,
- informing the **Dean's Office for Research (*Forschungsdekanat*)** of the Medical Faculty Heidelberg immediately upon leaving the institution or changing employment status.

Fellows are expected to apply to external competitive funding programs and acquire third-party funding during the course of the program.

When leaving the Medical Faculty Heidelberg, the funding ends with the termination of the employment contract. The applicable legal regulations regarding maternity leave and parental leave apply. Acceptance of a professorship during the funding period results in the termination of funding by the Medical Faculty Heidelberg.

9. Department Obligations

With acceptance of the funding, the hosting departments (clinics/institutes) commit themselves to:

- **Comply with all program conditions**, and
- **Provide the best possible support and promotion of the program participants**, including, but not limited to:
  - Releasing the fellow from **50% of their clinical duties** to allow dedicated research time
  - Enabling the fellow's **active participation in the program's qualification modules**
  - Providing **office/laboratory space, equipment, resources, and the infrastructure** required for the implementation of the project
  - Granting the fellow **independent group leader status** during the course of the funding
  - Ensuring that the fellow's employment contract is initially set for **at least three years**, with the commitment that—after a positive mid-term evaluation—the position will be **made permanent** by the clinic, and that **a senior physician (*Oberarzt*) position** will be provided for the fellow upon completion of the program

A **written, binding support letter** signed by the department's budget and personnel authority is required.

The Office of the Dean of Research at the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine must be informed **promptly** of any changes in the employment status of the funded fellow, including early termination of the program or difficulties in meeting the program's conditions.

10. Qualification Programm

Through a structured training program focused on leadership, career development, and translation/transfer, ACTION equips scholarship recipients with the essential skills needed for successful professional growth in university medicine. These skills complement the clinical and scientific excellence of the recipients and provide a comprehensive foundation for their future leadership roles. In specialized modules, ACS fellows receive targeted training in the following areas:

Organizational Leadership / Mentoring (Train-the-Trainer) / Conflict Management / Tenure-Track Hiring Procedures / Funding Opportunities and Coordination of Large Consortia / Negotiation Skills / Self-Presentation (separately for public speaking, online media, and linear media) / Scientific Communication / Fundamentals of Patent Law and Licensing / Regulatory Aspects of Marketing Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices / Startup Pitches and Venture Capital Financing. At least one module offered by the Faculty of Medicine must be attended annually. Externally conducted training courses, seminars, or workshops may be recognized. Concurrently, fellows are expected to complete two additional individual professional development measures or training courses during the program duration. Furthermore, various continuing education programs and training tracks offered by the MFHD and the UKHD outside of ACTION are available to fellows. Examples include the UKHD's leadership development program or scientific training programs at the Interdisciplinary Center for Neuroscience, in the Collaborative Research Centers at the MFHD and/or the German Centers for Health Research, as well as at non-university institutions in the region.

11. Mentoring

An individual mentoring system is mandatory for every ACS grantee; it consists of

- the department head or clinic/institute director
- a scientific mentor from an external institution within the Health & Life Science Alliance Heidelberg Mannheim,
- a member of the Steering Committee,
- and an additional mentor chosen by the fellow.

At least once a year, a mandatory "ACSAC" (Advanced Clinician Scientist Advisory Committee) meeting takes place, i.e., a meeting between the clinician scientist grantee and the four mentors, the results of which must be recorded in writing.

The assumption of the mentoring roles must be demonstrated through an initial written declaration of commitment as well as accompanying reports.

12. Duration, Extension, Termination

In the third year of funding, an interim evaluation will be conducted to assess both the research progress and the training activities of the grantee(s). To this end, grantees must submit a written interim report to the Office of the Dean of Research, detailing the results achieved to date (including publications), deviations from the planned research program, the staffing of the doctoral student/TA

position, the composition of their own group, as well as progress and milestones achieved by group members (e.g., master's or MD theses), completed modules of the training program, third-party funding secured, conferences attendance, and involvement in committees. The support provided by the host institution for the research activities of the Advanced Clinician Scientist must also be described and will be factored into the evaluation results.
If the grant has not been adequately initiated or carried out—for example, due to a lack of research space, a lack of research leave, and/or a lack of support activities from the department (clinic/institute)—this may lead to the termination of the grant.
Upon successful interim evaluation, the grantee will receive continued funding for the remaining three-year grant period.
Upon completion of the funding, a final report must be submitted to the Dean's Office for Research within three months. The requirements for this can be found in the guidelines for the final report.
A certificate is awarded as a seal of approval for the completion of the Heidelberg Advanced Clinician Scientist program. An evaluation report is not issued by the Medical Faculty of Heidelberg.

13. Data Protection and Confidentiality

The protection of applicants' personal information is a matter of great importance to the Faculty of Medicine. The Faculty processes personal information exclusively in accordance with applicable legal provisions, in particular the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Baden-Württemberg State Data Protection Act (LDSG BW). In addition, the technical and organizational measures necessary to ensure adequate protection of personal information have been implemented. For further details, please refer to the Privacy Policy document.

14. Final Provisions

There is no legal entitlement to admission to or funding within the program.
The bylaws entered into force in March 2026 following approval by the Faculty Board and with the launch of the first call for applications.