HEIDELBERG
FACULTY OF
MEDICINE

ACTION[1]

Advanced Clinician Translational Innovation

Career Development Programm of the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine

Application Guidelines

The goal of the Advanced Clinician Scientist (ACS) Program "ACTION" is to qualify outstanding and internationally competitive physicians in translational research and thereby sustainably strengthen the development of innovative diagnostic, therapeutic, and technological solutions for the four research pillars of the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine: Cardiovascular Medicine, Neurosciences, Translational and Individualized Oncology and Infectious Diseases. The Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine provides four Advanced Clinician Scientist positions per call, with one position allocated to each of the four research pillars.

1. Eligible Applicants

Applications should be submitted after habilitation or an equivalent qualification and specialist certification. Please follow the guidelines, instructions, templates, and leaflets provided.

1.1 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 external applications".
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 the Principal Investigator.
5. German medical license or recognized equivalent qualification.

1.2 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

[1] The Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine and Heidelberg University Hospital receive funding from the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) for the establishment of an Advanced Clinician Scientist (ACS) Program.

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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))

2. Program Components

2.1 Protected Research Time

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.

2.2 Funding Scope

- 50% of the Advanced Clinician Scientist position is funded by the Heidelberg Faculty of Medicine (TV-Ä, provided that the legal requirements are met), while the remaining 50% of the position is financed by the hosting clinic or institute.
- In addition to funding the ACS position, resources are available for further personal costs as well as for consumables, travel expenses, contract services, equipment investments, and other project-related costs. The total funding amounts to a maximum of **€135,000 per year** for a maximum funding duration of six years. Applicants must present a financial plan where all expenditure required for the implementation of their project are calculated.

3. 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.

4. Development Plan

A comprehensive, individualized development plan, jointly prepared by the applicant and the hosting institution, must be submitted with the application. This plan should include milestones for both the applicant's scientific and clinical career, with a view toward a future leadership position. The clinics and institutes are encouraged to create attractive career pathways for applicants that enable the integration of continued clinical development, scientific qualification, and the acquisition of leadership competencies.

5. Training Program

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.

6. 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.

There is no legal entitlement to admission to or funding within the program.