

How we judge your application.

Applications are scored against four criteria:

1. Scientific quality
2. Benefit to people living with CHS conditions (or wider population)
3. Benefit to NICHHS (the charity)
4. Value for money

Criterion 1: Scientific quality

Key question:

Is this a credible, well-designed study for its purpose?

Reviewers look for:

- Clear research question
- Appropriate design and methods
- Awareness of evidence
- Feasibility (can this be done?)
- Appropriate expertise

What your application should show

- A clear and worthwhile research question, problem or objective.
- A design and methods that are appropriate to that question and justified at the right level of detail.
- Enough reference to relevant evidence to show that the study is timely and necessary, without overloading the application.
- A realistic plan that can be delivered within the time, budget and resources requested.
- The right expertise, support and oversight for the work proposed.
- Enough thought given to ethical, scientific, statistical and technical considerations.

Proportionality

We are looking for good science that is appropriately scaled. We appreciate that many applications we receive are for studies that are:

- exploratory
- feasibility-based
- service-focused

This is appropriate. We ask reviewers to apply judgement in proportion to study scale, duration, risk and budget—your application should do the same. You must show:

- what this study delivers
- what it enables next



Applications are assessed proportionately, taking account of the scale, stage and purpose of the study.

Reviewers assess quality relative to:

- scale
- stage (pilot, feasibility, etc.)
- purpose

Strong applications usually

- state a clear, focused question,
- show awareness of existing evidence without over-reviewing,
- choose methods that fit the question (not the other way around),
- explain limitations and risks openly,
- Match ambition to resource, so the proposal looks deliverable rather than over-extended.
- and demonstrate realism.



Scientific quality does not mean complexity or large scale for its own sake.

Plain English is important. Your application will be read by:

- researchers
- non-specialists
- people with lived experience

If a non-specialist cannot understand:

- what the study is
- why it matters

...it is likely to push the score down.

All criteria are scored on 11 point scale.

This guide is prescriptive and is shared with reviewers. It is intended to show you the range of judgement applied. Reviewers use their own knowledge, experience and expertise to assess the whole application.

Indicative score	Descriptor	Description (illustrative / what this usually reflects)
9-10	Excellent (for scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An exceptionally clear, well-judged and internally coherent study. • Research question is precise, important and clearly justified • Design and methods align seamlessly with the aims and context • Use of evidence is up to date and proportionate • Risks, limitations and uncertainties are anticipated and handled with maturity • The study is convincingly deliverable within the proposed resources <p>Overall: inspires very high confidence in rigour and delivery.</p>
7-8	Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear, well-reasoned and credible study. • Research question is clear and well justified • Design and methods are appropriate to the purpose and stage • Key risks and uncertainties are recognised and reasonably managed • The study appears realistically deliverable at this scale • The team and expertise are appropriate • Minor limitations may be present, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some aspects that could be justified more sharply • small gaps in specification • modest uncertainty in feasibility, analysis or support <p>Overall: strong application, but not outstanding. Reviewer confidence: typically, high.</p>

5–6	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broadly credible study with noticeable weaknesses. • Research question is relevant and reasonably clear • Design is broadly appropriate, but lacks clarity or sharp justification in places • Important aspects of methods or analysis may be under-specified • Limitations are acknowledged but not fully addressed • Feasibility is plausible, but not fully convincing <p>Overall: credible, but not yet sufficiently well developed. Weaknesses are more evident and reduce confidence in the proposal's robustness or delivery. Reviewer confidence: likely moderate</p>
3–4	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An underdeveloped study with important weaknesses. • The core idea is understandable, but justification is limited or not clearly thought through. • Design only partially fits the research question • Key methodological, technical or analytical issues remain unresolved; team lacks sufficient skill. • Feasibility depends on optimistic or unsupported assumptions • Overall: important weaknesses substantially reduce confidence. Reviewer confidence: usually low.
0–2	Unsound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A study that is unclear, inappropriate or not credible. • Research question is unclear, incoherent, or not suitable for the proposed study • Design is inappropriate or fundamentally flawed • Major feasibility, ethical, or methodological issues are not addressed • Essential expertise is lacking • Overall: not a credible or deliverable study in its current form. Reviewer confidence: usually very low