

Merlin Trust Application Form Guidance Notes

1. Who can apply?

- **Horticulturists or botanists.** Both students and employed professionals can apply.
- **British or Irish citizens** only or with settled status. Unless you are currently studying on a full-time professional **horticultural** course in the UK or Ireland.
- Aged between **18 and 34** (You can apply up to the date of your 35th birthday and must travel within one year of applying). Or, **if you are over 35**, but within the first 5 years of your horticultural career (including time spent training/studying) you may also apply.
- Have you been awarded a Merlin Trust grant before? We will award a maximum of two grants per individual.
- You must be an individual. If intending to travel as a group, each person must submit an application form. Merlin Trust awards are focused on individual professional development so each application must reflect the personal benefit that would be obtained from the project proposed.

2. When can you apply?

You must allow a minimum of SIX weeks from submission of your application to your project start date but the earlier you can submit your application, the better. As applications are only considered when references are received, please ensure your referees send these to us as soon as possible after you submit your application form – we will not chase references on your behalf nor will the application be considered complete until both references are received.

3. Which projects can receive funding?

The Merlin Trust awards **Travel Grants** to **young horticulturists or other young people working with plants**. This includes all international destinations except those that the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advise against travelling to: please see the [FCDO website](#) to check your destination.

The emphasis is very much on day-to-day horticultural practice and this should be clear in your application. Projects that do not have a clearly defined purpose for professional horticultural or practical botanical development will not be successful.

You can apply for travel to see plants in the wild or collections held in gardens as well as conferences, study fees (short horticultural skills courses only), or purely conservation-based projects. The grant will also permit work experience and internships, both of which are strongly encouraged.

For travel beyond Europe, you will be required to explain why you cannot complete your intended project closer to home and explain efforts to make your project as sustainable as possible.

With global tensions rising and following on from the pandemic, we would also like to see that you have carried out a risk assessment for your project so please do provide evidence of this in your application form. You don't need to include the risk assessment itself but please do refer to any significant risks identified and the mitigation measures you intend to adopt.

For more in-depth advice about your project ideas you may contact the Merlin Trust Secretary for more information (info@merlin-trust.org.uk).

4. What is the maximum grant available?

The maximum grant that you may apply for is **£1,500**. We are more likely to support applicants who have sought funding from more than one source or funder. A personal contribution is a requirement of the application: this indicates that you are committed to and investing in your proposed project.

5. What can the grant be used for?

- Transport (Flights/Buses/Car hire etc) – we look more favourably on any efforts made to travel as sustainably as possible
- Accommodation
- Food although we would encourage you to consider this to be your personal contribution
- Travel Insurance which is a requirement of any funding we award
- Hiring a local guide
- Fees – conferences and short courses: evidence of how this will support your career will be required

6. What is not eligible for funding?

- Clothing
- Books
- Equipment – professional or otherwise
- Other consumables such as personal care products
- Garden entry fees unless the applicant can demonstrate that the entry fee will not be waived by the garden. Gardens generally will not charge for official visits so please do make contact and evidence in your application.
- Higher or Further Education courses
- Professional tickets such as chainsaw certificates

7. How do you apply?

Please submit a completed application form and arrange for your **two referees** to send a reference directly to the Merlin Trust. Send to: info@merlin-trust.org.uk (please include your name as the file name). You will need to complete all sections of the application form: incomplete forms will not be considered.

Submissions will only be considered when two references have been received. We will not chase references if they are not received on time. You need to instruct your referees to send their references as email attachments to info@merlin-trust.org.uk. Please DO NOT forward references to us as we need to receive these directly from your referee. File names should include the applicants name. It will make for a stronger application if your referees are in support of your project and explain why, not just that you work hard etc. We carry out 'spot checks' as part of our policies to improve application quality and might contact one of your referees to check the information they have provided.

8. What should the reference include?

There isn't a specific format for a reference but the reference should include the following:

- An indication of how long and in what capacity the referee knows the applicant.

- An overview of the applicant's strengths/areas requiring further work and how the intended project/visit outlined in the application will help the applicant to develop their horticultural skills further. For instance, does the project help build on strengths that the applicant already has, or does it address gaps in their training/experience?
- If possible, what an award might mean for the horticultural career of the applicant

The reference need not be long or too detailed if it addresses the points above: a couple of sentences for each point would be sufficient. Generic references that do not refer to the intended project/visit and what it might mean for the applicant will be accepted but might detract from the application.

9. When will you hear if you have been awarded a grant?

Provided the application form has been completed in full, that both references were received and that submission is at least SIX weeks before the intended date of project commencement, applicants will be informed of the decision as soon as possible. Please contact the Merlin Trust Secretary (info@merlin-trust.org.uk) to find out more. If successful, account information will be sought, and the grant will be paid out as soon as possible.

10. Are there any obligations on accepting a grant?

You will have to confirm that you have taken out or intend to take out appropriate insurance. With growing geo-political tensions and increasing costs, your travel could be cancelled at any time and you must ensure that you regain any spent funds. You will be liable to re-pay the Merlin Trust should your trip be cancelled.

The grant is offered on condition that within three months of returning from the trip, you submit a report of your experience and a breakdown of costs. This should be sent as an electronic copy emailed to info@merlin-trust.org.uk. Guidance for the report is provided on the Merlin Trust website and is available from the Merlin Trust Secretary.

The electronic copy should have all images compressed and saved as a pdf file (max 10 MB). The file name should include Merlin number and name of applicant only. For example: **537 Sarah Carlton.pdf**

Any surplus grant money should be returned to The Merlin Trust within six weeks after returning from the trip. Details of how to do this can be obtained from the Merlin Trust Secretary.

Checklist:

- Completed application form.
- Obtained **two** professional references in support of your application and these are sent to the Merlin Trust directly from the referees.
- Evidence of correspondence with horticultural professionals in regard of your proposed project (any formal invitations for work/study placements or formal visits, programme information for tours etc).

If in any doubt, please contact the Merlin Trust Secretary to discuss your questions further:
info@merlin-trust.org.uk