

Podcast 1, Transcription

Audio file title: FundingOptions, 8m 26s.Mp3

Subject: Funding Options for new academics

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council – Investing in Research for Discovery and Innovation.

Narrator:

In this podcast we're looking at the funding options available for new academics.

We're joined by four members of EPSRC staff who deal with applications on a daily basis.

EPSRC staff members introduce themselves:

My name is Nick Cooper, I'm the Portfolio Manager for Water Engineering and Coastal and Waterway Engineering.

Hi, I'm Elaine Massung and I'm the Portfolio Manager for Robotics in the Engineering team at EPSRC.

My name's Richard Gunn, I'm Head of Peer Review and Advanced Materials at EPSRC.

My name is Adam Luqmani, I look after Fundamentals of Computing, which includes theoretical computer science among other things.

Narrator:

The best initial starting point on the EPSRC website, when looking at the available routes for new academics, is to put into the search engine: 'EPSRC funding options flowchart'. Also on this web page is a short video outlining the five steps of the Peer Review Process.

We're going to start by giving you a broad overview of the options available for new academics, including the New Investigator Award Scheme, which is aimed at people who want to put in their first application as a Principal Investigator. We'll also go through initial steps and some of the terminology that you may not be familiar, if applying for the first time.

EPSRC staff members:

New academics may come across the terminology 'Managed Mode Calls' or 'Managed Calls', and another common phrase that they might hear is 'Responsive Mode' or what we now call 'Standard Mode' applications. Broadly speaking those are the two different types of scheme that we operate. So the Managed Mode or

Managed Calls would be specific time-limited calls in specific subjects that are advertised on our website under the 'Call for Proposals' section, whereas the Standard or Responsive Mode schemes are open at any point in time, they have regular assessment cycles and you can submit anything that falls within EPSRC's remit.

Responsive Mode applications are investigator-led, it's for the researcher to decide which area they want to work in.

When applying for funding at EPSRC it's important to remember that there's no one-size-fits-all funding route for new academics. They could come through a Standard Mode project, however we actually also have the New Investigator scheme which is specifically for people who haven't applied before, this gives them a chance to be compared against others at a similar career stage. They could also consider coming in for an Early Career Fellowship but just with the caution that that is only open in certain areas so you do need to check on that before applying.

In order to apply for funding you have to have an account with the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) and we recommend doing that as soon as possible. A common mistake is people leaving it to the last minute to set this up. In fact you can reduce the amount of stress in the process by setting up an account as early as possible and starting to complete the form.

You may find that you already have an account that's maybe a hangover from your PhD in the past and that's something that you can update with the new details of your current appointment, but really try and do that as soon as you are starting to think about applying for grants.

Some people don't recognise the importance of having project partners set up on the Je-S system, this would be an industrial partner or anyone else who's providing a letter of support and some support for the project that's being applied for.

When it comes to actually putting the application together and submitting the proposal through the Joint Electronic Submission System be aware of the fact that when you hit the submit button it will go to your research office and not to the research council, so you'll need to factor that into your time-frame for submitting the proposal.

One of the most important things I tell people is to make sure that they check their eligibility before applying, because I really hate having to tell people, after they've put so much time, energy and effort into writing an application, that they're actually not eligible for that scheme. So start off by looking at the website to see what you're eligible for, speak to your staff at the research office, because they'll be able to give you a better idea if you are eligible, and also do feel free to give us a call if something needs to be checked because you want to make sure that your application has the best chance from the very beginning.

Narrator:

It's important to emphasise that as part of UK Research and Innovation – UKRI – many EPSRC research projects are co-funded with other research councils. Also, a number of schemes have been harmonised across the UK Research Councils.

Staff at EPSRC, come across a number of commonly asked questions and misconceptions surrounding funding options for new academics.

EPSRC staff members:

There's a real myth that you need to already have research council funding in order to apply for further funding from us and of course that's absolutely not the case, it would be very difficult because you wouldn't be able to get started in the first place!

If you're an academic at any eligible institution within the UK then you can apply for any of the research council schemes, and particularly if you look at our New Investigator Award Scheme that's aimed at people who haven't had research council funding before.

There is a degree to which you need to show track record but that doesn't have to be through previous research council funding.

Relevant experience for showing your track record could be that if you've worked in industry that you have that experience as an example, potentially you've been involved with leading things on charities, NGOs, basically anything that you would do in a job application to show that you have experience. Think about things like that for track record it's not just about the funding that you've brought in.

We do sometimes hear the myth that Early Career Fellowship proposals should be treated the same way as Standard Mode or Responsive Mode proposals – that's not actually the case - those schemes have different assessment process and different assessment criteria.

Fellowships are very much about the person, so there should be aspects of the grant that focus specifically on the leadership and development of the individual. You need to be considering that when you're writing the application, so that it comes across to reviewers that you're going to be an advocate not only for your specific research area but for engineering and physical sciences as a whole.

This is very different to a Standard Mode proposal which is solely on the research that is being done and the impact of that research.

Some applicants ask what the difference is between an Early Career Fellowship and New Investigator Awards. New Investigator Awards are aimed at new academics and is a standard scheme in which they are able to apply for a research grant to fund a project with maybe a Research Associate on it. You are being compared against others who are at the same career stage as you.

An Early Career Fellowship is aiming more at training up an individual with leadership qualities and development. It is open only in certain priority areas and then at the Panel it will be up against other types of fellowships so we also have 'Post Doc' and 'Established Career' so it's up against those two as well. What I really recommend is that you reach out to the Portfolio Manager who looks after that research area to actually check on remit because the point of the fellowship is to promote leadership in a given area, we want to make sure that what you're doing is actually novel research in that area. So, for example, because I'm Robotics Portfolio Manager – just because you have robotics in a project it doesn't mean that you're actually doing novel robotics research, so this is the type of thing that I could work with you on to actually determine if it is within the scope of the fellowship.

For both the New Investigator Award and the Fellowship schemes it's really important to talk to the department that's going to host you, early on and to ensure that they will support you and they will provide resources that enable you to make a good case for your application.

Narrator:

That ends this look at funding options for new academics. Other podcasts in this series will be covering aspects of the Peer Review Process such as the 'Right to Reply' and also providing tips on writing a strong application.

You've been listening to a podcast by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council – investing in research for discovery and innovation.