

ARDA Webinar Q&A

Many thanks for attending the UKRI Ageing Research Development Awards Webinar. Please find below written responses to all questions asked on the day. We have grouped thematically linked questions for concision, for this reason you may not see the specific question that you asked on the day. If you feel that your question has not been answered, or if you have any other questions, then please contact ageing@mrc.ukri.org

BBSRC/MRC Ageing Across the Lifecourse Interdisciplinary Research Networks

Where to find further information on how to join the BBSRC/MRC Ageing Across the Lifecourse Interdisciplinary Research Networks?

Further information on how to join the BBSRC/MRC Ageing Across the Lifecourse Interdisciplinary Research Networks can be found [here](#).

Assessment Process

Accepting 'ambitious' and 'proof of concept' projects is great, but my experience is that grants are still assessed as regular awards and criticized for e.g. being too new or not having enough publications to support despite having preliminary data. Will this be highlighted at the assessment panel?

The Ageing Research Development Awards opportunity has been designed to fund projects that have already undergone a limited phase of development, but that may still be considered 'pre-competitive' for standard response mode funding mechanisms. The Assessment Panel will be fully briefed by the office with respect to what UKRI is looking to fund through this opportunity prior to the panel meeting.

Would applications that clearly involve patient and public involvement and engagement (PPIE) be viewed more positively over those that do not?

UKRI recognises that PPIE can be a valuable addition to research projects, but, depending on the specific research question and the stage of the research, it may not always be necessary for projects to include PPIE. We encourage applicants to carefully consider whether PPIE would be appropriate within the context of the ambitions of the research proposal. Where PPIE is deemed pertinent and beneficial to the project it should be included and appropriately costed within the proposal. The Assessment Panel will consider whether PPIE is necessary or appropriate for each project and will consider the quality of the engagement to date and plans throughout the project where relevant. This will be judged on a case-by-case basis, depending on circumstance.

Will there be any feedback from the panel?

UKRI's capacity to provide feedback on applications will be determined by the total number of applications received. UKRI will endeavor to provide feedback, particularly on unsuccessful applications wherever possible and practical.

Will applications be made confidential?

Yes. Applications will be accessible to UKRI staff and Members of the Assessment Panel only. UKRI Staff and Assessment Panel Members are bound by confidentiality agreements. Please be aware that the summary and technical summary of successful awards will be published on [Gateway to Research](#), the public portal used to provide information on UKRI funded research. Therefore, do not include any sensitive information within the summary and technical summary sections of the Je-S form.

Costings

If the awards are to be funded at 80% full economic cost (fEC), how will the remaining 20% (FEC) be financed?

As per standard [MRC/UKRI funding rules](#), Ageing Research Development Awards should be costed on the basis of the full economic costs necessary to deliver the research. If the grant is awarded, the MRC/UKRI will typically fund 80% of the fEC and the host Research Organisation must agree to find the balance of fEC from other resources.

Some exceptions to this rule do exist, for example where costs are attributed to [international research](#). Applicants seeking to include costs for international research must have this agreed in advance (by outline submission phase) with the MRC Ageing team (ageing@mrc.ukri.org).

Are costs associated with career development training opportunities for early career researchers considered eligible?

The Ageing Research Development Awards are intended to support research activity. Costs associated with researcher career development cannot be claimed through this opportunity and should be resourced by other means.

Are costs associated with incentives for research participants considered eligible?

Yes, provided that these are fully described and justified in the proposal.

Is there a limit to the amount of funding that can be requested for equipment?

There is no limit to the amount of funding that can be requested for equipment. Further guidance on eligible equipment costs can be found [here](#).

How can e.g. third sector partners participate in this opportunity and receive funding?

As per standard [MRC/UKRI funding rules](#), Principal or Co-Investigators must be based at a UK Research Organisation that is eligible for receipt of UKRI funding. Typically, these include:

- Higher education institutions
- Independent research organisations and NHS bodies
- Public sector research establishments
- MRC Institutes
- MRC Units and partnership Institutes
- Institutes and Units funded by other Research Councils

All investigators must also have a [registered Je-S account](#). Only individuals based at eligible UK Research Organisations can act as Principal or Co-Investigator. No funding can be directly awarded to organisations or individuals that do not fulfil the above eligibility criteria. However, third sector partners could participate in one of the following ways, in line with [MRC guidance](#):

- As a **subcontractor**. A subcontractor is a third-party organization, or third-party person not employed on a grant, who is subcontracted by the host organization to deliver a specific piece of work. This subcontracted work will be subject to the procurement rules of the host Research Organisation. All costs that support the delivery of the subcontract are eligible and will be paid at 80% FEC unless otherwise stated, these should be included in the outline and fully justified in the proposal and will be subject to scientific peer review.
- As a **project partner**. A project partner is a third-party organization, or third-party person not employed on a grant, who provides specific contributions either in cash or in kind to a project. Project partners provide contributions to the delivery of the project and should not normally

seek to claim funds from that project. However, if there are specific circumstances where project partners do require funding for minor costs such as travel and subsistence, this will be paid at 80% FEC.

- Where an organisation or individual seeks to participate as a project partner **and** expects to access and/or exploit any outputs or intellectual property arising from the research, applicants will need to submit an application under the [MRC Industry Collaboration Framework Guidance](#) (see this [decision tree](#) for further information).

Interdisciplinarity

What does UKRI mean by 'interdisciplinarity'?

Recognising the complex nature of the ageing challenge, and the need for a wide range of expertise to support the development of interventions to secure better health and wellbeing for individuals as they age, proposals must take an interdisciplinary approach. The aim of the Ageing Research Development Awards is to support interdisciplinary ideas that would not routinely be funded through existing UKRI response mode funding schemes, providing an opportunity for research that transcends, combines, or significantly spans disciplines.

Applications that fall within a single Research Council remit or have a clear Research Council 'lead' are ineligible and should instead be submitted through the appropriate response mode funding scheme.

Do interdisciplinary teams need to include expertise from the medical and health sciences?

While administered by MRC, the Ageing Research Development Awards call is a cross-UKRI opportunity that is open to all eligible researchers from all UKRI disciplines. There is no requirement to include any researchers from the medical and health sciences, if this would be unnecessary for the project. However, please do bear in mind that the long-term ambition of this opportunity is to reduce the time spent in poor health in later life and reduce the gap between health span and lifespan. Successful projects will explain how the proposed research will contribute towards reducing time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan.

Investigators

Who is eligible for investigator status on the grant?

As per standard [MRC/UKRI funding rules](#), Principal or Co-Investigators must be based at a UK Research Organisation that is eligible for receipt of UKRI funding. Typically, these include:

- Higher education institutions
- Independent research organisations and NHS bodies
- Public sector research establishments
- MRC Institutes
- MRC Units and partnership Institutes
- Institutes and Units funded by other Research Councils

All investigators must also have a [registered Je-S account](#). Only individuals based at eligible UK Research Organisations can act as Principal or Co-Investigator. No funding can be *directly* awarded to organisations or individuals that do not fulfil the above eligibility criteria. However, non-eligible partners could participate in one of the following alternative ways, in line with [MRC guidance](#):

- As a **subcontractor**. A subcontractor is a third-party organization, or third-party person not employed on a grant, who is subcontracted by the host organization to deliver a specific piece

of work. This subcontracted work will be subject to the procurement rules of the host Research Organisation. All costs that support the delivery of the subcontract are eligible and will be paid at 80% FEC unless otherwise stated, these should be outlined and fully justified in the proposal and will be subject to scientific review.

- As a **project partner**. A project partner is a third-party organization, or third-party person not employed on a grant, who provides specific contributions either in cash or in kind to a project. Project partners provide contributions to the delivery of the project and should not normally seek to claim funds from that project. However, if there are specific circumstances where project partners do require funding for minor costs such as travel and subsistence, this will be paid at 80% FEC.
 - Where an organisation or individual seeks to participate as a project partner **and** expects to access and/or exploit any outputs or intellectual property arising from the research, applicants will need to submit an application under the [MRC Industry Collaboration Framework Guidance](#) (see this [decision tree](#) for further information).

UKRI fully encourages the inclusion of non-academic stakeholders in the roles described above, where relevant to the project. A non-exhaustive list of organisations that may be eligible to participate as a subcontractor or project partner include:

- Industry
- Third/voluntary sector
- Local authorities
- Social enterprises
- PPIE groups

Can international Co-Investigators be included?

The costs for work undertaken at an international organization are admissible and should be discussed with UKRI prior to outline application submission (except work conducted within international MRC Units). International Co-Investigators must have a [registered Je-S account](#) prior to full application submission; international Co-Investigators cannot be based in non-eligible organisations (for example, industry and private sector, as per standard guidance for Co-Investigators). Further information on costs attributable to international Co-Investigators can be found [here](#).

Where international academic partners are included but are not seeking to claim any funds or form part of the named investigatory team, they can be included as standard collaborators.

Can international third-party organisations be included?

International third-party organisations or individuals (for example, industry and private sector) can be included on applications as a subcontractor or project partner, in line with the above question and [standard MRC guidance](#). They cannot participate as investigators.

Do investigators need to be registered on Je-S before the outline submission or the main submission?

Investigators should be registered on Je-S in advance of the main submission. Please note that this can take time.

Can Principal or Co-Investigators hold honorary contracts of the Research Organisation, as opposed to substantive?

Researchers holding honorary contracts are eligible to apply, provided the time commitment allocated to the grant does not exceed the time contracted to the research organization. If the honorary position is not salaried by the research organization, no requests for salary costs can be made.

Is it possible to be Principal Investigator on one application, and Co-Investigator on another?

You can make one application to this opportunity as Principal Investigator. You can be Co-Investigator on as many applications as you wish, provided that you are able to fulfil these commitments. You can be Principal Investigator on one application, and Co-Investigator on other applications.

Can more than one application be submitted at the outline stage by the same Principal Investigator?

No. Principal Investigators should submit one single outline application. Where more than one outline application is submitted by the same Principal Investigator, only the first outline received by UKRI will be considered

Would it be possible to change PI and Co-I roles, between outline and full application stage?

It would be possible to change PI and Co-I roles, provided that this is the most optimal arrangement for execution of the proposed research.

Are early career researchers eligible to apply for this call?

UKRI is fully supportive of early career researchers applying for this opportunity. Early career researchers based at an [eligible Research Organisation](#) within the UK are eligible to apply for this call. As per updated MRC funding rules, it is **no longer a requirement** for Principal or Co-Investigators to have a contract of employment with an eligible Research Organisation for the duration of the grant prior to application. MRC will accept applications from PIs and Co-Is where assurance can be provided from the eligible organization that, if the application is successful, a pre-existing contract of employment will be extended beyond the end date of the grant. This assurance should be provided from Departmental heads as a Letter of Support (maximum of two pages) confirming:

- That a pre-existing contract of employment will be extended beyond the end date of the grant.
- The employment contract covers the Investigator for their full employment/contracted time and not just for the time spent on the grant over the course of the project.
- The applicant will be provided with appropriate space, resources and access to facilities to carry out the research.

Can early career researchers apply for this opportunity through a New Investigator Research Grant (NIRG)?

No, the Ageing Research Development Awards opportunity is distinct from NIRGs offered by some Research Councils. If you have questions around eligibility or suitability for NIRG schemes, please get in touch with the relevant Research Council.

Opportunity Details

Will this be the only call?

The Ageing Research Development Awards opportunity will run once. Further strategic ageing research opportunities may become available in future. Please remember that ageing research is of relevance to all UKRI Research Councils and that your research may be eligible for consideration through standard response mode funding mechanisms.

What is the overall budget and how many projects are likely to be supported?

The budget available for this opportunity at the time of launch is £3.5M (UKRI contribution) and applications for a full economic cost of up to £400k per project can be submitted. UKRI will fund as many proposals as we can within the budget available, provided that they are deemed fundable by the Assessment Panel. If UKRI can acquire additional funding, further projects may be awarded.

Can applications that have previously been submitted to Research Councils and were unsuccessful be considered under this opportunity?

The eligibility of resubmissions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis dependent on the rules of the Council assessing the original application. Any outline case for an application that has previously been rejected by a UKRI Council should provide strong justification for why the resubmission should be considered and will need to meet the scope of this strategic call.

How many people registered for and joined the webinar?

601 people registered for the webinar and 494 attended.

Will any webinar materials be made available following the session?

You can access the presentation section of the webinar held on January 16th 2023 [here](#). Please use the password: %R!9t*j9

Outline Applications

Is there a template document for outline applications?

No. Outline applications should be sent to ageing@mrc.ukri.org as a Word document or PDF (two pages, plus an optional additional page for figures and other supporting evidence), detailing information requested on the funding opportunity page.

When do outline applications need to be submitted by? How should they be submitted?

Outline applications must be received by email (ageing@mrc.ukri.org) by 23:59 on Friday 17th February 2023.

In addition to the guidance provided for outline applications on the funding opportunity page, how heavily should existing evidence and pilot data feature in the outline?

A description of existing evidence and inclusion of pilot data is welcomed in an outline application but is not mandatory. However, existing evidence and the inclusion of pilot data (where relevant) is strongly encouraged as part of a full application.

How accurate and detailed do the estimated costings need to be in the outline application? Will it be possible for costs requested in the full application to deviate from those described in the outline?

Costs described in the outline application are intended to provide a rough indication to the office the scale of budget being requested, and the types of costs being claimed. It will not be a problem if costs change between the outline application and full application submission, provided that total costs do not exceed the funding envelope of £400k FEC per project and that all costs are eligible for consideration and are fully justified. Costs for additional avenues of research, or additional personnel because of substantive changes made post outline submission will not be allowed, unless requested by UKRI, for example inclusion of PPIE.

Do costs associated with international research need to be discussed with UKRI before outline application submission?

Yes. Please email ageing@mrc.ukri.org to discuss costs associated with international research as per [MRC Guidance for Applicants](#).

Remit

We received many questions on the eligibility of specific ideas. We are unable to consider these questions in the absence of further details. For confirmation of eligibility, please submit an outline application to: ageing@mrc.ukri.org.

What does UKRI mean by ‘intervention’?

For this opportunity, UKRI takes a broad perspective with respect to interventions, recognizing that a range of different interventions might be suitable to help secure better health and wellbeing for people as they age. As an example, an intervention could be any approach, tool, technology, diagnostic or treatment that has the potential to positively impact individuals as they age. This definition is not all-encompassing, and we invite you to be ambitious and think creatively around potential interventions. Interventions must be targeted and deployed at the level of the individual but implementable at scale; population health-level interventions will not be considered through this opportunity but will instead be supported through an upcoming [Population Health Improvement call](#).

What is UKRI’s definition of ‘ageing’?

UKRI adopts a broad definition of ageing, recognizing that it is a process that develops across life, from pre-conception through to its latest stages. Ageing Research Development Awards should support the development of interventions to reduce the time spent in poor health in later life and reduce the gap between health span and lifespan. Interventions could be targeted towards a broad range of different life stages to enable healthy ageing.

How should proposals consider health inequalities?

Ageing Research Development Awards applicants should clearly describe how their proposed research will address health inequality, for example by:

- Ensuring appropriate representation of biological sex in cell and animal studies (in line with [MRC guidance](#) on biological sex as an independent variable in experimental design).
- Ensuring diverse representation in studies involving secondary data analysis or samples obtained through other infrastructures.
- Ensuring diverse representation in studies involving humans.
- Ensuring appropriate consultation with diverse PPIE stakeholders where applicable.
- Carefully considering the intended intervention demographic and circumstantial pressures they may face (for example: socioeconomic, environmental, access to healthcare).

What stage of research should proposals occupy?

UKRI Ageing Research Development Awards should enable the development of interventions to reduce the time spent in poor health in later life and reduce the gap between health span and lifespan. To secure this ambition, Ageing Research Development Awards should strengthen existing evidence to de-risk the development and implementation of potential interventions. This could include:

- Further developing the basic principles underpinning an approach.
- Strengthening pilot data.

- Establishing proof-of-concept.
- Testing the feasibility and acceptability of a potential intervention.

UKRI is seeking to support systems thinking and hypothesis testing that will benefit from knowledge mobilization rather than funding the earliest stages of discovery research that could be supported through response-mode (hypothesis generating). UKRI seeks to further develop areas of existing evidence (even if limited) in already identified challenge areas. Funded projects will likely occupy research activities 2 to 6, broadly aligned with those developed by the UK Clinical Research Collaboration¹ from mid- to late-stage preclinical discovery research through to early translation and proof-of-concept clinical studies. Please contact ageing@mrc.ukri.org with an [outline application](#) to discuss the eligibility of your ideas. .

Can proposals be focused on specific diseases or health conditions, or common conditions experienced by older individuals? For example: dementia, fatigue, frailty, adverse mental health; pain; sarcopenia and/or multimorbidities?

Ageing Research Development Awards should support the development of interventions to reduce the time spent in poor health in later life and reduce the gap between health span and lifespan. Proposals that are focused on developing interventions **against specific diseases or conditions established in a group of individuals (patient group) rather than** studies in individuals who may have underlying disease (particular community or targeted to particular age demographic) to support the feasibility of deploying interventions in a real-world population would not be within remit for this opportunity and may be better suited to standard UKRI response mode funding mechanisms.

Proposals could be focused on pre-disease contexts to support healthy ageing and time spent in good health, or in individuals who do have disease but where direct treatment of that disease is not a primary focus. Proposals focused on managing physiological decline as part of the ageing process would be within scope.

Can the proposal involve animal research?

Yes, where necessary and justified within the ambition of reducing the time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan. Please ensure that you adhere to [MRC guidance](#) on the consideration of biological sex as an independent variable in experimental design.

Can the proposal involve research in or with humans, including small clinical studies?

Yes, where necessary and justified within the ambition of reducing the time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan. Clinical trials and large-scale testing of interventions in human studies are not within scope.

Can the proposal involve work in low- and middle-income countries?

Yes, where necessary and justified within the ambition of reducing the time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan. Any costs associated with work undertaken in low- and middle-income countries must be agreed in advance with UKRI, prior to the submission of an outline application. Costs must also align with current [MRC funding rules on international research](#).

Can the proposal involve the analysis of samples and data obtained from biobanks?

Yes, where necessary and justified within the ambition of reducing the time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan.

Can the proposal involve secondary data analysis?

Yes, where necessary and justified within the ambition of reducing the time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan.

Can the proposal involve qualitative research?

Yes, where necessary and justified within the ambition of reducing the time spent in poor health in later life and reducing the gap between health span and lifespan.

Can the proposal involve systematic reviews?

The proposal can involve a systematic review, if this is fully justified and necessary for the research. However, as Ageing Research Development Awards are intended to support mid- to late-stage discovery and early translation of interventions, the Assessment Panel will consider whether a proposal seeking to deliver a systematic review is of a sufficient stage of maturity for this call.

Can projects follow on from work delivered through the BBSRC/MRC Ageing Across the Lifecourse Interdisciplinary Research Networks?

Yes, but there is no formal requirement for proposals to follow on from network activity. Applications can come from investigators and ideas not linked to existing networks.