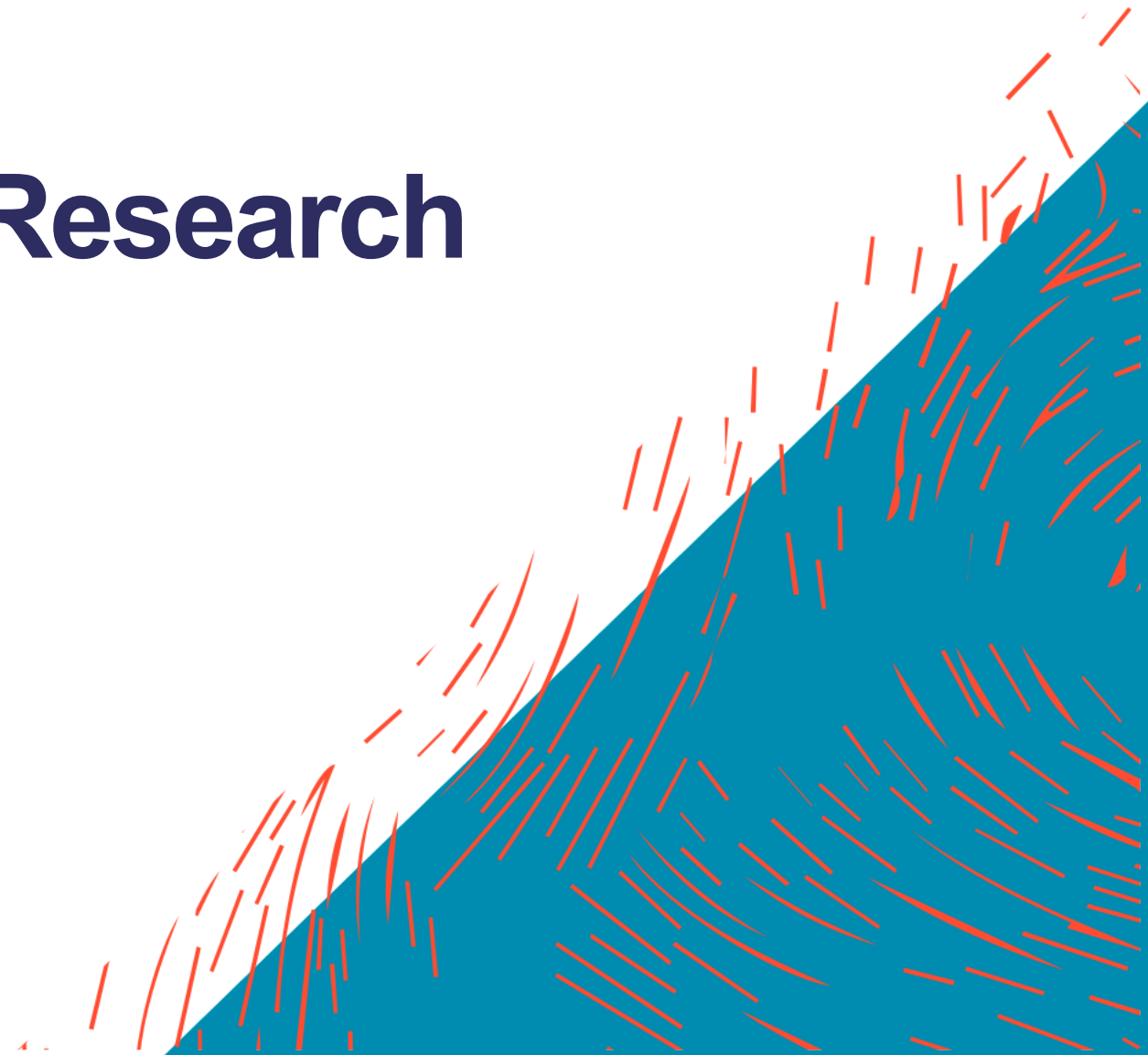# MRC Centres of Research Excellence

Round 2 Outline Webinar
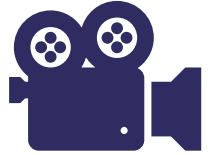8th November 2023

Agenda

Welcome and Housekeeping

Presentation from MRC

- MRC CoRE Introduction
- Round 2 Outline Opportunity
- Applying Using the Funding Service

Panel Q&A

Housekeeping

Webinar is being recorded

The slide deck will be shared

Please ask questions in the Q&A box at the bottom of the screen

You will have the option to upvote a question that's been asked by another participant by giving it a thumbs up

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What is MRC CoRE ?

- An agile, challenge-led funding model that addresses challenges across the spectrum of discovery to translational science
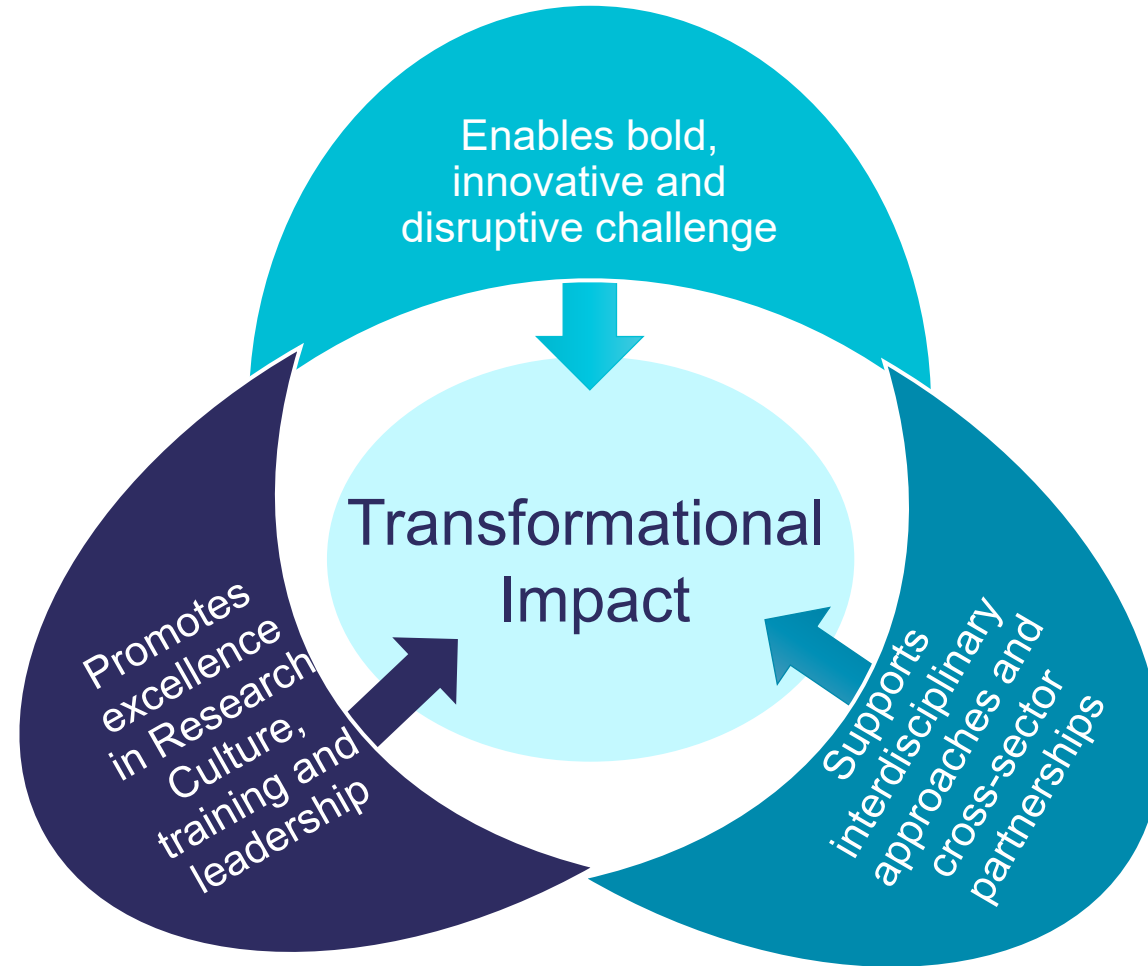
Key Features

A mission to address **a specific challenge** using innovative, disruptive and/or interdisciplinary approaches

7+7 model provides long-term flexible funding to undertake collaborative breakthrough science

Typical budget of ~£3m per annum over 7 years

Outward facing and collaborative

Led by a director, as part of a leadership team

Support stimulating training environment and a positive, diverse, and responsible research culture

Hosted by a single eligible organisation or a partnership of organisations

Growth / sustainability to be achieved through aligned competitive grants and fellowships

MRC CoRE Challenges…

- are bold, ambitious and innovative

- address a gap, opportunity, or thus far intractable obstacle in understanding or modifying human health and disease

- are composed of major strategic objectives achievable within the 14-year timeframe

- if achieved, will transform the research field or area of health research

- are aligned to the MRC mission

- require flexible, major long-term funding

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MRC CoRE Challenges will be achieved through…

Delivering distinct and disruptive research that drives **breakthrough** advances and addresses specific bottlenecks through knowledge generation, technological or methodological innovation

Providing a stimulating environment to train the next generation of researchers and technologists

Outward facing approaches, fostering innovation and engagement

Bringing together creative and diverse approaches for cross-sectoral and multi or interdisciplinary working

Harnessing the best talent in the UK to deliver upon the proposed vision

Delivering excellence in research culture, equality, diversity, and inclusion, leadership models, and innovation.

Leadership

Leadership environment

- inclusive and creative approaches to leadership that promote positive research culture
- a director **as part of leadership team** which has clear roles and responsibilities
- leadership rotation and/or clear succession plans as appropriate for delivery of the challenge
- diverse membership (expertise, career stage, protected characteristics)
- leadership which actively supports career development and mentoring to create future leaders in the field

Leadership team

- May include members from a single organisation or a partnership of organisation including international co-leads
- Should reflect the leadership required for:
  - delivery of the challenge and the research environment
  - management of the MRC CoRE across multiple sites and partnerships (if applicable)

Research Culture

MRC CoREs will adopt the highest standards in the way research is conducted and openly communicated and develop and nurture career paths and a training environment which supports a positive research culture.

The MRC/UKRI policies, as well as cross sector concordats and joint statements, emphasise three key principles which underpin a positive research culture:

Research is communicated to maximise impact, built on transparency and openness, and partnership with the public

Career paths, and training environment, are provided to recognise a diversity of talents, skills, and outputs, and embrace team science as the way of working.

Research is conducted with integrity, centred on reproducibility, responsible innovation, collaboration, interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary

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Training and Careers
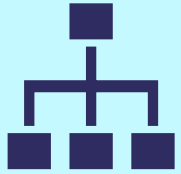
MRC CoREs are expected to build research capacity in their specialist area. We are looking for a training environment that will equip researchers with the tools needed to carry out world leading research and effectively transition between career stages.

Consider how to use the security offered by this long-term funding to address training needs specific to the challenge. This should include the provision of meaningful support and recognition for interdisciplinary research and for the range of people, skills and career pathways required to deliver an innovative training agenda.

Funding may be used for training and capacity building when it is required to address the research challenge, and where that cannot be addressed through conventional/existing training and career-focussed funding routes e.g. existing doctoral training programmes, fellowship schemes.

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Environmental Sustainability

- MRC strategic investments are expected to consider and promote environmental sustainability in their research practices. Successful awards will have an explicit environmental sustainability strategy which aligns with the host Research Organisation(s) sustainability plan and policies.

- In the first instance awards should aim to comply with the Greening Government commitments 2021-2025

- The host organisation(s) / MRC CoREs will be required to report to UKRI or MRC on the progress of these activities.

MRC CoRE Round 2

Timeline

25 Sept 2023 Outline Opportunity Open	**8 Nov 2023** Community Webinar
7 Feb 2024 Outline Application Deadline	**Apr 2024:** Outline Application Panel Meeting
May 2024: Full opportunity opens	**Sept 2024:** Full application deadline
Jan 2025: Full application assessment by Interview	**Mar 2025:** Informed of full application decision
Apr 2025: New MRC CoREs awarded	**Apr - Sept 2025:** New MRC CoREs start

Round 2 Themes

Enhancing Healthspan

Challenges in focussed areas of ageing research to achieve a step change in increasing healthy life expectancy

Immune Regulation

Scientific challenges to illuminate how the immune system interacts with and is shaped by other biological systems, at different stages of life, by environmental stimuli or in response to pathogen challenges

Molecular mechanisms to inform cancer intervention

Challenges investigating the molecular mechanisms associated with tumour development, growth, metastasis and recurrence to develop a more integrated understanding of cancer biology and accelerate progress towards future development of mechanism-informed interventions.

Outside of themes, compelling, time-sensitive ideas aligned to MRC Strategic Delivery Plan priority areas will **exceptionally** be considered – **contact the office**

Round 2 Outline Opportunity

Challenges may address **all** or **part** of our remit: discovery, understanding mechanism, and development of concepts or interventions

An MRC CoRE should address a **specific** and **defined** challenge which if successful will have a demonstrable, significant impact.

Challenges may focus on a single theme or be relevant to more than one theme

Enhancing Healthspan

Applications addressing challenges in focussed areas of ageing research that will achieve a step change in increasing healthy life expectancy

- We encourage proposals that are embedded within conceptual frameworks such as immunometabolism, frailty, resilience, inflammation and others
- Connecting mechanistic understanding of an aspect of ageing biology with longitudinal population study data to provide tractable insights
- Must include research in humans
- Must provide a vision for increasing health equity between different groups in society, but should not be the sole focus of the proposed research
- Must specify the population group(s) who will benefit
- Must specify how the focus will enable tractable interventions to improve health in later life
- Should be disease-agnostic to deliver pan-ageing impact

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Immune Regulation

Scientific challenges to illuminate how the immune system interacts with and is shaped by other biological systems, at different stages of life, by environmental stimuli or in response to pathogen challenges

- Applications should articulate a plan to overcome key barriers to our understanding of an area of immune regulation to unlock pathways for disease prevention, diagnosis and treatment
- The proposed work may be focused around specific extrinsic or intrinsic factors such as environment, socioeconomic drivers or biological systems/processes; or may address complementary cross-cutting challenges
- Plans should not be structured around existing disease definitions but should tackle underpinning mechanisms or pathways to deliver transformational impact

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Molecular Mechanisms to inform cancer intervention

Challenges investigating the molecular mechanisms associated with tumour development, growth, metastasis and recurrence to develop a more integrated understanding of cancer biology and accelerate progress towards future development of mechanism-informed interventions

- Cross-disciplinary approaches to drive progress in mechanistic discovery science towards an integrated understanding of dynamic cancer biology, initiation and evolution
- Inclusive of multiple cancer types, or to be tumour agnostic, in order to deliver pan-cancer impact
- May address priority areas identified (for example – cancers with unknown pathogenesis, poorer outcomes, limited treatment options)
- Early detection is not expected to be a sole focus
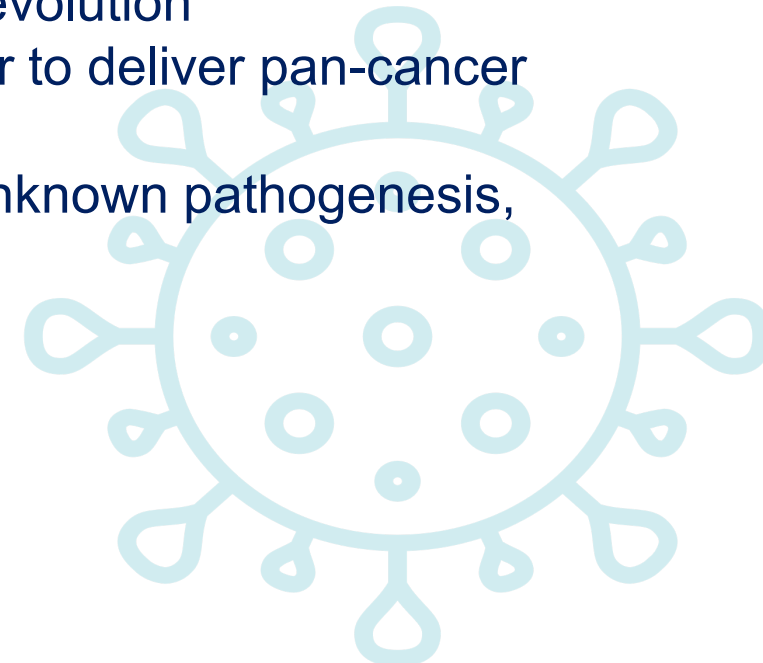
MRC CoRE R1 Outline: Key Learnings

Lack of defined challenge, cohesiveness, added value

- Vision too broad - lack of defined challenge and cohesion between research themes/work packages
- Research was an extension of what was already taking place
- Added value of MRC CoRE structure not articulated
- Too inward-looking
- Limitations/challenges/risks not identified
- Weak/generic statements on research culture, EDI, training, sustainability, etc.
- Insufficient details on governance/leadership structure and approach
- Focus veered away from mechanistic work, e.g. generating data/resources, focus on healthcare delivery
- R4RI conveyed individual contributions and not the <u>collective</u> capability

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Funding available

- You will be asked to indicate outline costs for the first funding period of seven years
- The FEC of your project for the first seven years can be up to £26.5 million
- We will fund 80% of the FEC and 100% of permitted exceptions
- We will provide all the awarded funding to the lead organisation to manage and distribute accordingly.
- Awards spanning multiple organisations must have plans to ensure funds can be used flexibly to support changes in research delivery and opportunity across the course of the award.
- We will support a limited number of interlinked research activities or themes, with funding focused on key strategic objectives related to the identified challenge, achievable during the 14-year lifespan.
- A full list of costs you can request funding for are on the MRC CoRE R2 Opportunity Page

Who can apply?

Project Lead and Co-Leads

- must be employed by an eligible organisation

- have the relevant expertise and experience to lead or contribute to an MRC CoRE and its research culture

International investigators can be a project co-lead and be part of the leadership team, where appropriate. Must offer expertise and/or facilities not available in the UK and provide clear indicators of commitment

We expect the research and management teams to be diverse in terms of expertise and inclusion of those at different career stages and with protected characteristics

Partnerships

- applications can be from a single eligible organisation or a partnership of organisations

- partnership applications must articulate clear plans for governance and management

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Research Organisation Support

- Considerable and clearly defined support from the Research Organisation(s) is essential for a successful application and will be part of the assessment, e.g.
  - The provision and maintenance of lab space
  - Access to existing facilities
  - HR services
  - Underpinning of key staff positions

- As part of the application process, a statement of support will need to be provided from the host research organisations.

- An organisation may lead up to three outline applications in round two, one in each theme.

- Applications from existing MRC units may be submitted in addition to other applications from the organisation and do not count towards the three applications guidance.

Applying using the funding service

- You must submit your MRC CoRE outline application using the new UKRI funding service (TFS) – you cannot use the Je-S system

Video demonstration *completing an application in the funding service* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NlWMVBr1jc

- Find all the application guidance, questions and word counts on our website https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/mrc-centre-of-research-excellence-round-two/

- TFS is under development so how you apply may differ to other opportunities – follow the **round two** guidance for MRC CoRE

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TFS Tips

- Applications should be created by the project lead rather than a member of the project team or research office and **only the project lead can edit**

- You will need to register for a funding service account after following the start application link on funding finder (not the same as your Je-S account)

- Complete your EDI profile – applications cannot be sent to the research office administrator unless this is completed for project lead (optional for co-leads)

- As soon as you start your research office administrator will have visibility of the application **but cannot edit**

- Your research office administrator will need time to approve the application - account for this

MRC CoRE outline application

- Has 18 sections

- All sections require a text box response – no documents to upload

- Word counts per question range from 100 – 2,000 words

- We are looking for a compelling case for the MRC CoRE not detail

- You can embed images in sections indicated to represent visually

- Core team is the proposed leadership team

- Leadership team capability to deliver – in team R4RI format

- Minimal cost information at outline stage

MRC CoRE outline application

Contents

Print this page

Untitled application

1. Details

Summary

No content has been added.

Start date

No content has been added.

Duration

No content has been added.

2. Core team

Name	Role	Organisation	Email

3. Challenge

▶ View application question

No content has been added.

4. Research

UKRI Organisational Change Working together for a simpler, better future

MRC CoRE outline application

Contents

16. Resources and costs

Funding type	Full economic cost (£)	Funding percentage (%)	Funding applied for (£)
Directly incurred	–	80	–
Directly allocated	–	80	–
Indirect costs	–	80	–
Exceptions	–	100	–

Total cost	£-
Contribution from applying organisations	£-
Total funding applied for	£-

17. Equipment

▶ View application question

No content has been added.

UKRI Organisational Change Working together for a simpler, better future

Help available

- Applications can't be returned or amended after submission – ask if unsure

- Your host organisation will be able to provide advice and guidance to assist you with the creation and completion of your application

- All general questions on MRC CoREs and completing an application

    contact us at core@mrc.ukri.org

- **For TFS technical support** UKRI Funding Service Helpdesk
  Email: **support@funding-service.ukri.org** Phone: 01793 547490

Round 2 Assessment

Assessment Panel

- MIB Members
- MRC Board and Panel Members
- International Panellists

Assessment Criteria
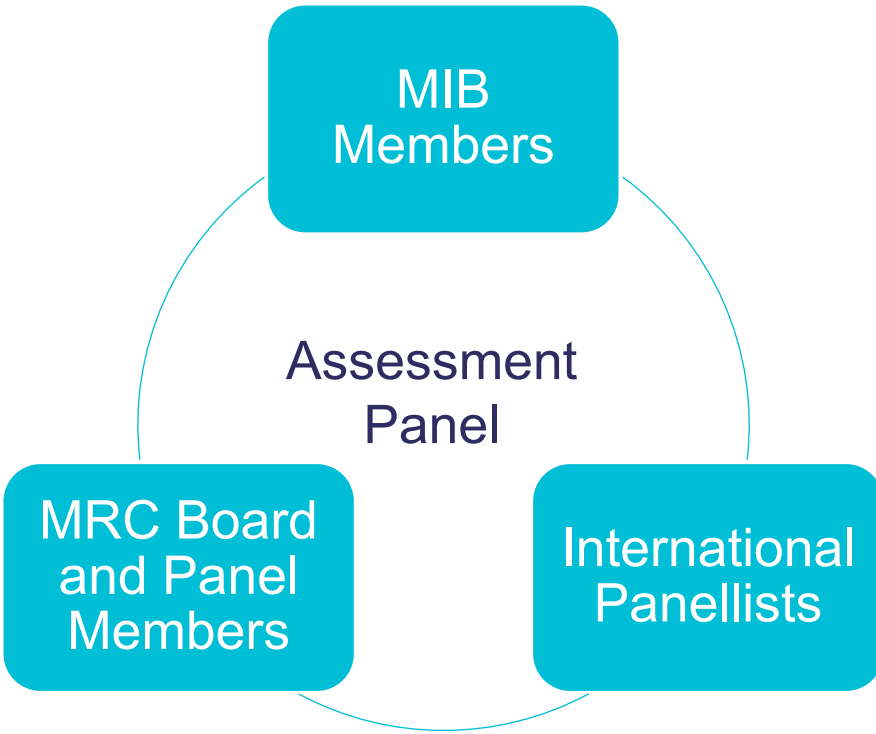
Challenge, including:
- importance
- innovation
- impact

Approach to the Challenge, including:
- research
- translation and knowledge transfer
- environmental sustainability

MRC CoRE environment, including:
- training, careers and capacity building
- research culture
- leadership environment

Capability to deliver the MRC CoRE, including:
- leadership team capability to deliver
- research organisation support
- partnerships and collaborations

- Outline applications must demonstrate the excitement of the research challenge and potential to fully meet all criteria and indicators to be invited to proceed

- Full application assessment will be via international peer review and applicant interviews