

Question and Answer Session

Medical Research Council (MRC) responsive mode research boards and fellowships - transition to the new Funding Service (TFS)

The webinar and the questions and answers below focus on the MRC’s transition of responsive mode boards and fellowships to the new Funding Service (TFS). It includes information and tips for applicants and research offices on the following MRC responsive mode research board and fellowship opportunities, closing January 2024:

- Clinical research training fellowship
- Clinician scientist fellowship
- Infections and Immunity Board
- Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board
- Neurosciences and Mental Health Board
- Population and Systems Medicine Board

Appreciating the new funding service will continue to evolve and more functionality is expected, the questions and answers below are true and correct for the January 2024 closing date. Please ensure for future MRC responsive mode research board or fellowship opportunities, or for other types of opportunity, you check the guidance available at the time.

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Useful links and guidance

Application timelines	https://www.ukri.org/councils/mrc/guidance-for-applicants/application-timelines/
New staff roles	https://www.ukri.org/publications/roles-in-funding-applications/roles-in-funding-applications-eligibility-responsibilities-and-costings-guidance/
Résumé for Research and Innovation R4RI	https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/before-you-apply/resume-for-research-and-innovation-r4ri-guidance/
Embedding diversity in research design	https://www.ukri.org/about-us/mrc/our-policies-and-standards/embedding-diversity-in-research-design/
Videos on how to use the UKRI Funding Service – UKRI channel – more videos will become available here	https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiewmEd0-UPB8Xb7E509IsHglzhwksZyX
Research offices	https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/improving-your-funding-experience/how-research-offices-use-the-ukri-funding-service/ https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/improving-your-funding-experience/about-simpler-and-better-funding/
Research Office webinar on co-edit and groups	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7ktM6cn2bM
Finding an opportunity in the funding finder video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_JMlvw3KdU
Applying for an opportunity in the funding service video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7f6TNz8mN8&t=12s
Completing an application in the funding service video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NIWMVBr1jc

Applying

Q: The Funding Service (TFS) was trailed recently by the EPSRC. They received an unprecedented number of submissions which means difficulties to find reviewers, review submissions on time, etc. This will likely require managing the budget allocated and perhaps move some submitted grants for the next panel. Will the MRC take some measures in anticipation of a surge in demand?

A: This is the second phase that MRC will roll out responsive mode board and fellowship opportunities on TFS.

MRC has continued our previous approach of having a regular pattern of closing dates for opportunities (unlike EPSRC which previously operated responsive mode with no closing dates), so we don't expect an increase in MRC application numbers. This was reflected in the first MRC opportunities using TFS, where across the responsive mode board and fellowships, the number of applications has remained at similar numbers to what we would usually expect.

Q: Can we nominate reviewers who should not be used?

This can be done, but please do not do this through The Funding Service. Currently, anything you enter in your application on TFS can be seen by all reviewers and panellists. If there are researchers who you'd prefer us not to approach, you can send an email to us via our support email address (support@funding-service.ukri.org) or the email address for your specific opportunity (e.g. mcmb@mrc.ukri.org, fellows@mrc.ukri.org etc)

Q: Do you fund desk-based, epidemiology projects. Reading the applications, it is hard to determine, thank you.

A: We do fund epidemiological projects, including those that make use of pre-existing data sets (rather than collecting new data). However, it's often a good idea to check with the appropriate MRC Board first to check that your proposed research falls within our funding remit. You can check this here: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/mrc/remittance-programmes-and-priorities/> - typically you'd probably want to check with the Population and Systems team, psmb@mrc.ukri.org.

Q: As an individual residing in Ethiopia who is not a citizen of the United Kingdom, I am interested in knowing if it is possible for me to submit an application. Furthermore, I would like to inquire whether the topics of medical education quality improvement, social accountability, and accreditation fall within the purview of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) themes. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude for any information you can provide, as we have established a partnership with a university based in the United Kingdom. Thank you for your assistance.

A: That's quite specific to your sort of research projects and area. Please do email MRC to at rfdp@mrc.ukri.org to discuss your project in more detail. Overall, we don't have strict residency criteria for our MRC eligibility criteria. So as long as you have an appropriate contract with an eligible research organisation, you would be eligible to apply for our funding. You could also consider [MRC Global Health](#) funding opportunities including the Applied Global Health Research Board

Vision and Approach Section

Q: For MRC research grant scheme, does the 6-page limit still apply to the 'Approach' section? Is there a restriction on the number of figures that can be included in the 'Approach' section?

A: The approach section of the application is no longer a separate PDF document, so there is a word limit instead of a page limit. The word limit is 3000 words for the approach section for a research grant, which is based on the equivalent previous page limit (approximately 500 words per page). There isn't a restriction for images specifically, but the guidance clearly states to use these sparingly (where you're unable to convey important information, i.e., it cannot be easily articulated in words).

Q: The guidance to approach for statistics is that we can use the vision section, is that correct?

A: There's a vision question and an approach question. The vision has a word count of 500 words, which should be high level information about the purpose, why you want to do the research and the potential impact. With a much larger section for approach, which is where we would expect the more detailed description of how you would carry out the research to be given, and details of reproducibility and statistical design within that section. We advise using 500 words of the approach section for reproducibility and statistical design.

Q: The reproducibility and statistical design is a substantial section. Can this be fitted into Vision?

A: We ask you to provide the detail on statistical design within the approach section of the application. And we have designed the word count that will allow you to do that. Specifically, the guidance is to use around 500 words addressing reproducibility and statistical design (equivalent to the one page used previously).

If you do not want to use 500 words on reproducibility and statistical design, then you should prepare an approach section that is shorter, (not using the full 3,000 words that you can potentially use for that section).

Co-editing capabilities

Q: Project lead and research office have view and edit rights, is there a way for other 'office administrators' helping build the application to be given access to edit?

A: Yes, research office staff with funding service administration status accounts should be able to view all applications from your organisation and be able to edit all sections when you submit an application for approval. If the office administrators have the right

administration access should also be able to edit/view applications. This is a question for your research organisation to consider how they want to manage access to accounts.

Q: Going back to the editing rights, will there be a move to allow access to an application to research development staff who don't have institutional administrator access

Co-editing for research office administrator access staff is what has been rolled out currently. Part of this is how research organisations choose to allocate accounts and set up statuses. So, we can't really comment in too much detail about what individual research organisations decide to do.

There's some new functionality for groups within the research office function. So, groups of staff could potentially have different levels of access and different types of status. The Simpler Better Funding (SBF) Research Office webinar on co-edit and groups will give more information: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7ktM6cn2bM>

At the moment, we don't have a timeline for when co-editing will be expanded beyond research office administration access staff, i.e. to co-leads and other staff.

Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI)/ Applicant and team capability to deliver

Q: For the Capability to Deliver – should outputs be referenced within the narrative as hyperlinked DOIs, or should they have endnote numbers relating to the References section in the overall application? The general R4RI guidance doesn't mention the References section in The Funding Service.

A: When referring to outputs such as publications, please provide these as a digital object identifier (DOI) which can be hyperlinked to the publication where possible. This will also help you to save space in the R4RI template. <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-to-apply/resume-for-research-and-innovation-r4ri-guidance/>

Q: How forward-looking should the Capability to Deliver statement be? Do you expect it to explicitly relate past experiences/contributions to the activities the applicant/team have said they will deliver for this particular project, or should the focus solely be on past contributions/experiences that demonstrate capability but without discussion of the specifics of what is going to be delivered on the project.

A: It needs to be a balance. It should clearly state past experiences and the track record of the team involved but it should be forward looking too. It should show how the past supports what you're going to take forward. There should be a strong demonstration of

what's been achieved previously, pointing to the future and how the team assembled will be able to deliver that.

Q: How can I avoid duplication in project partner section and R4RI when talking about what the project partners will contribute to the project?

A: In terms of the resume for research and innovation; how and why the project partner is going to contribute to the project, including how they will integrate with the other team members, how they are critical to the delivery of the outcomes.

For the letters of support from the project partner, they should be a statement that is confirming what they will contribute.

Project Partners

Q: Could we have some extra clarity regarding Project Partners. If someone is named in the approach as bringing in expertise in a specific technique/protocols/assay that the PL or PCLs don't have can they be included as Project Partners? Even if this contribution doesn't require costing i.e. £0

A: Project partners can be included that make no financial contribution and will make an in-kind contribution. It really depends on how significant and fundamental that contribution is to the project being deliverable (i.e. is it a contribution that the project is unfeasible without?) And if it is significant and fundamental then you include them as a project partner. The alternative is to describe this as a collaboration within your approach section. This is a judgement for the applicants to make, project partners cannot be from the applicant's organisation.

Letters of support

Q: Do same-institution collaborators no longer provide letters of support?

A: This is correct, they do not need to provide a letter of support, as they are not classified as project partners.

Research involving human tissues or biological samples

Q: Regarding "Research involving human tissues or biological samples," are commercially available iPSCs included here or not?

A: Commercially available iPSCs can be used without having to have a particular license within the UK.

A letter of support would not be needed to show the feasibility of getting that iPSC because you can buy it commercially. You won't need to have a project partner who can supply that resource.

New Investigator Research Grant

Q: Please give more details of what the new investigator research grant is about

A: The New Investigator Research Grant (NIRG) is aimed at early career researchers who are establishing their independence. It's for people at an equivalent stage to our other "transition to independence" Fellowships (CSF, CDA). For more detail on the "transition to independence" career stage, please see: <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/mrc/skills-and-experience-needed-to-win-support/>.

It's also similar to the "New Investigator Award" offered by other UKRI Research Councils. For more information please see: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/mrc/guidance-for-applicants/types-of-funding-we-offer/new-investigator-research-grant/>

Q: Regarding the MRC-NIRG, would still be eligible if previously unsuccessful in applying for an EPSRC-NIA (where re-submissions are not allowed)? This is important for interdisciplinary researchers

A: Yes, but you should ensure your project is fully within MRC remit and it does not provide a proxy for an EPSRC application. You should also check the eligibility to ensure you continue to fulfil the criteria: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/mrc/guidance-for-applicants/types-of-funding-we-offer/new-investigator-research-grant/who-can-apply/>

Q: For the MRC NIRG, the research organisation support letter is now just a textbox and there is no file to upload. Content wise, is it essentially the same thing as a letter but just copy pasted into the text box? At what stage does the university research office verify it?

A: In essence it should be similar to previous letter of support from the research organisation; a clear statement of commitment and support from the research organisation to you and the project. The content is described in more detail in the TFS question. The research organisation will need to approve before the whole application is submitted.

Fellowships

Q: Can the supervisor be added to the application for Clinical Research Training Fellowship (CRTF)?

Supervisors for CRTF applicants should be added as part of the "Core Team" and labelled as "Professional Enabling Staff". There is a separate section to provide details of supervisors and the support they'll provide.

Q: How do we give editing rights to our project supervisor?

Co-editing rights at the moment are only available to research offices. So, supervisors currently don't have that co-editing access. This is something that will be introduced for future opportunities.

Q: Re the supervisor access is it possible to therefore have a blank application to see what is required for them as supervisor since the supervisor role is crucial

A: There isn't a blank application form that you can download. However, if you go into the funding finder, onto the specific opportunity you are interested in applying to and scroll down to the 'how to apply' section you can see all of the questions, guidance and word counts. It is exactly what is asked in the TFS application.

Q: Who should submit the application for a CRTF - the Fellow or the PI?

The application should be started and written by the Fellow, though of course supervisor(s) can support in writing it. The Research Organisation's Research Office will need to check the application and will ultimately submit the application to the MRC. Applicants should ensure they speak with their research office and allow them sufficient time to complete their checks.

Award Rates

Q: Typically, what percentage of applicants get shortlisted and invited to respond to comments?

A: It depends on which scheme you're interested in; you can get in touch with us stating the specific scheme you're interested in.

Q: For the MRC NIRG, typically what percentage of applicants get shortlisted and invited to respond to comments?

A: Thank you. Award rates vary slightly by opportunity. In the most recent year (FY22/23), award rates were between 21% and 28%. In general, around 50% were shortlisted and invited to respond to comments, but again this varies by opportunity.