

Unlocking the Full Potential of Nature-Based Engineering – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Can multiple applications be submitted from the same research organisation?

Yes. More than one application can be submitted from a single research organisation. However, individual applicants may only act as Project Lead on one application.

2. Can an individual be named on more than one application?

Yes. An individual may be named on up to two applications in total, but can only be Project Lead on one. For example:

- Project Lead on one application and Co-Lead on another, or
- Co-Lead on two separate applications.

3. Who is eligible to apply for this funding opportunity?

Applicants must form a team of two or more researchers from at least two distinct areas of expertise. The team must:

- include at least one researcher with an engineering background,
- you are strongly encouraged to include researchers from biosciences, environmental sciences, or other complementary disciplines,
- have a Project Lead and at least one of the following: Project Co-Lead (UK), Project Co-Lead (International), or Researcher Co-Lead,
- include at least one Early Career Researcher (ECR).

For full details, see the “What we are looking for” section in the call guidance.

4. How is an Early Career Researcher (ECR) eligible for the additional funding defined for this opportunity?

An ECR is someone who self-identifies as being at an early stage in their research career. EPSRC does not define ECR status solely by job title, years post-PhD, or career path. Applicants should use the narrative CV (Resume for Research and Innovation) to describe their career trajectory, achievements, and potential.

For this call, an ECR, who is eligible for the career development funding, is someone who has recently (over the last couple of years) moved to a permanent position and is just starting out in their independent careers.

For this call, both early career group leads and postdoctoral research associates (PDRAs) qualify as ECRs.

5. What is a Postdoctoral Research Associate (PDRA) in this context?

A PDRA is a postdoctoral researcher typically employed on a fixed-term contract, usually at 100% FTE, to deliver research on a project led by a group leader.

Different institutions may use other titles (e.g., research associate, research fellow, or research and innovation associate), but these are treated equivalently here.

6. Who qualifies as an ECR or PDRA who has “recently” moved into a permanent position?

This refers to researchers who have transitioned into a permanent position within the last 2 years, ensuring they are still considered early in their independent careers.

7. What is the £75,000 ECR development “bolt-on” and how should it be used?

Each proposal must include a mandatory £75,000 allocation within the £481,250 Full Economic Cost (FEC) limit. This funding is ringfenced for ECR/PDRA career development activities such as:

- laboratory visits (including consumables and mentoring staff time),
- training (courses, retreats, conferences),
- networking and secondments,
- mentoring and skills development.

EPSRC will fund 80% of the total FEC, up to £385,000. Proposals exceeding the FEC cap or omitting the £75,000 bolt-on will not be considered.

8. Can the £75,000 bolt-on be used to cover the ECR’s salary?

No. The bolt-on is not intended to cover ECR salary.

It may, however, be used to buy out short periods of time from other staff (e.g., technicians or research technical professionals) to provide training and mentoring for the ECR.

9. If I apply for this call, will I still be eligible for a New Investigator Award?

Yes. Applying to this funding opportunity does not affect eligibility for the New Investigator Award, provided other scheme-specific criteria are met.

10. Will applicants be able to submit a “right to reply” to panel comments?

No. This funding opportunity does not include a right to reply stage.

11. How will applications be prioritised and selected for funding?

Applications will be assessed by an expert panel and grouped into quality bands. Funding will be allocated as follows:

- Projects in the highest-ranked band will be funded first.
- If funding remains, projects in the next band may be selected by random allocation.

Only applications deemed fundable by the expert panel will be considered. This pilot approach combines rigorous peer review with fairness and transparency.

12. Can a PDRA apply as a project lead?

No. Under UKRI standard eligibility rules, project leads must be employed by an eligible research organisation at lecturer level or equivalent for the duration of the award. Postdoctoral research associates (PDRAs) are typically employed on fixed-term contracts and at 100% FTE on a single project. For these reasons, they are not eligible to apply as project leads.

13. Do PDRA's need to be named in the application, or can an unnamed PDRA post be costed?

PDRA's do not need to be named at the application stage. Applicants may request an unnamed PDRA post in the proposal, provided a clear development plan is included to demonstrate how the PDRA will be supported. If the application is successful, the post can then be advertised and appointed through the host institution.

14. Can I add a company to my project, and how should I list them?

Yes. A company can be added as a project partner if they are contributing resources, such as expertise, staff time, data, equipment or cash. Project partners cannot receive grant funding, apart from small exceptions like travel expenses, because they are expected to support the project in-kind or financially.

If you need to pay the company for specific deliverables, they must be listed as a sub-contractor, with their costs included in the project budget and paid from the grant. A company can appear as both a partner and a sub-contractor only if the sub-contracted work has gone through a formal, auditable procurement process run by the host institution.

15. Can an international collaborator be a Co-Investigator?

No. Standard UKRI rules apply: international researchers can only be included as Project Partners, unless they are based in one of the very limited countries eligible for UKRI international Co-Investigator status (which does not currently include Japan).

If you wish to recruit someone from overseas to a UK PDRA post, you may cost an unnamed PDRA in the proposal and recruit them later, subject to your organisation's normal recruitment and visa processes.

16. Do researchers from different disciplines need to be based in different departments or schools?

No. The requirement is for a team with complementary expertise, not necessarily from separate departments. As long as the team brings together different disciplinary backgrounds and the research is primarily engineering-led, it meets the requirement.

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