

# Doctoral landscape awards in medical research webinar FAQs

Please note similar questions have been consolidated for clarity.

For any further questions please contact [students@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:students@mrc.ukri.org)

Any queries regarding the system or the submission of applications through the Funding Service should be directed to the helpdesk: [support@funding-service.ukri.org](mailto:support@funding-service.ukri.org)

## **Expression of interest (EOI):**

<b>Under “DLA partnership details” could you please clarify if you mean only the academic/HE partners or any partners/organisations where students for example could conduct their collaborative placement.</b>	You only need to provide a list of Project Leads and Co-Leads at the EOI stage, not project partners.
<b>Given the limited time for internal selection before 8<sup>th</sup> Jan, can institutions submit more than one EOI and then subsequently select the one to go forward by 24 Feb?</b>	<p>The EOI is primarily for our planning purposes. We encourage you to submit an EOI that as closely reflects your final application as possible. We expect that the project leads and co-leads will largely be fixed between EOI and full proposal, but we accept that as plans evolve there can be a degree of evolution after submitting the EOI.</p> <p>The pre-announcement has been live for some time, so we believe this should have provided enough time for institutions to have the necessary internal discussions.</p>

## **Who can apply:**

<b>Can a University lead on more than one application?</b>	No. An organisation may only act as the project lead on one application.
<b>What is the maximum number of co-leads?</b>	<p>There is no limit to the number of Co-Leads.</p> <p>You must justify the structure and size of your consortium and demonstrate complementary strengths between members that will enable you to deliver</p>

	<p>across all areas of the proposed programme. Each member of the consortium must make meaningful contributions to the delivery of the doctoral landscape award and demonstrate that there is significant added value from their inclusion.</p> <p>We strongly encourage applications from multi-organisation consortia which build on existing partnerships or seek to build new partnerships.</p>
<b>Will bids coming from only a single organisation be disadvantaged?</b>	No. You may apply as a single research organisation where you can demonstrate sufficient capacity and infrastructure to deliver high quality training across your proposed programme.
<b>Please could you clarify your expectation for organisations to be involved in only one application... what would you consider to be strong enough justification for a nationally distributed consortium?</b>	<p>In general, organisations are not expected to be involved in more than one application, whether as a project lead or project co-lead. These rules apply to all applications, including those seeking to continue existing DTPs.</p> <p>Any exception must be discussed and agreed with MRC in advance of submitting an application. You would need to demonstrate there's a specific skills need and the only way to address that is by bringing together organisations that are distributed nationally. If the theme could be incorporated into one or more regional bids, then a national approach would not be justified.</p>
<b>Can a HEI lead on a DLA and also host a focal award?</b>	These eligibility criteria only apply to MRC doctoral landscape awards. An HEI may lead a DLA application while hosting other doctoral programmes, including focal awards, but this opportunity is only open to DLA applications.
<b>How many partners can be on an application?</b>	There is no limit to the number of project partners you may have on an application.
<b>What is the status of NHS trusts - would they be project co-leads rather than project partners?</b>	NHS Trusts are eligible for UKRI funding. If an NHS Trust was acting as the primary host for students, they would be a Co-Lead, otherwise they would be a project partner and would need to provide a letter of support.

<p><b>In your guidance you say that 'academia' can be project partners but they are eligible for UKRI funding so please can you clarify this point as we have other HEIs wanting to be project partners.</b></p>	<p>Academic institutions may act as a project partner as long as they are not acting as a principal host for students and providing they are making a specific contribution to support your doctoral training, for example access to facilities or equipment or specific training for students. If they are acting as a principal host for any students, then they must be a co-lead on the application.</p>
<p><b>I believe international partners are allowed in this funding opportunity - would they need to contribute to the project costs in the same way as UK partners? Can international partners be International HEIs?</b></p>	<p>International partners can be international HEIs and are expected to support your doctoral training through cash or in-kind contributions, as with UK partners.</p> <p>International organisations are only expected to act as collaborative studentship partners in exceptional circumstances where they can provide the student with an opportunity to gain skills not currently available in the UK.</p>

**Student eligibility:**

<p><b>Can international students be supported as part of the programme? Does the 30% international cap still apply?</b></p>	<p>In line with <a href="#">UKRI policy</a>, all studentships supported through this opportunity will be open to international students. However, the proportion of international students appointed each year must be limited to 30 percent of the total. In addition, only the home fee level can be claimed from UKRI training grants, and UKRI funding may not be used to cover the difference between the home and international fee rate.</p>
<p><b>Can this be used to train medical students or is this covered through NIHR?</b></p>	<p>This is possible providing they are undergraduate students and are not yet clinically active or undergoing clinical training and as such can be supported with a stipend rather than a clinical salary.</p> <p>We wouldn't expect any proposed programme to be aimed at those who are clinically active or undergoing clinical training as we have dedicated MRC <a href="#">clinical research training fellowships</a> for this.</p>

**Scope:**

<p><b>Please could you clarify: your call speaks explicitly about early diagnosis, advanced treatment and precision prevention. That's all quite translational. But it also speaks about the MRC remit which is extremely broad. Does this call intend to focus on diagnosis, treatment and prevention or not?</b></p>	<p>MRC aims to improve human health and drive economic growth through a mechanistic understanding of biology and disease, enabling earlier diagnosis, advanced therapies, and precision prevention.</p> <p>While you do not have to fit neatly into any one of these areas, or span across them, you must demonstrate that your programme clearly fits within MRC remit to support ground-breaking research into human health and disease. We fund fundamental discovery science through to the development and testing of new diagnostics, therapeutic interventions and preventive measures.</p>
<p><b>Is it possible in the current DLA, for a proposal to align with multiple MRC remit areas, which would result in a broad focus, if such broad focus aligns with the vision proposed? (students would be offered a broad range of project from research labs with a broad range of research interests). Or is a narrower focus encouraged?</b></p>	<p>You should make the case whether a broad or narrow focus is optimal, as it depends on where your organisation(s) can bring a unique offering based on the expertise and experience that you're bringing together.</p> <p>Your programme needs to have a clear identify and cohesion. It could be that you focus on a quite a tight scientific theme or challenge, or you could cover a wide variety of areas across MRC remit but tie it together with a specific skills theme or programme structure that clearly supports students across the remit.</p>
<p><b>MRC highlights the importance of cross-cutting digital and data skills within medical sciences, as well as commercialisation and entrepreneurial skills. Are there additional skills or capabilities that applicants should consider developing or embedding in their proposals?</b></p>	<p>We'd encourage you to look beyond those two areas specified in the opportunity guidance which should feature in all applications. Beyond this, you should identify and evidence skills gaps in your application and demonstrate that your organisation(s) has the right expertise to address them.</p>
<p><b>MRC highlight sharing best-practice for DTPs. Is there anything available from previous/current DTPs on what they consider best practice, what works well and what doesn't?</b></p>	<p>We've provided a link in the opportunity guidance to <a href="#">Good practice principles in recruitment and training at doctoral level</a> which collates best practice from across UKRI doctoral training investments.</p>

**Funding available:**

<p><b>How many DLAs are expected to be funded across the UK- will a portfolio approach be taken? How many students in total per submission would typically be expected?</b></p>	<p>The minimum cohort size that we will support is five students per year. There is no upper limit to the number of studentships you may request, but you should consider the total number of studentships available through this funding opportunity and be able to demonstrate that you have a sufficient supervisory capacity within your partnership to deliver across all the areas of the proposed training programme.</p> <p>We anticipate supporting up to approximately 200 notional studentships in total across all awards.</p>
<p><b>Should this application be for a 3 year programme or 5 years to include the possible two year extension?</b></p>	<p>This application should be for the initial three intake years.</p>
<p><b>It is deeply disappointing that the RTSG is unchanged given the massive increase in research costs. This in effect means most studentships have to be majority funded off other grants significantly.</b></p>	<p>Following uplift of stipends and fees announced in Jan 2025, work is ongoing to determine the full economic cost of doctoral students, which will include consideration of consumable levels.</p> <p>In addition to the minimum RTSG provided per notional studentship, MRC's <a href="#">flexible supplement</a> can be used to support high-cost training.</p> <p>Awarded training grants will have substantial flexibility in the use of funding which you can use to maximise the impact of this investment.</p>
<p><b>Is the studentship cost the fees and stipend as well as RTSG and travel, or just fees and stipend</b></p>	<p>Please see the full breakdown of funding available in the <a href="#">opportunity guidance</a>.</p>
<p><b>In the past we also had some MSc studentships funded via the MRC DTP scheme - is this something that is allowed or, if not, could this be considered again by the MRC in the future? MSc courses are an excellent source of high-calibre PhD applicants and are underfunded these days.</b></p>	<p>This funding cannot be used to support a standalone MSc. However, awardees will have flexibility with their four-year notional studentship allocation to deliver different programme models if appropriately justified, for example 1+3.</p>
<p><b>Can you clarify the 2K request per studentship for administrative support? Could this also be applied to match</b></p>	<p>This contribution is capped at £2000 per notional studentship awarded by MRC. It would not apply to matched studentships.</p>

<p><b>funded students? There seems to have been a significant reduction in the administrative support for the DLA.</b></p>	<p>For example, if you were awarded 10 notional studentships a year, you could request up to £20,000 per intake year, or £60,000 in total for the initial 3 intake years.</p> <p>This is the only allowable costs to cover programme administration. We acknowledge that this does not reflect the full cost of doctoral training programme administrative structures. Our approach has been changed to bring MRC in line with other UKRI doctoral training opportunities, and to ensure consistency across MRC investments – while this would represent a reduced level of support for some existing DTPs, it would be an increase for others.</p> <p>If you wish to request these funds, please describe in the capability to deliver section how your programme will be managed and administered and why you need this additional funding to help you deliver that.</p>
<p><b>For the Programme Management Funds - can they be put towards staff costs i.e. FTE for a programme manager?</b></p>	<p>Yes, these funds can be used as a contribution towards staff salaries related to core administrative positions delivering the doctoral landscape awards.</p>
<p><b>You've said that the 20-50% collaborative partner contribution could be used flexibly, for example to create additional studentships or for cohort activities. Could it also be used to support administrative/operational delivery costs?</b></p>	<p>Our expectation is that collaborative partner contributions benefit the jointly supported collaborative studentship. This will 'free up' some of MRC's funding allocated to that studentship to be used flexibly to enhance the wider cohort, which could for example be through cohort activities, enhanced support for high-cost studentships or additional studentships.</p> <p>As per <a href="#">UKRI training grant terms and conditions</a>, we would not allow any training grant funds – including those freed up by collaborative partner contributions – to be used to support administrative costs, beyond those incorporated into your fee level, and the specific £2000 per studentship contribution to administrative costs.</p>

### **Flexible supplement:**

<p><b>It will be useful to have an indicative value of the flexible fund (as rough amount per studentship).</b></p>	<p>We appreciate this can be challenging but at this point, we can't commit to an exact figure. In the past, DTP allocations have ranged from approximately £50,000 to £175,000 per intake depending on the size of the eligible MRC student population.</p> <p>What we're looking for in your application is principles – how you're going to administer the fund fairly and for the maximum benefit of the cohort.</p> <p>You should ensure that you have processes and approaches to deliver against the intention of the flexible fund, which is to enhance individual's professional development and onward career progression through unique training opportunities: please see current guidance on the use of the <a href="#">flexible supplement</a>.</p>
<p><b>Does the flexible fund figure when available get included in the notional costs when looking at the minimum contribution required from industry for iCASE studentships?</b></p>	<p>No, it does not affect the notional costs outlined in the opportunity guidance. The flexible fund is additional to the notional studentships amount and would be calculated post-award; the amount would be proportional to the size of the total population of MRC funded students affiliated with each consortium.</p>
<p><b>Can the fund for professional development provided by the awardee be contributed to by 'in kind' offerings eg AI training in an informatics department?</b></p>	<p>Yes. While there is no expectation matched funding from institutions, you may describe any 'in kind' contributions in your application.</p>

### **Match funding:**

<p><b>Please can you clarify the implications for this Call of the statement regarding Institutional matched funding in the 11 November 2025 cross-UKRI update on Research Financial Sustainability (<a href="https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/research-sustainability/">https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/research-sustainability/</a>)?</b></p>	<p>To note, training grants (grants that support doctoral training) are exempt from the institutional matched funding policy.</p> <p>Nonetheless, we're not expecting matched funding from institutions and it's not part of the assessment criteria.</p> <p>For those institutions that do have matched funding or in kind contributions, you may list</p>
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	this as part of setting out what your programme will look like as a whole.
<b>Must all studentships be co-funded by the MRC or could some partners (or 'affiliate' institutions) add in additional studentships if they become available?</b>	<p>To be considered an MRC student and therefore covered by the provisions in UKRI T&amp;Cs (for example sick leave) and be able to access resources such as the MRC flexible fund, studentships must be at least 50% funded by MRC.</p> <p>Students funded from other sources may be associated with the doctoral landscape award cohort but they would not be eligible for the provisions outlined above.</p>

### Collaborative studentships:

<b>Is there an expectation that all DLAs will offer CASE/collaborative studentships?</b>	<p>There is not a requirement that all bids include collaborative studentships.</p> <p>However, there <b>is</b> an expectation that opportunities to engage with non-academic partners are available to all students. One route could be via collaborative studentships and if that were not the case, we'd expect justification for how other approaches will ensure engagement with non-academic partners is embedded throughout the programme.</p>
<b>The Collaborative studentships are different from the iCASE studentships with respect to non-academic investment - has this been done in consultation with any major pharma partners etc that might need to invest the 20-50% of the studentships?</b>	<p>At the lower end, the new required contribution is similar to what we have previously required for iCASE studentships but we're providing more flexibility with how you can use it now.</p> <p>We consulted our advisory group on these changes, which does have industry representation.</p>
<b>Do we bid for a number of collaborative awards to be added or is there a target % for collaborative awards per cohort as for EPSRC DLAs?</b>	<p>There's not a target, beyond the minimum of the whole overall cohort not being below five.</p> <p>It's up to you to determine what you think you can support in terms of number of non-academic partners available and your ability to deliver collaborative studentships. It should be part of a wider consideration of what your programme can reasonably</p>



	support and how that's delivering against your vision.
<b>If a non-HEI Research Organisation is eligible for UKRI funding, but they want to do collaborative studentships, would they be limited to being a standard co-supervised project?</b>	<p>If a research organisation is eligible for UKRI funding they cannot act as a collaborative studentship partner.</p> <p>The intention is to provide students with distinctive research training and experience not available in an academic setting.</p>
<b>Do we need letters of support from industry partners?</b>	Yes, it's important to demonstrate that you have potential links in place to successfully deliver collaborative studentships, however we recognise that at this point it won't be possible to demonstrate every collaborative studentship partner that could be part of the programme.
<b>Industry Collaboration Framework (ICF) – would you require signed collaborations 3 months after the award of the DLA, or could this wait until the specific studentship is being developed for student recruitment? Is the template letter of support for the Industry Collaboration Framework still applicable?</b>	<p>Collaboration agreements can wait until the individual studentships are being developed.</p> <p>MRC does not need to view or approve collaboration agreements or specific ICF letters of support; it is the responsibility of the host research organisation to agree any intellectual property arrangements with the non-academic partner.</p>

#### **Equality, diversity and inclusion:**

<b>Do the MRC see post 92 partners being a key EDI driver as per BBSRC DLAs or more interested in other elements?</b>	We don't specify a particular approach. Our expectations are that you champion and embed equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) for students and staff, across all aspects of the training grant, including supervision, training design and approaches, and flexible student support.
<b>Are we allowed to ring fence studentships for students from under-represented backgrounds?</b>	UKRI's position on any positive action was set out in a <a href="#">policy statement</a> in January 2025 (see 2.52).

**Application and assessment:**

<p><b>Because word counts are tightly limited, applicants may want to summarise information in graphics and figures. However, the support documents discourage excessive use of figures (and words in figures), with a possible consequence of application rejection. How will you determine ‘excessive’?</b></p>	<p>Images should only be used to convey information that can't be put into words. Where graphs or figures are included, a few words are permitted where the image would lack clarity without the contextual words, such as a diagram, where text labels are required for an axis or graph column.</p> <p>Providing you're not using it as an opportunity to get around the word count then it's probably OK.</p>
<p><b>Will the Capability to Deliver section need to be completed as an R4Ri document?</b></p>	<p>No, you may complete this section in whatever format you feel best addresses the criteria.</p>
<p><b>Are letters of support required from project leads and co-leads?</b></p>	<p>Letter of support are not required from Project Lead or Co-Lead organisations – their commitment and contributions should be described in the ‘capability to deliver’ section of the application.</p> <p>Your application may be rejected if you upload any extraneous statements of support, other than those directly requested, to the ‘Project partners: letters (or emails) of support’ section or any other section of your application.</p>
<p><b>Is that a separate letter of support for all partners or can they all sign up to a generic single supporting letter of intent?</b></p>	<p>We would expect a separate letter of support from each project partner, explaining their commitment to the programme and the specific additional value they will bring to the programme.</p>
<p><b>That time frame allows minimal time for project selection and recruitment as they may start in October 2027 but many DTPs have calls out a year before.</b></p>	<p>We expect to announce outcomes over a year before the first students will start in October 2027, so we believe that should give sufficient time to enable project selection ahead of recruiting students.</p>

**Other:**

<p><b>Will there be an MRC DFA call in the future?</b></p>	<p>Our approach to doctoral focal awards is to consider strategic growth in the number of PhDs via co-funding of UKRI focal awards where this meets capacity needs identified</p>
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	by MRC's research boards. We don't have any confirmed upcoming opportunities and no plans for an MRC-specific focal award call.
<b>Given the deadlines for EOI and full bid aren't far away, why does it take MRC so long to respond to email queries? 10 working days is a long time to wait for an answer that needs a response</b>	Please do approach us with queries by e-mail. We will do our very best to answer them as quickly as possible, but please also give us a reasonable time to respond. We'll always do our very best to help.