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UK Obesity Research Institute

Applicant webinar

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UK-ORI Team

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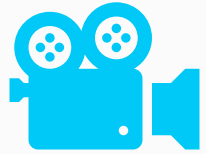
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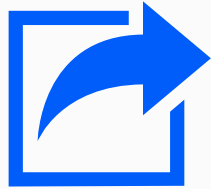
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Housekeeping



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This webinar will cover:

- 1) Key features of the UK-ORI
- 2) Research remit and scope
- 3) Training and skills
- 4) Applying for funding
 - Who can apply
 - Points to note
 - Assessment criteria
 - Assessment Timeline
- 5) Contacts
- 6) Questions and answer session



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Key features of the UK-ORI

UK-ORI: overview

- Led by: MRC in partnership with the British Heart Foundation (BHF)
- Inviting: Director-led applications to establish UK-ORI
- Focus: mechanistic biomedical drivers of obesity and related diseases e.g. cardiometabolic disease, to deliver transformative impact
- Aim: unlock understanding of the causes and consequences of obesity to enable targeted prevention and treatment
- Model: a central director-led research hub and partner research sites
- One award: up to £72 million, for an initial seven years and potential to renew

UK-ORI: Leadership

- Provide strong scientific and strategic leadership – UK-ORI to deliver international impact advancing the UK's position in obesity research
- Led by a director with an internationally recognised track record in large-scale research leadership and delivery in a relevant field
- Set and drive the institute's long-term vision and growth, including the development of strategic partnerships and future research directions
- Include support for the director's research programme, integrated within and contributing to the overall scientific vision of UK-ORI
- Establish an effective leadership and management structure to oversee day-to-day operations

UK-ORI: Model

- National, scalable institute centred on a director-led single-site hub
 - Delivering research providing overall scientific leadership, coordination, and strategic direction for the institute
- Collaborative multi-site structure
 - Partner research sites contribute complementary expertise and capabilities, playing a key role in the integrated co-development and delivery of the institute's vision and objectives
- Operate as a unified institute
 - Strong alignment and coordination across the hub and partner sites, ensuring a coherent approach to governance, research delivery, and achievement of strategic goals.

UK-ORI: Vision and approach to the challenge

- Deliver a bold, ambitious and innovative programme that addresses a major gap or opportunity in obesity
- Focus on significant unmet health needs, generating transformative advances in understanding, preventing or treating human disease
- Pursue a clear and compelling vision with specific, measurable objectives that can achieve major impact within the initial 7-year funding period
- Align with MRC, BHF and UK government priorities
- Position the UK at the international forefront of obesity research by harnessing expertise across the UK and fostering innovation, collaboration and capacity building
- Drive breakthrough, translational research through interdisciplinary, cross-sector approaches
- Build on existing UK and international investments

UK-ORI: BHF funding

- Up to £12 million over seven years to support a dedicated cardiovascular disease (CVD) research component
- Clearly describe how proposed research aligns with the BHF remit, particularly the links between obesity and cardiovascular health
- The BHF-funded element must:
 - address obesity-driven cardiovascular risk and disease, including underlying mechanisms, disease development, and novel therapeutic approaches
 - have a distinct, ambitious cardiovascular focus that adds significant value to the overall institute programme
- Delivery could include a dedicated CVD research theme



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Research remit and scope

UK-ORI: Research remit and scope

- Integrated, impactful research spanning fundamental biology, medicine and technology and addressing major scientific gaps or bottlenecks
- Mechanistic understanding of obesity and related diseases – biological pathways, dynamic human physiology, causal links to conditions such as CVD
- Translational and experimental medicine research – human proof-of-concept studies and target validation to test mechanisms and de-risk therapeutic targets
- Exemplar research areas: biological discovery; the behaviour-biology interface, obesity-related complications, safer and more sustainable weight-loss approaches (all informed by mechanistic understanding)
- Data driven and technology-enabled discovery

UK-ORI: What is not in scope

- Areas outside this funding opportunity include:
 - Broad, underlying societal and environmental factors contributing to obesity
 - Behavioural science alone without integration with basic biological mechanisms
 - Basic science, observational research or nutrition science which does not provide mechanistic insights
 - Longitudinal population studies and clinical trials beyond phase IIa
 - Proposals focusing predominantly on networking activities, or project type research grants components with no clear integration or added value



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Training and skills



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Training and skills

- UK-ORI is expected to play a significant national role in training and career development.
- Develop and enhance UK research capacity by providing strong multidisciplinary skills and training environments, particularly for early career researchers, and expanding research infrastructure to maintain the UK's position as a world leader in obesity research.
- Studentships may be requested for up to two studentships starting each year across the duration of the award (up to 14 studentships). Numbers should not exceed the supervisory capacity of the UK-ORI.
- Studentships are expected to be 4 years in duration, aligning with existing DTP/DLAs
- Prior to submission, applicants intending to include studentships must contact the office obesityresearchopp@mrc.ukri.org



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Applying for funding



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Who Can Apply

Institutions

- Open to institutions with standard UKRI Eligibility
- Organisations may be involved in multiple applications but can only lead one application
- International Organisations cannot lead a UK research site but can be involved where making an important research contribution
- Businesses & Charity/third sector organisations can participate as project partners but not Project Lead/Co-Lead

Individuals

- Must have relevant expertise & experience to lead/contribute to an internationally leading investment of significant scale
- May be involved in more than one application
- We welcome the involvement of Early Career Researchers within the application.
- **Directors** must show how they will strategically direct the investment, be actively engaged in the work and support a positive research culture

Please contact obesityresearchopp@mrc.ukri.org with specific eligibility questions

Application – Points to Note

- **Vision**

- Clearly define your challenge & its importance to the Obesity Research field.
- Ensure you convey how it aligns with MRC & BHF ambitions & its position in relation to other national & international research efforts.

- **Approach**

- Describe your research ambitions for the **full 7 years** and..
- ...provide **detailed research plans for the first 4 years** to provide confidence you have the tools, expertise, and methods to start undertaking this long-term challenge
- You should discuss how the research plans might evolve over the funding period what alternative approaches might be deployed should any new techniques, difficult or risky approaches fail.

Application – Points to Note

- **Approach to translational research**

- Applications should clearly articulate their vision for translational impact & expected progress including how early advances will lay the foundation for sustained impact beyond the funded period.
- Applications should outline the approach to industry partnerships & processes for identifying viable commercialisation pathways.

- **Partnerships**

- We expect applications to include appropriate partnerships (academic, industry, clinical etc.) and to leverage funding (including in kind) where possible.

- **Public Partnerships**

- All applications should include public partnerships (patient and public involvement and engagement - PPIE) in their research culture plans and research activities.

Application – Points to Note

- **Applicant & Team**

- The Expectation is that UK-ORI will be multi-site drawing on expertise across the UK/International were appropriate.

- **Leadership, Operations and decision-making**

- Ensure management plans are clear including how roles and responsibilities are shared and the approach decision-making and agility in response to new scientific development.
- Establish an independent strategic advisory board (ISAB) as part of its governance structure to provide critical advice and support to the director and leadership team.

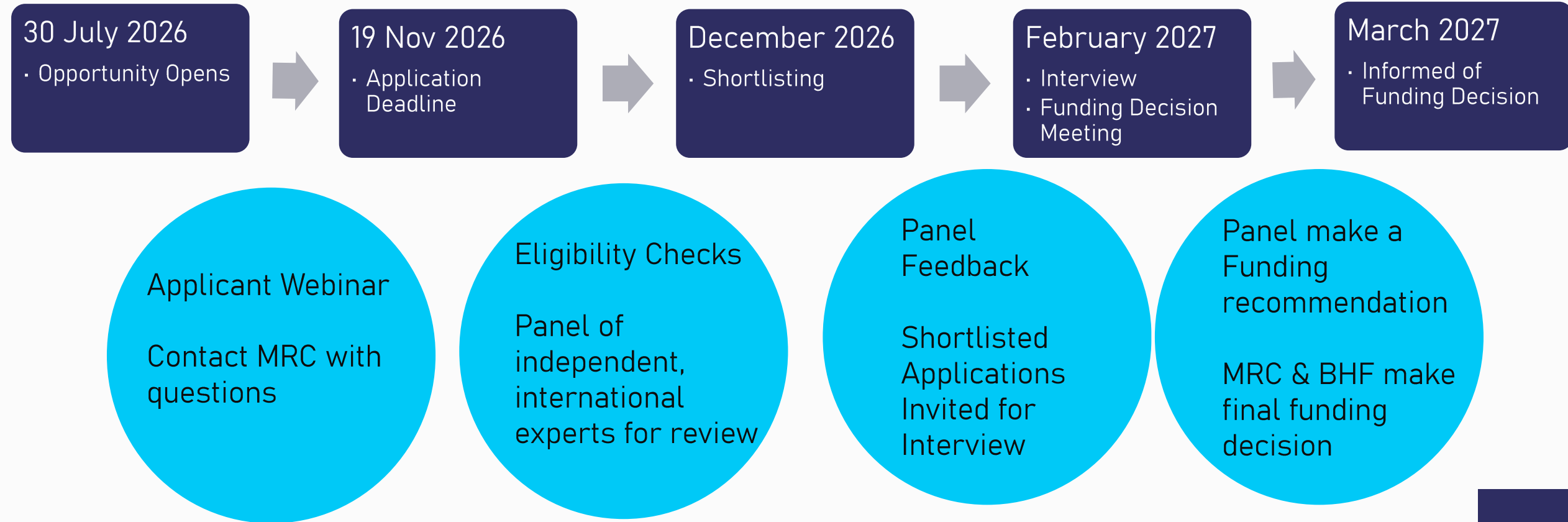
- **Research Culture**

- Look to build and sustain positive research culture, including committed leadership, support for career development paths, leadership training, mentoring, supervision and pastoral care

Assessment Criteria

Vision	strategy for influencing & advancing the field and delivering impact
Suitability of Director	and associated Leadership Team including experience & clarity of roles
Beacon of Excellence	nationally & internationally leading investment
Approach to Research Challenge	including monitoring of progress and measuring success, translational research, knowledge transfer and exchange, environmental sustainability, data management and sharing
Approach to UK-ORI Environment	including leadership, operations and decision-making, research culture, training, careers and capacity building and management of doctoral training
Capability to Deliver	including the director and leadership team's capability to deliver, your host research organisation(s), your partnerships and collaborations, project partners, project partners: letters or emails of support, and industry collaboration framework (ICF)
Ethical and responsible research and innovation considerations	including trusted research and innovation (TR&I), and ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)
Resources	resources and cost justification

Assessment Timeline



Contacts:

- Questions related to this specific funding opportunity please email obesityresearchopp@mrc.ukri.org
- General questions related to MRC funding including our funding opportunities and policy email: rfpd@mrc.ukri.org
- Queries regarding the submission of applications through the Funding Service should be directed to the helpdesk email: support@funding-service.ukri.org



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Questions and Answers

Question:	Answer
To what extent has the impact of GLP1R-based therapies been considered, e.g. in potentially decreasing the societal burden of obesity over the coming 5+ years? I think it's particularly interesting to consider how increased use of incretin-based therapies might change the food environment (and whether this could benefit those not taking these drugs). I also wonder how much the societal burden of obesity might change over the next 5+ years as GLP1R and multi-receptor agonists (presumably) become even more widespread. Should we be focusing on efficacy and biological variability in responses to these (including side effects), given their effectiveness?	Whilst the introduction and use of GLP1R-based therapies has been an important development over recent years, it has also generated a number of potential research questions. Improved mechanistic understanding of the health risks of weight loss drugs, to inform the development of safe and sustainable weight loss effects without requiring lifelong drug use, was provided as an example in the call text. However, the specific research challenges included in an application will be up to the applicant team (making sure that it falls within the scope of the funding opportunity).
Could you clarify whether a financial commitment from the host institution is expected as part of the application? If so, is there a typical level of commitment that would be considered appropriate for this call?	There is no requirement for matched funding from the institution(s) hosting UK-ORI, beyond any 20% FEC contribution. Please see the call text for more information regarding support from research organisations.
How should the application be costed given a detailed programme for first 4 years (where detailed costs can be provided) but then less detailed for years 5-7 (where more difficult to know exact costs)?	We would expect the first 4 years to have detailed costs as in any MRC application, the costs under each fund heading would need to be allocated within the application & an idea of how these costs will be assigned should be provided as well as how the leadership team will make decisions on the allocation of these costs. The director and their leadership team will have flexibility over use of the directly incurred funding within the total awarded, especially considering the award duration. Directly allocated and capital equipment funding are more constrained.
Will this call include direct funding for areas such as bioinformatics and genomics cores? I see both bioinformatics and genomics sit very well within the remit and scope, and they will be major components of the work required for this exciting UK-ORI research. However, it is unclear whether this is allowed or has been considered.	Direct funding for salaries, equipment, consumables etc. related to bioinformatics and genomics would be allowed. Please see the call text for more info on costs allowed.
What are the differences between this funding call and that of MRC CoREs? How similar to a CoRE is UK-ORI expected to be?	This call for a UK-ORI is quite separate to MRC CoREs which are funding entities with a distinct identity and brand. Whilst there are some similarities (articulation of an ambitious research challenge, outward facing partnership, training and research culture) the UK-ORI call differs in scale and scope and has a strong focus on the director who will be responsible for defining and driving the long-term scientific vision and strategy of the institute.

Question:	Answer
While I appreciate that underlying societal and environmental factors are not in scope, it's not clear to me how "a deeper, integrated understanding of the physiological and pathological mechanisms" will "reduce the impact of obesity on society". Do you have a theory of change?	The overall aim is to support the transformative underpinning biomedical mechanistic science that is needed to link into the broader obesity research landscape. A deeper, integrated understanding of the mechanisms underpinning obesity is likely to reveal how factors interact to drive disease risk and progression. This knowledge will contribute to identifying new targets for prevention and treatment, enabling the development of more effective and personalised interventions. Mechanistic understanding enables stratified prevention, precision medicine approaches, identification of critical life-course intervention points, and can point to more effective combinations of pharmacological, behavioural, environmental, and policy interventions. As more effective interventions are implemented, obesity prevalence and obesity-related complications decline, health inequalities are reduced, quality of life improves, and the societal and economic burden associated with obesity decreases.
What does existing national assets mean? Perhaps useful to know what assets MRC has in mind? Or not known?	We don't have a list of expected assets that the investment should be connected to. Applicants should ensure their investment connects to ongoing investments to ensure synergy, shared knowledge and avoid duplication.
Will the institute research the longevity of weight change; rates of weight recovery linked to the method of weight change, especially on cessation of treatment; increased risks of poorer health from weight cycling and the mental and physical health impacts of weight stigma?	All applications should include public partnerships (public involvement and engagement) in their research culture plans and research activities. Applicants should describe approaches to integrate meaningful public involvement and engagement into their research priorities and design as well as research strategy and delivery. The specific research included in an application will be up to the applicant team, within the scope of the funding opportunity.
Also, will the research include the lived experiences of people not attempting weight change alongside those who are, and for those contraindicated for current or future medications? How much PPIE and what sort of integration of PPIE is MRC looking for ? Was this a separate question? Or part of the question above. Where questions are similar/related they have been grouped into one row.	When considering conducting research with people with lived experience – further guidance can be found through Guidance on engaging the public with your research – UKRI

Question:	Answer
Do we need to have a full research programme for the full 7 years of the award?	Describe your research ambitions for the full 7 years and.....provide detailed research plans for the first 4 years to provide confidence you have the tools, expertise, and methods to start undertaking this long-term challenge
How can institutions not in a position to lead on a bid connect with potential leading institutions?	Through Gateway To Research - GtR which can be used to find out what research awards MRC has made in relation to obesity and metabolic research, including related conditions.
Can you please give specific information on the type of research that you are likely to fund?	This can be found in the 'What we are looking for' section of the call text – we indicate the scientific scope and also cover what type of research is not in scope.
As a clinician, what percentage of the time are we expected to allocate for research? This will change our job plan and will require advance planning.	For an Applicant-led opportunity, the clinician would normally just enter the percentage of their time committed to the project, and the host organisation confirms that the time can be provided.
How does the UK ORI determine what the critical root cause issues are that need addressing to best prevent obesity?	Regarding what obesity challenges UK-ORI might cover and specific questions on research content: UK-ORI's remit should focus on research into the biological origins, prevention, treatment, and health consequences of obesity, with a strong focus on elucidating underlying mechanistic pathways. Some aspects of novel methodology development may be included where this helps address a specific research question. We would not expect methodology research to be the major focus, however. We would expect applications from experts in the field to carefully consider the ambitions and research remit of UK-ORI (as specified in the call text) and to provide a well-justified and compelling case regarding specific key issues they wish to cover, what research will best address these and what expertise is required to do so. It important to remember that UK-ORI will deliberately not address all the challenges associated with obesity, which are broad and complex, and intersect across the whole of society. The aim is to support the transformative underpinning biomedical mechanistic science that is needed to link into the broader obesity research landscape.
Beyond the overview proposed, an idea if methods research with the aim of better understanding obesity and its evolution will be funded.	
How can we help the NHS to understand it can't solve the obesity problem, and must move to citizen centric supported self- management in collaboration with innovation active companies, community assets, universities and third sector to realise 'wellness as a service' benefits, remembering Nesta assessed the cost of obesity in Scotland in 2022 to be £5.2 billion (3% of GDP).	