**MRC Proximity to Discovery: Industry Engagement Fund**

**Guidance Notes for Applicants**

The aim of the Proximity to Discovery: Industry Engagement Fund is to provide flexible funding to support activities that will enable academic researchers to build relationships with industry partners. Many academic-industry collaborations are focussed on the delivery of specific project objectives and are developed as a result of a specific funding opportunity. The Proximity to Discovery: Industry Engagement Fund aims to address the bottleneck that can exist in the establishment of academic-industry partnerships by allowing researchers to develop collaborations at the very earliest stage of research so that, when funding opportunities arise, there is greater flexibility to respond quickly and develop successful applications. Short term people exchanges between industry and academia are seen as a key way of exchanging skills and knowledge and developing a longer term working relationship. Proximity to Discovery: Industry Engagement Fund can be used for people and knowledge exchange at the very earliest stage of a collaboration and may not necessarily be aligned to a specific project objective.

Applications to this scheme do not need to specifically address a translational aim. Examples of potential uses include:

* Projects/Events that will enhance academic understanding of industry or vice versa (e.g. needs, capabilities, business models).
* Initiatives to facilitate the further development of research outputs by highlighting collaboration/commercialisation opportunities to potential industry partners.
* Short-term people exchange activities that allow for an exchange of skills or knowledge which will enable new collaborative projects to develop.

The anticipated outputs from the scheme are:

* An increased number of new relationships with industry partners.
* Increased cross-sector/interdisciplinary collaborations.
* Greater understanding of industry research priorities and requirements for collaborations.
* The identification of industrial partners for downstream funding opportunities (e.g. Innovate UK, MRC DPFS, MRC CiC, Innovate UK KTP, SBRI, Horizon 2020 etc.) and development of collaborative project proposals.
* Increased commercial awareness and market understanding amongst researchers.

There will be three categories of activity supported by this fund to build relationships between the University and industry partners:

1. **People Exchanges/Secondments/Sabbatical Enhancement Grants**:

Funding can support outward staff exchange with new or existing partners.

* People exchange opportunities (whether principle investigator, research assistant or associate, technician, fellow or student) should be for those best placed to benefit and promote continued collaboration.
* Exchanges, which may be on a full-time or part-time basis, are not expected to exceed 6 months.
* In the case of outward-bound secondments of University staff, directly incurred secondee staff costs, travel and subsistence and costs associated with additional equipment/consumables required are eligible for support.
* Funding will only be provided for the academic partner and costs directly associated with hosting an industrial partner in the University setting. For inward-bound secondments of a member of staff from an industry partner to the University, the company will be expected to cover the salary costs of their employee. Any additional expenses incurred by the secondee (e.g. travel, subsistence) will however be reimbursed up to a maximum of £1k.
* Sabbatical Enhancement Grants will enable and encourage academic staff to engage with industry during their periods of sabbatical leave.
* Note that this funding is not intended to support staff exchange into a spin out company of Queen’s University.
1. **Relationship Development Pilot Projects:**

Funding is intended to support the development of relationships with new companies. Whilst applications involving existing university collaborative partners are also welcome, these will need to demonstrate why funding is required to further develop the relationship. Relationship Development Pilot projects do not need to be focussed on the delivery of specific technical objectives, but rather should seek to assist project partners in technical and business knowledge-exchange activities, so as to provide a sound platform from which to develop collaborative projects in the future.

1. **Seminars/Workshops/Industry Showcases**

Applications are welcome for initiatives that will provide a forum for increasing commercial awareness through knowledge transfer/exchange and networking. Applications are particularly encouraged for events that are will have broad applicability to a number of research areas and enable collaboration across disciplinary boundaries.

**Funding and Eligible Costs**

Funding is intended for activities that are innovative in approach and will result in the development of a new relationship or new collaborative research area. Applications must demonstrate the value proposition for both the partner and the University as a result of support from the MRC Proximity to Discovery fund.

The Proximity to Discovery scheme will support a range of small, medium and large-scale initiatives for industry engagement. Applicants should be aware that large-scale projects will only be funded where they represent exceptional value.

It is expected that the industry partner(s) will actively contribute to the project through provision of resources (e.g. finance, equipment/facilities, technical expertise, consumables). Industry Partner(s) must also provide a Letter of Support which clearly outlines their direct/in-kind contribution and provides details on the anticipated follow-up/next steps upon completion of the project. A Collaboration Agreement will be put in place which follows the principles and policies of a MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement (MICA). Please see [www.mrc.ac.uk/innovation/mrc-industry-collaboration-agreement-mica](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/innovation/mrc-industry-collaboration-agreement-mica) for further details. Industry partners should be made aware of these conditions.

Funding will be provided for **100% of Directly Incurred costs only**. Projects should be costed on a **full Economic Costing** basis, in consultation with the Faculty Finance office, and a pFact report produced.

Existing staff time will be considered as the university matched funding, with Overheads (i.e. Indirect + Directly allocated) covered by the School/Faculty and therefore acceptance of the proposal and approval of the cost model by the Head of School is required prior to submission.

**Eligible costs include**:

Staff costs (directly incurred)

Equipment and Consumables

Travel and Subsistence

Training and Development

Costs associated with hosting an event

**Ineligible costs:**

Purchasing equipment, the value of which is more than 15% of the budget

Work that would be likely to be funded entirely by the partner(s)

Attendance and travel to an academic conference

If outsourcing or consultancy support is required the university procurement procedures will apply, see: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/FinanceDirectorate/FinancialServices/Procurement/ProcurementObjectivesRegulationsProcedures/>

**Application Submission and Assessment:**

This is an Open Call, with applications invited from academic staff from 3rd October 2016 to 31st January 2017, please see the scheme schedule below. Applications will be assessed by the University’s MRC Proximity to Discovery Scheme’s panel. Funds will be allocated on a first come – first served basis until all funding has been committed.

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| Call Opens | Panel Review Deadline | Notification of Successful Applicants | Project Start from: |
| 3rd October 2016 | 31st October 2016 | 15th November 2016 | 1st December 2016 |
|  | 31st January 2017 (subject to funding available) | 15th February 2017 | 1st March 2017 |

All projects must be completed with budget allocations spent by 31st August 2017.

Successful applicants will be required to submit an interim report upon completion of the project and a final report providing updated information regarding outcomes and developments at the close of the scheme.

If you require advice and guidance prior to submitting your application and wish to **obtain an application form please contact**: Dr Karen McGeough in the Business Alliance Team, Research & Enterprise Directorate (k.mcgeough@qub.ac.uk, Tel: 028 90 971397)