

Research and Enterprise

# MRC Impact Acceleration Account – Guidelines

**Call opens 18 September and closes 30 October 2023**

## Background

Research and Enterprise invites applications for funding for projects relating to impact, commercialisation and external engagement. Additional funding has been received for the Medical Research Council (MRC) Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) and the closing date for this current call is **Monday, 30 October 2023**. This call will support several IAA projects. All projects must be based on previous or current research.

Applications will be open to members of staff in any School within the University that can satisfy four **essential criteria**;

1. Translational potential
2. Submitted an Invention Disclosure Form (IDF):
  - For Confidence in Concept projects an IDF must be submitted in advance of application
  - For Enterprise Fellowship applications an IDF must be submitted prior to the commencement of the project
3. The project must be able to start reasonably quickly
4. Completion Dates:
  - Confidence in Concept projects must be completed within 12 months of the start date
  - Enterprise Fellowships must be completed within 6 months of the start date
  - All projects must be completed (cost or spend incurred) by 03 March 2025

## Aims and Scope

The funding being offered must align to the MRC IAA objectives ensuring that fundamental science is translated into new therapies, diagnostics and medical devices. MRC's IAA aims to accelerate the transition from discovery science to the early stages of therapeutic and biomarker development and rapidly de-risk projects across the translational lifecycle, so that they become competitive for substantial funding bids from competitions or other sources.

The projects supported should aim to generate sufficient or critical preliminary data to establish the viability of an approach before seeking more substantial funding, for example, from the Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme (DPFS). The MRC IAA scheme is positioned as a steppingstone that can allow early-stage discoveries and technologies to build evidence that can attract larger-scale follow-on funding for development. Projects that fail to demonstrate a coherent translational and commercial pathway for their project are unlikely to be funded.

**Applications based on multi-/inter-disciplinary research are eligible and encouraged.**

## Funding opportunities

### Confidence in Concept (CiC) Fund

The overarching aim of the QUB MRC IAA is to strengthen our translational healthcare research portfolio, in line with the 'healthy living for all' theme of QUB's 'Strategy 2030'. Our objectives aim to address weaknesses identified through our recent QUB-CiC portfolio analysis, while strongly aligning with QUB's strategic goals which place emphasis on improving research culture, creating an inclusive research environment, enhancing research collaboration and driving impact.

The MRC IAA scheme aims to accelerate the transition from discovery science to the early stages of therapeutic, diagnostic, drug delivery, or medical device development by supporting early-stage technical development or feasibility studies that provide experimental validation of an emerging technology in one of the above sectors.

Projects should aim to strengthen our translational healthcare research portfolio, in line with the 'healthy living for all' theme of QUB's 'Strategy 2030'. Furthermore, and in line with MRC IAA objectives, projects should provide sufficient preliminary data to establish the viability of an approach – i.e. to provide confidence in the underlying concept before seeking more substantive funding from other sources for development of the technology or clinical intervention. Where possible, there is a particular emphasis on using MRC IAA funding as a lead-in to the MRC Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme / Developmental Clinical Studies (DPFS/DCS), although other equivalent schemes from other funders, or external investment from commercial partners may also be appropriate.

Funding of up to £75,000 may be awarded for each project. Typically, this will allow for a 12-month PDRA/RA contract plus consumables.

### Enterprise Fellowship (EF) Fund

A key challenge for commercialisation and delivering impact is the difficulty in releasing a dedicated individual within QUB to drive the project at the early stages. EFs will facilitate knowledge transfer and commercialisation activities, enhance business awareness/engagement, seed longer term collaboration and enrich career development.

Please note that, while ECRs/PDRAs are encouraged to apply and will be named as a Co-I, for the purposes of administering the award, the person named as Principal Investigator should be a permanent member of staff. Therefore, all applications should be supported by an academic. The proposed fellow will need to detail the technology or opportunity they will work on and prepare a personal statement as to why they should be funded through an IAA Enterprise Fellowship. This should cover what their plans are from a personal perspective, how they see the technology or opportunity developing and the further funding sources they will be targeting.

All EF applications must involve an external partner. There is an expectation of cash/in-kind contributions to be provided by this partner which are tailored to the specific project and the proposed fellow's professional development.

The application will have to detail the spending plans, there would be an expectation that the majority would be towards salary costs with some for consumables but a portion would be allocated towards career development support and associated professional development activities.

Projects that are able to utilise other internal funding and/or external funds would be prioritised. It would be expected that outcomes would include securing an external Fellowship, formal collaboration with industry, commercial licensing of protectable IP, creating a spin out company or becoming an entrepreneur.

Applications that are looking to extend research projects or that are targeting outputs of only research papers or future research grant applications are unlikely to be successful.

Funding of up to £20,000 may be awarded for each project, to cover a maximum six-month period.

## Expectations and Requirements

### Confidence in Concept (CiC) Fund

- All applicants are required to engage with the Commercial Development team. **CiC applicants must submit an Invention Disclosure Form to the Commercial Development Manager at least **two weeks in advance of application**.** This will allow the Commercial Development to assess and discuss the translational/ commercial plan or any other aspect of your MRC IAA project before submission. Failure to submit an IDF in advance will deem your application void.
- Successful applicants for the **CiC fund** will be required to attend an **Innovation Training Programme**. A tailored programme has been designed to provide support for researchers to engage and develop partnerships with the life sciences sector, equipping individuals with skills to network/negotiate effectively, and understand in more detail how Industry-Academia Collaborations work. It incorporates a session delivered by DPFS panel members, and provide training on intellectual property, IDF/patent process, project management essentials and detailed information on further funding opportunities.

- **9-month project review meeting.** Successful applicants for the **CiC fund** must provide brief quarterly updates and a 9-month project report in advance of their attendance at a review meeting. All projects will be reviewed by the Research Innovation Translation Committee (RITC) who will provide recommendations for next steps. Failure to do this may result in the applicants becoming ineligible to apply for future MRC IAA funding.
- **Future reporting.** Post project completion each successful applicant must complete an end of project report including plans for the next stage of development, one month following the completion date, and annually provide update reports on commercial and translational progress, project progress, income from funding sources and amount obtained. An updated translational and commercial pathway will also be required, and successful applicants are required to contact the Commercial Development to ensure that their IDF is up-to-date.
- It is important to note that the purpose of these awards is about the translational and commercial potential that they can have. Applicants must complete a question (Section 10 in the application forms) around describing potential work packages and milestones that might form the outline of a MRC DPFS grant application to follow up a successful MRC IAA project. In addition to future technical work and approximate funding level, it may be helpful to think about what types of industry or clinical partnership which might be required for the next stages, and if not already secured and protected, where intellectual property might reside.

For clarity, please note that while these sections must be completed within the applications, it will not be obligatory for awardees to actually make a follow-up DPFS application where an alternative route to funding is more appropriate. These could include a UKRI or charitable research grant, Invest NI POC award, Wellcome Trust funding scheme, sponsored research, out-licencing or formation of a spin-out company. These plans should be updated following the completion of the project and detailed in the end of project report, see above.

## Enterprise Fellowship (EF) Fund

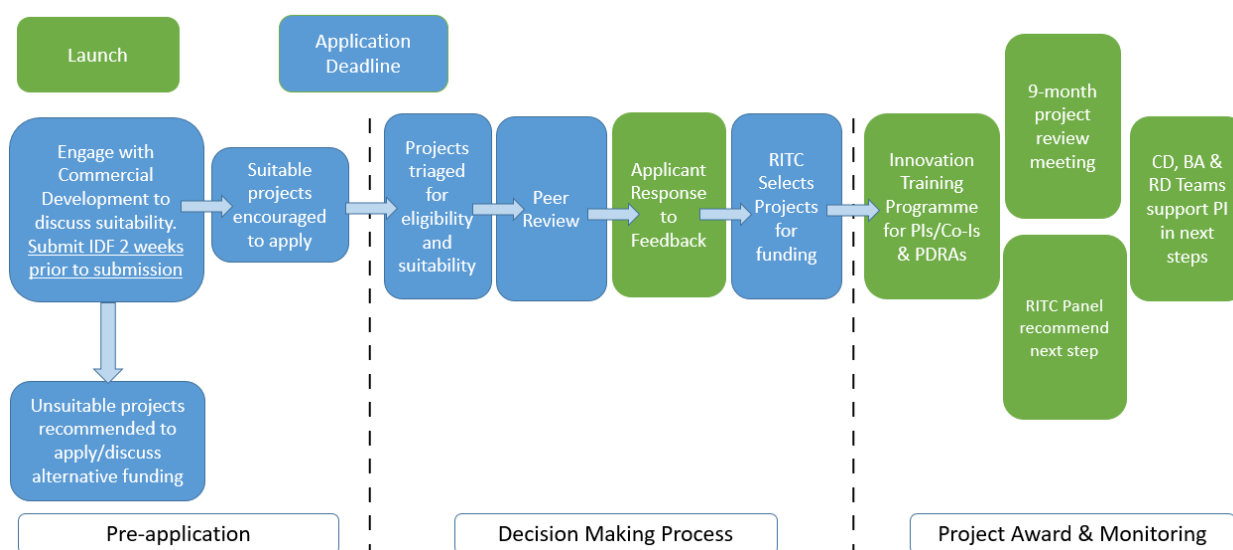
- **Invention Disclosure Form.** For **EF applicants**, while an Invention Disclosure Form is not required when submitting an application, applicants whose submissions are deemed fundable by the panel must submit the appropriate IDF for consideration prior to confirmation of funding award and subsequent project commencement.
- **Future reporting.** Post project completion each successful applicant must complete an end of project report including plans for the next stage of development, one month following the completion date, and annually provide update reports on commercial and translational progress, project progress, income from funding sources and amount obtained. An updated translational and commercial pathway will also be required, and successful applicants are required to contact the Commercial Development to ensure that their IDF is up-to-date.

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## Application process and project process

### Confidence in Concept Fund



**All applicants must submit an Invention Disclosure Form (IDF) at least 2 weeks prior to application submission.** The IDF can be downloaded [here](#). Contact Maria Colligan (m.colligan@qub.ac.uk) in the Commercial Development Team for more information.

All applications should be registered on the Research Application System (RAS). Applicants should work with the relevant Faculty Finance Office to calculate project budgets. **Please be in contact with your Faculty Finance Office at least 5 days in advance of the call deadline and must include a RAS number in their application.**

Applications should be submitted through the appropriate online application form, which can be accessed via the [website](#). Word versions are available to facilitate application preparation. Pre-submission conversations with the Commercial Development Team are strongly encouraged. Please contact [iaa@qub.ac.uk](mailto:iaa@qub.ac.uk) and include 'MRC IAA' in the subject line, and we will help set up an appointment with a member of the Commercial Development Team.

Eligible applications will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- Likely progress along developmental pathway or in translation
- Evidence of innovation/novelty in the scientific approach
- The quality of the project plan
- Likelihood of Commercial Impact and/or attracting further funding

Applications will be assessed by external and internal reviewers. Reviewer comments will be shared with applicants, who will have an opportunity to provide a one-page response, prior to a final decision being made by the MHLS Faculty Research Innovation & Translation Committee (RITC) IAA-panel.

**It is expected that the outcome of the call will be announced approximately 6 weeks after the closing date.**

### Enterprise Fellowship (EF) Fund

While an Invention Disclosure Form (IDF) is not required when submitting an application to the EF Fund, an award cannot be confirmed and the project commenced without a corresponding IDF being logged with the Commercial Development team. The IDF can be downloaded [here](#). Contact Maria Colligan ([m.colligan@qub.ac.uk](mailto:m.colligan@qub.ac.uk)) in the Commercial Development Team for more information.

All applications should be registered on the Research Application System (RAS). Applicants should work with the relevant Faculty Finance Office to calculate project budgets. **Please be in contact with your Faculty Finance Office at least 5 days in advance of the call deadline and must include a RAS number in their application.**

Applications should be submitted through the appropriate online application form, which can be accessed via the [website](#). Word versions are available to facilitate application preparation. Pre-submission conversations with the Commercial Development Team and Maeve Murphy (Business Alliance Team) are strongly encouraged. Please email [iaa@qub.ac.uk](mailto:iaa@qub.ac.uk), and include 'MRC IAA' in the subject line.

Eligible applications will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- Likely progress along developmental pathway or in translation
- Evidence of innovation/novelty in the scientific approach
- The quality of the project plan
- Likelihood of Commercial Impact and/or attracting further funding

Applications will be assessed by MHLS Faculty Research Innovation & Translation Committee (RITC) IAA-panel. **It is expected that the outcome of the call will be announced approximately 4 weeks after the closing date.**

## Required Documentation

The following documents should be uploaded to all online applications unless otherwise indicated:

- Details and approx. value of any funding contribution from external partner(s) (Mandatory for EF applications)
- Gantt chart or work plan of the proposed project activities (max 1 sides A4)
- A personal statement (Mandatory for EF applications only)
- Project Description, a ONE A4 page containing figures and legends may be uploaded (CiC applications only)
- A breakdown of funding requested, including cost and information on the following:
  - Salary (and associated superannuation and NI contributions)
  - Sub-contracting
  - Consumables
  - Other (please specify)
- Email communication confirming support for the application from the Head of School or School Director of Research
- Email communication confirming support for the application from any external partner (Mandatory for EF applications)
- Any further information to support your application, such as details of, and references to, any partner organisations and letters of support, quotes / emails from service or equipment providers, further details on your proposal, and any ethical approval which may be required for your proposal

## Permitted & non permitted activities & costs

IAA funding can enable multidisciplinary working and engagement activities with external partners, including other research organisations, industry and public or third sector organisations that do not hold an IAA. Any activity or project supported by the MRC IAA should be at least 50% within the remit of MRC. If you have a proposed activity that spans more than one IAA please do email [iaa@qub.ac.uk](mailto:iaa@qub.ac.uk) to discuss.

Permitted Cost/Activity	Detail
100% direct costs	<p>Directly incurred and directly allocated projects costs can be claimed, this includes staff time and travel and subsistence.</p> <p>For the EF the majority of the funding should cover the ECR, PDRAs salary, minimal IAA funding should be utilised for project running costs, travel, etc.</p> <p>All applications should be registered on the Research Application System (RAS). Applicants should work with the relevant Faculty Finance Office to calculate project budgets. Please be in contact with your Faculty Finance Office at least 5 days in advance of the call deadline.</p>



Engagement, knowledge exchange, training and culture change activities	
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## Non-permitted costs/activities

Activity/Cost	Detail
New research	New, fundamental research
Duplication of support	Impact activities that should already have been anticipated and supported through standard routes, e.g. impact activities costed as part of basic research proposals, CDTs Duplicate other sources of funding that can be used more appropriately for the impact activity within remit of Research Council i.e., CLASP/IPS
Public engagement	Non-Specific Public Engagement activities and science communication. However, IAAs will support public engagement where interaction is key to informing the research impact such as user or patient engagement as a critical pathway to achieving societal and/or economic impact
Training	Undergraduate activities, core PhD training including tuition or bench fees, Masters training
IP Management	Any costs relating to Intellectual Property protection including but not limited to registering, maintaining or supporting patents or property rights
Equipment	Equipment with a value of £10,000 or more
Other	Indirect costs or estate costs at the research organisation Contributions to KTPs

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The UKRI and Queen's is committed to EDI, and it is an important consideration for all IAAs. You can find out more about UKRI's commitment to EDIs on their [website](#). For MRC IAA projects, applicants should reflect on all aspect of EDI and how they are acknowledged and adequately addressed within their working environment, particularly in relation to decision making; how they will ensure that project design/development recognises their team's diversity and commonality and that of their wider stakeholder landscape; and how funded activities are carried out.

## Responsible Innovation

As detailed on the UKRI [website](#), Responsible Innovation refers to: *'a process that takes the wider impacts of research and innovation into account. It aims to ensure that unintended negative impacts are avoided, that barriers to dissemination, adoption and diffusion of research and innovation are reduced, and that the positive societal and economic benefits of research and innovation are fully realised.'* This is an area of growing emphasis for UKRI, and therefore applicants are asked to consider the principles of Responsible Innovation, namely



the wider impacts of their projects, when developing their project design/development, i.e. not just how something is done but whether it should be done.