# QUB MRC Impact Acceleration Account

APPLICATIONS CURRENTLY OPEN ON A ROLLING BASIS

Guidance Notes
Terms and Conditions

## Background

Queen's University Belfast invites applications for funding through the Medical Research Council (MRC) Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) to support impact-driven research, commercialisation, and external engagement. Funding applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, subject to availability, and the call may close or pause depending on submission volume and quality. All applications must be based on previous or ongoing research and outlined activities must be completed within six months of their start date, with final spending by end of December 2026.

Applicants must be full-time staff members from any School within the University and meet essential criteria, including demonstrating translational potential and, in some cases, submitting an Invention Disclosure Form (IDF). Collaborative proposals involving researchers from different Schools or industry partners are encouraged but not mandatory.

## Aims & Scope

The MRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) supports the translation of fundamental scientific discoveries into real-world healthcare applications. Work packages should address unmet clinical or technological needs, follow a clear developmental pathway, and demonstrate strong potential for translational and commercial impact. Industrial collaboration—whether direct or in-kind—is strongly encouraged.

Funding is intended to support discrete, well-defined **translational step** or **critical experiment** that are achievable within the funding period and **clearly aligned with a developmental trajectory**. The activity must be central to advancing a wider research effort towards implementation or commercialisation and should be designed to enable specific outcomes—such as de-risking a key step or generating data to support follow-on funding (e.g. MRC DPFS).

Eligible research areas include:

- Therapeutics
- Diagnostics
- Medical devices
- Digital healthcare technologies
- Healthcare data solutions.
- Current Funding Opportunities

### *Translational Catalyst Fund*

The Translational Catalyst Fund provides seed funding to address a key challenge within the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences: securing early-stage support to advance *novel ideas* toward proof-of-concept and follow-on funding. This early validation is critical for demonstrating the *translational and commercial potential* necessary to attract further investment.

The fund is designed to support focused translational activities that deliver meaningful impact—whether through clinical, commercial, or patient benefit. In contrast to previous schemes such as

Confidence in Concept (CiC) which supported broader early-stage exploration, this fund focuses on a **clearly defined activity** that provide critical validation or development needed to unlock the next stage—such as concept validation, prototype development, or generation of translational data.

Applicants must clearly outline how the proposed translational activity fits within a broader development pathway, including the intended next steps if the work is successful. This could involve positioning for more substantial translational funding schemes such as the MRC Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme (DPFS), NIHR i4i, or similar mechanisms.

Awards of up to £40,000 are available for defined activities lasting 3 to 6 months. The requested amount should be aligned with the specific development needs and objective of the proposed activity.

The fund prioritises clearly scoped, high-impact translational activities that can generate targeted outputs and instil confidence in a project's potential for progression. Proposals based on broad research programmes, general lab support, multiple or loosely connected work packages will **not** be prioritised.

**Please note:** Applications that are focused solely on bridging salaries for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) without a clear translational step or activity to advance the project will not be considered eligible. If the majority of the work is developed by and intended to be led by an ECR, we encourage applying through the Early Career Translational Fellowship (ECTF) Fund instead.

### *Early Career Translational Fellowship (ECTF) Fund*

The Early Career Translational Fellowship (ECTF) Fund supports Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and postdoctoral researchers (PDRAs) who are working on translational research with a clear potential for real-world application. The fund aims to enable promising researchers to take a significant step forward in their careers by providing the necessary support for conducting key translational activities or critical experiments that will help to progress their research toward commercialisation, industry collaboration, or external fellowship funding.

For administrative purposes, the principal investigator named in the application must be a permanent academic staff member, while the ECR or PDRA should be named as a co-investigator. The applicant should include a personal statement outlining how they envision the technology evolving, their target funding sources, and how this opportunity will support their career development. This should explain how participation in the project will advance their research trajectory, build skills, broaden networks, and move them toward research independence or leadership within their field.

Funding is available across three strands:

1. **Partnership Fellowship (£20,000, 3–6 months):** This strand is designed to foster collaborative translational research by pairing early career researchers with an external partner from industry, healthcare, or other relevant sectors. The external partner must contribute matched funding, either as cash or in-kind support (e.g., access to facilities, expertise, or data). This partnership ensures alignment with real-world needs and enhances the potential impact and commercial viability of the research. The Fellowship provides resources to undertake critical

experiments, validation work, or proof-of-concept activities that will strengthen the collaborative relationship and pave the way for further joint funding or commercial agreements.

Key expectations:

- Demonstrated commitment from an external partner contributing matched support.
- Research activities aligned with partner priorities and market needs.
- Clear pathway to deepen collaboration, such as joint grant applications, licensing, or product development.

2. Translational Fellowship (£40,000, 3-6 months): This strand supports early career researchers who are conducting translational research independently, without a formal external industry or partner involvement. It is ideal for projects where the researcher needs dedicated time and resources to generate pivotal data, optimise technologies, or undertake critical validation steps that will enhance the technology's readiness for commercialisation or further funding applications. This Fellowship aims to accelerate the transition of promising discoveries from the lab toward practical application, enabling researchers to strengthen their translational skills and advance their career development.

   Key expectations:

   - A clear translational objective targeting a specific unmet clinical or market need.
   - A focused, well-defined milestone that delivers a tangible output (e.g. critical data or a prototype) to help de-risk the opportunity.
   - Strong rationale for subsequent funding applications, industry engagement, or commercial pathways.

3. Emerging Talent Fellowship (£40,000, 3-6 months): This strand is designed for promising early career researchers who show exceptional potential in translational research and require flexible support to advance their research and careers. Unlike other fellowship strands, the requirement to submit an Invention Disclosure Form (IDF) for this Fellowship is flexible, allowing researchers greater adaptability in managing intellectual property considerations during early translational stages. Funding can be used to support salary, consumables, training, or networking activities that build translational skills and career development. The goal is to nurture emerging talent and help researchers prepare for future external fellowship funding or industry partnerships.

   Key expectations:

   - Applicants with clear career development plans focused on translation.
   - Translational activity to support research with strong potential for real-world impact and progression.
   - Flexibility around IDF submission to support early-stage innovation management.

Fellowship funding primarily covers salary costs, with some allocation for consumables and career development. Successful activities should lead to external fellowship funding, industry collaboration, commercial licensing, or spin-out creation.

## Application Process

Applicants are strongly encouraged to participate in the MHLS Signposting Initiative before submitting a full application. This initiative provides a valuable opportunity to present your proposal to an internal panel and receive constructive feedback to strengthen your application.

### *MHLS Signposting Initiative*

Applicants register to attend a Signposting Session, where they present a **concise 5-minute elevator pitch** focused on the key translational step or critical experiment they plan to undertake. This should be a tightly scoped, achievable activity that is central to advancing the project and unlocking follow-on funding opportunities. To keep pitches clear and impactful, we recommend structuring presentations using three slides only:

1. A brief context and wider research objective, avoiding lengthy background details.
2. The core translational activity or experiment driving progress—this is the specific, fundable activity that IAA funding is intended to support.
3. Where this activity fits within the wider translational pathway, including immediate next steps and plans for follow-on funding etc.

Following the session, applicants receive constructive feedback and guidance from a multidisciplinary panel. The goal is to help refine proposals to maximize the chances of success with IAA funding applications. If appropriate, applicants may also be advised on alternative funding routes better suited to their current project stage.

### *Full Application Submission*

Applicants submit their full proposals via MS Form and including via the Research Application System (RAS) upon readiness. Collaboration with the Faculty Finance Office is required to finalise budget calculations before submission.

**Please note:** A 20% VAT reverse charge will normally apply to costs from international collaborators who are not UK "eligible bodies" under the VAT Act 1994. This includes non-UK universities as well as commercial partners. If your subcontractor or collaborator is an international business or non-UK HEI, you must include the additional 20% in your budget at application stage to avoid a funding shortfall. UK HEIs and qualifying UK non-profits are generally exempt. If you are unsure whether your collaborator is eligible or VAT will apply, please contact Research Finance.

*Assessment*

Applications are reviewed by the MRC IAA panel, evaluating:

- Clarity and significance of the key translational step or experiment
- Translational potential and impact
- Clear articulation of the wider translational pathway, including how the proposed activity positions the work for follow-on funding
- Overall project quality and value for money
- Anticipated commercial or implementation outcomes

The MRC IAA lead reviews panel feedback and confirms final funding decisions.

*Eligibility of named researchers*

Named researchers on MRC IAA-funded activities must be employed at postdoctoral level or equivalent and must be formally employed by Queen's University for the duration of the funded activity. Individuals who have not yet completed a PhD (e.g. undergraduate or taught postgraduate students) are not eligible to be costed as named researchers under directly incurred staff time. Any exceptions or non-standard appointments should be discussed with both your School and the IAA team in advance.

*Pre-Award Requirements and Management:*

All necessary ethics, governance approvals, and legal agreements (e.g., collaborative research agreements) must be secured before project commencement. Activities must start within 60 days of award notification and be completed by the agreed end date unless exceptional circumstances arise. Award holders are responsible for managing spend according to best practice to ensure delivery against the approved plan. Any overspend will not be covered by the MRC IAA and remains the responsibility of the applicant or their host department.

## Post-Award Expectations & Reporting Requirements

Following the award applicants are expected to participate in the Innovation Training Programme. A final report is due within one month of activity completion, detailing next steps, funding strategy, and progress in commercialisation and translation. These updates are crucial for aligning activities with the goals of the MRC IAA Fund and informing future funding decisions. Additionally, all MRC IAA recipients may be called upon to provide annual updates on project progress and related funding secured to align with UKRI reporting requirements.

In addition, award holders are expected to participate in the MRC IAA Panel Network as part of their obligations. Members of the panel network will be contacted periodically to provide input on applications or to contribute to short advisory sessions relevant to their expertise. The network

comprises two complementary roles. The Assessment Panel requires members to review and score applications and provide advice on funding decisions. The MHLS Signposting Panel may invite members to participate in short advisory sessions, typically around two hours, to provide guidance to applicants and help strengthen translational projects. While participation is flexible, award holders are expected to contribute where their expertise aligns with the applications under review, thereby supporting the wider IAA programme and informing future funding decisions.

## Eligible & Ineligible Costs

*Eligible Costs*

- Direct costs: Staff salaries, travel, subsistence, and consumables directly associated with delivering the translational activity.
- Equipment: Small items essential for the activity, costing less than £10,000.
- Early-stage validation activities, such as prototype development or proof-of-concept studies.
- Costs associated with industry collaboration, including consultancy fees and partnership development.
- Training and development, particularly where it enhances the translational impact of the activity.
- Regulatory and ethical approvals, where necessary for progressing translational research.

*Ineligible Costs*

- New fundamental research, including exploratory studies without translational focus.
- Staff salary bridging funds, where the intent is to cover gaps in employment (if the majority of the work will be led by an Early Career Researcher currently on the project, we encourage applying through the Early Career Translational Fellowship route).
- Activities already funded through standard academic grants
- Public engagement and science communication, unless directly tied to impact generation.
- Undergraduate, PhD, or Master's tuition or training costs.
- Intellectual property (IP) protection costs, including patent filing and legal fees.
- Large equipment purchases, exceeding £10,000.
- Indirect and estate costs, as these are not covered under the IAA funding.
- Funding for industrial partners, including their staff and internal costs.
- Spin-out staff exchange programs, which fall outside the scope of this funding.

## Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

Queen's University and UKRI are committed to embedding EDI throughout all research funding activities. Applicants should consider how their project addresses EDI in practice, including the composition of the project team, the inclusiveness of decision-making processes, and the engagement of stakeholders or participants. It is important to reflect on whether the project benefits under-represented groups, how inclusion has influenced the design and delivery of activities, and whether any aspects of the project could inadvertently exclude certain groups. Consideration of EDI

should extend to methodology, access routes, and intended outcomes, demonstrating that inclusion is actively embedded throughout the project.

## Responsible Innovation

Responsible Innovation involves reflecting on potential societal, environmental, and ethical impacts, minimizing unintended negative consequences, and supporting the wider dissemination and adoption of research outcomes. It also encompasses consideration of longer-term responsibility and sustainability. Applicants should consider how stakeholders are engaged throughout the project and whether the work could have unintended implications, as well as how these might be addressed. Thoughtful reflection on the longer-term benefits, risks, and responsibilities of the project is central to embedding Responsible Innovation in research and innovation practice

## Governance

The MRC IAA is overseen through a structured governance framework that ensures expert assessment and strategic oversight of translational research activities. The MRC IAA panel network brings together experienced researchers and Research and Enterprise staff, providing a combination of academic and translational expertise. The panel is responsible for reviewing and assessing applications, ensuring that decisions align with the programme's strategic objectives and maximise the impact and translational potential of funded research.

## Pre-application advice

Applicants can discuss a proposal and get advice prior to attendance at signposting from the MRC IAA management team. Please contact Emma Doherty (Impact Acceleration Officer) at emma.doherty@qub.ac.uk