

Research and Enterprise
MRC Impact Acceleration Account – Guidelines

**APPLICATIONS CURRENTLY OPEN (subject to funding availability) ON A ROLLING BASIS**

**\*Spending deadline: 02 Feb 2026** – All projects must complete their spending by this date, so please plan your project timeline accordingly.

**Please Note: It is strongly recommend that IAA applicants attend an MHLS Signposting Session** to receive valuable guidance on their applications and explore available funding avenues. These sessions provide an excellent opportunity to receive expert feedback on your application, refine your approach, and ensure your project is positioned for maximum impact. By attending, you'll be able to align your research plans with available funding opportunities, gain insights into how to strengthen your proposal, and ensure that your project is in the best position for funding allocation and future success. You can find more information and register for a session using the following links:
**More information**: <https://qubstudentcloud.sharepoint.com/sites/int-re/SitePages/MHLS-Signposting-Initiative.aspx>
**Registration**: <https://forms.office.com/e/FdELuTiUBb>

## 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 this call will remain open on a rolling basis, subject to the availability of funds. Applications will be reviewed periodically, and **the call may close or be paused at any time based on the volume and quality of submissions.** 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):
* Mandatory for **Translational Catalyst Fund** applications, ideally submitted 2 weeks in advance of application
* Early Career Translational Fellowships (ECTFs):
* An IDF is required based on the project’s nature and fellowship strand.
* Translational and Partnership Fellowships will require an IDF before funding is confirmed.
* The Emerging Talent Fellowship will be assessed on a case-by-case basis for IDF requirements.
1. Due to funding constraints all projects must be able to start reasonably quickly
2. Completion Dates:
* Translational Catalyst Fund projects must be completed within 6 months of the start date
* Early Career Translational Fellowships must be completed within 6 months of the start date
* **All projects must be completed (cost or spend incurred) by 02 Feb 2026**

Aims and Scope

The funding being offered must align to the MRC IAA objectives supporting the translation of fundamental science 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

### Translational Catalyst Fund

The Translational Catalyst Fund aims to address one of the major challenges in translating research within the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences: securing early-stage funding to advance novel ideas toward securing further funding to confirm proof-of-concept stage. This early validation is critical for demonstrating the translational and commercial potential necessary to attract further investment. Through the MRC Translational Catalyst funding, the University is providing seed funding to build a pipeline of high-impact projects with the potential to deliver both translational and economic returns.

Projects are eligible to receive up to £50,000 in funding over a 3–6 month period, with the exact amount requested expected to align closely with the project's specific development needs and objectives. This funding is intended to support the development of early-stage ideas or generate additional data needed for concept validation. The goal is to provide sufficient preliminary data to instill confidence in the evidence supporting the underlying concept before applying for more substantial funding. Projects that demonstrate progression past the proof-of-concept stage and aim for basic validation are particularly encouraged, as this will enhance their attractiveness for future funding opportunities.

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

### Early Career Transitional Fellowship (ECTF) Fund

A key challenge for commercialisation and delivering impact is the difficulty in dedicating a specific individual within Queen's University Belfast (QUB) to drive projects at their early stages. ECTFs funded under the MRC IAA will address this by facilitating knowledge transfer and commercialisation activities, enhancing business awareness and engagement, seeding longer-term collaborations, and enriching the fellow’s career development.

**Eligibility:**

While Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and Postdoctoral Researchers (PDRAs) are encouraged to apply and will be named as Co-Investigators, for administrative purposes, the Principal Investigator must be a permanent member of staff. Therefore, all applications must be supported by a senior academic. Applicants should detail the technology or opportunity they intend to work on and include a personal statement explaining why they should be funded through an IAA Early Career Translational Fellowship. This statement should cover their personal development plans, how they envision the technology or opportunity evolving, and their target funding sources.

**Funding Structure:**

The ECTFs will now be offered under three distinct strands, tailored to specific project needs:

1. **Partnership Fellowship:**

Funding of up to £20,000 may be awarded per project, covering a maximum six-month period. This fellowship is focused on partnerships with external organisations to support collaborative, impact-driven work. The expectation is that the external partner will contribute an equal amount through cash or in-kind contributions, ensuring mutual investment in the project's success.

1. **Translational Fellowship:**

Up to £40,000 may be awarded per project, covering a maximum of six months.

This strand supports translational research aimed at advancing early-stage ideas toward practical application or commercialisation. External collaboration is not mandatory under this strand, allowing researchers to focus on developing innovative solutions independently or in academic collaborations.

1. **Emerging Talent Fellowship:**

Up to £40,000 may be awarded per project, covering a maximum of six months.

This fellowship is designed to identify and support high-potential ECRs who show significant promise or talent. While it may require an Innovation Disclosure Form (IDF) depending on the nature of the project, this requirement will be evaluated to avoid unnecessary restrictions. The fellowship targets researchers who may not have a fully developed research portfolio but exhibit exceptional potential for impact.

**Application Guidelines:**

* Applications must detail spending plans, with the majority of funding allocated to salary costs, some towards consumables, and a portion reserved for career development and professional growth activities.
* Projects leveraging additional internal or external funding will be prioritised.
* Expected outcomes include securing an external fellowship, formalising industry collaboration, commercial licensing of IP, spinning out a company, or the initiation of early-stage collaborations, positioning the fellow for larger opportunities and longer-term career success.
* Projects primarily focused on extending research or generating research papers and future grant applications are unlikely to be successful.

## Expectations and Requirements

### Translational Catalyst Fund

* Invention Disclosure Form (IDF): Applicants must submit a Queen’s Invention Disclosure Form (IDF), ideally **2 weeks prior** to application submission. The IDF facilitates the assessment of the project’s potential for intellectual property (IP) development and commercialization. Applications without a completed IDF will be ineligible. You can access the IDF and further details [here](https://www.qub.ac.uk/Business/Commercialisation/IP-and-innovation/Got-an-idea/).
* Innovation Training Programme: Successful applicants are required to attend an Innovation Training Programme, designed to help researchers build partnerships within the life sciences sector. This programme covers essential skills such as networking, negotiation, intellectual property, the IDF/patent process, project management, and additional funding opportunities, with sessions led by DPFS panel members.
* Reporting Requirements: Successful applicants must submit a final report at the end of the project, outlining outcomes, next steps, future funding plans, and progress in commercialization and translation. These updates are crucial for aligning the project with the goals of the MRC IAA Fund and informing future funding decisions.

### Early Career Translation Fellowship (ECTF) Fund

* **Invention Disclosure Form**. For **ECTF applicants,** the requirement for an IDF varies by fellowship strand and project type. For applicants to the Translational and Partnership Fellowship strands, an IDF **will be necessary** prior to confirmation of the funding award. For the Emerging Talent Fellowship, the IDF requirement will be evaluated individually to avoid undue restrictions on applicants. For more information, or to check the IDF requirement for an ECTF project you wish to propose, contact Maria Colligan (m.colligan@qub.ac.uk in the Commercial Development Team.
* **Future reporting**. Following project completion, each successful applicant must submit an end-of-project report within one month, outlining the next stage of development, including plans for further technical work and the approximate funding levels required. Applicants should also consider the industry or clinical partnerships that may be necessary for the next phases of the project, and if not already secured, identify where intellectual property (IP) resides and the steps needed for its protection. In addition to this initial report, applicants will be required to provide annual updates on the commercial and translational progress of the project. These updates should detail key project advancements, income from secured funding sources, and the amounts obtained. Furthermore, an updated translational and commercial pathway will be necessary, reflecting the evolving strategy for market engagement and application. Successful applicants are also required to maintain communication with the Commercial Development team to ensure their Innovation Disclosure Form (IDF) remains up to date.

## Application process and project process

### Translational Catalyst Fund

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 in good time to afford the development of necessary costing and include a RAS number in their application.** Applications should be submitted through the appropriate online application form, which can be accessed [**here**](https://forms.office.com/e/ZqG8yc6hHJ). 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 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:

* The ability to translate/exploit the potential of the technology disclosed in the IDF.
* The potential for follow-on funding to be leveraged following the project.
* The quality of the project plan.
* The perceived value for money.
* The translational and commercial potential of the idea, concept or technology

The applications will be assessed by a panel led by the Research and Enterprise Directorate’s IP and Commercialisation Team but drawing on expertise from academic/research staff.

**It is expected that applications will be assessed swiftly, and applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application once the review panel have made a decision. Projects can commence immediately or upon finalization of a collaboration agreement, if applicable, but must commence within 60 days of award (except in exceptional circumstances).**

### Early Career Translational Fellowship (ECTF) Fund

* **Invention Disclosure Form (IDF):** An IDF is required based on the specific fellowship strand and the nature of the project. For the **Translational Fellowship** and **Partnership Fellowship** strands, an IDF **will be required** before the funding award is confirmed. For the **Emerging Talent Fellowship**, the need for an IDF will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to avoid unnecessary restrictions. **The IDF template can be downloaded** [**here**](https://qubstudentcloud.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/int-re/Shared%20Documents/Staff%20and%20Student%20Resources/COMMERCIAL%20DEVELOPMENT/Invention%20Disclosure%20Form%20%28General%29.docx?d=wf0a469907f4243c393b1fb02cf08922f&csf=1&web=1&e=nQfvDe). For more details, contact Maria Colligan (m.colligan@qub.ac.uk) in the Commercial Development Team.
* **Research Application System (RAS) Registration:** All applications should be registered on the Research Application System (RAS). Applicants should collaborate with their Faculty Finance Office to calculate project budgets and must contact them at least 5 days prior to the call deadline. A RAS number must be included in the application.
* **Submission:** Applications must be submitted via the designated online application form, accessible[**here**](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6ner6qW040mh6NbdI6HyhnAclcRPY7pGpjfMjNiMTjdUOFZLRlpSQjA0V0c5QzVPQlgwS0FQTVdMOC4u). Word versions are available for preparation only and will not be reviewed, if submitted. Pre-submission discussions are encouraged with the Commercial Development Team and, if a partnership is planned, with Maeve Murphy, Business Alliance Manager. Please email iaa@qub.ac.uk, including 'MRC IAA' in the subject line.
* **Assessment Criteria:** Eligible applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:
	+ Likely progress along the developmental or translational pathway
	+ Evidence of innovation/novelty in the scientific approach
	+ Quality of the project plan
	+ Likelihood of commercial impact and/or potential to secure future funding
	+ The ability of the applicant, particularly early-career researchers, to demonstrate high potential for future impact, even if the research portfolio is still developing. (*Emerging Talent Fellowship*)

### 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 applications involving a project partner)
* Gantt chart or work plan of the proposed project activities (max 1 sides A4)
* A personal statement (Mandatory for ECTF applications only)
* Project Description, a ONE A4 page containing figures and legends may be uploaded
* 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 any external partner (Mandatory for ECTF-partnership 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 email iaa@qub.ac.uk to discuss.

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| **Permitted Cost/Activity**  | **Detail**  |
| 100% direct costs  | Directly incurred and directly allocated projects costs can be claimed, this includes staff time and travel and subsistence.  For the Early Career Translational Fellowship (ECTF) Fund the majority of the funding should cover the ECR, PDRAs salary, minimal IAA funding should be utilised for project running costs, travel, etc.  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 your target submission date.  |

### Non-permitted costs/activities

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| **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](https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/supporting-healthy-research-and-innovation-culture/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-strategy/). 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](https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/responsible-innovation/), 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.