



Translational Funding

MRC Impact Accelerator Account Applicant Guidance



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1. Introduction to Exeter’s MRC Impact Acceleration Account

The Medical Research Council (MRC) has awarded the University of Exeter a block grant of £414k in the form of Impact Accelerator Account (IAA). The current MRC IAA runs until March 2025.

The Impact Accelerator Account (IAA) is an integral part of MRC’s translational research strategy to flexibly support a portfolio of translational research projects. It is intended to accelerate the transition from discovery research to translational development projects by supporting preliminary work to establish the viability of an approach and to rapidly de-risk projects across the whole translational pathway so that they become competitive for substantial funding for development.

Ensuring that fundamental science is translated into new therapies, diagnostics and medical devices is central to the MRC mission. 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.

2. What does the MRC mean by ‘Impact’ and what does it expect from the IAA?

Although the IAA is operated by the University, the MRC has clear expectations regarding impact. The MRC definition of impact is 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy'.

Research impact embraces all the diverse ways that research findings and research-related skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations. These include:

- Fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom.
- Increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy.
- Enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.

A key aspect of the MRC definition of impact is **that it must be possible to demonstrate the impact that research has had**; it is not enough just to focus on activities and outputs that promote research impact. You must be able to provide evidence of research impact, for example, that it has been taken up and used by policymakers and practitioners or has led to improvements in services or business. Some of the core conceptualisations that the MRC uses to demonstrate the type of outcomes they expect from the IAA are:

- Impact that is instrumental - influencing the development of policy and practice.
- Impact that is conceptual - shifting understanding around issues and changing the way problems are understood.
- Culture change and enduring connectivity - more people working across the academic/ non-academic divide and building lasting relationships.

3. Exeter’s MRC IAA Funding Streams

I. Impact Cultivation Fund

Funding Amount: Up to £10,000

Aims and Objectives: To enable initiation and development of contacts, networks, and engagement between researchers and collaborators from beyond the academic sector (e.g. health departments, the NHS and charities) with a view to developing partnerships for health and economic impact. To enable early stage development of co-created impact projects. The rapid response element of this fund supports reasonable risk-taking and enables academics to respond quickly to urgent or rare events, taking advantage of time-limited opportunities.

Indicative Activities: Travel to meet collaborators or to visit strategic locations. Attendance at non-academic events. Workshop or network event delivery.

Suggested Length of Project: Up to 6 months.

Faculty Authorisation: Director of Research & Impact.

Notification of outcome: Within 2 weeks of application being submitted.

II. Impact Co-Creation Fund

Funding Amount: Up to £45,000

Aims and Objectives: To enable collaborative approaches with one or more non-academic partners (NHS, pharmaceutical, diagnostic, digital & technology companies) to the exploration, development, and implementation of findings from UoE research. To generate significant social or economic benefits through co-created outputs. The aims are to de-risk and accelerate medical interventions, enhancing the use of research evidence in policy development, and develop pathways to commercialisation.

Indicative Activities: A collaborative project through which co-created outputs are produced (for example, a toolkit, training programme, policy framework, intervention project, etc.). This funding can be spent on Research or Project Assistant salary cost, travel and subsistence, impact events such as symposia, or on specialist external services (e.g., a mobile app designer), workshop or network event delivery.

Suggested Length of Project: Up to 12 months

Faculty Authorisation: Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Impact, and Director of Research & Impact.

Notification of outcome: Within 5 weeks of application being submitted.

III. Knowledge Exchange Fellowship Fund

Funding Amount: Up to £45,000

Aims and Objectives: To deepen links between researchers and non-academic bodies (NHS, pharmaceutical, diagnostic, digital & technology companies) through short-term virtual or physical staff placements (inbound or outbound). KE Fellows will act as change agents, enabling the free flow of knowledge and expertise between the organisations, thus accelerating impact. Please note that the Fellow cannot also be the PI.

Indicative Activities: Development of co-created outputs and research with the objective of creating social and/or economic impact. Within this mode of collaborative working, activities may

include research design, the development of methodology, and interpretation and presentation of findings, as well as data development or the translation of existing research findings. This funding can be spent on academic salary costs, travel and subsistence, and impact events such as symposia. Fellowships are for between 3 and 12 months and can be organised in flexible blocks of time to suit the participants and nature of the project.

Suggested Length of Project: Up to 12 months

Faculty Authorisation: Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Impact, and Director of Research & Impact.

Notification of outcome: Within 5 weeks of application being submitted.

IV. Impact Visionary Fund

Funding Amount: Up to £45,000

Aims and Objectives: Aims and Objectives: The aim of this fund is to support interdisciplinary, curiosity driven, innovative and creative proposals for translating the outcomes of prior UoE Medicine and health research into positive real world impact that will make significant contributions to regional, national or international challenges. Proposals will demonstrate a method or approach that is novel, different or creative, based on untested ideas or techniques that are not yet established. This could include the application of an established method for a new and untested context or audience.

Indicative Activities: Due to the innovative nature of this award we are not prescriptive about indicative activities, however they must be within the funder’s eligible costs (see eligibility for applying).

Suggested Length of Project: Up to 12 months

Faculty Authorisation: Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Impact, and Director of Research & Impact.

Notification of outcome: Within 5 weeks of application being submitted.

4. Eligibility

Anyone employed by the University of Exeter on an academic/research contract seeking to accelerate the non-academic impact from their research is eligible to apply to the MRC IAA. Your employment contract must last for at least the length of the proposed project.

The project must clearly demonstrate how it will strategically take forward and build on the existing Research and/or relationship to make a significant difference either socially, economically, regionally, nationally or internationally etc.

5. Assessment Criteria

1. Application details

Successful applications to this scheme will demonstrate:

Collaboration with a committed external, non-academic partner.

- Has the external partner provided a letter of support that demonstrates their commitment to and enthusiasm for the project?
- Are the project partner(s) making a cash and/or in-kind contribution to the project? Partner contributions should be relative to the amount requested from IAA funds, and appropriate to the size and type of organisation.

The benefit to society and/or the economy the project activities aim to achieve.

- Does the application clearly articulate the overarching non-academic aim of the project?
- Why is it important that this project is supported?
- Is the overarching non-academic aim achievable and feasible?
- If the aim is commercialisation, does the application demonstrate a clear pathway to commercialisation and have they spoken to a member of the IP & Commercialisation Team?

Effective knowledge exchange (KE) activities.

- Do the proposed KE activities maximise engagement with the partner organisation?
- Are the KE activities outlined in detail and the intended outcomes clearly identified?

A clear and feasible project delivery and project plan.

- Does the application detail a specific set of activities (outputs), setting out responsibilities of the applicant(s) and of the project partner(s) for each?
- Does the application clearly state what the outcomes of the activities undertaken will be?
- Does the application have a clear and feasible delivery plan with realistic milestones?

Clearly defined key performance indicators (KPI'S). A guide to outputs, outcomes and KPIs can be found on the Internal Funding Opportunities page of the Research Toolkit.

- Does the application have clear and realistic targets?
- Does the application detail how the outcomes & KPIs will be recorded and monitored?
- Does the application detail what method of evidence capture they will use? Successful applicants will be required to provide evidence that they have achieved their stated KPIs.
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A well-planned, realistic & clearly defined project budget.

- Are the activities eligible for IAA funding? See the eligible and ineligible costs lists below.
- Does the budget demonstrate value for money?
- Are the funds requested appropriately justified and reasonable?

- Does the budget provide adequate detail? For example, rather than stating ‘£1k for workshop’, is the workshop cost broken down into its constituent parts (venue cost, printing costs, travel etc)?

Ethical and Health & Safety consideration.

- Does the application identify any potential ethical and/or health & safety issues?
- Does the application propose reasonable mitigating actions for any risks identified?

Appropriate Faculty Approval & support.

Adhesion to the application page limit.

2. Partner contribution and letters of support

It is expected that non-academic partners will make a match funding contribution to MRC IAA projects, the cash or in time contribution should be appropriate to the size and type of organisation. We request that a letter of support is submitted with the application. Non-academic partners will need to demonstrate their commitment to the project and applications should detail how participants will work collaboratively to achieve the aims and objectives of the project.

Letters of support are not essential when applying for the Impact Cultivation Fund, however, this would strengthen the application where a support letter is appropriate (i.e., where a relationship with the partner has already been established)

3. Faculty contribution

It is expected that the faculty will make an in-kind and/or cash contribution to MRC IAA projects to show their support for the project and their approval of the PI time spent on the project.

PI and Co-I time, Indirect Costs, and Estates will be considered an in-kind contribution from the faculty and will be calculated on Worktribe.

Match funding from the faculty must be approved by the Director of Research & Impact (applications under £10k) and by the Director of Research & Impact *and* the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Impact (applications £10k and over) prior to the application being submitted.

6. Eligible Costs

If you are considering a cost that does not appear here, please contact the Translational Funding Team for guidance.

Activities that are eligible for IAA funding include:

- ✓ Travel and subsistence.
- ✓ Venue hire.
- ✓ Research Assistant or Administration assistant salary costs.

- ✓ Participant payments (a small sum to cover out of pocket expenses and as compensation for inconvenience).
- ✓ External contractors for specialist tasks (e.g., design work).
- ✓ Equipment up to the value of £9,999.
- ✓ Costs associated with secondary analysis of primary data (the use of data that was collected by someone else for some other purpose).

Activities that are ineligible for IAA funding include:

- ✗ PI and Co-I salary costs.
- ✗ Partner costs.
- ✗ Undergraduate activities, core PhD training, Masters. Postgraduate research students cannot apply for funding.
- ✗ Direct funding for staff and funds to support IP protection and patent costs.
- ✗ Attendance at academic conferences or other initiatives with a primarily academic audience.
- ✗ Preparation of research grant applications.
- ✗ Contributions to KTPs.
- ✗ Equipment with a value of £10,000 or more.
- ✗ Indirect costs or estate costs (these will be part of your faculty contribution).
- ✗ Impact activities which have already been included within an EPSRC IAA funded project.
- ✗ Primary/Basic research activities.
- ✗ EPSRC IAA funds cannot be used to support a private company, as they are a public funder and have to adhere to [Subsidy Control measures](#). If you are unsure whether your cost would be considered to be a subsidy for a private company please contact the Translational Funding Team.

7. How to Apply (including Costings)

1. In all cases, please contact the Translational Funding team to notify them of your interest in the MRC IAA and to discuss your proposal.
2. Download the application form for the appropriate funding stream from the Internal Funding Opportunities page of the Research Toolkit on the University of Exeter intranet.
3. Create a new Project cost your application using the Worktribe system. Full instructions for using the Worktribe system to log and cost your proposal can be found on the Research Toolkit. 100% directly incurred and directly allocated projects costs can be applied for. All costs must be stated with the inclusion of VAT.

4. Complete the application form. Please ensure type size is no smaller than 11pt. If applications exceed the permitted length, they will be returned to you to be edited down, proximity to deadline permitting. If time does not permit, only the first five pages will be sent to reviewers.
5. Obtain a Letter of Support from external collaborators outlining their agreement to participate and details of any match funding or in-kind contribution.
6. For applications under £10k, obtain Faculty approval for your application from your Director of Research and Impact. For applications of £10k and over, obtain Faculty approval from your Director of Research and Impact **and** the APVC for Research and Impact. **Your application will not be accepted without this.**
7. Email your word application form and your Letter of Support to the Translational Funding Team MRC@exeter.ac.uk

8. Assessment Process

Applications to the Impact Cultivation Fund will be reviewed by the Translational Funding Team and relevant Exeter Innovation Sector leads. We aim to notify you of the outcome of your application within two weeks of your submission.

Applications to the Impact Co-Creation Fund, the Knowledge Exchange Fellowship fund, and the Impact Visionary Fund will receive two reviews from our MRC IAA Review Panel which consists of academics, professional services colleagues, and industry partners from a range of disciplines and sectors. All applications and reviews will be considered, and final funding decisions made at the Review Panel meeting. To ensure segregation of responsibilities the meeting is chaired by the Translational Funding Manager, funding decisions are approved by the MRC IAA Principal Investigator (PI), and minutes are taken by the Translational Funding Officer. We aim to notify you of the outcome of your application will be delivered within five weeks of the application submission deadline.

9. Reporting Requirements for Funded Projects

The Principal Applicant (Principal Investigator - PI) of each funded project will be required submit a mid-term project update and an end of project report on the activities carried out, outcomes and impacts (or expected future impacts), specifically:

- A report of the tangible benefits and successes achieved or likely to be realised after the project, by both the user (and their potential beneficiaries) and the University. This includes indicators of success, such as number of new connections and partnerships (defined as involving an exchange of resources – e.g., co-funding, leverage, and contributions in kind), projects started and numbers participating in events etc.

- A member of the translational funding team may also follow up several months after the project to find out about longer-term impacts.
- The PI must comply with requests for information about the project for publicity and for the Translational Funding website to enable us to share good practice and news about impact within the University and beyond.

Successful applicants will be sent a guide to research impact evidence capture.

10. Frequently asked questions

What is considered an Early Career Researcher (ECR)?

UKRI defines an ECR as someone who is either:

- Within eight years of their PhD award (this is from the time of the PhD ‘viva’ oral test), or equivalent professional training.
- Within six years of their first academic appointment (the first full or part time paid employment contract that lists research or teaching as the primary function).

These periods exclude any career break, for example due to:

- Family care.
- Health reasons.
- Reasons related to COVID-19 such as home schooling or increased teaching load.

Is it compulsory for my project to have a CO-I?

No, having a Co-I is not a condition of funding.

11. Further Information

If you have any questions about the MRC Impact Acceleration Account, please contact the translational funding team at MRC@exeter.ac.uk