

Key research funders – their focus and philosophies

UKRI – UK Research and Innovation

Launched in April 2018 and with a £7bn budget, UKRI brings together the seven Research Councils, Innovate UK and Research England (formerly HEFCE) to support world-leading research and innovation and create the optimal environment for research and innovation to flourish. Funded primarily through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), UKRI aspires to:

- Push the frontiers of human knowledge and understanding
- Deliver economic impact and prosperity
- Create social and cultural impact

UKRI works in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities and government.

UKRI is seen as a key vehicle to help the government reach its target of increasing investment in R&D to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. UKRI funding will be delivered through a combination of traditional routes through the separate Councils, and a number of centrally held pots of money, a few of which are detailed below.

- **UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships** – this scheme aims to develop, retain, attract and sustain research and innovation talent in the UK. Providing up to seven years of funding, the scheme will tackle difficult and novel challenges. There are two calls each year.
- **Strategic Priorities Fund** – for high quality multi- and interdisciplinary research and innovation programmes. Groups of Councils bid into UKRI around a specific area, and if successful, a call is announced through a lead Council.
- **Strength in Places Fund** – this new, competitive scheme takes a place-based approach to growth through Research and Innovation. The scheme looks at clusters of businesses within a region that have the potential to innovate or adopt new technology, and to enhance local collaborations of research and innovation.
- **Global Challenges Research Fund** - a £1.5 billion fund announced by the UK Government in late 2015 to support cutting-edge research projects that address the challenges faced by developing countries. Funding is allocated in a mixed of internal competitions and in response to arising opportunities or challenges. The University of Southampton leads these applications.
- **Fund for International Collaboration** – aims to enhance the UK's research and innovation through global engagement via bilateral and multilateral programmes. This fund of around £110m is delivered through the UKRI Councils.
- **Turing Artificial Intelligence (AI) Acceleration Fellowship and Turing AI World-Leading Fellowship** will open in November. The University of Southampton leads these applications.

www.ukri.org

MRC – Medical Research Council

The MRC supports research across the full spectrum of medical science from laboratory research to clinical trials and population studies. It also provides career awards for scientists.

Funding opportunities are either researcher-led or aligned to an area strategic to the MRC.

The delivery plan focuses on four areas:

- Discovery science
- Investing in people
- Fostering collaboration

- New technologies and infrastructure

Underpinning this, seven priority health themes have been identified in their strategy:

- Prevention and early detection
- Precision medicine
- Multi-morbidities
- Advanced therapies
- Mental health
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Global health

www.mrc.ukri.org

BBSRC – Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

Focuses on supporting discovery research, transformative technologies and researcher development:

- Advancing the frontiers of bioscience discovery
 - Understanding the rules of life
 - Transformative technologies
- Tackling strategic challenges
 - Bioscience for sustainable agriculture and food
 - Bioscience for renewable resources and clean growth
 - Bioscience for an integrated understanding of health
- Building strong foundations
 - People and talent
 - Infrastructure
 - Collaboration, partnerships and knowledge exchange

Funding opportunities exist through doctoral training, leadership and responsive mode research grants.

www.bbsrc.ukri.org

Other Research Councils

AHRC – Arts and Humanities www.ahrc.ukri.org

EPSRC – Engineering and Physical Sciences www.epsrc.ukri.org

ESRC – Economic and Social www.esrc.ukri.org

NERC – Natural Environment www.nerc.ukri.org

STFC – Science and Technology Facilities Council www.stfc.ukri.org

Innovate UK

Part of UKRI, Innovate UK drives productivity and economic growth by supporting businesses to develop and realise the potential of new ideas. It funds business and research collaborations, accelerating innovation and commercialisation.

Five strategic goals are laid out in the Delivery Plan 2019:

1. Deliver measurable economic and societal impact across the UK
2. Support and invest in innovative businesses and entrepreneurs with the potential and ambition to grow

3. Maximise the commercial impact of world-class knowledge developed in UK industries and its research base
4. Identify, support and grow transforming and emerging industries through innovation
5. Build a coherent, supportive environment incentivising R&D investment and enabling people and businesses to innovate

Priority Areas for Investment:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) and the data economy
- Ageing society, health and nutrition
- Clean growth and infrastructure
- Mobility, manufacturing and materials

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/innovate-uk>

NIHR – National Institute for Health Research

Established in 2006, the NIHR is the nation's largest funder of health and care research and works in partnership with the NHS, universities, local government, other research funders, patients and the public.

Its central mission is to improve the health and wealth of the national through research. This is delivered by five strategic workstreams:

- Funding, supporting and delivering high quality research
- Engaging and involving patients, carers and the public
- Attracting, training and support the best researchers
- Investing in world class infrastructure and a skilled delivery workforce
- Partnering with other public funders, charities and industry

Ten programmes address different research areas, methodologies and scales. In addition, the NIHR Academy delivers career support and advice, access to leadership development opportunities, mentoring and guidance through a range of training awards for all healthcare professionals.

Many schemes are open cyclically, providing regular opportunities for making applications at times to suit career and project trajectories.

www.nihr.ac.uk

Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust directly funds scientists and researchers around the world at every step from discovery to impact through grants for research project and career development. Grants are available across biomedical sciences, population health, medical innovation, humanities and social science, and public engagement.

Wellcome focusses funding in areas where it can lead significant change within five to ten years, such as drug-resistant infections; vaccines; mental health; epidemics; and data science and innovation.

<https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding>

Details of other funders can be found on the [current funding calls web page](#)