Funding opportunity

MRC Centre of Research Excellence: round two: outline application

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	**Medical Research Council (MRC)**
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£50,000,000
Maximum award:	£26,500,000
Publication date:	25 September 2023
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Closing date:	7 February 2024 4:00pm UK time

Last updated: 22 February 2024 - **see all updates**

Apply for Medical Research Council (MRC) Centre of Research Excellence (MRC CoRE) funding to tackle complex and interdisciplinary health challenges.

This is an annual funding opportunity, initially focused on specified themes.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for MRC funding.

MRC CoREs will be funded for up to 14 years. Your award will initially last for seven years, with a further seven years based on successful review.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your MRC CoRE can be up to £26.5 million for the first seven years. MRC will fund 80% of the FEC.

We expect to fund one or two MRC CoREs every year.

Who can apply

Before applying for funding, check the **Eligibility of your organisation**.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has introduced new role types for funding opportunities being run on the new UKRI Funding Service.

For full details, visit **Eligibility as an individual**.

Who is eligible to apply

To be eligible to apply for MRC Centre of Research Excellence (MRC CoRE) funding you must:

- be a researcher or technologist employed by an **eligible research organisation**
- show that you will direct the project or be actively engaged in the work
- have the relevant expertise and experience to lead or contribute to an MRC CoRE and its research culture
- focus your application on tackling complex and multi or interdisciplinary health challenges
- at the outline application stage, be a member of the proposed MRC CoRE leadership team

The leadership team can be from a single eligible organisation or a partnership of eligible organisations. The leadership team should have the relevant expertise and experience to lead or contribute to an MRC CoRE and its research culture.

Because of the long duration of MRC CoREs you do not require a contract for the full duration of the award. By submitting the application the research organisation is confirming support for the named applicants, that they are capable of leading the MRC CoRE and will accept its relevant terms and conditions

Who is not eligible to apply

If you are employed by these organisations you cannot apply as project lead or project co-lead, but can participate as project partners on an application led by an eligible UK organisation:

- businesses
- charity and third sector organisations
- international research organisations

International project co-lead

While international organisations cannot lead an application, it is possible for international researchers to apply as part of the leadership team, as an international co-project lead. We expect international co-leads to offer expertise or facilities not available in the UK and to provide clear indicators of commitment to the MRC CoRE.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks
- support for people with caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- alternative working patterns

Find out more about **equality, diversity and inclusion at UKRI**.

What we're looking for

We are looking for outline applications to create new MRC CoREs that will support bold and ambitious research focused on a specific and defined challenge with the potential to prove transformative to biomedical research, health research or both within 14 years. Tackling such challenges will transform approaches to the prevention, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of disease, improving health and wellbeing for all.

MRC CoREs will be beacons of excellence in research culture, equality, diversity, and inclusion, leadership models, and innovation. These major investments should be outward facing, harnessing the best talent in the UK to deliver upon their proposed vision and providing a stimulating environment to train the next generation of researchers and technologists.

Applications can be from a single research organisation or in partnership across multiple organisations. Applications may include project partners.

We expect to fund one or two MRC CoREs every year.

Scope

What types of challenges should MRC CoREs tackle?

MRC CoRE challenges are:

- bold, ambitious, and innovative, and address a gap or opportunity which is not being adequately addressed elsewhere
- address substantial unmet needs in understanding or modifying human health and disease
- have major strategic objectives achievable within the 14-year timeframe which, if achieved, will transform the research field or area of health research
- aligned to the MRC mission
- best pursued through coordinated and flexible, major long-term funding

MRC CoRE challenges will be achieved through:

- fostering innovation and engagement to establish the capability and capacity to place the UK at the international forefront of impactful health research
- harnessing and networking the best expertise in the UK, to bring together creative and diverse approaches for cross-sectoral and multi or interdisciplinary working
- distinct and disruptive research that drives breakthrough advances and addresses specific bottlenecks through knowledge generation, technological or methodological innovation, with clear translational relevance
- incorporating cross-cutting approaches and novel ways of working. How is what you are proposing different to what has gone before?
- pursuing a compelling vision around specific questions of importance or critical knowledge gaps, not through open ended discovery research programmes

What areas of research should the challenge address?

For round two, we welcome outline applications to address challenges under the following themes, which may address all or part of our remit, including discovery, understanding mechanism, and development of concepts or interventions for prevention or treatment:

- enhancing healthspan:
  - challenges in focused areas of ageing research to achieve a step change in increasing healthy life expectancy

- immune regulation:
  - scientific challenges to illuminate how the immune system interacts with and is shaped by other biological systems, at different stages of life, by environmental stimuli or in response to pathogen challenges

- molecular mechanisms to inform cancer intervention:
  - challenges investigating the molecular mechanisms associated with tumour development, growth, metastasis and recurrence to develop a

more integrated understanding of cancer biology and accelerate progress towards future development of mechanism-informed interventions

It is not our expectation that any single MRC CoRE will fully address the overarching challenge of the relevant field within a 14 year period. You should instead identify a compelling gap or opportunity, or the major barrier or bottleneck that needs to be surmounted, or the breakthrough advance that is pivotal for our understanding and ability to prevent, diagnose and treat disease, and build a specific and defined challenge around this.

Your challenge may focus on a single theme or be relevant to more than one theme.

Your outline application should be positioned in the context of ongoing investments across MRC and the broader landscape, synergising with or capitalising upon existing knowledge and investments where relevant.

You should consider what you would need to put in place to promote or achieve equity of access to resulting knowledge, technologies, interventions and therapies.

Outside of the specified round two themes, applications aligned with **MRC strategic delivery plan** priorities that address major challenges may be considered exceptionally, but only if they have a particular strategic and time-sensitive requirement or take advantage of a unique time-sensitive opportunity. If you are considering submitting such an idea outside of an advertised theme you must contact us before applying to assess your idea's suitability. The themes from round one are not being continued in round two.

Round two themes

Enhancing healthspan

While life expectancy in the UK has been increasing, healthy life expectancy, the time an individual can expect to live in good health, has not kept pace. Individuals in the most deprived groups of UK society on average spend almost 20 years longer in poor health than those in the least deprived groups, while there are large differences in healthy life expectancy between ethnic groups.

We are inviting MRC CoRE applications addressing challenges in focused areas of ageing research that will achieve a step change in increasing healthy life expectancy. Building upon and connecting existing UK strengths, for example in mechanistic understanding of the biology of ageing through to our rich portfolio of longitudinal population studies, a successful MRC CoRE will develop tractable interventions to reduce time spent in ill health in later life and could address prediction, prevention, diagnosis or management.

The proposed research must include research in humans and must provide a vision for increasing health equity between different groups in society. You should specify the focus of your research, including the population group(s)

who will benefit, and describe how that focus will enable tractable interventions for improved health in later life. Applications are expected to be disease-agnostic to deliver pan-ageing impact. We encourage MRC CoRE applications to be embedded within conceptual frameworks that provide new tractable insights in ageing research, such as immunometabolism, frailty, resilience, inflammation and others.

While we are is open to considering any challenge-led MRC CoRE application that is within the scope outlined above, the following examples illustrate some of the types of applications we might envisage. An MRC CoRE for enhancing healthspan could include one or more of the following areas within its focused challenge:

- focus on a key driver of ageing (deprivation, stress, diet, physical inactivity, pollution, and so on) combining molecular and genetic insights with population data to take a translational approach to intervention development
- consider the commonalities linking diverse groups with poor healthspans. Are there biological pathways or common mechanisms that converge to cause ill health in later life that would provide tractable targets for intervention?
- develop affordable technology and testing to enable real-time measurements of health, enhance healthspan or both
- support experimental medicine studies to test new innovative and bold approaches to extend healthspan
- deploy systems-modelling approaches to test cost-effective interventions to improve health equity

Immune regulation

The increasing prevalence of complex diseases and ongoing global health challenges highlight the critical need to advance our understanding of the immune system. Immune regulation clearly plays a vital role in health. The impact of a poorly regulated immune system is perhaps most apparent in autoimmune disorders, including rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and lupus, which continue to affect a significant portion of the population. More broadly, many complex diseases have an immunological component, including cancer, neurodegenerative conditions and chronic infectious disease, and the impact of differential immunity to pathogens and response to vaccination have been highlighted by the events of recent years.

The UK has well established strengths in immunology research, and it is timely to consider new investment opportunities that can further build on the legacy from the networks and assets created as part of UK's COVID-19 pandemic response.

MRC CoRE applications in this space should be assembled around complementary cross-cutting challenges with clear links to population health and clinical impacts. The following examples illustrate some of the types of application we might envisage. An MRC CoRE in immune regulation could include one or more of the following areas within its focused challenge:

- how environmental contaminants impact short and long-term immune function. Focus could be on the key pathways perturbed by environmental contamination and possible options to mitigate future harms, either through prevention of exposure or perturbation of these pathways
- how socio-economic drivers, ethnicity, biological sex or environmental factors associated with gender impact immune regulation and disease severity at different stages of the lifecourse. Focus could be on the factors underpinning apparent differences in disease susceptibility, prevalence or both, and how these could be moderated
- identifying the major factors that regulate an immune response to a vaccine and how these interact with other drivers of immune variance. Areas could include adjuvant factors to boost vaccine responses in key underserved populations, or identification of pathways that may underpin more durable immunity
- how changes in cellular metabolism impact immune system regulation. Focus could be on the mechanisms underpinning metabolic reprogramming in immune cells as they respond, and how alterations in these pathways driven by extrinsic or intrinsic factors impact immune function

Molecular mechanisms to inform cancer intervention

Cancer continues to be a leading cause of death in the UK and although we have improved our understanding of its causes, disease trajectory and disease management, there are significant research challenges that need to be addressed to deliver the required transformative improvements in patient diagnosis, care, and outcomes.

The underpinning pathogenic mechanisms that enable tumours to develop, grow, metastasise, and recur remain poorly understood. This limits the scope for therapeutic intervention and individualised management of cancer. Within this, health inequality is a significant challenge in cancer which requires further research.

We are looking for MRC CoRE applications which use cross-disciplinary approaches to drive progress in mechanistic discovery science towards a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of dynamic cancer biology, initiation and evolution. Early detection is not expected to be a sole focus.

MRC CoRE applications should prioritise investigation of molecular mechanisms and demonstrate routes to translation that will facilitate future prevention, intervention or novel treatment development to improve cancer outcomes equitably. Applications are expected to be inclusive of multiple cancer types, or to be tumour agnostic, in order to deliver pan-cancer impact. A cancer MRC CoRE will likely prioritise cancers with unknown pathogenesis, poorer outcomes and limited treatment options.

The following examples illustrate some of the types of application we might envisage. An MRC CoRE for molecular mechanisms to inform cancer

intervention could include one or more of the following priority areas within its focused challenge:

- mechanistic research to inform pre-cancerous patient identification, risk stratification and feasible interception of tumour initiation (primary, secondary, and recurrent). Applications should consider a focus broader than early detection or diagnosis
- application of multidisciplinary approaches to investigate cell and tissue states in the developing and dynamic tumour microenvironment, to support the future development of novel, or more effective, disease interventions across all stages of disease progression, including metastases. Focus could be on improving understanding of the dynamic interplay between the developing cancer and the tumour microenvironment, and how this leads to intra and inter-patient tumour heterogeneity and variations in treatment response
- research and innovation for the development of novel approaches towards more effective cancer intervention. Applications should consider the integration of discovery science with technical development and feasibility of potential future interventions, including the potential for broad utility

MRC CoRE research environment

MRC CoREs provide an opportunity for a different approach to research, creating collaborative and stimulating multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research environments. MRC CoREs are expected to adopt and maintain the highest standards in the way research is conducted and openly communicated; to support creative leadership approaches and a team science ethos, develop and nurture career paths and a training environment which supports a positive research culture.

Support from research organisations

Considerable, sustained and clearly defined support from the research organisation is essential to a successful application. We expect research organisations to provide:

- laboratory space
- access to facilities and equipment
- access to necessary digital support infrastructure
- support to manage estates
- human resources services
- finance services
- underpinning of key staff positions
- access to additional sources of funding and support available to other researchers across the research organisations

Number of applications

Organisations are encouraged to prioritise their involvement in applications and to realistically restrict the number submitted, considering the exceptional potential that must be demonstrated to be invited to submit a full MRC CoRE application and the host organisation commitment that is required. An organisation may lead up to three outline applications in round two, one in each theme.

In the exceptional situation where an application is approved for submission outside of the published themes, leadership would be at the expense of one permitted theme application.

Applications from existing MRC units may be submitted in addition to other applications from the organisation and do not count towards the three applications guidance.

Organisations may freely participate as a partner in applications led from other organisations.

For more information on the background of this funding opportunity, go to the 'Additional information' section.

Duration

The duration of this award is seven years.

We will support MRC CoREs for up to 14 years. The initial award is for seven years, with a review point in year six to approve release of the second period of funding.

You should enter the duration of the project as 168 months (14 years).

This reflects the maximum duration of a MRC CoRE.

Projects must start by 30 September 2025.

The MRC CoRE start date can be from 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025.

Funding available

You will be asked to indicate outline costs for the first funding period of seven years.

The FEC of your project for the first seven years can be up to £26.5 million.

We will fund 80% of the FEC and 100% of permitted exceptions.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) indexation will be applied at the time of award. We will not supplement awards for inflation after they have started.

We will provide all the awarded funding to the lead organisation, to manage and distribute accordingly. Awards spanning multiple organisations will require a clear plan addressing award governance and management to ensure funds can be used flexibly to support changes in research delivery and opportunity across the course of the award.

We will support a limited number of interlinked research activities or themes, with funding focused on key strategic objectives, achievable during the 14-year lifespan. The MRC CoRE award should be founded upon existing grants at the point of establishment and provide a platform to win additional grant support from all available funders.

What we will fund

You can request funding for costs such as:

- directly allocated contributions to salaries of the leadership team and other established researchers, usually between 15% and 30% of their time, in line with their research contribution
- directly incurred salaries of research staff, technicians, and professional enabling staff, where there is a clear justification for their critical role in delivering the MRC CoRE
- recruitment of new researchers critical to addressing the research challenge, for example those switching disciplines or sectors, or from overseas, where 100% salary may be requested for up to three years, before other grant support is established
- research consumables
- if required, up to £500,000 start-up costs for routine equipment (items over £10,000 that constitute normal elements of a well-founded laboratory). All items will have to be fully justified at the full application stage and may not include generic departmental equipment
- by exception and with the permission of MRC head office, mid-range or large equipment critical to establish platforms or facilities. However, it is anticipated for most mid-range equipment MRC CoREs will apply to the MRC annual mid-range equipment opportunity in competition with the wider community
- travel costs
- data preservation, data sharing and dissemination costs
- costs for innovative training and capacity building required to address the research challenge, when not available elsewhere
- studentships support (an exception funded at 100%), may typically be requested for up to two studentships each year across the duration of the award. Numbers should not exceed the supervisory capacity of the MRC CoRE. See **UKRI stipend and fees**
- technology and data platforms to provide accessible facilities and capability essential to the mission and to promote open science, when not available elsewhere
- experimental medicine studies

- initiatives to underpin or strengthen a positive research culture
- external stakeholder activities including public engagement and involvement
- initiatives to improve environmental sustainability
- estates and indirect costs
- directly incurred costs for international co-leads (an exception funded at 100%) may be requested, although we expect most costs to be incurred by UK organisations

The leadership team will have flexibility over use of most of the funding within the total awarded, especially considering the award duration. There will be constraints on the use of capital equipment funding.

We do not expect exact costs to be known at the time of outline application and specified. Flexible funds can be requested and used to develop activities and support new opportunities but must be appropriately justified with clear plans for financial management.

What we will not fund

We will not fund:

- open access costs: these must be covered by the UKRI open access grant
- training and capacity building that can be accessed through existing funding routes, such as existing doctoral training programmes, MRC or UKRI fellowships
- mid-range equipment other than agreed and assessed as necessary as part of the start-up requirements. All other mid-range equipment must be requested through the annual MRC equipment funding opportunity or other funding routes
- routine equipment (that constitutes normal elements of a well-founded laboratory) over and above the start-up fund of up to £500,000. MRC has other arrangements to modestly support ongoing routine equipment needs of its major investments
- additional or duplicative equipment that is already part of the existing research environment of the applicants
- generic computing platforms for data analysis or data storage, which should be part of wider research organisation data management activities
- buildings and other types of infrastructures
- clinical trials or longitudinal population studies, which have specific governance requirements and for which alternative funding routes are available. MRC CoREs may utilise existing cohorts or clinical trials funded through other routes

Team project partner

You may include team project partners that will support your MRC CoRE through cash or in-kind contributions, such as:

- staff time
- access to equipment
- sites or facilities
- the provision of data
- software or materials

Who cannot be included as a team project partner

The individual named as the contact for the project partner organisation cannot also be a named applicant, such as those with a role of project-lead or co-lead and any other named member of staff.

Supporting skills and talent

We encourage you to follow the principles of the **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** and the **Technician Commitment**.

International collaboration

UKRI is committed in ensuring that effective international collaboration in research and innovation takes place with integrity and within strong ethical frameworks. Trusted research and innovation (TR&I) is a UKRI work programme designed to help protect all those working in our thriving and collaborative international sector by enabling partnerships to be as open as possible, and as secure as necessary. Our **TR&I principles** set out our expectations of organisations funded by UKRI in relation to due diligence for international collaboration.

As such, at the full application stage, applicants for UKRI funding may be asked to demonstrate how their proposed projects will comply with our approach and expectation towards TR&I, identifying potential risks and the relevant controls you will put in place to help proportionately reduce these risks.

Further guidance and information about TR&I, including where applicants can find additional support, can be found on **UKRI's website**.

Find out about **getting funding for international collaboration**.

How to apply

We are running this funding opportunity on the new UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Funding Service. You cannot apply on the Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) system.

The project lead is responsible for completing the application process on the UKRI Funding Service, but we expect all team members and project partners to

contribute to the application.

Only the lead research organisation can submit an application to UKRI.

To apply:

Select 'Start application' near the beginning of this Funding finder page.

1. Confirm you are the project lead.
2. Sign in or create a UKRI Funding Service account. To create an account, select your organisation, verify your email address, and set a password. If your organisation is not listed, email **support@funding-service.ukri.org** Please allow at least 10 working days for your organisation to be added to the UKRI Funding Service.
3. Answer questions directly in the text boxes. You can save your answers and come back to complete them or work offline and return to copy and paste your answers. If we need you to upload a document, follow the upload instructions in the UKRI Funding Service. All questions and assessment criteria are listed in the 'How to apply' section on this Funding finder page.
4. Send the completed application to your research office for checking. They will return it to you if it needs editing.
5. Your research office will submit the completed and checked application to UKRI.

Watch our **research office webinars about the new UKRI Funding Service**.

Deadline

We must receive your application by 4.00pm UK time on 7 February 2024.

You will not be able to apply after this time.

Make sure you are aware of and follow any internal institutional deadlines.

Following the close of the opportunity, your application cannot be changed and applications will not be returned for amendment. If your application does not follow the guidance, it may be rejected.

Personal data

Processing personal data

MRC, as part of UKRI, will need to collect some personal information to manage your funding service account and the registration of your funding applications.

We will handle personal data in line with UK data protection legislation and manage it securely. For more information, including how to exercise your rights, read our **privacy notice**.

Publication of outcomes

We will publish the outcomes of this funding opportunity at **Board and panel outcomes – MRC**.

If your application is successful, we will publish some personal information on the **UKRI Gateway to Research**.

Summary

Word count: 250

In plain English, provide a summary we can use to identify the most suitable experts to assess your application.

Make it suitable for a variety of readers, for example:

- opinion-formers
- policymakers
- the public
- the wider research community

Guidance for writing a summary

As this will be the first information in your application use it as your 'elevator pitch'.

Clearly describe your proposed challenge in terms of:

- the gap, opportunity, or unmet need which the challenge addresses
- top level aims and objectives
- innovative approaches to delivering the challenge
- the transformational impact it will have if successful

Core team

List the key members of your team and assign them roles from the following:

- project lead (PL)
- project co-lead (UK) (PcL)
- project co-lead (international) (PcL (I))
- researcher co-lead (RcL)

Only list one individual as project lead. This should be the individual who will act as the grant holder with responsibilities to MRC at the start of the MRC CoRE award.

If the application is for an MRC CoRE to be delivered in partnership by two or more eligible organisations, then the project lead must be from the organisation which will lead the partnership.

List other leadership team members as project co-lead or international project co-lead.

All host organisations must be represented by an eligible co-lead.

The leadership team members' application roles should not imply relative status or influence the leadership model which is for the applicants to propose.

We encourage inclusion of senior professional enabling staff such as a Chief Operating Officer. We would expect this role to be part of the leadership team and should be included as a project co-lead in this application.

These roles do not limit who might be recruited to successful MRC CoRE teams. We will request more details of the research teams in the full application. These roles are not available in this outline application:

- specialists
- grant manager
- professional enabling staff
- research and innovation associate
- technician
- visiting researcher

Find out more about **UKRI's new grant roles**.

Application questions

Challenge

Word limit: 500

What is the research challenge and why is it important?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Ensure that you:

- describe the specific challenge you will address over the 14-year MRC CoRE timeframe
- explain why the challenge hasn't been addressed before and why it is important
- demonstrate how addressing the challenge will make a difference and lead to transformative impacts on biomedical or health research

We want to understand the specific challenge this MRC CoRE will address, rather than the general challenges of the field.

Within the challenge section we also expect you to explain:

- how the challenge is aligned with the MRC mission
- why an MRC CoRE is the best way to tackle the challenge
- how this MRC CoRE is positioned in the context of other national and international activities, and how it could place the UK in an internationally leading position

Research

Word limit: 1,000

What is your research approach to the challenge?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Outline your research approach, including:

- the original, innovative, bold or disruptive approaches you will use
- how you will use cross-sectoral and multi or interdisciplinary working to advance your ambitions
- how your approaches are different to what has gone before
- outline plans for the key research themes or work packages required to develop this MRC CoRE and deliver against the challenge
- what you will achieve within the timeframe if you are successful

Within the research section we also expect you to:

- explain how you will access facilities and specialist equipment, and facilitate collaboration across this MRC CoRE
- highlight significant risks to delivery and how they will be managed
- consider how the MRC CoRE may need to be flexible and evolve depending on the likely changes in the research landscape in fourteen years

Optional: within this section you can also demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. You must:

- use images sparingly and only to convey important information that cannot easily be put into words
- insert each new image onto a new line
- provide a descriptive legend for each image immediately underneath it (this counts towards your word limit)
- files must be smaller than 8MB and in JPEG, JPG, JPE, JFI, JIF, JFIF, PNG, GIF, BMP or WEBP format

The UKRI Funding Service will provide image upload details when you apply.

Translation and knowledge transfer and exchange

Word limit: 250

What is your approach to translational research and knowledge transfer and exchange?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain your approach, including:

- how your translational research approach will be developed in the MRC CoRE or with partners
- how you will maximise the potential benefit of research undertaken in the MRC CoRE to the research community, wider society and economy
- how you plan to maximise engagement with relevant stakeholders (academia, industry, charities, policy makers) to ensure the appropriate sharing of knowledge and expertise

Environmental sustainability

Word limit: 100

How will you approach environmental sustainability?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how you will:

- promote environmental sustainability in MRC CoRE research practices
- adopt relevant standards
- align your environmental sustainability strategy with host research organisation sustainability plans and policies

Training, careers and capacity building

Word limit: 500

What are your plans for the training, careers and capacity building environment in the MRC CoRE?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how your plans for training, careers and capacity building across career stages, pathways, and types will:

- provide the innovative training and capacity building environment needed to deliver on the challenge

- promote and share good practice in training and careers, including but not limited to:

  - ensuring an inclusive and progressive research training environment
  - preparing researchers for the challenges and opportunities available to them after their time at the MRC CoRE

- add value by convening and aligning existing training activity across the UK
- provide robust management and governance structures for training activities, including a named training lead

Within the training, careers and capacity building section we also expect you to:

- justify the training and capacity building proposed, in context of activities already on offer either within participating research organisations or nationally. If requesting doctoral studentships, you will need to demonstrate the national need for doctoral level training in this challenge area here and also complete the section 'Management of doctoral training'

Management of doctoral training

Word limit: 100

Will MRC CoRE students be managed as part of an existing MRC doctoral training programme (DTP) or equivalent?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Will MRC CoRE students be managed as part of an existing MRC DTP:

- if yes, state this and name the DTP and DTP lead
- if no, outline how you propose to manage doctoral training
- if you are not requesting support for doctoral students answer 'N/A'

Research culture

Word limit: 500

How will you achieve and continually strengthen a positive research culture environment?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Outline how you will:

- embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all activities
- embrace and realise the benefits of team science
- implement fair and transparent methods to assess performance, recognise contributions, and support career progression
- promote good research practice and open research

- integrate meaningful and challenge-led public involvement and engagement (PIE) into your research strategy and delivery

In describing your plans for research culture across the MRC CoRE you may need to refer to details in the leadership and training and career sections, you should not duplicate information provided in these sections.

Within the research culture section we also expect you to:

Describe the activities you will undertake to build on and enhance your host organisations' research culture plan or strategy, to support the following principles which underpin a positive research culture:

- research is conducted with integrity, centred on reproducibility, responsible innovation, collaboration, interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity
- research is communicated to maximise impact, built on transparency and openness, and partnership with the public
- career paths and training environment, are provided to recognise a diversity of talents, skills and outputs, and embrace team science as the way of working

Leadership environment

Word limit: 250

How will the leadership team lead this MRC CoRE?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how your plans for leadership will:

- represent an inclusive and creative approach to leadership
- establish a leadership team with clear roles and responsibilities, potential leadership rotation and clear succession plans
- support leadership commitments to building and sustaining a positive research culture
- manage the MRC CoRE and coordinate activities across multiple sites (if applicable)

Optional: within this section you can also demonstrate the proposed MRC CoRE leadership structure in visual form. You must:

- use images sparingly and only to convey important information that cannot easily be put into words
- insert each new image onto a new line
- provide a descriptive legend for each image immediately underneath it (this counts towards your word limit)

- files must be smaller than 8MB and in JPEG, JPG, JPE, JFI, JIF, JFIF, PNG, GIF, BMP or WEBP format

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Leadership team capability to deliver

Word limit: 2,000

Why are you the right leadership team to successfully deliver the proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Evidence of how your team, have:

- the relevant experience (appropriate to career stage) to deliver the proposed work
- the right balance of skills and expertise to cover the proposed work
- the appropriate leadership and management skills to deliver the work and your approach to develop others
- contributed to developing a positive research environment and wider community

The word count for this section is 2,000 words, 1,500 words to be used for R4RI modules and, if necessary, a further 500 words for Additions.

Use the Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI) format to showcase the range of relevant skills you and, if relevant, your team (project and project co-leads, researchers, technicians, specialists, partners and so on) have and how this will help deliver the proposed work. You can include individuals' specific achievements but only choose past contributions that best evidence their ability to deliver this work.

Complete this section using the R4RI module headings listed. Use each heading once and include a response for the whole team, see the **UKRI guidance on R4RI**. You should consider how to balance your answer, and emphasise where appropriate the following key skills each team member brings:

- contributions to the generation of new ideas, tools, methodologies, or knowledge
- the development of others and maintenance of effective working relationships
- contributions to the wider research and innovation community
- contributions to broader research or innovation users and audiences and towards wider societal benefit

Additions

Provide any further details relevant to your application. This section is optional and can be up to 500 words. You should not use it to describe additional skills, experiences, or outputs, but you can use it to describe any factors that provide context for the rest of your R4RI (for example, details of **career breaks** if you wish to disclose them).

Complete this as a narrative. Do not format it like a CV.

UKRI has introduced new role types for funding opportunities being run on the new UKRI Funding Service.

For full details, see **Eligibility as an individual**.

Research organisation support

Word limit: 2,000

Provide a statement of support from the host research organisations.

What the assessors are looking for in your response

We are looking for strong host support and capability to deliver, evidenced through a statement from an individual with oversight of the organisations research strategy, vice-chancellor research or equivalent. If the application is for an MRC CoRE to be delivered in partnership, then all participating organisations must contribute to a collective statement.

An outline of the support offered from the research organisation to this MRC CoRE and description of how the research organisation will help this MRC CoRE meet our expectations.

The statement should include:

- name and position of all contributors to the statement
- how this MRC CoRE aligns with host organisation strategies (research, research culture, training, sustainability)
- the support and facilities you will offer this MRC CoRE
- how you will operate this MRC CoRE and help it address its challenge
- how this MRC CoRE will be governed within your organisation or the partnership

Within the research organisation support section we also expect you to:

- explain how you will manage the partnership between research organisations (If applicable), to support delivery of MRC CoRE activities across organisations
- explain how your support you will contribute to a collaborative and stimulating multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research environment

If the MRC CoRE is to be hosted by a single research organisation you may only need 1,000 words.

Project partners

Word limit: 1,000

Provide details about any project partners' contributions.

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Download and complete the **Project partner contributions template (DOCX, 52KB)**.

Copy and paste the project partners table into the text box.

If you do not have any project partners, you will be able to indicate this in the UKRI Funding Service.

Ensure you have obtained prior agreement from project partners that, if you are offered funding, they will support your project as indicated in the contributions template.

For audit purposes, UKRI requires formal collaboration agreements to be put in place if an award is made.

Your partnerships and collaborations

Word limit: 150

How will project partners and collaborators contribute to capability to deliver this MRC CoRE?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

In your response explain:

- how specialist input from project partners and collaborators aligns with the MRC CoRE team to address the challenge
- how this increases capability to deliver this MRC CoRE
- how partners and collaborators will contribute to a stimulating multi or interdisciplinary research environment

Within the partnerships and collaborations section we also expect you to:

- refer to the leadership team described and the project partners listed in the 'Project partners' section. You should not repeat information provided in these sections

Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)

Word limit: 500

What are the ethical or RRI implications and issues relating to the proposed work? If you do not think that the proposed work raises any ethical or RRI issues, explain why.

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Demonstrate that you have identified and evaluated:

- the relevant ethical or responsible research and innovation considerations
- how you will manage these considerations

Consider the **MRC guidance on ethics and approvals**.

Outline costs

Provide costs that reflect, as accurately as possible, the funding you will need.

Provide headline figures only.

Justification for mid-range or large equipment costs should be included in the 'equipment section'

Equipment

Word count: 250

Do you want to request any mid-range or large equipment?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

If you want to request mid-range or large equipment critical to establish platforms or facilities at the MRC CoRE:

- list the equipment items
- include an estimated cost for each
- provide the percentage full economic cost to be requested
- justify why the equipment is required and how it will be used

Mid-range equipment is a single item costing over £138,000 (£115,000 excluding VAT).

If you do not want to request any mid-range or large equipment you will be able to indicate this in the UKRI Funding Service.

References

Word count: 250

List the references you have used to support your application.

Include all references in this section, not in the rest of the application questions.

You should not include any other information in this section.

We advise you not to include hyperlinks, as assessors are not obliged to access the information they lead to or consider it in their assessment of your application.

If linking to web resources, to maintain the information's integrity, include persistent identifiers (such as digital object identifiers) where possible.

You must not include links to web resources to extend your application.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

We will assess your application using the following process.

Your application will be assessed in a two-stage process. Your outline application will first be considered by an independent panel of experts.

If successful, you will be invited to submit a full application. This undergoes external peer review before a further and more detailed review by an independent panel of experts.

Panel

Outline applications will be assessed by the **MRC major investments board**, supplemented with additional panellists drawn from the MRC boards and panels and internationally to provide expertise based on the themes of interest.

We will invite experts to assess the quality of your application and rank it alongside other applications and agree which will be invited to submit a full application.

Timescale

We aim to complete the outline assessment process within three months of receiving your application.

Feedback

Feedback will be provided for all outline applications.

If your outline application is unsuccessful, we will indicate which assessment criteria were not met.

If you are invited to submit a full application feedback may include aspects to address in the full application.

Principles of assessment

We support the San Francisco **declaration on research assessment (DORA)** and recognise the relationship between research assessment and research integrity.

We reserve the right to modify the assessment process as needed.

Assessment criteria

Only a small number of applicants will be invited to prepare a full application. Outline applications must demonstrate the excitement of the research challenge and potential to fully meet all criteria to be invited to proceed. Outline applications which do not meet one or more criteria, including our expectations for MRC CoRE environment, will not be successful.

The criteria we will assess your application against are:

- challenge
- approach to the challenge, including:
    - research
    - translation and knowledge transfer
    - environmental sustainability

- MRC CoRE environment, including:
    - training, careers and capacity building
    - research culture
    - leadership environment

- capability to deliver the MRC CoRE, including:
    - leadership team capability to deliver
    - research organisation support
    - partnerships and collaborations

Find details of assessment questions and criteria under the 'Application questions' heading in the 'How to apply' section.

Contact details

Ask about this funding opportunity

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Helpdesk is committed to helping users of the Funding Service as effectively and as quickly as possible. In order to manage cases at peak volume times, the Helpdesk will triage and prioritise those queries with an imminent opportunity deadline or a technical issue. Enquiries raised where information is available on the Funding Finder opportunity page and should be understood early in the application process (for example, regarding eligibility or content/remit of an opportunity) will not constitute a priority case and will be addressed as soon as possible.

Contact Details

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

For questions related to remit and scientific aspects of this specific funding opportunity please contact **core@mrc.ukri.org**

For general questions related to MRC funding including our funding opportunities and policy please contact **rfpd@mrc.ukri.org**

Any queries regarding the system or the submission of applications through the Funding Service should be directed to the helpdesk.

Email: **support@funding-service.ukri.org**

Phone: 01793 547490

Our phone lines are open:

- Monday to Thursday 8:30am to 5:00pm
- Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm

To help us process queries quicker, we request that users highlight the council and opportunity name in the subject title of their email query, include the application reference number, and refrain from contacting more than one mailbox at a time.

You can also find information on submitting an application here: **Improving your funding experience**.

Sensitive information

If you or a core team member need to tell us something you wish to remain confidential, email **core@mrc.ukri.org**

Include in the subject line: [the funding opportunity title; sensitive information; your Funding Service application number].

Typical examples of confidential information include:

- individual is unavailable until a certain date (for example due to parental leave)
- declaration of interest
- additional information about eligibility to apply that would not be appropriately shared in the 'Applicant and team capability' section
- conflict of interest for UKRI to consider in reviewer or panel participant selection
- the application is an invited resubmission

For information about how UKRI handles personal data, read **UKRI's privacy notice**.

Additional info

Background

MRC CoRE funding is awarded based on the **MRC CoRE additional terms and conditions of funding**. These include the responsibilities of the director and leadership team.

Applications should be positioned in the context of ongoing investments across MRC, co-funding partners and the broader landscape and aligned with **MRC Strategic Delivery Plan 2022 to 2025** objectives.

Enhancing healthspan

MRC activity in ageing research is coordinated through the **Population and Systems Medicine Board**, which supports mechanistic and applied research relating to the physiology and pathophysiology of major human organs and systems. The promotion of healthy ageing and reduction of the burden of mental and physical illness throughout life is a priority within the MRC strategic delivery plan. MRC in partnership with other UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) councils are working to bring interdisciplinary research to bear on the challenge of ageing research through **UK Ageing Networks** where ideas can be shared, and through **ageing research development awards** as part of the UKRI theme of **securing better health, ageing and wellbeing**.

Immune regulation

MRC activity in immune regulation is coordinated through the **Infections and Immunity Board** which supports mechanistic and applied research to develop our scientific understanding of human infectious disease and disorders of the immune system. Immune regulation offers strong synergies with on-going **MRC** and **UKRI** priorities in ageing research and infectious disease.

Molecular mechanisms to inform cancer intervention

MRC activity in cancer research is coordinated through the **Molecular and Cellular Medicine Board** which supports research into basic biological mechanisms or technologies relevant to human health and disease, including understanding the aetiology of disease and developing treatments. The theme is directly relevant to objectives in the **MRC's strategic delivery plan** and including on-going priorities in ageing research.

Webinar for potential applicants

A webinar for potential applicants was held on Wednesday 8 November.

Watch the **webinar recording (YouTube)**.

Slide set from webinar (PDF, 1.74MB)

Question report (PDF, 202KB)

Research disruption due to COVID-19

We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities. We are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career, such as:

- breaks and delays
- disruptive working patterns and conditions
- the loss of ongoing work
- role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic

Reviewers and panel members will be advised to consider the unequal impacts that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the capability to deliver and career development of those individuals included in the application. They will be asked to consider the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing.

Where disruptions have occurred, you can highlight this within your application if you wish, but there is no requirement to detail the specific circumstances that caused the disruption.

Updates

22 February 2024
In the timeline, updated the outline application panel meeting date from 'March 2024' to 'April 2024'.

Timeline

○ **25 September 2023 9:00am**

Outline application opening date

○ **8 November 2023 10:30am**

Webinar

○ **7 February 2024 4:00pm**

Outline application closing date

○ **April 2024**

Outline application panel meeting

○ **April 2024**

Informed of outline decision

○ **May 2024**

Invited full application opening date

○ **September 2024**

Invited full application closing date

○ **January 2025**

Interview panel (funding decision meeting)

○ **March 2025**

Informed of funding decision

○ **2024 (timing to be confirmed)**

Future round open for outline application

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/mrc-centre-of-research-excellence-round-two