



Funding opportunity

Early Independence: NERC Independent Research Fellowship 2026

Opportunity status:	Open
Funders:	Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
Funding type:	Fellowship
Total fund:	£7,250,000
Publication date:	25 February 2026
Opening date:	25 February 2026 9:00am UK time
Closing date:	16 June 2026 4:00pm UK time

Apply for funding to further your career through an independent research fellowship

You must:

- be based at a UK research organisation eligible for Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) funding
- meet the individual eligibility requirements
- be an early career researcher
- hold a PhD qualification or have relevant research experience combined with clear evidence of leadership potential

Your application must be within NERC's remit.

There is no limit on the value of the grant. NERC will fund 80% of the full economic cost (FEC).

Your fellowship will last five years. You can work full time or part time (pro rata), see section 'Who can apply' for details.

Who can apply

This opportunity is open to organisations with standard eligibility. [Check if your organisation is eligible](#).

Before applying for funding, check the following:

- [NERC eligibility guidance for applicants](#)
- check if your project is within [NERC remit](#) and complete a [NERC remit enquiry form](#) if you are unsure if your application falls in NERC's remit.

For more details on funding for fellows on research grants, [see the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook](#).

Who is eligible to apply

This funding opportunity is open to early career researchers, as well as to a diversity of research and innovation staff including research technical professionals and research software engineers, wishing to carry out independent research. Applicants on an upward trajectory to pursuing working independently and developing research leadership are encouraged to apply.

You should be able to demonstrate appropriate and relevant research or innovation experience. You must also be able to evidence reasonable scientific and technical skills and competencies, in line with the ambitions of the Independent Research Fellowship scheme.

This could be through:

- completion of a PhD or other higher qualification
- relevant employment within a research or innovation environment

You do not need to hold, or be studying for, a PhD to apply. However, if you are currently studying for a PhD, you are only eligible if you are expecting to have submitted your PhD thesis before the Independent Research Fellowship (IRF) interview with the condition of having been awarded the PhD by your fellowship project start date.

There is no limit on the number of years postdoctoral or work experience.

Holders of postdoctoral training fellowships such as the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions can apply. Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin fellows and Daphne

Jackson Trust fellows who meet all eligibility requirements may also apply.

If you have been included on applications to other funding opportunities as a project co-lead, then you are eligible to apply provided you still meet all eligibility criteria. Your fellowship application must be different from previous applications you have been included on.

Applicants that have been previously employed at lecturer level are still eligible to apply for IRF if this was clearly a 'teaching only' post that did not provide an opportunity to start an independent research group.

International applicants

Fellowships are open to applicants of any nationality, with the condition that your fellowships must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for NERC funding. Where applicable, you will need to comply with the UK Visas and Immigration requirements and hold a work permit prior to taking up the fellowship. Work permits are a matter for direct negotiation between the institution, the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) department and the Home Office.

All successful applicants who require a visa to work in the UK will be eligible to be considered under the [Global Talent visa](#) route.

This visa route is designed for people who are internationally recognised as world leaders or potential world leading talent in the fields of science and the arts and enables the holder to be both adaptable and flexible during their research in the UK.

The grant of any visa is always subject to the standard Home Office general grounds for refusal of a visa. UKRI is able to provide additional guidance regarding the appropriate evidence required to complete the visa application process under the Global Talent visa route. If you have queries around the Global Talent Visa, please contact globalmobility@ukri.org.

Applications are welcome from candidates who intend to use the fellowship as a means of re-establishing themselves in the UK following a period overseas.

Who is not eligible to apply

You should not apply if you hold, or have ever held:

- a position at lecturer level, or the equivalent in an institution other than a university, that allowed you to set up a research group and conduct your own research
- an equivalent competitive fellowship that allows you to establish an independent research group, and therefore independent researcher status
- a tenured academic post

If you hold or have held a fellowship where you are eligible to supervise PhD students, as first supervisor, or are able to submit research applications as a project lead, then we consider that equivalent to a lectureship. As a result, you are not eligible to apply.

Examples of these fellowships include, but are not limited to:

- Wellcome Trust Sir Henry Dale Fellowships
- Medical Research Council career development awards
- UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships
- Royal Society University Research Fellowship

If you are unsure of your eligibility status, then email fellowships@nerc.ukri.org to confirm before you apply.

You cannot submit applications to concurrent [Fellowship investment framework](#).

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

[UKRI can offer disability and accessibility support](#) for UKRI applicants and grant holders during the application and assessment process. Find out more about [equality, diversity and inclusion at UKRI](#).

Part-time fellowship

IRFs may be held full or part-time where candidates wish to work on a part-time or flexible basis to combine caring responsibilities with a career.

IRFs can be held on a part-time basis with a min of 0.5 full time equivalent (FTE). In all cases, the length of the fellowship must be extended accordingly on a pro rata basis. For example, a five-year fellowship on a full-time basis would equate to a 10-year fellowship with the fellow working 0.5 FTE, but the value of the award would remain the same.

It is possible to change from part time to full time, or full time to part time at any point during the lifetime of the award but with an expectation of a min 0.5 FTE.

A part-time fellow may not hold another part-time position in conjunction with the fellowship.

For more details on funding for fellows on research grants, [see the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook](#).

Choice of institution

We recognise that mobility is not the only means to acquire the skills and experiences necessary to build a research career. We also recognise the need for having a fixed institution to provide unique facilities or opportunities, and other circumstances where moving would be unsuitable, such as domestic arrangements.

To demonstrate a commitment to the development of IRFs, we expect you to have agreed with your head of department of your host institution their support and evidence this in the appropriate 'Host organisation support' section of your application.

Resubmissions

Resubmissions of identical fellowships application are not permitted. However, applicants may submit revised applications that clearly address feedback from previous assessment.

What we're looking for

Scope

Through an Independent Research Fellowship (IRF) we will invest in researchers seeking to conduct their own environmental research, within an eligible host organisation. You should demonstrate convincing evidence of working towards this goal and a high potential to become an independent research leader of the future.

You must demonstrate that, if awarded an IRF, you will be working independently of senior colleagues with whom you might have previously collaborated, or with whom you might currently be working in a supporting role. Assessors must be convinced that you have devised your own research questions.

For examples, of how to demonstrate meeting these criteria, see the 'How we will assess your application' section.

This funding opportunity supports excellent investigator-led research across NERC's remit. We welcome multidisciplinary applications that cross into other

research council areas but expect the primary focus of your work to fall within NERC's remit.

Your application will be remit checked by NERC representatives. We work with other research councils to ensure that applications close to remit boundaries are assessed by the most appropriate lead council.

Duration

The duration of this award is five years.

Projects must start by 15 August 2027.

Funding available

There is no maximum or minimum value limit of the award.

NERC will fund 80% of the FEC.

All resources requested must be fully justified and reasonable in the context of the proposed research.

Project partners fund their own involvement. We will only fund minor incidental expenses, such as some travel costs, if needed for project partners.

Costs for ship and marine equipment (SME) are allowed, but you do not need to include them in your application 'Resources and cost justification' section. For more detail, refer to the 'Ship-time and marine facilities' section.

What we will fund

We will fund:

- facilities costs
- cruise costs
- other costs
- directly incurred costs

Costs that are explicitly identifiable as arising from the conduct of a project are charged as the cash value actually spent and are supported by an auditable record.

You may request individual items and consumables up to £25,000 under 'directly incurred other costs'.

Laptops may be costed where a new member of staff, for example a fellow, who is employed purely for the grant will require this, or where a higher specification is required for the completion of specific grant related activities such as data modelling or enhanced graphics.

At the end of your fellowship, any resources purchased will belong to your host institution.

Relocation and visas

Applicants moving to the UK from overseas to take up an award may request costs including immigration health surcharge .

Visa costs can be covered for the fellow only.

These costs should be applied for under the ‘directly incurred other costs’ heading on your application.

For more information on relocation costs, please [see UKRI terms and conditions of FEC grants guidance](#).

Directly allocated costs

Estates costs include building and premises costs, basic services and utilities and appear under the ‘directly allocated costs’ heading. Estates costs are calculated by the research organisation on application.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs include the costs of administration, such as personnel, finance, library and some departmental services. Like estate costs, indirect costs will be calculated by the research organisation, and a single figure will be entered on the application.

Pooled staff costs

Pooled staff costs can also be claimed under ‘Other Directly Allocated’ or ‘Directly Incurred Staff’ or ‘Directly Allocated Staff’ costs, depending on how your research organisation normally costs them. They need to be employed by the research organisation and can be added as unnamed in the resources and cost section.

The only permitted named role in the core team section is fellow. No other roles are to be added to the core team section.

For more details on funding for research grants, see the [NERC research grant and fellowships handbook](#).

What we will not fund

We will not fund:

- PhD studentship or research and innovation associate costs
- requests for equipment of £25,000 and over are not part of this funding opportunity.
You should request smaller items (under £25,000 individually) under

'Consumables (other directly incurred costs)' in your application. This £25,000 funding limit cannot be used to part-fund equipment costing more than the £25,000 limit.

Services and facilities

You can apply to use a facility or resource in your funding application.

You should discuss your application with the facility or service at least two months before the funding opportunity's closing date to:

- discuss the proposed work in detail
- receive confirmation that they can provide the services required within the timeframe of the funding

The facility will provide a technical assessment that includes the calculated cost of providing the service. NERC services and facilities must be costed within the limits of the funding.

You should not submit the technical assessment with the application, but you must confirm you have received it.

For more information, [see the NERC research grants and fellowships handbook](#).

[Read the full list of NERC facilities that require a technical assessment.](#)

High Performance Computing (HPC), [Ship-Time or Marine Equipment \(SME\)](#) and the large research facilities at Harwell have their own policies for access and costing.

High Performance Computing (HPC)

Please refer to the following guidance [Applying to use high performance computing services](#) and the [HPC section of the NERC facilities and resources](#) for the latest information on how to apply for HPC services.

Ship-time and marine facilities

Applications may require ship-time and other marine facilities. If you wish to use NERC's marine facilities, then you must complete an online 'ship-time and marine equipment (SME) or autonomous deployment (ADF) application form' available from [Marine Facilities Planning](#). Include the SME or ADF number on the 'Facilities' section of your application.

SMEs or ADFs must be submitted to and approved by NERC Marine Planning by the time your funding application is submitted. A PDF of the SME or ADF can be attached as a facility form to your application. If you do not do this, your request may not be included in the NERC Marine Facilities Programme.

If you intend on using NERC marine facilities, [see NERC marine facilities: availability 2025 to 2030](#) for advice on facility availability. You should also contact marineplanning@nerc.ukri.org to discuss your requirements as soon as possible and by Friday 15 May 2026.

British Antarctic Survey (BAS) Antarctic logistics support

If you require NERC BAS Antarctic logistics support, then you must complete a [Pre-Award Operational Support Planning Questionnaire](#) (OSPQ) online.

You must email the Antarctic Access Office (AAO) at BAS, afibas@bas.ac.uk, stating your name, institution and project title. The AAO will then grant you access to the OSPQ portal where you can complete a pre award OSPQ to detail your support requirements.

The deadline for pre-award OSPQs to be submitted is Monday 16 March. You are encouraged to engage with the AAO at an early stage for an initial discussion around the feasibility of your fieldwork plans. Any funding applications that require BAS Antarctic logistic support will not be awarded unless your OSPQ has been approved. All funding applications wishing to use Antarctic logistics support must add this to the facilities question in your application.

You should [refer to the BAS webpage](#) for direction on which Antarctic Logistic Support (ALS) costs should be included in your application budgets. These costs should be clearly identified on your funding application and included in the 'Resources and cost justification' as £XXX for ALS.

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](#).

Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I)

UK Research and Innovation (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 UKRI's expectations of organisations funded by UKRI in relation to due diligence for international collaboration.

As such, applicants for UKRI funding may be asked to demonstrate how your 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.

[See further guidance and information about TR&I](#), including where you can find additional support.

Data management

You must adhere to [UKRI open research policy](#) and [NERC data policy](#) and complete the 'Data management and sharing' question.

For details of data centres, [see the NERC Environmental Data Service](#).

We will pay the data centre directly on behalf of the programme for archival and curation services, but you should ensure that you request sufficient resource to cover preparation of data for archiving by the research team. Additional services from the data centres, such as database development or a specialist in project data management during your project, will need to be discussed with the relevant data centre prior to submission, costs for additional services will need to be funded from your grant.

Responsible research

Through our funding processes, we seek to make a positive contribution to society and the environment. This is not just through research outputs and outcomes but through the way in which research is conducted and facilities managed.

All NERC grant holders are to adopt responsible research practices as set out in the [NERC responsible business statement](#).

Responsible research is defined as reducing harm or enhancing benefit on the environment and society through effective management of research activities and facilities. Specifically, this covers:

- the natural environment
- the local community
- equality, diversity and inclusion

You should consider the responsible research context of your project, not the host institution as a whole. You should take action to enhance your responsible research approach where practical and reasonable.

How to apply

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

The fellow is responsible for completing the application process on the 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.

[Watch our recording on how to apply for an opportunity in the Funding Service.](#)

To apply

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

1. Confirm you are the fellow.
2. Sign in or create a 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 Funding Service. We strongly suggest that if you are asking UKRI to add your organisation to the Funding Service to enable you to apply to this funding opportunity, that you also create an organisation Administration Account. This will be needed to allow the acceptance and management of any grant that might be offered to you.
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 Funding Service. All questions and assessment criteria are listed in the 'How to apply' section on this Funding finder page.
4. Allow enough time to check your application in 'read-only' view before sending to your research office.
5. Send the completed application to your research office for checking. They will return it to you if it needs editing.
6. Your research office will submit the completed and checked application to UKRI.

Where indicated, you can also demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant.

When including images, you must:

- provide a descriptive caption or legend for each image immediately underneath it in the text box (this must be outside the image and counts towards your word limit)
- insert each new image on a new line
- use files smaller than 5MB and in JPEG, JPG, JPE, JFI, JIF, JFIF, PNG, GIF, BMP or WEBP format

Images should only be used to convey important visual information that cannot easily be put into words. The following are not permitted, and your application may be rejected if you include:

- sentences or paragraphs of text
- tables
- excessive quantities of images

A few words are permitted where the image would lack clarity without the contextual words, such as a diagram, where text labels are required for an axis or graph column.

For more guidance on the Funding Service, see:

- [how applicants use the Funding Service](#)
- [how research offices use the Funding Service](#)
- [how reviewers use the Funding Service](#)

References

References should be included within the word count of the appropriate question section. You should use your discretion when including references and prioritise those most pertinent to the application.

Hyperlinks can be used in reference information. When including references, you should consider how your references will be viewed and used by the assessors, ensuring that:

- references are easily identifiable by the assessors
- references are formatted as appropriate to your research
- persistent identifiers are used where possible

Reference should be included in the appropriate question section of the application and be easily identifiable by the assessors, for example (Smith, Journal, 2019).

You can have in-text citations as per above example, using DOI where possible, and hyperlink them to the scientific paper, so a full bibliography won't be needed as references count towards the word limit.

General use of hyperlinks

Applications should be self-contained. You should only use hyperlinks to link directly to reference information. You must not include links to web resources to extend your application. Assessors are not required to access links to conduct assessment or recommend a funding decision.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI)

Use of generative AI tools to prepare funding applications is permitted, however, caution should be applied.

For more information [see our policy on the use of generative AI in application and assessment](#).

Deadline

We must receive your application by 16 June 2026 at 4:00pm UK time.

You will not be able to apply after this time.

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

Following the submission of your application to the funding opportunity, your application cannot be changed, and submitted applications will not be amended. If your application does not follow the guidance, it may be rejected.

Personal data

Processing personal data

NERC, 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](#).

Sensitive information

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

Include in the subject line: Independent Research Fellowship 2026; 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 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to consider in reviewer or panel participant selection

For information about how UKRI handles personal data, [read UKRI's privacy notice](#).

Institutional matched funding

There is no requirement for matched funding from the institutions hosting the fellow, beyond the standard 20% FEC. Expert reviewers and panels assessing UKRI funding applications must not consider levels of institutional matched funding as a factor on which to base recommendations. Direct and in-kind contributions from third party project partners are encouraged.

This policy does not remove the need for support from host organisations who must provide the necessary research environment and infrastructure for award-specific activities funded by UKRI. For example, research facilities, training, development of staff.

Publication of outcomes

NERC, as part of UKRI, will publish the outcomes of this funding opportunity on [What NERC has funded](#).

If your application is successful, we will publish some personal information on the [UKRI Gateway to Research](#).

Summary

Word limit: 550

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

We usually make this summary publicly available on external-facing websites, therefore do not include any confidential or sensitive information. Make it suitable for a variety of readers, for example:

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

Guidance for writing a summary

Clearly describe your proposed work in terms of:

- context
- the challenge the project addresses
- aims and objectives
- potential applications and benefits

Core team

The only named member of staff in this section is the fellow. ‘Specialist’ and ‘technician’ are visible in the list due to the Funding Service functionality, do not select ‘specialist’ or ‘technician’ in this section. Only the fellow should be selected in this section, if other roles are selected the application will be rejected:

- fellow
- specialist
- technician

Unnamed, pooled staff can be costed in the Resources and Cost section. See ‘What we will fund’ for further details.

The fellow is responsible for setting up and completing the application process on the Funding Service.

[Find out more about UKRI’s core team roles in funding applications.](#)

Application questions

Classification of application

Word limit: 7

Which classification is the closest match to your application?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Write into the text box one of the following classifications to support the assessment process:

- atmospheric kinetics
- behavioural ecology
- biogeochemical cycles
- boundary layer meteorology
- climate and climate change
- community ecology
- conservation ecology
- earth engineering
- earth resources
- earth surface processes
- ecosystem-scale processes and land use
- ecotoxicology
- environment and health
- environmental biotechnology

- environmental genomics
- environmental informatics
- environmental microbiology
- environmental physiology
- geohazards
- glacial and cryospheric systems
- hydrogeology
- hydrological processes
- land – ocean interactions
- land-atmosphere interactions (focus on atmosphere)
- land-atmosphere interactions (focus on land)
- large scale atmospheric dynamics and transport
- mantle and core processes
- ocean – atmosphere interaction
- ocean circulation
- palaeobiology
- palaeoenvironments
- physics and chemistry of earth materials
- planetary surfaces and geology
- pollution
- population ecology
- population genetics and evolution
- quaternary science
- radiative processes and effects
- regional weather and extreme events
- science-based archaeology (focus on fossilised organisms)
- science-based archaeology (focus on geoarchaeology)
- sediments and sedimentary processes
- soil science
- stratospheric processes
- survey and monitoring
- systematics and taxonomy
- technology for environmental applications
- tectonic processes
- tropospheric processes
- upper atmosphere processes and geospace
- volcanic processes
- water in the atmosphere
- water quality

If your application has two classifications which share the dominant coverage, then select one of these only to write. You can find more information on NERC remit classification here: [Research areas covered by NERC remit](#).

Vision

Word limit: 1,100

What are you hoping to achieve with your proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how your proposed work:

- is of excellent quality and importance within or beyond the field(s) or area(s)
- has the potential to advance current understanding, or generate new knowledge, thinking or discovery within or beyond the field or area of its focus
- is timely, given current trends, context, and needs
- impacts world-leading research, society, the economy or the environment
- Supports wider capacity development in the field(s) or area(s) of focus

In this section we also expect you to:

- identify the potential direct or indirect benefits and who the beneficiaries might be
- identify the potential local, regional and or national impacts, both direct and indirect, and who the beneficiaries might be
- explain how your proposed work enhances the UK's research and innovation capabilities through local and or regional activity

References may be included within this section.

You may demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

Approach

Word limit: 2,750

How are you going to deliver your proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how you have designed your work so that it:

- is effective and appropriate to achieve your objectives
- is feasible, and comprehensively identifies any risks to delivery and how you will manage them

- uses a clearly written and transparent methodology (if applicable)
- summarises the previous work and describes how you will build on and progress this work (if applicable)
- will maximise translation of outputs into outcomes and impacts

Within this section we also expect you to:

- demonstrate access to the appropriate services, facilities, infrastructure, or equipment to deliver the proposed work
- provide a detailed and comprehensive project plan, including milestones and timelines in the form of a chart or diagram

References may be included within this section.

You may demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

Applicant capability to deliver

Word limit: 1,650

Why are you the right individual to successfully deliver the proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Evidence of how you have:

- the relevant experience (appropriate to career stage) to make best use of the benefits presented by this funding opportunity to develop your career
- the right balance of skills and aptitude to deliver the proposed work
- contributed to developing a positive research environment and wider community
- the appropriate team working or leadership skills (appropriate to career stage)

You may demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

The word limit for this section is 1,650 words, 1,150 words to be used for Résumé for Research and Innovation (R4RI) modules (including references) and, if necessary, a further 500 words for Additions.

Use the R4RI format to showcase the range of relevant skills you have and how this will help to deliver the proposed work. You can include specific achievements and choose past contributions that best evidence your ability to deliver this work.

Complete this section using the following R4RI module headings. You should use each heading once, [see the UKRI guidance on R4RI](#). You should consider

how to balance your answer, and emphasise where appropriate the key skills you bring:

- 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).

You should complete this section as a narrative. Do not format it like a CV.

References may be included within this section.

The [roles in funding applications policy](#) has descriptions of the different project roles.

Career development

Word limit: 1,000

Why is this fellowship the right way to develop your career and how will you use it to benefit others?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Ensure that you have identified:

- career development goals appropriate to the fellowship funding opportunity
- how the fellowship will provide a feasible and appropriate trajectory for your personal development and to achieve your stated career development goals (as appropriate to your career stage and field)
- an appropriate trajectory for you to acquire additional skills, like research, leadership, communication and management

Within this section we also expect you to describe:

- how you will ensure continued research and professional development in those you, if applicable, will be managing on the project, to have a positive research and innovation experience, with opportunities or support to progress their own careers (useful links [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) and [Technician Commitment](#))

- what mentoring arrangements are proposed and how they are appropriate to you

Host organisation support

Word limit: 1,000

How will the host organisation support your fellowship?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Provide a support statement including:

- evidence detailing how the host organisation will support you, as appropriate for your career development and the vision and approach of the fellowship
- who you have engaged with in your host organisation (name and role)
- how your research environment will contribute to the success of the work, in terms of suitability of the host organisation and strategic relevance to the project
- how the host organisation will ensure your time commitment to the fellowship is protected
- what development and training opportunities will be provided and how they form a cohesive career development package tailored to your aims and aspirations
- what financial or practical support, such as access to the appropriate services, facilities, infrastructure, or equipment, is being provided and how this strengthens your application

Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in your work

Word limit: 500

How are you showing a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in your work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Show evidence of:

- a commitment to DEI through your proposed work, ensuring any outreach is accessible and ensuring work carried out is DEI friendly
- an approach and commitment to championing DEI by removing barriers in the wider research environment and promoting an open and inclusive research community
- how you will instigate positive change in the wider research and innovation community, for example through Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), advocacy or advisory roles, stakeholder engagement, participation in expert review, influencing policy, public engagement, or outreach

Resources and cost justification

Word limit: 1,000

What will you need to deliver your proposed work and how much will it cost?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Justify the application's more costly resources, in particular:

- project staff
- significant travel for field work or collaboration (but not regular travel between collaborating organisations or to conferences)
- any consumables beyond typical requirements, or that are required in exceptional quantities
- all facilities and infrastructure costs
- training costs

You can request costs associated with reasonable adjustments where they increase as a direct result of working on the project. For further information see [Disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants and grant holders](#).

Assessors are not looking for detailed costs or a line-by-line breakdown of all project resources. Overall, they want you to demonstrate how the resources you anticipate needing for your proposed work:

- are comprehensive, appropriate, and justified
- represent the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes
- maximise potential outcomes and impacts

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 and RRI considerations
- how you will manage these considerations

This could include, but is not limited to:

- research involving animals

- genetically modified organisms
- research involving human tissues or biological samples, including the nature and quantity of the material used and its source
- research involving human participation, including the numbers and diversity of the participants involved and any procedures
- consideration of environmental sustainability, following [UKRI's environmental sustainability strategy](#), including preventing environmental harm and enhancing environmental benefit
- consideration of social responsibility including equality, diversity and inclusion, in line with [NERC's responsible business statement](#)

If you are collecting or using data, you should identify:

- any legal and ethical considerations of collecting, releasing or storing the data (including consent, confidentiality, anonymisation, security and other ethical considerations and, in particular, strategies to not preclude further reuse of data)
- formal information standards that your proposed work will comply with

You may demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

Please refer to the [UKRI position statement on funding ethical research](#) and [Responsible innovation](#) for more information around our expectations on ethical and responsible research and innovation.

Project partners

Provide details about any project partners' contributions. If there are no project partners, you can indicate this on the Funding Service.

A project partner is a collaborating organisation who will have an integral role in the proposed research. This may include direct contributions for example cash, donated equipment and resources, or staff seconded to the project, or indirect and in-kind contributions for example use of project partner's equipment, datasets, or facilities. Project partners may be in industry, academia, third sector or government organisations in the UK or overseas, including partners based in the EU.

Add the following project partner details:

- organisation name and address (searchable via a drop-down list or enter the organisation's details manually, as applicable)
- project partner contact name and email address
- type of contribution (direct or in-direct) and its monetary value

If a detail is entered incorrectly and you have saved the entry, remove the specific project partner record and re-add it with the correct information.

Letters of support from project partners are not required and cannot be added as attachments to this section.

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

Facilities

Word limit: 250

Does your proposed research require the support and use of a facility?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

If you will need to use a research council facility, follow your proposed facility's normal access request procedures. Ensure you have prior agreement so that if you are offered funding, they will support the use of their facility on your project.

For each requested facility you will need to provide the:

- name of facility, copied and pasted from the [facility information list \(DOCX, 42KB\)](#)
- proposed usage or costs, or costs per unit where indicated on the facility information list
- confirmation you have their agreement where required

If you have to attach a facility form, for example NERC ship-time and marine equipment, then upload it as a PDF. If you need to upload multiple forms, then combine them into a single PDF.

Facilities should only be named if they are on the facility information list. If you will not need to use a facility, then you will be able to indicate this in the Funding Service.

Upload guidance

Upload a single PDF containing facility forms ensuring it is no larger than 8MB, if applicable.

For the file name, use the Funding Service number the system gives to your application when you create an application, immediately followed by the words 'facility forms', then use the 'upload' button.

Unless specifically requested, do not include any personal data within the attachment.

Once you have uploaded, mark this section as complete and move to the next one.

Data management and sharing

Word limit: 500

How will you manage and share data collected or acquired through the proposed research?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Within this section we expect you to provide a data management plan that clearly details how you will comply with UKRI's published [data sharing policy](#), which includes detailed guidance notes.

Indicate:

- which UKRI data centre is required to archive the data
- whether the total volume of data is likely to be larger than 1TB
- any other detail on how you will comply with NERC data policy
- requirements of the proposed sensing system or capability on current digital research infrastructure (including data and compute)
- how data accessibility for both private and public end users will be enhanced

For queries, contact data@nerc.ukri.org

Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I)

Word limit: 100

Does your proposed work relate to UKRI's Trusted Research and Innovation principles?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Demonstrate how your proposed work relates to UKRI's Trusted Research and Innovation principles including:

- list any dual-use (both military and non-military) applications to your research
- if this project is relevant to one or more of the [17 areas of the UK National Security and Investment \(NSI\) Act](#), please list the area(s)
- please read the [academic export control guidance](#) and confirm if an export control license is required for this project and the status of any application(s)
- if your project involves any items or substances on the UK strategic export control list, please list these

We may ask you to provide additional TR&I information later, in line with UKRI TR&I Principles and funding terms and conditions (RGC 2.6.2, 2.7.1 and 2.7.2).

Resubmissions

Word limit: 500

Is your application a resubmission?

Please state 'yes' or 'no'.

If yes, please demonstrate how you have addressed the feedback provided by the panel in your application.

Other UKRI grants applied for

Word limit: 500

Are you named on any other UKRI applications currently under assessment?

Please state 'yes' or 'no'.

If yes, please detail the name of the funding opportunity that the application was submitted to and your role in the proposal.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

We will assess your application using the following process.

Assessment panel followed by interview panel

We will invite expert panel members to assess your application independently, against the specified criteria for this funding opportunity.

You will not be able to nominate reviewers for applications on the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Funding Service. Research councils will continue to select expert panel members.

Triage stage

Expert panel members submit scores for applications prior to the panel meeting. Working with the chairs, NERC will determine a cut-off point using panel member scores to create a shortlist of applications proceeding to the next stage.

Panel meeting

Shortlisted applications discussed at expert panel meeting. The expert panel provides NERC with a list of recommended applicants to be invited to interview.

For more information on how we prioritise applications for funding please visit [How we make decisions](#).

Interviews

Expert interview panel conducts interviews February to March 2027. Applicants invited to interview will deliver a presentation, followed by interview questions from the panel. These questions will consist of scientific questions raised by panel members about your proposed work and non-scientific questions (such as leadership, career development or impact).

Reasonable adjustments to the interview set up will be implemented for those who request it, [see Disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants and grant holders](#).

The interview panel will make a funding recommendation. NERC will make the final funding decision.

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

Timescale

We aim to notify applicants whether they have been selected for interview by February 2027 and aim to inform interviewed applicants by May 2027 whether they have been successful in being selected for funding. Successful IRF26 applicants should aim to start their project by 15 August 2027.

Feedback

NERC will give feedback with the outcome of your application.

Principles of assessment

We support the [San Francisco declaration on research assessment](#) and recognise the relationship between research assessment and research integrity.

Find out about the [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\) principles of assessment and decision making](#).

Using generative artificial intelligence (AI) in expert review

Reviewers and panellists are not permitted to use generative AI tools to develop their assessment, including to correct language, spelling, grammar and formatting. Using these tools can potentially compromise the confidentiality of the ideas that applicants have entrusted to UKRI to safeguard.

For more detail [see our policy on the use of generative AI](#).

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

Assessment areas

The areas against which your application will be assessed are:

- vision
- approach
- applicant capability to deliver
- career development
- host organisation support
- commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)
- resources and cost justification
- ethics and responsible research and innovation

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

Contact details

Get help with your application

If you have a question and the answers aren't provided on this page

The Helpdesk is committed to helping users of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) 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 funding 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 remit of a funding 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 application, contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

For questions related to this specific funding opportunity, contact fellowships@nerc.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 funding 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.

For further information on submitting an application [read How applicants use the Funding Service](#).

Additional info

Research and innovation impact

Impact can be defined as the long-term intended or unintended effect research and innovation has on society, economy and the environment, to individuals, organisations, and the wider global population.

Global Talent visa

Independent Research Fellows are eligible for a [Global Talent visa](#) under the 'exceptional promise' category for future research leaders.

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.

Our commitment to the principles of the Modern Slavery Act 2015

Modern slavery is a crime and a violation of fundamental human rights. It takes various forms which deprive a person of their liberty in order to exploit them for personal or commercial gain, such as:

- slavery
- servitude
- human trafficking
- forced and compulsory labour

We are committed to the principles of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and the abolition of modern slavery and human trafficking.

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

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<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/early-independence-nerc-independent-research-fellowship-2026>