

Research England Development Fund

Guidance on submitting a proposal

This document provides guidance for proposals to the Research England Development Fund and should be read in conjunction with the fund's information on the Research England website.

Additional documents also form part of the guidance for Higher Education Providers (the bidding template, frequently asked questions, and the list of our priorities).

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Introduction

1. The Research England Development (RED) Fund aims to support the development of the higher education sector's research and knowledge exchange in line with the developing priorities of Government and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The Fund will do this by supporting time-limited developmental projects for significant public benefit. Projects will most likely be collaborative in nature in order to secure benefits beyond the lead provider.

Developing proposals to the RED Fund

2. The first step in considering making a proposal to the fund is to test the project idea with a representative of Research England. Email REDevelopmentFund@re.ukri.org to log your interest and to be put in touch with the appropriate contact. We will advise on general fit with the fund policies and priorities, and the likely chances of success. If the project idea is at an early stage of thinking, an initial discussion may be more suitable. You may then be requested to complete a short summary of a proposed project idea, on one or two sides of A4. Alternatively, providers can submit the short summary, and we will seek to respond within two weeks.

3. Formal proposals must be worked up according to our guidance. Interested bidders should keep Research England informed of key developments so that we can provide advice as required and take account of any critical timing and external funding factors in our process. **Do note that successful proposals generally emerge after extensive discussions with us, and our templates must be used for all formal submissions.**

Eligibility for the RED Fund

4. The Research England terms and conditions state that for a provider to be eligible for grant funding from Research England, it must meet the following criteria:

- a. The provider must be registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in the Approved (fee cap) category of the OfS's register. This includes continuing to meet the OfS's ongoing conditions of registration.
- b. The provider must be undertaking of research and related activities (which includes knowledge exchange).
- c. The principal – though not necessarily exclusive - aim of the provider's research activity should be the creation of new knowledge which is made freely available to all.

5. In addition to our standard eligibility requirements, to access the RED Fund, providers must be able to demonstrate evidence of expertise in relation to the focus of the project for which they are seeking funding. Projects related to research must build on existing excellence; while projects in KE must build on KE expertise.

Priorities of the RED Fund

6. The RED Fund provides targeted investment for time-limited project-based activity led by providers. The fund supports:

- a. Activities contributing to Government and UKRI policy priorities – both short and longer-term.
- b. Innovative approaches to research and knowledge exchange in providers.
- c. Collaboration between providers or between a provider and partners external to HE.
- d. Risk sharing – where there are financial contributions, and investments/leverage from appropriate partners and beneficiaries – and support for higher risk activities.
- e. Additionality - activity that would not otherwise happen without our investment.

7. The fund has key priority areas for investment. All bids must clearly fit with **one** of these priorities in order to be successful. To see the list of current priorities, please refer to the separate document on our website.

8. We may also issue calls for funding in specific policy areas which require targeted interventions and investment, and may use this mechanism to support a specific priority rather than take forward ‘bottom up’ bids in the same area. We may also use workshops/sandpits to provide more advice on our requirements for proposals in specific priority areas, in order to support high quality bids.

9. The fund’s priorities will change and evolve regularly, in line with Government and UKRI priorities and development of our policies. We will advise:

- when priorities are changing;
- our highest priorities for investment during a particular period; and we may note areas where we have sufficient existing projects in a particular area.

Our intention is to support the highest priority activities, and to provide a clear focus for bidders to help alleviate any wasted resources to help minimise burden on both bidders and the assessment process.

Principles of the RED Fund

10. The RED Fund is used in line with four key principles:

- **Focused on our priorities:** As discretionary funding, the RED Fund investments will be focused on achieving our priorities rather than the positioning of individual providers. We will invest based on ideas from and negotiation with providers.
- **Exceptional funding:** The RED Fund should be used to secure benefits that could not adequately or reasonably be achieved through other means, by Research England and/or by universities (such as formula funding, information, and regulation).
- **Delivering net public benefit:** The benefits arising from our funding to the public, to universities as a whole and students should outweigh those to the providers receiving funding. This may be achieved particularly in a collaborative project.

- **Overall system consistency:** our investments should be consistent with the Government's aspiration for a dynamic research and innovation system that builds upon strength and success.
11. We expect all proposals to demonstrate:
- Robust project management - including dissemination and evaluation, with full consideration of risk.
 - Value for money - including clear success criteria, impacts and outcomes proportionate to the funding sought, return on investment, and clear contributions from key partners.
12. In assessing proposals we will consider:
- What issue is being addressed and what evidence is available to demonstrate its significance?
 - How does the issue fit with Research England's priorities for the fund?
 - What alternatives have been considered other than the RED Fund to address the issue?
 - Why can the issue not be tackled by the provider alone?
 - What would happen if Research England did not provide funding and what evidence is available to demonstrate this?
 - What evidence is available to demonstrate and quantify the benefits of the project to the public, to universities and colleges, and potentially to students?
 - Are there clear objectives, and is it clear how the project's success will be measured?
 - Are the activities appropriate to the issues and objectives identified?
 - Does the project have clear milestones and are the timescales realistic?
 - Are the costs appropriate and does the investment represent value for money for Research England, taking into account the outputs and outcomes identified?
 - Is there a suitable strategic and financial commitment from the participating provider(s) and any other key partners / beneficiaries?
 - Is there evidence of a robust risk assessment and are there suitable plans for project and risk management?
 - The approach to evaluate long term impact of the project.
 - State aid issues.

Process

Initial discussion and advice

13. We will advise on general fit with the fund policies and priorities, and the likely chances of success. We will aim to respond to the short summary of your project idea within two weeks, to advise on whether and how to proceed with further work on a bid.

Development of a bid

14. Proposals must be worked up according to our guidance. Interested bidders should keep Research England informed of key developments so that we can provide advice as required and take account of any critical timing and external funding factors in our process.

Do note that successful proposals generally emerge after extensive discussions with

us, and our templates must be used for submission of bids. For bids of up to £500k, we would not expect the level of detail provided in bids for larger sums of funding.

15. Our bidding template must be used for formal bids when submitting for final assessment. Bids will initially be considered by the Research England Executive to ensure that key points in the development of the bid have been addressed. Once we are content with the bid, it will proceed for consideration by the Executive Chair, RED Fund Panel or Research England’s Council depending on amount of funding requested and potential risk. We will write to bidders to advise them of recommendations and decisions.

16. The table below shows the routes of approval for all project proposals invited to proceed to full bid:

Funding thresholds	Approval route
Bids up to £500k	Executive Chair approves/declines on the basis of advice from the Research England Executive Group.
Bids of £501k to £5M	Fund Panel recommendation to the Executive Chair
Bids above £5M	Research England Council decision based on advice from the Fund panel.

17. Scrutiny at these levels ensures appropriate oversight over processes, including: ensuring broad consistency in treatment across providers and proposals; fit with the fund’s priorities and policies; and the reasonableness of financial and investment cases. This process also helps to identify any areas for amendment or further work, and propose additional terms and conditions before the final decision to fund or not is made.

18. We will take account of risk and may escalate bid assessment to the higher approval route and/or add additional terms and conditions or monitoring requirements to manage higher risk projects.

Funding and finance

19. There is no set amount for our investment in each proposal; it will depend on the specific requirements of each bid put to us, our assessment, and the availability of funds. While there is no minimum, we don’t envisage bids of less than £100,000 unless we advise otherwise such as through a call for smaller more targeted projects. In cases of such smaller funding requests, we will adopt a lighter touch approach in terms of the business case requirements.

20. Proposals must include a range of investors, including the provider and key partners involved. The balance of investor priorities and hence the investment mix (including Research England’s contribution) for different proposals will differ according to requirements.

21. **Providers must consider the financial sustainability of the activities for which they are requesting funding.** providers should ensure that total costs are reasonable. We may wish to discuss and review costings and full financial information during the assessment process.

Success criteria and project monitoring

22. Success criteria are target measures that demonstrate what success would look like for the project as a whole. They will be informed by the bid document and include milestones and delivery targets, focused on a few key measures which materialise within the project period and at end of grant reporting. Success criteria will be incorporated into the award letter and we will use them to monitor progress and completion of a project. Long term impact will be captured through a review/evaluation.

23. In line with our general approach in the fund, we tailor our monitoring to the level of risk associated with a project. As a minimum each project will be expected to report annually. A higher risk project will normally require more frequent and in-depth monitoring than a low risk project.

24. Reports of progress against success criteria from the lead provider will form the main focus of monitoring and on this basis we will assess whether the project is on track to be successful. We reserve the right to amend success criteria if a project changes. It is critical that at all times Research England and the providers involved are clear about the terms with which to judge the success of a project. Funding for projects that fail, or are highly unlikely to meet some or all of, their success criteria will be formally reviewed. Should we judge that a project falls into this category then we will discuss recovery options before formalising decisions on a course of action, which includes potential termination of grant.

End of grant reporting and assurance

25. We will notify in the award letter the form of assurance and end of grant reporting required, which will be tailored to the associated level of risk.

Project reviews and evaluation

26. We will expect providers to set out their plans for project reviews, including the approach they will take (such as an independent project evaluation) and timescales. We note that final outcomes of many projects are unlikely to emerge until sometime after our funding ends and indeed possibly after the project is completed (for example, a new building intended to provide research facilities for addressing a particular health problem with industry. Such outcomes will then only become measurable some years after the new build is complete). We would expect though that providers have in place clear policies and procedures to ensure that project reviews including measurement of outcomes are conducted as necessary and that results feed back into development within the provider.

27. We will conduct periodic evaluations of the Fund, and we may wish to conduct audits from time-to-time. We require providers to make available to us their project review information if needed for our evaluations, and to participate in case studies and interviews.

Impact assessment

28. We expect providers to demonstrate they have considered the impact of their project in a number of areas, including the positive steps that could be taken to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This includes a consideration of all the equality protected characteristics (age, disability, gender identity, pregnancy/maternity, religion/belief, race, sex, sexual orientation) in line with the Equality Act 2010. Guidance on how to do this proportionately is available from the [Equality Challenge Unit](#)¹.

29. We ask that providers describe within the Business Case how any equality element(s) of the project specifically relate to the university or college's published Equality Objectives.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

30. Research England is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which gives a public right of access to information held by a public authority. This may result in applications, communications between us and the provider, information arising from this work, or the outputs from the work undertaken being subject to disclosure if a valid request is made to us. We will comply with such requests in accordance with the legislation and UKRI's own policies.

31. Providers can, if they wish, provide potentially sensitive information (such as information relating to commercial interests) in a separate annex attached to the application form. This will highlight to us that there are concerns about disclosure. The applicant acknowledges that information provided in the annex is of indicative value only, and that Research England may nevertheless be obliged to disclose this information. Our assumption will be that all information in the main application documents can be disclosed on request.

32. Further information about the Freedom of Information Act is available at www.ico.org.uk.

State Aid

33. Projects need to comply with all relevant legislation including for state aid. We may need to ask for some information on state aid in finalising awards for successful bids where there are state aids dimensions, to comply with European Commission monitoring information.

¹ Equality Challenge Unit guidance on impact: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/governance-and-policies/equality-impact-assessment/>