

Astronomy Large Award Research Grant Application Guidelines – 2025

Introduction

The purpose of these notes is to provide guidance and instructions to Applicants when preparing a Large Award full application for consideration by the peer review panel. They are intended to supplement the information available in the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

The notes provide guidance on the following:

1. Eligibility to Apply to the 2025 Large Awards Opportunity
2. Aims of the Scheme
3. Large Award Remit
4. Timetable
5. How to Apply
6. Required Information
7. Large Awards Resources
8. How will we assess your application – Peer Review
9. Additional Information

1. Eligibility to Apply to the 2025 Large Award opportunity

This funding opportunity is only open to you if you submitted an outline application and have subsequently been shortlisted and invited to submit a full application. Any uninvited proposals will be rejected.

You are not permitted to vary costs or FTE by 10% up or down from those submitted in your outline submission. You are not permitted to change the team (unless in exceptional circumstances) from the team submitted in your outline submission.

You may amend costs within the headings submitted in your outline application, but the overall total may not vary by 10%. Applications which do not follow this rule will be rejected at the submission stage. You must submit your application for the same funding duration as requested in your outline application.

2. Aims of the Large Award scheme

The specific aims of the scheme are to:

- Provide an opportunity to apply for science-themed programmatic proposals, with the aim of providing a concerted and coordinated effort to address a specific research area or technology development.
- Ensure that the programme supported is scientifically excellent and is clearly in line with stated Council strategic science objectives.
- Consider the strategic objectives of the UK Space Agency, address the impact agenda and be responsive to changes and new ideas.
- Ensure that the process is transparent and accountable, particularly with respect to the means of prioritisation.
- Ensure that the outcome, where appropriate, takes account of the Council's and the UK

Space Agency's current and planned investment in facilities.

3. Large Award Remit

The Astronomy Large Awards Panel will assess and provide recommendations to the STFC Executive and the Discovery Advisory Committee for Science (DACS) of the UK Space Agency (UKSA), under the dual key arrangement, on all responsive research grant applications in astronomy and space science covering basic research, exploitation, theory and modelling, and the development of basic ('blue skies') technology (within TRL 1-4) related to the programme.

The Astronomy Large Awards Panel will comprise expertise to cover the science areas invited to submit to the Large Award full application closing date. The Panel will consist of existing Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP) membership, with additional members as required.

Details of the Astronomy Grants Panel membership can be found here: [Astronomy Grants Panel](#)
– [UKRI](#)

Research Remit of Large Awards

If you have been invited to submit a full application your application is in one or more of the astronomy observation, astronomy theory, solar system and planetary studies remits which include:

- Stellar physics, including star formation and extra-solar planetary systems (studies of the Sun as part of a programme of stellar physics may fit here).
- Studies of transient phenomena.
- The interstellar medium and galactic astronomy.
- Extra-galactic astronomy and cosmology.
- The astrophysical aspects of particle astrophysics, where particle astrophysics includes dark matter, the origin of cosmic rays and gravity.
- Laboratory astrophysics, including software development, relevant to the above programmes.
- Solar physics and heliospheric physics
- Space-based terrestrial magnetospheric science and fundamental space plasma physics (excluding the impact on the Earth's neutral atmosphere)
- Planetary science, including the surfaces and interiors, atmospheres, ionospheres, and magnetospheres of the solar system bodies other than the Earth.
- Laboratory studies of solar system material such as meteorites, returned samples, solar system analogues, other laboratory physics relevant to the area of the call and related software development.
- Blue skies technology/instrumentation development applicable to the above areas (within TRL 1-4).

Technology Development – STFC will consider funding astronomy and space science applications within technology readiness levels (TRL) 1 – 4 or their equivalent ([Eligibility of technology readiness levels \(TRL\) – UKRI](#)). Applications which plan to exceed TRL 4 in the timeline of the award will be considered out of remit. Modest upgrades to existing equipment, related to the delivery of science within the course of the project requested, may be considered. The UKSA will consider space mission-related applications at TRL 5 and above.

Telescope/instrument operations costs, where not directly linked to specific science outcomes from the proposed work within the grant period, are not within the remit.

Gravitational Wave Research – Astronomy Large Awards will consider support for some aspects of gravitational wave research: [Clarification of STFC Support for Gravitational Waves Research – UKRI](#)

Space Weather and the Impact of the Sun on Terrestrial Systems – STFC will support non-Earth-orientated solar-terrestrial physics research e.g., fundamental space plasma physics not related to the Earth. STFC will also fund the primary exploitation of space-based facilities (spacecraft and instruments) for solar terrestrial physics.

NERC is responsible for funding solar terrestrial physics where the primary goal is to understand the Earth’s environment from the deep interior to the upper atmosphere (i.e., mesosphere, thermosphere and ionosphere).

Mars Exploration and Sample Return - Studies related to the UKSA’s programme of Aurora science (Mars exploration and sample return) should be addressed to the UKSA (SpaceExploration@ukspaceagency.gov.uk) in the first instance, as separate funding may be available.

4. Timetable

| Date: | Action: |
|---------------|--|
| 04 March 2025 | Deadline for submission of Large Award applications by 4pm |
| April/May | Expert Peer Review |
| June | Applicants to respond to reviewer comments |
| September | Peer Review Panel Meeting |
| October | Science Board and UK Space Agency endorsement |
| November | Outcome Announced |

5. How to Apply

We are running this funding opportunity on the new 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 development of the application.

If you are submitting as a multiple-organisation consortium, only the lead research organisation can submit an application to UKRI. Please see the ‘how to apply’ section on the funding finder for full details on how to submit an application via the UKRI Funding Service.

Please be advised the UKRI Funding Service does not permit returns for amendment; if you fail to follow the format and guidance (outlined here and in the funding finder page) your application will be rejected and will not be considered further for funding in this round.

6. Required Information

The UKRI Funding Service requests information in a box/question set format. Please follow the guidance available on the UKRI Finding Finder page.

Failure to comply with the requested information/format and page limits will result in the application being rejected.

7. Large Awards Resources

The AGP considers applications which are wide-ranging in the level of resources requested, and would expect to see specific, explicit and compelling justification for all requests. The lack of a compelling justification will have a negative impact on the assessment of the application and may lead to the application being **REJECTED**.

Applicants are advised we do not provide a suggested guideline cost for RIA/Applicant/visiting researcher travel, computing, secretarial or computing support. Applicants can request these costs but should consult the links provided below and request/justify what is required to support the programme of work.

Computing officer support and administrative support must be fully justified and must be providing project-specific support. The applicants must clearly explain and justify why such support cannot be provided from indirect costs. The lack of a compelling justification will have a negative impact on the assessment of the application.

Please note that any Personal Costs requested (e.g., relocation, visa fee and NHS surcharge costs, etc.) should only be included where it is known that they will be required and not as a contingency for any posts that will need to be recruited for. Please see [Other costs – UKRI for further information](#).

Large awards must follow the guidance below:

- between 9 and 25 years of research and innovation associate (previously referred to as postdoctoral research assistant (PDRA)) effort in total. The panel recognises that technical or lab-based projects may require fractions of the time of specialist research and innovation associates, but this should not exceed the overall full time equivalent (FTE) limits
- applicant FTE (the values below are suggested for guidance. You are permitted to request the FTE you require to carry out the proposed research and should ensure it is explicitly justified):
 - 5 to 10% where you have a clear and significant, but not major, personal role in the research
 - 10 to 20% where you are leading a work package (or equivalent) or are heavily involved in the research at a personal level
 - applicants managing a PDRA are expected to request a minimum of 10%. Please ensure such management roles are clearly identified

Researcher co-leads are permitted on awards. Please read the [guidance](#) for the eligibility of a researcher co-lead before applying for this role type.

Applicants who are not requesting a salary contribution may request support costs such as travel and subsistence or other directly incurred costs. You must make it clear whether estates and indirect costs will be included in the request.

If requesting un-named research staff and named research staff, please refer to the grants handbook (**staff and investigator costs**).

If requesting technical and other staff, please refer to the grants handbook (**other staff**).

Applicants can also request and make the case for the following project specific costs:

- Travel and Subsistence ([Travel and subsistence – UKRI](#))
- Directly Incurred ([Other costs – UKRI](#))

- Directly Allocated Other Costs ([Other costs – UKRI](#))
- Equipment ([Equipment – UKRI](#))

Applications may include costs for reasonable adjustments. Where an application includes costs for reasonable adjustment, UKRI will ensure they are eligible, and these should be accepted without comment. Further information on disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants during the application and assessment process can be found [here](#).

Studentship posts are not permitted on large awards.

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

International collaboration

If your application includes international **project partners** or collaborators, visit **UKRI's trusted research and innovation** for more information on effective international collaboration.

8. How will we assess your application – Peer Review

STFC is committed to the UKRI [Principles of Peer Review](#) throughout our assessment and decision-making processes. The Large Awards assessment criteria are outlined below and detailed on the funding finder page and on the UKRI funding service:

- Vision
- Approach
- Applicant and team capability to Deliver
- Resources and cost justification
- Risk management
- Ethics and response research innovation

Applicants submitting to the STFC must provide a full ethics statement that confirms that proper consideration has been given to any ethics issues raised. If the statement does not adequately address these issues, this could lead to the rejection of a proposal, or the award of a conditional grant to ensure the necessary ethical considerations and ethical review are undertaken. In rare occasions, concerns around ethical considerations may mean that you deem a proposal to be unfundable.

Reviewer Comments

We will invite five UK and international experts to review your application. We will require a minimum of four reviewers to submit comments on your application. You will then be given the opportunity to respond to comments.

Applicant response to Reviewer comments

Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to reviewer comments via the UKRI Funding Service. Your response is limited to 500 words per review received, you can use this limit as you deem appropriate (for example you may wish to use more words on one reviewer over another). **Applicants are strongly advised to be clear and concise in their response.** You should ensure that you use this opportunity to highlight any areas of agreement or disagreement with reviewers, factual errors or misunderstandings about the application, clarify issues raised and answer questions posed by reviewers. The response is not intended to provide an opportunity to change finances or re-write the application. The response should be returned within 10 working days of receipt

Peer Review Meetings

The AGP is a peer review assessment Panel. A sub-set of the AGP, with additional expertise brought in as required, will sit as a single panel to consider the Large Awards applications. It will take into account documents provided in the application, as well as the reviewer comments and the applicant response to reviewer comments, in its assessment of your application. The AGP will also take into account whether the applicants have addressed any feedback from the sifting stage.

The Panel will not descope applications at the assessment stage. Applications will be scored and ranked in their entirety.

The AGP comprises four Sub-Panels of experts covering the following four broad science areas within Astronomy:

AGP: AO - Astronomy Observations (including technology expertise)

AGP: AT – Astronomy Theory

AGP: SS – Solar Studies & Space-based Solar Terrestrial Physics

AGP: PL – Planetary Studies

Details of the full AGP Panel membership can be found at [AGP Panel Members](#)

The AGP is committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment](#) (DORA). We do not use journal-based metrics, such as journal impact factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles when assessing proposals.

Post-meetings / Communicating Outcomes

The AGP Chair will report to STFC Science Board and to the UKSA on the recommended outcome for the round. The final funding line will be determined by the STFC budget holder, at which point Applicants will be informed of the outcome with appropriate feedback. We aim to communicate outcomes and provide feedback in November.

Future Submissions to the Large Award Scheme

If you are successful in securing funding as either a PL or Co-PL in the 2025 Large Award round then you cannot apply again for a Large Award whilst funding is ongoing (you cannot apply for overlapping Large awards).

9. Additional Information Contacts

Senior Programme Manager - Chloe.Woodcock@stfc.ukri.org

Head of Astronomy Awards – Kim.Burchell@stfc.ukri.org

Useful Links

[Peer review and assessment](#)

[Equality and Diversity](#)

[Researchfish - Reporting Outcomes](#)

[Impact Guidance](#)