UK Research and Innovation

Funding opportunity

Astronomy large awards outline 2025

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	**Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)**
Funding type:	Grant
Publication date:	20 June 2024
Opening date:	25 July 2024 9:00am UK time
Closing date:	24 October 2024 4:00pm UK time

Astronomy large awards support themed, programmatic large projects tackling big research questions or technology development with the potential to produce world-leading research.

You must be:

- employed by an eligible UK research organisation
- eligible to apply as an applicant – **check if you're eligible for funding**

Science and Technology Research Council (STFC) will fund 80% of the full economic cost (FEC) for most fund headings.

Applications should be proposed for a minimum of three years and a maximum of five years starting 1 April 2026.

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**.

Find out more about **roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance**.

We encourage multidisciplinary research within the astronomy remit and collaborations with other UK organisations. Applications to the large awards scheme are welcome from single research organisation or multiple research organisations (consortium applications).

International and non-academic collaborators can be involved as projects partners.

If you are submitting an application from multiple research organisations you should submit a single outline application.

Applicants (previously principal investigators or co-investigators) may be included in a maximum of one large award application per funding opportunity in any role.

Applicants are not permitted to change the proposed team, expect in exceptional circumstances, from that in the outline stage if invited to submit to full.

Demand management

Please be advised we have removed the demand management restrictions from this outline opportunity. If you applied to the 2024 round at either the expression of interest stage or the full stage you are permitted to apply to the 2025 round.

If your full application is successful in securing funding then you cannot apply again to the large awards scheme (as project lead or co-lead) for funding which would overlap your award (you cannot hold concurrent large awards).

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

This outline opportunity covers astronomy observation, astronomy theory, solar system and planetary studies. We support theory, including modelling, simulation and related software development, observation, experiment and new technology research.

Remit

Your application must be in one or more of the astronomy observation, astronomy theory, solar system and planetary studies remits which includes:

- 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 funding opportunity and related software development
- blue skies technology or instrumentation development applicable to the above areas (technology readiness levels (TRL) one to four)

If your application is in one of the following research areas we strongly advise you contact the STFC astronomy team to check the remit ahead of submitting:

Technology development

We will consider funding astronomy and space science applications within TRLone to four or their equivalent (**Eligibility of technology readiness levels (TRL)**). Applications which plan to exceed TRL four 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 UK Space Agency (UKSA) will consider space mission-related applications at TRL five and above.

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

Gravitational wave research

The Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP) will consider funding support for some aspects of gravitational wave research: **clarification of STFC support for gravitational waves research**. STFC is considering the peer review route for gravitational wave exploitation science and will provide specific guidance with respect to this in the near future. You should contact the STFC astronomy awards team for urgent advice as required.

Space weather and the impact of the Sun on terrestrial systems

We will support non-Earth-orientated solar-terrestrial physics research, for example, fundamental space plasma physics not related to the Earth. We will also fund space-based facilities (spacecraft, instruments and operations) for solar terrestrial physics and their associated primary exploitation.

The Natural Environment Research Council (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 (meaning, 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.

Scope

Large awards will cover funding for a minimum of three years and a maximum of five years of research activity starting 1 April 2026.

Large awards support themed programmatic large projects tackling big research questions or technology development. Our expectation is that large awards will have the potential to produce world-leading research. To achieve this, they will involve several different interdependent components coherently interacting in a single overall structure that is more than the sum of its parts.

Applications that appear as a collection of small individual projects are likely to be unsuccessful.

Under no circumstances should you receive duplicate funding for the same or similar proposal from more than one funding agency. We cannot prohibit the submission of the same or similar proposals to other funding agencies (outside of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)). It is your responsibility to demonstrate that the programme to be carried out in the large award is clearly distinct from existing support.

Large awards must follow the guidance below:

- between nine and 25 years of research and innovation associate (previously referred to as postdoctoral research assistant (PDRA)) effort in total. For example, three RIAs for three years or five RIAs for five years. 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 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):
  - five 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
- technician time

Duration

Large awards must be minimum of three and a maximum of five years in duration, all awards must start on 1 April 2026.

What we will fund

If you are not requesting a salary contribution you 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.

Requesting un-named research staff and named research staff (PDRA posts), please refer to the grants handbook (**staff and investigator costs)**.

Technical and other staff, please refer to the **grants handbook**.

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

- **travel and subsistence**

- **directly incurred**
- **directly allocated other costs**
- **equipment**

The research organisation is expected to provide standard laptops from indirect costs.
Laptops may only be costed to the application where a higher specification of laptop is required for the completion of specific grant-related activities such as data modelling, enhanced graphics and more.

What we will not fund

Studentship posts are not permitted on large awards.

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**.

You are free to make best use of the resources available for the application, but should bear in mind the principles of the concordat regarding employment and career development when planning research and innovation associate roles.

Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I)

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 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.

See **further guidance and information about TR&I** – including where you can find additional support.

How to apply

This funding opportunity is run in two stages:

- submission of an outline application
- invited submission of a full application, if successful at outline stage

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

The project lead 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.

To apply

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

1. Confirm you are the project lead/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 Opportunity, 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:

- 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 5MB and in JPEG, JPG, JPE, JFI, JIF, JFIF, PNG, GIF, BMP or WEBP format

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

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

Applications should be self-contained, and hyperlinks should only be used to provide links directly to reference information. To ensure the information's integrity is maintained, where possible, persistent identifiers such as digital object identifiers should be used. Assessors are not required to access links to carry out assessment or recommend a funding decision. You should use your discretion when including references and prioritise those most pertinent to the application.

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

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

Deadline

STFC must receive your application by 24 October 2024 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.

A mandatory outline application is required and successful applications at the outline stage will be invited to submit a full application. We will publish full guidance on completing a full application and assessment criteria when outcomes of the outline stage are announced.

Following the submission of your application to the funding 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

STFC 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

STFC, as part of UKRI, will publish the outcomes of this funding opportunity at **Astronomy grants panel small award ranking lists**.

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

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

- project lead (PL)
- project co-lead (UK) (PcL)
- specialist

- grant manager
- professional enabling staff
- research and innovation associate
- technician
- visiting researcher
- researcher co-lead (RcL)

Only list one individual as project lead.

Find out more about **UKRI's core team roles in funding applications**.

Application questions

Outline Vision and Approach

Create a document that includes your responses to all criteria. The document should not be more than 2 sides of A4, single spaced in paper in 11-point Arial (or equivalent sans serif font) with margins of at least 2cm. You may include images, graphs, tables.

For the file name, use the unique Funding Service number the system gives you when you create an application, followed by the words 'Vision and Approach'.

Save this document as a single PDF file, no bigger than 8MB. Unless specifically requested, please do not include any sensitive personal data within the attachment.

If the attachment does not meet these requirements, the application will be rejected.

The Funding Service will provide document upload details when you apply.

For Vision

Question: 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, generates new knowledge, thinking or discovery within or beyond the field or area
- is timely given current trends, context and needs
- impacts world-leading research, society, the economy, or the environment
- meets the strategic aims of the funding opportunity. You should include justification for why a large award is more appropriate than several small

awards. See **Astronomy awards guidance for applicants** for more information

For Approach

Question: How are you going to deliver your proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how you have designed your approach so that it:

- is effective and appropriate to achieve your objectives

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

References should be included within this Vision and Approach section.

Outline Applicant and team capability to deliver

Word limit: 1,000

How will the application team deliver the proposed research programme?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Evidence of how you, and if relevant your team, have:

- relevant research experience and skills to develop and deliver the proposed transdisciplinary research programme
- planned to identify and embed additional expertise where gaps in the team exist

The core leadership team should consist of the project lead (principal investigator) and the project co-leads (co-investigators) identified on the outline proposal.

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.

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

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

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).

Outline costs

What the assessors are looking for in your response

- provide the approximate total values in GBP (£) for the expected directly incurred, directly allocated, indirect costs and exceptions
- view the guidance on the costs you can apply for

You will not be permitted to vary the overall costs by more or less than 10% of those submitted in this outline stage if you are invited to submit a full application.

Please note: The UKRI Funding Finder suggests you are able to enter a 500 word justification for this section. This is not the case, please enter the costs as per the instructions above. You are not required to include any words to support your costs at this stage in the process.

Project partners

Add 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 (cash) or indirect (in-kind) contributions such as expertise, staff time or use of facilities.

Add the following project partner details:

- the organisation name and address (searchable via a drop-down list or enter the organisation's details manually, as applicable)
- the project partner contact name and email address
- the 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.

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

Fit to Scheme

Question: Outline how your application fits the large awards scheme

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how your proposed work:

- is more appropriate for a large award than several small awards. See **Astronomy awards guidance for applicants** for more information.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

We will assess your outline application using the following process.

Panel

We will invite a panel of experts to assess the quality of your application and rank it alongside all outline applications.

We will invite a maximum of nine applications to submit to the full stage.

Timescale

We aim to complete the assessment process within eight weeks of receiving your application.

Feedback

If your application was discussed by the panel we will provide short 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 **UKRI principles of assessment and decision making**.

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

Assessment areas

The assessment areas we will use are:

- Vision
- Approach
- Applicant and team capability to deliver
- Fit to scheme

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

Important note: 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 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 this specific funding opportunity please contact:

Chloe Woodcock: Senior Programme Manager, Astronomy Awards

Email: **chloe.woodcock@stfc.ukri.org**

Kim Burchell: Head of Astronomy Awards

Email: **kim.burchell@stfc.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.

See further information on **submitting an application**.

Sensitive information

If you or a core team member need to tell us something you wish to remain confidential, email **chloe.woodcock@stfc.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

Additional disability and accessibility adjustments

UKRI can offer **disability and accessibility support for UKRI applicants and grant holders** during the application and assessment process if required.

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.

Supporting links

STFC funding opportunities equality impact assessment

Guidance on good research

Good research resource hub

https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/astronomy-large-awards-outline-2025