UK Research and Innovation

Doctoral Focal award Webinar – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

General FAQs

Will the webinar host panel provide answers to questions sent by email?
Yes – please address your questions to our inboxes: DFA.AI.Data@bbsrc.ukri.org and DFA.EngBio@bbsrc.ukri.org

What is the expected contribution from host organisations?
These organisations (Project lead and any named Project co-leads) will host students for the majority of their studies and will support them throughout their PhD.

Will slides from the presentation be shared with attendees?
A transcript of the webinar will be available alongside the video. The recording can be accessed here:
https://ukri.zoom.us/rec/share/29Rb5saetJQ2Jl1W_UOb1bMSACEeeFy6qkP1ubLDbz1WBWwmZsktd9JV0mtHwT-d.S57EINNR7QCVz5HC?pwd=2HLKVELihJAbiXy4YNwUiCxwXE20UFnp.

What does the acronym CASE stand for?
Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering.

Application Process Questions and NOIs

Would it be an advantage or disadvantage to attach the DFA as part of a DLA?
Training delivered by this funding opportunity may build on existing infrastructure where applicable, and engagement with other relevant research council investments, for example, existing doctoral training programmes and their end-user networks, is encouraged. You may also use your existing or previously supported studentships to demonstrate key performance indicators (KPIs) or measures of success, where you think it is appropriate to do so, within your application.
Where an organisation has an existing doctoral training programme in place, we would not expect the application to merely state that students which are supported by these doctoral focal award funding opportunities will merge with their existing student cohorts; prospective applicants will need to consider the specific assessment criteria, training remit and scope of these funding opportunities when writing their application.

Is there a maximum number of studentships that ROs can request?
There is no set maximum, but we would encourage applicants to consider the total number of studentships available, in addition to the number of students they are able to support, when requesting studentships.

How do industrial partners connect with lead academic partners to provide support?
We would encourage any organisations beyond academia who wish to get involved with an application to a DFA to use their contacts to build links or reach out to academics they would like to work with.

Will there be any portals or collaboration areas to help companies interested in providing support for CASE studentships to find academic institutions who are putting an in an application in relevant topic areas?
No. We recommend that you get in touch directly with any ROs or individuals you wish to work with regarding these funding opportunities.

What are you looking for project partners to contribute to the studentships. Presumably placements, and potentially co-supervision?
See the relevant sections on CASE and Placements for the funding opportunity you wish to apply to. Involvement from organisations beyond academia in your DFA application/s may include, but is not limited to:

- work experience or placements for students outside of academia
- training for students, programme staff, or both
- access to facilities, equipment, or both
- financial commitments to partially, or fully, fund additional studentships
- commitment to cover the costs of access to facilities or training that cannot otherwise be provided
- strategic links to an important stakeholder or user

The call guidance states: "At the time of application, collaborative agreements should be in place regarding management of the doctoral candidate's work, and agreements concerning any intellectual property that may arise as a result. This collaboration should be effectively managed, to maximise the benefits for all parties concerned." Please could you clarify? Are UKRI expecting collaboration agreements to be in place with all partners at the point of submission of the DFA application? This guidance refers to specific doctoral candidates, but details of projects will not necessarily be known at the point of submitting the DFA.
We would expect that all prospective partners within an application would discuss their involvement prior to the submission of your full application. This may include if organisations are planning to be part of more than one application, and what their contributions would be, were those applications to be successful.
Ideally, collaboration agreements would be in place at the time that your application is submitted. Please ensure you have prior agreement from all partners included in your application so that, if you are offered funding, they will support your project as indicated in the Project Partners section of your application.
In instances where it is not possible for finalised collaboration agreements to be in place at the time of full application, we would expect a minimum of an MOU to be in place. Finalised collaboration agreements **must** be in place prior to any students commencing their studies.

We are surprised to see that there is no institutional support letter required. What is the reasoning behind this?
Partnerships must show a clear and joint strategy for delivering their vision and fostering the growth and maturation of collaborations over the funding period. This is assessed through the "Partnerships and governance" assessment criteria, which asks applicants to consider how their training grant will be governed, and partnerships/relationships supported and managed to maximise benefit and minimise risk.

What is the difference between PL and principal base (host)?
The Project Lead (PL) must host one student per year of intake and will be the training grant award holder, if you are successful. Students may be hosted at the project lead, or at any of your named project co-leads. An organisation eligible for UKRI funding must provide the principal base (host) for students who are supported by these funding opportunities.

Is the project lead a person or the institution?
The project lead will be the named individual within your project lead organisation who will act as the main point of contact for the organisation.

There appears to be no statement of support required at full stage by the Project Lead - is that correct?
This is correct, the assessment criteria are detailed on the funding opportunity webpages and the questions may be viewed on TFS.

For industrial partnerships, do we need to have support letter before applying or do we submit this after applying?
Letters of support are not mandatory for the application stage, but the expectation and contribution of partners should be outlined and agreed. See above.

Do CASE partners need to have committed funds by the point of full application or is non-binding intention to participate sufficient?
We need the agreement to be in place by the time the students start their projects/the start date of the funding opportunities (October 2026). Prospective applicants do not need every formal agreement for individual CASE project partners to be in place at the point of application, but an MoU should be in place.

Do you expect a support letter from the university? What information should it contain?
We do not require support letters from the university, but we would expect that collaboration agreements be in place at the time of application to ensure that if successful, all partners are able to provide the support needed to deliver a successful training programme.

Is there a limit on how many NOIs an organisation can submit?
No. Organisations may submit more than one notification of intent (NOI) per funding opportunity. However, organisations may only apply as the project lead on **one** full application per doctoral focal award/theme. Organisations can be a project co-lead (PcL) or project partner on any number of applications. Any organisation submitting an NOI should have permissions of all parties named in their NOI prior to submission.

Is there an issue of submitting multiple NOI's for the calls- there is no Institutional controls on the submission. I understand that only one application can be led by a RO for each call.
Organisations are responsible for knowing how many NOIs they have submitted.
Organisations are permitted to submit more than one NOI per funding opportunity. It is down to the submitting organisations to conduct any demand management processes, if necessary. Before submitting your NOI, you should have permissions from any organisation you have named or will be including.

Do project partners (e.g., CASE partners) need to be named at NOI stage or can it be at full proposal stage?
CASE partners can be added at the full proposal/application stage, but please do name CASE partners at the NOI stage where possible.

We've noted that a few UKRI calls have involved a notification of intent/expression of interest stage prior to a full stage with the NOI/EOI used to assess demand management. It hasn't always been clear if UKRI expect the NOI stage to be demand managed by institutions. Examples are these DFAs, MRC/NC3Rs/Wellcome call and the Proof of Concept. Is the approach of using an NOI stage to assess demand management a new development from UKRI?
This NOI stage will be used by UKRI to identify potential panel members before the closing date and advise in the design of the funding opportunity assessment. We hope this will serve to improve and speed up the assessment process. It is not a UKRI policy to mandate an NOI stage; we are choosing to include to assess demand and to give initial steer on remit/eligibility to potential applicants

Is the NOI is submitted by the PL and not the research office?
The NOI link for each funding opportunity is on the funding opportunity webpage and is a separate survey. The NOI should be completed by the individual who will be acting as your project lead. You will have an opportunity to input an email address on the final page where a copy of your NOI responses will be sent – this can be an email address which belongs to your research office, if you choose.
We recommend that prospective applicants keep a record of their NOI submission, including their response ID, to be shared with any colleagues, if required. Anyone submitting and NOI should have permission from any organisation named on their NOI form. Organisations are responsible for knowing how many NOIs they have submitted.

Does demand management apply at NOI stage, or just at full stage?
Organisations may submit more than one NOI per award but may only be the project lead on one full application per award. Organisations are responsible for knowing how many NOIs they have submitted.

What is the goal of the NOI? Is it just to determine eligibility or part of the assessment process in the full stage?
Your NOI will not be assessed by the expert review panel, but we will use the information to plan the funding opportunity assessment process. We will be giving light touch feedback to applicants who submit a notification of intent, such as whether the proposed work is in scope and remit for the associated funding opportunity.

Are the deadline dates correct - NoI March and full application submission deadline in April?
Yes, please check the dates on the funding opportunity call pages.

At NOI level, can one RO submit application to both DFAs?
Yes, an organisation may submit one or more NOI to each funding opportunity.

For assessing capability to deliver (who will lead and deliver the training grant), should institutions use the councils' assessment questions listed for the full application stage?
Yes.

Eligibility Questions

Who is eligible to apply for this funding opportunity?
Eligibility criteria is defined in the funding opportunity call text. Applications to this funding opportunity should be led by a research organisation (RO), such as a university or research institute, but ROs may submit applications as a consortium of organisations who are working in partnership to deliver their doctoral training programme, e.g., organisations who may act as project partners or CASE partners.

Can one person from the same organisation lead one EngBio and one AI & Data Science or is preferrable to have two different people?
Yes, this is permissible. The TG will be awarded to the RO, with the individual named on the application as the Project Lead acting as the main point of contact for the application and the RO. There is no preference for the same individual or different individuals to act as the project lead if the same RO is submitting an application to both DFAs.

Is the organisation (university) the Project lead?
Organisations eligible for UKRI funding may act as the project lead.

Can an institution lead on one engineering biology DFA AND one AI and data science DFA? Or do they have to choose between these?
One organisation can act as the Project lead on one application per DFA.

Can the proposals include another academic institution, i.e., the focal award is then shared between two Universities?
Yes, multi-organisation applications are welcomed. The Project Lead (RO) would receive the training grant, were you to be successful, and then may distribute funding to any named Project co-leads (which must also be eligible for UKRI funding) which are hosting students supported by the DFA.

Does the CASE partner need to be British/from the UK and do they need to be beyond the startup stage?
International CASE partners are eligible provided they are a non-academic organisation. The training grant holder must evidence that the CASE criteria the funding finder has been met (see funding opportunity for more details) and that the placement provides an opportunity for the student to gain skills that could not be provided by a UK-based partner. The student must be fully supported by the training partnership and CASE partner throughout the placement period. They do not need to be beyond the startup stage, but they must meet the requirements listed on the funding opportunity webpage.

Can you please explain the CASE rules as they apply here?
Full details are in the funding opportunity. CASE studentships are delivered in collaboration with partners beyond academia and must meet the following requirements:
1. over the lifetime of the award, a minimum of 25% of the total notional studentships supported by this funding opportunity must be CASE studentships
2. successful applicants' CASE compliance will be reviewed throughout the lifetime of the grant via reporting processes and reserve the right to use the outcomes to adjust future studentship cohort allocations
3. the CASE partner or partners must host the student for between three and eighteen months during their PhD. This placement does not need to occur in one single continuous period
4. CASE partners are encouraged to participate in the co-creation of studentships projects
5. CASE partners must provide co-supervision for any studentship project they are involved with

For multi-institute proposals can the research aspect of the student's PhDs be based in the majority of non-PL institutions?
Students are permitted to move between their host organisation and any additional ROs which are within your partnership (Project co-leads) and prospective applicants may use this as a model of how your Doctoral Focal award will work. Prospective applicants should be aware of any challenges this may present to students and/or staff, e.g., needing access to multiple RO email addresses, access to buildings/facilities, travel and living expenses, maintaining contact, sharing of resources, etc., and demonstrate how these challenges will be addressed within this model. Students are permitted to spend up to 18 months out of their 4-year PhD programme on placement. See the "Placements" section for more details.

Is the project lead a university or an academic?
The project lead is a named individual at the organisation which is eligible for UKRI funding and will act as the training grant award holder, if you are successful.

If PL changes organisation, how does that work with this call?
In the [Terms and conditions for training funding – UKRI](#) guidance document, we state that:
"Transfer of Student/Training Grant
Where Students transfer from one Research Organisation to another, the receiving Research Organisation will be required to accept all the terms and conditions relating to the Studentship as it was offered to the Student, including its start date and duration, registration requirements and submission date. Where there are multiple Students on the Training Grant, the respective Research Organisations will need to arrange any transfer of funding themselves. The Training Grant will remain with the original Research Organisation."
This would mean that the grant would still be held at the original organisation named as the project lead. The project lead organisation could transfer some funding/studentships to a Co-PL, if required. If the individual **named** as the PL at the lead institution were to move, the TG would still remain at the RO named as the project lead. This is because the TG was awarded to that RO, rather than that individual per se, as we expect these training grants to be governed and delivered by a team, rather than by one individual, even though they are acting as the main point of contact for the TG. In the case where the named PL contact moved to a different RO, the TG would likely have to be transferred to a new individual at the original RO.

Both calls emphasise interdisciplinary training, responsible research, and engagement beyond traditional STEM disciplines. The engineering biology call acknowledges the potential impact of social sciences and economics, while the AI and Data in Biosciences call highlights responsible AI, ethics, and governance. Given the expertise that social sciences and humanities institutions bring to areas such as regulation, policy, public engagement, and economic impact, can you confirm whether these institutions could participate in these calls in some way (even if not hosting studentships) provided they make a meaningful contribution to the training and research environment?
If these institutions are eligible for UKRI funding and are making suitable contributions, they can act as a Project lead or Project co-lead. Individuals based at these organisations may also hold a suitable role as part of the "Core team". If they are not eligible for UKRI funding, their contributions (both cash and in-kind) can be included as a Project Partner.

Are postdoctoral researchers eligible to apply? Are there any pre-conditions?
Applications to this funding opportunity should be led by a research organisation (RO), such as a university or research institute. In order to apply as a "project lead" or "project co-lead" you must be affiliated with and have a substantial relationship with the 'lead organisation' on the application.
Examples of a substantial relationship with an organisation include:
- emeritus status (that is, retired but still maintains their relationship with their department or the university)
- honorary appointment with the organisation
- contract with the submitting organisation, normally outlasting the duration of the project

If the postdoctoral researcher or RTP does not fit these criteria, they may still be included on the application as a Researcher co-lead, a Specialist or a Technician. A Researcher co-lead will have made a substantial contribution to the formulation and development of the application and will be closely involved with the programme of work, and Specialist and Technicians bring specialist skills or technical support to the programme of work. Typically, to fulfil these roles on an application, you must be employed by the lead organisation or one of the collaborating organisations. For more details, please see Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI.

Is there a limit in how many partner institutions can be included?
No. Organisations can only apply as the project lead on one submitted application per doctoral focal award but can be a project co-lead (PcL) or project partner on any number of applications.
There is no limit to the total number of organisations you may include within your application. However, each member of the consortia must make meaningful contributions to the delivery of the training grant, as outlined in your application.

I have questions related to the eligibility of non-academic partners, e.g., size of company, UK-only?
Organisations that are not eligible for UKRI funding, apart from Innovate UK, may act as project partners or CASE partners on your application. The definition of project partners can be found on our website: Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI.
We welcome applications to include a wide range of project partner organisations contributing to research within the two doctoral focal award themes.
This can include, but is not limited to:
- industry
- business
- small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- public organisations
- third sector organisations
- museums
- PSREs

PSREs wishing to be involved in an application are required to choose whether they wish to do so either as a hosting partner (project lead or project co-lead) or a project partner. An organisation cannot perform both roles within one application.
International CASE partners are eligible provided they are a non-academic organisation. The training grant holder must evidence that the CASE criteria has been met and that the placement provides an opportunity for the student to gain skills that could not be provided by a UK-based partner.

Can prospective students directly to the funding body? Can I be granted with a full scholarship?
No, prospective students may not apply directly for this funding opportunity and there is no route for prospective students to apply directly to the funding body for a studentship. The research councils at UKRI provide UK research organisations (universities and research institutes) with training grants to support UKRI-funded studentships. The advertisement of opportunities and recruitment of studentships is managed by those research organisations. Any students interested in UKRI-funded studentships should contact the research organisation or university at which they wish to study directly, who should include information on how to apply and their eligibility criteria.

How many applications can an organisation lead per Focal award?
Organisations may lead on a maximum of one application per Doctoral focal award theme.

Are single or multi-institution bids preferred?
Organisations may apply as a single institution, or as a consortium of organisations. Prospective applicants should choose the option which best fits their ability to answer the assessment criteria of the funding opportunity they are applying to. We welcome both types of applications. All prospective applicants should consider any additional partners which they choose to include, as all partners should bring demonstratable added value to the partnership. Please note that for multi-institutional bids that only **one** TFS application is submitted and that one of the institutions must be designated as the Project lead that submits the application.

Could you provide more details regarding PhD project co-supervision and flexibility (length) of visits to partner institutions.
We would expect that all studentships who are supported as part of these funding opportunities would receive supervision in line with the UKRI good practice in recruitment and training. 25% of all studentships must also be CASE students - CASE student projects are developed in collaboration between academia and organisations beyond academia, which may act as CASE partners. CASE partners must host the student for between three and eighteen months during their PhD, but this placement does not need to occur in one single continuous period. CASE partners must provide co-supervision for any studentship project they are involved with.
Please also see the section on "Placements" on the funding opportunity for more details.

Can you provide more details on the requirements for support from non-HEI partners/industry in various aspects of the programme?
We welcome applications which include organisations outside of academia who may act as CASE partners, provide the host for student placements, and/or act in the capacity of Project partners. CASE partners must meet specific requirements which are detailed in the funding opportunity, whereas project partners may contribute to the training programme in a number of ways, either via direct financial contributions, or indirect contributions, such as providing a host for students to undertake placements, offering training, support, administration or consultation for staff and/or students on the programme, or offering the use of facilities.

Is there any opportunity to increase the cap on International applicants given the difficulty in recruiting?
No, this limit is set by UKRI. Up to 30% of your student cohort supported by these funding opportunities may be classed as international students; this 30% cap can be applied across each year of recruitment, or across the total number of students.

Please can you clarify if there is an expectation of the size of cohort within each individual focal award?
Each prospective applicant is required to support a minimum of 5 students per year of intake, for 3 intake years, resulting in a minimum student cohort of 15 students. This minimum size is for each DFA.

Is there scope for CASE studentships in this DLA?
Yes, 25% of students supported by these funding opportunities must be CASE studentships.

Will institutional match (e.g., additional PhDs) be required on this call?
We encourage you to utilise funding from this funding opportunity to leverage additional investment (either as cash or in-kind support) from multiple stakeholders where appropriate. We also support co-funding to be used from non-research council sources to part-fund additional studentships. However, there is no mandatory requirement for match-funded studentships or cash leverage for this funding opportunity.

Does the call require industrial partners and do those have contribute financially?
25% of studentships supported by these funding opportunities must be CASE studentships, which will require collaboration with one or more CASE partners. However, CASE partners do not need to be from industry; they may be any organisation beyond academic which is not eligible for UKRI funding (except from Innovate UK).
CASE partners, as well as any additional project partners who are on your application are not mandated to contribute financially but they are welcome to support the programme via indirect or in-kind contributions, such as offering placements, training, or facilities to staff and students. For any organisation acting as a placement host, we strongly encourage them to cover all placement costs. See the section on "Placements" for more details.

What are the requirements for engagement with industry for the DFA scheme?
See previous questions on CASE + project partners, above. Project partners are also welcome to act as PIP-style placement hosts.

Any specific requirements for the supervisory team?
We encourage all applicants to read the [Statement of expectations for doctoral training – UKRI](#) and [UKRI good practice principles in recruitment and training at a doctoral level](#), which contain relevant sections on supervision. We would also encourage applicants to consider their wider supervisory teams; who is supporting or likely to support your students in addition to their primary supervisor, and are relevant training opportunities open to those individuals, e.g., postdocs + RTPs.

How many institutes/training centres are expected be funded?
The exact number will depend on the number of applications received, as well as the quality and remit of those applications. We encourage applicants to consider the maximum number of studentships available per funding opportunity when applying.

Can a proposal can be led by a non-degree-awarding organisation?
Yes, this is allowed. However, the project lead organisation must be eligible to receive UKRI funding, and a degree-awarding body must be present on your application.

Are University spin-offs considered as separate entities?
Any project lead or project co-leads named on the application must be eligible to receive UKRI funding; if an organisation is not eligible to receive UKRI funding and will not be providing the principal base (host) for the students during their studies, they may be included in your application as a Project partner, which includes CASE partners. Organisations which are separate from universities, such as limited companies, would be permitted to act as project partners in an application.

Can international students apply to these training programmes?
Yes, students can apply to the ROs which are successful, including international students. The first cohort of students on these training programmes will start in October 2026

If applying as a multi-centre DTP, what would be the best approach for maintaining a strong cohort identity?
Applicants are welcome to describe how they will develop their cohort over multiple years of intakes and what training/activities/etc., they will provide to ensure that the students supported by their programme feel part of their cohort. Exactly how this is accomplished is down to the applicant; for example, applicants may want to consider how they will make any event/training they provide is accessible to their student cohort, where and how often students will have the opportunity to meet, and how you advertise and recruit for your programme.

Does it need to include more than one University? or can it be multicentre within one big University?
We welcome single and multi-institution applications.

Are partnerships with international educational institutions encouraged / supported?
Any project lead or project co-leads named on the application must be eligible to receive UKRI funding; if an organisation is not eligible to receive UKRI funding and will not be providing the principal base (host) for the students during their studies, they may be included on the application as a Project partner. This includes international organisations. For further clarification, we only fund UK-based HEIs and UK-based applicants; therefore, the individual named as your project lead will need to be based in the UK.

Are placements compulsory?
Yes, all students must undertake a placement of a minimum of 3 months. Please see the section of the funding opportunities on "Placements"

Will cross-institution applications be prioritised? Is industry engagement required?
No, multi-institution applications will not be prioritised. There are opportunities for involvement from organisations beyond academia in a number of areas, providing CASE studentship partners and support, e.g., co-supervision + co-creation of student projects, hosting students on placement, providing training or facilities, providing financial or non-financial contributions.

What does it take for a newly graduated (Msc information technology) international student to apply?
Requirements for students to apply to doctoral training programmes supported by these funding opportunities will be determined by the successful training grant award holders. The ROs which hold these awards will advertise these PhD positions and students should direct their queries relating to recruitment to these ROs when they become available. The first cohort of students will start in October 2026.

What industry involvement is expected for these DFAs? What is the expectation for integration with industry partners (i.e., CASE studentships)?
See above and the sections on CASE studentships in the funding opportunity call text.

How can an EPSRC academic be involved in the leadership and supervision of an application?
EPSRC is one of the research councils who is co-funding the Engineering Biology DFA; if your proposed programme of work falls within the scope and remit of this call, you are welcome to apply to this opportunity via TFS.

Does a senior professor have to be the lead or can an associate professor lead (backed by a team including more senior members)?
Yes, an associate professor may act as a Project lead, provided that they fit the criteria for a PL as determined by the Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI.
The project lead is responsible for the intellectual leadership and overall management of the project. They are the main contact for UKRI. To be the project lead you must be affiliated with the 'lead organisation' on the application. Project leads and co-leads ('principal investigators' and 'co-investigators' in Je-S) must have a substantial relationship with an organisation eligible for UKRI funding. This organisation will support them if their application is successful.
If you do not yet work for the organisation who will hold the grant, you can still apply. However, you must first discuss with the potential organisation and get their support before you start your application.

Please can you clarify the collaboration agreement requirements at the point of the main DFA submission?
At the time of application, collaborative agreements should ideally be in place regarding management of the doctoral candidate's work, and agreements concerning any intellectual property that may arise as a result. This collaboration should be effectively managed, to maximise the benefits for all parties concerned.
At the point of submitting a DFA application, a minimum MoU must be in place. By the time students will be starting in October 2026, we would need the full formal agreement to be in place. For audit purposes, UKRI requires formal collaboration agreements to be put in place if an award is made.

[Terms and conditions for training funding – UKRI](#) and [UKRI-020424-TrainingGrantTermsConditionsApril2024.pdf](#) states that:
"TGC 2.6.2
You must undertake appropriate due diligence before any Student is recruited, any Student research activity starts and on Your collaborative partner(s) in advance of any collaboration between parties beginning, including where changes occur after the Studentship start date to organisations involved in the Studentship or, where any material change occurs in the nature of the collaboration or external factors which might alter the level of risk to the research activity and its potential usages. Where due diligence checks identify a potential risk, You must ensure that appropriate mitigations are in place to manage that risk before any Student research activity and/or collaboration affected by the risk begins/is continued. Due Diligence must be undertaken in line with UKRI's Principles on Trusted Research and Innovation: [Trusted research and innovation – UKRI](#)"

Would you be encouraging applications from those who have been successful with the Engineering Biology Mission Hubs?
Prospective applicants who already hold an Engineering Biology Mission hub award are eligible to apply for these funding opportunities.

General Scope Questions

Apart from differences in scope/remit, would other elements of these 2 opportunities be the same for future Doctoral Focal awards?
Any future Doctoral Focal Award funding opportunities funded by UKRI will cover their requirements for applicants in their specific funding opportunity call text, including what is expected in terms of training, scope and remit and their assessment criteria.

Is there an option for a 1+3 scheme with a first year MRes style training? This would be helpful to join CS and biology students into a cohort and train them for their projects.
Will the Eng Bio call allow/accommodate a 1+3 (MSc + PhD) model?
Would a 1+3 year structure, with the first year effectively run as an MRes equivalent and delivering taught training (e.g., in AI/ML), be an option for these programmes?
It would be permissible to have a DFA programme which includes a MRes style first year of training, but this training must be part of the PhD and not a separate qualification, i.e., so students can use any results generated from their "MRes" research to their PhD thesis. A model of "1+3" wherein the first year of the 4-year PhD programme does not in any way contribute to the thesis, is not supported. See below question for more details.

Not allowing a 1+3 (Masters + PhD) year model is counter to DEI, as it inherently makes it harder for students who do not have a Master's degree to compete for PhD studentships. The 1+3 model has also proven highly effective in delivering rigorous training in EPSRC CDTs for example. What is the thinking behind not allowing a 1+3 model?
BBSRC supports four-year PhD programmes only, to ensure that students have sufficient time to complete their research, participate in cohort-based training, and undertake a three-month internship. This approach strikes a balance between providing the breadth of training and experience we expect while also safeguarding student wellbeing. The selection criteria for PhD programmes are determined by our university and institute partners. UKRI does not require applicants to PhD programmes to hold a Master's degree, and encourages institutions to take a broad view of 'excellence' in their applicant assessments, beyond standard grade-based measures. See UKRI's [Good Practice Principles in Recruitment and Training at Doctoral Level](#).
Additionally, a four-year structure allows students to incorporate their first year of research activity directly into their doctoral qualification, rather than it being counted towards a separate Master's degree. If a student chooses to leave the programme after one year, they may have the option to write up their work for an MPhil qualification.

Are you looking to fund multiple small applications or just a couple of really large ones?
The number and size of applications which will be funded will depend on the quantity and quality of applications received and the recommendations from the assessment panel. Applicants must be able to support the minimum number of studentships (5) per year of intake, which equates to 15 total students, as there are three years of intake, but there is no preference for application or consortia size.

It sounds like this DFA call is a continuation of funding of previous engineering biology UKRI funding. Is the expectation that past hubs will have priority, or is this an open call?
These Doctoral Focal awards are new funding opportunities, not a continuation of funding from any previous investments and both of them are open calls.

I'm interested in the scope; would BBSRC rather fund two smaller bids vs one large cohort?
BBSRC has not denoted any preference for the scale of the cohort. However, we do recommend a minimum of 5 studentships per year which would mean an overall intake of 15 studentships across the lifetime of the DFA. For the AI and Data in Biosciences DFA there is a maximum of 20 notional studentships per year available, while for the Engineering Biology DFA there is a maximum of 33 notional studentships available per year.
Although there is no upper limit in the number of students per cohort, we expect applicants to consider the cohort size they can accommodate in relation to the training and experiential needs of their students.

If a team of applicants are relatively early career, would that be Ok if there is wider support for them e.g., mentoring from senior staff who have experience of delivering cohort programmes in other areas? Or would you expect the core-team in the bid to include someone with experience of delivering externally funded training programmes?
In the assessment criteria, we ask that applicants "provide evidence that those leading the delivery of this award:
  • have appropriate research and pastoral capacity to support the number of studentships that you expect to deliver through this award
  • have the experience and skills (for example, project management, leadership, stakeholder management, administration, and supervision) to deliver the proposed vision, training programme, and scale
  • have a well-evidenced track record of contributing to a positive research culture and the wider community
  • have a well-evidenced track record of supporting the training and development of others, particularly previous involvement in delivering doctoral training successfully"

Is diversification of funded organisations a factor in the award decisions? i.e., all things being equal, will organisations that haven't received other doctoral funding on these themes be more likely to receive an award?
Not necessarily. At the end of the assessment process. Portfolio balancing is an internal process which will be carried out at the end of the assessment period, after we have received the recommendations from the external panel. Portfolio balancing will be taken into consideration in situations where applications within the 'Fundable' scoring range (based on the scoring against the Assessment Criteria) require prioritisation for the allocated funding available. In these circumstances, we would consider all three of the portfolio balancing aspects which include:
  • Diversity of higher education institution types and non-HEI partner organisations, to ensure all funded consortia are diverse and collaborate with a diverse group of partner organisations
  • Research focus, to ensure coverage of the opportunity remit
  • Geographic coverage, to ensure the resultant doctoral focal awards are distributed evenly across the UK where possible
Please note that applicants will need to demonstrate both excellence in doctoral teaching/training as well as excellent research capacity regardless of the scope of their proposal.

Is there any balancing of awards around place/region for these calls?
We recommend that applicants do not consider these portfolio balancing elements when writing their applications and focus instead to focus on how best they can address the assessment criteria of the funding opportunity. For transparency, the panel will provide a recommendation to the relevant RC Executive with a view to creating a balanced portfolio from the highest quality applications. In balancing, the panel and the executive will consider the following:
- diversity of higher education institution types and non-HEI partner organisations, to ensure all funded consortia are diverse and collaborate with a diverse group of partner organisations
- research focus, to ensure coverage of the opportunity remit
- geographic coverage, to ensure the resultant doctoral focal awards are distributed evenly across the UK where possible

How many cross cutting aspects need to be covered?
For EngBio: Successful doctoral focal award applicants will deliver skills and talent development in engineering biology that will address one or more of the themes across the NEBP challenge areas.
For AI and Data: You should have a clear vision for the area or areas of training you will focus on, be able to articulate the uniqueness of the offering within the UK doctoral training landscape and explain the benefit of a cohort-driven approach to address this need. Though you are encouraged to consider what is most appropriate for your specific approach, please see the funding opportunity call text for examples of broad thematic areas where you may deliver your doctoral training programme.

Apart from the AI + Data or EngBio specific aspects of the training, what else do students need to receive training in as part of these awards?
The funding opportunity specific training requirements are detailed in the call text for each opportunity. This should include elements such as:
- Training across underpinning enablers such as standards and metrology, responsible research and innovation (RRI) and trusted research and innovation (TRI)
- Industrial placement (3-18 months) is mandatory to give experience of working across sectors outside of academia
- Entrepreneurial training is mandatory
- Students should receive explicit careers training and continuous professional development relevant career trajectories within and beyond academia
- Exposure to technical skills through collaboration with national facilities, where appropriate
- Mental health training and support

What is the crucial difference between Landscape and Focal award? Is the latter more focused? If so, how focused?
Doctoral landscape awards will support the UK's overall doctoral capability and capacity needs.
Key features include:
- broad, flexible funding
- overall awards and studentships shaped to fit the needs of the relevant disciplines or sectors
- studentships tailored to meet the needs of the individual project, student, and supervisors or supervisors and project partners

Doctoral focal awards will provide support for areas that require a concentration of studentships in combination with a highly tailored training programme.
Key features include:
- funding for research training in specific, tightly focused themes or challenges
- training programmes still supporting some tailoring of opportunities to individual needs

Please refer to the "Scope" and "Remit" sections of the DFA funding opportunities for more details.

Is this opportunity intended for full time students or is it open to part time programs too?
We welcome applications describing innovative models of delivering doctoral training, including the support of students who are undertaking their PhD part-time. For example, those who wish to combine their research training with work or personal responsibilities.

Students should be made aware that funding for part time study is an option, and Research Organisations and Students should be realistic about such arrangements. It is expected that the period of study will reflect the percentage of time spent pursuing doctoral studies, and a minimum of 50% of full time equivalent is required. Supervisors will wish to ensure that arrangements are made to incorporate any new research or research developments that are likely to emerge within the extended period of study. Part-time students should be able to fully participate in the training and cohort development opportunities, where applicable, provided through the training grant.

We also support part-time training and additional training elements designed to meet the objectives of the programme. You can describe how you would create and maintain a positive, inclusive, and supportive environment for all students and staff involved, addressing a variety of needs and supporting good wellbeing, including relevant in the "Positive culture and environment" application section.

Student Numbers and Costings

Please could you confirm the number of studentships that will be funded?
There is funding available for *up to* 20 students/year in AI + Data in the biosciences and *up to* 33 students/year in Engineering biology. BBSRC are expecting to fund a minimum of one focal award across each theme, where the final decision will depend on the number and quality of applications received via each funding opportunity. Final student numbers may also be dependent upon number and quality of applications received across the remit of EPSRC, MRC and NERC in the Engineering Biology DFA.

How many awards are you expecting to make for each call?
We state that there is funding for *up to* 20 students per year for the AI and Data in the biosciences DFA and funding for *up to* 33 students per year for the engineering biology DFA.

For the number of students funded, 20 for AI or 33 for Biol Engineering per year. Is this the total funding, or is it total per application maximum?
Without knowing the quantity, quality and remit of applications we will receive, how those studentships will be distributed across these funding opportunities cannot be quantified at this stage. Therefore, we state that there is funding for *up to* 20 students per year for the AI and Data in the biosciences DFA and funding for *up to* 33 students per year for the engineering biology DFA.

For the 'up to 33 students per intake' for EngBio DFA, is that for just BBSRC remit or across the whole call?
This is across the whole call. Please note that the actual number of studentships awarded will depend on the quantity, quality and remit of the applications received.

The slide on the number of studentships was unclear. 20 students per intake for the AI bid, could mean 3*20 over three years or 20 total. Which one is the correct number?
BBSRC will fund *up to* 20 students per year of intake for the AI and Data science in the bioscience Doctoral Focal award funding opportunity. There will be three years of intake, meaning that there is funding available for up to 60 students over the lifetime of the award. Please note that the actual number of studentships awarded will depend on the quantity, quality and remit of the applications received.

Does the number of students "per intake" mean that many studentships are available per year, so in total 3x that many studentships? E.g., 3x 33 studentships for EngBio?

Yes. "Per intake" is used to indicate the number of students which will be funded per year for the Doctoral Focal awards. The first cohort of students will begin their studies in October 2026, (intake year 1), and each successful applicant will receive funding for however many studentships they are awarded for three total years of intake, with cohorts stating in October 2026, 2027, and 2028. For the Engineering Biology Doctoral Focal award, we will fund *up to* 33 studentships per year of intake, which means we will fund *up to* 99 students in total across the lifetime of the award. Please note that the actual number of studentships awarded will depend on the quantity, quality and remit of the applications received.

Just to be absolutely clear, can I check the maximum figures of 33 and 20 studentships per intake are nationwide: across all awards made. So, 99 studentships max in total split between all Eng Bio DFAs, and 60 studentships max split between all AI/Data DFAs?

Yes, *up to* 99 total for EngBio and *up to* 60 for Ai and data and these will be split across successful applicants.

Another question on the intake numbers - for the EngBio DFA for example, does 33 per intake mean up to 33 students per intake per award made or is it 33 split across all the awards made?

For the Engineering Biology DFA, we will fund up to 33 students per year of intake. For the AI and Data science in the biosciences DFA, we will fund up to 20 students per year of intake. For both DFAs, these studentships will be split across successful applicants, providing that there is more than one successful applicant per funding opportunity.

If we provide matched funded studentships can the max. number of students go beyond the max. numbers stated in the call text? E.g., 20 BBSRC funded + 5 match funded per year for the AI DFA?

Yes. We encourage you to utilise funding from this funding opportunity to leverage additional investment (either as cash or in-kind support) from multiple stakeholders where appropriate. We also support co-funding to be used from non-research council sources to part-fund additional studentships. However, there is no mandatory requirement for match-funded studentships or cash leverage for this funding opportunity. If you were to have match-funded studentships as part of your Doctoral Focal award training programme, these studentships would be funded by you and would not affect the maximum number of studentships funded by UKRI.

Is it possible to ask for a certain number of studentships, and then BBSRC later suggest a lower number due to the competing needs of multiple applications? I.e., an applicant requests 7 studentships/year, but be awarded 5/yr.

Yes, this is a possible outcome.

Please can you further clarify the funding structure, particularly with regards training, management and administrative costs?

Successful applicants will receive funding in the form of notional studentships, with the indicative estimate funding per notional studentship provided as:

Stipend: £74,488*
Fees: £18,848*
Research Training Support Grant (RTSG): £20,000
Programme management: £2,000
Total: £115,336

*The student stipend and fees are indicative estimates only, based on the 2023 to 2024 UKRI minima multiplied by four, and excluding London allowance. At the time of award, stipend and fees will be indexed to accommodate rises in the minimum stipend and fees levels over the lifetime of the award.

The "Programme management" funding header can be used as a contribution towards placements, conferences, and administrative costs.
A contribution towards operational management costs has been included within the indicative funding calculation in recognition of the need to manage the partnership. BBSRC acknowledges that this does not reflect the full cost of the industrial doctoral landscape training programme administrative structures. In line with the requirements in the management section, adequate funds must therefore be committed by you from either flexibility within the training grant, leveraged support, or a combination of sources.
Successful applicants will also receive a portion of the "Flexible fund", which is permitted to be used for administrative costs. However, training grant funds are not intended to relieve the RO of any part of their normal expenditure.
Further, in line with the UKRI Training grant terms and conditions:
"TGC 4.7
You may incorporate costs associated with the administration of training, advertising costs and open days, into the fee level that You charge to the Training Grant, these costs may not be taken from the Training Grant other than through the fee level, unless explicitly stated otherwise within any Specific Terms and Conditions of the Training Grant. In addition, these fees must be equal to the level of fee used for UK non-UKRI funded Students on similar programmes. Where this fee is higher than the annual rate set by Us, You may draw this from the Training Grant subject to any Specific Conditions. Home Students must not be charged additional fees, above the level paid by Us. For International students, You are able to claim the difference between home and international fees from other sources, but these costs may not be taken from the Training Grant or other UKRI funding." Terms and conditions for training funding – UKRI

Is there a more detailed breakdown on what funding can be used for e.g., is it explicitly studentships and nothing else? Please could the financial aspects of the call be explained further. Only £10m appears to be allocated for notional studentships.
See above question; the funding provided by these funding opportunities is only for studentships.

Please can you explain the likely flexible fund sum? What does the rubric 'per year of intake' mean? Is it a one-off sum of c. £1750 per student or £1750 x 3 per student? Or something else?
Successful applicants will receive funding in the form of notional studentships, as outlined in the "Funding available" section of the funding opportunity, as well as a portion of the Flexible Fund. The flexible fund is valued at approximately £1,750 per student per year of intake, and there are three years of intake for the Doctoral Focal award funding opportunities. For example, if a successful applicant were to be awarded 10 studentships per year, they would receive £17,500 per year of intake, or £52,500 in total. Payments of the flexible fund are made annually, and funds may be rolled into subsequent years. For more information on what the flexible fund may be used for, please see the "Flexible Fund" section of the funding opportunity.

Can the RTSG be spent on the outsourced training?
No. RTSG is for consumables and small equipment purchases, if required, which are needed for the student's project. It is not for outsourced training. However, the Flexible Fund may be used for this purpose.

Can RTSG be used to cover admin costs?
No. RTSG is to be used to support the student's research project, such as on consumables and small equipment purchases. Administration is not an eligible RTSG cost. Please see the "Funding available" section of the relevant funding opportunity for more details on the "Programme management" funding header, which can be used to support administrative costs. Please also see questions above.

Is the RTSG (£20,000) the part that is given to labs to cover lab consumables?
The RTSG funding header should be used to support costs associated with the student's research project, such as on consumables and small equipment. In line with TGC 4.12, Costs charged to the RTSG funding heading must be explicitly identifiable as arising from the conduct of the award and must be verifiable, auditable, and charged on the basis of the cash amount spent.

RTSG is part of each notional studentship and the funding for these studentships is awarded to the RO acting as project lead on the application, which then acts as the training grant award holder if they were to be successful. Studentship funding is not automatically "given" to any particular laboratory or department; these funds are to be used by the RO acting as the training grant award holder to meet the objectives of the doctoral training programme.

Can you expand on what the £1750 per student per year flexible fund can be used for. Can this be used to support admin, or like the RTSG does it have to be used to support the student?

The flexible fund must be used to benefit those associated with the Doctoral Focal Award, which could refer to students, associated staff or both. It can also be used to increase access to potential future students of the programme, for example, widening participation activities. We would expect you to use the flexible support fund to complement and support the proposed training and EDI plan you have provided within your application.

For more details on the Flexible fund, in addition to examples of what it may be used for, please see the "Flexible Fund" sections of the DFA funding opportunity webpages.

Are the headline available funding figures at the top of the funding opportunities double counted for BBSRC? I.e., we cannot simply add them together to work out the total funding available?

BBSRC has funding available for *up to* 30 students per year across both funding opportunities. The studentship contributions from EPRSC, MRC and NERC will be determined by the quantity, quality and remit coverage of applications received to the engineering biology DFA. Without knowing the quantity, quality and remit of applications we will receive, how those studentships will be distributed across these funding opportunities cannot be quantified at this stage. Therefore, we state that there is funding for *up to* 20 students per year for the AI and Data in the biosciences DFA and funding for *up to* 33 students per year for the engineering biology DFA.

Where does the money come from to support students moving around e.g. co-leads, partners, placement locations?

For students on placement, we would strongly encourage the industrial partner to cover these fees. The programme management and fees headers can be used to support students travel for their studies.

What level of match-funding is expected from applicants, and can it be a percentage of the overall budget (e.g., 10%) rather than matching the number of funded students?

Match-funded studentships are welcome, but they are not a mandatory element of these funding opportunities.

Matched studentships are not required but universities often do this for various reasons. Does it impact the success of the bid? If no matched studentships are offered, are they marked down compared to a bid that does? Or any leveraging of cash / in-kind - does this positively impact the outcome of the bids?

Match-funded studentships are not a requirement of this funding opportunity. Therefore, applications won't be penalised by the panel for not having matched funding. However, if something is included in the application (such as matched funding from institution) then it can be assessed by the panel for both its strengths and its weaknesses. The application will be assessed as a whole by the panel in line with the assessment criteria. During the assessment process, we will reiterate to the panel what the requirements of the funding opportunity are, meaning that they will know that this aspect is not a requirement and hence an application which does not include match funding should not be penalised.

Are institutions expected to indicate/confirm in the application that they will match fund the difference in home and overseas fees for any international students up to the 30% cap?

It is not a requirement to include this information within your application, but as stated in the UKRI TG terms and conditions: "For International students, You are able to claim the difference between home and International fees from other sources, but these costs may not be taken from the Training Grant or other UKRI funding." Therefore, ROs should have a plan in place for how these costs will be met, were they to be successful, if they plan on supporting international PhD candidates.

What are UKRI's expectations for institutional management and in-kind staff contributions?
UKRI will fund 2,000 GBP per student for Programme Management. This header can be used as a contribution towards placements, conferences, and administrative costs. A contribution towards operational management costs has been included within this indicative funding calculation in recognition of the need to manage the partnership. We acknowledge that this does not reflect the full cost of the doctoral training programme administrative structures. In line with the requirements in the management section in the funding finder, adequate funds must therefore be committed by you from either flexibility within the training grant, leveraged support, or a combination of sources.

Can we cost for Project Lead/Co-Lead/administrative time?
If successful, you will receive funding in the form of notional studentships. Please see the "Funding available" section of the relevant funding opportunity for more details on the "Programme management" funding header, which can be used to support administrative costs. Please see above questions.

Given the financial restraints that many UK universities are facing currently, existing admin resource is scarce and already stretched. Is there scope to increase the contribution towards project management by moving funding between the cost headings? e.g. Can the RTSG be £18K instead of £20K to put a bit more towards covering this cost?
No. RTSG funding can only be used for student training, not admin. Funding will be granted to successful applicants in the form of notional studentships, where the "Programme management" header may be used to cover costs associated with student placements, conferences and/or programme administration.
A contribution towards operational management costs has been included within the indicative funding calculation in recognition of the need to manage the partnership. We acknowledge that this does not reflect the full cost of the training programme administrative structures. In line with the requirements in the management section, adequate funds must therefore be committed by you from either flexibility within the training grant, leveraged support, or a combination of sources.
The flexible fund can also be used for training of staff involved in the delivery of the training grant (supervisory teams and administrators). However, training grant funds are not intended to relieve the RO of any part of their normal expenditure.

AI & Data DFA Scope Questions

I have specific questions about my training programme and whether it will be in scope and remit for this call
If your query has not been answered in the call text, by watching the Webinar, or in this FAQ document, please address your question to: DFA.AI.Data@bbsrc.ukri.org.

Does the remit of the AI in bioscience Focal award include medical/clinical applications such as biomarker and drug target discovery?
This depends on the individual student projects which will be delivered as part of your DFA and your overall training programme. The underpinning research of developing biomarkers and drug discovery could be within scope, but if a project already has a clear route into clinical application there is a risk it would be out of scope. Feel free to get in touch to discuss further under dfa.ai.data@bbsrc.ukri.org.

Are reciprocal benefits to AI and Biosciences required?
The focus here is the training for doctoral students as future life science leaders. We expect students to receive training that equips them with deep, hands-on knowledge of the latest developments in computational systems biology, AI, ML, computer science, informatics, and advanced statistics in the context of bioscience research. We also expect students to gain an understanding of core underpinning topics such as responsible AI, software engineering, data management, and the use of high-performance computing platforms.

Co-development approaches where both AI and bioscience research are driven further are strongly encouraged, but new and creative application of established AI approaches in bioscience research is equally feasible. We do expect however that bioscience research benefits, and any projects solely driving AI research without direct benefit to bioscience would be considered out of scope.

Is the primary goal of the AI/Data Science doctoral focal award to: (i) take students from an AI/Data Science background and train them up for applying their skills in biosciences; (ii) take students from a bioscience background and develop their AI/Data Science skills; (iii) a combination of both?
A combination of both would be encouraged.

Does the focus lie on existing methods or is there scope for developing new methods and mathematical theory supporting the data?
A fundamental aspect of all doctoral awards is the pursuit of expanding the frontiers of our current knowledge. We would expect the students to be advancing current understanding, generating new knowledge, and developing the breadth of expertise in AI and data in biosciences for future economic and societal impact.

Does this DFA focus on specific computational themes with a diverse range of bioscience applications?
We give examples of thematic areas in the opportunity text, the inclusion of AI/ML as a thematic area is mandatory for all applications. It is up to you as the applicant to make the case that the DFA provides a competitive package that meets the criteria of the opportunity. The thematic areas within the opportunity text provide a good overview of the broad way we are interpreting computational biology.

Can a Computer Science faculty working on AI Safety be a lead on this call?
All applications should consider the implications of deploying AI and other advanced computational approaches in the intended domains, examining the legal, ethical and socio-economic consequences of potentially disruptive AI technologies before they are deployed. But this needs to be in the context of the biosciences, and a focus just on AI safety would likely be too narrow to be competitive against other applications.
To be a "project lead", you must fulfil the criteria of this role as stated in the Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI; if you do not fulfil these criteria, you may be included on this application as any of the other roles, e.g., Project co-lead, Specialist, Technician

Could you please comment, how broad should be the topic of the DFA in AI and Data in the Biosciences, e.g., should in include several disciplines within the biosciences?
The aim of this opportunity is to train the prospective students as future life science leaders, equipping them with deep, hands-on knowledge of the latest developments in computational systems biology, AI, ML, computer science, informatics, and advanced statistics in the context of bioscience research. The intention is to establish these future leaders with skills that are transferrable across a breadth of bioscience disciplines, and diversity of projects is encouraged. However, it is the responsibility of the applicants to make a compelling case for the breadth of bioscience disciplines they choose to include.

AI and Data DFA - Applicant team expertise

What type of expertise is preferred to lead a focal award?
The 'Applicant and team capability to deliver' provides the opportunity to set out the expertise and experience of the team that will deliver the focal award. We would anticipate that expertise includes those that work in the biosciences and those with computational only expertise also being important in these teams. However, the arrangement and organisation of that team would be an applicant decision.

AI and Data DFA - Student cohort

Are prospective cohorts expected to be a mix of students from the biosciences as well as mathematical/computational sciences?
This funding opportunity aims to train the next generation of leaders in computational approaches for bioscience research and innovation, including data science, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML). The composition of a prospective cohort is an applicant decision, but we anticipate that drawing on a diverse applicant pool would be beneficial to achieve the stated aim and would therefore encourage the inclusion of students from mathematical/ computational sciences. The inclusion of AI/ML as a thematic area is mandatory for all applications.

Engineering Biology DFA Scope Questions

Can you tell us about the distinction between Engineering Biology and Bioengineering as you see it?
We have a fuller description of what we would view as in scope which we will provide in the published FAQs, but if you would like to discuss please do get in touch via the relevant inbox DFA.Engbio@bbsrc.ukri.org

What are the intended/desired specific skills to be developed by the engineering biology student cohorts?
Please refer to the funding opportunity for full details of the training remit we expect applicants to deliver as part of their programme.
To fully harness the transformative, economic and societal benefit of engineering biology solutions, we encourage training in transformative cross-cutting technologies including, but not limited to:
- data interrogation and data science
- computational sciences
- artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) and
- automation, fermentation science and bioprocessing

For the scope/remit of an EngBio DFA, does the topic need to cover all different UKRI RCs, i.e., BBSRC, EPSRC, MRC and NERC?
No, a Doctoral Focal Award application needs to address one or more of the themes across the Discovery and / or application-inspired challenge areas.

What is the remit of engineering biology?
Please refer to call text. Send in any specific scope queries to DFA.EngBio@bbsrc.ukri.org.

Will you demand manage across the National Engineering Biology Programme themes?
The panel will provide a recommendation to BBSRC, EPSRC, NERC and MRC executive with a view to creating a balanced portfolio from the highest quality applications. In balancing, the panel and the relevant research council executive team or teams will consider the following:
- Diversity of higher education institution types and non-HEI partner organisations, to ensure all funded consortia are diverse and collaborate with a diverse group of partner organisations
- Research focus, to ensure coverage of the opportunity remit
- Geographic coverage, to ensure the resultant doctoral focal awards are distributed evenly across the UK where possible

Will the strength in the research portfolio be prioritised over teaching/training excellence?
No, the research portfolio will not be prioritised over the teaching/training excellence. Please refer to the 'How to Apply' section on the [Doctoral Focal Award Funding Finder Page](#) to see a detailed outline of the Assessment Criteria your application will be assessed against. Each Assessment Criteria will be equally weighted against one another.

In the Vision section we will be expecting:
- the project lead organisation and any additional organisations involved in your application need to demonstrate their research capability across the research area defined in the scope section, as evidenced by their research and innovation strategy and proven track record.

In the "Approach" section we will be expecting applicants to outline how they will:
- deliver the vision outlined for this doctoral training programme and any specific requirements set out in the opportunity documentation as well as why this approach is necessary to achieve your expected outcomes

Portfolio balancing is an internal process which will be carried out at the end of the assessment period, after we have received the recommendations from the external panel. Portfolio balancing will be taken into consideration in situations where applications within the 'Fundable' scoring range (based on the scoring against the Assessment Criteria) require prioritisation for the allocated funding available. In these circumstances, we would consider all three of the portfolio balancing aspects which include:
- Diversity of higher education institution types and non-HEI partner organisations, to ensure all funded consortia are diverse and collaborate with a diverse group of partner organisations
- Research focus, to ensure coverage of the opportunity remit
- Geographic coverage, to ensure the resultant doctoral focal awards are distributed evenly across the UK where possible

Please note that applicants will need to demonstrate both excellence in doctoral teaching/training as well as excellent research capacity regardless of the scope of their proposal.

Is the intention to also prioritise bids from institutions with an EngBio mission hub?
No, there will be no prioritisation over bids from institutions with an existing Engineering Biology Mission Hub. The call welcomes applications from across all institutions whether they have existing awarded programmes or not. Training delivered by this funding opportunity may build on existing infrastructure where applicable, and engagement with other relevant research council investments, for example, existing doctoral training programmes and their end-user networks, is encouraged.
You are encouraged to consider how you may support a translational approach to engineering biology by engaging effectively with partners both within and beyond academia to unite around common challenges.

Will bids with a relatively narrow scientific focus be stronger than those with a broad EngBio portfolio?
No, there is no steer or preference on the breadth of the scientific focus of your application. The scope of the call has been left open and broad to both enable and encourage applicants to put a bid in within an area that they feel they would be able to demonstrate that their programme will offer a scientifically excellent training environment and has sufficient high quality research capacity, delivering leading edge, frontier research and innovation training across the training remit and scope of the funding opportunity.

How important is it to cover all of the cross-cutting technologies highlighted in the bid?
The opportunity text sets out the broad range of areas and there is no expectation that a single application will address every discovery or application-inspired challenge. It is therefore for the applicant to determine which of the cross-cutting technologies they consider would provide a competitive and well-rounded training programme.

If my Engineering Biology doctoral training programme encompasses student projects which fall under the remit of multiple councils, should the student number (split) be explained across students?
Regardless of how the studentships on your programme are funded, i.e., which research council is funding them, the funding for all notional studentships supported by these funding opportunities is the same and they will be worth the same amount. In the instance where you receive studentships which are funded by different research councils, e.g., 3 funded by BBSRC and 2 funded by NERC, this can be recorded for monitoring purposes.

How much of each council area need to be covered in % in the Engineering Biology call?
There is no expectation that an application must cover a set percentage of each council's remit.

Please may I request if examples of medical devices that can be considered as a topic area for the Engineering Biology DFA?
Please refer to the call text and direct any specific scope queries to DFA.EngBio@bbsrc.ukri.org.

Following on from a previous question, for the EngBio DFA, are the award panels also cross RC and proposals expected to primarily address priorities from multiple RCs? Also, does the remit need to be specified around allocation of studentships and supervision? For example, 40% EPSRC, 30% BBSRC, 30% MRC?
The panels will be representative of the scope of the call and the requirements of all the Councils involved. As mentioned above, applications can cover one or more RC priorities- the important thing to get across in the application will be a clear narrative of what these are and how the students will be supported to address them.