



# UKRI Metascience Unit AI early career fellowships

Questions and answers, pre-submitted and from the information webinar on Friday 28 Feb 25, 10:00 – 11:00

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## 1. Scope

**Q: Is my project in scope?**

A: Your proposal should build understanding of the *implications* of AI for the science and research ecosystem. AI is currently understood as a set of technologies including machine learning, deep learning, and foundation models. We will not fund fellows whose primary research focus is the direct development of scientific AI tools or general AI ethics. Topics that might be considered too general include examinations of data and algorithmic bias, hallucinations and AI-generated disinformation, dual use of AI tech, environmental costs of AI, or applications of AI to other industries like clinical medicine, law or fintech rather than to the activities uniquely undertaken in scientific research. If you are still unsure, please email [metascience@ukri.org](mailto:metascience@ukri.org)

**Q: Does the term 'science' stipulate the focus of the Fellowship should be on the implications of AI on the hard sciences?**

A: No. This opportunity is intended for philosophers, social scientists, or AI researchers and concerns the implications of AI for all disciplines within UKRI's remit (including social sciences) and the broader research ecosystem.

## 2. Eligibility

Q: Is there an application limit per Research Organisation?

A: No.

Q: Does it make a difference if I earned my PhD a few years ago but am still considered an ECR?

A: No. There are no eligibility rules based on years since PhD or whether the applicant currently holds a permanent or open-ended academic position or job role. However, individuals should not previously have been a project lead or lead on an externally funded project or led a significant programme of work in a commercial or non-academic setting.

Q: What if I have already held a fellowship, such as a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship?

A: This funding opportunity is intended for early career researchers who have completed their PhD (or equivalent experience) by the start date of the fellowship. Whilst applicants may have held a previous fellowship, they should not have been a project lead or lead on an externally funded project or led a significant programme of work in a commercial or non-academic setting.

Q: What does UKRI consider a “completed” PhD?

A: Officially awarded by 30th September 2025, not just thesis submitted, or viva scheduled/completed.

Q: Is it possible to delay the start date by a few months to fit with other work commitments?

A: No.

Q: What if I’m in the process of getting my PhD, but also have additional experience in the field?

A: As you have started a PhD, you now fall under the rules for PhD completion and not for those with equivalent experience. You are expected to commit 100% of your working time on the fellowship i.e. fellowships cannot be held part time to combine with other activities, such as part-time job/studies.

Q: Can I apply for other funding while holding the fellowship?

A: Yes, but you cannot take up other projects during the fellowship. As above, it is expected that your time will be fully committed for the whole duration.

Q: Does a previous role as Co-investigator/Project co-lead count against eligibility?

A: No. You are only ineligible if you have been the project lead/PI of previous grant or project.

Q: If I'm on a current contract at less the 0.5 FTE, am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes, but only if you apply at a minimum of 0.5 FTE.

Q: Do I need to already be employed by/have a contract with the organisation I want to host my fellowship?

A: No, but we do expect you to have contacted them and discussed your intent to work with them, particularly as their research office will ideally need to submit the application.

Q: Can I apply as a visiting researcher or an associate?

A: For this opportunity you need to be based at an eligible research organisation in the UK which has agreed to support your fellowship both in terms of contributing to the full economic cost and providing a mentor for the duration of the fellowship.

### 3. How to apply

Q: Are applicants allowed to claim estate and indirect costs as well as salary costs?

A: Yes, at the discretion of the research organisation and provided that they don't double charge.

Q: Can I apply with co-applicants or research assistants?

A: No, fellowships are intended to be individual and personal awards. The system only allows for a single applicant. Mentors should not be added.

Q: Is there an expectation for match funding by the host organisation and/or does this bear any weight in terms of its assessment?

A: No. Match funding is not expected but as is standard practice with UKRI funding opportunities, UKRI will pay 80% of the full economic cost (FEC) and the host organisation is expected to contribute the remaining 20%.

Q: Is resubmission allowed?

A: No. The resubmission of any previously unsuccessful applications is not permitted.

## 4. Assessment criteria

Q: Will applicants be judged on track record in grant funding or publication outputs?

A: No. The only assessment criteria that will be used are those listed on the UKRI Funding Finder webpage and in TFS itself, under 'What the assessors are looking for in your response'.

Q: Do I need a mentor to apply?

A: Yes. All applicants must have a named mentor at the host organisation during the time of the award. You will need to upload a statement of support from your mentor as part of your application.

Q: How many reviews will there be for each application?

A: Notwithstanding conflicts of interest, we aim for each application to be reviewed by an average of 8 peer reviewers.

## 5. Distributed peer review (DPR)

Q: This will be my first experience of peer review. How do I conduct reviews?

A: You will be given guidance both on the assessment criteria for this opportunity and on how to write a good review.

Q: How long will I have to complete my reviews?

A: You will have 4 weeks to complete your reviews (02 – 30 May 2025). Please take this into account when applying. Completing your reviews is part of the process. Please note that if you do not complete your reviews, your own application will be rejected.

Q: What if other applicants try to gain an advantage by giving tactically lower scores?

A: A common concern with DPR is that applicants may give tactically lower scores, in order to improve their own relative position. The Metascience Unit would like to reassure applicants that protections are in place to ensure that it is extremely difficult for applicants to 'game' the system. For example:

- 1) Reviewers will be assigned to different pools from the applicants they review. As a result, they are not 'competing' against the applicants whose proposals they review.
- 2) No two applicants from the same institution will receive each other's application.
- 3) To mitigate against collusion, we will use an allocation algorithm that avoids having any reciprocal pairs / triads within which reviewers review one another.

The Metascience Unit will use independent moderators to check that reviewers have adhered to the guidelines for this funding opportunity. If an applicant does attempt to 'game' the overall scoring system (for example, by giving consistently negative reviews and low scores without clear justification), their own application may not proceed. The independent moderators will advise on any reviews that should be excluded from the assessment process.

**Q: How will you check on the quality of DPR?**

A: Applications and reviews will be checked by the Metascience Unit. Our own analysts will check that reviewers have followed the review guidelines for this opportunity and refer discrepancies to our independent moderators. If evidence of attempts to game the system are detected, the reviewer's own application may be rejected.

**Q: Will the reviewer allocation method and analysis be transparent?**

A: Yes – we will publish details afterwards.

## **6. Other**

**Q: As a research associate., can I transfer the funding to another eligible research organisation if I get a permanent position during the fellowship?**

A: Yes – you could apply to transfer the funding. You would need host institution support and a named mentor at your new research organisation.