Introduction
The Confidence in Concept (CiC) scheme is intended to accelerate the transition from discovery research to the early stages of therapeutic/biomarker development and rapidly de-risk projects through the translational lifecycle such that they can secure substantial funding awards.

The projects supported should aim to deliver feasibility studies or sufficient preliminary data that provide confidence in the underlying concept before seeking more substantive funding. Applicants should be aware that translational research funding differs from a typical project grant in that the underpinning basic research will already be in place. Up to 2 pages of preliminary data must be included in the application. Programmes of work should be focused around a number of key milestones that de-risk specific elements of further development towards commercialisation or implementation.
Aims & Remit

All disease areas and modalities of intervention are eligible for support from the scheme, including small molecules, peptides, antibodies, vaccines, gene therapy, devices, surgical techniques and engineering / medical technology, bioinformatics and psychological approaches.

We encourage applications from across the Colleges of MDS, LES and EPS, and are particularly keen on interdisciplinary collaborative approaches. Teams that actively involve clinicians from partner NHS Trusts (including Birmingham Health Partners) are welcome.

The MRC wishes to promote academic-industry interactions through the CiC scheme, with the provision of a Confidence in Concept award expected to lead to:

- successful applications for more substantive funding from public funders, e.g. DPFS or equivalent schemes, or industry,
- increased interactions with and understanding of industry as demonstrated by research collaborations, joint funding applications, licencing of IP and successful knowledge exchange etc.

Further guidance from the MRC of the aims of the block grant can be found on the MRC website.

Out of remit

The funding is not intended to support:

- Entire translational projects – applicants seeking funding for entire projects are directed to the MRC’s Biomedical Catalyst: Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme (DPFS),
- Administration costs,
- Industrial partner costs,
- Staff between posts/funding (i.e. as “bridging” funds), or PhD studentships,
- Continuation of normal research grants,
- Costs related to protection of intellectual property,
- Staff exchange into a spin-out company of the host institution.

Awards & Eligibility

The significant potential for further funding and impact inherent in these projects means that support is more substantial than other internal awards – typically we can support projects of 6 – 12 months of values up to £100k at 100% fEC (Cost to Funder).

Projects must be complete by 31st September 2022, to comply with the conditions of the core institutional fund award.

Applicants are encouraged to consider how awards could be used to develop academic-industry interactions. Other routes such as co-funding projects and developing early-stage collaborations are also encouraged.

Principal Investigators (PI) must be a member of academic staff employed by the University of Birmingham. We welcome applications from all lecturers, senior lecturers, readers and professors, along with Early Career Researchers (ECRs). The minimum formal qualification required for an award is a PhD.

Co-investigators (CoI) must meet the same eligibility criteria as PIs, but in addition may include post-doctoral researchers.

Researcher Co-investigators (RCoI) are those who have made a substantial intellectual contribution to the formulation and development of the project but are not eligible to be either PI or CoI in their own right, e.g. they do not have an employment contract with UoB. This could apply to clinical fellows, PhD students and technology specialists or equivalent roles.

For more details, please refer to the MRC guidance.
How to Apply
The funding call is a two-stage process: Expression of Interest (EoI) and Full Stage for shortlisted projects.

All applications **must** be discussed with a Project Manager from the Translational Research Team (TRT) prior to EoI submission to ensure your intended project is appropriate for this funding scheme. Additionally, you will need to consult your Institute / School’s Research Facilitator for accurate project costs and provide your **Worktribe Project ID** in the application. **You are expected** to have engaged with external funders before submitting this application, to establish what proof of concept, translational viability, or any other data they would wish to see to support future applications.

![Figure 2: MRC CiC Application and Award Timeline](image)

Those invited to submit Full Stage applications will be able to access additional support from the Translational Research Team, UoB Enterprise, Business Engagement and external consultants as required. We advise applicants to **engage as early as possible after shortlisting**.

All Full Stage applications must be signed off by the Translational Team Lead and your Research Facilitator on behalf of your Head of Institute / School.

The latest internal guidance and application forms can be found on the [Internal Research Funding intranet page](#).

**Assessment**
Projects are reviewed and scored by a **panel of translational scientists and clinicians**, including independent experts, chaired by **Professor Ferenc Mueller**, Deputy Director of Research for the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. The panel consists of scoring members and non-scoring advisors from MDS, LES and EPS Professional Services.

All applicants (successful and unsuccessful) will be provided **written feedback** following both EoI and Full submission stages. Applicants unsuccessful at either stage will still be able to access TRT support, either to develop grant proposals for external funding streams or new EoIs for the next internal translational funding call.
Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week commencing 25th May 2020</td>
<td>Call open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday 1st July 2020</strong></td>
<td>Expression of Interest application deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 17th July 2020</td>
<td>EoI panel review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week commencing 20th July 2020</td>
<td>Shortlisting / feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-August 2020</td>
<td>Pre-Full Stage Feedback Session</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday 3rd September 2020</strong></td>
<td>Full stage application deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 18th September 2020</td>
<td>Full stage review panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week commencing 21st September 2020</td>
<td>Panel outcome notifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Contact

The Confidence in Concept fund is managed by the **Translational Research Team**, based in MDS Research Delivery. The Translational Research Team provide pre-award application support and post-award project management support to awarded projects. If you are unsure which translational funding stream to apply for, please contact the team who can advise where your project best fits.

All enquiries, including which translational fund you could apply for, please email the Translational Research Team at **TranslationalResearch@contacts.bham.ac.uk**.

**Dr. Claire Potter**
Head of Research Delivery, interim Team Lead

**Dr. Manuela Carvalho-Gaspar**
Translational Project Manager

**Alice Sayers**
Translational Project Officer

**Dr. Jane Gilmour**
Translational Project Manager

**Nicola Beaumont**
Research Delivery Team

**Dr. Angela Murray**
Translational Project Manager
Guidance for Applicants Invited to Full Stage Submission

Pre-Full Stage Feedback Session

Attendance at this session is a mandatory requirement for Full Stage application submission. The session will be chaired by an expert consultant with relevant translational experience. There will be participation from a tailored group of staff, which may include the Translational Research Team, UoB Enterprise and Research Support Services.

Applicants will receive written feedback from the Panel in advance of this meeting and you are expected to attend with a draft of your Full Stage application. This draft should be submitted to the Translational Research Team two working days before your meeting.

Full Stage Application Guidance

1.3 Project Duration

Projects must be complete with all funds defrayed by 31st September 2022, to comply with the conditions of the core institutional fund award.

1.4 Project Cost

See Section 3 Costings guidance below.

2.1 Ethics & Approvals

For any projects involving the use of animals, it is expected that the Biomedical Services Unit will have been contacted, who can also provide advice on NC3Rs Guidelines (bmsu@contacts.bham.ac.uk).

It is not expected that an ethical review will be in place ahead of the Full Stage submission deadline, but applicants should be aware that appropriate ethical approval will be a condition of starting the award. Please also be that aware ethical approval is a requirement of the University of Birmingham’s Code of Practice for Research. For further detail see: intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/Financial-Services/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/index.aspx

2.3 Project Plan & Milestones

At Full Stage there will be more emphasis on the implementation of your project plan. Please provide a justification of any resources requested in supporting this project and ensure it is aligned with the resources identified in Section 3 (Costings). Explain how each of the investigators named in the proposal will work together and outline other major collaborations important for the research.

Where appropriate, a justification of the proposed sample size must be given along with details of the planned statistical analyses. Please include details of any professional statistical advice that has been sought.

If preliminary data is to be included, text provided should only address the interpretation of the figures. If any inappropriate text is included in the preliminary data, this will be redacted before sending to the Panel for review.

Project milestones should be written as SMART goals (see details and examples below) and relevant go / no-go decision points should be included. CiC projects typically have 2 – 4 milestones and your go / no-go decision points should be closely tied with the funding (particularly staffing) in such a way that projects can be terminated for non-delivery. This will be a key consideration in funding decisions.
Table 1: Examples of SMART Milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Example 1 | Establish fit for purpose primary screening assay  
- Primary screening assay established with transient transfection in 384 well format with $Z' > 0.7$ (acceptable 96 well assay, $Z' > 0.5$) at month 6. |
| Example 2 | Evaluate hits from HTS  
- Re-evaluate hits in single shot and full EC50 mode in primary assay. Re-confirmed hits ranked according to EC50 and chemical characteristics (see target product profile for measurables). Completed at month 12. |

The template Gantt chart provided should be completed for all applicants invited to submit a Full Stage application. Please ensure you complete your name and project title in cells B3 and B4 respectively, then enter the start date for your project in cell E5. Milestone and task details should then be filled in, with dates for individual tasks indicated. Further milestones and tasks may be added as necessary. The task bars can be filled in simply by changing the background colour, or the provided conditional formats may be used. Remove the example task bars by selecting the area and pressing delete on the keyboard. Then use numbers 1 through 5 to quickly apply a range of colours to the chart and build your task bars.

2.4 Industry Interactions

Please be aware that any project involving an industrial partner (contributing either in cash or in kind), which does not have an existing collaboration agreement in place, will be expected to have a MICA (MRC Industry Collaboration Agreement) completed as a condition of award.

Through the MICA, the MRC encourages and supports collaborative research projects between academic and industry researchers. It is an agreement between the commercial and academic partners to undertake collaborative research. The key feature of the MICA is its flexibility, allowing the level and nature of the industry contribution to vary according to scientific needs, from cash and time input to sharing compounds and staff. Companies of any size may participate, from spin-outs and SMEs to major pharma. More details about the MICA can be found on the MRC’s website: mrc.ukri.org/innovation/mrc-industry-collaboration-agreement-mica/
2.5 Intellectual Property
This section applies to all forms of IP, including patents for inventions, such as new drugs or medical devices, copyright in software, database rights in large datasets, rights in designs, e.g. for new equipment and rights in confidential knowhow.

Please ensure you have freedom to operate in your project and that you have considered any IP that may be generated. Where appropriate, we expect you to engage with the Translational Research Team and UoB Enterprise.

2.7 Future Development Plans
Please provide a brief description of likely subsequent proposals directly related to this project if this work is successful. It is expected you will have spoken to potential follow-up funders to establish what proof of concept, translational viability, or any other data they would wish to see to support future applications. Describe any clinical, commercial, or organisational dependencies necessary to help translate your work into practice.

3 Costings
The Confidence in Concept fund will provide up to £100k at 100% fEC over 6 – 12 months. Your total request value cannot increase by more than 5% of your EoI value. All values used in Section 1.4 (Project Cost) and Section 3 (Costings) must match the Cost to Funder values as reported in your Worktribe project record.

Please note that we will only honour the quoted value provided in this application. All quotes must be appended and should always include VAT (e.g. equipment, contract research services, sequencing costs etc.). If you are purchasing services or equipment for medical research and the supplier confirms that they will not charge VAT, you may exclude it.

For the avoidance of any doubt, if you have excluded VAT at this stage, it will not be included in your award.

4 Authorisation
Email authorisation from your designated Research Facilitator on behalf of Head of Institute / School must be submitted with your application.

Final authorisation will be provided by the Translational Team Lead after submission of the application and this will include the condition that you have attended the Pre-Full Stage Feedback Session.