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| **Guidance for the MRC CiC Fund 2016/17** |

## Background

## Ensuring that fundamental science is translated into new therapies, diagnostics and medical devices is central to the MRC’s mission. The Confidence in Concept scheme aims to accelerate the transition from discovery science to the early stages of therapeutic/diagnostic development by providing locally-administered, responsive and flexible funding to support preliminary translational work. The projects supported should aim to provide sufficient preliminary data to establish the viability of an approach – i.e. to provide confidence in the underlying concept – before seeking more substantive funding (e.g. from [*MRC DPFS*](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/browse/developmental-pathway-funding-scheme/) *and the wider* [*Biomedical Catalyst*](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/science-areas/translation/biomedical-catalyst/)*,* [*Wellcome Trust Translation Fund*](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/funding/Innovations/awards/translation-fund/index.htm) *or* [*NIHR i4i*](http://www.nihr.ac.uk/funding/invention-for-innovation.htm)).

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## All disease areas (including those relevant to global health) 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 therefore 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 (particularly Birmingham Health Partners) are also welcome.

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### Application process

The call for applications will consist of two stages – Expression of Interest (EoI) and full-stage for shortlisted projects – to ensure that sufficient input is given to the design of robust translational projects with a high likelihood of delivering significant outcomes. Depending on the level of funding awarded in this call, there may be a further call

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| EoI deadline | Shortlist notification | Full-stage deadline | Funding decision |
| 1pm Fri 14th Oct 2016 | Fri 28th Oct 2016 | 1pm Fri 2nd Dec 2016 | Fri 16th Dec 2016 |

All projects must be complete by 28th February 2018, as this is the duration of the institutional funding award.

Key contacts for discussion of projects with translational potential and further support are Claire Fenlon ([c.m.fenlon@bham.ac.uk](mailto:c.m.fenlon@bham.ac.uk)), MDS Technology Transfer Officer, and Jonathan Watkins of Alta Innovations ([j.watkins@alta.bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.watkins@alta.bham.ac.uk)), although the College Research Support Offices will also provide input where requested.

Those projects shortlisted from EoI will have extensive input into further development of the case and formation of an appropriate support team (see below). Support will be provided to those applications not shortlisted, either to develop new EoIs for the second call if appropriate or for external funding streams.

## Translational funding – not your average project grant

## 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. Proof of concept data must be included in the application and up to 2 pages may be appended to the EoI. Programmes of work should be focused around a number of key milestones that ‘de-risk’ specific elements of further development towards commercialisation/implementation. These milestones are associated with the funding requested – if these cannot be delivered on time and on-budget, then funding may be withdrawn and the project terminated.

The significant potential for further funding and impact inherent in these projects means that support is more substantial than normal internal awards – typically we can support projects of 6-12 months of values between £50k-£100k (although those over the £75k range should have extensive justification, since the total institutional award is £600k to span a number of projects). Work should be fully economically costed through the appropriate Research Finance contact. Estimates are acceptable at EoI stage, however a copy of the Research Finance costings should be appended at full application stage.

## The MRC wishes to promote academic-industry interactions through the CiC scheme; applicants are therefore strongly encouraged to explore how awards could be used to develop these interactions. People exchange (in either direction) is permitted, where focused on delivery of project objectives. Other routes (e.g. co-funding projects, developing early-stage collaborations) are also encouraged. Interactions with small and medium enterprises are particularly welcomed.

#### Translational Training

Recognising that translational projects are non-typical and outside the comfort zone of many researchers, we will provide a programme of ‘Translational Training’ to support project development for CiC internal funding as well as the multitude of other external funding possibilities available. This will range from open sessions – some of which will be mandatory for those researchers leading an EoI bid for CiC funding – to one-on-one feedback and mentoring sessions that will be available to support individuals and projects. In some cases these will be specifically recommended, but they are open to all researchers on request.

The mandatory 1hr translational training session will be held on **Thursday 22nd September (2pm, Stanley Barnes Room, MDS).** Please contact Neil Holland ([N.A.Holland@bham.ac.uk](mailto:N.A.Holland@bham.ac.uk)) for more information and to book your place.

### Project Translation Groups

For each project invited to submit a full application, we will form a small Project Translation Group (PTG) comprising the lead academic applicant together with internal and external experts and professional support. These PTGs provide the expertise required to plan in detail the fundamental science, preclinical and clinical development, IP and commercialisation. For projects already engaging with industry collaborators, representatives of the latter may also be involved, and external advisors with industry backgrounds will chair each PTG. The central CiC Steering Group will make recommendations to support formation of these.

Key date for initial PTG meetings (approx. 1 hr) is yet to be confirmed, however we anticipate it will be **w/c 14th November**.

## Additional information

Due consideration must be given to the milestone structure of projects – there should be 2-3 milestones maximum, and these 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.

The funding is not intended to support:

* Entire translational projects; applicants seeking funding for entire projects are directed to the MRC’s BMC:DPFS and BMC:RMRC schemes
* Staff between posts/funding (i.e. as “bridging” funds), or PhD studentships
* Continuation of normal research grants
* Costs relating to protection of intellectual property

Where staff are needed to deliver certain aspects of the work, the Steering Committee would welcome projects that consider subcontracting these out to external organizations, or if internal staff are necessary then named researchers should be included in the full-stage application (with due consideration to the impact this will have on other projects they may be associated with).

As outlined, industry partnerships are strongly supported and will be favourably viewed in funding decisions. Applicants should consider relevant IP arrangements – and Jonathan Watkins of Alta Innovations ([j.watkins@alta.bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.watkins@alta.bham.ac.uk)) can advise on this – but should also be assured that projects and PTGs will be covered by confidentiality agreements that will protect IP and these relationships.