

FSE bid development and review of external research funding applications

This document sets out additional support available for review of external funding applications in FSE. This is provided by the Faculty Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Team.

For eligible proposals, the FSE RDI offer covers a non-technical or 'grant writing' style review of the application. This support sits alongside any departmental level peer review procedures; it does not replace them.

Context and rationale

The external funding landscape

Success rates for external research funding continue to fall due to a combination of ever-growing numbers of applications and real terms cuts to funders' budgets.¹ This has led to (i) pressure from funders to reduce the number of uncompetitive proposals submitted and (ii) a trend towards funding larger, more interdisciplinary grants which require a more comprehensive review process.

Support for researchers in FSE

In light of the above, the [FSE Research Development and Innovation \(RDI\) Team](#) is expanding our **bid development and review service** for external research funding applications, with of aim helping to improve the quality of submitted proposals.

This review service is an addition to the work already being done by the RDI Team's [Research Development and Strategy](#) function in providing in-depth support to high-value and **strategically important initiatives** and **research bids**.

The RDI Team works to help the Faculty increase its income from research and innovation, maintain its world-leading research environment and impact, and deliver the research and innovation aspects of the [Faculty's strategy](#). Working alongside Research Services (RS), we now have dedicated teams for both Schools, and for FSE institutes. You can find your dedicated RDI support unit on our [SharePoint page](#). If you have any queries about this document, or you want support for a high value or strategic funding bid, please contact fse.rdi@manchester.ac.uk.

Eligibility

For a funding proposal to be eligible for support under this scheme, it must

1. Fall into one or more of the following categories:

- A. The project is expected to deliver **£1m≤ of revenue (recovered costs)** for UoM. *
- B. **Prestigious, high-value early career schemes**
- C. **Other strategically important funding calls** which may arise.

¹ The number of applications submitted by FSE academics rose from 697 in 2020-21, to 1063 in 2024-25.

The list of all currently eligible funding schemes can be found on the [RDI SharePoint site](#).

AND

2. Meet all of the following criteria:

- The project is led by The University of Manchester, and the Principal Investigator/Project Lead is based in FSE (or would be incoming to FSE, in the event of an award to an external candidate).
- Where relevant, the team has initial group/departmental approval to go ahead.²
- Compliance with all relevant RS policies on [Applying for Research Funding](#).
- The request falls within the timeline for this service (see ‘**How to use the RDI bid development and review service**’)

Clarifications

- * If you do not have a draft budget, it should be possible to discern this from the scheme and/or the [costing request form](#) available from Research Services.
- For schemes which do not fall under 1 or 2, the RDI Team may provide alternative support, such as SharePoint pages or webinars.
- The RDI Team will look to give advance notice of support for funding calls with fixed deadlines (e.g., annually recurring fellowships) that are eligible for the RDI review scheme via announcements published on the RDI SharePoint page.
- Whilst support for ‘always open’ schemes will not be published, they are eligible if they meet the above criteria.
- Where a call is demand-managed by the funder, University or Faculty, the RDI team may facilitate the internal sift/EoI process. In this instance, proposals submitted for the internal sift are not eligible for review; RDI review is only available when the internal selection process has been completed.
- RDI review support covers every stage of the application process thereafter. This includes multi-stage funding schemes, which may have an outline and full-stage submission. The RDI and RS teams can also help to arrange and run **mock interviews** for applicants/teams where this is relevant.

How to use the RDI bid development and review service

The information below sets out minimum timescales and operation for the RDI review service. Academics are encouraged to make contact earlier than this whenever possible to ensure maximum time for bid development.

Please note that for schemes where the funder imposes a cap on submissions, or where the University is implementing demand management, institutional timelines will supersede those laid out here.

² This can vary widely depending on contractual status, your home department, and the funding scheme. If you are unsure if approval is needed, contact your line manager in the first instance.

Request

At least 6 weeks before the submission deadline: The PI submits the support request via this [MS Forms link](#).

Any **available draft application documents** should also be submitted at this point. This is encouraged to maximise the amount of time available for bid development.

If this notice period is not possible due to the call opening at short notice, the Form should be filled in as soon as possible. In such cases, we will try to assist where team capacity allows.

Bid Development Phase

- The PI will be contacted by an RDI team member **within 1 week** of submitting their form to discuss next steps.
- Providing as much of the application as possible, as early as possible, will provide for a more thorough review. Whilst this model is well suited to, e.g., shorter applications for fellowships, it may not always be possible or practical.
- In such instances, the PI and RDI Team member supporting them can agree a **segmented drafting/reviewing schedule** to ensure all parts of the proposal are produced and reviewed in good time.
- If not providing a full draft, in the first instance you will likely be asked to provide, at a minimum:
 - The **main project proposal section** (e.g., ‘Vision and Approach’ for UKRI)
 - The **Costing Request Form** submitted to Research Services, or the most recent budget.
- Applicants should provide **reasonably cohesive drafts** of any agreed documents in **MS Word** for review. There is no requirement to produce ‘final version’ quality documents from the start.
- **At least 2 weeks before the submission deadline.** PIs should aim to have a full draft completed, including at least one review of **all written sections** by the RDI Team member supporting your application. A final review of the whole application will then be offered.
- **1 week before the submission deadline:** The final application should be complete and ready to submit; RDI colleagues cannot review documents after this point.

Letters of support

For proposals which require a letter of support, PIs should be aware of the timelines for securing sign-off of the final text, which may be up to 2 full weeks.

RDI can help with discussions and drafting of letters of support, but PIs should always discuss with their RSO/RSM in the first instance.

What to expect from an RDI review

- RDI reviews will be carried out by a member of the FSE RDI Team with experience of supporting bid development and reviewing applications.
- After the initial request/document submission, drafts will be exchanged via Outlook or a shared folder.
- Comments will be made on any relevant elements of the draft proposal in the context of the call guidance, including the funder's rubric for evaluating proposals. This may include:
 - The structure and consistency of the application.
 - The case made for the importance and urgency of this project in the context of the scheme aims.
 - The clarity of the proposed methodology.
 - The feasibility of the work plan.
 - Project resources.
 - The skills and experience of the applicant(s) (R4RI), including external collaborators.
 - Research culture, including EDIA.
 - Development plans for the lead and other team members.
 - Plans for outputs, dissemination and impact.
 - General readability
- Comments will be honest and constructive, highlighting specific about potential issues and, where possible, offer suggestions to remedy them.
- Feedback may be given as annotations on the draft proposal and/or using the review template.
- **Evaluating the proposal's scientific credibility remains the preserve of academic peer reviewers.**
- **The final decision on whether to make any particular change suggested by a reviewer remains with the applicant.**

All documents submitted to this service and annotated drafts will be securely stored by RDI for a period of up to five years, in line with UoM records retention policies. Documents will not be shared beyond our team, but suitably redacted versions may be used for internal training sessions. In such instances, we will see permission from the PI beforehand.

Process and Timeline

- For schemes where the funder imposes a cap on the number of submissions, or where the University is implementing demand management, institutional timelines will supersede those laid out here.
- RDI review is separate from the **formal costings and approvals processes run by Research Services**, which must still be adhered to.
- For large, complex and strategic bids, it is strongly encouraged to contact the RDI Team early in the development process, beyond the minimum timelines laid out for this review service.

