

APEX Awards Webinar Question and Answer Session

Monday 7 September 2020

On 7 September 2020, we held a webinar to discuss the APEX awards scheme. The following questions were asked during the Question and Answer session. Please note that more detailed information can also be found in the [APEX scheme notes](#) and [FAQs](#), available on the [APEX website](#). Thank you again to all those that attended and for the questions. Please do contact us at apex@RoyalSociety.org

1. Applicant

1.1 What is the definition of an established independent researcher?

An established independent researcher is someone who is leading and directing their own research without supervision. Individuals should be able to apply for their own funding and potentially employ staff. Please note that unconventional career paths will be considered, and career breaks will not limit an applicant's eligibility.

1.2 All examples highlighted include highly established academics with a very long track record, what are the chances of success for colleagues with a shorter career trajectory?

The scheme is open to all established independent researchers, from those in the early stages of independent research to those at the peak of a distinguished career. In addition, alternative career pathways will be considered and do not pose a limitation. Current APEX award-holders include those in the early stages of their career, and the scheme has previously supported applications from applicants and co-applicants at different stages of an established independent career. Ultimately, the maturity of the proposal will be the deciding factor.

1.3 Do I have to have a minimum number of years of research experience to be eligible to apply?

No, applicants must be established independent researchers but there is not a minimum number of years of research experience required to be eligible to apply for this award.

1.4 How many applicants in total can be included in an application? Can you have more than two investigators, e.g. two from the same discipline?

For an interdisciplinary proposal, at least two applicants will be expected i.e. the primary applicant and a co-applicant. Together these two applicants must cover at least two remits of the three academies. Additional co-applicants from the same remits can be included, but their contribution will need to be strongly justified.

1.5 Do both applicant and co-applicant have to be full staff members of a University/non-profit? I am employed on a research assistant grade but am expected to lead.

The primary applicant must be an established independent researcher. In cases such as this, we would need to discuss the exact details of your circumstances, so we advise

prospective applicants to contact the Royal Society using the APEX email address to discuss their eligibility apex@Royalsociety.org

2. Co-Applicant

2.1 Does the co-applicant need to be teaching to be eligible?

It is not a requirement of the scheme that the co-applicant has teaching responsibilities. However, if costs are being requested on behalf of the co-applicant it is expected that these costs would be used to relieve them from their teaching responsibilities.

2.2 Can the co-applicant a) be from overseas b) have teaching buy out?

a) No, both the applicant and co-applicant must be based at a UK University (or UK University overseas campus) or not-for-profit research organisation. However, there is no restriction on the location of collaborators. The applicant and co-applicant can be of any nationality.

b) Co-applicants can also apply to be bought out of teaching responsibilities. Note that the award is made to the primary applicant, so in this case the primary applicant's university would need to arrange a transfer of funds to the university of the co-applicant.

3. Resubmissions and Other applications

3.1 Can unsuccessful applicants re-apply?

Yes

4. The proposed research and costings

4.1 What's the rough success rate for this scheme?

It is difficult to give a specific success rate as it differs from year to year depending on the number and quality of applications received. Like all funding programmes delivered by the National Academies, it is a competitive process whereby only the highest quality applications are selected for support. For the 2020 round of APEX Awards, we were able to make eight awards.

4.2 What kind of balance does the committee look for between disciplines? E.g. a 50/50 split between the two disciplines, or a three-way equal split between the three disciplines?

It is anticipated that there will be an equal partnership between the collaborating disciplines (irrespective of how many disciplines are involved). Applicants should also provide evidence of mutual benefit from working together.

4.3 The scheme notes state that you are looking for applicants to develop a new direction for their research. I am already working on an idea and currently have an existing partnership. Am I eligible to apply or are you looking for a completely new idea?

Priority will be given to new thinking; however, many successful applications have come from researchers who have been thinking about the idea and working together for a duration of time previously. Note that there should be no overlap of this research proposal with any others for which you are already in receipt of funding.

4.4 Is there any funding for Research Assistance support, or do the applicants do all the research themselves?

The APEX award does not provide any funding for research assistance e.g. post-docs or PhD students. Therefore, these costs cannot be included in the application. APEX awards support costs of up to £100,000 to relieve the applicant and/or co-applicant from some of their teaching and administrative duties. In addition, up to 25% of the total award can be spent on research costs, please note that costs for additional staff i.e. research assistants are not allowed. Successful applicants will be invited to apply for an additional £10,000 to support public engagement activities.

4.5 Is funding based on Full Economic Cost?

This scheme is funded through charitable funds, with the support of the Leverhulme Trust, and therefore covers 100% of directly occurred costs and does not cover overhead costs.

4.6 I do not have any teaching and administrative duties that I can be bought out of, can I still apply for an APEX Award to buy in my own time to work on the project or pay for a post-doc?

No, funding is only supplied to buy out teaching and administrative duties and cannot be used to fund additional posts such as post-docs, or to buy in time as suggested.

4.7 Does the teaching buy-out need to be spread evenly over the duration of the grant? For instance, suppose the PI is requesting 50% of their teaching bought out. Could this be used to free up 100% of the PI's teaching time in the first year, and go back to full teaching load in the second year?

That would be fine. There is no requirement for the full teaching workload to be bought out, and it is up to applicants how they wish to split this over the course of the award.

5. Remit specific questions

Please do note that the exact details of the project will determine the eligibility of the application in all cases mentioned below.

5.1 Is there a list of disciplines within Royal Society's remit? I've looked at the list of topics and projects but am not clear if a project (on patient engagement on NHS wards) might be slightly out of remit for Royal Society and whether that would be a problem? The other half of the project is within British Academy remit.

There is a list on The Royal Society website which outlines the subject groups covered by The Royal Society remit <https://royalsociety.org/grants-schemes-awards/grants/subject-groups/>

Eligibility of the proposal will depend on the angle from which this is investigated. Submissions from clinically qualified scientists may be considered, but the Society does not support clinical or interventional research on humans at the individual or group level, unless otherwise stated.

5.2 To what extent are biomedical engineering projects, linking computer science and biomedicine (including data from patients), within remit?

Computer science and biomedicine could fall within the remits of the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society respectively. Engineering is defined in its broadest sense, encompassing a wide range of diverse fields, including computer science and materials. However, it will be left to the panel to decide whether projects are truly interdisciplinary and therefore eligible for the APEX award.

5.3 I understand computer science falls within the remit of both the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering. Could you confirm? Would a computer scientist working with a psychologist be an acceptable team for APEX?

Yes, Computer Science comes under the remit of Royal Academy of Engineering so a Psychology/Computer science project would be within the remit of APEX.

5.4 Does Computer Science fall under the remit of Royal Society or Royal Academy of Engineering? So, for instance in a collaboration between a physicist and a computer scientist, would this count as Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering, or Royal Society and Royal Society?

There is indeed some overlap between the remits of these two Academies. In terms of the remit of the Royal Academy of Engineering, engineering is considered in its broadest sense and would include computer science. Therefore, this example would fall within the remit of the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering. However, it will be left to the panel to decide whether projects are truly interdisciplinary and therefore eligible for the APEX award.

5.5 Applications with a connection to the Royal Academy of Engineering are particularly encouraged. Are such applications given some formal priority or weighting once the panel deliberations begin? Or is this much 'softer' policy, aimed at encouraging applications with an engineering dimension, but not giving them any formal advantage in the panel's decision making?

Applications spanning the remit of the British Academy and the Royal Academy of Engineering are encouraged, as the Panel would like to see more of this type of application. However, panel decisions are based purely on the quality of the application and no priority is given to applications spanning these remits.

5.6 Psychology and behavioural science are inter-disciplinary by nature. Which society or societies do they belong to?

The behavioural sciences, including psychology, fall within the remit of the Royal Society and the British Academy, so depending on how the proposal is worded a project might or might not be truly interdisciplinary. For example, a project combining behavioural economics and psychology could lead to in-depth discussion by the Panel as to whether

this was truly interdisciplinary. Psychologist should certainly apply and any specific details regarding proposals can be discussed with the office. Please do get in touch.

5.7 If I was involved in Engineering and Medical such as Ophthalmology, would an application straddling Engineering and Neuroscience be seen as sufficiently departing from the usual research?

Yes, this would be within the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering remits. Please note that clinical research (see 5.1) is not within the remits of any of the academies.

6. Public Engagement funding for APEX Award holders

6.1 What are the benefits of taking part in public engagement activities around my APEX project?

Public Engagement can be defined as:

"The myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit."

National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)

Mutual benefit is a really important part of this definition, and good public engagement should benefit both the researchers and the audience group. Public Engagement could help you:

- Gain new ideas and insights for your research.
- Increase your profile, not just in your research area but also across your organisation.
- Build your skillset, and skills can be translated across many areas of your research and personal development.
- Increase your research reach and help to generate more meaningful and lasting impact.

Some suggestions following our inaugural round of public engagement grants would be to think about how you can achieve effective two-way interaction and gain insights from the public. Don't be afraid to get creative with your ideas and think outside the box, as interdisciplinary projects can lend themselves really well to public engagement.

Do get in touch with the team for further information and any questions about this part of the scheme. publicengagement@royalsociety.org

You will find the 2020 round press release on our website including those awards who received additional Public Engagement funding. <https://royalsociety.org/news/2020/09/apex-awards-announced-2020/>