

Summary

This paper sets out the background and institutional benefits to providing central investment funding, targeted at Early Career Researchers¹ through the **Acorn** (Acceleration Of Research & Networking) funds scheme with a central dedicated budget of **£25,000** in 2017-18.

Background

It is increasingly common in the sector for universities to provide a central fund for research development activities, with funds allocated via an internal competitive process. This annual scheme will provide up to five awards of up to £5k to support BU's ECRs, with the most promising talent, to gain experience of managing and leading their own pilot research projects.

There will be a strong link to the ECR Network and the ECR Showcase, both also being launched in 2018. In this way, those who do not benefit directly from the Acorn funds scheme by receiving funding, will benefit indirectly through interaction with those ECRs who receive support via this scheme.

The scheme is championed by the PVC (Research & Innovation) and managed by the Research & Knowledge Exchange Office (RKEO). The decision-making body will be a panel lead by the PVC R&I, together with at least one representative from each Faculty. Any appeals should be made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Application Process

The scheme is a pilot in 2018, with the application deadline being **18th April 2018**. All applicants will be advised of the panel's decision by **9th May 2018**. Priority will be given to those applicants who plan to complete their expenditure before **31st July 2018**. All applications must be submitted on the scheme application form.

Up to five awards will be made at up to £5k per application and will only cover direct costs (i.e. overheads and established staff costs will not be reimbursed). Applications need to include a breakdown of costs. No applications for retrospective funding will be considered. The Panel reserve the right to award more or fewer than five awards depending on the number, quality and volume of applications.

Payments will be made in accordance with current BU financial regulations. Payments for successful awards will be journaled to the relevant Faculty and the Faculty will be responsible for administering the expenditure. All expenditure should be committed in the current academic year. It will not be possible to carry funding forward into the next academic year. RKEO will, however, review whether funds can be made available from the 2018/19 budget (any unspent monies from 2017/18 will be lost). Please note that this scheme is currently funded by the Fusion Investment Fund.

Projects must have clear, tangible deliverables and must be explicit in how they will lead directly to future proposals for research funding.

¹ REF definition modified to: an ECR in this case is defined as someone who started their research career on or after 1 August 2013. This is the point at which they held a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or greater, which included a primary employment function of undertaking 'research' or 'teaching and research', with any HE or other organisation, whether in the UK or overseas.

Budget

Expenditure must be stated and justified in the application. Categories for expenditure:

- Pilot projects / Pump-priming
- Attendance at external networking events leading to collaborative research proposals
- Meetings with external organisations to establish collaborations
- Fieldwork
- Visiting major libraries, museums, other research institutions, etc.
- Organisation of an academic conference at BU with external participants
- Preparation of specialist material or data
- Short-term Research Assistant support or replacement teaching
- Interview transcription
- Research consumables and equipment (providing it is clear these would not normally be purchased by the Faculty)

This list is not exhaustive; applications can be for other expenses providing it is clear how the funding will benefit research at BU and lead to future proposals for research funding. The scheme does not cover open access publication costs but these can be applied for from the BU Open Access Publication Fund (OAPF).

The application must be authorised by the relevant Faculty Deputy Dean Research and Profession Practice or equivalent, prior to submission.

Assessment criteria

Applications will be considered and scored by a panel of academic staff. The academic panel will give each application a score out of 15, based on how well they score against the criteria outlined below. These are equally weighted with each criterion carrying a total possible score of 5. Applications will then be ranked with funding awarded to the highest ranked and where expenditure can be committed within this financial year (2017/18).

- **Research quality (scored out of 5):** Activity should be underpinned by quality research that will lead to applications to prestigious funders.
- **Impact (scored out of 5):** Activity should have a high likelihood of positive impact. Proposals should, therefore, contain robust indicators as to how this will be demonstrated. The potential impact will be considered against the funds requested, i.e. whether the potential impact warrants the funds requested and offers value for money.
- **Implementation (scored out of 5):** Activity should be costed and planned to ensure delivery within a realistic timeframe.

The Researchers' Commitment:

Successful applicants will be required to:

- Actively engage in the Early Career Academics Research Network, which is being formally launched in September 2018
- Present at the ECR Annual Research Showcase event planned for 12/09/18
- Commit to submitting at least one high-quality proposal to a prestigious research funder ([UK research councils](#)², [Wellcome Trust](#), [Leverhulme Trust](#), [British Academy](#), [Royal Society](#), [NIHR](#) and [EU Horizon 2020](#)) within 12 months of the award

² The seven UK research councils are [AHRC](#), [BBSRC](#), [EPSRC](#), [ESRC](#), [MRC](#), [NERC](#), and [STFC](#). This will also include any applications directly to [RCUK](#).

- Evidence that the award has been spent according to the plan given in the 'breakdown of costs' section of the application
- Submit an end of award report (using the form available from the BU staff intranet) to the PVC R&I within 8 weeks of the end date of the award. The end of award report must include the final expenditure against the original budget. The end of award report will be made available to RKEO to help determine future rounds of this scheme. Failure to provide a report will debar award holders from applying for future internal grants. RKEO will contact award holders at four months and at ten months from the submission of the end of award report for an update on research activity to find out how the award has been beneficial.

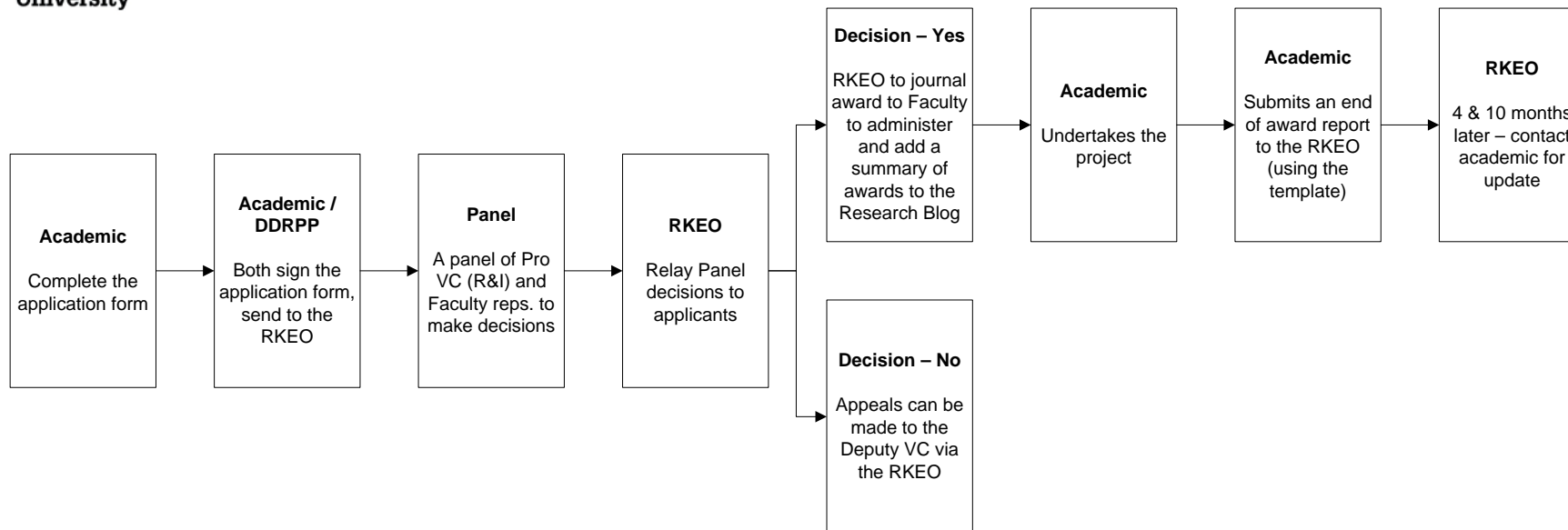
Any appeals should be made to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor via the RKEO.

Please refer to the BU staff intranet, under 'Policies/Research/Pre-Award', for all of the forms and further information on this scheme.



Acorn funds

Process 2017-18



If you want to apply to the Acorn funds scheme then you must complete an application form (available from the BU Staff Intranet).

Deadlines 2017-18:

18 April 2018

Applications received by the RKEO after the deadline will not be considered.