

# NERC

SCIENCE OF THE  
ENVIRONMENT

## Independent Research Fellowships (IRF) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Useful Links & Contacts

The [NERC Research Grants and Fellowships Handbook](#)

The [UK Research and Innovation fEC Grants T&Cs](#)

NERC Head Office Fellowships team: [Fellowships@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:Fellowships@nerc.ac.uk)

### Tips

- Consider the assessment criteria for the scheme against which you are making a fellowship application and present information so it can be clearly mapped against these.
- NERC Fellows, Members of the NERC Peer Review College, and experienced members of our community are based at research organisations across the UK – these individuals are very familiar with NERC's application processes and should be able to provide advice and guidance.

### What does your question relate to?

[Eligibility](#)

[Remit](#)

[Application](#)

[Host organisation](#)

[Finance and Funding](#)

[Absence and extensions](#)



# FAQs

## Eligibility

### **Question: At which organisations can I hold my NERC IRF?**

Answer: All awards must be held at an eligible UK research organisation. For a full list of eligible Research Organisations, please consult the UK Research and Innovation website (see links below)

[UK Research and Innovation Eligibility for funding](#)

[HEFCE-funded higher education institutions](#)

### **Question: Can I apply for a NERC Independent Research Fellowship (IRF) if I am not a UK national?**

Answer: Yes, although all fellowship applications must be submitted through and held at an eligible UK research organisation.

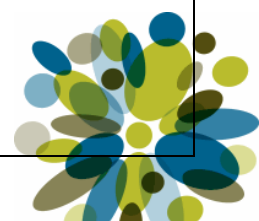
### **Question: Do I need a minimum amount of post-doctoral experience to apply for a NERC IRF?**

Answer: There is no minimum amount of postdoctoral experience necessary to apply for an IRF but applications will not be accepted from individuals with more than 8 years full time post-doctoral experience to apply.

If you have not yet completed your PhD, you must expect to submit your PhD thesis before the fellowship interview would take place (March following the closing date), and if successful would not be able to take up the fellowship until the intent to award the PhD has been confirmed by the awarding university.

### **Question: Do I need publications to apply?**

Answer: No, but a strong publication record represent an excellent means of demonstrating independence and a growing research profile.



**Question: If I apply for a NERC fellowship can I apply to another funding body (E.g. the Royal Society) at the same time?**

Answer: Yes. If you are successful with both applications please inform the NERC office of your choice as soon as possible.

**Questions: Can I apply for a NERC IRF and a UKRI FLF at the same time?**

Answer: No, applicants may only have one Fellowship application under consideration by UKRI.

**Question: Can I reapply for a fellowship if I have been unsuccessful in the past?**

Answer: Yes, as long as you still meet all of the eligibility requirements.

**Question: Am I eligible to apply for Discovery Science funding during my IRF?**

Answer: NERC IRFs are eligible to apply for New Investigator grants for the duration of their award. However, you will not be eligible to apply for a New Investigator award having completed your IRF and secured a permanent academic post.

## **Remit**

**Question: What do I do if my proposed research overlaps between two different councils?**

Answer: The Research Councils do not co-fund fellowship applications. NERC assess the remit of each application once received and, if an application is considered at least 50% within NERC remit, it will be accepted to the IRF competition.

**Question: What will happen to my application if it is considered <50% within NERC remit?**

Answer: Your application will not be considered for IRF funding. It will either be rejected or we will explore whether it can be moved to a comparable funding scheme at another Research Council. Please contact the [NERC Remit team](#) if you would like to discuss the remit of your application.

**Question: Will the assessment of my application be affected if I propose interdisciplinary research with some objectives outside of NERC remit?**

Answer: No, NERC strives to ensure that all applications are reviewed appropriately by individuals with expertise in that area.



## **Application and assessment process**

### **Question: What time does the call close on the last day?**

Answer: The call closes on Je-s at 16:00 on the last day of submission. Applicants are strongly advised to submit well ahead of this time though (preferably a few days before) to ensure that NERC receives their application ahead of this deadline as it can take some time for documents to be processed through Je-S.

### **Question: Can I have a Co-Investigator on my application?**

Answer: No, the fellow can be the only member of staff on their application.

### **Question: Can I request staff time for technicians, fieldwork help, etc. in my application?**

Answer: Yes but these costs must be requested as costed pool staff time to undertake a particular activity. Named staff positions (for example, 0.5 FTE Technician) cannot be requested on an application. The fellow can be the only named staff on an application.

### **Question: Can I have an overseas project partner?**

Answer: Yes, there is no limit to how many project partners you can have or where they can be based. A project partner must provide specific contributions to the project and these detailed within a letter of support. The role of all project partners to the success of the fellowship must be clearly detailed within the Case for Support document.

### **Question: Can I have a project partner from my host research organisation?**

Answer: No, collaborations occurring within the fellow's Research Organisation should be detailed within the Case for Support document justifying the fellow's choice of Research Organisation.

### **Question: What do I do if I want to decline a NERC fellowship offer?**

Answer: Please email the NERC head office and inform the team of your decision. Please note, once you have informed NERC of your decision to decline your offer of a fellowship this decision cannot be reversed as the available fellowship will then be offered to a candidate on the reserve list.

### **Question: If successful at the Sift Panel, will I receive my peer review comments before the Interview stage of the application process?**



Answer: No, peer review comments are used by the panel to inform their questioning at interview so are not provided before the interview.

## **Host organisation**

**Question: Can I move my fellowship to another research organisation once it has been granted?**

Answer: Yes, but the organisation you are moving to must be UK Research and Innovation eligible. Please contact NERC Head Office if you are considering moving your award.

**Question: Can I move my fellowship abroad once it has been granted?**

Answer: No, if you move abroad you must terminate the NERC fellowship as it can no longer be held at an eligible Research Organisation

## **Finance & funding**

**Question: Do I receive funding directly from NERC to support my fellowship?**

Answer: No, funding is awarded to your host research organisations who are responsible for ensuring you have access to this funding to undertake the activities outlined within your fellowship proposal. You must contact your host research organisation to find out about the financial policies in place.

**Question: Is there a maximum funding limit for IRF applications?**

Answer: There is no funding limit for IRF; however, all costs must be justified appropriately. Applications generally request £500,000 total funding although this varies between research areas and according to the research objectives of the fellowship proposal.

**Question: Will requesting a high total budget for my fellowship negatively impact its assessment?**

Answer: No but all costs must be justified appropriately or they may be cut prior to offer of award.

**Question: Can I apply for equipment costs within my fellowship?**



Answer: Yes, equipment costs can be included within an IRF application up to a maximum of £10,000 for any single item. Applicants cannot request equipment costs to contribute towards the purchase of equipment costing over £10,000, even if co-funding is secured to undertake this purchase.

**Question: Can I factor in publication costs into my application?**

Answer: No, NERC no longer provides funding within grant applications for any publication costs associated with peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers. Publication costs are supported through block grants made to Research Organisations by NERC, please contact your departmental administrators for further information concerning how to access this funding.

**Question: Can I request relocation costs within my application?**

Answer: No, relocation costs are not eligible within an IRF application.

**Question: If I transfer my fellowship from a non-London University to a University that is within the London weighting zone, can I increase my salary to match the London weighting?**

Answer: Yes, you can transfer directly incurred costs to meet these differences in salary but this must be in accordance with the host organisation's employment policies. NERC will not provide any additional funding to meet additional salary requirements so all additional costs must be met from funding awarded through fellowship grant.

Please follow the links below for further information:

[UK Research and Innovation Open Access Policy](#)  
[NERC grants handbook](#) section 1 – Publication of work

## **Start Dates, Absence and extensions**

**Question: What is an Announced Start Date?**

Answer: An Announced Start Date is the date you include within your application to indicate when you intend to start your IRF. All successful applicants are offered the opportunity to amend this date following confirmation of their award.

**Question: Do I have to start my IRF on my Announced Start Date?**

Answer: No, you have three months from the Announced Start Date to begin your IRF. When you do begin your IRF you must submit a Start Confirmation to NERC via Je-S. This is your Actual Start Date and your IRF End Date is automatically generated to be five years from your Actual Start Date.



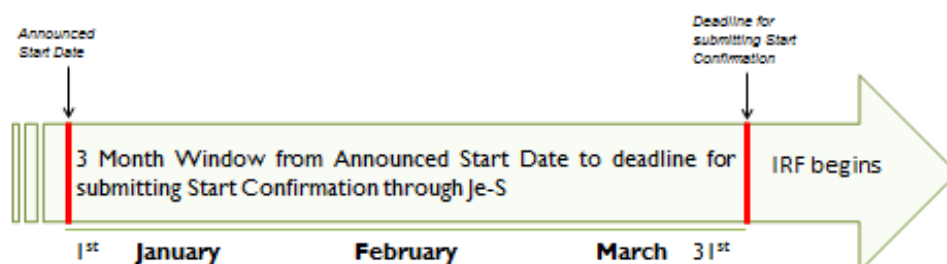
**Question: What is the earliest date I can begin my IRF?**

Answer: This is dependent on when the awards process is completed but this is typically complete by May each year. All applicants are offered the opportunity to change the Announced Start Date following confirmation of their award and we will try and process awards aiming to start soon after the completion of awards process as soon as possible so as to minimise disruption.

**Question: What is the latest date I can begin my IRF?**

Answer: All IRFs must start by March 31<sup>st</sup> the year after they are awarded e.g. an IRF awarded in May 2018 must start by March 31<sup>st</sup> 2019.

**EXAMPLE:**



In this example, an IRF applicant has an Announced Start Date of 1<sup>st</sup> January. Therefore, from 1<sup>st</sup> January they will have three months until March 31<sup>st</sup> to submit their Start Confirmation. Their IRF will begin and last for five years from the date of submitting their Start Confirmation.

**Question: What do I do if I take an extended period of sick leave during my fellowship?**

Answer: Please follow the [UK Research and Innovation terms and conditions](#) of Research Council fEC grants (RGC 10 – Sick leave). Alternatively, contact the host research organisation about terms and conditions.

**Question: What are the terms and conditions for maternity leave once funded?**



Answer: Please follow the [UK Research and Innovation terms and conditions](#) of Research Council fEC grants (RGC 9 – Parental Leave).

**Question: When would I be eligible for an extension on my fellowship?**

Answer: NERC may, in exceptional cases, permit a short-term no cost extension to an award. This may occur only where unforeseen circumstances have severely affected the progress of the work (e.g. loss of key staff or external factors leading to the rescheduling of fieldwork/ship time), and is not intended to allow the pursuit of new avenues of enquiry. A fellowship grant may also be extended to cover periods of maternity/paternity/adoption/parental leave, extended jury service or sick leave exceeding three months. See the [UK Research and Innovation Grants terms and conditions](#).

