National Centre for the Replacement Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

Joint BBSRC-NC3Rs business interaction vouchers

Applicant guidance

Joint BBSRC-NC3Rs Business Interaction Vouchers

1. Scheme overview and remit

The NC3Rs[1] and BBSRC are collaborating to offer Business Interaction Voucher (BIV) awards. This document provides guidance to prospective applicants applying to the funding scheme.

The aim of BIV awards is to develop new or enhance existing early-stage partnerships relevant to the 3Rs between academic and industry/SME partners.

Proposals must fall within BBSRC's remit whilst having the realistic possibility of replacing, reducing, or refining the use of *in vivo* models or animal studies in line with the NC3Rs mission. To be eligible, applicants must be a member of the NC3Rs oncology, cardiovascular or NAMs networks. It is important to note that while the focus areas of the NC3Rs networks may not traditionally fall within BBSRC's remit, BIV applications should be centered on enhancing the biological relevance of models, tools and technologies by improving their physiological accuracy and predictive validity for real-world applications.

By fostering cross-sector collaborations between academic and industry/SME partners, BIV awards aim to:

- Strengthen engagement and interactions between academic and industry/SME partners, laying the foundations for longer-term collaborative relationships.
- Support the further development, optimisation and qualification/validation of 3Rs models that offer benefits to both partners.
- Facilitate the sharing and transfer of existing 3Rs models, tools and technologies across partner labs.
- Create opportunities for future funding ventures between academic and industry/SME partners.

The nature of applications will vary depending on the proposed collaboration and to help you develop your ideas, examples of projects within scope include:

- Generating data to demonstrate a 3Rs approach can be applied with confidence. Studies may include characterisation, performance, optimisation, comparative and/or reproducibility assessments.
- Developing or adapting 3Rs models, tools and technologies for a new application.
- Working towards solving technical problems for the broader benefit of both partner labs.

[1] The NC3Rs is an autonomous body responsible for setting and delivering its strategy and the use of its resources. It is not an independent public authority and for this reason operates under the umbrella of the Medical Research Council (MRC) which is part of UK Research and Innovation. As such it uses some MRC and UKRI administrative systems which are referred to within this document.

Activities associated with business development or advertising are not in scope.

Each application must include both an academic and industry/SME partner. The lead applicant must be based in academia, and funding will be awarded to the academic lead. In cash and/or in-kind contributions from the industry/SME partners are encouraged.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the NC3Rs Office at **3Rsgrants@nc3rs.org.uk**, before submission to determine whether the proposed research fits the remit of the funding call.

2. Eligibility criteria

2.1 Establishment eligibility

Any UK research establishment including:

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- Eligible independent research organisations (IROs).
- Research institutes.
- Public sector research establishments.
- Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)*.
- Industry*.

* The industry/SME partner should be registered in the UK or have a UK based R&D or manufacturing site. Where a suitable company cannot be found in the UK, an overseas company may be used. However, such collaborations would be judged on a case-by-case basis, and clear justification must be provided. BBSRC-NC3Rs BIVs provide funding in line with the UK's obligations and commitments to subsidy control. Applicants are wholly responsible for declaring and managing all potential subsidy control matters.

Subsidy control

This funding opportunity provides funding in line with the UK's obligations and commitments to subsidy control. Under the standard terms and conditions for this opportunity, you are wholly responsible for declaring and managing all potential subsidy control matters.

Please refer to the Subsidy Control Act 2022 for further information and the Windsor Framework to check if these rules apply to your organisation. EU state aid rules now only apply in limited circumstances.

Further information

If you are unsure about your obligations under the UK subsidy control regime or the state aid rules, you should take independent legal advice. We are unable to advise on individual eligibility or legal obligations.

You must at all times make sure that the funding awarded to you is compliant with all current subsidy control legislation applicable in the UK. This aims to regulate any advantage granted by a public sector body which

threatens to, or actually distorts competition in the UK or any other country or countries. If there are any changes to these requirements that mean we need to change the terms of this opportunity, we will tell you as soon as possible.

Trusted research and innovation (TR&I)

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is committed in ensuring that effective international collaboration in research and innovation takes place with integrity and within strong ethical frameworks.

TR&I is a UKRI work programme designed to help protect all those working in our thriving and collaborative international sector by enabling partnerships to be as open as possible, and as secure as necessary.

Our TR&I principles set out UKRI's expectations of organisations funded by UKRI in relation to due diligence for international collaboration.

As such, applicants for UKRI funding may be asked to demonstrate how their proposed projects will comply with our approach and expectation towards TR&I. You will be asked to identify potential risks and the relevant controls you will put in place to help proportionately reduce these risks.

Further guidance and information about TR&I, including where you can find additional support.

2.2 Individual eligibility

Applicants should be UK-based researchers who can demonstrate that they are:

- Eligible to receive UKRI funding.
- A member of a relevant NC3Rs network[2] (including those that have previously been awarded network primer awards).
- Will direct the plans set out in the proposal and be actively engaged in the accomplishing the project's aims.
- Hold a graduate degree – the minimum formal qualification required.

3. Award values, duration and use of funds

Awards are for **up to six months** in duration with the amount requested dependent on the science and limited to a **maximum of £25k (100% FEC, including VAT).** The budget for the 2025 call is £250k.

[2] The NC3Rs networks bring researchers together to maximise the impact of 3Rs innovations in key scientific areas, including NAMs, cardiovascular, oncology research. They are open to scientists and stakeholders at all career stages from across academia and industry and membership is free - Join here.

While not mandatory, in-cash or in-kind contributions from the industry/ SME partner are encouraged.

BIV funds **cannot** be used for the following:

- Patent filing or similar costs associated directly with registering intellectual property rights.
- Equipment purchases above a **total combined value** of £2k. Equipment purchases below this threshold are acceptable if adequately justified.
- Consortium building is not eligible as the sole purpose of a BIV; meetings and consortium building can form part of a BIV but should not be the primary focus.
- Indirect or estate costs at the academic organisation.
- Undergraduate activities, core PhD training or master's degrees.
- Funding for generic staff posts not directly related to BIV activities.
- Other costs not allowed in the UKRI Standard Research Grant T&Cs.

4. The application process

4.1 How to apply

The completed application form and supporting documents should be submitted as a single PDF file by email to 3rsgrants@nc3rs.org.uk. The application deadline is **4pm (GMT) on 4 November 2025**.

Applications may be submitted by either partner but must be collaborative. Awards for successful proposals will be made to the **lead applicant who is based in academia**.

A letter of support signed by the industry/SME partner must be provided as part of the application. Applications submitted without a letter of support will not be considered further.

4.2 Considerations for completing the application form

This section contains guidance on how to complete the application form. It is important that you address and respond to each section clearly. Table 1 outlines the key information required for each subsection.

The guidance notes are not intended to be exhaustive; you should develop your own responses based on your own skills, knowledge and experience. You may refer to other sections of the form in your answers if this helps avoid repetition. Maximum word limits apply and are indicated on the application form.

Table 1. Key information required in the application form

Section 3 – Project overview	Information to note	Word limit
Project summary	Please summarise the main aim(s) of your project, proposed methodology and likely outcomes. To note, this summary should be non-confidential, as if successful, it may be made publicly available by NC3Rs	300

	and BBSRC as part of project monitoring and promotional activities.	
Expected project start date and duration	Please state the proposed start date and duration. To note, the **latest start date for projects is 31 March 2026**.	20
Which 'R' does the work impact?	The NC3Rs website gives a description of our 3Rs definitions. Select all options that apply.	N/A
Does your proposed research involve the use of vertebrate animals or other organisms covered by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act?	If you are proposing research that requires using animals, download and complete the Animals Scientific Procedures Act template (DOCX, 74KB), which contains all the questions relating to research using vertebrate animals or other Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 regulated organisms. The file should be named 'Use of animals in research' and submitted as an appendix to the application.	N/A
Does your proposed research involve the use of human tissues, or biological samples?	If you are proposing work that involves human tissues or biological samples: ▪ Provide the name of any required approving body and whether approval is already in place. ▪ Justify the use of human tissue or biological samples specifying the nature and quantity of the material to be used and its source.	200
Section 4 – Proposed plans	**Information to note**	**Word limit**
What are you hoping to achieve with your proposed work?	This section should describe what you aim to achieve with your proposed project. It should include a description of: ▪ The scientific and 3Rs objectives of your project. ▪ How your project meets the remit of the funding call (including the realistic possibility of replacing or	800

	reducing the use of specific *in vivo* models or refining animal studies in line with the NC3Rs mission). ▪ How the proposal will establish a new partnership between the academic and industry leads or develop an existing one. ▪ The potential direct and indirect benefits to the industrial partner and field of research (e.g. in terms of the underlying biological research). Figures and images can be inserted into this section, a descriptive legend should be included underneath each image.	
How are you going to deliver your proposed work?	This section should describe how you will deliver your plans. It is not necessary to describe each experiment, but enough detail must be provided to demonstrate your methodology is appropriate and sufficient to deliver the stated aims. You should include a detailed and comprehensive description of your experimental plans, including supporting preliminary data (where applicable). It is important to demonstrate that your approach: ▪ Is effective and appropriate to achieve your scientific and 3Rs objectives. ▪ Uses a clear, transparent and sound methodology. Applicants are required to submit as an attachment the proposed experimental design and analysis plan. This information must be provided in a **mandatory appendix** using one of the following options (please refer to section 4.3 for further guidance): 1. EDA report – only for experiments using animals. 2. Experimental design and methodology appendix. This is limited to one side of A4. ▪ Is feasible and identifies potential risks to delivery and how they will be managed. Key milestones/project deliverables and a timeline in the form of a Gantt chart, or similar should be included. ▪ If applicable, builds upon and progresses previous work.	800

	▪ Describes how the team and research environment will contribute to the success of the work. Figures and images can be inserted into this section, a descriptive legend should be included underneath each image.	
What are the anticipated impacts of the project?	This section should describe the likely outcomes and impacts of the project. These should include, but are not limited to: ▪ Potential 3Rs impacts. Where possible, include metrics demonstrating the 3Rs impacts that will/ could be achieved and where (e.g. in your own laboratory, institution, partner lab). For guidance on how to clearly convey the potential 3Rs impacts of your work, please use our resource: 'How to write effectively about the 3Rs in your funding application'. ▪ Potential for building a longer-term collaborative relationship between the academic and industry partners. ▪ How the project will/could benefit the partners in the future. Including for example potential savings, efficiencies, profitability, access to new markets or other benefits. ▪ How the proposed work would contribute to scientific advances in the respective research area. ▪ Additional outputs and impacts (e.g. training or secondment opportunities, knowledge and skills sharing etc).	400
Section 5 – Resources and value for money	**Information to note**	**Word limit**
Financial breakdown of BIV request	In this section you are required to summarise in GBP (£) the resources needed to achieve the objectives of the project. A maximum of £25k can be requested at 100% FEC (including VAT).	N/A

	All fields in this section must be populated, even if nil costs apply. Please refer to section 3 for costs that are not permitted.	
Financial breakdown of industry contribution	In this section you are required to summarise in GBP (£) the resources that will be provided as either in cash or in kind contributions from the industry/SME partner. All fields in this section must be populated, even if nil costs apply.	N/A
Justification for resources	In this section you are required to demonstrate at a high-level how the resources you anticipate needing for your proposed work: ▪ Are comprehensive, appropriate and justified. ▪ Represent value for money and optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes. ▪ Maximise potential outcomes and impacts. Detailed costs or line-by-line breakdown of all project resources is not required.	200

4.3 Experimental design and methodology appendix

Applicants are required to clearly describe and justify the experimental design and methodology of the proposed research. This includes, as appropriate:

Objective and general approach

- Specific hypotheses being tested.
- Brief details of the design of each experiment, including the groups being compared.

Sample size

- The proposed sample size per group, along with a clear definition of the experimental and biological units.
- How the sample size was calculated, showing power calculations and including justification for the effect size chosen. Consider any risks associated with not achieving the sample size required.
- If power calculations are not appropriate, justify why and provide a principled explanation of the choice of sample size. Explanations based solely in terms of ‘usual practice’ will be considered insufficient.

- If using animals, total number in each experiment.

Measures to reduce subjective bias

- How masking (blinding) will be implemented or why it is not appropriate.
- How randomisation will be carried out or why it is not appropriate; how the sex will be taken into account in the allocation to experimental groups.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Also consider potential sources of sampling bias in both field and captive studies with wildlife species.

Outcomes measures and analysis plans

- Outcome measures that will be assessed. For hypothesis-testing studies, specify the primary outcome measure, for example the outcome measure that was used to determine the sample size.
- Analysis plans, explaining how sex and other factors are taken into account and showing that statistical methods are appropriate for the types of data that will be collected.
- Details of any statistical advice sought/available.

Animals/samples characteristics

- The sex of the animals, humans, tissues or cells to be used in the study. If the sex cannot be determined, provide a justification for this. If the proposed study is not using both sexes, provide a justification.
- Relevant information for the samples, animals or model organism to be used (e.g. species, strain, developmental stage, weight).

This information is provided as mandatory appendix; there are two possible formats:

Applicants must include an appendix, using one of the following options:

- **Experimental design and methodology appendix.** This is limited to one side of A4. The purpose of the appendix or EDA report is solely for the provision of information relating to the experimental design and methodology of the proposed research and must not be used as a continuation of the Approach section. Applicants should not duplicate information presented elsewhere in the application.
- **EDA report – only for experiments using animals.** Where appropriate, the use of figures, tables and/or diagrams is encouraged. The appendix must be submitted with the application form. Applicants are encouraged to seek input from those with the relevant statistical and/or methodological expertise to review their proposed experimental design and analysis plan.

Applications lacking sufficient detail to convince the Panel that the proposed experiments will be carried out appropriately to produce robust and reproducible research will be rejected for funding on these grounds.

5. Assessment procedure

There is a one-stage application process for joint BBSRC-NC3Rs BIV awards. Applications will be assessed by the BIV Assessment Panel. The Panel will reach a consensus decision for each application on whether or not the application should be recommended for funding.

The following criteria are taken into consideration when making funding decisions:

- Potential impact on the 3Rs.
- Quality of the underpinning science.
- Proposed partnership(s), the knowledge and skills transfer plans and likelihood of adoption.
- Potential for future investment and/ or uptake by the wider scientific community.
- Team capability to deliver and likelihood of success.
- Value for money.

Submissions will initially be assessed by the NC3Rs Office to confirm eligibility and fit to remit of the call. Applications that are ineligible and/or out of scope will be rejected.

Depending on the number of applications received, a shortlisting stage may be introduced. In this case, applications would be reviewed by the Panel to identify those which are not competitive. The NC3Rs website has further information available, including the assessment and scoring criteria for Panel members, Panel membership and Declarations of Interest.

In order to maintain transparency and integrity of the peer review process the NC3Rs has adopted the UKRI principles of peer review.

Please note Panel decisions are final and not open to appeal.

All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application after the Panel meeting in January.

The NC3Rs and BBSRC reserves the right to amend the application process.

5.1 What happens if you are successful?

The lead applicant is informed by email of the outcome of their application approximately one week after the Panel meeting. Awards are made to the lead applicant's organisation which then administers the award including return of signed documentation.

Work on the awarded project may only begin following receipt of the signed award document, which includes the award terms and conditions applicable to the joint BBSRC-NC3Rs awards. These terms and conditions are non-negotiable. Award documents are expected to be finalised and signed **within two weeks** of receipt.

For successful applications involving more than one organisation, the lead applicant must agree to manage the joint BBSRC-NC3Rs award on behalf of the others (co-applicants). Co-applicants negotiate their agreements with the lead applicant directly.

It is expected that work on successful projects should commence promptly and within eight (8) weeks of returning the signed award document. Failure to comply will result in the award being terminated. To ensure rapid commencement of the work, all funding will be provided upfront.

The NC3Rs and BBSRC will coordinate award announcements. Award holders may be required to participate in media-related activities regarding the announcements

6. Post-award information

6.1 Intellectual property

The lead academic applicant and the SME/ industry partner will each own the intellectual property (IP) they generate within the project, as described in the award document with the lead applicant. The applicants shall between themselves agree written terms setting out ownership and rights of use of intellectual property, including but not limited to any commercialisation income or revenue share arrangement. Although the NC3Rs is not a joint owner of any IP arising from a project, it is a condition of funding from the NC3Rs that work furthering the 3Rs must be made available to the rest of the bioscience sector. The protection of IP through filing of patents should therefore be pursued without unreasonable delay, and access by third parties to 3Rs benefits must be provided through publication and dissemination, or by appropriate licences, royalty-free or royalty-bearing on fair and reasonable terms.

A **collaboration agreement** should be created between the project participants, and it should incorporate the operation and exploitation of the outcomes of the project. NC3Rs does not need to see a copy, but you are required to state that you have in place a document specifying the relative contributions to, and intellectual property ownership issues regarding, the bid.

It can take some time to reach agreement on this document, especially considering the involvement of applicants' legal and finance departments. We strongly advised to allow sufficient time. An example of collaboration agreement can be found on the Lambert Agreement website.

Please note the latest start date for awards is 31 March 2026.

6.2 Reporting

End-of-award report

All competition awardees are required to submit a **final report** and a **final expenditure statement (FES)** within three (3) months of the completion/termination date. The final report should describe the work undertaken, the achievements and outcomes of the project and details of how the project advanced the 3Rs. The report template, FES and additional guidance will be sent to awardees four (4) weeks before the completion date.

Failure to provide the requested report and FES, within the specified timeframe, may result in funding being recouped. It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to manage the funds awarded responsibly and any additional costs incurred above the total amount awarded will not be reimbursed.

Researchfish

Award holders are expected to disseminate their results by publishing in appropriate scientific journals and at relevant conferences. The UKRI policy on open access should be adopted. Award holders are required to report research outputs and outcomes on a regular basis using Researchfish. There is a mandatory annual collection period for the submission of data.

The NC3Rs and BBSRC support for the project should be acknowledged on all publications and presentations where such support has been significant. The NC3Rs should be informed of any publications or other promotional material or events arising from the award.

It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to keep the NC3Rs informed in a timely manner of outputs from the funded project.

Studies using animals should be reported in accordance with the ARRIVE guidelines taking into account the specific editorial policies of the journal concerned.

Further information on reporting requirements can be found on the Researchfish website.

7. Confidentiality and what information will be available to others

The NC3Rs and BBSRC will handle all applications for funding in confidence, however applicants should note that in certain circumstances it will be necessary to share the information submitted with different audiences. The guidance below provides more information on this.

7.1 Declarations of interest – Panel members

Panel members are required to comply with the UKRI Conflicts of Interest Policy. Members are required to declare any private, professional or commercial interests that might, or that might be perceived to, conflict with the NC3Rs' and BBSRC's interests.

Interests for members of the research panels are declared under the following categories:

- Personal remuneration (employment, pensions, consultancies, directorships, honoraria etc.).
- Registrable shareholdings and financial interests in companies.
- Research income.
- Major academic collaborations (national and international).
- Unremunerated involvement with and membership of bioscience, bio-medical, pharmaceutical/ chemicals industry, healthcare provision or science policy/communication and similar activities/ organisations.

- Political/ pressure group associations.

Declarations of interest for the current BIV Assessment Panel can be found on the NC3Rs website.

7.2 What we publish on our website

Details of awarded grants are routinely published. The information published on the NC3Rs website includes the following:

- Grant holder names, including co-applicants.
- Host institution and location.
- Value and duration of award.
- Research project title.
- Project summary.
- 3Rs and research classification.
- Potential 3Rs impact.
- Keywords.
- Publications and other outcomes associated with the funding.

7.3 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The FOIA gives anyone the right to request access to information held by the NC3Rs, including the information relating to applications and the peer review process.

The NC3Rs is an independent, scientific organisation and has responsibility for setting its scientific strategy and making funding decisions. However, it is not an independent public authority. The NC3Rs utilises some MRC systems and processes and for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is considered as part of the MRC, which in turn is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Any request for information will be considered on a case-by-case basis and the NC3Rs will work with the MRC/UKRI to ensure information is handled appropriately and any sensitive material is correctly identified and has relevant exemptions of the Act applied. The NC3Rs and the MRC/UKRI will seek the views of the applicant and the research organisation wherever possible and will consider these opinions in their deliberations. Further information can be found on the UKRI website.

8. Questions and queries

For questions related to the joint BBSRC-NC3Rs Business Interaction Vouchers scheme please contact the NC3Rs Office at 3rsgrants@nc3rs.org.uk.