

N.B. There have been changes to this policy since the previous round (18/19). Applications for the autumn 2019 round will be bound by conditions within this version.

## 1. Summary

This paper sets out the background and institutional benefits to providing central investment funding, targeted at Early Career Researchers through the **ACORN Fund** (*Acceleration Of Research & Networking*) funds scheme with a central dedicated budget of **£25,000** in 2019/20.

## 2. 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 as many awards, as agreed by the ACORN Fund Review Panel, as can be supported by the maximum fund of £25,000. Each award will be a maximum of £5k and is to support BU's ECRs, with the most promising talent, in gaining experience of managing and leading their own pilot research project. Indicatively, six awards were made in the 2018 pilot and seven in June 2019.

There is a strong link between the ACORN Fund and the ECR Network and the annual ECR Showcase. Both were launched in 2018, with the ECRN having monthly meetings and a Brightspace community. Award holders are expected to engage with the ECRN and present at the ECR Showcase. The next ECR Showcase is planned for early 2020. 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 Panel Chair and Deputy Chair and managed by Research Development and Support (RDS). The decision-making body is a panel lead by an appointed Chair and Deputy Chair, together with at least one representative from each Faculty, mid-career and ECR academics, at least two independent professors / associate professors, a Doctoral College and Professional Services representative. Any appeals should be made to RDS, for independent consideration by Jim Andrews, BU's Chief Operating Officer.

## 3. Eligibility

Key requirements:

- All applicants must have completed their PhD
- All applicants must have a post at BU (established or fixed term) for the full duration of the award and the post-award commitments or longer (see section 9)
- All applicants should have held a 0.2 or above research contract from no more than six years in total, excluding periods where the applicant was involved in non-research employment or not at work (e.g. caring responsibilities)
- ACORN award holders cannot hold more than one award concurrently

For the purposes of this fund, the REF modified definition of ECR is being used:

An ECR, in this case, is defined as someone who started their research career on or after 1 August 2014 or has been employed in such a role for no more than six years. This is the point at which they held a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or greater, which includes a primary employment function of undertaking 'research' or 'teaching and research', with any HE or other organisation, whether in the UK or overseas.

In addition, applicants must, at the time of application, be able to comply with the commitments given in section 9, and the deadlines by which those commitments should be met.

Applicants must confirm on the application form that they meet the ECR definition and the faculty signatory confirms this, along with any breaks in research employment that may extend the qualifying period. For example, someone who commenced their research career in August 2012 but was employed in a non-research role from March 2014, returning to research employment in August 2016, would still qualify as an ECR, subject to faculty confirmation.

#### **4. Application Process**

There will be an optional pre-application workshop to be led by the Panel Chair and other members of the panel. Potential applicants are strongly advised to attend but attendance will not form part of the award criteria.

The application deadline is **30<sup>th</sup> October 2019**. It is anticipated that all applicants will be advised of the panel's decision by week commencing **9<sup>th</sup> December 2019**. All applications must be submitted on the scheme application form and to the email account [ACORN@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:ACORN@bournemouth.ac.uk).

Projects must have clear, tangible deliverables and must be explicit in how they will lead directly to future proposals for research funding. Bullet points may be used for clarity and conciseness where appropriate.

The application must be authorised by the relevant Faculty Deputy Dean Research and Profession Practice or equivalent, prior to submission. The faculty must provide a statement in section 7 outlining the importance of this proposal to the research strategy of the Faculty including relevance to the REF submission. The applicant is responsible for ensuring that this is completed and that sufficient time is allowed for this step.

#### **5. Financial Aspects**

The awards made will be a maximum £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 below the total fund of £25,000, depending on the number, quality and volume of applications.

Payments will be made in accordance with current BU financial regulations. Funding for successful awards will be managed by RDS and the relevant Faculty. The Faculty will be responsible for administering the expenditure. All applicants must complete their expenditure within six months of the award, unless extenuating circumstances are advised at the time of application. RDS will, however, review whether funds can be extended beyond this date. This may, for example, include presentation at a pertinent conference that takes place after the final date for expenditure, given below and given when the award holder is notified. Any

unauthorised spend that extends beyond the six month deadline will need to be fulfilled via the faculty's budget. Please note that expenditure is, for accounting purposes, recognised at the point of the activity taking place, including travel or delivery of an item or service, not the point when the purchase is booked or made.

The member of faculty who approves the application will agree to fund any overspend from faculty funds.

This scheme is currently funded by BU's QR allocation.

## 6. Budget

This scheme does not require Full Economic Costing and should not include your own employment costs but only those items that are required as a direct result of your research. 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 expenses
- 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 that 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 requested from the BU Open Access Publication Fund (OAPF).

All travel must be booked via Key Travel and award holders must follow BU booking procedures, including any local to their faculty. Please refer to the [business travel guidance](#).

RDS has prepared guidance for the costings for internal funding calls. Please refer to <https://staffintranet.bournemouth.ac.uk/aboutbu/policiesprocedures/> > Research > Pre-award > RKE Internal Funding Sample Costs. Applicants should not contact the RDS Funding Development Officers to complete your costing for you.

## 7. Ethics

As the ACORN Fund supports research activity, all successful applications **will need to complete the [online ethics checklist](#)** and, subsequently, may **require ethics approval**.

As such, BU requires that all research (as defined in the [RECP Section 5](#)) is subject to appropriate ethical reflection leading, if necessary, to formal approval. Approval must be obtained prior to the commencement of research, particularly if collecting data as part of the research activities approved as part of your ACORN application.

If ACORN funding is being used to extend an existing research project, you may not need to submit a new checklist if you already have ethics approval in place. It might be appropriate to submit an Amendment Request (via online ethics checklist). If you are unsure, please email [researchethics@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@bournemouth.ac.uk) for advice.

Please note that if your research requires external **NHS Ethical Approval** and does not already have this in place, the ACORN Fund timeline will not allow your research, in this form, to go ahead. It may be that changes to your project may negate the need for such external approval. If you are affected by this, please contact BU Research Ethics, as above, for further advice, **before** submitting your ACORN Fund application.

## 8. Review Process

Following application screening by RDS (see Sanctions for Errors in Submission, below), application will be reviewed thus:

- The application will be reviewed by a panel member from the same faculty and by second reviewer from another faculty, as anonymously allocated by RDS.
- Each reviewer should provide meaningful feedback on the scoring sheet which can be forwarded to the applicant
- Each application will be assigned to an ACORN panel member who will act as an independent lead or champion, and they will oversee the scoring and resolve any significant scoring variations prior to the full panel meeting.
- The independent lead will prepare the joint feedback to the applicant, with assistance from RDS.
- The reviewers will remain anonymous to the full panel with any discussion to be directed through the independent lead.
- The outcome of previous applications to the ACORN Fund may be taken into account.

### 8.1 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 30, based on how well they score against the criteria outlined below. Each criterion carries a total possible score of 6 with quality to be weighted at twice the importance of the others. Applications will then be ranked and, following full discussion by the ACORN Fund Panel, will be awarded until the funds available for the year are exhausted.

- **Research Quality (scored out of 6, 12 with weighting):** The applicant should clearly state the overall aims, rationale/background, methods/approach and outcomes/deliverables of the project, leading to an application to a prestigious funder. *Weighting x2, to be added when all scores are collated prior to full panel review.*
- **Pathways to Impact (scored out of 6):** Activity should have a high likelihood of positive impact. Proposals should, therefore, contain robust indicators as to how this will be demonstrated. The potential for 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 6):** Activity should be costed and planned to ensure delivery within a realistic timeframe and include a Gantt chart, or similar.
- **Future Plans and Value for Money (scored out of 6):** The applicant should outline plans for future external grant applications. Activity should reference BU2025 and departmental or research centre plans, representing a good return to BU in terms of the investment made.

## 8.2 Sanctions for Errors in Submission

Applications to the ACORN fund are designed to provide similar rigour as would be provided by external applications. It is however, noted that most applicants have limited external bidding experience. As such, the following applies:

- 1 mark deducted for <10% over the stated word count for every section over the limit
- 2 marks deducted for >10 over the stated word count for every section over the limit
- Desk rejection for sections missing or not completed, including the Gantt chart or similar timeline chart
- Desk rejection for an application that does not have the faculty signature on the actual document
- Desk rejection for late submission and those not submitted as per the instruction on the application form

A desk rejection is where all applications are screened by RDS prior to inclusion in the packs to panel reviewers. If an application is 'desk rejected', it will not be sent for review and that application will be withdrawn with the applicant advised when all applicants are notified of the outcome.

## 9. The Researcher's Commitment:

Successful applicants will be required to:

1. Conduct their research as per the outline and adhere to the budget provided in the application.
2. Submit an Ethics Checklist prior to commencing their research.
3. Inform the ACORN Fund panel, via RDS, should there be any significant changes to the research plan.
4. Actively engage in the Early Career Academics Research Network.
5. Present at the ECR Annual Research Showcase event in 2020.
6. Demonstrate that stated deliverables have been met including by internal and external dissemination (for example, via the *BU Research Blog* and *The Conversation* as a minimum) and update BRIAN and the staff profile, stating that funding has been received from the ACORN Fund.
7. Commit to submitting at least one high-quality proposal to an external funder, within 12 months of the final report deadline. This should be to the prestigious research funders ([UK research councils](#), [Wellcome Trust](#), [Leverhulme Trust](#), [British Academy](#), [Royal Society](#), [NIHR](#) and [EU Horizon 2020](#)) If applying to alternative funders, such as, charities, professional associations and international bodies (such as overseas universities), a case should be made for why this is more appropriate. Where no submission is made within the time limit, the ACORN panel reserves the right to explore this with the award holder and their line manager, with the view to the award holder being barred from further BU internal funding awards.
8. Provide evidence that the award has been spent according to the plan given in the 'breakdown of costs' section of the application.
9. Submit a Final Report (using the form available from the BU staff intranet) to RDS within 8 weeks of the end date of the award. The Final Report must include the final expenditure against the original budget. The Final Report will help RDS determine future rounds of this scheme. RDS will contact award holders at regular intervals after the submission of the Final Report for an update on research activity and to find out how the award has been beneficial.
10. Engage with RDS monitoring, evaluation and promotional activities, where possible, such as preparing a blog post for the BU Research Blog, completing RDS surveys to

provide feedback about the scheme and your experience, and contributing to case studies prepared to support the evidencing of this scheme's impact on, for example, your research development / researcher support at BU / research capacity building.

**N.B. If award holders fail to comply with these ten commitments, this may debar them from applying for future internal funding.**

Any appeals should be made to RDS, for independent consideration by Jim Andrews, BU's Chief Operating Officer.

## 11. Final Report Review

The final report will be reviewed by two members of the panel and brief feedback will be provided as a 'critical friend'. If the award holder applies to other internal funds in the future, this feedback may be taken into account.

Should the award holder require this, arrangements can be made, via RDS, to meet with a reviewing panel member for c. 15 minutes to discuss feedback face to face. This is subject to the availability of all parties.

## 10. Indicative Timetable:

Action	Indicative Date
Launch 2019 competition w/c	09/09/2019
Introductory briefing for potential applicants	25/09/2019
Pre-application workshop with panel member(s)	21/10/2019
Closing date	<b>30/10/2019</b>
Awards and feedback to be disseminated to applicants w/c	09/12/2019
<b>Award date (point used for subsequent dates)</b>	<b>02/01/2020</b>
Final date for project spend (six months from award date)	03/07/2020
Final report due (8 weeks after final spend date)	28/08/2020
RDS to contact award holders w/c (c 1 month after final report) circa ^	21/09/2020
RDS to contact award holders w/c (c 4 months after final report) circa ^	04/01/2020
RDS to contact award holders w/c (c 8 months after final report) circa ^	24/04/2021
Award holders to have submitted to a prestigious funder	28/08/2021

^ RDS will be offering support to ensure that award holders are on track to meet their obligation to submit at least one high-quality proposal to a prestigious research funder within 12 months of the final report deadline

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

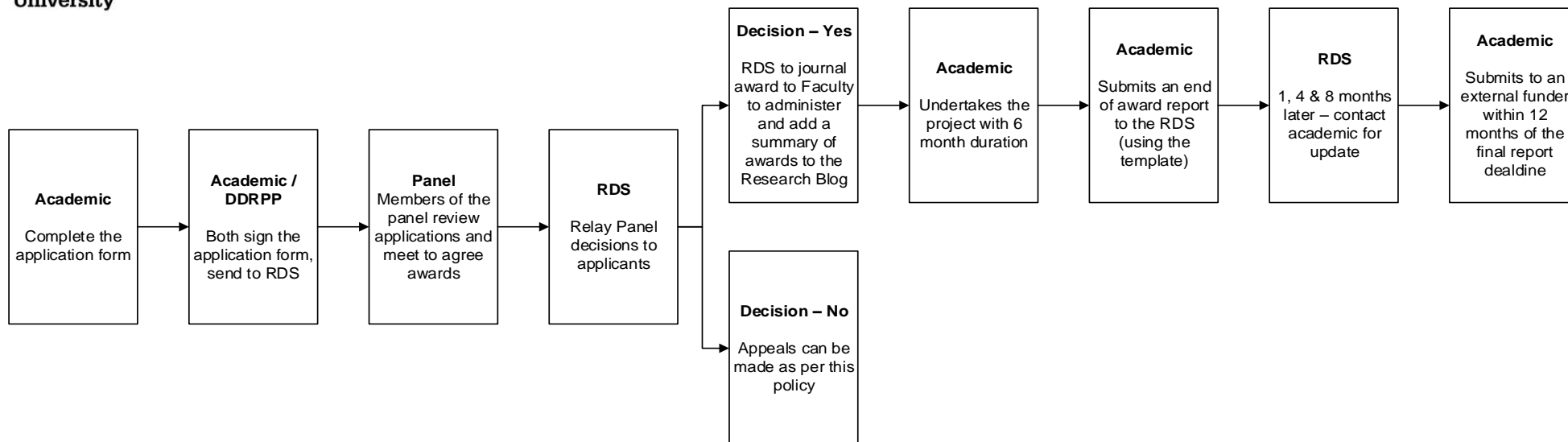
### ACORN Gantt chart (and example for applicants)

Action	Indicative End Date	26/08/2019	02/09/2019	09/09/2019	16/09/2019	23/09/2019	30/09/2019	07/10/2019	14/10/2019	21/10/2019	28/10/2019	04/11/2019	11/11/2019	18/11/2019	25/11/2019	02/12/2019	09/12/2019	16/12/2019	23/12/2019		Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020	2021	
Launch Autumn 2019 competition	10/09/2019																									
ACORN Information event	25/09/19																									
Pre-Application Workshop	21/10/2019																									
Closing date	<b>30/10/2019</b>																									
Applications out for review	30/10/2019																									
Reviews to be completed	15/11/2019																									
Panel packs to be prepared by	22/11/2019																									
Panel meeting to take place	25/11/2019																									
Collate feedback for all applicants	06/12/2019																									
Awards and feedback disseminated	09/12/2019																									
Journals to award holders faculties	31/12/2019																									
Commencement Date	02/01/2020																									
Final date for spend	03/07/2020																									
Final report due	28/08/2020																									
Report to RPMC (final reports)	Sep-20																									
RDS to contact award holders	28/09/2020																									
RDS to contact award holders	04/01/2021																									
RDS to contact award holders	24/04/2021																									
Submit to external funder	28/08/2021																									
Report to RPMC 1 year post award	Sep-21																									



## ACORN Fund

Process 2019-20



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

Deadline Autumn 2019: **30<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

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