Biomedical research facilities

Newcastle University | Research Facilities

Grant writing and funding opportunities for technical staff

Alex Laude

Head of Biomedical Research Facilities

IMA INNOVATION METHODOLOGY APPLICATION

The BioImaging Unit

What I used to do…

2010-2024 – Manager of Bioimaging facility (Senior Experimental Scientific Officer)
2024 - Head of Biomedical Research Facilities

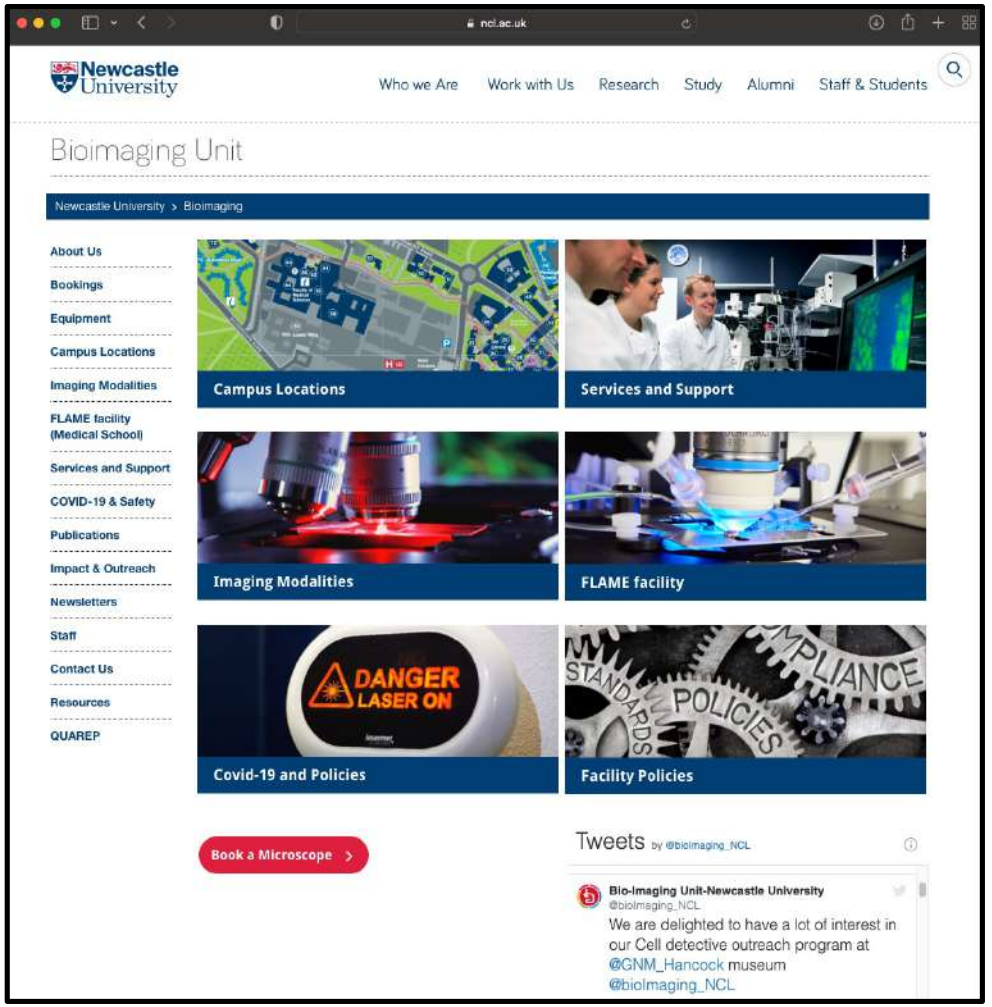
Large biomedical research facility specialising in access to high resolution light microscopy

- **Underpin a wide breadth of biomedical research taking place across our campus**
  - ~120 research groups
  - ~400 researchers

- **30 imaging resources**
  - Basic widefield and brightfield
  - Confocal
  - Super resolution
  - Multi-photon
  - High-content & slide scanning
  - Automated imaging & Image analysis

2018 – Established Cell Detectives outreach group

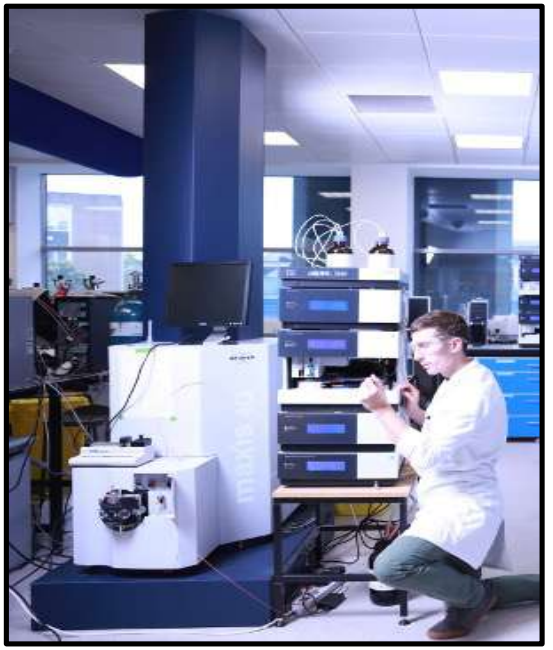
www.ncl.ac.uk/bioimaging



What I do now… 2024-

Director / Head of Biomedical Research Facilities

- Strategic management of the facilities
  - **Cutting-edge**
  - **Expertise**
  - **Innovate**
  - **Collaborate**
  - **Drive discovery**
- Promotion internally and externally
- Cost-recovery – pricing models & mechanisms
- IT and data management
- Collaborative workflows
- **Investment: staff & equipment**
  - **Core facilities, core infrastructure & technical innovation**



2024 – Established the Research Facility Coordinator's Network (RFCN)

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12 *in vivo* Imaging

Shear Wave Elastography, Fluorescence, bioluminescence, MRI, CT & Ultrasound imaging of small animals

1 Biobank, 2 Biomarkers & Sample preparation

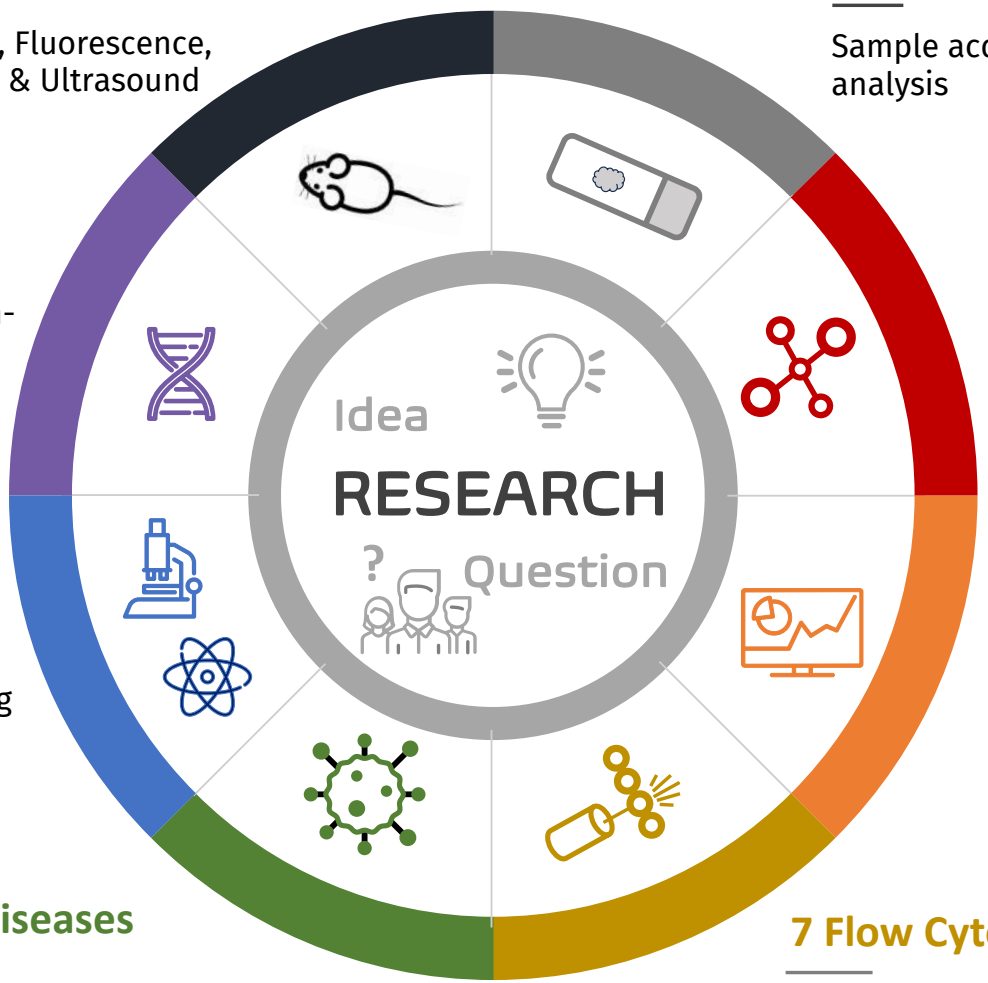
Sample acquisition, storage preparation and analysis

11 Genomics

Single-cell sequencing, medium-scale genomic & transcriptomic analysis

3 Proteins & Proteomics

Protein production & protein analysis



9 Light & 10 Electron Microscopy

Micro- to nano-scopic imaging solutions

4 BioInformatics, 5 HTS & 6 Image Analysis

Analysis of genomics, proteomic and micro array data, HTS & Image analysis

8 Infectious Diseases

Specialist facility for containment level 3 pathogen research

7 Flow Cytometry

Multiparametric analysis of cell populations

The current funding landscape: What has changed?

- **Changing funding landscape, especially for Research Technical Professionals (RTPs)** – eligibility criteria is being widened. UKRI applications now identify and include several key roles in the research process '**Core Team**' https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/before-you-apply/individual-eligibility/

- **Increasing expectation from funders of involvement of RTPs and technical staff** in methodology and technology-focussed grant applications, especially for UK Research & Innovation (UKRI)

- **Narrative CV (R4RI) can showcase the background and experience that RTPs, technical staff** and anyone named on the application can bring to the proposal

- **The UKRI grant portal Je-S has been replaced by the new TFS portal** - application form requirements have changed significantly – slimmed down

- **RTPs are being invited to participate as grant reviewers, funding panels and strategic advisory boards**

    - **Grant reviewer, panel member 23TRT & MRC-Equip, BBSRC – people & Talent Strategic Advisory Board RTP-Subgroup**

As a technical member of staff you have a 'day job' - so why bother?

Benefits to your research organisation

- Expensive equipment grant acquisition, especially in these difficult financial times
- Cutting-edge equipment delivers cutting-edge research
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) & Research Culture, recognition of – cited in other grants
- Team-working and more engaged staff who are well informed of funder policies
- Don't underestimate the importance of these to your host organisation (REF 2029?!)

Benefits to you!

- Promotion or more secure contract, more diverse career pathway potential
- University, parity of esteem & recognition by professional organisations
- Internal & external selection panel membership
- Cutting-edge equipment to work with and develop
- Develop specialist expertise re aspects of grant applications
- Personal satisfaction
- Remember, you are not alone, there will be people who can help you with your application – ask to see examples of awarded applications

Applications citing desirable involvement of RTPs: some recent UKRI examples

- NERC-led Digital infrastructure: new approaches to skills or software C/D 22 August 2024
- **EPSRC Strategic infrastructure for engineering and physical sciences: June 2024 no closing date**
- NERC-led Digital Research Technical Professional (RTP) Skills NetworkPlus, C/D 27 June 2024
- BBSRC Enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion in BBSRC-funded networks C/D 25 June 2024
- MRC Better methods, better research new investigator C/D 12 June 2024
- MRC/NIHR Understanding public involvement in non-clinical research C/D 12 June 2024
- MRC/NIHR Develop guidance for better research methods C/D 12 June 2024
- EPSRC Accelerating research outcomes to deliver a prosperous net zero: outline 1 C/D 6 May 2024
- BBSRC Bioinformatics and Biological Resources Fund (24BBR) C/D 7 May 2024
- **BBSRC Mid-range equipment for biosciences research: ALERT 2025**
- **MRC Purchase mid-range equipment for biomedical research: MRC Equip**
- STFC Public engagement Spark Awards 2023 round 2 C/D 2 November 2023
- BBSRC Flexible Talent Mobility Accounts (FTMA) C/D 28 November 2023
- **BBSRC 2025 Transformative Research Technologies (26TRT)**
- STFC Public Engagement Reaction Awards C/D 31 May 2023
- STFC Engage the public with science, technology or facilities: Spark Awards 2023 round one C/D 4 May 2023

Funding opportunities for RTPs & technical staff: start small

Less complex and smaller alternatives to Mid-range equipment grants:

- Internal funding opportunities
- Public Engagement
- Hosting vacation studentships
- Conference attendance
- Skills training – similar to researchers, e.g. Mentorship
- Learned Societies and Professional Organisations (e.g. Physiological Society, Genetics Society, Royal Microscopical Society, Royal Society of Chemistry)
- Search for funding opportunities using your organisation's research funding subscription, e.g. Research Professional, RESEARCHconnect, etc.

TSN ROKS

UK INSTITUTE FOR TECHNICAL SKILLS & STRATEGY

https://itss.org.uk/tsn/tsn-roks-opportunities/

TSN ROKS is an EPSRC funded initiative from the Technology Specialists Network to deliver funding and funded opportunities for RTPs whose work overlaps with EPSRC remit and/or priority areas to improve their skillset, build a professional network of technology specialist colleagues across the UK and undertake professional development opportunities. There are three main workstreams, each with a variety of projects to achieve the objectives.

Funding Opportunities

Developing pipelines and promoting RTP careers:
Outreach demonstrator fund | UG summer placements

Skills & Opportunities:
Workshops

Visibility & Knowledge Exchange:
Facility days | International Conference Fund | Equipment sharing

Your personal career development & preparing for grant writing

Have discussions with your line manager and make time available for:

- **Skills development**
- Professional organisations & conference attendance
- **Horizon scanning** technical developments, new equipment and methods
- **Time** - apply for small grants, internally and externally
- Involvement in large grant applications – write sections, review.
- Mentorship – giving and receiving
- Shadowing – internally and externally

Maximise your potential

Seek out opportunities & find the funding calls

- Sign up for internal and external mailing lists
- Join learned societies or professional bodies
- Network and ask around
- Put yourself forward
- Talk to academics – get yourself known internally

Do your homework

- Check that you are eligible to apply – with funder and host institution
- Check that your proposal is within remit of the funding call
- Start small
- Seek internal or external mentors or reviewers, do you know anyone previously that has applied?
- Fully answer the questions - get the message across **concisely**. Word count is limited, reviewers don't like waffle. Make it easy for them!

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My grant writing journey

IMA INNOVATION METHODOLOGY APPLICATION

The BioImaging Unit

Postdoctoral researcher (academic)

I was written into grants but never asked to review or write them

Through membership to RMS and BSCB wrote summer studentship applications

Manager of BioImaging Facility (RTP)

Summer studentship applications to BSRC, RMS, University and Wellcome Trust (**~£5-8k**)

2013 – Co-I **BBSRC** TDRF (now Transformative Research Technologies (TRT) fund) application to provide microscopy support - **£130k**

2017– PI Internal pump-prime research fund to develop correlative microscopy methodologies - **£9k**

2017 – Co-I **Wellcome Trust** multi-user equipment grant to provide microscopy expertise, equipment management and support - **£800k**

2019 – PI Tilly Hale prize award for outreach – The Cell Detectives - **£4.5k**

2020 – Co-I **BBSRC** ALERT19 multi-user equipment grant to provide microscopy expertise, equipment management and support - **£350k**

2020 – Co-PI Internal research policy funding - 2 rounds **£35k**

2021 - Co-PI **MRC** Better Methods– support the development of quality-control and standardization procedures for Light Microscopy - **£70k**

2021- PI **BBSRC/RMS** Business Interaction Voucher - **£15k**

2022 – Co-PI **MRC**-equip purchase of 3 live-cell imaging systems - **£650k**

Director of Biomedical Research facilities

2022 – Co-I **MRC**-equip Multi-plexed imaging system, provide microscopy expertise, equipment management- **£450k**

2023 – Co-I **MRC**-equip Crystallography imaging system equipment management - **£700k**

2024 – PI **MRC**-equip high-plex platform for gene expression analysis - **£374k**

My experience of grant writing – the ones that missed out

"Your proposal was recently considered for funding and we regret to inform you on behalf of [insert funder here] that it was not ranked highly enough to receive funding as there were a number of other, stronger, proposals."

Postdoctoral researcher

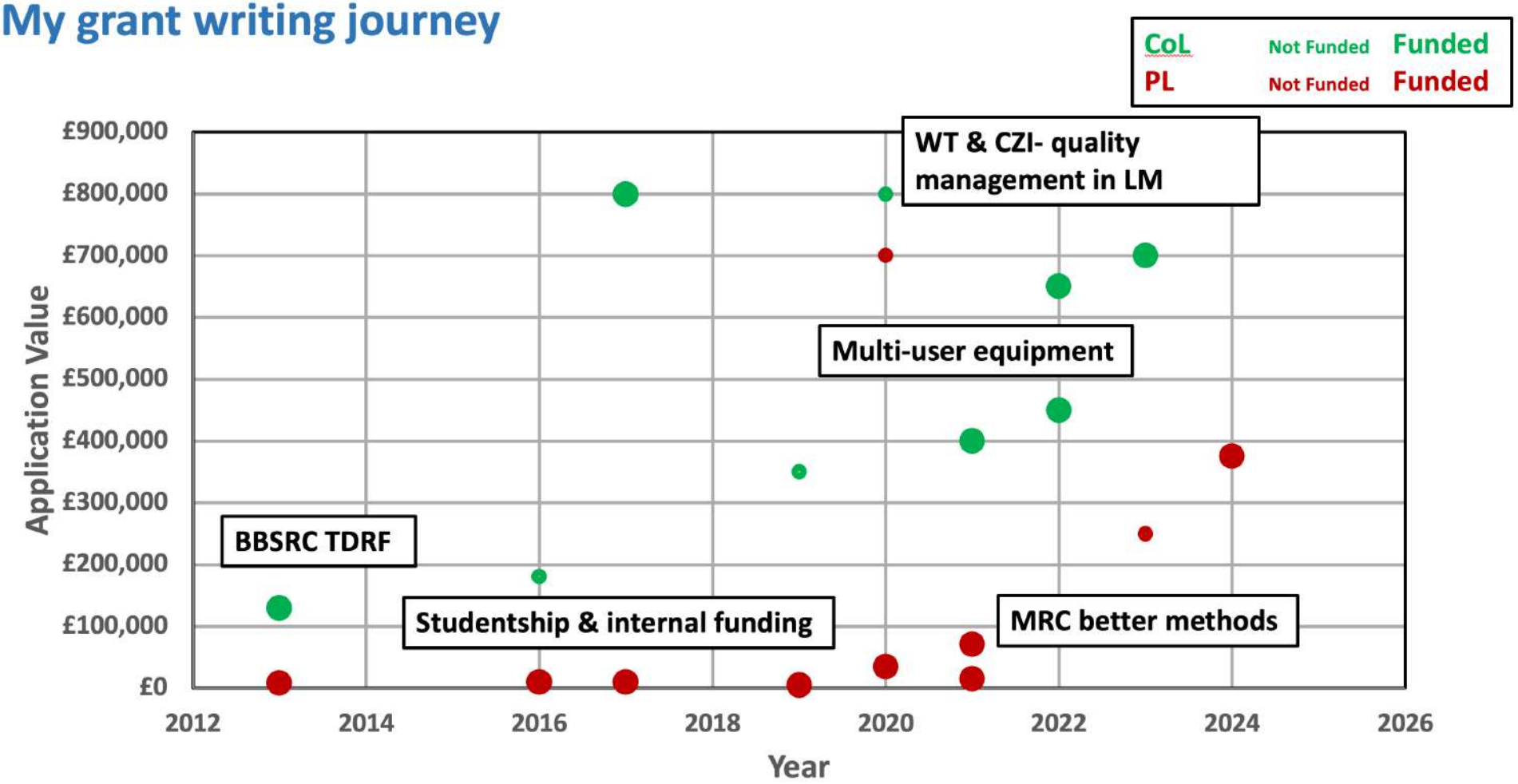
Several summer studentship applications

Manager of BioImaging Facility (RTP)

Several summer studentship applications

2016 - Co-PI	BBSRC TDRF – improve quality control and management in light microscopy - £180k
2020 – Co-I	WT technology development -microscope quality control procedures - £700k
2020 – Co-PI	CZI - improve quality control and management in light microscopy - £800k
2021 – Co-PI	BBSRC ALERT – metabolic analysis platform - £400k
2023 - PI	Sir Jules Thorn Trust - sample management software - £250k

My grant writing journey



Benefits

- ✅ **Be a very rewarding**
- ✅ **Gain access to cutting-edge instrumentation and technologies**
- ✅ **Career enhancing**
- ✅ **Financial reward & recognition**
- ✅ **Networking and travel**

Negatives

- ✗ **Time consuming (very)**
- ✗ **May not get buy in from line management**
- ✗ **Balance ‘day job’ with bringing together the application**
- ✗ **Little / no financial reward & recognition**
- ✗ **Little / no internal support for technical staff wanting to write grants**

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Multi-user equipment grants: your input WILL make the difference

IMA INNOVATION METHODOLOGY APPLICATION

The BioImaging Unit

BBSRC ALERT & MRC mid-range equipment applications

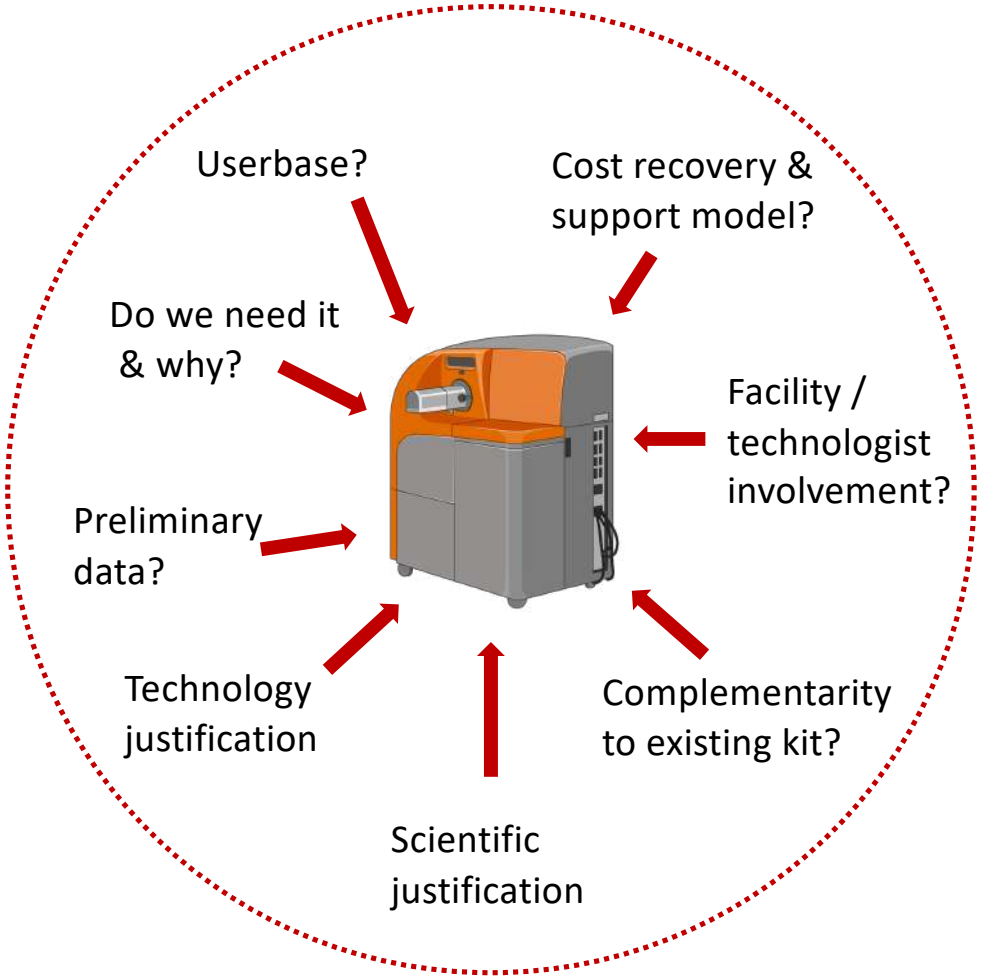
2026 Technology / equipment–focussed funding calls

BBSRC- ALERT26: **Oct –Jan**
Mid-range equipment for biosciences research:
https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/mid-range-equipment-for-biosciences-research-alert-2025/
Funding limits: £200k - £1.5M (incl. VAT)

MRC-Equip26: **Aug - Nov**
Purchase mid-range equipment for biomedical research:
https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/purchase-mid-range-equipment-for-biomedical-research-mrc-equip/
Funding limits: £100k - £800k (incl. VAT)

BBSRC 26TRT: **Nov – Feb**
Transformative research technologies:
https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/bbsrc-2025-transformative-research-technologies-25trt/
Funding limits: £225k

Equipment & Technology grants, tips and tricks: influence the decision makers



Equipment grants

Note funding window

- £100k-£800k MRC
- £200k-£1.5m BBSRC
- <£400k EPSRC strategic infrastructure

You are the best person to:

- Identify the need
- Be aware of the cutting-edge, understand the technology
- Know the existing and potential userbase
- Know if there is similar equipment around
- Talk with manufacturers – demo and gather preliminary data
- Support the equipment

Technology & methodology development grants

- You are an expert in the application of a specific technology to research
- Know the limitations of the equipment but also how it can be improved
- Currently working with samples and data

What makes a good equipment application: feedback

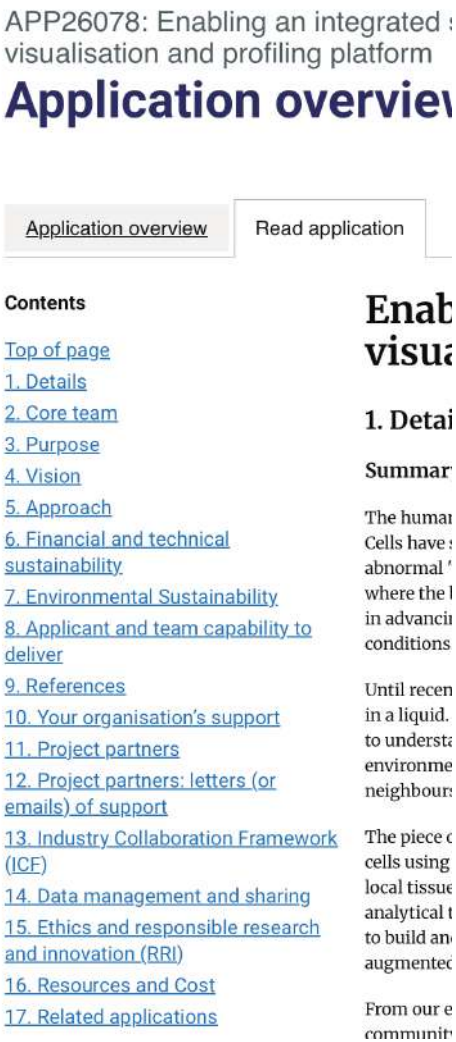
- **The Team**, especially whether it includes RTPs
- **Fit to funder remit**
- Host and regional **need** for the proposed equipment
- Detailed installation and **management plan**
- Training and **career development** plans for the RTPs involved
- Vendor discount and host Research Organisation support
- Justification of resources requested
- Environmental Sustainability
- Societal and EDI aspects
- Accessibility

N.B. The detail you supply makes the application convincing

The Funding Service

* your input required!

TFS mid-range equipment application form sections	BBSRC	MRC
Summary	500	550
Core Team		
Purpose *	1,000	1,000
Vision *	1,000	2,250
Approach *	1500	2,000
Environmental Sustainability *	500	500
Resources and costs *	1,500	
Financial and technical sustainability *		700
Your organisations' support	1,000	500
Project Partners		
PDF of Project Partners Letters of Support		
Applicant and team capability to deliver (R4RI or 'narrative' CV) *	1,500	1,500
Additions to capability to deliver	500	500
Data management and sharing *	500	1,500
Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI) *	500	500


APP26078: Enabling an integrated
visualisation and profiling platform

Application overvie

Application overview | Read application

Contents

Top of page
1. Details
2. Core team
3. Purpose
4. Vision
5. Approach
6. Financial and technical sustainability
7. Environmental Sustainability
8. Applicant and team capability to deliver
9. References
10. Your organisation's support
11. Project partners
12. Project partners: letters (or emails) of support
13. Industry Collaboration Framework (ICF)
14. Data management and sharing
15. Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)
16. Resources and Cost
17. Related applications

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The ‘Core Team’

Assign roles of key members of your team

- project lead (PL)
- project co-lead (PcL)
- researcher co-lead
- specialist
- professional support staff
- research and innovation associate
- technician
- visiting researcher

***A research technical professional (RTP) can be listed as a project lead or project co-lead**, provided that:*

- *their appointment is resourced from the central funds of their research organisation at the time of application*
- *their level of responsibilities and duties is appropriate to a person with substantial research experience*
- *their contract extends beyond the duration of the project*

The narrative CV – UKRI definition

A narrative CV is defined by the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) as a CV format that provides a structured written description of a person's contributions and achievements that reflects a broad range of relevant skills and experiences, more than can often be seen in a traditional academic CV.

In enabling a broader range of people to evidence a wider variety of skills and experience, it helps see the whole person, helping identify the best people and ideas so they can be supported to flourish. This aligns with a number of areas including:

- Responsible research assessment
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Career, skills and talent development
- Career diversity by enabling increased movement between roles, sectors and disciplines across the global R&I community

The Narrative CV

Module one

Explain your contributions to the generation of new ideas, tools, methodologies or knowledge. For example, you could include:

- how you communicated your ideas and results
- key outputs, such as data sets, software, research and policy publications
- skills acquired from past research projects

Module two

Explain your contributions to the development of others and maintenance of effective working relationships. For example, you could include:

- expertise you provided that was critical to the team's success
- teaching activities, workshops and mentoring
- your leadership in shaping the direction of a team

The Narrative CV

Module three

Explain your contributions to the wider research and innovation community.

Examples of what you could include are:

- positions of responsibility
- commitments such as reviewing, editing and committee work
- your strategic leadership in influencing a research agenda

Module four

Explain your contributions to broader research or innovation users and audiences and towards wider societal benefit. Examples of what you could include are:

- how you've engaged with the public sector, clients and the wider public
- research which has contributed to public understanding
- research which has contributed to policy development

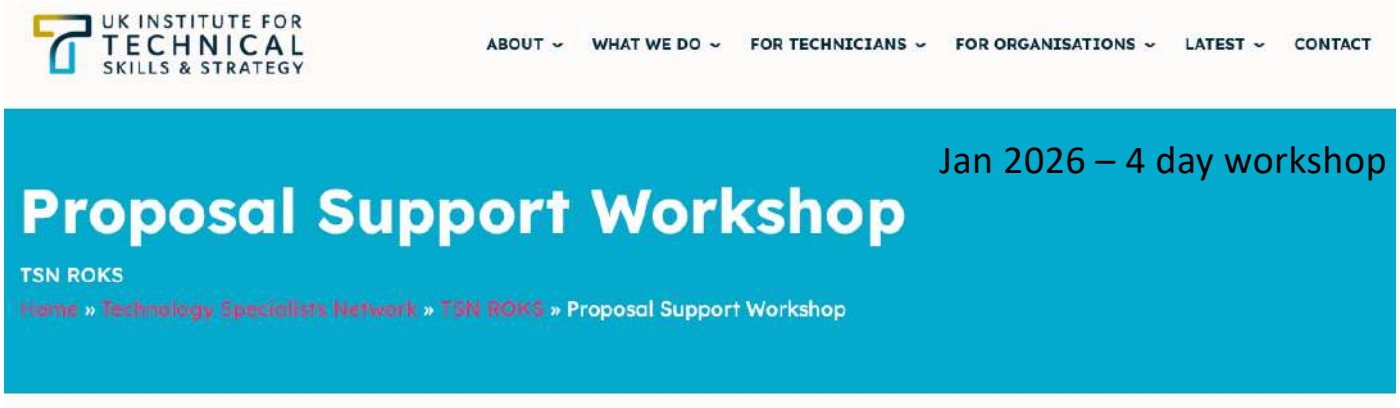
How to build your narrative CV

Within your role you ***will*** have one or more of the following skills

- Be a project manager
- Outreach and engagement experience
- Information manager
- Adept at problem solving
- An effective speaker / communicator
- Being a critical thinker – publications?
- Leadership, supervision and management skills
- **Be an expert in your technical area**
- Mastered a broad range of 'basic' and 'intermediate' laboratory skills & techniques
- Gained experience of advanced analytical techniques and modalities

All of the above can be built into the narrative CV
- What skills and experiences can you add to the grant?
- Why are you named? – you add value to the grant, you are integral to its success

Training opportunities



Jan 2026 – 4 day workshop

Residential Workshop for Proposal Writing

We are excited to announce a unique opportunity for you to join a workshop designed to boost your understanding and confidence in crafting successful proposals. This fully-funded workshop is specifically tailored for Research Technical Professionals and will cover the entire funding process from start to finish.

Apply now to join a select group of professionals at our 4-day residential workshop from 20 – 23 January 2025, at the University of Warwick. Enhance your ability to write compelling proposals, gain valuable insights into the funding process, and network with peers and experts in your field.

https://itss.org.uk/tsn/tsn-roks-opportunities/proposal-support-workshop/

- Internal opportunities?
- Mentors (academic or technical)?
- Grant support officers?

Are you thinking about or already preparing a proposal? TSN ROKS Grant writing retreat (20th May 2026 deadline)

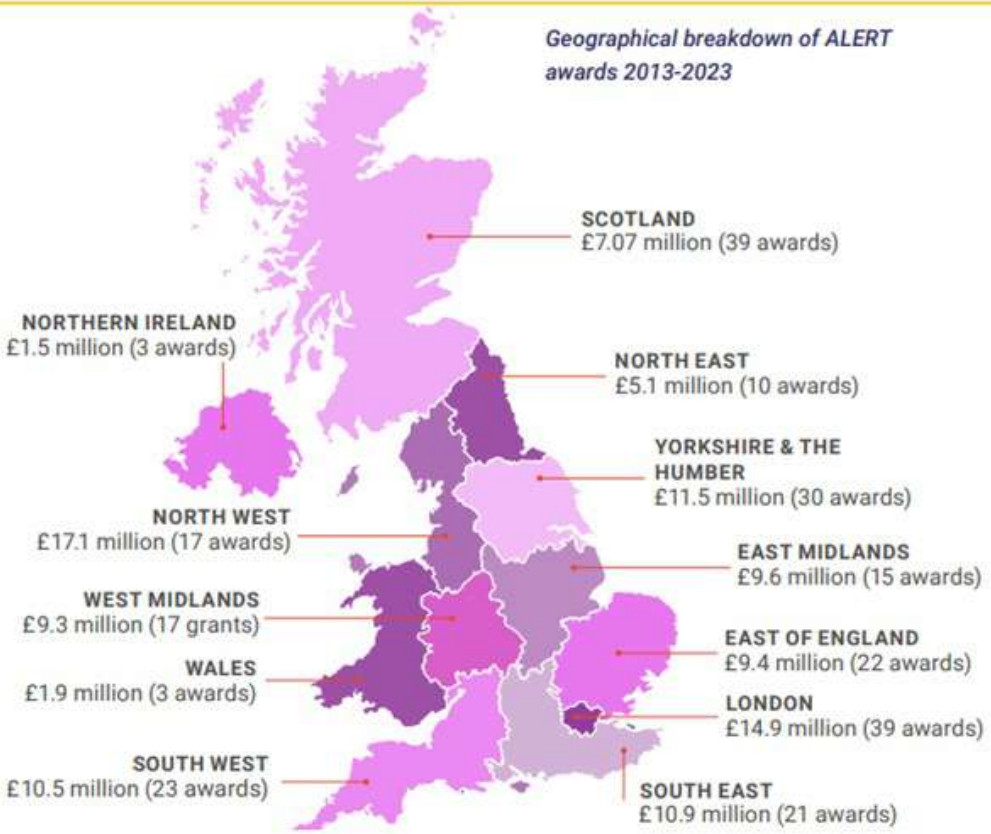
BBSRC-ALERT Statistics

ALERT

The Advanced Life Sciences Research Technologies (ALERT) fund provides targeted support for mid-range equipment for bioscience research, ranging from widely used, underpinning so-called 'workhorse' equipment to cutting edge technologies and lab-to-field platforms, with the goal of enhancing institutional and regional capabilities. Since its introduction in 2013, BBSRC has invested £120 million in 258 ALERT awards across 51 research organisations.

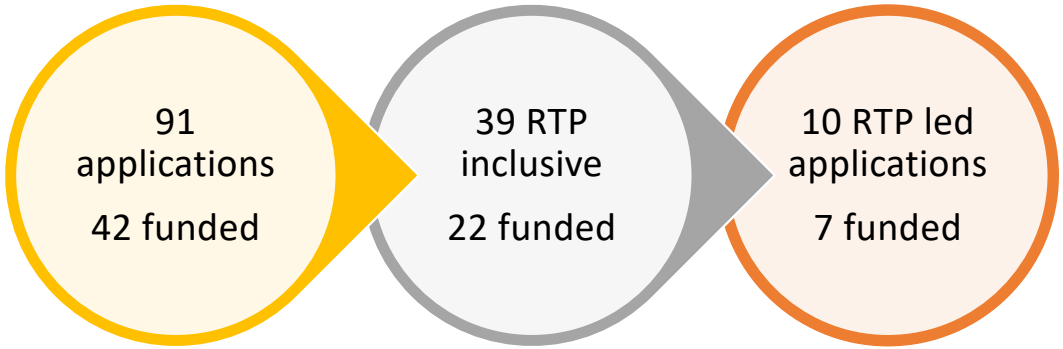
In addition to supporting the community's equipment needs, ALERT has enabled BBSRC to highlight the vital role of research technical professionals (RTPs) in enabling research, such as facility managers, technologists, data stewards, research software engineers, trainers and other infrastructure staff. In recent years, BBSRC has increasingly sought to raise the profile of RTPs through representation on assessment panels and as panel chairs.

Geographical breakdown of ALERT awards 2013-2023



The number of applications from eligible technical staff as either principal investigator or co-investigator has grown over the years: in the 2022-23 round, 43% of proposals included RTPs, and in both 2021 and 2022, the top proposals were led by RTPs.

ALERT 2022



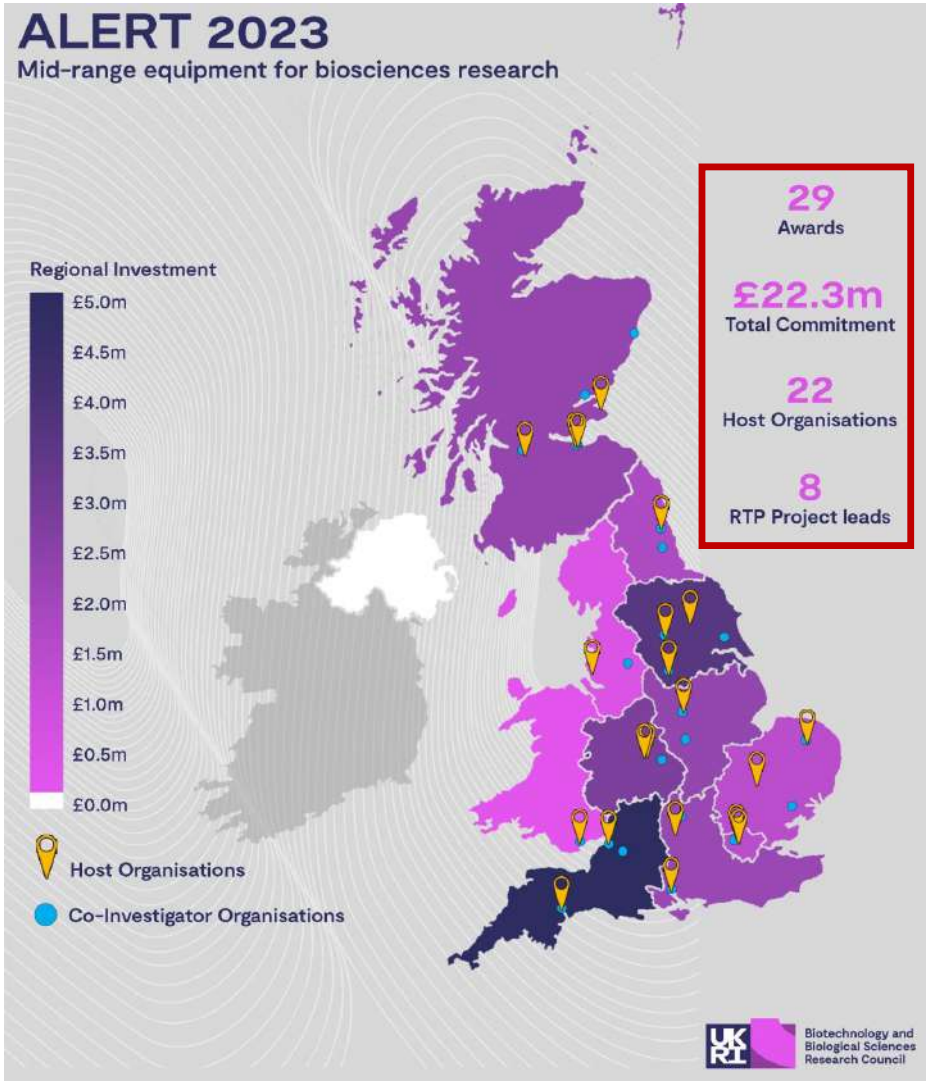
ALERT 2022 success rates

Overall = 46% (42/91)

RTP inclusive = 56% (22/39)

RTP led = 70% (7/10)

ALERT 2025 – 50% of funded applications now led by RTPs



BBSRC 23TRT (Transformative Research Technologies)

23TRT success rates

Overall = 31.5% (23/73)

RTP led awards = 75% (3/4)

£4m investment

24TRT: https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/2024-transformative-research-technologies-24trt/

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Email: alex.laude@ncl.ac.uk