Overview

The Aberdeen Grants Academy offers the underpinning infrastructure to support the development and nurturing of the University’s leaders, and future leaders, in research.

The aim of the Grants Academy is to:

Support our staff in all stages of the research grant life cycle from ideas conception, through development and refinement of a funding application, to research delivery and realising impact for the research we undertake.
Background

The University of Aberdeen’s Strategic Plan 2015-2020 sets out the vision of ensuring that University is a world leading centre of excellence in research.

To meet the ambitious targets to increase research income, the University recognises the need for investment in the development of its future leaders and the need to improve both the volume and success rates of externally funded research applications.

The University’s Professional Services Review, published in May 2016, identified a need to strengthen existing supportive mechanisms available to colleagues preparing grant applications.

Where supportive processes have been in place in the University for some time, success rates have risen significantly, for example, success rates for BBSRC have risen from a low of 17% in 2013/2014 to high of 43% in 2015/2016 (against a sector average of 25%)

source BBSRC

There is growing evidence that the introduction of current internally managed processes improves the quality of submissions (e.g. Intention to Submit, the Fellowship Traffic Light Process, and Internal Peer Review).

The Grants Academy will allow for a consistent approach to supporting the grant application process across the institution, and offer the ability to manage these processes in a more efficient manner.

**1. Idea preparation**

The Grants Academy will support movement of grants through the application cycle, ensuring that grants are submitted at an optimal time.

The Grants Academy will facilitate applications re-entering the grant cycle to ensure that good ideas have the best chances of success.

The Grants Academy will also ensure that positive learning can be shared, and fed back into the Grants Academy.
Concept

At the core of the Grants Academy’s values is support

A structured framework of support will:

- significantly enhance our research environment, which will directly impact our REF submission.
- offer a comprehensive programme of development that is directly linked to our strategic objectives.
- enhance career prospects of all researchers, but particularly those at earlier career stages who may need significant assistance to build their external research grant portfolio.
- through improved horizon scanning, offer the ability to be better prepared for opportunities and enhance our ability to respond to calls.

The activities of the Grants Academy will interface with, and complement, the agenda offered by the Researcher Development Unit (RDU), the new Graduate School for postgraduate research students and the support for stakeholder engagement plans and impact activities offered by Research and Innovation (R&I) and the Public Engagement with Research Unit (PERU).
How the Aberdeen Grants Academy will work

The goal of the Grants Academy is to increase both the success rate and the overall submission rate of grant applications. The Grants Academy will offer added value to colleagues with a measureable increase in the quality and quantity of grants being submitted.

The Grants Academy comprises a series of “Elements”, that are offered to research active colleagues. The Elements comprise an integrated platform to ensure an appropriate level of support is available at all stages of the grant application process.

Other academic staff, School management and Professional Services staff will utilise or facilitate the Elements as part of their support for research.

Support from all staff is essential to the success of the Grants Academy and, ultimately, research targets in the strategic plans of the Schools in the University.

The Grants Academy therefore represents a significant undertaking and investment in the research future of the University from all colleagues throughout the University.

As researchers travel through the Grants Academy, developing their applications and writing skills and winning grant funding, they can then, in turn, feed back into the Grants Academy as a supporter and facilitator.
Expectations of the Grants Academy

The Grants Academy represents a significant investment of time and resources from a number of colleagues to help researchers raise their submission and success rate.

Expectations will be tailored to career stage, individual workload (in-line with work load modelling), discipline, and line managers will be best placed to articulate expectations for specific individuals.

R&I will monitor:
- attendance at Grants Academy events and compliance with guidance and processes;
- the involvement of senior staff in delivery and facilitation of the elements to ensure fair distribution of these activities;
- participation and outcomes will also be monitored for equality and diversity purposes.

By collecting data on the journey of an application or member through the Grants Academy, R&I can report on the impact of these processes on application quantity and quality, and in turn, link this to success rate.
Elements and the grant pipeline

The Elements consist of existing and new initiatives that span the grant application preparation stage and beyond. Click on Elements in the table below to find out more.
Aberdeen Grants Academy Element Guide

Grantsmanship support

Grant Writing Workshop

The Grants Academy runs Grant Writing Workshops facilitated by external grant writing experts.

Attendance at the workshops is through open applications and/or Head of School recommendations.

See also One2One grant support.

R&I maintain a list of potential external facilitators, which will be drawn on depending on the type of workshop to be run, focus on funder, career stage etc.

Examples of workshops would also include: Impact development and stakeholder engagement plans to embed within the early stages of research development and the grant application.

Grants Academy Grant Library

The Grants Academy maintains a library of successful grants that researchers can have access to in order to take tips on style, presentation and grantsmanship. Access to these documents is controlled by R&I, and only released on request in order to maintain confidentiality as grant applications are sensitive documents.

Researchers can “borrow” a grant from the library with strict confidentiality provisions outlined to them. They will be expected to “return” (in reality, confirm deletion) of a grant application after use.

The aim here is not to offer grant applications to copy from. It is for members to see the writing style, level of content, format, layout, grantsmanship, etc that goes into a successful application, with comparisons to some unsuccessful applications.
Grant Academy Sandpit Events

The Grants Academy hosts “Sandpit” events with a specific focus – e.g. those wanting to utilise bioinformatics or a particular piece of equipment, those looking to apply to a particular panel etc, where interested parties and facilitators will discuss potential ideas, or as facilitated sessions for horizon scanning and brainstorming to develop proposals.

Grants Foundry

The Grants Foundry offers the chance to present and discuss ideas for a grant application with an internal panel. This will be very early stage, before much is committed to paper and will allow members to direct their thoughts and efforts towards the more structured parts of the Academy. The aim is that this allows a supportive, open forum for the member to get the ideas and advice before spending vast amounts of time developing a draft application.

Impact workshop

Along with One2One support, teams from PERU and R&I will facilitate workshops focused on impact and stakeholder engagement of planned research projects to ensure that potential impacts are clearly articulated and described in grant applications.

Grants Academy Support Fund

Grants Academy so researchers are eligible to apply for the Grants Academy Support Fund. This Fund is for small sums of money (circa £2k) to strengthen a grant application, for example, to secure pilot or essential data or to fund a visit to a collaborator laboratory to learn a crucial technique to support a grant application.

To be eligible, researchers must have attended a Grants Academy grant writing workshop, and must have had a draft proposal considered by a Grants Academy Intention to Submit panel or have undertaken a review of an unfunded application with the Grant Outcome Analysis Panel. The relevant Panel must be in agreement that the proposal activity would add value to the application and increase its likelihood of being funded.
Funders Workshops and Panel Events

The Grants Academy invites funders to visit the University and present funding opportunities and tips. The funders are invited to take part in a Grants Academy Panel Event, as are any colleagues with experience of sitting on panel for that funder will also be invited. Members of the Academy have access to the collective expertise for general Q&A and One2One clinic sessions.

Grants Academy Writing Retreats

The Grants Academy hosts writing retreats throughout the year. Colleagues may have the opportunity to attend when they have a grant in preparation and parts of the retreat may be facilitated by R&I, other colleagues or a grant writing expert. A funding panel will be convened towards the end for review and feedback.

Grants Academy Grant Writing Club

Researchers that are preparing grants get the chance to meet on a regular basis to share experience or to facilitate peer-to-peer grant reviewing. These sessions are not facilitated for the most part as it is hoped that researchers will use these sessions to support each other.

Occasionally, the Grants Academy Peer Review Panel members or an external grant writer or facilitator will be available for a panel Q&A type event or to focus on a particular funder.

One2One support from Grant Writing Expert

Once a researcher has attended a Grant Writing Workshop and presented an application idea to the Intention to Submit panel, they may have access to One2One support from an external grant writing expert. This will assist developing the project style and content.

Intention to Submit

Grants Academy will adopt the Intention to Submit process that is successfully running in some Schools already. An early review of a grant application to certain funders is considered by an Intention to Submit panel and feedback is provided.
Grants Academy Internal Peer Review Support Team

The Grants Academy retains a number of academic staff on an Internal Peer Review Team. There is prior agreement with each Team member how many applications they will be allocated to review per year. The applicant can select their own Peer Reviewers but they will also be allocated at least 2 members of the Peer Review Team. Team members may be allocated for knowledge of the research area, funder or for general grantsmanship. Those that have benefitted from the Grants Academy will be expected to serve on the Internal Peer Review Team.

Heads of Schools nominate and encourage colleagues to serve on the Internal Peer Review Team.

TRAINING ASPECT:
Grants Academy members will receive other members’ grants to review. They will be expected to critically review the whole application and use the Peer Review Proforma to feed back comments. This is expected to foster an appreciation of reviewing applications, and therefore foster an appreciation of a well communicated grant. Detailed guidelines will be developed for peer reviewers.

Grants Academy Funding Support Panel

The Grants Academy Funding Support Panel is convened to consider full applications from members of the Grants Academy. The Panel critically reviews the application, and structure its review like an RCUK panel, with 2 Panel members leading the review and introduction to the Panel. The applicant is invited to defend their application, and receive feedback from the Funding Panel. Members are advised if the application is appropriate for submission to an upcoming deadline, or requires further development before submission can be supported.

The Grants Academy Funding Panel dates are determined and circulated to members for the upcoming 12 months.

Initially this Funding Support Panel is restricted to Research Council proposals and significant value applications on a case-by-case basis.

TRAINING ASPECT:
- Researchers will be invited to observe a Funding Support Panel before presenting a grant to it.
- After observation, the researcher will be invited to review the application alongside the Panel and be a co-opted member of that panel.

These training elements are expected to prepare a member for presentation to the Funding Panel and an awareness of the expectation of their applications.
Interview preparation

Interview skills training and mentoring is offered from experienced colleagues or those who sit on panels or host interviews for funders.

Mock interview panel

The Grants Academy arranges mock interviews for funding schemes that hold an interview with applicants before a funding decision is made. The Mock Interview Panel should be used in conjunction with the Interview Preparation support.

Rebuttal preparation

Well written rebuttals are increasingly important at funding panels to sway decisions. The Grants Academy facilitates access to Grants Academy Panel Members to assist with review of rebuttal letters.

TRAINING ASPECT:

- Academy members will be invited to observe a Mock Interview Panel before presenting a grant to it.
- After observation, an Academy Member will be invited to review the application alongside the Mock Interview Panel and be a co-opted member of the panel.

These training elements are expected to prepare a member for interviews that they may face in the future, but also raise awareness of the review process of an application that a panel goes through in preparation for an interview.
Aligning with the support measures around grant preparation itself, there will be a series of workshops available that will focus on academic development and public engagement, coordinated by RDU and PERU respectively. It is anticipated that these workshops and supportive mechanisms are embedded within the Elements described above such that the Grants Academy can offer a holistic approach to research support.
## Grants Academy Calendar

The calendar of events will be added to continuously throughout the year. Please check the Grants Academy website for the most up to date information.

### March

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>ONE Life Sciences Networking Forum (linked to the Innovate UK – Health and Life Sciences call)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>GCRF and Newton fund workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Spring Fellowship Tutorial at SMMSN</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Intension to Submit panel for NERC</td>
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### April

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>IMS/RINH Grants Foundry, Level 5 Conference Room, 14:00-16:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 or 27</td>
<td>Research in Focus Ltd visit (Becky Stelianos), speciality EPSRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Wellcome Trust visit</td>
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### May

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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grants writing workshop (host: A. Derrington) (CoPS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Carnegie Trust visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Grants writing workshop one-2-one/ small groups (host: A. Derrington) (CoPS)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Grants writing workshop 1 (host: A. Derrington) (SMMSN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Grants writing workshop one-2-one/ small groups Part 1 (host: A. Derrington) (SMMSN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>EU grant writing workshop</td>
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### June

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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Grants writing workshop 2 (host: A. Derrington) (SMMSN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Grants writing workshop one-2-one/ small groups Part 2 (host: A. Derrington) (SMMSN)</td>
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<td>Intention to Submit deadline for MRC/ BBSRC/ Wellcome Trust</td>
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Grants Academy: Who are we?

**Professor Bryan D MacGregor**  
Vice Principal for Research  
Bryan has been the Vice-Principal for Research since 2015 and is also Executive Dean of the Business School. He has been the Head of both the College of Physical Sciences and the College of Arts and Social Sciences, and has held the MacRobert Chair in Land Economy since 1990. Previously, he worked as a research manager for Prudential Portfolio Managers in London, for the Universities of Reading and Glasgow and for the Scottish Office Central Research Unit.  
*b.d.macgregor@abdn.ac.uk*

**Professor Michael Brown**  
Dean for Research & Knowledge Exchange – Arts and Social Sciences  
After gaining his PhD in History from Trinity College Dublin and working there and in University College Dublin, Michael moved to Aberdeen in 2006, and being awarded a personal chair in 2014. Michael was appointed to Director (then Dean) for Research in 2014.  
Contact me if you are in CASS or the Business School or if you have general enquiries about the Grants Academy.  
*m.brown@abdn.ac.uk*

**Dr Liz Rattray**  
Director, Research & Innovation  
Liz has in depth experience of supporting research from the very early stages through to commercial benefit and impact realisation. Liz manages teams of specialist advisors in R&I covering grant preparation, commercialisation, impact and graduate studies.  
Contact me if you have any general questions concerning the Grants Academy or R&I supportive structures.  
*e.rattray@abdn.ac.uk*

**Professor Marion Campbell**  
Dean for Research & Knowledge Exchange – Life Sciences and Medicine  
Marion has extensive experience of the development and assessment of grant applications having sat on numerous RCUK and other funding boards. Marion was appointed to Director (then Dean) for Research in 2015, following 8 years as Director of the University’s Health Services Research Unit.  
Contact me for advice on the shaping of grant applications especially in life sciences and medicine.  
*m.k.campbell@abdn.ac.uk*
Richard was appointed to Director (then Dean) for Research in 2014.

Contact me if you are in CoPS or for advice on the shaping of grant applications for industry.

r.d.neilson@bdn.ac.uk

Dr Richard Neilson
Dean for Research & Knowledge Exchange – Physical Sciences
Richard has extensive experience of the development of grant applications for industry having run 9 Knowledge Transfer Partnerships.

Dr Juliette Snow
Business Development Officer
Following her PhD Juliette worked at Unilever Research before joining Research and Innovation as a Technology Transfer Officer. Juliette then moved into a Business Development role at Foresterhill and currently supports the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition. Juliette's particular focus is in supporting clinical studies and joint working with the NHS.

Contact me for support and advice on funding opportunities, bid development for clinical studies and support in contract negotiations etc.

j.e.snow@abdn.ac.uk

Dr Andrew Phillips
Business Development Officer
Andrew had post-doctoral research experience in the USA and UK before moving into University administration, he currently supports academic staff in the School of Biological Sciences and School of Psychology to apply for external funding and proactively seeks opportunities to increase the number, value and success rate of funding applications and supports contract negotiations to ensure the University’s, and its staff’s, interests and rights are protected.

Contact me if you require bid development or contracts support related to research within the School of Biological Sciences or Psychology or for general queries on NERC Responsive Mode or Research Connect.

andrew.phillips@abdn.ac.uk

June Middleton
Business Development Officer
June has worked in higher education for over two decades, firstly in an R&D role and then administrative posts in Faculties/Colleges before joining Research and Innovation in 2004. She currently supports the School of Geosciences, School of Engineering and the School of Natural & Computing Sciences in their quest to increase external income through research grants and consultancy.

Contact me if you need support with your funding strategy and bid development and for support in contract negotiations etc.

june.middleton@abdn.ac.uk
Dr Despoina Kaloriti
Business Development Officer
After a post-doctoral career in academic research, Despoina has been supporting funding applications and negotiations of research related contracts in the School of Medicine, Medical sciences and Nutrition.

Contact me if you are in SMMSN and need support with identifying funding opportunities, bid development, the fellowship traffic light system, and research related contracts.

d.kaloriti@abdn.ac.uk

Dr Anpu Varghese
European Business Development Officer
Anpu has a life sciences research background and manages the process of European bid/network development, grant writing & submission, grant agreement preparation and post-award project management of grants, with specific expertise in the Framework Programmes, currently Horizon 2020.

Contact me for Guidance and support on identifying and applying for funds from the European Commission and related schemes, as well as project management of successful EU grants.
a.varghese@abdn.ac.uk

Karim Mahmoud
Business Development Officer
Karim joined the Research & Innovation team having had a background in European funding support and broad experience in research support including grant finance administration. Karim works closely with academic colleagues to support them in developing funding applications to a range of external funders.

Contact me if you wish to discuss your latest research proposal idea or if you have queries on the application process to an external funding body.
karim.mahmoud@abdn.ac.uk

Dr Jenifer Scott
Development Coordinator, Public Engagement with Research Unit (PERU)
Jen joined the University in 2008 after a number of years working in the engineering industry and now supports researchers in the increasingly vital area of public engagement and impact pathways, bringing on board the institution’s award winning public and stakeholder engagement strategy.

Contact me: to discuss impact planning and embedding public engagement (PE) in your research proposal or to find out about PE opportunities.
j.scott@abdn.ac.uk
Dr Ann Lewendon
Commercialisation Manager
With a background in university research in enzymology and as a founder of a spin out company, Ann now manages the Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise team in Research & Innovation, which includes specialists to advise academics and students on a range of knowledge exchange activities, in particular working with industry, consultancy and the commercial exploitation of IP through licensing deals, joint ventures, company spin-outs and start-ups.

Contact me if you are interested in generating impact from your research through knowledge exchange or commercialisation.

a.lewendon@abdn.ac.uk