

Early Career Researcher (ECR) Research Fund

Seventh Call for proposals – July 2024

The Supergen Offshore Renewable Energy Hub is inviting applications for the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Research Fund. The fund is designed to be a flexible research fund for ECRs to support small activities that either supports and develops your existing research activities, or develops your skills further. Research activities should be aligned with the objectives of the Supergen ORE Hub, further details of which can be found on our website [HERE](#). Applications should be directed at offshore wind, wave or tidal energy research. Multi-disciplinary or multi-sectoral proposals are welcomed. **The maximum award size will be £4,000 at 80% FEC (direct costs only).**

Scheme Objectives

The primary objective is to **help individuals develop as Early Career Researchers**. The secondary objective is to help to **develop the science, engineering and technology to deliver Offshore Renewable Energy**.

Time Line

The deadline for submission of applications to the current call of the ECR Research Fund is noon (BST) on Monday 16th September 2024.

All applications will be peer reviewed with the process coordinated by the scheme coordinator, Prof. Richard Willden (University of Oxford), with support from Supergen ORE Hub ECR activity co-lead Prof. Byron Byrne (University of Oxford). The scheme coordinator will coordinate the peer review and ranking process leading to funding decisions. Funding decisions will be made within 3 weeks of the proposal deadline with **award announcements made on or before Friday 11th October 2024.**

The proposed activity must **start within 3 months of the proposal deadline**, and be completed within 9 months of commencement.

Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility for this fund is limited to Early Career Researchers who are either:

- Early Career Academic Staff (less than 3 years from first academic appointment),
- Post-Doctoral Research Assistants.

Whilst the wider Hub ECR network includes and welcomes final year PhD students, support for PhD student research activities should be delivered by host institutions or Centres of Doctoral Training (CDTs) as applicable, and hence PhD students are not eligible to apply to this ECR Research Fund.

- ECRs should be employed by an organisation that is eligible to receive EPSRC funding. A list of organisations eligible to apply to EPSRC is provided at: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/stfc/guidance-for-applicants/check-if-youre-eligible-for-funding/eligibility-of-research-organisations/>
- The proposed activity must not extend beyond the ECRs current employment (unless the requested funding does itself extend that employment).

- Due to the multiple rounds of ECR Research Funding, only in exceptional circumstances will ECR applicants receive more than one award.
- Joint applications from a maximum of two ECRs are welcomed where the inclusion of more than one ECR is justified with respect to the scheme objectives and the assessment criteria outlined below. The award limit will be raised in accordance with the number of ECRs making the joint application. A joint application should not include a non-ECR as an applicant.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

One of the objectives of the Supergen ORE Hub is to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity in everything that it does and across the Offshore Renewable Energy industry. Applications are encouraged from all, particularly from under-represented groups, and those returning from career breaks or having followed unusual career paths.

Where required and at the discretion of the scheme coordinator, the eligibility criteria may be interpreted flexibly to accommodate those who have followed unusual paths. If you are in any doubt as to your eligibility for this scheme you should contact the scheme coordinator (details provided below) well in advance of submitting your application.

Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria. Applicants should identify how their application fulfils each of the assessment criteria.

- **Personal Development** – How will the requested funds support you in developing as a researcher or early career academic?
- **Additionality** – How does the proposed activity go beyond your current activities, how will it transform them, and why can't it be supported by existing or more general funds?
- **Excellence** – Demonstrate that your proposed activity will be of excellent scientific and academic quality.
- **Impact** – How will your proposed activity deliver impact, both in a scientific or engineering context and promote you as an Early Career Researcher.
- **Alignment** – Proposed activities should be aligned with the research strategy of the Supergen ORE Hub. Applicants should identify where their activities fit within the ORE Hub [research landscape](#). Applications addressing multi-disciplinary or cross-sectoral problems are welcomed.

Assessment Process

All eligible applications submitted in accordance with the process outlined in this document will be peer reviewed with the process coordinated by the scheme coordinator, Prof. Richard Willden. The scheme coordinator, with support from ECR co-lead Prof. Byron Byrne and the other Supergen ORE Hub Co-Directors, will coordinate the peer review and ranking process leading to funding decisions. Funding decisions will be made within 3 weeks of the proposal deadline with **announcements made on or before Friday 11th October 2024**. The proposed activity must start within 3 months of the proposal deadline.

Examples of what the ECR Research Fund might support

This is a non-exhaustive list and innovative applications are welcomed.

- A discrete research activity, possibly seed funding leading to a new more substantial proposal, including a research Fellowship application,
- Travel for a national or international collaboration,
- Small equipment/consumables,
- An industrial internship or public service secondment,
- Awards to support a return from a career break,
- Public awareness engagement activities and support for developing outreach events are particularly welcome.

The scheme will not support costs associated with travel or fees associated with a workshop or conference. Such costs should be borne by research grants or general funds.

It is not intended that the scheme be used to just extend an ECR's contract of employment other than to achieve personal development activities, e.g. secondment or internship, except in circumstances relating to supporting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity.

For the previous six ECR Research Fund calls, 47 awards have been made (from 85 applications) with total funds awarded totalling circa £188k at 80% FEC. Successful awards included internships & industrial secondments, enabling small laboratory equipment, seed / proof of concept research projects, spanning sensors, fluid mechanics, foundations, control, O&M and ecology. You can find more details regarding previous awards [HERE](#). A large number of successful awards had support from industrial partners in the form of equipment, materials or in-kind support.

Costs

Total eligible project costs of £5,000 (FEC) are permitted (per ECR in the case of a joint ECR application). **Only direct costs will be permitted, i.e. no indirect costs or estates charges can be made.** In-line with EPSRC funding policy costs are paid at 80% FEC. This means that although you will be able to spend £5,000 on your project, only 80% of the cost will be able to be recovered from the Supergen ORE Hub, the remaining 20% will be required to be funded by your Department/University. This is normal UKRI funding practice, and your Department will have a process to cover costs associated with the non-recovered 20% of FEC. Note that PI direct costs should only be included where they lead to an employment contract extension specifically required to execute the proposed project. PI direct costs should not be included where the PI's employment is unaffected if the proposal is successful.

All applicants should follow their institutional grant costing process and consult with their departmental costing team. **All applications will require a host statement of support which must state that your institution is willing to cover the cost shortfall in recovering only 80% of direct project costs, and that, in the case of a non-autonomous researcher, i.e. a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant, that you have your supervisor's support and permission to submit this application.**

Letters of Support

A maximum of two letters of support, each of a maximum length of 1 page, can be submitted with your application which should include a letter from an appropriate project partner if

required for your project. One letter of support must come from your host institution and state that you have consulted your costing team and that your department is willing to support your application and will cover the cost shortfall in recovering only 80% of direct project costs. Additionally, if you are a non-autonomous researcher, i.e., a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant, then the letter of support should confirm that you have discussed your proposal with your supervisor and that they are supportive of your application.

Health and Safety, and Risk mitigation

All applicants applying in the current round are required to confirm that their proposed activity complies with their institution's Health and Safety processes and that they have consulted with their local Safety Officer as appropriate. Proposals should consider activities that can be executed, with limited risk, within the timeframes as set out in this call. Please include any risk mitigation actions that you have considered in your application.

How to Apply

The following documents form the application:

- A 2-page **Case for Support** that addresses the assessment criteria described above and includes an explanation of the costs for the proposed activity. The case for support should include at least the following sections:
 - 1 paragraph **summary** of the proposed activity suitable for promoting on the Hub website if awarded,
 - A full **description of the proposed activity**, including confirmation that your proposed activity complies with your institution's Health and Safety processes and any risk mitigation actions you have considered,
 - 1 paragraph explanation of how the activity will **support your development** as an ECR,
 - 1 paragraph explanation of the potential **engineering impact** of your proposed project,
 - 1 paragraph explanation of **project costs**.
- 1-page **CV** that clearly states career stage to satisfy eligibility and confirms that the current position outlasts the funding applied for.
- 1-page **Letter of Support** from your host institution
- up to 1 further 1-page **Letter of Support** from a project partner.

All documents should have a minimum of 20 mm margins on all sides and adopt a font of not less than 11pt. **The documentation should be combined and submitted as a single pdf.**

Submission of Applications

Completed applications should be submitted to the Supergen ORE Hub via email to: SupergenOREHub@plymouth.ac.uk with the subject line: "**Supergen ORE Hub - ECR Research Fund Application – July 2024**"

Conditions of award

As a condition of being granted an award, successful applicants will be required to report back on their award to the ECR and wider Supergen ORE Hub community. This will be in the form of a (maximum) one-page report and a blog suitable for the Hub website following the

completion of their award, as well as a presentation at a Supergen ORE Hub event. Additionally, award holders will be asked to provide a short (1-2) slide pack that can be used by the Hub to showcase its activities. A previous example of ECR Research Fund outputs can be found [HERE](#) on the Supergen ORE Hub website.

Successful ECR Research Fund Applicant institutions will also be expected to sign a Research Grant agreement, formalising the required outputs, financial contributions by the Supergen ORE Hub and the details of the activities to be undertaken. This agreement will be forwarded to successful applicants with a copy of the award letter.

Scheme Coordinator

The ECR Research Fund is being coordinated by Prof. Richard Willden (Co-Director of the Supergen ORE Hub, University of Oxford). Any queries about the scheme including your eligibility to apply should be directed to him at Richard.willden@eng.ox.ac.uk