



**CALL FOR PARTNERS TO TRIAL RESEARCHER TRAINING
AND NETWORKING**

**Information for Expression of Interest
(EoI) applicants**

March 2026

1. OVERVIEW

The Research England-funded **Developing Business-Aware Academics** (DBAA) project brings together academics, industry, non-profits and policy makers to inspire collaborative and impactful research that addresses today's most urgent societal and environmental challenges. We have found strong and consistent evidence, from both scholarly literature and researcher insights, to support our assumption that collaboration between universities and non-academic organisations delivers mutual value. Research becomes more impactful and better-informed by societal, business and economic needs. Academics are empowered to identify new ways to turn their ideas into action. Industry gains access to cutting-edge knowledge, innovation, and talent. The challenge is not lack of interest; it is how to make collaboration easy, effective, and repeatable in practice, and – importantly – how to ensure that it is both encouraged and rewarded within academic careers.

Landscape mapping confirms that existing training and support for academia-industry collaboration predominantly serves researchers who have already identified an opportunity and/or have a mature understanding of the value of external engagement. The DBAA project aims to reach a wider population, targeting those early in their careers (i.e. doctoral and early-career researchers) so that they become equipped for activities that lead to more innovative, impactful research and knowledge exchange. We anticipate that this will also strengthen the pipeline of researchers who initiate start-ups, pursue commercialisation opportunities, or choose to enter non-academic workplaces.

Our research has also revealed that existing external engagement support for researchers within HEIs often under-utilises existing expertise and connections, especially in business schools. More broadly, we have also observed sub-optimal collaboration within and between universities, despite there being considerable appetite for collective approaches (not least to achieve the efficiencies currently required across the sector). Finally, we have concluded that experiential learning opportunities offer the greatest potential for positive outcomes, complemented by tailored resources and training that are accessed as preparatory activities rather than stand-alone provision.

Drawing on this evidence base, over the past six months we have designed and run a series of pilot training and networking initiatives that have offered over 200 researchers the knowledge, skills and networking opportunities to engage effectively beyond academia. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative evaluation data from these events has revealed positive results, while further refining our understanding of how to achieve optimal engagement and outcomes.

To further test our approach across a range of different contexts, we are now inviting **Expressions of Interest** from higher education institutions (HEIs) in England to trial our templated initiatives. By covering the costs of organising and running these, and providing detailed guidance and support, we aim to make participating in the trials as accessible as possible for colleagues across the sector. Evaluation data will then allow us to make robust policy and practice recommendations that build capacity for future provision.

2. TRIAL DETAILS



We are seeking Expressions of Interest from HEIs that are eligible to receive Research England funding and have the capacity and expertise to use one or more of our four evidence-informed templates to trial this provision with their own doctoral and/or early-career researchers. Alternatively, the initiatives can be offered to researchers from more than one HEI via consortia, research networks, or other groupings.

The four types of initiatives are:

- A. Researcher workshop
- B. Exhibition experience
- C. Workplace visit
- D. Networking event

While the researcher workshop (A) can be run as a stand-alone event, we highly recommend that it is used as preparation for one of the experiential learning opportunities (B, C or D). Applicants who wish to run B, C or D will be expected to organise at least one workshop (A) to prepare the researchers and optimise the experience for all participants, including any non-academic partners.

All initiatives should be tailored to best meet the needs of both researchers and, where relevant, external partners, but will need to align with the DBAA pilot initiative templates and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) as detailed in Document B.

We expect each initiative to be attended by a minimum of twenty researchers, though some formats may accommodate much larger numbers, as this will offer the most meaningful evaluation data. Our research and pilots have offered insights into how to best attract engagement and sign-ups, and we will share these findings with all successful applicants.

3. WHO CAN APPLY?

As we are looking to build on existing capacity in HEIs, we expect applicants to harness existing institutional expertise, connections and collaborations when planning and running initiatives. This will allow us to explore realistic and sustainable solutions to developing business-aware academics, rather than expecting that HEIs will be able to invest in additional capacity to sustain provision beyond the lifetime of the DBAA project.

We anticipate that a range of different role holders may be well-placed to complete an Expression of Interest and co-ordinate initiatives, and we particularly encourage those with current responsibilities for supporting and developing researchers (in either academic or professional services roles). Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have institutional support for trialling DBAA provision, and that they would be well-positioned to work across disciplines and with all relevant teams within their HEI, including innovation / enterprise / knowledge exchange services.

Due to conditions of our award, the DBAA project can only transfer funding to HEIs that are eligible to receive Research England funding. As well as Eols from individual HEIs, we will also consider applications that bring together researchers from across a range of HEIs (including those involving research consortia, mission groups or other organisations) but in these cases funding and responsibility for outcomes must sit with a single lead HEI.

If you are interested in joining this trial but anticipate that resource constraints or a potential conflict of interest at your institution may prevent you from securing appropriate administrative and/or operational support (even with funding), please contact us for a conversation to explore options. We are keen to include insights from all types of institutions with research-active staff.

4. WHAT CAN WE FUND?

Funding can cover the costs of:

- Additional staff (including facilitators) brought in to organise, administer, recruit to and deliver the event(s)
- Room hire or exhibition stand costs
- Refreshments or subsistence
- Equipment hire or reasonable materials to support the event(s)
- Reasonable travel and accommodation expenses for participants where the event is taking place outside of the participant's normal place of work or study, as well as for any speakers/facilitators.

Costs for subsistence and travel should be allocated in line with existing institutional or organisation policies, and details of these will be required before funding is allocated.

Further details about eligible costs will be provided to those whose Expressions of Interest are taken forward to a full proposal stage.

5. HOW TO APPLY

We are aware that applicants will be differently placed to respond to this call as they identify the potential for initiatives within their own contexts. There may be longer lead-in times to accommodate the preferences of industry partners or where specific events, such as exhibitions or conferences, have a specific date. However, we wish to make funding available at pace and to support initiatives that can be offered to researchers as soon as possible.

We are therefore adopting a two-stage process:

1. Submission of an Expression of Interest (Eol) with some high-level details about the proposed approach.
Eols should be received by **midnight on Friday 1st May 2026**.
2. We will select Eols in line with the criteria outlined below and invite successful applicants to work with us to develop and submit a fully costed and detailed proposal. These will then be reviewed on a rolling basis and applicants will be contacted with the outcome of their application, and a contract will be issued to the host HEI.

6. CRITERIA

We will use the following criteria to identify Eols to take forward to the full proposal stage:

- a. Strong evidence that the applicant has an appropriate role and connections within their home HEI to broker collaborations across professional services teams (primarily those supporting innovation, knowledge exchange and researcher development) and academic departments/research units.
- b. Where relevant to the proposed approach, strong evidence that the applicant has well-established connections across a region or identified network to broker collaborations and involve researchers from more than one HEI.
- c. Confirmation that the applicant has institutional support to (i) take forward an Eol to full proposal stage and (ii) take responsibility for delivery of the proposed initiatives within a realistic timeframe, if awarded.
- d. Evidence that the applicant has a targeted plan for identifying and recruiting doctoral and/or early-career researchers, as well as non-academic partners where relevant, to participate in initiatives (and a high level of confidence that a minimum of 20 researchers would participate).
- e. Evidence, where relevant, that the applicant has identified specific external events that would, if taken forward, offer opportunities for trial initiatives.

- f. Strong evidence that the applicant has considered value for money, including anticipating how initiatives might be incorporated into 'business as usual' within their HEI beyond the DBAA-funded period.
- g. Suitability of the EoI overall in terms of geographical location of the HEI(s) involved, type and/or size of HEI(s) and/or discipline-focus to ensure that the DBAA initiative trials take place across as diverse a range of contexts as possible.

7. SUPPORT FOR APPLICANTS

We will provide information about the call for partners at a webinar on 31st March 2026 and a recording of that session will be available via our website. We will also host two open Q&A sessions to answer questions and discuss proposed approaches. All supporting documents will be available on our website, with further guidance offered in due course to those whose EoIs have been accepted to progress to the full proposal stage. This will include guidance on organising, recruiting to and running initiatives, to optimise success and outcomes.

We will also provide opportunities for awardees to come together as a community of practice, to develop facilitation skills and share their experiences of organising and trialling the initiatives. We also aim to bring together trial partners and project stakeholders at an event in London in Autumn 2026.

8. PAYMENTS & LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Payment will be made to awardee HEIs through purchase order via two instalments: 50% of the total following an invoice at the point of finalisation of contracts, and the remaining 50% of the total one month after the date of the awardee's final initiative. This final instalment invoice will, if necessary, be adjusted to reflect actual spending. All costings are inclusive of VAT.

If invited to submit a full proposal, applicants will be asked to provide contact information for their institution's legal team. A contract will set out the terms of the funding including arrangements around intellectual property and data management.

The agreement will need to be signed by both parties prior to any transfer of funds. Successful awardees should notify their legal contact upon confirmation that their application has been successful, so that they are expecting contact from the University of Exeter.

Awardees must ensure that both the DBAA project and Research England logos are visible on presentations, signage, websites, and printed or online assets related to the initiatives.

9. EVALUATION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Full details will be made available upon the acceptance of full proposals, but applicants submitting an Expression of Interest may wish to be aware of the following.

Awardees overseeing DBAA initiatives will be responsible for collecting participant registrations and consent using their preferred platforms, and for ensuring participants complete the pre- and post-event evaluation surveys. The DBAA team will share the participant consent form, Participant Information Sheet and the links to the participant evaluation surveys. The DBAA team will also share print-ready versions of the consent form, Participant Information Sheet, and pre- and post-event evaluation surveys, for completion by any participants unable to access the online versions.

Awardees will also be responsible for ensuring that facilitator(s) and organiser(s) who are present during the initiative/event(s) complete facilitator/organiser consent forms and evaluation surveys. DBAA will provide links to complete these.

After each event, awardees must ensure that all digital responses to consent and registration forms, **and** scanned copies of any hard-copy consent forms or pre-event surveys, are uploaded to a designated area of the DBAA SharePoint site. Awardees must not publicise outcomes or data from the initiatives, or use them in their own research, without explicit prior consent by the DBAA team at the University of Exeter.

A full description of awardee responsibilities, and file sharing processes, will be provided to those whose full proposals are accepted. Awardees will be required to keep accurate, up-to-date records of receipt and expenditure of the funding. University of Exeter and Research England may request to review these accounts and records and to make copies of them.

Following the completion of the funded initiatives, awardees will be required to prepare a short financial report to confirm expenditure, and this will determine the exact amount of the final payment instalment. A template will be provided, and any unspent funds will need to be returned to the DBAA project at the University of Exeter.

All funded initiatives must comply with the Terms and Conditions of Research England Grants available [here](#).

10. ETHICS

The DBAA initiatives and related data collection approach have been reviewed by the University of Exeter Business School Research Ethics Committee and received a favourable review. The review reference is 10665280.

The Business School Ethics Committee may be contacted by email via the Co-Director, Steven Boyne, S.Boyne@exeter.ac.uk. For any comments or complaints please contact Research Ethics and Governance at cgr-reg@exeter.ac.uk.

Any applicants whose Expressions of Interest are taken forward to the full proposal stage will need to check with their own institution's research ethics team about whether they require any additional ethics approval internally.