Application process for UKAN+

Funding of explorative (pilot) studies, knowledge transfer (KT) and larger networking activities

1. Background

The original aim of UKAN+ was set in 2019 to create strategic connections between the Acoustics Challenges (Acoustics Research Priorities) and 4 Grand Challenges (Clean Growth; Healthy Ageing, Future of Mobility; and AI and Data). It was proposed to tackle these challenges, through pilot and Knowledge Transfer (KT) studies, which would lead to large-scale grant proposals for research projects involving the wider community. UKAN+ promised to support ongoing world-class research in acoustics and to initiate new research, strategically important to the UK.

In March 2021 the government revisited its Industry Strategy providing The UK Acoustics Network with the flexibility to align our Research Priorities with broader EPSRC research Themes rather than with the 4 Grand Challenges related to the abandoned Industry Strategy. Through consultation within the UKAN+ investigators team, it was agreed that these Themes should be: (i) Well-being; (ii) Manufacturing and Transport; (iii) Sustainability (Net-Zero); (iv) AI.

The Acoustic Research Priorities are a result of collaborative work between the 16 UKAN+ Special Interest Groups, UKAN+ investigator team and the wider UKAN+ community. Applicants should make use of the Acoustic Research Priorities to guide their applications.

2. Aim of scheme

The EPSRC award to UKAN+ will be cascaded to researchers across the acoustic communities over a period of three years. The award is to provide funding to address the Acoustics Research Priorities which UKAN+ has identified. The range of interests of members within the world of acoustics provides a productive environment for cross-fertilisation of ideas and initiatives. Interdisciplinary and collaborative proposals are strongly welcomed but they should address key challenges highlighted in the *UKAN+ Acoustic Priorities document.* Ultimately, the best projects will be those which are 'high risk, high reward' and have potential as the basis or act as a springboard for new, exciting translational research with real industrial application, societal potential and which can lead to large-scale proposals for follow-on research funding. The calls should utilise the Acoustics Research Priorities. UKAN+ will not fund research for which funding is available from other sources or which is a direct continuation of an existing research project.

3. Application Process

Figure 1 explains graphically the application process for pilot and KT. Application for these calls is only through the UKAN+ webpage. All application form templates can be downloaded for reference but must be an **online application**.

To support individuals with applying to Funding Call 3, UKAN+ are exploring a number of avenues. The first we are pleased to announce is the collaboration with Dr Elaine Massung and Professor Dan Allwood. Proposal Launchpad is a five-session programme to help ECRs learn how to approach idea generation.

The third call will again run a workshop with The Collaborative. These informal events are designed to build research communities to develop new, innovative ideas for proposals and opportunities to deliver a step change in world-class research. They will aid proposals to align with the agreed acoustic priorities and project proposal assessment criteria. The workshop calls will be limited in attendee numbers to enable collaborative working. Prospective attendees will complete an application form available on the UKAN+ website. In the event of over subscription. We will blind assess applications with a view to eliminating unconscious bias by removing personal identifiers when issued to the assessment panel.

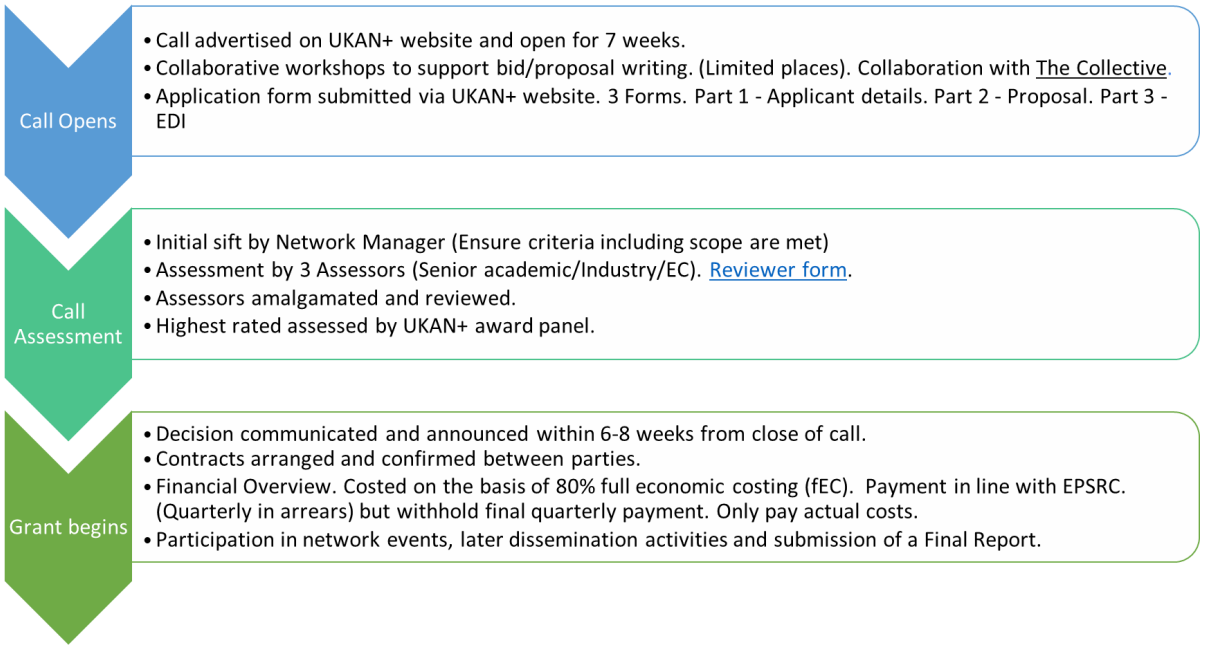

Figure 1. The timeline for application process.

Activity	**Time**	**Dates for Call 2**
Collaborative Workshops	½ day events	tba
Call launch		14th September 2023
Deadline for submissions/Call closes	Call open 7 weeks	9th November 2022
Successful proposals announced and summary feedback communicated		December 2023
Projects begin (no later than)	6 months from announcement	May 2024

4. Duration and scope

Project proposal duration must be no longer than 6 months. The choice of the project duration needs careful justification to meet the funding criteria outlined below. In the case of an explorative (pilot) study grant, a main criterion will be the capability of the investigator(s) to develop their pilot study idea into competitive full-scale proposals in an area which is new to the UK or strategically important. In the case of knowledge transfer grant applications, a main criterion is a strong financial

commitment from the non-academic partner and clear need for the partner to make use of underpinning science. Please ensure you are able to carry out your project as planned with the specified timeframes as no extensions will be granted. The UKAN+ funding encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and the engagement of academic and non-academic partners.

There are three core streams of activity that are available to funding, they are:

Pilot/Explorative:

Pilot project is a standalone, short-term, small-scale project designed to prove the viability of a project idea.

Key criteria for funding a pilot/explorative research project idea will be:

I. capability of the investigator(s) to develop their idea into competitive full-scale proposals to initiate research areas which are new to the UK or strategically important;
II. quality, novelty, risk and adventure of the proposed research idea;
III. potential to make significant impact in a particular Acoustics Priority area;

Knowledge transfer (KT):

Knowledge transfer is a process that allows research results, discoveries, scientific findings, intellectual property (IP), technology, data and knowhow to flow between different stakeholders. The most commonly, the term refers to the transfer of such assets from universities and research institutions to industry or governmental institutions, thereby generating economic value and industry development. The UKAN+ KT is part-funded by the UKAN+ grant.

Key criteria for funding KT projects are:

I. strong financial commitment from the non-academic partner (seeking 50% fEC contribution, or provide justification if the percentage is lower);
II. substantial research element and potential for step-change;
III. strategic relevance to the non-academic partner and clear potential for non-academic impact.

Applicants for KT projects must demonstrate that their ideas would be difficult to get funded by other mechanisms such as that offered by InnovateUK or through wholly private investment.

Our total funding for this call is £200,000 and we want to fund as many high-quality applications as possible. The indicated maximum amounts from UKAN+ below should be viewed as maximum amounts, and not as targets.

As the grant holder, the University of Sheffield is responsible for allocating funding to successful proposals and will reimburse subcontracting organisations at 80% full economic costing (fEC). Academic institutions will be required to itemise bills based on 100% fEC and then invoice at 80% fEC. Payment will be made in line with EPSRC rules i.e. quarterly in arrears but withhold final quarterly payment until the final report is received. Only actual cost will be paid. Additional financial support to top up these amounts are welcomed.

Grant name	Maximum Value	80% fEC	Duration
Pilot/explorative projects (PEP)	£60,000	£48,000	6 months
Knowledge transfer project (KT)	£30,000	£24,000	6 months

Networking Events:

In addition, UKAN+ have the remit to fund networking projects such as conferences, symposia, advocacy activities and outreach.

Key criteria:

I. the ability to promote knowledge transfer between SIGs;
II. the ability to facilitate knowledge transfer to a wider community in the UK and overseas;
III. the ability to develop new long-term collaborations leading to competitive full-scale research grants;

If you are looking to host a networking event/project please submit a proposal (A self prepared document, no longer than 2 sides of A4/1000 words) providing details of the event, including how this will meet UKAN+ objectives and funding requirements to info@acoustics.ac.uk. The award if for a maximum of £10K and 1 week duration. Funding provided by UKAN+ is a maximum of £8k as these awards are at 80% FEC. Submissions can be made throughout the year, but close September 2024 and the event must have taken place by 1 February 2025.

In line with the agreed protocol of UKAN+ management, the decision to award will be made by Kirill Horoshenkov Director of UKAN+ and Richard Craster Deputy Director of UKAN+.

5. Eligibility

Anyone in the UK who is eligible to bid for a full scale UKRI grant is also eligible to apply for the UKAN+ calls. We strongly encourage applications from early career researchers who do not have a long track record of funding. We encourage applications led by early career academics, research fellows and other researchers who are eligible for particular roles in UKRI-funded projects (e.g. as a named researcher) to apply for these grants. PhD students and PDRAs who wish to submit a proposal, but are ineligible to lead on an UKRI grant are encouraged to engage with their academic line managers who are eligible to lead such a grant. Named UKAN+ investigators will not be eligible to bid for this funding.

Proposals are welcome from public, private and third sector organisations and international partners, provided there is a UK-based academic as lead applicant and project will contribute to the health of UK acoustics research and/or industry. Applications may come from individuals or groups and be a mix of industry and academia, but must have a single lead academic contact, as the funds are awarded to a single academic partner. The applicant (PI) must take responsibility for directing the grant, and his/her employing institution must also agree to administer the grant.

For information on the eligibility of organisations and individuals to receive EPSRC funding, see Funding guide - EPSRC website. A list of eligible organisations to apply to EPSRC is provided at: Check if you are eligible for research and innovation funding. Although interdisciplinary projects are

encouraged, e.g. those projects which may struggle through a normal UKRI grant peer review responsive mode process, at least 50% of the proposed research idea(s) must fall within the EPSRC remit.

6. Resources

Projects should be costed as for a standard UKRI proposal. The costing table should include full economic costs at 100% and the request from the UKAN Plus Network at 80% fEC. Resources can be requested for researcher and technician time, travel, subsistence, consumables and facilities. The Network will not fund new equipment. Subcontracting is allowed but Research Organisations must ensure that expenditure on sub-contracts are subject to robust controls to ensure value for money and propriety. All costs should be fully documented/invoiced and available to UKRI if required.

The administration of the scheme is undertaken solely by the UK Acoustics Network with all aspects of the application process, assessment process and award process managed by the University of Sheffield.

7. Contract and project start date

The contract that all awards will be made on these terms can be found here. The above terms are not subject to amendment. Prior to application please seek preliminary financial and contractual approval from your University. The contract must be signed and returned within 6 months to indicate acceptance of the award.

The project must start within 6 months from the award letter date. Applicants are strongly encouraged to make use of their existing researchers (e.g. PDRAs or PhDs) to start the proposed work within a reasonable time frame. The appointment process for new research staff can take a long time and considerably delay the start of the project. UKAN+ reserves the right to withdraw funding if the appointment process is not completed within 6 months from the award letter date.

8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) matters

Diversity enriches the field of acoustics and the network is committed to our committees, membership and funded projects being inclusive and diverse, and to supporting activities to making acoustics more accessible to everyone.

Over the duration of the project we will look to implement interventions across strategies, policies and processes. As part of our commitment to being an inclusive and diverse network we are looking at ways of more effectively mainstreaming equality and diversity among all projects and participants, at all stages of the bid process.

We have incorporated a question on the submission form requiring proposals applying for funding to provide information about how EDI will be taken into account. The answer will also form part of the marking scheme.

To assist us in monitoring and evaluating the delivery of our vision we are requesting that PIs complete the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (optional and anonymous) monitoring form. All named participants of successful projects will be asked to complete an (optional and anonymous) EDI monitoring form. This applicant EDI data will be collated to produce reports on participation and success rates by gender, race/ethnicity, and disability status, that we will use to regulate and improve processes and strategies to enhance and support the diversity of our network.

We will be blind assessing applications at the first round; removing any personal information from the application with a view to eliminating unconscious bias by removing personal identifiers.

9. Expectations

- In line with the EPSRC, UKAN+ expects that EDI is embedded at all levels and in all aspects of research practice and funding policy.
- The sustainability of the research activities both during and after the grant should be considered.
- Successful applicants will be expected to participate in network events, later dissemination activities and will be required to submit a Final Report on the work carried out and the resources used, which must be countersigned by the collaborator in the case of a cross-disciplinary award. The Final Report will be passed to the UKAN+ leadership to be signed off prior to final quarter funds being released. Reports will be open for peer review via the UKAN+ website and newsletters.
- Reference to UKAN+, EPSRC and UKRI funding on all online or printed materials related to activities funded by the grant.
- Provide information and updates for the project webpage on the UKAN+ website when requested.
- Development and execution of an engagement strategy with potential users of the research.

10. Assessment Process

The Review process will commence with an initial sift by the Network Manager to ensure applications are consistent with the aims and objectives of the Network.

Applications will then be sent to three reviewers, sought from a pool of potential reviewers which may include a senior academic, early career and non-academic UKAN+ member. Applications will be issued with personal identifiers removed, ensuring a blind assessment process. Reviewers are required to treat proposals in confidence.

Reviewers will be expected to adhere to the highest standards of scientific integrity as laid down EPSRC peer review process and guidance for reviewers can be found at:

https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-reviewers/peer-reviews/

The marks from the reviewers will be assessed and amalgamated. The highest awarded applications will then be considered by an awards panel.

If the UKAN+ reviewers consider a high number of pilot/explorative project applications meet the requirements UKAN+ selection process, successful applicants will be invited to pitch to a multidisciplinary panel.

We aim to respond to applications within 6-8 weeks of submission. Feedback is not normally returned to the applicant. Reapplications are exceptionally permitted where a bid of merit is identified by the Assessment Panel, feedback may be given, along with an invitation to resubmit to the next call in the light of that feedback. This offer is strictly limited to one reapplication.

11. Assessment Criteria

Selection and funding of top-class pilot research is a key responsibility for UKAN+. Apart from research quality, key criteria for funding a pilot project idea will be:

I. the capability of the investigator(s) to develop these ideas into competitive full-scale proposals for the UKRI;
II. the relation of these ideas to the UKAN+ Acoustic Priorities;
III. scientific merit to develop or maintain an international lead in this area of research.

Reviewers

Following the closing date, an initial sift will be undertaken by the Network Manager to ensure that criteria, including correct financial details, are met. All viable proposals will then be issued to three assessors. They will be required to complete the Reviewer Form. The top tier of applications are then sent to the award panel who review and award the best proposals.

To support UKAN+ reviewers, a course will be run in October 2023 and any prospective review will be welcome to register their interest.

If you have any questions regarding this call for proposals, please contact The UK Acoustics Network Plus Manager, Zoë Hunter email: z.hunter@acoustics.ac.uk