General Questions

Who is eligible for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover?

BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover is open to all UK researchers and technicians from any discipline. This includes any research staff or technical research staff member who receives their salary or stipend from an eligible university, PSRE, research institute or organisation (including, but not limited to, Ph.D., technician*, PDRA, fellowship, and group leader positions).

*Building on the Technician Commitment UKRI Action Plan and the UKRI people and teams action plan, we particularly encourage applications from research technical professionals (RTPs) as entrepreneurial lead.

However, we are actively seeking applications from:

- Universities that have not previously participated in the 3-month ICURe programme.
- Universities that do not receive HEIF funding.
- Teams led by early career researchers and/or principal investigators who are from under-represented groups, including women, people of colour, those living with disabilities, and those from the LGBTQI+ communities.
- Teams from regional Universities.
- Approved public sector research enterprises (PSREs).

I'm a PhD student; can I apply to BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover?

Yes, you are eligible for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover if you have a contract of employment with the university or PSRE. However, it is recommended that you apply towards the end of your PhD as it enables you to move forward into ICURe Explore if you are interested without restrictions.

I am a non-UK national; can I participate in BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover?

Yes, provided you have the necessary visas allowing you to travel and work in the UK.

Do I require a team for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover?

You don't require a team to participate in BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover. However, it is recommended that you are aware of who your Technology Transfer Officer (TTO) is and inform your PSA (Principal Scientific Advisor) or Senior Researcher.

Can we apply for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover if the Entrepreneurial Lead/ applicant is from another university?

This is allowed for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover, but there would need to be an agreement between both universities' TTOs and research groups.

Does the idea have to be directly related to the research I am doing?

Yes, and the participation must be supported by your research group.

Can an application include more than one Entrepreneurial Lead for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover?

For BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover, only one researcher can apply per research group.

What's the time commitment required for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover if I am successful?

BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover is a 10-week (plus 3 additional weeks to accommodate the Christmas break), part time programme and will be delivered online between 17/10/25 and 15/01/26.

What is the scope for the BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover?

Engineering Biology must be the primary, underpinning technology for the product, process, or service being carried forward for market exploration.

UKRI defines engineering biology as the application of rigorous engineering principles to the design and fabrication of biological components and systems, from modifications of natural systems to new forms of artificial biology.

Please see below an illustrative list of example inclusions and exclusions to demonstrate the boundaries of the scope for this opportunity. Please note this list is not exhaustive.

Examples of Inclusions

- Orthogonal biosystems: proposals in engineering cells and organisms which include systems or parts not found in nature to impart new capacities or chemistry
- Regulatory circuits: proposals designing and inserting well-characterised circuits or networks, to generate new functions or responses in cells and organisms
- Protocells: proposals in bottom-up chemical design approaches to produce synthetic or semi-synthetic cells and compartments
- Metabolic engineering: proposals involving using complex modifications informed by predictive models of biosynthetic pathways to allow or enhance production of useful products
- Minimal genomes: proposals involving the understanding of the minimal number of parts (genes) needed for life, to serve as a chassis for engineering minimal cell factories for new functions
- Bio nanoscience: proposals that utilise and exploit synthetic molecular nano machines based on cellular systems

Examples of Exclusions

- Applications that focus on the engineering of a system in which biology is embedded, rather than engineering the biological system itself. *For example, engineering the scaffold in tissue engineering, while not engineering the biological component*
- Applications that are learning from biology, rather than engineering the biological system. *For example, design of a purely physical or chemical mechanical construct, taking inspiration from biological systems, rather than engineering an artificial or modified biological system*
- Applications focused on the development of an output of pre-existing engineering biology, with no tangible engineering biology being conducted. *For example, an experiment using a metabolite of a well-established engineered chassis as an input to a chemical process, with no demonstrable element of engineering biology conducted by the applicants.*
    - However, if you are taking pre-existing engineering biology in a new context, such as a novel chemical production using an existing engineered chassis, then you would be eligible for BBSRC EngBio ICURe.
- Applications based on medical/clinical devices and therapeutics being developed solely for a specific end-point clinical utility (including diagnostics). *For example, developing a technology specifically for diagnosing or treating a specific disease.*
    - However, if you also aim to investigate other market opportunities for this technology outside of the health sector, for example for livestock, or if this technology can be pivoted and used as a platform technology, then you would be eligible for this BBSRC EngBio ICURe.

Applicants are strongly advised to contact us if they are unsure whether their application would fit the scope of this call.

IP- related Questions

Would intellectual property (IP) that is being developed between a university/PSRE and a company be eligible?

Yes, if the new IP is wholly owned by the University/PSRE and not in the business environment.

Am I eligible for BBSRC EngBio ICURe Discover if I own the IP or if it is shared with a university /research organisation?

Yes, but only with the full support of the host University's TTO and research team. Otherwise, you will need to demonstrate that you have an appropriate team to support the commercialisation process.

Are there any implications for IP ownership and revenue distribution if the academic takes part?

The ICURe programme does not take any equity or revenue from any teams or companies. It is a fully paid-for programme funded by Innovate UK to help UK researchers explore the commercial potential and application of their research.

What happens if my Senior Researcher owns all the IP?

If the Senior Researcher is employed by the University, the IP is owned by the University. Hence, it is recommended that your TTO is aware that you are applying to ICURe programmes.

In exceptional cases, some academics may own their own IP. Please reach out to us to discuss this further.