

EMERGE RehabTech Collaboration Fund: Mobility Grants Round 1

Opportunity status: Open

Funder: UKRI via EMERGE RehabTech

Funding type: Grant

Award range: up to £20,000

Publication date: 28 April 2026

Opening date: 28 April 2026

Submission deadline: 16 July 2026

EMERGE RehabTech funds activities that deliver impact through advances in rehabilitation technologies (rehabtech) by improving health outcomes, promoting wellbeing, and enhancing quality of life for individuals and communities, with a focus on supporting the growth of the East Midlands rehabtech economy.

All projects we fund must address at least one of three key challenges for the rehabtech pipeline in the East Midlands:

- Widening health inequalities within the East Midlands
- Engaging at-risk people, groups and communities who typically do not engage with rehabilitation programmes and opportunities
- Disconnect between rehab research infrastructure and businesses in the region

Apply for funding through the Collaboration Fund for Mobility Grants that enable engagement, relationship building, and knowledge exchange (KE) via flexible, bidirectional placements. Mobility Grants aim to facilitate collaborations that accelerate translation of research towards commercialisation and clinical deployment, delivering impact for communities in the East Midlands and beyond.

We will fund two types of placement through this funding call:

1) Inward Mobility

Enable researchers at EMERGE RehabTech consortium universities to host academic and non-academic collaborators. Inward placements facilitate access to specific expertise, knowledge and problem-solving skills that progresses rehabtech innovations.

2) Outward Mobility

Enable researchers at our consortium universities to visit collaborating organisations, both within and outside the East Midlands. Outward placements will facilitate knowledge transfer with partners, provide opportunities to acquire new skills and access state-of-the-art facilities, and cultivate new and ongoing collaborations that boost development of novel rehabtech.

Mobility Grants can start from 1 Nov 2026 and last up to 3 months. Up to £20,000 is available.

Who can apply

Round 1 of the EMERGE RehabTech Collaboration Fund: Mobility Grants is only open to individuals from Nottingham Trent University, the University of Nottingham, Loughborough University, or the University of Derby. For the avoidance of doubt, the lead applicant must be an individual from one of the four consortium universities for both Inward and Outward placements. We welcome and encourage the inclusion of collaborators outside of the consortium, but projects must be led by an individual based at the consortium universities.

Applicants must be resident and eligible to work in the UK at the time of the award. Standard UKRI individual eligibility criteria will apply. Applicants must be academic employees – lecturer or equivalent – at one of the four consortium universities and must be resident in the UK.

Principal investigators should normally hold a permanent post, but fixed-term employees may be eligible provided the host research organisation is prepared to give the individual all the support expected for a permanent employee. The term of employment of a fixed-term employee must extend beyond the duration of the proposed placement supported by a Mobility Grant.

[Read the guidance on individual eligibility](#)

Across all our funding mechanisms, EMERGE RehabTech is particularly interested in supporting under-represented groups of researchers and research stakeholders/end-users, and will actively look to fund projects that aim to address urgent societal needs and social disparities identified through proactive Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE).

We encourage researchers from all disciplines that are supported by UKRI to apply and welcome interdisciplinary collaborations that accelerate the development, delivery, and uptake of new RehabTech. Mobility Grant proposals should be within Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) remit, but do not need to directly link to prior EPSRC funding.

Please note, successful applicants will be expected to engage with the wider EMERGE RehabTech programme.

What we are looking for

Scope

Mobility Grants will support short, agile projects that establish and consolidate resilient, collaborative relationships and generate impact by helping to accelerate the translation of novel rehabtech, moving beyond the lab and into real-world health, care, or commercial settings.

We are interested in supporting a range of activities through this funding call that build relationships with partners from other universities and research institutions, industry, civic bodies and regulators, and a broad range of health care settings. Our intention is for Mobility Grants to provide resources that create opportunities for KE within and between sectors, allowing participants to benefit from fresh perspectives as they develop and expand their rehabtech ideas, concepts and prototypes. Mobility Grants will provide space to acquire new skills, share essential knowledge and access facilities that support translation of rehabtech.

We welcome applications that:

- Pilot and test innovative and creative approaches to addressing key challenges for the rehabtech pipeline in the East Midlands: (1) widening health inequalities; (2) difficulties engaging people and communities who typically do not engage with rehab services; and/or (3) the disconnect between rehab research infrastructure and businesses in the region.

- Develop rehabtech at different stages of maturity, with no requirement for projects to meet set criteria around Technology Readiness Level (TRL). However, projects must build on existing research with demonstrable, achievable outputs in the timeframe, and clearly articulate a plan for achieving impact that the Mobility Grant will support.
- Propose activities designed to improve engagement between university research and relevant local, regional, and national policymakers, civic actors, and decision makers, to create a rehabtech policy pipeline and/or support evidenced-based policymaking to address rehabilitation challenges.
- Mobilise partners, knowledge, and key actors to co-create a credible and ambitious funding application in a relevant area.

We anticipate that the nature of expected impact will vary from project to project. It may primarily be through contributing to the growth of the East Midlands' MedTech economy by progressing rehabtech solutions toward commercialisation and/or viable products and services, bringing new products to market, commercial adoption of new rehabtech, increased turnover, improved cost-effectiveness, or jobs creation. Alternatively, impact might be achieved through focussing on improving health outcomes and enhancing patient/user experience, promoting wellbeing, changes to clinical/public health guidelines or policy, and enhancing quality of life for individuals and communities.

Please note, we will not fund new fundamental research. This is outside the scope of EMERGE RehabTech.

Mobility grants must focus on translational or applied activities that build upon existing research to progress technologies toward real-world use, such as refining prototypes, conducting user studies, or progressing commercialisation or clinical pathways.

All proposals submitted will be assessed equally irrespective of the type(s) of impact described. For further details, please see the assessment criteria. Across all EMERGE RehabTech funding mechanisms, we will fund a balanced portfolio of projects in terms of impact generated and challenges addressed.

Inward Mobility

These placements will enable researchers at EMERGE RehabTech consortium universities – Nottingham Trent University, the University of Nottingham, Loughborough University, and the University of Derby – to host visiting academic and non-academic collaborators, such as clinicians, industrialists, innovation specialists or policymakers, within their teams.

Inward placements should bring in specific expertise, knowledge and problem-solving skills on a short-term basis to build and reinforce collaborative partnerships that progress emerging rehabtech innovations towards commercialisation and/or clinical, real-world deployment.

Outward Mobility

These placements will enable researchers at our consortium universities to visit collaborating organisations, both within and outside the East Midlands. There are no restrictions on the location of host organisations, provided there is a clearly articulated benefit to the East Midlands, and all due diligence and requirements under Trusted Research are adequately addressed.

Outward placements will facilitate knowledge transfer with partners, provide opportunities to acquire new skills and access state-of-the-art facilities, and cultivate new and ongoing collaborations that aid development of novel rehabtech.

Host organisations might include:

- Companies and enterprises that provide opportunities to explore commercial priorities, market drivers, health economics, and manufacturing constraints for novel rehabtech
- Innovation teams at a range of organisations who can provide expertise around progressing rehabtech development
- Health and social care providers in both the public and private sectors to develop understanding around clinical requirements
- Other organisations such as civic bodies, think tanks or regulators

Mobility Grants must be led by an eligible researcher at one of the consortium universities.

Ineligible activities

Owing to the nature of our underlying funding, we are unable to support impact activities that should be supported through other standard routes, e.g. impact activities costed as part of basic research proposals or CDTs, contributions to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, or broader activities and institutional culture change relating to impact. We are also unable to fund undergraduate or postgraduate activities or training, or core PhD training including tuition or bench fees. This funding cannot be used to support costs relating to Intellectual Property (IP) protection including but not limited to registering, maintaining, or supporting patents or property rights.

Responsible Innovation

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is at the heart of our plans for EMERGE RehabTech. We expect our projects to anticipate and reflect on how research and innovation might affect people and societies in the future, either through intended or unintended outcomes.

We are looking to fund projects that dedicate time and effort to understanding the value of their rehabtech innovation to ensure they maximise benefits and avoid harms, and to build on this throughout the life of their project, for example through carefully constructed PPIE activities. We welcome the inclusion of resource requests for activities that promote and instil responsible research and innovation. We encourage applicants to carefully consider how to weave PPIE into their project plans to maximise engagement without overloading PPIE groups.

Intellectual Property

The responsibility for negotiating ownership and use of arising IP from an EMERGE RehabTech project resides with the award recipient's university, in consultation with the project team.

Where necessary for multi-partner projects, collaboration agreements must be in place prior to projects starting to ensure appropriate provisions are in place for managing arising IP. Where projects involve partnership-building or collaborative working that lies outside the scope of a formal collaboration agreement, the external collaborator should have sight of the application, workplan and budget in advance of submission.

All commercialisation projects funded by EMERGE should be developed in consultation with the awardee's institutional IP and Commercialisation team.

In line with the EPSRC research data policy framework, our expectation is that EMERGE projects will commit to making data open access wherever possible, subject to necessary restrictions to protect privacy, confidentiality, or IP.

What we will fund

Applicants are encouraged to contact the EMERGE RehabTech Management Team to discuss the suitability of their Mobility Grant proposal, if unsure.

Funding available

In total, up to £100,000 funding is available for Round 1 of the EMERGE RehabTech Collaboration Fund: Mobility Grants.

Due to the nature of our underlying funding, grants will only cover Directly Incurred costs associated with the project. Eligible Directly Incurred costs will be funded at 100%. We will not cover Directly Allocated Staff costs, Estate costs or Indirect costs.

Funding can be used to support any directly incurred (DI) costs, such as staff time including for project management and commercialisation support, consumables and specialist services required for developing commercialisation plans, or travel.

Please note, equipment over £10,000 in value (including VAT) is not available through this call.

Receiving funding for a Mobility Grant does not preclude applicants from applying to other EMERGE RehabTech funding streams, e.g. future rounds of the Impact Acceleration Fund, nor is it a precursor should applicants choose to submit further proposals for funding.

Inward Mobility

Inward Mobility placements can start from 1 Nov 2026 and last up to 3 months on a full-time basis.

Up to £20,000 is available to support Directly Incurred costs associated with the placement. Applicants are strongly advised to consult their Research Office on the practicalities of resourcing for Mobility Grants, prior to applying.

Salary costs for visiting collaborators can be met, if they are employed by an institution eligible to receive UKRI funding, and their salary costs are Directly Incurred. Due to the short-term nature of these projects, we would not expect Mobility Grants to warrant recruitment of new staff, but the funding might, for example, be used to cover salary costs for a visiting postdoctoral researcher during their placement as part of their existing, substantive employment.

As a rule, we do not expect to meet salary costs for individuals employed by organisations that are ineligible to receive EPSRC funding. Applicants are encouraged to discuss eligibility with their Research Office and contact the EMERGE Management Team if unsure.

Proposals can include international collaborators undertaking placements at a consortium university. Resources can be requested for travel, accommodation and subsistence for the collaborator while in the UK. We cannot fund salary costs for international visiting researchers.

The academic lead and visiting collaborator must discuss arrangements for the placement with their respective local HR and administrative teams to ensure necessary provisions can be made and approvals in place to host the visiting collaborator at the consortium university, e.g. managing existing workload, essential insurance, or access to buildings and IT systems, and that any potential barriers are therefore identified early, with plans for mitigation. We encourage applicants to articulate any such risks and mitigation strategies in their proposals and will ask reviewers to note this during assessment.

Outward Mobility

Outward Mobility placements can also start from 1 Nov 2026 and last up to 3 months on a full-time basis. We will consider proposals to undertake the visit on a part-time basis when

appropriately justified and compatible with the proposed activities supported by the Mobility Grant.

Up to £20,000 is available to support Directly Incurred costs associated with the placement, including salary costs (where Directly Incurred), travel and subsistence, and reasonable project consumables costs. We would not normally expect Mobility Grants to warrant recruitment of new staff.

Applicants are strongly advised to consult their Research Office on resourcing for Mobility Grants and the practicalities around arrangements as a visiting researcher at the host organisation. The relevant approvals, e.g., from line managers and researchers' Heads of Department should be sought at the point of applying.

Ineligible costs

Ineligible costs for the Collaboration Fund include Directly Allocated Investigator costs and other Directly Allocated costs including Estates, Indirect costs, items of equipment over £10,000 in value (including VAT), undergraduate or postgraduate costs including stipend, training, tuition or bench fees, and any costs relating to Intellectual Property protection, e.g. to register, to maintain, or to support patents or property rights.

How to apply

Applicants should ensure they are aware of, and comply with, any internal institutional deadlines that may be in place. The lead applicant is responsible for completing the application process.

Submitting a proposal

Round 1 of the Collaboration Fund: Mobility Grants will open on 28 April 2026.

The deadline for submitting your proposal is 16 July 2026 16:00 BST.

Prior to applying, applicants are required to complete the short Intention to Submit form, available here: [Intention to Submit form](#).

A submission pro forma template and further instructions will be sent to applicants once the Intention to Submit form has been completed. All sections of this template should be completed, and it should be submitted as a single PDF, including the required Letters of Support.

Letters of support

Applicants should provide a letter of support from the host organisation involved in delivering their proposed placement.

Inward Mobility

Required:

- 1) A letter should be provided from the relevant Head of Department at the consortium university that will host the incoming visiting collaborator. This letter should confirm support for the proposed placement and confirm that the visiting collaborator will be granted access status to university systems and buildings, and that other necessary arrangements will be made in time for the outset of the placement. Furthermore, this letter should describe any arrangements made to manage background and arising IP.

- 2) A second letter of support from the collaborator's employer should confirm arrangements for the placement and detail any in-kind contributions to the project, such as covering salary costs for the collaborator during the placement.

Optional: Letters of support from additional project partners may also be included where they substantiate other partner involvement and add value to the application, e.g. by detailing how a project will generate impact that benefits the consortium and East Midlands communities.

Outward Mobility

Required:

- 1) A letter should be provided from the organisation hosting the consortium researcher. This letter should confirm support for the proposed placement and confirm that the visiting researcher will be granted access to relevant systems, facilities and buildings, and that other necessary arrangements will be made in time for the outset of the placement. The letter should also confirm the primary contact at the host organisation who will coordinate the placement on behalf of the consortium researcher.
- 2) A second letter of support should be provided from the consortium researcher's Head of Department confirming they are supportive of the placement and describing any arrangements made to manage background and arising IP.

Optional: Letters of support from additional project partners may also be included where they substantiate other partner involvement and add value to the application, e.g. by detailing how a project will generate impact that benefits the consortium and East Midlands communities.

How we will assess your application

EMERGE RehabTech reserves the right not to fund a project if ethical concerns are raised by reviewers or panel members. Awards are conditional upon acceptance of the Terms and Conditions, which will be set out in the Award Letter.

Mobility Grant proposals will be evaluated by a panel of experts according to the Assessment Criteria for the call, considering suitability of the candidate, the host organisation, and the proposed project to the scheme, and the potential for impact that will benefit East Midlands communities and strengthen capacity for rehabtech innovation in the region.

Funding decisions are made based on a rank ordered list, considering the nature of projects and a balance across domains to ensure complementarity with our existing portfolio of funded projects.

Contact details

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process. Any queries regarding the call or submission of proposals should be directed to the EMERGE RehabTech team: EMERGErehabtech@ntu.ac.uk

Assessment Criteria

Vision

- Excellent quality, with clearly articulated importance of the rehabtech innovation
- Builds on an identified base of relevant high-quality research
- Has the potential to enhance impact and drive growth in the region
- Articulates how developing the collaboration through a Mobility Grant will contribute to addressing challenges faced in the region in terms of widening health inequalities and difficulties engaging at-risk people, groups and communities with rehabilitation services
- Clearly fits the remit for a Mobility Grant, focuses on developing collaborations and KE

Approach

- Realistic and achievable objectives
- Promotes KE within and beyond the cluster
- Builds collaborative relationships that develop capabilities, skills and capacity to generate impact in the East Midlands
- Evidence of co-creation with collaborating organisations
- Appropriate strategy to access and protect existing and arising intellectual property
- Costs are appropriate and well justified, and optimised to achieve intended outcomes

Applicant and host organisation

- Applicant has appropriate experience (relative to career stage) to deliver the work
- Suitable partners with clear roles in the project
- Host organisation will provide all necessary support to enable the project and successfully develop the collaborative relationship

Responsible stakeholder engagement

- Relevant responsible research and innovation (RRI) and ethical considerations evaluated
- Relevance of the project to identified stakeholders and sectors
- Planned Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE), where appropriate
- Includes activities to target new business collaborations within the region

Additional info

Background

Rehabtech encompasses tools, equipment, and digital solutions designed to support people in recovering, maintaining, or improving physical, cognitive, or functional abilities following injury, illness, surgery, or age-related decline. They include devices and systems such as mobility aids, therapeutic equipment, assistive technologies, remote monitoring tools, digital platforms, and robotics. Rehabtech accelerates recovery, reduces disability, and enhances independence, ensuring safe and effective therapy, and empowering people to manage their health and daily activities.

As people live longer and chronic health conditions increase, rehabtech demand is soaring; developing new approaches that improve health outcomes and are more efficient and cost effective is essential.

We define **rehabilitation** as person-centred approaches that support individuals to recover, maintain, or improve physical, cognitive, or emotional function following serious injury, illness, surgery, or age-related decline. It aims to help people regain independence, enhance quality of life, and participate fully in daily activities through coordinated therapies, support services, and adaptive strategies.

Also in scope for EMERGE RehabTech is **prehabilitation**, which includes proactive approaches to prepare for upcoming medical treatments, surgery, or health challenges by optimising physical, psychological, and nutritional wellbeing. The aim is to build resilience and enhance recovery outcomes through tailored interventions such as exercise, education, lifestyle changes, and emotional support, improving both short- and long-term health and independence.

The East Midlands is at the forefront of rehabilitation and associated technologies, establishing a thriving ecosystem of world-class facilities, networks, and centres, and recognised at a national level by the Government's £105M investment in the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC). In parallel, economic decline in the region is causing widening health inequalities, with more people living in income-deprived areas and with higher rates of preventable disease, e.g. heart disease, stroke, and COPD, in East Midlands cities compared with the UK average. In the East Midlands, 18.6% of the population have a limiting long-term illness or disability, compared to 17.6% in England.

EMERGE RehabTech is a UKRI-funded Place-Based Impact Accelerator. The work we fund will deliver impact for communities in the East Midlands, and beyond, through advances in rehabtech. We will consider rehabtech in the broadest sense; we want to fund ambitious projects that deliver tangible, quantifiable benefits in *any* field of rehabilitation. For instance, this might be (but not limited to):

- advances in sensor technologies and imaging for non-invasive health monitoring
- medical device materials and custom-fit device design
- smart medical wearables (physical and mental health)
- bioengineering
- robotics
- artificial intelligence
- data and synthetic data
- data for therapeutic use and in silico
- digital twin modelling
- biomaterials
- software, including apps for movement and mental cognition
- collaboration with SHAPE disciplines to embed interdisciplinary approaches to complex challenges

We are looking for projects that address the significant known health inequalities in our region, such as people experiencing homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, vulnerable migrants, and those in the justice system. These barriers introduce and exacerbate fear of stigma, lack of identification, limited awareness of the healthcare system, language barriers, and digital exclusion. Innovations that increase access to rehabilitation and recovery services on an equal footing are essential to reduce these inequalities.

What do we mean by 'Impact'?

Impact encompasses real-world applications and influence of research outcomes. It refers to demonstrable effects, changes, or benefits of research that extend beyond academia, influencing the economy, society, culture, public policy, services, health, the environment, or quality of life.

Fundamental research projects primarily focus on generating new knowledge, understanding, or theoretical insights without requiring an immediate pathway to application. Fundamental research is driven by curiosity, discovery, and methodological advancement.

In contrast, an impact project is designed to translate research into real-world benefits, delivering measurable improvements for people, organisations, public services, or the economy. These projects emphasise implementation, scalability, and collaboration with users, practitioners, or industry partners. While fundamental research builds the evidence base, impact projects ensure that this knowledge is applied in ways that create tangible societal, economic, health, environmental, or cultural outcomes.

EMERGE Rehabtech will only fund impact projects. Mobility grants must focus on translational or applied activities that build upon existing research to progress technologies toward real-world use, such as refining prototypes, conducting user studies, or progressing commercialisation or clinical pathways.

The EMERGE RehabTech programme aims to boost and accelerate impact from cutting-edge translational research at the intersection of engineering and physical sciences, and rehabilitation. We are looking to support projects that move rehabtech innovations beyond the lab and into real-world health, care, or commercial settings, through clinical deployment, partnership with industry, or scale-up strategies.

Ethics and regulatory approval

We do not anticipate Mobility Grant proposals will require ethics permissions and regulatory approvals, given the short duration and limited scope of the funding we will provide. However, in the event that these approvals are required then they should be in place before the project begins, and a clear plan for obtaining approvals before project kick-off outlined in the proposal. It is the responsibility of the project team and their host organisation to ensure that the appropriate ethics and regulatory approval has been obtained and that no activities requiring approvals are initiated before it has been granted.

EMERGE RehabTech will not fund a project if it is felt that ethical concerns have been overlooked or are not appropriately accounted for. We reserve the right to pause or terminate projects experiencing significant delays associated with ethical or regulatory approvals where such delays are not outlined and mitigated for in the application for funding.

Conflicts of interest

Applicants are expected to declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest between parties, explaining the nature of these conflicts and providing details of how they will be managed, including in relation to managing IP.

Academic applicants must declare any interests in the commercial owners of background technologies or IP, such as shareholding options or consultancy fees.

Grant additional conditions (GACs)

Please note that due to the nature of this funding, there will be specific monitoring and evaluation requirements. The project team from each funded project will be expected to engage fully with the programme, including participating in EMERGE RehabTech activities and events, alongside fulfilling monitoring and reporting requirements during the lifetime of the project. In addition, within one month of the end of the project, a final report will be submitted to the EMERGE RehabTech Executive Committee highlighting and evidencing the project outcomes and impact.