RISE Impact Competition Fund

£40,000 awards available

Call opens 9am Monday 9th March 2026

Applications close 4pm Monday 13th April 2026

1. Background

The Research Institute for Secure Hardware and Embedded Systems (RISE: www.ukrise.org) is hosted at the Centre for Secure Information Technologies (CSIT), Queen's University Belfast and has been funded since 2017 by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), with the support of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). RISE is one of four cyber security institutes in the UK and aims to be a global hub for research and innovation in hardware and embedded systems security. This call is funded through RISE and is managed by the RISE commercial and innovation team.

2. Purpose of the Competition

The RISE Impact competition seeks to encourage and accelerate the translation and pull through of research relevant to RISE into practical tools and technologies that can be applied to solve real world challenges. The competition seeks to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within the RISE community.

One of the key challenges in commercialising University research through either licensing or the creation of a spin-out, is access to the early-stage funding necessary to take a novel idea to an early stage of proof - thereby validating the commercial potential in order to attract additional investment. To help address this challenge RISE has developed the Impact Competition Fund (ICF) to support projects and individuals to identify potential to deliver economic impact via a licence, open sourcing or creation of a spin-out.

Awards of up to £40,000 will be granted for projects of up to 6mths in duration with the intention of moving research concepts to the next stage of proof, for example, to develop an early prototype, more in-depth market understanding or the generation of additional data to support validation of the idea. The focus of ICF is to provide short-term investment to develop early-stage ideas and outputs from research projects relevant to RISE, where there are some preliminary findings, but no clear route to the marketplace.

The competition has been designed to help you prepare your knowledge and technology for commercialisation. The programme is **not** intended to support the extension of research projects. Applications that simply seek to extend research projects or target outputs of only research papers or future research grant applications are unlikely to be successful. It is designed to help academics demonstrate the potential for economic impact (via either licensing, open sourcing or creation of a spin-out) of a new concept, technology or invention and to highlight the need for, and type of, additional development support that would be required to take the technology further up Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) and closer to the market place.

ALL IP ownership will remain with the University within which the research was conducted. There will be NO dilution of any IP ownership in availing of this funding.

3. Criteria

- This competition will adhere to UKRI's organisation eligibility requirements. We encourage applications form early career researchers and early career academics. Applicants must ensure they are employed by their home institutions for the duration of the project.
- Applications must be based on research that is relevant to the RISE Technical Research Challenges.
- The awards will be up to a maximum of £40,000 for a maximum period of 6 months.
- Two £40,000 awards will be made.
- All submitted budgets should be inclusive of all costs, e.g. overheads etc.
- Applicants must complete the template application form and ensure it is signed correctly.
- Applications must be returned by email to info@rise.org.uk no later than **4pm on 13th April 2026**.
- Projects must be able to start reasonably quickly (no later than 15th July 2026), and all work must be complete before 31st January 2027.
- All successful projects must present project updates at future RISE events between project commencement and 31st March 2027.
- All successful projects must engage on a regular basis with the RISE Commercial and Innovation team. This will be an average of 1.5 hours per month, however, should applicants require or wish to have further support from the team this can be discussed and an innovation plan put in place.
- Applicants should discuss applications with their home institution's IP and Commercialisation Teams prior to submission.

Examples of costs that the fund may support (*this is not an exhaustive list*):
- Staff time (PI/Co-I) to carry out the activities required to deliver the project.
- Experimentation to strengthen the IP position of a concept.
- Activities to strengthen the case for an external Proof-of-Concept award.
- Activities to address gaps/issues raised by potential industrial partners.
- Development of the route to market or roadmap for a concept.
- Development of a prototype.
- Cloud infrastructure and tools/cloud computing resources for development and testing.
- Hosting of an event which partners attend.
- Commissioning external expertise/consultancy on the best commercial development strategy for a business idea. Where this is part of the project, PIs are responsible for following their own University procurement guidelines.
- Completing a market assessment to determine likely economic potential, competition and opportunities for an idea.
- IP searches – in particular freedom to operate (but not patent filing costs).
- Travel and subsistence to attend meetings with partners in order to carry out customer discovery work (normally no more than 5% of the budget).

Examples of what the Fund will NOT generally support:

- Purchasing equipment, the value of which is more than 25% of the budget.
- Work that typically would be likely to be funded by an external organisation.
- Initial research investigations which do not demonstrate potential for producing economic benefit via a licence, open sourcing or creation of a spin-out.
- Patent filing costs

4. Assessment

The application should clearly justify the potential for economic impact either through licensing, open sourcing and spin-out activities and should outline a road map for potential subsequent funding sources including, Innovate UK, UKRI, Royal Academy of Engineering, charities or any alternative funding source.

Applications will be assessed for the following:
- Eligibility under the above criteria.
- The ability to exploit the potential of the technology within the project.
- The quality of the project plan.
- The perceived value for money.
- The commercial potential of the idea, concept or technology to deliver economic impact via a licence, open sourcing or creation of a spin-out.

5. Key Dates

Shortlisted applicants should be available for a short informal interview on 29th/30th May 2025.

Applications open	9.00am Monday 9th March 2026	
Applications close	4.00pm Monday 13th April 2026	
Applications reviewed	15th – 23rd April 2026	
Shortlist interviews	27/28th April 2026	
Notification of award	30th April 2026	
Projects commence	No later than 15th July 2026	
Projects end	ALL projects MUST be completed by 31st Jan 2027	

If you are considering an application but wish to seek some advice or a discussion before submission, please contact Louise Cushnahan. E: l.cushnahan@qub.ac.uk