



SHAPE Catalyst

FAQ



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GENERAL QUESTIONS



What does SHAPE mean and what is a SHAPE venture?

SHAPE stands for: Social sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy. A SHAPE venture is one where the product or service is primarily built on SHAPE research. SHAPE ventures are extremely diverse and can address a wide range of challenges. Social science-based ideas from business schools are also welcome. Please get in touch if you are unsure whether your idea is in scope!



Are the Discover and Launch stages the same as the 'SHAPE Pre-Accelerator' programme that some universities have already organised?

Our new programme replaces the SHAPE Pre-Accelerator and ARC Accelerator versions that were only open to some universities. The new ARC Pathway provides a slightly changed, more coherent curriculum and is open to eligible researchers from all UK research organisations.



How is the ARC Accelerator funded?

The ARC Accelerator is funded through the joint ESRC/AHRC SHAPE Catalyst programme, which runs from 2023-2026. This is a first-of-its-kind programme that enables UK-based researchers in SHAPE disciplines to develop their research into ventures.



What is the cost?

There is no cost. All stages of the programme are fully funded.

ARC PATHWAY & TIME COMMITMENTS



How does the ARC Accelerator work?

The ARC Accelerator has developed a comprehensive 4-stage programme, the ARC Pathway: ARC Discover, ARC Launch, ARC Accelerate, ARC Scale. These four stages are designed to guide SHAPE researchers on their commercialisation journey from initial exploration to fully validating and developing a venture idea.



Do I need to go through the ARC Discover and ARC Launch stages to be allowed to apply to the funded ARC Accelerate stage?

The four ARC Pathway stages build on each other, so we recommend that interested researchers start their journey with ARC Discover and move along the ARC Pathway to be best placed to apply to the different stages. However, attendance of ARC Discover and ARC Launch is not mandatory and researchers can join at any stage.



Is the timeline around the four stages fixed or might different projects move through the process at different rates?

The timeline around the four stages is not fixed and projects can move along the ARC Pathway at their own rate.



How much time does the SHAPE Catalyst take?

PARTICIPANTS

ARC Discover consists of two workshops with a total duration of 3.5h.

ARC Launch consists of five sessions and takes around 15h.

ARC Accelerate includes time buyout and requires applicants to commit to a minimum of 3 days per week for the duration of the 6-month programme. Most of this time will be spent validating the venture idea, together with training sessions (40h+), homework and 1:1 support.

ARC Scale is still in design, with further details available in 2024.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER OFFICER (TTO) /PROFESSIONAL & SUPPORT STAFF

ARC Discover: If it's your first time engaging with the programme, please attend both sessions or watch the recordings from past workshops.

ARC Launch: If it's your first time, please attend all sessions. If you've attended the programme before, only session 1 and 5 are mandatory.

ARC Accelerate: If it's your first time, please attend all sessions. If you've attended the programme before, only a few participatory sessions are mandatory (flagged in advance). Time commitment (incl. regular meetings with your academics): 4h/week during the first month of the programme and 3-4h/month thereafter.



Are all sessions mandatory?

We recognise that all participants juggle their involvement with the ARC Accelerator around their existing academic commitments. We will label which sessions are mandatory and ask that, where possible, you attend every session and, failing that, catch up via recordings.

ELIGIBILITY & APPLICATIONS



Who is eligible to apply?

Applicants must have a PhD or similar research or innovation experience and be based at an eligible UK research organisation. For further information please see the [ESRC's research funding guide](#) and check if you are [eligible for research and innovation funding](#).



I'm part of a team, can they attend and can we share the time commitment?

We positively encourage teams, although we ask for you to assign a lead person. Some sessions are for the lead researcher only. This is because they involve other participants, and, out of fairness, we want to keep the class size to a minimum. However, we are happy for the rest of the team to attend all other sessions.

During the ARC Accelerate stage, the required time commitment can be shared as a team. Please provide a justification and/or outline your reasoning for the split as part of your application.



The guidance states that applicants without PhD but with research or innovation experience are still eligible. What experience would be acceptable?

For eligibility for ESRC-led grants, please look at the [ESRC Research Funding Guide](#). Though we don't go into granular detail on what equivalent experience is because it varies from discipline to discipline. If you have specific concerns, please get in touch with the ESRC (Natasha.Stanton@esrc.ukri.org) or the ARC team (hello@arcaccelerator.io).



What are we looking for?

We are looking for innovative research ideas that can be transformed into ventures to deliver impact at scale. This means we are looking for researchers who want to grow and sustain the impact of their research by bringing an idea to market.



How can I apply?

ARC Discover: There is no formal application process. Academics and TTOs/Professional & Support Staff can sign up via the form on the [Discover website](#).

ARC Launch: Fill out our short application form on the [Launch website](#).

ARC Accelerate: When the next cohort opens, you can submit an Expression of Interest on the [Accelerate website](#). If shortlisted, you'll then be invited to submit a full application. At the next stage, shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview.

ARC Scale: Still in design, with further details available in 2024.



I missed the application webinar, what can I do to learn more?

You can catch up on recordings of our application webinar on our [website](#).

VENTURE CREATION & OUTCOMES



Are there any additional benefits of the programme that are unrelated to the creation of a specific venture?

Participants learn how to transform an idea into a real-world business. Even if their current venture idea fails, they acquire useful knowledge and valuable skills that will help them with future endeavours. We offer researchers a safe place to learn and experiment in a cohort of like-minded individuals looking to grow and sustain the impact from their research by bringing an idea to market.



Do I have to spin-out at the end of the ARC Accelerator programme?

Not necessarily. The decision to spin-out is between yourself and your institution and you should only do so when you are ready, and your institution has given approval to go ahead. We want to make sure that the applicants use commercialisation to scale and sustain the impact from their research.



What happens if I decide it is not possible to form a venture at all?

ARC is a discovery process, it aims to help SHAPE researchers explore and develop their venture, but it's perfectly possible that you may decide a venture is not possible and that you'll take a different path (like a licence) or that there is no route to market. That is completely ok. We only ask that participants have a serious aspiration to form a venture when they join.



What if I don't want to make a profit from my venture?

We understand that for many SHAPE entrepreneurs the focus will be on creating impact from the research. This is why we support social ventures. Social ventures have to be financially sustainable – as these are the resources to pay for people's time and anything else the organisation needs. However, it's entirely up to you what you do with any surplus.



What if I want to create a charity?

This is a conversation you should have with your TTO (or your organisation's equivalent). However, generally social ventures are easier to set up than charities, they have more freedom and less reporting and regulation as they are not regulated by the charity commission. We would suggest setting up as a social venture first and then further down the line you may decide a charity is the right way to go, but speak to your TTO about the options for your venture.



Does ARC take any equity or fees?

ARC and UKRI do not take any equity or fees. The entire programme is funded through the ESRC and AHRC Catalyst grant.



Does the ARC Accelerator own my Intellectual Property (IP)?

ARC and UKRI do not take ownership of any Intellectual Property. All participants are subject to the IP policy of their institution.



Does the impact of the venture need to be based in the UK or can the activities or impact be international?

Neither the impact nor the activities of the venture need to be based in the UK. However, the applicant needs to be based at an eligible UK research organisation.



Will we be able to engage with the ARC Accelerate stage if the idea is there but the product is not ready yet and maybe won't be for a few years?

Yes, as long as you have a basic idea (i.e. certain hypotheses) or specific parts of your final product that you can test during the market validation process. We know that a lot of ideas require quite a large sum of funding to be realised and we don't expect you to have a finished product in order to join.



What could projects look like?

The ESRC/AHRC SHAPE Catalyst is newly launched, but there are examples from the Aspect ARC Accelerator in the [Case Studies](#) section on our website.

ARC ACCELERATOR FUNDING



What do participants receive if they are accepted onto the ARC Accelerate stage?

- Up to £62,000, with circa 80% FEC provided by ESRC, in line with its [standard funding rules](#), to fund commercialisation activities
- A tailored programme of support, led by industry experts, to develop key entrepreneurial skills
- Specialised, sector-specific training
- Access to experienced entrepreneurs, investors and networks
- Dedicated mentorship support to help validate their idea, develop the business model and support their pitch for further funding or investment
- 1:1 pitch practice and coaching
- Lifelong support of alumni and events to network and support the growth of their venture
- The chance to do all of this in a peer group full of like-minded researchers



What can the funding offered during the ARC Accelerate stage be used for?

Funding must be used for commercialisation activities, not further research. As well as salary costs to engage with the programme, this might include budget for market research or to develop a user interface for a product, for example.



How does the time commitment during the ARC Accelerate stage correspond to the funding?

As we are asking for a minimum of 3 days per week commitment during ARC Accelerate, we expect the majority of the budget will go on salary costs for one or more people. Individuals and teams are both welcomed, and we are happy to discuss options for part time working or other issues.



What is the Award duration during the ARC Accelerate stage?

Up to 12 months. The required time commitment of 3 days per week for the 6-month ARC Accelerate training is unchanged by the 12-month Award duration.

TTOS & SUPPORT



What does a Technology Transfer Officer (TTO)/Manager or Innovation Officer do?

They provide specialist professional services to academics, including developing commercialisation strategies and Intellectual Property (IP) due diligence. The role is tasked with translating academic research and expertise into projects that make a tangible difference to businesses and academics through the filing of patent applications, technology licensing and the formation of spin-out companies. A TTO or Professional and Support Staff will support you throughout your ARC journey.



Can I ask for support from the Technology Transfer managers from other institutions?

Yes, and we include some sessions where you will ask for their support. Every university involved is working as part of the ARC team and a core aim of ARC is that we collectively help each other. Feel free to drop emails asking for support if they can provide it, there is a wide range of experience and contacts.



I'm a Technology Transfer Officer (TTO), where can I find additional guidance?

We have a range of resources to support all TTOs and equivalent (e.g. staff in Innovation/Knowledge Exchange/Enterprise/Tech Transfer teams). Our handbook for TTOs/PSS, comms packs and more can found on our [resources page](#).



Do you have a mailing list?

You can sign up to the ARC Newsletter in order to receive all updates and news [here](#).



I still have questions, can you help?

Of course! Please contact us at hello@arcaccelerator.io