Call for proposals: Agri-Tech in China Newton Network+

Closing date: 4pm on 16th January 2015
Proposals to be emailed to NewtonAgriTech@stfc.ac.uk

1. Background

The [Newton Fund](#) is an initiative to strengthen research and innovation partnerships between the UK and emerging knowledge economies and will deliver £375 million of funding over the course of five years. The Fund forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment which is monitored by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD). ODA funded activity focuses on outcomes that promote the long-term sustainable growth of countries on the OECD [Development Assistance Committee](#) list and is administered with the promotion of economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective. Research Councils UK is one of several UK delivery partners. More information about [RCUK's Newton Fund activities](#) can be found on the RCUK website.

STFC RAL Space has won £12M from the Newton Fund to develop a new research and development programme in the area of agricultural technology (agri-tech) in China. This programme has the aim of using the UK's expertise in remote sensing and modelling to work with and aid the agricultural economy and farming community in China. The £12M fund is spread over 5 years and will build on technologies and expertise in STFC RAL space to make use of breakthroughs in satellite imaging, remote sensing, smart sensors and modelling to help provide facilities and technologies that will support research-driven, decision making tools for farmers and policy makers in China..

As part of the initial phase, STFC RAL Space is inviting proposals to manage an Agri-Tech in China Newton Network+. The purpose of the Network+ will be to ensure that the Agri-Tech in China Newton projects funded through the programme and the associated institutes are networked with each other and with the breadth of activities, disciplines and stakeholders in the Agri-Tech/Global Food Security/Nexus space, including other relevant Newton-funded activities led by other Research Councils.

The Network+ will add value to the Programme by facilitating knowledge sharing and the creation of new partnerships and will play a strategic role in ensuring that research is aligned with user needs. Therefore, a key activity of the Network+ will be to support interactions between STFC-funded researchers and appropriate science, technology, industry and end user groups, both in the UK and in China, including social and economic science aspects. To facilitate this, the Network+ will be able to commission small scoping and proof of concept projects.

The aims of the Network+ include:

- To ensure that the Agri-Tech in China Newton projects and the associated institutes are networked with other activities, existing or planned (e.g. the RCUK Global Food Security programme, ESRC Nexus Network, Agri-Tech Catalyst, Satellite Applications Catapult)
- To develop a multi-disciplinary community focused on addressing agri-tech development issues in China
- To deliver scoping and proof of concept studies to test and de-risk ideas

The Newton Fund requires that the funding be awarded in a manner that fits with ODA guidelines. All applications under this programme must therefore be compliant with these guidelines. RCUK has provided guidance on ODA compliance and applicants are advised to read this before writing and submitting their application.

The Agri-Tech in China Newton Project is aimed at developing UK-China research partnerships. Funds cannot be used to cover the costs of participation of other countries. However, the involvement of other countries will be considered if a strong strategic need is articulated in the proposal and it is made clear the 'other' partners have funding to support their involvement in the partnership. A list of eligible partners countries is available.

In keeping with the aims of the Network+, collaborative proposals are strongly encouraged.

2. Structure of the Network+
Proposals to manage the Network+ are invited from researchers who can articulate a clear vision for the Network+ and bring together the necessary range of stakeholders to enable its delivery.

Up to £2.5M at 100% fEC (£2.0m at 80% fEC) funding is available for a grant to run up to the end of March 2019. The proposal should set out four main strands:

- **Management plan**, including how leadership will be provided to a diverse group of Network+ participants, how the proposed programme of Network+ activities, outputs, scoping and proof-of-concept studies, visits and placements will be managed and the role and function of any advisory or management groups (including the required steering board). The proposal should also set out how the outputs and knowledge generated will be managed and communicated in order to maximise impact.
- **China Engagement Strategy**, , including how the Network+ would engage with researchers and agencies at National, Provincial, Prefectorial and village level in China to ensure that the technology becomes available to China's farmers.
- **Network activities**, including delivery of activities to facilitate networking, knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary working, the creation of new partnerships and the alignment of activities with user needs. The proposal should indicate the proposed mechanisms for engaging the community. Typical mechanisms might include workshops, meetings and short training courses. However, applicants are encouraged to be innovative in the choice of mechanism for operating the Network+. The Network+ is expected to produce position papers, syntheses and other outputs as part of its work and to organise a conference at the end of the programme.
- **Grants**, including administration of a competitive selection process for the award of small scale scoping studies (indicative value up to £10k), proof-of-concept studies (indicative value up to £50k) and funding for visits and placements. The indicative amounts given are for guidance only and it should be noted that experience elsewhere has shown that small grants can provide a very cost effective way to stimulate new activities. The Network+ will be required to develop a robust governance process (e.g. assessment, monitoring progress and outputs), for approval by STFC for administration of this part of the budget.

Applicants should indicate the funding split envisaged between managing and operating the Network and the grant awards. As a rough guide, the balance between the two elements is expected to be around one third for managing and operating the Network and two thirds for grant funding.

[Information about previously funded Networks](#) (without the "plus" element) is available on the STFC website.

3. Eligibility

The proposal must be submitted by a researcher (the Principal Investigator) who is an employee of a Research Organisation that is eligible for STFC Grants, i.e. Higher Education Institutes, recognised academic analogues, such as institutes funded by other Research Councils and other organisations eligible to apply for STFC funding. Only academic partners may request funding. For further information applicants should refer to the [STFC Research Grant Handbook](#). Joint applications with other Research Organisations and industry are encouraged.

4. Assessment Criteria and Process

Proposals will be assessed by an independent Panel against the following criteria:

- Clearly articulated strategy and vision for the Network+, with clear objectives and a well-defined purpose
- Proposed programme of activities and events to deliver the objectives of the Network+, including clearly identified process for commissioning and managing a suitable range of scoping studies, pilot projects, visits and placements
- Track record of applicants and composition of leadership team that demonstrates their ability to create an effective interdisciplinary community
- Appropriateness of membership and recruitment strategy for building, maintaining and managing a membership with appropriate critical mass that evolves with the Network+
- Clearly articulated vision, strategy and mechanisms to deliver engagement with users, in China, the UK Demonstration of a robust management plan, including the role of the Network+ coordinator, governance and managing for impact

Applicants may be invited to present their plans to the Panel and/or to respond to any queries or suggestions arising from their proposal.

In considering proposals STFC will make the final decision over which, if any, proposal to fund and STFC will reserve the right to suggest reconfigured consortia and work plans.

5. Application Process

Please note that the application stage of this call is not being handled through the RCUK Je-S system. However, the successful applicant(s) will be required to enter the grant information on Je-S prior to the start of the award.

Applicants must submit their proposal by email (NewtonAgriTech@stfc.ac.uk) before 16:00 on the 16th January 2015. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator (PI) to ensure the application has been approved by their institution.

Full details of the terms and conditions under full economic costing (fEC) can be found in the fEC Grants Handbook www.stfc.ac.uk/rgh. Applicants are advised to read the [RCUK guidance on ODA compliance](#) before writing and submitting their application.

11pt Arial (or equivalent) font should be used throughout, with a minimum of 2 cm margins around each page. **Please submit all application attachments in pdf format.**

The application should include:

- Proposal summary details document using the Word template provided
- Proposal funding proforma using the Excel template provided
- Case for Support: maximum of 10 pages
- Head of Department letter confirming institutional support for the proposal
- Letters of support, where relevant
- One page Gannt chart
- Data management plan

Pathways to Impact is not required.

Case for Support

The Case for Support should use the following headings:

- **Management Plan**: Applicants should explain how they will provide leadership to a diverse group of Network+ participants, how the proposed programme of Network+ activities, outputs, scoping and proof-of-concept studies, visits and placements will be managed and the role and function of any advisory or management groups. The Network+ should propose its own internal management arrangements to ensure delivery of the agreed programme. A description of the proposed principles and structure of these arrangements, including the proposed division of major management and leadership roles and responsibilities and proposed time commitments of key individuals is required. Applicants should also demonstrate that the delivery team has a demonstrable track of delivering projects and working with a range of partners in the UK and abroad and are of sufficient standing to provide leadership to the Network+ community.
- **Engagement Plan**: Applicants should explain how they will engage with a range of stakeholders from different disciplines, sectors and countries and, in particular, with researchers and end users in China. Communications plans, proposals for the development of the community and the fostering of dialogue to inform the work plan for the Network+ should be articulated. Applicants are invited to identify the key issues and barriers they might anticipate in the engagement process, and how they would propose to overcome these to ensure that the Network+ reaches beyond those who routinely engage with these activities. Please provide an indicative list of people or organisations who have indicated that they would be interested in being involved in the Network+.
- **Organisational Support**: STFC will be looking for evidence of a strong organisational commitment to hosting the Network+, for example, through the provision of high quality infrastructure including web and communications.
- **Governance**: An independent steering committee must be appointed to provide advice on the conduct and content of the Network+. This steering committee should have a membership drawn from the academic, industrial and international scientific community and include a representative from STFC. There should also be cross-membership with the ESRC Nexus Network. The steering board should meet at least once every six months. The steering committee Terms of Reference are to be agreed with STFC.

Letters of Support (if applicable)

The partners can either be supporters or co-recipients. You will need to complete the project partners section in the proposal summary details template.

Resources to be provided by any project partners, whether in cash or in-kind contributions, should be clearly identified in the proposal. STFC will pay up to 80% of the project's fEC excluding the

project partner contribution. Project partners' contributions in cash or in-kind should be in addition to the STFC's contribution and are not considered part of the fEC of the project.

Collaboration Agreements
If the project includes more than one organisation (academic or non-academic) on the form, a collaboration agreement must be signed between all organisations and a copy sent to the STFC office before the project start date. This should include how background and foreground IP will be managed.

Example model research collaboration agreements that may be used as a basis for specific agreements between partners have been developed through the [Lambert toolkit](#) for collaborative research.

Any additional documents, such as CVs, list of publications, etc, will be removed and not sent for review.

It is the responsibility of the principal applicant to ensure that any information is worded in such a way to protect commercially confidential or sensitive areas. STFC will assume that the applicant has obtained necessary permission from any party that may be involved in the application.

6. Eligible costs

The funding is intended to cover the operating and support costs of the Network+ and the associated small projects and justification for the sum requested should be included in the proposal.

Investigator salaries
The Principal Investigator (PI) can request funds to cover their salary costs for the time spent on setting up and managing the Network+. Requests can also be made, if appropriate, for one Co-Investigator (Co-I) to assist in the management of the Network+. Time spent by the PI and Co-I on the co-ordination of the Network+ must be reasonable and is not expected to form the majority of the cost of the proposal. The salary costs of Network+ members should not be included in the proposal.

The grant would not pay the salary of any placement into academia but would cover overheads. Salary and overheads will be covered for academic placements out of academia (full or part time, up to a year). International placements are encouraged

Network+ Co-ordination and Support
Costs can be requested for an appropriately skilled Network Manager or Co-ordinator (full or part-time) to be responsible for activities such as the day-to-day Network+ management, small projects awards, administration of event co-ordination and website development. Again any such costs should be reasonable.

Scoping and Proof of Concept Studies
Costs will be awarded to cover the small scale scoping studies (indicative value up to £10k), proof-of-concept studies (indicative value up to £50k), funding for visits and placements that the Network+ will administer.

Applicants should indicate and the funding split envisaged between managing and operating the Network and the grant awards. As a rough guide, the balance between the two elements is expected to be around one third for managing and operating and two thirds for grant funding.

Network Activities
Costs of supporting and facilitating meetings and events can be requested, including travel and subsistence for participants although, wherever possible, industrial collaborators should meet the costs of their own travel. Associated costs should be justified in the Case for Support. The costs of travel and subsistence to enable Network+ members to meet to exchange ideas and expertise and to visits each other's laboratories can also be requested.

Other
Additional funding, for example, contributions from industrial members is encouraged, and details should be included in the proposal.

7. Project Monitoring and Reporting
The Network+ will be required to report annually on progress against objectives, outputs and outcomes and hold at least two steering group meetings per year. A mid-term review will be held to ensure that progress is being made and the project funding is being used appropriately. The Network+ will be expected to provide STFC with meeting reports, workshop summaries, position papers (at least every two years), an invitation to all events, information on grant awards made.

ResearchFish
All award holders are required to submit information about outputs arising from their grants on the ResearchFish platform during the period of the award and normally for at least five years after the award had terminated. Outputs of Network+ awards are monitored by the Programme Manager who may contact you for further information on outputs and outcomes.

8. Contacts
The STFC office can provide help and support on Network+ grant applications. We encourage potential applicants to contact the office to discuss their proposal. Please contact Tracey McGuire (tracey.mcguire@stfc.ac.uk).