

Strategic Priorities Fund – Turing staff and researchers FAQ

1. What is the Strategic Priorities Fund?

Led and delivered by UKRI, the objective of the Strategic Priorities Fund is to drive an increase in high quality multi-disciplinary research and innovation; ensure that UKRI's investment links up effectively with government research priorities and opportunities; and ensure the system responds to strategic priorities and opportunities. It is arranged around a number of themes, for example there are Strategic Priorities Funds for the digital economy, energy and food security. Both our Strategic Priorities Funded programmes are part of the AI theme announced today (19 December 2018).

2. What is the background to the Turing winning the funding?

The funding came about following an approach from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) in May for the Turing to help to shape a submission to UKRI for the new Strategic Priorities Fund, related to AI. The Institute was given a limited timeframe to respond and a core project team led by Alan Wilson drew together a shortlist of projects from our set of published research challenges, focusing on health, government, engineering and data science for science. The proposal required projects which could get started quickly, and we consulted with our Programme Directors for their ideas for projects which we knew could get off the ground in year one of the programme. EPSRC then iterated this proposal to ensure it aligned with their ideas and priorities for their bid to UKRI; this included involving the projects of other institutions and research councils as well as various government offices.

In addition, we put forward a long-standing research project idea we had been exploring with the British Library, 'Living with Machines', to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for the same funding source. This proposal was formulated by a team led by Ruth Ahnert of Queen Mary, University of London.

The programmes then went through a system of approvals involving the UKRI Board, UKRI Investment Committee, BEIS and HM Treasury.

Throughout this process all information related to the Fund has been strictly embargoed and thus our ability to communicate about it widely across the Institute has been limited, pending the public announcement which arrived in December 2018.

3. What do the two Strategic Priority Fund programmes currently look like?

The programme funded through EPSRC, **AI and Data Science for Science, Engineering, Health and Government** is made up of four main themes and a cross-cutting 'methods' theme. See below titles of the themes and their relevant Programme Director lead.

- Digital Twins
 - complex systems engineering (Mark Girolami)
 - urban analytics (Mark Birkin)
- Health (Chris Holmes)
- AI for Science (Jon Rowe)
- the Criminal Justice System (Helen Margetts)
- Tools, Practices and Systems (James Hetherington)

As part of the bid for the AI programme, EPSRC asked for specific project ideas within the themes which have been sourced from the relevant programmes, in consultation with the Programme Director. The majority of the proposed projects are short term in the first

instance (up to six months) and there will be opportunities for more project ideas to be put forward across the five-year funding period.

The programme funded through AHRC, **Living with Machines**, is joint with the British Library. It will focus on the century encompassing the industrial revolution, particularly on cities in the north of England, and will demonstrate the value of linking digitised data from archival sources to address historical questions in new ways. The aim is to produce valuable history, and to offer a new paradigm for historical research, and to develop methods that can be made widely available for other projects. This project has been under discussion with the Library for some time, with the involvement of Barbara McGillivray, Turing Research Fellow and University of Cambridge, and members of the Research Engineering team.

4. How will the funding be apportioned?

Budgets are still being confirmed. Both Strategic Priorities Fund programmes are being convened by the Turing, and both represent a collaboration across Turing university partners, government agencies and national research institutes. This provides a valuable opportunity for collaboration, as well as an opportunity for researchers at our partner universities to lead and participate in interesting and important research themes which build on several of the Turing's strategic challenge areas.

5. How will the programmes be governed within the Turing?

Alan Wilson, Director of Special Projects, will direct the AI programme, reporting to EPSRC. He will chair a Management Board which includes the six 'theme leads' (all Programme Directors) and a UKRI/EPSRC representative. There will also be an Advisory Steering Group, yet to be appointed. The new AI programme will be integrated with the Institute's existing structures and programmes; for example the health theme will be managed jointly through the Institute's partnership with Health Data Research UK.

Business team support will come from Allaine Cerwonka (Director of Academic Research Programmes), Amit Mulji (Strategic Support Manager), Oonagh McGee (Head of Research Management and Facilitation), Helena Quinn (Senior Strategy Officer), and Kristen Alfaro (Personal Assistant) with James Hetherington (Head of Research Engineering, to be complemented with Programme Managers (yet to be appointed).

Living with Machines will be led by Ruth Ahnert (QMUL) as Principal Investigator with a team of Co-Investigators: Mia Ridge (British Library), Adam Farquhar (British Library), Emma Griffin (UEA), Jon Lawrence (Exeter), Barbara McGillivray (Turing Research Fellow and Cambridge), James Hetherington (Turing) and Alan Wilson (Turing). It has an Advisory Board chaired by Martin Daunton (Cambridge).

6. Where will the research projects take place?

Researchers from every partner university will be involved, and research projects will be based in locations across the network, as appropriate and suitable for their specific needs. Regular meetings will be convened in the Turing or another location, which bring together the whole programme or particular themes and projects.

7. How can I get involved?

In the first half of 2019 we will run a number of scoping workshops, held in the Turing and across the university network, which all Turing researchers will be encouraged to attend. These will focus on the EPSRC-funded 'AI and Data Science for Science, Engineering, Health and Government' programme and will have three aims:

- a) Share information on the project ideas which have been proposed for the programme's early stages, and refine them
- b) Identify researchers who could work on them
- c) Develop new project ideas that align with each theme

8. What does this new funding mean for the Turing?

Access to exciting new research opportunities and partners and consolidated funding and support for our research programmes, including those three new programmes without strategic partner support (government, health, data science for science).

It will also strengthen collaboration across our university network, as we draw together projects involving researchers from all 13 universities, and improve sustainability for the Institute long-term, with these successful bids representing a significant vote of confidence from both government and research councils.

9. What will change as a result of this funding?

More funding for research within the Turing, more opportunities to work with research councils, and new partners like the British Library and career opportunities, as we recruit to support the new programmes.

Want to hear more?

Please come along to the SPF staff talk on **Monday 14 January** to hear more about the new programmes from Alan Wilson and the theme leads for the EPSRC programme. You can join the talk live on Zoom or watch the video afterwards. [Register before 7 January to confirm your place.](#)

Workshop dates for the EPSRC projects will be published soon.