

ESRC

Centres Policy

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What are ESRC Centres?

ESRC Centres are major strategic investments of £2.5-10 million (100% of full economic costs) over five years led by experienced research leaders who require longer term or extended support for research groups, inter-institutional research networks, project-linked programmes, medium-to-large surveys, methodological developments or any related larger scale projects. In addition to taking forward an ambitious research agenda and making significant economic and/or societal impact, Centres add value by increasing research infrastructure, building capacity, encouraging interdisciplinary working and enabling research collaboration in the UK and internationally.

Background: The ESRC Review of Centres Policy

The ESRC recently reviewed the way it funds its Centres in recognition that the past reduction in funding period for Centres, for budgetary reasons, had created a 'cliff-edge' in funding after five years which did not enable Centres to maximize impacts, and build on their research activities to the extent that they would have been able to under the older 5+ 5 funding model. The review proposed a new model to foster and sustain Centres in the context of ongoing budget constraints, on the basis of consultation with Centres, research organisations (ROs) and the ESRC Council.

The review, in particular, highlighted the benefits of supporting these high-profile

and high-impact centres of excellence over a longer period, not only for the ESRC, but also for the Centre's host research organisations. Centres have a strategic and financial value to ROs, contributing substantially to their level of quality-related funding. The new Centres policy proposes a new relationship between ESRC and ROs, in recognition of the mutual benefits in establishing a sustainable funding model for Centres. The model is explicitly designed to foster and sustain Centres' excellence and impact beyond the life of ESRC funding, by leveraging RO commitment and embedding Centres in the higher education funding landscape.

The new ESRC Centres Policy

The new ESRC Centres policy aims to support a larger number of Centres over the longer term, without a significant increase in ESRC Centre's budgets. It is also designed to help manage the demand for Centres Competition funding, providing more opportunities for new entrants. The policy provides two funding tracks for Centres:

- A new Centres funding model of graduated support to help Centres establish a self-sustaining funding model once ESRC full centre funding comes to an end.
- Longer term support for a small number of strategically valuable 'ESRC Institutes' that have been persistently successful in open Centres Competitions over a long period.

The new Centres Funding Model

The graduated funding model provides the opportunity for a longer period of reduced funding for the Centre, subject to a process of review every 5 years, over a potential 15-year period (5+5+5). A typical funding pathway for a new Centre under this new policy would be as follows.

- The Centre proposal would be funded by the ESRC for five years, following success in an open Centres Competition.
- Towards the end of the grant the Centre will be invited to apply for a lower level of ESRC Centres transition funding, supplemented by a minimum RO commitment. The Transition review panel approve Transition funding for a further three to five years.
- Towards the end of that period, the Centre can then apply for a further period of recognition as an ESRC Legacy Centre to support it in leveraging further funding (from other funders) and communicating and engaging with stakeholders.

ESRC Centres Competition

The ESRC Centres Competition will remain the flagship ESRC funding for Centres. We aim to run periodic Centre Competitions, typically every two years, to fund a limited number of Centre proposals ranging from £2.5 million to £10 million (100% full economic cost) for a term of up to five years. The ESRC

will meet 80% of the full economic cost of proposals submitted; standard funding rules will apply. We will be looking for evidence of long-term institutional commitment to the Centre, including additional financial resources from the RO to extend the work programme beyond the 100% fEC funding requested by at least 5%. The excellence of the proposal will remain the overriding criterion for funding.

All ESRC Centres designated as such at the time of call announcement will be entitled to apply to a Centres Competition once during the period of their grant, regardless of other applications from the same RO. This allowance will enable successful Centres to build eligibility to apply for Institute status should they be persistently successful.

Centres Transition Funding

As an ESRC Centre approaches the final year of its existing grant, it will be offered the opportunity to apply for Centres transition funding unless there is an ESRC strategic review in progress affecting particular investments.

Centres transition funding offers an additional period of three to five years of ESRC support at a lower level to help maximise the impact and use of their research activities, methods and data developments and in becoming more self-sustaining.

This funding should support the Centre in securing the strategic and financial commitment of their RO to co-fund. For

this reason, Centres transition funding is designed to provide for Directly Incurred (DI) costs only. The RO will be required to evidence their support for the Centre through its contribution to Directly Allocated, Indirect and additional DI costs, equating to, or exceeding, the full economic costs (fEC) of the ESRC request (i.e. 25% at 100 fEC).

The Centres Transition Review entails an independent assessment of the application from the Principal Investigator (Centre Director), alongside supporting evidence of the Centre's impact via Researchfish. The application will inform an interview panel made up of members of the ESRC Council and the ESRC Director of Research.

Working Example

Existing ESRC Centre grant was £4m at 100% fEC.

25% of grant at 100% fEC = £1m
ESRC contribution maximum (funded at 80%):

£800k to cover DI costs only

RO contribution minimum:

£1m of which:

£200k covers 20% DI costs remaining from the ESRC request

£800k RO costs for DA and Indirect costs (and any additional DI).

Total Transition funding (ESRC+RO contribution) = £1.8m

Application for ESRC Legacy Centres Status

As the Centre approaches the end of its transition funding, it will be offered the opportunity to apply for continued recognition as an ESRC Centre for a further five years through Legacy Centre Status Review. This is a rigorous process of review to establish the ongoing excellence and credibility of a former ESRC Centre. It will be assumed that the centre has an established sustainability plan by this stage and is largely self-supporting. The process will, however, provide the opportunity to apply for up to £100,000 total ESRC grant value) over five years to support knowledge exchange, engagement and communication with research users or capacity-building activities. DI costs will be paid at 100% fEC. This period of support will enable the Centre to continue to brand itself as an ESRC Centre and seek advice and support from the ESRC in its communication, knowledge exchange and impact activities and support the Centre in leveraging further funding.

Branding as an ESRC Centre would not preclude the Centre from applying for other ESRC funding, including ESRC Centres Competitions. Centres that are not successful in ESRC Centre Transition Review will not typically be eligible to apply for ESRC/UKRI branding.

Additional Information

If you have any further questions, please contact esrcenquiries@esrc.ac.uk. For more information visit <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-large-investments/esrc-centres-and-institutes/>