



Funding opportunity

ESRC centres

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£36,000,000
Award range:	£5,000,000 - £9,700,000
Publication date:	3 February 2023
Opening date:	1 February 2023
Closing date:	17 May 2023 4:00pm UK time

Apply for funding to establish an ESRC centre. Our centres are world-leading centres of excellence that carry out interdisciplinary, cutting-edge and impactful research in the social sciences and beyond.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for ESRC funding.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your project can be between £5 million and £9.7 million. ESRC will fund 80% FEC.

Funding is available for up to 5 years.

Who can apply

Standard ESRC eligibility rules apply.

The principal investigator for this funding opportunity must be based at an organisation eligible for ESRC funding for the duration of the grant.

Eligible organisations are:

- UK higher education institutions (HEI)

- research council institutes
- UK Research and Innovation-approved independent research organisations
- public sector research establishments
- NHS bodies with research capacity

[Check if your institution is eligible for funding.](#)

It is likely that successful applications will be led by experienced researchers who are internationally recognised, with proven ability to deliver a large-scale research project successfully and lead an investment of this nature.

The amount of time committed to the grant by the principal investigator and co-investigators must be costed into the proposal, but very small fractions of co-investigator time should be avoided.

Standard ESRC research funding rules would apply for staff engaged in more than 1 ESRC grant (see [ESRC research funding guide](#), page 26).

Co-investigators and collaborators

The inclusion of international co-investigators in proposals is encouraged.

Academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) must be from established overseas research organisations of comparable standing to ESRC-eligible UK research organisations to be listed as international co-investigators under this funding opportunity.

Applicants should note [ESRC's policy on the inclusion of international co-investigators](#) on proposals.

International collaboration is not limited to co-investigators but may also involve partnerships to:

- develop international datasets
- promote knowledge exchange and international impact
- enhance social science conceptual development on an international scale

We welcome inter-institutional applications and strongly encourage collaboration to fulfill the aims of the centre.

Partnerships are encouraged with non-HEI organisations and across third sector, business and the public sector, either as project partners or as co-investigators.

ESRC will fund all justified costs associated with international co-investigators and co-investigators from UK business, civil society or government bodies at 100% FEC. However, these combined costs must not exceed 30% of the full 100% FEC of the grant.

Demand management

We are limiting the number of applications per institution in order to alleviate pressure on all involved in the application and peer review process.

Research organisations are asked to support the most competitive bids from their institutions using the assessment criteria for the opportunity.

Research organisations may submit up to 2 applications for centres through this open funding opportunity.

In addition, if your research organisation has an existing ESRC centre, this may re-apply where eligible without counting towards the limit. If your ESRC centre is currently in its transition phase and has applied to a previous centres' competition while in transition, then it is not eligible to apply, in line with [ESRC's centres' policy](#).

Proposals for centres may only be submitted through 1 of the available centres funding opportunities being led by ESRC: the ESRC centres open funding opportunity or 1 of steered centres funding opportunities highlighted in the 'Additional information' section.

Applicants submitting the same or a similar proposal to 1 of the steered centres funding opportunities and the open funding opportunity will be withdrawn from the open funding opportunity.

Please note that demand management measures are only in place for this open centres funding opportunity and not the separate steered centres funding opportunities listed in the 'Additional information' section.

Please also note that demand management measures may be necessary for future ESRC centres funding opportunities, and there is no guarantee that existing ESRC centres will be excluded from the limit in future.

What we're looking for

We are looking for centres that deliver challenge-led research, bringing together the right people, disciplines, institutions and infrastructure to respond to that challenge within a 5-year timeframe.

At least 50% of the proposed programme of research must fall within ESRC's remit.

Challenges addressed through successful centres will be critical to the future of our society or the economy, or both. Research will address a gap that is not being addressed elsewhere that can be delivered within a 5-year timeframe. You should describe the challenge that your centre is responding to as part of your case for support and outline:

- what the challenge is and how it is currently affecting society or the economy, or both
- the geographic scale and demographic focus of the challenge
- why the research needs presented by the challenge are currently unmet

Research challenges

Research

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver high-quality, interdisciplinary, internationally-recognised research findings to address unanswered questions about a defined challenge to our society or economy, or both.

Applications are expected to set out their proposed programme of research and how they will drive forwards innovations in social science theory and the development and application of novel research methods.

Applicants should justify their proposed geography, whether local, national or international. Where research focuses on a geographically defined community, wider scale up and applicability must be demonstrated.

Impact

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver significant economic and societal impact, demonstrating that the centre is responding to its specified challenge.

Impact should be a major consideration throughout the scoping of a proposal, and during and beyond the lifetime of a centre.

Impact should be multisectoral, with evidence of user engagement from inception throughout all stages of the planned timeframe for the award.

Centres should consider other ESRC investments in terms of adding value to their centres, for example maximising opportunities through Impact Acceleration Accounts.

You must include a logic model in your case for support demonstrating the changes the centre will bring about to respond to the challenge, and how and why your programme of research will bring about those changes.

Further resources to support the development of a logic model can be found under 'Supporting documents' in the 'Additional information' section.

Capability

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver the resources needed to become a centre of excellence that adds value to the wider community. This includes developing the people, producing the data and creating the infrastructure needed to respond to their specified challenge.

Career and skills development

You should clearly articulate your plans for career development.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and the Technician Commitment. Through these UKRI commits to support the professional and career development of

researchers and technicians through its funding opportunities. You are encouraged to consider both leadership development and capacity building in your plans.

Leadership development skills should be considered at all career stages to equip researchers in the centre with the leadership skills needed to be able to design, lead and deliver large and complex or interdisciplinary projects and teams.

Research leadership should go beyond project management to include a capacity to enthuse, ignite and sustain an intellectual vision that is inclusive, flexible and open to challenge. The ESRC-commissioned report '[Fit for the future: research leadership matters](#)' gives insight into the skills related to research leadership at different career stages and some preliminary suggestions for how those skills might be supported across the career life-course.

You should also demonstrate how you plan to build capacity. For example through the development of both academic and non-academic skills for research staff and technicians at all career levels, from PHD students to early and mid-career academics to established professors.

Up to 3 associated studentships may also be included in this application, for those Doctoral Training Partnerships eligible to receive studentships from 2024.

Data

Centres should maximise the use of relevant existing data resources in the first instance, as well as (where appropriate) producing data that responds to their proposed challenge and is of value to the wider community.

Data collection and management should be in accordance with the [ESRC research data policy](#).

ESRC funds a range of data infrastructures that are available and free to use for all bona fide researchers (subject to appropriate data sharing considerations). Data collections include:

- [Centre for Longitudinal Studies](#) (home to 6 UK cohort studies)
- [Digital Footprints](#) investments
- [Understanding Society](#) (the UK Household Longitudinal Study)
- several election studies and international surveys

These all cover a wide range of topics.

Data services enabling data access, discovery, user support and training include:

- [UK Data Service](#)
- [Administrative Data Research UK](#)
- [Cohorts and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resource](#)
- [3 UK census longitudinal studies support units](#)
- [National Centre for Research Methods](#)

Management and structure

You should consider the structure of your proposed centre to ensure it can successfully deliver the objectives of the funding opportunity, whether through a consortium approach or single institution.

Partnerships with non-higher education institutions across government, industry and civil society are encouraged where appropriate.

International collaboration is also encouraged to:

- develop international datasets
- promote knowledge exchange and international impact
- enhance social science conceptual development on an international scale

You must include a brief management plan in your case for support, demonstrating:

- how you will provide leadership across the collaborators
- how the management of the centre and its activities will be carried out, including details of project management and administration resource

You should also include details of any advisory group that will be appointed to oversee the development of the centre.

You are also expected to indicate your plans for monitoring your progress against your logic model, and any plans for self-evaluation throughout the lifetime of your award.

All successful ESRC centres will be allocated an ESRC investment manager who will work with their centre to agree a monitoring and evaluation plan in the starting phase of the award.

Institutional support

We will be looking for evidence of long-term strategic and financial institutional commitment to the proposed centre, above the required 20% (as ESRC funds at 80% FEC). This should be through the provision of grant-associated parallel activities. Examples include but are not limited to:

- studentships
- summer schools
- refurbishment of facilities for the centre
- provision of equipment
- administration
- new lectureships

Outline proposals must include an institutional letter of support from the pro-vice chancellor of research (or equivalent role) from the lead organisation that confirms the research organisation's commitment to the centre application.

If the application is from an existing ESRC centre then this should be noted in the letter of support.

Research ethics

You must ensure that the activities and research of the centre will be carried out to a high ethical standard.

You must clearly state how any potential ethical, safeguarding and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place and all risks are minimised before the project commences.

All proposals must comply with the [ESRC framework for research ethics](#).

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Promoting EDI is an integral part of UKRI's vision to deliver new knowledge and an enriched, healthier, more sustainable and resilient society and culture, and to contribute to a more prosperous economy.

You are expected to demonstrate throughout your proposal how you will consider EDI during the centre's lifetime.

Environmental sustainability

UKRI recognises that we must embed environmental sustainability in everything we do.

You are expected to consider the environmental impact of your centre's activities and to put in place actions that encourage sustainability and mitigate any risk of environmental harm.

How to apply

Outline proposals must be submitted to the [Joint Electronic Submission \(Je-S\) system](#) by 17 May 2023 at 4:00pm UK time.

Electronic acknowledgements will be sent to the principal investigator and submitting organisation.

All proposals must be submitted in English or Welsh and costed in pounds sterling using the Je-S system.

Proposals can only be accepted by electronic submission through the Je-S system.

The proposal has 2 elements:

- an online form requesting key information
- a series of mandatory attachments, including:
 - case for support
 - justification of resources
 - institutional letter of support
 - list of key publications

- CVs for all named individuals

All attachments should be completed offline and uploaded as attachments in Je-S. We recommended uploading attachments as PDF documents.

Generic guidance on the completion of the structured boxes and sections of the form is available from the Je-S help screens, which can be found at the top right-hand corner of each Je-S screen.

You must ensure that you have read and complied with:

- the funding opportunity specific guidance set out in the [Je-S guidance \(PDF, 233KB\)](#)
- the assessment criteria set out in this funding opportunity specification

Where funding opportunity specific guidance provided in these documents differs from generic Je-S help, the funding opportunity specific guidance should always be followed.

Care and attention must be given to completing the proposal correctly and complying with all technical requirements. Proposals that are not completed correctly may be rejected by the ESRC office.

The final submission process is the responsibility of the host institution, and we cannot accept responsibility for any delays which may occur. It is recommended that applicants submit in good time before the funding opportunity deadline.

We strongly advise applicants to confirm with their relevant administrator that the proposal has been submitted successfully to ESRC.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

The assessment of applications will be a 2-stage process:

- outline proposal stage
- full proposal stage

Outline proposals will be assessed and shortlisted by an assessment panel. Shortlisted applicants will subsequently be invited to submit applications to the full proposal stage.

Full proposals will be subject to external peer review and assessed by a commissioning panel. Shortlisted full proposals will be invited to interview.

Assessment criteria: outline stage

Scientific excellence with impact is the primary criterion and is an essential requirement of all proposals.

All outline proposals will be scored according to ESRC's [scoring scale for panel introducers](#) (page 3).

Proposals which demonstrate that they meet the following criteria are most likely to be invited to apply for the full stage:

- an innovative, interdisciplinary research agenda which responds to a defined challenge and paves the way for the centre to be world-leading in its area of research, making an original and significant contribution to theory, methods and knowledge
- plans for impact generation throughout the lifetime of the centre, with evidence of user engagement, backed up by a clear logic model
- justification for the geographical focus of the research, whether local, national or international
- clearly articulated plans for people development at all career levels
- demonstration of how the centre will add value to the wider community, for example by addressing research gaps, through data collection and reuse, or collaboration with existing relevant UK Research and Innovation investments
- a robust management structure with a nominated director or directors and clear arrangements for coordination and management of the strategic direction and operations of the centre
- strong institutional commitment with financial support and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining an ESRC centre
- evidence that issues relating to equality, diversity, inclusion, risk, ethics and environmental sustainability have been considered throughout the proposal

Contact details

Get help with developing your proposal

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

Ask about this funding opportunity

ESRC Centres Team

Email: esrc.centres@esrc.ukri.org

Additional info

The Funding Service

The full proposal stage of this funding opportunity is likely to run on [the Funding Service](#) our new funding platform, rather than via the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. [Set up an account on the Funding Service](#).

If successful at the outline stage, you will be invited to submit a full application, and will receive guidance at that point.

The Funding Service has a digital form-based format with sections addressing application questions which are the assessment criteria for the funding opportunity.

Supporting documents

[Je-S guidance \(PDF, 233KB\)](#)

[Equality impact assessment \(PDF, 346KB\)](#)

[Logic model guidance \(PDF, 101KB\)](#)

Timeline

- 1 February 2023**
Outline opening date
- 17 May 2023 4:00pm**
Outline closing date
- July 2023**
Full stage opening date
- November 2023**
Full stage closing date
- April 2024**
Interviews
- October 2024**
Awards commence

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

© 2023 Copyright UKRI

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/esrc-centres>