

AHRC Focal awards: multilingual futures for UK growth and connectivity: 2025/2026 Frequently Asked Questions.

Version	Date of Publication	Comments
1	TBC	Content based on questions during 2 live webinars held in December 2025 and January 2026, and enquiries received in relation to this funding opportunity.

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1. Introduction

This document covers aspects of the funding opportunity but does not duplicate content from the funding opportunity. Please see the full [funding opportunity](#) and the FAQs before you approach the AHRC for advice.

2. HEI Eligibility

2.1 Can the HEI be based in another country, other than the UK?

The lead applicant must be based at a UK research organisation to be eligible for this funding.

2.2 If the lead HEI is UK, can a co-lead HEI be overseas?

No, a co-lead cannot be from overseas.

2.3 Can the collaboration between HEIs involve individuals within university departments or subject areas rather than whole departments?

Yes, collaborations can involve individuals or specific subject areas within universities, not necessarily whole departments.

2.4 Can you please set out expectations around in-kind support from HEIs or other partners?

A project partner is a collaborating non-HEI organisation who will have an integral role in the proposed consortium. This may include direct contributions for example cash, donated equipment and resources, or staff seconded to the project, or indirect and in-kind contributions for example use of project partner's equipment, datasets, or facilities. Project partners may be in industry, academia, third sector or government organisations in the UK or overseas, including partners based in the EU.

We do not provide funding for administrative costs of setting up and delivering the training grant. Therefore, HEIs are expected to provide in-kind support for this.

2.5 What level of admin or management support are you expecting from the lead HEI?

The lead HEI must provide strong administrative capacity to run a multi partner doctoral training consortium, which would include:

- Managing a multi-HEI consortium over an 8-year funding cycle
- Handling allocation of studentships across four cohorts
- Coordinating governance processes across partners
- Ensuring compliance with UKRI/AHRC terms and conditions

2.6 Will geographical distance between the HEI institutions be considered a problem in terms of cohort building?

No, geographical distance between HEIs is not considered a problem in itself, as long as you can demonstrate strong, coherent cohort building plans.

2.7 Can you advise how to balance regional spread with ensuring students feel part of a cohort?

The regional spread should be determined by your vision and goals for the Focal award and how these might best be achieved. Where there is a wide geographical

spread, we would encourage you to outline what mechanisms you might use to ensure that students feel part of a cohort.

2.8 What does the 30% cap on international students exactly mean? Can you confirm the following:

1 international student in 3 is above the cap (i.e. 33.3%)

To meet the 30% cap, it would mean that we are allowed 1 international student over 4.

Is this correct?

Please see UKRI's guidance on [EU and international eligibility for UKRI studentships from 2021](#). More detailed guidance will be provided when the awards are made, as there are a range of ways in which the 30% may be achieved. At this stage, please ensure that you are factoring in that the studentships will be open to international students.

2.9 What is the maximum size for a consortium to be competitive/deliver a good cohort experience across multiple institutions for this call?

There is no maximum consortium size in the AHRC Focal Awards guidance, however, you should consider what would be feasible for what you plan to deliver and for governance purposes.

2.10 What proportion of the awards offered by the successful consortium is expected to be CDAs? You mentioned 2-3. Can you clarify?

You can apply for up to 3 CDAs in total per award (which should be counted within the student numbers requested). CDAs are not mandatory.

2.11 You mentioned that consortia should think about 'regional breadth.' Turning that around, are you expecting universities to partner within a region as with the previous DTP regime or has that expectation been lifted? Could the partner HEIs come from different ends of the country?

There is no expectation that HEI leads, and co-leads should be within one region or that HEIs will be geographically close together. You will need to demonstrate that you have considered methods to create a cohesive partnership and student cohort in your application.

2.12 Can supervisory teams be cross-institutional? For example, the main supervisor being based in one of the participating institutions and secondary supervisors being based in another?

Yes, supervisory teams can be cross institutional, as this is in line with AHRC practice for doctoral training awards.

2.13 What is the emphasis you are putting on SSIs this time and how do we know what counts as an SSI?

AHRC does not provide a formal definition of small specialist institutions, and we prefer SSIs to self-identify. Diverse consortia are encouraged, which may include SSIs.

2.14 What regional spread are you hoping to achieve?

AHRC are keen to ensure that doctoral training is not centred in one area.

Portfolio balancing will take place at the outline and full stages.

In balancing at the outline stage, we will consider the following:

- HEI lead: HEIs are permitted to lead up to two applications at outline stage, but it is likely that only one will be taken through to full stage
- diversity of higher education institution types
- research focus, to ensure we invite full applications across a range of languages research
- geographic coverage of leads and co-leads, to ensure that we invite full applications located in a range of regions across the UK

In balancing at full stage, we will consider the following:

- diversity of higher education institution types and non-HEI partner organisations, to ensure all funded consortia are diverse and collaborate with a diverse group of partner organisations
- research focus, to ensure we fund consortia across a range of languages research
- geographic coverage, to ensure the new training grant awards are located in a range of regions across the UK

2.15 Can supervisory teams be cross-institutional? For example, the main supervisor being based in one of the participating institutions and secondary supervisors being based in another?

Every student must have a single home HEI, where:

- they are officially enrolled
- the principal (lead) supervisor is based
- the degree will be awarded

However, secondary or co-supervisors can be based at a different HEI within the consortium.

2.16 For a wider geographical spread, are you asking HEIs to top-up the funding for students co-supervised between geographically distant HEI?

It is possible to use the grant to support such travel cost, but you will need to consider the limited budget and the opportunity cost of using it for this purpose would encourage the Focal Awards to consider whether online access would be a more efficient use of resources

2.17 To what extent might it be preferable to bring together a range of different institutions in terms of size? Could this be looked upon more favourably by reviewers?

AHRC are seeking diverse consortia and will consider diversity of higher education institution types as part of portfolio balancing, therefore it is encouraged that HEIs work with different types of institution to build their consortia.

2.18 The Call sometimes speaks of the 'applicant' in terms of an individual person and sometimes as an HEI. Obviously, the consortium will have to be strongly led, but is the application meant to come from a single academic (who 'possesses the skills to deliver') or from the lead university, in which case the name on the application might be a research funding manager?

There is an expectation that there will be expertise within the team, ideally by a project lead or co-lead. However, as long as there is evidence of research expertise within the consortium, someone in an administrative role e.g. with research management or development experience, could be named project lead.

2.19 Can you please explain the focus on 'for UK growth and connectivity' in the name of the call, especially when the call itself includes many other questions (social cohesion, diplomacy, technology, etc)?

The opportunity is seeking to build the high-level skills, innovation capacity and global connections that underpin the UK's growth and prosperity. UK growth and connectivity is the overarching aim; there are a wide range of ways in which this can be delivered as indicated through the more detailed descriptions in the Funding opportunity.

3. Co-Lead Eligibility

3.1 It has been mentioned that colleagues from universities abroad cannot be included as Co-Leads but can be involved in other ways. What are some of these other ways?

International HEIs can act as project partners, for example to host student placements or provide other cohort or individual opportunities.

4. Student Eligibility

4.1 Can the student be part-time?

UKRI's training grant terms and conditions guidance states that: "Students may be full-time or part-time and should be made aware that funding for part-time study is an option. You may decide on the period of support for individuals.

Our Standard Conditions state that you must offer the option of studying on both a part-time and full-time basis with a minimum of 50% of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) required. You are encouraged to consider offering different levels within that range

(for example, 60% or 80% FTE), particularly where this will benefit diversity or other objectives, though this is not a requirement.”

4.2 Should projects be student-led or supervisor-led or should there be a balance?

You can offer either or both, but there should be the potential for students to shape their project even when it is supervisor-led. We indicate: ‘At the student recruitment stage, each training grant consortium must:

- enable doctoral research projects which are student-driven, where students have agency to develop their doctoral proposal’

5. Funding

5.1 Given the theme and its global reach, is there any funding to "top up" for international student fees, or any indications about quotas on international students?

AHRC will only pay the PhD stipends at home rates, not international student rates. It would be possible for HEIs/partners to help support their students in topping up their fees if required.

UKRI has a cap of 30% for international studentships: “The cap will be calculated based on a maximum of 30% of the individuals funded by UKRI per cohort per training grant for all standard studentship competitions. Where the 30% does not equal a whole number, this should be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.” Please see UKRI’s [Implementation Guidance](#) for more information.

5.2 How does the funding for a CDA award differ from a normal award?

CDAs are doctoral research projects which are collaboratively and equitably developed and delivered by a HEI and non-HEI partner, align with the non-HEI partner’s area of activity, and have impacts beyond academia, including the not-for-profit third sector. They are student career focussed, with the student spending up to half their time in the non-HEI organisation and benefitting from the support of two supervisors – one within and one beyond academia. We will provide additional stipend of £600 per academic year for these students and funding is available to support two to three CDA awards per award (subject to demand).

5.3 Following up on the question about 4/3.5-year funding, what can that 0.5 year be used for if not for the student stipend or RTSG?

AHRC funding should be used to deliver high quality training for AHRC-funded students. Any remaining funding under stipend and fees should be used flexibly to create opportunities for individual students, which might include, but is not limited to, placements (with non-Higher Education Institution (non-HEI) partners or overseas institutions), training courses, research support costs, extended fieldwork, or any combination of these. This provision can be for research development (supplementing the Research Training Support Grants (RTSG)) or career

development, it should be responsive to student need and will enable award holders to deliver student provision in line with the [UKRI Statement of Expectations](#). Funding should primarily be used to extend the student's period of study, which can be up to four years, to enable training and development opportunities. Such an extension can take place at any time during the student's funded period. It can also be used for travel and subsistence, course fees, etc. which enable student development.

5.4 If a student has supervisors at 2 universities in different regions, will it then be possible to allocate additional funding to the student for some travel between institutions?

It is possible to use the grant to support such travel costs, but you will need to consider the limited budget and the opportunity cost of using it for this purpose and would encourage the Focal Awards to consider whether online access would be a more efficient use of resources

6. Theme

6.1 Is this call specifically relevant to Modern Languages departments?

No, the call is open to anyone working within departments that undertake language-focussed research, and not specifically for those that are named as language departments.

6.2 Are you open to applications on endangered languages, e.g. a collection of understudied project areas as opposed to more established language and cultural studies?

Yes, applications are welcome from all areas of language study.

6.3 Does the lead have to be a specialist in the theme chosen?

There is an expectation that there will be expertise within the team, ideally by a project lead or co-lead. However, as long as there is evidence of research expertise within the consortium, someone in an administrative role e.g. with research management or development experience, could be named project lead.

6.4 Would applicants for the studentships be expected to have competence in a foreign language?

AHRC would expect the student to have sufficient proficiency in a second language or languages to be able to undertake the proposed research without needing additional language learning. In addition, the student should have experience of undertaking languages research, ensuring that linguistic proficiency is complemented by appropriate contextual, disciplinary, and methodological knowledge and experience.

6.5 Given the emphasis on UK policies around growth and connectivity, should cohorts focus only on languages which are likely to have the greatest

impact for UK policy e.g. minoritised languages used in the UK vs international minoritised languages.

The overarching aim is to support UK growth and connectivity. There will be no tensioning of languages, as all languages (European, indigenous and global heritage languages) will be eligible and assessed equally under this call. In the 'What we're looking for' section it describes the diverse ways in which this might be addressed. It is not an exhaustive list, and applicants should make the case for an approach which they believe will deliver against the ambitions set out in the Funding opportunity.

6.6 Would history research/cultural heritage research be a good fit so long as there is a multilingual context for each studentship project?

Yes, this would be within scope, as long as each studentship is genuinely grounded in a multilingual context.

6.7 What support will be offered for students to conduct fieldwork within language communities, especially those overseas?

The Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) can be used to enable students to undertake fieldwork, though it may also be used for other purposes.

6.8 What is the definition of an institution with capacity in languages research?

We would expect applicants to make their case to show that they have the correct level of expertise within the languages research field(s) proposed and to evidence their capacity to deliver their proposals in full.

6.9 Is the expectation that applications will name specific PhD projects or that they will outline broad areas, topics of interest and strands? Or both?

We do not expect applicants to name specific PhD projects, but to outline broad themes and areas for studentships.

6.10 How interdisciplinary can the work be, e.g. how do we demonstrate the minimum of 50% AHRC remit?

AHRC encourages interdisciplinarity, and your application should outline the balance between disciplines. It needs to be clear that you will ensure all studentship projects are 50% or more within AHRC's remit.

A full list of AHRC's disciplines can be found in section 7 of our [Research Funding Guide](#).

7. Future and Existing Opportunities

7.1 Are there more focal awards coming out or will there now be annual or biannual calls going forward?

This opportunity is part of AHRC's future doctoral provision programme. There is currently an additional focal funding opportunity available and full details can be found [here](#).

We expect another round in the future, but AHRC have not yet outlined and agreed a specific timeline for the next AHRC Doctoral Focal Award funding opportunity.

7.2 If a consortium with an existing AHRC Doctoral Focal Award applies, can it incorporate the delivery and governance into the existing structures?

This would be acceptable if it can be accommodated without detriment to the current governance structures. It may not be applicable as it is likely that the two awards will have a different configuration of partners and governance needs tailored to the award.

7.3 To what extent should these Focal Awards liaise with other landscape awards, AHRC regional hubs etc.?

AHRC encourage award holders to work with others within similar schemes, such as landscape awards and regional hubs but, it is not a requirement.

8. Other

8.1 Will we receive a list of institutions who attended this meeting for matchmaking purposes?

AHRC does not share attendance lists for webinars as this is personal or organisational data. In addition, matchmaking is not provided as part of the Focal Award process, as consortia are expected to self-form.

8.2 On the panels being matched to the areas that applications address, will these include members from areas outside arts and humanities given the interdisciplinary focus.

AHRC assessment panels can include expertise from outside arts and humanities where appropriate.

8.3 Will the selection process of doctoral applicants be managed internally and independently by the HEI co-partners? Or will there be specific processes mandated?

The selection of applicants will be managed internally by the consortium HEIs.

8.4 This call does not seem to necessarily be about training the next generation of academics, but rather researchers who may well not be working in HEIs. Would a very academically focused proposal be competitive?

AHRC recognises that doctoral students will go into a range of careers and expects training grants to provide high-quality professional development options which recognise and promote the diversity of careers open to students. We expect applications to refer to [UKRI's statement of expectations for its students](#) and outline an innovative, unique, and specific training and development approach to address identified skills shortages within the research theme.