

What Works Centre (WWC) for local employment support Applicant Webinar: FAQs

Leadership team

Q: What stage of career would you expect for someone leading this, and if I am not yet at that stage, how can I get involved?

Q: Is this funding opportunity open to ECRs who do not have tenured academic positions or are employed on a part-time basis?

A: The WWC leadership team should be composed of internationally recognised experts with a diversity of skills and experience. They must have a track record of delivering complex, multi-partner programmes that generate and mobilise evidence to improve outcomes. And they will also need the demonstrable ability to engage constructively with senior stakeholders across government, public services, academia, and civil society. As such, they are likely to be well-established in their relevant field(s).

That being said, the opportunity specification makes it clear that the WWC should be composed of a multidisciplinary team with the capacity, expertise, and credibility to deliver the objectives of an outcomes-focused centre. Proposals should also include an action plan for ensuring a sustainable legacy from the centre, which includes developing capacity and capability within the academic community. We would encourage proposals to include a mix of team members at different career stages, supported by robust management structures and clear avenues for genuine career development. From personal experience, this is also something that reviewers and assessors view favourably when considering proposals.

Q: I would like to be a Project Lead on the basis of a job share. Is that possible?

A: Yes, applications may be submitted jointly by more than one applicant on the basis of a job-share, as long as both are based at institutions eligible for UKRI funding for the duration of the award.

In such cases, one person must be regarded as the project lead, taking the lead responsibility for the conduct of the project and the observance of the terms and conditions. Correspondence regarding the proposal and grant will be addressed to the project lead only (and in the case of any offer letter, to their research office).

What Works Network application requirement

Q: It is clear that the centre is expected to apply for membership within 12 months of the award start date and that this process is independent of both ESRC and DWP. However, it is less clear what the consequence would be of not being granted membership. For example, would it result in funding for the centre being paused or withdrawn until such point membership was awarded?

A: The WWCLES' continued funding is dependent on:

1. Successfully passing the stage-gate review in month 10, which will be administered by ESRC in consultation with DWP. The stage-gate review framework is still in development, but will be built around: progress against agreed milestones and objectives; continued alignment with the WWN principles; and continued alignment with ESRC expectations for [good research conduct and governance](#), and [innovation, interdisciplinarity and impact](#).
2. Formally applying for official What Works Centre status and membership of the What Works Network (WWN) within the first 12 months.

In the case that the WWCLES passed the ESRC-DWP stage-gate review, but was not granted formal WWC status and WWN membership by the WWN:

The WWN membership application process allows for resubmission to address any identified gaps or concerns. We would therefore expect the WWCLES to take appropriate measures to enable resubmission in a timely manner.

Eligibility – organisations & Individuals

Q: Can an individual or organisation be named on multiple applications?

A: An individual may be named as a Project Lead on only one application; but may be included as a co-lead on multiple applications.

Applicants should note, however, that naming the same individual as a co-lead on several bids is not generally advantageous within the assessment process unless a clear and robust justification is provided.

Named project partners, subcontractors and consultants may be included on multiple applications, and their inclusion across several bids is not generally considered disadvantageous.

Q: Why is it potentially disadvantageous for a project co-lead to be included on multiple bids?

Q: Why do assessors prefer to see "commitment" to a single proposal?

A: While ESRC rules permit Project Co-Leads to appear on multiple proposals, in practice reviewers and panel members have previously expressed several concerns when this occurs. These include:

- Awareness and transparency within teams: If the Project Lead is unaware that a proposed Co-Lead is named on another bid, reviewers may question the team's internal communication and cohesion. This can raise broader concerns about trust and collaboration should one bid be successful and others later learn that a team member had commitments elsewhere.
- Risks of inadvertent information flow: Even where all parties are aware, reviewers may still consider the risk—however unintentional—of sensitive discussions, strategic thinking, or design details influencing a competing proposal.
- Clarity of commitment and focus: Panels may also question the extent to which a Project Co-Lead named on multiple bids can be fully dedicated to each centre's vision, development, and proposed work programme. This can lead to concerns about whether the individual's primary focus is the strength of the project or their own professional positioning.

For these reasons, while not prohibited, naming Co-Leads on multiple bids should be approached with care and with clear justification.

Q: Can I include international Project co-leads?

A: Project co-leads based in non-UK research organisations can be included, provided they meet the [UKRI Project co-lead \(international\) policy: ESRC guidance](#).

Q: I am a UK-based business, can I apply as a Project Lead?

A: No, the project lead for this funding opportunity must be based at a [research organisation eligible for UKRI funding](#) for the duration of the grant.

UK-based businesses that meet the relevant eligibility criteria can come in on bids as [project co-leads or specialists](#); but the application itself will need to be submitted and led by a partner at an eligible research organisation.

Please refer to the ['who can apply'](#) section of the opportunity specification for full details of the eligibility requirements for this funding opportunity.

Q: Can HDRC's be a PcL in this application?

A: Yes, Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) are eligible to come in on a bid as a project co-lead from a government organisation as they are based in local authorities. Please refer to the policy: [Inclusion of business, third sector or government body Co-Is on ESRC proposals](#) for further guidance.

Eligibility – costs

Q: Would you expect WWCs to have a flexible fund?

A: Applications are not required to include a flexible fund. If applicants choose to include one, they must fully justify its purpose and rationale; and clearly set out how the fund will be managed and governed.

Q: What costs can project co-leads (PcLs) from government, third sector or business claim?

A: Eligible costs for PcLs from UK business and third sector organisations remain the same as those outlined in the ESRC's policy on the [inclusion of project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations](#).

Under new ESRC rules, project co-leads from government organisations (including local government) can claim staff salary costs as long as their role is being backfilled. These salary costs will need to adhere to the ESRC project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations policy, be fully justified, and the backfill commitment evidenced.

As with all ESRC awards, the lead research organisation will retain responsibility for the management and oversight of all funds.

Q: On government organisations being project co-leads, can government agencies that are PSREs claim costings?

A: A list of eligible Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs) can be found [here](#). These organisations are eligible for research funding under standard UKRI terms with ESRC supporting 80% of the 100% FEC costings and the PSRE expected to meet the other 20% costings.

Any PSRE that is not currently on the list of eligible PSREs wishing to apply to be an eligible organisation will need to follow the guidance in the link above.

Connecting with DWP activities, including Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination project (Phase 1)

Q: Can the DWP be a partner, or is it already on board?

A: DWP—whether as a whole, or through specific individuals or teams (including at regional and local level)—cannot be named as a Project Co-Lead or as a Project Partner on any proposal. As a co-funder of the opportunity, this would constitute a conflict of interest. ESRC and DWP will instead engage with the successful Centre through formal governance arrangements, such as participation in the Funders Group.

Q: How is the Labour Market Evidence Programme meant to inform the application? What evidence will be made available in advance and to what extent are IES expected to inform/develop/deliver the centre, given the key role they have played in compiling the initial evidence base?

Q: Can you say more about how the centre is supposed to work with the Labour Market Evidence Programme? At what point will applicants have access to that team's plans?

A: Please refer to slide 19 of the slide pack for details of the Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination programme's planned outputs and their provisional timeline.

We recognise that key findings from DWP's Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination work and the UKRI Rethinking Economic (in)Activity project ([LEAF: Liverpool Economic Activity Framework](#)) are unlikely to be published in time to meaningfully inform proposals.

To address this, the successful centre will undertake a nine-month project refinement phase to work with key partners (including funders) to refine its vision, research questions, and work programme in light of new evidence. As part of this, we would expect the WWCLES team to draw on the Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination project's User Consultation Research outputs. Progress beyond the refinement phase will be subject to a light-touch stage-gate review in month 10, led by ESRC in consultation with DWP.

Applicants should note that we expect the project refinement phase to run in parallel with early research activity. Applicants should outline how they will manage both strands within their proposed programme.

Q: Will bids that do not include the organisations involved in the DWP Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination project be viewed less favourably by assessors?

A: There is no requirement for any of the organisations involved in the DWP Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination (LMESD) project to be included in bids for the What Works Centre on Local Employment Support. The same applies to existing ESRC investments, such as the Liverpool Economic Activity Framework project funded through the UKRI Rethinking Economic (in)Activity opportunity.

Assessors will be advised in their guidance that the inclusion – or non-inclusion – of these organisations should not, by itself, influence their assessment.

We recognise that key findings from DWP’s Labour Market Evidence Synthesis and Dissemination work and the UKRI Rethinking Economic (in)Activity project ([LEAF: Liverpool Economic Activity Framework](#)) are unlikely to be published in time to meaningfully inform proposals.

To address this, the successful Centre will undertake a nine-month project refinement phase to work with key partners (including funders) to refine its vision, research questions, and work programme in light of emerging evidence. Progress beyond this phase will be subject to a light-touch stage-gate review in month 10, led by ESRC in consultation with DWP. We would expect the Centre to draw on LMESD outputs during this period, particularly the User Consultation Research findings. As DWP will be a key member of the Funding Group overseeing the Centre, they will also be able to support the successful team by sharing learning from the LMESD project.

We strongly encourage applicants to set a clear plan for the nine-month refinement phase to demonstrate how they will incorporate knowledge and insights that emerge after the opportunity closes (including, where relevant, from the LMESD project – as well as other stakeholders).

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Applicants should note that we expect the project refinement phase to run in parallel with early research activity. Applicants should outline how they will manage both strands within their proposed programme.

Q: Could DWP comment on how the WWC will interact with other engagement they have with MSAs? For example, expectations around evaluation in Integrated Settlements.

A: We recognise that the wider devolution landscape—including agreements with Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) and the use of Integrated Settlements—creates a complex environment for local partnership working. The What Works Centre will need to navigate this environment carefully to ensure its work is both relevant and additional.

A key part of this will be the centre's initial phase of user engagement. This is a complex landscape: in certain areas, evaluations are already planned or underway around local employment programmes, and some localities have devolved funding through Integrated Settlements. The centre will therefore need to work closely with local areas and with DWP to understand existing programmes, funding arrangements, and ongoing evaluations. This will enable the centre to determine where it can add value without duplicating activities already in progress.

More broadly, the centre should ensure its programme of work complements—rather than replicates—DWP's ongoing engagement with MSAs. Clear alignment and open communication will be important to avoid duplication and to maximise the centre's contribution to strengthening evidence use across devolved areas.

At the same time, the centre is expected to act as a partner in disseminating relevant evidence generated centrally by DWP on what works in local employment support. This will help ensure that local areas benefit from both the centre's own research and the wider evidence base available through national programmes.

Working with non-academic co-leads and partners

Q: How will you be enabling and supporting contribution and collaboration from SME organisations and those in the third sector with expertise in work and health? It is difficult for us smaller organisations to know how to contribute to such a large project at proposal stage, but we have knowledge and expertise that are highly relevant

A: This opportunity is designed to bring together research expertise and frontline insight. While Project Leads must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for UKRI funding, proposals must include at least one Co-Lead from a UK business, third sector, or government organisation.

To support meaningful collaboration, the WWCLES opportunity provides additional flexibilities for eligible non-academic Co-Leads, including how funding can be allocated to partner organisations and the size and structure of partner teams. Full details can be found under '[who can apply](#)' in the opportunity specification.

To support networking, webinar participants were able to opt into sharing their details during the registration process. We regret that we are unable to share contact information outside that process.

If you missed this, you could try:

- Emailing the ESRC team at workinglives@esrc.ukri.org — we may be able to connect you with prospective applicants (where known)
- Commenting on the ESRC LinkedIn post for this opportunity, highlighting your interest in consortium bids
- Contacting your local universities, whose business engagement teams may help identify interested collaborators

Q: In terms of partnership, is the expectation that the WWC builds deep partnerships with a select group of local/regional stakeholders, or that it establishes a wider national network of collaborators?

A: The centre is expected to develop both deep partnerships and a broad national network, as each serves a distinct purpose.

To deliver core objectives—such as generating, testing, and scaling effective solutions—the centre will need to build strong, durable relationships with a select group of local and regional partners. These deeper partnerships will be essential for undertaking robust research, implementing interventions, and supporting evidence-informed practice on the ground.

At the same time, the centre should maintain a nationally open and outward-facing approach, engaging a wider community of stakeholders across the country. It should not be geographically constrained or operate as a closed network. Instead, it should provide value and access to a broad range of authorities, organisations, and practitioners.

In practice, a balanced model is expected: a core set of committed local and regional partners supported by a wider national network that enables broad influence, shared learning, and wider impact.

Scope – geographical focus and location(s)

Q: In relation to the conversation previously about local / regional and national network - are we meaning England as the national network and Wales as a separate national network or do we mean the whole of the UK as the "national" network?

Q: What is the position of Scotland and Wales? In the webinar it was suggested that the call should focus on England, does this mean that Scotland and Wales should not be included or be included in a minor way/as comparators only?

A: Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are all within scope for this funding opportunity. However, for the purposes of this opportunity, the "national level" is defined as including UK Central Government and the Devolved Administrations (the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive).

The corresponding regional and local levels are defined using the [International Territorial Levels](#) (ITLs):

England

- ITL 1: Regions
- ITL 2: Counties, Combined Authorities and groups of counties
- ITL 3: Counties and groups of unitary authorities

Scotland

- ITL 2: Combinations of council areas, and parts thereof
- ITL 3: Combinations of council areas, and parts thereof

Wales

- ITL 2: Groups of unitary authorities
- ITL 3: Groups of unitary authorities

Northern Ireland

- ITL 3: Local government districts

We expect the successful WWCLES to adopt an overarching UK-wide perspective, while embedding place-based approaches throughout its work. This will help ensure that the evidence generated is relevant, actionable, and sensitive to diverse socio-economic and institutional contexts across the country. In practice, this could, for example,

include workstreams focused on particular places or on specific types of local or regional actors.

We recognise that place-based case studies are not always easily generalisable to wider populations. Applicants must therefore outline the transferability of their research findings and learning to other contexts within the UK—particularly where research is conducted in a single locality or a small number of sites.

Applicants should review the guidance on Place-based approaches in the Key requirements section of What we're looking for.

Q: Can my application include an international dimension?

A: Applications may include comparative or international elements, but these should not form the primary focus. All findings, insights and recommendations must be relevant to the UK context.

Q: While the focus is on local levers and supporting local decisions makers, is there any expectation or ability for the insights to contribute to national policy, which can be an enabler for local support?

A: We anticipate that the centre's outputs will also be of interest to central government, the devolved administrations, and national-level policy advocates and practitioners; however, these should be viewed by applicants as an indirect audience.

Q: Is it envisaged that this is a physical centre or a collaborative multi-site centre?

A: The opportunity specification is not prescriptive on whether the centre should operate as a physical single-site entity or as a collaborative multi-site model. Applicants are free to propose the structure that best supports their vision and approach. However, in all cases, applications must clearly describe the proposed design, provide a strong rationale, and demonstrate how any potential limitations will be managed.

If proposing a physical single-site centre, applicants should explain:

- how national reach and engagement will be ensured beyond the host location;
- how stakeholders and partners in other parts of the country will be involved;
- how project co-leads or partners based elsewhere will be supported; and
- how the approach aligns with the principles of equitable partnership.

If proposing a collaborative multi-site centre, applicants should outline:

- how effective coordination and communication across sites will be achieved;
- whether sufficient resources have been allocated for in-person meetings and joint activity;
- how workstreams delivered in different locations will avoid operating in silos; and
- how leadership and management structures reflect the distributed model.

Both approaches are acceptable, but each requires a clear, credible plan showing how the model will support coherence, accessibility, and impact.

Scope – themes and populations of interest

Q: Would you expect work streams that focus on different categories of unemployed (e.g. young/old/health conditions etc), even though these shouldn't be the sole focus?

A: The opportunity specification is deliberately not prescriptive on this point. It is for applicants to design a Centre focus and approach that, in their expert judgement, aligns with the overarching scope of the specification.

As a reminder, the aim of the WWCLES is to improve understanding of which local and regional government levers are effective in increasing and sustaining labour market participation—particularly for people affected by ill health, long-term health conditions, and disability, as well as their informal carers—and how these approaches can be implemented effectively across the country.

Applicants may choose to include workstreams that focus on particular groups, locations, or conditions, provided that:

- such workstreams are not and do not become the primary or sole focus of the Centre as a whole; and
- the proposed activity does not duplicate the work of existing What Works Centres or other government initiatives.

For example, a proposal could include a workstream involving young people as a population of interest, as long as the activity is clearly and demonstrably distinct from the work of the Youth Futures Foundation and its inclusion is well-justified for assessors.

Q: Employer-led interventions are out of scope. Would you positively judge an application which makes no mention of employers, or would you expect their key role in ALMP to be reflected?

A: Employer-led interventions that do not substantively involve government actors or public service providers in their design or delivery are out of scope for this funding opportunity. However, collaborative ventures involving employers or third-sector organisations are in scope when they are led by, or meaningfully involve, local or regional government in both their design and implementation.

Assessors will generally expect applicants to acknowledge the important role employers play in Active Labour Market Policies or cross-policy ventures. That said, proposals will not be judged negatively for not including collaborative ventures with employers, provided the applicant offers a clear and well-reasoned justification for this choice.

Scope – activities (types & proportion) and outputs

Q: Do you envisage that this WWC will be commissioning other organisations to undertake research (reviews, evaluations etc), similar to other WWCs? And if so, is it intended that the funding for this will need to come out of the £15m?

A: In line with the opportunity specification, we expect that the centre will work with partners and stakeholders to co-identify critical gaps where evidence is weak or unavailable; and that it will seek to fill these through its own primary research or by encouraging other organisations to do so. The WWC could commission other organisations to undertake some of this research (for example, via a flexible fund), but funding for that would need to come out of the £15 million budget envelope. If applicants choose to include a fund to commission external projects (for example, via a flexible fund), they must fully justify its purpose and rationale and clearly set out how the fund will be managed and governed.

Given that the WWCLES budget is finite, we would encourage applicants to consider innovative ways that academic and non-academic partners might work together to leverage partnerships and maximise access to resources and expertise. For example, you might look for opportunities where the Centre could piggyback on intervention plans that are already in place by local and regional partners -- and work together to co-develop RCT plans around them.

Q: How small do you see the "small scale trials" being, within the overall envelope?

A: Trials can be as small as the applicant deems appropriate, as long as the evidence they gather is valid and reliable - and aligns with recognised frameworks for ranking evidence. This is equally the case for trials based on quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method research methods.

Q: In terms of the research, the elements that I saw/heard mentioned explicitly were evidence synthesis, small-scale trials and participatory research. Were these just examples, or a comprehensive view of the envisaged scope? On the face of it this seems to leave out large categories of relevant research - e.g. new evaluations of existing/past interventions.

A: These were just examples to give a flavour of the types of activities we're looking for in a What Works Centre for Local Employment Support. It's worth noting however, that evidence syntheses tend to be a core component of the What Works Centre offer and so their absence would be likely picked up by assessors.

Q: Does this commissioning team agree that RCTs are essential? If so - is there an expectation that this centre will fund RCTs, or will they have to convince others to fund them?

Q: RCTs are very difficult to combine with co-design and are not seen as the gold standard in all policy/practice evaluations - will this be taken into account when applications are reviewed

Q: Randomised Control Trials. One speaker said these were compulsory, there were several questions about this but they were not answered – including that in this area and with the element of co-design they did not make sense. Are RCTs compulsory?

A: We anticipate that experimental and quasi-experimental methods will form a core component of the centre’s methodological approach, particularly where robust causal inference is required. We recognise that RCTs will not be universally appropriate in every context. However, applicants should give serious consideration to the situations in which randomised or otherwise high-quality experimental designs are feasible and proportionate.

If RCTs are proposed, applicants should articulate realistic assumptions, dependencies, and limitations.

If a proposal does not include RCTs, applicants should clearly justify that choice and demonstrate that their alternative causal-inference strategy—whether quasi-experimental, natural-experimental, or well-structured non-randomised designs—has a credible track record for producing high-quality, policy-relevant evidence.

In all cases, the successful Centre’s methodological approach must align with established evidence-rating frameworks—such as the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale, GRADE, CERQual, Nesta’s Standards of Evidence, and the RAMESES guidelines—to ensure that the strength of evidence produced is consistently and openly assessed. Proposals must also demonstrate that their methodological approach meets the What Works Network standard for rigour, regardless of method. This is especially important, given the requirement for the successful centre to apply for formal WWC status and WWC membership within the first 12 months of the award.

In terms of funding, applicants may choose to resource RCTs within the £15m budget, through co-funding with partners, or by setting out credible mechanisms for leveraging external funding. Building evaluations onto existing or planned interventions—with delivery funded by system partners—is also entirely acceptable. What matters to

assessors is that the proposal sets out a robust, feasible, and strategically justified plan for generating high-quality causal evidence where it is most needed.

Q: What are your expectations about the balance / mix of this new WWC in terms of focusing on reviewing existing evidence vs. conducting new primary research incl. trials?

A: We expect the new What Works Centre to strike a clear balance between reviewing existing evidence and generating new evidence, including trials where appropriate. The specification sets out the standards we expect: methodological rigour, clear criteria for quality and relevance, and alignment with recognised frameworks like the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale.

We do anticipate that experimental and quasi-experimental methods will form a core part of the centre's approach. But we also recognise the value of theory-based work, process evaluations, mixed methods, and participatory approaches. The strongest proposals will combine robust quantitative methods—including RCTs—with high-quality qualitative insight.

We're also realistic: RCTs must be done well, and implementation can be challenging. That's why one of the centre's roles is to support testing and evaluation where evidence gaps exist. Centres may choose to budget for small-scale trials, but we're not expecting them to fund intervention delivery. Instead, we encourage them to build evaluations onto existing or planned interventions, working with partners to design feasible and rigorous studies.

So overall, we want a balanced portfolio: authoritative synthesis of what we already know, and targeted, robust evidence generation where it's needed most.

Q: Could you give indication of your expectations about how budget should be allocated across different activities? Specifically, trials can be expensive (especially if intervention also has to be funded) so would be useful to understand expectations around scale of activities to generate new evidence.

A: We have intentionally not set any specific expectations regarding how applicants should allocate their budget across different activities. Approaches to building and operating a centre will vary, and costs may differ substantially depending on the chosen model. Applicants therefore have full flexibility to determine how their budget is distributed across partners, workstreams, and evidence-generation activities, including trials.

What matters is that the proposed allocation is proportionate, reasonable, and clearly justified. As long as the rationale is well explained in the application, and would be considered sensible by an assessor, applicants will not be disadvantaged. No specific ratios or minimum percentages have been mandated in the Opportunity Specification, and assessors will refer to that specification when reviewing proposals.

However, applicants should ensure that all core elements of the centre's work are appropriately resourced. For example, allocating only a very small proportion of the budget to knowledge mobilisation activities would be unlikely to demonstrate a balanced or viable approach. Within a broadly reasonable range, though, decisions about the precise distribution of funding are entirely for applicants to determine.

Q: Would you be interested in actual physical proof and ongoing pilots that have had high success and retention rates?

A: We welcome proposals that build on prior work, including existing pilots or programmes with strong early evidence. Where this is the case, you must contextualise and build on previous work within a robust, methodologically rigorous research and evaluation framework. You must explain how earlier findings will be tested, extended, or refined through the centre's programme of research. Please refer to the information in the funding opportunity (specifically on what is required for the 'Approach' section) for more information.

Q: Given that high quality primary research (e.g. Participatory, RCT methods) can take significant time to produce results and insights, what outputs would you expect in the first year outside of systematic reviews?

A: In Year 1, we would expect centres to deliver meaningful interim outputs. These should be proportionate and strategically chosen vs user need, and applicants should set out clearly what they consider realistic and valuable within their proposed model. It is for applicants to propose outputs, but such outputs might cover some of the elements required to deliver against the call longer term - for example:

- Co-production of a clearly articulated research agenda with partners
- Methodological standards and evidence-rating protocols
- Development and registration of trial protocols
- Baseline data collection
- Theory of change articulation and refinement
- Rapid evidence syntheses or scoping reviews
- Stakeholder engagement outputs

Q: Evidence and data are different things: The earlier presentations focussed on more typical What Works activities such as evidence synthesis, but the last presentation was focussed on data quality, data sharing and raw data limitations. Solving these issues is a different task than traditional What Works activities that produce systematic reviews and RCTs etc. Is there an expectation/hope that the centre will include workstreams that seek to solve data sharing and raw and secondary data collection issues? Or is the aim that the centre would find examples of places that have solved similar data sharing issues, and point other authorities to that work? (Rather than doing hands on problem solving of data issues).

A: No. The centre is not expected to focus on data-sharing or data-linking issues. DWP is already aware of the challenges in this area and is progressing work on data-sharing arrangements between central and local government. As such, addressing these issues is not within the intended scope of the centre.

Similarly, the centre will not be expected to provide hands-on support to resolve data-sharing problems on behalf of individual organisations.

However, the centre may find it valuable to highlight where data-sharing barriers are creating particular difficulties for local actors, and to share examples of effective practice where similar challenges have been successfully addressed.

Q: In the webinar it was said that WWCs could not fund interventions – does this mean that the implementation costs of any co-design need to be borne by partner organisations/we can only observe and evaluate interventions that would have happened anyway? Or does it refer only to full scale interventions and trials may be funded?

A: The opportunity specification states that funding cannot be used to deliver full-scale interventions or to implement interventions in their final, long-term form. For example, national programmes or interventions delivered across an entire devolved nation are out of scope.

However, the Centre may fund smaller-scale test-case interventions where this is necessary to generate evidence. This could include:

- testing established interventions with new populations or in new locations;
- adapting existing approaches under different conditions; or
- piloting innovative interventions co-designed with partners.

In these cases, implementation costs associated with the test phase can be covered by the Centre. Where interventions are already being delivered by partners, the Centre may also choose to observe, evaluate, or support them—provided this aligns with the overall aims of the opportunity.

Regardless of the approach taken, applicants should ensure that test-case activities are designed to generate transferable and actionable learning, even where findings may not be directly generalisable to all contexts or populations.

Centre sustainability and legacy

Q: Could you elaborate on the expectations for this WWC's sustainability beyond the funding period please, such as regarding financial sustainability and long-term policy/academic/societal impact?

A: Proposals should set out a clear and credible plan for ensuring a sustainable legacy for the centre beyond the funded period. This should include:

- **Leadership and governance continuity:** Plans for succession of key roles and leadership throughout the lifetime of the centre, as well as arrangements that support continuity after the funding period ends.
- **Preservation of outputs and resources:** A strategy for maintaining and archiving websites, datasets, tools, publications, and other digital or electronic materials so they remain accessible and usable in the long term.
- **Long-term impact and sustainability:** Consideration of how the centre's insights, evidence, and relationships will continue to inform policy, practice, academia, and wider society beyond the lifetime of the grant. This may include plans for continued partnerships, follow-on funding, or embedding of processes within existing systems.

Assessment process

Q: How will you be sourcing assessment panel experts?

A: We will convene a panel of UK and international experts with recognised authority in the research and innovation areas covered by the WWCLES opportunity. Panel members will be selected for their relevant expertise and will assess applications against the published criteria.

Further information on how funding decisions are made is available on the [UKRI website](#).

Working with ESRC investments, ESRC, or DWP

Q: As this is a joint opportunity with DWP, are we able to discuss our application with DWP colleagues?

A: No. To ensure fairness and transparency, neither ESRC nor DWP can discuss or provide feedback on individual proposals or emerging ideas. This includes informal discussions with DWP colleagues involved in wider policy or programme work.

For clarity, neither ESRC nor DWP participate in the assessment or scoring of applications. ESRC provides secretariat support to the assessment panel, and DWP attends in an observer capacity only. All funding decisions are made independently by the panel.

If you have questions about the opportunity specification, ESRC policies, or the application process, please contact the ESRC team at workinglives@esrc.ukri.org

Q: Can we approach ESRC investments to work with us on this application?

A: Individuals who are currently named on ESRC-funded awards may be included in new proposals, provided they meet [ESRC's standard eligibility requirements](#). However, applicants should note that UKRI limits the total time an individual can be costed across all UKRI-funded grants to a maximum of 100% full-time equivalent (FTE). It is the responsibility of the host research organisation(s) to ensure that appropriate internal checks are in place to monitor time commitments and prevent any individual from being costed above 100% FTE across multiple awards. Applicants should work with their research offices to ensure that all named team members comply with these requirements when preparing proposals.