

AHRC Town Hall Q&A

Consolidated Question and Answer List

This document contains answers to questions asked at the Town Hall that we were unable to answer on the day. The 12 questions below have been collated to address queries that were sufficiently distinct from the five questions answered during the Town Hall's live Q&A and therefore warrant a separate response.

Questions and answers

1. Recognition of non-HEI Partners

Question: Can AHRC reintroduce the category of Collaborating Partner so non-HEI partners can be recognised appropriately without becoming a financial liability for HEI applicants?

Answer: The removal of the Collaborating Partner category was a UKRI-wide change introduced through the Funding Service. UKRI regularly reviews community feedback to improve both its funding policies and the system itself. AHRC will continue to feed evidence from our community into wider UKRI consideration of project roles, eligibility and financial responsibility.

2. Professional Services Support

Question: How will AHRC support the development and sustainability of research partnerships with non-academic organisations, including through professional services support to build, manage and communicate those partnerships?

Answer: AHRC supports partnership development through its funding portfolio, including Curiosity Awards, which explicitly support networking and partnership-building. Applicants and research organisations should use the flexibility within relevant opportunities to identify and justify the professional support needed to build, manage and communicate those partnerships, rather than leaving that work unrecognised or absorbed as invisible overhead.

3. Alternative Leadership Models

Question: What opportunities will there be for alternative leadership models that enable teams to co-lead, including with community and external partners?

Answer: AHRC recognises that effective research leadership can be shared across a team and can take different forms at different scales. Our new Large Grants scheme, building on the Mission Awards pilot, requires a team-convening approach and enables people from business, third sector and government organisations to take formal co-lead roles. Curiosity Awards also support teams and networks, project co-leads and partnership-building, including applications from practitioners and others who do not hold traditional academic posts. Together, these routes provide scope for different forms of collaborative leadership, while retaining clear governance and accountability.

4. Entrepreneurial Training and Capacity Building

Question: How will we be able to scale commercialisation opportunities without the entrepreneurial training that built our pipeline of social ventures and provided academic time buyout?

Answer: AHRC is to launch its first-ever commercialisation strategy in autumn, setting the direction of travel for the remainder of the spending review period. The strategy is designed to be straightforward, coherent and flexible. This means that, while there may not be new entrepreneurial-skills opportunities to announce at the launch, AHRC is exploring and improving its links to Innovate UK's offering in this space. This is a live conversation. Using a range of methods, we will always consider how best to support our applicants to access the commercialisation pathway alongside their existing commitments.

5. Impact Toolkit

Question: Is the toolkit available now?

Answer: The impact toolkit will be made available from September, and we will use this as the basis for further conversation to refine it through your feedback.

6. People as Infrastructure

Question: How will AHRC ensure that participatory and co-produced research is appropriately supported and assessed, and that the people, relationships and collaborations that underpin such work are recognised as a vital part of the UK's research infrastructure?

Answer: AHRC will continue to design opportunities and assessment processes so that participatory and co-produced research is judged on the quality, appropriateness and equity of the approach, rather than against a single conventional academic model. This includes using relevant reviewer expertise and recognising that the people, relationships and sustained partnerships underpinning this work are a form of critical research capability.

7. Access to Peer Reviews

Question: Why can't peer reviews still be made available to applicants through the Funding Service, even if the right of reply has been removed?

Answer: Where the assessment process of a funding opportunity includes a written peer review stage, reviews are always made available to applicants on the system either to reply to as part of an applicant response or shared following the rejection of the application at review stage. For any issues accessing reviews on the system please contact support@funding-service.ukri.org

8. Peer Review College Recruitment

Question: Given pressures on peer review, will AHRC consider accepting applications to the Peer Review College on a rolling basis?

Answer: Yes, AHRC is actively exploring the best mechanism for its next round of Peer Review College recruitment and is aiming to announce further details this year.

9. Gateway to Research / Portfolio Approach

Question: How will the redevelopment of Gateway to Research support the increasing emphasis on a portfolio approach, and what is the timeline?

Answer: Gateway to Research (GtR) makes information about UKRI's funded research openly available, and the redevelopment gives us the chance to make that information more useful for looking across our investments as a whole – not just council by council.

One planned improvement is the ability to tag investments by the specific programme they belong to, alongside the council that funds them, so that people can see funding patterns that cut across councils as well as within them.

We're still refining the data behind this and don't have a firm date for when the new labelling will be in place, but we'll share more as our plans firm up.

10. Support for Small Specialist Institutions

Question: How will AHRC support small specialist institutions in funding design?

Answer: AHRC recognises that small specialist institutions, including museums, archives, libraries and other non-academic organisations, play a vital role in the UK's design research and innovation ecosystem. Through initiatives such as the Design Generator programme, AHRC encourages consortia that actively involve and support these organisations, enabling them to contribute their expertise, access funding opportunities, and build sustainable partnerships with academic and industry partners.

11. National Doctoral Training Offer

Question: Could AHRC develop a national training offer rather than having each doctoral award create its own training provision?

Answer: We are exploring whether elements of training could be offered collaboratively across Landscape and Focal Awards, reducing duplication while retaining the distinctive purpose and expertise of individual awards. Award holders are already encouraged to share good practice and open training courses beyond their own cohorts where appropriate and practicable.

12. Accessibility of PhD funding

Question: What assurances can AHRC provide that PhD funding will become more equitable and accessible, particularly for researchers outside red-brick universities and those from underrepresented groups?

Answer: AHRC continues to be deeply mindful about EDI and the systemic challenges we all face. A particular focus for us at the moment is around barriers to access arising from disability. AHRC actively promotes widening participation through its training awards. EDI approaches are a key part of the assurance process in making awards, and all award holders are expected to encourage applications for studentships from underrepresented groups.

The Doctoral Focal Award consortia model facilitates cross-organisation working, creating opportunities for a diversity of institutions to train doctoral students. In addition, AHRC has awarded additional funding to a Small Specialist Institution (SSI) led award to build a community of SSIs and to support their broader involvement in doctoral training.

AHRC will monitor participation and outcomes across the portfolio to understand whether these measures are improving access in practice.