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What Works Centre (WWC) for a climate resilient UK Applicant Webinar: Q&A

1. Thematic questions

Q1: What is the spatial coverage of the call, is it just England or the whole UK?

A1: The Centre should operate with a whole of UK approach, and we have partners across the UK as part of the Programme Board to facilitate this.

Q2: How will this Centre build on the existing work of programmes such as the MACC Hub (UK wide) and ClimateXChange (Scotland)?

A2: This What Works Centre opportunity has been developed in consultation with stakeholders to provide a systematic focus on establishing what works, for whom and in what contexts. It will synthesise evidence across existing programmes, undertake robust evaluations and trials where evidence gaps remain, and translate findings into decision-ready guidance.

The Centre will also work with government, local authorities, businesses and communities to address barriers to implementation and support the wider adoption and scaling of effective approaches. It will build on evidence and learning from existing and previous programmes (such as the MACC Hub and ClimateXChange) working with relevant stakeholders and experts to avoid duplication.

Q3: Will it be in scope to look at governance structures and place-based adaptation and implementation barriers? What works for climate adaptation is primarily an implementation challenge.

A3: The Centre is required to integrate the following cross-cutting themes: place-based adaptation and systems of adaptation governance and accountability. These areas are therefore within scope of for the Centre. Successes and lessons learned from implementation will be an important output from the investment.

Q4: Would the budget be expected to be split equally across the three main themes?

A4: It is up to the applicants to determine the best use of budget to respond to the opportunity topics.

Q5: Is this call about past adaptation, future adaptation or both?

A5: This call is focused on building resources to improve future adaptation policy. However, we expect learning from past examples to be important to achieve this.

Q6: The call places strong emphasis on understanding what works for whom, where and under what conditions, as well as on vulnerability and inequality. Do funders expect the Centre to develop a common set of population- and place-based outcomes or metrics that can be applied across different pilots and topic areas, or would evaluation frameworks be expected to remain primarily intervention-specific?

A6: It is for applicants to propose appropriate outcomes and KPIs for the proposed centre that aligns to the objectives and outcomes of the What Works Centre.

Q7: The call asks the Centre both to apply robust evaluation methods and to advance adaptation evaluation practice. To what extent would you welcome methodological innovation—for example approaches that integrate multiple incomplete or uncertain data sources—alongside established experimental, quasi-experimental and theory-based evaluation methods?

A7: A key objective of the Centre is to co-develop, test and advance robust standards, methods and frameworks for evaluating climate adaptation interventions, improving consistency, comparability and learning to support policy development and practical place-based delivery across the UK. Applicants can set out a proposed approach that delivers against that objective, utilising innovative and/or existing approaches, as appropriate.

Q8: Regarding the 3 topics, there is plenty of work there of course! But I was wondering whether there is a deliberate choice to leave out security and human migration impacts of climate change? It all seems to be about adapting what we currently do (what we do strictly within the UK) to cope with higher temperatures, but the raw climate change is only part of what we have to adapt to.

A8: The three topics provide a framework for prioritising the Centre's work rather than an exhaustive description of every climate-related risk.

The three topics were designed to provide a practical and manageable structure for the Centre's work, while recognising that climate adaptation is highly cross-cutting and that many important issues span multiple sectors and systems. The Centre will be expected to consider interdependencies, cascading risks and wider societal impacts where these are relevant to climate resilience outcomes. The proposed scope also highlights the importance of understanding how impacts in one system can affect others, and how compounding risks can be managed.

While the Centre's primary focus is on generating evidence to support climate adaptation decision-making in the UK, applicants could consider international drivers

and cross-border impacts, including migration and global system dependencies, where these materially influence UK climate resilience and adaptation outcomes. National security considerations may therefore be relevant across the topics, particularly where climate risks affect essential infrastructure, services, food systems or communities.

Ultimately, the successful Centre will refine its priorities through engagement with users, delivery partners and funders.

Q9: Would you please give examples of pilots in the Resilient Infrastructure area.

A9: The opportunity does not prescribe particular pilots.

Applicants are encouraged to identify, test and evaluate interventions that strengthen the resilience of critical services and infrastructure to climate risks.

Illustrative examples might include, but are not limited to:

- Testing approaches to improve drought resilience and water efficiency in water networks.
- Piloting interventions to reduce climate-related disruption to transport networks.
- Evaluating adaptation measures that help healthcare, education or emergency response services continue operating during extreme weather events.
- Assessing governance arrangements or investment approaches that improve resilience across interconnected infrastructure systems

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Q10: The proposed What Works Centre for a Climate Resilient UK will invest significant resources over five years in generating, synthesising and mobilising evidence. Given that climate adaptation and resilience are challenges that will extend well beyond this funding period, what is the funder's vision for the Centre's long-term legacy? In particular, how will the evidence, data, tools and networks developed through the programme be maintained, updated and made accessible after the grant ends? Understanding this would help applicants consider how best to structure, curate and synthesise evidence from the outset, ensuring that the Centre's outputs become a durable national resource rather than a time-limited project.

A10: The need for adaptation and resilience action will certainly extend beyond the next five years. From a public policy perspective, the need to take delivery partners through the 'understand, plan, act and then evaluate' cycle on climate risk will always remain. Whilst the pace and scale of climate impacts will evolve, from a 'What Works' perspective, the solutions and evidence-led actions that work today will still be relevant in many years to come. Therefore, the findings from the work proposed should be able to be used by policy makers beyond the grant lifetime.

The Centre can plan for legacy in their applications and demonstrate the pathways they will take to ensure longevity and potentially for further funding if this helps support meeting of the criteria, but it can be planned for during the award too.

Q11: A lot of adaptation work happens at the local or regional level - which matches strongly the current big devolution push. How much is this funding focused at supporting delivery at the local and regional government level (with all sectors at that level) or is it more focused on national policy?

A11: Much of adaptation is ultimately delivered at the local and regional level. As the Centre's aims are seeking to understand what effective adaptation action looks like, then local and regional delivery should be a central part of the analysis and the resulting outputs. There could be a focus on national policy too if required for the outputs of the designed Centre, but there is no specified proportion of resources for any of the levels.

Q12: Are there objective criteria for where in the UK the centre should be located, for example proximity to key national infrastructure (water, energy, comms, transport) and its exposure to current and future climate risks?

A12: There is not an assessment criterion for where the Centre should be located, but there is a focus on delivering evidence-based knowledge mobilisation and dissemination through sustained engagement with stakeholders at national, devolved, regional, local or community contexts, which could influence the location of the Centre or where activities take place.

There is an ask for demonstrating a UK wide perspective which encourages place-based thinking. There is a recognition that both the risks and the policy solutions do change depending on location, however, there are aspects of policy making and adaptation that's agnostic to geography.

Due to this, the Centre can have a place-based outlook which may influence the positioning of the Centre if the team composition and objectives make the impact more effective and this should be justified in the application, but equally valid would be a justification of siting the Centre to address broader, national needs too.

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2. Process questions

Q13: Is the application multiple stages for this grant given the announcement from ESRC to introduce this for new schemes? If so, can you talk through this and how it works for the sections of the application? Do we have to provide a complete budget at this stage, for example?

A13: It is a single application process and separate from ESRC's recently announced Applicant Led Mode refresh. Yes, we expect applicants to fully complete all the required

sections in their entirety and submit their applications for the deadline of 4pm 15 December 2026.

Q14: Will only one centre be funded?

A14: Yes. This opportunity is to fund a single What Works Centre.

Q15: Recognising that there are often broader considerations that influence funding timelines, could UKRI share any further information on the factors that led to the current application timeframe for this opportunity?

A15: The current application timeline is based on current available budget allocations. The timeline has been designed to allow for the maximum time for the partnerships to develop and applications to be written around these timeline and administration constraints.

Q16: The call, rather than just being multi-disciplinary, reads as multi-challenge. That is, whereas previous calls of this type may have funded 2-3 centres/networks around 2-3 different strands, this WWC requires all aspects (natural environment/food; thriving places; services/infrastructure) under one roof. Could you overview the rationale for this?

A16: By drawing together the expertise from multiple challenge areas under one project umbrella, there is an aim to produce a single point of contact and engagement for decision makers, drawing on different expertise within these topics and cross-cutting areas going forward. It is hoped it would allow for easier longer term legacy plans to be developed.

Q17: Are there requirements in terms of the academic background of the Project Leads or the Co-Leads (e.g. from an ESRC background, specialism in economic evaluation) or are applications assessed on the basis of the mix of expertise within the team?

A17: The submitted Centre's project team will be looked at as a whole and it's up to the project application to explain why they have selected the critical expertise that they have, what value they'll bring and how as a whole they will operate in order to deliver the Centre. There is no expectation of a specific background needed for Project Co-Leads, but this should be carefully considered for the Project-Lead as to justifying why their expertise is the correct one to lead the Centre. The team as a whole should demonstrate how they are a sum of the parts to achieve the Centre objectives and outcomes.

Q18: Can you add more detail on the flexible fund - is this for the consortium to use to invite proposals and grant funds outside of the centre - or for use within the centre by the collaborators to respond to future needs?

A18: The Flexible fund should be utilised within the Centre by collaborators as a mechanism to respond to emerging needs.

Q19: Do the applicants need to pursue the WWC joining process in advance of being granted or does this happen after selection of successful centre?

A19: Within 12 months of the award date, we expect that the successful centre would be at a position to apply for What Works membership status. This is not something that needs to be done in advance of the award when the application is being prepared.

Q20: Our understanding is that not for profit, social enterprises can participate in a consortium. And are eligible for up to 100% recovery of project related costs. Is this correct?

A20: You may allocate more than the usual 30% of total costs (at 100% FEC) to non-academic partners where clearly justified, and while remaining within the total budget available for this funding opportunity.

UK based businesses, third sector or government organisations can be involved as co-leads in the consortium, with costs eligible as per ESRC guidance.

Inclusion of business, third sector or government body Co-Is on ESRC proposals

International businesses, third sector or government organisations may be involved in a project partner capacity.

Q21: What role do you envisage industry playing (either as partner or as target audience?)

A21: Industry can participate with the Centre, either as project partners, a mechanism for the impact, or a Co-Lead member of the consortium as per the ESRC project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations policy.

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3. Cohort building questions

Q22: Will UKRI facilitate consortium building or partner matching for organisations with specialist expertise and established real-world research platforms that would like to contribute to, rather than lead, a Centre proposal?

A22: The partnership platform for consortium building and partner matching is available, so please do utilise this platform to support with developing those connections. Sign up to the partnering platform here: B2Match Partnering Platform - WWC for a climate resilient UK

Q23: Could you share the participant list of the webinar? Also when will the opt-in attendee directory be posted on Funding Finder, and can independent collaborators use it to approach research teams forming bids?

A23: When people registered for the webinar, they were given the option to provide contact information for an attendee directory. This directory is now available on the Funding Finder and is accessible here.

Independent collaborators can use this list to approach individuals for the purpose of building bids, and, as presented by Georgia, we also have a partnership platform for the opportunity to support collaboration across interested groups.

Q24: How many bids can an NGO be involved in? Do the demand management limits apply to institutions or individual applicants?

A24: There is no limit on involvement at an organisational level, there are demand management limits on involvement set at an individual level.

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4. Financial questions

Q25: Local Authorities are at the front lines of being able to adapt to a changing climate, does the funding support delivery of initiatives from them?

A25: Local authorities could be involved in the What Works Centre investment either in a Project Co-lead or project partner role, noting the eligible costs and criteria as set out in the ESRC policy for including Project Co-leads outside of academia.

Local authority involvement is welcome where it adds value and supports delivery of the Centre's objectives, but applicants should determine and justify the most appropriate role for each organisation. There is no expectation that every application must include a local authority as a costed co-lead.

Including project co-leads from business, third sector or government bodies – UKRI

Q26: For a defined paid evidence assurance work package, which applicant cost category should be considered?

A26: This depends on how the research is being carried out, for example by the core project or through existing organisational resources, or subcontracting. Please refer to the ESRC research funding guide for options ESRC research funding guide for the UKRI Funding Service – UKRI

Q27: **Part 1:** how would a municipality's transformation under local government organisation and or devolution within the duration of the award affect the participation within the award and can the municipality be funded at least 80 percent of external charge out rate

Part 2: Can a municipality staff person be co-lead at a fraction of FTE say less than 40 percent and a percentage seconded to the HE establishment to facilitate bridging of the innovation transfer.

A27: **Part 1**: UKRI grant holders can request alterations to their project in response to changing circumstances. In this case the project lead should contact UKRI to explain changes to project Co-I or project partner status, and the impact on funding. Funding can be adjusted within an expenditure bracket (Directly Incurred, Exceptions, Directly Allocated) in response to changing circumstance, but cannot typically be moved across those brackets. Eligible local government co-investigator costs would be paid at 100% full economic cost, as per the relevant ESRC guidance. Noting the removal of the 30% total cost cap on these exceptions, which is specific to this opportunity.

Part 2: A municipality staff member can be a co-lead for less than 100% FTE on a project. A project co-lead can only be linked to a single organisation on a project, so they would need to be based at either the HE establishment or the municipality. A secondary arrangement in terms of how that time is used could be agreed between the organisations (with one being the lead for that staff member).

Q28: Given the number of Prime Ministers we have had since 2014, and the changing priorities and funding that follows a change of administration, what does "subject to future spending review" mean for a long-term investment in this centre?

A28: The funding for the Centre goes beyond the current Spending Review settlement period and so we have built in allowances for changes beyond this into the opportunity wording. The Centre should plan for the outlined duration and financial information provided when submitting the application as well as any initial legacy plans.

Q29: Can you please clarify if the annual budget limits apply to project years, or to financial years e.g. 1st August 2027 start date and a financial year running from the April.

A29: The budgets will apply to financial years. Therefore, "Financial Year 2027-2028" will have a budget from 1 August 2027 until 31 March 2028.

Q30: What type or level of commercial and business partnership is anticipated for this call. Do you expect UKRI to fund £21M, and cash or on-kind by partners?

A30: The total funder contribution for the investment is up to £21.1 million.

We expect the testing and scaling of interventions to consider commercial pathways, investment conditions and partnerships as part of their delivery. For this opportunity we have removed the 30% cap on allocation of funding to Project Co-leads from business, the third sector or government bodies to facilitate collaboration.

For project partner roles, as detailed in the ESRC funding guide, typically partners will bring specific contributions either in cash or kind to the project. [ESRC research funding guide for the UKRI Funding Service – UKRI]