Centres Competition 2020
Outline phase
Je-S guidance for applicants

Updated July 2020

Introduction
This is a guidance document created to assist applicants to this call in the completion of their proposal. It is specific to this call and should be used in conjunction with the following information:

- **ESRC Centres Competition 2020**
  https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/centres-competition-2020
- **ESRC Research Funding Guide**
  www.esrc.ukri.org/RFG
- **ESRC guidance on 'How to write a good research grant proposal'**
  www.esrc.ukri.org/How-to
- **Je-S help text** is available in every page of your Je-S form, simply click on the question mark against any section (or on the word 'Help' in the top right hand corner of each page)
- **Je-S helpdesk** (for all Je-S system enquiries)
  jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org or 01793 444164

  If you experience difficulties using Je-S or have questions regarding its use, helpdesk staff can be contacted Monday to Thursday 8.30-17:00, Friday 8.30 – 16.30 UK time (excluding bank holidays and other holidays). Out of hours: please leave a voice message.

  When reporting problems by email or telephone, please give your name, organisation and user id, the date and time, what part of the form or system you were working on, and the nature of the problem.

For further information contact the Centres Team (esrc.centres@esrc.ukri.org).

Important: Where information and guidance issued in this document differs from the general guidance offered in these sources, you should follow the guidance in this document.

Impact
In line with the UKRI position on Excellence with Impact (https://www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/), applicants are expected to have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impacts of their research. ESRC applicants should actively consider how these impacts can be maximised and developed within their proposal. Applicant's plans to maximise and develop the potential impacts of their research will form part of the peer review and assessment process.

Opportunities for making an impact may arise, and should be taken, at any stage during the research lifecycle: the planning and research design stage; the period of funding; and all activities that relate to the project up to – and including – the time when funding has ended. The research lifecycle therefore includes knowledge exchange and impact realisation activities – including reporting and publication, and the archiving, future use, sharing, and linking of data. It is important that researchers have in place a robust strategy for maximising the likelihood of impact opportunities and their own capacity for taking advantage of these.

It is important to set out how you intend to identify and actively engage relevant users of the research and stakeholders (within and beyond the academic community including, for instance, the public sector, private sector, civil society or the wider public in general) and include evidence of any existing engagement with relevant end users. You should articulate a clear understanding of the context and needs of these users and consider ways for the proposed research to meet or impact upon these needs. The proposal should also outline how the legacy of proposed activity will be managed to engage beneficiaries and increase the likelihood of its impact in providing lasting value to participants, stakeholders and the wider social science community.

To be effective, all communication, engagement and impact activities must be planned in detail and properly resourced in the proposal.

The ESRC's **Impact Toolkit** gives you detailed advice on how to achieve the maximum impact for your work. The toolkit includes information on developing an impact strategy, promoting knowledge exchange, public engagement and communicating effectively with your key stakeholders: https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/.

Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S)
All proposals under this call must be completed and submitted through the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S). To be able to do this the organisation must be registered (or self-registered for certain calls) for Je-S, and the applicants must hold Je-S accounts.

There is one possible category of organisations from which proposals can be submitted:

UK higher education institutions and all other independent UK research organisations are already **recognised institutions** on Je-S. A list of these organisations is available from the Je-S login page. The organisation will have set up the Je-S submission process and will therefore be available within the Je-S searches.

Je-S accounts for applicants and submitting applications
All principal and co-investigators must have a Je-S account which has been verified by a third party before they can be found in searches within the Je-S System and added as an applicant. To get you started on creating an account please refer to the Je-S helptext at https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/pages/SettingupaJeSaccount/SettingupaJeSaccount.htm
Please ensure that applicants select the 'Account Type: Research Proposal' and the option 'An Applicant on a Standard or Outline Proposal'. Accounts should be created as soon as possible once the call opens to allow sufficient time for the account(s) to be verified.

It is recommended that applicants forward their proposal to the organisation submitter pool in good time before the call deadline to allow a sufficient period for the approval and final submission process. The proposal must be submitted through the Je-S System to ESRC by the institution's nominated contacts. Once the applicant completes and submits the proposal, notification is then sent to their organisation's 'submitter' to action. The 'submitter' is the person in that organisation authorised to approve the proposal and do the final stage of submission.

The applicant will receive an email confirming that the proposal has been submitted to the Submitter Pool - this means the proposal is still with the organisation but is **not** yet submitted to the Research Council. The final submission process is the responsibility of the

host institution, and we cannot accept responsibility for any delay which may occur at this stage. We strongly advise applicants to check that they receive an email confirmation from the Je-S System confirming that the proposal has been submitted to the Research Council.

Before creating your proposal
Research proposals may **only** be made on Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) forms.

Please note that **the deadline for research organisation submission of proposals is 16.00 on 06 October 2020.** You should **allow sufficient time for completion of the research organisation submission process checks/authorisation.** You can view all Je-S registered organisations via the Je-S login page, to ascertain whether the proposed submitting organisation is registered. A list of eligible organisations can be found here: https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/

As in the previous Centres competition, we have again decided to limit the number of applications per institution and ask research organisations to support only the most competitive bids. Your research organisation has been contacted and told how many proposals they can submit to this competition. Your institution will be able to provide you with further information. Applications to the highlight notice will not count as part of the demand management allocations.

Your proposal will actually be sent to Je-S/ESRC from the submitter pool at your research organisation. There is a **further layer of administration between your submission of the proposal and the proposal being submitted to the ESRC, via Je-S**. The research organisation's submission route usually includes both an approver (for example - head of department) and submitter pool (such as, central finance office), and the ESRC cannot accept responsibility for any delay which may occur as a consequence. We strongly advise applicants to secure confirmation from their relevant administrator that the proposal has been successfully submitted to the Je-S team (see also 'Tracking your proposal').

Creating your proposal
1. Log in to Je-S at https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/JeS2WebLoginSite/Login.aspx

2. Select documents

3. Select 'New Document'

4. Add new document screen: Select 'Call search' (highlighted at top of screen).

5. When prompted, type in the call title **Centres Competition 2020 – Outline** and select from the list created. The remaining three selection fields will be automatically populated.

6. Select the 'Create Document' button.

It is the **applicant's responsibility to ensure that the proposal is created and submitted against the correct call** (and consequently correct scheme). We will **not accept** proposals for processing that are not submitted using the above call route.

Completing your proposal

The initial Je-S document instructions page will give you general guidance on the navigation layout, specifically icon descriptions.

The left hand column 'Document Menu' lists all the sections associated with this call and clearly identifies which ones are mandatory (red cross, turning to green tick when completed).

The details below are not an exhaustive step-by-step guidance, and we recommend that you refer to the Je-S helptext for additional information.

Please note you may return to edit saved documents at any time.

Project details

- Select organisation and department from drop down lists
- 'Your Reference' should be supplied by your research organisation (consult your Research Office). If your administration office does not have a system for referencing grant proposals, a suitable reference of your own choice will be acceptable. Use "Your reference" to help distinguish easily between proposals in users' Current Documents lists. The reference is intended to be a unique identifier for the proposal, and is unrelated to the reference that the organisation would be asked to provide if a grant were awarded.
- Enter 'Project Title' (maximum limit of 150 characters)
- If your proposal is being submitted under the highlight notice, your project title **MUST** be prefaced with the word 'Highlight'. If your proposal is not identified in this way it will be considered as part of the open call only.
- For 'Proposal Call', select **Centres Competition 2020 - Outline**. Please note that the option will only be available once the call is live.
- Your start date should not be before 1 October 2021. Your grant should have a proposed duration of 60 months.
- Submission route once you have saved the page - It is recommended that once this initial section is completed, check the submission path (via Document Actions tab) to see if the proposal has to be signed off by submitters and approvers, in which case please make sure they will be available to process the document on the day you intend to submit it to Council.

Investigators

Enter the name of the principal investigator (PI) and any co-investigators (Co-I) if applicable. This means principal investigators on proposals to this call must be based at a UK institution eligible for Research Council funding; see the UKRI website for a list of eligible organisations (https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/).

Investigators may be from more than one research organisation, but the PI must be from the organisation that will administer the grant. The PI will take intellectual leadership of the project and manage the research; this individual will be the contact person for ESRC correspondence. All named investigators are responsible for ensuring that successful proposals are undertaken and completed in the manner specified.

Please note that it is mandatory that you answer positively to the question 'Post will outlast project?' To clarify, there is an expectation that the PI's post will be in place for the duration of the project.

UK co-investigators in business, civil society or government bodies
Please note that any researcher from an established business, civil society or government body based in the UK will be eligible to be listed as a **co-investigator** under Centres Competition 2020.

ESRC will fund 100% of justified costs, however, the project costs associated with these types of Co-Investigator contributions must not exceed 30% of the overall cost of the grant (at 100% fEC). (It is important to note that the **combined** costs for International Co-investigators, and UK Business, Third Sector and Government Body Co-investigators must not exceed 30% of the of the full 100% fEC cost of the grant.) Please note that costs cannot be claimed from government bodies.

On receipt of the proposal, eligibility of business, civil society or government body will not normally need to be checked if it is reasonably clear that they are appropriate to conduct the work. Where there is doubt, checks will be carried out should a positive funding decision be taken.

It is recommended that potential UK co-investigators from business, civil society or government bodies should select 'Self Registration for Organisations' from the Je-S login page, if their organisation is not selectable as part of the Je-S person account registration process.   Je-S accounts should be created as soon as possible once the calls opens to allow sufficient time for the accounts(s) to be verified.

All project costs relating to UK business or civil society co-investigators must be prefixed as 'UK Co-I's business or civil society costs' and must be entered into the costs section on Je-S as follows:

Co-investigator 'time' allocation must be entered under the standard co-investigator section, but the salary rate must be entered as zero. The co-investigator salary costs must then be entered under 'Other Directly Incurred Costs' (please tick the 'Is Exception' box to ensure 100% costs claimed), as should all other claimed staff salaries and related costs associated with the UK co-investigator's business or civil society body.

All costs must be specifically justified, and applicants must explain why such costs are required to achieve the aims of the research project. Applicants must also state clearly in the 'Justification for Resources' attachment of the Je-S form which costs in the proposal relate to the UK co-investigator's business, civil society or government body. Please note that UK co-investigator's business or civil society salary costs should only be claimed where clear justification is provided as to why this cost cannot be met by the UK co-investigator's business or civil society organisation.

Host/submitting institutions are reminded that for calls that encourage non-academic co-investigators, a suitable support structure should be in place to assist such individuals in registering for Je-S accounts and contributing to the research case.

International co-investigators
Please note that any academic researcher (PhD or equivalent) from an established international research organisation of comparable standing to an ESRC-eligible UK research organisation will be eligible to be listed as an international co-investigator under this scheme. ESRC will fund 100% of justified costs, however, the project costs associated with these types of co-investigator contributions must not exceed 30% of the overall cost of the grant (It is important to note that the **combined** costs for International co-investigators, and UK Business, Third Sector and Government Body co-investigators must not exceed 30% of the of the full 100% fEC cost of the grant).

It is recommended that potential overseas-based co-investigators should select 'Self Registration for Organisations' from the Je-S login page if their organisation is not selectable as part of the Je-S person account registration process. Please ensure you initiate such discussions as soon as possible before the call closing date to allow sufficient time for the account(s) to be verified.

All costs associated with the international co-investigator - whether salary, fieldwork, equipment or travel and subsistence - should be entered as 'Other Directly Incurred' and should be marked as an 'Exception' using the tick box. All costs should also be prefixed with 'Overseas:'.

Co-investigator 'time' allocation must be entered under the standard co-investigator section, but the salary rate must be entered as zero.

All costs must be specifically justified, and applicants must explain why such costs are required to achieve the aims of the research project. Applicants must also state clearly in the 'Justification for Resources' attachment of the Je-S form which costs in the proposal relate to international research organisations. Please note that international co-investigator salary costs should only be claimed where clear justification is provided as to why this cost cannot be met by the international research organisation.

Objectives
The ESRC Centres competition is open to innovative new research addressing any major social and economic topic. Centres are seen as an integral part of the ESRC's long term strategy for extending research in excellence and impact and successful proposals must add value to the current portfolio of ESRC Centres. ESRC envisage Centres as long term investments which strengthen the social science landscape in the UK.
Proposals may be made for fundamental or more applied research topics. and should make appropriate use of existing data. The call offers researchers considerable flexibility to focus on any subject area or topics, providing that it falls within ESRC's remit. We strongly encourage inter/multidisciplinary working both within and beyond the social sciences, as long as at least 50% of the proposed programme of research is within ESRC remit. Please refer to the list of research areas that fall within ESRC remit
www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/discipline-classifications for further information.

The call also includes a highlight notice in the area of Changing Populations, in particular 'Connecting Generations'.

We particularly encourage ambitious and novel research proposals addressing new concepts and techniques and those with the potential for significant scientific or societal and economic impact.

Submissions from existing Centres should explain how the proposal meets and develops the current Centre's aims and objectives and how the research programme will be expanded upon. Proposals for new Centres should ensure that they do not substantially overlap or duplicate an existing centre.

If you intend to apply as an existing centre, you should clearly note this in the institutional letter of support, stating the name of the existing centre and grant reference, otherwise your submission will be counted as part of your research organisation's demand management allocation.

Resource summary
The outline call will be subject to the full Economic Cost (fEC) funding model. If successful, ESRC will meet 80% of the full economic costs on proposals submitted and the host institution is expected to support the remaining 20%. We would also encourage ROs to offer commitments appropriate to the plans for their Centre. Further details can be found in the call specification.

All costs expected to be covered by ESRC funding should be included in this section; however, it is not expected that financial details will be precise at this stage. All prices and salaries should be calculated at current rates. Costs will need to be broken down as described in the 'Resource Summary' section of the Je-S help text for outline proposals:

https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/pages/OutlineProposals/ResourceSummary.htm

Equipment
Standard Research Funding Rules apply

Summary
Provide a plain English summary of the research you propose to carry out in a language that could be publicised to a general, non-academic audience. Please note that this section may be made available on the Gateway to Research database, therefore applicants should ensure confidential information is not included in this section *(4000 character limit)*

Project partners (updated July 2020)
If you have secured a commitment from another organisation or funding body to provide additional resources for this project, the details of that support should be entered here. This information needs to cover an **indication** of the support that will be provided rather than specific commitment details. A letter of support from each partner organisation confirming the level of support will **not** be required as part of the **outline** stage proposal but **will** be required should your application be invited to progress to the **full call** stage.

Attachments
It is important that applicants **only submit the supporting attachments specified in this document**. We reserve the right to reject applications that do not include the required attachments or include attachments not specified in this guidance. It is recommended that attachments are uploaded in PDF (rather than Word) format, to ensure

unsupported font type issues do not cause problems with maximum length requirements, please see Je-S guidance; https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/pages/SystemRequirementsFormatsandSa/SystemRequirementsFormatsandSa.htm and https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/pages/OutlineProposals/Attachments_.htm

The following are mandatory Je-S attachments for this call:
- Case for support (6 A4 pages max)
- Justification of resources (2 A4 page max)
- CV (2 A4 pages max. for each named researcher)
- List of key publications (1 A4 page max)
- Other attachments (mandatory) - Institutional Letter of Support (1 A4 page max)

Important note: If you are unclear about whether you can include a specific attachment please contact esrc.centres@esrc.ukri.org for advice, as unrequested attachments can hinder the processing of your application. ESRC reserves the right to return or reject proposals that include attachments not permitted on this call.

Case for support
(maximum of six sides of A4 – minimum font size 11 with 2cm margins)

Please refer to the Je-S helptext for further guidance.

This is the body of your research proposal. It must not exceed *6 pages* and must include the following sections:
- The introduction should set the aims and objectives of the study in context. It should briefly sketch the main work on which the research will draw. Any relevant policy or practical background should be included.
- The research questions to be addressed should be clearly stated.
- Give a description of the proposed research methods and explain the reasons for their choice.
- The bibliography for key references cited in the proposal should be attached under the 'list of publications' attachment.

Additional points to consider are:
- ESRC is committed to funding excellent research which is also innovative, and with the potential for scientific and/or user impact. Where there are risks associated with such research please outline any measures which will be taken to mitigate them.
- It is vital that the economic and social impact of all projects funded by ESRC is maximised. Consider potential beneficiaries and users involved in the development of the proposal and the delivery of the grant where appropriate. This should cover who will benefit from the proposed research, and the relevance of the research to these beneficiaries.
- Explain what steps you will take, to provide opportunities for users to benefit from your research, and to ensure that your research has maximum economic and societal impact.
- Indicate the expected outputs - both academic and those orientated to (potential) users (eg articles, papers, datasets, events). Where possible, describe the expected impact.

- Include details of any potential for linkages to other research activities (for example, those supported by other funding bodies in the UK or beyond) or for international collaboration.
- Include details of any capacity-building activities.
- If the research involves data collection or acquisition you must demonstrate that you have carried out a datasets review, and explicitly state why currently available datasets are inadequate for the proposed research.

The data, materials or information to be collected should be clearly stated, and the methods for achieving this explained. Where sampling is involved, the sampling frame, population and sample sizes, the sample design and arrangements for any pilot should be specified, and the reasons given for the procedures adopted. Where access to people or archives is needed, indicate clearly the records, population or samples to be consulted, and any permissions already obtained.

Using up to one page of the six sides in the 'Case for Support' attachment, applicants are required to include the following information:
- Applicants must provide a management plan explaining how they will provide leadership to a potentially diverse group of academic and (as appropriate) non-academic collaborators, how the proposed programme of activities and its outputs will be managed, and the role and function of any advisory or management groups. This section should include how various work-streams in the proposal will be co-ordinated and managed and detail project management resources and administrative support. Please explain how centre leadership will provide adequate operational capabilities and resources to meet the demands of the research.
- Additionally this section should very briefly outline a commitment to the professional development of researchers at all stages of their career and capacity-building. To be further developed at full phase.

Justification of resources
(maximum of two sides of A4 – minimum font size 11 with 2cm margins)
A two-side A4 statement justifying that the resources requested are appropriate to undertake the research project. The justification of resources should explain why the resources requested are appropriate for the research proposed, taking into account the nature and complexity of the research proposal. It should not be simply a list of the resources required, as this is already given in the Je-S form. Where you do not provide explanation for an item that requires justification, it will be cut from any grant made. Please indicate if a full proposal will include a case for associated studentship(s) and indicate that the DTP director has been contacted for support.

Please refer to the [Je-S helptext](#) for further guidance.

CV
(maximum of two sides of A4 per person - minimum font size 11 with 2cm margins)
A CV for each applicant and named research staff member must be included. This should include contact details, qualifications (including class and subject), academic and professional posts held since graduation, a list of the most relevant and recent publications, and a record of research funded by the ESRC and other bodies. This should not exceed two A4 sides.

List of key publications
The bibliography for references cited in the proposal only should be attached. Please note publications not cited in the proposal should not be added here. A list of the most relevant and recent publications by the applicant should be included in the applicant CV.

Other attachments (mandatory)

Institutional Letter of Support
(1 A4 page max- minimum font size 11 with 2cm margins)
Please upload this document as 'Other Attachment'

As in previous Centres Competitions, ESRC will be looking for evidence of long term institutional commitment, both strategic and financial, to the proposed Centre application through the provision of grant-associated parallel activities and capacity-building. Our current funding model expects the host RO to contribute a minimum amount to demonstrate the ESRC/RO joint strategic commitment to the centre over the longer term.

This funding model is intended to help Centres establish a self-sustaining funding model beyond the life of ESRC funding and, in particular, establish a new relationship between ESRC and ROs, in recognition of mutual benefits, in supporting these high-profile and high-impact Centres of excellence over a longer period. The Centres policy explicitly aims to embed Centres in the higher education funding landscape and host ROs are expected to play an important part in providing this longer term strategic and financial support to the Centre beyond the life of the ESRC centre grant. In particular, there will be a normal expectation that, if successful, the host RO will plan to provide the minimum RO contribution required (25% of the full economic costs of the proposed ESRC centre grant) for the centre to apply for transition funding towards the end of the ESRC centre grant.

ESRC will provide an opportunity for Centres that are successful in this competition to go on to apply for further graduated ESRC support to follow on from the centre grant. Should an existing Centre not wish to re-apply for future funding as a full Centre it is expected that they will apply for a lower level of ESRC 'transition funding' to follow on from the centre grant for up to a further five years, supported by strong strategic, and minimum stipulated financial, commitment from their host Research Organisation (RO). Towards the end of the ESRC transition funding the centre may then apply for a further period of recognition as an ESRC centre to help it leverage funding from other sources and in communicating and engaging with research users.

We recognise that the centre competition grant already requires an RO contribution of 20% (as ESRC funds 80% of the full economic costs of the proposal) and we would encourage ROs to offer commitments appropriate to their plans for the Centre.

Some examples of institutional commitment may include (but are not limited to):
- studentships
- equipment
- refurbishment of facilities to specifically support the centre activities
- seminar and summer schools
- administration of the Centre
- the appointment of new lectureship posts

- support through the institution's existing knowledge exchange, impact and/or international strategies

ESRC would particularly welcome commitments to cover costs that are not eligible under the Centres scheme. If successful, the contribution to the centre's outcomes and impact of these additional strategic RO commitments will be reviewed as part of the ESRCs standard investment management during the grant, and through the Transition review process on application for transition funding.

Outline proposals must include a substantial Institutional Letter of Support from the Pro-Vice chancellor of research (or equivalent role) from the lead organisation that confirms the RO's (and any Partner ROs') commitment to the Centre application.

If you intend to apply as an existing centre, you should clearly note this in the institutional letter of support, stating the name of the existing centre and grant reference, otherwise your submission will be counted as part of your research organisation's demand management allocation.

Proposal classifications
The information provided in this section will be used by us to identify appropriate panellists/reviewers. It would therefore assist us greatly if you could populate the Research Area/Qualifiers/Keyword sections to provide a comprehensive description of your area of expertise.

The Proposal classification area is a harmonised (and expanded) structure agreed with all UKRI councils. Therefore, if your area of expertise crosses the remits of more than one research council you will now only need to provide the information once.

It is an **essential requirement** that your **primary research area is in the social sciences.** We strongly encourage inter/multidisciplinary working both within and beyond the social sciences, as long as at least 50% of the proposed programme of research is within ESRC remit. Please refer to the list of research areas that fall within ESRC remit for further information https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/discipline-classifications/

Please note this information is used to determine eligibility for ESRC funding and to assist in the selection of appropriate panellists/reviewers.

Submit your proposal
After all mandatory sections have been completed, the submit button will appear across the top menu bar. Please ensure that you have **completed all attachments** that are not standard mandatory attachments for Je-S but are a **mandatory requirement to be completed for this specific call.** The submit button will route your finalised proposal to the authorising facility within your organisation (as explained in the Registration section above).

Please note that the proposal must be formally submitted by your organisation before **16:00 on 06 October 2020.**

Commissioning timetable
- Outline Call published - April 2020
- Closing date for proposals - **16.00 on 06 October 2020**
- Outline phase decisions to applicants - November 2020
- Full stage call published (invite only) - December 2020
- Closing date for proposals – 16.00 on 9 March 2021
- Shortlisting Panel meeting - July 2021
- Interview shortlisted applicants - July 2021
- Decisions to applicants - July 2021
- Approximate start date - October 2021

Tracking your proposal
There are additional document maintenance actions that can be undertaken via the Document actions button. For example, the 'Show submission path' will indicate to you where in the organisation submission chain the proposal currently is located (and who holds current responsibility) - such as - owner, approval pool, submitter pool or submitted to Council.

Further enquiries
Enquiries relating to ESRC research funding rules and proposal procedures should be addressed to:
- The Centres Team
  Email: esrc.centres@esrc.ukri.org

Enquiries relating to technical aspects of the Je-S form should be addressed to:
- Je-S helpdesk
  Email: jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org
  Telephone: 01793 444164. Helpdesk staff can be contacted Monday to Thursday 8.30-17:00, Friday 8.30 – 16.30 UK time (excluding bank holidays and other holidays). Out of hours: please leave a voice message.