Centres Competition 2020
Outline phase
Call specification

Summary

This Centres competition will be open to applications of excellent quality in any area of social science within the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) remit. The call also includes a highlight notice in the area of Changing Populations, in particular 'Connecting Generations'.

For details on the highlight notice please see Annex 1. Applicants to the highlight notice must consider all of the guidance in this document, not just the additional information in Annex 1.

ESRC will be investing up to £45m 100% full economic cost (fEC) over five years through the open element of this Centres competition, with up to a further £10m 100% fEC for a Centre funded under the highlight notice. The competition is for proposals ranging from £2.5 million to £10 million 100% fEC with a term of up to five years. ESRC will meet 80% of the full economic costs on proposals submitted. It is anticipated that ESRC will fund up to five Centres under the open call and a further Centre under the highlight notice. All proposals to this call must be led by a researcher at an eligible UK Research Organisation (RO) and will need to be submitted through the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. For details of eligible organisations please visit the following website: https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/

Centres are major ESRC strategic investments. In addition to taking forward an ambitious research agenda and making significant economic or societal impact, they add value by increasing research infrastructure, building capacity, encouraging interdisciplinary working in social science and beyond, and enabling research collaboration in the UK and internationally. ESRC envisages Centres as long term investments which strengthen the social science landscape in the UK. We anticipate that over time Centres awarded under this call will become major strategic partnerships with their host research organisations.

This Centres competition will be run as a two-stage application process. In the first stage, outline proposals should be submitted via the Research Council Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) System no later than **16.00 on 6 October 2020.** In November 2020, shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit full proposals by 9 March 2021. Following peer review, shortlisted proposals will be invited for interview during summer 2021, with funding decisions available July 2021.

The expected start date for new Centres is 1 October 2021.

Background and scope

Research centre funding is aimed at experienced research leaders who require longer-term or extended support for research groups, inter-institutional research networks, project-linked programmes, medium-to-large surveys, methodological developments or any related larger-scale projects. Research Centres also have a distinct role in supporting the development of early career researchers and building new research capacity. They are expected to be high-impact investments over the longer term.

The ESRC Centres Competition is open to innovative new research addressing any major social and economic topic. Successful proposals must add value to the current portfolio of ESRC Centres. We welcome applications of excellent quality in any area of social science within ESRC's remit. The call also includes a highlight notice in the area of Changing

Populations, in particular 'Connecting Generations'. For details on the highlight notice please see [Annex 1](#).

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 (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/discipline-classifications) for further information.

What we expect from Centres
Our expectations are that Centres:
- will be national or international Centres of excellence for social science research, where researchers can collaborate on long-term projects
- provide scientifically coherent programmes of research aimed at driving forward innovations in social science theory, the development and application of novel research methods, data sources, and practical application
- make significant contributions to scientific, economic and/or social impact
- involve potential users of research, and take advantage of international collaborative and/or comparative opportunities
- support active career development programmes aimed at building research capacity.

We would expect Centres to have the strategic support of their host research organisation (RO), and to provide evidence of the institution's support to the centre over the longer term. We would expect the centre to seek sustainable funding over the longer term from their RO and beyond.

Funding can also be used to develop capacity for the collection, linkage and/or analysis of major new data resources. Such data might include social media data, tracking data and image data. The ESRC appreciates the value of these and other new forms of data for academic research, and the exploitation of such data, including the development of innovative tools and methods for collecting, preserving and analysing them, is actively encouraged.

Successful applicants will be expected to follow branding guidelines of the ESRC (http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-us/visual-identity-and-logos/) and any other funders when developing digital or printed material as part of the grant activity, such as including appropriate logos on websites or publications.

Call details
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. 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, specifically 'Connecting Generations'. For details on the highlight notice please see Annex 1.

This call provides major opportunities for promoting innovation and interdisciplinarity, both within and beyond the social sciences, although excellent research within a particular social science discipline is also eligible for this call. Knowledge exchange and impact-generating activities will be an integral part of any centre proposal, regardless of topic area or discipline.

We particularly encourage ambitious and novel research proposals addressing new concepts and techniques, and proposals 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.

The list of eligible existing Centres can be found on the ESRC website: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/centres-competition-2020. If you are an existing Centre and have any queries around inclusion in this list please contact your Investment Manager. This list does not suggest obligation or expectation that we will receive an application from the centre. Co-funded Centres should seek advice from their Investment Manager if considering applying for funding through the Competition. Applications from existing Centres will be treated the same as any other application and will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way.

Given our commitment to creating and maintaining large-scale data resources, proposed Centres which undertake secondary analysis of these existing longitudinal, business and administrative data sets are particularly welcome, details of our data investments can be found on the ESRC website www.esrc.ukri.org/research/our-research/ and include but are not limited to UK Data Service (www.ukdataservice.ac.uk), CLOSER (www.closer.ac.uk/), Understanding Society (www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/), Big Data Network investments (www.esrc.ukri.org/research/our-research/big-data-network/big-data-network-phase-2/), Centre for Longitudinal Studies (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/centre-longitudinal-studies), The British Election Study (https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/) and ADR UK (https://www.adruk.org/).

Structure and organisation
Applicants are encouraged to think imaginatively about the appropriate structure for their proposed centre, considering for example how the centre structure might facilitate transformative work streams or provide opportunities for early career researchers to lead a particular project. The centre may consist of:
- researchers from a number of disciplines within the social sciences and beyond
- non-academic partner and co-investigator institutions including any combination of public sector, civil society and private organisations.

- a team in one or more organisations, with a lead institution that has overall management and financial responsibility

We welcome inter-organisational proposals and also encourage partnerships with non-HEI organisations and the inclusion of business, civil society, NGOs or public sector co-investigators, and international co-investigators. We expect non-academic stakeholders, including potential research users and intermediary organisations with a mandate to communicate research, to be included and involved in both the early design and on-going conduct of the programme.

Institutional support
Between 2015 and 2017, ESRC undertook a review of Centres policy, leading to a revised model of funding. This model is intended to help Centres become self-sustaining 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. Further information about the review and the background and principles behind the funding model is available on the ESRC website (www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-large-investments/esrc-centres-and-institutes).

The Centres policy explicitly aims to embed Centres in the higher education funding landscape, and the host RO is expected to play an important part in providing longer term strategic and financial support to the Centre beyond the life of the ESRC 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.

As with previous Centres Competitions, ESRC will be looking for evidence of long-term institutional commitment, both strategic and financial, to the proposed Centre 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. 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 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
- establishment of a Chair

- 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 an 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. Assessment of institutional support would not form a critical part of the assessment of the outline bids and further guidance will be provided to Centres that are shortlisted for full proposals.

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.

Research impact and knowledge exchange
Consideration of, and advance planning for, knowledge exchange (KE) and strategies to maximise economic and/or societal impact should be central elements of proposals submitted to the Centres Competition. The resources required to undertake effective knowledge exchange will need to be accurately reflected and fully costed at the full proposal stage. We recommend that a minimum of 10% of the overall budget should be dedicated to deliver impact activities.

In line with the UKRI position on Excellence with Impact (https://www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/), we expect that our researchers will 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/

Leadership and management
At full phase we would expect applicants to demonstrate experience and track record to evidence competencies to lead large collaborative and complex Centres of this kind. At outline phase we will be looking for broad evidence within planning to support partnerships and collaboration, and in the management plan.

Partnerships and collaboration
For this call we strongly encourage proposals which involve partnerships and collaborative relationships with other organisations, stakeholders and users of the research. Partnerships may build on existing relationships or represent new collaborative relationships. The configuration of partnerships and collaborations should be driven by the research and impact objectives underpinning the proposal. The principal requirement is for substantive, targeted and high-quality collaborations or partnerships, demonstrated through clear leadership roles, and balance and proportionality in partners' roles and responsibilities.

We also recognise that it may take time to create new partnerships as well as build on existing ones. The commissioning panel will consider the plans for involvement of academic and non-academic stakeholders but will bear in mind the lead time required to generate new partnerships.

Management plan
Applicants should explain how they will provide leadership to a potentially diverse group of collaborators and how the proposed programme of activities and it's outputs will be managed. Proposals should include details of any advisory group that will be appointed to oversee the development of the centre and to advise on key activities and directions. This section should also address how the centre will be 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. These arrangements will need to be briefly set out in the 'Case for Support' attachment in the proposal submitted at the outline stage. Further guidance is provided in the 'Je-S guidance for applicants' document (available to download from https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/centres-competition-2020). Those invited to submit full proposals will be required to develop this aspect further.

Additionally, this section should address how the centre will be managed and detail project management resources and administrative support. Please explain how centre leadership will link the demands of research with operational capabilities and resources.

Research ethics

Applicants must ensure that the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard and must clearly state how any potential ethical and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place and all risks are minimised before the project commences. All proposals must comply with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics: www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/

Funding

ESRC will be investing up to £45 million 100% full economic cost (fEC) over five years through this Centres Competition, with up to a further £10m 100% fEC for the highlight notice. Proposals are invited for projects with a full economic cost (fEC) value between £2.5 million and £10 million. The fEC value refers to the total cost of the project, and is not the actual contribution paid by the ESRC. The ESRC's contribution for UK applicants is 80% of fEC. It is anticipated that ESRC will fund up to five Centres in the open competition and one further centre under the highlight notice. The final decision on how many proposals will be funded will depend primarily on the quality of the proposals but will also be informed by the availability of funds.

Costs will be supported in-line with standard ESRC funding rules.

If you think that your proposal may be eligible for Official Development Assistance related funding please clearly state this if your case for support. Further details will be required in full stage proposal submissions.

Full stage proposals recommended for funding may have budgets reduced if they are considered excessive. All applicants are strongly advised to consult their institutional finance/research offices regarding the financial aspects of their proposal in good time before the call deadline. All costs should be broken down and fully justified.

Selection criteria

Scientific excellence with impact is the primary criterion and is an essential requirement of all proposals. All proposals will be subject to the core ESRC assessment criteria: http://www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-peer-reviewers/. (Further criteria will be used to assess applications to the highlight notice. Details can be found at Annex I) However, only those proposals which demonstrate that they meet the following criteria are likely to be awarded funding:

- An innovative research agenda (in theory, methods, data and application) that can be fully sustained through the life of the award
- Clear potential for impact and a clear set of strategies to maximise knowledge exchange and impacts through the proposed research
- A strong career development programme shaped to suit the stage of the researchers' career and providing increased opportunities for professional development of established investigators
- A robust management structure with a nominated director(s) and clear arrangements for co-ordination and management of the strategic direction of the centre

- Strong institutional commitment and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining an ESRC centre
- A commitment to identifying and exploiting potential opportunities to work with existing ESRC investments, where appropriate, to maximise impact
- Full consideration of the contribution that the centre will make to international collaborative and/or comparative opportunities
- Research contributions which add value to the ESRC's existing portfolio of research investments by addressing current gaps in coverage.
- Evidence of the strategic and minimum financial support of the host RO and planning to ensure sustainable funding for the centre over the longer term

Eligibility

Standard ESRC eligibility rules apply. For further information please see ESRCs' Research Funding Guide http://www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/

However, if in doubt of eligibility, please refer to the FAQs which can be downloaded from the ESRC website: (http://ersc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/faq-centres-competition-2020) or contact the office.

Demand Management

As in the previous Centres competition, we have decided to limit the number of applications per institution and ask research organisations to support only the most competitive bids. Your research organisation have 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.

Principal investigators

For this call, normal ESRC eligibility rules apply. 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/).

It is likely that successful applications will be led by experienced researchers who are internationally recognised and have a well-established track record of publication within their field of study, as well as proven ability to deliver a large-scale research project successfully. The amount of time committed to the grant by the PI and co-investigators must be costed into the proposal, but very small fractions of co-investigator time should be avoided. Standard ESRC research funding rules would apply for staff engaged in more than one ESRC grant (see ESRC Research Funding Guide, page 27: www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide).

Co-investigators and collaborators

The inclusion of international co-investigators in proposals is encouraged, however please note that academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) must be from established overseas research organisations of comparable standing to ESRC-eligible UK research organisations to be listed as international co-investigators under this call.

International collaboration is not limited to co-investigators but may also involve partnerships to develop international datasets, promote knowledge exchange and international impact, and enhance social science conceptual development on an international scale. Further information on eligibility is provided within the ESRC Research Funding Guide (www.esrc.ukri.org/rfg); guidance on the inclusion of international co-investigators is also available at www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals.

We also welcome inter-institutional applications and strongly encourage partnerships with non-HEI organisations and the inclusion of third sector, business and public sector co-investigators (see www.esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-esrc-proposals).

The ESRC will fund all justified costs associated with international co-investigators and UK business, civil society or government bodies at 100% fEC. However, these combined costs must not exceed 30% of the full 100% fEC cost of the grant. Applicants should note ESRC's policy on the inclusion of international co-investigators on proposals (please see Je-S guidance for the call).

Capacity-building and associated studentships
We will be looking for evidence of a strong commitment to support the development of researchers at all stages of their career and that capacity-building is considered an integral part of the Centre.

Please note that we expect these approaches to be addressed in the **full** proposal and not in detail at the outline stage and that this will be included in the selection criteria at full phase. In full proposals this will be expected to include a strong career development programme shaped to suit the stage of the researchers' career and providing increased opportunities for professional development. This should include but not be limited to the early career stage and you are encouraged to consider how you can support the continuing career development of *all* members of the team regardless of their career stage.

The focus should be on the quality and impact of the research, and how increasing capacity contributes to this. Examples of building capacity include:
- Support and mentoring for all members of the team
- Building networks within and beyond academia
- Associated studentships (eligibility requirements below)

We encourage Centre proposals to include the participation of Early Career Researchers in the Centres application as co-investigators. Please refer to ESRC policy development around early career researchers in other ESRC funding schemes: www.esrc.ukri.org/skills-and-careers/postgraduate-careers/early-career-researchers

Associated studentships are permissible under this call. Up to **three** ESRC funded associated studentships may be included on any one proposal. The student must have a distinct, independent area of enquiry that will add value to the overall research objectives of the grant. The total cost of the studentship(s) can also be match-funded by the Research Organisation.

In exceptional cases, proposals that include more than three associated studentships will be considered, providing that a strong justification for capacity-building in that particular area and how it adds value to the overall proposal is supplied.

Associated studentships must be located at an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP), on an accredited pathway, or an ESRC Centre for Doctoral Training and can start from 1 October 2021 onwards. Only principal investigators or co-investigators based at the DTP/CDT are approved to act as primary supervisors, and these must be identified in the studentship attachment. The total cost of the studentships must be included in the total costs for the grant, and within the maximum funding available. Please note that the case for such studentships will need to be provided at the **full** proposal stage.

Please note that the RO can also fully fund studentships as part of their institutional support. RO fully funded studentships are not obliged to follow the same requirements as ESRC-funded associated studentships, but their role should be explained in the case for support.

For more information on associated studentships, please see the ESRC website: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/associated-studentships/

How to apply
Outline proposals must be submitted to Je-S by the call deadline **16.00 (UK time) on 6 October 2020.** Electronic acknowledgements will be sent to the principal investigator and submitting organisation. All proposals must be submitted in English, costed in pounds sterling using the Research Councils Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. Proposals can only be accepted by electronic submission through the Je-S system: https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/jeS2WebLoginSite/Login.aspx

The proposal has two elements: an online form requesting key information; and a series of mandatory attachments, including the Case for Support, Justification of Resources, Institutional Letter of Support, list of Key Publications and CVs for all named individuals, which are to be completed offline and uploaded as (recommended PDF) attachments in Je-S. Generic guidance on the completion of the structured boxes and sections of the form is available from the Je-S Help screens, which can be found at the top right hand corner of each Je-S screen.

Applicants must ensure that they have read and complied with the call-specific guidance set out in the 'Je-S guidance for applicants' which is available at http://ersc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/faq-centres-competition-2020 as well as the assessment criteria set out in this call specification. Where call-specific guidance provided in these call documents differs from generic Je-S help, the call-specific guidance should always be followed. Care and attention must be given to completing the proposal correctly and complying with all technical requirements. Proposals that are not completed correctly may be rejected by the ESRC office.

The final submission process is the responsibility of the host institution, and the ESRC cannot accept responsibility for any delays which may occur. It is recommended that applicants submit in good time before the call deadline at this stage. We strongly advise applicants to confirm with their relevant administrator that the proposal has been submitted successfully to the ESRC.

Assessment of applications
The assessment of proposals will be a two-stage process. Outline proposals will be assessed and shortlisted by an assessment panel. Shortlisted applicants will subsequently be invited to submit applications to the full proposal stage. Further Je-S guidance will be issued at this time.

Full proposals will be referred to a minimum of six external peer reviewers, including at least two from outside the UK. Applicants will be asked to nominate two academic peer reviewers, with one from outside the UK. Normally, one of these nominees will be approached as part of the peer review group. Applicants should seek the nominated reviewers' permission and commitment before nominating them. Applicants will also be asked to nominate up to two users of the research from outside the research community. We may also approach independent user reviewers.

Applications will be assessed by the commissioning panel and a final short-list invited to interview in July 2021. Funding decisions will be available in late July 2021 and the Centres awarded will be expected to start 1 October 2021.

Commissioning timetable
- Outline Call published – April 2020
- Closing date for outline proposals – **16.00 on 6 October 2020**
- Outline phase decisions to applicants – November 2020
- Full stage call published (invite only) – December 2020
- Closing date for full proposals – 16.00 on 9 March 2021
- Shortlisting panel meeting for full proposals – July 2021
- Interview shortlisted applicants – July 2021
- Decisions to applicants – July 2021
- Approximate start date envisaged – October 2021

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
  Monday to Thursday 08.30 to 17.00
  Friday 08.30 to 16.30 (UK time, excluding public and other holidays)

Annex I
Connecting Generations highlight notice

Applicants should note the following:
To submit a research proposal for this highlight notice, please prefix the title of the proposal with 'Highlight'.

Background
The ESRC 2019 Delivery Plan identifies 'Changing Populations' as a priority area for research and innovation (https://www.ukri.org/files/about/dps/esrc-dp-2019/) and identifies Connecting Generations as a key area for investment. We are including a highlight notice in this year's Centres Competition to stimulate excellent research that will inform policy and practice now and in the future by expanding the evidence base on how changes in our population, society and economy influence the connections and inequalities between generations.

Different generations provide each other with support at different stages of their lives. The support given differs both within and across generations. The background and circumstances of individuals within a generation will result in variation in the support that they give, while whole generations are positioned to deliver different support relative to one another. The support given has also changed over time in response to a variety of demographic, social, cultural and economic factors. The way in which generations support each other now differs from how they did in the past and will in the future.

The changing nature of the connections between generations has profound implications for the UK's productivity and growth, public services, the coherence of communities, inequalities, and the opportunities for, and wellbeing of, people of all ages. As such, there has been growing demand for new knowledge and policy responses to intergenerational challenges among policy makers and beyond. For example, an All-Party Parliamentary Group for Inheritance and Intergenerational Fairness was established in February 2019 to promote understanding of these issues and to facilitate discussion on methods of reform.

Scope of the Centre
Research by the Centre will consider how different generations provide support to each other across the different stages of their lives. This can include financial, emotional and practical support. The research will consider how this support varies within and across cohorts, how it has changed over time and what impact this has had. An understanding of the experiences of individual generations will underpin the Centre's research on connecting generations. This will provide deeper analysis of issues including, but not limited to, social mobility, job security, family formation and reproductive strategies, social coherence and resilience, housing, caring responsibilities, and work-life balance.

The Centre will also consider the broad range of factors that might influence intergenerational support and connections. This is likely to include the influence of the key

components of demographic change, i.e. fertility, mortality and migration. For example, delayed fertility and a rise in the number of people who do not have children will influence where support can be drawn from in later life.

Beyond the influence of demographic change, the Centre will consider a range of other factors that might influence intergenerational support such as: the nature of work (e.g. the gig economy, fragile employment for younger generations); housing (e.g. greater levels of renting, the housing market); education (e.g. an increase in the number of school-leavers going in to Higher Education); family structures (e.g. the marital and co-habiting status of parents); the welfare state (e.g. the provision of social care in older age); the economy (e.g. recessions). Again, the influence of these factors will vary within and across generations and change over time.

Research in the Centre will remain responsive to national and global events that emerge during the lifetime of the funding and which may influence intergenerational connections. Notable recent events include Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. Both have brought refreshed focus on the connections within and across generations and the responsibilities of generations to one another. For example, the social and economic measures being put in place to stop the spread of COVID-19 are having differential impacts both within and across the generations.

The Centre will respond to the growing demand for new knowledge and policy responses to intergenerational challenges among key stakeholders. The Centre will go beyond describing intergenerational connections to generate impact, including informing policy and practice. To achieve this the Centre will have a clear impact strategy and appropriate expertise. From the outset the Centre will proactively engage with a range of stakeholders, including those from the public, third and private sectors, to ensure that evidence it produces is both useful to, and used by, those who need it. Note that this links to the requirements set out in the main call for Centres around stakeholder engagement.

It is anticipated that the main focus of the Centre's potential impacts will be in the UK. However, it is acknowledged that analyses beyond the UK can be beneficial in understanding populations. Therefore, cross-national comparisons, international collaborative working, and drawing on data beyond the UK are permitted (although not a requirement).

Cross-cutting Issues
The Centre will make good use of existing data in their research. Over the past two decades ESRC's strategic investment in data has laid a strong foundation for social science research and innovation in understanding populations. Longitudinal data investments, such as Understanding Society, the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing and the UK's birth cohort studies, provide invaluable data on the health, social and economic circumstances of the UK's population and its wellbeing. The Centre's analyses should draw on these and other data sources, including qualitative data where appropriate, to understand differences and connections between generations. Non-longitudinal data resources may also be of value,

including cross-sectional studies that repeat measures over time. These will provide important evidence on cultural, social and economic change.

The Centre will engage with innovative approaches to addressing diversity and underrepresentation of certain groups of people in the datasets used for research. For example, there may be opportunities provided by linked administrative and bio-marker data (including genetic and epigenetic information), as well as other new forms of data, e.g. social networking and consumer data. This will ensure that the analyses the Centre produces are as accurate and representative as possible.

Additional considerations

This annex provides an overview of the expected scope of the Centre. Applicants should not feel restricted by the outline above and can expand the scope beyond this whilst demonstrating coherence across the proposed research agenda. We encourage innovative approaches to the research challenges. The research should involve a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods as appropriate.

Applicants are expected to demonstrate their awareness of existing research and data investments in this area and look for possible linkages and opportunities to complement this work where appropriate.

Proposals to this highlight notice will be assessed against the criteria set out in the main call specification. In addition, proposals to this highlight notice will be assessed on the extent to which their proposal fits the scope of the highlight as set out in this annex.