



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and DFID

# **ESRC-DFID Education and Development: Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme 2013-2014 Call Specification**

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## Summary of programme and funding opportunity

The Department for International Development (DFID) and the ESRC are continuing their strategic partnership with a dedicated research programme on 'Education and development: Raising learning outcomes in education systems'. Both funders are committed to commissioning world-class research and ensuring the results are available for policymakers and development workers worldwide.

The programme will generate world-class and cutting-edge policy-relevant research that addresses key questions on learning outcomes within education systems in developing countries<sup>1</sup>. The ultimate aim is to provide policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning and an understanding of how these ideas will translate to their specific contexts and institutions - enabling more effective policies and interventions.

In total £20 million has been allocated to the programme, which will be awarded through three annual research calls. Each call will have a core thematic focus, but opportunities will also be provided for other innovative research on learning outcomes and education quality, as well as larger-scale work addressing the lack of high-quality data in education and development research. Proposals are sought from across the social sciences and may be for fundamental or more applied research topics, as long as the policy relevance is clearly articulated. There are no geographic restrictions on who may apply for this funding opportunity: researchers from developing and developed countries can work together in any configuration of their choosing, and principal investigators can be from anywhere in the world.

The 2013-2014 call is focused on the theme '**effective teaching**'. A total of up to £5 million is being made available for full proposals to three different types and scale of grant within this call:

- **Small grants/pilot projects:**
  - Between £50,000 and £150,000 at full Economic Cost (fEC)
  - one year duration
  - may or may not address the call theme of 'effective teaching'
- **Medium grants:**
  - between £200,000 and £500,000 fEC
  - two-three years duration
  - must address the call theme of 'effective teaching'
- **Large grants:**
  - up to £1,000,000 fEC
  - up to five years duration
  - must address the call theme of 'effective teaching' **but, given their scale, will normally be expected to include** analysis of other system dynamics that influence teaching practices and learning outcomes

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<sup>1</sup> For this call, the term 'developing countries', refers primarily to Low-Income Countries but includes all of the countries listed on the 'countries of focus' document on the call page

- will produce a major new dataset and/or access to previously inaccessible developing country administrative data for secondary analysis.

The earliest start date for successful grants is 1 November 2014.

**The deadline for proposals: 16.00 (UK time) on 25 March 2014**

## **Background to the programme**

Thanks to more effective education policies and sustained national and international investment, many more children are in school across the developing world. Out-of-school children are down from 105 million in 1999 to 57 million in 2013. Despite this progress on increasing access, too many children in school are learning little or nothing at all. Learning is a vital and measurable dimension of a quality education. Achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as developing other non-cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, are components of a rounded education. At least 250 million children cannot read or count, even if they have spent four years in school. The world is facing a global learning crisis. There is now a need to reorient education systems away from an exclusive focus on expanding access toward improving learning outcomes and the overall quality of education.

Despite agreement of the importance of learning, we know remarkably little about how to improve the quality of education in complex developing contexts. From the evidence it is however clear that providing more input in a 'business as usual' manner will not be sufficient. Increasing real expenditure in education across the developing world in the past decade has resulted in increased school quality as measured by inputs (eg pupil-teacher ratio, textbook supply) but has not translated into higher learning outcomes on internationally comparable assessments. This is borne out in findings from the recent wave of experimental research on education interventions which have introduced a new emphasis on rigour and understanding impact in education policy and research. This body of research finds minimal evidence of traditional inputs impacting on learning outcomes without supporting interventions (eg teacher training). There is a growing body of evidence around more policy-relevant questions, including modifications to incentives and instructional innovation (eg performance incentives, group learning and ICT provision).

However, the number of studies is still small and the variation in effect sizes indicates that the design of interventions and context are critical to effective impact. Many of these studies also focus on small-scale and often NGO-led interventions, which means there are legitimate concerns of whether they can be scaled up to government systems. Further research is required to develop an improved understanding of the complex, contextual dynamics which influence educational quality and the effectiveness of policies and interventions intended to develop teaching and learning.

## **Programme focus and structure**

Against that background, this programme seeks to fund a portfolio of research in critical policy areas that are currently constraining education systems in developing countries from translating resources into better learning and ultimately positive social and economic

change. The funders have identified three broad areas in which research is needed, and these constitute the overarching focus of the programme as a whole:

- How do interacting dynamics in the social, political, economic and cultural context enable or inhibit the delivery of quality education in specific developing country contexts? This includes consideration of governance, institutions, social and cultural contexts, incentives and norms, and their influence on efforts to raise education quality and learning outcomes.
- How do specific policies or interventions designed to deliver quality education and learning for all interact with these contextual dynamics, and with what impact? This includes intended and unanticipated effects within and beyond the education system.
- How do we better understand, measure and evaluate educational quality and learning outcomes in development contexts?

Given the strong inequalities that exist within education (ie girls, disabled people, lower socio-economic groups), research funded in this programme will focus on how to raise learning outcomes for **all** by considering equity as well as quality dimensions of education. To enhance opportunities for scale-up, research in this programme will need to be conducted within or in conjunction with government systems or large non-state/private sector providers.

A key output of the programme will be the generation of world-class and cutting-edge policy-relevant research addressing key questions on learning outcomes in developing country education systems, particularly those in Low-Income Countries (LICs). Typically this will lead to publications in high-quality peer-reviewed academic publications. However, the ultimate aim of this programme is to provide policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning and an understanding of how these ideas will translate to their specific context and institutions. This will enable them to implement more effective policies and interventions to deliver better learning outcomes at scale and cost effectively. A key output will therefore be the effective dissemination of research findings to key policy- and decision-makers, indicated by examples of engagement with and influence on policy-making.

A second major objective of the programme is to improve the quality of social science for development and education and to increase its diversity. The funders aim to support projects from a broad range of social science disciplines, including education, psychology, anthropology, sociology and economics. The research will require strong mixed-methods approaches and the programme will encourage inter-disciplinary collaboration and invest in a diversity of methods. The programme will promote improved attention to and reporting of methodology, and will work in partnership with other research funders and users of research to improve the accessibility and use of high-quality research on education. A key output of the programme will be strengthening the capacity of Southern researchers in research management and leadership, knowledge generation, and policy impact generation.

To deliver these aims, the funders have allocated £20 million to be awarded over three annual research calls, each of which will have a core thematic focus. By focusing each call on a specific theme, the funders aim to build up a body of evidence around critical areas which will be of greater value to policymakers globally. However, the funders also wish to enable

innovative, ground-breaking research that explores new directions to increase understanding of how educational quality can be improved to in order raise learning outcomes in developing countries. They also recognise, and seek to address, the significant challenge of undertaking research at scale and a lack of sufficient high quality data in education and development research. Within the programme, therefore, opportunities will also be provided for projects which address these concerns.

## Specification of 2013-2014 call

### Call structure

£5 million has been allocated to this first call, which is focused on the theme of '**effective teaching**'. To address the programme aims set out above, in this call proposals are sought for three different types and scales of grant:

- **Small grants/Pilot projects** of between £50,000 and £150,000 fEC (see below for explanation of this). Projects should be one year in duration and may be used for innovative, exploratory/ proof of concept or higher risk research related to promoting educational quality. Where appropriate, pilot projects will have the opportunity to apply for additional funding for a full research project in a later phase of this programme, though future funding will not be reserved only for previously funded pilot projects. Small grants **may or may not** address this call's theme of 'effective teaching'.
- **Medium grants** of between £200,000 and £500,000 fEC. Projects will normally be two to three years in duration.

Medium grants **must** address this call's theme of 'effective teaching'.

- **Large grants** of up to £1,000,000 fEC and up to five years in duration. Funding at this level is reserved for projects which will undertake research at significant scale and which will produce a major new dataset and/or result in substantial quantities of previously inaccessible developing country administrative data being made available for secondary use. Where data are a key output of the proposal, projects are expected to formulate and address their own research questions, but there must also be substantial potential for other researchers to utilise the resulting data in future.

Large grants **must** address this call's theme of 'effective teaching' but, given their scale, will normally **also** be expected to include analysis of other system dynamics which influence teaching practices and learning outcomes.

In this first call, the funders aim to fund approximately 8-10 small grants, 5-7 medium grants and 2 large grants. However, this is only an estimate and the funders reserve the right to alter the profile of the funded portfolio of research depending on the quality of proposals received into each stream.

## General principles and overview

It is crucial that all research funded demonstrates clear relevance to decision-makers and practitioners in the field. The funders expect non-academic stakeholders, including potential users of the research, to be included and involved in the design and delivery of projects within this call. This is especially the case for medium and large grants within this call where research is taking place within government systems. This high level of engagement from the outset will not necessarily be expected of very innovative proposals and those focused on non-state education providers. See the 'International dimension and partnership/collaborative relationships' section below for further information.

Proposals to this call are sought from across the social sciences, including education, psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics and political economy. The support of learning and educational quality for all is a complex issue, and the funders are keen for it to be addressed through a broad range of disciplinary perspectives, frameworks and methodologies. Given the aim of this programme to move beyond simply evaluating interventions, it is expected that strong mixed-method approaches will be utilised and inter- and/or multi-disciplinary collaboration are therefore strongly encouraged, although not a prerequisite for funding. See the 'Multi/inter-disciplinary research' section below for further information.

Proposals may be made for fundamental or more applied research topics, as long as the policy relevance of the proposed research is clearly spelt out. All research projects must be grounded in empirical evidence. Proposals which challenge existing policy and practice assumptions are welcomed.

Given the importance of context in the learning process, projects which investigate a single context are welcomed. However, given the funders' desire to fund research of general relevance and broad applicability, comparative studies are encouraged and research proposals should also highlight the wider significance to knowledge and policy development of their projects. See the 'Geographical focus' section below for further information.

Projects should seek to identify the most critical contextual elements impacting on educational outcomes and explore how they are interrelated, where required in specific relation to the thematic focus on 'effective teaching' (see below for further details). They should also examine how understanding of these can be effectively translated into policy-making. Applicants must identify the potential impacts of their research on policy and practice, and must actively consider how these can be maximised and developed. All research proposals are required to submit robust impact plans. See the 'Research impact' section below for further information.

Two key cross-cutting issues are relevant to all research funded through this programme: structural inequalities, and measurement and metrics. Applicants to this call must ensure these important issues are considered and addressed within their proposed research, including through appropriate disaggregation of data and the generation of data on at least one aspect of learning. See the 'Cross-cutting themes' section below for further information.

## **Funding exclusions**

Proposals which duplicate work previously supported by ESRC or DFID will **not** be funded.

The programme will **not** fund contract research or consultancy work where the results and physical outputs are to some extent already pre-defined and known.

The programme will not fund project/intervention or process evaluations that are not guided by social science-driven questions of broader relevance and applicability.

## **Geographical focus**

While ESRC and DFID recognise that many of the world's poor live in middle-income countries, it is a specific objective of this programme to increase the body of research that is specifically relevant to low-income countries and a select group of other priority countries (a list is available to download from the call webpage). Research focused on middle-income countries not in this list is allowed under the programme. However, proposals focused on middle-income countries must explicitly detail how the research is relevant to one or more low-income countries. It is not sufficient to note only that the area under study is similar to conditions in average low-income countries. Specific similarities must be articulated and the Pathways to Impact must include clear plans to engage with stakeholders in one or more low-income countries, normally at an early stage in the research process. Proposals lacking sufficient detail in these plans may be rejected by the ESRC office prior to peer review. The funders aim for a significant majority of research projects within the portfolio to focus on low-income countries. In the decision-making process this will come into consideration when making funding decisions on proposals of equal scientific quality.

## **Thematic focus for medium and large grants: 'effective teaching'**

This research programme will cover a number of critical policy areas, and this first call is focused on 'effective teaching': how to improve and support the quality of teaching practice and the impact on learning. The educational contexts to be addressed may include all levels of educational provision from early childhood education to higher education taking place within government systems or large non-state/private sector providers. Teaching effectiveness is understood to be interconnected with complex system dynamics such as resources, curricula, educational leadership, organising processes and home/community dynamics.

Proposals at the medium grant and large grant level **must** address questions of teaching effectiveness, situated within a broader context that may include institutional, systemic, political, economic, social and cultural dynamics. A body of recent research has found consistent evidence that teachers are an important component of student learning and are critical to raising learning outcomes. The difficulty for decision-makers is that effective teaching practices are not closely related to observable individual teacher characteristics (eg qualifications, source of teacher training, salary level), and it is not clear what policies or interventions can best develop and support teaching effectiveness at scale. Teachers are one of the biggest inputs to the education system across the developing world. Improving

teaching effectiveness therefore has the potential to significantly increase the impact of government funds in the education sector.

A list of potential research topics related to developing effective teaching for improved learning outcomes is outlined below. This is intended to be illustrative, not restrictive:

- Resources (material, infrastructure, human etc.) that best support teaching effectiveness
- Role of school management structures and processes in teaching effectiveness
- Interventions that develop teaching effectiveness among new teachers
- Alternative entry approaches to teaching
- Integration of community/contract teachers
- Improvement of teacher supervision and evaluation processes
- Comparison of teaching effectiveness within and across school contexts dealing with diverse challenges
- The problem of teacher absence and how best to address it
- The role and status of teachers in society
- Allocation of teachers in education systems: where are they most needed, what factors affect unequal and often inequitable allocation of teachers across national education systems, and what reforms could address these barriers
- Interventions that promote teacher learning and development for educational quality
- Community and school level initiatives that contribute significantly to teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes

Proposals are invited on any research question which will increase understanding of how teaching practices might be improved and supported to deliver increased learning outcomes and quality education in developing countries. Projects centred around particular interventions should not simply assess **if** these are effective in a given context, but must examine **why** this is the case. Projects which merely assess the effectiveness of a particular intervention without situating that assessment within a broader research and policy context will not be funded. Research should examine the interplay of institutional, home and community environments, as well as the governance and political economy factors which impact on processes within national educational systems relevant to effective teaching, and should be situated within an understanding of the wider context and cultural history.

An important aim of this programme is to provide policymakers with empirically-grounded conceptual tools to inform decisions about whether interventions are likely to be effective when introduced and how they can be scaled up. Given this, proposals for medium and large grants should be situated within government systems (at the national, regional or local authority level) or within large non-state/private sector providers to enable examination of political economy and implementation factors which will be critical when transferring interventions to other contexts or when scaling up.

### **Wider programme focus: research questions for small grants/ pilot projects**

Small grants under this call are not restricted by the focus on 'effective teaching': while proposals in that area are welcome if a small grant is the most appropriate means to address



the particular research question, proposals at this level are invited on any topic which will increase understanding of how educational quality can be improved to raise learning outcomes in developing countries. Proposals must however directly address the three broad areas of research that constitute the overall focus of the programme, as set out above. High risk and exploratory projects are encouraged here, to draw out additional directions for research, to encourage novel interdisciplinary methodological approaches, and to develop new collaborations, particularly with Southern researchers.

As noted above, we expect that in later rounds of this programme, funded small grants will have the opportunity to apply for subsequent, larger-scale research funding which would build on the outcomes of the initial grants with a new research proposal. However, we currently do not intend to ring-fence funding exclusively for these kinds of projects.

### **Cross-cutting issues**

Two key cross-cutting issues are relevant to any research undertaken within this programme, regardless of the amount of funding applied for:

- Structural inequalities, including those based on gender, age, disability, ethnicity, race, religion, class, educational status and spatial factors
- Measurement and metrics

Applicants must ensure these are addressed within their proposed research, including through appropriate disaggregation of data.

### **Structural inequalities**

The major focus of education efforts globally is now on learning for all. Given the large numbers of children still not in school and the significant discrimination faced by different social groups, especially women and girls, a robust approach to researching what works to deliver better learning for all should include these elements. This research programme proposes to understand how to improve learning across the board without losing a focus on ensuring quality education for the most disadvantaged. There is a possibility that a relentless focus on average quality could undermine the equitable provision of quality education, as it will likely be harder to reach the most marginalised students, compounding their educational deprivation. The proposed research should therefore consider both the quality and equity dimension in improving learning outcomes.

Failure to identify and explore the distinctive gender dimensions of economic and social policies and institutions – as well as other structural inequality dimensions such as those relating to ethnicity, age, disability and spatial geography – may lead to bias in interventions and processes, or limit impact and value for money. In order to produce knowledge and evidence to inform more effective policies and programmes and to support transformational changes in structural inequalities, applicants should make a genuine effort to integrate adequate analysis of gender and other structural inequalities in their research design, even where this may not be the central focus of the project. We strongly encourage researchers to ensure that relevant data – where feasible – are disaggregated by sex, age and other

structural inequalities, but also to analyse the different roles and responsibilities, constraints and opportunities or power differentials between, for example, girls/women and boys/men.

### **Metrics and measurement**

Learning is a vital and measurable dimension of a quality education. A well-rounded education should develop both cognitive skills (literacy and numeracy skills), as well as non-cognitive skills (such as critical thinking and problem-solving). The lack of data on learning outcomes and classroom practices in developing countries means that the metrics developed and data collected in this research programme are valuable in themselves. All projects are expected to generate data on at least one aspect of learning. Where appropriate, researchers will be expected to utilise sample-based learning outcome data and benchmark these to internationally comparable tests to enable cost effectiveness comparisons across contexts. Researchers should engage closely with policymakers and build on country data systems where available to reduce duplication and increase sustainability.

### **Multi/inter-disciplinary research**

ESRC and DFID recognise the need for a new research approach to effectively respond to the complex international development challenges of the post-MDG era. This funding programme is focused on research from across the social sciences, including education, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and economics, and **all proposals must be at least 50 per cent social science** - our definitions of social science disciplines are available from the Proposal classifications - ESRC disciplines webpage (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/discipline-classifications/>). Any queries on this aspect of a proposal should be sent to the programme secretariat in the ESRC Office (see the 'Contact details' section).

However, although not a pre-requisite for funding, we encourage multi or inter-disciplinary research projects. This may involve researchers from different social science disciplines bringing together their perspectives, approaches and expertise, or unite social scientists with those working within the natural, environmental, arts and humanities or other disciplines. A key requirement is that applicants demonstrate a clear and strong rationale for how their proposed research and the approach taken to it meets the criteria for world-class and cutting-edge policy-relevant research addressing key questions on learning outcomes in developing countries, particularly LICs.

Research which takes a mixed methodological approach may also contribute to the quality and potential impact of social science for development and education. Investigating the complex factors which influence teaching practices and learning outcomes and the implications of these for interventions at scale will in many cases require well-integrated mixed method approaches. Proposals which effectively and rigorously combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies to address a research question are likely to strengthen their case for funding. However, superficial or token inclusion of either quantitative or qualitative elements in a research project is inadequate. Not all research questions are suited to mixed methodologies. Although encouraged, using a mixed methodology is not a prerequisite for

funding. Applicants must ensure that their proposed methodology is appropriate to addressing their research questions.

### **International dimension and partnership/collaborative relationships**

By definition, this programme is concerned with international co-operation to address issues of global importance. Underpinning the programme and all funded projects must be a strong research ethic based on mutual respect and understanding for different cultural, ethnic, social and economic beliefs and practices. Solutions to raising education outcomes must be rooted in, and acceptable to, the institutions, communities and societies where they will operate.

Projects with developing country leads and developing country partners are strongly encouraged. Principal investigators can be based anywhere in the world, and funding is **not** dependent on the involvement of a UK-based research organisation. Formal partnerships and collaborators in the research process are **not** a prerequisite for support under the programme. Sole applicants are acceptable and may be based in any country (subject to eligibility requirements explained below).

However, we strongly encourage partnerships and collaborative relationships where these are substantive and meaningful. The programme allows academics from developing and developed countries to work together in any configuration of their choosing, and partnerships may build on existing relationships or represent the development of a new collaborative relationship. The intellectual challenge should be the determining factor when configuring appropriate partnerships and collaborations. The principle requirement is for meaningful quality collaborations or partnerships, demonstrated through clear leadership roles across the proposed partnership and balance and proportionality in partners' roles and responsibilities. These factors will be taken into account by the commissioning panel.

ESRC and DFID also expect non-academic stakeholders, including potential research users and intermediary organisations with a mandate to communicate research, who are listed in the application form to be included and involved in both the early design and on-going conduct of research projects. This is especially the case where research is taking place within government systems, without compromising the independence or integrity of the research. There is recognition that the exploitation of new knowledge does not just occur at the end of a research project, but rather is embedded throughout the research process itself. The commissioning panel will take account of an appropriate context for the involvement of non-academic stakeholders in the research process.

### **Research capacity**

ESRC and DFID recognise three key aspects of capacity development: building the research capacity of **individuals**; building **organisational** capacity (eg management, financial, communications); and **institutional** capacity-building (eg the incentive structures, the political and regulatory context and the resource base in which research is undertaken and used by policymakers). The capacity to undertake and maximise the impact of research depends on a combination of human capacity, the availability of research resources (including data), and the political and incentive context for policy and decision-making.

DFID and the ESRC are **not** seeking to fund capacity-building *per se* through this programme. Both sponsors fund capacity-building activities through other mechanisms. However, we expect at a minimum that all proposals identify capacity-building activities as part of, and not separate to, the stated research approach. Applicants are encouraged to consider the diversity of opportunities and contexts for capacity-building within their proposed research. However, capacity-building elements should be set out in relation to the core intellectual agenda of the research proposal and not treated separately; the focus should be on the quality and impact of the research, and how increasing research capacity contributes to this.

Good examples of capacity-building include co-design of research and implementation, field-based research methods training for developing country partner staff, and opportunities for developing country partner staff to author/co-author journal and conference papers and participate in national and international conferences. Support and mentoring for more junior team members may also contribute importantly to building future research capacity. Successful proposals will also demonstrate a strong understanding of the local research context and ensure the research programme does not undermine local research capacity.

This programme does **not** provide support for standalone doctoral students. Standalone masters and ad hoc courses for UK students will also **not** be funded. Applicants who are considering including a doctoral studentship in their research project must refer to the document '**How to include a doctoral student on a project**' on the programme call web page for eligibility requirements.

## **Research impact**

The ESRC and DFID expect researchers funded under the programme to have identified the potential impacts of their research on policy and practice, and will actively consider how these can be maximised and developed. This emphasis on research impact will be reflected within the assessment process. It is recommended that a minimum of 10 per cent of the overall budget should be dedicated to delivering the activities outlined in the impact summary.

As a key component of this research programme to build evidence within government systems it is expected that researchers will already have engaged with key stakeholders in the research countries in developing the proposal. Applicants for small grants researchers may not have established these links, but it is expected that developing these will be amongst the key activities of their proposal.

Researchers are encouraged to be innovative in the kinds of user engagement, knowledge exchange, communications and research uptake activities they plan to undertake during and beyond the period of research funding. It is important that applicants appreciate that outreach and engagement activities in and of themselves do not constitute impact. The development of a clear impact strategy will be important to ensuring research impact is

achieved. When completing the impact summary section of the form, applicants may find it helpful to refer to ESRC guidance on developing an impact strategy.<sup>2</sup>

It is recommended that each project holds a seminar with key stakeholders in the country or countries where the majority of the research is taking place at the earliest opportunity, to set out the aims of the projects and fully ground it in the local context. This will facilitate the potential co-production of knowledge and will also allow researchers to ‘reality-check’ their plans. If this kind of activity is not appropriate for your project we would expect you to set out the reasons why in your proposal.

## Open Access policy

RCUK and DFID both have published policies on open access to publication and data.<sup>3</sup> Researchers funded under this programme will be expected to comply with the requirements outlined in these policies. Where the policies differ from one another, we would expect researchers to comply with the more stringent policy. Funding will be available for all associated legitimate and proportionate costs but the route to funding will depend on the researchers’ institutional affiliation. UK institutions are no longer able to apply for Article Processing Charges (APCs) as part of a research proposal, but instead funds are provided to research organisations at an institutional level as block grants in order to set up publication funds. For those researchers not covered by this new RCUK block grant mechanism, ESRC and DFID will work to ensure that you are not disadvantaged. If APCs cannot be covered by block grants (if there is no UK researcher on the application or involved in the article in question), applicants should include the APC costs and justify these fully in their proposals. Applicants should seek advice from the programme secretariat as to whether publication costs should be requested (see Contact Details below).

## What can applicants apply for?

Proposals are invited for projects under three streams within this call:

- Small grants/Pilot Projects (fEC value of between £50,000 and £150,000, 1 year duration)
- Medium grants (fEC value £200,000 - £500,000, 2-3 years duration)
- Large grants (fEC value up to £1 million, duration up to 5 years)

The budget limits on grant proposals under this programme refer to the total cost of the project - known as **full Economic Costs (fEC)**. The fEC cost is not the actual contribution paid by the ESRC and DFID. The funders contribution for UK applicants is 80 per cent of fEC. Funding arrangements for non-UK institutions are set out below. If applicants or their host organisations have any doubts about the costing basis of their proposals they should contact the programme secretariat.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/developing-an-impact-strategy/>

<sup>3</sup> Please see <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-research-open-and-enhanced-access-policy> for more information.

**For non-UK institutions** the programme will support in full (100 per cent) all the direct costs of the research. In addition, indirect costs may be charged on staff salary and other staff-related costs (ie statutory contributions analogous to UK National Insurance or Superannuation contributions). Indirect costs may **not** be charged on non-staff related direct costs, eg equipment, travel and subsistence, consultancies, conferences etc. The following rates for indirect costs should be applied:

- For applicants from developing countries, the overhead rate is 50 per cent
- For applicants from developed countries, the overhead rate is 20 per cent.

Further information is provided in the document '**Costings Guidance for Non-UK Institutions and Partners**' - available to download from the call webpage. Applications from a non-UK institution or which include any non-UK partners must refer to this document before completing the Je-S application form. ESRC will ask for adequate evidence of the costing basis for all direct and indirect costs. If a grant is recommended for funding, budgets may be reduced if 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.

The duration of grants should range from a minimum of one year up to a maximum of five years, depending on the grant size applied for, though applicants should note the specific rules for duration of projects involving doctoral students.

## **Eligibility to apply**

The principle investigator **must** be based at an authentic organisation with the capacity to undertake high quality research. This means an institution that possesses an existing in-house capacity to host a grant and to carry out research that materially extends and enhances the national or international research base, and is able to demonstrate an independent capability to undertake and lead research programmes.

Eligibility checks will be applied to all proposals on receipt at ESRC. Peer reviewers will also be asked to comment on the credibility of the host institution. If you are unsure about your organisation's eligibility, please consult the programme secretariat. **Applications which are not from a credible research organisation will be rejected by the ESRC office.**

## **Recognised research institutions**

Research Council recognition of institutions eligible to hold grants is a longer and more involved process that will be undertaken once a proposal has been recommended for funding, after the full peer review and commissioning panel assessment for full applications. This must be completed before a grant can be issued to the grant holder's institution. The following paragraphs outline this process.

All grants will be awarded to the institution of the principal investigator, and this institution will be responsible for the proper disbursement and accountability of all monies received. In

order to be eligible to hold ESRC grants, institutions must be recognised as meeting specific criteria relating to mandate, research infrastructure, governance and accountability. Most UK higher education institutions and some other independent UK research organisations are already recognised institutions, and hence eligible to apply for, and hold, Research Council grants.

Most non-UK institutions and some UK organisations will not be recognised to hold UK Research Council grants. Lead institutions which are not recognised to hold UK Research Council grants will have to obtain Research Council recognition before any grant can be confirmed. In order to minimise administrative burdens and costs to both applicants and ESRC staff, **formal recognition will only be pursued if the grant is successful.**

No grant can commence until full RCUK eligibility has been granted following this process.

Applicants that are not based in a Higher Education Institute (for example work for an NGO or other third sector organisation) should consider carefully whether their organisation is best placed to host a grant and can meet the stringent expectations of RCUK eligibility. It is essential that institutions with minimal research capacity collaborate with a credible research organisation who would host the project. **Applications which are not from a credible research organisation will be rejected by the ESRC office.**

Further details of the recognition process are available from the secretariat, but in broad terms it covers:

- Research infrastructure, intellectual capacity and critical mass of researchers to undertake high-quality social science research
- Institutional governance and accountability structures
- Audit and accountability procedures
- Sources of core funding and other funding.

This process takes some time. When setting proposed start dates, applicants in host organisations not recognised to hold UK Research Council grants should allow a minimum of two months beyond the earliest call start date for the recognition process to be completed.

### **Principal investigators and co-investigators**

The programme is open to researchers based in recognised higher education institutions, research organisations or organisations with a credible research capacity (see above). Researchers may be based in either UK or non-UK organisations with demonstrable research capacity.

Under the programme rules an individual is permitted to be involved in multiple bids to this call, but **cannot be the principal investigator on more than one bid.** Where applicants are involved in more than one bid their proposed overall time commitment must not exceed 37.5 hours per week.

All grants will be made to the institution hosting the principal investigator, and that institution will be subject to standard terms and conditions for ESRC grants with regard to the disbursement of funds to co-investigators at other institutions, and with additional programme-reporting requirements.

**Important note:** In addition to a formal recognition process explained above, all applicants and their organisations must register to use the Research Councils Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system before submitting an application. Je-S will be used to receive and process all applications under this call. The section 'How to apply and decision making process' below contains full information and guidance on this registration process. All applicants intending to submit an application are strongly advised to read this section carefully. **All applicants and co-applicants must register to use the Je-S system.**

### **Other collaborators and consultants**

In addition to principal and co-investigators, it is possible to name other specific collaborators and consultants in the proposal - for instance public, private or NGO sector experts who could provide invaluable stakeholder input and advice to the project. These must be fully costed on the proposal and their role on the project must be made clear.

If consultants are included on a proposal, clear justification must be provided to explain why a consultancy is the most appropriate way to staff this aspect of the project.

### **Studentships and visiting fellowships**

Doctoral students may be included on applications provided the research project will be of three-year duration and the student will be based at an ESRC-accredited Doctoral Training Centre (DTC). Applicants who are considering including a doctoral studentship in their proposed research project should refer to the document 'How to include a doctoral student on a project' - available to download from the call webpage.

Visiting fellowships, both professorial and lecturer/researcher level may also be included in a research project. In this case the proposed fellow working on the grant should be known and named on the application. A rationale for their role and contribution to the project must be included in the application.

### **Decision-making process and assessment criteria**

Proposals will be subject to full peer review by a pool of assessors and applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to assessors' comments before decisions are made by a Commissioning Panel of academic and non-academic experts. Final funding decisions will be communicated to applicants in September 2014. The earliest start date for successful projects is from 1 November 2014.

Peer reviewers and the commissioning panel will consider whether applications are of world-class standard (being intellectually innovative, well-focused and methodologically sound), and whether the research has the potential to have a real impact on improving education outcomes in developing countries. Assessors will be asked to comment on the



following criteria in assessing proposals, and applicants are advised to consider all these criteria in preparing their applications:

### **Research agenda**

- Is there a clear understanding of the problem/issue to be addressed through this research?
- Is the proposed research approach appropriate to address this problem/issue?
- Are there clear research questions in the proposal?
- Are the methods appropriate and clearly articulated?
- Is there clarity and coherence in the research design between research questions, research methods and anticipated intellectual outcomes?
- Does the proposal contain analysis by gender and where appropriate by other marginalised groups eg socio-economic, disability, indigenous groups?
- Does the proposal adhere to the ESRC data policy and follow standard data management practices?
- Is the approach to analysis for qualitative and/or quantitative data clearly specified and appropriate?
- If appropriate, is learning outcome data to be benchmarked to international standards enabling comparisons and assessments of cost effectiveness across contexts?
- Does data collection build on country data systems where available to reduce duplication and increase sustainability?
- Have appropriate ethical considerations been addressed in the proposal?

### **Project management**

- Are the project management plans and configuration of roles and responsibilities reasonable, appropriate and credible for the given project?
- Are the credentials of the investigators and host institutions appropriate to deliver the project?

### **Capacity-building**

- Has capacity-building been appropriately considered as a core part of the intellectual agenda?
- Is there an understanding of the local research context, and have steps been taken to ensure the research programme does not undermine local research capacity?
- Where an application includes a linked doctoral student:
  - Does the application demonstrate sufficient evidence of an appropriate research environment and infrastructure for doctoral work?
  - Are the arrangements for the supervision of students adequate and appropriate (including the suitability of the proposed doctoral supervisor(s))?
  - Is the research conducted by a doctoral student a discrete piece of work which is clearly of a standard to be submitted as a doctoral thesis, but will also produce synergy and added value to the main research project?

## **Research impact**

- Does the project have real potential for impact on education delivery in LICs?
- Does the 'Pathways to Impact' statement present a set of clear, well-funded activities for genuine collaboration with a variety of stakeholders throughout the life of the project?
- Does the application appropriately address demand for research, either by demonstrating effective demand for the research from policymakers and other stakeholders beyond the academic community, or by setting out a feasible strategy to raise awareness of the significance of the research among relevant stakeholders?
- For medium and large grants focused on government systems (rather than non-state providers) a higher level of engagement from government partners is expected from the outset. To what extent have government partners and policymakers been involved in the design of the research, and what is their role moving forward?
- Is the analysis of who the stakeholders/potential users of research outputs are and the processes and means for engaging with them appropriate, at all stages of the research process?
- Are there clear plans to make findings available to target audiences and to maximise research uptake?

## **Value for money**

- Is the budget appropriate and reasonable for the proposed programme of work, including all staff costs, travel, field work, data collection, data analysis tasks and research uptake activities?
- Are there any components of the project which appear excessive? (Estates and indirect costs should not be commented on)
- Is the amount of senior staff time on the project appropriate?
- If consultancy costs are claimed, is this the most appropriate mechanism of staffing and are the rates reasonable?

## **Research partnerships**

- Are the proposed partnerships or collaborations appropriate for the research project? Are there plans for interdisciplinary partnerships? Are the roles and responsibilities of partners and collaborators proportionate and balanced?
- Where there are international partnerships, to what extent have all the research partners been fully involved in the design of the research and what is their role moving forward?
- Where there are interdisciplinary teams to what extent have all the partners been fully involved in the design of the research and what is their role moving forward? Have sufficient resources and time been allocated to ensure strong working partnerships across disciplines?

## How to apply

Applications **must** be submitted to Je-S by the call deadline **16.00 (UK time) on 25 March 2014**. Electronic acknowledgements will be sent to the principal investigator and submitting organisation.

All applications must be submitted in English, costed in pounds sterling (£) and made on the official ESRC application form using the Research Councils Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. NB: Applications can **only** be accepted by electronic submission through the Je-S system.

**Application forms are available on the Je-S system** (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/jes2webloginsite/login.aspx>). The application has two elements: an online form comprising a number of structured boxes for key information, and a free text section called 'Case for Support' to be completed offline and uploaded as an attachment to the online form, along with a series of other mandatory attachments. The application form will include generic guidance on the completion of the structured boxes and sections of the form. Generic guidance is also available from the Je-S Help screens, which can be found at the top right hand corner of each Je-S screen.

The Case for Support contains the substance of the research application, and it is essential that a coherent overview of the proposed project is presented addressing the intellectual and academic case, potential for impact on the poverty reduction agenda, any collaboration or partnership configuration, an appropriate management plan and justification for all costs.

Applicants must ensure that they have read and complied with the guidance set out in the document 'Guidance Notes for Applicants' on the call web page and the generic Je-S advice for ESRC applicants, as well as the programme criteria set out in this specification document. Where programme-specific guidance differs from generic Je-S advice, the programme-specific guidance should always be followed.

In order to use the Je-S system, **principal investigators (PIs) and the host organisation** need to register on the system. Registration of both the PI's organisation and their own details must be completed before the application can be formally submitted to the ESRC.

When setting up a Je-S account your institution will be asked to nominate **an approver** and **a submitter** whose roles are to check and then submit the proposal to ESRC.

Care and attention must be given to completing the online form correctly. Applications 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 secure confirmation from their relevant administrator that the application has been submitted successfully to the ESRC.

## Contact details

The ESRC is responsible for the implementation and administration of the joint DFID-ESRC calls. Jointly funded by the two sponsoring agencies, a secretariat has been established at ESRC to develop and manage the programme policies and procedures.

All queries or comments about this call should be addressed in the first instance to the DFID-ESRC email address [eddev@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:eddev@esrc.ac.uk). Any enquiries may also be addressed to:

- Petya Kangalova  
Telephone: +44 (0)1793 413074
- Lauren Watters  
Telephone: +44 (0)1793 413047

Enquiries relating to technical aspects of the Je-S form should be addressed to:

- Je-S Helpdesk  
Email: [jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk](mailto:jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk)  
Telephone: +44 (0)1793 444164

The Helpdesk is staffed Monday to Friday 9.00 to 17.00 (excluding public and other holidays).