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Tip for selecting the correct call on Je-S:

Please select the New Document menu and search for and select ‘Productivity Institute Full Proposal (Invite only) - 2020’ using the Call Search function.
Preface

The ESRC, as part of UK Research and Innovation, is making a major investment to support a world-leading interdisciplinary research Institute that will directly inform government policy to improve UK productivity. Improving productivity is essential for raising living standards, and closing the productivity gap within the UK and between the UK and its peer nations is arguably the UK’s biggest economic challenge. It is against this backdrop, and supported by new funds from UKRI, that the ESRC is making the largest single investment in research in its history, to better understand, measure, and enable improvements in productivity. To address this challenge the Institute will need to:

- Be a trusted, world-class centre of research excellence and innovation. The Institute should produce a step-change improvement in the quality and quantity of productivity research in the UK. This step-change improvement should be commensurate with the significance of the problem being addressed.

- Work with and make the world’s best researchers and research accessible to government and business, so that the Institute’s activities can have a direct impact on policy and practice. This will include developing, testing and scaling new ways for individuals, business and policy to improve outcomes, and will require the Institute to build new partnerships between researchers, business, policy-makers and society.

- Undertake a broad body of research across the entire economy, extending beyond the private sector to include the public and third sectors. This includes identifying and addressing new measurement challenges, so that research can address the drivers of, and barriers to, productivity growth in previously under-researched sectors and places.

- Play a pivotal role in collating, developing and maintaining the high-quality data that will enable future research to both develop new insights and inform those seeking to understand and improve productivity.

The Institute is an opportunity for a team to build a new, world-class centre of excellent interdisciplinary research that will make a significant contribution to advancing knowledge, informing and influencing policy and improving outcomes. Applicants should explain how their proposed activities will catalyse, coordinate and cross-fertilise world-leading research across a range of thematic areas, and how they will translate research findings into solutions that can be tested, refined and scaled to improve productivity across firms, sectors and places. The team will receive substantial support from the most senior levels of ESRC, UKRI and Government departments.

The call has a budget of up to £32.4m at 100% fEC. Proposals must not exceed this limit, but proposals that are below this limit are welcome.

The successful applicants will need to demonstrate world-class academic excellence and an ability to provide leadership across relevant research communities. This will include demonstrating expertise from a wide range of disciplines and methodological approaches. The team will also need to show a clear appetite and ability to communicate and collaborate with both external stakeholders and researchers within and beyond the social sciences. The successful team will need to generate evidence of their outputs and outcomes for the funder, and pursue new funding opportunities to support the Institute’s activities in the longer term. This is a significant opportunity for an ambitious, dynamic team, and we look forward to receiving your proposals.
Introduction
Raising productivity is a national priority for the UK and one of the biggest economic challenges the UK currently faces. Raising productivity is a key means of achieving a range of social and economic ends – including raising incomes, generating sustainable economic growth and improving the effectiveness of the public and third sectors. However, UK productivity levels have been poor by international standards and have stagnated in recent years.

Productivity has traditionally been defined in terms of ratios between inputs and outputs, such as the amount of output that is generated per worker or hour worked. To address the productivity challenges the UK faces, research will have to address low productivity by traditional measures, but also expand beyond this focus, to explore wider issues including variation across geographic areas, distributional impacts, environmental implications and the delivery of a low carbon economy, relationships between well-being, productivity and human capital, and the need for new ways of measuring productivity in a changing economic, technological and environmental context.

Given the extent of these challenges, the ESRC is seeking highly ambitious proposals that will deliver both world-leading, innovative research, and significant impacts on policy, practice and outcomes.

Institute scope and objectives

Scope
The scope for this call covers productivity across the whole economy. This includes productivity in the public and private sectors, as well as in wider civil society. The scope of the activities funded by this call is deliberately broad and covers the drivers and barriers to productivity improvements, processes and policies, measurement, geography, and short and longer term consequences, including their distributional and environmental impacts.

Given the importance of improving private sector productivity growth, it is likely that research on the business sector will be a major part of all bids. However, an exclusive focus on the private sector would not provide the breadth of research needed to address the UK’s productivity challenges, and is likely to miss important lessons that may be drawn from research across sectors. Applicants should explain the balance of their research (and their other activities) across the whole economy and justify its coherence.

A non-exclusive range of topics encompassed in the scope of the call include:
- Institutions, entrepreneurship and innovation
- Regulations and regulatory reform
- Diffusion and adoption (at scale) of innovation and good practices
- Impacts of productivity changes on CO2 emissions, natural capital and the delivery of NetZero
- Spatial differences, interactions and inequalities
- Work, workers and labour markets
- Skills, education and training, including human capital formation broadly understood and the combined impact of skills and place on productivity growth
- Investment in productivity enhancing activity
- Access to finance
- Infrastructure (including decarbonisation)
- Wellbeing and inclusive growth
- Economic inequalities and the social distribution of positive and negative effects
- Relationships with wider societal outcomes such as health, wellbeing, and social capital.
• Comparative cross-country research, including research on what lessons for the UK can be drawn from the experiences of other countries.

Objectives
The over-arching aims of the Institute are to:

• Produce innovative, authoritative and trusted research on productivity, to the highest international standards.
• Ensure the Institute’s world-leading interdisciplinary research helps shape and improve government policy throughout the UK.
• Directly and indirectly improve the performance of UK firms.
• Support and transform the quantity and quality of productivity research in the UK.
• Increase the capacity of researchers, policy makers and practitioners to collaborate, and create new partnerships so that the world’s best research and researchers work with and are accessible to government, business and the third sector.

For additional information on objectives and aims, applicants should refer to information set out in the preface to this document and the preface to the call for outline applications.

Applicants should include a thorough plan for addressing the following objectives in their full proposal:

• Establish and deliver a coordinated, comprehensive programme of internationally-excellent research on productivity across the whole economy. This programme of research should directly address the challenges involved in improving UK productivity in a sustainable and inclusive way, and include long-term strategic research, medium-term changes in policy and policy-frameworks, and near-term responsive research and support.
• Deliver an innovative work programme and engagement strategy that will transform how researchers and policy-makers collaborate across the UK in ways that will deliver significant changes in policy and outcomes.
• Develop innovative approaches for improving productivity that can be embedded within organisations and applied at scale. The Institute’s activities should increase the propensity and capability of academic researchers to engage directly with businesses and policy communities. Funding for a business innovation fund has been allocated to support the Institute’s activities to improve academic-business engagement.
• Build multidisciplinary communities by forging sustainable engagement between the research community and policy-makers, practitioners and businesses. This will include increasing the capability of policy and business to work with the research base in order to embed research into policy making and practice.

The plan should be ambitious and clearly demonstrate large prospective benefits that would not otherwise be achieved. It should show how the Institute’s activities, research and data will achieve outcomes over-and-above what would have been achieved without the creation of the Institute. In doing so, it should explain what is novel and innovative about the proposed activities and how they will move research and researchers beyond their existing individual, group and disciplinary perspectives.

Other Institute requirements
As well as advancing knowledge and engagement directly with policy and practice to improve outcomes, the Institute will also be responsible for delivering a set of specific requirements during the period of investment.
Research agenda
An early priority for the Institute will be to develop a new agenda for UK productivity research. This will also provide a framework for academic researchers and policy communities outside the Institute to engage, integrate and align their future work. This agenda and ongoing input from the Institute will shape the funding of additional thematic research programmes by ESRC in 2021. The agenda should be ambitious, integrated, UK-focused and informed by international research and experiences. The research agenda will necessarily retain a high degree of flexibility so that potentially fruitful findings can be developed, new research avenues explored, and research can be responsive to evolving policy and research priorities during the life of the Institute.

Business innovation and fellowship programmes
The Institute will need to deliver two programmes for engagement activity within the Institute’s overall budget:

i. An indicative £4mn (RC contribution) is allocated for the Institute to create and deliver research informed interventions to help UK firms address their productivity challenges. Working with Innovate UK, the Institute will create and deliver a business innovation programme which will enable businesses to benefit from academic research on productivity growth. The total amount can be varied upwards or downwards if a strong case can be made to do so. There is no requirement for grant holders to attract or accept co-funding from business. The Je-S guidance explains how the budget for this activity should be accounted for in the full application.

ii. An indicative £4mn (RC contribution) is allocated as a guide for a productivity fellowship programme, providing secondments and exchanges between academics, government and businesses (both into and out of the Institute environment). This will include national and international fellowships for visiting researchers. The programme should co-deliver research and analysis, forge lasting relationships and connections between academia-policy-business-third sector and support international collaborations. The total amount can be varied upwards or downwards if a strong case can be made to do so. The Je-S guidance explains how the budget for this activity should be accounted for in the full application.

Project management, reporting and evaluation
UKRI requires all its Strategic Priority Fund investments to report on their delivery, outputs and outcomes. The Institute should allocate sufficient strategic and operational resources to participate fully in these project management, reporting and evaluation activities, including an externally contracted evaluation that will be managed by ESRC. Reporting and evaluation requirements will be confirmed in the summer of 2020 and are likely to include:

Delivery information:

a) A schedule of milestones for the delivery of the Institute’s work e.g. staff recruited, governance structure in place, research agenda published.
b) Oral and written progress reports against the agreed milestones.
Output and outcome information:

a) Recorded details of outputs, outcomes and impacts in the Researchfish® system.
b) Participation in an ESRC led evaluation which will specify the information that will needed to be collected, analysed and reported by the Institute team.
c) Participation in two stage gate reviews¹, which will aim to utilise the data collected in the evaluation.
d) The Institute should also plan to deliver a downloadable public-facing annual report for each year of activity.

Planning for longevity
ESRC intends the Institute to be sustained well beyond the initial five years of funding that is currently available. The ESRC anticipates working with the leadership of the successful proposal over the lifetime of the grant to build the evidence base and make the case for future funding. The ESRC will welcome discussions with the Institute about future funding, and applicants are welcome to include proposals on how they would plan for future funding. The Institute should nominate a senior leader amongst whose responsibilities include working with ESRC and others on thinking about and planning for future funding.

Institutional and partner contributions
The objectives and requirements of this call are demanding. ESRC recognises that this investment is likely to test the resources, skills and systems of many host organisations. ESRC has therefore identified a range of support services that applicants may find useful in operationalising the Institute. These are listed below. Contributions from host organisations to provide support in these areas are particularly welcome, and can form part of organisations’ financial contributions. Requests for funding towards these services (and/or services proposed by the applicants) can also be included in the application for funding. They may also be provided through partnerships and advisory structures included in the Institute’s delivery model:

- Experienced centre administration and management.
- Expertise in delivering outcomes from research (knowledge mobilisation) in complex organisational systems.
- Expertise in operating inward and outward secondments, staff exchanges and student placement schemes.
- Knowledge of operating business innovation and business engagement programmes with potential to be scaled. This should include an ability to deliver against external reporting requirements.
- Arrangements for supporting staff development and skills acquisition, especially in carrying out stakeholder engagement, leadership across organisations, communicating research, expectations management, collaboration, evaluation, impact and programme management.
- Support from an organisational development service to help the winning team successfully set up a new organisation at pace. This should include implementing effective governance structures.
- Digital communications systems and services including web-based conferencing facilities.

¹ This is likely to review the effectiveness of the Institute’s governance, evidence of delivery of sufficient performance information, adequacy and success of the income generation plan and successful delivery of required outputs e.g. the research agenda.
Leadership and management
The Institute’s success will depend on excellent strategic and operational leadership. Therefore, the Director and the principal researchers leading the Institute will:

- be recognised leaders in their field, with an international reputation.
- have a demonstrable track record of setting up and managing large-scale programmes. This will include managing any associated risks across a diverse group of collaborators to achieve the desired outcomes.
- have experience of running effective leadership teams, and providing supportive and inspiring support to colleagues.
- ensure that sufficient managerial and professional resources are employed.
- understand and able to work within policy and innovation landscapes in different parts of the UK. This will include experience of communicating research and building trust with research users.

The composition of the leadership team should reflect the multifaceted nature of the productivity challenges facing the UK. The leadership team must bring fresh perspectives to the creation and application of productivity research, be action-focused and prioritise the involvement of stakeholders representing a diverse range of sectors, disciplines and places. Applicants must clearly demonstrate the contributions (time and activities) that each team member will make to the Institute’s activities and the additionality that will come from their engagement.

Governance
The current Advisory Group is ESRC’s Productivity Research Advisory Group, providing support to ESRC for the establishment of the Institute and the ESRC’s wider programme of research on productivity. The successful leadership team will be expected to establish a governance structure for the Institute, which is expected to include an advisory function. This governance structure should be appropriate for the programme of research and other activities undertaken by the Institute, and this may include members of the current Advisory Group at the discretion of the successful team.

Multi-disciplinarity
Given the complexity of the productivity challenges facing the UK, addressing them will require coordinated and collaborative research across a range of disciplines. Bibliometric evidence suggests research on productivity is fragmented, and policy makers find that even within relatively narrow disciplinary areas, different research communities’ findings may offer contradictory conclusions.

To move current research beyond narrow individual approaches, towards a richer, deeper and more integrated body of knowledge, the Institute’s research and activities will need to draw expertise, concepts, methods and insights from across a range of disciplines and fields. Applicants must therefore clearly demonstrate how and why their proposal integrates a diverse range of disciplines across and beyond the social sciences. This means much more than simply including a range of disciplines. The ESRC does not expect research partnerships to be formed simply to increase the number of disciplines on the proposals at the time of submission. It is suggested the composition of the research team, and hence its disciplinary nature, should follow from the research strategy, and not the other way around. Applicants must show how their research plans and impact-strategy are coherent and draw on an appropriate range of expertise to allow them to successfully transform understanding and generate impact.

For example, ESRC would like to see co-investigators from non-academic backgrounds and would welcome the inclusion of an appropriate selection from the following (non-exclusive) list of disciplines within teams as part of the applicant’s research-plan and impact strategy:
Computer science (including robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning), Sociology, History, Mathematics, Economic and Business History, Education, Law and Legal studies, Occupational psychology, Behavioural science, Human resource management and development, Innovation/Science and Technology Studies, Geography, and Business and Management.

However, this is not a prescriptive list and proposals should include the most appropriate range of disciplines for the areas of research and approaches that are being proposed. Applicants should indicate how they intend to more interdisciplinary approaches in the future.

Commitment to ambitious research that breaks new ground in understanding and addressing productivity by successfully working across disciplinary boundaries will be one of the criteria used to assess the proposals.

Reach across the UK and importance of place
There are large differences in productivity across the UK that have an important influence on overall performance. These differences are substantial in both absolute terms and by international standards. Given the importance of place, the ESRC expects the Institute to allocate a proportionate amount of its activity to understanding how productivity and productivity growth differ across the UK, how policy and management practices need to reflect this diversity, and how drivers and barriers to productivity growth operate across a range of spatial scales (that may not align with the geography of existing activity or existing policy categories).

The extent to which the proposed programme of research and other activities addresses the diverse research needs of different parts of the UK will be one of the criteria used to assess the proposals.

Impact
The Institute activities should be structured to deliver non-academic impacts at a scale commensurate with the level of funding. It should clearly explain the underlying vision for impact taking into account the call objectives, what will be novel about its engagement activity and how the various activities will interact to maximise the impact of the Institute’s research on policy and practice. These activities should be designed to shape policy and achieve improved outcomes and should be funded at an appropriate level. Simply making research available will be insufficient.

Applicants should explain how they will deliver at scale, across sectors and the variety of policy systems in the UK. For example, impact strategies directed at firms should influence the behaviour and productivity of a wide range of companies, rather than be focused on improving productivity in individual businesses. Further guidance on integrating proposals for impact into the Case for Support attachment are in the Je-S call guidance document.

Data Management
Data access, development, dissemination and support will be an essential part of the Institute’s activities. The Institute’s data strategy should be well integrated with the research strategy and impact plans. Applicants should include a data management plan with their application (maximum three sides of A4). This should provide information on what data is going to accessed, what data is going to be collected, and how that data is going to be accessed by other parties. For a programme of research of this scale, the data management plan will be a living document that will develop and evolve with the changing activities of the Institute. An appropriate degree of flexibility is therefore important. The initial data management plan should explain how data collection, access and dissemination fit within the Institute’s research strategy and impact plans. Additional information about the requirements is included in the Data Management section of the Je-S guidance.
Capital funding
Applications for capital funding, to develop assets with long term value, may be included in proposals to this call. In line with ESRC Funding Guide equipment costs can also be included in proposals. Applicants should specify the amount, timing and purpose of the proposed capital expenditure, which should be allocated within the overall budget envelope. Any allocation of capital funding will be made from within the overall call budget. Awards for capital expenditure are not guaranteed.

Associated studentships
Associated studentships, formerly known as grant-linked studentships, are permissible under this call. These should be independent PhD research projects affiliated with the Institute and an accredited doctoral training pathway that has been approved by ESRC or another UKRI Research Council as per the ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide.

The students must have a distinct, independent area of enquiry that will add value to the overall research objectives of the grant. Proposals that include more than three associated studentships should provide a strong justification for capacity-building in that particular area, and the proposal should show how it adds value to the overall proposal.

The substantive work of the Institute should still be viable without studentships, which must not be a displacement for the normal research support required on the grant. The Institute will need to clearly demonstrate that it can adequately support any students.

Associated studentships must be embedded in an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) studying on an accredited pathway, and can start from 1 October 2021 onwards. The student’s primary supervisor must be either the principal investigator or a co-investigator on the grant and must be based at the DTP and 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. A separate case for each associated studentship for which ESRC funds are being requested must be submitted with the proposal.

Please note that the RO can also fully fund studentships as part of their institutional support. Where an RO is fully funding studentships, we would expect students to follow the same requirements as ESRC-funded students unless there is a clear justification as to why this would not be appropriate in this instance. Where institutions are planning to co-fund the associated studentships with ESRC, this must be confirmed in the proposal and the relevant documentation should be included for all students. For example, if funding equivalent to three full students is being requested, but the RO intends to co-fund an equivalent amount, six project student requests should be included in the proposal. The application must include a letter of support from the relevant DTP director.

ESRC Research Institutes policy
The ESRC does not envisage that the Research Institutes policy will apply to the Institute.

Assessment process and criteria
Full proposals will be peer reviewed by international experts covering a range of disciplinary areas. Proposals will then be assessed by the Productivity Research Advisory Group who will interview teams. Once the interviews have taken place, the Advisory Group will make a final funding recommendation to the ESRC.

Full proposals should clearly demonstrate how they satisfy all of the criteria in Table 1.
### Table 1: Assessment criteria for Productivity Institute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>How clearly and comprehensively does the applicant demonstrate:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic fit</strong></td>
<td>• Overall fit of the proposal with the Institute’s scope and objectives. This will include explaining how the Institute’s strategy, programmes of work, supporting activities and investment from partners and host institutions are aligned with the requirements of the call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research excellence and scientific impact</strong></td>
<td>• Compelling plans for new research across the entire economy that aims to be internationally excellent and break new ground in understanding and addressing productivity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Track record of academic excellence, incorporating expertise from a wide range of disciplines and methodologies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Clearly described and justified research methods.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clearly described and justified data management and access plans that identify the risks to, and mitigations for, accessing, managing and sharing data.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proposals for multi-disciplinary research engagement across and beyond the social sciences.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Exceptional knowledge of the current productivity research landscape across a range of disciplines, approaches and methods.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Specific requirement to be assessed</strong></td>
<td>(see page 5 of the call specification for details of the requirements):</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Capabilities and plans for delivering a research agenda for productivity research within the required timeframe.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Proposals for managing the allocation of the Institute’s research capacity across long, medium and nearer term. This will include the mechanisms for attracting and selecting new research projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-academic impact</strong></td>
<td>• Clear proposals for generating impact underpinned by a thorough understanding of the principles and practices of effective knowledge exchange and impact generation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How the Institute will work with research users, and conduct activities and produce outputs that are highly relevant to their needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How research and other activities addresses the diverse needs of different parts of the UK and will build with key actors within the policy and practice systems across the UK. This should include devolved administrations, regions, and city and regional partnerships.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge of key business support and innovation agencies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Commitment from within the leadership team to drive non-academic impact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific requirement to be assessed</strong></td>
<td>(see page 5 of the call specification for details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feasibility of plans to distribute and use the dedicated budget for business innovation programmes to enable substantial engagement and impact with business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feasibility of plans to distribute and use the dedicated budget for fellowship programmes to enable substantial engagement and impact with policy makers, practitioners and researchers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eligibility
This call is by invitation only. Please refer to the Productivity Institute Je-S Guidance for full details of the eligibility requirements.

Principal investigators must be based at a UK institution eligible for UK Research and Innovation funding.

Eligible international co-investigators, co-investigators from UK business, policy or civil society and PSREs can also be included in proposals.

Please note that applicants’ (and members of the research team) total commitment for this grant and their ongoing ESRC grants should not exceed 37.5 hours.

Open Access policy - Researchers will be expected to comply with the requirements outlined in the UKRI open access policy.
**How to apply**
Proposals to this stage of the call are by invitation only. If you have not been invited to apply, your application will be rejected. Please refer to the Productivity Institute Je-S Guidance for full details of the application requirements. Please select the New Document menu and search for and select ‘Productivity Institute Full Proposal (Invite only) - 2020’ using the Call Search function.

Proposals must be submitted by 16:00 on 18 March 2020 using the Research Council’s Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system at [https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk](https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk). Proposal costs must **NOT** exceed £32.4m (at 100% fEC) and must be approved by the institutes research office before submission. It is strongly recommended that applicants submit in good time before the call deadline and ensure that they are aware of any deadlines within their institutions that relate to the grant submission process.

**Proposal attachments**
All attachments should be submitted using PDF format and Arial or other Sans Serif, with a minimum font size of 11.

It is important that applicants only submit the supporting attachments specified in this document. Please refer to the Productivity Institute Je-S Call Guidance for full details of proposal attachment requirement.

The following are mandatory attachments for this call:
- Case for Support (not exceeding **12 sides** of A4).
- Justification of Resources (not exceeding **four sides** of A4).
- Data Management Plan (not exceeding **three sides** of A4).
- CV attachment for all researchers (one document only to be submitted to include all named researchers’ CVs). A maximum **two** page CV should be provided for the PI, Co-Is and any named research staff member on the proposal.
- Host Research Organisation Letter of Support (one document, not exceeding **two sides** of A4).
- If requesting associated studentship(s) - Project Student Request (not exceeding **two sides** of A4) and Letter of Support (not exceeding **one side** A4)

The following are attachments that can also be included for this call:
- List of publications.
- Final/interim reports (not exceeding **three sides** of A4)
- Other Letters of Support that are essential to the successful conduct of the research, if relevant

No other attachments should be included. If you are unclear about whether you can include a specific attachment please contact productivity@ersc.ukri.org for advice. ESRC reserves the right to reject proposals that include attachments not permitted on this call.
Commissioning timetable

- Full proposal submission deadline: 18 March 2020
- Peer review process: March-April 2020
- Assessment process: Early-Mid May 2020
- Commissioning Panel meeting & Interviews: Late May/Early June 2020
- Decisions communicated: June 2020
- Expected project start date: 01 Sept 2020

Contacts

Enquiries about this call should be addressed to:

- Claire Feary
  Email: productivity@esrc.ukri.org

Enquires about the Je-S Submission System:

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

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