



GCRF Inequalities and skills acquisition in young people

Call specification

Summary

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is pleased to invite proposals for innovative research grants focusing on skills and vocational education in developing countries. Funding for this call has been allocated from the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

GCRF (www.esrc.ac.uk/gcrf) is a £1.5 billion funding stream to support research which addresses the problems faced by developing countries. GCRF forms part of the UK's official development assistance (ODA) commitment, and as such funding under this call will be awarded in a manner consistent with official ODA guidelines (www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm).

GCRF will address global challenges through disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and will strengthen capability for research and innovation within both the UK and developing countries, providing an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.

Although there are large populations of young people in developing countries, many with some formal education, high levels of unemployment and underemployment persist.

This GCRF call seeks to fund a range of research awards to address issues within inequalities and skills acquisition in young people, in order to further understand and explore potential policy and practice solutions and to shape recommendations in Low and Middle Income country (LMIC) contexts. Research under this call should consider some of the wide range of issues affecting young people, skills acquisition and transitions into meaningful work and how the resulting understanding of those issues can be applied to influence policy at national/ international levels, develop specific interventions or new ways to improve existing transitions to meaningful work.

Different forms of skills provisioning (public, private, work-based, nonformal) can be considered under this call, as well as skills acquisition at a local, national or international level.

We are looking for ambitious projects, capable of proposing new avenues for research, that directly engage with this agenda. This may include comparative, cross-regional and cross-

sectoral research. Partnerships, whether with academics, policymakers or stakeholders, are encouraged.

Proposals are invited for durations up to 27 months and must be led by a researcher at an eligible UK research organisation. Proposals will be submitted through the research councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). All grants are expected to **commence on 1 December 2018. All grants must be completed by 28 February 2021.**

The ESRC has a total budget of £5 million allocated to this call. ESRC expect to fund a balanced portfolio of proposals of varying sizes and ambitions, with a maximum grant value of £1 million at 100% full Economic Cost (fEC). ESRC will contribute 80% fEC on successful proposals. It is expected that the portfolio will include grants which are significantly smaller than this maximum value.

The deadline for proposals is 16:00 on 22 March 2018.

Background and scope

Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)

GCRF aims to harness the UK's scientific expertise to tackle some of the world's most pressing development challenges. It operates across a number of partners, including the Research Councils UK (RCUK), National Academies, UK Space Agency and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The RCUK GCRF represents the largest portion of the Fund and is a strategic fund spanning all seven UK research councils. The research councils have each received directly allocated portions of the GCRF; ESRC are drawing on their allocations to support this call.

Every discipline within the social sciences has the potential to make a strong contribution to the GCRF agenda, and the ESRC anticipates playing an integral role in developing and delivering the GCRF objectives, working alongside other research councils and partners. Further information about our approach to GCRF and details of other current GCRF calls is available on our website (www.esrc.ac.uk/gcrf).

Call background and scope

Research in high income countries has provided insights into the mismatch between skills developed in educational settings and their application in various areas of work, but little is known about how these processes work in developing countries. Not enough is known about how workplace conditions impact on learning, what the best place is to develop skills for decent, meaningful work, health or other development needs. It is acknowledged that the nature of work and the job market will change over the next 20 years, and that moves towards enhancing gender equality, political voice, and improving accountability of states will all have a consequence for this, but further investigation is needed to identify the skills that are needed to support these processes.

Education is widely recognised as a key field for developing and supporting human rights and sustainable development. It is understood that education and skills development is central to the improvement of the lives of young people. Considerable gaps in our knowledge remain on how the education sector can develop understanding and skills to address the vision outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

(www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/). In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals' (MDG) narrow focus on primary education, the SDGs develop a vision of expanded access and engagement with education and skills acquisition at all levels. However, this vision is to be realised in the context of significant inequalities within and between countries and development challenges including the severe effects of climate change, discrimination, injustice and constraints on the realisation of rights. These issues particularly impact on the poorest and most marginal at all levels, from the household, to the community, the state and in international processes. The large numbers of people displaced by wars and other humanitarian crises add to the scale and depth of how to deliver on rights. Mobilising adequate resources of finance, planning, professional practice, monitoring and research to fulfil the rights to education of all children and adults around the world is an enormous task, but a strategic investment in skills and education research could make a key contribution.

Much of the research to date has focused on improving policies to address access to schooling and improving learning outcomes for children. But the complexities of the problem of inadequate education and skills, and how inequalities around knowledge and understanding intersect with other areas of political, economic and social development and the effects these have on young people is less well understood. This limits delivery of the integrated SDG vision. There are some striking gaps in knowledge of how conflict, migrations and emergencies affect the delivery of education and skills programmes across the life-course, for youth in particular, and how inequalities may exacerbate these shortcomings in provision. Research to further understand and address the problems of providing education and skills for all, and the intersecting inequalities and complexities affecting skills provision and education for young people and across the life-course will support the successful delivery of related policies and programmes.

Research funded under this call should consider active collaboration and/or engagement with, for example, local communities, practitioners and wider stakeholders (including policymakers). In doing so, researchers should take into account the social, cultural, religious and linguistic context.

Call details

This GCRF call seeks to fund a range of research grants to address issues within inequalities and skills acquisition in young people, to further understand and explore potential policy and practice solutions and to shape recommendations in Low and Middle Income Country (LMIC) contexts. Some key areas have been set out below, although they are not exhaustive and applicants may choose to cover one or a number of cross-cutting issues.

This call seeks to address how inequalities such as gender, class and caste manifest in access to and experiences of skills training and skills programmes linked with the SDG agenda both within and outside employment. These and other inequalities affect experiences across the life-course, and this call seeks to further increase understanding on issues particularly affecting adolescents and young people. Different forms of skills provisioning (public, private, work-based, nonformal) can be considered under this call, as well as skills acquisition at a local, national or international level. It is understood that there are long-term effects of inequalities and equalities in skills programmes on, for example employment, health, wellbeing, access to work, citizenship and social solidarities. Further research can address

these inequalities through focussing on appropriate and useful skills provision. Applications may consider how skills-oriented programmes can transform rather than reproduce intersecting inequalities - in addition, where and how provisions are made for learning difficulties and disabilities in terms of skills provisioning and employment. The call seeks to address how creative solutions to meeting the SDG challenges (such as developing clean energy, revitalising the public sphere, ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all, etc.) work with programmes to develop education and skills. Research may focus on teachers, healthcare workers and other professions linked with the SDG agenda, although is not restricted to these areas.

Although there are large populations of young people in developing countries, many with some formal education, high levels of unemployment and underemployment persist. The call aims to address how transitions to meaningful work could be more successfully and smoothly achieved and the aspirations of young people moving into the workplace be met. Research under this call should consider some of the wide range of issues affecting transitions into work for young people and how the resulting understanding of those issues can be applied to influence policy at national/ international levels, develop specific interventions or new ways to improve existing transitions to meaningful work. Issues include: What changes in forms of education and training can expand access to decent, meaningful work? In addition, what kinds of opportunities can build and maintain relevant and strong skills ecosystems, taking advantage of investment, international opportunity and industry? How do employers make decisions around their workforce (for example, on employment and job opportunities, work conditions, programmes for decent work, investment in skills training, and the existing Technical and Vocational Educational Training provision? How are decisions made by employers and those who are self-employed in the informal sector compare, and how can the two aspects of employment be drawn closer to support livelihood and meaningful work for young people? How does labour migration impact on employers' decision-making on whether or not to train local employees or young people and why employers value particular kinds of qualifications or employees could be considered under this call. Further areas of interest for this call include those around the wider political economy, structural issues and how different forms of financing, relationships of work and decision-making could enhance education and skills programmes, markets, the state and international actors. This should include how they interact to support skills development programmes that realise rights and equalities and align with the SDG vision.

Research teams should consider ways in which they can incorporate voice of young people in all stages of their research projects.

In better understanding these issues, funded research should be well placed to share recommendations with policy-makers and other stakeholders on improving the prospects of young people moving into meaningful employment, and applicants should set out plans to do this.

The use of existing country data, where appropriate, is encouraged. Proposals from single, multi- and interdisciplinary teams are welcome and may further facilitate use of data from a range of sources. Research teams should set out clear management and data plans accordingly.

Methodological opportunities

The UK has world-leading data resources for social and economic research, providing a huge opportunity for comparative analysis into some of the most pressing global challenges we face today. Given the richness of these resources we encourage applicants to fully exploit these through a secondary/data analysis approach when addressing the aims, objectives and themes of this call. Proposals are permitted which use a range of data-sets and resources. We recommend that applicants refer to the Low and Middle Income Longitudinal Population Study Directory (www.ifs.org.uk/tools_and_resources/longitudinal) as a useful starting point for longitudinal population study data resources. The use of any data resource is acceptable provided applicants can justify the data's ability to provide answers to the research questions posed in the proposal.

Given the huge diversity of the social sciences, particularly in their inherent methodological approaches, it will be essential for interdisciplinary research to be methodologically robust. We encourage methodological innovation where it is appropriate.

Eligibility

For this call, standard ESRC eligibility rules apply. Principal investigators must be based at an UK research organisation eligible for research council funding (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/>). Co-investigators may be based anywhere in the world, but, additionally for GCRF calls, the co-investigator's research organisation must submit a 'letter of support' using the template provided within the Je-S guidance. This is to ensure comparability of standing between international organisations and RCUK-recognised UK research organisations, and to ensure commitment to the project. Further information on eligibility is provided within the ESRC Research Funding Guide (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/). Guidance on the inclusion of international co-investigators is also available (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/).

Proposals which duplicate work previously supported by the ESRC will not be funded. We will not fund contract research or consultancy work where the results and physical outputs are to some extent already pre-defined and known. Proposals which are not deemed to be within the scope or remit of this call will be rejected.

Funding

The ESRC has a total budget of £5 million allocated to this call. ESRC expect to fund a balanced portfolio of proposals of varying sizes and ambitions, with a maximum grant value of £1 million at 100% full Economic Cost (fEC). The research councils will contribute 80% fEC on successful proposals. It is expected that the portfolio will include grants which are significantly smaller than this maximum value.

Funding of international co-investigators

GCRF calls will follow standard ESRC policies in that the ESRC will fund 100% of the justified costs for international co-investigators. Applicants should note the ESRC's policy on the inclusion of international co-investigators on proposals (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/).

In addition to our usual policy, GCRF calls permit the fully justified costs associated with international co-investigators' contribution to the project to exceed 30% of the overall cost

of the grant (at 100% fEC). No upper limit will be applied, though all costs will need to be fully justified and principal investigators must be based at a UK research organisation.

This applies equally to co-investigators from countries on the DAC-list and those from countries not on the DAC list (available at: www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm).

Please note that we strongly encourage co-investigators from countries not on the DAC-list to make a significant contribution to their own research costs. If a co-investigator is from a country flagged as likely to graduate from the DAC-list during the course of the project this should be treated as a country NOT on the DAC-list.

The overhead rate for DAC-list country co-investigators is up to 20% of salaries and other staff-related costs (that is, statutory contributions analogous to UK National Insurance or Superannuation contributions). Indirect costs may not be charged on non-staff-related direct costs, such as equipment, consultancies and conferences as well as travel and subsistence.

Please note that only DAC-list country co-investigators are eligible for 20% of international salary-related costs as overheads/indirect costs, and that this does not apply to non-DAC-list country co-investigators. If a co-investigator is from a country flagged as likely to graduate from the DAC-list during the course of the project this should be treated as a country NOT on the DAC-list.

Further guidance is provided in the call-specific Je-S Guidance for Applicants at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/gcrf-inequalities-and-skills-acquisition-in-young-people/>.

Stakeholder engagement

The primary purpose of research funded under this call is to promote the economic development and welfare of a developing country or countries. We expect researchers funded under this call to have identified the potential impact of their research on relevant policy and practice, and to actively consider how this can be maximised and developed in ways which are realistic and appropriate to the particular context.

We recommend that a minimum of 10% of the overall budget should be dedicated to deliver the activities outlined in the impact summary. Researchers are encouraged to be innovative in the kinds of user engagement, knowledge exchange, communications, and research uptake activities they plan to undertake. Applicants must consider how the impact of research on inequalities and skills acquisition in young people in LMICs can be increased through innovative knowledge exchange approaches, particularly bearing in mind the likely need to compensate for lack of capacity, infrastructure and workforce to inform, educate, and empower people in LMICs.

Please note that outreach and engagement activities in themselves do not constitute impact. The development of a clear impact strategy will be important to ensure 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 (www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/developing-an-impact-strategy/).

It is recommended that each proposal includes plans to hold a seminar or workshop with key stakeholders in the country or countries where the majority of the research is taking

place, to set out the aims of the projects and fully ground it in the local context. This should take place at the earliest opportunity to facilitate the potential co-production of knowledge and allow researchers to 'reality-check' their plans.

Partnerships and collaboration

For this call we strongly encourage proposals which involve partnerships and collaborative relationships, particularly with developing country partners. 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. All partnerships, including international ones, should be based on mutual respect and understanding for different cultural, ethnic, social and economic beliefs and practices.

Collaborative partnerships with non-academic stakeholders, including potential research users and intermediary organisations with a mandate to communicate research, are also encouraged where appropriate. The exploitation of new knowledge does not just occur at the end of a research project, but is rather embedded throughout the research process itself, so we expect such stakeholders to be included and involved in both the early design and on-going conduct of research projects.

Please see the FAQs for guidance on the different ways of including international costs (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/gcrf-inequalities-and-skills-acquisition-in-young-people/>).

Capacity-building

An important aspect of GCRF is capacity development, and we strongly encourage all proposals to this call to identify research capacity-building activities as part of, and not separate to, the stated research agenda. Examples of building capacity include:

- provision of new opportunities for those with relevant skills who have not previously worked on development-relevant research projects to orient their research towards global issues
- support and mentoring for more junior team members
- co-design of research and implementation with developing country partner staff.

Further information on capacity-building in relation to GCRF is available on the ESRC website (www.esrc.ac.uk/research/international-research/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf/capacity-development/).

Associated studentships will not be funded through this call.

ODA compliance statement

This call is funded through the GCRF, which forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment. In turn, this is monitored by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (www.oecd.org/). ODA-funded activity focuses on outcomes that promote the long-term sustainable growth of countries on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list (www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.htm).

Funding within this call will be awarded in a manner that fits with official ODA guidelines (www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm).

To comply with ODA requirements, all proposals must make clear how their primary purpose is to promote the economic development and welfare of a developing country or countries on the DAC-list. There are no priority countries. Proposals may relate to any country or countries on the DAC-list except those which are flagged as likely to graduate from the list during the course of the proposed project. If a country is flagged as likely to graduate it should not be the primary focus of a proposal, although it can be included as an additional case study or comparison. In such proposals the primary purpose of the research should be to promote the development and welfare of a developing country not due to graduate from the list.

Applicants must clearly demonstrate how they meet ODA requirements throughout their case for support and pathways to impact submission. In addition, **all proposals must include a mandatory attachment addressing the following three questions:**

1. Which country / countries on the DAC-list will directly benefit from this proposal?
2. How is your proposal directly and primarily relevant to the development challenges of this country/these countries?
3. How do you expect that the outcome of your proposed activities will promote the economic development and welfare of a country or countries on the DAC-list?

Important considerations:

- To be ODA-compliant the principal motivation of the project must be to directly benefit a country or countries on the DAC-list, and the key/principal beneficiaries of the research should be located in a DAC-list country or countries.
- Research can take place outside of a DAC-list country, or for projects to include a comparative element, as long as the principal motivation is to benefit a DAC-list country or countries. (Research projects can also have secondary impacts outside of eligible countries.)
- If a focus country within a proposal is flagged on the DAC-list as likely to graduate from the list during the course of the project, the research will not be ODA-compliant unless the primary focus is on a country or countries not due to graduate.
- The impact-generating and knowledge exchange-related activities must be focused on a DAC-list country or countries, and if the applicants intend to generate impact via international organisations or international non-governmental organisations they should explain why this is likely to lead to greater impacts than working directly with stakeholders in-country.
- Compliant proposals must address development challenges in an eligible country or countries and be likely to contribute directly to their economic development and/or welfare. Impacts should be targeted at specific DAC-list countries and should not depend on the 'trickle down' of impacts elsewhere.

Further guidance on how to submit the ODA compliance statement as a 'non-UK component' attachment is provided in the call-specific Je-S Guidance for Applicants. General advice on ODA and links to other useful sources of information are provided on the ESRC website (www.esrc.ac.uk/research/international-research/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf/official-development-assistance-oda/). RCUK guidance on ODA in relation to GCRF is available at www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/gcrf/.

Initial ODA compliance assessment will take place within the ESRC, though final decisions may include input from commissioning panels as well as external sources of ODA expertise.

Assessment

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria (in no particular order):

- Originality/potential contribution to knowledge
- Contribution to promoting the welfare and economic development of people in DAC-list countries (GCRF criterion)
- Design and methods, including data and information management
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination and impact
- Research ethics

Applications will undergo peer review before being considered by a specially convened panel of academic and non-academic experts at a meeting in July/August 2018. The panel will be asked to assess the proposals against the fit to the call and the assessment criteria, and make formal recommendations to the funders. The funders may wish to apply some conditions on grants, and there may be subsequent negotiations on the details of the support offered. Funding decisions are expected to be announced in late September 2018 and awards are expected to commence **on 1 December 2018**.

Additional grant conditions

It is anticipated that successful applicants awarded funding under this call will form a strong, high-quality network to generate additional value from the research projects. Grant holders will be expected to participate in network events as an additional condition of their award. The nature of such events will be discussed with the final grant holders.

How to apply

Proposals must be submitted to the Je-S system (<https://jes.rcuk.ac.uk/jes2webloginsite/login.aspx>) by the **call deadline 16.00 (UK time) on 22 March 2018**.

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 research councils 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.

What we will do with your information

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, the personal information that you provide within the Expression of Interest will specifically be used for the purpose of administering the call. The information will be viewed by ESRC staff and selection panel members, but will not be used for any other purpose without your specific consent.

For further information on how your information is used, how we maintain the security of your information, and your rights to access information we hold on you, please contact the Joint Information Services Unit (jis@epsrc.ac.uk).

Commissioning timetable

- Call announced – 16 January 2018
- Closing date for proposals – 22 March 2018
- Decisions announced – September 2018
- Grants start – 1 December 2018

Contacts

If you have any questions or would like further information about the scheme, please use the contacts below. In the first instance, we encourage the use of email so that research council staff may direct your enquiry to the most suitable respondent.

- Email: gcrfskills@esrc.ac.uk
- Raquel Pullicino
Telephone: (+44) 01793 413106
- Mary Day
Telephone: (+44) 01793 413121

We will collate an FAQ document which will aim to answer commonly asked questions. This FAQ document will be updated regularly and can be found on the ESRC website (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/gcrf-inequalities-and-skills-acquisition-in-young-people/>).

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

- Je-S helpdesk
Email: jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk
Telephone: (+44) 01793 444164