New Investigator Grants
Call specification

Summary

One of ESRC's strategic aims is to invest in the most talented people by offering diverse and flexible training to outstanding individuals at all stages of their careers. As part of this we have embedded a call for New Investigator Grants in to our Research Grants scheme. This is just one element of our strategy for supporting early career researchers. For further information please see: https://esrc.ukri.org/skills-and-careers/postgraduate-careers/early-career-researchers/.

New Investigator Grants will support new researchers and academics at the start of their careers to become independent researchers through gaining experience of managing and leading research projects and teams. In addition, they will provide applicants with an opportunity not only to support their own skill development but also the skill development of research staff employed on the grant.

As with the Research Grants scheme, proposals could be for a range of activities such as standard research projects, surveys and other infrastructure projects and methodological developments. Proposals are welcomed across the full disciplinary range of the social sciences and at the interface with the wider sciences, however the social sciences must represent at least 50 per cent of the research focus and effort.

There are no fixed closing dates – you can submit proposals to the call at any time.

Grants can be for up to five years in duration (a five year grant would need a clear justification of the timeframe), and within an overall limit of £300,000 at 100% full Economic Cost (fEC); ESRC's contribution for UK applicants is 80% of fEC. We anticipate being able to fund up to around 30 to 35 grants a year subject to quality and available funds.

Background and scope

We are committed to providing a suite of funding opportunities flexible enough to support academics at all stages of their careers. For early career researchers, we believe that ESRC funding will be best utilised supporting key transition points. The New Investigator Grants are designed to enable researchers to make the transition to becoming an independent researcher through gaining experience of managing and leading research projects and teams.

Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria detailed below, applicants have the flexibility to determine when they apply for funding rather than being bound by annual closing dates. Proposals are processed alongside our Research Grants scheme and considered by our Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs).

The early career researcher must be the principal investigator on the proposal and must demonstrate how an award would have a demonstrable impact on their career progression to becoming an independent researcher.

This call is open to high-quality candidates from anywhere in the world but can only be held at UK research organisations eligible for Research Council funding. Please see https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/ for more information.

Proposals are welcome in any topic which falls within the ESRC's remit and can be for basic, applied or strategic research. We welcome interdisciplinary proposals and recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and between the social sciences and other areas of research. However, we also remain committed to the support of excellent research within a single discipline.

Please note, whilst New Investigator grants are specifically aimed at supporting early career researchers, early career researchers are also eligible to apply to other ESRC funding opportunities including our research grant scheme. Please see our website for further information on current calls: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/

Call details

New Investigator Grants are designed to allow early career researchers to gain experience of research leadership and management and to formulate their plans for their research careers.

Co-investigators (Co-Is) are permitted on this call, and encouraged for interdisciplinary proposals or where a Co-I would provide specific technical expertise that is essential to the project. However, it must be clear that the PI is responsible for leading the project.

Associated studentships are not permitted on this call. However, applicants may wish to include provision for a research assistant(s). All requests for additional staff time, to develop staff management skills and assist in the completion of the proposed research project, must be fully justified.

Whilst the configuration of the research team should be informed by the proposed research, we expect that by the end of these awards the new investigator will be able to demonstrate their ability to lead research projects and teams. Applicants need to carefully consider how they can demonstrate their ability to manage people either through employing research staff on their award or from other relevant experience.

Eligibility of research organisations

All UK Higher Education Institutions are eligible to receive funds for research, postgraduate training and associated activities. The higher education funding councils for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland determine whether an organisation meets the criteria to be a Higher Education Institution.

Some independent research organisations (IROs) are also eligible for Research Council funding. The current list of eligible IROs can be downloaded at https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/ .

Eligibility of applicants

The 'new investigator' must be the principal investigator who submits the proposal.

This call is open to high-quality candidates from anywhere in the world to enable them to further their research careers. However, all potential applicants must have the strong support of an eligible research organisation in the UK to host them if they are successful.

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:
- Applicants cannot be current or former principal investigators on ESRC or other UKRI grants[1], except ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships.
- As part of their proposal, applicants must articulate why they should be considered an early career researcher and how the award of a New Investigator grant will have a demonstrable impact on their trajectory to becoming an independent researcher[2].
- Proposals must include a programme of skill development activities to support their continued development
- The call is open to applicants with or without a permanent academic post, subject to the above restrictions.
- Applicants who already hold a professorship will not be eligible to apply as there is an expectation that they have already obtained these research and management skills.

Contributions of the host research organisation

We expect to see only a limited number of proposals from a single research organisation and organisations must have a process in place to support this. In submitting the proposal the RO is demonstrating its commitment to supporting an individual researcher's transition to the next stage of their academic career.

Beyond the standard support offered by a research organisation to an ESRC grant holder, we expect the following two aspects to be carefully considered by the proposed host organisation in supporting a New Investigator proposal:

Provision of a mentor
All applicants are required to have a named mentor based at the research organisation where the grant is to be held. The proposed mentor should be of high academic standing and have a strong interest in the applicant's field of research, but should not normally be the applicant's former PhD supervisor. The mentor should also be able to offer the applicant

---

[1] Where the primary purpose is to fund research. Those who have held grants where the primary purpose is not research (such as for seminars or networks) will need to clearly articulate why they should be considered eligible for this scheme.

[2] This scheme previously operated on the basis of having time bound eligibility criteria. This has now been removed in recognition of the increasing diversity in career trajectories but it is important to note that this remains a scheme for early career researchers. Please see the Frequently Asked Questions document for further information on this change https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants-faqs2/

advice and assistance in developing their proposal, building suitable links with leading researchers in their field, as well as with potential beneficiaries and users of the applicant's research.

The role of the mentor is to support the work of the grant holder, both scientific and non-scientific, but the mentor will not be directly involved in running the project. Regular contact must be maintained between the grant holder and mentor through the course of the project, and the mentor will help the grant holder to review progress against agreed milestones, including the implementation of the training and development programme.

Costs for mentoring time cannot be claimed as part of these grants; they must be met as part of the host institution's contribution to the award.

Provision of career development support
The proposal must include a programme of research and skills development to ensure the applicant's continued progression towards being an independent researcher. The programme must be tailored to the individual needs of the applicant in light of their research and career goals in consultation between the applicant, their mentor and the host organisation.

It is likely that a programme of training and development activities will include aspects of project management, research methods development, knowledge exchange and user engagement, impact, national and international networking and research development.

Applicants must also demonstrate how they will identify, address and monitor the training needs of any staff employed on the grant.

Mobility: UK and international

As research is an increasingly international endeavour we are keen to support grant holders in developing links with leading researchers in their field both in the UK and internationally. We encourage research visits to one or more internationally leading research organisations - either in the UK or abroad - for the purposes of research collaboration, training, and/or access to data or other resources not available at the applicant's host organisation. The ESRC wants to encourage research proposals which use and develop international comparative methods. The opportunities provided for mobility should support this.

Where a long-term overseas visit is planned, applicants are required to name a second mentor at the overseas host organisation. They must also articulate how the research team will be managed effectively whilst they are overseas. However, the majority of the grant holder's time should be in the UK at their host research organisation.

We also recognise that long-term mobility may be difficult or impossible for researchers with disabilities or caring responsibilities. Candidates will therefore not be disadvantaged for not including a mobility element. In those instances, applicants may wish to consider alternative mechanisms for enhancing collaboration through their grant, such as hosting short visits from collaborators, or using information technology to develop and sustain collaborations.

Knowledge exchange and collaboration

We are committed to knowledge exchange and encouraging collaboration between researchers and the private, public and civil society sectors. Collaborative working benefits both the researchers and the individuals/organisations involved. Through collaboration, partners learn about each other's expertise, share knowledge and gain an appreciation of different professional cultures. Collaborative activity can therefore lead to a better understanding of the ways that academic research can add value and offer insights to key issues of concern for policy and practice.

Knowledge exchange should not be treated as an 'add-on' at the end of a research project, but considered before the start and built into a project.

Impact

In line with the UKRI position on Excellence with Impact (https://www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/) we expect that our researchers will have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impacts of their research.

ESRC applicants should actively consider how these impacts can be maximised and developed within their proposal. Applicant's plans to maximise and develop the potential impacts of their research will form part of the peer review and assessment process.

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

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

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

Excellent research without obvious or immediate societal or economic impact will not be disadvantaged in the peer review and assessment process. If you consider that your research has no obvious or immediate societal or economic impact, you should explain your reasoning in the Case for Support.

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

COVID-19 Guidance for Applicants

Accounting for the unknown impacts of COVID-19

UKRI acknowledges that it is a challenge for applicants to determine the future impacts of COVID-19 while the pandemic continues to evolve. Applications should be based on the information available at the point of submission and, if applicable, the known application specific impacts of COVID-19 should be accounted for. Where known impacts have occurred, these should be highlighted in the application, including the assumptions/information at the point of submission. There is no need to include contingency plans for the potential impacts of COVID-19. Requests for travel both domestically and internationally can be included in accordance to the relevant scheme guidelines, noting the above advice.

(Reviewers will receive instructions to assume that changes that arise from the COVID-19 pandemic, post-submission, will be resolved and complications related to COVID-19 should not affect their scores.
Where an application is successful, any changes in circumstances that affect the proposal will be managed as a post-award issue.)

Research ethics

As the principal funding agency for UK social science research we require that the research we support is designed and conducted in such a way that it meets certain ethical principles, and is subject to proper professional and institutional oversight in terms of research governance.

As an important source of public funds for social science research and as a body charged with encouraging, supporting, undertaking and advising on such research, the ESRC recognises that it has a special obligation towards the general public and academic community to ensure that the research which it funds is carried out to a high ethical standard.

We have agreed a Framework for Research Ethics that all submitted proposals have to comply with. Further details about the Framework for Research Ethics and guidance on compliance (together with links to other web-based resources on research ethics) may be found at https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/.

Open access

We are committed to ensuring that our research community makes the outputs from ESRC-funded research publicly available. The Research Councils UK (RCUK) open access policy came into force on 1 April 2013, and ESRC-funded researchers are expected to comply with this policy. The payment of article processing charges (APCs) and other publication charges related to ESRC-funded research are supported through RCUK open access block grants which are provided to eligible research organisations.

How to apply

The call will operate alongside ESRC's Research Grants open call (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/). Following peer review, projects will be assessed by the Grants Assessment Panels (GAP) who will make recommendations on which proposals to fund. Following the panel recommendations, the Grants Delivery Group will make final funding decisions. For more information on the assessment process please see https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/esrc-council/responsive-mode-grant-assessment-process/ .

GAPs meet in March, July and November of each year. The new investigator grant annual budget will be around £7.5 million. It is expected that 10 to 12 proposals will be funded at each GAP round, therefore we expect around 35 grants will be funded each year (dependent on quality and available funds).

Proposals can be submitted at any time and there are no set closing dates; however given the annual funding levels and expected number of grants to be funded at each GAP round, applicants are required to carefully consider the timing of their proposal. Large volumes of proposals will adversely affect success rates at each GAP round and will count towards the demand management statistics of the applicant's research organisation.

Please see the Je-S guidance notes for applicants for more information on how to apply to this call: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants/

The assessment criteria

Applications to the new investigator grant scheme are processed alongside our standard grant scheme. For further information on the assessment process, please refer the call for our research grant scheme: https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants-open-call-call-specification/

Assessment criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:
- Originality, potential contribution to knowledge
- Research design and methods
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination and impact
- The applicant and their skill development programme

Please note, as part of our commitment to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; https://sfdora.org/read/), UKRI reviewers and panel members are advised not to use journal-based metrics, such as journal impact factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an investigator's contributions, or to make funding decisions.

The content of a paper is more important than publication metrics, or the identity of the journal, in which it was published, especially for early-stage researchers. Peer review and panel members are encouraged to consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets, software, inventions, patents, preprints, other commercial activities, etc.) in addition to research publications. We advise our peer reviewers and panel members to consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

Contacts

For questions relating to ESRC's application processes please see the research grant Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), available at https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/

For questions about the New Investigator Grants please see the new investigator FAQs https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants/).

For any other grant enquiries please contact esrcenquiries@esrc.ukri.org.

Enquiries relating to the Je-S application procedure should be addressed to:
- Je-S Helpdesk
  Email: JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org
  Telephone: 01793 444164