



**ESRC-NRF Newton call for collaborative research
Higher Education in South Africa
Call specification**

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Aim and summary of funding opportunity

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) invite collaborative projects between UK and South African researchers which can offer additional value to existing programmes of education research, and contribute to the economic development and welfare of both South Africa or wider Africa more broadly.

In particular we invite proposals which address the following topics:

- Organisation of higher education systems, higher education institutions and alternative providers
- Equity in higher education access and participation
- Curriculum, pedagogy and modes and levels of provision
- Higher education for the public good

- Higher education and the labour market

Further details on these topics as they are used can be found below. Proposals are invited for joint UK and South African projects; each proposal may request £415,000 - £630,000 at 100 per cent full economic cost (fEC) from the ESRC and R1.67 - R2.5 million from NRF over 30 months duration. In accordance with RCUK policy, the ESRC will contribute up to 80 per cent fEC of UK costs, and research organisations will be expected to honour the remaining 20 per cent except where otherwise specified.

The ESRC has allocated up to £2.5 million and NRF has allocated R10 million; we expect to fund between four and six research projects through this joint call.

Consortia should consider how their proposal makes the best use of available expertise in the UK and South Africa, the added value of collaboration and how the proposal will meet the official development assistance (ODA) requirements (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/international/newton/>) of this Newton Fund activity and contribute towards the economic development and welfare of wider Africa.

ESRC-funded costs of each grant will be issued and managed by the ESRC in accordance with its normal research funding guidelines and procedures (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/rfg>). NRF-funded costs of each grant will be issued and managed by the NRF in accordance with its normal guidelines. Please liaise closely with prospective South African partners to ensure that both ESRC and NRF-supported elements of the proposal abide by all regulations for both funders.

Proposals should be submitted by **16.00 UK time and 17.00 SA time on 3 May 2016**.

Background of the funders

The ESRC is an international leader in the social sciences. It fosters international collaboration with a wide range of partners and, through joint schemes, enables UK social scientists to collaborate on challenging global issues with the very best international researchers from around the world.

The NRF is an independent government agency that promotes and supports research in all fields of knowledge. It also conducts research in specific national strategic areas and provides access to National Research Facilities. The NRF provides services to the research community, especially at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Science Councils, with a view to promote high-level human capital development and the production of internationally competitive knowledge. Its aims are to uphold excellence while at the same time transforming the system in all its investments in knowledge, people and infrastructure.

The ESRC funding for this initiative is coming from the Newton Fund (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/international-research/newton-fund/>), which is aimed at developing science and innovation partnerships that promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. As the fund forms part of the UK's official development assistance (ODA), the partnerships must clearly demonstrate that they will support the development of research collaborations addressing the economic development, improvement in welfare and alleviation of poverty in South Africa or developing countries.

The NRF funding for the initiative comes from the core parliamentary grant. It is generally aimed at supporting or enhancing the production of internationally competitive research, its uptake and the development of the related human capacity.

Thematic focus - background

Drawing on input from experts in both the UK and South Africa, this call has been framed around the umbrella heading of ‘Higher Education in Africa,’ seeking to ask fundamental questions about how higher education is organised and funded and what it is for (its nature and purpose) in relation to the individual and society.

It is acknowledged that there are particular challenges facing the South African higher education context, for example widening access and improving completion rates from areas of society that did not traditionally enjoy equality of access to or participation in higher education. As highlighted in the South African government report *Innovation towards a knowledge based economy: Ten Year Plan for Africa 2008-18*, Higher education is recognised as having a distinctive and crucial role in building modern South African society and is a key driver of ‘equity, social justice and democracy’ in the state’s vision for 2030¹.

While it can be said that wider schooling systems are also struggling to improve significantly, higher education is recognised as needing urgent and immediate attention, with both undergraduate and doctoral level education being seen as central to addressing skills shortages in South Africa, and expected to yield significant social returns – including a consistent positive impact on societal institutions and the development of a range of capabilities that have public and private benefits.

However, the precise extent and nature of these impacts (both positive and negative) remain unclear in light of economic, social and global challenges. This call seeks to fund research that sheds new light and understanding on these processes and their impacts.

Scope of the call

The purpose of this call is to fund high-quality collaborative research on higher education in South Africa and/or wider Africa. The more specific topics that this call is seeking to address are set out below.

This call is interested in higher education in a variety of contexts including HEIs and alternative post-school providers. We also welcome projects that encompass a comparative approach, and this might include research:

- across different higher education (HE) contexts within South Africa or wider Africa
- comparing the South African experience with HE contexts in other African countries
- opportunities for shared lessons with other regions of the global south.

It could include comparative projects that encompass a historical perspective and draw lessons from the past for addressing contemporary issues.

¹ Department of Science and Technology report: ‘Innovation towards a knowledge based economy: Ten Year Plan for Africa 2008-18’ (http://www.esastap.org.za/download/sa_ten_year_innovation_plan.pdf) (PDF)

It is intended that the projects funded under this call will develop context-specific knowledge on higher education in South Africa or other contexts in Africa, but may also develop our understanding of higher education in other settings including higher income countries.

In addition to the academic assessment criteria, a successful proposal must:

- be a joint activity involving research groups from both the UK and South Africa
- be able to meet the ODA requirements (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/international/newton/>) stipulated under the Newton Fund for the economic development and welfare of Africa
- offer contributions to the knowledge and understanding of higher education under one or more of the priority topics.

Proposals must show a true joint partnership between UK and South African researchers. The added benefit of the collaboration to each party should be clearly demonstrated in the proposal.

Proposals must demonstrate the ambition and novelty of the research and demonstrate how the outputs of the project will be communicated to relevant stakeholders in academia, industry and government, in both South Africa and the UK.

It is important to note that a key goal for this funding opportunity is to ensure that knowledge exchange between partners occurs both ways and continues throughout the project, in order to build upon and strengthen bilateral relationships between South Africa and the UK.

Research topics

Proposals should clearly identify one or more of the following topics as the focus of the research project.

- Organisation of HE systems, HEIs and alternative providers
- Equity in higher education access and participation
- Curriculum, pedagogy and modes and levels of provision
- Higher education for the public good
- Higher education and the labour market

Although the research agenda can be broadly cast into the following top level themes, we recognise that there will be natural and necessary links between these themes, and research funded will not be required to identify with only one of these themes.

Organisation of HE systems, HEIs and alternative providers

The theme can include comparison of changes of systems and provision over time. New research could examine effects of rapid changes facing the HE sector including:

- globalisation
- the marketisation of higher education including graduate and postgraduate student support

- the appearance of new educational technologies and the effect of technology on institutional change
- the growth of new and evolving funding models for HEIs
- the role of alternative providers of post secondary/post-school education²
- the perceived rise of for-profit providers in the global marketplace.

Research questions could explore national and international policy contexts which act to constrain or enable policy change, and the potential for independence vs conformity to “international best practice”.

The theme could also include the impact of reform and new business models on higher education - the management of HEIs and HE systems, their internal rewards and incentives, and the regional, national and international partnerships between HEIs that might be driven by change, including how institutions can be collaborative and competitive at the same time.

The theme can also consider pressure from grassroots groups, beyond the recognised challenges of marketisation, extending to broader examinations of engagement by students and others on issues such as systems and processes and identity issues (eg fee protests in the UK and SA, protests against austerity cuts in the UK, and protests around service delivery, decolonisation of HE etc in SA).

Equity in higher education access and participation

This theme examines inequality in access to higher education at both the graduate and postgraduate level, given the economic and non-economic benefits of higher education for participants. Within South Africa the transformation agenda highlights the need to redress the historical legacy of an unequal system of access and participation, and HE is a key driver of ‘equity, social justice and democracy’ in the state’s vision for 2030. Research questions here might involve:

- higher education and social mobility
- examining disadvantage and how higher education changes lives
- the importance of student engagement in relation to the curriculum, the discursive construction of the “non-traditional” student, and issues of institutional culture/s and climate and the role of student movements in relation to issues of widening and equity of participation
- the involvement of students in governance
- inequity in higher education outcomes
- later-life higher education and its effects as well as the effects of early life higher education participation on later life
- links to school provision and assessment.

This theme would also consider the dynamics of the international student market and related applied equity considerations, and how this relates to international satellite campuses of elite or other global institutions.

² SA Govt White Paper: ‘Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System’ January 2014 (<http://www.gov.za/documents/white-paper-post-school-education-and-training-building-expanded-effective-and-integrated>)

Beyond the dynamic of students as consumers (with particular needs and concerns, such as fees – and groupings, such as graduate, postgraduate, international or mature students) and the perceived value-for-money based on fee structures, the theme also invites consideration of changing student demographics and associated implications for the design of a system and the provision of services and facilities, for non-standard student models such as those with financial or caring responsibilities that involve non-academic work alongside study, have needs related to disabilities, religion, cultural practices or language fluency, or who do not conform to binary norms of sexual / gender identity.

The 'value' of study could also be explored under this heading, for example in relation to postgraduate level fee structures with regards to their effect on widening participation and fair access, as well as on choice of HEI. Finally, student motivation, in South Africa and across wider Africa and internationally, related to graduate pay fluctuations or changes, including participation in alternative types of higher education which may not involve academic credit.

Curriculum, pedagogy and modes and levels of provision

There is a need to consider the curriculum in the post-colonial context both across Africa and internationally. Examples of student protest movements within South Africa and internationally are demanding a critical interrogation into curriculum in its broad sense, and the relationship of curriculum to the changing student body, the institutional and environmental location and the privileging of some forms/modes of knowledge (deemed white, western, patriarchal and heteronormative) over others.

The theme could explore:

- the changing (and socially diversified) access to communicative technologies in everyday life and the effects on pedagogical practices
- the blurring of the boundaries both between the real and virtual worlds, and between the academy and the world beyond
- the varying impact on students of the wide range of higher education cultures and pedagogies
- effects on perceptions of value for money, equality of access, experience and outcome.

This theme would also cover research on the delivery of online education, through online and other digital or virtual mechanisms, and how comparable these are to 'standard' courses in terms of the value of these courses.

As well as value for money, a wider discussion could be invited on the 'value' to the individual and to society of sub degree courses and or modules – such as, is there an intrinsic value (in the ways we usually judge: pay, employment, more engaged citizens) or is value realised only when these are used in a progression framework and multiplied to the level of a degree? Considering both the rapid expansion of doctoral provision in the UK through more structured provision, and the focus in South Africa on expansion of PhD

graduates to benefit the economy, more research is needed to understand the nature and consequences of these changes³.

Higher education for the public good

This theme covers research on identifying, understanding and valuing the wider benefits or drawbacks of higher education, in the context of a wide range of users and stakeholders. Research might consider the extent to which (and differences in how) graduates, postgraduates and the HE sector itself impact on society in social, cultural or political terms.

There is established dialogue in policy circles around four purposes of HE; the HR function (training for work), the civic function (producing active, critical citizens), the science function (generating new knowledge), and individual and societal benefit (including in relation to equity). Research under this theme could include analysis of these functions, whether they remain relevant and appropriate in differing national contexts both in relation to priority order and related policy implications.

This theme would also consider knowledge production and transformation, examining the potential role(s) of HE, including the role HE research plays in society. Research here might explore:

- how other areas of society, including the worlds of policy and the media, make use of knowledge from higher education
- how public and private higher education differ in the way they produce and transmit knowledge
- models of partnership with public bodies such as local government and public health systems, schools and further education, and with bodies responsible for school standards and the national curriculum.

Higher education and the labour market

This theme examines both the role of the labour market produced by HE and of the academic labour market in terms of economic growth. This could involve employer involvement in HE and student employability – including the successful/feasible models of employer engagement at different levels within the HE system and what students are themselves seeking both in terms of quality and employability; and how this can be delivered.

In addition, examining part-time degree completion, success rates and employment – the effect on pay and employment when students stop their studies or take long breaks, and whether drop-out or non-completion should only be regarded as a failure with no other benefits. It is recognised that students who have not traditionally had access to HE for a variety of socioeconomic reasons are at greater risk of non-completion, which has significant implications in relation to equity. New research in this area could look beyond causes of non-completion and processes of retention to how best to identify students at risk of early leaving and prepare them to maximise the benefits of the HE exposure they have experienced, and strategies for possible return to HE at a later date.

³ African National Planning Commission's National Development Plan; Vision for 2030 (<http://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030>)

In terms of the academic labour market, the HE sector is a major employer, nationally and in many cities. Research questions could examine the training, formation and capacity of the academic workforce in the context of the global labour market and of university strategy. This research may involve examining the circulation of people, for example the mobility of academics, the numbers that work in countries other than where they received their degree, the global sources of change and stability in the labour market, and incentives and rewards, and how this can affect education and research for the public good.

The theme can also include considerations of 'blended' or HE-specialised non-academic professionals such as student support, learning development, educational technologists etc, and the increasingly important role they play in HE systems and institutions. The theme also covers the university as a workplace and can include examinations of the impacts of corporate policy and staff being incorporated into HE settings, and how these can be developed in ways that are sensitive and appropriate to the functions that the HE sector plays in society.

Research impact

Researchers are encouraged to be innovative in the kinds of user engagement, 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 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 (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/developing-an-impact-strategy/>).

Open Access Policy

RCUK (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/>) and NRF (<http://ir.nrf.ac.za/handle/10907/103>) have an Open Access policy. Researchers funded under this call will be expected to comply with the requirements outlined in these policies. UK institutions are no longer able to apply for Article Processing Charges as part of a research proposal, but instead funds will be provided to research organisations at an institutional level through the RCUK block grant funding mechanism in order to set up publication funds.

Eligibility

ESRC eligible applicants

UK applicants must meet the ESRC eligibility and remit criteria outlined in the ESRC Research Funding Guide (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/rfg>).

The Newton Fund requires that the funding be awarded in a manner that fits with Official Development Assistance (ODA) requirements. All proposals under this call must therefore be compliant with these guidelines (see <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/international/newton/>)

NRF-eligible applicants

Full-time employees at an NRF-recognised research institution in South Africa, who are eligible to apply according to the general NRF regulations and conditions, are invited to apply.

Part-time employees on contract at an NRF-recognised research institution (as defined above) in South Africa are invited to apply, but on condition that their appointment at the South African institution is for (at least) the duration of the project applied for in the submission. The length of the contract should be stated in the proposal form. Salaries must be paid by the research institution, and the primary employment of the individual concerned must be at that institution. A contract researcher appointed at a research institution on behalf of a third party to fulfil a very specific function for the latter does not qualify for support.

Retired academics/researchers are invited to apply, provided that they meet all set criteria as stipulated below:

- Are resident in South Africa
- Are formally affiliated to a South African higher education institution (eg appointed as an emeritus professor, honorary research associate/professor, supernumerary/contract employee).

How to apply

Proposals are invited for joint UK and South African research projects. Each proposal may request £415,000-£630, 000 at 100 per cent fEC from the ESRC and R1.67 - R2.5 million from NRF over a duration of 30 months.

It is expected that the ESRC funding will be used to support the UK component of the partnership and that NRF funding will support the South African component. Each proposal should have a UK principal investigator who will submit the proposal to the ESRC and a South African principal investigator who will submit an identical proposal to NRF.

Proposals must be submitted by **16.00 UK time or 17.00 SA time on 3 May 2016**. Any proposal received after this deadline will not be considered for funding, and proposals must be submitted to both funders in order to be considered.

Proposals should be submitted to ESRC through the UK Research Councils' grant submission system Je-S (see accompanying guidance) and to NRF through their Online Submission System (<https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>).

Proposals should include all supporting documents as requested below and in the accompanying submission guidance from ESRC and NRF. Applicants should ensure the following documents are submitted to both the ESRC and NRF:

- Case for support (six pages max)
- Justification of resources (two pages per country – two pages for the resources requested from ESRC and two pages for the resources requested from NRF)
- Pathways to Impact (two pages max)
- CV (two pages max for each named researcher)
- List of publications - cited in proposal (one page max)

- Management Plan (two pages max)
- International Funding Agency Resource Form
- Statement of ODA relevance (one page max)
- Letters of support (only if applicable)
- Data Management Plan (three pages max and only if applicable)

Please read the accompanying Je-S Guidance to ensure that all the required attachments are provided and that they are the correct page length. We reserve the right to reject applications that do not include the required attachments or include attachments not specified in the guidance.

Assessment of proposals

Once a proposal has been received by the ESRC and NRF, it will be considered according to eligibility and adherence to the criteria of this call by both funding agencies and then sent to expert peer reviewers for comment. Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to peer review comments, and proposals will be considered by an independent expert commissioning panel which will make final recommendations for funding. Funding recommendations from the panel will be subject to approval by each of the national funding agencies.

There will be one review process and a single decision on each proposal, however please note that proposals will only be funded if both funding agencies agree. It is anticipated that final funding decisions will be communicated to applicants in September 2016 with successful projects commencing on 1 October 2016.

Assessment criteria

Proposals will be assessed by a joint international peer review panel established between ESRC and NRF. The criteria for the selection of proposals will include:

- Meeting the requirements of the Newton Fund in relation to ODA requirements
- Assessment of the relevance to the call topics
- The originality and potential contribution to new knowledge or practice
- The appropriateness of the research design, work plan and research team
- Assessment of the South Africa-UK collaboration
- The costings and value for money of the research
- Appropriate consideration of ethical issues
- Dissemination and communication plans and the potential impact.

Timeline

- Call for proposals announced – 2 March 2016
- **Closing date for proposals – 3 May 2016**
- ESRC and NRF joint panel – August 2016
- Decisions announced – September 2016
- Grants commence – 1 October 2016

National contacts

ESRC

Any enquiries related to this call should be directed to:

- Tim Pank
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- Kim Fuggle
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Je-S helpdesk

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NRF

- Andrew M Kaniki
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For enquiries relating to the NRF submission system email bettie@nrf.ac.za or pinky@nrf.ac.za