Research Grants (open call) FAQs

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Am I eligible to apply to ESRC?

ESRC research funding is available for universities, colleges of higher education and independent research institutes in the UK approved by the ESRC. See the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) website for further information (https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/). Details of eligibility are given in ESRC's Research Funding Guide (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/) which you should read carefully before applying. Proposals can be submitted by people who are not established members of the proposed host institution. In these circumstances by submitting the proposal the Research Organisation (RO) is confirming that, in the event of a grant, they guarantee to provide facilities for you as if you were an established member of staff for the duration of the grant.

What can I apply for, and what can I not apply for?

If you have an excellent idea for a research project, you may seek funding for it by submitting a Research Grant proposal through ESRC's responsive mode. Grants ranging from **£350,000 to £1million (100% fEC)** can be made to eligible research organisations to enable individuals or research teams to undertake anything from a **standard research project** through to a **large-scale survey** and **other infrastructure or methodological development**. There is considerable flexibility when it comes to subject area, too. As long as you always make sure that your suggested topic falls at least 50 % within ESRC's remit (see next section), you are free to concentrate on any research area. Research grants can be made for a period of up to five

years and can be for basic, applied or strategic research. The ESRC seeks to ensure that the research it supports will be of general interest and significance and of relevance to an audience wider than that of the host institution.

Proposals are accepted for the classification, cataloguing and compilation of information which would be of benefit to social science researchers and a possible wider audience. However, it is important that such proposals clearly demonstrate their utility to a broad community of researchers, and wider audiences as appropriate.

Research proposals cannot be accepted for the following:
- unspecified research work
- research already carried out
- writing up previous research
- literature surveys
- conference attendance, other than within an grant
- travel for general study
- expeditions
- unsolicited requests to hold conferences, workshops or seminars outside of the Research Seminar Competition
- preparation of books and publications
- primarily for the preparation and production of materials such as curriculum materials and software development.

ESRC's Research Funding Guide (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/) gives more information on the type of funding opportunities we offer; eligibility for funding; our expectations; how to apply; what costs our grants cover; how proposals are assessed and what happens once your proposal is successful.

I'm not sure if my proposal falls within the remit of the ESRC, how do I find out?

Applicants should read the UKRI guidance at (https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/) for proposals which may span other Research Council remits. If you are unsure whether your research is suitable for ESRC funding, please fill in our Remit Query form which is available at (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/remit-query-form/). Your enquiry will be passed to the Remit Team, who will respond to your query. For more information see (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/).

Further clarification of the remit of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and that of the ESRC, is detailed in the AHRC-ESRC joint statement on our website (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/)

The same proposal should not be submitted for consideration by more than one research council at any one time or to more than one call for an individual research council.

When can I apply?

The Research Grants (open call) has no fixed closing date, therefore proposals may be submitted at any time. See section below 'What happens to my proposal once I have submitted it?' for guidance on how long you should allow from submission to decision.

How do I apply?

Proposals can only be made through the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S), see (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/je-s-electronic-applications/) for details.

To begin writing your proposal, please select the 'New Document' menu and search for and select 'Research Grants (open call)' using the Call Search function.

There is call specific Je-S guidance available on our website (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/) and there is also a help option on the Je-S website (https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/Index.htm).

Is there any further guidance on how to complete the proposal?

The content and quality of the proposal you submit to the ESRC will determine whether or not you are successful. Therefore it is vital that you have a full understanding of what is required, as well as knowing the various stages of the application process, so that you maximise your chances of receiving grant funding. In addition to the call specific Je-S guidance we have developed a guide for applicants to the research Grants (open call) on how to write a good application (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/). If you are stuck whilst you're filling in the Je-S form you can also click on the Help option (https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/Index.htm) at the top right of the screen. Please be mindful that if the guidance is in conflict you should always follow the call specific guidance that is provided on the ESRC website.

Who should I contact if I have an enquiry?

Please direct all queries to esrcpeerreview@esrc.ukri.org. Your query will be dealt with by the appropriate colleague in ESRC.

What happens to my proposal once I have submitted it?

Once your proposal is submitted via Je-S it will be checked by UKSBS (UK Shared Business Services) colleagues to make sure the proposal fits ESRC's basic eligibility criteria. Your proposal will then be allocated to an ESRC Case Officer in one of the Research and International disciplinary-based teams who will check that it is eligible for consideration. If your proposal is deemed to be outside the ESRC's remit, or is not considered to provide sufficient information or detail for it to be adequately assessed by reviewers, then it will be rejected at this stage.

Once accepted, proposals are sent to three academic reviewers primarily drawn from ESRC's Peer Review College, sometimes more reviewers will be approached depending on the nature of the project. Where the College may not have the necessary coverage of knowledge and

expertise for a particular proposal, Case Officers may approach reviewers outside the college. Non-academic research users will be approached for their comments as appropriate.

Once a required minimum number of usable responses have been received these will be checked by the ESRC Officer. Proposals with an average score from the academic reviewers of below 4.5 (see next section) will normally be rejected at this stage without referral to the Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs).

Those proposals with an average score of 4.5 or above are then allocated to two members of the Grant Assessment Panels who, in the light of the specialist advice and views of reviewers, provide an independent assessment and score for the proposal (see next section) prior to consideration by the full Grant Assessment Panels. The GAPs meet three times a year, usually in March, July and November.

Each of the Grant Assessment Panels will agree a prioritisation list of proposals that it recommends for funding, and these lists will be considered by the Grants Delivery Group, who agree the final funding decision. The Grants Delivery Group is chaired by a member of the Council, and its members are the Chairs of the Grant Assessment Panels. We aim to announce the majority of decisions within 26 weeks of receiving the proposal. You will be informed by email of the outcome of your funding proposal. Results of proposals will not be given over the telephone.

How will my proposal be scored by peer reviewers?

Score	Description
6	The proposal is **outstanding** in terms of its potential scientific merit.
5	The proposal is **excellent** in terms of its potential scientific merit.
4	The proposal is **important** as it has considerable potential merit.
3	The proposal has **significant** potential scientific merit but is not of a consistently high quality.
2	The proposal will add to understanding and is **worthy** of support, but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. Such proposals are unlikely to have a significant influence on the development of the research area.
1	The proposal is **flawed** in its scientific approach, or is repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not worth pursuing; or which, though possibly having sound objectives, appears seriously defective in its methodology.
0	Not able to assess

All peer-review forms have four core criteria (shown below), with sub-scores on a scale from 0 to 6 (plus two call-specific ones which are not used on Research Grants):

- Assessment Criterion 1 - Originality; Potential Contribution to Knowledge
- Assessment Criterion 2 - Research Design and Methods
- Assessment Criterion 3 - Value for Money
- Assessment Criterion 4 - Outputs, Dissemination and Impact.

Please note that for non-academic ('user') reviewers, the grades, equivalent score mappings and core criteria are as follows:

Score	User grades	Description
5-6	High	Research of high importance to users of research, ie of such novelty or timeliness and promise that a significant contribution to policy or practice is likely.
3-4	Worthy	Research that will add to understanding and is worthy of support but which may not be of such relevance or urgency as to have a significant influence on policy or practice.
2-1	Reject	Research that will add to understanding and is worthy of support but which may not be of such relevance or urgency as to have a significant influence on policy or practice.
0	Not able to assess	

- Assessment Criterion 1 - Likely importance of research to potential users
- Assessment Criterion 2 - Timeliness of the outcomes for potential users
- Assessment Criterion 3 - Effectiveness of plans for involving potential users and disseminating results to them
- Assessment Criterion 4 - Outputs, Dissemination and Impact.

What are the basic funding criteria?
The content and quality of the proposal you submit to the ESRC will determine whether or not you are successful. Funding decisions for research proposals are based on four key assessment criteria:

- originality, potential contribution to knowledge
- research design and methods
- value for money
- outputs, dissemination and impact.

Many proposals are unsuccessful not because they lack interesting or important research ideas, but because they fail to communicate adequately how these research ideas will be explored and translated into an achievable plan of action. Many proposals devote too much space to explaining why the research is important and too little to detailing how the research will be conducted. Therefore it is vital that you have a full understanding of what is required, as well as knowing the various stages of the application process, so that you maximise your chances of receiving grant funding. We offer guidance notes on how to write a good proposal on our website: (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/how-to-write-a-good-research-grant-proposal/)

Will I have the chance to respond to reviewers' comments?

Yes. If you receive sufficiently supportive reviewers' comments (average score of 4.5 or above) for your proposal to be considered at the Grant Assessment Panels, you will have the chance to provide a response to reviewers' comments. You will have five working days to provide a response of up to two sides of A4, which you can use to highlight any areas of agreement or disagreement with reviewers, factual errors or misunderstandings about the proposal and/or to clarify issues raised by reviewers and answer questions posed by reviewers. The response is not intended to provide an opportunity to change a proposal or the financial aspects of the proposal in light of reviewer comments.

How long will I have to wait for a decision on my proposal?

The majority of decisions on Research Grant proposals are announced in around 26 weeks. The processing time will be determined largely by the speed with which reviewers respond. We normally allow three weeks for a reviewer to reply, but it often takes longer to get the full number of responses required, particularly around Christmas, Easter and during the summer.

The Grant Assessment Panels meet three times a year, in March, July and November. After office checks and the selection of external reviewers, the first stage of peer review can take anything between three to eight weeks. If scored at or above an average of 4.5, the proposal will then be sent to two GAP Members (Introducers) and we allow them at least three weeks to assess, before the proposals are scored, ranked and sent to the full Panel two weeks prior to the meeting. The Grants Delivery Group (GDG) usually meets within two weeks of the Panels and decisions are announced about two weeks following their meeting.

ESRC cannot guarantee that a particular proposal will be discussed at a particular meeting, and there are sometimes other factors that are outside the control of ESRC that may delay the final decision. If you are submitting a proposal that is being internationally co-funded where a secondary decision is required from other funder/s, or where the research covers other disciplines than those of ESRC which requires a decision from another Research Council, you can expect that time taken between submission and decision may be up to nine months.

What feedback can I expect on my proposal?

Feedback will be sent with decision emails on both successful and unsuccessful proposals. For a Research Grant proposal you can normally expect anonymous comments from three external reviewers (if as yet unseen). If your proposal is referred to a Grant Assessment Panel for consideration, in order to improve the transparency of the peer review process, both applicants and Research Organisations (RO) will receive Panel introducer's comments, and when available, any further consolidated comments from the Panel Meeting.

Final score range information on your proposal will be available within 30 days of decisions for this GAP round being finalised and may be found in anonymous format on the ESRC website (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/how-to-write-a-good-research-grant-proposal/)

Please note this information will be uploaded around the **16th day of each month only**.

Who are the reviewers?
We send every Research Grant proposal to three reviewers for expert comment; sometimes more reviewers will be approached depending on the nature of the project. Comments may also be sought from non- academic reviewers.

Reviewers are selected from the Peer Review College database by ESRC Officers who will have specialist knowledge of the relevant primary social science discipline indicated in the proposal. In cases where there are no college members available with the necessary expertise, we will approach reviewers from outside the college. They will be identified through various sources including ESRC Officers personal knowledge, academic websites, Panel Members' suggestions, learned society and other online databases.

The selection of academic reviewers is subject to certain constraints. We do not normally approach anyone with a Research Grant proposal currently under consideration, or from the same RO as any of the applicants. We also take care not to overburden individuals with requests.

Applicants may nominate two academic reviewers. These nominated reviewers must not normally come from your own RO. It is advisable to check that your chosen nominated academic reviewers are not proposing to apply for a research grant at the same time as you and that they would be willing to comment on your proposal if approached. Where relevant you may also nominate two users or non-academics to comment. Where the applicant nominates reviewers, we usually approach one of the academic and all of the user nominees.

Who are the Grant Assessment Panel Members?
The three subject specialist Grant Assessment Panels are made up of a Chair and approximately 15 members from across the range of disciplines covered by the ESRC. A fourth GAP makes recommendations on proposals to the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI). Membership includes users of research who comment on, but do not grade, the applications. The Chair of each Panel represents their Panel on the Grants Delivery Group. A full list of the current Panel membership can be found on our website (https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/esrc-council/responsive-mode-grant-assessment-process/).

I already hold an ESRC grant. Can I apply again?
There is no restriction to the number of ESRC research grants you may hold simultaneously, or the number of different proposals you may submit. ESRC will, however, have a careful eye to potential over-commitment when considering a fresh proposal. You may not exceed a time commitment of 1,650 hours per year week, which is equivalent to 37.5 hours a week, 44 weeks a year (this includes applications, so for example you may not apply simultaneously for two projects where you would be 60% committed on each).

Can I submit the same proposal more than once?
The same proposal may not be submitted for consideration under more than one ESRC competition at any one time. Duplicate proposals may be submitted to any other award-

making body, apart from the other Research Councils, subject to a clear declaration of the simultaneous submission being made in the relevant section of the proposal.

ESRC does not allow the resubmission of any previously unsuccessful proposals (including proposals previously submitted to another Research Council), unless you have been explicitly invited to do so. Resubmissions are restricted to proposals which the Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs), or equivalent, judge to be of the very highest quality, where a moderate change could make the proposal high priority for funding, but where the Panel's concerns cannot be addressed by grant conditions alone.

In order to treat everyone fairly, we cannot engage in discussions about whether a particular proposal will be treated as a resubmission before you apply. We advise that you consult within your RO before submitting a proposal which you believe may be considered a re-submission.

The identification of uninvited resubmissions will rest with staff within the ESRC. In considering the eligibility of a new proposal the ESRC may approach a member of the GAPs to assess whether the proposal is an uninvited resubmission of a previous proposal. This will generally only be in difficult cases where external advice is required to inform the decision.

Refer to 'What constitutes a new proposal?' (https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/esrc-council/responsive-mode-grant-assessment-process/) for further guidance.

If my proposal is successful when can the research start?
Once you have been informed that your proposal has been successful, the details of the grant will need to be finalised by the ESRC officer and a formal grant letter issued to your RO by the UK Shared Business Services (UK SBS). Our aim is to issue most grants within eight weeks of the announcement of the decision but this may take significantly longer where the grant is subject to specific conditions; for a substantially reduced amount; or involves co-funders.

The earliest possible start dates for research projects are likely to be 34 weeks after the date of submission of the proposal. If you need to recruit research staff before your project can start then you will need to make an additional allowance for this when considering the start date of your grant. ESRC cannot guarantee that you will be able to start on your preferred start date but will make every effort to process proposals as speedily as possible. Grants cannot start until a formal grant letter has been issued by UK SBS and accepted by your RO. Grants should normally start within three months of the grant start date specified in the offer letter. ESRC reserves the right to withdraw the offer where a grant has not started within three months of the date stated in the offer letter and a later date has not been approved. For further information please see the Research Funding Guide (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/).

Do I have to report back on my grant?
All ESRC grant holders are required to update the Researchfish (https://researchfish.com/) outcomes collection system as soon as an outcome is generated. This can be done on the Researchfish system at any time.

Once a year (whilst the grant is live and for up to five years after its end date) grant holders are required to confirm that outcome information on Researchfish is accurate and up-to-date. This needs to be done during an annual submission period. More information about Researchfish can be found on the UKRI website (https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/research-outcomes1/)

In addition to reporting outcomes through Researchfish as you go, within three months of the grant end date you must also complete the Key Findings section on Researchfish, formally deposit all data created during the funding period of the grant with the UK Data Service (http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/), and ensure that all other outcomes are up to date on Researchfish.

A year after the grant end date you must complete a final Narrative Impact report through Researchfish.

More information on these reporting requirements can be found at (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-grant-holders/reporting/)