

ESRC International Co-Investigators Policy

Guidance on the inclusion of international co-investigators in ESRC proposals

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Background

Many major issues requiring research evidence (e.g. the global economic crisis, climate change, security etc.) are international in scope, and therefore must be addressed with a global research response. It is imperative that researchers from around the world work together with the best minds, organisations and facilities, wherever they are located, in order to thrive in this global research effort.

Introduced in 2007, the ESRC's International Co-Investigators Policy provides the opportunity for UK researchers to collaborate with appropriate researchers from anywhere in the world to enhance and strengthen international collaboration, and to add value to research. The policy is **not a separate funding scheme** and therefore requires no additional forms or review. Rather it is intended to be a **simple and straightforward** mechanism which allows researchers from any country to be included on ESRC proposals (exclusions apply)¹ with a UK principal investigator (PI). There is no direct involvement from any overseas research funding agencies, or separate international decision-making process.

Unlike the previous system, where researchers from anywhere outside the UK were referred to on proposals as 'visiting fellows', 'collaborators' or 'consultants', the International Co-Investigators Policy allows them to be recognised academically for their contribution to the work conducted and 'ownership of ideas'.

Definition

An international co-investigator is an individual from a research organisation outside the UK who otherwise fits the normal definition for a co-investigator on a research project (see the [ESRC Research Funding Guide](#)). That is, they assist the grant holder in the management and leadership of a project. They would normally be expected to make a major intellectual contribution to the design and conduct of the project.

Eligibility

Proposals including international co-investigators must feature a PI based at a UK research organisation [eligible for Research Council funding](#). Any academic researcher (i.e. those holding a PhD or equivalent qualification, or higher) from an established international research organisation of comparable standing to an ESRC-recognised UK research organisation will be eligible. Where it is clear that the international research organisation has the capacity and capability to conduct the specified work, eligibility will not normally need to be checked. In any cases where it is not clear, eligibility checks will be carried out by the ESRC office.

Registering international co-investigators with Je-S

In order for an international co-investigator to be included on a proposal, they must be registered with Je-S.

To do this, the international co-investigator should go to the [Je-S website](#) and select 'Create Account'. They will need to complete their details until they reach the 'Research Organisation' screen.

¹ For example, fellowships do not usually allow the inclusion of co-investigators. Please refer to the call specific guidance on other calls to determine whether international co-investigators can be included.

If the international research organisation is not listed, the international co-investigator should contact the Je-S helpdesk either by email (jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org) or telephone (+44 (0)1793 444164) and provide details of the project with which they wish to be associated (reference number, title, PI). The Je-S Helpdesk will then register the international co-investigator, allowing the PI to add them to the proposal.

Applicants should ensure that, if they are submitting a proposal to a closed call (i.e. working towards a specific deadline after which time the call will close and further submissions will not be possible), the international research organisation should begin the process of registering the international co-investigator with Je-S **as soon as possible and no later than seven working days prior to the date of submission.**

Please note that formal recognition of the international research organisation will only be pursued following a positive funding decision. The Je-S Helpdesk is available 9:00-17:00 (UK time), Monday to Friday.

Eligible costs

Applicants who include international co-investigators must fully justify the associated costs within the 'Justification of Resources' section of the proposal. The ESRC will fund 100% of justified costs, however the costs associated with an international co-investigator's contribution to a project must not exceed 30% of the overall cost of the grant at 100% fEC. (It is important to note that the **combined** costs for international co-investigators, and UK business, third sector and government body co-investigators must not exceed 30% of the total fEC of the grant application.)

- International co-investigator salaries - **Considered***
- Estates and other indirect costs - **No**
- Directly incurred costs - **Yes**
- Overseas Research Assistants – **Yes**

***See below**

International co-investigator salaries

The ESRC will consider paying salaries for international co-investigators only in circumstances where payment of salaries is absolutely required for the research project to be conducted. For example, where the policy of the international co-investigator's home institution requires researchers to obtain funding for their salaries for time spent on externally-funded research projects.

In instances where the research funding structure of the collaborating country is such that national research funding organisations equivalent to the ESRC do not normally provide salary costs, these costs will not be considered. Alternative arrangements to secure researcher time, such as teaching replacement costs, will be considered where these are required by the co-investigator's home institution.

UK institutions preparing proposals for submission are **strongly advised to liaise closely with the international co-investigators named on the proposal** to ascertain any requirement for salary cost requests. The international co-investigator is best placed to advise what costs they can typically request on proposals to their national research funding agency.

Where applicants request salaries for international co-investigators, a supporting letter must be submitted as an additional attachment (under 'Other attachments' in Je-S) to explain the reason(s) for inclusion of these costs. It is normally expected that such a letter should be written by the international co-investigator's home institution.

Estates and other indirect costs

Practically, it is not possible for the ESRC to accurately check and monitor the calculation of estates, overheads and indirect costs by institutions outside the UK because they do not use the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) method. In addition, institutions in the UK receive funding for maintaining and developing the UK research infrastructure via the Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Because of the significant variation in practices, it is not deemed to be appropriate for the ESRC to provide funds which could be used to develop the research infrastructures of other countries at this time. For these reasons the ESRC will not consider any estates, overheads or indirect costs pertaining to international co-investigators.

Directly incurred costs

Applicants may apply for funds to cover a small amount of administrative support for international co-investigators. This will be assessed in the context of the proposal as a whole and the justification of the support.

Similarly, applicants may apply for funds to cover the cost of an overseas Research Assistant to support research activities in collaborating countries. An overseas Research Assistant may be locally recruited in the collaborating country, or recruited in the UK and based overseas. In cases where a Research Assistant is recruited and employed by a UK-based institution but based overseas, costs will be paid at 80% fEC. Where a Research Assistant is locally recruited and employed by an overseas institution to support the international coinvestigator, these costs will be paid at 100%.

Reasonable and fully justified travel and subsistence costs will be provided for international co-investigators in accordance with normal ESRC guidelines. Other directly incurred costs (as outlined in the ESRC Research Funding Guide) may be applied for, provided they are fully justified.

Survey Costs

Where a survey is externally commissioned it is considered as a general project cost and costed to the project at 80% fEC (excepting surveys exceeding £10,000 which will be funded at 100% fEC as 'Large Surveys').

Where a survey will be undertaken in house, by staff at the non-UK Co-Investigator organisation, the cost of the survey may be costed as a 100% fEC co-investigator cost.

Costs associated with an international co-investigator's contribution to a project, including any survey costs, must not exceed 30% of the overall cost of the grant at 100% fEC.

Please note that the ESRC-DFID joint schemes operate under different rules and are subject to different allowable costs.

Applicants seeking to include international co-investigators should consult the specification of the call they are interested in.

Inputting international co-investigator costs on Je-S

All costs associated with international co-investigators must be entered in Je-S under 'Other Directly Incurred Costs'. Costs associated with any overseas Research Assistants should be entered under the Directly Incurred Costs section. Both international co-investigators and Research Assistants who are recruited and employed at an institution outside the UK must be prefixed with 'Overseas' and should be marked as an 'Exception' using the tick box.

Please note that costs for Research Assistants who are based overseas, but recruited and employed by a UK institution, should not be marked as 'Exceptions' as these will be paid at 80% fEC.

In addition, applicants **must** include a table detailing all costs associated with international co-investigators as an additional attachment to their Je-S proposal form.

Project Partners

An international collaborator may be included on a proposal as a Project Partner in instances where source(s) of co-funding have been secured. A Project Partner may also be listed as an international co-investigator when the intellectual/scientific contribution of the individual to the proposed project is significant. In these cases we expect the costs for the international co-investigator to be met by the co-funder rather than by the ESRC. As such, it is possible for international co-investigators to also be Project Partners, but not all Project Partners will be eligible for international co-investigator status. Applicants are advised to consult the Je-S Guidance for instructions on how to input Project Partners on Je-S.

Consultants

Costs associated with overseas collaborators may be included on the proposal under the heading 'Consultancy Costs'; however, overseas consultants will not be recognised as international co-investigators within the Je-S proposal.

It is expected that in most cases a consultant will not make a significant scientific contribution to the project overall, but rather facilitate the research. For example, if it was required that an individual outside the main project team conduct some data analysis, this individual could be costed as a consultant. However we recognise that there may be cases where a researcher cannot participate unless they do so as a consultant, for example, if an overseas collaborator who would clearly make a valuable intellectual contribution to a proposed research project, is based in a developing country where the funding system is such that it is normal to supplement a low salary with research consultancy work for organisations outside the employing institution (eg governments or NGOs). If this is the case, and if participation in an ESRC project would require the overseas collaborator to forego this income, then the principal investigator is required to specify that they will be given proper recognition for their contributions. The award may also be subject to conditions to safeguard this.

All overseas collaborators should calculate costs at a daily rate appropriate to the going rate for their level of expertise in their country. These costs will be paid at 80% fEC.

Examples

An international co-investigator (Professor A) is employed by University V on a contract which specifies that they are expected to teach and carry out research throughout the year. This is the norm in Professor A's country and their national research funding agency therefore does not normally pay salary costs on its research grants. **Professor A is not eligible for salary costs as an ESRC international co-investigator.**

An international co-investigator (Professor B) is employed by University W on a contract which specifies that they are expected to teach and carry out research for 10 months of the year. The other two months, they are expected to supplement their income with external contracts. **Professor B is eligible for salary costs as an ESRC international coinvestigator for the two months of the year they are not under contract from their institution.**

An international co-investigator (Professor C) is employed by University X on a contract that requires they obtain external funding for their salary to work on research projects. University X might be located in an OECD or developing country, either way without this funding, the institution will not allow them to carry out the work as salary costs for research are normally paid by the national research funding agency. **Professor C is eligible for salary costs as an ESRC international co-investigator.**

An international co-investigator (Professor D) is employed by University Y on a contract which specifies they are expected to teach and carry out research. However, Professor D's research time is already committed to other projects funded by the national research funding agency. University Y agrees that they can participate in the ESRC-funded project if it includes teaching replacement costs to cover some of their teaching load. **Professor D can claim these costs as an international co-investigator.**

A researcher (Professor E) is employed in University Z in a developing country. Their base salary is expected to cover teaching and research but does not constitute a living wage. Therefore Professor E normally supplements their salary through several consultancy contracts with the national government or NGOs. Professor E would clearly make a significant intellectual contribution to the proposed ESRC research project, but would have to forego their normal consultancy work to participate in the ESRC project. **Professor E could be costed into the grant either as an international co-investigator (with salary costs) or as a consultant at the going local rate. This decision will be left up to the principal investigator and international coinvestigator to decide, however if they are to be included as a consultant the principal investigator must make it clear in the application that Professor E will be given appropriate recognition for their contribution to the project.**

Reimbursement of international co-investigator costs

As is ESRC policy, payments on all grants are made in arrears in accordance with a specific payment schedule, as agreed with the ESRC at the time the grant is awarded. This includes grants including international co-investigators. In all cases, funds are transferred to the UK PI's research organisation in the first instance. It is then the responsibility of that institution to disburse funds to co-investigators, international or otherwise. Particular attention should be paid in the Case for Support to the management and communication protocols in place to enable this to happen smoothly.