

ESRC

Research Institutes

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Research Institute Status

Research Institute status will be awarded to ESRC Research centres that have demonstrated their long term strategic value to the Council and to the broader social science research landscape. A centre with such status will receive long term ESRC funding, subject to a quinquennial review process. The budget for a centre with Research Institute status will be in line with standard ESRC centre funding thresholds (currently between £2 and £10m over a five year period).

The Vision for Institutes

Institutes are global centres of excellence that play a critical strategic role in the development of the national and international social science research landscape. They are expected to produce research outputs of international quality and generate impact that extends beyond the academic community. Institutes are expected to provide broad leadership within the social sciences, through the development and dissemination of new research ideas and strengthen the research base through capacity building within and beyond the UK.

Institutes are expected to demonstrate

- long term strategic value to the ESRC and to the social science landscape more generally
- a tightly woven critical mass of highly regarded Principal and Co-Investigators;
- a well-developed long term research agenda focused on complex, deep-seated enduring research challenges;

- high impact non-academic outputs that inform policy and practice;
- leadership in capacity building across the social science research base in the UK and beyond
- broader leadership of the sector through their prominent role in national and international learned societies and other academic networks
- a significant fit to the long term research strategy of their host Research Organisation
- a significant financial commitment from their host Research Organisation and/ or a strong strategic plan to leverage funding

The Funding of Centres with Institute Status

Institutes will be funded through a rolling five year award process at a level consistent with standard ESRC research centre funding thresholds (currently between £2m- £10m over a five year period). Renewal of funding will be subject to a review process, when the Institute will be expected to report on the progress of its existing research programme and outline its proposed research programme and budget for the next five years. The review will take place early in the fourth year of any five year award cycle.

The ESRC reserves the right to hold a 'Special Review' outside of the normal review cycle if deemed necessary. The possible causes for a special review include the under-performance of the Institute against its agreed objectives or a significant change in leadership

– particularly the Directorship of the Institute.

Commitment from Research Organisations

Given the ESRC's decision to offer sustained support to a select number of centres through Institute status, there is an expectation that the host Research Organisation will similarly make a significant strategic long term financial commitment. The ESRC will need to be convinced that any centre with Institute status is fully embedded within the host Research Organisation and is demonstrably an integral part of the RO's research strategy. An ESRC centre that is hosted by an independent RO may apply for Institute status; the Centre must be able to clearly demonstrate how it intends to generate income from other funding sources to ensure its long term sustainability.

The Governance of ESRC Centres with Institute Status

An Institute will be expected to have a high level advisory board made up of a mix of senior academics, policy makers and other business and third sector practitioners. They will also be expected to have a close strategic relationship with the ESRC, meeting regularly with senior staff and ESRC investment managers. The ESRC will also wish to meet periodically with senior representatives from the host Research Organisation to discuss the strategic direction and continued funding of the Institute.

Eligibility to Apply for ESRC Institute Status

To be eligible for Research Institute status, an existing centre will need to have been successful in a minimum of three ESRC Research Centre Competitions. Centre funding secured through non-competitive means will not 'count' towards cumulative eligibility. ESRC Research Centre competitions. This success need not be consecutive but it is expected that it will have led to continuous ESRC funding and a coherent long term research programme, which will have evolved over time, demonstrating the Centre's long term relationship and strategic value to the ESRC. Any other major ESRC funding gained through open competitions (e.g. large grant) will provide evidence of continuous funding but will not count towards the requirement of success in three Research Centre competitions.

Any significant break in ESRC funding would mean that a centre would become ineligible until in receipt of ESRC funding again, at which point the count would start from zero. Equally a very significant change in purpose and work programme of a centre even with continuous funding (i.e. effectively a new centre) will restart the 'count' towards cumulative eligibility for Institute status.

Review Process

A research centre that has successfully secured funding through at least three Research Centres competitions will not automatically be conferred with ESRC Institute status. There is a review process, which will include

- an application from the Centre Director
- an analysis of ResearchFish data and summaries
- an independent review of the scientific quality and non-academic impact of the centre
- an Office Report on the performance of the centre
- an interview with a sub panel of ESRC Council members and the ESRC Director of Research

Assessment Criteria

In assessing eligibility for Research Institute status, the following criteria will be used

- Adding strategic value: A Research Institute must clearly add value to the portfolio of research investments supported by the ESRC in terms of overall coverage and balance of investments. It must demonstrate its strong strategic fit with ESRC's mission and priorities. It must also demonstrate its strategic importance to the broader national and international social science research landscape.
- Research excellence and impact: The Research Institute will demonstrate a sustained track record of research excellence and scholarly and non-academic impact. It will need to offer

a convincing rationale for further investment, including why a break in funding would be inefficient.

- Broader leadership and impact across the social science research base: The Research Institute will need to evidence how it has provided broader leadership across the social science research base. This will need to include its leadership or prominent role in learned societies and other national and international academic networks and how, through capacity building, it has helped to strengthen the research base both within and beyond the UK.
- Institutional commitment: The Research Institute will need to demonstrate how it is embedded within its host Research Organisation and is an integral part of that RO's long term research strategy. The expectation is that ESRC's long term investment will be matched by a significant strategic commitment from the RO.

Sun-setting

If circumstances are such that the ESRC wishes to withdraw Institute status following a quinquennial or special review then there would be an orderly wind down of funding. Centres will be offered the opportunity to apply for Transition Funding under the standard process.

Additional Information

If you have any further questions, please contact escr_enquiries@esrc.ac.uk. For more information visit <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-large-investments/esrc-centres-and-institutes/>