ESRC Legacy Centre Status Review – Invitation only

Call specification

Summary

Legacy Centre Status Review is a rigorous process of review to establish the ongoing excellence and credibility of a former ESRC Centre. Legacy Centre Status is intended to follow on from a period of ESRC full, and then transition funding for an existing centre. Centres will typically be invited to apply for this status as their transition funding comes to an end.

The Legacy Centre Status Review will also provide the opportunity for the established centre to apply for limited funding (total value of ESRC grant - £100,000 over five years) alongside the status review process to support knowledge exchange, engagement and communication with research users or capacity-building activities. Please note we will fund DI costs at 100% fEC, limited DA staff costs may be requested as an exception but will be paid at 80% fEC.

Proposals for Legacy Centre Status are invited via a formal ESRC invitation to centre directors. The proposals must be submitted by 16:00 on 4 November 2020 using the Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) system.

Background and scope

What are ESRC Centres?

ESRC Centres are major ESRC strategic investments, funded at £2.5-10 million over four to five years. Research centres are expected to provide scientifically coherent programmes of research aimed at driving forward innovations in social science theory, the development and application of novel research methods, data sources, and practical application of research findings leading.

Research centre funding is aimed at experienced research leaders who require longer-term or extended support for research groups, inter-institutional research networks, project-linked programmes, medium-to-large surveys, other infrastructure or methodological developments, or any related larger-scale projects. Research centres also have a distinct role in supporting the development of early career researchers and building new research capacity. They are expected to be high-impact investments over the longer term.

In addition to taking forward an ambitious research agenda and making significant economic or societal impact, centres add value by increasing research infrastructure, building capacity,
encouraging interdisciplinary working in social science and beyond, and enabling research collaboration in the UK and internationally.

**ESRC Centres policy**

In 2017 ESRC announced some changes in the funding model for centres following an internal policy review. This review recognised the strategic value of ESRC Centres as beacons of research excellence, with high impact nationally and internationally.

The review proposed a number of changes in policy to foster and sustain centres’ excellence and impact over the longer term, without reducing investment elsewhere. In particular, the funding model was designed to reflect the mutual benefits of supporting these high-profile and high-impact centres of excellence over a longer period, not only for the ESRC, but also for the centre’s host research organisation (RO). The new funding introduced graduated support over the longer term to help centres establish a self-sustaining funding model once ESRC funding comes to an end.

ESRC Legacy Status and funding forms the last stage of the graduated centres funding model, and it is expected that the centre would continue to be supported by strong strategic commitment from its research organisation.

A potential funding pathway for a centre under this new policy would be as follows:

- **Centres competition funding**
  The centre is funded for four to five years following success in an open centres competition.

- **Transition review**
  Towards the end of its grant the centre successfully applies for ESRC transition funding for a further three to five years, which is supplemented by a commitment from their host research organisation.

- **Legacy ESRC Centre status**
  Towards the end of the transition funding the centre applies for a further five-year period of limited funding and recognition as an ESRC Centre to help it leverage funding from other sources, and in communicating and engaging with research users.

Further information on the ESRC Centre Policy changes, background and principles behind the funding model are detailed in our [Centres Policy summary](#).

**Call details**

Legacy Centre Status Review is a rigorous process of review to establish the ongoing excellence and credibility of a former ESRC Centre. Legacy Centre funding is intended to constitute a minor contribution to the total resources available to an already self-sustaining centre.

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1 Please note that Centres can apply for full Centres funding once during their full and transition phases.
If successful, Legacy Centre Status will enable the centre to continue to brand itself as an ESRC Centre and receive up to £100,000 (at 100% fEC) funding to support communication, knowledge exchange, and capacity building activities. It will also be encouraged to take part in networking with other ESRC Centres and investments to ensure the longer-term legacy of ESRC investment in the centre for the wider social science research landscape.

Legacy Centre Status acknowledges that while ESRC is not in a position to fund existing centres through follow-on funding over the longer term, recognition of existing ESRC Centres of continuing excellence and high impact has a mutual value to the centre, research organisation and to the ESRC. Legacy Centre Status and funding aims to:

- Maximise the impact of the research activity and ESRC investment to date, through support for knowledge exchange, capacity-building and communication activities
- Support the centre through its assurance of excellence in leveraging further funding and supporting the centre’s efforts to ensure the influence and use of its research.

Legacy Centre funding can be requested alongside this review to support costs relating to knowledge exchange, communications and capacity-building activities during the period of ongoing Legacy Centre Status. We would welcome proposals for impact-generating activities broadly relating to the ESRC Centre. The funding can be used:

- To strengthen RO and researcher user engagement
- To support knowledge exchange – support costs of engagement with non-academic partners, including at early stages of progressing research design, outputs and outcomes to the point when they can be supported by other funding
- To leverage other funding to progress research outputs and outcomes towards impact
- To support new, innovative and imaginative approaches to KE and impact, including processes that enable “fast failure” and appropriate learning.
- To support two-way secondments and exchanges between centres and research user organisations.
- To support the development of research and leadership capacity within the centre. This should be considered in its broadest sense and take a whole life-course approach. Mechanisms may include placements; exchange visits; coaching and mentoring; and innovative management practices.

**How much funding can be requested?**
The centre can request up to a total value of the ESRC grant of £100,000 over a five-year period (with a maximum £30,000 in any one year) from the ESRC. There is no requirement for a minimum financial commitment from the RO in order to be eligible for legacy status or legacy funding. However, establishing the investment’s ongoing credibility as an ESRC centre will require the RO to evidence sustainability planning for the centre. This may include support from the RO as well as other sources of funding such as external grant
income. Should the RO intend to contribute then it has considerable flexibility in what forms of support it provides to the centre and how it is profiled over the lifetime of the grant. The assessment process will consider the sustainability plan as a whole and assessors will be advised that there is no requirement for a financial commitment from the RO.

A successful application for ESRC Legacy Centre Status and funding would not preclude the centre from applying for other types of ESRC funding, including a future Centres Competition, and other uplifts to the grant in response to additional knowledge exchange, capacity-building and other opportunities.

**What costs will be covered by Legacy Centre funding?**
Specifically, Legacy Centre funding may be used to support the following:

- Directly incurred, including travel and subsistence, related to communication, capacity building and impact-generating activities
- Limited (DI or DA) staff costs/fees may be requested to provide administrative or communications support for the impact-generating and capacity building activities proposed
- Limited (DI or DA) staff costs may also be requested to support two-way secondment and exchanges between centres and user organisations. The credibility, nature, and intended outcomes (e.g. outputs and benefits to the user organisation) of the secondment must be justified

Legacy Centre funding will support the full economic costs requested (100% fEC) for DI costs. Where DA staff costs are requested as an exception, these will be funded at 80% fEC. All costs must be fully justified.

We would encourage ESRC Legacy Centres to engage with the network of other ESRC Centres and may include travel and subsistence costs to attend roughly one event per annum.

Legacy Centre funding is **not** intended to:

- fund activities that should already have been anticipated in an existing ESRC grant and supported through standard routes
- fund primary research
- support indirect and estates costs
- fund research activities or research-related staff or studentship costs

**Does the Legacy Centre funding need to be costed at the same amount per year?**
Costs do not need to be the same amount every year, but cannot exceed a maximum of £30,000 in any 12 month period. A centre could, for example, budget to spend more in the initial years than in the later years to fund planned activity, or budget to spend later to support activity to follow on from existing planned activity. Detailed proposals for planned
activity for the first two years should be provided. To allow for flexibility to respond to opportunities, plans for the following three years may be provisional on application, outlining likely activities that may be agreed in detail in year two with your ESRC investment manager. Centre directors should explain the proposed profiling of costs in the ‘justification of resources’ attachment. We will provide a Legacy Centre Status Review costings template to enable you to request the profile of costs preferred.

**Sustainability planning**
Legacy Centre funding is intended to constitute a minor contribution to the total resources available to an already self-sustaining centre. The funding should be used to facilitate additional activities to supplement the centre’s wider activities. It is important that the centre can demonstrate its ongoing sustainability as a centre, and, at a minimum, provide a credible plan to support this.

There is no requirement for a minimum financial commitment from the RO in order to be eligible for legacy status or legacy funding. However, establishing the investment’s ongoing credibility as an ESRC centre will require the RO to evidence sustainability planning for the centre. This may include support from the RO as well as other sources of funding such as external grant income. Should the RO intend to contribute then it has considerable flexibility in what forms of support it provides to the centre and how it is profiled over the lifetime of the grant. The assessment process will consider the sustainability plan as a whole and assessors will be advised that there is no requirement for a financial commitment from the RO.

**Management of the centre**
We are strongly encouraging all our investments to consider how best to create planning and management systems able to respond in a timely way to the opportunities of the rapidly evolving funding and research landscape. In particular, we would encourage you to think about your approach to leadership and talent development for staff at all levels and how you will be best placed to take up the opportunities for international, interdisciplinary and user collaboration. Consideration should be given to issues of succession planning for key roles or skill-sets where relevant. It is not a requirement that you request funding for these activities from us through this call but we would encourage you to outline in your Centre Director’s Final Report how networking, planning and management systems have allowed you to respond to unexpected opportunities and challenges to date. Please also outline how you intend to use networks, systems and processes, or adapt/develop them, to enable you to adapt swiftly to opportunities and changes in the research landscape in your case for support.

Centres should aim to offer a research environment that is fit for the future, supporting interdisciplinary and intersectoral engagement and provide an inclusive environment in which everyone at all career stages can thrive. Researchers are encouraged to be adaptable and flexible and opportunities for interdisciplinary, intersectoral and international mobility should be provided where relevant.
Eligibility
Current centre directors (PIs) are eligible to apply for Legacy Centre funding by invitation only. Typically, as a centre approaches the end of its transition funding grant it will be offered the opportunity to apply for continued recognition as an ESRC Centre for a further five-year period. Centres will typically be contacted six months before the end of their transition award at the same time as a request for a preliminary final report to accompany the application.

Please refer to the Je-S guidance and contact the ESRC if you propose to change PI ahead of or during centre legacy funding. Standard processes for a change of grant holder may apply (see ESRC Research Funding Guide, p37).

It is essential that the activities proposed are clearly related to the aims and objectives of the centre, and that the centre continues to demonstrate its strategic fit with ESRC and UKRI priorities. The activities proposed must also relate to activity that is at least 50% within ESRC remit. If the activity supports multidisciplinary engagement or relates to multidisciplinary research activity in the past, the activity must be at least 50% social science-related. Please also refer to the list of research areas that fall within ESRC remit for further information.

Can a centre apply when it already has other ESRC funding, or wishes to apply for other ESRC funding?
A past ESRC centre is eligible for Legacy Status and funding even if receiving other ESRC funding. If a centre is receiving a centres transition funding, the transition funding must end before the legacy funding starts.

Any existing ESRC grants must be declared in the Je-S application, and clearly demonstrate that the activities and costs requested are for additional work that has genuine value to ESRC separate from existing activities already funded. Where a centre has considerable ESRC funding through non-centres funding, the timetable for the delivery of activities to be funded through legacy funding may, as an exception, be scheduled for delivery later in the five-year period. Please contact the legacy centres call coordinator in this instance to discuss the application.

There are no restrictions on whether a centre in receipt of legacy centre funding can apply for further ESRC funding.

Eligibility to apply for ESRC open centres competitions
We anticipate that centres competitions will typically be held every two years. Centre directors should note that application for Legacy Centre Status and funding does not preclude the centre from applying to an ESRC open centres competition in tandem, and there are no restrictions on how many times a legacy centre could apply for centres competition funding during a period of ESRC legacy centre status. If successful in applying for a centre competition, centre’s full funding will replace a legacy centre funding and the legacy centre funding will be ended when a centre’s full funding starts.
How to apply
ESRC Centre directors will be invited to apply for Legacy Centre Status funding as the centre approaches the final year of its transition funding, unless there is an ESRC strategic review in process affecting particular investments.

The letter of invitation to apply will include the timetable for submission of applications through the Je-S online system.

Assessment of applications
The Legacy Centre Status Review is intended to be light-touch for both applicants and assessors, as centres were originally selected through rigorous open competition. Two independent academic members of the Strategic Advisory Network will be asked to assess whether the centre should be awarded the ongoing status of an ESRC Centre on the basis of its centre’s track record (the quality and impact of the work programme to date) as evidenced in the preliminary final report. If approved, they will also review the proposed activity going forward and pathways to impact on the basis of the information provided in the funding application. Applicants should note that Legacy Centre Status Review is not a competitive process, and applications will be judged on their own merits. Assessors will review the proposal on the basis of the assessment criteria outlined below:

Legacy Centre Status Review process
1. Track record: research excellence and scientific impact to date
2. Track record: capacity-building, knowledge exchange and impact through engagement with research users
3. Track record: management of the centre
4. Sustainability and institutional strategic commitment
5. Alignment with ESRC and UKRI strategic priorities

Legacy Centre funding
6. Planned programme of work: to support knowledge exchange and impact (required)
7. Planned programme of work: new capacity-building activities (if applicable)
8. Value for money

Assessors will also be asked to provide an overall judgement of the application by selecting one of the scores available using the four-point scale below.

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Brief reason for grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Meets criteria – status awarded, fund without conditions</td>
<td>Clear evidence that the centre has an excellent track record and remains a credible and sustainable entity and the proposal meets the aims of the funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meets most criteria but requires minor clarification/amendment – status</td>
<td>Evidence that the centre has an excellent track record and remains a credible and sustainable entity and the proposal meets the aims of the funding, but minor clarifications/amendments may be required.</td>
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2 Please note: assessors will be asked to consider ‘research’ in its broadest form, including capacity building and resource creation when this in central to a centre’s aims and objectives.
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<th>2</th>
<th>Meets some criteria but requires major clarification/amendments – status awarded with major conditions</th>
<th>Some evidence that the centre has an excellent track record and remains a credible and sustainable entity and the proposal meets the aims of the funding, but requires significant clarification and/or amendment.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does not meet criteria – status not awarded/not funded</td>
<td>Not convinced the centre has adequately evidenced that the centre has an excellent track record and/or remains a credible and sustainable entity and the proposal does not meet the aims and conditions of the funding.</td>
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**Engagement with ESRC during the legacy grant**

If successful, we will encourage the centre to proactively engage with the ESRC to access wider opportunities that ESRC may be able to provide to develop skills in knowledge exchange and communications, networks with research users and awareness of further funding opportunities. ESRC will also expect centres to provide us with impact case studies to demonstrate the impact of ESRC’s long-standing investment in the centre and keep us in contact with activities.

Successful applicants to ESRC Legacy Centre Status Review will continue to be expected to follow our branding guidelines and any other funders when developing digital or printed material as part of the grant activity, such as including appropriate logos on websites or publications.

**Commissioning timetable**

- Deadline for invited proposals – 4 November 2020
- Assessor review – November 2020
- Funding decisions – December 2020 /January 2021
- Grant begins – As requested

**Further enquiries**

Please contact the Legacy Centre Status Review coordinator on centrespolicy@esrc.ac.uk, if you have any questions about this process or ESRC research funding rules.

Enquiries relating to technical aspects of the Je-S form should be addressed to:

- Je-S helpdesk
  - Email: jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk
  - Telephone: 01793 444164
  - Monday to Friday 09.00 to 13.00 (UK time, excluding public and other holidays)