

New Investigator Grants Call specification

Summary

One of ESRC's strategic aims is to invest in the most talented people by offering diverse and flexible training to outstanding individuals at all stages of their careers. As part of this we have embedded a call for New Investigator Grants in to our Research Grants scheme. This is just one element of our strategy for supporting early career researchers. For further information please see: www.esrc.ac.uk/skills-and-careers/postgraduate-careers/early-career-researchers/.

New Investigator Grants will support new researchers and academics at the start of their careers to become independent researchers through gaining experience of managing and leading research projects and teams. In addition, they will provide applicants with an opportunity not only to support their own skill development but also the skill development of research staff employed on the grant.

As with the Research Grants scheme, proposals could be for a range of activities such as standard research projects, surveys and other infrastructure projects and methodological developments. Proposals are welcomed across the full disciplinary range of the social sciences and at the interface with the wider sciences, however the social sciences must represent at least 50 per cent of the research focus and effort.

There are no fixed closing dates – you can submit proposals to the call at any time.

Grants can be for up to five years in duration (a five year grant would need a clear justification of the timeframe), and within an overall limit of £300,000 at 100 per cent full Economic Cost (fEC); ESRC's contribution for UK applicants is 80 per cent of fEC. We anticipate being able to fund up to around 30 to 35 grants a year subject to quality and available funds.

Background and scope

We are committed to providing a suite of funding opportunities flexible enough to support academics at all stages of their careers. For early career researchers, we believe that ESRC funding will be best utilised supporting key transition points. The New Investigator Grants are designed to enable researchers to make the transition to becoming an independent researcher through gaining experience of managing and leading research projects and teams.

Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria detailed below, applicants will have the flexibility to determine when they apply for funding rather than being bound by annual closing dates. Proposals will be processed alongside our Research Grants scheme and considered by our Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs).

The early career researcher must be the principal investigator on the proposal and must demonstrate how an award would have a demonstrable impact on their career progression in becoming an independent researcher.

This call is open to high-quality candidates from anywhere in the world but can only be held at UK research organisations eligible for Research Council funding. Please see www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/ for more information.

Proposals are welcome in any topic which falls within the ESRC's remit and can be for basic, applied or strategic research. We welcome interdisciplinary proposals and recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and between the social sciences and other areas of research. However, we also remain committed to the support of excellent research within a single discipline.

Please note, whilst the ESRC offers funding schemes that are particularly relevant to early career researchers – the New Investigator Grants and the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/secondary-data-analysis-initiative-sdai-open-call/) – early career researchers are also eligible to apply to other ESRC funding opportunities. Please see our website for further information on current calls: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/.

Call details

New Investigator Grants are designed to allow newer researchers to gain experience of research leadership and management and to formulate their plans for their research careers. Applicants who technically meet the eligibility criteria but hold a professorship will not be eligible to apply as there is an expectation that they have already obtained these research and management skills.

Co-investigators (Co-Is) are permitted on this call, and encouraged for interdisciplinary proposals or where a Co-I would provide specific technical expertise that is essential to the project. However, it must be clear that the PI is responsible for leading the project.

Associated studentships are not permitted on this call. However, applicants may wish to include provision for a research assistant(s). All requests for additional staff time, to develop staff management skills and assist in the completion of the proposed research project, must be fully justified.

Whilst the configuration of the research team should be informed by the proposed research, we expect that by the end of these awards the new investigator will be able to demonstrate their ability to lead research projects and teams. Applicants need to carefully consider how they can demonstrate their ability to manage people either through employing research staff on their award or from other relevant experience.

Eligibility of research organisations

All UK Higher Education Institutions are eligible to receive funds for research, postgraduate training and associated activities. The higher education funding councils for England, Wales,

Scotland and Northern Ireland determine whether an organisation meets the criteria to be a Higher Education Institution.

Some independent research organisations (IROs) are also eligible for Research Council funding. The current list of eligible IROs can be downloaded at www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/ .

Eligibility of applicants

The 'new investigator' must be the principal investigator who submits the proposal.

This call is open to high-quality candidates from anywhere in the world to enable them to further their research careers. However, all potential applicants must have the strong support of an eligible research organisation in the UK to host them if they are successful.

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Applicants should have a maximum of four years' academic research experience following the submission of their PhD, or be of equivalent professional standing. This period is measured between the initial submission date of the PhD thesis and the submission date of the New Investigator proposal. Career breaks will be excluded from the four-year period and periods of part-time academic employment can be calculated on a pro-rata basis.
- Applicants cannot be current or former principal investigators on ESRC or other Research Council grants, except ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships and Research Councils UK Fellows.
- The call is open to applicants with or without a permanent academic post, subject to the above restrictions.

These criteria were used for our Future Research Leaders Scheme, which has now closed, and will remain in place while we move our support for early career researchers to an open date scheme. However, following our review of early career support and discussions with other Research Councils we are looking at the potential for moving to competency-based criteria. As such it is essential that applicants check the eligibility criteria in place at the time of their application.

Contributions of the host research organisation

We expect to see only a limited number of proposals from a single research organisation and organisations must have a process in place to support this. In submitting the proposal the RO is demonstrating its commitment to supporting an individual researcher's transition to the next stage of their academic career.

Beyond the standard support offered by a research organisation to an ESRC grant holder, we expect the following two aspects to be carefully considered by the proposed host organisation in supporting a New Investigator proposal:

Provision of a mentor

All applicants are required to have a named mentor based at the research organisation where the grant is to be held. The proposed mentor should be of high academic standing

and have a strong interest in the applicant's field of research, but should not normally be the applicant's former PhD supervisor. The mentor should also be able to offer the applicant advice and assistance in developing their proposal, building suitable links with leading researchers in their field, as well as with potential beneficiaries and users of the applicant's research.

The role of the mentor is to support the work of the grant holder, both scientific and non-scientific, but the mentor will not be directly involved in running the project. Regular contact must be maintained between the grant holder and mentor through the course of the project, and the mentor will help the grant holder to review progress against agreed milestones, including the implementation of the training and development programme.

Costs for mentoring time cannot be claimed as part of these grants; they must be met as part of the host institution's contribution to the award.

Provision of career development support

The proposal should include a programme of research and broader skills development to ensure the applicant's continued progression towards being an independent researcher. This programme of activities should be tailored to the individual needs of the application and developed in consultation between the applicant, their mentor and the host organisation.

It is likely that a programme of training and development activities will include aspects of project management, research methods development, knowledge exchange and user engagement, impact, national and international networking and research development.

Applicants must also demonstrate how they will identify, address and monitor the training needs of any staff employed on the grant.

Mobility: UK and international

As research is an increasingly international endeavour we are keen to support grant holders in developing links with leading researchers in their field both in the UK and internationally. We encourage research visits to one or more internationally leading research organisations - either in the UK or abroad - for the purposes of research collaboration, training, and/or access to data or other resources not available at the applicant's host organisation. The ESRC wants to encourage research proposals which use and develop international comparative methods. The opportunities provided for mobility should support this.

Where a long-term overseas visit is planned, applicants are required to name a second mentor at the overseas host organisation. They must also articulate how the research team will be managed effectively whilst they are overseas. However, the majority of the grant holder's time should be in the UK at their host research organisation.

We also recognise that long-term mobility may be difficult or impossible for researchers with disabilities or caring responsibilities. Candidates will therefore not be disadvantaged for not including a mobility element. Applicants with restricted mobility may wish to consider alternative mechanisms for enhancing collaboration through their grant, such as hosting short visits from collaborators, or using information technology to develop and sustain collaborations.

Knowledge exchange and collaboration

We are committed to knowledge exchange and encouraging collaboration between researchers and the private, public and civil society sectors. Collaborative working benefits both the researchers and the individuals/organisations involved. Through collaboration, partners learn about each other's expertise, share knowledge and gain an appreciation of different professional cultures. Collaborative activity can therefore lead to a better understanding of the ways that academic research can add value and offer insights to key issues of concern for policy and practice.

Knowledge exchange should not be treated as an 'add-on' at the end of a research project, but considered before the start and built into a project.

For further information on the RCUK principles for knowledge exchange please visit: www.rcuk.ac.uk/ke/policies/

Impact

In line with the RCUK position on Excellence with Impact (www.rcuk.ac.uk/publications/policy/efficiency2011/), we expect that our researchers will have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impacts of their research.

ESRC applicants should actively consider how these impacts can be maximised and developed through the Pathways to Impact (www.rcuk.ac.uk/ke/impacts/) document in their proposal. This will form part of the peer review and assessment process.

Opportunities for making an impact may arise, and should be taken, at any stage during the research lifecycle. The research project lifecycle includes the planning and research design stage, the period of funding for the project, and all activities that relate to the project up to - and including - the time when funding has ended. The research lifecycle therefore also includes knowledge exchange and impact activities - including reporting and publication, and the archiving, future use, sharing, and linking of data. It is important that researchers have in place a robust strategy for maximising the likelihood of impact opportunities and their own capacity for taking advantage of these.

Excellent research without obvious or immediate societal or economic impact will not be disadvantaged in the peer review and assessment process. If you consider that your research has no obvious or immediate societal or economic impact, you should use the Pathways to Impact document to explain your reasoning. ESRC shares and endorses the RCUK statement on Research Councils' expectations of researchers (www.rcuk.ac.uk/Publications/archive/StatementofExpectationon/).

The ESRC's Impact Toolkit gives you detailed advice on how to achieve the maximum impact for your work. The toolkit includes information on developing an impact strategy, promoting knowledge exchange, public engagement and communicating effectively with your key stakeholders: www.esrc.ac.uk/research/impact-toolkit/.

Research ethics

As the principal funding agency for UK social science research we require that the research we support is designed and conducted in such a way that it meets certain ethical principles, and is subject to proper professional and institutional oversight in terms of research governance.

As an important source of public funds for social science research and as a body charged with encouraging, supporting, undertaking and advising on such research, the ESRC recognises that it has a special obligation towards the general public and academic community to ensure that the research which it funds is carried out to a high ethical standard.

We have agreed a Framework for Research Ethics that all submitted proposals have to comply with. Further details about the Framework for Research Ethics and guidance on compliance (together with links to other web-based resources on research ethics) may be found at www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/.

Open access

We are committed to ensuring that our research community makes the outputs from ESRC-funded research publicly available. The Research Councils UK (RCUK) open access policy came into force on 1 April 2013, and ESRC-funded researchers are expected to comply with this policy. The payment of article processing charges (APCs) and other publication charges related to ESRC-funded research are supported through RCUK open access block grants which are provided to eligible research organisations.

How to apply

The call will operate alongside ESRC's Research Grants open call (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/). Following peer review, projects will be assessed by the Grants Assessment Panels (GAP) who will make recommendations on which proposals to fund. Following the panel recommendations, the Grants Delivery Group will make final funding decisions. For more information on the assessment process please see www.esrc.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-structure/advisory-committees/research-committee/responsive-mode-grant-assessment-process/.

GAPs meet in March, July and November of each year. The new investigator grant annual budget will be around £7.5 million. It is expected that 10 to 12 proposals will be funded at each GAP round, therefore we expect around 35 grants will be funded each year (dependent on quality and available funds).

Proposals can be submitted at any time and there are no set closing dates; however given the annual funding levels and expected number of grants to be funded at each GAP round, applicants are required to carefully consider the timing of their proposal. Large volumes of proposals will adversely affect success rates at each GAP round and will count towards the demand management statistics of the applicant's research organisation.

Please see the Je-S guidance notes for applicants for more information on how to apply to this call: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants/

Assessment criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Originality, potential contribution to knowledge
- Research design and methods
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination and impact

Contacts

For questions relating to ESRC's application processes please see the research grant Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), available at www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/

For questions about the New Investigator Grants please see the new investigator FAQs (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants/).

For any other grant enquiries please contact esrcenquiries@esrc.ac.uk.

Enquiries relating to the Je-S application procedure should be addressed to:

- Je-S Helpdesk
Email: jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk
Telephone: 01793 444164