

New Investigator Grants Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: April 2017

Proposals to the New Investigator Grants will be processed alongside our Research Grant scheme so you should also refer to the Research Grants FAQs for more information on the assessment process: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/>

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Introduction of New Investigator Grants

Why is ESRC introducing New Investigator Grants?

The consultation that informed the development of our 2015 Strategic Plan identified the lack of provision for early career researchers as a key issue. We subsequently undertook a review to consider evidence from a variety of sources to inform discussions about where ESRC support could add most value.

It was agreed that we should continue with an early career scheme where the core objectives would remain the same as the Future Research Leaders scheme - to provide the opportunity for early career researchers to get their first major element of research funding and experience of managing a research project and team – but that the application process should be simplified and proposals could be submitted on an open date basis. Applicants would need to have a mentor and would be required to include plans for their continuing professional development.

We are changing the name of the scheme both to clearly signify the changes that are being made to the operation of the scheme and to align our provision with other Research Councils who also have similar schemes.

The New Investigator Grant is just one strand of our support for early career researchers and is specifically aimed at those looking to make the transition to being an independent researcher. We will also be introducing a postdoctoral fellowship opportunity in 2017 for doctoral graduates who are within one year of completing their PhD, to give them the opportunity to consolidate their PhD through developing publications, their networks, and their research and professional skills.

What do you mean by ‘independent researcher’?

Early career researchers may have participated in research projects as co-investigators or research staff but not had the opportunity to lead a research project in their own right. By referring to independent researchers we are referring to someone who has submitted their own proposal and taken on the role of principal investigator (PI). The PI takes the lead for both the intellectual leadership and conduct of the research as well as managing the project and team including observance of the terms and conditions.

What’s happening to the Future Research Leaders Scheme?

There won’t be any further calls for applications to the Future Research Leaders (FRL).

When is the closing date?

There is no closing date; as with our Research Grants scheme proposals can be submitted at any time.

Eligibility

Which research organisations are eligible to apply? (Updated)

All UK research organisations (ROs) eligible for Research Council fundings. Please see www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/ for more information.

My RO has an office overseas, can I be based there?

No, you must be based in the UK within reasonable travelling distance of your host RO except when on fieldwork or overseas visits.

The call specification suggests the eligibility criteria are temporary and that you plan to change them – is that correct?

Yes, we have retained some eligibility criteria as FRLs in the short term whilst we move to an open date process but, in discussion 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.

Do I need to be within four years of submission of my PhD at the time of applying or on commencement of the grant?

The four year eligibility is calculated from the initial submission of the thesis to the date when the new investigator proposal is submitted.

By submission date, is the ESRC referring to the original submission date or the final submission date after corrections?

The original submission date, which must be confirmed on your CV in the format of 'DD-MM-YY'.

Does academic research experience obtained prior to submitting my PhD affect my eligibility to the scheme? (Updated)

For the purpose of calculating eligibility we are principally calculating academic research experience since PhD submission. Some potential applicants may have been in academic positions for some time prior to undertaking their PhD; whilst such applicants are eligible, they need to consider whether their circumstances are compatible with the overall aims of the scheme (ie to support their transition to being an independent researcher) and provide a clear statement in their CV explaining how they satisfy the aims of the scheme.

Can I apply if I'm studying for, but haven't submitted, my PhD?

Yes; however, you need to consider whether you would be able to demonstrate your transition to being an independent researcher responsible for the leadership and management of a research grant. If not, you may want to consider seeking funding for postdoctoral support first.

We will also be introducing a postdoctoral fellowship opportunity in 2017 for doctoral graduates who are within one year of completing their PhD to give them the opportunity to consolidate their PhD through developing publications, their networks, and their research and professional skills.

I have two PhDs. Do I need to be within four years of submission of my first or second PhD at the time of applying?

The submission date of the first PhD would apply in this case.

Since completing my PhD I have undertaken a master's degree, can this be considered as a career break when calculating my eligibility?

We would not disregard further full-time study that would have contributed to your academic career progression.

Can I apply if I have years of research experience but I do not have a PhD?

Yes, if you can demonstrate 'equivalent professional standing' to someone with a PhD and up to a maximum of four years subsequent research experience and are transitioning to being an independent researcher.

What is meant by 'equivalent professional standing'?

You may not have a PhD but have had experience of conducting research at postgraduate (and beyond) level and may hold a postgraduate qualification. For example, working at a non-governmental organisation, in government or the private sector.

Can ESRC confirm my eligibility on these grounds before I submit my proposal?

No, you must make the case within the proposal and the reviewers will judge this.

The specification states that career breaks will be disregarded from the four year criteria - how is ESRC defining 'career break'?

We will disregard periods of maternity, sick leave or unemployment. Relevant information must be clearly presented on your CVs otherwise your proposal may be rejected.

What about applicants who have been employed in a research post outside of academia following their PhD?

They will be eligible if they can demonstrate that they had no more than four years postdoctoral experience and hadn't led and managed major research projects in their role. There would need to be a clear statement within their CV to justify this.

What if I have been employed on a 'teaching-only' contract with no scope for research activities?

Periods of teaching-only contracts could be disregarded from the calculation but the onus is on applicants to demonstrate why they think this should be the case based on the nature of their prior academic posts within their CV.

I have been working in academia since I submitted my PhD, but on a part-time basis. Can the four year period be calculated on a pro-rata basis - ie can my 5-year 0.5 post be considered as equivalent to 2.5 years?

Yes, period of part-time academic employment can be calculated on a pro-rata basis. Applicants will need to demonstrate their eligibility clearly in their CV, and we will undertake eligibility assurance checks on proposals once they have been submitted. ESRC will not undertake the pro-rata calculation on behalf of applicants or verify it prior to application. Potential applicants should discuss their individual circumstances with the RO through which they intend applying.

Can the ESRC confirm my eligibility before I submit my proposal? (New)

No, you should discuss and confirm your eligibility to apply for the scheme with your institution's research office and ensure that your CV submitted with your proposal demonstrates your eligibility. We cannot confirm your eligibility in advance; this includes pro-rata calculations of previous part-time employment and advice on the latest date on which application can be made.

I know the call is open to researchers who have not previously been principal investigators on Research Council grants, but is an individual who has been named as a co-investigator on a previous grant still eligible to apply?

Yes, previous co-investigators are eligible to apply as we see a clear distinction between the role of a PI and Co-I in terms of the intellectual leadership and management of the research.

I have been allocated funding through my institution's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) – does that count as being a PI on a research council grant?

No, being allocated funds via an IAA would not constitute being the PI on a research council grant.

I don't have a PhD but have spent five years in a succession of research posts since completing a masters' programme. Am I eligible?

Yes, if you can demonstrate 'equivalent professional experience' and that you are now making the transition to being an independent researcher.

Can I check this with ESRC before submitting my proposal?

No, this will be assessed as part of your proposal.

Can I apply for a New Investigator Grant if I meet the criteria eligibility but have gained a professorship?

No, the scheme is aimed at researchers who are transitioning to being an independent researcher. We would expect anyone who had gained a professorship to have already made that transition.

What if I submit my proposal but am subsequently promoted to a professorial post before my grant starts?

If you gain a professorship before the award starts then you are no longer eligible for this scheme but if your promotion occurs after the grant has started (and was not known about at the grant start date) the grant can continue provided the requirements of your new post are compatible with the programme of work.

Is the competition open to non-British nationals?

It's open to all nationalities, but to apply the applicant must have the support of a UK research organisation where they will be based for the duration of the grant.

Do I need to have a permanent post in order to apply?

No, as long as your research organisation is willing to provide the necessary support for your proposal and the portion of your salary not covered by the ESRC contribution for the duration of the grant. Please refer to the ESRC Research Funding Guide

(<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>) for further information on eligibility of applicants.

I would like to apply but I have been awarded funding from a non-Research Council body (eg Leverhulme, National Science Foundation). Does this mean I'm ineligible for a New Investigator Grant?

Funding received from outside of the seven UK Research Councils will not affect your eligibility for these grants unless the funding you received was for a similar purpose - i.e. to support your transition to an independent researcher.

Am I eligible to apply to ESRC if a proposal based around the same research stream is under review with a different funding organisation?

Yes, you can apply to different funding bodies (except other Research Councils) with the same project but not be funded for the same project from two different funders. If you were successful with both you would have to decide which one of the two to accept.

Can I apply for a New Investigator Grant if I've had funding for an RC Studentship?

Yes.

Can I apply to another ESRC call at the same time as applying for a New Investigator Grant?

Yes, as long as the two proposals are different in scope and content, as we do not allow the same proposal to be submitted to more than one scheme. If successful in both schemes, you would have to choose which grant you wanted to hold.

In order to be eligible for a new investigator grant I need to submit my application soon however I won't be in a position to start the research until next year – is that OK? (new)

We appreciate that applicants may have prior commitments that inform their preferred start date and this should be clearly explained in their proposal. Please note that all grants must start within a year of their decision date.

The guidance states that the ESRC expects to see a limited number of proposals from a single research organisation – is there actually a limit?

No but research organisations should adhere to the ESRC policy on demand management as we will be looking closely at both the volume and quality of proposals ROs submit. For further information please see <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-us/strategy-and-priorities/demand-management/>

Nature of proposals

How can I check if my proposal is suitable for ESRC funding?

If you are unsure, please complete the remit query form available on our website:

www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/

Your enquiry will be passed to the Remit Team, who will contact you directly. We strongly advise you to contact us prior to submission if your work encompasses the remit of more than one Research Council.

Activities and funding

Is the New Investigator Grant primarily an opportunity to lead a research project, an early career training scheme, or a chance to build up my network of contacts?

The primary focus is the intellectual leadership of a research project but we also want to encourage the grant holder's continuing professional development.

Can my research activities follow on directly from my PhD?

We expect that in the process of completing your PhD you may have identified new, but related, avenues for further enquiry, so your New Investigator Grant proposal may be related to your PhD. However, you will need to demonstrate very clearly within your proposal how you will make the transition to being an independent researcher.

Can I apply to this call to undertake a secondary data analysis project?

Yes, you can as long as your proposed programme of work also addresses the developmental aspect of New Investigator Scheme. If not, you should consider applying to the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI).

What do you expect to see in terms of a programme of skill development?

Your proposal should clearly demonstrate how the programme of activities all contribute to your development and will support your transition to being an independent researcher. You may wish to start by identifying your priority learning needs that arise from the research and tasks associated with managing the grant, to ensure that it is successful and makes a positive impact on key beneficiaries. Then you could creatively consider what programme of activities could meet these needs effectively.

Is there a minimum length of time for the grant?

No, there's no minimum length but it must be sufficient to support the transition to independent researcher.

Is there a minimum time commitment for the principal investigator?

No, although reviewers will be looking to be assured that the proposal is compatible with the aims of the scheme in terms of leading and managing the grant and the associated skill development activities.

Is there a maximum time commitment that can be claimed from the grant?

It's down to the applicant(s) to determine the configuration and time commitment of the team based on the project being proposed. As such there's no limit on the proportion of time they can request but it must be clearly justified in relation to the project and the aims of the scheme in supporting the transition to being an independent researcher.

I note that the scheme aims to support the principal investigator to manage a research project and team, what if I am unable to cost both my time and that of a research assistant within the scheme limit? (New)

The configuration of the research team should be informed by project being proposed. Whilst there is no limit on the time commitment of the principal investigator it is important

to remember that this is a grant, rather than a fellowship, and you need to consider whether what is being proposed is in line with the overarching aims of the scheme. If you are struggling to configure the team within the overall limit of the scheme you should consider both your own time commitment along with the proposed scope and duration of project. We also recognise that applicants may have had prior experience of managing teams so if you are not proposing to employ research staff you need to consider what evidence you can provide of management experience to reassure assessors that by the end of the award you would be in a position to manage major projects and teams of researchers

Will the ESRC be able to advise on costings?

No, you should contact your research organisation's finance office for advice.

When applying for the funding, will the staff element for the investigator be categorised Directly Incurred or Directly Allocated?

The principal investigator's time should be added under directly allocated costs if they are working directly on a project but their time charged to the grant will be based on estimates rather than actual costs. Where costs are actual, auditable and verifiable, they should be included under the Directly Incurred heading.

Can I include a consultant on the project?

Yes, as long as it is within the overall limit for the call and their role and contribution to the project is clearly justified.

If successful, will my grant be funded at the level I've applied for?

No, not necessarily. In assessing your proposal reviewers will need to be assured that it offers good value for money and that the requested costs are appropriate for the proposed programme of activities. Costs will be checked to ensure that they are eligible under our research funding rules and that they have been clearly and adequately justified. Costs that are ineligible or unjustified will be removed from the amount awarded.

When you say that costs should be justified, what do you mean?

We need to be clear about how you've arrived at the costs you're requesting and why they are necessary for the successful completion of the project. This should be detailed in the justification of resources attachment.

Mentors

Why must I have a mentor?

As an early career researcher, your learning stands to be enhanced by drawing on the expertise and contacts of an academic mentor who will be internationally acknowledged as an expert in your field of enquiry. You can turn to your mentor regularly for advice on aspects of your research project, for an introduction to other academic experts and senior practitioners or policymakers in your mentor's network, and for advice on your research and knowledge exchange skills training and development programme.

What is expected of a mentor?

The role of the mentor is to supervise and support the work of the PI (both scientific and non-scientific), answer any queries and help with any problems that may arise during your

research. They will not be directly involved in running the project, their role is advisory. It is expected that regular contact will be maintained between the PI and mentor, and that the mentor will review progress against agreed milestones (including the implementation of the training and development programme).

How much time will mentoring take?

We anticipate mentoring time will be around one to three hours per week, but the exact commitment will depend on the understanding between mentor and grant holder and should be confirmed within the mentor's statement.

Can mentors be costed into the proposal?

No.

Should my mentor be from the same research organisation as me?

Yes. Ideally applicants should have a single mentor based at the same research organisation as the PI. If it is not possible to find a mentor with all the suitable knowledge within the PI's organisation a second mentor may be appointed for this purpose from another organisation.

Can I have more than one mentor?

Yes, this is particularly encouraged for proposals that are on the borderline between social sciences and other disciplinary areas or where an extended period at an overseas RO is planned. The need for more than one mentor should be clearly articulated in the proposal.

Can my PhD supervisor be my mentor?

The purpose of the New Investigator Grant is to support the transition to being an independent researcher. As such we would encourage applicants to consider how they might link to and be influenced and challenged by a wider network of academics working in the area, and therefore how the grant would be a step forward from their PhD. Therefore we would not normally expect the mentor to be your principal supervisor, although we do recognise that this is not always practical. Ultimately it's down to you to justify your choice, but you must be able to demonstrate that the grant will have a demonstrable impact on your career trajectory.

Could my PhD supervisor be a co-investigator?

There's nothing to preclude your PhD supervisor from being a co-investigator but you'd need to think about how this would fit with the aim of the scheme in terms of your transition to becoming an independent researcher.

Could my mentor also be a co-investigator?

No, we would consider the two roles to be distinct.

Do I need to include a CV for my mentor?

Yes, a CV will be required for each mentor.

Co-investigators and staff resources

I would like to apply for a New Investigator Grant as the principal investigator and have a co-investigator from another RO. Is this allowed?

Yes; you should explain the role and contribution of all team members within the proposal.

Can I include research staff on the proposal?

Yes. All costs, including staff ones, must be clearly and adequately justified in the proposal.

Can I include a linked studentship in my proposal?

No, studentships cannot be included in this call.

Where my research project includes employing a Research Assistant (RA), is funding available to support the RA's development and training?

Yes, your responsibility as PI extends to supporting their development as a researcher. You need to identify whether the RA has any learning needs related to fulfilling their project duties effectively, and to arrange appropriate opportunities to meet those learning needs.

Resubmissions

I have previously applied to the Future Research Leaders Scheme and was unsuccessful. Can I apply for a New Investigator Grant?

We have an invited resubmission-only policy so you cannot resubmit an amended proposal (this applies for all previous unsuccessful Future Research Leader proposals). You can submit a new proposal with a significant change of focus with fresh or significantly modified objectives and/or an entirely revised methodological/analytical approach to a research question. Please see our website for further information:

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/resubmissions-policy/> and the guidance on what constitutes a new proposal: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/resubmissions-policy/what-constitutes-a-new-proposal/>.

Joint Electronic Submission

I don't seem to be able to select myself as the principal investigator - does this mean that my mentor should be named as the principal investigator?

No, the applicant (ie the new investigator) is the principal investigator, not the mentor. You need to check that you have the correct Je-S account type for this call, ie a Je-S registered account that is verified by the research organisation.

How I can set my account in Je-S?

The New Investigator Grant requires a Je-S registered account. For further information on how to set up your account please contact:

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

If you experience difficulties using Je-S or have questions regarding its use, Helpdesk staff can be contacted Monday to Friday 9.00 to 17.00 (excluding public and other holidays).

I'm having trouble accessing or using the Je-S system. What shall I do?

You can find guidance at the Je-S website (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/jes2webloginsite/login.aspx>) or you can contact the Je-S Helpdesk.

I am not sure how to fill out a particular section of the Je-S proposal form. Can you help?

Please refer to the 'Je-S Guidance Notes for Applicants' document on the ESRC new investigator grants webpage (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants/>).

Assessment process

What happens to my proposal once I have submitted it?

Your proposal will be processed alongside applications to our Research Grants open call, therefore you should refer to the Research Grants frequently asked questions for further information on the process: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/>