



## Guidance

# ESRC research funding guide for the UKRI Funding Service

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[See all updates.](#)

## 1. Introduction

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) brings together the seven disciplinary research councils, Research England, which is responsible for supporting research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England, and the UK's innovation agency, Innovate UK.

As part of UKRI, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest funder of economic, social, behavioural, and human data science. We fund world-leading research, data and postgraduate training to understand people and the world around us.

ESRC grants provide financial support for projects across two primary funding approaches:

- applicant-led funding opportunities, which allow applicants to submit funding applications on any theme or focus area within our social science remit – this includes our Research Grants, New Investigator, and Secondary Data Analysis opportunities

- targeted strategic funding opportunities, which invite applications on specific strategic themes or focus areas within the social sciences

Find out more about the [types of funding offered by ESRC](#).

[Search open and upcoming ESRC funding opportunities](#).

## UKRI terms and conditions for research grants

Successful awards will be subject to the [UKRI research grant terms and conditions](#). The ESRC research funding guide is provided as an additional resource to the UKRI terms and conditions. Please refer to both resources when addressing ESRC research funding concerns.

## Purpose of this guide

UKRI sets a broad policy framework for the funding of research grants, but all councils, including ESRC, have specific guidance based on the different types of research funding that is offered to their research community.

The purpose of this guide is to outline the policies and procedures which should be followed when applying to ESRC research funding opportunities in the UKRI Funding Service ('the Funding Service'). Where possible, the guide will direct you towards policies harmonised across UKRI.

This guide does not outline how to use the Funding Service, or complete applications in the system, but instead specifies the policies which should be considered when preparing an application. Detail on how to complete your application can be found in the Funding Service.

This guide does not cover postgraduate training which can instead be found in the [ESRC postgraduate funding guide](#).

ESRC reserves the right to amend these policies at any time and without prior notice. A list of the most recent changes to this guide can be found at the top of this page.

## Contacts for general enquiries

For general enquiries regarding the policies and procedures outlined in this guide, contact ESRC:

### Email

[esrcenquiries@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:esrcenquiries@esrc.ukri.org)

## Funding opportunity queries

If your query concerns a specific funding opportunity, please contact the Funding Service Helpdesk.

## Email

[support@funding-service.ukri.org](mailto:support@funding-service.ukri.org)

## Telephone

01793 547490

# 2. ESRC remit

## Areas we fund

ESRC funds research across a broad range of disciplines within the social sciences.

Find out more about [social science, the core disciplines we support, and common methodological approaches](#).

## Interdisciplinary proposals

Funding applications to ESRC can draw from the wider sciences, but the social sciences must represent more than 50% of the research focus and effort. We recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary, both within the social sciences and between social science and other research areas. Interdisciplinary proposals are therefore welcome.

If your application is interdisciplinary, and extends beyond the remit of one research council, you should apply to the council with the majority remit interest (lead council). Under the Cross-Council Remit Agreement (CCRA), the lead council will consult other relevant councils to agree levels of remit interest and acquire expert review recommendations. The CCRA only applies to applicant-led opportunities. Applications made to our targeted funding opportunities may be rejected without referral to an alternative council if they are considered not within ESRC's remit. Applications to targeted funding opportunities will be rejected if the project focus is outside the opportunity remit.

For further detail on interdisciplinary applications, and the CCRA process, refer to [UKRI's guidance on research which spans different disciplines](#). Opportunity-specific remit eligibility requirements will be clearly detailed in the UKRI Funding Finder.

Applications should not be submitted to more than one council at the same time. If we judge that a supporting council would be more appropriate as the lead, you will need to resubmit your application to the relevant council before

the next funding closing date. In this instance we will reject your initial application and contact you with the next steps.

## Remit queries

If you are unsure whether your application falls within ESRC's remit, you can complete a Remit Query Form before you submit. Our Remit Team will then advise on whether your proposal meets ESRC's remit requirements, or whether it would be more appropriate for a different lead council. For guidance on submitting a remit query, [visit the ESRC website](#).

## 3. Eligibility

There are different eligibility criteria for each of UKRI's funding opportunities.

Eligibility is normally based on:

- your suitability to lead or work on a research project
- the research organisation where the work is intended to take place
- the research council you are applying to

Your organisation could be eligible for some levels of funding, but not others. For example, it might not be eligible to get a grant directly from UKRI, but could take part in a funded project as a collaborator.

### Organisational eligibility

To apply as a project lead or project co-lead, you must be employed by an eligible organisation, or will be during your project. For full details of organisational eligibility see [eligibility as an organisation](#).

Research organisations are particularly requested to ensure that:

- the training and welfare needs of all staff are identified and recorded, and that an annual staff training plan and welfare support exists to address these needs
- advice is available on future career opportunities, both inside and outside academia, with guidance on the appropriate options
- bridging opportunities and continuity opportunities are discussed with staff, and that they are involved in the future planning research where this is applicable
- promotion opportunities are available where the capacity for such work is demonstrated
- permanent or rolling contract appointments are available to such staff, especially where they have proven track records in research in excess of six years

Research organisations in receipt of ESRC grants must make provision for research careers which is at least equivalent to the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) and the requirement for researchers to have a minimum of 10 days' professional development, pro rata, per year. Research organisations must also support the professional development of technicians employed on the grant in line with the [Technician Commitment](#).

## **Project lead and project co-lead eligibility**

UKRI is introducing new role types for opportunities being run on the new Funding Service. For full details see [roles in funding applications](#).

### **Project co-leads (international)**

Individuals from international research organisations outside of the UK are eligible to apply as a 'project co-lead (international)' to most ESRC opportunities. Where this is not permitted it will be clearly indicated in the opportunity specification.

Project co-leads (international) are only permitted to apply for this role on an application led by an applicant from an eligible UK research organisation. Applicants based at non-UK organisations cannot apply as a project lead themselves.

Any academic researcher from an established international research organisation which has the capacity and capability to conduct the specified work will be eligible for the role of project co-lead (international).

The combined costs of international project co-leads from non-OECD DAC list countries, plus applicants based in research organisations in India and China, and any project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations on an application cannot be more than 30% of the total FEC.

In the interests of supporting equitable partnerships with academics based in low or middle income countries, the 30% funding cap set on costs related to international project co-leads does not apply to any PcL(I) based in a country on the [OECD DAC list](#) (excepting India and China). PcL(I)s from a country on the OECD DAC list (excepting India and China) are also eligible to claim overheads support where it will assist in developing research capacity. Overheads will be paid at 20% of the international research organisation's directly incurred staff salary costs.

For further detail on eligibility for international project co-leads, including eligible costs, see [UKRI Project Co-Lead \(international\) Policy](#) and [ESRC Project Co-Lead \(international\) policy guidance](#).

### **Project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations**

Individuals from UK-based business, third sector or government organisations are eligible to apply as project co-leads to most ESRC opportunities. Where this is not permitted it will be clearly indicated in the opportunity specification.

Non-academics are only permitted to apply as a project co-lead on an application led by an applicant from an eligible research organisation and cannot apply as a project lead themselves.

To apply in this role, your organisation must be based within the UK. International non-academic organisations which are based outside the UK are not eligible.

Project co-leads from UK business, third sector and government organisations can only claim certain costs depending on their organisation type. You should carefully check each organisation type's eligible costs to make sure that only allowable costs are requested. You should note that project co-leads from business organisations cannot claim estates or indirect costs when applying to ESRC opportunities.

The combined costs for project co-leads (international) not on the [OECD DAC list](#) (plus any based in organisations in India and China), and project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations, on an application cannot be more than 30% of the total FEC.

Applications which include project co-leads from the business sector or from third sector organisations must ensure that the involvement of these organisations comply with the UK [Subsidy Control Act 2022](#). It is the responsibility of the research organisation to ensure their use of the grant complies with relevant legislation and any breach of the UK Subsidy Control Regime (or EU State Aid law if applicable) may require UKRI to recover some or all grant funding.

Further detail on eligibility for project co-leads from UK business, third sector and government organisations, including eligible costs associated with each organisation type, can be found in ESRC's [policy on the inclusion of project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations](#).

## **Associated studentships**

Associated studentships (previously called grant- or project-linked studentships) are designed to add value to the proposed research outlined in the grant application, while providing a clear opportunity for a distinct and independent course of enquiry for the student. Through being embedded within a high-quality research team, they should offer the student an opportunity to develop their substantive research skills, alongside broader professional development.

Associated studentships are only permitted on some targeted funding opportunities and cannot be claimed on applicant-led grants. The specific

guidance for an opportunity will confirm whether associated studentships can be supported or not.

You must check the opportunity specification (on the specific funding opportunity they are interested in) to see whether associated studentships are permitted before completing your application.

Associated studentships are subject to the standard rules for ESRC studentships and should be calculated on the same notional cost basis. You must refer to the [postgraduate funding guide](#) for the full details of eligibility and the requirements when completing your application.

Where permitted, up to three studentships can be applied for on any single application. The studentships must be embedded within an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) or Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT).

The costs associated with the studentship(s) must be costed as part of the overall value of the application. No additional costs, for example travel and subsistence, conference attendance or items of equipment should be costed into the application. Where they are, these costs will be removed from the final award.

Further information on the terms and conditions of ESRC studentships can be found within the [postgraduate funding guide](#). Guidance on how to complete an application with an associated studentship will be available in the Funding Service where applicable.

## **Project partners, subcontractors and consultants**

Third-party individuals or organisations can be included in your application as either 'project partners', 'subcontractors' or 'consultants'.

An organisation or individual may act as both a project partner and subcontractor on a project ('dual role'), however, this must be justified in your application and will be subject to expert review. A dual role may be required, for example, when an organisation or individual is contributing to the project in kind but is selected to deliver other work to the project involving substantial costs to be covered via a subcontract.

Organisations or individuals that are applicants on a project, or UKRI Head Office staff acting in their capacity as a UKRI employee, are not eligible to be project partners.

Where a research project is funded by or undertaken in collaboration with third parties, you should consider ESRC's policy on intellectual property and entitlement to project outputs (see 'Intellectual property rights and entitlement to project outputs section' below).

### **Project partners**

A project partner is a third-party organisation, or person, not employed on the grant who provides specific contributions in cash or kind to the project.

### **Can costs be claimed?**

Project partners should not normally claim funds (unless operating as a dual role). Necessary minor travel and subsistence costs may be claimed. These will be paid at 80% FEC under the 'directly incurred: travel' heading.

### **Subcontractors**

A subcontractor is a third-party organisation, or person, not employed on the grant who is subcontracted by the lead research organisation to deliver a specific piece of work.

### **Can costs be claimed?**

Subcontracted work will be subject to the procurement rules of the research organisation. All costs supporting delivery of the subcontract are eligible. These will be paid at 80% FEC under the 'directly incurred: other' heading.

### **Consultants**

A consultant is a third-party organisation, or person, who facilitates the research by providing specific contributions beyond the project team. Consultants cannot be named as applicants and should not make a significant scientific contribution to the project.

### **Can costs be claimed?**

Consultancy is expected to be subject to competitive purchasing requirements and should be costed at a per diem rate. This will be paid at 80% FEC under the 'directly incurred: other' heading.

## **UK subsidy control framework**

It is the responsibility of the research organisation to ensure that at all times any grant funding requested or awarded is compliant with the UK [Subsidy Control Act 2022](#) or [EU State Aid regulations](#) where these apply (for example where the grant funding will affect trade between Northern Ireland and the EU as envisaged by Article 10 of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland in the EU Withdrawal Agreement).

The research organisation must not make any subcontract or other agreement with a Third Party which would constitute a breach of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 or EU State Aid regulations where these apply. Any breach of the UK Subsidy Control Act (or EU State Aid law, where applicable) may require UKRI to recover some or all grant funding, together with interest.

See RGC 2.3.1 to 2.3.11 of the [UKRI terms and conditions for research grants](#).

## 4. Expectations for scientific practice

### Ethics, research integrity and data requirements

Applicants to ESRC funding opportunities are expected to comply with our [ESRC policies on best practice for researchers, data management and research ethics](#).

We also encourage applicants to visit the [UKRI good research resource hub](#). This brings together policies, standards and guidance to support researchers, innovators and organisations.

### Trusted research

If your application includes international applicants, project partners or collaborators, visit [trusted research and innovation](#) for more information on protection of those connected with the proposed activity.

### Innovation, interdisciplinarity and impact

We expect our portfolio to include a diverse range of research encompassing, amongst other things:

- work based on single disciplines
- research which combines disciplinary approaches
- research focused on advancing scientific theory
- research aimed principally at developing practical applications

As part of this portfolio, we encourage research applications which demonstrate one or more of innovation, interdisciplinarity and impact.

Find further [guidance on our expectations for innovation, interdisciplinarity and impact](#).

### Advisory or external stakeholder groups

When creating an advisory group or external stakeholder group for an ESRC awarded grant, it is expected that best practice will be followed. This includes ensuring that:

- membership has a mix of users and academics
- when selecting group members, due consideration is given to achieving an appropriate balance in terms of gender and geographical location. Where group members hold party political appointments, consideration is given to achieving a balance with regard to this declared political allegiance
- members are aware of who has funded the project

- members are clear in their role on the group, including the potential to act as ambassadors on behalf of the group and why this may apply
- the group is an independent body which will provide impartial and informed advice
- members state any conflict of interests and political affiliations before joining the group, and this should be taken into account in the development of the agenda for all meetings
- where appropriate, ESRC may recommend individuals working within ESRC's portfolio of related research to sit on the group to enable information sharing across investments

## Public engagement

Social science research plays an important role in our society. We believe that by raising public awareness of the social sciences, and encouraging their involvement in both social and science-related research, this will translate into real benefits for society and individuals.

Public engagement involves activities that bring researchers and the public together. It is more than just meeting an audience and telling them about your research. Effective public engagement is about two-way communication, with the researchers listening to and learning from participants.

ESRC supports public engagement in a number of ways including:

- discrete funding to support different engagement activities
- enabling grant holders to include costings in their grant to undertake any impact activity

Find out more about the [opportunities we provide in public engagement](#).

ESRC, as part of the [UKRI Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research](#), believes that engaging the public with research ensures that the work of researchers, departments and universities is relevant to society, helps empower people and communities, and can enable research impacts and exploitation of research results.

The Concordat's key principles are that:

- UK research organisations have a strategic commitment to public engagement
- researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement with public engagement activities
- researchers are enabled to participate in public engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities
- the signatories and supporters of this Concordat will undertake regular reviews of their and the wider research sector's progress in fostering public

engagement across the UK

Further information about how, why, and the benefits of undertaking public engagement are in our [impact toolkit for the social sciences](#).

ESRC is 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 and 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 in which academic research can add value and offer insights to key issues of concern for policy and practice.

To be most effective, 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 the project.

ESRC builds partnerships and works collaboratively in a range of diverse ways. Examples of our collaborative activity include:

- developing strategic partnerships with organisations to ensure we maximise the impact of our activities
- working with partner organisations to develop and fund major research and capacity building initiatives
- supporting initiatives to foster direct collaboration between social scientists and other individuals and organisations

For further information, see [how ESRC supports collaboration](#).

## Exploitation of findings and results

We strongly encourage the exploitation of the results of research. If results of industrial or commercial value emerge from projects, grant holders are required to make suitable arrangements for exploitation and take up by industry. ESRC make no claim to the intellectual property rights arising from research that we support.

The research organisation must ensure that all those associated with the research, whether staff, students, fellows or visitors, are aware of and accept these exploitation requirements.

## Exploitation procedures

To ensure maximum exploitation ESRC requires that the [UKRI terms and conditions for research grants](#) covering exploitation and impact are followed at all times.

It is particularly important that the grant-holding research organisation has a central point for advice on potential exploitation, and that there is early consultation during the grant period between the project co-lead and this central advisor on how to maximise the application and exploitation of any practical outcomes.

Research organisations should also ensure that adequate procedures and resources are in place to maximise the exploitation of any research. These might include support for:

- networks, conferences, roundtables and other engagement activities which ensure regular contact between researchers and those who will have an interest in practical application of the research
- databases and information services including regularly updated web pages, which give easy access to those outside the research organisation to work with a broader application
- rewards in terms of salary and promotion opportunities for staff successfully promoting and engaging the users of research in their work
- the development and maintenance of databases, computer models and computer software resulting from research projects, which may have wider application
- advice on patenting and licenses which may be important in some areas
- publication in professional journals, magazines and the general media which may increase the outreach of the research

## **Intellectual property rights and entitlement to project outputs**

The ownership of the intellectual property arising from a research project should be clear from the outset. ESRC will assume that this will rest with the research organisation receiving the grant, unless stated otherwise and set out in the offer.

Entitlement to the outputs of a project or intellectual property will be determined between the parties involved, however any access to project outputs or intellectual property must be in line with any relevant Subsidy Control regulation. Any entitlements should be set out in a formal collaboration agreement, as per RGC 12.1 in the [UKRI terms and conditions for research grants](#).

Where research is funded by or undertaken in collaboration with others, the research organisation is responsible for putting appropriate formal agreements in place covering the contributions and rights of the various organisations and individuals involved. Such agreements must be in place before the research begins.

Research organisations must ensure that the terms of collaboration agreements do not conflict with UKRI's terms and conditions. The [Lambert toolkit](#) for collaborative research can offer a good starting point for such agreements.

The grant holder must ensure that ESRC has the right to make use of all necessary intellectual property rights (IPR) free of charge, to make available for world-wide access, display, downloading, storage, archiving, linking and use on the UKRI Gateway to Research or the UKRI website:

- any content arising from the grant
- any websites or online media the grant holder may establish or use from time to time to disseminate content via the internet

Such use will be permitted on terms stipulated by ESRC from time-to-time which ESRC will ensure are protective of grant holder/research organisation IPR as ESRC shall reasonably determine, consistent always with allowing access to the content and linking to any websites via the UKRI Gateway to Research or the UKRI website.

## **Royalties and income**

ESRC reserves the right to reclaim up to one third of the total income, up to the value of its original grant.

When income is generated ESRC should be alerted to open discussion to agree an income plan; this will be agreed annually. During the lifetime of the grant, ESRC should be alerted directly via the case officer. Following the grant period, ESRC should be alerted via Researchfish.

In any event, the research organisation's regulations on the internal sharing of royalty income, as set out in its Statutes, shall take precedence.

## **Computer software**

Computer software, firmware and related documentation are governed by the general conditions outlined above. However, ESRC requires grant holders to take particular care to protect the value of any computer software, firmware and related documentation resulting from its grants by:

- confining public statements about the software or firmware merely to what it does without revealing details of the software or firmware itself
- ensuring that copies are not supplied to third parties except to individuals who have undertaken to keep them confidential and not to use them for commercial purposes

## **Open Source Software (OSS)**

Publicly funded R&D projects which aim to produce software outputs must specify a proposed software exploitation route at the start of the project. At the completion of a project, the software shall be exploited either commercially or within an academic community or as OSS.

Full details of the government policy on OSS can be found on the [Open Source Initiative website](#).

## 5. Costs

### Principles of full economic cost

All research grant applications and fellowship applications must be costed on the basis of 'full economic cost' (FEC). If a grant is awarded, we will fund 80% of the FEC. The applying organisations must then agree to find the balance of the project's FEC from other resources.

The FEC of your application must fall within the minimum and maximum award range of the opportunity you are applying for. Applications with a FEC above or below the maximum award range will be rejected before assessment.

Universities and other higher education organisations must use the [Transparent Approach to Costing \(TRAC\)](#) methodology to calculate the cost of the project's activities. This methodology has been validated by UKRI and is subject to ongoing review.

Other research organisations, research institutes and public sector research establishments can use dispensation rates or can calculate their own rates for validation by [UKRI Funding Assurance](#).

Research organisations must ensure that expenditure on subcontracts at home and abroad are subject to robust controls to ensure value for money and propriety. All costs should be fully vouched and maintained for possible inspection and checks by UKRI.

See also the [UKRI terms and conditions for research grants](#).

### Cost justification

In your application, you will need to justify the resources you anticipate needing for your proposed work. Where you do not provide adequate justification for a resource, we may deduct it from any funding awarded.

Details of costs and resources which require justification can be found in the 'Resources and cost justification' section of your application in the Funding Service.

### Summary fund headings

Costs are divided into four summary fund headings:

- directly allocated costs
- directly incurred costs

- indirect costs
- exceptions

Most of these summary fund headings have several subheadings which are outlined below. Further explanation of the costs which can be requested under each subheading is explained in the following sections.

You only need to provide a single total cost figure for most subheadings in your application, except for staff costs where individual costs are required for staff. Although you do not need to specify individual costs, it is important that all costs are calculated robustly as we may request further detail if your application is successful. You will also need to provide justification for individual resources requested in your application.

## **Directly allocated costs**

Directly allocated costs are resources used by a project that are shared by other activities. They are charged to projects on the basis of estimates rather than actual costs and do not represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis.

Directly allocated costs are funded at 80% FEC and include the following subheadings:

- staff
- estates
- other

### **Directly allocated: staff**

If an applicant's time is being charged to the grant based on estimates, this should be included as a directly allocated cost. If their time is instead actual, auditable, and verifiable they should instead be included as a directly incurred staff cost.

The applicant's proposed time commitment for the project, but not their salary itself, must be justified.

The maximum amount of time that one applicant can request for funding, across all UKRI projects, is 1,650 hours a year, equivalent to 37.5 hours a week, 44 weeks a year. It is the responsibility of the research organisation to have a process in place which monitors the time claimed by any applicant to ensure that no more than 100% of full time equivalent (FTE) is claimed as salary for any individual across all grants funded by UKRI.

Salary increments over the period of the project should be taken into account, but only known future pay awards should be included. If it is known that individuals will be promoted during the lifetime of a grant then provision for this may be made in the application.

Project leads and project co-leads who are not paid a salary by the research organisation, for example, emeritus or honorary staff, and whose time is not fully funded on other UKRI grants, should include their hours on the project, but request zero salary costs.

If a project lead or project co-lead is retired, the expectation is that their involvement in the project will be covered by a contract with the research organisation. If there are costs associated with their time, these should be regarded as a directly incurred cost.

## **Retired academics**

Salaries for retired academics who have pensions from schemes other than the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) can be funded in full. Salaries for retired academics who receive USS pensions can be funded in full provided they are working on a part-time contract where the annualised pay plus pension does not exceed the full-time rate for the job.

Retired academics in receipt of USS pensions whose actual pay rate is being abated by their employer because the annualised pay for the hours they work plus their pension exceed the normal salary for the job, are only eligible for funding on the adjusted (for example, reduced) pay scale on which they are engaged.

## **Directly allocated: estates**

Estates costs may include building and premises costs, basic services and utilities, and any clerical staff and equipment maintenance or operational costs that have not been included under other cost headings. These costs will be calculated by your research organisation and a single figure is required for your application.

Visit [roles in funding applications](#) to find out which project team roles attract estates costs in addition to salary costs. You should note that under ESRC's [policy on the inclusion of project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations](#), project co-leads from business organisations cannot claim estates costs when applying to ESRC opportunities.

Estates costs exclude any period where a staff member will be working away from the research organisation on secondment for over six months. No reduction should be made for absences shorter than six months.

It is the responsibility of the research organisation to monitor the time claimed by any staff member to ensure that no more than 100% of FTE is claimed as estates costs for any individual across all applications funded by UKRI.

Information about the calculation of, or justification of, estates costs is not required. We will not question the estates costs requested, however the full cost of the proposed research (including these costs) will be taken into account in any assessment of its value for money.

If your application is successful, and the level of staff time to be awarded is different to the original application, your organisation will be required to recalculate your estates costs within ten working days, using the original costing basis. If your organisation is unable to recalculate the costs on this timescale, we will adjust these in proportion to the change in staff costs.

### **Directly allocated: other**

These include the costs of shared resources, such as pooled staff, infrastructure technicians, and equipment. You will need to justify the level of pooled staff effort and shared facilities requested and you should indicate the basis on which these have been calculated, however, justification for these costs is not required.

### **Directly incurred costs**

Directly incurred costs are explicitly identifiable as arising from the conduct of a project, are charged as the cash value actually spent and are supported by an auditable record.

Directly incurred costs are funded at 80% FEC and include the following subheadings:

- staff
- equipment
- travel
- other

### **Directly incurred: staff**

Staff costs which are directly incurred by the project, including research and innovation associates, should be included under this subheading. UKRI will pay 80% of staff salary costs which includes national insurance, superannuation and the health and social care levy. Casual staff employed by a research organisation must be entered under the subheading, 'directly incurred (DI) other' and not 'DI staff'.

Timesheets must be completed for all directly incurred or exception staff who are contracted to work on two or more UKRI projects. Timesheets must be approved no later than two months after period end. Staff costs for these individuals must reflect the actual, rather than budgeted, hours worked on each UKRI project. When a person is contracted to work 100% of their time on a single project (whether is it full or part-time) timesheets are not necessary.

If a project contains public sector research establishment (PSRE) staff, then the salary they receive from their organisation, or the salary cost that the organisation claimed by other means, cannot be claimed unless that salaried post has been backfilled. This also includes any contribution made to cover indirect and estates costs. See RGC 2.3.2 of the [UKRI terms and conditions](#)

[for research grants](#) and guidance regarding costings information and staff time costs.

## **Directly incurred: equipment**

Applications may include costs for items of equipment where appropriate. Items of equipment with a value less than £25,000 should be included under 'Directly Incurred Other'.

Single items of equipment costing over £25,000 should be included under the Equipment heading. Justification is required for equipment costing in excess of £25,000 and must be included in your application. The justification should include evidence of an evaluation of the use of existing relevant capital assets.

Project co-leads based in countries on the OECD DAC-list (except India and China) can claim for equipment exceeding £25,000 in value (funded at 100% FEC) where it is necessary for the delivery of the research programme. Further information or justification may be required if the application is successful.

UKRI will fund all items of equipment at 80% of their full economic cost (80% FEC).

Exceptions (funded at 100% FEC) are restricted to the following:

- specific equipment or infrastructure opportunities
- international partner costs (OECD DAC list countries only)
- instrument development awards

The funding opportunity will indicate where any equipment costs are eligible to be funded at 100% FEC.

## **Directly incurred: travel**

Where required, applicants may request travel and subsistence costs for staff assigned to and funded by the project. You must first check with your research organisation to ensure that such travel is permissible, and not against the advice of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

Subsistence costs should reflect the normal rates applied by your research organisation. All travel claims should evidence value for money alongside environmental impact, welfare and business need. Consequently, these should only include travel by standard class by train and economy class by air. Exceptions to this may be permitted where there is a justifiable health and wellbeing need and approved by the research organisation prior to purchase and evidence of this should be available.

The environmental impact across all activities should be considered. The use of low-carbon approaches to collaboration in place of travel are encouraged. Consideration of the environmental impact of travel should be in line with your

organisation's policy. Any exception should be approved within the terms of that policy.

Carbon offsetting costs arising from project-related travel cannot be requested.

## **Directly incurred: other**

Any directly incurred costs not captured in the subheadings above should be requested under this subheading.

Examples of other directly incurred costs which can be included in your application include:

- casual staff employed by a research organisation
- minor items of equipment, including basic computer equipment for directly incurred staff, for example, laptops and tablets, or higher-specification computer equipment for specific grant related activities
- surveys completed using your research organisation's own in-house resources.
- vehicle hire
- recruitment and advertising costs
- consultancy fees
- predicted costs for the project's planned communication, knowledge exchange, public engagement, or impact activities
- predicted costs for conference attendance. We encourage early career researcher conference attendance where it can be demonstrated as a key development opportunity
- publication costs for monographs, books, critical editions, volumes, catalogues or other forms of non-peer reviewed material published before 1 January 2024. The [UKRI open access policy](#) provides full details of the costs which come under the scope of this policy
- visa fees, including immigration health surcharge and certificates of sponsor costs, for directly incurred staff employed on the project for 50% or more
- printing or postage costs specific to the project and its dissemination plans

This list is not exhaustive as under full economic cost most resources are eligible to be claimed as part of your application provided they are sufficiently justified. However, there are specific costs which are not permitted and should not be requested (see 'costs not permitted' section).

Applications requesting items that would ordinarily be found in a department, for example non-specialist computers, should justify why they are required for the project and why they cannot be provided from your research organisation's own resources, including funding from indirect costs.

## **Flexible funding pots**

Certain opportunities, such as network grants or research hubs, may allow you to include flexible funding pots for the purpose of subcontracting further small research projects. Flexible funding pots are not eligible for all opportunities and where these are allowed it will be clearly outlined in the opportunity-specific guidance on the funding finder. Where these are allowed, they must be costed at 80% FEC under the 'Directly Incurred: Other' subheading. Funding awarded for flexible funding pots will be ring-fenced and funding allocated to the flexible pot cannot be vired for any other use.

## Indirect costs

Indirect costs are non-specific costs charged across all projects, based on estimates, which are not otherwise included as directly allocated costs.

Indirect costs are funded at 80% FEC.

Indirect costs should include the costs of administration, such as personnel, finance, library and some departmental services. Like estates costs, indirect costs will be calculated by your research organisation and a single figure is required for your application.

Visit [roles in funding applications](#) to find out which project team roles attract indirect costs in addition to salary costs. You should note that under ESRC's [policy on the inclusion of project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations](#), project co-leads from business organisations cannot claim indirect costs when applying to ESRC opportunities.

It is the responsibility of the research organisation to monitor the time claimed by any staff member to ensure that no more than 100% of FTE is claimed as indirect costs for any individual across all applications funded by UKRI.

Information about the calculation of, or justification of, indirect costs is not required. We will not question the indirect costs requested, however the full cost of the proposed research, including these costs, will be taken into account in any assessment of its value for money.

If your application is successful, and the level of staff time to be awarded is different to the original application, your organisation will be required to recalculate your Indirect costs within ten working days, using the original costing basis. If your organisation is unable to recalculate the costs on this timescale, we will adjust these in proportion to the change in staff costs.

## Exceptions

Exceptions are directly incurred costs that are funded at 100% of FEC, subject to actual expenditure incurred, or items that are outside FEC.

Only certain items specified in the sections below should be included as exceptions under the following subheadings:

- staff
- travel
- other

## **Exceptions: Staff, travel and other**

Costs associated with project co-leads (international) and project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations should be funded as exceptions. This can include their staff costs and travel, as well as any other costs directly incurred by the project (see further examples in the ‘directly incurred’ section above).

The combined costs for project co-leads (international) not on the [OECD DAC list](#) (plus any based in organisations in India and China), and project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations, on an application cannot be more than 30% of the total FEC.

Additionally, the specific costs requested for each individual project co-lead (international) and project co-lead from UK business, third sector or government organisations must be eligible according to their respective policies. For further detail, see the section on ‘project co-leads’.

In certain circumstances, your application may include some international costs to cover fieldwork or other project related activities (the opportunity funding finder text will state if such costs are permissible). These costs will only be funded as exceptions where they are associated with a project co-lead (international) or relate to social surveys, as indicated in the ‘Exceptions: Equipment’ section. Any other international costs will be funded at 80% FEC.

## **Subcontracted social surveys**

Any social surveys which are sub-contracted to a third party (such as a specialist survey company) will be funded as exceptions, regardless of value, and should be included under the equipment subheading.

Surveys completed using the in-house resources of a UK research organisation are not eligible as exceptions and should instead be included under the directly incurred heading. Project co-leads (international) or project co-leads from third sector, business or government organisations may claim in-house survey costs as exceptions under the subheading, ‘other’.

## **Competitive purchasing principles for capital items**

Costs for capital items should be based on the best estimates available, or preferably on actual quotes for the work. You should explain the basis for the estimates in your application, using benchmarking figures where possible. Quotations from suppliers are not required on submission but may be requested later if your application is successful.

Major costs for capital items should be estimated as robustly as possible. This also applies to subcontracted social surveys which are subject to normal competitive purchasing principles. Surveys costing more than £10,000 should be subject to external competition to ensure best value for money.

If capital items, including surveys, are expected to exceed £25,000 (£20,830 exclusive of VAT), the research organisation's full tendering procedures must be followed. Professionally qualified procurement staff at your research organisation must be consulted and must approve the order before it is placed with the supplier.

## Costs not permitted

Under FEC, most resources are eligible to be claimed as part of your application provided they are sufficiently justified.

However, the costs listed below are not permitted and should not be included in your application. If your application includes these costs, and is successful, they will be cut from the final grant:

- Article Processing Charges (APCs) and other publication charges relating to peer-reviewed research articles and conference papers
- publication charges for monographs, book chapters and edited collections published on or after 1 January 2024. The [UKRI open access policy](#) provides full details of the costs which come under the scope of this policy
- visa fees for staff working less than 50% of their time on the project
- visa fees for family members
- general printing or postage costs which are not specific to the project and its dissemination plans
- basic computing equipment for directly allocated staff already employed by the organisation (unless justified, see 'cost justification' section)
- general miscellaneous expenditure or contingency costs
- separate apprentice levy costs or health and social care levy costs: these should instead be included within staff salary costs (directly incurred or directly allocated as appropriate)
- carbon offsetting costs arising from project-related travel
- major costs for project partners beyond minor travel and subsistence requests
- costs related to merit pay and bonus award schemes offered by a research organisation for their employees
- costs related to alcohol are not permitted and should not be sought as an eligible cost
- costs which are not sufficiently justified

Applications which include substantive ineligible costs will be rejected.

## Cash limits

In accordance with TRAC, the costs requested in your application should be based on prices at the time of submission. ESRC will award grants on a cash limited basis.

The amount awarded will allow for inflation calculated using standard indexation rates. The total payments made against a grant will not exceed the original maximum value awarded, apart from additions for maternity or sick leave associated with staff under the directly incurred heading. UKRI bear no financial responsibility for the cost of sick leave or maternity pay for project leads.

## Vouching and transaction listings

You may be required to provide supplementary information to support final and interim expenditure statements on your grant:

- directly incurred costs: transaction listings are required if the amount claimed over the period of the grant is over £10,000 – copy vouchers are required for individual items over £20,000
- equipment: transaction listings are required if the amount claimed over the period of the grant is over £10,000 – copy vouchers are required for individual items over £20,000

## Grant transfers

If your grant is transferred from one research organisation to another, it will not be re-costed to account for different Indirect costs and estates costs rates used at the new research organisation. The directly allocated and indirect costs which are awarded to the new research organisation will be calculated based on the amount of time which has passed since the grant started.

## 6. How to apply

Applications must be made using the Funding Service.

[Search open and upcoming ESRC funding opportunities.](#)

Applications should not be submitted to more than one opportunity or council at a time as this may lead to parallel processing. You should ensure that your application is submitted to the most appropriate council only. For further information please see the 'remit queries' section above.

Unsuccessful applications should not be resubmitted unless explicitly invited to do so.

For some targeted funding opportunities, we may request outline applications or expressions of interest in advance of full applications. If this applies, it will be clear in the published funding opportunity guidance and in the Funding Service.

If an opportunity has a specific closing deadline this will be clear in the published funding opportunity guidance and in the Funding Service. Deadlines are strictly enforced. Applications must be submitted on time and opportunities will not be reopened to allow for late applications. Applications cannot be changed once submitted and cannot be returned to amend any errors or omissions.

You must ensure that you have obtained the permission of any other person named on the application form (for example any project co-leads, staff members or project partners) for the provision of their personal information to UKRI and the processing of their data by UKRI for the purpose of assessing the application and management of any funding awarded.

You must not receive duplicate funding for the same, or similar, projects from more than one funding agency. We cannot prohibit submission of the same, or similar, applications to other funding agencies outside of UKRI, however you must advise ESRC if you receive a successful funding decision from another funding agency after any application is made. Where this applies your UKRI application will not be processed further.

Applications must comply with the rules of the opportunity being applied to. Applications which do not comply with these rules, including applications with a FEC above or below the opportunity's maximum award range, will be rejected before assessment.

## **SoECAT forms**

If your proposed research requires access to NHS or NIHR resources or support, you should consider before submission whether completion of a SoECAT form is required, with appropriate sign-off by a NIHR Regional Research Delivery Network AcoRD specialist. For further guidance, visit the [NIHR website](#).

ESRC does not require submission of SoECAT forms (unless specified in the funding opportunity criteria for targeted funding opportunities). Applicants can indicate if a SoECAT form has been completed by confirming this in the 'resources and cost justification' section of the application in the Funding Service.

## **7. Application assessment**

All applications to ESRC are assessed according to the [UKRI principles of assessment and decision making](#).

Most ESRC research funding decisions are based on external expert review, followed by consideration by an appointed commissioning or assessment panel. The exact assessment process will depend on the funding opportunity you are applying for and will be outlined in the published funding opportunity guidance. For example, certain opportunities may include an outline stage, applicant interviews, or may proceed straight to the panel stage. Most assessment processes will involve sifting stages to ensure only the most competitive applications are considered at panel.

You must not attempt to lobby or canvas ESRC panel members, or ESRC staff, in order to improperly influence the prospects of any current or future application. If this occurs, your application will be disqualified. Panel members are required to notify ESRC about any such lobbying or canvassing.

It is also not acceptable for applicants to approach reviewers or panel members who they think may have assessed their applications. If this does happen, we advise reviewers and panel members not to enter into any discussion regarding the application, including whether they have assessed it or not, and to inform ESRC immediately so that appropriate action can be taken.

UKRI will ensure that expert reviewers and panel members acting on their behalf in the assessment of applications for funding understand clearly the responsibilities placed on them to treat applications confidentially and to disclose conflicts of interest, either personal or institutional. See also [guidance for reviewers](#) and guidance and [ESRC Code of Practice](#).

## Assessment criteria

There are five areas of assessment which relate to the five core application questions used in the Funding Service:

- the vision of the project
- the approach to the project
- the capability of the applicant(s) and the project team to deliver the project
- the resources requested to do the project
- the ethical and responsible research and innovation considerations of the project

Some opportunities in the Funding Service may include additional questions and additional areas of assessment.

## Peer review

Most opportunities will initially assess applications by external expert review and most ESRC expert reviewers are selected from the [ESRC Peer Review College](#). All expert reviews are conducted against the opportunity assessment criteria.

## Applicant response

If your application receives sufficiently supportive reviewers' comments, you will have the opportunity to respond. This is primarily informed by the average expert reviewer score. The minimum threshold score for progressing to applicant response and panel is determined on an individual funding opportunity basis. You will have 14 calendar days to provide a response which can be used to clarify any issues raised by the reviewers. The response is not intended to provide an opportunity for you to change your application, or its costs. Your response will be considered at the panel stage alongside your application and expert reviewer comments.

Applications which do not receive sufficiently supportive expert reviewer comments (an average expert reviewer score below the minimum threshold) will not be considered by the panel and will be rejected at this stage. In this case, you will not be invited to respond to the expert review comments.

## Panel stage

If your application proceeds to the panel stage, it will be allocated to specific panel members for assessment (introducers). The introducers will consider the application in its entirety, including expert reviewer comments and the applicant response. If the introducers score your application sufficiently highly, the panel will collectively agree on a final score for your application. This final score forms the basis of the panel's funding recommendations to ESRC.

Further detail is available on [ESRC guidance for reviewers](#).

# 8. Funding decisions

## Unsuccessful applications

You will be notified if your application is unsuccessful. Applications may be rejected following expert review or following the panel stage. ESRC's resubmissions policy applies if your application is unsuccessful following either of these assessment stages.

## Resubmissions policy

Applications which are unsuccessful following assessment, including applications previously submitted to other UKRI councils, cannot be resubmitted to other funding opportunities unless explicitly invited to do so. Uninvited resubmissions will be rejected.

A small number of applications may be invited to resubmit following the recommendation of assessment panels or equivalent. If this applies, your invitation to resubmit will be clearly communicated when you receive your decision.

If you are not invited to resubmit, any future application must be sufficiently different from the original submission as to constitute a new application. Find further guidance on [ESRC resubmissions policy and what constitutes a new application](#).

Applications which are rejected before assessment are not prohibited from resubmitting to future funding opportunities.

## Successful applications

If your application is successful, you will be notified, and an offer sent to your research organisation's administrative authority. Successful applicants must not commit expenditure until the formal offer of grant is made and accepted and the period of the grant has commenced.

Applicants who do not wish to take up the grant offer should notify ESRC, via their administrative authority, as soon as possible.

If you have an existing grant which terminates during the processing of a new application, your formal grant offer will not be made until the 'key findings' section of Researchfish has been received and accepted.

## Start dates

Any planned start date entered in your application should be realistic, and accommodate the likely duration of the assessment process as outlined in the Funding finder text for the funding opportunity. ESRC may amend Grant start dates, and some funding opportunities may mandate a fixed start date.

If successful, the Official Start Date may be delayed by up to 6 months from the start date shown in the Grant Agreement, but the duration of the Grant will remain unchanged. The Grant may lapse if the Project is not started within 6 months of the start date in the Grant Agreement. Grants cannot start prior to the start date shown in the Grant Agreement.

ESRC reserves the right to impose a specific start date where necessary, which may not allow for the six months start date leeway. In exceptional circumstances, such as maternity leave, an extension to the six month start date deadline may be applied for and approved by ESRC.

As per RGC 5 of the [UKRI Standard Terms and Conditions](#) of Grant, the Grant must be accepted within 10 working days of the issue of the Grant Agreement. You must submit the Start Confirmation within 42 calendar days of the project starting.

## UKRI terms and conditions for research grants

Grants awarded by UKRI are made on the basis of a single set of core terms and conditions. See the latest version of the [UKRI terms and conditions](#). UKRI reserve the right to vary these terms and conditions. The ESRC research

funding guide is provided as an additional resource to the UKRI terms and conditions. Please refer to both resources when addressing ESRC research funding concerns.

ESRC may add additional conditions to the grant to reflect the circumstances and requirements of the council, or of the funding opportunity applied for.

Acceptance of a grant constitutes acceptance of both the core conditions and any additional conditions.

Grants which include a grant holder based in a UK research organisation may be funded under a co-funded opportunity where the grant is awarded and contracted by another funding agency or organisation. In such cases all grant holders are bound by the terms and conditions of the contract issued by that funding agency or organisation and UKRI terms and conditions will not apply.

## **Risk management**

Risk management is the responsibility of the grant holder and ESRC advise that grant holders produce a risk register and routinely monitor this. Grant holders should inform ESRC of any changes to key risks in relation to the delivery of outputs required under the funding agreement.

## **Funding responsibilities**

ESRC accepts no responsibility, financial or otherwise, for expenditure or liabilities arising out of the research it funds, other than that specifically covered by the conditions of the grant and which has been incurred during the period covered by it.

Any expenditure relating to activities, goods or services incurred before a grant is formally announced, or retrospective payments for such expenditure before an approved starting date of a grant, are the responsibility of the research organisation and are ineligible for ESRC funding.

Any expenditure in excess of the approved grant cash limit, or expenditure incurred after the end date of the grant, are also the responsibility of the research organisation, and ineligible for ESRC funding.

Expenditure properly incurred during the lifetime of a grant, but for which bills or invoices are unavoidable after the end date, can properly be charged to a grant. However, expenditure relating to activities, goods or services commissioned during the period but for delivery after the end date are not eligible and must be the responsibility of the research organisation.

ESRC accepts no responsibility for any redundancy, severance or compensation payments for which the research organisation may become liable as an employer.

In the event of any industrial action which involves staff funded on an ESRC grant the research organisation must reduce staff costs for days not worked due to strike action at the grant reconciliation stage, ensuring that they comply with UKRI reconciliation terms and conditions and the usual virement rules for any underspend when completing the Final Expenditure Statement (FES).

In exceptional circumstances ESRC will consider requests for grant extensions where it can be demonstrated that industrial action has resulted in significant delays to the research.

## Virements

Virement will only be permitted within and between 'directly incurred' and 'exception' costs. Grant holders are expected to provide details of virements on the FES. The ESRC reserves the right to seek full justification of any virements. Virements in or out of the equipment heading is not permissible as these funds are ring-fenced. In exceptional circumstances, a virement from Equipment to Directly Incurred cost may be permitted, subject to prior approval from ESRC.

Costs vired from 'exceptions' to 'directly incurred' heading will be vired at the research council contribution rate of 80% only. The remaining 20% must be repaid to ESRC at the final reconciliation stage. Where costs are vired from 'directly incurred' to the 'exceptions' heading the 80% FEC amount only may be vired, the total budget of the grant will not be increased to cover the research organisation 20% contribution.

Funds may only be transferred into studentship stipend or fees to supplement an existing studentship post on the grant. Transferring funds to create new studentship posts is not permitted without UKRI approval.

See also RGC 4.4 of the [UKRI terms and conditions for research grants](#).

## 9. Managing your award

Find out more about how to manage your award once an offer has been made. These pages include information on the following:

- [accepting your offer](#)
- [getting your funding](#)
- [meeting UKRI terms and conditions for funding](#)
- [requesting a change to your project](#)
- [reporting your project's outcomes](#)
- [publishing your research findings](#)
- [reporting your project's spending](#)

These web pages will be updated with specific guidance for the Funding Service as further functionality becomes available.

# Requesting a change to your project

This section includes information of [requesting a change to your project](#).

If there is an unexpected change in circumstances:

- grant extension
- grant suspension
- changing the grant project lead
- project lead transfer to a new organisation
- requesting additional funding
- extending due date
- delaying a start date

[Transferring money between types of cost](#).

[Transferring your research grant to another country \(Money Follows Researcher Scheme\)](#).

## Submitting datasets

Applicants who receive funding from ESRC must deposit all data from the project in the UK Data Service or a responsible data repository. A ReShare record must also be created to submit metadata relating to the grant. If you do meet these requirements, you will not be able to submit future funding applications to ESRC for consideration. Find out more about [submitting datasets](#).

## Evaluation

We undertake a rolling programme of reviews and impact assessment studies of our research and policies. The focus of this programme is informed by ESRC council and our advisory committees, with the outcome of these studies informing strategy, policy and delivery, as well as providing evidence as to the value and importance of social science.

We do not evaluate or review all the activities that we fund, instead we focus on strategic reviews and studies of funding schemes, priority areas and cross-cutting themes. Find out more about [ESRC's evaluation programme](#).

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<https://www.ukri.org/publications/esrc-research-funding-guide/esrc-research-funding-guide-for-the-ukri-funding-service>