

ESRC Peer Reviewer Academic Assessment guidance

This Peer Reviewer Assessment Criteria covers the following schemes (to be read in conjunction with the ESRC Je-S specific assessment helptext).

Schemes covered

Research Grants

These allow the ESRC to support the best ideas coming from the academic community. We welcome proposals on any topic within our remit and encourage applications which demonstrate one or more of innovation, interdisciplinarity and impact. Applications are assessed primarily on their scientific merit.

Centres and Large grants

Centres and Large grants are major investments in one or more areas of ESRC's remit. Specific calls may highlight one or more strategic priority areas for investment.

Research Resources

Research resources are the foundations upon which our researchers can undertake work of the highest quality and relevance. These resources include not only data, but also the expertise in research methods required to utilise this data, and the information technologies to improve access to the ESRC's world class information resources.

- **Resource Programmes** are a group of projects aimed at developing the tools and techniques which underpin high quality research.
- **Resource Centres** are major ESRC investments upon which are placed high expectations.

The specification for Programmes and Centres and Large Grants competitions can be found via the Funding Opportunities section of the ESRC website. You will have been sent a direct link to the page containing the specification and any specific reviewer guidance for this initiative. This will be shown in any 'Important Instructions' which can be found in the 'Reviewer Information' screen in Je-S.

Associated studentships

Some calls allow for the inclusion of associated studentships. Where they are permitted, associated studentships should be designed to add value to the proposed research outlined in the grant proposal, whilst providing a clear opportunity for a distinct and independent course of enquiry for the student. Up to three studentships can normally be applied for on any single grant proposal. The studentship must not be a displacement for the normal research support required on the grant. The main research grant project should still be viable without the studentship and should have distinct objectives that are not reliant upon the studentship.

Fellowships

A fellowship award is for a Programme of work rather than a single research project and aims to develop the career of the selected outstanding researcher. Fellowship awards are

made to named individuals rather than research teams based on their personal research potential or track record of excellence in research.

If you've been invited to review a fellowship application you will have been sent a direct link to the page containing the call specification and any specific reviewer guidance for this Initiative. This will be shown in any 'Important Instructions' which can be found in the 'Reviewer Information' screen in Je-S.

Research Seminars

Seminar groups are multi-institutional groups of academic researchers, postgraduate students and non-academic users who meet regularly to exchange information and ideas with the aim of advancing research within their fields. The maximum duration of an award is two years.

Research Initiatives and Programmes

Research Initiatives and Programmes are networks of related projects, together addressing one or more of ESRC's priority areas. They are typically five years in duration. Selection is based on a competition worked around a specification for the programme.

The Programme Specification can be found on the webpage for this Programme in the Funding Opportunities section of the ESRC website. You will have been sent a direct link to the page containing the Programme Specification and any specific reviewer guidance for this Initiative. This will be shown in any 'Important Instructions' which can be found in the 'Reviewer Information' screen in Je-S.

The applicant

You may wish to comment upon the applicant's ability to carry out the proposed programme of work.

New Investigator Grants

Applicants to this call are early career researchers and academics at the start of their careers, and your assessments should take this into consideration. You should judge New Investigator proposals on the level of knowledge and experience that is appropriate to someone at the start of their career and not judge the proposals against more ambitious research undertaken by more senior academics.

Case for Support

The body of the research proposal is known as the Case for Support. The Case for Support should be a self-contained description of the proposed work with relevant background and references and should not depend on additional information such as the inclusion of external links. Peer reviewers are advised to base their assessment on the information contained within the application, and are under no obligation to access such links (so they should not be used as a way to provide critical information).

Areas of assessment

You should indicate your judgement of each of the criteria (see below) by selecting one of the grades available. Please explain the reasons for your judgement in the Overall Assessment section.

Originality / potential contribution to knowledge

- Is the proposed research likely to make an original and significant contribution to theory, methods or knowledge? ESRC is keen to support ambitious and innovative work which is clearly specified.
- Is there similar or related work, not mentioned in the proposal, of which the applicant(s) should be aware? If so, please specify.

Design and methods (including data management)

- Does the proposal have clear conceptual and theoretical foundations? Where it is appropriate, ESRC encourages applicants to combine approaches from more than one discipline. However, ESRC is also committed to the support of excellent research within a single discipline.
- Are the research methods and framework for analysis suitable to the aims and objectives?
- Are they clearly defined, rigorous and feasible?
- Is the timescale and scheduling of the work appropriate and realistic?
- If the research seems potentially risky, are the risks justified by the scale of the ambition, and/or the innovativeness of the research, and/or its potential impact? Are there appropriate plans for mitigating the risks in carrying out the research?
- Have potential ethical issues been addressed?

Data Management Plan

The Data Management Plan is mandatory in all proposals planning to generate data. Please see separate guidance here.

- Is there evidence that secondary sources of data have been considered and evaluated?
- Have all obstacles to sharing data been considered? Have strategies been considered for dealing with these issues?
- Is the information on data to be produced adequate and realistic and according to the research and methodology proposed in the application?
- Is the data back-up procedure described fit for purpose?
- Have data management responsibilities been allocated to named individuals?

Research ethics

ESRC has adopted six key principles of ethical research which it expects to be addressed whenever applicable.

(If the application is successful and there are ethical issues, then appropriate approvals will be required, normally before funding commences.)

The six principles of ethical research can be found here:

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/our-core-principles/>

For full details see [ESRC's Framework for research ethics](#).

Referees are invited to comment on whether they feel the application shows sufficient awareness of, and as applicable, adequately addresses the above issues and any other ethical issues that might be raised by the proposed research.

Outputs, dissemination and impact

Please see the [additional guidance](#).

The general questions to consider are as follows:

- Is the planned output of the research appropriate?
- Have the applicants made adequate plans to disseminate the results of the research?
- Have appropriate arrangements been made (where relevant) for engaging potential users of the research at relevant stages of the project?
- Have the applicants identified the whole range of potential beneficiaries of the research and how they might be reached?

Value for money

In looking at value for money it would be helpful if you could focus on the following issues:

Overall value for money

Is the research proposed overall good value-for-money for the total cost involved? The key issue here is whether the core potential of the research, and the likely contribution to the advancement of knowledge, understanding and/or methodology which it will make, either narrowly within its particular focus, or more broadly across its particular discipline, the sciences more generally, or wider society, is likely to be sufficient to justify the inevitable costs involved.

Individual aspects of resourcing the proposal

Are the specific funding requests in the following areas essential and sufficient for the proper conduct and exploitation of the research proposed?

- The amount of time to be devoted to the project by the proposed principal and coinvestigators.
- The level of the proposed principal and co-investigators.
- The amount of time for research, technical and support staff proposed.
- The level of appointment for such staff.
- The equipment, consumables and other directly incurred costs such as travel and subsistence. Where equipment has been requested please comment explicitly on the viability of the arrangements described to access equipment needed for this project, and particularly on any university or third party contribution.
- Costs of collecting, establishing, providing or organising the necessary data and research materials.
- Resources devoted to maximising the scientific, societal and economic impacts of the proposed research.
- Access to institutional research facilities
- The overall length of time for the project

Please comment individually if you believe any of these might need to be curtailed or expanded.

Areas where you should not comment

The costs of particular resources are for resolution as to true economic cost between the research councils and other relevant bodies. You should **not** comment therefore upon:

- The level of estate costs in different institutions
- The level of indirect costs

- Charging rates of institutional or other research facilities which are not open market provisions
- Specific salary levels in individual institutions

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

ESRC is committed to support the recommendations and principles set out by the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; <https://sfdora.org/read/>). Peer reviewers should not use journal-based metrics, such as journal impact factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an investigator's contributions, or to make funding decisions.

For the purpose of research assessment, please consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets, software, inventions, patents, preprints, other commercial activities, etc.) in addition to research publications. You should consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

The content of a paper is more important than publication metrics, or the identity of the journal, in which it was published, especially for early-stage investigators. Therefore, you should not use journal impact factor (or any hierarchy of journals), conference rankings and metrics such as the H-index or i10-index when assessing UKRI grants.

Scheme-specific assessments

Research seminars

Reviewers should consider the following areas of the application:

- Are the aims and objectives of the Seminar Series, including the extent to which the ideas contained within the proposal, new/innovative?
- Are the planned outputs, potential impact and potential for contributions to publications appropriate?
- Are the plans and extent of user engagement appropriate?
- Is the Seminar Group likely to contribute to research capacity building, by including a mix of established and less established researchers within the participants?
- Is there a sufficient justification for ESRC funding, and has particular consideration been given to contributions from other sources. ('Established' groups should demonstrate dynamism, explain why the ESRC remains the most appropriate funding source, and demonstrate that they have sought and/or secured co-funding from other sources;)
- Is the format of the proposed Seminar Series appropriate to its aims and objectives?
- Are there areas of particular merit and/or areas requiring further attention?

Research Initiatives and Programmes

You should indicate your judgement of each of the criteria by selecting one of the grades available. Please explain the reasons for your judgement in the Overall Assessment section of the form.

Theoretical advancement

- Is the proposed research likely to make an original and significant contribution to theory, methods or knowledge? ESRC is keen to support ambitious and innovative work which is clearly specified.
- Is there similar or related work, not mentioned in the proposal, of which the applicant(s) should be aware? If so, please specify.

Methodological improvement

- Does the proposal have clear conceptual and theoretical foundations? Where it is appropriate, ESRC encourages applicants to combine approaches from more than one discipline. However, ESRC is also committed to the support of excellent research within a single discipline.
- Are the research methods and framework for analysis suitable to the aims and objectives?
- Are they clearly defined, rigorous and feasible?
- Is the timescale and scheduling of the work appropriate and realistic?
- If the research seems potentially risky, are the risks justified by the scale of the ambition, and/or the innovativeness of the research, and/or its potential impact? Are there appropriate plans for mitigating the risks in carrying out the research?
- Have potential ethical issues been addressed?

Practical significance

- Is the planned output of the research appropriate?
- Have the applicants made effective and appropriate plans for maximising the potential scientific, economic and societal impacts at all stages of the research?
- Have appropriate arrangements been made (where relevant) for engaging potential users of the research at relevant stages of the project?
- Have the applicants identified the whole range of potential beneficiaries of the research and how they might be reached?
- Does the proposal address issues that are central to the Programme specification?
- What contribution would the research make to the broader aims of the Programme for example in terms of encouraging multi-disciplinarity, promotion of methodological or theoretical development, establishment of international collaborative links, cross-fertilisation of ideas, exchange of data and/or impacts on policy or practice?

Research and Resource Programmes

Contribution to the Programme

You are invited to assess the potential contribution of this proposed research to the aims and objectives of the research programme, as detailed in the Programme Specification. The Programme Specification can be found on the webpage for this Programme in the Funding Opportunities section of the ESRC website. You will have been sent a direct link to this page in any 'Important Instructions' which can be found in the 'Reviewer Information' screen in Je-S.

When assessing the potential contribution of the proposal to the Programme please use the following scale:

- **Wholly Relevant:** Proposals which fall entirely within the priority research areas identified in the research specification and are likely to make a significant contribution to the overall aims and development of the Programme.
- **Marginally/Partially Relevant:** Proposals which are considered to be of only marginal relevance to the specified priority research areas or where only some elements of the proposal fall within the scope of the Programme. Such proposals are likely to make some contribution to the Programme but are unlikely to have a significant impact on its development.
- **Irrelevant:** Proposals which fall largely outside the scope of the Programme and are unlikely to contribute to its development.