ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships
Call specification

Summary

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is pleased to announce the latest call for applications to its Postdoctoral Fellowship (PDF) scheme, aimed at providing a career development opportunity for those in the immediately postdoctoral stage of their career, to provide the opportunity to consolidate their PhD through developing publications, their networks, and their research and professional skills.

The PDF call forms part of ESRC's strategy to support early career researchers and will be delivered through our national network of Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) which encompasses 89 research organisations across the UK.

The fellows must be aligned to an accredited DTP subject area. Through being embedded within a high-quality environment for research and training, the fellows will have the opportunity to undertake a programme of activities supporting their continued development for careers both within and outside of academia.

DTPs will have their own procedures in place to peer review the proposals and make funding decisions on behalf of ESRC. **Where this includes an Expression of Interest stage, potential applicants must abide by the deadlines specified by the DTP to which they intend applying.**

Full proposals should be submitted to the relevant DTP by 23.59 on **23 March 2027**.

Fellowships are intended to start on 1 October 2027 and full-time fellowships must finish by 30 June 2028[1].

Call details

The objective of this call is to provide support to those who are in the immediately postdoctoral stage of their career, to support them in consolidating their PhD, and preparing them for the next stage of their research careers. For the majority this is likely to be a research career in academia; however, those with a clearly articulated programme of activities to support their transition to a research career outside of academia (eg a researcher in public, private, or civil society organisations) will also be considered.

Fellows' actual programmes or proposed programme of activities should reflect their prior knowledge and experience and be designed to support their longer term research career

[1] Exceptions will only be considered for part-time awards, parental or sick leave.

aspirations. Some suggested activities which could be included in the programme are provided below but it is important to note that fellows are **not** expected to complete all activities on the list.

Applicants should tailor their chosen activities to the aims of the fellowship and ensure they are relevant to their desired career intentions. Applicants **must** demonstrate a **realistic and practicable** programme of work in their proposal; proposals considered to be unrealistic or overambitious, particularly where too many activities are being proposed within the timeframe, are unlikely to be competitive.

- Produce publications in order to help establish track record
- Engage with a range of different audiences to communicate research findings
- Build networks to develop impact opportunities and inform and support further development
- Collaborate with users through an internship or placement to help develop professional and transferrable skills and understanding of users' organisations, provided they are an integral part of the fellowship
- Further training to improve research and related skills
- Developing funding proposals
- Teaching, if this is aligned with the wider purposes of the fellowship (up to a maximum of six hours per week)
- Internships or placements, providing they are an integral part of the fellowship
- Research visits to internationally leading research organisations – either in the UK or abroad – for the purposes of research collaboration, training, and/or access to data or other resources not available at the applicant's host organisation.

Fellowships cannot be undertaken remotely. Fellows are expected to reside within a reasonable travelling distance of their RO for the duration of the fellowship, except when on research visits.

Proposals are welcome from both single disciplines and combinations of disciplines but the fellowship activities must be based at least 50% within the social sciences.

New research **cannot** be funded through these awards. Potential applicants who wish to apply for research funding should consider applying to our Grow grant opportunity.

Duration of fellowships

The grants provide funding for **up to 9 months full-time, or up to 18 months part-time**[2] to give fellows time to prepare for a successful career in research either within or beyond academia.

Part-time grants are intended for applicants whose normal working hours are part-time and not for applicants who wish to hold the fellowship and continue other employment. The exception to this is applicants whose PhD was undertaken on a part-time basis alongside permanent part-time employment. Applicants in this position can continue to hold their part-time employment alongside the fellowship but all other fellows **must spend 100% of**

[2] For part-time awards, the duration should be pro rated based on the fellow's time commitment

their working time (whether full-time or part-time) on the fellowship and cannot take any secondary paid employment during the course of the grant.

A limited amount of teaching will contribute to the professional development of the fellow and therefore grant holders can set aside up to six hours per week (pro rata) to teaching-related duties during the fellowship, including training and class preparation time. This time **must** form part of the fellowship's programme of activities and cannot be paid for outside of the fellowship salary.

Eligibility

This opportunity is open to applicants who have completed their PhD in the UK at a UK research organisation (RO) and must be held at an RO that is part of a DTP eligible to participate in this initiative and aligned to an accredited subject area: https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/esrc-postdoctoral-fellowships/.

Only **one application** to a single DTP is permitted. If an applicant submits to more than one DTP, all of their applications will be withdrawn from further consideration.

Applicants are eligible for funding whether or not they are established members of the RO at which they are applying. Applicants who are not established members must be accommodated by the RO and provided with appropriate facilities to carry out the fellowship. Further details about eligibility of applicants can be found in the Research Funding Guide (ESRC research funding guide – UKRI). The call is **not open** to applicants who are established, permanent members of staff in an academic position with a research component.

Applicants are not required to have previously held an ESRC-funded studentship in order to be eligible to apply.

To be eligible applicants must:

- Have been awarded a PhD or have passed their viva voce with minor amendments by the application deadline of 23 March 2027 and have been awarded their PhD by the fellowship start date of 1 October 2027.
- Have no more than 12 months[3] of active postdoctoral experience. This is measured from the applicant's viva voce pass date to the application deadline of 23 March 2027.

Permanent members of staff in an academic position with a research component are not eligible for this scheme. If a candidate has previously been employed on a part-time basis, that employment can be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

Please see the Frequently Asked Questions document that supports this call for further information on eligibility.

This call welcomes proposals from those returning to research following a career break. Applicants are, however, required to meet the eligibility criterion of having no more than 12 months of active postdoctoral experience at full-time equivalent rate.

[3] At full-time equivalent and allowing for career breaks

Funding including costs and staffing

The total cost for each fellowship can include the following:

- Fellow's salary costs
- Indirect costs
- Estate costs
- Up to a maximum of £7,500 **for all other costs** (to include costs such as mentoring costs, travel and subsistence, conference attendance, training, and impact and engagement events, for example).

Each proposal will need to show these figures as 100% of full Economic Cost (fEC) and the ESRC will meet 80% fEC on the proposals submitted. All proposals will be subject to ESRC's funding rules in place at the time the award is issued, as outlined in our ESRC research funding guide – UKRI.

Mentoring arrangements

All fellows are required to have a mentor based at the research organisation where the fellowship is held. The mentor should have experience and a strong interest in the applicant's field of research but should ideally not be the applicant's PhD supervisor. We recognise that this may not always be possible, so in exceptional circumstances the PhD supervisor may be the mentor, however where this is the case, the choice should be fully justified. The mentor should have the skills and experience relevant to the aims of the fellowship.

Whilst the mentor should be able to assist the fellow in achieving the goals and activities of the fellowship, it will be important for the applicant to demonstrate how they are actively managing their own career development.

We expect the mentoring time required to be around one or two hours per week, and funding will be provided through the fellowship to enable this (under the 'other costs' heading).

A secondary mentor is permitted, particularly in interdisciplinary areas or where the fellow will be spending time at an overseas institution. The secondary mentor could be the PhD supervisor or if they are moving institutions, an individual from the institution where the fellow completed their PhD.

Stakeholder engagement and impact expectations

We expect fellows funded under the call to have identified the potential impacts of their research on policy and practice, and to actively consider how these can be maximised and developed. This emphasis on research impact will be reflected within the assessment process and taken into account during the review process. Costs for impact-related activities can be included within the proposal.

Research disruption due to COVID-19

We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities. We are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career(s) such as:

- breaks and delays
- disruptive working patterns and conditions
- the loss of on-going work
- role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic.

Assessors will be advised to consider the unequal impacts that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the capability to deliver and career development of those individuals included in the application. They will be asked to consider the capability of the applicant and wider team to deliver the proposed programme of work.

Where disruptions have occurred, you can highlight this within your application if you wish, but there is no requirement to detail the specific circumstances that caused the disruption.

How to apply

DTPs will have their own procedures in place to peer review the proposals and make funding decisions on behalf of ESRC. Where this includes an Expression of Interest stage, potential applicants must abide by the deadlines specified by the DTP to which they intend applying.

All applicants must submit full proposals on the provided submission form along with required attachments by **23.59 on 23 March 2027** to the DTP to which they are applying:

https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/esrc-postdoctoral-fellowships/.

When considering where to apply, potential applicants should carefully consider which DTP would offer the best fit for their area of research and career aspirations. Only **one application** to a single DTP is permitted. If an applicant submits to more than one DTP, all of their applications will be withdrawn from further consideration.

Each DTP will assess proposals through expert review and make funding decisions on behalf of ESRC. Successful applicants will then be required to submit their proposal to ESRC. Applications will not be re-assessed, but ESRC will undertake eligibility checks to ensure that they meet the requirements of the scheme.

Assessment criteria

Proposals will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. **Quality of work programme**
   Has the applicant described a clearly defined programme of work that is achievable and realistic within the period of the fellowship?
   Are the proposed activities clearly justified in terms of supporting the applicant's longer term career aspirations?

2. Value for money

Is there clear and adequate justification of the costs being requested?

3. Mentoring arrangements

Has the fellow's choice of mentor(s) been clearly justified?
Has the mentor(s) adequately demonstrated that they have considered the individual applicant's needs, and how they would seek to address them?

4. Impact and outputs

Are the planned outputs of the fellowship appropriate and attainable?
Are there adequate plans to share the results, and to engage with academic and non-academic audiences?

5. Consideration of ethical issues

Does the proposal show sufficient awareness of any ethical issues that may be raised by the proposed fellowship, including the impact plans and user engagement?
Has the applicant described how these will be addressed?

6. Data management plans

Where the applicant is required to submit a Data Management Plan (DMP), does their Plan clearly show how the data will be managed throughout the lifecyle of the award including specific plans for archiving with UK Data Service?

Mandatory attachments

In addition to an application pro forma, the following seven attachments are mandatory and must be included with each proposal in a minimum of font size 11:

1. Case for support (maximum four sides of A4)

This **must** be structured to include the following headings:

- Abstract/summary of progress
  Applicants should provide either a summary or abstract of their in-progress or completed thesis. This should be no more than one page and should include its main claims to originality and excellence, methodology used and significant findings. It should also describe the impacts your research has had or that you expect it to have.

- Research-related achievements
  This section requires a well-structured summary of 'where you are now' in your training and personal development. This will help reviewers decide whether an applicant is at a stage in their career development where a fellowship will have an important and lasting impact on their ability to work as a professional researcher. We are also interested in the impact the applicant's training to date has had on their skills development and on their prospects for a successful research career.

- Planned programme of activities
  This section should detail your planned programme of activities. Please note that the programme of activities should be tailored to support your longer term career

aspirations, whether you are aiming for a career in academia or a research career in the broader economy.

If you are applying to hold your fellowship part-time alongside existing permanent part-time employment (provided this was also the case for your PhD studies), then this should be clearly stated and explained.

Please justify your choice of mentor.

The fellowship does not have to be directly building on the work of the PhD; however, it does need to follow on or be related to it.

The programme of activities should provide the fellows with time to maximise the impact of their PhD, which could include communicating the research findings arising from their doctoral work, building international networks to develop impact and further research, collaborating with users, learning the skills of writing for publication, and further improving their research and related skills.

If you are intending to visit an overseas institution within the period of the fellowship, please outline the activities you plan to undertake whilst overseas and how they align with the aims of the fellowship.

We recognise that during the grant period a limited amount of teaching could be beneficial to the professional development of the fellow. Grant holders will therefore be permitted to put aside a maximum of six hours per week (pro rata) to teaching including preparation time. This time must form part of the fellowship's programme of activities and cannot be paid for outside of the fellowship salary.

- Key milestones
  This section should provide a high level timetable and summary for the proposed programme of activities.

2. Justification of resources (maximum one side of A4)

This statement should be used to break down and justify the resources required to undertake the programme of activities.

- Explain why the indicated resources are needed.
- Estates and indirect costs do not need to be justified.
- Break down resources into the following directly incurred fund headings:
  - Staff (salary costs of fellow)
  - Travel and subsistence
  - Other costs (to include mentoring costs, conference attendance, training, impact-related costs, networking)
- Travel and subsistence and other costs under the directly incurred fund heading must not exceed £7,500.
- Where your RO costs infrastructure technicians separately to estate costs, these will not be counted within the £7,500 limit on other costs and do not need to be justified. However, you should clarify in the statement where this is the case.

3. CV (maximum two sides of A4)

The CV **must show the date the PhD viva voce was passed**, or the scheduled date for the viva voce, brief details of education to date, any awards received for work or training, previous employment history, and any conference papers or publications.

4. Mentor statement and summary CV (maximum two sides of A4)

A combined mentor statement and CV must be included as an attachment to the proposal that does not exceed two sides of A4 in total. Where there is more than one mentor, the statement should be completed by the primary mentor but must detail the contribution to be made by all mentors. Brief CVs of not more than one side of A4 should be included for each of the other mentors.

Fellows will be required to have a mentor throughout the period of the grant and they should be identified at the time of applying. The mentor should be a social scientist and have experience, and a strong interest, in the applicant's field of research but should ideally not be the PhD supervisor. The reviewers will consider the role of the mentor seriously and will look for strong evidence of support. Thus the mentor statement should demonstrate that the mentor:

- has considered the individual applicant's needs carefully and tailored their programme of support to their individual needs
- will ensure the fellow is kept properly active and focussed throughout the period of the award
- will also keep the fellow's long-term career prospects clearly in mind.

The mentor statement must address all of the above points and not just be a general reference or personal statement from the mentor.

Additional attachments

Attachments under the following two headings must also be included where necessary. This will be dependent on the nature of activities being undertaken in the proposal (minimum of font size 11):

5. Data management plan (maximum of three sides of A4)

Whilst applicants cannot collect any new data as part of this fellowship, there may be exceptional circumstances where existing data is re-used or combined with other data to form a new dataset. In those instances, it is a requirement of the ESRC Research Data Policy to include a Data Management Plan with any application. Deposit of new datasets with UK Data Service is a required standard and exemptions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

The ESRC recognises the importance of research data quality and provenance. Research data generated by ESRC-funded research must be well-managed by the grant holder

during the grant period to enable their data to be exploited to the maximum potential for further research.

6. List of publications

Where references are cited in the proposal, a list of publications should be included containing the relevant bibliography. The applicant's own publications should be included with their CV.

7. Other attachments

If you are intending to visit an overseas institution within the period of the fellowship, a letter of support from the institution must be provided, supporting the visit in principle. Letters must be on headed paper and should not exceed a maximum of one side of A4.

Where the programme of activities involves direct engagement with a project partner, a letter from the project partner should be included confirming their contribution to the project. Letters must be on headed paper and should not exceed a maximum of one side of A4 per partner.

No other additional attachments will be accepted.

Commissioning timetable

- Call announced – November 2026
- Closing date for proposals – 23 March 2027
- Decisions confirmed to applicants – See webpage of DTP you are applying to
- Successful proposals submitted to ESRC – by 30 June 2027 (at the very latest)
- Fellowship end date – 30 June 2028

Contacts

For queries related to the call, please contact the DTP you are applying to.