

ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Call

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Background

Why is ESRC introducing a postdoctoral fellowship call?

The consultation that informed the development of our 2015 Strategic Plan identified the lack of support for early career researchers as a key issue. We subsequently undertook a review to consider evidence from a variety of sources to identify where ESRC support could add most value. It was agreed that there needed to be more support for the immediately postdoctorate stage of early career researchers, and the introduction of the postdoctoral fellowship call is a response to this.

Why are the postdoctoral fellowships (PDFs) being run through the Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs)?

The Postdoctoral Fellowship call forms part of our strategy to provide additional support for early career researchers (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/skills-and-careers/postgraduate-careers/early-career-researchers/>). We are running them through the DTPs and CDTs as they have been through a robust peer review exercise, ensuring that the fellows will be embedded within a high-quality environment for research and training, and be supported in their continuing career development.

Where should applications be submitted to?

Applications must be submitted directly to the DTP or CDT where you are planning to hold the fellowship. Please see the ESRC website and call specification for contact details: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/postdoctoral-fellowships/>

Why aren't all DTPs eligible included to award PDFs?

DTPs and CDTs were invited to apply for funding to award PDFs. This process consisted of submission of a business case, which was assessed by a specially convened panel. Business cases had to address how the DTP or CDT would administer the call and support the fellows' development.

DTPs who are not included this year will have the opportunity to participate in future years as we will review participation ahead of the second round of the call. Applications for inclusion in future years will be via the same process – submission of a business case.

Can I apply at more than one DTP or CDT?

When considering where to apply potential applicants should carefully consider which institution would offer the best fit of their area of research and career aspirations and limit their application to those. Applicants must make the DTP or CDT aware if they have applied to another DTP or CDT.

How many fellowships are available at each DTP and CDT?

The actual number allocated to each DTP and CDT will differ so please see individual DTP or CDT information. The aim is to fund around 50 fellowships per year, with fellowships commencing in October 2018.

Eligibility

At which research organisations can I hold a postdoctoral fellowship?

Fellowships can only be held at research organisations which are part of a DTP or CDT and eligible to participate in this initiative. In addition, fellowships must be aligned to accredited pathways. A list of eligible DTPs and CDTs can be found here:

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/postdoctoral-fellowships/>

Do I have to have completed my PhD at the DTP or CDT I intend to apply to?

No, but you must have completed your PhD at a research organisation that is part of a DTP or CDT. A list of these eligible organisations can be found here:

DTPs: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/skills-and-careers/studentships/doctoral-training-partnerships/>

CDTs: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/skills-and-careers/studentships/centres-for-doctoral-training/>

The eligibility criteria says that I have to have submitted my PhD by the time I submit my proposal. What does this mean?

If you have not yet been awarded your PhD, you must have submitted your thesis and passed your viva voce with minor corrections by the time you submit your proposal.

I have a fixed-term contract ending before the fellowship start date. Am I eligible?

The call is not open to those who are established, permanent members of staff in an academic position with a research component. If you have been employed on a fixed-term contract you are eligible to apply, provided you do not have more than 12 months of active postdoctoral experience since the viva pass date and before the closing date for the competition.

The specification states that career breaks will be disregarded from the 12 months postdoctoral experience – how are you defining ‘career break’?

Career breaks include periods of maternity, sick leave, or unemployment, and will be disregarded from the 12-month period. Relevant information must be clearly presented on your CV.

Is the 12 month period of postdoctoral experience calculated from the closing date for the competition or the start date of the fellowship?

The closing date of the competition i.e. 23 March 2018.

Can I apply for a fellowship on a part-time basis?

You can only apply for a fellowship on a part-time basis if that is your usual contract of working hours.

I have partial funding on a postdoctoral project (50%) for the start of the fellowship. Is it possible to start the fellowship at part-time and then move to full-time?

No, part-time fellowships are only for those on part-time contracts; the fellowships are intended as full-time opportunities and cannot be held alongside any other employment.

Why can't I apply if I have a permanent post?

The call is intended to support early career researchers in their career development, which could include gaining a permanent position. As such, those who already have a permanent post are seen as already on a path to career development.

Funding

Who can advise me on costs?

Speak to your research organisation's research office for advice.

How much can I apply for?

There's no maximum limit but fellowships can only include the following costs:

- salary costs of the fellow
- indirect costs
- estate costs
- up to £10,000 of other costs.

Eligible costs under the 'other costs' heading should include mentoring costs, travel and subsistence, conference attendance, networking, training, and fieldwork, for example.

Can I include a co-investigator or any other research staff on the proposal?

No, only the fellow can be included.

The call specification states that up to 10% of the budget should be allocated for impact-related activities. This seems high; do impact activities include travel costs for networking?

The 10% of the budget is a recommendation; however, impact should be at the heart of the fellowship activities, therefore the majority of activities will be impact-related. Please see the [Impact Toolkit](#) for further guidance.

Will proposals be assessed for their value for money? Are there any guidelines to conform to 'value for money'?

We expect costs requested to be appropriate and fully justified for the fellowship activities. Costs should be reasonable, and reviewers will assess how appropriate these are based on the proposed work plan.

Focus of the fellowship

The call says the fellowships must start on 1 October 2018. Is there any flexibility on the start date?

We expect fellows to start as close to this date as possible but recognise there might be exceptional circumstances which require a later start. You are advised to discuss this with the DTP or CDT you are applying to.

Can I carry out new research as part of the fellowship?

The fellowship is designed to build upon your PhD experience and develop your skills for a future career in research. Whilst these fellowships are not aimed at supporting a programme of research, limited additional research activity directly linked to the PhD can be undertaken. New research is limited to 25% of the time commitment of the fellowship.

The specification states that the fellowship should be based on PhD work. Does this make work based on current postdoctoral research ineligible?

The fellowship is expected to be related to the focus of the PhD. If the postdoctoral research is related to the PhD focus, then this would be acceptable. If the postdoctoral research is not related to the PhD, then it would not be suitable for these fellowships and you may want to consider applying to our New Investigator scheme instead (<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/new-investigator-grants/>).

Can we use funding to visit international academic organisations or other research organisations?

Yes – if the organisation would be suitable to collaborate with, will help broaden your networks, or provide training, access to data or resources not available at your host organisation. Extended visits to other organisations must be accompanied by a letter of support outlining the organisation's support of the visit in principle.

Mentors

Why do I need a mentor?

As an early career researcher, your learning stands to be enhanced by the expertise and contacts of an academic mentor who can guide you in achieving the goals and activities of your fellowship. You are required to have one to two hours' contact time with your mentor every week, where they can advise on the progress of the fellowship.

Does my mentor need to be from the same RO and pathway as me?

Yes, ideally the applicant will have a single mentor based at the same research organisation as the fellow.

Can I have more than one mentor?

Secondary mentors can be permitted if the focus of your fellowship is on the borderline between social sciences and another disciplinary area, or where you will be spending considerable time at another research organisation. However your primary mentor must be based in your host organisation.

How can I identify a mentor?

Contact the DTP or CDT you wish to apply to, as they may have mechanisms in place to identify and match mentors to applicants.

Can the mentor be my PhD supervisor?

To encourage your development in this next career stage, we recommend that the mentor should not be your PhD supervisor. This is to broaden your network and be challenged by a wider group of academics than might have been engaged with through the PhD. We do however recognise that this may not be possible in all cases, therefore in exceptional circumstances the PhD supervisor can be the mentor; however, this needs to be fully justified in the proposal.

If I choose to have two mentors, how do I present this in the proposal?

The need for more than one mentor must be fully articulated in the proposal. A CV will be required for both mentors and the mentor statement should be completed by the primary mentor, but should cover the input of the secondary mentor.

Can I include costs to cover the mentor's time?

Costs for the mentor's time can be included under the 'other costs' heading. Along with the other funds requested under this heading, there is a maximum limit of £10,000.

Attachments

For the Head of Department statement, does it need to be the Head of Department/School / Faculty, or can it be the Head of discipline area?

You can speak to the DTP or CDT as to who would be most appropriate to provide this, but it should be someone at the department, school or faculty level who can guarantee their commitment and support for the fellowship.

Can you explain the 'list of publications' attachment? The guidance suggests this should be a bibliography but as this is not a research proposal, where do you envisage applicants referring to literature?

There is still place for a bibliography in this type of proposal, and it is also relevant given it is a standard attachment for ESRC funding. In particular, the case for support and workplan may include references to literature. This attachment is simply a reference list, not a bibliographic essay. Speak to your research office if you are unsure.

Is the 'referee statement' referring to the mentor?

No, the referee statement is to assist in the assessment process. The referee statement should not be provided by the mentor. The referee can be the PhD supervisor, but if the PhD supervisor is the proposed mentor then the referee statement should be provided by another academic.

The call does not clearly mention the pathways to impact, could you explain how to complete this section?

Impacts of your research achieved so far and planned impact should be covered in the case for support and the mandatory question in the application form. There is not a separate pathways to impact attachment, as impact should be at the heart of the proposal and woven through any planned activities as the focus of the fellowship is on consolidating the outputs of the PhD.

Assessment process

What happens to my proposal once I have submitted it?

Your proposal will be assessed by the DTP or CDT that you have applied to, by a procedure approved by ESRC. The final date to confirm decisions to applicants is the end of June 2018. Successful applicants will then be required to submit their proposal in Je-S by the end of July 2018. Guidance for this will be provided nearer the time.