



ESRC TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME

WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Summary:

1. The ESRC wishes to commission a set of research projects looking at the theme of widening participation in, and fair access to, higher education as a part of its Teaching and Learning Research Programme. Researchers based at higher education institutions in England, in collaboration with other partners as appropriate, are invited to submit full proposals by the closing date of 7th June 2005. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has provided approximately £2m funding for this phase of which £1.66m is available to support a small number of projects (approximately 5-8) under this competition.

Aims and Scope of the Competition:

2. The aim of this competition is to support high quality innovative research with the potential to enhance understanding, and inform and/or underpin future policy, practice and outcomes relating to widening participation in, and fair access to, higher education (HE) in England. In order to ensure capacity building and the widest possible impact upon policy, practice and learning outcomes, proposals should build and strengthen links between researchers, learning and teaching staff and widening participation practitioners.

3. Widening participation is taken to mean extending and enhancing access to and experience of HE, and achievement within HE, of people from so-called under-represented and diverse social backgrounds, families, groups and communities and positively enabling such people to participate in and benefit from various types of HE. These could include people from socially disadvantaged families and/or deprived geographical areas, including deprived remote, rural and coastal areas or from families that have no prior experience of HE. Widening participation is also concerned with diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability and social background in particular HE disciplines, modes and institutions. In addition it can also include access and participation across the ages, extending conceptions of learning across the life course, and in relation to family responsibilities, particularly by gender and maturity.

4. Higher Education is also to be conceptualised broadly in terms of pedagogies or practices of learning and teaching and may include delivery of HE programmes from sub-degree to doctoral level. These may be delivered in various types of institution, including teaching-intensive universities, research-intensive universities, Further Education colleges offering higher education, HE institutions offering further education, and HE colleges and various forms of distance learning. In other words, this covers HE across the spectrum.

5. The research studies can also be broadly conceptualised to give consideration to various innovative aspects of policy and practice around developments to widen engagement, participation and retention in HE. International comparisons of experience in widening participation, including HE pedagogies, policies and practices or developing programmes within and across higher education locally, nationally or internationally will also be considered.

6. This new phase will support theoretically informed, carefully designed and grounded studies of widening participation in HE, addressing, for example:

- a. The relation between prior experiences of education, social networks, expectations of the benefits from education/HE, family, economic and social backgrounds and participation in forms of HE and the ways they may reproduce patterns of social difference in institutional experiences, retention and learner outcomes
- b. Innovative policies and practices to widen participation in higher education at various stages of the life course and explorations of the social, economic and cultural processes that might enable participation and improved retention in HE
- c. The influences of different kinds of political, social, economic and cultural contexts on informal or formal learning processes, experiences and outcomes for diverse learners from higher education
- d. Specific and/or international comparisons of policy changes in relation to student support for differential involvement of students in different kinds of HE and their implications for learner outcomes
- e. The impact of different kinds of political, educational and institutional interventions on widening participation in higher education
- f. The perspectives or voices of diverse learners on the development of their identities as learners, the implications for access to and retention in HE and the potential implications for policies for widening participation, pedagogies and practices in HE institutions or specific practices within and across subjects
- g. The perspectives of teachers, teacher educators and trainers on developing pedagogies and practice for a diverse range of HE learners, including across new and traditional subjects and/or disciplines

- h. The ways in which specific subject knowledges and their pedagogical practices and assessment may limit or enable diverse involvement in higher education
 - i. Different routes/pathways into various forms of higher education over the life course, from young to adult learners, and the roles of employers, organisations and social networks, economic and cultural processes in enabling these processes, including work-based learning
 - j. The ways individual choices, across the life course, are taken, shaped and influenced by social, cultural and economic factors and how various learner identities, from young to mature adult, are formed in ways that encourage engagement with learning and bring HE within the bounds of the possible.
7. This list offers examples only and should not be read as definitive or constraining.

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme

8. This research call is being launched under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme. This is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and Department for Education and Skills and managed by the ESRC. It supports research projects and related activities designed to lead to significant improvements in outcomes for learners and the processes by which these are achieved. Learning outcomes are broadly conceived and include: participation and engagement in learning, the development of positive learner identities; the acquisition of qualifications; the acquisition of skill, understanding and bodies of knowledge; the development of attitudes and values relevant to a learning society; and the broader values and commitments relevant to individual, social and community development and civic concern. Its remit covers learners at all ages and stages in all sectors and contexts of education and training, including informal learning settings, throughout the United Kingdom.

9. The core objectives of the Programme are to:
- enhance learning at all ages and stages in education, training and life-long learning
 - develop the capability for transforming the knowledge base relevant to learning into effective and efficient teaching and training practices.
 - enhance the system-wide capacity for reflective and research based practice in teaching and learning.
 - promote and extend multi-disciplinary and multi-sector research in teaching and learning.
10. Projects supported under the Programme are expected to:
- set up learning relationships with partners from all relevant interested parties including practitioners, learners, policy makers and the research community;

- while recognising diversity and difference, achieve significant improvements in learning outcomes for identified groups of learners;
- work in authentic settings of teaching and learning; wherever appropriate, bring multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches to research, including the involvement of appropriate practitioners, learners and other potential beneficiaries in research teams;
- enhance the capacity for a reflective research-based approach to education and training practices;
- work in partnership with the wider teaching, training and informal learning communities, to achieve maximum impact of the research results;
- make research-based contributions to the fundamental understanding of teaching and learning and to effective practical action in education and learning.

11. These activities reflect the essential conditions of researching and enhancing teaching and learning in the circumstances in which teachers, trainers and learners work.

12. Currently there are at least 10 projects funded under the TLRP that are of relevance to this new research call for studies of widening participation in HE. There are projects about different aspects of learning in HE, such as about disabled students and their experiences; Teaching-Learning environments in undergraduate courses; the social and organisational mediation of learning in HE; learning to perform, and the effectiveness of problem-based learning and similar projects within FE and lifelong learning such as on transforming learning cultures; literacies for learning and policy; learning and inclusion in the learning and skills system. There may be others that can be developed, such as ones from Phase 1 or 2 of the programme. Further details are available at <http://www.tlrp.org>

13. This new phase is launched under TLRP because a key objective is to enhance and extend research capacity, through encouraging collaboration between researchers, practitioners and users concerned with encouraging a greater social diversity of participants in HE. It is not intended to constrain proposals to a narrow definition of teaching and learning; proposals may take a broader perspective of social, cultural and economic factors which affect HE participation and success. Proposals submitted under the Scheme should be theoretically informed and should take account of existing research including the above TLRP-funded studies. They could also take account of other relevant research funded by the ESRC and could include innovative re-analysis of existing data sets available through the ESRC Economic and Social Data Service. Other national data bases also provide a potentially important resource and there are now significant opportunities for mining and linking such data in new ways. Proposals should also be well rooted in an understanding of current policy contexts and practices in widening participation and learning and teaching within and across higher education, involving practitioners wherever possible. It is also expected that the

projects will be carefully designed, demonstrating an understanding of current research practices and could use innovative methods or methodologies in order to make an important contribution to the achievement of the Programme's broader objectives as outlined above. Award-holders will be expected to participate fully in Programme activities.

14. Applications are invited from researchers based at HE institutions in England as full proposals. Awards may include provision (including funding) for collaboration with other HEIs, whether in England, the UK or internationally, and with other bodies as appropriate, such as research-based organisations or FE institutions. Studies which bring together the experience and expertise of HEIs with different missions and track records in WP would be particularly welcomed.

Funding available

15. The Higher Education Funding Council for England has provided approximately £2m funding for this phase of which £1.66m is available to support a small number of projects (approximately 5-8) under this competition. Remaining funds will cover programme management, networking, communication and dissemination activities. Applications may be for between £100,000 and £300,000. Awards will be expected to begin in early 2006 and end by the end of April 2008. Smaller projects, although not separately funded, could be brought together into a bid which reached the minimum threshold. Applicants are advised to check the eligibility of any costs requested under *ESRC Research Funding* rules (available from the ESRC website) before applying. Normal *ESRC Research Funding* rules will apply to all awards.

Development of Proposals

16. Professor Miriam David is the member of the TLRP Programme Director's team with responsibility for developing this scheme. Applicants are encouraged to discuss their proposals with her before submitting an application, although formal expressions of interest are not required in advance of the final proposal. Miriam can be contacted by email on m.david@ioe.ac.uk (please head your e-mail WP RESEARCH COMPETITION) or by phone on 0207 9479577.

17. It is vital that practitioners, policy-makers and other appropriate user groups are fully involved in the development of proposals and in the subsequent stages of the research. Details of collaboration with such groups should be detailed in the proposal. Applications should have their own Communication and Impact Plan, designed to complement the Programme's Communication and Impact strategy (details of which are available from the Programme's website at <http://www.tlrp.org>).

Assessment of Applications

18. Applications will be assessed by the Programme Steering Committee, which will be responsible for quality control and determining the priorities for funding. Additional advice from peer reviewers will be sought as appropriate to inform the Committee's decisions. In considering which full proposals should be funded, particular attention will be paid to the following issues by the Steering Committee and other reviewers:

- a. *Fit to the Specification and Potential Contribution to the TLRP Programme.* Does the proposal display a close fit to overall aims and objectives outlined in the call for proposals? Is there a thoughtful commitment to active participation in the TLRP Programme as a whole?
- b. *Added Value and Innovation.* Would the research add significant value to and extend current research into widening participation in an innovative way?
- c. *Contribution to Knowledge.* Is the proposal grounded in a thorough review of the extant literature in relevant fields? Is it likely to make a significant contribution to the development of the current research knowledge base?
- d. *Impact upon Policy, Practice and Learning Outcomes.* Is the research likely to make a significant impact on widening participation policy and/or practice in England: for example, are appropriate target audiences clearly identified in the proposal? Is consideration given to the scope for generalisation beyond the specific contexts studied in the research (e.g. to other social groups, learners, institutions or settings)? Are the findings likely to provide a sound and convincing basis for research-informed policy and practice, and does the proposal show how this will be achieved (ie. how the link between research and practice will be realised)? Are they likely to be workable and sustainable in practice?
- e. *Theoretical and Analytical Framework.* Does the proposal have a coherent theoretical and analytical framework?
- f. *Research Design and Methods.* Does the proposal clearly and fully describe a research design appropriate for the achievement of the stated research objectives? Are there rigorous methods for assessing the potential impacts on widening participation and other outcomes, broadly conceived? Is the project time-scale appropriate to the research design?
- g. *Ethical Issues.* Has careful consideration been given to any ethical issues that may be raised?
- h. *User Engagement and Partnership.* Does the proposal include strong collaborative partnerships and appropriate user engagement with relevant policy-makers and practitioners (and, where appropriate with learners themselves) in England (and elsewhere as appropriate) throughout all stages of the research? Is there evidence that

relevant partners have been engaged, as appropriate, in the development of the proposal?

- i. *Communication and Impact Plans*. Is there a well-developed project communication and impact plan, for appropriate audiences, which would make a significant contribution to the Programme's overall Communication and Impact Strategy?
- j. *Outputs*. Is there a clear statement of the anticipated outputs appropriately targeted at a range of potential audiences (learning and teaching staff, widening participation practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and others)?
- k. *Contribution to Research Capacity Building*. Is there a commitment to helping to build and enhance research capacity in widening participation in the field?
- l. *Research Teams and Project Management*. Does the proposal have a clear, well-designed and robust project management team, with evidence of some track record or appropriate expertise, and a structure capable of managing the proposed partnerships and delivering on the specified research work programme?
- m. *Value for money*. Would the research represent value for money relative to the likely outcomes? Are the resources requested necessary and adequate for the effective conduct of the research as outlined, including the communication and impact proposals?

Participation in the Programme

19. Successful applicants will be expected to collaborate fully with the Programme Director's Team and to participate in Programme activities, throughout the life of the Programme, including those arranged as a part of the Programme's Communication and Impact Strategy and the Programme's strategy for enhancing research capacity, (see Annex 1 for further information). They will be required to produce an annual progress report for consideration by the Directors' Team and Steering Committee and a final end of award report that will be subject to normal ESRC evaluation procedures.

HEFCE Seminar and ESRC TLRP Competition Briefing Meeting

Prospective applicants may wish to attend a specially convened seminar and briefing meeting to be held on Tuesday 26th April at the Institute of Education, University of London. This event will be in two parts. In the morning (coffee at 09.45, start at 10.15), HEFCE will host speakers to contextualise some key issues on research on Widening Participation in Higher Education. In the afternoon (start at 1.15 end by 3.45) members of existing TLRP HE projects and of the Directors' Team will talk on the nature of the Programme and will highlight some key aspects of this competition. Attendance at the briefing meeting is entirely

optional. Up to two representatives from each prospective research team may attend. For further information about this event, please consult the TLRP website at www.tlrp.org or email e.peck@ioe.ac.uk. Registration will be through: Elaine Peck, Conference Office, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL.

Submission of Full Proposals Electronic submission

20. Applicants are encouraged to submit their full application electronically using the ESRC electronic forms submission service by using the Full Research Programme Forms Editor (RPG eRP version 1.7) available from <http://eforms.esrc.ac.uk/> (please ensure that you use the full programmes form editor). Please read all instructions before downloading this form. Applications and awards will be made under current pre-full economic costs (FEC) funding rules and will **not** be made under new FEC rules which come into effect after the closing date and expected date of issuing awards.

21. If you require technical support on the use of the electronic submission service please contact the helpdesk by telephone (01235445924) or by e-mail to esrc.forms@rl.ac.uk (please note that this helpdesk can only address technical questions relating to use of the ESRC electronic system; questions regarding ESRC funding rules should be addressed to the ESRC Office as explained above). Please note that the application will need to be despatched by a registered despatcher at the administering institution and time should be allowed for this.

22. The ESRC electronic submission system, as detailed above, is the only system which may be used for the submission of proposals electronically; applications sent in other electronic forms (e.g. as attachments to emails) will not be accepted. Electronic submissions must be despatched to the ESRC for receipt by 1700hrs on 7th June 2005. Please note that hard copies are NOT required for applications submitted using the electronic submissions system.

Hardcopy applications -Special instructions

Alternatively applications may be submitted in hardcopy form. For a copy of the application form please write to **Dr Ian Farnden, Research, Training and Development Directorate, ESRC, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1 UJ**, enclosing a self-addressed A4 envelope, or e mail ian.farnden@esrc.ac.uk. If submitting applications in hardcopy, please follow the instructions on the form and return the original plus twenty copies by 7th June 2005 to: **The Registrar, ESRC, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN21UJ**

23. This deadline will be strictly enforced. Hardcopy applications postmarked before the closing date of 7th June 2005 will be accepted but applications postmarked on or after this date will NOT be accepted. Faxed or emailed applications will NOT be accepted. Twenty copies must be included with the hardcopy original. Please note that on hardcopy applications

signatures are required from all co-applicants and from the principal applicant's Head of Department and the appropriate authority at the administering institution. Please allow sufficient time to collect all these signatures. Hardcopy applications will NOT normally be accepted without all the required signatures. However, in the event of a serious difficulty in obtaining the signature of a co-applicant, applicants should contact the ESRC in advance to discuss the possibility of this being forwarded at a later date.

24. Incomplete applications or applications not submitted using either the ESRC electronic submission system for full programme proposals, or the correct hardcopy full application form, will NOT be accepted. Applicants are strongly advised not to leave completion and despatch of applications to the last minute, as late applications will NOT be accepted.

25. Please note that research proposals should not exceed 3,500 words. Any material in excess of this word limit (excluding technical appendices) will be removed by the ESRC and not considered in the assessment of applications.

Annex 1

PARTICIPATION IN THE ESRC TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME: NOTES FOR APPLICANTS

26. ESRC Research Programmes are co-ordinated networks of research projects at geographically distributed sites. Programmes are, except in exceptional circumstances, multidisciplinary in nature and capable of producing, through the co-ordinated network, added value over and above the sum of outputs from individual projects. Some programmes, such as the Teaching and Learning Programme, are explicitly aimed at building research capacity in certain areas, while all are expected to be centrally relevant to the concerns and priorities of prospective users of the research output. This mode of funding allows the Council to address topics of strategic national importance by recruiting social scientific expertise wherever it is located. In addition, it enables researchers to participate in larger scale social science than they might otherwise.

27. Council has delegated responsibility for the Teaching and Learning Programme to its Strategic Research Board. The Board has, in turn, delegated responsibility for the strategic management of the Programme to a Programme Steering Committee. Operational management of the Teaching and Learning Programme is provided by the Programme Directors' Team. Management of the Programme within the ESRC Office is the responsibility of the ESRC Programme Manager based within the Council's Research, Training and Development (RTD) Directorate, who is also Secretary to the Programme Steering Committee.

28. While there are clear benefits to be derived from participation in research programmes, applicants should also be aware that there will be certain requirements in terms of their participation in programme-wide activities. These responsibilities are outlined below:

Co-ordination of the Programme

29. The Programme Directors' Team will be responsible for organising a range of activities to ensure effective communication between projects and the dissemination of research findings. All project holders will be expected to co-operate fully in these activities.

Programme Conferences, Workshops and Seminars

30. As part of Programme networking activity, the Programme Directors' Team will organise conferences, workshops, seminars, working groups or other activities (e.g. electronic networking, international collaborative activities etc.) to facilitate the exchange of information and collaboration between projects and with other key researchers and policy / practitioner partners. All award holders will be expected to contribute to these activities; normally there will be a TLRP Conference each year and at least two or three workshops (or similar activities) each year.

Capacity Building

31. As appropriate, award holders will be expected to contribute to, or participate in, activities arranged in support of the Programme's research capacity building objectives. This may include relevant training or related activities arranged by the Programme Directors' Team or other parts of the Programme.

User Engagement and Communication

32. Project holders will be expected to actively seek to engage in dialogue with potential users of their research at all stages of the research process. All award holders will be expected to co-operate with the Programme Directors' Team in Programme communication activities such as meetings/seminars with non-academic research audiences and preparation of targeted briefing papers.

Reporting

33. In order to monitor the progress of the Research Programme, the Programme Directors' Team will, from time to time, require updates from award holders in relation to their own progress. In addition, award holders will submit an annual progress report to the Programme Director. The Director will submit an annual report to the Steering Committee, the Strategic Research Board and the Programme's funders.

Communication and Impact

34. In addition to the usual requirements regarding the active and effective communication of research results, award holders will be required to contribute to the Programme's overall Communication and Impact Strategy. This might include contributions to publications and other materials as well as presentations of the supported research.

Acknowledgement

35. All publications arising from work supported by the Programme will be expected to acknowledge this involvement. An appropriate form of words will be agreed. The TLRP logo should be used on all major project publicity material and on project websites.

Publicity

36. A copy of all publications (including press releases and press cuttings) should be sent to the Director. The Programme Directors' Team should be consulted in advance about any planned press releases or other major planned publicity / events organised as a part of projects.

37. The Programme has developed a Communication and Impact Plan that outlines in more detail the planned communication and impact activities to which award holders will be expected to contribute. This is available from the Programme's website at <http://www.tlrp.org>. The Programme Directors' Team has a budget for Programme-level communication and impact activities funded as a part of this plan, including the travel and subsistence costs

incurred by award holders in participating in such activities.

38. Programme award holders will be expected to contribute to Programme-level activities as outlined above throughout the duration of the Programme, irrespective of when their individual project award ends.