

ESRC TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH PROGRAMME

FIRST CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The Programme

1. The ESRC is mounting a major programme of research into learning and teaching. The prime objective is to improve outcomes for learners at all ages and across a wide range of educational and training contexts including pre-school, primary and secondary school, FE, HE, community, adult, and continuing education and the many forms of professional, industrial and commercial training.
2. Researchers will work in partnership with practitioners and other users on all aspects of the projects commissioned to build on the significant achievements of the teaching and research communities.
3. The Programme is large scale and will be designed to achieve long term benefits, not the least of which will be an increase in the capacity of practitioners to promote further improvements in learning through the conduct and use of research.
4. Around £11.5m is available for the Programme. The funding comes principally from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), with contributions from the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office, and will extend to 2005. This ensures the possibility of UK wide comparisons and collaborations in pursuit of excellent research.
5. Strategic management of the Programme rests with a Steering Committee of academics, practitioners and other users chaired by Professor Sir David Watson, Director of the University of Brighton. The Steering Committee is accountable to ESRC Council through the Research Priorities Board. The Programme will be led from 1 March by a full-time Programme Director, Professor Charles Desforges, currently Director of the School of Education at the University of Exeter.

Programme Commissioning

6. This call for proposals is preliminary. The Programme's major commissioning phase will follow a call for proposals in November 1999.
7. The current preliminary call for proposals is one aspect of a number of activities being put in place as a preamble to the development of a sharper focus for the Programme as it unfolds. These include:
 - (i) a series of reviews and seminars to establish the state of knowledge in the field, with a particular emphasis on the link between research and practice;

- (ii) the development of a specification, in consultation with researchers, practitioners and other users, for commissioning the Programme's main phase;
- (iii) early commissioning of a limited number of collaborative Research Networks and Fellowships.

Details of the reviews, seminars and consultation activities will be posted on the ESRC website over the coming months. The current Call for Proposals concerns solely the commissioning referred to at (iii) above.

Preliminary Phase Commissioning

- 8. The level of funding available for commissioning under the preliminary phase is £1.7m. Outline proposals are now invited for Research Networks and Research Fellowships to be commissioned under the Programme's first phase. Applications may be for a Research Network **or** a Research Fellowship **or** a Research Network in which one or more Fellowships are embedded. Outline applications are invited in the first instance for awards to start in January 2000.
- 9. **Applicants will be required to demonstrate how the research they propose will bring about improvements in learning and they should be underpinned by the objectives of the Programme, as specified in paragraphs 1-3 above.**

Research Networks

- 10. Applications for collaborative Research Networks should indicate the extent to which the research they propose contributes to bringing about improvement in learning.
- 11. Applicants should specify how the Network will
 - engage with practitioners and/or other users at all stages of the research;
 - make an impact both within and beyond the research community;
 - promote cross-sector and cross-institutional collaboration;
 - involve a multi-disciplinary approach.
- 12. The Research Networks will involve a series of fully integrated projects and proposals will need to demonstrate how the Network adds value over and above stand alone research projects.
- 13. The Networks will be self-managed with a Network Co-ordinator overseeing the coherence and integration of constituent activities. Applicants should specify their proposals for collaboration with the Programme Director to realise the overall aims of the Programme.

14. Research Network applications should involve between three and five higher education institutions. They should be for a maximum three year period and a maximum amount of £450k in total with an annual upper spending limit of £150k. The Networks will be expected to start in January 2000.
15. Applications for Research Networks should at this stage be confined to a maximum of three pages. Proposals should refer to all the constituent projects, justifying these in terms of Network coherence, and to the management and co-ordination arrangements. Costs should be itemised as far as is possible at this stage.
16. Where a Research Fellowship (or Fellowships) is applied for as part of a Research Network, an outline Fellowship application should be appended to the Research Network application form. The proposal to include the Fellowship(s) within the Network should be signalled by including Fellowship applicants as co-applicants on the Network application form. The Network application should specify the contribution of the Fellowship(s) to the coherence of the Research Network.
17. The Co-ordinator has responsibility for drawing together all the individual constituents of the Network within one application form.
18. Beyond the special conditions for Research Networks specified above, awards will be subject to the conditions set out in ESRC Research Funding (July 1997).

Research Fellowships

19. The intention in funding Fellowships is to stimulate research activity involving practitioners and make an immediate contribution to capacity building in the field with particular reference to methods of acquiring firm evidence of effectiveness in improving outcomes. The Fellowships will be for new researchers. They will be for two or three years and will require collaboration with practitioners. Fellowship proposals will involve working directly where learning and teaching take place, contributing to the evidence base of pedagogy.
20. Beyond the above requirement, there is flexibility of approach, discipline, sector and tenure in order not to constrain the emergence of imaginative and original proposals. Fellowships will be expected to start in January 2000.
21. The following general conditions will apply to the Fellowships:
 - The aim of the Fellowships is to allow for concentrated research activity. They will provide a significant career opportunity for promising researchers, who would benefit from a period of intensive research activity and development.
 - Fellowships are open to applicants proposing research activity in any aspect of teaching and learning. Fellows will have a mentor, usually within their own institution, who will support and appraise the Fellow's progress annually and submit a report to the Programme Director. Where the Fellowship is held as a constituent part of a Research Network, the mentor will be the Network Co-ordinator.

- An element of career development should be incorporated into the Fellowship. Proposals may be made for up to 120 hours (including not more than 30 hours teaching) annually of the Fellow's time to be spent in this way, for example in enhancement of research skills, research management, dissemination skills, discipline-based knowledge, teaching skills. Institutional confirmation of support for this should be stated at the application stage, together with details of which activities are to be included.
- The institution will be expected to support Fellows with the provision of research facilities and accommodation, together with any additional research costs not covered by the Fellowship payment (although additional funding could be sought from another research funder). The ESRC will meet the indirect costs associated with the Fellowships.
- The individual's full salary will be paid, along with superannuation and National Insurance costs. Support for travel, subsistence and some equipment and training will normally be limited to a maximum of £5k per year. These costs will be subject to specification, in accordance with Research Funding regulations (July 1997 edition).
- All other conditions of Fellowships are in accordance with ESRC Research Funding (July 1997 edition).

22. Outline applications are invited for the Fellowships.

Applicants should specify:

- how the Fellowship will contribute to the Programme's aims;
- the proposed programme of work, including arrangements for partnership with practitioners;
- any proposed extra activities, such as teaching and supervision;
- the proposed training opportunities;
- the proposed mentoring support from the institution or from the Research Network Co-ordinator as appropriate;
- salary costs and support costs of up to £5,000 per year.

Before awards can be made, institutions will be asked to:

- confirm support for the Fellow;
- confirm the research support facilities available to the Fellow;
- confirm any additional financial/training support available to the Fellow.

23. Research Fellowships may be applied for independently of a Research Network proposal. In such cases, candidates are invited to submit an application form which includes a synopsis of the research proposal in not more than one side.

Submission of Applications for Fellowships and Networks

24. Outline applications for Fellowships and Networks are invited. The closing date for receipt of completed outline applications is **5.00 pm on Tuesday 13 April 1999**. Applications arriving after this time and date will not be accepted.
25. Completed application forms along with five copies should be sent to:

The Registrar
The Economic and Social Research Council
Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon
SN2 1UJ

All applications received by the due date will be acknowledged.

Assessment of Proposals

26. Outline applications will be considered by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme Steering Committee. Applicants will be informed at the end of May 1999 whether or not their application has been successful at this stage. Successful applicants will be invited to prepare a more detailed proposal for submission by 30 June 1999. Full applications will be assessed by peer reviewers, practitioners and users over the summer. The Steering Committee and the ESRC Research Priorities Board will decide on successful applications in autumn 1999. The final outcome should be announced in November 1999.