

ESRC 2014/15 Centres and Large Grants Competition Call specification

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Summary

Research centres and large grants are major ESRC strategic investments. In addition to taking forward an ambitious research agenda and making significant economic and/or societal impact, they add value by increasing infrastructure, building capacity, encouraging interdisciplinary working in social science and beyond, and enabling research collaboration in the UK and internationally.

The ESRC Centres and Large Grants Competition is aimed at experienced researchers who require longer-term or extended support for research groups, inter-institutional research networks, project-linked programmes, medium-to-large surveys, other infrastructure or methodological developments, or any related larger-scale projects. The competition is for proposals ranging from £2 million to £10 million (at 100 per cent full economic cost) with a term of up to five years. It is currently anticipated that the budget for this round will be £22 million. The ESRC Council expects to make around four awards.

This year's competition will be run as a two-stage application process. In the first stage, outline proposals should be submitted via the Research Council Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) System **no later than 16.00 on 5 June 2014**. In early August 2014, shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit full proposals by late September 2014. Following peer review, shortlisted proposals will be invited for interviews on 14 and 15 January 2015. Final funding decisions will be available in January 2015, and grants will start in October 2015 unless, exceptionally, applicants can make the case for an earlier start. It is expected that the Centres and Large Grants Competition will run again in 2015.

We welcome applications of excellent quality in any area of social science. This year's competition also has two specific strategic steers, on **'The Future of Higher Education'** and on **'Sustainable Prosperity'**, which sit alongside the normal open element of the call. Further details can be found in Annexes I and II.

What we expect from centres and large grants

Our expectations are that centres and large grants:

- provide scientifically coherent programmes of research aimed at driving forward innovations in social science theory, the development and application of novel research methods, data sources, and practical application
- be international or national centres of excellence for social science research, where researchers can collaborate on long-term projects
- make significant contributions to scientific, economic and/or social impact
- involve potential users of research, and take advantage of international collaborative and/or comparative opportunities
- support active career development programmes aimed at building research capacity.

There is no specific distinction between a centre and a large grant, and they will be assessed on the same criteria by the commissioning panels. As a general guide, centres are likely to have a broader management structure and a wider research focus than large grants, which may contain a narrower set of linked projects. There is also the expectation that centres

will become embedded within their institutions and in the broader research landscape, whereas this is expected less of large grants.

This call provides major opportunities for promoting innovation and interdisciplinarity, both within and beyond the social sciences, although excellent research within a particular social science discipline is also eligible for this call (however, if applying under the 'Sustainable Prosperity' steer, please see Annex II for steer-specific guidance). Knowledge exchange and impact-generating activities will be an integral part of any centre or large grant proposal, regardless of topic area or discipline.

Given our commitment to creating and maintaining large-scale data resources, proposed centres which undertake secondary analysis of these existing longitudinal and other data sets are particularly welcome (see www.esrc.ac.uk/research/research-resources/index.aspx), details are available from the UK Data Service (www.ukdataservice.ac.uk). Proposed centres and large grants may also take advantage of recent ESRC investments in data research centres that will enable safe access to de-identified data from public or private sector organisations. The ESRC's Administrative Data Research Network provides the infrastructure for safe access to such data for approved projects. Further information about the ESRC Big Data Network can be found at www.esrc.ac.uk/research/major-investments/big-data/.

Funding can also be used to develop capacity for the collection and subsequent analysis of major new data resources. Such data might include social media data, tracking data and image data. The ESRC appreciates the value of these and other new forms of data for academic research, and the exploitation of such data, including the development of innovative tools and methods for collecting, preserving and analysing them, is actively encouraged.

Successful applicants will be expected to follow branding guidelines of the ESRC (www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/visual-identity/index.aspx) and any other funders when developing digital or printed material as part of the grant activity, such as including appropriate logos on websites or publications.

Structure and organisation

There are various ways of structuring centres and large grants. They may be based in one institution. However, given our expectation that proposals will draw together the very best researchers from across the UK and abroad, they may very well involve investigators from a number of both academic and non-academic organisations, networked together. Grants which deliver multi-stream research programmes may, for example, provide opportunities for more innovative and higher-risk individual work streams and/or for early career researchers to lead particular projects. Applicants are encouraged to think imaginatively and flexibly about the appropriate structure for their proposed centre/large grant.

Open element

The 2014/15 Competition is open to innovative new research addressing any major social and economic topic. Successful proposals must add value to the current portfolio of ESRC

centres and large grants. Proposals that substantially overlap or duplicate existing centres or large grants are unlikely to be successful.

- Existing ESRC investments (www.esrc.ac.uk/research/major-investments/all-topic.aspx)

Strategic steers

The Council has recently reviewed the current activities funded under each of its three strategic priorities (www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/mission-strategy-priorities/refining-priorities/index.aspx) and has identified two areas where it intends to target further funding. Proposals that address research, capacity building and data issues focussed on **‘The Future of Higher Education’** and on **‘Sustainable Prosperity’** are particularly encouraged in the 2014/15 Centres and Large Grants Competition. Further information about these themes is included in Annexes I and II.

To facilitate the new interdisciplinary relationships and networks that may be required to address the ‘Sustainable Prosperity’ steer, we strongly advise that potential applicants attend the information and consortium-building event being held in central London on **28 April 2014**. Event delegates must be eligible to act as principal investigator or co-investigator. This includes representatives from voluntary sector, business, and government bodies. To register an expression of interest in attending this consortium-building event, please email the following details to sustainableprosperity@esrc.ac.uk by **16.00 on 22 April 2014**:

- full name
- title or position
- organisational affiliation
- email address
- area of expertise.

Please note that information supplied by delegates will be included in a delegate list provided to all who attend. We reserve the right to limit delegates due to logistical constraints.

The principal investigator

There is no formal restriction on who may be principal investigators (PIs) but, for the duration of the award, they must be based at a research organisation eligible for ESRC funding; see the RCUK website for a list of eligible organisations (www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs). It is likely that successful applications will be led by experienced researchers who are internationally recognised and have a well-established track record of publication within their field of study, as well as proven ability to deliver a large-scale research project successfully. The amount of time committed to the grant by the PI and co-investigators must be costed into the proposal – but very small fractions of co-investigator time should be avoided. Please note that shortlisted applicants will be required to set out details of their research experience in a separate attachment at the full proposal stage.

Management plan

Applicants should explain how they will provide leadership to a potentially diverse group of academic and (as appropriate) non-academic collaborators, how the proposed programme of activities and its outputs will be managed, and the role and function of any advisory or management groups. These arrangements will need to be briefly set out in the 'Case for Support' attachment in the proposal submitted at the outline stage. Further guidance is provided in the 'Je-S guidance notes for applicants, outline stage' document (available to download from - www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/3672/centres-and-large-grants-competition.aspx). Those invited to submit full proposals will be required to develop this aspect further.

Knowledge exchange

While it is possible to have knowledge exchange without impact, it is not possible to have impact without knowledge exchange. Therefore, although some research topics are more theoretical than others, awards made under this competition will provide for excellent research with economic and/or societal impact. In many cases, this will involve the co-production of knowledge and impact activities with those in the voluntary sector, the business community, public sector bodies and/or the wider public.

Applicants are required to consider carefully how best to build links and contacts with potential beneficiaries and users of the research at the earliest possible stages of research design and development, and to work towards co-production of knowledge with research users where appropriate. In addition to knowledge exchange and impact strategies that focus on particular user groups and/or specific named beneficiary organisations, public engagement activities which bring together researchers and the wider public are also strongly encouraged.

Consideration of, and advance planning for, knowledge exchange (KE) and strategies to maximise economic and/or societal impact should be central elements of proposals submitted to the Centres and Large Grants Competition. In the 'Pathways to Impact' attachment, applicants should present initial plans for developing an impact strategy, promoting knowledge exchange, public engagement and effective communication with key stakeholders. We encourage the submission of creative and innovative pathways to impact.

The resources required to undertake effective knowledge exchange will need to be accurately reflected and fully costed at the **full** proposal stage.

Helpful resources include the ESRC's Impact Toolkit (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/tools-and-resources/impact-toolkit/index.aspx) and results from the ESRC's series of impact evaluations (www.esrc.ac.uk/impacts-and-findings/impact-assessment/analysis-and-scoping.aspx).

Other support

Applicants may request justified costs for the following:

- research assistant support
- technical and clerical support
- necessary travel, fieldwork, data collection, equipment
- knowledge exchange activities
- communications costs
- centre management support (where appropriate)
- indirect and estates costs.

Institutional support

We will be looking for evidence of strong institutional commitment and contributions to hosting a centre or large grant, for example, through the provision of grant-associated parallel activities and capacity-building. A brief statement of institutional commitment will need to be set out in the 'Case for Support' attachment included with the outline proposal, and should be appropriate for the type of grant and level of funding being requested. Some examples of institutional commitment may include (but are not limited to):

- the appointment of new lectureship posts
- studentships
- seminar and summer schools
- support through the institution's existing knowledge exchange, impact and/or international strategies
- high-quality accommodation.

Applicants must also include a one-page letter of support from their institution, detailing the institutional commitment to the proposal, at the outline stage.

As part of the ESRC's policy on demand management, we will be looking closely at both the volume and quality of applications that institutions submit to this competition. We are also looking for evidence of strong institutional commitment and consider it doubtful that many institutions will be capable of maintaining an appropriate level of support across more than one application.

Co-investigators and collaboration

The inclusion of international co-investigators in proposals is encouraged. Please note that academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) from established overseas research organisations of comparable standing to ESRC-eligible UK research organisations are eligible to be listed as international co-investigators under this call. We will consider funding the direct costs of international co-investigators at 100 per cent fEC. However, these costs must not exceed 30 per cent of the full 100 per cent fEC cost of the grant. For further information: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/guidance/applicants/international-co-investigators.aspx. International collaboration is not limited to co-investigators but may also involve partnerships to develop international datasets, promote knowledge exchange and international impact, and enhance social science conceptual development on an international scale.

As noted above, we welcome inter-institutional applications and also strongly encourage partnerships with non-HEI organisations and the inclusion of third sector, business and public sector co-investigators. For further information: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/guidance/applicants/uk-co-investigators.aspx.

Career development and capacity building

We will be looking for evidence of a strong commitment to supporting the development of researchers (particularly at the early-career stage) and of plans for capacity building. Please note that we expect these approaches to be addressed in the **full** proposal and not in detail at the outline stage.

Plans for capacity building could include, but should not be limited to, grant-linked studentships. For further information www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/applicants/Grant-linked-studentships.aspx. Applicants should note that up to three grant-linked studentships may be included on any one proposal. Linked studentships must be located at an ESRC Doctoral Training Centre, on an accredited pathway. Applicants are encouraged to contact the relevant DTC Director for prior approval. Exceptionally, proposals including more than three grant-linked studentships will be considered, providing that a strong justification for capacity building in a particular area is supplied. The total cost of the studentships must be included in the total costs for the grant, and within the maximum funding available. Please note that the case for such studentships will need to be provided at the **full** proposal stage.

Research ethics

Applicants must ensure that the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard and must clearly state how any potential ethical and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place before the project commences and all risks are minimised. All proposals must comply with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics: www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/research-ethics.aspx.

Funding

Proposals may be for a period of up to five years in length, above £2 million and up to £10 million. These limits are set in terms of the full economic cost (fEC) of the grant as estimated using the fEC procedures. The ESRC will only fund 80 per cent of this cost, and the balance must be guaranteed by the research organisation.

It is currently anticipated that the total budget for the 2014/15 Centres and Large Grants Competition will be £22 million. The ESRC Council expects to make around four awards as a result of this competition. The final decision on how many proposals will be funded will depend primarily on the quality of the proposals but will also be informed by the availability of funds.

How to make an application

Outline proposals should be made via the Research Council Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) System (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>), and submitted to ESRC **no later than 16.00 on 5 June 2014**. Proposals must be costed and approved by the relevant institutional authority at the research organisation before submission.

The 'Je-S guidance notes for applicants, outline stage' document (available to download from www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/3672/centres-and-large-grants-competition.aspx) provides details on the information that applicants will be required to submit as part of their proposal. All applicants should consult the ESRC Research Funding Guide (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/guidance/applicants/research-funding-guide.aspx), which sets out the rules and regulations governing funding.

To submit a research proposal for the 'Future of Higher Education' steer, prefix the title of the proposal with 'Future of HE: '.

To submit a research proposal for the 'Sustainable Prosperity' steer, prefix the title of the proposal with 'Sustainable Prosperity: '.

Following shortlisting, applicants of successful outline proposals will be invited to submit full proposals via the Je-S System (see timetable, below). Further Je-S guidance will be issued at this time.

Selection criteria

Scientific excellence with impact is the primary criterion and is an essential requirement of all proposals. However, subject to this, we will give due weight to the competition steers. Proposals must clearly demonstrate that they meet the remit of the steers in order to be considered by the steer panels.

Only those proposals which demonstrate that they meet the following criteria are likely to be awarded funding:

- an innovative research agenda (in theory, methods, date and application) that can be fully sustained through the life of the award
- a clear set of strategies to maximise knowledge exchange and impacts through the proposed research
- a strong career development programme focused on encouraging new researchers and providing increased opportunities for established investigators
- a robust management structure with a nominated director(s) (for centre applications) and clear arrangements for co-ordination and management of the strategic direction of the centre or large grant
- strong institutional commitment and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining an ESRC centre or large grant
- a commitment to identifying and exploiting potential opportunities to work with existing ESRC investments, where appropriate, to maximise impact

- full consideration of the contribution that the centre or large grant will make to international collaborative and/or comparative opportunities
- research contributions which add value to the ESRC's existing portfolio of research investments by addressing current gaps in coverage.

Assessment of applications

The assessment of proposals will be a two-stage process. Outline proposals will be assessed and shortlisted by the commissioning panels. Shortlisted applicants will subsequently be invited to submit applications to the full proposal stage. Further Je-S guidance will be issued at this time.

Full proposals will be referred to a minimum of six external peer reviewers, including at least two from outside the UK. Applicants will be asked to nominate two academic peer reviewers, with one from outside the UK. Normally, one of these nominees will be approached as part of the peer review group. Applicants should seek the nominated reviewers' permission and commitment before nominating them. Applicants will also be asked to nominate up to two users of the research from outside the research community. We may also approach independent user reviewers.

Applications will be assessed by the commissioning panels and a final short-list invited to interview in Swindon on **14 and 15 January 2015**. Funding decisions will be available in January 2015, and the centres/grants awarded will start in October 2015 unless, exceptionally, applicants can make the case for an earlier start.

Timetable

- Issue call for outline proposals - **10 April 2014**
- Deadline for submitting outline proposals - **5 June 2014**
- Decisions to applicants on outline stage - **late July 2014**
- Issue call for full proposals (for successful outlines only) - **5 August 2014**
- Deadline for submitting full proposals - **23 September 2014**
- Commissioning panel meeting/interviews for shortlisted applicants - **14-15 January 2015**
- Decisions to applicants - **late January 2015**

Contact

If you have any questions or would like further information about the scheme, please contact:

General competition

- Tim Pank
Telephone: 01793 411508
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk

- Glen Noble
Telephone: 01793 413138
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk
- Christina Rowley
Telephone: 01793 413133
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk

‘Future of Higher Education’ steer

- Jeanine Woolley
Telephone: 01793 413012
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk
- Rachel Tyrrell
Telephone: 01793 444518
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk

‘Sustainable Prosperity’ steer

- Tom Roberts
Telephone: 01793 442821
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk
- Hannah Collins
Telephone: 01793 413024
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk

For information about the consortium-building event for this steer, please email sustainableprosperity@esrc.ac.uk.

Annex I: The future of higher education

Applicants to this strategic steer should note the following:

To submit a research proposal for the future of higher education steer, prefix the title of the proposal with 'Future of HE: '.

Background

The ESRC is committed to continuing its support for investment into the area of higher education (HE). We are therefore placing a specific steer in this year's Centre and Large Grants Competition to stimulate excellent research with impact that contributes to the evidence base in this area. Proposals should demonstrate coherence across the areas proposed to be covered, and innovative approaches to the research challenges are encouraged. Research may be quantitative, qualitative or involve a mix of research methods, the latter being especially welcome.

The following text is intended to indicate an overview of potential areas of emphasis for research investment, but it not intended to be prescriptive. We recognise that areas within these themes are overlapping and intersecting, rather than discrete areas of study. Proposals are not required to address all of the themes mentioned here, nor should applicants feel restricted by the scope of this outline.

Core themes

Scoping activities have led to the framing of the work under the umbrella heading of 'The Future of Higher Education' - how higher education is organised and funded and what it is for (its nature and purpose) - with the following themes:

- organisation of higher education institutions (HEIs) and the HE system
- equity in higher education participation
- curriculum, pedagogy and modes of provision
- higher education for the public good
- HE and the labour market.

Organisation of HEIs and the HE system

New research could examine effects of rapid changes facing the HE sector including: globalisation; the marketisation of higher education including graduate and postgraduate student support; the appearance of new educational technologies and the effect of technology on institutional change; the growth of new and evolving funding models for HEIs; the perceived rise of for-profit providers. The themes would also include the impact of reform and new business models on higher education – the management of HEIs and HE systems, their internal rewards and incentives, and the regional, national and international partnerships between HEIs that might be driven by change. Finally, how institutions can be collaborative and competitive at the same time and how audit, assessment and accountability processes (such as the Research Excellence Framework) affect change and innovation.

Equity in higher education participation

This theme examines inequality in access to higher education, at both the graduate and postgraduate level, given the economic and non-economic benefits of higher education for participants. Research questions here might involve higher education and social mobility; examining disadvantage and how higher education changes lives; inequity in higher education outcomes; later-life higher education and its effects, as well as the effects of early-life higher education participation on later life; links to school provision and assessment. This theme would also consider the dynamics of the international student market and related applied equity considerations, and how this relates to international satellite campuses of UK institutions. Also, the dynamic of students as consumers (with particular needs and concerns, such as fees, and groupings, such as graduate, postgraduate, international or mature students) and the perceived value-for-money based on fee structures. Finally, student motivation, in the UK and internationally, related to graduate pay fluctuations or changes, including participation in less formal types of higher education which may not involve academic credit.

Curriculum, pedagogy and modes of provision

There is a perceived inertia in the education sector in terms of the development of pedagogical methods and modes of curriculum delivery. Research questions could approach pedagogy practices, value for money, and the varying impact on students of the wide range of higher education cultures and pedagogies. This theme would also cover research on the delivery of online education, through mechanisms such as Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) and how comparable these are to 'standard' courses in terms of the value of these courses. As well as value for money, a wider discussion could be invited on the 'value' to the individual and to society of sub-degree courses and or modules - such as, is there an intrinsic value (in the ways we usually judge: pay, employment, more engaged citizens) or is value realised only when these are used in a progression framework and multiplied to the level of a degree?

Higher education for the public good

This theme includes research on identifying, understanding and valuing the wider benefits of higher education, in the context of a wide range of users and stakeholders. Research might consider the extent to which (and differences in how) graduates, postgraduates and the HE sector itself contribute to society and the public good, perhaps in social, cultural or political terms. This theme would also consider knowledge production and transformation; examining the potential role(s) of HE, including its research function and as a positive force in society. Research here might ask how other areas of society, including the world of policy, make use of knowledge from higher education; how public and private higher education differ in the way they produce and transmit knowledge and examining models of partnership with public bodies such as local government and the NHS, schools and further education and with bodies responsible for school standards and the national curriculum. The value of study could also be explored under this heading, particularly at postgraduate level fee structures with regards to their effect on widening participation and fair access, as well as on choice of HEI.

HE and the labour market

Research in this area could examine both the role of the labour market produced by HE and of the academic labour market in terms of economic growth. This could involve employer involvement in HE and student employability – including the successful/feasible models of employer engagement at different levels within the HE system and what students are themselves seeking in terms of employability; and how this could be delivered. In addition, research could examine part-time degree completion, success rates and employment – the effect on pay and employment when students stop their studies and/or take long breaks, and whether drop-out or non-completion should only be regarded as a failure with no other benefits. In terms of the academic labour market, the HE sector is a major employer, nationally and in many cities. Research questions could examine the training, formation and capacity of the academic workforce in the context of the global labour market and of university strategy. This research may involve examining the circulation of people and the global sources of change and stability in the labour market, and at incentives and rewards.

Contact

If you have any questions about this steer, please contact:

- Jeanine Woolley
Telephone: 01793 413012
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk
- Rachel Tyrrell
Telephone: 01793 444518
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk

Annex II: Sustainable prosperity

Applicants to this strategic steer should note the following:

ESRC will be holding an applicant information and consortium-building event on **28 April 2014**. Potential applicants under this steer are advised to attend this event. Please see the end of this document for details of how to register.

To submit a research proposal for the sustainable prosperity steer, prefix the title of the proposal with 'Sustainable Prosperity: '.

Background

The ESRC is committed to continuing its support for investment into addressing the social science challenges of the energy-environment-food nexus. We are therefore placing a specific steer in this year's Centre and Large Grants Competition to stimulate excellent research with impact that contributes to the evidence base in the area of sustainable prosperity. The research undertaken may be quantitative, qualitative or involve a mix of research methods.

We have identified sustainable prosperity as one of a set of priorities which emerged from a consultation exercise in 2013 that engaged key social science academics, government departments, businesses and other stakeholders around the question: 'What are the future social science challenges that cut across the energy-environment-food nexus?'. The consultation demonstrated that more needed to be done to bring disparate communities from across the social sciences (and beyond) together in ways that generated high-quality, novel and interdisciplinary social science-led research.

Since then, the following activities have been initiated:

- the Nexus Network Plus - which is creating a nexus-thinking capacity that actively spans work in the energy-environment-food domains - has been commissioned
- ESRC is leading a task force to establish whether there is scope for a policy evaluation centre in the energy-environment-food space
- together with the British Academy (and with substantive input from an expert working group), ESRC co-hosted a scoping workshop on 'Sustainable Prosperity' at the Academy on 20 February 2014.

The 'Sustainable Prosperity' event brought together a breadth of academic and practitioner perspectives from across the economic, social and sustainability domains. A synthesis document providing a summary of the workshop and its headline findings has been jointly published by the ESRC and British Academy (www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/announcements/30581/Sustainable_Prosperty_New_directions_for_social_science_research.aspx) and provides background to this steer.

Core themes

The following text is intended to indicate an overview of potential areas of emphasis for research investment, but it is not intended to be prescriptive. We recognise that areas within these themes are overlapping and intersecting, rather than discrete areas of study. Proposals are not required to address all of the themes mentioned here, nor should applicants feel restricted by the scope of this outline.

Five broad and overlapping research themes emerged from the scoping activities outlined above and form the core themes for this steer:

- economic models and metrics
- social justice and sustainability
- finance, business and work
- governance and regulation
- dimensions of sustainable prosperity.

Economic models and metrics

Research under this theme might examine: whether and how a macro-economic growth-based paradigm is still tenable, given the constraints posed by the nexus and the potential of several degrees of warming due to climate change; how economies can be made more resilient and robust, given the increasing frequency of ‘black swan events’ and their consequences; the role of the standard approach, given the pressures to shift demand away from conventional consumption; ways of increasing sustainable economic innovation and demonstrating the viability of alternative approaches (which may include natural capital and ecosystems services models and the circular economy, as well as steady state and zero growth theses) as well as the implications of such alternative approaches for current economic activities. Measurement of the subtle relationship between economic growth and human prosperity is also important, for example, is GDP a sophisticated enough metric to meet the challenges of sustainable prosperity? What are the potential societal implications of adopting different metrics, which may include, but are not limited to, adjusted economic measures, subjective measures of wellbeing, and weighted composite measures of multiple indicators?

Social justice and sustainability

Social justice is potentially a key element of sustainable prosperity. With climate change accepted as a significant indicator of the unsustainability of current lifestyles and with plausible scenarios of up to 4 degrees warming due to climate change, research under this theme may examine: how we might better address the needs and capacities of present and future generations through the equitable management and distribution of critical resources including food, water, and energy; and the implications of constraints upon population and environmental protection and the role and limit of technology in addressing such tensions. Research may also examine the extent to which a sense of ‘fairness’ can be harnessed to re-frame sustainable prosperity. The role of carbon budgeting and accounting may be relevant to this theme. There could also be a role for exploring how and whether formal education may address this challenge. Other research here may explore understanding the barriers to

social justice, investigating viable social, economic and political strategies for sustainable prosperity. A particular concern is to frame social justice and sustainability in the context of the lives of poor and vulnerable people in all parts of the world.

Finance, business and work

Understanding the role of global markets, finance and investment will be essential if sustainable prosperity is to be realised. This steer welcomes research questions that examine the standards, attitudes and behaviours of investment communities, for example: Where are the opportunities, drivers and pinch-points for investors in bringing about changes in investment behaviours? What might be learnt from existing 'green' and ethical investment activities? How and why might shareholders demand more than just the highest possible return on capital? How might businesses go beyond the reputational value of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by adopting new approaches to future-proof themselves and their supply chains against the challenges posed by the energy-environment-food nexus? Research might consider whether and how the risk premium for unsustainable businesses might be increased? Research questions under this theme may also examine the implications of alternative economic approaches for the labour market and business community; the value of a maximum wage; the role of human creativity and wellbeing in the workplace; and the value and status of unpaid work.

Governance and regulation

Regulation may help to make responsible behaviour the norm, and can be an important driver of cultural and business change. Research questions under this theme might look at: what governance and fiscal arrangements are required to foster sustainable prosperity across local, regional, national and global dimensions; what the role could be for political, civic, and community leadership in generating and inspiring public debate; the types of fiscal, regulatory, and political interventions that might be required to better align individual, public sector, and business interests toward sustainable prosperity, long-term thinking and planning; examining the role of the 'super-rich'. There is also a need to address particular public sector challenges associated with turnover of policymakers. Research might look at ways to reward stability and institutional learning, and whether and how the public sector could act as a seedbed for nurturing and spreading sustainable innovation and behaviour.

Dimensions of sustainable prosperity

There are a number of research strands under this theme: revealing the material, social and psychological dimensions of prosperity, wealth, and credit; understanding why and how people come to desire and acquire the things they do (for example, how and under what circumstances do 'wants' become 'needs', and when and under what circumstances do countervailing trends such as frugality and minimalism come in?) There are also potential questions and debates around the resource implications of less or more equal societies, how to account for ecological footprints, and how to mitigate against 'rebound effects'. Research may be required to understand better how to make best use of the social science tools available to encourage public participation, dialogue and mass imagination in planning for the future and sustainable prosperity. What might past changes in behaviour suggest

about possible future directions, and what are the roles of traditional and new media in shaping public opinion on climate change, consumerism, and nexus concerns?

Next steps

The complex nature of these themes demands a broad range of disciplinary approaches and forms of expertise to respond in a co-ordinated and systematic way. ESRC recognises that the UK research community currently has pockets of excellent research expertise in areas that can contribute to this steer, but these communities are disparate. In order to address the challenges of sustainable prosperity, new interdisciplinary collaborations and groupings of expertise are required to move the research agenda forward.

Centres and Large Grant applications in this ambitious and complex area will seek to maximise synergistic benefits across multiple institutions, develop capacity and create new communities. Proposals will be required to demonstrate close collaboration, co-production and interdisciplinarity. They will require a strong governance structure whilst also remaining sufficiently agile to make best use of the distributed nature of such expertise.

Information and consortium-building event

In order to foster and facilitate the new interdisciplinary relationships and networks that may be required to address this steer, ESRC will be holding an applicant information and consortium-building event in central London on **28 April 2014**, which potential applicants to this steer are advised to attend.

Event delegates must be eligible to act as principal investigator or co-investigator. This includes representatives from business, the voluntary and community sector, and government bodies. Those wishing to attend should register by emailing the following details to sustainableprosperity@esrc.ac.uk by **16.00 on 22 April 2014**:

- full name
- title or position
- organisational affiliation
- email address and
- area of expertise.

Please note that information supplied by delegates will be included in a delegate list provided to all who attend. ESRC reserves the right to limit delegates due to logistical constraints.

Contact

If you have any questions about this steer, please contact:

- Tom Roberts
Telephone: 01793 442821
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk

- Hannah Collins
Telephone: 01793 413024
Email: centreslargegrants@esrc.ac.uk