

Research Council Delivery Plans 2011 – 2015 and Changes to British Academy Funding

In late December 2010 each of the UK Research Councils published their delivery plans for the spending review period of 2011-2015. The key points for each of the councils are summarised below:

1. Arts and Humanities Research Council

1.1 General points

- Longer and larger grants to be awarded to fewer institutions.
- Promotion of consortia arrangements.
- Analysis of application trends and success rates, strategic discussions with HEIs falling below average to develop self-management of demand and quality control of proposals, introduction of sanctions if necessary.
- Development of new methods for making awards such as sandpits, summits, highlight calls and expressions of interest.

1.2 Research schemes

- Majority of Fellowships to be allocated to strategic priority areas – languages, digital humanities, creative economy, heritage and interdisciplinary research with science subjects.
- Closure of Creative and Performing Arts Fellowships, Practice-led and Applied Route Research Grants, Knowledge Transfer Fellowships and Knowledge Transfer Catalyst schemes.
- Withdrawal of stand-alone Masters, 1+3 doctoral support will be allowed under the Block Grant Partnership Programme.
- Continuation of commissioned research to invest in areas of strategic or emerging importance.
- Specific funds to be allocated to three areas of current strategic need: Modern Languages, Design and Heritage. Block Grant Partnerships and Fellowships will be offered in these three areas.

1.3 Thematic programmes

- Implementation of new thematic programmes – Science in Culture, Care for the Future, Translating Cultures and Digital Transformations.
- Increased contribution to cross-Council programmes: Connected Communities, Digital Economy and Living with Environmental Change.
- Implementation of a new strategy for knowledge exchange and economic impact focusing on the creative economy.
- Creation of Creative Economy ‘hubs’ to develop research partnerships with the creative and cultural sectors including commercial and public partners.
- Prioritisation of heritage research.
- New initiatives to be launched in medical humanities and the role of culture in wellbeing.
- More focused specifications for thematic awards to stop opportunistic bidding.

For a copy of the AHRC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:
<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Policy/Documents/DeliveryPlan2011.pdf>

2. Economic and Social Research Council

2.1 General points

- Move away from smaller projects to fewer but longer and larger grants.
- Move from self-regulation to the introduction of methods to manage demand and improve quality of grant submissions.

2.2 Priority areas

- 'Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth', 'Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions' and 'A Vibrant and Fair Society'. Priority areas to be addressed by strategic calls.

2.3 Research Schemes

- Termination of Small Grants, Postdoctoral Fellowships and Mid-Career Development Fellowships Schemes on 1st February 2011.
- Increase in the lower threshold for standard grants from £100,000 to £200,000.
- The introduction of a new Future Research Leaders Scheme for early-career researchers in spring 2011. Grants of up to two years, open to applicants within 6 years of their PhD, 50-80 new grants per year.

For a copy of the ESRC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:
http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC%20Delivery%20Plan%202011-15_tcm6-37630.pdf

3. Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

3.1 General points

- Move from being a funder to a sponsor of research, investments a national resource focused on outcomes for the good of the UK.
- 'International Excellence' and 'Importance to the UK' to be applied as selection criteria.
- New system for managing demand for research funds has resulted in fewer grant applications being submitted and an average success rate of 35%, 32% for responsive mode.
- Aim to build a critical mass in research groups.
- Encouragement of collaboration on research grants to attract additional funding.
- Implementation plan to be published before April 2011.

3.2 Priority Themes

- Manufacturing the Future, Energy, the Digital Economy and Healthcare Technologies.

3.3 Research Schemes

- End of support for project studentships on research grants.
- End of dedicated public engagement programme – this will be embedded in research and training programmes.

For a copy of the EPSRC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Publications/corporate/EPsrcDeliveryPlan2011-15.pdf>

4. Natural Environment Research Council

4.1 General

- Larger proportion of budget to be spent on strategic research programmes addressing issues such as flooding, drought, water quality, renewable energy, bioresources and climate change.
- Development of agreements with research organisations to manage level of demand for research funding.

4.2 Priority sectors

- Marine renewable energy, environmental management for food and agriculture, water security, resource management including minerals and waste and financial services risk management and valuation.

For a copy of the NERC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/perform/documents/deliveryplan201012.pdf>

5. Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

5.1 General Points

- Move from the position of a funder to an 'investor' of public funding.
- Return to fundamental bioscience and protect crucial core subjects.
- Driving data intensive and multi-disciplinary approaches.
- Rationalisation of fellowships to occur in this period.
- Strategic longer-larger grants going to the best HEIs.
- Improve the translation readiness of research.
- Aim to 'de-risk' early innovation by bridging the gap between research outputs and their development into commercial prospects.
- Committees will be asked to prioritise research proposals which address the following priority areas: food security, bio-energy, industrial biotechnology and basic bioscience underpinning health and wellbeing.
- Seek a reduction in applications of at least 10% by setting success rate targets and capping the number of applications from unsuccessful institutions and providing information on the rank ordered position of grants to all institutions.

5.2 Priority areas

- Food security
- Sustainable bio-energy, chemicals and renewable materials from bioscience.
- Enhancing lives and improving wellbeing

5.3 Research Schemes

- Expanding the Follow-on Fund to over £4M p.a. by 2014-15 to allow for a small number of major projects.

For a copy of the BBSRC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:

http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Publications/delivery_plan_2011_2015.pdf

6. Medical Research Council

6.1 General Points

- Focus on partnerships and the delivery of public sector investment.
- Strengthening of translational research.
- Safeguarding the future, through support of future leaders at the intermediate stage of their careers, increasing the number of early and intermediate career fellowships to provide career support for scientists at a critical career stage.

6.2 Priority areas

- Stratified medicine, regenerative medicine (tissue engineering, nanoscience, chemical biology), system level medicine, mental health, health and wellbeing and old age.

6.3 Research Schemes

- Reform and concentration agendas will be supported by a **Strategic Research Fund**: fast response to high impact work and new developments.

For a copy of the MRC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Newspublications/News/MRC007639>

7. Science and Technology Facilities Council

7.1 Redevelopment of Grant Funding

Following a consultation in summer 2010 the STFC has already redeveloped its grant scheme which will be rolled out in 2011, key features of this are:

- an end to the mixed portfolio of standard and rolling grants to a single grant mechanism;
- limiting applications to one every three years per university department per subject area;
- an estimated reduction in the number of proposals from 600 every three years to between 100 and 200.

7.2 General Points

- Spending on grants will be maintained and the number of research studentships kept constant at 220 per year.
- £3.5 million will be redirected to fund a new fellowships scheme and Studentship Enhancement Programme to support future research leaders.
- £16 million will be redirected to new funding schemes to support Global Challenges, innovation and collaborative research.
- £39m will be spent to support cross-Research Council programmes.
- The scientific advisory committee structure is being reviewed to reduce both costs and complexity.

- To work closely with HEIs to support them to self manage demand, deliver quality control of research grants and share good practice.
- To continue the policy of focusing grant funding to top institutions, although no targets will be imposed for this.

7.3 Research Schemes

- A new fellowship scheme aimed at individuals with leadership potential will be introduced. This elite scheme will offer up to 12 fellowships per year, £3m is available for the full complement of fellows by the end of 2016. This scheme replaces the existing advanced fellowships scheme.
- Full and part-time placements will be established for mid-career researchers to work at the interface between the STFC and Global Challenges.

For a copy of the STFC's Delivery Plan please see the following webpage:

<http://www.stfc.ac.uk/resources/pdf/DP2011-15.pdf>

8. Changes to British Academy Funding

As part of its plans for the new spending review period the British Academy has announced changes to its funding schemes. The Small Research Grants scheme and Conference grants scheme will be phased out during 2010/2011. The final rounds of both schemes will be announced in January with expected deadlines in March.

The Academy has launched a new Mid-Career Fellowship Scheme to support outstanding researchers and those involved in public engagement activities. These fellowships aim to allow successful applicants time away from teaching and administrative duties to complete a major piece of research or promote a programme of public engagement. A salary contribution of £80,000 fEC will be made by the Academy to support Fellowships of between six and twelve months duration. The deadline for applications is 9th March 2011.

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