

ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (2023-2028) Application Guidance for Responsive Projects, Rapid Action, and Knowledge Exchange Fellowships

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Introduction

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has awarded the Leeds Social Sciences Institute (LSSI) funding through an Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) to support Leeds researchers in the social sciences to maximise the impact and influence of their research on non-academic beneficiaries and to foster non-academic stakeholder engagement. The IAA will support a comprehensive portfolio of activities and resources across the social science community which will maximise the potential for impact of social science research and contribute to economic and societal development regionally, nationally, and internationally.

The ESRC award is worth £1.25m in total and runs from 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2028. The ESRC IAA will allow us to build on the successful ESRC funded IAA that the LSSI has coordinated since 2019.

Objectives of the IAA

To build upon the established ESRC IAA processes, infrastructure and learning to deliver impact aligned to the following core objectives.

- a) To co-ordinate and maximise support for social science impact activity, providing responsive, flexible funding for innovative social science impact projects and allowing researchers at all development stages to connect with external partners through knowledge exchange and secondment opportunities.
- b) To drive responsible innovation with appropriate risk, supporting experimental impact and engagement through processes that allow fast failure.
- c) To build new and enhanced relations with partners in the industrial/business sectors and to diversify and strengthen relations with organisations in the third sector at regional, national, and international levels.
- d) To deliver a step change in local and national policy engagement through regional collaboration and strategic partnerships.
- e) To track investments in impact, whether successful or not, to better understand effective pathways to impact, models of co-production, innovation, and skills development to inform future research partnerships and strategies and enhance institutional learning.

The key outcomes for the IAA are listed in Appendix 2.

The IAA defines impact in accordance with the UKRI definition of economic and societal impact, which is described here.

The IAA uses the ESRC definition of social science research as listed [here](#) but is not limited to ESRC funded researchers.

Eligibility

- a) Project proposals must align to the ESRC's disciplinary remit and definition of social science. Link to ESRC Webpage [here](#)
- b) Applications are invited from any researcher active in the social sciences who at the point of application, holds a current contract of employment at the University of Leeds which will last the duration of the proposed activity for which IAA funding is applied for. All applications should be approved and signed off by the applicant's Head of School to ensure that the applicant is able to apply for this funding in line with their employment contract, i.e., leading this project is not a role that sits outside their current contracted role and that there is scope within the applicant's FTE to do this project.
- c) PhD students are only eligible to apply for the PGR Placement Scheme. For further details of the placement scheme [click here](#).
- d) Applications must be led by a named Principal Investigator (PI) within the University, and projects are expected to identify external partners as co-applicants (with named responsible individuals). 'In kind' or cash contributions are expected from the external partners and internally from School/Faculties where relevant.
- e) In kind School contributions may include the time commitments of named external co-applicants. PIs are encouraged to provide approximate costings and value of such co-funding and a letter of support from the external partner(s) that itemises all such contributions. Please note we only accept letters of support and not emails. It is mandatory for all in kind contributions to be calculated and specified in the application.
- f) Other Universities can also be co-applicants to IAA bids but alone do not constitute external partners for the purpose of the IAA. We would expect co-funding from other HE institutions where they are involved in any application; this may take the form of co-funding with another IAA where relevant.
- g) Awards are **not** for the continuation of existing research, bridge-funding nor to keep research officers/assistants employed beyond the term of their contracts. Applications should focus on the development of impact activities and outputs not research itself (see [ESRC Expectations and Purpose](#) below).
- h) Applications which read like research grant proposals redrafted for the IAA are unlikely to be successful. Applications should clearly define the development of prior findings and ideas towards impact. Careful thought should be given to the kinds of impacts that are intended, how these might be realised and who the key beneficiaries are expected to be. All applications will need well-considered 'follow on' plans as to longer-term developments beyond the funding period.
- i) Existing ESRC (and UKRI) grant holders are able to apply to the IAA, however, it is not anticipated that the fund will support project specific activities which would normally be included in prior funded/planned 'pathways to impact', unless good reasons are provided as to the emergence of new impact-related opportunities which might not have been easily identified at the time the original ESRC (or other UKRI) grant application was made.
- j) Projects should have the potential to deliver economic, cultural and /or societal benefit to organisations and/or citizens outside academia.

Eligible Costs

All IAA awards can only cover **directly incurred costs** associated with the award (i.e., awards do not cover Full Economic Costs), which may include the following:

- Reasonable travel, accommodation and subsistence costs - in accordance with the University expenses policy.
- Equipment - consumables directly related to the project may be eligible for funding.
- Salaries - to support existing non-academic staff already employed by the University of Leeds (when justification is provided that their contribution to the project falls outside of their contracted responsibilities at the University of Leeds) or to recruit new members of staff (on a fixed-term basis). For any recruitment there is expected to be a demonstration that this staffing is necessary to meet the skills requirement of the role, and that recruitment can be achieved in an appropriate timescale for the implementation of the project. Projects can be carried out on a full-time or part-time basis. Please ensure the University of Leeds [Recruitment Guide](#) is followed. Please also refer to the University guidance on [naming people on research grants](#).
- Other – such as registration costs at events (this does not include academic conferences), production of professional materials, room bookings, catering etc.
- Applicants should provide costings in their application (in consultation with Faculty Research offices) and justification for the budget.

The following costs are **not eligible**:

- Academic staff time (however, these costs should be included in applications as UoL internal co-funding).
- Estates and indirect costs.
- Building and refurbishment costs.
- Patent filing or similar costs associated directly to registering intellectual property rights.
- Infrastructure and Capital Expenditure, i.e., no single items of equipment above the £10k threshold are permitted.
- Costings for students e.g., student placements only eligible within the PGR Placement Scheme.
- Alcohol is not an eligible cost through the IAA.
- If funded through IAA, the cost of activities that fall beyond 31st March 2028.

Successful projects will have an account set up for the project costs, please note that this may take up to 2/3 weeks from confirmation of award. (Please note if a risk review or contractual agreements are required, this should be completed prior to account set up). If a project is unsuccessful or invited to resubmit and is not funded at the resubmission, the project will not be eligible to go forward to further panel meetings.

ESRC Expectations and Purpose

The ESRC IAA is not restricted to applications from individuals whose research is funded by the ESRC or other research councils.

The ESRC requires that the IAA funds are to be used flexibly and rapidly to support knowledge exchange and impact and **should include substantive user engagement**, for example:

- a) Building relationships and networks with potential users of research to facilitate co-production of research and to maximise impact – i.e., building relationships that might lead to new research and inform the ‘pathways to impact’ of a future research grant application.
- b) Movement and secondment of people into and from external organisations and user stakeholders.
- c) Support for translation, application, and utilisation of existing research findings to enhance their impact and to enable researchers to build networks with potential users of the outcomes of their research, and further work to establish proof of concept for their innovations.
- d) Improving engagement with the public sector, policy sector, civil society, industry (including SMEs and local business) and the public.

To ensure IAAs can be used to fund a diversity of knowledge exchange and impact activity, the following are **ineligible** for support through the IAA:

- a) Large ESRC investments (e.g., Centres, Large Grants, Infrastructure Investments).
- b) New research - i.e., the collection and/or analysis of new primary data. The awards are not for the continuation of research. Applications should therefore focus on the development of impact activities and outputs and not on research.

IAA Supported Activities

The IAA will support the following strands of activity. Through all the IAA activities, we are keen to support EDI principles, such as early career researcher development, support of under-represented groups and the facilitation of flexible circumstances (see [Appendix 1](#))

Responsive Projects

Funding of up to £15k is available, projects will be supported up to a maximum of 12 months.

The purpose of the *Responsive Projects funding* is to provide flexible funding for projects that demonstrate strong user engagement and potential for local/ regional/ national/ international societal impact. We seek to particularly support projects that embed and develop co-designed and co-produced impact relationships to contribute to our ambition to drive culture change across social science activities. We encourage interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary engagement beyond the usual disciplinary mixes; ensuring the right mix of expertise can drive workable solutions to real world issues.

Smaller amounts for initial testing of impact relationships are also welcome. The fund will support activities such as building co-produced relationships with non-academic users,

including public engagement where applicable; co-development of activities designed to apply research to policy and practice; co-designed policy/evidence workshops or the co-production of novel experimental types of impact generation.

All projects must have at least one external, non-academic partner that is contributing to the project (either cash or in-kind). External partners could include national and international businesses, public and third sector organisations or community groups.

Responsive Projects will be supported for a maximum of 12 months. Applicants will need to specify a start and end date to the project. The project must start within 3 months of the call deadline.

The call for Responsive Projects will be made quarterly, and applications will be assessed by the IAA Award Panel (see [Funding Call](#) section below).

Rapid Action

Funding of up to £2k is available, projects will be supported up to a maximum of 6 months.

The Rapid Action fund will allow social scientists to react quickly to influence governmental, national, and international debate, or respond to tactical, urgent, and pressing opportunities in short timescales.

This funding could be used for but not limited to:

- The creation of short-term impact projects.
- Workshops, events, or meetings that may inform impact.
- Travel to meet with national policy departments (this does not include travel to attend conferences).
- Developing and pitching ideas for broadcast media.

The funding cannot be used to support existing IAA funded activity (e.g., through a Responsive Project).

Rapid Action funding calls are ongoing and will be assessed on a rolling basis by the LSSI/IAA Manager, Award Panel members and LSSI Director. Funding is only available for a small number of rapid action fund requests per year (no more than 2 per year); successful applicants will therefore not be allowed to submit a further application request for this award within that given year. If successful and dependent on any conditions being agreed, applicants will receive notifications of the award within 15 - 20 working days of the request being submitted.

Knowledge Exchange Fellowships

Funding of up to £10k per fellowship.

The aim of the Knowledge Exchange Fellowship scheme is to enhance co-produced, long-term/ sustainable knowledge exchange interactions between external organisations and the University of Leeds through staff mobility.

The scheme will provide academic staff with an opportunity to work with a non-academic partner at their site, or for a non-academic partner to work on a project at the university (or a mixed approach) for up to 12 months on either a full-time or part-time basis.

The following will be supported:

- a. *Incoming Practitioner Fellowships*: To enable individuals from external non-academic organisations to be embedded within the University of Leeds for a dedicated piece of work.
- b. *Outgoing Academic Fellowships*: This scheme will enable researchers to develop new KE activities with partner organisations. A flexible approach for a) and b) (shorter full-time or extended part-time up to 12 months) will be applied to increase flexibility.
- c. *Mixed knowledge Exchange Fellowships*: This model combines incoming and outgoing fellowship activities over an extended period to enhance knowledge exchange between the University of Leeds and strategic partners, leading to enhanced sustainability of partnerships, increased capacity for productive engagement and co-created research and impact agendas.

External partners may include industry, business, public sector/government organisations or third sector organisations. We are keen to strategically support:

- Closer third sector collaboration to build capacity to utilise research, including through LeedsACTS!, and key national and international charitable organisations.
- Enhanced collaboration with private sector organisations, to increase mutual understanding of ways of working and to support the commercialisation agenda.

For outgoing exchanges, the scheme supports teaching buy-out to allow the researcher to spend time at the partner organisation (match funding from your School or Faculty is required); we cannot cover academic time. Match funding would be expected from external partners for secondments which extend beyond 6 months.

For incoming projects, this scheme will provide funding to enable individuals from external non-academic organisations to visit the University of Leeds and be embedded within departments or research groups for an appropriate length of time. Visiting Practitioners will be expected to have a planned programme of KE or engagement activity for the duration of their time at the university.

PIs must discuss secondment preparations with their Faculty HR team to ensure correct arrangements are put in place prior to the start of the project, e.g., access to buildings/systems necessary to carry out project.

Collaborations may be either early-stage interactions or well-established partnerships. There must be a clear case for further development of the relationship via a KE project.

Fellowships outside the UK are eligible; however, all external partners should have a significant presence in the UK, e.g., manufacturing and/or R&D base, and the activity should be able to deliver benefit to the UK. Projects with external partners with no UK presence are eligible providing that the project can demonstrate clear potential for delivery of a net benefit to the UK.

The call for Knowledge Exchange Fellowships will be made quarterly, and applications will be assessed by the IAA Award Panel. Projects need to specify a start and end date to the project. The project must start within 3 months of the call deadline.

Application and Award Process

There will be up to four open **Calls for Proposals** per academic year for Responsive Projects and Knowledge Exchange Fellowships. Rapid Action applications are reviewed on a rolling basis. Details of each specific call will be available on the LSSI website and will be circulated via social science research networks and LSSI.

Applicants must ensure they use the correct and the latest version of the Application Form and Guidance, this is available on the [LSSI website](#).

The word and page limits as indicated on the application form should be adhered to, failure to do this may result in your application not progressing to panel.

Completed forms should be submitted electronically to Cheryl Harris: C.A.Harris@leeds.ac.uk – the IAA Manager who will also be available to answer specific questions about the IAA funding that are not covered in the published documents.

Faculty Research & Innovation Office

For all awards (except for PGR Placements) we request that you consult with your Faculty Research & Innovation Office (FRIO) prior to submission; a Faculty Research Manager and Head of School sign off is required. Please ensure that sign off and costings from the FRIO are done in a timely manner.

Contracts and HR

If your proposal includes recruitment/secondment of staff or the arrangement of IP and contractual agreements, please have these discussions with HR and commercial teams early in the process to safeguard against any delays should you be awarded funding.

If your project is funded and your partner is new to the University and will be receiving payment from the University of Leeds; please contact your faculty finance teams as soon as possible so they can be set up on our systems, to reduce the risk of payment delays.

Co-funding

IAA applications can be considered in conjunction with other IAA funding schemes such as the EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC and STFC IAAs that are available at the University. For further details about these schemes click [here](#).

If you wish your application to be considered for co-funding with other funding schemes at UoL, please detail this in your application.

Trusted Research and Export Controls

All applications to the ESRC IAA must consider Trusted Research and Export Controls issues prior to application.

Trusted Research guidance; link to webpage [here](#). This guidance will help university staff to understand and manage the potential risks of international partnerships. The aim is to conduct safe, secure, and transparent research whilst supporting the UK's research integrity and strong ethical frameworks.

Export controls are designed to restrict the export and communication of sensitive technology or strategic goods. The controls apply to the academic community as to any other exporter. The guidance is aimed at academics or individuals doing applied research in fields where there is a high risk that could be used for non-civilian purposes. A link to the full guidance is [here](#).

Funding Call Timetable

Please note that the dates may be subject to change.

Call Deadline	Approximate Panel Date	Approximate Decisions by
6 th September 2023	w/c 18 th September 2023	29 th September 2023
29 th November 2023	w/c 11 th December 2023	21 st December 2023
6 th March 2024	w/c 18 th March 2024	29 March 2024
5 th June 2024	w/c 17 th June 2024	28 th June 2024
4 th September 2024	w/c 16 th September 2024	27 th September 2024

All application forms are available on the [LSSI website](#)
Completed forms should be sent to Cheryl Harris: C.A.Harris@leeds.ac.uk

The IAA Award Panel meets approximately 2 weeks after each call. The Award Panel consists of the LSSI Director and Deputy Directors, representatives from the harmonised IAA, and academics (including ECR representation) drawn from across the University. Importantly, the Panel benefits from significant input from external representatives from the business, third and public sectors. For the complete list of panel members [click here](#).

The IAA Manager will notify applicants of the award panel's decision within 2 weeks of the IAA panel review. The award holder will be required to advise the relevant Faculty Research and Innovation of the awarded project. The award-holder will also be required to provide confirmation that the project has gone through, or will go through, ethical review procedures, if appropriate.

Once the approved project has been confirmed, an account code will be assigned to the project, (this can take up to two – three weeks to set up) through which all project related costs should be charged. The award-holder is responsible for managing and reporting on all IAA expenditure and complying with all University of Leeds Financial Regulations.

Terms and conditions of funding

By accepting an IAA award, successful applicants are agreeing to the following terms and conditions:

- Successful projects will be listed on the Leeds Social Sciences Institute website.
- Award holder's information and application may be shared with other ESRC IAA award holders and prospective applicants.
- Award-holders will engage with LSSI to monitor project progress both during the life of the project and post project to allow the reporting of outcomes and capture of impact and 'good practice'. This will include making nonconfidential aspects available to assist with the development of promotional materials.
- Recipients of funding must ensure that the ESRC IAA is credited as providing support for the activity in any outputs.
- PI/RIDM/FRIO are responsible for ensuring all related contracts and agreements are signed by all parties.
- Award-holders will be expected to participate in future capacity building events to share their experience and develop wider learning.
- The IAA Manager may request information from an award holder on their approved project at any given time.
- The award is non-transferable.
- Any changes to the project in terms of timelines, expenditure or the work plan must be informed to Cheryl Harris, IAA Manager for approval as soon as possible.
- All expenditure must comply with the University's [financial regulations](#), award holders must ensure appropriate probity in managing the finance and expenditure of awards. The faculty are responsible for all procurement and payments. The PI is responsible for managing and reporting on the budget of their award. The project timescales should be adhered to with any deviation reported to Cheryl Harris: C.A.Harris@leeds.ac.uk.
- If the PI of the IAA award leaves the University a nominated grant holder should be notified to take over as PI, in this instance the IAA Manager should be informed in advance.

- Award-holders will be required to fully follow the reporting requirement as detailed in section 9 below.
- Where applicable, outcomes and impacts from IAA-funded activities should be reported in Researchfish® against UKRI research grants to which they relate. The use of IAA funds must be clearly identified by researchers reporting on any related UKRI grant in the 'Further Funding' section and must include the grant reference for the ESRC IAA.

Reporting Requirements

All report templates will be provided to successful applicants prior to the end of their award. Templates for the interim and final reports are available on the LSSI website.

Responsive Projects and Knowledge Exchange Fellowship

The reports required for these projects are:

- **A one-page Interim Report** will be required to be submitted halfway through the project to capture the progress and to inform of any changes to the original application timeline.
- **A Final Report** will be required to be submitted within a month of the project completion date, outlining how the objectives of the project and the relevant KPIs have been met and future plans.
- **Email update to the IAA Manager** within 8-12 months following completion of the project to inform of any further impacts, follow on grants, further activity.

The IAA Manager will additionally follow up with some awardees 18 months after the final project report has been submitted to capture any longer-term impacts

Rapid Action

Rapid action projects will require:

- **A Final Report** will be required to be submitted within a month of the project completion date, outlining how the objectives of the project and the relevant KPIs have been met and future plans.
- **Email update to the IAA Manager** within 8-12 months following completion of the project to inform of any further impacts, follow on grants, further activity.

The IAA Coordinator will additionally follow up with some awardees 18 months after the final project report has been submitted to capture any longer term impacts

Appendix 1 – Assessment Criteria and Methodology for Responsive Mode, Rapid Action, and Knowledge Exchange Fellowships

All eligible proposals will be considered and assessed by the Award Panel against the following **Criteria**:

Criteria 1: Overall proposal quality

- Is the underpinning research on which the proposal builds clearly defined and of the appropriate standard i.e., is it academically rigorous in terms of methodology, reach and significance?
- Is it clear what ‘problem’ this proposal hopes to address and how this will be achieved?
- Is it clear knowledge exchange activity, where the collaborators are working together on generating impact from University of Leeds research?

Criteria 2: Work plan/Resource

- Are the proposed activities deliverable within the timespan defined?
- Are there clear and SMART objectives for the proposed activity? (SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound)
- Have the resources requested been fully justified and are these in line with the proposed work-plan?

Criteria 3: Outcomes and Impact

- Can the project result in impact that can deliver significant economic, environmental and/or societal benefits?
- Are there appropriate plans in place to record and evaluate impact generated within the project lifespan?
- How transformative could this IAA funding be in terms of PIs growing capacity in impact generation, and career progression?
- Does the proposal align with the University’s [Research Culture Statement](#) and the development of a supportive, inclusive and collaborative research culture, for example, embedding ‘equality, diversity and inclusion’ (covering, but not limited to, early career researcher development, support of under-represented groups and the facilitation of flexible circumstances) and ‘responsible research and innovation’ considerations?

Criteria 4: Follow-on plans

- Are the follow-on plans developed and detailed beyond the period of funding and will these progress the broader project towards future impact?
- Is there a plan for further engagement/collaboration between partners, in any form, after the duration of the proposal?
- Is there potential for the proposed activity to lead to the development of a sustainable relationship with an external organisation?

Assessment Methodology

Proposals against different strands of activity are not necessarily expected to be able to meet all the criteria listed above, but the Award Panel will be seeking to ensure applicants score positively against the core criteria that focus on the deliverability and effectiveness of proposals.

In all cases, the Awards Panel will provide feedback and recommendations as to how the Project/Fellowship could be developed, in some cases the applicant will be invited to resubmit at a subsequent panel meeting. In some instances, applications may only be awarded upon confirmation of terms and conditions of funding set by the Award Panel.

Risk, innovation and 'fast failure'

The Award Panel will encourage an open and expansive appetite for more risky and innovative types of impacts. These will be duly supported where they can show the potential for excellence in impact. This agile approach has been supported by ESRC to enable experimentation, the fostering of innovation and ensuring reasonable risk taking that allows for fast failure in ways that support continuous organisational learning and capacity building. The Award Panel may request consideration of 'in project' proposed changes in response to evaluation of initial steps, in order to support this approach to risk and innovation.

Appendix 2 –IAA outcomes for funding streams

Responsive Projects

- Culture change across University of Leeds towards co-produced impact relationships, new models of co-production and enhanced interdisciplinary.
- Influence on policy/practice.
- Public engagement relationships advanced
- Benefits to the economy and society from external partner utilisation
- Non-academics more involved with research from inception
- Capacity building and skills development of researchers

Rapid Action

Influencing emerging debate and strategic pressing opportunities
Prompting dialogue and deliberation; exploring risk
Influencing national or international debate

Knowledge Exchange Fellowships

Closer third sector and private sector collaboration
Facilitate KE beyond secondment.
Evidence-based policy