Scoping the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research: Supplier engagement webinar held on Tuesday 12th May 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

This document collates responses to the questions received at the supplier engagement webinar to inform the commissioning of the project Scoping the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research. The slides from this event and these FAQs will be made available alongside the Invitation to Quote documentation.

<u>Scope of the project</u>

Should the focus be on core skills that all social scientists need or a wider set of research skills they may wish to acquire based on their research interests?

Our focus is on the social science community and bidders should concentrate on their needs. We are interested in the core skills all social scientists will need to have as well as the more advanced skills that those undertaking more complex analysis may also need to develop.

Bidders may wish to think more expansively about skills needs in other scientific domains, particularly as many social scientists work in interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary areas. However, we appreciate that it might not be feasible to cover such a broad remit in this review and the priority should be the skills needs of social scientists.

The supplier is expected to scope current and future skills needs. How far into the future should this scoping extend (i.e. three years, five years or ten years)?

We're expecting the review to advise on current gaps and needs but interventions will need to be forward looking. Practically, we are thinking about three to five years into the future. This reflects our organisational practices with the time span over which proposed interventions might typically be implemented. We also recognise the particular difficulty in this area to predict needs longer term.

You have offered a cross-disciplinary definition of 'data-driven research' but the social sciences encompass a very broad and varied set of disciplines. Are there any specific 'core' disciplines on which the supplier should focus?

We want to emphasise the importance of analysing the skills needs across the breadth of the social sciences because disciplines vary in their skills needs. We will consider this question further and may provide more guidance in the tender specification if relevant.

What are the types of changes ESRC would like to make on the basis of this work? Would such changes be limited to investments in training and capability building or would it extend to infrastructure (e.g. facilitating access to data)?

Primarily, we are interested in how we can make training and capacity building interventions in social sciences. In addition to bespoke initiatives, recommendations from this scoping study will also be used to inform other aspects of ESRC's work, such as the PhD review or our postgraduate training strategy post-2022. The evidence gathered may also inform other relevant parts of ESRC strategy. This could include investing in our infrastructure investments or other parts of our research portfolio.

<u>Project delivery</u>

Do you envisage the desk-based research taking international as well as UK evidence into account?

We are keen to learn from practice outside the UK and encourage bidders to consider whether it would be possible to incorporate an international dimension into their analysis. . However, bids should take care to propose a feasible programme of work Bidders will need to make a case for their intended approach, including a rationale if certain countries are selected as focal points.

Would you be interested in bids involving a partnered approach between academia and business or SMEs?

We are open to such arrangements and welcome bids from multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral teams. Whatever the configuration of the proposed team, it is crucial that bidders demonstrate they have the necessary expertise to successfully undertake this work and articulate how such partnerships will contribute and add value to the delivery of this work.

What expertise is the supplier required to have? Can you provide any necessary training to undertake this work?

The supplier should have a sound understanding of the Higher Education training and funding landscape. More specifically, they should have demonstrable knowledge of the priorities and issues relating to building capability in data-driven research and have links to relevant stakeholder networks. We are not anticipating that the appointed team would require further training to undertake this work.

Does ESRC 'tag' data-driven research in its records? Is this information publicly available (e.g. via Gateway to Research)?

We would need to consult colleagues internally in order to understand what data is available and whether it has been published.

Stakeholder engagement

Can you provide more information about your expectations for stakeholder engagement?

The presentation slides indicate some of the stakeholder groups that we think would be relevant for this piece of work. This is not exhaustive and bidders will be asked to outline who they intend to involve, including those beyond ESRC's regular networks, as part of their bid. We would be pleased to broker introductions where we have an existing relationship with a stakeholder and will discuss how to facilitate that contact with the appointed supplier.

We're expecting a wide range of stakeholders to be consulted. This includes non-academic stakeholders as well as researchers who typically sit outside of the social sciences and either collaborate with social scientists on research projects; or include a social science dimension in their own research. When we mention 'individuals working at the interface with the social sciences', we want bidders to consider the full breadth of potential interdisciplinary collaborators for social scientists.

Should the supplier consult non-academic employers about their skills needs?

We are interested in the skills needs of non-academic stakeholders as employers and how we can encourage career mobility between sectors. However, this is only one dimension and we are also interested in their needs when commissioning or collaborating on data driven research.

Do you expect any engagement with ESRC investments like the National Centre for Research Methods?

Yes. We will brief the team appointed on any ESRC investments relevant to this work and facilitate introductions where necessary. Additionally, we are keen for the team to involve and engage their own networks when scoping different stakeholders' needs.

Covid-19

Do you expect Covid-19 to affect the availability of academics for interview? Is this situation likely to change (e.g. beginning of the new academic year)?

It is difficult to answer this question. We have not seen any evidence as yet that it is affecting the ability of stakeholders to engage with work of this kind.

ESRC Review of the PhD in the social sciences

Can you offer some additional background on your review of the PhD in the social sciences?

The PhD review began in January and is due to report in spring 2021. The purpose of the review is to ensure that ESRC is funding PhDs in the social sciences that are internationally competitive and fit for the future. Crucially, the review is assessing whether this social science PhD involves appropriate kinds of skills and professional development training, not just for the present but also in the future.

The review addresses two overarching questions:
- What are the skills needed by social science PhD graduates to prepare them for careers both within and beyond academia?
- What are the optimum ways to develop these skills for a diverse student population while also safeguarding student health and well-being?

[Further information on the review is available on the ESRC website]

We can share further details on the project, including details of the PhD review team's workplan, with the successful supplier.

How will this project compliment the analysis of doctoral skills needs undertaken through the ESRC's review of the PhD?

The review of the PhD and the project scoping the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research are two complementary but separate pieces of work. The team appointed to scope the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research would not only be required to consider doctoral skills needs but also situate those needs within the broader context of researchers' whole careers. Relevant questions for the scoping study are *What skills do social scientists need throughout the course of their careers* and *What are appropriate interventions to develop those skills at different career points*? Whilst the PhD review touches on data-driven research, it has a much broader

focus and covers many other aspects of doctoral education (such as more general skills needs and models of provision). We want this subject to be covered in more depth by the team appointed to scope the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research, adopting a broader, long-term perspective on these skills needs across career stages.

What sort of interaction and engagement will be expected between the suppliers scoping the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research and the team delivering ESRC's review of the PhD?

Whilst separate projects, we will want to be able to connect the two pieces of work together where appropriate.

Once a team has been appointed to scope the skills needs in the social sciences to support data-driven research, ESRC will facilitate an introduction to enable a robust collaborative working relationship. There may be opportunities for the two teams to work together throughout both programmes of work, particularly when engaging common stakeholders. For example, the data scoping skills team might organise workshops or stakeholder engagement events that the PhD review team would attend to hear first-hand the some of the issues or the needs affecting doctoral students.

The suppliers scoping the skills needs to support data-driven research are expected to produce an interim report covering emerging findings and recommendations at a doctoral level in February 2020. this will be shared with the PhD review team to inform their conclusions and recommendations.

Is there overlap in the targets for stakeholder engagement for this project and the PhD review?

We will be able to answer this question fully once we know the successful suppliers' proposed plans for approaching and engaging stakeholders; the level overlap; and where this falls.

What should the interim report cover? Will it need to include findings from Stage 1 (Needs analysis) and Stage 2 (Doctoral interventions)?

Yes. We will expect Stage 1 and Stage 2 to inform the report. The interim report is expected to provide an overview of the skills needs at the doctoral level and identify where there are gaps in provision. We would also expect reference to be made to the interventions needed at a doctoral level.

Budget

Can you give an indicative or maximum budget for this work?

We are still in the process of finalising the budget but the maximum is likely to be in the region of £80,000 - £100,000. Bidders' submissions should reflect the work that has been specified and take into account the need to mitigate risks, including those related to Covid-19.