

Towards a National Collection: Opening UK Heritage to the World Discovery Projects Call FAQ

These FAQs should be read in addition to the [Call Document](#) which can also be found on <https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/funding-calls>

Version Control

The changes made to this call document are recorded here. Please ensure you have the latest version of the Call Guidance.

Version	Date	Changes
2	26.8.2020	<p>Added questions following the Introductory and Support webinars in August 2020</p> <p>Changed answer to “Would a project focusing on a small or niche collection be eligible under this call?” (p.4)</p>
3	15.10.2020	<p>Added further question to section on eligibility regarding the status of IROs on any application.</p> <p>Added further question to section on partnerships.</p>

Contents

[Theme and content of call](#)
[Relationship to Foundation Projects](#)
[Partnerships](#)
[Eligibility](#)
[Costs](#)
[Project Staff](#)
[Submitting an Application](#)
[What will happen to my application?](#)
[Other](#)

Further amendments to the Discovery Projects Call

You can also read these in the context of the amended [Call document](#).

Unnamed Co-Investigators

The *Towards a National Collection* Steering Committee has approved the following amendment, in response to the ongoing impact of Covid-19. Where applicants face difficulties in identifying all of their Co-Investigators, we will now allow, at outline stage, the naming only of an IRO/RI/HEI who will provide a Co-Investigator. This option can be exercised where detailed discussions with the proposed individual are not currently possible. Information must be provided on the area of expertise to be represented by the unnamed Co-Investigator, and the commitment to provide a Co-Investigator with that expertise must be confirmed in a letter of support from the employing institution. All Co-Investigators will be required to be named at full proposal stage.

Outline stage assessment panel

The *Towards a National Collection* Steering Committee has approved the following amendment, in response to the ongoing impact of Covid-19. An additional instruction will be given to the outline stage assessment panel, requesting them to highlight any particularly strong features or work-packages within outline proposals, if applicable, where the application overall does not meet the quality threshold to be shortlisted. This will allow discussion to take place, after shortlisting and before full bid development, to explore if strong elements from unsuccessful bids could be incorporated (with agreement of all concerned) into a shortlisted proposal to develop a stronger full bid. For example, a particularly innovative type of public engagement could be incorporated into a proposal that was digitally brilliant but less strong in that area. Alternatively, an outstanding digital idea, and the team behind it, could be incorporated into another proposal where it would strengthen the overall project.

Research Institutes

Research Institutes are now eligible to lead proposals and are required to partner with a minimum of either one HEI or one IRO.

Theme and content of call

Would a project focusing on ‘x subject area’ be eligible under this call?

If you have an idea for a proposal please get in touch with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey, to discuss it (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot). The Director is happy to discuss ideas for proposals, whatever stage of development they are at, and can advise on whether they would be a good fit for this call.

The AHRC remains the main point of contact in answering questions around process and policy. Please contact National.Collection@ahrc.ukri.org should you need guidance on policy or process.

All projects must, at their core, be about developing new ways of joining together digital collections and must deliver impact in each of the three key impact areas outlined in the call document: dissolving barriers between collections; enhancing research capability; and public engagement. Provided they meet these criteria, proposals in any subject area or on any theme could, in theory, be eligible under this call.

What is meant by “key thematic areas”? Are these the same as the “impact areas” also mentioned in the call document?

No, these are two different things. The three impact areas (dissolving barriers between collections; enhancing research capability; and public engagement) are the areas that each project must deliver impact in. By ‘thematic areas’ we mean any theme or subject that a particular project focuses on. We have not given any examples of potential ‘thematic areas’ to try to ensure that the call is as open as possible to different approaches. If you are concerned about whether proposals in a particular thematic area would be eligible under this call then please get in touch with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot), and she will be able to advise.

Could developing a new collection be involved as part of a project, or is the call only for work on existing collections?

No, the call is only for projects working on existing collections. Due to the scale of the challenges involved in joining together existing collections, the creation of new collections is out of scope for this call.

Would creative work/practices on existing collections – e.g. animating collections – fall within the scope of the call?

Yes, creative and innovative approaches to working with collections are strongly encouraged as part of the call. All projects would need to deliver impact in each of the three key impact areas outlined in the call document – dissolving barriers between collections; enhancing research capability; and public

engagement. If creative or innovative work with collections helped to deliver impact in these areas, it would be eligible under the call.

Would projects working on non-arts and humanities (i.e. scientific, biological, natural science) collections be eligible under this call?

The goal of the “Towards a National Collection” programme is to create innovative ways in order to make collections more accessible. AHRC accepts that this may include scientific collections that may be used by arts and humanities researchers. Therefore, scientific collections may be included, as long as the focus of the project is on collections as heritage assets, rather than on undertaking scientific research. The applicants will need to demonstrate how the project fits the requirements of the call.

Please get in touch with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot) if you have any concerns as to whether your proposal would be eligible.

Is there scope for Public Engagement and Research-Driven, Practice-led Public Outputs?

Yes, the call is open to such outputs. However, any resources allocated for such outputs should be proportional to those allocated to developing new ways to join together digital collections.

Would the digitisation of collections as a public engagement activity fall within the scope of the call – i.e. providing communities with the tools, support, education to develop their own digitisation techniques?

Yes, such activities could fall within the scope of the call as a public engagement activity and would be eligible providing the proposed project also met the requirements of the call to deliver impact in dissolving barriers between collections and enhancing research capability.

Would a project focusing on a small or niche collection be eligible under this call?

Given that the programme is about developing new ways of linking together digital collections at a large scale, we would advise that small or niche collections are studied as part of a wider set of collections and the focus do not fall solely on them.

How much digitisation/documentation of existing collections can be included as a part of a proposal?

A small proportion of a project’s budget can be allocated to digitisation of collections provided that work is critical for achieving the aims and objectives of the project as a whole and this can be justified within the scope of the call document.

Can work with creative practitioners be included?

Yes. Provided the work is within the scope of the call and all costs are fully justified in the final proposal.

Is developing new tools, technologies and research methodologies as part of the project eligible?

Yes, this could include the development of new tools and technologies as well as improving existing ones. This programme aims at dissolving barriers between collections including addressing technological and methodological issues that stand in the way of an integrated virtual 'national collection'.

Relationship to Foundation Projects

All of the Foundation Projects are led by IROs. Will this mean all the Discovery Projects will be led by IROs also?

No, there is no expectation that the five Discovery Projects will be direct successors to the Foundation Projects. Proposals can be led by Research Institutes, HEIs or IROs – in each case the project should be led by the person best placed to do so, regardless of whether they are based at a HEI, Research Institutes or IRO. We expect that the funded Discovery Projects will be led by PIs based at a range of different institutions.

Will there be an expectation that the Discovery Projects build directly on the work done by the Foundation Projects?

A direct link between Foundation Projects and Discovery Projects is not expected in all proposals but applicants should consider the areas under investigation in the Foundation Projects and seek to benefit from that early work, where relevant and useful to their project. Summaries of the Foundation Projects are available <https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/projects>

Will the AHRC expect to see the 8 Foundation projects applying for Discovery projects, too?

No, but they are welcome to do so, and some Foundation PIs have expressed readiness for potential collaboration with others.

What is the relationship between the Foundation projects and the Discovery projects?

It is not a requirement that Discovery Project proposals build on the work of one or more of the Foundation Projects. However, the teams leading the Foundation Projects can be contacted where an applicant sees potential relevance between what they are proposing and the research already underway.

With the *Towards a National Collection* Foundation Projects running alongside the outline application process for Discovery Projects will there be opportunities over the next few months for the Foundation Projects to feed into the potential Discovery Projects?

All teams leading the Foundation Projects are open to discussing their work and sharing information on what they are developing. Each Foundation Project will prepare an Interim Report to be published in January 2021 to help inform the development of full Discovery Project proposals. Many of the Foundation Projects have experienced delays and disruptions due to COVID-19 so how much they will be in a position to report by January 2021 will vary.

Partnerships

I have an idea for a project/proposal, is there any help available to meet potentially interested HEI/IRO partners?

AHRC has set up a discussion mailing list with JISC for use as a partner matching tool. The mailing list can be found [here](#). If you wish to speak to a particular IRO, but are not sure who to get in touch with, please get in contact with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot) and she will be able to put you in touch with the appropriate person.

How can *Towards a National Collection* help further in building collaborations with IROs, when several of the main IROs are already involved in projects and often have limited time or resource? Would it be possible to know which IROs are still free and available to collaborate?

As the closing date for this call is 17th November 2020, we would urge potential applicants to contact the IROs they are interested in working with as soon as possible. You can use our JISC list LISTSERV@JISCMAIL.AC.UK to reach out to potential partners or contact the Programme Director Rebecca Bailey, who can put you in touch with specific IROs, as well as give preliminary advice on likely capacity.

How are the larger IROs involved with *Towards a National Collection* reaching out to smaller organisations, bodies, archives, libraries, museums and others across the four nations?

Ideas for collaborations are often explored in conversations between IROs and academics/industry specialists who share similar research interests. It is important to reach out to potentially interested partners/collaborators across the United Kingdom, as well as to involve local and smaller GLAM institutions.

Can a proposal include funding for coordinating research activity with international partners?

Yes, such costs can be included provided they are fully justified. International Co-Is (and their costs) can also be included as per standard AHRC eligibility rules. However, projects should be primarily focused on UK-based rather than international collections.

Which organisations are eligible to be ‘Collaborating Organisations’?

Any organisation can be a ‘Collaborating Organisation’, provided they are not eligible to directly receive AHRC funding. Those that are eligible to apply for AHRC funding cannot be ‘Collaborating Organisations’ and should instead be included as Co-Is or ‘Project Partners’. This includes university museums, galleries, libraries and archives working with a Higher Education Institution that they are not formally affiliated with.

What is the difference between a ‘Project Partner’ and a ‘Collaborating Organisation’?

A Project Partner is an organisation that is making a significant and specific contribution (either in cash or in kind) to the project, for example, expertise, staff time, use of facilities etc. A small proportion of their costs can be included in the proposal (please see p.8 of the call guidance document for further details). A ‘Collaborating Organisation’ is an organisation where all or a substantial amount of their involvement is being charged to the project.

IROs can apply to be a ‘Project Partner’ but are not eligible as a ‘Collaborating Organisation’.

Is it possible for a project partners to be based outside of the UK? Would it be possible to have a Collaborating Organisation or a software provider which is based outside the UK?

Yes, both international project partners and collaborating organisations are eligible, but this needs to be justified within your proposal, as international partners/collaborating organisations should be involved in the projects with the goal of assisting the realisation of the full, combined potential of UK collections.

Is there a threshold for the amount of costs that could be included in the grant before a ‘Project Partner’ becomes a ‘Collaborating Organisation’?

There is no set amount or proportion of costs that can be covered by a grant before a ‘Project Partner’ is instead classed as a ‘Collaborating Organisation’. As individual proposals and grants can vary significantly there are no set guidelines. If you are unsure about which category a partner should be included in, please get in touch with us at national.collection@ahrc.ukri.org and we can advise accordingly.

What is the advice around multi-HEI partnerships? Are applicants encouraged to seek partnership with other HEIs?

Multi-HEI partnerships are not a requirement, however, they are welcome where they bring together the required knowledge and experience, particularly where that contributes to the diversity of the individuals and institutions involved in projects.

What costs can be charged by the ‘Collaborating Organisation’?

Collaborating organisations can charge any directly incurred costs, i.e. staff time and any other costs/resources directly attributable to a project e.g. cost of running workshop. They are not eligible for overheads.

The AHRC does not fund costs that are reasonably expected to be covered by an established organisation (such as estate costs, basic IT, equipment, printing costs, etc.). Under the scope of the call, Co-Is from collaborating organisations cannot be included, therefore we encourage applicants to provide additional context in the Case for Support and Justification of Resources on what the contribution of the collaborating organisation is and who will be working on the project.

Is there a limit to the proportion of any grant that can be spent on Collaborating Organisations?

No. The proposal must be led by an organisation that is eligible to directly receive AHRC funding, but there is no limit to the proportion of costs that can be allocated either to other research organisations on the bid, or any ‘Collaborating Organisation’. It is the responsibility of individual applications to justify the proposed structure of their research.

Is there a limit on the number of Co-Is/Collaborating Organisations/Project Partners that can be involved on any single proposal?

No. All costs must be fully justified but there is no limit on the number of partners or organisations that can be involved in any one project.

Can we include industry (commercial) partners who have pertinent expertise?

Yes, these can be included, as long as they either meet the criteria for project partners in making an in kind or cash contribution or are included as Collaborating Organisations.

I work for a Research Institution. Who am I eligible to partner with in this instance?

We require an applying Research Institute to partner with at least one HEI or one IRO.



I am a researcher on a fixed-term/rolling contract at a HEI/IRO – am I eligible to be an investigator on one of the Discovery Projects?

Yes, as per standard AHRC rules you would be eligible to apply as a PI or a Co-I providing you had a formal agreement with your institution that if the proposal was successful in securing funding then you would be treated as an employee for the duration of the grant. Please see the [AHRC Research Funding Guide](#) for further details on contractual eligibility for investigators.

Would international Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives that are linked to a university but operate independently be eligible as Co-Investigators?

Yes, in theory. If they are a recognised research organisation, then they should be eligible to provide Co-Investigators. They can also participate in the role of Project Partners or Collaborating Organisations. Please get in touch with AHRC at national.collection@ahrc.ukri.org if you are unsure about the status of a particular institution.

We would like to run a mini call during our Discovery Project for additional small-scale Collaborating Organisations to be funded to join the project for specific initiatives that we cannot define until the project is well underway. Is this allowed?

Yes, this is allowed provided you include a clear justification for it in your Case for Support and have clear governance arrangements in place. The associated costs should be a relatively modest proportion of the overall budget. The justification will be particularly important for the assessment of your proposal alongside those where all participants are identified in advance and are included in the application. The funds can be disbursed by an IRO, an HEI, a Research Institute or a Collaborating Organisation.

Eligibility

What are the eligibility requirements for PIs? What is meant by track record?

To be eligible as a PI, you must be actively engaged in postdoctoral research and be of postdoctoral standing. This means that you either have a doctorate or can demonstrate in the application that you have equivalent research experience and/or training. You must also have a level of skills, knowledge and experience appropriate to the nature of the proposed project.

For this call, we would expect PIs to have a track-record of delivering large-scale projects with multiple partners and multiple work-streams or packages. They should also be actively engaged in research relevant to Towards a National Collection. They do not have to be from academia.

Can museums that are also attached to universities apply for IRO status in their own right, or are they considered HEIs?

They are formally linked to HEIs and therefore are already eligible to receiving funding from the AHRC. They are not, therefore, eligible to be IROs. University museums may also participate as project partners provided that they are working with a Research Organisation other than or in addition to the Research Organisation with which they are formally linked.

Would someone who has taken career-breaks be eligible to be a PI? How should they address this in the proposal?

Yes. A line in the respective CV to indicate that there has been a career-break over a certain period would be sufficient.

Why do IROs not qualify to be Collaborating Organisations?

IROs are directly eligible to receive UKRI funding, by providing the PI or Co-Is. That is the only route for them to receive UKRI funding.

My Research Institute is eligible to apply for UKRI research grants, but our main focus is not the arts and humanities. Can we lead a project?

If you are eligible to receive UKRI funding, and your proposal meets the criteria of the call, you can apply.

Can HEI-based researchers outside AHRC/cultural heritage research areas be listed PIs or Co-Is?

Yes, they can – as long as their involvement and suitability for the role is justified in the application.

Can only already existing IROs be involved or is it possible to become an IRO in advance?

The process of applying to become an IRO is lengthy and is unlikely to meet the deadlines for this call. Any interested organisations, however, may be involved as Collaborating Organisations or Project Partners. For more information please refer to <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/>.

Do PIs and Co-Is need to have doctoral qualifications?

No, but they must qualify to be a PI or a Co-I i.e. they must be actively engaged in research, have a track record of research activity relevant to the project and be of postdoctoral standing – i.e. be able to demonstrate that you have equivalent research experience/training. Please refer to the Eligibility section of the AHRC Funding Guide <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/>.

If a HEI is providing the Principal Investigator, does the proposal have to have a Co-Investigator from an IRO to be eligible to apply?

To be eligible to apply, a proposal must include a collaboration between an HEI and an IRO (or between a Research Institute and an HEI or an IRO). By collaboration we mean taking a partnership approach to the development of a proposal and, if successful, its leadership and delivery. This level of collaboration would require the IRO to be represented by at least one Co-Investigator.

Costs

As there is no Justification of Resources required at the outline stage, what costings are expected for outline applications?

An indication of overall costs will be expected at outline stage. There will be space on the submission form on J-eS to indicate the overall cost and under which headings these costs fall, but a detailed breakdown is not expected. We expect the costs to be as accurate as possible but recognise that the final costs (submitted at the full-stage application) may differ as proposals are further developed and partnerships finalised. The usual tolerance that we expect to see between the outline and full stages budget is +/- 10%.

The outline stage requires applicants to indicate the financial/in-kind contribution of partner organisations. How is this figure going to be used in the assessment process (i.e. is it going to be seen as a 'competitive advantage')?

Financial and in-kind contributions will be assessed as part of the value for money of the project. However, they are not a key element of the assessment process and should only be included when relevant.

What balance would you expect between academic and collaborating organisations in terms of costs/amounts of funding?

All costs need to be fully justified but the balance of where those costs are allocated is dependent on what is appropriate for that particular project, there are no set limits.

What proportion of costs would you expect to be allocated to technology vis a vis researcher time?

All costs need to be fully justified but the balance of where those costs are allocated is dependent on what is appropriate for that particular project, there are no set limits.

Project Staff

Can Research Assistants (RAs) be embedded within collections?

Any Research Assistants would need to be employed by an eligible institution as per AHRC funding rules, but their work could take place at a different institution or collection if this was the best option for delivering the project

You can find more guidance on this under the Eligibility section in the AHRC Research Funding Guide <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/>

Will research positions be created through these projects, such as postdoctoral positions, will new jobs that are created through the programme be advertised on the *Towards a National Collection* website?

*Yes, we expect that most or all projects will result in postdoctoral positions. We will explore providing links to these on the *Towards a National Collection* website.*

Can proposals include studentships or placements?

The costs of studentships or placements are not eligible.

How large are you expecting project teams to be?

Due to the size and scale of the projects, it is unlikely that a team consisting of a PI and a single Co-I would be able to deliver them effectively. We would expect to see a team consisting of a number of people, with a range of different expertise, and with varying levels of involvement in the project.

Submitting an application

Are letters of support required at the outline stage of the application?

Yes, they are. As per [AHRC guidance](#), you need to make sure that the submitted letters of support aren't older than 6 months from the date of submission. In any event, you will be required, if shortlisted, to submit refreshed letters of support at full proposal stage.

Is there a preference that bids will be led by IROs or HEIs?

No. We welcome proposals from HEIs, IROs or Research Institutes. In each case proposals should be led by the person best qualified to deliver that particular project, regardless of the institution at which they are based.

What is required in the ‘Case for Support’ document for outline stage applications? How will this differ from the requirements for full-stage applications?

The requirements for the Case-for-Support document at outline stage are set out in ‘Annex A – Attachment Guidance’ in the call document. The Case-for-Support document for the full-stage application will use the same headings, but we would expect the proposal to have been further developed by the submission of the full-stage application, and the Case-for-Support to have been significantly re-written in order to reflect the further developed complexity of the project.

What are the requirements for letters of support?

Where possible you should attach letters of support from each collaborating organisation or project partner. Where those partnerships have not yet been finalised due to the impact of COVID-19, then the application can proceed at the outline stage without a letter of support. However, if the partnerships have not been finalised, then applicants should detail why this is the case, and outline a pathway for these partnerships to be finalised under the ‘partnerships and collaborations’ section of the case for support.

What will happen to my application?

How will my application be assessed?

*Outline applications will be assessed by an expert panel comprised of UK and international experts from academia and collections organisations, this will include members of the Towards a National Collection Steering Committee who do not have a conflict of interest. Applicants will be notified whether they have been shortlisted by the end of January 2021. All short-listed applicants **must attend the workshop on 17th February 2021** in order to proceed to full-proposal stage.*

How many projects do you anticipate shortlisting?

We do not know. It will depend on the quality of applications we receive and the assessments of the expert panel, but we have no pre-established view on how many will be short-listed. The total funding envelope for this call is £15 million.

Are the assessment criteria and the reviewing process the same as other AHRC grants?

The assessment process is set out in the Call guidance – what makes this call different from many is the two-stage assessment process. You can find more information on that in the [Call document](#).

Will AHRC fund five Discovery Projects – or does it reserve the right to increase the number of projects and adjust the budgets accordingly?

The total funding envelope for this call is £15 million and we will only be able to fund projects up to that limit. The indicative limit for each project is £3m where £3m represents 80% of the project's full economic cost (fEC). Applicants may submit proposals for less than the indicative limit where this is appropriate to the research proposed. If we can fund more than five projects whilst remaining under the total funding envelope then we would reserve the right to do so.

Guidance on adjusting costs and budgets may be provided to shortlisted applicants at the workshop stage if required.

Other

Is there an ECR route for the call?

There is no ECR specific route for this call due to the size, nature and complexity of the intended research projects. However, ECRs can be included as Co-Is, and the involvement of ECRs in proposals is strongly encouraged.

What is the relationship between this scheme for funding the development of a virtual national collection and ongoing discussion about creating national digital infrastructure?

This is a conversation in development, and it is too early for us to share conclusions at this stage – however, there certainly is an understanding of a link between the two.

Is there a plan for sustainability included? Is sustainability a requirement for the Discovery Projects?

Sustainability is a priority for AHRC and the Programme Director, and we are currently looking at this at a programme level. All proposals should consider the legacy and potential sustainability of their research and other outputs, but as projects will only last three years, we are realistic about what can be promised.

UKRI has recently published a [Sustainability Strategy](#), which sets out how UKRI will protect and enhance the environment across our investments and operations, while ensuring that the research and innovation we support stays at the cutting edge. One of our aims is to embed environmental sustainability across all our investments by 2025. We will encourage applicants to consider sustainability in alignment with this.

If multiple outline applications with similar or cross-over themes are submitted, will AHRC broker linkages across projects?

Potentially yes. The opportunity for this is the workshop on 17th February 2021 which all short-listed projects must attend.

For obvious reasons small museums and non-museum collecting partners are battered by COVID-19 related work pressures. Can the fund support distinct jobs in these organisations?

If these organisations are providing staff time to the delivery of projects, they should be included as Collaborating Organisations and the staff time can be costed as part of the budget. Routine running/operational costs of Collaborating Organisations cannot be included.

In Wales, national and local heritage organisations have been working towards developing their own national collection that brings together different digital collections

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/>. This seems to replicate some of the aims of this programme. Has the Welsh experience been used to inform what might happen here?

The Programme Director has been active in encouraging potential applicants to make contact with the relevant institutions in Wales where the Welsh experience might inform or strengthen proposals.

Will there be an opportunity for smaller-scale projects within the programme?

The scope and scale of the projects for the current call is unlikely to change, however, the AHRC operates a number of responsive mode open calls that you are welcome to apply to at any time, i.e. Research Grants, Research Networking, Follow-on Funding for Impact and Engagement, and the Research, Development and Engagement Fellowship Scheme. Further information is available on AHRC's Current Opportunities pages: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/apply-for-funding/current-opportunities>.

How can attendees access the presentations?

Recordings from the Introductory and Support webinars will be uploaded to the *Towards a National Collection* website <https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/>

Many in-kind contributions from partners will be in the form of data. Are there standard ways of assigning a monetary value to these?

Due to the nature of the call we expect that some in-kind contributions will be in the form of data. The only monetary value that should be assigned to this data is the staff costs involved in preparing and transferring or sharing it.

How are the larger IROs involved with *Towards a National Collection* reaching out to smaller organisations, bodies, archives, libraries, museums and others across the four nations?

Ideas for collaborations are often explored in conversations between IROs and academics/industry specialists who share similar research interests. It is important to reach out to potentially interested partners/collaborators across the United Kingdom, as well as to involve local and smaller GLAM institutions.

Collaboration between the four nations is important for the success of the programme and so is diversity and inclusivity of the teams and individuals – e.g. different stages of career development, geographical spread, etc.

Can a project focus only on one UK area if there is a rationale for that?

There is no rule against this, but a strong rationale of why regional or national borders are not being crossed is expected.

Are there plans for any long-term funding to sustain *Towards a National Collection* projects after the current funding runs out?

We are developing the arguments for long term funding to deliver on what is developed by the five projects at a programme level, but not necessarily to sustain individual projects themselves. While we are trying to leverage funding to build on the methodologies or approaches to linking collections that prove particularly successful, we would not expect to continue to provide funding to individual projects once the grants have finished. All proposals, however, should consider the legacy and potential sustainability of their research and other outputs.