

Joint AHRC ESRC Statement on Subject Coverage

Interfaces between the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences

A Joint Statement by the AHRC and the ESRC

Many cutting edge research challenges cross over between the arts and humanities on the one hand and the social sciences on the other. There are a series of interfaces, and many areas of overlap between the two. These areas of overlap and interface offer considerable opportunities for both the arts and humanities and social sciences. Moreover, disciplines and areas of study are continually evolving, as researchers identify new questions and approaches. Some of the most important research questions and the most innovative approaches arise at the interface between established disciplines.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) share responsibility for the support of research in a number of areas. Neither the AHRC nor the ESRC wishes to draw tight and exclusive boundaries between their respective subject areas, even if that were possible. Rather, both bodies wish to be as open and inclusive as possible in defining and interpreting their respective subject domains.

With regard to research applications, the two Councils wish to ensure that no application falls into a gap between the two Councils or is subject to doubly difficult assessment hurdles. Both Councils, therefore, will support work that includes elements that might plausibly have been supported by the other body. In the case of those research applications that address research questions substantially within both Councils' remits, the two Councils will use peer reviewers from both communities and for larger awards agree an appropriate balance of co-funding. Since both the AHRC and the ESRC will fund research projects in areas of overlap between the arts and humanities and the social sciences, applicants should not artificially seek to focus their proposals in one area or the other.

The two Councils' approach to postgraduate funding reflects the specific training needs of the arts and humanities and the social sciences. Co-funding of studentships is not available, other than within a specific joint initiative between the Councils. The Councils are, however, pleased to commit to providing effective guidance to postgraduate applicants on the appropriate Council for their work.

In order to assist applicants in deciding to which body they should direct their applications, the AHRC and the ESRC have developed guidance relating to various overlap areas of study, as set out below. Both bodies are happy to provide personal advice to potential applicants on these issues. There is also regular consultation between the two Councils on these matters, as there is with other Councils within the framework of RCUK (www.rcuk.ac.uk).

In selected areas of research on the interface between the arts and humanities and the social sciences, the AHRC and the ESRC will develop jointly-funded initiatives with researchers to provide new opportunities for challenging and exciting research. In this way, both bodies hope to foster and support high quality work that transcends and brings together the interests of researchers in the arts and humanities and the social

sciences. Recent examples include the Cultures of Consumption, Religion and Society and Language-based Area Studies initiatives.

Subjects where the AHRC and the ESRC share interests and responsibilities

The following is a list of some of the main areas of study where the AHRC and the ESRC share interests. Please also consult the Guides to applicants produced by the AHRC and the ESRC prior to preparing an application.

Area Studies. AHRC supports research that is concerned with the culture, history, language and religion of specific regions. ESRC supports research that is concerned with the society, economy, politics and human geography of specific regions.

Communications, Cultural and Media Studies. AHRC supports research that seeks to understand communications, culture and media through the study of phenomena such as the visual arts, film and television, history, language, literature and performance. ESRC supports research that approaches communications, culture and media through the study of sociology, social theory, social anthropology, politics and economics. Note that there is also an important interface between AHRC, ESRC and EPSRC in this area where proposed research projects include a significant engagement with, or advancement of, communication technologies. In the case of relevant research applications, the AHRC and/or ESRC will liaise with EPSRC when consulting reviewers and making funding decisions.

Cultural Policy and Management. AHRC supports historical, comparative and empirical research that addresses questions of human value in creativity and culture, including both the individual and collective experience of creativity and culture. AHRC also supports research in museum studies. ESRC supports research into the psychological processes involved in creativity and the social and economic influences on and consequent impacts of creativity and culture, and public policy and management in this area.

Education. ESRC is the primary funding body for educational research across all subjects, including the arts and humanities. AHRC supports research where the imperative for the research questions resides in the arts and humanities, but there may be an educational element. Examples include research into the history of education, children's literature, creative art and performance in (but not for) educational environments, religious teaching and scholarship, and the role of education in librarianship and museums practice.

Gender Studies. AHRC supports research that is concerned with sex and gender as they relate to the creative and performing arts, language, law, literature, religion and history of all periods. ESRC supports research that is concerned with sex and gender as they relate to society, the economy and politics.

Human Geography. ESRC is the primary funding body for human geography; but AHRC also supports research in cultural geography. This includes research into the interpretation of the cultural landscape; cultural constructions of nature and environment; creative and imaginative aspects of geographical thought and practice; and relationships between space, place and cultural identity.

History. AHRC supports historical research covering all periods of history from ancient times to modern, and in all parts of the world. Applicants whose research focuses primarily on the very recent past will need to show in their proposal how and why their focus is indeed predominantly historical, for example how the study will focus on change over a defined period of time or will make predominant use of historical modes of analysis.

ESRC supports historical research across all periods that seeks to understand the development of social and economic arrangements over time and applies social and economic theories. Research focusing on contemporary or near-contemporary social, political, economic or geographical themes should normally be directed to the ESRC.

International Relations. ESRC is the primary funding body for international relations, but AHRC supports research that is concerned with the relationship between international relations and the culture, history, language and religion of specific countries and regions.

Librarianship and Information Science. AHRC supports research into the practice and techniques of information and knowledge management as they relate to librarianship, archives and records management, information science and information systems, storage and retrieval, and professional practice in journalism and the media. AHRC also supports research into information use and users in specific organisational environments. ESRC supports research into the broader socio-economic context of information use and policy, information flows within and between organisations, and the shaping, use and potential of information and communication technologies. The ESRC also supports research on knowledge management and on forms and structures of knowledge, as they relate to the wider socio-economic context. Note that there is also an important interface between AHRC, ESRC and EPSRC in this area where proposed research projects include a significant engagement with, or advancement of, technologies dealing with information management. In the case of relevant research applications, AHRC and/or ESRC will liaise with EPSRC when consulting reviewers and making funding decisions.

Linguistics. AHRC supports research into the structure, history, theory and description of language and languages. This includes the development and exploration of theories of language, the elucidation of the historical development of languages and the production of descriptions of languages or features of languages. ESRC supports research in areas of computational linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and interdisciplinary social science research involving linguistics. Both Councils also fund research into phonetics and applied linguistics relating to the areas for which they are responsible.

Law. AHRC supports research into the content, procedures, theory, philosophy and history of the law. This includes studies of legal systems and legislation in all periods of history and in all parts of the world. ESRC supports socio-legal studies, which are concerned with the social, political and economic influences on and impact of the law and the legal system.

Philosophy. AHRC supports research in philosophy, covering all topics, methods and periods. This includes research into ethical theory and applied ethics, for example bio-ethics, professional ethics and environmental ethics. ESRC supports research into the social political and economic influences on and effects of ethical positions of institutions and individuals.

Religious Studies. AHRC supports research into religions and belief systems of all kinds, in all periods of history and in all parts of the world. This includes research into the ethics of religions and belief systems, and their application in socio-economic, scientific and technological contexts. ESRC supports research that is concerned with the social and economic influences on and the impacts of religious beliefs and groups.

Science & Technology Studies. ESRC is the primary funding body for research on innovation and the interdisciplinary study of science, technology and society. AHRC supports research into the history, law and philosophy of science, technology and medicine, as well as their interface with religion. AHRC also supports research into the interpretation and representation of, and engagement with, science, technology and medicine through art, literature, performance, museums, galleries, libraries and archives.

Social Anthropology. ESRC is the primary funding body for social anthropology, but the AHRC also supports anthropological research where the research questions and methods are significantly concerned with arts and humanities phenomena and critical, historical and practice-led approaches. This includes studies of archaeology, history, language, law, literature, the creative and performing arts and religion.