

AHRC Design Fellowships: Challenges of the Future 2020

Call opens: 5th December 2019

Deadline for proposals: 7th January 2020

Introduction

The value of Design to the UK economy is well-established. The Design Council's *Designing a Future Economy* showed that

- workers with design skills contribute £209bn to the UK economy (GVA)
- people who use design skills are 47% more productive than the average UK worker
- demand for workers with design skills has grown at twice the rate of UK employment over the same period (14% vs. 7% since 2012)
- 43% of workers using design skills were more likely to be in jobs requiring and generating innovation... compared with an average for the wider UK workforce of just 6%¹.

Upstream from these is the value of Design research, recently showcased by the AHRC *Design Research for Change* showcases at London Design Fairs 2018 and 2019. 77% of the Design research project applications submitted to AHRC since 2015 have been interdisciplinary, and Design researchers are being sought after more and more for their ability to broker relationships across hitherto impermeable disciplinary boundaries.

AHRC-funded projects such as [Developing an Action Plan for the Strategic Use of Design in the UK](#) and [Design Innovation for New Growth](#) are further demonstrating the essential value of Design research to the UK's economy, well-being and community cohesion.

Design features strongly in AHRC's Delivery Plan 2019, in both strategic outlook and historical case studies. AHRC's own portfolio of funded projects demonstrates the breadth and reach of Design research and the interdisciplinarity of its researchers. Recent projects have shown the discipline to be a translational lens through which to approach the Grand Challenges of the Industrial Strategy. Our responses to those Challenges 'rely on recognising the human dimension in the development of new technologies', and it is through Design research that we find that dimension.

The universities of the United Kingdom are home to world-leading design research. Whether it be doctoral candidates at our four Design Centres for Doctoral Training, or researchers on the many discovery-led Design projects we fund every year, or indeed those researchers who we have not yet funded, the value of UK university-led design research to the national economy and wellbeing is enormous.

We are now looking to understand and demonstrate that value through the production of five distinct but complementary reports which explore in depth the contribution of

¹ Designing a Future Economy 2017

university-led Design research to the economic and social challenges facing the UK. We are not seeking primary research projects, but rather in-depth explorations of the value which university-led design can add to the contribution of the design sector, as a whole, to the UK economy.

To effect this, we are funding five short-term, intensive Fellowships, each of which will have as its primary focus one of the following themes:

- Clean Growth/Net Zero
- The Future of Mobility
- AI & data
- Public Services
- Place

The successful Fellows will not only be required to produce a comprehensive coverage of the contribution to their theme of university-led Design research, but should also explore the synergies and divisions between them which Design research, and Design researchers, are bridging.

Nature of Proposed Activities

The aim of the AHRC Residential Design Fellowships is to create a better understanding of the role of design research in these challenging areas and the economic and social impact of Design research, while also enhancing the funding opportunities available for the discipline. We are looking for design researchers in UK universities who are keen to develop a wide and deep awareness of the design research landscape within the above themes. Each Fellow will collaborate with an identified Design research centre of excellence, identified by them in their application and which has demonstrated its support of the application; from that base, they will track discovery-led Design research projects, through outputs and outcomes, to impact and engagement, innovation and economic, social and behavioural transformation.

Successful Fellows will compile a literature, capacity and capability review of their theme, assessing the UK university-led design research community's current contribution to it, the relevant skills pipeline (or lack thereof), and identifying recommendations for future action and opportunities for funding programmes. We will expect the Fellow to use the resources made available by their host organisation to review and collate relevant existing research and evidence on their research topic, but also to range widely across the UK to ensure that regional reach and penetration is explored. The AHRC expects the

Fellow to produce a single output, a report entitled “UK Design Research: ***Insert Theme***”, which will be used by the AHRC in planning for future investments in this area and may then be disseminated to academic, business, government and other stakeholders. Successful candidates will be supported throughout their Fellowship by an AHRC Relationship Manager and a coordinating design academic, who will provide advice, guidance and feedback on project progress.

Themes

- *Clean Growth/Net Zero*

The move to cleaner economic growth – through low carbon technologies and the efficient use of resources – is one of the greatest industrial opportunities of our time. By one estimate, the UK’s clean economy could grow at four times the rate of GDP. Whole new industries will be created and existing industries transformed as we move towards a low carbon, more resource-efficient economy.

- *The Future of Mobility*

We are on the cusp of a profound change in how we move people, goods and services around our towns, cities and countryside. This is driven by extraordinary innovation in engineering, technology and business models. The UK’s road and rail network could dramatically reduce carbon emissions and other pollutants, congestion could be reduced through higher-density use of road space enabled by automated vehicles, and mobility could be available when we want it, where we want it and how we want it.

- *AI & Data*

Artificial Intelligence and machine learning are general purpose technologies already starting to transform the global economy. They can be seen as new industries in their own right, but they are also transforming business models across many sectors as they deploy vast datasets to identify better ways of doing complex tasks – from helping doctors diagnose medical conditions more effectively to allowing people to communicate across the globe using instantaneous speech recognition and translation software.

- *Public Services*

Design researchers are working ever more closely with policy makers and public administrators; bodies such as the Cabinet Office’s Policy Lab, and toolkits like the Service Manual, have furthered this collaboration. With more and more demand on the country’s public services, however, innovation is sorely needed in health and social care, transport, environment, education and the justice system, to name a few.

- *Place*

None of these innovations will matter, of course, if where we live and work cannot accommodate them in a fair, inclusive and accessible way. To reimagine and reinvent our homes and workspaces in this manner requires more than just architecture and urban and environmental design; it requires a participatory approach which reflects the physical, social, cultural and economic realities of that space, and permits it to support its residents' health, happiness and wellbeing.

To each of these themes, the questions must be asked: *What is design research doing in this area? What part has it traditionally played, and what more needs to be done? Are there any current barriers to the adoption of design research in these areas and how might they be overcome? What skills do design researchers need to have the greatest impact, and what disciplinary boundaries must they bridge in order to gain these skills?*

Reports may include statistical data, case studies, interviews, literature reviews, research analysis and any other method which the successful candidate deems appropriate. The successful Fellow would be expected to engage and consult widely with academia, business, government and the wider public. Each project report will be organised under the following chapters:

- **Overview**

What is the current UK design research landscape in relation to this theme? Why is design research important to it? How is design research supported (or not), and how does it compare internationally?

- **Research**

What are the cutting edge research questions being asked? What knowledge gaps are there? What emerging areas of design, relevant to the theme, can be identified? With which other researchers, disciplines and fields are design researchers working?

- **Skills**

What skills pipeline is there? What activity can be seen emerging from bodies such as the AHRC Design Centres for Doctoral Training, the Doctoral Training Partnerships, and individual research organisations? What support is there for Early Career Design Researchers with an interest in this theme? What sort of skillsets do researchers need to meet the challenge?

- **Infrastructure**

Where are the centres of excellence? How can we improve accessibility to them? Where are the regional strengths and weaknesses? How can we ensure that their work produces results for the country as a whole?

- **Recommendations**

What could design research offer? How best would it be coordinated? What needs to happen to ensure that design research is allowed to contribute further to answering the challenges of this theme? What skills, funding and engagement programmes would be appropriate?

How the successful Fellow approaches these chapters will be their choice, but their Case for Support must outline this approach in detail.

NB Applicants may apply for more than one theme – we understand that design researchers will have a diversity of interests – but these must be in separate applications, with the theme and expertise relevant to that theme clearly signposted.

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply, you must:

- hold a PhD (or equivalent) in Design Research or related field; this is a deliberately broad church, but you must demonstrate in your application the relevance of a “non-design” qualification;
- submit a letter of support from *either* an eligible research organisation by whom you are already employed, *or* an eligible research organisation willing to host you for the duration of the Fellowship, which recognises that for the duration of the Fellowship you will be full-time contracted to the above-described project;
- be available to work full-time on the report between the months of February 2020 and May 2020.

Funding

A maximum of £55,000 will be available to support a Research Fellow for a period of no longer than 3 months on a full time basis. Due to the time constraints of the Fellowship, we regret that part-time applications will not be eligible. For these Fellowships, AHRC will meet 100% of the full Economic Cost (fEC). Awards **must start between 1st February and 29th February 2020 inclusive**, and must produce a finished report **no later than 31st May 2020**.

How to apply

Detailed guidance on completing the Case for Support and other attachments is provided in Annex A.

You should submit your proposal using [this dedicated SmartSurvey link](#), which will go live no later than 5pm on **5th December 2019**.

All proposals must be completed and submitted by the deadline of **7th January 2020**.

Assessment process and criteria

Proposals will initially be evaluated through a process of peer review. For these applications we will request reviews by members of the AHRC's Peer Review College. If suitable college members are not available then we reserve the right to seek reviews from specialists from the UK and abroad, who are not current members of the Peer Review Colleges.

The following will be taken into account when assessing proposals:

- the extent to which the proposal meets the specific aims of the call
- the quality of the project process outlined, including: agenda, participants, sustainability and appropriateness of methods
- the quality and appropriateness of the suggested approach by which the theme is to be explored
- the extent to which the proposed activities will build on and add value to existing research
- the extent to which the potential outcomes justify the costs
- whether the proposal demonstrates an appropriate strategy for the dissemination and exploitation of any outcomes, including the extent to which plans are in place to extend collaboration once the award has ended
- the extent to which what is proposed will have an impact beyond the lifetime of the award.
- the extent to which the proposed project benefits both the Fellow and the host organisation.

AHRC Contacts

Enquiries regarding this call should be directed to:

Harry Kerr, Senior Investment Manager for Design
harry.kerr@ahrc.ukri.org or 01793 416040

Annex A

Guidance for completing attachments

All the following documents should be completed in a font **no smaller than size 11**. Please also note the permitted document lengths.

Case for Support

The Case for Support should be no more than **4 sides of A4** outlining the rationale for the applicant's chosen theme and a description of the proposed activities to be undertaken in support of the report's production. You should structure your Case for Support using the following headings:

Fit to Theme

You should ensure that it is clear to the reader how the proposed activity fits with the Design Fellowships call and how you envisage your project developing into a comprehensive report.

Rationale and context

You should describe clearly the rationale, approach and context of the activities. Why are the proposed activities necessary to address this theme at this time? How will the proposed work assess the existing research base? How will it identify emerging areas of research innovation or potential gaps in current research? Why are you the right person to conduct this work? What is the context in which the activities will operate and how will they advance knowledge and understanding of the contribution of design research to the identified theme?

Timetable of activities

You should give a clear timetable of activities, including key milestones.

Justification of Resources

All costs associated with the project must be justified in the Justification of Resources. Applicants should:

- Explain why the indicated resources are needed, taking into account the nature and complexity of the activities proposed.
- Refer to the breakdown of resources in the summary fund headings Directly Incurred and Directly Allocated

- Estates costs, Indirect costs, Fellowship salary costs, and some other Directly Allocated costs such as general technical services do not need to be justified

The Justification of resources should not exceed **two sides of A4**.

Workplan

A Workplan attachment is required for all applications. It must be used to outline your timetable for the project and to indicate the work to be undertaken in each month of the award. The Workplan should clearly outline the time commitment of the Fellow for each phase of the Fellowship. The Workplan must not exceed **one side of A4**.

Curriculum Vitae

Summary curriculum vitae should be attached as separate documents for the Principal Investigator. This should be no more than **two sides of A4**. CVs should include basic information about education, employment history, and academic responsibilities.

Publications Lists

A summary lists of publications/research outputs should be attached as separate document for the Fellow. These should cover major publications/outputs in the last five years and should be no more than **one side of A4**.

Letters of Support

As described above, candidates must submit a letter of support from *either* an eligible design research centre of excellence by whom they are already employed, *or* an eligible design research centre of excellence willing to host them for the duration of the Fellowship on secondment, which recognises that for the duration of the Fellowship they will be full-time contracted to the above-described project. If a candidate is employed by one research organisation, but wishes to be based at another (perhaps due to the latter institution's recognition as a design centre of excellence) then two letters of support will be required – one from the candidate's "home" institution and one from their "host" institution. Candidates may provide no more than two letters of support.