



ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships Scheme Competition

Competition Guidance and Process 2025/26

On Friday 20 March 2026 the 2025/26 ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme Competition will launch. SGSSS is offering **five, nine-month (FTE)** postdoctoral fellowships funded by ESRC.

Due to changes within the UKRI and ESRC funding structure this year, the Postdoctoral Fellows competition is taking place over a shorter period than usual. The process of applications and reviews is therefore different compared with previous years. SGSSS have sought to balance time available to applicants to complete a competitive application, and time for thorough and robust reviews to take place.

As per the 2025/26 [ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Call Specification](#), this opportunity is open to applicants who have completed their PhD at a UK Research Organisation and must be applying to an institution that is part of the SGSSS-DTP. Applicants must also apply to an academic department/School/faculty that is administratively aligned to an SGSSS approved [Unit of Assessment \(UoA\)](#) within their proposed institution. The mentor does not need to have the same alignment, however, the application needs to be able to justify why it is an appropriate mentorship arrangement. Some HEIs may choose to impose additional local conditions for their nominations regarding the alignment of the mentor. Please also refer to the [ESRC Call Specification](#) and [FAQs](#).

The Postdoctoral Fellowship Competition is highly competitive and a large volume of applications are received each year, with only five awards being available. The competition is structured as a one-stage application process and a three-stage review process. Please note, however, that different HEIs may have their own internal deadline, ahead of the SGSSS/ESRC deadline. Applicants **MUST** speak to proposed HEI before submitting an application. It is essential you contact your proposed university **before starting** an application.

The outcome of the process is a list of five candidates that SGSSS will nominate to ESRC for final confirmation as Postdoctoral Fellow. See our website for the full [competition timeline](#). Applicants should note the deadlines, and the full submission requirements for each stage of the competition.

Full applications must be submitted via the [SGSSS Apply](#) portal by 23:59 on 1 June 2026.

As stated above, individual HEIs may have additional internal deadlines and processes that applicants must adhere to.

The three review stages (and dates) are:

- HEI Review Stage: applications will be nominated by their HEIs on 1 June 2026, in line with submission of the full applications on SGSSS Apply.
- SGSSS Review Stage: 2 to 8 June 2026.
- Final Selection Review Stage: 11 to 25 June 2026.

Successful and unsuccessful candidates will be kept informed of their progress through the competition by SGSSS at all relevant stages, however any feedback requested at the HEI Review stage will be directed to the relevant HEI Champion.

1. HEI REVIEW STAGE

Applicants are required to submit a full application via the SGSSS application system, [SGSSS Apply](#). The application has been defined by the ESRC and will consist of:

- [ESRC application form](#)
- Case for support (maximum four sides of A4)
- Justification of resources (maximum one side of A4)
- CV (maximum two sides of A4)
- Mentor statement and summary CV (maximum two sides of A4)
- Additional attachments (included where necessary)
 - Data management plan (maximum of three sides of A4)
 - List of publications
 - Other attachments

Please review the [ESRC Call Specification](#) and [FAQs](#) for further detail on the requirements for each section.

HEI Review Stage Process:

- Applications will be accessible via *SGSSS Apply* for institutional ‘[Postdoc Champions](#)’ on a **rolling basis**. Institutions, led by the Postdoc Champion, will decide which candidates to nominate for further review by the SGSSS and Final Selection panels.
- To ensure academic quality, equity and diversity, applications should be assessed by a balanced panel within each institution.
- HEIs may also choose to create their own internal “expression of interest” or others shortlisting process, ahead of the full application deadline.
- To guide consistency and facilitate benchmarking, HEI review panels may choose to use the [Stage 1 Fellowship Marking Framework](#) used in previous years as a guide.
- Applicants will be updated on the outcome of the HEI Review Stage through the SGSSS Apply system on a rolling basis, but this should be completed no later than 23:59 on 1 June 2026.
- To manage demand and meet timescales, each institution is encouraged to only shortlist the highest quality applications, **capped at three**. Please note, unsuccessful applicants at this stage will be advised to contact their HEI Champion, should they want feedback on their application.
- Institutions must ensure nominated candidates meet the eligibility criteria (including word and page limits). Applications which exceed the word or page limits, or otherwise do not abide by the call guidance, will be rejected by the ESRC.
- Only one application to a single DTP is permitted. Following the application deadline, SGSSS will perform checks with other DTPs to ensure applicants have only applied to one DTP. If an applicant submits to more than one DTP, all of their applications will be withdrawn from further consideration.

2. SGSSS Director Review

The SGSSS Director Review Stage will be conducted by a panel of SGSSS academics, led by the Director and Associate Director (Postdoctoral Fellows).

Reviewers will be given access to the relevant applications for review via [SGSSS Apply](#) from **2 June 2026**.

Assessment, Scores and Rankings

Reviewers will assess and rank applications. To guide consistency, reviewers will use the [SGSSS Director Review Fellowship Marking Framework](#) based on ESRC criteria.

Reviewers will enter their scores and comments via SGSSS Apply. **Reviewers must complete inputting their scores and comments by the deadline of 23:59 8 June 2026.**

All applications will then be ranked according to the averaged review scores. The SGSSS Director and Associate Director (Postdoctoral Fellows) will then complete a review of the application scores and rankings to establish the cut-off point for applications to go forward to the Final Selection Review Stage. Applicants will then be updated on the outcome of the SGSSS Director Review Stage by SGSSS.

3. FINAL SELECTION REVIEW STAGE

The final selection of the five applicants to be nominated to the ESRC for a Fellowship will be conducted by the Final Selection Panel, which comprises SGSSS academic representation, an SGSSS aligned Dean, a Researcher Development colleague from a partner university, and panel members from external research focused partners including SDS, Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government.

Final Selection Panel members are asked to review the scores, rankings and comments collated during the Review Stage of the competition as a guide. Panel members are not required to score the applications, but rather to moderate the scores and rankings already provided, that is, consider if any scores should be revised or rankings changed. Reflections on the ranking will be discussed during the Final Selection Panel meeting **on 25 June 2026.**

During the Final Selection Panel, the five applications to be nominated for a fellowship award will be agreed, along with a reserve list. All successful (including those on the reserve list) and unsuccessful applicants will then be contacted by SGSSS by **26 June 2026.**

The five SGSSS nominated candidates will be submitted to ESRC. Upon confirmation of these nominations, individual candidates and their HEIs will be asked to upload information to the UKRI Funding Service online system (this will be supported by the relevant HEI Research Offices). This process **MUST** be completed by **23 July 2026** at the very latest. Late applications will be rejected by the ESRC. Once applications have been reviewed by the ESRC, the Head of Department at the successful candidates will receive a grant award letter from the ESRC.

Fellowships will start on **1 October 2026**; grants must end by **30 June 2027** and extensions will not be permitted (except in the case of part time awards, parental leave or significant sickness absence).

If you have any queries regarding the process outlined in this guidance document, please contact SGSSS on team@sgsss.ac.uk.