ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships Scheme Competition

Guidance for Selection Process 2023/24

On 21 February 2024 the 2023/24 ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme Competition will launch, offering four postdoctoral fellowships funded by ESRC. As per the 2023/24 [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, and also aligned to an eligible [Unit of Assessment (UoA)](#).

The Postdoctoral Fellowship Competition is made up of a two-stage application process and a three-stage review process. For the full competition timeline, see [here](#).

The two application stage deadlines are:

- Stage 1 Application Deadline: 12pm (noon) on 18 March 2024
- Stage 2 Application Deadline: 4pm on 16 May 2024 (shortlisted applicants only)

The three review stages (and dates) are:

- HEI Review Stage: 20 March 2024 to 09 April 2024
- Peer Review Stage: 22 May 2024 to 04 June 2024
- Final Selection Review Stage: 10 June 2024 to 21 June 2024

Successful and unsuccessful candidates will be kept informed of their progress through the competition by SGSSS at all relevant stages, however any feedback should be provided by the HEI Champion (as these fellowships are staff positions, not studentships).

1. HEI REVIEW STAGE

Applicants are required to submit a Stage 1 application via the SGSSS application system, *SGSSS Apply*. The Stage 1 application should consist of**:**

- [Stage 1 Application Form](#) (includes the proposal and CV),
- Official confirmation of eligible PhD (awarded or pending)
- Mentor Statement of Support (500 words maximum)

The SGSSS is committed to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles into our application and cohort support processes and practices in order to encourage the participation of applicants with non-traditional educational backgrounds and to ensure that successful applicants are able to flourish with Postdoctoral Fellowship funding and to contribute to a positive research culture.

As part of the assessment of applicants, SGSSS are interested in candidates as a whole person. What this means is that rather than solely looking at academic achievements, we will consider what candidates can bring to an ESRC Fellowship from their work and life experiences. We want candidates to be able to demonstrate and articulate their potential to undertake and complete an ESRC Fellowship, to flourish as a result of ESRC Fellowship funding and to be a proactive contributor to a positive research culture. As part of their application candidates will be asked to tell us about

their **preparedness to undertake and complete an ESRC Fellowship and to flourish as a result** of **ESRC Fellowship funding** and how they will **contribute to a positive and diverse research community.**

For further details on how applications will be assessed using a 'whole person approach', please see the **SGSSS PDF Stage 1 Marking Framework** (Link to framework on website).

The Stage 1 Application Form provides the basis for intended host HEIs to decide about whether to support the application to Stage 2.

HEI Review Stage Process:

- Stage 1 applications will be accessible via *SGSSS Apply* for institutional 'HEI Champions' on **20 March 2024**. Institutions, led by the HEI Champion, will then decide which candidates to shortlist, i.e., invite to submit a 'full' Stage 2 application.
- To ensure academic quality, equity and diversity, Stage 1 applications should be assessed by a balanced panel within each institution, comprising of the HEI Champion and at least two appropriate PGR Leads.
- To guide consistency and facilitate benchmarking, HEI review panels must use the Stage 1 Fellowship Marking Framework (total score out of 25).
- Each HEI Champion must submit candidate scores and comments (shortlisted/not shortlisted) through *SGSSS Apply* by **4pm on 09 April 2024**. **Please note: once the HEI Champion has selected 'Mark as Complete' on an individual's application, an email will be sent automatically to the applicant regarding the outcome of their application.**
- Applicants will be updated on the outcome of the HEI Review Stage by SGSSS on a rolling basis but no later than 4pm on 09 April 2024. Shortlisted candidates will work with host institutions to produce a full Stage 2 application, in line with ESRC requirements (see the guidance on our website here for more details). HEI Champions are also asked to provide a summary of the process followed to assess and rank applications (500 words max) to team@sgsss.ac.uk within one week of candidate submission.
- To manage demand and meet timescales, each institution is encouraged to only shortlist the highest quality applications, capped at 4 (this is the same number as available fellowships). Please note, unsuccessful applicants at this stage will be advised to contact their HEI Champion, should they want feedback on their application.
- Assurance checks will be conducted by the SGSSS Associate Director (Postdocs) and the SGSSS Head of Strategy and Operations.

2. PEER REVIEW STAGE

The Peer Review Stage will be conducted by various members of the SGSSS governance structure:

- Two PGR Leads from the Unit of Assessment (UoA) the applicant has applied to, however these PGR Leads should not be from the same institution as the applicant's intended institution. Please note, each PGR Lead may be asked to review a maximum of 4 applications, however the actual number will likely be lower.
- SGSSS Associate Director (Postdocs). Please note, the Associate Director will be asked to review a maximum of 56 applications, however the actual number will likely be lower.

Access

Peer Reviewers will be given access to the relevant applications for review via *SGSSS Apply* from **22 May 2024**. Stage 2 applications will consist of the following documents:

- Case for support (including Abstract/summary of progress; Impacts of fellow's research; Research-related achievements; Planned programme of activities)
- Justification of resources
- CV
- Head of Department statement
- Mentor statement and summary CV
- Referee statement
- Workplan
- Data management plan (if applicable)
- List of publications (if applicable)
- Other attachments (e.g., If the fellow is intending to visit an overseas institution within the period of the fellowship, a letter of support from the institution must be provided, supporting the visit in principle).

Assessment, Scores and Rankings

Peer reviewers will assess and rank applications. To guide consistency, reviewers will use the Stage 2 Fellowship Marking Framework based on ESRC criteria.

Peer reviewers will enter their scores and comments via *SGSSS Apply*. **Peer reviewers must complete inputting their scores and comments by the deadline of 4pm on 4 June 2024**.

All applications will then be ranked according to the averaged peer review scores, completed by SGSSS. The SGSSS Director and Associate Director (Postdocs) will then complete a light touch review of the application scores and rankings to establish the cut-off point for applications to go forward to the Final Selection Review Stage. We expect this to be the top 20 ranked applications (this is an approximation). Applicants will then be updated on the outcome of the Peer Review Stage by SGSSS on **07 June 2024**.

3. FINAL SELECTION REVIEW STAGE

The final selection of the 4 applicants to be nominated for a fellowship will be conducted by the following Panel Members:

- **SGSSS Director**
- **SGSSS Dean's Group member (ideally from a non-represented HEI)**
- **Two members of SGSSS's Non-HEI Partners (SDS & SFC)**
- **Nominee from Research & Development, Partner HEI**

On **10 June 2024**, all panel members will be asked to review and rank the final shortlisted applications (approx. 20 applications) using the scores, rankings and comments collated during the Peer Review Stage of the competition as a guide. Panel members are not required to score the applications, but rather to rank them in the order they deem appropriate. The deadline for panel members to complete this task (via *SGSSS Apply*) is **4pm on 21 June 2024**. The rankings from all panel members will then be collated and averaged, resulting in a "Pre-Selection Panel Rank", which will then be discussed during the Final Selection Panel meeting on **28 June 2024**. During the Final Selection Panel, the 4 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 on **01 July 2024**. Applicants will be directed to the SGSSS Associate Director (Postdoctoral Fellows) should they request additional feedback.

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