

## **Developing the logic of a convincing argument in an ESRC research proposal**

This is a guide to what you might enter into each section of the application form and attachments in building up a convincing overall argument. The rationale for the guidance in each section is given in italics, to help you see how what you write could make your account convincing to sceptical assessors and reviewers. The guidance covers the small grants and first grants schemes, as operating in 2010.

### **BUILDING UP EVIDENCE FOR WARRANTING YOUR CONCLUSION WHEN COMPLETING THE PROPOSAL FORM**

**(Organisation where the Grant would be held)**

#### **Project Title**

Keywords summarising the topic in general terms, *a very brief summary which is the starting point for clueing assessors and reviewers in to the focus of your proposal.*

#### **Start Date and Duration**

Proposed start date and number of months of the research – *indicating a realistic start date, given when the application is submitted, and a realistic period for fulfilling the objectives.*

#### **Applicants**

Possible inclusion of an experienced researcher as co-investigator. *An opportunity to include a colleague who already has a successful track record of research funded by the ESRC - implying that the research team includes a 'safe pair of hands' who will ensure that the research is carried out effectively.*

(No co-investigator is allowed for first grant outline proposals. But here a mentor must be identified, who can fulfil a similar experienced researcher support role - *demonstrating that the applicant will be supported by a 'safe pair of hands'.*)

Indication of the applicants' time to be spent per week on the project, *which needs to be consistent with the amount of work to be done during the research period. It indicates that the applicants will give sufficient time to the research to conduct it to a high standard.*

#### **Objectives**

What will be done to investigate the topic as summarised in your title, focused on the particular context of the investigation. You may wish to state a broad aim embracing your set of more specific objectives. The objectives may potentially cover collection of data, contribution to knowledge, policy or practice, and development of theory, methodology or methods. *They clue assessors and reviewers more fully into the precise focus of the proposed research, and hint at the kind of outputs that will be achieved by the end of the award as the first part of the conclusion to your overall argument..*

#### **Summary**

A 'plain language' account of what is in your research proposal, targeted at a general audience (implicitly including potential beneficiaries). *This account provides assessors and reviewers with an 'easy-read' overview of your proposed research and its projected outputs and potential impacts for key academic and non-academic beneficiaries. The account also indicates that you know how to write in a simple and direct style appropriate for disseminating your work to a non-academic audience. (For first grants, user reviewers may constitute non-academic potential beneficiaries. The summary then provides an opportunity to convince them that the research will produce practically important outcomes, and that these outcomes will be disseminated to potential beneficiaries.)*

### **PART OF THE CONCLUSION (IMPACTS OF OUTPUTS FOR ACADEMIC BENEFICIARIES)**

(You might wish to complete this section after you have clarified in the case for support what your anticipated outputs will be to achieve the objectives stated earlier.)

### **Academic Beneficiaries**

Relating back to the objectives (e.g. anticipated findings related to an objective about the collection of data), addressing how your projected outputs will potentially impact positively on key academic beneficiaries who stand to be informed or guided by the research outputs. *This is the basis for asserting to the assessors and reviewers that your investigation promises to offer some valuable contribution that will impact positively on academic beneficiaries for ESRC-funded research.*

### **MORE WARRANTING**

#### **Staff Duties**

Indicating what the responsibilities of the applicants and any employed research and support staff are - *to show that the applicants are competent to fulfil these duties, and that any funding requested for research and support staff is necessary for the conduct of the research.*

### **PART OF THE CONCLUSION (IMPACTS OF OUTPUTS FOR NON-ACADEMIC BENEFICIARIES)**

#### **Research Impact Summary**

Relating back to the objectives (e.g. anticipated findings linked to an objective about the collection of data), addressing how your projected outputs will potentially impact positively on key non-academic beneficiaries (e.g. businesspeople, policy-makers, public service practitioners,) who stand to be informed or guided by the research outputs. The summary will include an indication of how you have and will communicate with and engage such beneficiaries (e.g. whether the proposed research focus has been informed by consultation with policy-maker or practitioner user communities, whether they will be involved in its conduct, how they will be kept informed through the dissemination of interim findings and final outputs, how some might be involved in knowledge transfer activities flowing from the research.) *This is the basis for asserting to the assessors and reviewers that your investigation promises to offer some valuable contribution that will impact positively beyond the academic world on important beneficiaries for ESRC-funded research outside academe. It enables you to show why and how you will try to relate your research directly or indirectly to important concerns of these non-academic users, as well as academics, especially through dissemination and possibly also knowledge transfer activities.*

### **MORE WARRANTING**

#### **Ethical Information**

Summarising how any ethical issues have been addressed (e.g. dealing with informed consent, confidentiality, impartiality, specifying the code of conduct to be followed), and whether any ethical approvals have been obtained or are to be sought if the research is funded. *To demonstrate that you have thought about how to address potential ethical problems that might otherwise jeopardise the research and its dissemination, or reflect badly on the ESRC, if your proposal is funded. Also to show that you are seeking ethical approval where required or otherwise prudent to do so, and will operate in accordance with the ESRC's Research Ethics Framework. Your response is implicitly indicative of your competence to undertake the research.*

#### **Summary of Resources Required for Project (and sections requiring related information)**

Indicating what requested funding within the eligible categories will be used for in order to achieve the objectives - *to show that the costings are eligible.*

#### **Timetable**

An estimation of the time during the award by which necessary tasks will have been started or completed, and reiterating the duration of the proposed research. *To show that the timetable is feasible, given the ambition of data collection, and so that the costings offer good value for money.*

### **Data collection**

Checking that data covering your research focus have not already been collected. *To demonstrate that collection of new data is needed, and to indicate how you will prepare data for archiving and how you have costed this task.*

### **Other Information - Academic Reviewers, User Reviewers**

(For first grant full proposals, nominated academic and user reviewers, *whose own professional standing and knowledge of your academic work can be drawn upon to support your case for funding.*)

## **WARRANTING THROUGH THE ATTACHED CASE FOR SUPPORT**

Setting out what you are going to do to achieve your stated aims and objectives and why doing so is important, within six sides of A4, using a 12 point font (around 3,500 words). *This is the basis for building up the warranting in each subsection, offering evidence that your research will fill a significant knowledge gap, and that you know what you are doing and so will conduct your investigation competently. The warranting builds towards the first part of the conclusion in the final subsection: your detailed account of your projected outputs linked to the previously stated objectives.*

### **Introduction**

Setting any broad aim and the specific objectives in context. A statement of your purpose - maybe formulated as a central question or issue expressed in general terms, why you are competent to tackle this central question, the rationale for the research (e.g. its policy and practical significance as *warranted by the literature*), any theoretical framework for addressing this central question or issue *and reasons warranting its application to your substantive topic, referring to the literature.*

### **Research Questions**

Indicating how each objective will be achieved by seeking answers to one or more detailed research questions, perhaps informed by your theoretical framework, and relating to your selected data sources. *To indicate how you will translate a broad aim and the specific objectives into detailed research questions directly tackled in your research.*

### **Research Methods**

Indicating your methodological approach *and why it best fits your purpose and the scope of your study*, your choice of data collection methods *and why have chosen them* and, as appropriate:

- the form of sampling (e.g. opportunity sample) *and what your selection criteria are to show why you are choosing constituents of your sample*, details of each constituent of the projected sample itself
- the main unit of analysis (e.g. organisation level, individual level) *and how it relates to your theoretical framework and your purpose*
- a summary indication of instruments to gather data answering your research questions, *and piloting as appropriate to show that you will check instrument validity and comprehensibility*
- major tasks and timetable (consistent with but more detailed than what you stated in the form, *indicating that you have planned the entire research process*)

### **Potential Problems**

Pointing to any potential problems and proposing how you will pre-empt them or solve them if they arise. *To demonstrate that you are aware of potential problems which reviewers might identify, and that you have thought through how to avoid or how to tackle them.*

In particular, showing how you will ensure adequate access to data sources, if appropriate referring back to your account of your communications plan and user engagement in the form. (You can also attach letters of support that are essential for the research.) *To indicate how you can guarantee as far as possible that you really will be able to collect your data, so that it represents a good risk from the perspective of assessors and reviewers.*

### **Framework and Methods for Data Analysis**

Summarising the means you will use to analyse the different types of data collected (e.g. a computerised qualitative data analysis package) and the analytical approach for data reduction (e.g. coding, thematic analysis, interpretive statistics) and display (e.g. matrices), checking reliability of interpretation (e.g. coding by more than one person). *To show that you have planned how to analyse the data collected in order to produce the projected outputs that will achieve your stated objectives.*

## **PART OF THE CONCLUSION (DETAILED OUTPUTS LINKED TO IMPACTS)**

### **Projected Outputs and Impacts**

Summarising how answering your research questions will offer important findings for academic and possibly non-academic beneficiaries, indicating that these findings will represent the achievement of each of your stated objectives, and specifying the outputs into which these findings will be incorporated (e.g. papers, dissemination events). Also, reiterating very briefly the gist of what you have stated in the 'academic beneficiaries' and 'research impact summary' parts of the form that shows how these outputs stand to impact positively on the thinking and practice of the key academic and non-academic beneficiaries. *This is the basis for asserting to the assessors and reviewers that your research promises to achieve your objectives through specified outputs that together answer all the research questions, and to reiterate that the research outputs are likely to be valued by the full range of key academic and non-academic beneficiaries you have identified.*

### **DETAILED WARRANTING OF PART OF THE CONCLUSION THROUGH THE IMPACT PLAN (HOW IMPACTS OF OUTPUTS ON NON-ACADEMIC BENEFICIARIES WILL BE ACHIEVED)**

Up to two sides of A4, showing in detail how far your proposed research is already informed by non-academic beneficiaries and how you will continue to maximise your chances that the proposed research will impact positively on them.

### **Communications and Engagement**

Indicating in detail whether, and if so how, the proposed research focus has been informed by consultation with policy-maker and practitioner user communities, whether they will be involved in its conduct, and how they will be kept informed through the dissemination of interim findings and final outputs. *To indicate why and how you plan to relate your research directly or indirectly to important concerns of non-academic users, especially through initial and ongoing consultation and through interim and final dissemination activities.*

### **Collaboration**

Where appropriate, showing how any collaborations and partnerships entailed in the proposed research will be managed (e.g. plans for a formal collaboration agreement, regular liaison meetings). *Demonstrating that if your research is collaborative you have thought through how to maximise the chances of the collaboration working successfully.*

### **Exploitation and Application**

Where appropriate, indicating how it is planned to exploit, commercially and non-commercially, findings taking the form of particular outputs during and after the end of the proposed grant period. *Shows that you have considered the possibility of anticipated outputs having potential for exploitation and any arrangements necessary for exploiting them and protecting the intellectual property they constitute.*

## **Capability**

Indicating who will be responsible for the specified impact activities and how their past experience and past or planned training (e.g. in media presentation skills) will enable them to promote impact effectively – *an opportunity to demonstrate that you or others are already competent or prepared to develop the necessary skills for promoting impact.*

(Also ensure that you have costed in and justified in the relevant sections any additional resources needed to conduct the activities to promote impact on non-academic beneficiaries.)

## **FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR WARRANTING IN THE OTHER ATTACHMENTS**

### **Justification of Resources**

Up to one side of A4, justifying why you need each category of resources and the amount of them that you have costed in the form, *indicating that your proposed research will offer good value for money.*

### **CVs of Applicants and other Named Researchers**

A summary for yourself and any co-applicant or named researcher of qualifications, experience, previous research, funding, and publications, targeting those that are most relevant to the focus of the proposal. *To show that the applicants and any named research staff are competent to carry out the proposed research.*

### **List of Publications**

The bibliography for references cited in the proposal. An option is to submit this as a separate attachment, so saving space in your case for support.

## **(FIRST GRANTS ONLY) WARRANTING SUPPORT FOR THE APPLICANT'S DEVELOPMENT**

A key purpose of the first grants scheme is to support the development of early-career researchers through being principal investigator for a project and other development activities. Therefore, for a first grant outline and full proposal you will be expected to complete additional sections.

### **Mentor Statement**

A statement of up to one side of A4 indicating how the mentor will provide ongoing support for the applicant's development as a researcher if the proposal is funded. *To show that the applicant will receive strong academic expert support throughout the project for his or her development as a researcher, building the potential to direct more complex projects in the future.*

### **Training Plan**

A statement of up to one side of A4, indicating how the applicant has identified and will seek to meet needs for her or his development as a researcher through activities in addition to the project itself. *To show that the applicant has a coherent plan for training and other activities to develop her or himself as a researcher, during the project and in preparation for directing more complex future projects.*

### **Mentor CV**

A short CV. *To show that the mentor is an established and successful researcher, has supervisory experience and is likely to be an effective mentor for the applicant's development as a researcher.*