

A Guide to the application process for an ESRC Overseas Institutional Visit

The following document is designed to offer guidance for applicants of ESRC funded Overseas Institutional Visits (OIVs). This document should be read in addition to the Guidance Notes for Applicants, to help applicants write the highest quality proposal for their visit.

What are the basic funding criteria?

The content and quality of the proposal you submit to the ESRC DTC for your Overseas Institutional Visit will determine whether or not you are successful. Funding decisions for visits are based on the quality of four key assessment criteria:

- the purpose of the visit provided by the applicant
- the intended work plan provided by the applicant
- arrangements for continued supervision provided by the supervisor
- the confirmation of support provided by the proposed host university.

Many proposals are unsuccessful not because they lack interesting or important ideas, but because they fail to communicate adequately how the visit will integrate into the overall PhD programme or provide “added value” to the student, such as how the visit will contribute to their current or future career or academic endeavours. This should be explored and translated into an achievable plan of action. Therefore it is vital that you have a full understanding of what is required, as well as knowing the various stages of the application process, so that you maximise your chances of gaining an award.

Allow yourself time

Preparing a draft application, preparing the project costs and consulting others are all time-consuming parts of the application process. Make sure you allow yourself time to research the application, attain feedback and submit.

Study your funding source

Characteristics of successful ESRC OIV applications:

- a well thought-out and achievable programme of activities that will add value to the PhD
- demonstrate value for money (not necessarily the same as cheapness)
- demonstrate how the visit will contribute to the student’s career and broader academic endeavours
- an unreserved recommendation from the host organisation
- clear commitment from the supervisor to continue supervision throughout the visit.

Read the rules

...and the guidance notes attached to the application form which are designed to help you through the application process. This cannot be over-stressed; familiarising yourself with the content of the ESRC OIV Guidelines will help you to avoid basic mistakes which at best will require clarification with office staff and at worst may prejudice chances of success.

Think about the “added value”

Have a think about the way that you can get the most from your visit.

- Are there any conferences or seminars that you could attend while you're there? (Remember conference costs can be covered by your RTSG).
- Speak to your University International Office; does your University have any links with Universities or Research Organisations in the area that could provide you with opportunities?
- Does the British Council have a presence in the country or region that you are hoping to visit? Are there any events that you could attend or is there someone you could contact to help plan relevant activities?
- Does the Science and Innovation Network have any presence in country that you are hoping to visit? Do they have any events you could attend?
- Has RCUK got any initiatives or collaborations that you could look into in the country? This is especially relevant if you are hoping to visit the US, China or India.

How exactly will your visit aid your research and future career?

Discuss your application

...with peer groups and colleagues. Speak to your supervisor and your host institution to ensure that they know what you are doing. Consult the Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidance relating to your intended destination. This can be found at www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad

Justify your costs

Be realistic - lavish costs are unlikely to find favour in the application process and a proposal which promises the earth at remarkably low expense will be regarded with caution. Applicants should think carefully about the time and resources needed to achieve a successful visit. A well thought out financial plan helps to create confidence in the proposal generally. Give as detailed a breakdown of costs as possible so that assessors can properly assess the case for support. Bear in mind that the ESRC DTC is looking for value for money.

Check the details

Once you have completed the application form make sure that all the required information is provided. Some of the most common omissions and problem areas are:

- an unrealistic start date
- a lack of detail of the value of the visit
- vague financial costs.

What happens next?

For the OIV scheme:

Each OIV application will be considered on its own merits by members of the ESRC DTC Operational Group Committee.

Comments will be sent with your decision letter, and the feedback may be helpful if you submit a new application or proposal in the future.

If you are successful

Congratulations, we hope your visit goes well. Please let the ESRC Coordinator know if there are any changes to your visit and be aware that you will be required to complete an End of Visit Report **within two weeks** of your return.

Don't forget to...

- Leave plenty of time to sort out your visa if you need one.
- Make sure you sort out your travel insurance.
- Contact your Doctor if you are travelling somewhere where you might need vaccinations or medication.
- If you are hoping to develop your language skills on the OIV, speak to your University about whether there are any opportunities available before you go.