



Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

Guidance Documentation

EPSRC Balancing Capability Open Call for Evidence

CALL FOR EVIDENCE: CONTEXT

Balancing Capability is a core strategy for EPSRC, as an approach to setting strategic priorities aligned to UK strength and national importance, and to maintain and develop the UK's world leading position in engineering and physical science research within a finite budget.

EPSRC has a proactive engagement approach to managing its portfolio of research in partnership with the research community and stakeholders including the academic community, business, charities, and other funders. Through our continuous engagement with stakeholders we collect information and evidence about the current UK research, training, and innovation landscape. In partnership with our strategic advisory bodies and key community members, we synthesise this information and evidence into intelligence and knowledge about the current shape of the landscape across engineering and physical sciences, and use it to set aspirational strategies for the direction of our portfolio.

WHAT IS EPSRC DOING NOW AS PART OF THE BALANCING CAPABILITY STRATEGY?

At its introduction in 2011, and again at the main refresh exercise in 2016, EPSRC led large-scale Balancing Capability consultation exercises with the community and other stakeholders in order to set the direction of the research portfolio for the next five years. With over [1,000 pieces of evidence](#) received through a number of engagement activities, the 2016 refresh exercise provided a thorough review of the research landscape. Whilst this large-scale refresh approach provides a comprehensive review of EPSRC's portfolio, it does not enable EPSRC to respond in a suitably agile manner to the changing research environment.

In July 2018 it was announced that EPSRC would be delivering its Balancing Capability strategy through an ongoing process of portfolio monitoring and evidence collection, in order to enable a more dynamic and responsive approach to managing our portfolio and setting strategies. Whilst this means there will not be a large scale refresh exercise in 2020/21, continuous engagement enables EPSRC to regularly review and evolve strategies in response to a rapidly changing landscape. This approach maximises opportunities to advance new and emerging research areas that arise from challenge-driven and discovery-led fields, and provides clear routes for our stakeholders to engage with us on a regular basis.

WHAT IS THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE?

Gathering evidence from stakeholders including industry, academic communities, learned societies, other research organisations and funders is a key component of portfolio management at EPSRC; this evidence is used in Balancing Capability to develop and monitor evidence informed research area strategies.

Building on the strength of the previous call for evidence gathering exercise we are releasing this continuously **open Call for Evidence** to which stakeholders can input evidence about the current research environment at any time. This Call for Evidence will not replace the active engagement between EPSRC and its partners by which we collect very valuable intelligence, but provides a complementary and transparent route to input to our evidence base and strategy development.

This will enable us to continuously evolve our knowledge and understanding of the landscape we need the community to help us by evidencing changes and needs within the landscape through reports, discussions and other resources and one way of collecting this evidence is through this open call for evidence.

HOW TO SUBMIT TO THE CALL

- To submit please [complete the survey](#). Submissions will be reviewed at key points each year (November and May)
- When submitting evidence please explain what this demonstrates relative to the quality, national importance and capacity of a research area or areas (as defined [here](#)). We are particularly interested in evidence with an international perspective. Evidence should be timely and relate to the research area within the context of the last 5 years.
- To support our process for the triaging and reviewing submissions of evidence about the EPSRC portfolio, where possible, evidence should be tagged to the relevant [research areas](#) and [themes](#) in the survey. Where there isn't a clear mapping to specific research areas or it would be beneficial to add broader descriptions of the relevant research, there is also a field to add key words relevant to the research related to the evidence submitted.

WHAT DO WE CONSIDER AS EVIDENCE AND WHO SHOULD SUBMIT?

- Please see our definition of evidence [here](#). Please bear in mind that we do not consider personal opinion as evidence.
- EPSRC does not expect significant levels of resource to be invested in seeking or generating evidence. We do however want to pool the collective knowledge of the community to identify pieces of evidence, which may be of benefit in informing the future direction of research area strategies.
- A snapshot of evidence at the last call for evidence is [here](#). As evidence and engagement activities are on-going, this evidence pool will continue to evolve alongside this call and we will update the list at regular intervals each year
- We will evaluate the call for evidence process at regular intervals to ensure the approach is fit for purpose.

WHAT WILL THE EVIDENCE BE USED FOR?

Evidence submitted will be used to inform the monitoring and ongoing strategies for Research Areas. Working in partnership with our strategic advisory bodies each year, EPSRC will assess the state of the current Research Area rationales and make recommendations on the future strategies for research areas, where appropriate. All evidence submitted will be considered by EPSRC, but submitters should be aware that strategic decisions are made on the basis of a body of evidence, knowledge and information.

Please note that not all evidence submitted will be specifically referenced in research area strategies. All submissions will be considered as part of the wider body of evidence to form forward strategies that also balance external constraints and emerging trends across our portfolio.

For further information on how we set and monitor our portfolio strategies see [here](#).

WHAT DOES EPSRC REGARD AS EVIDENCE FOR THIS CALL?

Pieces of evidence are documents that identify facts or information that indicate a conclusion around the criteria of national importance, quality and capacity (defined at Annex B). These facts may be research area, discipline or theme specific and can be used to build an assessment of the change in activities over the last Delivery Plan period and inform decision-making around future rationales and directions. Evidence should be timely and not historical pieces of evidence with little relevance to today's environment.

Factual evidence

- Evidence that has been published in the form of a report or publication (see below),
- Evidence where points made cite references that have not been misrepresented,
- Evidence focused on potential future opportunities e.g. horizon scanning.

In addition to published reports, this category may include the outputs of activities such as theme day reports or community workshops, especially if a wide collection of experts contributed. Internal working group outputs may also count as evidence; however, their outputs will be tensioned against other returns of this nature.

Opinion data should not be included, especially where:

- It represents the views of an individual alone,
- Points made cannot be linked to published evidence or credible internal analysis i.e. are observational or perceived in nature.

N.B. We will not accept individual research publications in journals as evidence against quality, national importance or capacity. A formal and publically accessible meta-analysis may be eligible where appropriate and demonstrates against the criteria as defined at annex B

Reviews may be cited as evidence if they demonstrate against the criteria as defined at [here](#).

DEFINITIONS OF QUALITY, NI AND CAPACITY

The overall **Quality** of a research area takes into account:

- The international standing of the Research Area;
- Its potential to lead to transformative or disruptive research;
- Whether the area provides the UK with a unique capability in an international context.

The **National Importance** of a Research Area takes into account:

- how the Research Area contributes to, or helps maintain the health of other research disciplines, contributes to addressing key UK societal challenges, contributes to current or future UK economic success, for example, through increased productivity, connectedness, resilience and health. See our Delivery Plan [Outcome framework](#);
- Enables future development of key emerging industry(s);
- the extent to which the Research Area has the potential to meet national strategic needs by establishing or maintaining a unique world leading research activity (including areas of niche capability);

- how the Research Area fits with and complements other UK research funded in the area or related areas in EPSRC's portfolio.

The **Capacity** definition takes into account:

1. The balance of people:

- The numbers, international standing and quality of the researchers in this area.
- The balance of researchers at different career stages, profile or shape of the people pipeline.
- Evidence of leadership and potential leadership
- The destination of PhD students
- Flexibility in skills, knowledge and attitude of the cohort
- The risks of losing capacity
- Trends in people issues over time e.g. the speed of change

2. The range of accessible facilities & equipment:

- The relevance of facilities/equipment e.g. the age of equipment, whether it is state of the art or how critical it is to the research process
- The value of the facilities/equipment for the research community – identify who uses them and how they are used
- Researchers' ability to use facilities and equipment
- Mid- range facilities – how useful they are and what other areas the model could be extended to
- Equipment replacement programmes – consider what is needed for a research field e.g. by looking at what has been needed historically

3. The coverage of research themes across the Engineering & Physical Sciences

- Mechanisms for interdisciplinary working
- Comparison of top down (strategy) vs. bottom up (how people actually work)
- The flexibility of the UK's capacity, including how well researchers are able to respond to emerging challenges.
- International benchmarking
- UK researchers' engagement in addressing societal challenges
- Leading UK researchers' involvement in Grand Challenges
- Level of support to align with EPSRC strategic aspirations