

Briefing note – UK Research and Innovation

24 September 2018

Introduction

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) was launched in April 2018 to bring together the seven research councils, as well as [Innovate UK](#) and the newly created [Research England](#). Its establishment was originally announced in the Government White Paper on higher education and research, [Success as a Knowledge Economy](#) (2016), as a means of uniting arms' length bodies under a single integrated research and innovation funding body. UKRI has also taken on the research funding functions of HEFCE, the Higher Education Funding Council for England. It benefits from £6bn per annum of public funding.

The seven research councils are: AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council), BBSRC (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council), ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council), EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council), MRC (Medical Research Council), NERC (Natural Environment Research Council), and STFC (Science and Technology Facilities Council).

This briefing note aims to highlight opportunities for heritage science research arising from this change in the research landscape.

- **Interdisciplinary funding opportunities:**

The 'single structure' nature of UKRI allows it to coordinate cross-disciplinary research. Unlike the previous, fragmented approach to research funding, this multi- and inter-disciplinary approach to research and innovation sits well with the applied and contextual nature of heritage science research, which falls under the remit of multiple research councils.

Through the Research Councils, UKRI coordinates the delivery of multidisciplinary research programmes in the following priority areas:

- Digital Economy
- Energy
- Global Food Security
- Tackling Antimicrobial Resistance
- Technology Touching Life
- Urban Living Partnership

At least two of these themes present direct opportunities for heritage science projects:

[Digital Economy](#) is a partnership between EPSRC, AHRC, ESRC and Innovate UK supporting "research to rapidly realise the transformational impact of digital technologies on aspects of community life, cultural experiences, future society, and the economy."¹ Heritage science is especially involved in digital content creation – one of the theme's four priority areas – and there is scope for research into technologies enabling the creation, co-creation (including user-generated), exchange and distribution of such content.

The [Urban Living Partnership](#) (between the seven Research Councils and Innovate UK) focuses on "harness[ing] UK research and innovation strength to help cities realise a vision of healthy, prosperous and

¹ <https://epsrc.ukri.org/research/ourportfolio/themes/digitaleconomy/>

sustainable living,”² and supporting regional economies. Linking research to economic impacts is essential for future prosperity – grants based on the delivery of economy-focused outcomes can be an advantage for heritage science research, which does a lot to improve the heritage experience for communities and tourists, but also plays a significant role in placemaking and community-building.

Additionally, UKRI funds projects that fall beyond the remit of individual research councils through broader funding calls. Recent notices have included Innovate UK calls for “innovative ideas that could grow the economy”³ and for “improving local services with data”⁴. These funds are not tied to the challenges of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, increasing the scope for collaborative research funding.

In May 2018, UKRI announced the launch of the [Strategic Priorities Fund](#), building on the vision of a “common research fund”⁵ with an emphasis on interdisciplinary research. The Fund will aim to “drive an increase in high-quality multi- and interdisciplinary research and innovation by encouraging and funding work in areas which previously may have struggled to find a home”⁶, and ensure that strategically important research is supported.

- **Opportunities for strengthening interdisciplinary work:**

In September 2018 UKRI launched eight new [Mental Health Networks](#) to “bring researchers, charities and other organisations together to address important mental health questions.”⁷ These new networks include, notably, MARCH: Social, Cultural and Community Assets for Mental Health, which will “bring researchers together with policymakers, commissioners and third-sector organisations to further understand how these social, cultural and community assets can enhance public mental health and wellbeing, prevent mental illness and support those living with mental health conditions.”

Health and wellbeing has been an area of particular focus for the cultural sector in the past year. The National Alliance for Museums, Health & Wellbeing merged with the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing to create the [Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#). Research organisations are producing an increasing body of research in support of the positive impact of culture and heritage on health and wellbeing, and into the role that heritage plays in people’s connection to place, cultural identity and sense of community. The new Strategic Framework for Heritage Science in the UK includes a strand on wellbeing as one of its main areas of impact. Heritage science’s unique position at the intersection of the sciences, arts and humanities not only allows for valuable contributions to research into wellbeing, but also to the creation of opportunities to tackle social isolation and improve mental health through a diverse range of interactions.

UKRI’s place-based approach also looks to enhance local collaborations, to support regional growth. The new [Strength in Places Fund](#) (SIPF) will “identify and support existing research and innovation clusters and collaborations across the UK. Successful bids will be those that can demonstrate the greatest proportionate economic benefit to their locality by aligning excellent research and high-quality innovation capability to the needs of local industry.”⁸ Projects will need to include both research organisations and businesses, presenting an opportunity to strengthen the ties between research and industry.

- **Linking research to social and cultural impacts**

UKRI’s approach to research and innovation has a strong emphasis on [creating social and cultural impact](#). A system facilitating grant aid to deliver economy- and society-focused outcomes is a welcome change that can greatly benefit heritage science research. The *Strategic Prospectus: Building the UKRI Strategy*, in fact,

² <http://urbanliving.epsrc.ac.uk/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/innovative-ideas-that-could-grow-the-economy-apply-for-funding>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/improving-local-services-with-data-apply-for-contracts>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nurse-review-of-research-councils-recommendations>

⁶ <https://www.ukri.org/files/about/ukri-strategy-document-pdf/?pdf=Strategic-Prospectus>

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/news/uk-research-and-innovation-launches-new-mental-health-networks/>

⁸ <https://www.ukri.org/news/strength-in-places-fund-call-open/>

uses the example of Stonehenge to illustrate the potential of this approach, stating: “these initiatives are supporting sustainable heritage strategies, creating new technological advancements in imaging and motion capture, and, significantly enhancing tourism revenue.”⁹

- **Creating a research and infrastructure roadmap**

[Current work](#) by UKRI to create a long-term research and innovation infrastructure roadmap is focusing on charting existing UK infrastructure (and participation in key international facilities) and assessing future needs and priorities. As the results will shape future investment priorities, the heritage science sector would benefit from providing input to this programme.

- **Mobility of researchers**

The UKRI – Science, Research and Academia scheme allows non-EEA researchers, scientists and academics to come to the UK for a period of up to two years, as an addition to the Tier 5 visa route (Temporary Worker – Government Authorised Exchange). It opened on 6 July 2018 and is operated by UKRI, meaning that “they, along with 12 approved research organisations, such as the Natural History Museum, are able to directly sponsor highly skilled individuals, such as specialist technicians, to work and train in the UK”¹⁰. The scheme presents another step towards strengthening international collaboration, and increasing opportunities for heritage scientists globally.

Conclusion

UKRI’s cross-disciplinary remit, emphasis on interdisciplinary research and innovation, and approach to investment based on delivering economic, social and cultural impact are well-suited to heritage science and present a large number of opportunities for the sector, which often requires multi-partner and interdisciplinary collaboration.

To date, UKRI has issued research councils-wide funding calls which have increased the scope for collaborative projects, and launched new Funds that fall within and beyond the remit of the research councils. It cites examples of the impact that heritage science can have on society, and has taken steps to facilitate the mobility of researchers and to create a research and infrastructure roadmap identifying future research and investment priorities.

NHSF will engage with UKRI and the research councils with the aim of securing a research environment that enables heritage science research to flourish, with clear associated benefits to society and the economy.

⁹ <https://www.ukri.org/files/about/ukri-strategy-document-pdf/?pdf=Strategic-Prospectus#page=37>

¹⁰ - <https://www.ukri.org/news/new-scheme-for-overseas-researchers-to-come-to-the-uk/>