



# **Science and Delivery Leadership Team (SDLT) for an Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study**

## **Full Call Specification**

**1 October 2020**

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## Summary

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), is pleased to announce an open competition to appoint a Science and Delivery Leadership Team (SDLT) to develop and deliver an Early Life Cohort (ELC) Feasibility Study.

ESRC's total budget for this work is £3m (cost to ESRC). Proposals are invited for up to £1.5m for the SDLT and development of the Feasibility Study. This £1.5m represents the full cost to ESRC, payable for most cost headings at 80% of full Economic Cost (fEC). Up to a further £1.5m will then be made available, principally for fieldwork. See Funding section, below, for further details.

The deadline for proposals to this call is 16:00 UK time on 1 December 2020.

## Background

Since the 1940s, the UK has developed a globally leading set of birth cohort studies. They provide data that has enabled researchers to understand the lives of generations of children as they grow up, and to relate experiences in childhood to experiences and outcomes in adulthood. These datasets provide a valuable research resource for scientists, practitioners, and policy makers from across the globe and continue to enable world-leading research with considerable scientific and practical impact.

The existing UK cohort studies provide scientifically valuable data about cohorts of participants born up to the millennium (2000-2). However, future generations of children growing up in the UK are likely to experience an environment very different to that of past generations, reflecting the impact of events and changes including the 2007-8 financial crisis and subsequent austerity, the significant societal and economic impacts of the UK's exit from the European Union, growing in-work poverty, increasingly complex family structures and dynamics, a changing world of work and education, the digital revolution, climate change, changing health and mental health challenges, and the pervasive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This creates a pressing need for a new ELC study to provide individual-level longitudinal data that is high quality, representative of the population of interest, takes advantage of new opportunities in data collection and linkage, and incorporates strategies to minimise future sample attrition.

Following the report of the Longitudinal Studies Strategic Review (<https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/publications/corporate-publications/longitudinal-studies-review-2017/>), ESRC commissioned scoping work as part of its 'UK Population Lab' programme to inform the development of a new birth cohort including commissioning reports on aspects of its possible design and methodology and discussions with relevant organisations about sampling options. The reports are available on the ESRC website: (<https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/publications/corporate-publications/innovation-and-development-in-longitudinal-studies-outputs-from-the-uk-population-lab-programme/>).

Prior scoping and independent expert advice has resulted in ESRC being clear that a main-stage ELC must be UK-wide, post-birth, embedded in an administrative data sampling frame and, as far as possible, inclusive of priority 'hard to reach' groups, that is those groups normally

not included or under-represented in surveys. The cohort would pursue innovative approaches to sample member contact, recruitment and retention, and data collection and linkage. ESRC does not expect to require the main-stage ELC to use an accelerated design.

ESRC is currently seeking funding for the main-stage ELC study, which could begin in the mid-2020s. This main-stage study would be a major new data infrastructure for the UK, for which ESRC has estimated £28m as an indicative cost for the first five years. The actual cost and scope of the study will be fully informed by the Feasibility Study, further engagement with UKRI and potential collaboration with other funders.

Given both the time elapsed since the last active, UK-wide birth cohort study was established, and the opportunities for methodological and technological development since then, ESRC regards a substantive Feasibility Study as an essential precursor to a main-stage study.

## **Call details**

### **Call objectives**

ESRC will commission a Science and Delivery Leadership Team (SDLT) to develop and deliver a study that comprehensively develops innovations for, and tests key aspects of, a main-stage ELC study. The Feasibility Study will identify and test suitable sampling frames and will develop and test fieldwork strategies for effective recruitment to achieve an acceptable response rate, especially from prioritised hard to reach groups. It will also develop and test innovations in data collection and other methodological issues that can be employed in or inform a potential main-stage study.

Applications to this call should contain two core elements, expressed across the set of documents submitted in response to this call (see JeS guidance). Firstly, a proposal for a Feasibility Study that sets out how the commissioning objectives outlined here will be delivered within the time and budget available. This proposal will clearly set out the SDLT's priorities, including the process to identify the priority 'hard to reach groups', the sample sizes the study will aim to achieve and the key scientific questions it will seek to answer. Consideration should be given to the procurement of sampling frames and fieldwork. Secondly, a case for why the proposed SDLT, in terms of both its expertise and operating model, will be able to deliver the applicants' proposed Feasibility Study. The latter should provide substantial discussion of the management, governance, monitoring and reporting arrangements the SDLT would put in place.

This call covers the set-up costs of the Feasibility Study and one round of data collection. An objective of the Feasibility Study is to develop approaches to maximise retention. It is recognised that retention cannot be assessed without undertaking further rounds of data collection and further rounds of data collection may be funded following the evaluation of the first round. In this scenario, the Feasibility Study would continue as a longitudinal study aligned to the main-stage study. Proposals to this call should make clear how the SDLT would lay the groundwork for the future assessment of retention (conditionally funded via an additional award), and how it would draw on existing knowledge to ensure that the design of the Feasibility Study maximises retention, particularly among groups with known high attrition risk.

The Feasibility Study is intended to provide data quickly for evaluation and for methodological and substantive research.

An immediate priority for the successful applicants will be to continue ongoing work on sample procurement and begin the process to contract fieldwork. Proposals should give confidence that the SDLT can do these in a timely manner, and that the procurement of fieldwork will be via an open, competitive process.

### **Sampling strategy and composition**

Information on ESRC's recent relevant engagement with the UK statistical system is provided in Appendix 1.

The SDLT will be tasked with developing a sample design and participant contact protocol to inform the main-stage study. This will detail the means by which the sample would be drawn, scenarios for its overall size and composition (including any sub-population boosts), and how participants will be recruited to the study and then retained. Proposals to this call should set out how the SDLT would secure access to and use a sample in the Feasibility Study, in line with the objectives and timetable outlined in this call specification.

The main-stage ELC study will require a sample that is as representative and inclusive as possible of the population of new-born babies in the UK, and that oversamples the devolved nations and hard to reach groups. Prior scoping and expert advice have shown that a sampling frame employing linked birth registration and maternity data is most appropriate to meet this need (see Appendix 1), meaning that initial participant contact must be post-birth.

A key purpose of the Feasibility Study is to inform the development of the sample design and participant contact and engagement procedures for the main-stage study. The Feasibility Study must achieve access to sampling frames in England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and test effective recruitment approaches using the samples drawn. The SDLT will liaise directly with the relevant data controllers and will be responsible for identifying and meeting any legal or ethical requirements. ESRC understands that this is likely to include (at a minimum) submissions to NSDEC and (in Scotland) the Public Benefit and Privacy Panel.

The Feasibility Study must test the effectiveness of approaches to sampling, recruitment and retention, particularly of groups that are typically under-represented, 'hard to reach' or have high attrition rates. A distinction is made between (i) hard to reach/retain groups that are small in the population and who may be challenging to contact and retain, such as parents who are substance misusers, and (ii) groups that represent a much larger proportion of the population but are at risk of under-representation in surveys, such as ethnic minorities or mothers in the lowest income decile. Either group type may require oversampling in the main-stage study to ensure statistical power. The Feasibility Study should test how recruitment from priority type (i) groups might best be achieved. It is expected that, especially at main-stage, representation of all substantial type (ii) groups would be achieved through oversampling strategies based on the existing sampling frame in the recruitment of a representative sample of the population of UK-born babies, coupled with targeted engagement.

The Feasibility Study should identify how this could be done and test the effectiveness of approaches. It is recognised that at Feasibility Study stage there may be significant trade-offs in testing recruitment from both group types. Proposals should set out how the SDLT would

balance these priorities in their design and test strategies aligned to recruiting a suitably sized sub-sample, and provide a sufficient basis to inform the design of the main-stage sample. The minimisation of participant burden and the effective communication of study aims and impacts will be essential to the successful recruitment and retention of participants in the Feasibility Study. Applicants must set out how co-production and meaningful engagement with potential participants will be embedded in the development of the study to meet these needs.

The SDLT will be responsible for consulting widely with relevant stakeholders in the research, policy and practice communities to determine which groups should be a priority for inclusion in the sample and whether any additional steps are required to achieve this. Indicative examples of potential priority groups include minority ethnic groups, resident/non-resident parents/carers, or groups based on household economic status. Proposals should present a convincing plan to do this at Feasibility Study stage. At a minimum, the main-stage study sample will need to oversample families (relative to absolute numbers of births) in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland sufficiently to enable investigation of the effects of different early life circumstances, policies and relevant regional, community, family and individual factors in those nations. The main-stage study sample should also have adequate numbers (at inception and over time) to support analyses of minority ethnic-group children. Proposals should give confidence that the Feasibility Study will produce sufficient learning to inform this (see Project outputs section).

### **Targeted sub-studies**

It will be possible for the main-stage study to include qualitative sub-studies aligned to the main sample quantitative data collection, focussed on selected groups of priority interest where alternative means are needed to gather information. Proposals are required to include outline plans for one or more targeted qualitative sub-studies using alternative methods, operating in their own right alongside the main Feasibility Study. The purpose is to test sampling, recruitment, participant engagement and retention and data collection among selected hard to reach and/or under-represented groups.

### **Sample success measures**

To help inform decisions about the main-stage sample specification, the SDLT will be expected to explore appropriate measures of success with ESRC, their fieldwork partners, and in consultation with their Advisory Group, when in place. These are likely to include target response and future retention rates and other measures of sample performance. It is recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic may impact the response rates achievable by a new cohort study. Assessing this, and identifying forward-looking mitigation strategies, should be an outcome of the Feasibility Study.

ESRC, informed by advice from the study Management Board (see Governance and monitoring section, below), will sign off the agreed measures of success and these will be monitored and managed by the funder through investment management, governance and evaluation processes.

The outcomes of the Feasibility Study's different recruitment approaches will be used to help determine the final design for the main-stage ELC study, if it is commissioned.

## Public engagement

The proposal must set out credible plans for public engagement relating to the Feasibility Study. Proposals should make clear which public engagement activities will be delivered by the SDLT and which by contracted fieldwork partners or other public engagement specialists. This should be reflected in the costings presented (see Funding section).

Public trust is vital to recruiting and retaining a representative sample. The SDLT will be responsible for ensuring that there is clear and accessible communication to the public about how data will be used, how personal privacy will be protected, how data security will be achieved, who will have access and why, and how research findings will be disseminated and provide public benefits. ESRC expects that the [Five Safes Framework](#) will be used to help shape these communications, as appropriate.

Public engagement in the Feasibility Study provides an opportunity to develop and test innovative approaches and recommendations that may be implemented in the potential main-stage study.

ESRC encourages applicants to draw on the principles of the ESRC's public engagement strategy for longitudinal studies, scheduled for publication on the ESRC website by October 2020, and outputs from other public engagement activity including by Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK) and Understanding Patient Data.

## Data collection

The Feasibility Study will include substantive data collection from participants, as the first wave of a projected longitudinal study which runs alongside but is distinct from the main-stage study. The primary purpose of this data collection is to test the effectiveness of the methodological approaches that could be employed in the main-stage study. However, credit will be given to proposals which make a credible case for the Feasibility Study also establishing a new data resource of research value in relation to addressing the major national and global challenges and shocks for the next generation and their families. It is expected that the questions and objectives underpinning data collection and linkage will be fully specified as part of the SDLT's consultation with stakeholders (see page 4); the findings of the Feasibility Study will help to inform the data collection strategy and content of the main-stage study.

Proposals should specify which types and modes of data collection will be pursued in the first wave. Alongside face-to-face fieldwork, this could include web, app, telephone or other innovative virtual modes; the collection of data from wearable technology or sensors; ecological momentary assessments; and biological, including genomic, data. It is recognised that the breadth of data collection must be balanced against cost and participant burden, and applicants are encouraged to discuss in their proposal the trade-offs involved. Proposals should also discuss which other types of data collection and linkage will be pursued in subsequent waves, for instance by obtaining prospective consents. This could include obtaining consent, including from non-participants or those who decline further participation after the first wave, to be included in administrative data-based analyses.

In addition, the risk of continued restrictions on traditional survey fieldwork methods due to the COVID-19 pandemic will require new and contingency approaches to be developed and tested. This might include testing methods of online, remote or passive data collection and

efficient methods of collecting biological samples and measures, as well as learning from other studies. Proposals should outline how they will develop and/or test innovative forms of data collection, and discuss the circumstances in which 'tried and tested' approaches are likely to remain most appropriate.

Proposals should give clarity on from whom data will be collected. Beyond the index child and main parent, this could include resident or non-resident partners, siblings, grandparents or other family members. It is recognised that there are trade-offs between cost, complexity, participant burden and richness of data. Testing from whom it would be productive to collect data could be a useful area of enquiry at Feasibility Study stage.

It is expected that a future main-stage study will establish linkages with other complementary administrative, health, environmental and relevant new forms of data. Proposals to this call should outline the kinds of data linkage that could be undertaken, the expected benefits of such linkages, the design features required to facilitate this, and a strategy to support this including public engagement and ethical considerations. Differences exist between the UK nations in terms of the data linkages that can be achieved. An analysis of this could be a valuable research output.

The study should also enable harmonisation where possible with other existing and planned longitudinal studies in the UK and internationally, and consider trade-offs between this and the use of innovative data collection methods and cohort-specific measures.

### **Biological measures**

The Feasibility Study must test strategies to obtain participant consent to provide biomarker data and biological measures (e.g. height). The study must consider the collection of biological samples and measures from participants and relevant others (e.g. parents) and any impacts this may have on proposed sample numbers or on representativeness.

### **SDLT composition and structure**

Applicants should state how the SDLT will include or access the strength and breadth of expertise and experience required for the successful delivery of the Feasibility Study. Multi-organisation, transdisciplinary proposals are highly encouraged, if supported by credible, justified plans for how such partnerships will operate.

There are no formal restrictions on who may constitute the SDLT but it is likely that the successful proposal will be led by a team who:

- possess substantial expertise and experience in designing, implementing and delivering surveys, including drawing a sample and obtaining legal and ethical approvals
- have a demonstrable record of effectively managing and successfully delivering complex projects, programmes and/or research infrastructures, including financial management and oversight
- have substantial academic knowledge and expertise in relevant areas of social science and data collection, especially including longitudinal studies, biosocial research, early years development, complex family dynamics and parenting, and data collection about babies and young children

- include expertise in survey methods specific to longitudinal surveys with a substantial social science component
- have experience of commissioning fieldwork, including agreeing and monitoring deliverables
- have experience of building close and productive relationships with key stakeholders and partners, with demonstrable ability to work effectively with the UK statistical agencies and fieldwork agencies
- have an ability to draw on and deliver best practice in participant engagement and public engagement
- are committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in their teams and working relationships
- have a demonstrable understanding of key issues relating to the collection and processing of participant data
- can work internationally to engage in meaningful and productive collaborations particularly around innovations in survey design and methodology.

The SDLT will be led by a Director or co-Directors with the relevant expertise and experience to develop and lead an initiative of this kind. It is likely, though not mandatory, that the Director(s) will be a leader in longitudinal survey research and data collection. The Director(s) will be required to contribute a significant proportion of their time to the overall leadership and direction of the Feasibility Study.

Please note that if any individuals named on the grant are employed by a survey organisation those individuals will be required to recuse themselves from the subsequent fieldwork tender process. The inclusion of other specialised expertise, such as in public engagement, or project management capability, is also welcome. It is acceptable for individuals with highly specialised expertise to be part of multiple bids submitted to this call. Any proposals containing individuals named in multiple bids must make this clear.

Proposals should set out how the proposed structure and management of the SDLT will enable the delivery of the Feasibility Study's aims and objectives. Proposals should set out in detail the division and co-ordination of major management and leadership roles and responsibilities, as well as the time commitments of key individuals. Applicants should explain the roles and activities of all key staff. It is expected that a clear and simple management structure will be outlined, indicating clearly where ultimate responsibilities sit.

Proposals can be submitted by a single research organisation or may be a collaborative proposal from more than one research organisation, with a lead organisation. In the case of collaborative proposals, how responsibilities will be organised across institutions should be clearly set out.

Proposals must include confirmation of support and institutional arrangements in their Case for Support (see 'JeS Guidance Notes for Applicants'). Applicants wishing to include non-academic co-investigators or project partners can do so. Please see the Eligibility section for further information.

## **Governance and monitoring**

Proposals should detail the arrangements that will be instituted to secure expert advice. These structures should include an independent Advisory Committee, comprising a breadth of stakeholders including from outside the UK, who can advise on strategic, scientific and management/delivery issues. The meaningful involvement of representatives of participants and communities is encouraged. Applicants should explain the roles and functions of all groups/committees they propose.

Proposals should detail, with dates, the key forecast milestones in delivering the Feasibility Study. These milestones should include, for the first year, progress in accessing sampling frames and procuring fieldwork. Proposals should also state how they will monitor and report on progress in a manner aligned to these milestones, and the processes that will be put in place to recognise and deal with challenges in meeting the delivery timetable. Following the provisional award of a grant, these milestones and procedures will be agreed with ESRC via the grant terms and conditions.

ESRC will appoint and convene a Management Board, to which the Director (or co-Directors) of the SDLT will report. Meetings are expected to coincide with critical points of the project. As discussed above (Sample success measures section), the SDLT will agree sampling success measures with the Management Board.

Requirements regarding monitoring, reporting and governance will be set out in the terms and conditions of the grant award between ESRC and the award recipient.

Outputs from the project will feed into an independent evaluation process commissioned by ESRC, forecast to run in 2023 and focused on informing a decision on whether/how to proceed with the main-stage study.

## **Project outputs**

The Feasibility Study must produce a set of high-quality outputs which can be used to help inform a decision about the overall feasibility of the main-stage ELC study, and to enable the main-stage study to begin from an advanced position with respect to its design and data collection. It is also expected that the Feasibility Study will result in methodological innovations and insights of much wider interest, the full dissemination of which is expected.

Proposals should set out the key outputs the project will produce, with the following outputs considered essential:

- Sample design and participant contact protocol for the main-stage study detailing all factors considered in its design and justifications for final recommendations
- Proposed data collection methods and an outline of the required instruments for the main-stage study, including bio-samples
- Key findings, including the response rates achieved, estimated response rates for the main-stage study, and an assessment of innovations and co-production. This includes consideration of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and response rates, and evaluation of innovations or experimental elements of the Feasibility Study. A report on these findings will be required for use in the independent evaluation of the Feasibility Study.

- An assessment of item response for each data item collected in the study
- An individual-level dataset, containing all information collected from respondents, with associated coding frames, labels for variables and their values, and other technical documentation to be delivered to the UK Data Service in a timely manner
- A forward-looking assessment of effective strategies to deal with potential restrictions on face-to-face fieldwork
- Recommendations for data linkage and the steps required to implement them

It is required that these outputs will be made openly available for independent evaluation, to the main-stage leadership team and to the wider research community.

## Funding

The principal elements of the Feasibility Study costs comprise:

- SDLT costs to develop, manage and deliver the Feasibility Study including the cost of sub-contracting fieldwork
- Payments to UK statistical agencies to provide a sample
- Fieldwork, including communications with sample members and participants.

Up to £3m (cost to ESRC) is available in total for the ELC Feasibility Study. Of this, £1.5m (cost to ESRC) is available for the SDLT to develop, manage and deliver the Feasibility Study. This is likely to include undertaking public engagement, participation in advisory and management board processes, running a fieldwork procurement exercise, questionnaire development, development of qualitative sub-studies, data processing, analysis and deposit, documentation, production of outputs, and participation in evaluation. Funding is available at 80% fEC, with exceptions at 100% fEC, as per standard ESRC policy.

The remaining £1.5m is ringfenced for the purpose of sampling and fieldwork. ESRC expects this funding to be available on a 100% fEC basis. Funds will be released by ESRC to the SDLT once significant progress in defining costs has been achieved. A robust but proportionate process will be implemented to do this, expected to involve the submission of a short proposal to an independent expert review panel. Since the cost of sampling and fieldwork cannot be fully established before the SDLT has undertaken work on the design and objectives of the study, ESRC does not require such costs to be submitted in proposals in response to this call.

Proposals should include costs for participation in an independently-led evaluation exercise, expected to run in the first calendar quarter of 2023. The cost of this exercise will be borne by ESRC, outside of the £3m announced in this call. ESRC expects this to require five days in total of the Director and co-Directors' time.

A timetable that can inform the phasing of costings is presented below.

## Eligibility

All applicants must be eligible to receive Research Council funding. For further information please see ESRC's Research Funding Guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>).

## **Principal investigators**

Principal investigators (PIs) on proposals must be based at a UK institution eligible for Research Council funding; see the UKRI website for a list of eligible organisations (<https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>).

The SDLT may be led by more than one Director. However, one person must be regarded as the principal applicant taking the lead responsibility for the conduct of the commissioned investment and the observance of the terms and conditions. Correspondence regarding the proposal and grant will be addressed to the principal applicant only.

## **Co-investigators and collaborators**

Applicants based at multiple organisations may jointly submit proposals. In such cases, as above, a single investigator must be identified as the lead applicant. All individuals and organisations must make a significant contribution to the conduct of the project, and proposals should include a clear statement of roles and responsibilities.

The amount of time committed to the grant by the PI and co-investigators must be costed into the proposal. Standard ESRC research funding rules will apply for staff engaged in more than one ESRC grant (see ESRC Research Funding Guide).

The inclusion of international co-investigators in proposals is welcome. However, please note that academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) must be from established overseas research organisations of comparable standing to ESRC-eligible UK research organisations to be listed as international co-investigators under this call.

International collaboration is not limited to co-investigators but may also involve partnerships to develop international datasets or data linkage, promote knowledge exchange and international impact, and enhance development on an international scale. Further guidance on the inclusion of international co-investigators is available at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/>.

ESRC also strongly encourages partnerships with non-HEI organisations and the inclusion of third sector, business and public sector coinvestigators in accordance with ESRC policy.

## **Ethics**

ESRC requires that funded research is designed and conducted in a way that meets certain ethical principles and is subject to proper professional and institutional oversight in terms of research governance. In addition to demonstrating compliance with ESRC's Framework for Research Ethics, proposals should briefly reflect on any specific or particularly challenging issues raised by the project.

All proposals must comply with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics. Further details and guidance on compliance (together with links to other web based resources on research ethics) may be found at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics>.

Applicants are invited to consult the best practice resources published by the Market Research Society (MRS): <https://www.mrs.org.uk/resources/coronavirus>.

## Intellectual property, open access and data deposit

Further information about expectations regarding outputs is included in the ‘Project outputs’, above.

The appointed SDLT will be required to follow the principles below with regards to IP created from the results of research, as set out in the Research Funding Guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>). Further information about ESRC’s policy can be found on the ESRC website (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/intellectual-assets-and-intellectual-property/>).

ESRC-funded researchers are required to comply with the UKRI policy on open access and with the ESRC Research Data Policy (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-grant-holders/research-data-policy/>).

## Assessment of proposals

### Assessment criteria

Criterion	Weighting
<p><b>Feasibility Study proposal</b></p> <p>High-quality proposals are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present a convincing plan for how the Feasibility Study will be designed and delivered, including an assessment of the risks associated with the plan and how these will be mitigated</li> <li>• Give confidence that the team can secure access to the necessary sampling frames to recruit post-birth a sample of babies</li> <li>• Outline a credible process for consulting on and agreeing the substantive focus of the study and priority sampling groups</li> <li>• Include substantive data collection of research value</li> <li>• Make a persuasive, innovative and forward-thinking case for the forms and modes of data collection that will be pursued</li> <li>• Give confidence that a competitive procurement process will result in fieldwork being commissioned that meets the study’s needs</li> <li>• Consider harmonisation with existing or planned studies</li> <li>• Be feasible within the available timetable and budget</li> <li>• Propose high-quality, relevant outputs and give confidence that such outputs will be delivered</li> <li>• Demonstrates high-level awareness of and engagement with relevant ethics and data protection issues.</li> </ul>	40

<p><b>SDLT composition and structure</b></p> <p>High-quality proposals are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propose a SDLT that fully covers the attributes discussed in the ‘SDLT composition and structure’ section above</li> <li>• Give confidence that the team can develop a study design that enables the costing and procurement of a sample and fieldwork</li> <li>• Involve applicants from more than one research organisation</li> <li>• Have clearly defined roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Have realistic time allocations</li> <li>• Give confidence that the Feasibility Study will be delivered in a timely manner meeting the objectives outlined in the proposal.</li> </ul>	30
<p><b>Management, monitoring and expert advice arrangements</b></p> <p>High-quality proposals are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propose transparent and effective monitoring arrangements</li> <li>• Present a credible approach to obtaining stakeholder/expert advice</li> <li>• Identify appropriate milestones at which progress will be reported</li> <li>• Identify appropriate procedures to recognise and deal with challenges in meeting project milestones.</li> </ul>	15
<p><b>Stakeholder, public and participant engagement</b></p> <p>High-quality proposals are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify how a range of potential data users with expertise in priority areas will be engaged to inform the design of the Feasibility Study</li> <li>• Include plans and relevant experience to demonstrate likely success in meaningful co-production and prospective participant engagement at appropriate times in the study</li> <li>• Give confidence that the purpose and benefits of the study will be effectively communicated to a range of audiences.</li> </ul>	15

### **Assessment procedure**

The following procedure is subject to change if the volume of proposals received differs significantly from expectations.

All proposals submitted to this call will be subject to standard eligibility checks. Following these checks, eligible proposals will be sent for expert peer review.

Peer reviewers will provide a score (using the following scale) and written comment *per assessment criterion*.

Score	Meaning
4	Very clear response. All aspects of the criterion have been addressed to a satisfactory degree. The response is very persuasive.
3	The response is clear. Most aspects of the criterion are addressed satisfactorily. The response is persuasive.
2	The response is mostly clear. Some aspects of the criterion have been addressed satisfactorily. The response is mostly persuasive.
1	The response is less than clear. Most aspects of the criterion are not addressed satisfactorily. The response is not very persuasive.
0	The proposal is very unclear. The criterion has not been addressed satisfactorily in any way. The response is not persuasive at all.

Weighted average scores will be used to shortlist proposals. PIs will be invited to submit a response to reviewers' comments.

An expert panel will be convened to consider shortlisted proposals. Proposals will be allocated to two panel members who, with consideration of the specialist advice and views of reviewers, will provide an independent assessment of the proposal prior to discussion at the full panel.

Shortlisted applicants will also be invited for interview by the commissioning panel.

Following the interviews, the panel will make a funding recommendation (potentially with conditions) to ESRC.

## Timetable

Due to the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the following timetable may be subject to unavoidable change.

**ESRC strongly encourages potential applicants to opt-in to receive updates from ESRC regarding this call. This should be done by emailing the address below.**

- Closing date for proposals – 16:00 on 1 December 2020
- Peer review and PI response – December 2020-January 2021
- Panel meeting – January 2021
- Interviews of shortlisted applicants – January 2021
- Agreement of monitoring and governance arrangements and funding profiling agreements between partner institutions established (if applicable) – February 2021
- Decision announced – February 2021
- **Award start – 1 April 2021**
- Feasibility Study is complete and assessment can begin – January 2023
- **Feasibility Study assessment – January-March 2023**

## **How to apply**

All applicants should consult the ESRC Research Funding Guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide>), which sets out the rules and regulations governing funding.

Further information is provided in the accompanying JeS guidance. This provides further details on the information that applicants will be required to submit as part of their proposal.

## **Contacts**

For all enquiries, please contact the following email address in the first instance: [EarlyLifeCohort@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:EarlyLifeCohort@esrc.ukri.org)

## Appendix 1: Recent engagement with the UK statistical system

ESRC has already commissioned or undertaken significant scoping of potential sampling frames, through reports funded under the 'UK Population Lab' programme and by direct liaison with the UK statistical agencies. This has indicated that the birth registers linked to maternity records held by the UK's three national statistical agencies (the Office for National Statistics (ONS), National Records of Scotland (NRS), and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)) would provide an effective sampling frame for the new ELC. In June 2020, ESRC presented an outline paper to the National Statistician's Data Ethics Committee (NSDEC). This paper is published by ESRC alongside this call specification. ESRC expects the minute of this meeting to be published in Autumn 2020 (<https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/committees/nsdec/key-documents/>).

In prior discussions with colleagues in the UK statistical authorities, ESRC has presented the following criteria as essential to a viable sample:

<b>Coverage</b>	Universal coverage of the population of interest - babies born in the UK within a specific period
<b>Content</b>	Contains information about characteristics of interest that can be included in the sample design
<b>Legal basis</b>	Established legal route and access process
<b>Consent model</b>	Access does <u>not</u> require sample members to opt-in to being approached and invited to join the study
<b>Procurement</b>	Information about sampled participants can be shared with a fieldwork agency following competitive tendering exercise

ESRC understands that the sampling frames described above include the following variables:

- Age of mother at birth (and other parent if applicable for joint registrations)
- Parity of the birth
- Birthweight
- Socio-economic status of mother and second parent when a joint registration
- Occupation (10% of records in England and Wales, near 100% in Scotland)
- Registration status of father or second parent
- LSOA (address of residence).

A sampling frame held by ONS for England and Wales would also include the following variables, via linked NHS maternity records, though additional approvals from NHS data owners may be required to access these fields:

- Gestational age of child
- Ethnicity of baby (where reported by mother).