

Terms of Reference

ESRC Strategic Advisory Network (SAN)

Purpose and scope

The Strategic Advisory Network (SAN) exists to provide ESRC and its Executive with:

- Detailed expert support and advice (to cover the design of strategies and schemes, investment management, pre- and post-award, and interventions).
- A broad perspective of advice on issues, proposals and decisions, including feedback on views within our various stakeholder groups.
- Access to a pool of academic and user experts to whom the office can turn for *ad hoc* advice and advocacy and to test out new ideas.
- Provision of input into general policy advice.

The advisory function of the SAN is separate from:

- Responsibility for the decisions made by the Executive.
- Independent peer review processes managed by ESRC.

Membership

SAN will typically comprise between 30 and 45 members, ensuring coverage of the breadth of disciplines, priority areas, UK regions and devolved nations, career stages and other considerations, as well as a balance between academic researchers, non-academic researchers and users of academic research.

ESRC will ensure the following stakeholder perspectives, in particular, are represented:

- Academic, including representation from core social science disciplines as well as appropriate representation from research infrastructure (for example on methods, research talent, data and longitudinal studies) and other foundational pillars (for example commercialisation).
- Non-academic researchers and users of social science research, including within business, charities and national and devolved government.

In addition to their area of expertise, members are expected to bring a broad strategic view to bear and to act as 'generous generalists', advising across the breadth of ESRC's portfolio.

SAN membership does not preclude ESRC from accessing additional academic or non-academic expertise not formally part of the SAN where this may be required.

The Seven Principles of Public Life (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>), which are the foundations of public



appointments and provide guidance on the standards expected of public appointees, apply to SAN membership.

The UKRI conflict of interest policy (<https://www.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/conflicts-of-interest/>) summarises our approach and applies to staff and non-staff members in advisory capacities alike. Members are required to declare any personal, private or commercial interests that might conceivably conflict with the interests of ESRC and must withdraw from any discussion of topics in which they have such an interest.

Nominations and recruitment

Periodically, ESRC will issue an open call for self-nominations to the Network via our website and publicised via other routes, and also invite nominations from across key stakeholder groups as needed. The Executive will identify those it might wish to appoint based on the competencies and characteristics required for the vacancies.

Term length

Membership will generally be for up to three years, with the possibility of extension of up to a further two years. In order to ensure maximum flexibility and continuity across the SAN membership, ESRC will ensure terms are staggered.

Members' terms may be terminated by ESRC without notice if attendance becomes so variable as to interfere with the good running of SAN and its activities.

Remuneration

Remuneration for work will be via a day rate of £160 for pre-approved discrete activities that ESRC requests. Members are also reimbursed for any ESRC-related travel and subsistence expenses incurred. Civil or public servants are not entitled to receive payment, though they will be reimbursed for travel and subsistence expenses.

Operation

ESRC is experimenting with more agile ways of working for SAN. Members will be invited to join both formal and informal workstreams throughout their time on the Network. These may include:

- Joining formal advisory, steering and 'task and finish' groups that bring together particular configurations of experts to help ESRC address specific questions or issues.
- Thematic workshops with SAN or a self-selecting sub-group thereof.
- Individual participation in commissioning and other panels.

- Informal expert consultations to explore and advise on possible new directions for policies, strategies and programmes.

The size of SAN sub-groups will vary according to need.

The time commitment can vary by activity, but it is expected that SAN members will need to commit around four to ten days to SAN work per year. Members are also expected to participate in regular meetings of the entire SAN.

Activity specification

While SAN participation in most advisory and subgroups will be framed by their Terms of Reference, some activities may not require more than an email setting out the objectives of the activity and the expectations of SAN member involvement.

Pre-activity briefing

For each workstream, SAN members involved will be provided with a briefing in advance, tailored to the scope and duration of the activity. When the scope has been discussed and agreed, members will usually be asked to consider if any additional expertise might be needed on the group. At the same time, members will be informed about the levels of confidentiality that will apply. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

SAN members will also be informed about levels of confidentiality applying to documents shared before, during and after SAN meetings.

Quality assurance

ESRC relies on the quality of the strategic advice it receives. This provides a valuable external check on the development of ESRC's direction and plans. Where appropriate a Council member may be assigned as chair of individual workstreams, primarily to provide oversight of these aspects and to ensure that the reported outcomes accurately reflect the nature of the advice received.

The Executive will conduct independent reviews of SAN's effectiveness and periodically invite SAN members to conduct self-assessments as part of these review processes.

Expectations

The Executive will endeavour to:

- Identify advisory activities ahead of need.
- Provide a clear specification for each advisory, steering and 'task and finish' group.



- Provide appropriate information so that SAN members are adequately briefed and able to contribute meaningfully.
- Provide an appropriate forum and tools for members to provide high-quality strategic advice.
- Maintain members' knowledge of SAN activities and ESRC strategic thinking and direction through regular information flows following Council meetings and through at least one annual general meeting of SAN.
- Be clear about the information SAN members can share more widely and that which is provided in confidence.
- Inform members about the outcome of the advice and how it will be used, and explain the rationale where advice has not been followed.

As individual members, and as a group, SAN will endeavour to:

- Act within the 'Seven Principles of Public Life', in particular to provide independent, informed advice avoiding actual or perceived conflicts of interest and taking a collegiate approach to policy and strategy development.
- Bring a broad strategic view to bear and act as 'generous generalists'.
- Contribute regional and national viewpoints and an understanding of the international context.
- Be willing to challenge their own and others' thinking, and ESRC's perspectives and policies, in constructive ways, drawing on the available evidence and their own experiences.
- Express individual views but have the ability to work together in order to advise ESRC.
- Take individual and collective ownership of the advice they provide whilst recognising the separation of that advice from responsibility for the decisions made, which rests with the Executive.
- Make themselves available to participate in thematic advisory groups and SAN 'task and finish' groups, subject to sufficient notice.
- Respond to any requests to participate in pre-activity briefings.
- Attend and actively participate in SAN meetings and events.
- Use their profile as SAN members to encourage, facilitate and nurture dialogue between stakeholder communities and ESRC, and also, where appropriate, with decision-makers:
 - e.g., on intelligence gathering that can be brought to bear in policy development,
 - explaining ESRC policies to the community, and
 - advocating, where relevant, on specific issues on behalf of the social sciences.
- Be advocates and ambassadors for ESRC.
- Operate flexibly with the ESRC Executive and other ESRC advisory groups.