

**Request for proposals:**  
**Early Career Researcher (ECR)**  
**Network Leadership**  
**programme campaign**

**The British Academy with support from Wellcome**

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# Background

## The British Academy

The [British Academy](#) is the UK's national Academy for the humanities and social sciences. Our purpose is to deepen and share understanding of societies and cultures across time and place. Our vision is that the humanities and social sciences are at the forefront of research and discovery, working across disciplines and enabling everyone to learn, progress and prosper.

We use the term SHAPE to refer to disciplines we support. SHAPE stands for Social sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy.

## The British Academy Early Career Researcher Network

Early Career Researchers (ECRs) are people who have started their career as academic researchers and are typically within ten years post-PhD. They are keen to learn the skills they need to advance in their career and call on the support of their peers, established researchers and organisations.

We want the [Academy's ECR Network](#) to be a thriving ecosystem of SHAPE ECRs, where they can strengthen their skills and networks to reach their potential regardless of funding source, background or location. The Network aims to complement the current provision being offered to ECRs across the country by Academic Institutions, Learned Societies and others, to enable ECRs to develop professionally and personally in a holistic way.

It is a UK-wide network of currently 6,000 ECRs who can access a community platform and a range of activities, including training, workshops and panel sessions.

## Wellcome

The Wellcome Trust is one of the world's largest charities and one of the largest funders of research with mission to improve health. They are one of the British Academy's major funding partners, supporting a wide range of activities within the SHAPE disciplines.

Wellcome's funding of the Academy's ECR Network aims to support researchers early in their career, which in turn strengthens the UK's research community. This is a strategic investment in the SHAPE disciplines.

## British Academy Leadership and Advancement SHAPE Programme

This is a new programme to train and support SHAPE ECRs, providing a variety of tools to develop and enhance management and leadership skills that can be utilised in research and academia. There are two tracks of activity:

- The Leadership Skills Stream (LSS) will train 186 ECRs, equipping them to become the next generation of leaders within SHAPE disciplines. The programme will run for the next three years, with 62 participants undertaking the training in each annual cohort, ensuring structured, impactful development
- An advancement stream of skills-based training available to the entire ECR Network

Our ambition is for the LSS to be as widely recognised and regarded as the [EMBO Young Investigator Programme](#), which is for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) ECRs. We want to be the go-to SHAPE equivalent. Our programme is different and we'll need to demonstrate those differences.

The funding for this campaign comes from this programme, but we have broader aims which are detailed in this document.

# Objectives

## Primary

In the first year, increase membership and member engagement of the ECR Network by promoting it as a network that provides support, training and development for SHAPE ECRs. The programme should be part of this offering.

Create and build awareness of the LSS, so it becomes recognised as 'the' leadership and training programme for SHAPE. We see this as being the bigger focus in years two and three when we can highlight the success of the first cohort.

## From the British Academy

Create a format, assets and distribution plan that can be delivered over the three years, either by the agency or in an achievable way by ourselves.

Demonstrate that the British Academy is at the forefront of supporting and developing SHAPE research in the UK.

Show the value of SHAPE research careers, how people progress in their careers and the value this brings to society.

## From Wellcome

Illustrate Wellcome's support of SHAPE researchers. Show them as the enabler of this premier programme.

Wellcome is perceived as being primarily a STEM funder; they want to work with the British Academy to demonstrate that they are also committed to supporting SHAPE, through the ECR Network, our Small Research Grants Programme, and our Academic Conference Programme.

# Audiences, their needs and reaching them

## Early Career Researchers

In essence, these are people at the start of their career as a researcher. For this programme they are:

- UK based
- Typically within ten years of completing their PhD
- Working in universities as ECRs – this is the biggest audience
- Working outside of academia – working at universities, institutions, independent research organisations (IROS), public sector research establishments (PSRES). This is a smaller audience
- Researching SHAPE areas

## Their needs and motivations

A successful researcher needs to be more than just an expert in their field and know how to conduct thorough research on a subject.

ECRs who want to advance their career will be looking for the following, which the LSS will help them develop:

- Academic leadership: seeking skills to transition into senior roles such as research leads or department heads, with a focus on team management, securing funding, managing large grants and project and institutional leadership.
- Policy and public engagement: wanting to influence decision-making by translating research into policy impact, gaining skills in communication, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement.
- Working outside academia and commercialising research: learning how to apply research beyond academia, collaborate with businesses, and commercialise research to promote real-world impact.
- Entrepreneurship and independent research: developing the skills to secure funding, establish self-sustaining projects, and strategically planning for independent research initiatives.
- Career progression: wanting structured leadership training to move beyond early-career roles, gaining confidence and expertise for long-term professional advancement.
- Networking and visibility: seeking how to develop and sustain connections with sector leaders, mentors, and peers to expand professional networks and enhance career impact.
- Bridging skill gaps: learning how to effectively address challenges such as lack of mentorship, peer to peer learning, imposter syndrome and unclear leadership pathways, and limited professional development opportunities.

- Embodied leadership and wellbeing: learning how to embody leadership in the self, developing confidence, resilience, and integrity while practising healthy mental health techniques to navigate uncertainty and career precarity.

While the LSS will provide in-depth support for those who make it on the programme, the advancement programme and the ECR Network supports everyone with this through networking, events and other training.

## Reaching them

We currently have 6,000 SHAPE ECRs in our network, with around 60% engaging in network activities. These are the easy ones for us to reach through our community platform.

According to [HEIDI+](#) data, between 2014/15 and 2021/22, approximately 64,115 individuals hold a PhD and would be classified as ECRs. However, the data does not indicate the proportion of ECRs employed in university-based research and academic roles or those working outside of Academia, in Independent Research Organisations (IROs), Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM), Think Tanks or Charities. Additionally, there is no available data on how many individuals have transitioned away from working in academia or research-related roles—either within universities or outside them—to pursue alternative career paths in other fields. So, though this number may seem large to reach there are a number of stipulations that need to be considered.

The good news is that we already know the organisations and groups we want to target and have contacts through work we have done with them at the Academy, such as the Learned Societies and through our ECR Network university regional partners.

A big part of this campaign needs to reach them and bring them into our network.

The other part is reaching the people already in our network and to encourage more engagement.

This campaign must reach underrepresented groups including ethnic minority researchers, disabled researchers, first-generation academics and women, as we know they often face additional barriers to career progression, mentorship, and leadership opportunities across all sectors.

## Secondary audience – research officers and managers

All organisations will have research managers that support ECRs internally. In universities this expands into big research offices and graduate schools.

It will be important to reach these with the programme as they will be advising their ECRs on how to develop their careers.

In organisations that cover a wide range of disciplines, these people will be managing ECRs from many disciplines. Explaining to them how the LSS is specially designed for SHAPE ECRs will be vital.

## Secondary audience – research funders and employers

In year two and especially year three, we want the LSS to be recognised by people who fund or employ researchers.

After completing the LSS, ECRs will be ready to progress to the next stage of their career. They will need the programme to be well-regarded and to use it to demonstrate their leadership skills.

Before the programme commences, we will be working to get the LSS to be CPD accredited, ensuring the programme is on par with other established initiatives, such as the EMBO Lab Programme.

We will need something in these later years to reach this audience.

## The campaign

This is where you come in. We want you to use your expertise and experience to work with us to develop what this is.

But as a starter we are thinking:

### Year one

Develop and deliver a marketing format that is used to promote the ECR Network and its offering including the LSS. This needs to:

1. go out to the places where SHAPE ECRs are and recruit them to join the ECR Network. This includes working with research offices that support ECRs
2. be a regular format to engage with the Network members to promote the LSS and what we do

### Years two and three

Continue the recruitment efforts initiated in year one. Utilise content from the first year of the LSS, adapting it to the established format developed during that phase. Distribute this material to Network members to reinforce engagement and participation. Engage with research officers and managers who support ECRs in universities and organisations to promote the value of the LSS to SHAPE ECRs.

Plan and deliver a small bespoke campaign to reach research funders and employers and build their awareness of it.

# Success and measurement

## What a successful campaign will achieve

- The LSS is fully subscribed and recognised as an important programme for SHAPE ERCs to develop their leadership skills
- Increased membership in our ECR Network
- Higher engagement rate on the Network across all our activities
- The Academy has an ongoing mechanism to promote the Network and increase engagement
- Increased awareness that Wellcome is keen to fund researchers in the humanities and social sciences with an interest in public health and wellbeing and vice versa i.e. the British Academy also funds those from STEM interested in public health

## Measuring success

How we measure success will depend on the format of the campaign and the type of engagement. It can be a mix of quantitative and qualitative.

As the majority of our work is funded by external sources, we are accustomed to reporting on our activities, and we have an in-house monitoring and evaluation team.

# Budget, resources and timeline

## Budget available

This is a three-year project with the following allocated for marketing:

Year 1 - £60,000

Year 2 - £20,000

Year 3 - £20,000

All figures **include VAT**. As a charity, the Academy has to pay VAT.

This must cover all agency costs, including design, print (if required), and production of any assets. There is no other budget available for this campaign.

## Resources

We have a [community platform](#) that can be used to contact our ECR Network members. It uses the Graduway platform and the features available are listed on the [Graduway website](#).



They are also held in Salesforce, which can be set up to contact them.

A weekly email newsletter sent to all the members of the ECR Network with jobs, funding calls, events and insights.

The ECR Network has a section on the British Academy website. This can be developed within the confines of our site templates, which we can assist with this. We wouldn't expect to develop an additional web presence for this project or the Network.

We are considering setting up a LinkedIn group for the ECR Network.

We actively visit institutions and events across the country where fellow researchers gather to present the network and connect with ECRs.

We are in the process of rolling out updated British Academy brand guidelines, which focus on digital accessibility. These will be available for the agency's designer to work from. The Academy is hiring a new in-house designer who, along with our brand and marketing manager, will be able to advise on how to use our brand in this new campaign. (Note the ECR Network falls under the Academy brand guidelines.)

## **Campaign timeline**

Applications for the LSS's first year will close in November. Therefore, we need to focus the recruitment activity in September and October.

The wider aims of building the ECR Network numbers and engagement will continue over the three years.

This means we will need to launch the campaign in September, but it can then build.

# Responding to this call

## What we are looking for

We are primarily seeking an agency that can demonstrate experience in creating effective campaigns for clients within our budget level. Examples of past work will be important to demonstrate this.

We want to know that you can be creative and capture the audience's imagination.

We want the campaign to be both engaging and sustainable over the three-year period. It isn't a one-off hit. Please show us how you would work with us over the years.

We would like to know how you would approach working with us, what information you would want to know, and what you would need from us.

We don't expect a fully worked-up pitch for the creative and what the campaign will be. We expect you will need time with us to get to that. Options for format types and distribution platforms within our budget will help us understand what you think you can do.

Show us how you have proven the value of your past campaigns.

Importantly, we want to see how you ensure your work is accessible to people with an impairment. And how your work and company ethos are inclusive for all.

## Asking questions

Email [a.barron@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:a.barron@thebritishacademy.ac.uk) with any questions about the brief or anything you would like clarified by 1pm on 23 June. Where relevant, the responses to these questions will be published as an appendix to this document on 25 June.

## Submitting a response

### Stage 1

A single Word document or PDF responding to the requirements in this document should be sent to [a.barron@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:a.barron@thebritishacademy.ac.uk) by 1pm on 14 July.

It should include:

- Play back your understanding of our requirements and how you propose working with us to meet them
- Your initial ideas on format types, ways of reaching our audiences and how they deliver on our objectives
- Two to three case studies where you successfully ran campaigns similar to the size and scope of this project. One of these should include an end of campaign report or show measures of success
- A high level breakdown of indicative costs based on your initial ideas, include any other costs (for example account management)

- Two references (including contact name, email, organisation) we can contact as part of this RFP process
- Your approach to diversity, equity and inclusion within your plans for this project and your organisation as a whole
- Details of your public liability, employers' liability and professional indemnity. The successful company will need to sign our services agreement and data protection term
- Your approach to data protection
- Registered name, address and registration number of your organisation

If you want to include media files, please provide links to them within the document.

## Stage 2

As this is a three-year project, working closely with us to develop the campaign, we expect to hold presentation sessions. This will be an opportunity to present ideas and talk to us about what you do.

Depending on the number of submissions, we may need to shortlist companies before this stage.

## Timeline

Milestone	Date
<b>Request for Proposals (RFP) opens</b>	9 June 2025
<b>Deadline for proposal clarification questions</b>	1pm, 23 June
<b>Final clarification of questions issued</b>	25 June
<b>RFP closes</b>	1pm, 14 July
<b>Assessment and shortlisting</b>	14-18 July
<b>Shortlist presentations</b>	28 July
<b>Contract award notification</b>	30 July
<b>Contract start date</b>	August

## Tender assessment criteria

Criteria number	Criteria	Weighting
1	Demonstrable experience of delivering effective campaigns of this size at the budget level	30
2	Demonstratable experience of delivering creative campaigns that have captured the target audience's imagination	30
3	Approach to working with us to meet the campaign's aims and understanding the audiences	25
4	Experience of (and a commitment to) reaching underrepresented audiences and the needs of people with an impairment	15

# Appendix 1 – More on the programme

## Aims and background to the programme

We aim for the Leadership and Advancement SHAPE Programme to be a sector-recognised initiative that equips ECRs in SHAPE with the skills and confidence to step into leadership roles. Our goal is to ensure participants not only develop strong professional and personal skills but also set a positive example for their peers and future generations.

To achieve this, we have collaborated closely with ECRs and external partners who actively support ECRs ensuring the programme is fit for purpose and directly addresses existing gaps while enhancing current opportunities in the sector.

Additionally, the programme builds on the British Academy's extensive experience in supporting ECRs through its funding scheme, policy work and long-standing relationships across the sector—as well as building on the work of the ECR Network over the past five years. As the home of the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Academy has leveraged its expertise to shape a programme that responds to the evolving needs of ECRs and supports their long-term development.

The LSS is designed for ECRs aiming to advance their careers by building on their existing skills. Through the programme, participants will refine their abilities in strategic thinking, professional influence, and team leadership, equipping them with the tools necessary to propel them to the next stage of their career journey. This programme aims to foster growth, confidence, and long-term impact, ensuring ECRs develop the leadership capabilities required to thrive in their field.

We want to ensure that participants in the training are at the right stage to translate their learning into tangible outcomes and progress to the next level in their careers.

During the selection process, the panel will carefully review ECR applications to ensure we select those best positioned to benefit from the programme at this stage.

For those who may not yet be ready, we aim to provide constructive feedback to help them strengthen their readiness and, hopefully, apply in the next round. For those not selected, the advancement stream will play a crucial role in developing the necessary skills to reach the right stage for future participation.

By engaging in the advancement stream, alongside other external opportunities, ECRs can build a holistic and robust skillset, strengthening their professional growth and leadership potential. This approach ensures that the programme delivers maximum impact while supporting all ECRs in their long-term development and career progression.

The aim is for the Leadership Stream to be CPD accredited. The process of this is currently underway. It's important that the programme is on par with other established initiatives, such as the EMBO Lab Programme. This is also the first leadership programme exclusively tailored for SHAPE ECRs, making it essential that it is legitimised and recognised within the industry as a credible, high-impact initiative.

CPD accreditation will not only validate the programme's quality but also ensure that ECRs receive the structured leadership training needed to develop into outstanding leaders. Additionally, this accreditation will strengthen CVs and professional experience, helping ECRs effectively demonstrate their skillset to prospective employers and funders.

## **Open to underrepresented groups**

Underrepresented groups, including ethnic minority researchers, disabled researcher, first-generation academics and Women, often face additional barriers to career progression, mentorship, and leadership opportunities across all sectors.

The Leadership and Advancement SHAPE Programme is designed to address these disparities by providing targeted support, inclusive training, ensuring all ECRs—regardless of background—can thrive, lead, and make a lasting impact in SHAPE disciplines.

Through flexible opportunities and a commitment to equity, the programme works to reduce inequities in SHAPE, fostering a diverse and empowered research community. By supporting innovation, inclusion, and skills development, the Leadership and Advancement SHAPE Programme helps build a new generation of highly skilled researchers, advancing knowledge and ensuring that SHAPE disciplines continue to shape how we understand the world—which is at the heart of SHAPE's mission.

## Appendix 2 – Replies to questions

These questions were received from potential respondents to the RFP. Questions have been edited for clarity.

### **Does the budget include media and planning costs (for example, out-of-home advertising or paid social)?**

The budget has to cover everything. There is no more money available for the project.

### **Thinking about audience we most want to attract, what might your criteria be for the LSS selected applicants?**

The programme is open to Early, Mid, and Late-stage ECRs, with training tailored to each stage, alongside sessions designed to be broadly relevant across the spectrum.

We're seeking ECRs who are ready to take the next step in their careers—those actively preparing to apply for new roles, funding, or other developmental opportunities, where they can immediately apply what they learn.

It's important that we engage participants at the right stage of their journey—not only so they can make the most of the training, but also so we can meaningfully demonstrate the programme's impact.

### **What would the approval process be once into the project, and who would be the stakeholders?**

Once the project is up and running you'll be working directly with the ECR Network team and agreeing any regular activity with them.

The overall concept/plan will need to be signed off by the Head of ECR Network; Director of Research; Director of Communications; Head of Digital, Brand and Marketing; Marketing and Brand Manager.

Our Marketing and Brand Manager will oversee the ongoing use of our brand and any use of our social channels.

If there are any external media elements, our Head of Communications and Public Affairs will need to approve them. If the Academy needs to make a statement or recommendation, this may require governance approval.

Our Head of Development will manage Wellcome and keep them across plans. There may be some direct consultation with Wellcome about where their name is used, and how we credit them.

### **You are appointing an agency in August for a campaign starting in September. Is this correct, given the extremely tight turnaround?**

Yes, we are aware of this and appreciate the impact this can have on discovery work.

Applications for the first cohort of the LSS will close on 31 October. We already have 6,000 ECRs in our network and have 62 places for the first year. Therefore, we expect to be oversubscribed from our existing network initially. We will want to work with the agency on this initial recruitment, but this can be a pilot and part of the discovery process. Sign off for this phase can be expedited.

The bigger campaign to grow the ECR Network and the wider programme will roll out across the 2025-26 academic year. In years two and three, we want the LSS to reach people who are not currently in the ECR Network.