

Tender Document: Scoping Activities for Early Career Researcher Leadership and Advancement Programme in Africa

Background

The [British Academy](#) is the UK's National Academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving wellbeing – today's complex challenges can only be resolved by deepening our insight into people, cultures and societies. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone. Our purpose is to deepen understanding of people, societies and cultures, enabling everyone to learn, progress and prosper. As part of the Academy's work, it has established an [Early Career Research Network](#) (ECRN). The ambition of the [Academy's ECR Network](#) is 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. The Network is a UK-wide initiative of nearly 10,000 ECRs who can access a community platform and a range of activities, including training, workshops and panel sessions.

In 2025, the Wellcome Trust supported the ECRN to launch the [Elevate Programme](#), formerly titled [Leadership and Advancement SHAPE Programme](#). This initiative is designed to support researchers in the UK in the early stages of their careers across SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy). As part of this investment, the Academy committed to determine whether a form of the [Elevate Programme](#) might be suitable for the needs of ECRs based within Africa. This tender is taking forward that work with the intention to map and summarise existing ECR provision and networks, develop a needs analysis of SHAPE ECRs, and to suggest the potential for different delivery models for ECR to career development support within Africa.

Tender Introduction

The British Academy invites proposals from suitably qualified UK-based or internationally based individuals or organisations to undertake a two-year scoping study. The Academy considers it critical that any proposal clearly demonstrates detailed knowledge of local context and the Academy encourages proposals from and working with relevant organisations based in Africa.

The study will assess the landscape of leadership and professional development support for SHAPE ECRs in Africa and to provide clear, evidence-based recommendations for how ECRs professional and skills development can be effectively supported. This study will inform whether, and how, the Elevate Programme can address these needs. This scoping study will help the British Academy understand existing provision, identify needs, and determine how the British Academy and the Wellcome Trust can potentially support further SHAPE ECR-focused activity in LMICs.

Total Budget

£80,000 over two years (all figures include any applicable VAT for UK organisations and reverse-charge VAT for overseas organisations. If we appoint an overseas organisation we will need to pay [reverse-charge VAT](#) on the cost of the service being provided).

Purpose of the Scoping Study

The overarching aim is to assess the landscape of leadership and professional development support for SHAPE ECRs in Africa and to provide clear, evidence-based recommendations for how ECRs' professional and skills development can be effectively supported. We wish to understand existing provision, identify needs, and determine how the British Academy and the Wellcome Trust can potentially support further ECR-focused activity in LMICs.

The study will:

- Map current leadership development support and ECR support across within Africa
- Identify existing networks, organisations, and delivery models
- Assess the needs and priorities of SHAPE ECRs in African contexts
- Drawing on the lessons of Elevate identify gaps and opportunities
- Recommend practical, sustainable approaches for future ECR-focused activity in Africa with a focus on strengthening existing actors and initiatives where possible
- Recommend practical, sustainable approaches for future international engagement through the British Academy ECRN.

Year 1: Landscape Review & Early Needs Exploration

Period: July 2026 – June 2027

Activities include:

- Identifying and engaging key contacts and stakeholders in Africa
- Mapping existing leadership and ECR support provision across in Africa
- Drawing insights on the current state of play of ECR support provision across Africa
- Conducting a detailed review and identifying innovative or emerging practices in global ECR professional and skills development
- Benchmarking the ECRN against international comparators
- Reviewing the current ECRN offer to identify opportunities for adaptation
- Conducting rigorous scoping activities with African and any other relevant stakeholders to inform and set out concretely the needs assessment approach so that its outcome can be as robust and considered as possible as the foundation for potential future activity

Output: A concise Landscape Review summarising the key stakeholders and initiatives in ECR support provision in Africa, drawing insights from this current state of play and from practices elsewhere globally to help inform and establish the approach to the needs assessment.

Year 2: International SHAPE ECRs Needs Assessment & Final Report

Period: July 2027 – July 2028

Activities include:

- Delivering a full needs assessment through activities and approaches to be suggested by the tenderer but could include for example surveys, interviews, workshops, convenings or other methods
- Developing a comprehensive final report including:
 - A summary and mapping of existing ECR support provision in Africa
 - The identification and analysis of existing initiatives, organisations and delivery models of ECR support provision in LMICs in Africa, drawing out case studies illustrating effective models of support and identifying key themes, challenges and gaps in ECR support provision in Africa
 - A review of global ECR support provision including identifying innovative or emerging practices, drawing out examples with case studies
 - An analysis of the needs and priorities of SHAPE ECRs in African contexts
 - An analysis of how the needs and priorities identified of SHAPE ECRs in African contexts matches to the current ECR support provision, and the gaps and challenges that are unmet. Consideration should be made as to whether/how the Elevate programme and wider ECRN activities address the gaps and unmet challenges.
 - Setting out options for potential delivery models for ECR support provision in Africa taking into account the analysis above and the need to consider practical and sustainable approaches for future ECR-focused activity that strengthens existing actors and initiatives where possible

Output: The comprehensive final report described above.

Interim Activity (Ongoing Across Both Years)

While the scoping study is underway, the ECRN will continue to deliver online workshops and training sessions for international ECRs through the Elevate Programme where applicable. The sessions will be online from September 2026 and are currently being organised, with a duration of between 1hr to 90 minutes, once the events have been finalised a schedule will be shared. Feedback from these activities will be shared with the appointed individual/organisation to inform recommendations.

Responding to this call: What We Are Looking For

We are seeking an individual(s) or organisation(s) with demonstrated experience in conducting scoping studies of similar size and complexity within comparable budget levels. Examples of past work will be essential to illustrate your capability.

Key qualities we are looking for include:

- **Expertise in research and analysis** – the ability to design and deliver a robust, evidence-based scoping study that identifies current provision, gaps, and opportunities for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in Africa.

- **Collaborative approach** – outline how you would work with us throughout the two-year period, what information you would need, and what support you would require from our team.
- **Reach and inclusion** – demonstrate how you would achieve coverage across Africa as a whole, including attention to specific needs and contexts of ECRs in different countries, and ensuring equitable and inclusive coverage
- **Methodological clarity** – provide an overview of your proposed approach, including data collection methods, stakeholder engagement strategies, and how you will ensure findings are actionable.
- **Sustainability and impact** – show how your recommendations will be practical, context-specific, build on existing provision rather than duplicating efforts, and support the long-term development of ECR provision across Africa.
- **Evidence of success** – demonstrate how you have measured and proven the value of previous scoping studies or similar projects.
- **Accessibility and inclusion** – explain how you will ensure your work is accessible to people with impairments and how your organisational ethos supports diversity, equity, inclusion, and will build trust with participants.

Asking Questions

Please email p.thuo@thebritishacademy.ac.uk with any questions about the brief by **Friday 19th June**. Responses to questions will be published as an appendix to this document on **Thursday 25th June**.

Submitting a Response

Stage 1: Submit a single Word document or PDF (maximum 8 pages) to p.thuo@thebritishacademy.ac.uk by **Monday 6th July** including:

- Your understanding of our requirements and proposed approach to meet them.
- Initial ideas on methodology, stakeholder engagement, and how your approach delivers on our objectives.
- Two to three case studies in an Annex of similar scoping studies or research projects, including one with an end-of-project report or success metrics. This is not part of the 8-page limit.
- A high-level breakdown of indicative costs, including any additional costs (e.g., project management). This is not part of the 8-page limit.
- Two references for us to contact (name, email, organisation).
- Your approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion for this project and within your organisation
- Details of public liability, employers' liability, and professional indemnity insurance.
- Your approach to data protection.
- Registered name, address, and registration number of your organisation.

If you wish to include supporting materials, please provide links within the document. Links within the document must not be used to increase the length of the core proposal.

Stage 2: Shortlisted candidates will be invited to present their approach and methodology ahead of the final decision.

Milestone	Date
RFP opens	01 June 2026
Deadline for clarification questions	1 pm, 19 June 2026
Final clarification responses issued	25 June 2026
RFP close	1 pm, 6 July 2026
Assessment and shortlisting	6 July – 13 July 2026
Shortlist presentations	22 July 2026
Contract award notification	27 July 2026
Contract start date	29 July 2026

Tender Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Weighting
1. Demonstrable experience delivering high-quality scoping studies of this size and budget	25
2. Proven ability to design and implement robust methodologies	25
3. Approach to collaboration and understanding of objectives	25
4. Experience and commitment to reaching underrepresented audiences and ensuring accessibility	15
5. Demonstrate value for money	10