

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and The British Academy Knowledge Frontiers Symposium

Scheme Notes for Applicants

Contents

1	Introduction.....	2
2	Purpose and Focus.....	2
3	The Symposium	4
4	Eligibility.....	4
5	Selection Criteria.....	6
6	Application Process.....	6
7	Further Information.....	7
8	About The British Academy	7
9	About the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation	7

Please read the scheme notes carefully. Any application incorrectly submitted will not be eligible for award.

Applications should be submitted well in advance of the deadline; we recommend at least five days prior to allow for institutional approval.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The British Academy and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation are inviting applications for early career researchers in the humanities and social sciences to attend a research collaboration symposium on the broad theme of Humans and Nature: More resilient towards the future.
 - 1.2 The symposium aims to incentivise and establish international engagement and collaboration between early career researchers based in Germany and the United Kingdom from a broad range of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, encouraging the exchange of ideas across both disciplinary and national boundaries.
 - 1.3 The symposium will take place from 21 to 23 April 2027, in Bonn, Germany.
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2 Purpose and Focus

- 2.1 The relationship between humans and nature has always been contested. While some argue that humans stand above nature and are positioned to 'manage' it, others rather perceive humans as being part of nature and hence stress the need to co-exist, questioning excessive human interference into natural habitats. In times of polycrises and increasing systemic risks, the need to rethink this relationship appears more urgent than ever. Impacts of e.g., technological advancement, population growth, economies based on growth and consumption, constant loss of biodiversity, increasing hydro-climatic variabilities/extremes and ever-increasing demand for natural resources shape this human-nature relation. We can only understand what makes natural, social, political and economic systems more resilient by reconsidering human-nature relations in terms of balancing societal needs and ecological integrity in more sustainable ways.
- 2.2 Such a critical rethinking exercise, necessary to find alternative pathways to a more resilient future, could span the whole cycle from philosophical, ethical and artistic considerations, to social, political, economic and geographical challenges, and to designing concrete policymaking solutions. Accordingly, participants from a large variety of disciplines could contribute, ensuring the symposium's interdisciplinary and forward-looking character. Themes and questions to be addressed could include, but are not limited to:
- 2.3 Contested (?) Society and Nature Conceptualisations
 - What are different philosophical ideas underpinning the relationship and possible differing interpretations thereof?

- How is the relationship portrayed in artistic productions, in literature, art or in music? What does that tell us about this relationship?
- How do these society-nature conceptualisations serve specific visions for transformative change?

2.4 Social and Environmental Justice Perspectives

- How can we create the conditions for justice, for instance between generations, between social groups, or between spatial entities, e.g., the Global South and the Global North?
- How can we protect vulnerable groups, including local and indigenous communities?
- Do humans have the ethical duty to sacrifice and adapt their individual lifestyles to increase justice?

2.5 Norms and Values

- Should the right to an intact environment be considered and treated as a human right (to ensure younger generations' future self-realization, for instance)?
- Should ecosystems (such as rivers or lakes) have rights? Why for instance is it normal for companies, to have rights as legal entities/objects but for ecosystems it is still the exception?
- Which role can and should local initiatives and social movements play? How can they be made agents in decision-making?

2.6 Sustainability and Resilience in coupled Human-Nature Systems

- How do human-nature relations undermine the resilience of societies and ecosystems?
- How can we improve political decision-making under conditions of extreme uncertainty?
- How can we design sustainable habitats and living spaces (e.g., green cities)?
- How can we, more generally, make local communities more resilient?

2.7 Knowledge generation and narrative development

- How have local and indigenous communities interacted with nature? Can their ideas help finding more sustainable solutions?
- What can we learn from different civilizations throughout history?
- Who creates and owns the knowledge and sets the agenda?

3 The Symposium

- 3.1 The symposium will bring together around fifteen early career researchers from the UK and fifteen from Germany (understood as up to ten years after obtaining a PhD) from across the humanities and social sciences to discuss key questions around the theme of Humans and Nature: More resilient towards the future. The symposium is designed specifically to encourage collaboration and networking. In advance of the symposium, participants will be able to discuss their research and exchange ideas among themselves; begin to discuss the session themes; and make connections for possible future activities.
- 3.2 In order to incentivise long-term collaboration and networking, seed funding will be made available for which participants can apply. These collaborations must be international in their makeup, and can be either partnerships or groups. Time will be set aside on the final day of the symposium for a 'sandpit' style session in which participants write up their proposed collaboration and submit applications by the end of the session. Over the course of the symposium there are further networking sessions set up to facilitate the development of collaborations and proposals. The application form for seed funding will be circulated in advance of the symposium to ensure participants are fully aware of the opportunity and requirements.
- 3.3 Participants will also be eligible to apply for CONNECT, a follow-up programme for participants of Frontiers of Research Symposia offered by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. It provides allowances for short workings visits in Germany or in the United Kingdom that can be taken up at any time following the symposium.
- 3.4 In addition to funding a number of collaborative proposals, the symposium will aim to provide opportunities for a range of other outputs. Participants, for example, could be invited to contribute to a publication focused on the symposium theme, either through individual papers or in partnership with other symposium participants, record audio outputs or write blog posts that will be compiled into a series dedicated to the symposium. Further information about such opportunities will be provided at the symposium.

4 Eligibility

- 4.1 For the purpose of this symposium, early career is defined as being within a ten-year period from the award of a doctorate. Participants must be based at research institutions in the UK.

- 4.2 Participants must be able to travel on dates and times, and on trains or other modes of transportation chosen by the British Academy.
- 4.3 Attendance is mandatory for the entire symposium. If this is not met it will result in a participant not being eligible for the seed funding available.
- 4.4 UK-based attendees may only participate in two British Academy Knowledge Frontiers Symposia in any 24-month period.

5 Selection Criteria

- 5.1 Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:
- a) Proven research interest and/or experience in the symposium's theme;
 - b) Commitment to interdisciplinary engagement and research;
 - c) Value of symposium to applicant's career development.
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6 Application Process

- 6.1 Applicants should provide:
- A completed application form.
- 6.2 Applications must be submitted online using the British Academy's Grant Management System (GMS), Flexi-Grant®.
- 6.3 The deadline for submissions is Wednesday 16th September 2026 at 17.00 (UK time).
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7 Further Information

- 7.1 Further information is available from international@thebritishacademy.ac.uk

8 About The British Academy

8.1 The British Academy is the UK's national body for the humanities and social sciences – the study of peoples, cultures and societies, past, present, and future. The British Academy's purpose is to inspire and support high achievement in the humanities and social sciences throughout the UK and internationally, and to promote their public value. We have three principal roles:

- A Fellowship of distinguished scholars from all areas of the humanities and social sciences, elected by their peers, that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas and promotes the work of our subjects.
- A Funding Body that supports the best ideas, individuals and intellectual resources in the humanities and social sciences, nationally and internationally.
- A Forum for debate and engagement that stimulates public interest and deepens understandings, that enhances global leadership and policy making, and that acts as a voice for the humanities and social sciences.

9 About the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

9.1 The Alexander von Humboldt (AvH) Foundation promotes academic cooperation between excellent scientists and scholars from abroad and from Germany. To this end it grants more than 700 research fellowships and research awards annually. These allow foreign scientists and scholars to conduct a research stay in Germany and to collaborate closely with their hosts and partners. Scientists or scholars from Germany can carry out a research project abroad as a guest of one of well over 30,000 Humboldt Foundation alumni around the globe – the Humboldtians. Nowadays the foundation's network embraces scientists and scholars from all disciplines in more than 140 countries - including 61 Nobel Laureates.

9.2 Each year, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation grants:

- Humboldt Research Fellowships to highly qualified foreign scholars and scientists who have either completed their doctorates in the last four years (postdoctoral researchers) or less than twelve years ago (experienced researchers), enabling them to undertake long-term periods of research in Germany;
- Georg Forster Research Fellowships to postdoctoral and experienced researchers from transition and developing countries;

- Humboldt Research Awards to internationally recognized foreign scholars and scientists (nominations by German scholars/scientists);
- Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Awards to outstanding scholars and scientists from abroad who have completed their doctorates less than eighteen years ago;
- Feodor Lynen Research Fellowships to highly qualified German scholars and scientists who have either completed their doctorates in the last four years (postdoctoral researchers) or less than twelve years ago (experienced researchers), enabling them to spend periods of research abroad;
- Alexander von Humboldt Professorships to top-rank researchers of all disciplines working abroad who are eligible to be appointed to full professorships in Germany to carry out ground-breaking and long-term research (nominations by German universities).