



## Definition of Research

The AHRC's Charter states that it is responsible for supporting basic, strategic and applied research: it is therefore necessary to have a practical definition of what constitutes 'research' in order that judgments can be made on what is eligible for funding. The definition of eligible research adopted by the Council was developed following recommendations made by a Working Group established by the AHRB to consider Subject Domain and Research Definitions, and following consultation with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and learned societies. The definition is intended to be broad enough to be applicable to all subject areas within the Council's remit.

The Council's definition of research is primarily concerned with the definition of research processes, rather than outcomes. This definition is built around three key features and any proposal must fully address all of these in order to be considered eligible for support:

- it must define a series of **research questions, issues or problems** that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its aims and objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions, issues or problems to be addressed.
- it must specify a **research context** for the questions, issues or problems to be addressed. It must specify why it is important that these particular questions, issues or problems should be addressed; what other research is being or has been conducted in this area; and what particular contribution the particular project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in the area
- it must specify the **research methods** for addressing these research questions, issues or problems. It must state how, in the course of the research project, it will seek to answer the questions, address the issues or solve the problems. It should also explain the rationale for the chosen research methods and why they provide the most appropriate means by which to answer the research questions, issues or problems.

This definition is essentially pragmatic and it could fit a number of theoretical models. It does, however, provide a distinction between research and practice *per se*. Creative output can be produced, or practice undertaken, as an integral part of a research process as defined above. The Council would expect, however, this practice to be accompanied by some form of documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and to demonstrate critical reflection. Equally, creativity or practice may involve no such process at all, in which case they would be ineligible for funding from the Council.

The precise nature of the research questions, issues or problems, approaches to the research and outputs of the work may vary considerably, embracing basic, strategic and applied research. The research questions, issues, problems, methods and/or approaches may range from intellectual questions that require critical, historical or theoretical investigation, to practical issues or problems that require other approaches such as testing, prototyping, experimental development and evaluation. The outputs of the research may include, for example, monographs, editions or articles; electronic data, including sound or images; performances, films or broadcasts; or exhibitions. Teaching materials may also be an appropriate outcome from a research project as defined above.

The AHRC expects the research to be conceived as broadly as possible and so consideration should also be given to the outcomes of, and audiences for, the research. The outcomes of the research may only benefit other researchers and influence future research, but consideration must be given to potential opportunities for the transfer of knowledge into new contexts where the research could have an impact.

Once issues of eligibility have been resolved, judgments have to be made, of course, about the quality of the application. Here too the definition can help as it provides the beginnings of a framework of criteria: how well are the questions or problems specified; how significant will be the contribution to knowledge and understanding; and how convincing is the methodology?