

Common Awards

Seedcorn Grants for Research and Development

Call for Applications – Closing Date: Friday March 21st, 2025

We are committed to fostering research and development across the Common Awards partnership. We define ‘research and development’ broadly, to include any kind of conversation, investigation or experiment that can help us explore together the future of ministry and mission, and the forms of theological education that will best serve them.

We will consider proposals in **any relevant area of research and development**, but for this round we will give priority to projects in two areas:

- **theological education and artificial intelligence**
- **diversity, inclusion and belonging**

The first of these areas is our new Common Awards research theme. Each year we pick a new theme, and you can read about past themes, and about what we do to pursue each team, [on our website](#).

In relation to the first priority, on ‘**theological education and artificial intelligence**’, we are interested in projects that focus on

- understanding the challenges, possibilities and questions created by generative AI for teaching, learning and assessment in TEIs,
- preparing students to minister in a world shaped by AI, and to respond to the ethical and environmental issues that it generates, and
- exploring the relationship between AI and embodied, situated knowledge.

The second of our priorities relates to our ongoing commitment to [diversity, inclusion, and belonging](#). In relation to that wider agenda, we continue to look for projects that

- address critical gaps in our understanding of the present state of inclusion and diversity in theological education;
- explore and help overcome the multiple barriers faced by students in theological education as a result of their social and political identities – including class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability;
- experiment with creative pedagogies and forms of assessment that might help with overcoming these barriers; or
- investigate the opportunities for overcoming these barriers presented by different modes and forms of training.

Deadlines

The deadline for applications is **Friday, March 21st, 2025**. Applicants will be informed about the outcome of their applications by May 30th, 2025.

Projects should *start* no earlier than Sep 1st, 2025 and no later than April 30th, 2026, and should last no more than one calendar year in total.

Criteria

Projects *must*

- have the potential to shape the Common Awards – that is, some potential to inform or challenge the *content* of what we teach and learn, the *practices and processes* by which we teach and learn, the *institutional contexts and relationships* within which that happens, or the *theological visions* that shape our activity;
- be led by a member of staff employed by a TEI, the Church of England's Ministry Development Team, the Discipleship and Ministries cluster of the Methodist Church, an equivalent body in another denomination, or Durham University – with that institution acting as the 'host institution' for the project;
- involve collaborators from at least one other body (e.g., another TEI, a university department, a national church body, a church-based education programme or centre, or a charity);

- pursue clear and worthwhile objectives, by posing a focused research question, explaining how it relates to existing work in the area, and setting out a manageable plan of collaborative activity likely to lead to the answering of that question;
- have appropriate institutional permission (see 'Financial Arrangements', below); and
- seek appropriate ethical approval (see below, under 'Research Ethics').

Financial Arrangements

When a grant is awarded, we normally pay the full amount *to your institution* (or, if you relate to several institutions, to the most appropriate one) before the start of the project. You then claim specific expenses during the project *from your institution*, to be paid from this fund. Before we pay over the funds, we will therefore need someone in your institution who has the authority to do so to sign a letter of agreement, agreeing that the institution will accept the funds, and commit to holding them for the sake of your project. In your application, you therefore need to tell us who it is who has the appropriate authority (e.g., a TEI Principal), and confirm that you have informed them of your application and that they are happy for you to proceed.

Research ethics

If your project includes research involving human participants (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or formal observations of activity), you will need to get appropriate ethical approval. You will need to show that you are providing your participants with enough information to allow them to make an informed judgment about whether to participate; that you have been clear with them about what you will and won't do with the data you gather; that you have been clear about what you will do to anonymise your data, and that you have considered any risks involved, especially if you are dealing in sensitive areas or with vulnerable people.

We do not provide research ethics clearance for you. Most projects will be based in (or involve work with) an institution that has a research ethics process, and we normally expect

you to use that process. You do not have to secure clearance in advance of applying, but we expect you to secure it before proceeding with any of the relevant activities.

Further information on research ethics clearance is available in the Common Awards Research Ethics Policy and Guidance, a template policy available to TEIs at www.durham.ac.uk/media/durham-university/departments-/common-awards/documents/templates-and-forms/Research-Ethics-Policy.docx

Projects costing more than £2,000

Project budgets can be for any amount (up to the total of £12,000 that we have available for this round). However, the panel will only award grants over £2,000 where they are convinced that the proposed project has strong potential to shape thinking and practice around the Common Awards network, and where the project involves wide collaboration.

Past Projects

Details of existing grant winners can be found at <http://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/research/previous-seedcorn-grants/>.

Application Process

Applications should comprise all the elements set out below. To help you, a template document is available at www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/research/seedcorn-grant/. You can resize any of the boxes, and you certainly do not need to write as much as the word limits below allow – but you must not exceed them. Please aim to be concise and clear. Ask yourself whether someone reading your application will end up with a clear idea of exactly what you plan to do, and why you plan to do it.

1. Title (no more than 20 words)

This will be the only information about your grant that will appear in some forms of publicity. Please make sure that it clearly conveys the main idea of your project.

2. Information about the Principal Investigator

Name, institutional affiliation, and full contact details for one person who will be the coordinator for the project, and our key contact. This person must be a member of staff employed by a TEI, by the Church of England's Ministry Development Team, by the Discipleship and Ministries cluster of the Methodist Church, by an equivalent body in another denomination, or by Durham University.

3. Institutional Information

Contact details for the head of your institution (or the relevant sub-section of it), and confirmation that you have made them aware of your application and secured their permission. We will contact this person to arrange the letter of agreement that allows us to pay the funds to your institution.

4. Research Ethics

Confirmation of whether or not your project requires ethical clearance, and, of whether you have identified where to seek such clearance.

5. Brief overview (no more than 500 words)

A short paragraph describing your project. This text should be suitable for use in any publicity we send out about the outcome of this round of awards, and will normally be published in the details of the successful applications listed on our website. The description should convey what your topic is, what you hope to do, and why it is important.

6. Proposed start date

Please note that projects must *begin* no earlier than Sep 1st, 2025 and no later than April 30th, 2026.

7. Duration

Projects should last no longer than 12 months.

8. A full description (**this section should be no more than 5000 words in total – and in many successful applications this section is considerably shorter**)

If your project relates to one or more of the priority areas listed on the first page above, you should explain that here.

Your full description **must** include the following elements.

a. Objectives

What do you hope to achieve by pursuing this project? The amount of funding available is small, and the time available short, so make sure that your objectives are realistic – but remember also that when we assess your grant we will be asking whether your objectives are worth the time, effort, and money that your project will involve.

b. Research Questions

What question or questions are you seeking to answer? A clear and focused set of research questions is central to a good application. We will be asking whether you are posing questions worth asking, whether they have already been answered, and whether your proposed activities are likely to lead you to an answer in the time available.

c. Research Context

What existing work has been done in this area? Who has written on this topic, or gathered data relevant to your question? Who is already engaged in thinking about this? How will your project interact with all that existing work, and how will you take it further?

d. Research Methods

What exactly do you propose to do, in order to answer your research question or solve your research problem, in the light of existing work in the area, and so achieve your objectives? We need to be convinced that these activities will genuinely help you answer the questions you have posed, within the time available – and that you have chosen the most appropriate activities for the purpose. For some questions, lengthy discussion and rumination will be the appropriate method, for others the conduct and analysis of interviews, for others the gathering of feedback on some practical pedagogical experiment, and for still others some other method. What matters is that the activity is a good fit for your questions.

e. Outputs

What outputs will your project produce: e.g., publications or other forms of writing; larger grant applications; electronic resources? Be as precise as possible. Who will produce these things? When? Where? How? Be realistic!

f. Project Management

How will the Principal Investigator ensure that the project stays on track, and achieves its objectives within the time available? How will members of the team communicate? How will the main activities be organised?

g. Project Timetable

What will happen when?

h. Project personnel

Who, beyond the Principal Investigator, will be involved in delivering this project, and what will they do? You are reminded that all projects must involve collaborators from at least two institutions (e.g., TEIs, university departments, national church bodies, church-based

education programmes and centres, charities), including at least one TEI. Please supply names, institutions, and full contact details.

9. A budget

This should include

- a breakdown of costs (**totalling no more than £12,000**); and
- a brief explanation of how these costs have been arrived at.

Please make sure you have read the note above on projects costing more than £2,000.

10. An up-to-date CV for the Principal Investigator.

This does not need to be lengthy: a one-page CV is often sufficient.

Applications should be sent to common.awards@durham.ac.uk, to arrive **no later than midnight on Friday, March 21st, 2025**.

Please note that, as part of the decision-making process, we may share your application documents with various members of academic and administrative staff of Durham University, with key contacts in our partner churches (e.g., staff of Ministry Division and of the Methodist Church's Discipleship and Ministries cluster), and with representatives of the TEI Forum chosen to be independent of all applications received.

Any queries about the grants or the application process should be sent to Mike Higton, mike.higton@durham.ac.uk.

Further information about the Common Awards Research Network can be found at www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/research/