

King's Climate and Sustainability Seed Fund – ROUND 5

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

King's Strategy 2026 aims for a large and distinctive contribution to the global challenges of sustainability and the climate emergency through our research, teaching, impact and influence, and in our own operations. Academically, we already have focal areas of research excellence and impact, but for our size, our research is on a comparatively small scale.

King's is building up its academic profile for Climate & Sustainability research with a small number of new appointments, and with extensive support for existing staff to develop new research, make new connections, and scale-up existing strengths.

This internal seed funding is an ambitious opportunity at King's, with six calls planned from 2023 to 2026. To date, 22 awards have been made in 4 calls and you can see summary of these projects and academics involved [here](#).

1. What we want to support

The Seed Fund is an internal funding scheme aiming to advance research to a stage where it is more competitive for external funding. Therefore, applicants will need to demonstrate a clear vision for potential further external funding routes. The scheme is helping staff to secure grants, fellowships, or business/government income; and which fit with King's strategy for developing a distinctive and cohesive research profile.

King's strategy recognises that there are already significant UK and international centres of excellence in climate science and sustainable technologies, and we therefore need to stand out not through size, but through agile connections, a multidisciplinary and whole-system approach, and a focus on real-world solutions. A vital part of this is exploiting untapped potential we already have in our research programmes – from health research, engineering, business, law, social and natural science to humanities – to contribute to the challenges.

We expect that the Fund will support:

- Applying existing research strengths (e.g. AI, security studies, digital humanities, population health) to respond to climate and sustainability challenges
- Supporting early career researchers to develop new lines of research
- Cross-discipline connections that will give better whole-system insights
- Co-developing research and impact routes with users (government, business, or third sector)
- Research methods/ technologies/resources that will enable more effective research
- External academic partnerships that can accelerate our development in important areas

2. Awards available

We will support proposals of two sorts:

A: In the range **£15,000-£60,000** for focussed developments (typically 6-12 months). Most will involve partnerships and new interdisciplinary links, we expect to also support projects to explore and test single ideas, and/or new lines of work that may not yet connect with others at King's.

B: In the range **£60,000-£125,000** to develop well-defined opportunities to apply for major awards, important partnerships, or centre-type grants (6-18 months). These would all involve cross-Department collaborations, and we would encourage external partnerships.

3. Eligibility criteria

3.1 Applicants:

The competition is open to all research-active staff: permanently employed academics and independently funded research fellows are eligible to be PIs. Post-Doctoral Research Associates are eligible to be joint PIs or Co-Is. The corresponding PI and budget holder should be an academic or independently funded research fellow with a contract with King's which extends at least twelve months after the end of the project.

Post-Doctoral Research Associates applying for KCS seed funding as joint PIs are expected to have 1) a track record of leading projects; 2) an academic or independently funded research fellow as budget holding Principal Investigator who will be fully involved in the project; 3) plans for internal dissemination and knowledge exchange activities such as research workshops; 4) clear plan to work towards applying for strategic external funding.

3.2 Costs

We expect that awards will normally support research assistant or technician time; materials, data access, small equipment and consumables, data processing; and travel costs for King's staff or collaborators.

The applications should not include:

- Academic staff salary costs (but teaching cover may be requested where there are long periods (several terms) of extra commitment needed)
- 'Business as usual' research – extending existing projects and collaborations where the award will not substantially change future grant-winning potential
- Studentships – stipends or fees
- Overheads
- Large equipment (equipment costing over £10,000)
- Conference attendance within your current academic area
- Publication charges

4. Timeframe

	Round 5	Round 6
Call open	Monday 13 January 2025	TBC (Early Summer 2025)
Outline feedback period*	Mid-February to Mid-March 2025	TBC (Summer 2025)
Full proposal deadline	Tuesday 29 April 2025, 5pm	TBC (Autumn 2025)

***Note:** The outline stage is an advisory step introduced in round 4 aiming to provide quick feedback on your ideas. This will ensure your application aligns with the scheme, and more proposals succeed first time, rather than at resubmission 6 months later. We aim to provide feedback during the period of Mid-February to Mid-March 2025 (dates and format will be confirmed after we receive applications). The earlier you can let us your ideas, the better. This will help us plan the workload.

4. Assessment

Proposals will be assessed by a multidisciplinary panel, using these five criteria :

1. **Importance, impact, and strategic fit** – e.g. Will this address an important issue and contribute to solutions in future? How well does it fit King’s strategy? Can it help create a large programme or Centre of Excellence or complement other developments?
2. **Research quality and distinctiveness** – e.g. Does the project have an exciting vision and approach? Does it identify the most important areas to develop, and address them effectively? Will it build distinctive, high-quality, competitive research that meets funders’ expectations?
3. **People and Partners** – e.g. Is the team the right group of people to tackle the problem? Are these the right external partners? Is the approach to partnership appropriate?
4. **Right time** – e.g. Is this work at the right stage of development for this call? Is there a solid plan for grant funding/ investment at the end, as well as longer-term potential for sustained funding?
5. **Coherent and realistic plan** – e.g. Is this an efficient use of funds with clear and tangible outcomes and deliverables? Is the timing realistic?

ANNEX 1

King's strategy for Climate and Sustainability Research – summary points

Context

Responding to risks from climate change and biodiversity loss while sustaining human wellbeing and nature over the longer term are key global challenges in the 21st century. Transitions to sustainable futures require unprecedented and systemic changes to economies, politics, and societies.

For all leading universities, sustainability and climate change will become an integral part of research and teaching across all disciplines, while they change their own operations to minimise climate and ecological footprints and play an active role in society to enable transitions to sustainability. UK public funding will grow, with “building a green future” a major challenge focus for UKRI, alongside broader UK Government Net Zero innovation roadmaps and aid investment increasingly linked to sustainability and climate goals. 30% of Horizon Europe funds are earmarked for climate-related research. Philanthropic and business investment is also growing, and climate change is identified as one of the top three challenges for human health by the largest biomedical charity, the Wellcome Trust, which is increasing its investment very substantially.

King's overall aims

For the University, success means rapid development not only in research, but also education, impact, operations and visibility, with each reinforcing and complementing the others, to create a profile that is distinctive in three ways:

- Sustainability 2.0 – building an academic focus on the multiple interacting factors (economic, social, political) that shape transitions and adaptation alongside technological and environmental research and identifying solutions with partners.
- Integration - close coupling of world-class research with education, external impact, and ‘walking the talk’ in our own operations and with our partners: organisational transformation
- Just and fair transitions – working towards the capabilities, insights, technologies, and impacts that will be needed for more equitable futures.

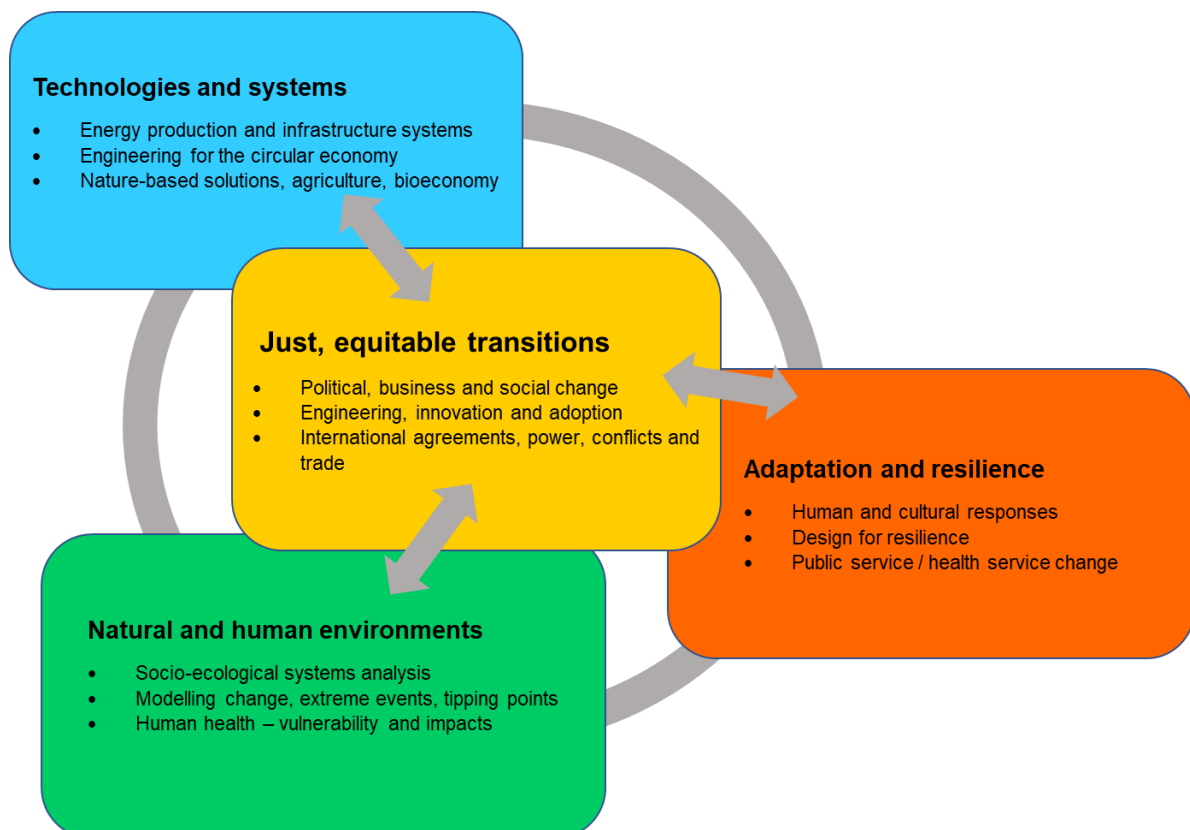
Research strategy

As part of preparations for *Strategy 2026*, a working group explored how King's can achieve growth, and make a distinctive academic contribution alongside well-established sustainability and climate research centres. Key points included:

- King's should encourage growth in sustainability research across a broad base, but must also develop distinct focal themes with visibility and critical mass – especially around understanding, enabling and critiquing the processes of societal transition towards environmental and social sustainability.
- Transitions to net-zero and protecting ecosystems are now underway, but there is a widening and critical gap between what *could* be done and what *is* being done – for

technical, economic, social, political and cultural reasons. Understanding the broader factors shaping transitions to sustainability and their societal consequences navigating through these tensions towards desired futures should be at the core of the King's strategy.

- Governments, businesses, and the third sector will need comprehensive, timely knowledge about the interactions between environment, technologies, economic and social trends, international competition, security, politics, public health, public attitudes, and regulation, including proposals and assessments of the strategies and options to guide choices for fair and just transitions. Partnership will therefore be an important feature of the initiative, with King's leveraging its convening power in the UK and internationally to make a difference.
- Academically, King's has some focal areas of research excellence with high quality outputs and impact, but for our size, our research and research income is on a relatively small scale. We should aim for a four-fold increase by 2029 through a mixture of broad-based growth and larger thematic or centre-type funding.
- King's is academically well placed to focus on a next generation sustainability research which moves beyond advocacy of problems towards real-world problem solving. We can accelerate development by mobilising and connecting existing King's expertise not yet being applied to the challenge (e.g. in politics, business, security studies, humanities, population health). Figure 1 illustrates the intersecting domains of knowledge and research that could be brought together at King's to inform decision-making.



Last updated: 08/01/2025

Example themes

The strategy is not prescriptive about where the focus of research will come to be – that will be determined by the interplay between the ideas emerging across Faculties and evolving external funding and partnering opportunities. Discussions so far have highlighted a range of thematic areas which would benefit from a better connected and multidisciplinary approach, and where King's could make strong contributions. These are illustrative only:

- Net-zero technologies and systems for sustainable cities, mobility, and energy
- New business models, law & regulation, economics, and sustainable consumption
- International power, trade, security, and conflict in the shift towards sustainable societies
- Political economy of sustainability transitions in the Global North and South
- Socio-ecological dynamics for risk management/ resilience -observations, monitoring, & modelling
- Diverse cultural expressions and framings of challenging transitions to sustainability
- Intersections with human health and development, in policy and individual behaviour change, demographics, or resilience and sustainability of health systems and health technologies

For more information, see [Q&A document](#) or contact us via KCSseedfund@kcl.ac.uk