

King's Climate and Sustainability Seed Fund

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 will build up its academic profile over the next three years 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 with additional College seed-funding. This is an ambitious research seed funding opportunity at King's, with six calls planned over the coming two and a half years.

Changes for future rounds

For Rounds 4, 5, and 6 we have made three changes:

- A higher max budget, to reflect pay awards and inflation since the scheme started.*
- An improved application form that makes it easier to present clear plans for the medium/long term.*
- An advisory step – you submit your initial ideas (< 1 page / 500 words) for quick feedback from panel members and / or research development professionals. We want to see more proposals succeed first time, rather than at resubmission 6 months later. This step is compulsory, but advisory only. The earlier you can let us know your emerging ideas the better, but we will be able to turn around responses as late as 4 September 2024.*
- In addition, we will ensure successful proposals are each linked to a research development manager for follow-up support. The outline word count is deliberately short (maximum 500 words) to minimise the time and effort for you to complete this stage.*

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. 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

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- 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 **£15-60,000** for focussed developments (typically 6-12 months). Most will involve partnerships and new interdisciplinary links, but especially in the early rounds, 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 **£60-125,000** 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. Timing

The next calls deadlines are:

	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6
Call open	01/07/2024	06/01/2025	TBA
Outline deadline	04/09/2024	18/03/2025	TBA
Full proposal deadline	08/10/2024	29/04/2025	TBA
Project length	Up to 18 months	Up to 12 months	Up to 6 months

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. King's overall aims

For the College, 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.

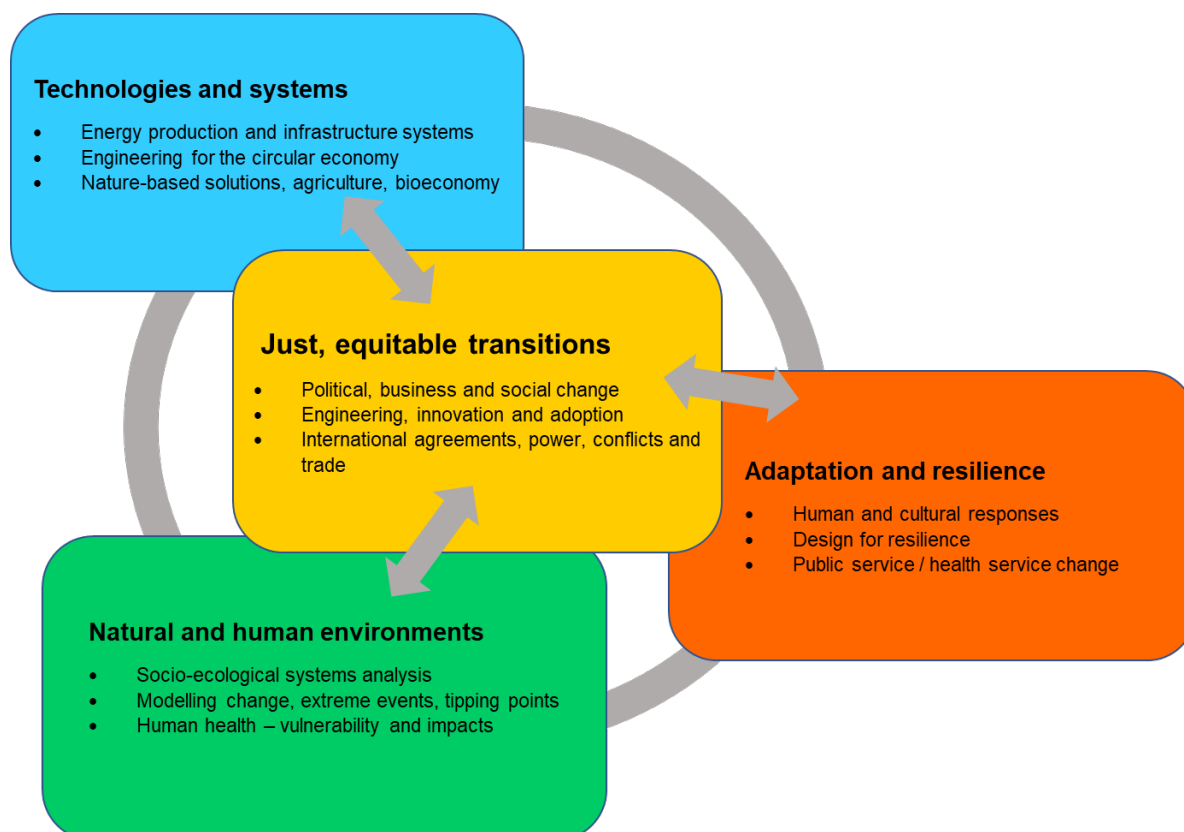
Research strategy

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.



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