

Oxford-Berlin Centre for Advanced Studies: Call for Initiatives Related to the BUA ‘Social Cohesion’ Grand Challenge

Call opens:	01.08.2020	Call closes:	16.09.2020, 12 p.m.
Earliest start of funding:	01.10.2020	Duration:	maximum 15 months
Funding volume:	Flexible, depending on demand, with a total budget envelope of 303,000 euros. Each separate cooperation group award is expected to be in a range between 30,000 and 130,000 euros (see below for more details).		

Introduction

The Berlin University Alliance – Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin – have set themselves the ambitious joint goal of establishing Berlin as an integrated centre of research dedicated to addressing global challenges – known as “Grand Challenges”. The first two Grand Challenges have been identified as Social Cohesion and Global Health. The BUA has already held several calls for projects focussed on Social Cohesion, partly in response to the societal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The BUA and the University of Oxford have established a new, for the time being virtual, Centre for Advanced Studies, with a joint budget in excess of 1.1M euros over the period 2020-22. The Centre proposes, inter alia, to support a small number of thematic funding initiatives linked to the BUA’s Grand Challenges. The first of these will focus on Social Cohesion, with funding available between 1st October and 31st December 2021.

This is a targeted call to groups of Oxford and Berlin researchers currently working on seed-funding projects related to the Social Cohesion theme. The rationale for this is that these groups will already be benefitting from established connections and be in a position to develop additional research projects in a quicker timeframe. It is anticipated that future calls for funding from the CAS will be made with a broader audience across Oxford and BUA institutions.

Objective

The objective of this call is to complement the main aims of the concurrent BUA Social Cohesion funding scheme. This scheme intends to promote the understanding of global conditions, dynamics, perspectives and limitations of social cohesion whilst demonstrating potential structures that could provide solutions for a future society characterized by sustainable success and stability.

This more limited funding call, addressed only to OX|BER Seed funding recipients is intended to specifically promote longer term interactions between scientist within the BUA and at the University of Oxford who are working in cognate areas of research. It tries to create further opportunities for mobility between Oxford and Berlin including the development of “Cooperation Groups”. It is envisaged that a large part of the funding will be used to bring Oxford researchers to Berlin to work with BUA colleagues (e.g. via workshops and short sabbaticals of up to three months in any one calendar year). As this first call is funded purely from BUA sources, none of the allocated funding may be spent in Oxford.

Project Format

OX|BER Cooperation Groups are concerned with interdisciplinary research projects focused on BUA's Grand Challenges. This is a highly flexible funding format applicable for smaller groups of three to ten fellows who come together for several shorter/medium-term stays or block visits. The funding is available to establish a broad overarching Cooperation Group under the Social Cohesion umbrella. It may include several sub-groups engaged in cognate areas of research.

The Cooperation Group format has been designed to offer organizational flexibility with regards to formats, structure and method of working. The precise structure and modus operandi will remain at the discretion of those within the group.

Possible formats could include:

- Intensive collaboration between two fellows over several weeks ("research in pairs")
- Cooperation of a group of fellows (approx. 4 to 10) for several months
- Shorter block visits of a group over a longer period of time (e.g. 4 to 6 meetings lasting several weeks, where the maximum time of individual researchers on site is a maximum of 6 months spread over two years;
- Periodic meetings to prepare larger research grant applications

It is anticipated that the activities within a Cooperation Group will be considerably more extensive than a simple series of workshops.

Eligibility

The Call for Proposals is open to salaried faculty members or equivalent post-doctoral level staff from any of the five partner institutions, working within any discipline. It is expected that Berlin researchers will already have fruitful research links with colleagues in Oxford (and vice-versa), and thus be better able to take advantage of the funding and the deadline for applications. Applications should be made jointly between one or more BUA principal investigators and another from Oxford, as with the previous seed-funding grants made available through the Oxford-Berlin Research Partnership. Members of non-university research institutions in Berlin or other German universities which are not affiliated to the Alliance institutions may participate as Cooperation Group partners but must provide their own funding.

Where appropriate applicants are encouraged to seek gender and diversity dimension balance and to include early- and mid-career researchers within their proposals.

Funding

Funding totalling 303,000 euros is available over a 15-month period. However, a summer school which must take place in 2021 should be included in the proposals from each Cooperation Group. It is anticipated that each successful cooperation group will receive an award of up to 130,000 euros per year for each of two years (not including additional sums for the holding of a summer school and final conference). However, there is some flexibility in the funding available, and other, smaller, awards may be possible at the discretion of the BUA Executive Board. While the budget may be flexible, no individual cooperation group should be funded with less than 30,000 euros. Broader complementary collaborations may come together as part of a single application.

Where other contributions are being made by faculties/units/external partners this will be counted as additional to the OX/BER award and has to be displayed as such in the budget distribution.

Proposals must detail how awarded funding will be allocated for the duration of the collaboration, and how research might continue once the funding period is complete.

The call is made on the assumption that some degree of travel and residential visits between the UK and Germany will be possible from 1st October 2020. Accordingly, a significant level of funding is to be available early in the award time schedule. Additionally, some elements of virtual interaction are anticipated.

The BUA can make up to 130,000 euros available before 31st December 2020 (the end of the current German financial year) with the remainder of the overall funding to be spent within 2021. It may be possible to transfer up to 20% of the 2020 funding allocation into 2021, if this is requested at the time of application. In broad terms, it is anticipated that the research will focus on socially relevant issues and build on work already being undertaken by researchers within the BUA and the University of Oxford.

Although the Cooperation Group concept primarily aims to mobilize researchers and graduate students travelling to Berlin from Oxford, funding for the Berlin partners for other areas of expenditure will be possible (e.g. employment of student assistants and administrative staff located at Berlin institutions, equipment or rental costs, activities aimed at networking or public understanding of the research outputs). It is anticipated that a significant part of any award will be used for Berlin accommodation and subsistence costs for Oxford researchers. However, compensation of personnel costs resulting from a sabbatical spent in Berlin cannot be covered.

Eligible claims:

- Travel, accommodation and other associated costs for joint workshops as well as academic and graduate researcher exchanges;
- Workshop and other meeting costs;
- Employment of student assistants and additional administrative staff working on the cooperation;
- Material costs relating to the proposed collaborative research (as contributions towards laboratory or field-based costs for participating academics and/or graduate researchers);
- Costs associated with the preparation of joint grant proposals to respective national and international funding agencies, philanthropic sponsors or foundations.

Application Procedure

Applications must be submitted via the online portal (link below) and should consist of a project proposal of no more than 1500 words, together with a detailed budget plan, project timeline, list of potential fellows and short CVs (not exceeding two A4 pages and with an additional list of no more than five main research publications) of the PIs and researchers within the proposed Cooperation Group.

Proposals should be submitted in English.

Selection Criteria

Successful applications should demonstrate:

- Quality and originality of the research program according to international standards
- Coherence of the research program to be undertaken, interdisciplinarity and the research productivity of the cooperation
- Contribution of the research program to the BUA's Grand Challenge Social Cohesion
- Success with any current seed funding projects
- International profile and research excellence of the participating researchers
- Contribution to the public understanding of the research area
- International competitiveness
- Promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity of the Cooperation Group members
- Appropriateness of the funds applied for

Evaluation process

In the case of a positive preliminary, administrative evaluation by the partners of the OX|BER research partnership, the applications will be submitted to a Selection Committee consisting of Vice Presidents, Vice-Pro-Chancellors or Pro-Deans respectively of the five institutions for review. The partnership's leadership will present a joint suggestion to the BUA Executive Board who will make the final funding decision.

The evaluation will take into account the quality, feasibility and overall potential of the project. In addition, interdisciplinarity, competence and expertise of involved faculty members will be considered alongside the cost-effectiveness of the budgetary plan and prospects for sustainability beyond the funding period. It will also focus on effective communication and cooperation between faculty members and researchers in each location, the added value of the collaboration, as well as the mobility of researchers between Berlin and Oxford.

How to Apply

Proposals should be submitted in **English** via the online portal <https://portal.bihealth.de/Portal/SitePages/Portal.aspx> (after creating an account you will find the call under "Open Calls" in the "Start new application" menu).

The final date for application submissions is 1st September 2020, 12 p.m.

Contact

Any questions should be addressed to the academic coordinators at oxber@berlin-university-alliance.de

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