

Kaplan Assessments

Emerging Voices Award Scheme 2026-27

Eligibility Criteria

1. Who may apply

To be eligible as the lead applicant, you must meet all of the following requirements at the application deadline:

- You are aged 18 or over.
- You are one of the following: a taught Master's student undertaking or preparing a dissertation; a research Master's or MRes student; a registered doctoral or professional doctorate candidate; or an early-career researcher whose PhD was formally awarded within the three years preceding the application deadline.
- You are currently enrolled at, employed by, or formally affiliated with a recognised higher education institution in the UK. Applicants of any nationality are welcome; nationality is not an eligibility criterion.
- You can complete the proposed work in English and within the agreed project period, normally 6-12 months.
- You have an appropriate supervisor, mentor or line manager who is willing to endorse the application and support the project. A formal endorsement is mandatory for students and required for early-career researchers.
- You can obtain all institutional permissions and ethical approval required for the research before collecting data or involving participants.
- You are not an employee of a Kaplan group company, are not directly involved in administering, reviewing or approving the Award Scheme, and are not an immediate household member of anyone directly involved in those activities.

Career breaks and non-linear pathways

When applying the three-year early-career window, Kaplan may take account of documented career breaks or reduced research activity arising from parental leave, caring responsibilities, disability, long-term illness, bereavement, displacement or comparable circumstances. Applicants should contact the award team before the deadline if they need this flexibility.

2. Team and application rules

- A proposal may include collaborators, but one eligible lead applicant must take responsibility for the application, project delivery and award agreement.
- Each person may submit only one application as lead applicant in the 2026-27 cycle.
- The award and conference registration are attached to the named lead recipient only and cannot be transferred without Kaplan's written approval.

- The lead applicant must tell every named collaborator, supervisor, mentor and referee that their personal information will be included in the application and must provide them with the Applicant Privacy Notice.

3. What projects are eligible

The proposed project must:

- address the 2026-27 theme, “Inclusive English Assessment for Access, Opportunity and Wellbeing”;
- have clear and substantive relevance to the Kaplan Test of English (KTE), whether through KTE materials, KTE-supported data or a research question whose findings could directly inform KTE design, use, interpretation or candidate experience;
- focus on assessment design, delivery, use, interpretation, fairness or test-taker experience rather than on general student support or wellbeing in isolation;
- be sufficiently focused and feasible for the award scheme timetable (completion within 6 to 12 months of the agreed start date);
- be at the planning or early delivery stage. The award is intended to enable future work, not to recognise a completed study;
- use a method appropriate to the research question and include a realistic plan for ethics, recruitment, data collection, management, analysis and dissemination;
- be capable of proceeding without access to data or materials that Kaplan has identified as unavailable; and
- produce findings that have value beyond the applicant’s immediate setting, even if the study itself is small or context-specific.

4. Priority research areas

Priority area	Examples of relevant work
Accessibility and inclusion	Disability access, neurodiversity, accommodations, interface usability, readability, digital barriers, low-bandwidth or low-resource access.
Candidate experience and assessment-related wellbeing	Candidate burden, assessment anxiety, confidence, clarity of instructions, perceptions of fairness and experiences of online or remote testing.
Transition into postgraduate study	How English assessment supports or hinders entry, progression and transition; how scores are interpreted or used by students, departments and institutions.
Employability, mobility and opportunity	Work-readiness, professional progression, mobility or wider opportunity where English assessment has a clear and meaningful role.
Responsible digital innovation	AI, automation, security, feedback or digital delivery where the research question is directly linked to fairness, access, transparency or candidate understanding.

5. Projects that are not eligible or are unlikely to be supported

- A completed study, retrospective best-paper submission or project for which the substantive data collection and analysis are already complete.
- A general mental-health, counselling, admissions-policy, teaching or employability project with only a token connection to English assessment.
- A project whose main purpose is commercial product development, consultancy or promotional evaluation rather than independent research.
- A project that is already fully funded for the same activities, or that duplicates another award without clearly distinct costs and outputs.
- A project that depends on identifiable KTE candidate data, data about test takers under 18, biometric signals, item psychometric parameters, secure item content, live security rules or other security-sensitive materials.
- For the inaugural cycle, a project involving direct research participation by people under 18.
- A project that cannot demonstrate a credible institutional ethics and safeguarding route.
- A proposal that is so broad, technically demanding or data-intensive that it cannot reasonably be delivered with the available award and Kaplan Assessments support.

6. Widening participation

Kaplan particularly welcomes applications from first-time applicants for external research funding and projects that meaningfully involve underserved candidate groups or underrepresented educational contexts. Selection remains merit-based. Where two proposals are otherwise of comparable quality, the panel may take these widening-participation factors into account as a tie-breaker.

7. Required application materials

- Completed online application form and project proposal.
- Project abstract, research question(s), rationale, brief literature context, methodology, ethics plan, timetable, anticipated outcomes and dissemination plan.
- Simple itemised budget explaining how the £2,500 would be used.
- Short CV or researcher profile for the lead applicant.
- Supervisor, mentor or line-manager endorsement.
- Completed KTE Data and Support Request Form, including whether each request is essential or desirable.
- Disclosure of any actual or potential conflict of interest, overlapping funding and use of generative AI in preparing the application or planned research.

8. Application adjustments

Applicants who need an accessible format, reasonable adjustment or alternative method of submission should contact EmergingVoices@kaplan.co.uk as early as possible and no later than 10 working days before the deadline. Requesting an adjustment will not disadvantage an application.