The closing date for applications is Friday 30 October. The closing date will be strictly adhered to.

All applications must be submitted on the SGSSS platform GradHub. Links to this are on the website [www.sgsss.ac.uk](http://www.sgsss.ac.uk).

SGSSS plans to communicate the outcome of the competition to successful and unsuccessful applicants by the end of November and

Successful applicants must recruit a student to commence in the 2021/22 academic year.
In partnership with the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS/DTP), Skills Development Scotland wishes to co-fund up to three PhD Studentships in social science subjects to commence in October 2021. We are seeking proposals from academics across the SGSSS from any accredited pathway which is interested in hosting studentships.

Projects must align with the SDS proposed topics. You can find a list of the 2020/21 topics online here. For further information on topics please contact Emma Hollywood (Insight and Impact Manager) - Emma.Hollywood@sds.co.uk.

Please note that supervisors can put in only one application per competition – that is, a supervisor may apply to both a collaborative competition and the steers competition but cannot put more than one application to a single competition. Please note that the single application requirement applies to any position within a supervisory team – that is, an applicant cannot apply to a competition as first supervisor on one application and second or subsequent supervisor on another application to the same competition.

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Background

1.1 Skills Development Scotland is Scotland’s National Skills body tasked with developing the skills and learning system in Scotland for the benefit of individuals and businesses. Our vision is for a Scotland in which individuals and business are supported by a skills and learning system that helps them to reach their potential in contributing to sustainable economic growth. We aim to work collaboratively with other agencies to help Scotland to move towards the top of the OECD rankings for productivity, equality, well-being and sustainability. We have four overarching goals (detailed in our Strategic Plan):

- All people in Scotland have the skills, information and opportunities to succeed in the labour market
- Scotland’s businesses drive productivity and inclusive growth
- Scotland has a dynamic and responsive skills system
- SDS leads by example and continually improves to achieve excellence

The services we provide in seeking to achieve our vision are shaped by the Scottish Government’s Careers Information, Advice & Guidance (CIAG) Strategies and its Youth Employment Strategy. We work with partners across Scotland to deliver a range of services for individuals and business, including: CIAG services, National Training Programmes, Apprenticeships (Modern, Graduate and Foundation), Individual Learning Accounts, PACE services (support for those facing redundancy) and support for employers to develop the skills of their people.

New, high quality research is a critical factor in contributing to the evidence base which informs the work of Skills Development Scotland. We therefore welcome the opportunity to work with the academic community in providing these new research opportunities for talented Scottish graduates.

1.2 Skills Development Scotland wishes to co-fund up to three PhDs to start in October 2021. The overall aim of the PhD scheme is to provide new research opportunities which contribute to the evidence base for the development of skills policy in Scotland. The sponsorship of PhDs will also increase the capacity of the research community to conduct policy-focussed research relevant to the skills agenda.
**Time Frame**

The timeframe for the process between the call for proposals in this document and the start of the PhD studentship is outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call issued</td>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline for full applications</td>
<td>Friday 30 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions communicated to applicants</td>
<td>End of November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studentships commence</td>
<td>October 2021*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A later start may be possible if a student has special circumstances.

**Aims and Objectives**

1.3 Skills Development Scotland is working with the SGSSS-DTP to support innovative and cross-cutting research on skills-related issues of relevance to Scotland. We aim to support research which involves rigorous and imaginative designs and methods.

1.4 ESRC funding covers both full and part-time PhD opportunities. SDS will consider proposals suitable for part-time doctoral candidates, subject to a close fit with the PhD topic (for e.g. focus on longitudinal research) and the benefits in terms of promoting wider participation in Doctoral research. Part-time candidates currently in employment will be required to provide a letter of confirmation from their employer indicating their formal agreement and commitment to supporting the individual in their PhD research. Part-time candidates in employment must work for a maximum of 0.5 FTE.

1.5 The aims of the PhD Scheme are to:

- add to the strategic and cross-cutting evidence base which informs the development, implementation and evaluation of skills policy in Scotland;
- increase and enhance the impact of high quality academic research on policy and delivery;
- support research that is capable of being applied in the delivery of social policy and services;
- develop capability amongst high-quality academic researchers to conduct policy-applied research in disciplines relevant to the Scottish skills agenda;
- enhance ongoing relations between the academic, policy and user communities.

1.6 It is also expected that students and academic institutions will benefit through an improved understanding of contemporary issues affecting economic and social policy in Scotland with regard to skills and training. This will help to ensure better understanding of how future research can more fully make an impact on policy and delivery and of how that impact can be demonstrated and sustained.

1.7 This scheme is also intended to develop rounded social scientists from a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary training pathways. The competition is open to a variety of approaches in terms of design and methods including quantitative designs, analysis of administrative data, modelling, qualitative and ethnographic studies, action research, participatory approaches to research, and proposals that use mixed methods.

1.8 Applications are expected to consider diversity issues where appropriate in their proposals, both in terms of methodological approach and topic. Proposals are welcome which consider European and international comparative elements.

1.9 Each PhD project will have a named liaison contact at Skills Development Scotland, who will provide support throughout the PhD.

1.10 More information about the work of Skills Development Scotland can be found on its website at: [https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk](https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk)
SECTION 2 FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

SGSSS Funding

2.1 SGSSS-DTP funding is limited to the standard ESRC studentship package: fees, maintenance, Research Training Support Grant (RTSG), cohort development and overseas travel allowance. The SGSSS funding model states that all SDS studentships awarded will be co-funded by the host institution and SDS as per the below;

SGSSS: 50%; HEI: 17%; SDS: 33%

Please Note:

- SDS do not pay towards cohort development (£4,000 per student in their first year of funding) and as such this will be split between SGSSS and HEIs as per the standard co-funding arrangement:

  SGSSS: 67%; HEI: 33%

- Unlike all other collaborative contributions, SDS pay their contributions to SGSSS directly and as such, HEIs are not required to oversee these arrangements. For all other collaborative partnerships however, it is the responsibility of the HEI to agree the funding arrangements with the collaborative partner and to arrange for the funding to be paid to the HEI directly – SGSSS will only ever pay an HEI the SDS and SGSSS percentage of cost(s) for a studentship.

Please see here for full guidance on the different types of SGSSS funding arrangements available for each studentship competition/studentship type.

Cross-Institutional Supervision

2.2 SGSSS will continue to support cross-institutional supervision where the arrangements are in the best interest of the students. In these cases, the lead institution will be regarded as the host institution. The expectation is that the host institution will be responsible for covering the HEI contribution. The second institution will not be responsible for any proportion of the contribution. Further, the fees due will be transferred to the host institution with no expectation of a proportion of the fees going to the second institution.

Exceptions will be made where the cross-institutional supervision partnership is with one of our four HEIs¹ that currently do not hold studentships. In these cases, the host institution will pay only 70% of the institutional cost with SGSSS contributing the remaining 30% of the institutional costs. For these studentships, we will support the transfer of 30% of fees going to the second institution.

¹ Abertay University; Robert Gordon University; University of the Highlands and Islands; University of the West of Scotland
SECTION 3 APPLICATION PROCESS

General Information

3.1 Applications for co-funded 1+3 or +3 Studentship Awards are invited from prospective supervisors based in the SGSSS.

3.2 Applications should be based on the topics outlined. There will be no set limit on the number of projects for which an institution or pathway can apply. However, SGSSS will only accept one application per supervisor.

3.3 Skills Development Scotland and SGSSS-DTP expect successful supervisors to engage in early recruitment processes and expect a commitment of support for early advertisement of the opportunity. A clear timetable (with dates for advertisement and recruitment milestones) and the Quality Assurance process for student recruitment, including a named administrative contact in the institution, should be provided.

3.4 Full-time three year (+3) awards are normally for three years duration, subject to the ‘length of funding’ eligibility rules, leading to the submission of a PhD thesis based on the work carried out within the project. Prospective supervisors should confirm training and eligibility arrangements for their pathway with the relevant pathway representative and/or convenor.

3.5 We welcome interdisciplinary and cross-institutional applications for this call. Please note that the first supervisor must be based in an ESRC-accredited training pathway and institution at the Scottish DTP. Second supervisors can be based in any Scottish Graduate School of Social Science partner institution.

Issues for Applicants to Consider

3.6 In addition to outlining a high-quality PhD proposal, applications should include a well thought out and broadly based research training programme throughout the PhD.

3.7 Applications are encouraged to demonstrate evidence of:

- Innovation and fresh thinking in the proposed research
- Clarity of proposal, outlining how the proposed project addresses the chosen topic area including clear title, aims, relevance to policy and methods
- Good research design and methods
- A sound articulation of how the potential impact of the research will be maximised through dissemination
- Building upon existing expertise and embedding the early career stage researcher in a relevant research grouping and high quality, active research environment
- Quality of proposed research skills training
- Supervisory experience including evidence of collaborative research
- High standard of ethical practice and risk management in terms of researcher safety

3.8 Applications should focus on the specified topics. It is strongly recommended that the academic institution pay particular attention both to presenting clear objectives and research questions for the topic and to the timing and availability of data and research results. The topics provide scope for flexibility, in terms of design and methods, as well as shaping the research questions. If you would find it helpful to discuss your interests with Skills Development Scotland, please contact:

Emma Hollywood – Insight and Impact Manager - Emma.Hollywood@sds.co.uk
3.9 In submitting your proposal, you should address Skills Development Scotland’s key questions alongside the development of methodological skills. As always, the PhD should be designed to provide an original contribution to the relevant discipline.

Assessment of Applications

3.10 Assessment of proposals will be co-ordinated by Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish DTP.

3.11 Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- The quality of the research proposal in terms of conceptual and methodological approach, its consideration of ethics and risk and its plausibility within the time frame;
- The fit with the supervisory team and the quality of the supervisory team in relation to its capacity to support the necessary advanced training of the recruited student – consideration will be given here to the particular institutional setting and its wider national context;
- Collaborative fit – how does the proposal and its supervisory team give confidence that the practical and policy context of the proposal is understood and that the skills necessary for collaborative activity are in place and will be fostered in the recruited student.

Student Recruitment

3.12 Responsibility for student selection and recruitment lies with the successful institutions, although the SGSSS will assist with advertising opportunities through the DTP’s network and FindaPhD.com. All collaborative studentship projects should be fairly advertised and abide by the recruitment processes within the supervisor’s HEI.

3.13 The ESRC is committed to equality and diversity of opportunity. All studentship opportunities should be offered as a 1+3 or +3 award and for full-time or part-time study. The 1+3 award should be designed to support students that do not have a Masters degree prior to appointment.

3.14 The recruitment process must include an interview involving Skills Development Scotland.

3.15 The successful institution must ensure that residency criteria are met in order for a student to receive the full studentship including stipend. The lead HEI is responsible for carrying out these checks. We recommend that the eligibility check takes place after candidates have been shortlisted and before they are invited to interview.²

3.16 Please note that +3 prospective students must satisfy the research training requirements laid down by ESRC, and therefore the SGSSS must approve all student appointments before they are confirmed. Once you have identified a student you would like to appoint, please have them complete the coversheet and equal opportunities forms and return them to the SGSSS along with a CV before confirming their appointment.

3.17 Please note that all full-time students funded through the Scottish DTP must submit no later than one year after their funding end date.

² The ESRC residency criteria are available here: https://esrc.ukri.org/files/skills-and-careers/studentships/postgraduate-funding-guide/
SECTION 4: SUPERVISION AND PROGRAMME SET-UP

General Information

4.1 To complement the academic supervisors, the student will have access to a PhD Sponsor at Skills Development Scotland. The SDS Sponsor will be a senior member of staff who has knowledge and experience of the PhD topic area and will provide advice and support to the student in relation to the requirements of the PhD topic, opportunities for engagement with the policy community and support to disseminate research outputs. The SDS Sponsor will also attend formal, annual reviews of the PhD with the student and supervisor.

4.2 The SDS PhD Programme Coordinator will also provide a key point of contact for academic supervisors and students and will facilitate mutual support and networking between PhD students and SDS stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the skills policy environment. The SDS Sponsors and PhD Programme Coordinator will work in consultation with academic supervisors and will arrange:

- At least one face-to-face support meeting with the PhD student per annum;
- At least one visit to the student and their supervisor(s) at their academic institution per annum;
- At least one event per annum where all PhD students receiving SDS funding will be invited to present to, and discuss their work with, SDS staff.

4.3 The academic supervisors remain responsible for guiding the research to a successful conclusion, including agreeing the methods, milestones and outputs. Academic supervisors should encourage good communication between the researcher and Skills Development Scotland and help with links with wider academic networks. It is strongly recommended that academic outlets pay particular attention both to the expected outcomes from the research and the timing and availability of data and research results.

4.4 It is expected that students and their academic supervisors will co-operate with the overall scheme aims and activities, and meet reasonable expectations to participate in scheme events and contribute research findings to publications and other outputs.

4.6 All students will be expected to adhere to the standard rules laid out in the ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide.

4.7 All PhD students undertaking these PhDs will be encouraged to apply for Skills Development Scotland internships which may be available during the second or third year of their study. Students may also take up Overseas Institutional Visit funding opportunities offered by the ESRC and apply for other internships during the course of their study with permission from both the academic supervisors and Skills Development Scotland.

4.8 The possibility exists for overseas fieldwork to be included in research proposals where appropriate. Where overseas fieldwork is included in proposals, applicants should follow appropriate ESRC guidelines.

4.9 Please see the below diagram for the SDS Collaborative PhD journey. You can also see example projects and learn more about the SDS Collaborative PhD programme [here](#).
Figure 1: The Student Journey

Please see below the student journey on the SDS Collaborative PhD Programme. In addition to the training and development opportunities students have access to through SDS, they will also be able to access the variety of training opportunities that are run by the SGSSS-DTP, including the annual SGSSS Summer School, the SGSSS internships scheme, and the SGSSS Final Year Conference.
SECTION 5: APPLICATION FORM NOTES

Notes on Completing the Application Form

5.1 Applications will focus on one of the project topics which have been proposed and potential supervisors are free to apply for more than one topic. The topics provide scope for flexibility in terms of shaping the research questions, design and methods. Academics are encouraged to discuss their proposals with Skills Development Scotland. The PhD student will also have considerable freedom to develop their ideas and the approach to the PhD in the course of their study.

5.2 In the application form, applicants are invited to set out their preferred theoretical and methodological approach to the topic. Skills Development Scotland will be interested in relevant findings arising from the student’s work throughout the course of the PhD, however, the main focus of the PhD will be high quality academic work and the application form should reflect this.

5.3 Applicants from any relevant social science discipline (from an SGSSS accredited pathway) are invited to apply for the PhDs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SGSSS-DTP SDS Collaborative Competition Award Marking Framework (2020/21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marking Criteria</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate can demonstrate:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An excellent proposal and scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate can demonstrate:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good and promising proposal but with identifiable weaknesses. Some, but not all, components of the proposal will be problematic, ill-expressed, or show a lack of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 6 | A good proposal with only minor but still identifiable weaknesses. The research question will be clear, the methodology appropriate and clearly presented, and most of the appropriate literature identified. | Supervision arrangements represent a **good** fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes an experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field. The supervision combination meets well the student’s potential training needs and has good plans around advanced training. The destination HEI offers high-quality specialist training. The research fits well with the wider department/school/faculty. |

| 5 | A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature. | The proposed collaboration represents an ideal fit with the proposal, demonstrates significant and well-resourced engagement of the collaborating partner planned throughout the PhD, and provides detailed consideration of ethics and intellectual property rights. |

| 4 | A proposal with one serious weakness or several minor ones, which suggests gaps in knowledge and a weak grasp of the proposed methodology and its suitability. | Supervision arrangements represent an **adequate** fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes an experienced supervisor with some expertise in the field. The supervision combination meets directly the student’s potential training needs and has adequate plans around advanced training. The destination HEI offers good quality specialist training. The research fits with the wider department/school/faculty. |

| 3 | A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature. | The proposed collaboration represents a very good fit with the proposal, demonstrates very good and well-resourced engagement of the collaborating partner planned throughout the PhD and provides detailed consideration of ethics and intellectual property rights. |

| 2 | | |

| 1 | | |
| 2   | A problematic proposal that would need considerable additional work before being fundable. All components of the proposal will require further work and/or demonstrate little or no background or interest in their subject. | The supervision combination meets directly the student’s potential training needs and has adequate plans around advanced training. The destination HEI offers good quality specialist training. The research fits with the wider department/school/faculty. | The proposed collaboration represents an adequate fit with the proposal but fails to demonstrate good engagement of the collaborating partner throughout the PhD and/or provides little detailed consideration of ethics and intellectual property rights. |
| 1   | A problematic proposal that would need considerable additional work before being fundable. All components of the proposal will require further work and/or demonstrate little or no background or interest in their subject. | The proposed collaboration represents a poor fit with the proposal, demonstrates weak or no evidence of the engagement of the collaborating partner throughout the PhD and/or little consideration of ethics and intellectual property rights. |