Applying for an interdisciplinary studentship

Lydia Plowman
Associate Director, SGSSS
Outline

1. The interdisciplinary steer
2. What does ‘interdisciplinary’ mean in this context?
3. Current studentships
4. Writing your proposal
5. Assessment process and timeline
The interdisciplinary steer

• ESRC has provided SGSSS with an additional allocation of studentships known as ‘steer studentships’ which aim to develop specific advanced skills since 2017.

• One of these steers is for interdisciplinary studentships
  ✤ they are supervisor-led, ie the proposal is submitted by the supervisor, not by the student
  ✤ ESRC funds 4 SGSSS interdisciplinary studentships each year

• Each student has one supervisor who is a social scientist who works alongside a supervisor whose research is within another research council remit.

• It’s important to read the guidance available at www.sgsss.ac.uk/studentships/esrc-steers-competition/
What does ‘interdisciplinary’ mean in this context?

• Applications must be genuinely interdisciplinary
• Studentships must be at least 50% social science, but no more than two thirds.
  ❖ disciplinary contributions should be between half ESRC and half other research council(s) and two-thirds ESRC and one-third other research council(s)
## Studentships awarded 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Council remit</th>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Project title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>A realist evaluation of Path for All's <em>Workplace Step Count Challenge</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/AHRC</td>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Innovation, Information &amp; Communication Studies</td>
<td>Living the news: Interactivity and the promise of immersion in transmedial digital journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Social Anthropology</td>
<td>“Do you take sugar?” Value, consumption, and sugar politics in Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/EPSRC</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Computing the face syntax of social communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/AHRC</td>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Moving beyond ‘common sense’ understandings of nature and society in the Scottish Highlands: A study of socio-natural relations and heritage in Wester Ross</td>
</tr>
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### Studentships awarded 2018

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC/ EPSRC</td>
<td>Strathclyde</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>The effects of combined brain stimulation and mirror therapy on movement, daily living and quality of life in stroke survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/AHRC</td>
<td>Strathclyde</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Advancing the state-of-the-art in child development and autism with precise human movement analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC</td>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>Health, Families, Relationships and Demographic Change</td>
<td>How might access to, and engagement with, diverse forms of 'greenspace' support reductions in the use of alcohol and drugs among young people in Scotland?</td>
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## Studentships awarded 2019

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<tr>
<td>ESRC/NERC</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Human Geography, Environment &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>Mining the Anthropocene: Interrogating heritage and nature at Spireslack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/EPSRC</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Making sense of teachers' communities of practice with social and epistemic network analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/NERC/AHRC</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Human Geography, Environment &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>Exploring the social, historical and environmental legacies of steel slag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/NERC</td>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>Human Geography, Environment &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>Water journeys: accessing safe drinking water in Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/BBSRC</td>
<td>SRUC</td>
<td>Human Geography, Environment &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>Farmer’s cattle breeding choices: balancing productivity, sustainability and food security objectives</td>
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## Studentships awarded 2020

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Improving sleep after stroke: a behavioural intervention for treating post-stroke insomnia (ISLES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/BBSRC/NERC/AHRC</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>Human Geography, Environment &amp; Urban Planning</td>
<td>Meat futures: socioeconomic geographies of livestock production and consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Investigating the suitability of neurofeedback to improve post-stroke fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRC/MRC/BBSRC/EPSRC</td>
<td>St Andrews</td>
<td>Health, Families, Relationships and Demographic Change</td>
<td>Development of a Bayesian network approach for analysing interdisciplinary social science and biological data: the case of health inequalities</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Writing your application 1: the basics

Not sure about ESRC disciplines? Check at esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/discipline-classifications/

Other research councils:
- Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
- Medical Research Council (MRC)
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
- Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

SGSSS does not have a quota to meet for specific research councils
Writing your application 2: remit and rationale

- Make a case for why the stated research problem needs an interdisciplinary approach
  - what added value does an interdisciplinary approach bring?
  - this could apply to methods, concepts, theories, bodies of literatures
  - think about the role of interdisciplinarity at different stages
  - what are the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach for impact and KE?
- Be clear about the ways in which the research questions relate to the remits of the relevant research council(s)
Writing your application 3: training

• Outline specific training needs for the interdisciplinary elements of the project and how they will be met

  ✷ what challenges will the interdisciplinary nature of the project present?
  ✷ consider whether it will take longer for a student to get up to speed – learning how to use equipment, familiarisation with new concepts, methods, theories
  ✷ adjust the timescale to take account of possible extra training needs
  ✷ how will the training be distributed across the two (or three, if necessary) supervisors?
  ✷ how will this training prepare the student to work across disciplinary boundaries?
Writing your application 4: being realistic

• The project must be suitable for completion in three years
  ❖ extra time is not available because it’s interdisciplinary
  ❖ provide a detailed and convincing timetable
  ❖ students should adhere to the disciplinary steer throughout the 3 years
  ❖ the proposed project is for a PhD student, not for a research assistant

• What experience of ID research do the supervisors have?
  ❖ have they worked together before?
  ❖ how will supervision be allocated and managed?

• How will you recruit a suitable student?

• How will the research environment support interdisciplinary work?
The process: Expression of Interest

- Expression of Interest (500 words)
  - This should be developed by both supervisors
  1. In 250 words or fewer, please outline the key strengths of the proposed supervisory team including how they will contribute to ensuring that the appointed student would emerge from the PhD with enhanced skills.
  2. In no more than 250 words and using the ESRC Guidance on Steers and Targets, describe how the proposed approach and supervisory team meet the relevant steer.
  - Make sure that you address ethics.

- Reviewed by members of the SGSSS directorate; one external checks that the steer criteria have been met
  - we avoid reviewers considering applications from their own HEI

- 12 go through to full proposal
  - 4 of these will typically be selected for funding
The process: full proposal

- Abstract - 300 words
- Impact summary - 250 words
- Fit with interdisciplinary steer - 250 words
- Feasibility of project being completed in three years - 250 words
- Case for support – 2250 words (exc references)
- Risk assessment – 250 words
- Strengths of supervisory team – 250 words
The process: review

- Three external peer reviewers: one will be assigned to cover the remit of the additional research council (eg AHRC, EPSRC)

- Panel meeting
  - Directorate, Deans’ Network & expert reviewers
  - 4 interdisciplinary steer studentships awarded
Timeline

9 October 2020 at 12pm
Expression of Interest deadline

6 November 2020
Shortlisted candidates invited to complete full application

4 December 2020 at 12pm
Deadline for full applications

25 January 2021
Award outcomes communicated to applicants

12 February 2021
Student recruitment period begins

28 May 2021
Deadline to notify SGSSS of preferred candidate
More information: www.sgssss.ac.uk/