



SCOTTISH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (SGSSS)

STUDENT-LED OPEN COMPETITION 2020/21

APPLICANT GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS

Contents

1.	Overview	2
1.1	Before Applying.....	2
1.2	Eligibility	2
1.3	Length of Award.....	3
1.4	Masters Programmes.....	3
1.5	Supervision.....	4
1.6	Interdisciplinary Proposals.....	4
1.7	Funding Arrangements.....	4
2.	Applications	6
2.1	Overview of the Application Submission Process.....	6
2.2	Stage 1 Application Process	6
2.3	Stage 2 Application Process	7
2.4	Competition Stages and Timeline	8
3.	Supervisor Statement of Support	10
4.	Assessment Framework.....	11
5.	Example Applications.....	12

The closing date for Stage 1 applications is **Thursday, 7 January 2020 at 5pm**. The closing date will be strictly adhered to.

All applications must be submitted via the SGSSS application platform, [GradHub](#).

For the full Student-led Open Competition timeline, please click [here](#).

1. Overview

This document will provide the application guidance required to submit a Student-led Open Competition application and should be read in full, prior to submitting an application.

The studentship awards made through the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS-DTP) Student-led Open Competition are co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council ([ESRC](#)) and partner universities (institutions) and are governed by the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

The SGSSS is not a University, but rather a partnership of 16 institutions in Scotland¹, of which 12 are accredited to receive ESRC funding across 15 pathways. A pathway is analogous to a subject area/discipline. Not all 12 institutions are accredited for all 15 pathways. A comprehensive list of the institutions and the pathways in which they are accredited can be found on the SGSSS website [here](#).

Each pathway has a designated representative at each institution within the pathway (Pathway Rep). Before applying to the Student-led Open Competition we ask that you contact the relevant Pathway Rep, as well as your potential PhD supervisor(s). You should discuss your research proposal with them and inform them that you wish to apply for an ESRC studentship via SGSSS. **Please note, you should have engaged with your proposed supervisor(s) before applying to the Open Competition.**

You may apply for an ESRC studentship through only **one** of the 12 SGSSS institutions however; you may apply to multiple pathways within that one institution. For example, you may apply to the *Education* pathway at Aberdeen and the *Human Geography, Environment and Urban Planning* pathway at Aberdeen; but not the *Education* pathway at Aberdeen and the *Human Geography, Environment and Urban Planning* pathway at Dundee. If you apply to more than one pathway within an institution then you must complete a separate application for each pathway.

1.1 Before Applying

Before applying, even if you have the support and approval of a supervisor, we would ask you to consult the eligibility criteria in order to ensure that you are eligible to receive funding from the ESRC. Please see section 1.2 below for full details.

Before you start an ESRC funded studentship, you must have secured an unconditional offer from the institution of your choice. Please note, SGSSS has no role in this process and each institution will have different application processes, including when you need to secure your institutional offer. In some cases, you will have to have secured a conditional offer prior to applying for an ESRC award, whereas in other institutions you can secure an offer once you have been awarded a funded studentship. It is your responsibility to find out what the process is within your selected institution.

1.2 Eligibility

From October 2020, the eligibility criteria for ESRC funding has changed for studentships commencing in the 2021/22 academic year.

As per [guidance](#) published by UKRI in October 2020, a minimum of 70% of all studentships awarded by SGSSS will be made to *home* students, while a maximum of 30% of all studentships awarded can be made to *international* students. Please note, it is not a requirement for 30% of studentships to be awarded to international students, as the quality of applications will always remain the primary assessment criterion during the Competition.

¹ See [here](#) for our member institutions.

Residential Criteria

To be classed as a home student, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a UK national (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have settled status, or
- Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have indefinite leave to remain or enter.

If you do not meet the criteria above, you will be classed as an international student.

To establish if you would be classed as a home student, please see pages 4 and 5 of the UKRI eligibility guidance [here](#).

Before applying, international students should make sure to read section 1.7 (Funding Arrangements) closely.

1.3 Length of Award

The length of award depends on the extent to which you meet core methods training requirements set out by ESRC. If you are applying for a +3 studentship, you must have already met the minimum ESRC training requirements. If not then you may choose to apply for a 1+3 award instead. Please see [here](#) for guidance in determining which is the appropriate length of award for you. Please also discuss this with your supervisor(s) and your Pathway Rep before applying.

Please note, SGSSS will also conduct an audit of the training needs of all final applicants – this means in some circumstances we may determine a fractional award, such as a 3.3² or a 3.5³, is required where we identify that you have some, but not all, of the core methods training required by ESRC.

If a first year student (or part-time equivalent) is self-funding their PhD, or they are in receipt of financial support not in excess of an ESRC award⁴, they can apply for ESRC funding from their second year, i.e. they must be in their first year when applying. The precise length of award will be determined by SGSSS based on the stage of progress (but may be +2 or +3).

Part-time awards are permitted and the funding and award lengths are pro-rated accordingly, in accordance with the [ESRC funding guidance](#).

1.4 Masters Programmes

Students applying for a 1+3 award within an institution which does not offer an [ESRC accredited Masters programme](#) on the desired Pathway, are required to undertake their Masters in another Pathway eligible institution (within the SGSSS-DTP) before transferring to their 'home' institution for the PhD programme. If this applies to you, then you must upload a [Masters Arrangement Form](#), completed in conjunction with the relevant SGSSS [Deans of Graduate Studies Network](#) representative at the institution where the Masters will be undertaken. Students should work with their Pathway Rep and supervisor(s) to facilitate the completion of the Masters Arrangement Form.

² Three years and three months.

³ Three years and six months.

⁴ See page 10 and 11 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) for details on financial support not in excess of an ESRC award.

1.5 Supervision

You must have support from a first supervisor **before you apply** to this competition.

Students must be the lead authors of submitted proposals with guidance provided by the proposed supervisory team. Proposals should not be submitted that have been led or written by a supervisor.

First supervisors must be located at the institution to which you are applying; however, a second supervisor/joint supervisor may be attached to the project from any of the 16 partner institutions that form the SGSSS, either with or without pathway recognition. If you are proposing a jointly supervised project between two institutions, the Supervisor Statement of Support (see section 3) should be jointly written by both supervisors who should refer to the explicit benefits of the proposed cross-institutional arrangement. If you are interested in proposing such an arrangement please discuss this with your Pathway Rep as soon as possible.

1.6 Interdisciplinary Proposals

The ESRC welcomes interdisciplinary studentships, as many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and other areas of research. For that reason, we ask you to indicate (within the relevant section of the application form) whether your proposed research is deemed interdisciplinary, or not. To meet the criteria for this label, the proposed research should include substantive interaction between relevant disciplines and incorporate training that is not constrained to one disciplinary approach. Please discuss this with your supervisor and Pathway Rep where relevant and for guidance if required. Please also specify which other research council Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) your proposed work aligns to and what additional training would be offered by this DTP. For guidance on the ESRC requirements for interdisciplinary awards, please see [here](#) (page 2).

1.7 Funding Arrangements

Home Students

For home students, the SGSSS-DTP funding operates within the standard ESRC studentship package:

1. Tuition Fees;
2. Maintenance stipend;
3. Research Training Support Grant (RTSG);
4. Overseas fieldwork support (where applicable to the student's project).

The ESRC studentship packages for years 2021/22 onwards are*:

Funding Type	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Stipend	£15,582	£15,886	£16,203
Tuition Fees	£4,492	£4,579	£4,670
RTSG	£750	£750	£750
Overseas Fieldwork (if applicable)	£450	£450	£450

* These are approximations based on the UK Government's GDP deflators.

Please Note: From 2019/20, each SGSSS studentship is co-funded by the student's home institution (SGSSS-DTP institutions) for a minimum of one-third (33%). This co-funding agreement is already in place and no action is required by students to facilitate this.

International Students

The funding arrangements for international students are primarily the same as that of home students, i.e. you are eligible for the full ESRC studentship package, with the exception that some institutions require international students to pay the difference between home and international tuition fees (top up fees). This is detailed in Table 1 below:

Institution	International Students required to pay Top Up Fees (Masters and PhD)
University of Aberdeen	No
University of Dundee	No
University of Edinburgh	No
Edinburgh Napier University	No
University of Glasgow	No
Glasgow Caledonian University	No
Heriot Watt University	No
Queen Margaret University	No
Scotland's Rural University College	No
University of St Andrews	No
University of Stirling	No ⁵
University of Strathclyde	No

Please Note: International tuition fees are significantly higher than the home fee rate. As such, please see the institutional website you are planning to apply to for the current international fee rate before you submit your application to SGSSS.

⁵ Whilst fee waivers will be offered, this will be up to an internal institutional cap of 30%. Applicants are strongly advised to seek confirmation of the funding position from the University of Stirling directly by contacting the HEI Admin Lead at ias@stir.ac.uk.

2. Applications

2.1 Overview of the Application Submission Process

A high-level process for applicants submitting an application for the Student-led Open Competition is below. For more details on the actual documents required for upload, please see sections 2.2 and 2.3 below.

1. Register for [GradHub](#) as a prospective student.
2. **Stage 1 Application:**
 - 2.1. Click [here](#) to access the *ESRC Open Competition Application Portal 2020/21* via GradHub.
 - 2.2. Next, complete the *ESRC Open Competition Eligibility Check* section.
 - 2.3. Next, complete the *Institution* section.
 - 2.4. Next, input the contact details for your *First Reference request* so SGSSS can contact them (this happens automatically once you submit your referee's details). Your *Reference 1* (as it is called) can be unique for each pathway application you submit; for example, you may have a different first supervisor for your project depending on the pathway you are applying to.
 - 2.5. Next, input the contact details for your *Second Reference request* so SGSSS can contact them (this happens automatically once you submit your referee's details). Your *Reference 2* (as it is called) will be the same for all applications you submit, regardless of the pathway. This too can be provided by a member of your supervisory team.
 - 2.6. Next, upload your completed Application Form, located [here](#). You will also need to upload your existing transcripts (where available) and your CV.
3. **Stage 2 Applications:**
 - 3.1. Once the initial review stage is complete (by 1 February 2021), applicants will be notified if they have been shortlisted or not.
 - 3.2. Shortlisted applicants will then be invited to upload a *Supervisor Statement of Support* and make any final minor amendments to their applications before the deadline of 5pm on 11 February 2021.

There are two primary deadlines that you need to be aware of:

- Thursday, 7 January 2021 at 5pm: this is the deadline for Stage 1 Applications
Please Note: As a manual process is required to approve GradHub accounts, applicants must have created their GradHub account by 9am on Wednesday, 6 January 2021 (to allow the SGSSS team to approve new accounts).
- Thursday, 11 February 2021 at 5pm: this is the deadline for Stage 2 Applications (shortlisted candidates only).

Please Note: Late applications, at both stages, will not be considered.

2.2 Stage 1 Application Process

Both the [GradHub](#) registration and Stage 1 Application submission must be completed by Thursday, 7 January 2021. Applications can be submitted at any point from the competition opening date, 5 November 2020, until the deadline, 5pm on 7 January 2021.

The GradHub registration process must be completed in a single sitting. You will not be able to save parts of the registration form and return to it later. Registration is only required once, even if you plan to apply to more than one pathway. GradHub permits a single user to submit multiple applications; these can be to multiple pathways but must be within the same institution.

To register on GradHub:

- Go to [GradHub](#) and click 'New User' and register as a 'Prospective Student';
- You will then be asked to enter your personal details and complete our Equal Opportunities Monitoring data;
- SGSSS will then approve your GradHub account (between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday), at which point you will receive an email asking you to confirm your email address. It is important that you do this, as you will not receive communications regarding the status of your application(s) if not.

To apply:

Once your GradHub account has been approved by SGSSS you will then be able to start a Stage 1 application. As part of this process, you will need to have the following details:

- Information regarding nationality, residency and visas;
- Institution and pathway(s) to which you are applying.

You will also be required to upload the following as part of your application submission, preferably as PDF documents, however Word documents will be accepted if required.

1. [Application Form](#) (which includes a lay summary, section on preparedness and your research proposal).
2. CV (academic where applicable).
3. All relevant Undergraduate and Masters level degree transcripts (and translations, if not originally in English) – provisional transcripts are sufficient if you are yet to complete your degree.
4. Contact details for two references, both provided as part of your Stage 1 application:
 - 4.1. [Reference 1](#)
This should be from an academic familiar with your work (including a member of your proposed supervisory team) unless you have been out of academia for more than 5 years, in which case a work reference is acceptable. If you are applying to more than one pathway then you can opt to use different referees as referee 1 for each pathway application.
 - 4.2. [Reference 2](#)
This should be from an academic unless you have been out of academia for more than 5 years. This reference will be the same for all pathway applications submitted. Like Reference 1, a member of your supervisory team can provide this reference.
5. Details of any overseas fieldwork you propose to undertake during your research (advised within the Application Form).
6. Details of any difficult language training you propose to undertake during your research (advised within the Application Form).

Please Note: You should seek prior permission for SGSSS to contact your referees in advance, as automatic requests will immediately be sent via GradHub once you submit your referee's contact details. Both referees will be asked to return their references (a template is provided by SGSSS) directly to your institution for upload to your application portal on GradHub. Once a reference has been attached to your application portal, you will be notified via email automatically. As this is a manual process, there may be a short delay between your institution receiving a reference and the reference being uploaded to your application portal. That being said however, it is your responsibility to ensure your referees complete and return all references before the deadline of 7 January 2021.

2.3 Stage 2 Application Process

If you have been shortlisted you will be invited to submit a Stage 2 application on 1 February 2021. From this date you will have until 5pm on Thursday, 11 February to complete your Stage 2 application. All that

is required at this stage is to upload your Supervisor Statement of Support and to make any final, minor amendments to your Stage 1 application.

1. Supervisor Statement of Support – this is a statement from your prospective first supervisor. If a cross-institutional supervision arrangement is being proposed then the statement should be jointly written and signed. Full details of what is required can be found within section 3 below).

After the 11 February 2021 deadline, SGSSS will work to select the best students who have applied to study within each Pathway. For details on the various competition review stages and the dates for each review stage, please see the Competition Stages and Timeline section below.

2.4 Competition Stages and Timeline

There are four rigorous review stages during the Student-led Open Competition. You will be updated after each relevant review stage until either you are awarded a studentship or your application is unsuccessful. To view these dates, please see [here](#).

1. HEI Review Stage (5 November 2020 to 16 February 2021)

This stage is when institutions shortlist Stage 1 applications, resulting in students being invited to submit a Stage 2 application. Each institution can nominate four applications per pathway for which it is eligible. Of the four applications, up to two may be international applicants.

2. Pathway Review Stage (17 February to 11 March 2021)

This stage is when pathways (made up of the relevant Pathway Reps from different institutions) shortlist Stage 2 applications. Each pathway can nominate six applications per accredited pathway. Of the six applications, up to two may be international applicants.

3. Hub Review Stage (12 February to 6 April 2021)

This stage is when our three Hubs⁶ (each Hub is made up of five relevant pathways) nominate 45 applications (15 per Hub) from the nominated applications at the Pathway Review Stage. Each Hub can nominate five international applicants out of their 15 nominations.

4. Global Panel Review Stage (7 April to 13 May 2021)

This stage is when a final review panel consisting of Deans and members of the SGSSS Directorate meet to make the final award decisions. In 2020/21, approx. 27 applications, of the nominated 45 applications, will be funded. A maximum of eight awards to international students can be made. On 13 May, the outcome of the competition will be announced to applicants.

⁶ See [here](#) for details of our three Hubs.

Dates to note are:



For the full competition timeline, please see [here](#).

Unsuccessful candidates will be informed if they have not progressed to the next review stage of the competition at the end of the previous review stage.

We expect decisions on who has been selected to receive studentships (and, if relevant, who is being held on a reserve list) to be decided and communicated by Thursday, 13 May 2021.

If you have any queries regarding the application process, please email team@sgsss.ac.uk.

3. Supervisor Statement of Support

All applicants shortlisted to submit a Stage 2 application are required to submit a Supervisor Statement of Support provided by their prospective supervisor(s). The Supervisor Statement of Support is a key component of the application and of the assessment process. We suggest supervisors refer to the [Open Competition Guidance for Supervisors](#) (specifically the Assessment Framework) when writing their statement of support, as the purpose of this statement is primarily to detail the ways in which you will fit within your institution's overarching research environment (i.e. within the relevant department). In particular, we are looking for clarification on how the proposed supervisory team will provide you with an outstanding PhD experience that engages with appropriate advanced training opportunities.

If you are shortlisted, i.e. invited to submit a Stage 2 application, you will need to upload the Supervisor Statement of Support as part of your Stage 2 application by **5pm on Thursday, 11 February**. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Supervisor statements should follow the style and content guidance provided below:

Style Guide

- The statement must be in either PDF or Word format.
- The statement must display the letterhead of the supervisor's home institution.
- The statement must clearly state the name and position of the supervisor(s).
- The statement must contain, as a subject line, the name of the student that the reference concerns (e.g. Amna Singh), the academic discipline (e.g. Human Geography), and the host institution (e.g. University of Glasgow).
- Statements should not exceed two sides of A4.

Content Guide (statements should include all of the below)

- Proposed supervisory arrangements including second supervisor(s) and their relevance to the project, as well as contingency supervisory arrangements. Where the supervisory team is cross-institutional, the added benefits to the student and their proposed research should be detailed. Please note, the statement should be co-written and signed by both supervisors.
- A consideration of the research environment at the host institution, with specific reference to the fit between the department and the proposed topic of research.
- Detail of the potential research training courses/programmes offered by the host institution that would benefit the applicant; consideration of broader advanced training that will likely be required including, but not limited to, that provided by SGSSS.
- An assessment of the potential impact of the proposed research and its significance to the academic discipline(s) concerned.
- Details of the supervisory team's experience of supervision. This should include the number of students supervised by each supervisor (including ongoing supervision) and their completion rates where applicable, i.e. we would like to know the proportion of students who have completed within four years (or equivalent for part-time students). In addition, we are interested to know of any specific research experience relevant to the student's proposed project, including any particular methodological experience or training.
- Confirmation that the proposal is the applicant's own work, although you may have provided advice on the content.
- Confirmation that the first supervisor has attended supervisory training within their institution within the last 5 years.

4. Assessment Framework

1. To view the Student-led Open Competition Award Assessment Framework for +3 Awards (2020/21), click [here](#).
2. To view the Student-led Open Competition Award Assessment Framework for 1+3 Awards (2020/21), click [here](#).

5. Example Applications

Please see the two examples below for what makes a good Student-led Open Competition application.

For each, we have included the full application form (marginally different to the 2020/21 form) and the Supervisor Statement of Support, both anonymised.

1. PhD title: Monetary policy rules under model uncertainty

Key Information

- **Institution:** University of Strathclyde
- **Pathway:** Economics
- **Hub:** Economies, Mind and Technologies

Click [here](#) to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.

2. PhD title: Pro-environmental Voluntary Simplicity: the Lived Experience within Family and Domestic Life

Key Information

- **Institution:** University of Edinburgh
- **Pathway:** Sociology
- **Hub:** Society and Welfare

Click [here](#) to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.