Guidance for Students applying for an ESRC Studentship through the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science 2019

INTRODUCTION

You should be reading this because you wish to apply for an ESRC studentship through the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science and Doctoral Training Partnership. It is important for you to understand how we work with Universities across Scotland before reading the guidance on the process itself. For clarity, throughout the rest of this document the Scottish Graduate School will be referred to as the SGSSS.

The first thing to understand is that the SGSSS is not a University. We work with 16 Universities in Scotland, of which 12 are accredited to receive ESRC funding across 15 pathways. A pathway is analogous to a subject area. Not all 12 Universities are accredited for all 15 pathways. A comprehensive list of the Universities and the pathways in which they are accredited can be found on the SGSSS website.

Each pathway has a designated representative at each University within the pathway. The first step on the road to becoming an ESRC-funded PhD student is thus to make contact with that representative, as well as with 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.

Please note that you may apply for an ESRC studentship through only one of the 12 SGSSS Universities but you may apply to multiple pathways within that one University. For example, you may apply to the Economics pathway at Aberdeen *and* the Human Geography, Environment Climate Change & Energy, Urban Planning pathway at Aberdeen; but not the Economics pathway at Aberdeen *and* the Human Geography, Environment Climate Change & Energy, Urban Planning pathway at Dundee. If you apply to more than one pathway within an institution then you must complete one application per pathway.

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. The criteria are outlined in Annex 1 of the ESRC's Postgraduate Funding Guidelines.

Before you *start* an ESRC funded studentship you must have secured an unconditional offer from the institution of your choice. Please note that SGSSS has no role in that 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.

ELIGIBILITY AND ENHANCED STIPENDS

ESRC student eligibility criteria can be found [here](#)

Residential eligibility has been partially waived for applicants to the economics pathway such that only 35% of offers made through this pathway can go to EU or international students. The expectation from the ESRC is that where awards go to international students then the difference between home and international fees is waived. Because of the 35% cap on the residential eligibility waiver there is no guarantee that the best ranked students in this category will secure an award.

No enhanced stipends will be available from 2019 onward.

LENGTH OF AWARD
The length of award depends on the extent to which you meet core methods training requirements. Students applying for a +3 studentship must meet the minimum ESRC training requirements. If you do not meet these requirements then you may choose to apply for a 1+3. Please see [here](#) for guidance in determining which is the appropriate length of award for you – please note that this should be discussed with your supervisors and your pathway representative. SGSSS will conduct an audit of the training needs of all applicants – this means that we will sometimes given a fractional award (such as a 3.3 or a 3.5) where we identify that you have some but not all of the required methods training.

SUPERVISION
You must have support from a first supervisor at this stage in order to proceed to application. Students must be the lead authors of submitted proposals with guidance provided by the proposed supervisor. **Proposals should not be submitted that have been led or authored by a research supervisor.**

PhD Supervision across Institutions
The SGSSS wishes to encourage pathways, supervisors and applicants to consider supervisory arrangements across the 16 institutions of the SGSSS if appropriate to the particular student project, and with the support of both proposed supervisors. This will usually be within pathways but across institutions though we do not wish to rule out cross- pathway supervision if this is clearly in the interests of the student's project. All SGSSS applications for studentships *must* have the main proposed supervisor based at a recognised SGSSS pathway institution. However, a second supervisor may be attached to the project from a second institution either with or without pathway recognition. If you are interested in proposing such an arrangement please discuss this with your Pathway Representative as soon as possible. If proposing a jointly supervised project between two institutions, then the supervisor's statement of support should be jointly written by both supervisors who should refer to the explicit benefit of the proposed cross-institutional arrangements.

We are aware that some research proposals will be situated on the edge of social science and other disciplines and are thus planning to liaise with other Doctoral Training Partnerships in Scotland. While we welcome such applications they should be appropriately tailored for each Graduate School with the linkages between disciplines made clear. Students should indicate if

they are applying to other Doctoral Training Partnerships when registering their application.

Students eligible for a 1+3 award, wishing to study in institutions without an ESRC accredited Masters program, may require to complete their Masters in another accredited institution (within SGSSS-DTP) before completing their PhD program at their chosen university. If this is the case then the applicant must upload a letter of support from the Deans' representative at the institution where the Masters will be undertaken using the [template](#) provided.
Supervisors and students should work with their pathway representative to facilitate this.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PROPOSALS
The ESRC welcomes interdisciplinary studentships since many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences, and between the social sciences and other areas of research. For that reason we ask you to indicate whether your proposed research is deemed interdisciplinary. To meet the criteria for this label (please see guidance [here](#)), the proposed research should include substantive interaction between relevant disciplines and incorporate training that is not constrained to one disciplinary approach approach. **Please discuss this with your supervisor and pathway representative where relevant** and, if appropriate, indicate your proposal's potential applicability to be considered as interdisciplinary research here. Please specify which other research council Doctoral Training Partnership your proposed work aligns with and, within which, training might be sought. You should read closely the ESRC guidance on requirements for interdisciplinary awards.

2. APPLYING FOR AN ESRC STUDENTSHIP

The process of applying for an ESRC studentship has the following stages:

a. **Registration** on GradHub (https://gradhub.sgsss.ac.uk)
b. **Application Stage 1** – applicants must upload **a completed application form, existing transcripts where available and CV** to GradHub. Applicants must provide **contact details for one referee** - this reference should be from an academic unless you have been out of academia for more than 5 years. The referee will be contacted automatically via GradHub for a reference.

   n.b. the reference at this stage **cannot** be from the proposed supervisor
   The referee will be asked to return the reference directly to the institution's HEI Admin Lead (contact details will be provided to the referee).
   It is vital that you upload the contact details in good time for the referee to be contacted and reference to be submitted before the deadline.

c. **Application Stage 2** - **shortlisted candidates only** will be invited to add a **supervisor's statement and contact details for a second referee** before their application is progressed to the next stage (this second reference may be from the proposed supervisor). Shortlisted candidates will have the opportunity to revise their application up until the Stage 2 deadline.

n.b The referee will be contacted automatically via GradHub for a reference and asked to return the reference directly to the institution's HEI Admin Lead (contact details will be provided to the referee).

It is vital that you contact your referee as soon as possible **before the 11th January deadline** and let them know that they will be expected to provide a reference as soon as requested to do so and **no later than 11th January**. Guidance and templates for referees can be found at https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/studentships/open-competition/

We would encourage you to read the guidance below in full before beginning your application.

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

- *12 noon, Friday, 11 January 2019*: this is the deadline for **Application Stage 1**

  n.b. institutions may have their own earlier internal deadlines. You must check this with the institution in advance.

- *12 noon, Thursday, 7 February 2019*: this is the deadline for **Application Stage 2** *(shortlisted candidates only).*

The SGSSS cannot consider students who have not registered and completed Application Stage 1 by 12 noon, Friday, 11 January 2019.

A. **FIRST STAGE:**
Registration and Application Stage 1 (MUST BE COMPLETED BY Friday 11 January 2019) – please note that applications can be submitted at any point from the competition going live up until the deadline.

Please note that the 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. Also note that **you need to register only once, even if you plan to apply to more than one pathway**. GradHub permits a single user to submit multiple applications, these can be in across more than one pathway but **must** be within the same institution.

To register:

1. Go to GradHub and click 'New User' and register as a 'Prospective Student'.
2. You will then be asked to enter your personal details and complete Equal Opportunities Monitoring data.

To apply:

You will then be able to start an application form for the SGSSS Open Competition. As part of this process you will need to have the following details:

- Information regarding nationality, residency and visas;

- University and pathway(s) to which you are applying
- Referee and supervisor contact details and permission to contact

You will also be required to upload the following:

- Completed application form (one per pathway)
- Existing transcripts (where available)
  Degree transcripts (and translation, if not originally in English) – a provisional transcript is sufficient if you have yet to complete your degree. Please create a pdf of all of your transcripts to upload.
- CV
- Contact details for a referee (this reference should be from an academic unless you have been out of academia for more than 5 years) – the referee **may not** be the proposed supervisor
  n.b. the referee will be contacted directly via GradHub and asked to return the reference directly to the institution's HEI Admin Lead. Applicants will be notified through GradHub as soon as the reference has been attached to their application.
- Details of any overseas fieldwork and difficult language training you propose to undertake during your research.

B. SECOND STAGE:
Shortlisted applicants only (MUST BE COMPLETED BY 12 noon, Thursday 7 February 2019)

- Application form – please note that your initial application may be revised between notification of progression to the second stage and the second stage deadline.
- Supporting statement from your prospective supervisor(s). Please refer your supervisor to the SGSSS guidance note on Supervisor's Statements for details about the information that should be included. Your application will be strengthened through adherence to this guidance.
- Additional referee details – this **may** be from the proposed supervisor
  n.b. the HEI Admin Lead at your proposed institution will monitor all applications to this competition at institutional level. If you are successful in progressing to this stage, as before, the HEI Admin Lead will upload your reference and attach it to your application. Applicants will be notified through GradHub as soon as the reference has been attached to their application.

3. AFTER SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

After the **7th February 2019** deadline, Universities and the SGSSS will work together to select the best students who have applied to study within each pathway.

There are several rigorous review stages during which further shortlisting is undertaken before final awards are made. These are as follows:

Pathway Review period – 7 February to 25 February 2019
Hub Review period – 25 February to 28 March 2019
Global Review period – 28 March to 24 April 2019

Unsuccessful candidates will be informed if they have not progressed to the next stage at the end of each period.

We expect decisions on who has been selected to receive studentships (and who is being held on a reserve list) to be made and communicated by no later than **1 May 2019**. The SGSSS office is unable to provide any information about the status of your application before this date. We appreciate that this period can be an anxious one and the Universities and the SGSSS work as quickly as possible to allocate studentships in a rigorous way that rewards the highest quality applicants.

Please note that throughout this process your first point of contact should be your pathway representative. Applicants should be kept informed by the SGSSS regarding the status of their applications. However, if you are unsuccessful in your application, SGSSS is not able to offer you feedback, but your pathway representative will be able to discuss the process with you.

November 2018

SGSSS-DTP Open Competition Award Marking Framework (2019) Assessment for +3 Awards

SGSSS -DTP Open Competition Award Marking Framework (2019)
Assessment for +3 Awards (note: pathways must be convinced that the candidate has met the training requirements for their pathway and are expected to go back to candidates that have applied for +3 and have not acquired at least 40 credits in the required core methods)

	Candidate Record (OUT OF 10) (Please note that the descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so)	Research Proposal (OUT OF 10) (Please note that the descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so)	Supervision & Training (OUT OF 5)
Marking Criteria	**Candidate can demonstrate:** The equivalent of a first class degree AND/OR an already achieved distinction at Masters level OR strong and relevant professional experience (All of the above must meet the ESRC training requirements), AND an excellent degree of preparedness for PhD study **Plus**	**Candidate can demonstrate:** An excellent proposal scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed. **Plus**	
10	Two exceptional references in which student is identified, for example, as amongst the very best ever encountered in terms of abilities and potential	Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components and fulfils criteria 7-9 below	
9	As (8), but with one clearly exceptional reference in which student is identified, for example, as amongst best ever encountered in terms of abilities and potential	Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically and fulfils criteria 7 and 8 below	

	References	Proposal	Supervision
8	Two very strong references in which student is, for example, singled out as amongst the best of a peer group encountered in terms of abilities and potential	Proposal contains clear awareness of the potential impact of the research and fulfils criterion 7 below	
7	Two strong references in which student potential is communicated with clear examples	A well-defined proposal with researchable questions, appropriately identified sources, an awareness of the theoretical and empirical background to the research and an appropriate methodology. The proposal should display an awareness of the research for economic and societal relevance.	
	Candidate can demonstrate: The equivalent of a 2:1 degree AND/OR an already achieved 60+ average at Masters level OR relevant professional experience (All of the above must meet the ESRC training requirements), AND a good/very good degree of preparedness for PhD study Plus	Candidate can demonstrate: 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. Plus	
6	Both references offer glimpses of strong potential but with little substance and few examples.	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.	
5	Two minimally satisfactory references which make it clear student is capable of conducting research but little more.	A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature.	Supervision arrangements represent a near-perfect 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 directly the student's training needs. The destination HEI offers high-quality specialist training. The research fits well with the wider department/school/faculty.

4	A mixture of weak and satisfactory references which leave questions to student's suitability to conduct research.	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 a very good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The lead supervisor is an experienced supervisor with a strong reputation for research in this field, and the combination of supervisors offers the student good training in the field. There is provision of advanced and specialist training and a broadly supportive research environment at the destination HEI.
3	Two weak references in which student potential is not communicated.	A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature.	Supervision arrangements represent a good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The lead supervisor will be an expert in the field and the combination of supervisors will offer good support to the student. The HEI offers good general support and advanced training for the student.
2	The equivalent of EITHER a 2:2 degree AND an already achieved pass at Masters level (average mark of 50) which does not necessarily meet the ESRC training requirements AND clear evidence of additional experience or training that would bring the candidate up to the required level DTP would be unlikely to consider applicants with academic scores below these levels.	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.	Supervision arrangements are appropriate and the supervisor has experience in the area of the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. . The supervisory team offers good general support and the HEI offers some advanced training for the student.
1	The equivalent of EITHER a 2:2 degree AND an already achieved pass at Masters level (average mark of 50) which does not necessarily meet the ESRC training requirements AND clear evidence of additional experience or training that would bring the candidate up to the required level DTP would be unlikely to consider applicants with academic scores below these levels.	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.	Supervision arrangements and support offered by the HEI meet the threshold for ESRC recognised training on this pathway. Note: supervision arrangements below this threshold do not meet the ESRC training requirements and students should not be offered DTP funding on this basis.

SGSSS-DTP Open Competition Award Marking Framework (2019) Assessment for 1+3 Awards

SGSSS -DTP Open Competition Award Marking Framework (2019)
Assessment for 1+3 Awards

	Candidate Record (OUT OF 10) (Please note that the descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so)	**Research Proposal (OUT OF 10)** (Please note that the descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so)	**Supervision & Training (OUT OF 5)**
Marking Criteria	**Candidate can demonstrate:** The achievement or expectation of a first class degree or equivalent AND/OR a Master's degree which does not meet the ESRC training requirements **Plus**	**Candidate can demonstrate:** An excellent proposal scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed. **Plus**	
10	Two exceptional references in which student is identified, for example, as amongst the very best ever encountered in terms of abilities and potential	Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components and fulfils criteria 7-9 below	
9	As (8), but with one clearly exceptional reference in which student is identified, for example, as amongst best ever encountered in terms of abilities and potential	Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically and fulfils criteria 7 and 8 below	
8	Two very strong references in which student is, for example, singled out as amongst the best of a peer group encountered in terms of abilities and potential	Proposal contains clear awareness of the potential impact of the research and fulfils criterion 7 below	
7	Two strong references in which student potential is communicated with clear examples.	A well-defined proposal with researchable questions, appropriately identified sources, an awareness of the theoretical and empirical background to the research and an appropriate methodology. The proposal should display an awareness of	

		the research for economic and societal relevance.	
	Candidate can demonstrate: The equivalent of a 2:1 degree AND/OR an already achieved Masters which does not meet the ESRC training requirements Plus	Candidate can demonstrate: 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. Plus	
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Date	SGSSS Student-led Open Competition stages
	STAGE ONE
October	Announcement of Competition - open for entries from November
November	Applicants can access GradHub to register, upload Equal Opportunities Data and complete application Stage 1
November to Friday, 11 January	Each institution's HEI Admin Lead will decline any applications that do not meet their institutional criteria - the candidate will be informed through GradHub
Friday, 11 January	Deadline for Stage 1 applications on GradHub
11 January till 25 January	HEI Admins will verify applicants on GradHub and decline any outstanding eligible students. Institutions review and nominate up to 4 candidates per pathway.
Friday, 25 January	Deadline for institutions to nominate candidates to go forward to the next stage
Monday, 28 January	Email to approved applicants reminding them of final closing date for uploading final applications along with supervisor statement
Thursday, 7 February	Applicants to upload final versions of their applications along with their supervisor statement by this date – 12 noon
	STAGE TWO
Thursday 7 February – Monday 25 February	Pathway Review stage Unsuccessful applicants at this stage will be notified through GradHub **after** 25 February.
	STAGE THREE
Monday 25 February – 28 March	Hub review stage Unsuccessful applicants at this stage will be notified through GradHub **after** 28 March.
	STAGE FOUR
28 March – 24 April	Global Panel review stage
Wednesday 24 April	Global panel meets to make final recommendations on rankings and awards
1 May	SGSSS-DTP will communicate with all candidates on the outcome of the competitions by Wed 1 May