Guidance for Pathways
2020 Student Led Open Competition

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this guidance document is to set out the process through which ESRC Student Led Open Competition Awards will be made in 2020.

Please note that this guidance should not be read in isolation. It is being issued by the SGSSS-DTP in parallel to guidance on the content of Supervisors’ Statements of Support, References, and a guidance note for students applying for an ESRC studentship including guidance on whether applications meet the criteria for ESRC steers (Guidance on Steers and Targets). We also ask that you share this guidance with all prospective supervisors, in particular stressing that their role should be as support, not lead, in the development of a research proposal.

The Collaborative Competition, the Skills Development Scotland Collaborative Competition, and the ‘Steers’ Competition continue to run as supervisor led competitions and have separate guidance and processes. Proposals submitted to these competitions should not be submitted to the student-led competition.

1. THE PROCESS
This section details the process for Pathways. The Guidance for Students details specifically what materials and documents are required to apply for a studentship. Pathway Representatives and Convenors should familiarise themselves with this guidance and direct students to it. A further detailed timetable at the end of this document sets out key dates.

STAGE ONE – INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW
November 2019 until 12 February 2020

1 November to 10 January, Candidate Application Stage 1:
Applications may be submitted at any point from the competition opening until Friday, 10 January 2020. At this point Pathways Representatives and Convenors will be working with supervisors and HEI Admin Leads to assist in directing potential applicants to the appropriate processes within their HEI as well as ensuring that applicants are clear on the requirements of the application process and of relevant deadlines.

Student application process outline:
   a. 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 the applicant has 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 contact details are uploaded in good time for the referee to be contacted and reference to be submitted before the deadline.

Once students make a formal application through GradHub it will be immediately sent to the HEI Admin Lead who will then forward it to the Pathway Representative.

13 January to 3 February, Institutional Pathway review:
Following the deadline for first stage application, pathways will be able to nominate up to 4 applicants* to put forward to the cross-institutional stage of the competition.

Upon approval of the Dean, the nominations for each Pathway will be entered on GradHub by the HEI Admin Lead. The submission by the HEI Admin Leads will serve as confirmation of the Dean’s approval.

*Please note this is a maximum number and the SGSSS-DTP would urge pathway representatives to put forward only the best applicants. We also encourage you to make it explicit to EU-resident candidates that they are eligible to receive their fees only. The Economics pathway should be mindful of the 35% on residential eligibility waiver that applies to this pathway only.

4 February to 12 February, Candidate Application Stage 2:
Nominated candidates will be informed that they are through to the next stage on Tuesday 4 February. They will have up until 12 noon on Wednesday 12 February to revise their application, add second referee contact details and ensure that the supervisory statement is uploaded to GradHub. They must ensure that their referee has provided a reference in time for the deadline. The 2nd referee has until 12 noon on 14 February to submit the reference.

It is expected that pathway representatives again work with supervisors and students to ensure that the final version of the proposal and the supervisory statement are in preparation and submitted by the 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).

Wednesday, 12 February 2020, 12 noon: deadline for Application Stage 2 (shortlisted candidates only).
After the 12th February 2020 deadline, there are several rigorous review stages during which further shortlisting is undertaken before final awards are made as follows:

Pathway Review period – 17 February to 28 February 2020
Hub Review period – 4 March to 2 April 2020
Global Review period – 6 April to 5 May 2020

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

**STAGE TWO – PATHWAY REVIEW**
17 February to 28 February 2020

The SGSSS-DTP recognises that pathways will vary in their practices at this stage. However, Annex A contains best practice guidance and this should be consulted before Pathway Convenors establish the process by which the pathway itself will assess and rank application

**Access**
Pathway Representatives and Convenors will be given access, on Monday 17 February 2020, to the applications they require ahead of the assessment and ranking process. Applications are available to download as PDF forms.

**Assessment, scores and rankings**
Pathways will meet to assess and rank applications. Please be aware that the Pathway Hub Lead will expect to be involved in the pathway process (not as assessor but to ensure consistency across pathways). Pathway Convenors are then responsible for uploading candidate scores and rankings to GradHub. We expect pathways to nominate a maximum of 6 applications per pathway for cross-pathway review and subsequent allocation of the Open Studentships. The Pathway Convenor will be given access to a marking sheet to enter in their ranking information, scores, and comments and will be required to allocate a unique rank and score to each application. Please note: scores can be fractional.

Each Pathway Convenor must upload the following information to GradHub by no later than 12 noon on 2 March 2020:

- Ranks, scores, award details, and comments for all applications for their pathway. Where two or more applicants have been ranked equally, pathway convenors, in consultation with pathway reps must decide on a merit-based ordering of applicants.
- Please specify in the comments section for each student whether their application is to be put forward for the Open Competition or not.

SGSSS-DTP has issued a marking framework in which three criteria are assessed on a 1-10 or a 1-5 scale. Thus, all applicants should receive a score out of 25. The marking framework is linked in Annex B.
Summary
Pathways are requested to provide a brief (100-125 words) summary in support of each application shortlisted for consideration in the Open Competition and should include whether the application meets the requirements for an interdisciplinary steer. A collective pathway assessment of additional training needed to meet the core requirements can also be helpful. The summaries will be used to guide the cross-pathway reviewers and panel members on the significance of the application from a subject specific point of view. These summaries must be entered into the comments section for each student. Likewise, comments should be provided for all those who are not in the top 6 and who will therefore fall out of the competition at this stage. These comments will be fed back to students to summarise the reasons why they have not been successful, therefore we ask that any comments you submit are student-facing.

Outline
Pathway Convenors are also asked upload a detailed outline of the process that was followed by the pathway to assess and rank applications to GradHub. This should identify any applicants who, for whatever reason, were deemed inappropriate by the pathway to hold an ESRC studentship.

Outcomes
Successful applications will progress to the Hub Review stage. Applicants will be kept informed about their position. Unsuccessful applicants at this stage will be notified through GradHub. PLEASE NOTE: if an applicant has been deemed unsuccessful for the Open Competitions at this stage (i.e. is not in the top ranked list in the Pathway), they will be directed to contact their pathway representative should they wish to request additional feedback.

STAGE THREE – HUB REVIEW
4 March – 3 April
Nominated applications at this stage will be considered by each hub, with Pathway Convenors and Hub Leads scoring and ranking across all applications outside their own pathway. Each convenor will get a maximum of 24 applications. Pathway Convenors and Hub Leads must upload all graded applications to GradHub by 12 noon on 25 March 2020.

Thematic Panels will meet on Wednesday 1 April/Thursday 2 April to rank hub applications and determine the top nominated applications to progress to the next stage.

The top 18 from each Hub will go forward to the Global Panel. Unsuccessful applicants will be informed at this stage via GradHub.

STAGE FOUR – GLOBAL REVIEW
4 April to 5 May
The Global Panel will rank the applications received by each hub – ensuring that individual hub rankings are not overturned. They will agree those studentships which should be awarded, identify a quality threshold and agree a reserve list.

All applicants will be informed of whether they have been successful/unsuccessful or on a reserve list by Wednesday 13 May 2020.
IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR PATHWAYS

ELIGIBILITY AND ENHANCED STIPENDS

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

SGSSS reminds supervisors that the residency criteria must be met in order for a student to receive the full studentship including stipend. There is a partial exception to this within the Economics pathway where residential eligibility waivers are allowed for a maximum of 35% of offers made meaning that some EU resident and international students may be able to obtain full awards.

No enhanced stipends will be available from 2019 onward.

LENGTH OF AWARD

Students applying for a +3 studentship must meet the minimum ESRC training requirements. If a student does not meet these requirements they may choose to apply for 1+3 award. As pathway convenor/representative you should be familiar with ESRC training requirements so that you can best advice your student. Please see [here](#) for the guidance which students receive in relation to this. In addition, SGSSS conduct an audit of the training requirements of all applications nominated by pathways – this means that we will sometimes give a fractional award (such as a 3.3 or a 3.5) where we identify that applicants have some but not all of the required methods training. This will extend the award by a few months more than a +3 but will mean that the student doesn’t need to do an additional Masters degree.

CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL SUPERVISION

The SGSSS-DTP 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 but we do not wish to rule out cross-pathway supervision if this is clearly in the interests of the student project. We therefore ask Pathway Representatives and Supervisors to let students know that while their main supervisor must be at a recognised SGSSS-DTP pathway institution a second supervisor may be attached to the project from a second institution either with or without pathway recognition. The rationale for this needs to be clearly stated within the supervisory statement. Where there are two institutions involved in the proposed supervisory team then the statement of support must be jointly written by both supervisors and refer to the research and training environment within each institution and specify the benefits to the student of cross-institutional supervision.
Students eligible for a 1+3 award, wishing to study in institutions without an ESRC accredited Masters program, may choose to complete their Masters in another accredited institution (within SGSSS-DTP) before completing their PhD programme 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 the application form asks whether the 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 the studentship should provide training that is not constrained to one discipline and supervision should straddle the different approaches. Please discuss this with your student and pathway representative where relevant and, if appropriate, ensure that your student indicates their proposal’s potential applicability to be considered as interdisciplinary research on the application form. When they do so they will be required to specify which other research council Doctoral Training Partnership their proposed work aligns with and, within which, training might be sought. You should read closely the ESRC guidance on requirements for interdisciplinary awards.
ANNEX A

Best Practice for Assessment and Selection and Marking Scheme

Applicants for ESRC studentships with the SGSSS-DTP are required to submit a standard set of application materials as follows:

- Application form including lay summary, section on preparedness and research proposal
- Curriculum Vitae
- Degree transcripts (and translation, if not originally in English) – provisional transcripts are sufficient if the applicant has yet to complete his/her degree
- Supporting statement from the prospective supervisor. If a cross-institutional supervision arrangement is being proposed then a letter from EACH proposed supervisor is required
- Two references as follows,
  - Reference One submitted at Application Stage One
    *n.b. the reference at Stage One cannot be from the proposed supervisor*
  - Reference Two submitted at Application Stage Two (shortlisted candidates only)
    *n.b. this reference may be from the supervisor*
- Details of any overseas fieldwork the applicant proposes to undertake during his/her research
- Details of any difficult language training the applicant proposes to undertake during his/her research

When pathways assess and rank applicants for nomination for ESRC Open Competition the SGSSS-DTP asks that **at least one** of the following three mechanisms be used.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT all pathway processes should involve the Pathway Hub Lead**

1. Pathway representatives rank candidates from other Universities – for example in Politics & IR, St Andrews and Glasgow assess and rank Edinburgh candidates, Edinburgh and St Andrews assess and rank Glasgow, and Glasgow and Edinburgh assess and rank St Andrews, as a basic minimum standard. Pathway representatives should score all applications outwith their own institution.

2. An external assessor ranks applicants – pathways secure an external assessor who will manage the assessment and ranking process. **Pathways using this approach must meet to discuss and confirm the external scores and ranks. Pathways with fewer than 3 HEIs should use options 2 or 3. If using option 3 they should include the Hub Lead on the panel.**

3. Pathways conduct interviews with applicants – there is a strong expectation that interviews would be conducted via Skype or other means of video-conferencing as SGSSS-DTP does not have the funds to
reimburse applicants travelling for interview.

Please note: Academics assessing/ranking applicants and/or voting on applicants from their home institution is not allowed at the cross pathway stage. Please note this rule applies after pathway representatives have put forward applicants from their University.
Annex B:

SGSSS-DTP Open Competition Award Marking Framework (2020) Assessment for +3 Awards

SGSSS-DTP Open Competition Award Marking Framework (2020) Assessment for 1+3 Awards

Competition Timeline for Students and Supervisors