



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND AND SCOTTISH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (SGSSS/DTP) CO-FUNDED ESRC POSTGRADUATE STUDENTSHIPS

2019 COMMENCEMENT

INFORMATION PACK AND APPLICATION FORM

1	Introduction and Context	2
	Background	2
	Time Frame	2
	Aims and Objectives	3
2	Application Process	4
	General Information	4
	Issues for Applicants to Consider	4
	Assessment of Applications	5
	Selecting a Student and Supervisory Arrangements	5
	Other Issues	6
3	Application Form Notes	7

The closing date for applications is 1 November. 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

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

Successful applicants must recruit a student to commence in the 2019/20 academic year.

Skills Development Scotland and Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Programme (SGSSS/DTP) for PhDs for October 2019 Commencement

In partnership with the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS/DTP), Skills Development Scotland wishes to co-fund up to four PhD Studentships in social science subjects to commence in October 2019. We are seeking proposals from academics across the SGSSS from any accredited pathway which is interested in hosting studentships.

For further information on topics please contact Lynne Robson (Lynne.Robson@sds.co.uk – 0300 013 2144)

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 have four overarching goals (detailed in our [Corporate Strategy](#)):

- Enabling people to meet their potential
- Making skills work for employers
- Working together to improve the skills and learning system
- Achieving excellence as an organisation

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 four PhDs to start in October 2019. 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.

Call issued	August
Deadline for full applications	1 November
Decisions communicated to applicants	End of November
Studentships commence	October 2019*

(* 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.

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>

SECTION 2 APPLICATION PROCESS

General Information

- 2.1 Applications for co-funded **1+3 or +3 Studentship Awards** are invited from prospective supervisors based in the SGSSS.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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

- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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
- 2.8 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:

Lynne Robson, PhD Programme Lead (Lynne.Robson@sds.co.uk, 0300 013 2144)

2.9 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

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

2.11 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.

Selecting a Student and Supervisory Arrangements

2.12 Responsibility for student selection and recruitment lies with the successful institutions though the Scottish DTP will assist with advertising. The recruitment process **must** include an interview involving Skills Development Scotland. In identifying an appropriate student please note that +3 prospective students **must** satisfy the research training requirements laid down by ESRC. The Scottish DTP will be able to update potential applicants on these requirements. If you are in doubt about eligibility of a prospective candidate, please contact the SGSSS-DTP. **All full-time students funded through the Scottish DTP must submit no later than one year after their funding end date.**

2.13 Once you have identified a student you would like to appoint, before confirming their place please have them complete the coversheet and equal opportunities forms and return them to the SGSSS along with a CV. This will enable us to ensure that all ESRC criteria are met, or to ask the student for further information if needed. **The SGSSS must approve all appointments before they are confirmed.**

2.14 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, to be arranged either as a separate review meeting with SDS or as part of a University's internal annual PhD review process.

2.15 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.

2.16 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.

2.17 The above information is highlighted at this stage to ensure familiarity with ESRC guidelines for nominating a suitable candidate and for putting appropriate supervisory arrangements in place.

2.18 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.

Other Issues

2.19 All students will be expected to adhere to the standard rules laid out in the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

2.20 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.

2.21 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.

2.22 Once a student has been recruited to the project a Memorandum of Understanding (PhD Agreement) will be issued between the host institution and SDS. SDS has a standard PhD Agreement for participating Universities. In applying to the project you are agreeing to the terms outlined in the PhD Agreement. A copy of the standard agreement is available on request (contact Victoria.Kincaid@sds.co.uk – 0300 013 2344)

SECTION 3: APPLICATION FORM NOTES

NOTES ON COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

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

SGSSS -DTP SDS Collaborative Competition Award Marking Framework (2019)			
	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 (Please score out of 5 - this will then be double weighted)	Collaboration (OUT OF 5)
Marking Criteria	<p>Candidate can demonstrate:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Plus</p>		
10	<p>Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components</p> <p>and</p> <p>fulfils criteria 7-9 below</p>		
9	<p>Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically,</p> <p>and</p> <p>fulfils criteria 7 and 8 below</p>		

8	<p>Proposal contains clear awareness of the potential impact of the research</p> <p>and</p> <p>fulfils criterion 7 below</p>		
7	<p>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.</p>		
	<p>Candidate can demonstrate:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Plus</p>		
6	<p>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.</p>		
5	<p>A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The supervisory team demonstrates an excellent degree of preparedness for supervising PhD study</p>	<p>The proposed study represents an ideal fit with the topic as set out by SDS in terms of its planned engagement with SDS and its cognisance of the policy and practice landscape including its commitment to knowledge exchange and impact.</p>

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 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. The supervisory team demonstrates a very good degree of preparedness for supervising PhD study	The proposed study represents a very good fit with the topic as set out by SDS in terms of its planned engagement with SDS and its cognisance of the policy and practice landscape including its commitment to knowledge exchange and impact.
3	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. The supervisory team demonstrates a good degree of preparedness for supervising PhD study	The proposed study represents a good fit with the topic as set out by SDS in terms of its planned engagement with SDS and its cognisance of the policy and practice landscape including its commitment to knowledge exchange and impact.
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.	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. The supervisory team demonstrates an adequate degree of preparedness for supervising PhD study	The proposed study represents an adequate fit with the topic as set out by SDS in terms of its planned engagement with SDS and its cognisance of the policy and practice landscape including its commitment to knowledge exchange and impact.
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.	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.	The proposed study represents a poor fit with the topic as set out by SDS in terms of its planned engagement with SDS and its cognisance of the policy and practice landscape including its commitment to knowledge exchange and impact.