



Supporting, delivering and facilitating high quality opportunities and training by engaging with students, staff and partners to positively impact the social science community in Scotland

Supervisor-led Studentships Q&A

Open Collaborative & Steers Competitions

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Scottish Graduate School
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Sgoil Cheumnaichean Saidheans
Sòisealta na h-Alba



Economic
and Social
Research Council



Scottish Funding Council
Promoting further and higher education

What will we cover?

- A brief introduction to DTP2 and its implications for supervisors
- An introduction to steers and collaborative Competitions and Timelines.
- Tips for funding
- Time for Q&A (use the chat function too)





Supervisor-led Studentships

Key changes in DTP2

- **Major change in ESRC Completion Policy for students commencing from October 2024:** completion within the funded period.
 - **Risk assessment** and **feasibility** key in devising, assessing and implementing research proposals
- **The length of the standard PhD** has increased to 3.5 years in recognition of ESRC expectations that students will undertake a 3ms placement (more later) and 3 months for additional new training required by the ESRC. All studentships must be offered as **1+3.5 or +3.5** awards. (A reminder that all studentships must be offered as **full-time or part-time** opportunities).
- **Eligibility for first supervision** - First supervisors need to be research-active social scientists who are aligned to a UoA for which their institution has eligibility. SGSSS (and ESRC) will audit supervisor eligibility carefully. For more on eligibility criteria, visit [this page](#).



Supervisor-led Studentships

Key changes in DTP2

- **Move to challenge-led pathways:** each applicant must select a challenge-led pathway within which their student will sit.

Communication, AI, and New Technologies	Environment, Migration, and Demographic Change
Governance and Institutions	Health, Wellbeing and Communities
Securities: Justice, Economies, and Conflict	Social Inequalities



Supervisor-led Studentships

Introducing “Research in Practice”

Through Research in Practice, SGSSS seeks to equip ESRC funded students to be confident collaborating across sectors and disciplinary boundaries.

- The placement must be separate to the PhD student’s research and be designed to support their researcher development, sector knowledge and transferable skills.
- Students must undertake the placement in the second or third year of their PhD study, with more than 3 months remaining before their funding end date.
- Placements can take place within academia or outside academia.
- Academic placements must not be undertaken with the student’s current supervisor and/or research team
- Placements must provide opportunity to apply their research skills in new environments
- Students will discuss placement plans with their supervisor team and SGSSS at the Development Needs Analysis.
- SGSSS must approve all placement proposals in advance to confirm that they meet the placement requirements.

For more on placements, [click here](#)



Supervisor-led Studentships

Key notes for new supervisors

- In 2021 we introduced a new element to our marking Framework – the Whole Person Approach – all successful applicants to our supervisor led competitions will be expected to use this in recruiting students – you will receive guidance on this following our panel decisions.
- In 2020 the ESRC changed its recruitment policy on international students – we are now able to recruit international students up to a maximum of 30% of our total allocation. This is complex to implement across competitions and so successful supervisors will receive guidance on recruitment.



Supervisor-Led Competitions (Steers)

Steers Competition

Approximately 3 awards in each of the following steers (9 in total):

- Advanced Quantitative Methods (Advanced quantitative methods for discipline)
- Data Sets (see guidance on SGSSS website on eligible data)
- Interdisciplinary (cross-Research council)

Evaluation/review

Stage 1 – SGSSS Directorate (based on methods skills)

Stage 2 – expert reviewers (cross-institution/discipline)

Final panel – 2 Deans, SGSSS, steer expert

Scoring: - Research Proposal (10) and Supervision and training (10)

Dates for your diary

- **20 August 2025:** All Steers competitions go live
- **24 September 2025:** Deadline for Stage 1 Applications for Steers
- **20 October 2025:** Stage 1 outcome announced
- **17 November 2025:** Deadline for Stage 2 Applications for Steers
- **10 February 2026:** outcomes announced

Please note institutions may set their own internal deadlines

Advanced Quantitative Methods



Applications must contain methods that are advanced in the context of the particular discipline in which the proposal is based

A level over and above the basic generic and subject-specific methods requirements for that discipline

Vary from discipline to discipline (e.g. Economics compared to Geography compared to Social Anthropology)

Applicant must justify AQM fit and this is considered in evaluation

An application of Multilevel models in a proposal based in, for example, Human Geography or Education, would not meet the requirements since such models are routinely used

However a proposal would meet the 'advanced' criteria if it were extended to (for example):

- Evaluate of the underlying assumption of multilevel models or
- Develop multilevel modelling methods to accommodate spatial information or non-hierarchical structures possibly in novel ways

Advanced Quantitative Methods: key considerations



- Are you developing an existing quantitative method in a new and innovative way?
- Are you critiquing the assumptions underpinning a particular quantitative method?
- Are you developing a new quantitative method?
- Are connecting two different methods in a novel way?
- what added value does the proposed methodology bring over existing simpler techniques?
- what are the benefits of advanced quantitative methods for impact and KE?



Datasets

- Originally to encourage the use of ESRC-funded data sets
- Longitudinal data (Understanding Society, Birth cohort studies)
- Biosocial resources (e.g. English Longitudinal Study of Ageing),
- Big Data (e.g. ADRN, Urban Big Data),
- Qualitative resources (e.g. Time-scapes)
- Administrative data, unstructured commercial data (such as loyalty card databases), digital interactions between people, people and organisations, and interactions with urban environments (such as transport or footfall data)
- Non-ESRC and data from an applicants own research can be used assuming:
 - The primary project funding period has ended;
 - At least one publication deriving from the funded project has appeared in a peer-reviewed journal; and,
 - The project through which the dataset has been generated has been externally funded and awarded through a peer-review process.

ESRC requirements are here - [ESRC-Steers-Guidance.pdf](#)



Datasets: key considerations

- Are you analysing a new dataset or one neglected in social science research
- Are you analysing data in a new and innovative way?
- Are you making new linkages between data sources?
- Can you combine insights from data analysis across experimental and established data or with primary data collection?
- How will your proposed data analysis progress knowledge in the substantive research area?
- What are the benefits of the secondary data analysis for impact and KE?



Interdisciplinary

- Proposal must be **cross-research council**

E.g. Arts Humanities Research Council, Medical Research Council, 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)

- Expect a supervisor from each Research Council
- There should be substantive interaction between the relevant scientific areas
- The studentship should provide training that is not constrained to one scientific approach.
- The social science element of the proposal should be between 50% and two-thirds



Interdisciplinary: key considerations

- 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)



Steers (training needs)

- Detail specific training needs, including how these exceed generic and subject-specific requirements
 - How will training needs be met and monitored?
 - what challenges will the AQM, Datasets or Interdisciplinary nature of the project present?
 - consider whether it will take longer for a student to get up to speed – learning how to use software, familiarisation with new statistical/computational techniques, master/clean complex data, understand interdisciplinary aspects such as using equipment, familiarisation with new concepts, methods, theories
 - adjust the timescale to take account of possible extra training needs that may evolve
 - how will the training be distributed across the two (or three, if necessary) supervisors?
 - What external training/connections might be necessary for methods at the forefront of current practice?



Supervisor-Led Competitions (Collaborative)

'Open' Collaborative Competition

Approximately 15 awards

Co-produced by supervisor and non-academic partner

Financial contribution from collaborative partner is graded by size/nature of organisation

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Collaborative Competition

Approximately 4 awards

Evaluation/review

Stage 1 – SGSSS Directorate + non-academic partners

Final panel – 2 Deans, SGSSS, non-academic partners

Scoring: - Research Proposal (10) and Supervision and training (10), Collaboration (5)

Dates for your diary

- **19 August 2025:** Collaborative awards competition opens
- **16 October 2025:** Deadline for SDS and Open Collaborative Competition Applications
- **5 December 2025:** Competition outcomes are announced

Please note institutions may set their own internal deadlines

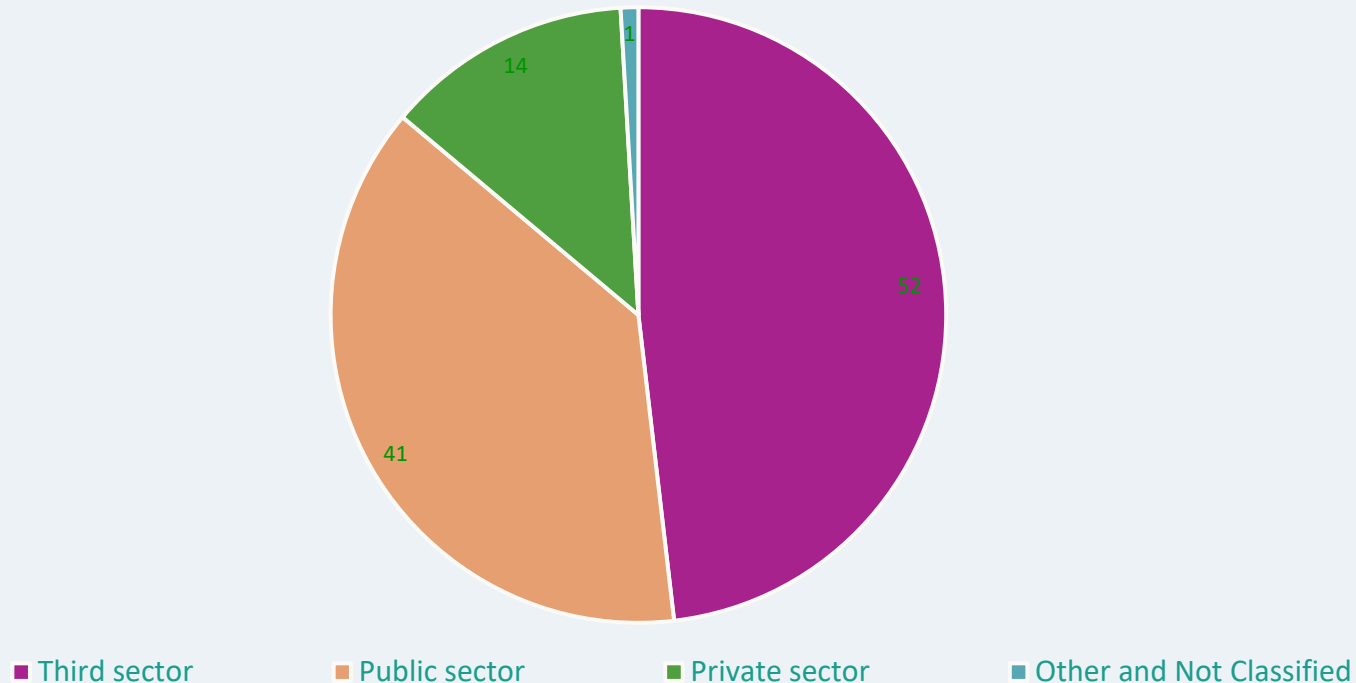


Collaborative Studentships

Partner Organisations

Since 2017, the SGSSS has awarded 108 collaborative studentships with a range of public, private and third sector organisations.

Studentships by sector





Collaborative Studentships

Partner Contributions

Partner organisations are expected to contribute to the studentship financially.

As we know not all organisations will be able to contribute the same amount, there is a sliding scale:

Type of Partner Organisation	Partner Contribution	SGSSS Contribution	HEI Contribution
Private sector (micro)	10%	65%	25%
Private sector (small)	25%	50%	25%
Private sector (med)	33%	50%	17%
Private sector (large)	50%	50%	0%
Public sector	33%	50%	17%
Charity sector	10%	65%	25%



Key tips for securing funding

- Our review will include evaluations by academics outside the discipline area of the student/supervisor
- So, there is a need to communicate clearly the logic, value and broader impact of the research to colleagues in other disciplines
- Consider the wider social/economic/academic contribution of the thesis. Can you link these to ESRC strategic ambitions?
- Look at PhDs funded by ESRC as well as the examples of previously successful studentships that are included in guidance for each competition
- Develop a collaborative application **with** the collaborative partner
- Pay close attention to the scoring criteria (reviewers are trained to use this) for each competition



Key tips for securing funding

- The ESRC requires PhD research to be completed in the funded period (no writing-up year) - Our evaluation of applications will consider the feasibility of PhD projects carefully - consider elements like data access/preparation, overseas elements
- Use the 'risks' section of the application form to explain contingency planning in the event of delays in order to maintain ambition in the proposal
- Supervision and training – be specific and think beyond research skills to other things that will be useful to develop a student to thrive in and beyond the PhD (dissemination, ethics, wellbeing, engagement with policymakers). Consider supervisor development needs.
- There is strong competition..... We do welcome re-submissions and we do provide feedback



Open Collaborative Competition Timeline

Competition Launch	
16 October, 5 pm (Thursday)	Deadline for applications via SGSSS Apply
Outcome of Competition	
05 December, by 5pm (Friday)	SGSSS to communicate the outcome of the Competition to all applicants (successful and unsuccessful), confirming awards

Steers Competition Timeline



Dates and Times	SGSSS Supervisor-led Steers Studentship Competition Timeline 2025/26
Stage 1 (Expression of Interest)	
24 September 2025, 5pm (Wed)	Deadline for Stage 1 applications via SGSSS Apply
20 October 2025, by 5pm (Mon)	SGSSS to update applicants confirming outcome of Stage 1 (successful and unsuccessful)
Stage 2 (Full Application)	
20 October 2025, by 5pm (Mon)	Shortlisted applicants invited to submit a Stage 2 application (full application)
17 November 2025, by 5pm (Mon)	Deadline for applicants to submit their Stage 2 applications via SGSSS Apply
Competition Outcome	
10 February 2026, by 5pm (Tues)	SGSSS to communicate the outcome of the Competition to all Stage 2 applicants (successful and unsuccessful), confirming awards

Next Steps

- To find out more about the collaborative studentships competition check out the case studies and guidance at:
www.sgsss.ac.uk/studentships/collaborative-competition/
- For more detailed guidance on how to apply to the various steers (AQM, Datasets or ID) within the Steers Competition, please see the competition webpage:
www.sgsss.ac.uk/studentships/steers-competition/
- Also the ESRC guidelines [here](#)
- If you have any additional queries, please email us on team@sgsss.ac.uk