Scottish Graduate School of Social Science
Sgoil Cheumnaichean Saidheans Sòisealta na h-Alba

Challenge Pathways Cohort Fund
Guidance for events taking place in 2026/27

1. Context

The **Challenge Pathways Cohort Fund** ("the Fund") has been created to enable student-led activities focused on SGSSS Challenge Pathways.

All ESRC funded students currently in their first year of PhD research are part of a cohort aligned to their chosen Challenge Pathway:

- Health, Wellbeing and Communities – supported by Professor Kathy Hamilton, SGSSS Associate Director
- Securities: Justice, Economies and Conflict – supported by Professor Kathy Hamilton, SGSSS Associate Director
- Communication, AI and Technologies – supported by Dr Yuki Kamide, SGSSS Associate Director
- Governance and Institutions – supported by Dr Yuki Kamide, SGSSS Associate Director
- Environment, Migration and Demographic Change – supported by Dr Shari Sabeti, SGSSS Associate Director
- Social Inequalities – supported by Dr Shari Sabeti, SGSSS Associate Director

Challenge Pathways were developed so PhD students have the opportunity to develop the skills and capacity for interdisciplinary connections within the social sciences and beyond. In practical terms, SGSSS want students who are researching the same grand social challenge to be able to communicate their research, methods, theories and ideas to researchers in other disciplines and outside academia.

We want students to learn from one another about new methods and theories and knowledge exchange networks that are relevant to a grand social challenge. These cohorts will meet regularly through the academic year, as opportunities to discuss research, ideas, concepts, training and other aspects of PhD research and experience.

What is the Cohort Fund for?

The purpose of the Fund is to encourage Challenge Pathway cohorts to design and deliver their own cohort and knowledge building activities. The Fund is intended to support group activities for cohorts; the activities must be demonstrably linked to Challenge Pathway related topics, and with an identifiable follow-up output.

The Fund can be used for a wide range of activities related to Challenge Pathways. Examples may include:

- to support students in attending a public event, exhibition or performance;
- to support students in hosting a cohort building event e.g. a discussion or debate group;
- to fund a student led event with an invited expert speaker; and
- to support students attending a relevant academic event (only where this would not normally be available through RTSG or other resources – SGSSS can advise on this if needed).

- We are also open to applications for other types of activities in unconventional academic settings: we are supportive of cohorts being imaginative and creative!

Outputs can be varied and may include a blog or brief written summary of key takeaways from the activity.

What can it not be used for?

The fund is not to be used to organise disciplinary or core training, as this is otherwise funded and delivered through other SGSSS routes. (Further regulations about how the Fund money must be used are below.)

2. Eligibility: who can apply?

The Fund is open to all ESRC funded students. While we expect those in their first year (or part time equivalent) of PhD research to submit the majority of applications, we are also open to applications from those in later years if the proposed activities would be open to the first year cohort. Applications to the Fund must be made on behalf of a Challenge Pathway Cohort, and in conjunction with support from the aligned SGSSS Associate Director.

3. Application and Approvals Process

Applications to the Fund must follow the following steps:

1. Applications must be made by at least two members of a Challenge Pathway Cohort.
    a. Cohort members are strongly encouraged to discuss their ideas with their Cohort. The Cohort meetings will provide space to develop ideas with support from the Challenge Pathway Associate Director and the development of ideas can also be continued via Portal. This is to widen input and participation in idea development and ensure proposals meet the aims of the fund. (Using Portal will also help SGSSS record the activities undertaken by each Cohort, and provide support where needed.)
    b. Funded activities should be made open to all members of a Challenge Pathway Cohort.
2. Applications should be made via SGSSS Apply.
3. Applications will be approved initially by the aligned Challenge Pathway Associate Director, using the Apply review system.
4. Applications will then be passed via Apply for a final review by the Deputy Director (Studentships and Partnerships), Deputy Director (Training) and the Head of Strategy and Operations.
    a. As part of the process, SGSSS may request more information to help finalise the decision.
    b. Applications will be judged on relevance to the challenge pathway, value for money, and consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion (e.g. how will an event timing, activity and location be as accessible as possible for all members of a diverse cohort).
    c. This process will typically be completed within two weeks of the application submission.
5. Applicants will be informed of the outcome via email, including details of the financial award made for the activity.
6. Applicants are then expected to organise and deliver the activity within the proposed timeframe.
    a. The SGSSS Operations Team will support with payments for activities, but applicants are expected to investigate and propose how financial aspects of an event will be managed. University of Edinburgh financial regulations must be adhered to (as host of SGSSS), and the administrative burden minimised wherever possible.

7. SGSSS can provide guidance about how to support event planning, with a particular focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.
8. Applicants must submit the agreed post event output to the Associate Directors within two weeks of the activity taking place.
9. Associate Directors will collate the output from each event, for use on Portal, SGSSS website, SGSSS Year in Review and other fora. Participants are also encouraged to use social media (taking into account individual permissions for photographs, IP etc.) to record the events.
10. The SGSSS Operations Team will support Associate Directors in monitoring and tracking applications and awards, so the monetary balance is kept up to date.

3. Fund Finances and Regulations

- The Fund has been allocated £2000 in total. Students in each pathway should collaborate on how they wish to budget for their proposed activities. Funds can be used for a single or multiple events, dependent upon the proposals made.
- Applications can be made at any point within the academic year (subject to the final date stated below).
- All proposals must be for activities that are open to participation by all members of the Challenge Pathway cohort. Proposals can also involve and/or invite participants from multiple Challenge Pathways if the activity is relevant to more than one pathway.
- All activities must adhere to principles of inclusion, diversity and fairness, in line with SGSSS' commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion principles. This means consideration should be made to all aspects of accessibility and inclusion: the SGSSS team can support with this.
- Funds can be used to pay people for their time (e.g. payment for a keynote speaker or trainer) but **ONLY** with prior agreement with the SGSSS team: this is to ensure Right to Work checks and tax/NI regulations are correctly adhered to.
- Proposals can include funds for event related hospitality (e.g. refreshments during an event, such as teas/coffees, or lunch if an event is ongoing over that time period). Other "subsistence" claims (e.g. dinner after an event or activity) will not be approved but should be paid for from stipends. Please contact the team if you need any guidance about this.
- Participants in cohort activities can claim expenses, e.g. for travel, in line with the SGSSS expenses policy. Individual travel expenses will not be deducted from the Cohort Fund.
- Cohorts must conclude events and pay any costs by **31 July 2027**. Event planning and application should take account of this e.g. it is expected that the last applications will be received through Apply by **11 June 2027**.