

## The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) Internships Scheme

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The SGSSS internships scheme places social science PhD students with partner organisations for three months (full time) or six months (part time). The scheme enables PhD students to learn more about the knowledge and skills that are required in research careers. It supports PhD students to develop transferable skills, whilst making a meaningful difference for one of SGSSS' partner organisations.

Since the scheme's inception, almost 500 internship placements have taken place with partners including The Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland, Social Security Scotland, The Promise Scotland, RBS, Environmental Standards Scotland and The Steamship Explorer Preservation Society.

The partner-led scheme, whereby PhD students apply for an internship project devised by one of our existing partners is advertised biannually. Once in summer for placements that begin in Autumn, and then another call in January for placements that begin in Summer. Additionally, SGSSS sometimes advertises new partner-led opportunities on an ad hoc basis. The scheme is open to all eligible social science PhD students registered at Scottish universities, regardless of the student's funding source.

This FAQ document is designed to support PhD students planning to apply to an internship placement through SGSSS, and should also be useful for students currently undertaking an internship. Please contact the team on [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk) if you have further questions.

For **ESRC funded students whose funding began after October 2024** please also read the separate [Research in Practice Placement guidelines](#).

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## 1. What is the benefit of doing an SGSSS internship?

Collaboration and impact is increasingly important for both academic and non-academic careers. Undertaking an internship through SGSSS will give you an opportunity to step back from your research and academia, and understand the needs of a partner organisation as well as their working environment. This affords the chance to build transferable skills and sector knowledge that will enhance your CV, whilst also giving you the space for a fresh perspective on your PhD research.

Our Interns say:

“The internship has changed my perspective on future career plans. I now understand that there are other environments where you can utilise your research skills outside academia. I’ve really enjoyed working in government and would now definitely consider this as a good option for a future career.” – PhD Intern with Scottish Government

## 2. Are internships paid positions?

All students undertaking an internship through SGSSS will receive a stipend that is commensurate with [UKRI doctoral stipend levels](#). For 2025/26, the doctoral stipend is £20,780 – this equates to £5,195 in total for a three-month (full-time) or six-month (for a typical part-time) internship.

The internship stipend is administered by the PhD intern’s University, through the SGSSS HEI Administrative Lead contact. This will be processed differently, depending on your funding status. Please see a summary below for different funding statuses:

### ESRC funded students whose funding began before October 2024

- For full-time ESRC-funded students whose funding began before October 2024: usually the internship replaces PhD activity for the duration of the placement; funding continues without interruption during the internship and SGSSS will extend your PhD funding end date by three months.
- For part-time ESRC funded students whose funding began before October 2024: usually internship replaces PhD activity for the duration of the placement; funding continues without interruption during your internship and SGSSS will extend your PhD funding end date by six months.

### ESRC funded students who hold a student visa and whose funding began before October 2024

- ESRC funded students whose funding began before October 2024 who hold a student visa can only complete an internship part-time alongside full-time study, in order to meet UKVI limits on working hours and ensure visa status is not compromised by a suspended studentship. This means that your internship stipend would supplement existing funding arrangements and your end date for your PhD would not be extended.

### ESRC students whose funding began after October 2024

- ESRC students whose funding began after October 2024 **including ESRC funded students who hold a student visa** have time for a placement included in their studentship: please see the separate [Research in Practice guidelines](#) for more information.

### Non ESRC funded students

- For non-ESRC funded students, your institution will administer monthly payments during your internship to the amount of the stipend level. Any regular funding will typically pause for the duration of the internship and resume once the internship is complete.

- Please note: non-ESRC international students with a student visa can only complete an internship part-time alongside full-time study in order to meet UKVI limits on working hours and ensure visa status is not compromised by a suspended studentship. This means that your internship stipend would supplement existing funding arrangements and your end date for your PhD would not be extended.

### 3. I have funding for a placement from another source am I eligible to complete an SGSSS internship?

If you have funding for a placement from another source, e.g. your studentship includes a funded placement, we are happy to support an internship. However, we will discuss your individual circumstances including stipends, programme and suspensions with you directly. Please contact [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk) before applying for an internship.

### 4. Who is eligible to do a SGSSS internship?

- Applicants must be registered for a PhD at an [SGSSS partner university](#) in a social science discipline.
- Applicants must be in their 2nd or 3rd year (or part-time equivalent) at the date of the start of the internship. Final year students need to have more than 3 months left of their PhD when the internship starts.
- Please note that UK public sector bodies, such as the Scottish Government, have additional nationality and eligibility requirements. Applicants that do not meet these criteria are not eligible to apply for internships with these organisations. Please [check your eligibility](#) before you make an application.

### 5. I hold a Student Visa, am I eligible to apply?

If you hold a student visa and are a non-ESRC funded student, or are an ESRC funded student whose funding began before October 2024, and you would like to undertake an internship, you can only do so on a part-time basis alongside your normal study. ESRC funded students who hold a student visa and whose funding began from October 2024 onwards can complete a full time internship as part of their studentship placement requirements. (Please see the [Research in Practice guidelines](#) for more information.) Wherever possible, we offer internship placements as part-time or full-time, to enable you to do this. Part-time internships for student visa holders would be calculated as 17.5 hours per week.

**Please note: It is your responsibility to ensure that undertaking a placement would not contravene the terms of your visa or funding arrangements before making an application.** Some Universities and/or funders place restrictions on the number of hours that a full-time PhD student can work each week.

All international students will also need to make sure that they meet UK civil service nationality criteria if applying for a public sector placement such as with the Scottish Government [check your eligibility](#).

### 6. Why am I not eligible for the SGSSS internship scheme if I am in my 1st / 4th year (or part-time equivalent)?

- It is expected that a student completing an internship will have the requisite experience and skill-set in order to complete the work. It is felt that students in their first year (or first and second year for part-time students) will benefit more from focusing exclusively on their PhD studies and building up the requisite core skills.
- However, when you are coming towards the end of your first year (or part-time equivalent), you can apply for an internship that would start during the second year of your studies. For example, you can apply in the summer of your first year for a placement that would start during your second year.
- For students in their fourth year of study (or part-time equivalent), it is normally envisaged that this period will facilitate the writing-up portion of the PhD and may include your viva voce and any subsequent corrections. During this period, it would not be advisable to interrupt or impede progress, and some funders

specifically do not allow it. We therefore do not permit students in the fourth year of their study (or within three months of that period) to undertake an internship.

## 7. How do I apply for an SGSSS partner-led internship?

SGSSS will advertise the **Partner-Led Internship** opportunities on our website and through our communication channels. To get a notification of upcoming opportunities, make sure you have signed up for the weekly [SGSSS Digest](#).

Applications are made through our online application platform [SGSSS Apply](#).

The online process for SGSSS Apply involves:

- Inputting information such as personal details, period of PhD study, pathway or discipline;
- Selecting the chosen internship host and title;
- Providing a description of the skills and experience you can bring to this internship (maximum 1000 words);
- Providing a short statement on your reasons for applying, what you'd hope to gain from an internship and how it fits with your PhD or career plans;
- Upload your CV (two pages maximum);
- Uploading a Statement of Support from your Supervisor. Your supervisor will need to be aware of the timeline in order to contribute meaningfully to your application within the deadlines.

We strongly advise applicants complete the application process at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline. If you have any questions about this process, please contact us at [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk).

## 8. Can I apply for more than one internship?

You can apply for more than one internship in the same call. However, in each call a student can only accept and undertake one internship. If you are applying for internships with multiple hosts, please do so by submitting a separate application form for each host.

For Scottish Government internships, you can apply for up to four placements within Scottish Government. As well as four projects, there is also an opportunity to apply to a "general pool", and you could be allocated to any of the advertised projects. The experienced team at Scottish Government will match you with the opportunity that best fit with your skills and experience. On the [SGSSS Apply](#) application form for Scottish Government, indicate up to four preferences from the listed internships and you can also tick the box for the pool.

**Please note: If you have previously completed an internship through the SGSSS Internship Scheme you are not permitted to apply for a further internship.**

## 9. None of the internship projects advertised are connected to my academic research, should I apply?

We strongly encourage students to choose opportunities to work outside the area of their PhD topic in order to gain wider skills and experience.

It is important to note that PhD internships cannot contribute to your PhD study – the intellectual property from an internship will belong to your host organisation, and no data or resources that are developed through the internship can be utilised for your PhD.

In any case, students are encouraged to carefully consider the information requested in the application form and pay particular attention to setting out their expertise in particular research methods to address the desired skills listed. Applicants are usually not required to have academic experience in the policy area or context of the internship unless specified in the project description.

## 10. I am a full-time student: can I work on my PhD at the same time as doing an internship?

Full-time students are expected to take a step back from PhD work to focus on the internship. Previous PhD interns have felt the benefit of stepping back from their PhD and gaining new perspectives.

It is expected that students will work with their supervisor to update their project plan for PhD to include time off for the internship and in a way that avoids clashes between key milestones in the PhD and the time for internship. As such students cannot take time out from their internship for data collection or other focused PhD work. SGSSS encourage students to minimise other commitments such as other paid work wherever possible, to ensure full engagement with the internship.

The above is different for **full-time international students who hold a Student Visa, and are not ESRC funded from October 2024 onwards**, as you will not be able to suspend study. This means that you can only undertake internships part-time alongside full-time study and must remain enrolled in your PhD (See question 5).

## 11. I am a part-time student; can I undertake an internship on a part-time basis?

Yes, provided the internship is advertised as a part-time option: not all projects can be offered part-time because they are time-sensitive.

Part time students are expected to step back from their PhD to focus on the placement and can maintain other roles they were holding part time alongside their PhD, e.g., employment, caring responsibilities etc.

You must be in your third, fourth, fifth or sixth year of part-time study (equivalent to second or third year full time) when you start the internship, with more than six months left when you start the internship.

## 12. What type of expenses can I claim during my internship?

Students can claim up to a maximum of £2,400 for expenses for an internship. These expenses are designed to cover exceptional costs that you would not have incurred if not undertaking an internship.

Eligible costs may include:

- Relocation costs
- Travel expenses
- Childcare

For full details of what can be claimed, please see the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#). All expense claims relating to internships must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Administrative Lead](#).

## 13. My internship host requires me to apply for Disclosure Scotland – can I recover this cost?

Yes, your host should reimburse you for this cost if it is necessary for the internship.

## 14. Am I entitled to annual leave during my internship?

For a full-time internship, PhD interns are entitled to six days leave plus any public holidays that arise during the internship. This is pro-rated for part time students. Flexi-time working can be discussed and agreed with the local line manager. Leave and flexi-time working are at the discretion of the placement host, or internship line manager, based on the terms of the Placement Agreement you will sign when you start your internship.

### **15. What happens if I am unwell during the internship?**

If you are unwell during the internship and are not able to work, you need to inform the host organisation and SGSSS before the start of work that day. You will then need to inform the host organisation and SGSSS when you are able to start working again. You can contact SGSSS by emailing: [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk).

SGSSS will support absence for medical reasons for up to three weeks during a three-month full-time internship. If a longer period of sickness leave is required that prevents the successful completion of the internship, it may be possible to resume the internship at a later date but only in cases where the host and SGSSS agree that the internship still aligns with the host's requirements. In this case, SGSSS will support the student and host to agree the best course of action.

For ESRC funded students whose funding began after October 2024, if sickness leave prevents the successful completion of a placement, SGSSS will review this in relation to the Research in Practice placement requirement of the student's studentship on a case-by-case basis.

### **16. What happens if I need to take any other leave during the internship?**

For the benefit of successful completion of the internship we strongly suggest that other planned leave e.g. extended plans for annual leave, planned parental leave etc., does not overlap with the internship. If other unexpected leave is required during the internship please contact SGSSS [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk)

### **17. I have personal circumstances that make me unsure if an internship is possible, who can support?**

Please contact the SGSSS team [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk) if you would like to discuss a specific circumstance that may be making you feel unsure whether an internship is possible. This may include (but is not limited to) caring responsibilities, disability and/or need for flexible/remote working patterns. Many of our partners can offer flexibility, and we encourage you to reach out to us to discuss this further, prior to making an application.

### **18. Will the host provide adjustments for students with disabilities?**

Yes, SGSSS and our internship host partners wish to ensure placements are accessible to all. It is required that hosts will provide reasonable adjustment for students with disabilities who are completing an internship. SGSSS can also provide support to discuss adjustments with your internship host.

SGSSS will cover reasonable expenses to support students with disabilities where the expenses required exceed the usual internship expenses of £2,400. Please contact [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk) for support to claim expenses for adjustments.

### **19. What happens at the end of my internship?**

When your internship ends you will be expected to complete an evaluation. This will include a short online evaluation form.

There will also be the opportunity for all students who have taken part in the internship scheme to share their internship project and its impacts or planned impacts as part of a poster competition at the annual SGSSS Collaboration and Impact Showcase in May. This competition gives students who have completed an internship a chance to celebrate their internship success with other interns, hosts and SGSSS partners. More details will be shared upon completion of the internship.

ESRC funded students whose funding began after October 2024 should read the Research in Practice guidance for full details of the expectation for evaluation of their placements.

## 20. What about the Intellectual property of my internship?

Where relevant, ownership of any new intellectual property rights that arise from the placement should be agreed in advance. If Intellectual Property is required this will be dealt with on an individual basis and on a separate document. Interns should not sign any IP documentation with their host without seeking guidance from SGSSS.

## 21. Where can I find further information?

- [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#)
- [HEI Admin Leads](#)
- [Current Internship Opportunities](#)