

## Scottish Graduate School of Social Science

### Student Guidance for Research in Practice placements

For ESRC funded students whose funding began from October 2024 onwards

#### 1 Introduction and rationale for Research in Practice Placements

These guidelines are designed to support students and their supervisors with the “**Research in Practice**” element of their ESRC studentship. The guidelines outline the different placement options and considerations for planning, undertaking and assessment of Research in Practice.

**Research in Practice** comprises **two new elements** that are built into the new PhD funding model.

1. All ESRC funded students whose funding began from October 2024 are expected to undertake a placement as part of their studentship. The **placement can be** undertaken in a **non-academic or academic** setting.
2. All students will have access to new Research in Practice **wrap-around training** so that they can thrive in a placement with subsequent benefits for their development. The training will enable students to apply their research skills in new environments, communicate with impact, and proactively engage in their own personal development and career direction.

**SGSSS’ vision for Research in Practice** is to equip Scottish Social Science students to be the next generation of research leaders. SGSSS want to support students to be confident collaborating across sectors and disciplinary boundaries. SGSSS have committed to developing students’ understanding of the meaningful contribution that they can make to society, the economy, and the research community through their knowledge and skills and the difference that their PhD will have on their own professional growth.

##### 1.1 Delivery of Research in Practice

All ESRC funded students whose funding began from October 2024 are expected to undertake a placement as part of their studentship. The placement can be academic or non-academic, should be three months (full time students) or six months (for a typical part time student) and is included as part of the standard PhD award. Students who do not complete a placement will have their funding reduced by three months (or part time equivalent).

##### 1.2 Key Research in Practice placement guidance

- Students must undertake the placement in the second or third year of their PhD study, with more than three months remaining before their funding end date (or six months for part time studentships).

- The placement must be separate to the PhD student's research to give students the opportunity to apply their research skills in new environments.
- Any outputs from the placement cannot be included in the student's PhD project, it must not include data collection or literature/policy review that will be directly included within the thesis ([as per ESRC regulations](#)).
- Where the placement is in an area of work closely aligned to the thesis, the thesis may reference any written pieces of work completed as part of the internship.
- Placements must be designed to support researcher development, their sector knowledge and transferable skills.
- Placements can take place within academia or outside of academia.
- Academic placements must not be undertaken with the student's current supervisor and/or their immediate research team.
- Full time students are expected to step back from their PhD to focus on the placement for its duration in line with ESRC guidelines ([ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide pg 27](#)) we encourage students to minimise other commitments such as other paid work wherever possible, to ensure full engagement with the placement.
- 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.
- Placements can be undertaken in person, online or in hybrid format as agreed in advance between the student and host.
- Whilst international placements will be possible the ESRC requires that there is a clear rationale as to why the relevant skills could not be developed at a UK based organisation.
- All proposals for placements need to be approved by SGSSS in advance, to confirm that they meet the placement requirements

## 2 Placement types

There are several ways that students can fulfil the Research in Practice placement requirements of their studentship. All placements should focus on a discreet project, challenge or research question which will enable students to build on their PhD skills.

Options for placement are:

### 2.1 Non – academic placements

Non-academic placements, designed to meet ESRC requirements, can be completed through the [SGSSS internship scheme](#).

The SGSSS internships scheme is a paid, professional internships scheme. SGSSS 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.

Eligibility for the SGSSS internship scheme is as follows:

- Applicants must be eligible to work in the UK.
- Applicants must be registered for a PhD at a Scottish 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.

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, challenge 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 this aligns 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.

To get a notification of upcoming opportunities, make sure you have signed up for the weekly SGSSS Friday Digest. [Newsletter – SGSSS Social](#).

More information about the SGSSS internship scheme is available on the Internships section of the SGSSS website [here](#).

## 2.2 Academic placements

From October 2025, academic placements will be available to **ESRC funded students whose funding began from October 2024 onwards**. Academic placements will be available in professional service teams or on an academic research project connected to a research team or centre. Students must **not** undertake an academic placement with their academic supervisor and immediate research team.

SGSSS will provide a list of available academic placements designed to meet ESRC requirements to ESRC-funded students who can apply to placements directly. There is also an opportunity for students to work directly with an academic contact to set up a student-led academic placement.

### 2.2.1 Academic Placement Guidelines

- The PhD student can join an already existing, or new, research project/initiative to undertake a clearly defined and realistic package of research work.
- The placement tasks should be discrete, clearly defined and achievable within the context and timing of the proposed placement.
- The placement should develop new research competencies and skills as well as consolidating existing skills, to enhance career prospects and employability.
- The placement cannot be something that casualises or takes work away from existing employees at the institution.
- The placement can be within a research team\*, research centre or professional services team.
- Placements hosted by professional services teams should provide insight into the strategic and operational work that underpins and delivers higher education.
- To provide the student with the intended Research in Practice experience of applying their research skills in different contexts, the placement should be hosted outside of the student's supervisor/research team and home department (SGSSS can advise on this as required).
- The placement can take place in any of the SGSSS partner institutions and students are encouraged to consider placements outside of their own institutions to allow the opportunity to engage across a wider network (where the student's personal circumstances allow).
- **Academic placements cannot form part of the student's PhD work** for a number of reasons including ethics, data protection and the overarching purpose of the Research in Practice placement as per [ESRC regulations](#).
- Any outputs from the placement cannot be included in the student's PhD project, it must not include data collection or literature/policy review that will be directly included within the thesis.
- Where the placement is in an area of work closely aligned to the thesis, the thesis may reference any written pieces of work completed as part of the internship.

**The SGSSS team will review all academic placement offers to ensure they comply with the ESRC placement guidelines.**

\*The host team may be subject to a minimum size. This will depend on the ability and capacity of the team to provide a placement experience that offers the student an understanding of team working with academics at differing career stages, and with relevant skills and expertise to enhance the student's career prospects and development.

### 2.2.2 Process for academic placements

ESRC funded PhD students whose funding began after October 2024 will be eligible for any academic placement from their second year (or part time equivalent) of PhD studies.

A range of placement proposals will be developed with SGSSS partner HEIs. Placement opportunities will then be advertised to our ESRC funded students. The application process will be through SGSSS Apply.

The online process for SGSSS Apply involves: - Inputting information such as personal details, period of PhD study, challenge pathway or discipline;

- Selecting the chosen academic placement;
- Providing a description of the skills and experience you can bring to this placement (maximum 1000 words);
- Providing a short statement on your reasons for applying, what you'd hope to gain from an academic placement and how this aligns 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.

### 2.2.3 Cost for academic placements

Academic placements hosted by a research centre, research team or professional services team at one of SGSSS 16 partner HEIs will **not be charged a host contribution**.

Academic placements at HEIs outside of the SGSSS partner HEIs **will be** required to pay a host contribution of £6,100.

## 2.3 Student led placements

Students can set up a student led Research in Practice Placement. Student led placements can be academic or non-academic.

Student led placements give students a chance to use existing networks or build networks with an organisation that is particularly relevant to their areas of interest or research. SGSSS will support with the set-up of the student led Internship placements and will need to check the proposal meets with ESRC requirements. SGSSS will provide a suite of resources to support students in sourcing and approaching hosts.

Student led placements are subject the placement guidelines outlined in section 1.2.

### 2.3.1 Student led placement process

Students can identify and contact potential non-academic or academic hosts to set up their placements.

Academic hosts must be outside of the student's current supervisor and research team.

Non-academic hosts can be public, private or third sector organisations. The placement project should have a research focus, however, the host does not need to be a research-focused organisation.

If you are interested in working with Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland, or another public sector agency – SGSSS already works with these organisations through the Internships Scheme (see section 2.1). Please contact SGSSS before reaching out to any contacts in these organisations.

### 2.3.2 The student led placement project

Once a contact has been secured the student should inform SGSSS. SGSSS will then support the student and host to create a robust proposal.

The placement project should provide a challenging role with clearly defined task(s). This could be one large project, e.g., the production of a report; or a series of smaller tasks contributing to a larger outcome. The project should ensure that students can use their research skills in new contexts.

The Project should offer a genuine 'something extra' that has a medium- to long-term benefit for the host organisation rather than simply a short term 'extra pair of hands'. Projects that have most value to hosts and students give the PhD student ownership/responsibility for some aspects of their work, and potentially the opportunity to present it or explain it to others.

Research in Practice can help students understand a particular sector and/or profession, so the placement should provide some sense of how the organisation works more broadly, as well as in the project. This could include an element of shadowing at a strategic level or inclusion in other team or organisational activity where relevant. Successful student led placements provide the student with a chance to work with a range of people, providing the opportunity to network and build relationships with people at multiple levels in the host organisation and beyond.

### 2.3.3 Student led placement host finance

Student-led non-academic placements and academic placements with an institution outside of the 16 SGSSS partner institutions will be subject to a host contribution. In line with the SGSSS internship scheme the host contribution in academic year 2024/25 is £6,100 per placement.

Student-led academic placements with one of the 16 SGSSS partner HEIs will not be subject to a host contribution.

When exploring a student led placement, ESRC funded students whose funding began after October 2024 are encouraged to get in touch with the SGSSS Research in Practice team if the host is unable to make a financial contribution or meet the full contribution of £6,100. The SGSSS team can assist in the negotiation of the host contribution with partners and/or discuss possible financial assistance for eligible third sector organisations.

Students who are interested in establishing links with international HEIs and do not meet the placement requirements could consider an [Overseas Institutional Visit \(OIV\)](#).

Host contributions explained		
Type of host	Host contribution	Why?
<p>Non-academic</p> <p>Academic host outside of SGSSS partner HEIs</p>	£6,100	<p>There are costs to maintain and develop links with a range of non-academic partners and to develop high quality projects that lead to positive experiences for host and student, to support students before and after placements, to run the administrative aspects of placements and to ensure placements meet ESRC regulations.</p> <p>“It was just so well managed and provided a fascinating insight... I love working on a genuine project that was high profile, it felt like important, valued work” <b>Feedback from Recent Intern</b></p> <p>We open our placement scheme to all students in Scotland in line with the inclusive vision of SGSSS. There are excellent benefits of a wider placement programme for both ESRC and non-ESRC funded students. In order to operate such an inclusive placement scheme we do require a host contribution.</p> <p>As a result of host contributions student expenses can be covered to ensure equality of opportunity by covering travel, accommodation, additional childcare and other relevant expenses where needed.</p>
Academic partner host	No contribution	Our HEI partners already contribute financially to SGSSS and this covers their contribution to placements.

## 2.4 External placement opportunities

The Research in Practice placement can also be completed by the student undertaking a placement outside of the SGSSS schemes outlines above. This could include the [UKRI Policy Internship Scheme](#) or similar opportunities.

There may also be placement opportunities within your HEI. Students are encouraged to check with their PGR office or similar to keep informed of any upcoming opportunities.

Any students undertaking opportunities outside of the SGSSS internship scheme are asked to seek approval that the placement meets their funding conditions. It is also essential that SGSSS have a record of all placements undertaken to avoid any implications for the student's funding.

SGSSS will promote any external opportunities to ESRC funded students through email and the Friday Digest where applicable.

## 3 Placement support

SGSSS will monitor student's placement dates and maintain regular contact with students during placement to provide opportunities for feedback on how placement is progressing.

### 3.1 Supervisor placement support

Students should maintain regular contact with their supervisor throughout the placement duration and consider planning an onboarding and offboarding process with their supervisors to support transition from PhD into placement and for their return to PhD study post placement.

### 3.2 Annual leave

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

### 3.3 Sickness absence

If you are unwell during the placement 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 placement. This is calculated pro rata from [UKRI guidelines on sickness and absence](#). If an absence exceeds three weeks, SGSSS is likely to advise that the placement should to be terminated and payments will cease. It may be possible to resume the placement at a later date but only in cases where the host and SGSSS agree that the placement still aligns with the host's requirements.



### 3.4 Research in Practice placement planning 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 a placement difficult. This may include (but is not limited to) caring responsibilities, disability and/or need for flexible/remote working patterns. Many hosts can offer flexibility, and we encourage you to reach out to us to discuss this further when planning a Research in Practice placement.

SGSSS will offer a quarterly Research in Practice online drop-in session to support students with planning their Research in Practice placement. For students who have specific questions about their plans for placement or questions about placement that are not covered in the guidance. The drop in can be attended with your supervisor. Sessions will take place in April, July, October and January and students will receive information on how to sign up to the events in due course.

### 3.5 Expenses

Students can claim up to a maximum of £2,400 for expenses related to their Research in Practice placement. These expenses are designed to cover exceptional costs that you would not have incurred if not undertaking a placement. Full details about what can and cannot be claimed can be found in the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#).

Please note that all expense claims relating to placements must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Administrative Lead](#).

## 4 Research in Practice training

Research in Practice placements will be supported through wrap-around training which is integrated into the SGSSS training calendar. This includes:

- Training for placements with our partners, including the Scottish Government and Skills development Scotland
- Expanding our Collaboration and Impact Showcase event to include a poster session for all students post placement and an opportunity for networking to build communication skills with external partners;
- Relevant Research in Practice sessions will be integrated into the existing SGSSS training calendar such as at induction, Summer School and Beyond the PhD;
- Research in Practice knowledge exchange events where students will have the opportunity to engage with an audience of policy, academic and civil society audience to share their research impact will be open to all students
- Students will be supported throughout their placement including with the set-up, cohort development throughout the placement and coordination with supervisors.

More information on these sessions will be shared directly with students undertaking a Research in Practice placement throughout the duration of the PhD.

## 5 Placement monitoring

SGSSS will monitor every student's participation in a Research in Practice placement closely. Students should expect to share with SGSSS the details of plans and considerations for their placement as follows:

### 5.1 Pre award DNA conversation

Students will discuss placement plans with their supervisor team and SGSSS at the pre-award Development Needs Analysis meeting. Supervisors are asked to consider any contacts that might provide a placement in and outside of academia and this will be followed up through the new SGSSS supervisor support and development provision.

### 5.2 Annual DNA survey

SGSSS will continue to track students' placements through questions in the mandatory Annual DNA questionnaire from the second year of funding onwards (or part time equivalent).

### 5.3 Ad hoc

Ad hoc support in finding a placement will be available to all students from the SGSSS Research in Practice team throughout the year. Students are also expected to share any ad hoc updates on their placement plans with the team by email [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk)

### 5.4 Non completion

Any student who has not completed or planned their placement nine months before their funding end date will be considered to not have met their ESRC funding criteria. This will result in them having their **submission date brought forward three months and the commensurate stipend payments will no longer be available to them (or pro rata equivalent for part time students).**

This is anticipated to be extremely uncommon and in the first instance all efforts will be made by SGSSS to work with students and supervisors to facilitate a placement.

## 6 Evaluation

SGSSS will ask all ESRC-funded students post placement to complete an evaluation report and produce a suitable output e.g., poster, short video, relevant creative output, that will be used to shape an exhibition at our Collaboration and Impact Showcase event. More details about the expectations of these outputs will be shared with students before they begin their placement.

Outputs will be assessed on a pass/fail basis by student's supervisor if required for student visa terms from UKVI.

## 7 Research in Practice contacts and useful links

### 7.1 Contact us

For assistance with Research in Practice queries that cannot be answered through these guidelines, or to update the SGSSS team on placement plans contact. [team@sgsss.ac.uk](mailto:team@sgsss.ac.uk)

### 7.2 Useful Links

[SGSSS Internships Scheme webpage](#)

[SGSSS Internship Scheme Case Studies](#)

[SGSSS Friday Digest Newsletter - Sign up](#)

[ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2022 \(Annex III Research in Practice - placements\)](#)