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

SGSSS Steers Competition Marking Framework 2025/26

Each application is to be assessed according to two categories with a total score out of 20. These categories are:

1. Research Proposal – Score out of 10 (50%) **Please note that attention to feasibility of research proposal to be completed within the funded PhD is exceptionally important since the ESRC have announced that the thesis-pending or 'writing-up' year will no longer be acceptable – ie, submission within a fourth unfunded year will be counted as a late submission). The research of the PhD must be done in 3 years. ESRC provide an additional 0.5 years but this is not for PhD research it comprises research in practice (+ training) and new skills that ESRC wish PhD students to be exposed to.**
2. Supervision & Training – Score out of 10 (50%)

Score	Research Proposal (OUT OF 10) PLEASE NOTE: YOU SHOULD CONSIDER FIT WITH STEER CRITERIA IN ASSESSING THE PROPOSAL	Supervision & Training (OUT OF 10) PLEASE NOTE: YOU SHOULD CONSIDER FIT WITH STEER CRITERIA IN ASSESSING THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SUPERVISORY TEAM AND PLANS FOR ADVANCED TRAINING DURING THE COURSE OF THE PHD
	Descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so	
10	An excellent proposal (MEETING THE STEER CRITERIA) and scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed. **PLUS** Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components **AND** Fulfils criteria 9 to 7 below	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 at least one experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field (SGSSS is very supportive of the inclusion of a less experienced supervisor for capacity building reasons). There is excellent fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team demonstrates excellence in their commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and in their existing plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. They have also engaged very well with the identification of their own development needs.

9	Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically **AND** Fulfils criteria 8 to 7 below	***SEE ABOVE*** (Descriptor represents a score of 9 to 10)
8	Proposal contains clear awareness of the potential impact of the research **AND** Fulfils criterion 7 below	Supervision arrangements represent a very good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes at least one experienced supervisor with a strong reputation for research in this field. There is very good fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team demonstrates very good commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and in their existing plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. They have also engaged well with the identification of their own development needs.

7	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 cognisant of ethical issues. The proposal should display an awareness of the research of the economic and societal relevance feasible within 3.5 years of a funded PhD including appropriate risk assessment.	

6	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. **PLUS** 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.	Supervision arrangements represent a good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes at least one experienced supervisor with a good reputation for research in this field. There is good fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team demonstrates good commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and have articulated their existing plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. They have also engaged with the identification of their own development needs.
5	A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature.	
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 are appropriate though the fit is not as strong as it could be but at least one supervisor has some experience in the area of the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. There is some fit between the research and the wider department/school/college although the relationship might be rather weak. The supervisory team demonstrates some but not strong commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and have some plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. Their identification of their own development needs is weak .
3	A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature.	
1-2	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.	There is a poor fit between the proposal and supervisor experience and/or the wider department/school/college AND/OR consideration of likely development needs (supervisor and student) and how they will be addressed is cursory/generic.