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| **SGSSS Student-led Open Competition 2025/26**Research Proposal Application Form (Word Version)**Please note, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO UPLOAD THIS APPLICATION FORM - ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE MADE USING THE ONLINE APPLICATION SYSTEM. This Word version can be used to develop your application offline and to share with your supervisors for feedback. You will be able to copy across from the Word version to the online application system (**[***SGSSS Apply***](https://apply.sgsss.ac.uk/)**). If you have difficulties using our application portal, please contact as soon as possible at** **team@sgsss.ac.uk****The application and references are due at 5pm on 24 November 2025 GMT****Please note, applications must be completed in conjunction with the *Student-led Open Competition Guidance*,** [**located here**](https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/files/SGSSS-Student-Led-Open-Competition-Guidance.pdf)**.** **Applicant details** |
| **Applicant name:** |  |
| **Applicant email:** |  |
| **Applicant telephone:** |  |

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| **Please select the** [**institution**](https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/about-us/governance/) **you are applying to:** |
| Choose an item. |

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| **Award type**Please select one from each row below: |
| Masters + PhD funding [ ]  PhD Funding [ ]   |
| Home Student [ ]  International Student [ ]  |
| Full-time [ ]  Part-time [ ]  |

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| **Are you currently enrolled in the first year of a PhD (or equivalent if part-time)?**Please note, if you are currently in the second year of your PhD, or beyond or you have an existing scholarship with fees and a stipend at the same value as an ESRC scholarship then you are not eligible to apply for ESRC funding. |
| Yes [ ]  No [ ]  |

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| If yes, depending on the desired award length you have selected above, please outline the current progress of your PhD, providing an estimate of your progress by September 2025, including an explanation of why your preference is for either a +2.5 award (2.5 years of funding) or a +3.5 award (3.5 years of funding). Your answer should include progress with writing introductory chapters, refining your research proposal and in establishing research networks important to your study. You should also give an indication of the nature of your current funding and the amount of time that you have been able to dedicate to your PhD. Please note, the answer on your PhD progress that you provide below will help SGSSS determine your length of your award, if successful. (350 words max) |
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| **Provisional title of research project:**Please advise the title of your research project (it is expected that titles might be tentative at this stage) |
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| **Supervisory team:**Enter the name of your planned supervisors here. (Please note that each applicant should have at least two academic supervisors; please review eligibility criteria for primary supervisors, [here](https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/studentships/supervisoreligibility/)). |
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| **Lay Summary:**Please provide a lay summary that explains your project to a non-academic audience. (250 words max) |
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**Preparedness to undertake and complete a PhD and to flourish as a result of PhD funding**

**Successfully undertaking a PhD requires not only academic ability but also resourcefulness, commitment and resilience. It involves a range of skills including the ability to communicate complex ideas (about why a research question is of societal and academic importance, why it can be addressed using particular methods and why your findings matter), planning and organisation (including within changing circumstances), working with others (inside and outside of universities) to increase the chances of your research making a difference. You may find it useful to refer to the** [**Researcher Development Framework**](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/researcher-development-framework-rdf-vitae.pdf/view) **in thinking about this question.**

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| Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced. (400 words max) |
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**Research Proposal**

The research proposal must be a detailed description of the intended research topic. It will form the basis for assessing the application. The proposal should be written in a clear and concise manner and applicants should be aware that applications will be reviewed by interdisciplinary panels so please make sure that you fully explain disciplinary specific concepts or techniques. **Your research project must be feasible within the funded PhD – from 2024 onwards all ESRC funded students must submit their thesis by the end of the funded period (previously students were given 12 additional unfunded months to submit the final draft). Feasibility will be considered carefully by reviewers.** The main body of the research proposal (excluding the bibliography) must not exceed 1,500 words.

**Please also note that reviewers of this proposal will include those outwith your discipline.**

The Research Proposal MUST include the following sections:

* Overview – a general introduction that succinctly sets out exactly what the project seeks to explore. This should also include the research question(s) to be addressed and the overall aim of the project.
* Context – situate the research within the relevant literature/s. This should include a brief summary of research already taken in the field, addressing key works and scholars. Specific attention should be paid to problems in the existing literature and ways in which your proposed research challenges/addresses these problems. You should also give an account of the theoretical issues relevant to your research, and whether you intend to test existing theories or develop new ones.
* Methodology – provide a detailed account of the methodology and/or methods that will be used. Specific attention should be paid, where relevant, to any innovative aspects of the proposed methodology.
* An indication of ethical issues associated with this proposal (including those that may impact on formal ethics committee approval and those requiring ongoing consideration in the field/during analysis) and proposed actions to mitigate these.
* You will be able to upload diagrams via SGSSS Apply, should you so wish.

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**Indicative Bibliography**

Enter bibliography here. References within the research proposal should be Harvard Style and the bibliography should reflect this. Please only include references referred to in the research proposal.

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**Risk Assessment**

Please set out the aspects of your proposal that are at particular risk of non-implementation and indicate the approaches that you will take to manage such risks to ensure that your timely submission **within the funded period** is not compromised. (250 words max)

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**Provisional Timetable**

This section must only include an indicative timeline for your research, which, for a full-time PhD should fit to 3 years. Note, this timetable excludes any Master's Degree that is required prior to a PhD and it excludes the additional 0.5 years provided to cover Research in Practice (placements) and the additional new training required by the ESRC in the recommissioned SGSSS. Any substantive discussion of your research in this box will not be considered by reviewers. Please note, your timetable should take account of the expectation that your PhD will be submitted at the end of your funded period.

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**Challenge-Led Pathways**

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| **SGSSS delivers much of its PhD training in** [**challenge-led pathways.**](https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/files/SGSSS-Student-Led-Open-Competition-Challenge-Pathways-FAQs.pdf) **These pathways bring together students across all social science disciplines to encourage cross-disciplinary and student-led learning relating to the main global and national challenges facing our society. Within your challenge-led pathway you will have the opportunity to discuss and learn about methodological, conceptual and theoretical issues from your peers, academic experts and experts from the public, private and third sectors. Please select the challenge-led pathway that most closely fits with your application (we recognise that many applications will fit with multiple pathways but you will have the opportunity to identify other pathways of interest below). If you think that your research does not fit any of the named pathways then select ‘none of the above’ - THIS WILL NOT DISADVANTAGE YOU IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**  |
| **Please select** |

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| **If you think, your proposal fits with more than one challenge pathway then tick up to two additional pathways.**  |
| **Please select** |

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| **In no more than 500 words set out:  a) how your research responds to your selected challenge(s) and how you will maximise societal impact including through the identification of and engagement with non-academic stakeholders; b) what you will contribute to your preferred challenge-led pathway; and, c) how you anticipate that being part of the cohort of students on this pathway might facilitate your own development.** |
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| **If your application does not fit with any of the listed pathways, set out in no more than 500 words: a) the societal challenge which your research addresses and how you will maximise impact including through the identification of non-academic stakeholders; b) how your proposed research (concepts, methods, theories, knowledge exchange and impact approaches) will contribute to the development of other SGSSS students outside your own discipline; and, c) what you will hope to learn from other students in return.** |
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**Contributing to a positive and diverse PhD community**

**SGSSS aims to attract and support a positive and diverse PhD community where everyone can reach their full potential; Research and Development (R&D) is a supportive and fulfilling sector to work in; and is seen as a shared endeavour across society rather than only the concern of professional researchers. You may find it useful to refer to the UK Government’s** [**R&D People and Culture Strategy**](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1004685/r_d-people-culture-strategy.pdf) **when thinking about this question. Note, this information is not used to evaluate your application. Rather SGSSS use this information so that we can best support and develop our student cohort.**

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| Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community? (250 words max) |
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**Developmental Needs Analysis (DNA)**

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| All ESRC funded students will undertake a Development Needs Analysis with SGSSS at time of award and during the PhD. This is a supportive conversation designed to help SGSSS understand how best we can support you. To help our planning for this process, we are asking all applicants to outline their perceived areas of development at the point of application. Please could you outline here how you see the PhD programme supporting your broader career trajectory, and any key areas of development that you would be hoping to prioritise along the way? These might include methods, disciplinary knowledge, or broader career skills / exposure like working with policy makers. This part of the application form is not part of the assessment process so don’t worry if your plans are still a little vague. |
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**Placement during the PhD**

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| Through Research in Practice, SGSSS aims to equip ESRC-funded students to be the next generation of research leaders. We want our PhD students to be confident in collaborating across sectors and disciplinary boundaries. To support this, SGSSS will offer a suite of development opportunities and training. These opportunities will enable students to apply their research skills in new environments, to communicate with impact, and to proactively engage in their own personal development and career direction. All ESRC funded students are expected to undertake a placement as part of their studentship. Visit [this link](https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/files/RinP-Placement-Overview.pdf) for more on placements. **Note: This question is only for internal office use and will not be considered by the reviewers of the competition.** |
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**Additional Costs for Difficult Language Training, an Overseas Institutional Visit and/or Overseas Fieldwork**

Please indicate if your proposal is expected to beneﬁt from the following:

**Overseas Fieldwork** [ ]  **Difficult Language Training** [ ]

**Overseas Institutional Visit** [ ]

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| **Domestic Fieldwork**If this proposal does not involve overseas ﬁeldwork, can you conﬁrm that the proposed ﬁeldwork is likely to be undertaken within the notional [RTSG](https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/studentships/esrc-training-funds/) allowance of £940 per annum. If not, please explain why and specify any likely additional costs. Please specify how additional costs will be met. (150 words max) |
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