



SGSSS Student-led Open Competition 2025/26

Marking Framework - Stage 1

Assessment for All Awards (+3.5 and 1+3.5)

Applications are to be assessed according to three components (where applicable) with a maximum total score out of 25. These components are:

Candidate Capabilities – Score out of 10

This component of the marking framework is aimed at assessing the whole person - not just academic achievements but also resourcefulness, commitment and resilience as demonstrated by broader professional and life experiences. It focuses on likely preparedness and potential to:

- undertake and complete a PhD;
- to flourish with ESRC funding;
- and, to contribute to a positive PhD community

Assessment is split into two parts: obtained and expected academic achievements; and, professional and life experiences. Each part is allocated 5 marks.

Research Proposal– Score out of 10

Particular attention should be paid to the stage of the candidate, i.e., candidates without a recent Master's might be expected to have a less well worked through research proposal that is none-the-less thought to be excellent in its originality, use of conceptual framing, broad methodological approach and/or likely societal impact. Please note that you may also review applications from students already registered on a PhD programme – such applicants would be expected to have very well-advanced proposals with high levels of specificity across the various components. **Consideration of impact is one element of the research proposal assessment. Please note that impact narratives will be found in the challenge pathways section of the application [please see [here for guidance on the aim and nature of our challenge pathways](#)]. In this section applicants are asked to indicate their preferred challenge pathway, how their proposal fits with and will contribute to impact in this pathway, what they will bring to their interdisciplinary cohort and what they will hope to learn in return. A small number of applications may not align with any of the 6 challenge pathways – they have been asked to address a similar set of questions on impact and contribution to peer learning – STUDENTS IN THIS CATEGORY MUST NOT BE DISADVANTAGED IN SCORING.**

Please note also that feasibility of the thesis being completed within the funded period is very important – the ESRC from 2024 intake onwards will no longer accept submissions post the funded period as being on time.

Supervision and PGR Development – Score out of 5

This component assesses the candidate's fit with the supervisory team and wider department/school/college as well as the quality of the plans to meet student's likely development needs and the student's orientation to peer-learning within their challenge pathway. It also assesses supervisor commitment to continuous development of the student and consideration of their own development

needs in relation to the supervision of a specific proposal or, more generally, in relation to PGR supervision.

Candidate Capabilities (Total score out of 10)

This component of the marking framework is aimed at assessing the **whole person** - not just academic achievements but also resourcefulness, commitment and resilience as demonstrated by broader professional and life experiences. It focuses on likely preparedness and potential to:

- undertake and complete a PhD;
- to flourish with ESRC funding;
- and, to contribute to a positive PhD community.

Assessment is split into two parts: obtained and expected academic achievements; and, professional and life experiences. Each part is allocated 5 marks. Reviewers should familiarise themselves with the relevant questions sets within the application form.

Scores	Descriptors for Academic Qualifications Please consider submitted transcripts, references, candidate CV. Discretion should be used with regard to candidates with existing qualifications outside the social sciences or with social science qualifications deemed to be outside the disciplinary requirements.	Scores	Descriptors for Professional and Life Experiences Please consider submitted candidate CV, references, responses to the questions within the application form on 'Preparedness to do a PhD'
5	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a first class degree/ distinction at Masters AND has been awarded prizes or other significant academic distinctions.	4-5	Drawing on their professional/life experiences, showing resilience, resourcefulness and commitment, the Student explicitly articulates very good/outstanding potential to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ undertake and complete a PhD; ▪ to flourish as a result of PhD funding, and, as a result; ▪ to be a proactive contributor to a positive research culture.
4	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a first class degree/ distinction at Masters OR student has obtained (there is strong evidence that that the candidate will obtain) a 2:1/merit AND with a first class/ distinction for the dissertation.		
2-3	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a 2:1 class degree/ merit at Masters OR student has obtained (there is strong evidence that that the candidate will obtain) a 2:2/pass at Masters AND with a 2:1 class/ distinction for the dissertation.	2-3	Drawing on their professional/life experiences, showing resilience, resourcefulness and commitment, the Student explicitly articulates good potential to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ undertake and complete a PhD; ▪ to flourish as a result of PhD funding, and, as a result; ▪ to be a proactive contributor to a positive research culture.
1	Student has obtained (or there is strong evidence that the candidate will obtain) a 2:2 class degree/ pass at Masters.	0-1	Application does not adequately draw out potential to undertake and complete a PhD and flourish as a result of PhD funding as evidenced by academic

0	No evidence of obtaining or likelihood of obtaining a 2.2 degree at undergraduate level.	background and professional/life experiences.
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Research Proposal (Score out of 10)

Particular attention should be paid to the stage of the candidate, i.e., candidates without a recent Master's might be expected to have a less well worked through research proposal that is none-the less thought to be excellent in its originality, use of conceptual framing, broad methodological approach and/or likely societal impact. Please note that you may also review applications from students already registered on a PhD programme – such applicants would be expected to have very well-advanced proposals with high levels of specificity across the various components. In assessing this element of the scoring framework you should focus on the research proposal within the application form as well as the statement of disciplinary contribution.

Scores	Descriptors
10	<p>An excellent proposal scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed <i>for the stage of the candidate</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plus</p> <p>Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components and fulfils criteria 7 to 9 below.</p>
9	<p>Proposal is original and at the cutting edge of developments substantively and/or methodologically (<i>this may be less well specified by still discernible for students without Masters training</i>).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plus</p> <p>Fulfils criteria 7 and 8 below.</p>
8	<p>Proposal contains good awareness of the potential impact of the research (<i>this may be less well specified but still discernible for students without Masters training</i>).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Plus</p> <p>Fulfils criterion 7 below.</p>
7	<p>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 potential ethical issues. The candidate should display an awareness of the proposal's economic/ societal relevance and the proposal must be feasible within 3.5 years of a funded PhD with a plausible risk assessment plan. Levels of methodological detail and conceptual framing may be less detailed for those students without Masters training.</p>
6	<p>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.</p>
5	<p>A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature.</p>
4	<p>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.</p>

3	A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature.
0-2	A problematic proposal that would need considerable additional work before being fundable. All or most components of the proposal will require further work and/or demonstrate little or no background or interest in their subject.

3. Supervision and PGR Development (Score out of 5)

This component assesses the candidate's fit with the supervisory team and wider department/school/college as well as the quality of the plans to meet student's likely development needs and those of the supervisors.

Scores	Descriptors
5	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. The student will also have given careful thought to how they will engage in peer-learning within their challenge pathway.
4	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. The student will also have given careful thought to how they will engage in peer-learning within their challenge pathway.
3	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. The student has considered how they will engage in peer-learning within their challenge pathway.
2	Supervision arrangements are appropriate though the fit is not as strong as it could be although 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 will be weak. The student will have given minimal thought to how they will engage in peer-learning within their challenge pathway.

0-1	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 (student and supervisor) and how they will be addressed is cursory/generic.
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