Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS)

2026/27 Supervisor-Led Steers Competition

Applicant Guidance



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Stage 1

The deadline for the submission of a Stage 1 application (Expression of Interest) is **23 September 2026 at 5pm**. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of Stage 1 on 19 October 2026.

Stage 2

The deadline for the submission of a Stage 2 application (full application) is **16 November 2026 at 5pm**. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of Stage 2 on **9 February 2027**. As such, successful applicants will be in a position to start recruiting students during the first quarter of 2027.

All applications must be submitted via the SGSSS online application system, SGSSS Apply.

1. Background

The SGSSS is the UK's largest facilitator of funding, training and support for doctoral students in social science. By combining the expertise of 16 universities across Scotland, SGSSS facilitates world-class PhD research. SGSSS is funded by the ESRC, the Scottish Funding Council and partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

In line with the ESRC's core commitment to enhancing social science capability and building capacity in priority areas, the SGSSS is running a **two stage** Supervisor-led Competition awarding studentships in the following priority areas (steers):

- Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM)
- Datasets
- Interdisciplinary (research which straddles other research council remits)

Up to **three** awards will be allocated per steer during the 2026/27 competition with students starting their studentships in October 2027.

ESRC is conducting a Mid Term Review of all DTPs during late 2026, which SGSSS is looking forward to participating in. The outcome will be shared towards the end of the year, and confirmation of studentship awards made will be subject to that outcome.

The key competition stages are outlined below:

1. Supervisors submit a Stage 1 application (Expression of Interest).
2. The SGSSS Directorate review all Stage 1 applications.
3. Shortlisted supervisors are invited to submit a Stage 2 application (full application).
4. A cross-institutional group of expert reviewers and a subsequent Steers panel review select successful Stage 2 applications.
5. Successful Stage 2 applicants are informed of the outcome of their applications and are invited to start student recruitment.
6. Supervisor informs SGSSS of their preferred candidate, further to eligibility checks within their own University.
7. SGSSS approve the preferred candidate and specify the necessary training requirements for the student, subject to their eligibility checks, thus determining the final award length offered.

Please note: As of 2024 intake, all ESRC funded students **are** expected to submit their PhD within the funded period – that is, the ESRC does not recognise **a** thesis-pending or 'writing-up' year. To support student wellbeing and to ensure that our universities are not penalised for non-completion (the ESRC reserves the right to withhold awards from institutions which do not comply), it is vitally important that project plans are feasible within the funded component of the PhD. This will be scrutinised by assessors. The research of the PhD must be done in three years. ESRC provide an additional 0.5 years (in the standard 3.5 year award) **to accommodate** "research in practice" placements (and wrap around training for placement) as well as training in new skills that ESRC wish PhD students to be exposed to.

Supervisors can only submit one application per supervisor-led competition – that is, a supervisor may apply once to the Open Collaborative, the Skills Development Scotland Collaborative and the Steers Competition. Please note, the single application requirement applies to any position within a supervisory team – that is, an applicant cannot apply to a competition as first supervisor on one application and second (or subsequent supervisor) on another application to the same

competition. **Any application submitted to a supervisor-led competition must not be repurposed as a student-led application, with any applications to the Student-led Open Competition, which are assessed to be resubmissions of a supervisor-led application being withdrawn from the competition**

For the Steers Competition we allow a supervisor to submit the same application to more than one steer during the application cycle. This should only be done if there is a strong and clear case that the application meets the aims of more than one steer and should not be done on a speculative basis.

1.1 Funding Arrangements

SGSSS Funding

SGSSS-DTP funding consists of the standard ESRC studentship package: fees, maintenance, Research Training Support Grant (RTSG), cohort development and overseas travel allowance.

The SGSSS funding model states that all steer studentships awarded will be co-funded by the host institution to the value of one third as follows:

SGSSS: 67%; HEI: 33%

The exception to the one-third HEI contribution is where the award is for a collaborative studentship with a financial contribution from a non-academic partner. For these awards the contribution from the host institution is reduced as follows:

- 10% contribution from the non-academic partner: 25% contribution from host HEI and 65% from SGSSS
- 25% contribution from the non-academic partner: 25% contribution from host HEI and 50% from SGSSS
- 33% contribution from the non-academic partner: 17% contribution from host HEI and 50% from SGSSS
- 50% contribution from the non-academic partner: 0% contribution from host HEI and 50% from SGSSS

Please see here for full guidance on the different types of SGSSS funding arrangements available for each studentship competition/studentship type.

Cross-Institutional Supervision

SGSSS support cross-institutional supervision where the arrangements are in the best interests of students. In these cases, the lead institution will be regarded as the host institution. The expectation is that the host institution will be responsible for covering the HEI contribution of the relevant funding split. The second institution will not be responsible for any proportion of the contribution. Further, the fees due will be transferred to the host institution with no expectation of a proportion of the fees going to the second institution.

Exceptions will be made where the cross-institutional supervision partnership is with one of our two institutions [1]that currently do not hold studentships. For these studentships, 33.0% of SGSSS

[1] For DTP 1: Abertay University, University of Highlands & Islands, Robert Gordon University, University of the West of Scotland; for DTP 2: Queen Margaret University and Robert Gordon University.

contribution to fees will be made to the second institution as part of the SGSSS reconciliation process (with the remaining 67.0% going to the host institution).

Where there is cross-institutional supervision, we expect that there are two supervisors based at the host institution. Where there is cross-institutional supervision we require two supervisors at the host HEI.

Institutional Funding Confirmation

All shortlisted Stage 2 applicants should seek funding confirmation (email or letter) from the home institution's SGSSS Dean of Graduate Studies, confirming that the institution will meet the required financial contribution. This confirmation will need to be uploaded as part of the Stage 2 application submission via SGSSS Apply. Please note, this is not required when submitting a Stage 1 application.

2. Application Guidance and Timeline

2.1 Supervisor Eligibility

Applications should be submitted by prospective first/lead supervisors meet the criteria listed in pg. 5 (see guidance below for more). SGSSS supports applications from academics at any stage in their careers, i.e., from early career researchers to more experienced supervisors. What we do ask however, is if a less experienced academic is applying as the first/lead supervisor, that they have one or more members on the supervisory team that are experienced in supervising PhD students to completion. Our threshold for an experienced supervisor is that they have supervised at least two PhD completions.

Of the 16 institutions in Scotland that are partners of SGSSS, 14 are eligible to receive ESRC funding across 21 Units of Assessment (UoA). Each UoA is analogous to a subject area-/-discipline. Not all 14 institutions are eligible to hold studentships in all UoAs. A comprehensive list of the eligible institutions and UoAs can be found on the SGSSS website here. Social science PhD students at the two institutions who are not eligible to for funding (Queen Margaret University and Robert Gordon University) are eligible for training programmes offered by SGSSS.

To be eligible to be first supervisor in any SGSSS competition, supervisors will:

- Meet any institutional requirements of first supervisors that are not covered below. Please contact your HEI Administrative lead for this information;
- Have undergone supervisor training within your institution within the last five years;
- Hold a research and teaching or research--only contract expected to last for the duration of the proposed PhD project;
- Work in a department/school/subject area that is administratively aligned to an eligible Unit of Assessment (UoA) for your Higher Education Institution; and
- Be a research active Social Scientist with output (e.g. papers and/or research funding) that is aligned to your UoA.

In order to audit supervisor eligibility, as part of the application process, we ask all first supervisors to provide details of a paper or funded research project that adopts a social science perspective. For more information on supervisor eligibility, please visit this page.

Liaison with the relevant SGSSS PGR Lead at your institution is strongly encouraged. Details of previously funded projects can be found in **Appendix 1**.

2.2 Competition Process

Stage 1

Applicants are invited to submit a co-produced Stage 1 application (Expression of Interest). The brevity of a Stage 1 application is to encourage rapid and creative responses from interested colleagues. It should articulate the primary conceptual idea and methodology of the proposal and demonstrate how it meets the AQM criteria. The Stage 1 application form can be found here and should be submitted via SGSSS Apply by 5pm on **23 September 2026.**

Please Note: When assessing applications, equal weight will be given to the research proposal and the supervisory team/research environment; both must demonstrably fit the steer – see the Marking Framework for details. The strongest applicants will be asked to submit a full proposal as outlined in Stage 2.

Stage 2

Shortlisted applicants will be asked to submit a Stage 2 application (full application) via *SGSSS Apply*. The same weighting will be applied to the assessment of applications as at Stage 1. The top **three** proposals will then be funded and supervisors will be required to advertise studentships widely. The Stage 2 application form can be found here and should be submitted via SGSSS Apply by 5pm on **16 November 2026.**

2.3 Competition Timeline

Please find below the Supervisor-led Steers Studentship Competition 2026/27 timeline. Individual institutions may wish to deploy earlier internal deadlines for Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications.

Please note, before a student is appointed, the home institution will need to complete eligibility checks to establish if the nominated student is eligible for the award, and in what capacity, i.e., home or international student.

For a full copy of the timeline, click this link.

2.4 Steers Descriptors

Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM)

This competition aims to encourage the development of advanced quantitative methods skills in relation to the norms of the discipline. Applicants are advised to read the ESRC Guidance on Steers and Targets which provides the requirements of an AQM award.

Datasets

This competition aims to encourage the development of data skills as applied to secondary data analysis. Applicants are advised to read the ESRC Guidance on Steers and Targets which provides the requirements of a datasets award. In addition to the ESRC Guidance on Steers and Targets criteria, where applications involve the use of datasets created through applicant's own research, you should evidence that:

- The primary project funding period has ended;
- At least one publication deriving from the funded project has appeared in a peer-reviewed journal; and,
- The project through which the dataset has been generated has been externally funded and awarded through a peer-review process.

Interdisciplinary

This competition aims to encourage conceptual and methodological creativity. Co-funding from another Doctoral Training Partnership is not required however applicants are advised to read the ESRC Guidance on Steers and Targets which details the requirements of an interdisciplinary award. The supervisory team should consist of a first supervisor within the social sciences and a second supervisor outwith the social sciences who demonstrably works within the remit of another research council.

2.5 Ethics Guidance

The Steers Competition Stage 2 application form states that the case for support **MUST** include:

> 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.

We recognise that the 2,250 word limit constrains the level of detail available to applicants but we expect to see consideration of ethical issues commensurate with the type of study being proposed. Where possible, applicants should indicate both the principles and practicalities of relevant ethical considerations and demonstrate how they are integral to all stages of the research. *All* research projects need to be considered in terms of ethics and integrity, even if they do not involve human participants.

Pointing to relevant experience of the supervisors and other sources of support will provide further reassurance that consideration has been given to the training needs of the research student, their personal safety and wellbeing, where relevant, and how emergent issues will be managed. Note that studies involving children or vulnerable populations, social media or involving overseas fieldwork may need particularly careful consider, of which is stion.

For guidance on how intellectual property rights should be handled, please see **section 4** of the SGSSS Collaborative Agreement template here, noting the relevant sections.

In addition to guidance from your professional discipline-based association (e.g. BERA, BPS, BSA) and your home institution, many useful resources are provided by UKRI here. As their guidance notes, ethical considerations are "less about compliance and 'getting through' the ethics process, and more about mature, constructive and collaborative ethical deliberation, mutual learning and shared action aimed at maximising benefit and minimising harm." Some proposals may also benefit from EPSRC resources on responsible innovation available here.

Below, we include some examples taken from research proposals where we considered the approach to ethics to be inadequate. In all cases, more information was required to assure the reviewers that supervisors had a good understanding of the ethical implications of the study and of the student's likely training needs. The amount of detail required will depend to some extent on the type of project proposed, but reviewers will want to be confident that supervisors will promote good practice in the areas of ethics and integrity.

- "All data are fully anonymised and will be kept securely."

- "Data collection will conform with strict protocols."
- "The work does not involve human participants or ethical data and therefore does not require ethical review."
- "There are no substantial ethical issues associated with this project."
- "The supervisory team will ensure that the data are ethically obtained."
- "We will apply for NHS ethical approval."
- "Ethical approval will be sought from the faculty of X's ethics committee. We will follow the guidelines established by the British Association of X."
- "The student will be trained to deal with ethical considerations through the department and other training."

Please note that there is no specific requirement to address ethics during Stage 1, however, in most cases we would expect to see an indication of an awareness of the need for ethical considerations in the section on key strengths of the proposed supervisory team and/or the case for support.

3. Steers Marking Framework

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 (i.e., submission outside the funded period will be counted as a late submission). The research of the PhD must be done in 3 years (or part-time equivalent). 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%)

SGSSS Steers Competition Marking Framework 2026/27

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. **SEE ABOVE** (Descriptor represents a score of 9 to 10)
9	Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically AND Fulfils criteria 8 to 7 below	
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

3	A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature.	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.
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.

Click here to download as a standalone document.

4. Studentships

4.1 Student Eligibility

In October 2020, the eligibility criteria for ESRC funding changed for studentships commencing from 2021 onwards.

As per guidance published by UKRI, a minimum of 70% of all studentships awarded by SGSSS will be made to home students, while a maximum of 30% of all studentships awarded can be made to international students. Please note, it is not a requirement for 30% of studentships to be awarded to international students, as the quality of applications should always remain the primary assessment criterion during the competition.

Residential Criteria

To be classed as a home student, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a UK national (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have settled status, or
- Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have indefinite leave to remain or enter.

If a student does not meet the above criteria they are to be assessed as an international student.

4.2 Student Recruitment

The ESRC is committed to equality and diversity of opportunity. For widening access purposes, all collaborative studentship opportunities should be offered as a +3.5 or 1+3.5 award and for full-time or part-time study. The 1+3.5 award should be designed to support students that do not have a Master's degree prior to appointment, i.e. Master's year plus 3 years for the PhD. The

length will be finalised at the DNA meeting and there is a possibility for it to be fractional (i.e., 4 (3.5 plus 6 months of training).

Important information regarding recruiting international students (only applicable to the universities listed below (this guidance was included on 08 September 2026):

SGSSS studentship awards include funding which covers home fees. Please be aware that if a student is categorised as liable for international fee status, the following universities will likely charge them the difference between the home and international fee level:

- **University of Dundee,**
- **University of Glasgow,**
- **Glasgow Caledonian University,**
- **Heriot-Watt University, and**
- **University of Stirling.**

That means if they accept the studentship at one of these universities, they will be liable to pay additional fee costs, and funding will not be available from SGSSS beyond the home fee level already covered. Please note that for visa purposes, you will have to demonstrate that you can pay the difference in fees (the exact amount will vary by university, but this could be around £15,000-£20,000 per annum).

Supervisors should clearly identify how they plan to advertise and recruit a student as part of their initial application. If successfully awarded a studentship, supervisors will need to consider the following guidance during the recruitment process:

Regulations on appointing students

- All studentships should be fairly advertised and abide by the recruitment processes within the first supervisor's institution. The expectation is that student recruitment would start in early 2027. Exact dates will be confirmed if your studentship application is successful.
- The SGSSS will advertise all opportunities on its website, however in prior years some awards have proved difficult to fill. As such, please ensure you commit to advertising as widely as possible to ensure the best choice of well-qualified student candidates. Please consider in advance whether your HEI or collaborative partner would be willing to pay for further advertisements.
- The first supervisor's instution **must** ensure the nominated student's eligibility, i.e., home or international status is correct. This is vital to allow SGSSS to adhere to the ESRC's 30% cap on international students. We strongly recommend that eligibility checks take place after candidates have been shortlisted and before they are invited for interview.[2]
- The SGSSS **must** approve all student appointments before they are confirmed. The ESRC continually monitors SGSSS processes, and it is critical that students entering directly onto doctoral programmes meet the required ESRC core training criteria.
- **UKRI regulations are that only 30% of the awarded studentships to our supervisor-led awards can go to international students. In the event that the number of nominated international students exceeds this cap then SGSSS will allocate studentships to first-**

[2] The ESRC residency criteria is available within the ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide.

ranked international students using a on a lottery. The detailed guidance will be provided to you at the time of award. It will include information on the student recruitment timeline, how to review applications as well as how to nominate students, amongst other information.

4.3 ESRC Approved Master's Provision

When you come to recruit a student to fill the studentship award, if successful, they may be required to undertake a 1+3.5 award. If this is the case and the home institution does not have an ESRC approved Master's programme aligned to the relevant SGSSS Unit of Assessment, the student will be required to undertake their Masters at another SGSSS-DTP institution where an approved ESRC Master's programme is available (before 'transferring' to their 'home' institution for the remainder of the PhD programme). If this could apply to your student, i.e. your institution does not have an ESRC approved Master's programme aligned to the pathway you are applying under, you must upload a completed Masters Arrangement Form as part of your application. This must be completed in conjunction with the relevant SGSSS Dean of Graduate Studies representative at the institution where the Masters will be undertaken.

Please Note: SGSSS will undertake a training requirement assessment for all nominated students, determining the length of the award applicable (1+3.5, +3.5 etc.). For more details on possible award lengths, please see the guidance here.

5. Appendix 1: Example Applications

Advanced Quantitative Methods

Professor Christian Ewald	**UoA:** Business and Management Studies **Challenge Pathway:** Social Inequalities	**University of Glasgow**

Random Fields in Continuous-Time Overlapping Generations Models: Wealth Inequality and Macroeconomic Dynamics

This PhD project develops a new quantitative framework for analysing how inequality and macroeconomic dynamics interact in modern economies. Classical overlapping generations (OLG) models are central to macroeconomics but typically treat shocks in a simplified way, focusing on aggregate disturbances while ignoring correlations across individuals and cohorts. Meanwhile, random growth models explain the fat-tailed distributions of income and wealth but abstract from intergenerational and macroeconomic feedbacks.

This project unifies these perspectives by introducing random fields—stochastic processes indexed by both time and cohort—into continuous-time OLG models. Random fields enable both idiosyncratic (individual) and systematic (correlated) shocks to be modelled consistently, using stochastic partial differential equations (SPDEs) to describe how economic variables evolve and interact. This provides a richer, data-informed way to understand inequality and aggregate fluctuations.

The research proceeds in four steps: (1) establishing the theoretical framework for random-field-driven OLG models; (2) applying Malliavin calculus and stochastic control to derive behavioural responses; (3) analysing stationary and transitional wealth distributions and the emergence of inequality "tails"; and (4) calibrating the model to UK data to evaluate the effects of taxation, pensions, and macroprudential regulation.

By combining advanced quantitative methods with policy relevance, the project will advance understanding of how correlated shocks shape inequality and macroeconomic stability in the UK and beyond. It will also contribute to training a new generation of researchers fluent in the application of frontier stochastic methods to major social science challenges.

Professor Thomas Scotto	**UoA:** Politics and International Studies **Challenge Pathway:** Social Inequalities	**University of Strathclyde**

Bias and Inclusion in Survey Data: Modelling Respondent Effort Across International and Youth-Focused Surveys

This studentship will train a PhD candidate in advanced quantitative methods, specifically latent variable and mixture modelling, to address a key methodological and ethical challenge in contemporary survey research: identifying and managing low-effort or inattentive respondents (Careless or Insufficient Effort, C/IE) across diverse populations and survey modes. Such respondents threaten data reliability and can distort the representation of marginalised or disengaged groups, reinforcing existing inequalities in whose voices are heard in social research.

Building on recent advances in probabilistic modelling, the project will develop latent classification techniques that go beyond binary exclusion rules (such as response time thresholds or manipulation checks) to model a spectrum of respondent attentiveness. This approach enables more precise, inclusive, and interpretable assessments of data quality. The research will benchmark these innovations against conventional rule-based methods, assessing gains in validity and inclusiveness.

The project will leverage three major datasets: the British Election Study, the Afrobarometer survey series, and the UK Youth Poll, a new initiative co-led by Dr Joe Greenwood-Hau at the University of Glasgow's John Smith Centre. Together, these datasets allow for comparative exploration of attentiveness, inclusion, and representation across political, cultural, and generational contexts.

Supervised by experienced Strathclyde Professors Thomas J. Scotto and Robert Mattes, and co-supervised by early career researcher Dr Greenwood-Hau, the student will gain cutting-edge methodological training and professional experience in applied survey research. Outputs will include peer-reviewed publications, methodological guidance for practitioners, and contributions to public and private survey organisations. The project aligns with the Social Inequalities challenge pathway by improving the inclusivity and accuracy of survey-based evidence used to inform public policy anddemocratic participation.

Datasets

Professor Jim Lewsey	**UoA:** Social Work and Social Policy **Challenge Pathway:** Health, Wellbeing and Communities	**University of Glasgow**

Evaluating the effects of Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit as a public health intervention using natural experimental methods

Established in 2005, Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) pioneered a public health approach to violence prevention by addressing the social determinants of violence, rather than relying solely on enforcement. Following a 58% reduction in violent crime volume from 2008-09 to 2021-22 and halving of Scotland's homicide rate since 2008-09, this model has gained international recognition. Twenty such violence reduction units (VRUs) have been established across England and Wales since 2019.

While specific violence reduction interventions have showed promising results (Williams et al., 2014), comprehensive evaluation of the SVRU's overall impact using robust causal inference methods has not been undertaken. Additionally, prior analysis of homicide data has noted that societal shifts may have contributed, independently of the SVRU (Geoghegan, 2015). New analytical techniques using Scottish Ambulance Service data have been shown to give sensitive, area-based estimates of specific callouts – potentially able to measure rates of injury due to violence. The availability of novel data to detect incidences of violence and the scope of cutting-edge epidemiological methods presents an opportunity to assess what contributions the SVRU approach made to falls in violent crime.

This project will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the SVRU's effectiveness. The candidate will utilise natural language processing methods to categorise and detect records of ambulance callouts for violent injuries and use these to generate estimates of rates of violent assault as an outcome targeted by the SRVU strategy. They will work with stakeholders to co-develop an evaluation design approach that uses natural experimental methods to estimate the contribution the SVRU made to reducing violence in Glasgow.

This project will model emerging approaches to using existing non-conventional data sources to answer important policy questions. Outcomes will inform further implementation of VRU approaches. The student will collaborate with stakeholders and gain insights into the use of evidence in decision-making.

Professor Nissa Finney	**UoA:** Geography and Environmental Studies **Challenge Pathway:** Social Inequalities	**University of St Andrews**

The mobilities slowdown and the reproduction of socio-spatial inequalities

How are new residential mobility trends bringing increasing deprivation, housing precarity and population unsustainability to certain neighbourhoods and populations?

This project examines the growing phenomenon of the 'mobilities slowdown' which describes a decline in residential mobility across higher income countries. Given that the ability to move house has been demonstrated as beneficial for economies, population sustainability and individuals' social mobility and wellbeing, uneven experience of 'mobilities

slowdown' has implications for social and spatial inequalities which scholarship has not yet explored. This project will provide new evidence on who and where is affected, why we see population and place differences in experiences of the mobilities slowdown, and how this is impacting socio-spatial inequalities.

The project is distinctive in bringing an inequalities lens, innovative in its creative interrogation of unrivalled, recently-released large-scale data, and timely in its relevance to policy concerns around housing, community cohesion, regional inequalities and population sustainability. It will address the following research questions:

- **What** are the contemporary patterns of residential mobility: How do new trends in the slowdown of residential mobility vary across population groups and places?
- **Who and where** is affected: What population groups and places gain and lose from the (new) patterns of residential mobility (e.g. in social mobility, neighbourhood deprivation, housing precarity, population sustainability)?
- **Why** do we see varying residential mobility for population groups and places: What (individual/family and place) factors are associated with residential mobility trends?

The core analyses will use the exceptional, recently-released England and Wales/Scotland Census data (2021/2022) together with historical census products and linked (commercial/administrative) area-level indicators to enliven salient debates in migration and urban studies and build capacity in analysis of complex, large scale, spatio-temporal population datasets.

Interdisciplinary

Dr Sudeepa Abeysinghe	**UoA:** Social Work and Social Policy **Challenge Pathway:** Health, Wellbeing and Communities	**University of Edinburgh**

Immune memory: How can Black Caribbean historical narratives inform understandings of low vaccine uptake across the lifecourse?

Routine childhood vaccination coverage in England has been declining since 2013, but the burden of disease risk is not evenly distributed across the population and is particularly acute among undervaccinated children from minoritised backgrounds. People of Black Caribbean heritage in England and Scotland are consistently less likely to receive routine child and adult vaccinations, leading to a chain of persistent inequality across the life course. Lower COVID-19 vaccine uptake among adults of Black ethnicities, despite higher morbidity and mortality, has been linked to the enduring legacy of racialised medical exploitation and the impact of broader structural violence. Against this backdrop, the proposed PhD study will integrate approaches from health policy, health sociology and anthropology, and history to examine the extent to which influences on vaccine decision-making are intergenerational among Black Caribbean families. Methods will be triangulated through a three-phased approach: (i) archival research into public health and NHS practices relating to Black

Caribbean-born and descended people in Britain from 1948-71; (ii) semi-structured interviews with Black Caribbean-born people who arrived in Britain between 1948-1971 and (adult) children of those who arrived in this period, to explore experiences and the legacies of healthcare and public health programmes both in the Caribbean and the UK; (iii) and using select extracts identified above in novel 'reading group methodologies' with Black Caribbean parents of children (0-5 years) to explore the extent to which the past informs parental decision-making in the present. This approach will excavate perceptions and experiences of vaccination and public health racism across first, second and third generation Black Caribbean migrants. Analysis will take forward critiques of the afterlives of slavery and colonialism by considering how public health legacies persist as 'immune memory' in the vaccine decisions of Black Caribbean and descended

people in Britain.

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Spatial Open-Source Intelligence (S-OSINT) in the Age of Misinformation and Disinformation: Developing a Best Practice Framework for Law and Engineering

Access to reliable and verifiable sources, which can document human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law, are crucial in legal contexts. Spatial open-source intelligence (S-OSINT), which is information gathered from publicly available data, such as remote sensing observations, geotagged IOT sensors or social network data, has become an increasingly significant resource in human rights and humanitarian lawyering, ranging from investigations and fact-finding missions through to courtroom evidence at trial.

This innovative, interdisciplinary project analyses the value of S-OSINT, specifically satellite remote sensing data, in legal contexts. The project has two aims: (1) it identifies, analyses and evaluates how practices of misinformation and disinformation pose legal and engineering challenges to the use of S-OSINT; (2) it develops a best-practice framework that promotes the development of reliable, verifiable and integrity-driven S-OSINT applications and their uses in legal contexts. To deliver on these aims, the project deploys an interdisciplinary methodology, which conjoins approaches from legal studies, qualitative interviews with S-OSINT users such as legal professionals and engineers, and satellite remote sensing methods. This approach is based on the premise that the research challenge, specifically the authentication of S-OSINT, its use in human rights and humanitarian fact-finding missions, and its admissibility as legal evidence at trial, requires substantial interaction between lawyers and remote sensing engineers.

The project's interdisciplinary research focus will be supported by cross-sectoral working via placements in legal and engineering contexts. These placements will broaden the student's employability skills, expand their professional networks, and advance the project's KE and impact strategy via the production of policy briefs and best-practice guidelines for S-OSINT users. These guidelines will be the first bespoke recommendations to address the issue of mis- and disinformation with respect to S-OSINT. Further outputs will include the student's PhD thesis, a co-authored journal article, and seminar and conference presentations.