

North West
Social Science
Doctoral Training
Partnership



Economic
and Social
Research Council

+3/+2 Studentship Application Guidance For October 2023 entry

Introduction

This document is intended for those who wish to apply to the Universities of Keele, Lancaster, Liverpool or Manchester for an Economic and Social Research Centre (ESRC) postgraduate award under the North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (NWSSDTP) scheme to support doctoral study in Social Sciences from October 2023. The guidance below sets out the types of awards provided, eligibility for awards and the application process.

This guidance is for candidates who are applying for funding towards doctoral study only. If you intend to apply for funding towards a Master's and a PhD, please refer to the 1+3/2+2/2+3 guidance on the NWSSDTP website.

It is crucial that you read this guidance carefully before making your application.

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Types of Awards

This guidance is for candidates who are applying for funding towards doctoral study only. If you intend to apply for funding towards a Master's and a PhD, please refer to the 1+3/2+2/2+3 guidance on the NWSSDTP website. The NWSSDTP does not fund standalone Master's programmes.

The ESRC-funded NWSSDTP provides funding to enable students to study at Keele University, Lancaster University, the University of Liverpool or the University of Manchester.

+3 Scheme (Three Years Doctoral Study)

This scheme will provide support for up to three years of full-time study, or six years of part-time study, on a programme leading to the award of a doctoral degree.

+2 Scheme (Two Years Doctoral Study)

This scheme is as the +3 scheme, but for students who are already in the first year of their doctoral study at one of the four eligible universities. Such students may apply for support for two years of full-time study, or four years of part-time study, on a programme leading to the award of a doctoral degree. Students who have completed more than one year full-time study (or two years part-time) are not eligible to apply for funding.

Eligibility

Residential eligibility:

NWSSDTP Studentships are open to both Home and International (including EU and EEA) candidates.

Please note that NWSSDTP Studentships will only fund tuition fees up to the Home rate. This is £4,596 in 2022/23 (exact rate for 2023/24 subject to confirmation from UKRI). International tuition fees are usually substantially higher than this sum. However, all institutions within the NWSSDTP have committed to waiving increased tuition fees for international NWSSDTP students. International students recruited to NWSSDTP Studentship will not be expected to pay any additional tuition fees themselves.

Please also be aware that the NWSSDTP is only permitted to award a maximum of 30% of its studentships - a maximum of 18 awards - to international (including EU and EEA) students per annum.

To be classed as a home student, candidates 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 candidate does not meet the criteria above, they would be classed as an International student.

This will not apply to Irish nationals living in the UK and Ireland whose right to study and to access benefits and services will be preserved on a reciprocal basis for UK and Irish nationals under the Common Travel Area arrangement. Such applicants will be classified as Home students.

You must refer to the UKRI Terms and Conditions for Training Grants for full details
<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Academic eligibility:

For +2 and +3 studentship applications, candidates must have qualifications of the standard of a good undergraduate honours degree at first or upper second class level and a suitable Master's degree.

In the majority of cases, candidates will have undertaken an undergraduate course and Master's course at a recognised UK higher education institution. However, some may have qualifications from outside the UK, or be able to offer a combination of qualifications and/or experience. It will be necessary to ascertain whether these qualifications can be equated to an honours degree, and at what level. The ESRC bases its assessments of qualifications attained outside the UK on the British Council's NARIC guide. For non-UK qualifications transcripts in English as well as details in the original language must be provided with the application form.

Candidates must be planning to study in an ESRC recognised pathways (see Appendix 1 for a list of recognised pathways for the NWSSDTP).

Please note that the supervisory fit of your prospective supervision team will be taken into consideration when the application is assessed during the competition.

Global Majority Directed Studentships

In order to reflect and promote the ethos and values of the consortium, we actively encourage applications from students from backgrounds that are currently under-represented within the ESRC NWSSDTP and in postgraduate research within Higher Education in the UK more broadly.

We are committed to supporting individuals from communities that have historically been marginalised and discouraged from progressing to academic research through structurally embedded forms of exclusion and bias. Our goal is to address imbalances and to proactively promote and embed equality of opportunity, through a series of policies and measures which form our EDI strategy. This includes outreach work across education facilities, communities and networks, a concentrated focus on advertising and soliciting part time applications, and the introduction of three directed studentships to be awarded annually to students from Global Majority communities.*

Applicants wishing to be considered for these directed studentships will have the opportunity to identify Global Majority affiliation on the NWSSDTP application form. These applications will be noted on receipt and considered in the process of the standard award competition, in line with the assessment criteria and schedule (see further details above and below).

*Global Majority: A collective term for over 80% of the world's population who do not consider themselves, or are not considered to be white, therefore referring to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/or have been previously referred to as "ethnic minorities".

Financial basis of the awards

An NWSSDTP Studentship consists of:

- Payment of academic fees, at the standard UKRI Home rate (£4,596 in 2022/23, exact rate for 2023/24 subject to confirmation from UKRI)
- Maintenance Stipend (£17,668 in 2022/23, exact rate for 2023/24 subject to confirmation from UKRI)
- Access to a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) for reimbursement of research related expenses including - but not limited to - conference attendance, training courses and UK fieldwork.
- Opportunity to apply for additional funding towards:
 - Overseas Fieldwork (only if the need for overseas fieldwork has been detailed at the application stage) and Difficult Language Training,
 - Overseas Institutional Visits
 - Internships

Students opting to study part time will receive a pro rata maintenance grant of the equivalent of a full time award.

Students who specify in their original application that their doctoral project will require fieldwork and/or Difficult Language Training may also submit a claim for additional financial support to enable them to undertake this, once they have commenced their studies. For more information on this please refer to the NWSSDTP web pages. Fieldwork and Difficult Language Training funding can only be claimed at doctoral level, not during the Master's.

Students will receive additional Disabled Student Allowance where appropriate.

Priority Areas

The ESRC have awarded the NWSSDTP 12 steered awards each year in the following Priority Areas:

- Advanced Quantitative Methods (4 awards)
- Use of Datasets (4 awards) - the NWSSDTP particularly welcomes applications to this Priority Area which focus on *Longitudinal Data Analysis*.
- Interdisciplinary research which straddles other research council remits (4 awards) - the NWSSDTP particularly welcomes applications to this Priority Area which focus on *Data Science*.

The NWSSDTP strongly encourages applicants to indicate alignment with the Priority Areas where appropriate.

The Application Process

Students will normally be expected to have been offered a place at one of the four NWSSDTP institutions before submitting their NWSSDTP Studentship Application, on one of the programmes eligible for NWSSDTP funding (please see the NWSSDTP website for a list of eligible programmes for each pathway). However, Studentship Applications will be accepted from students who have submitted their institutional application but have yet to receive a formal offer, providing that such an

offer has been made by the time of the Studentship Allocation meeting, which will take place on the 21st March 2023. In no case will an NWSSDTP Studentship be officially awarded until the student has secured a conditional or unconditional place at their university.

You should apply to one institution for admission onto your chosen postgraduate programme using the online application forms:

Keele: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/pgresearch/howtoapply/>

Lancaster: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/how-to-apply-for-postgraduate-study/>

Liverpool: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-research/how-to-apply/>

Manchester: <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/postgraduate/howtoapply/>

IMPORTANT Applicants must contact their School PGR Administrators prior to completing and submitting their applications, as some schools have local internal deadlines. Please find contact details here: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/submitting-apps/>

Copies of transcripts and references included in your original programme application will also be required for your NWSSDTP Studentship application. Please see Appendix 2 for referee guidance – it is advised that potential referees are sent a copy of this document when approached for a reference.

You should send a digital copy of the completed NWSSDTP application form with transcripts and references to the relevant School PGR Administrator (details [here](#)) by 5pm on 1st February 2023.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Please ensure you complete and submit an EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING FORM with your application. This will not be made available to those reviewing your funding application, but will be used to survey equality and diversity of applicants and our funded students.

Assessment of Applications

a. Panels

Your application will initially be assessed by the **Institutional Pathway Panel**. The panel consists of senior academics from within the relevant pathway at the institution you intend to register. Each application is judged on its own merits based on the information provided in the NWSSDTP Application Form and your transcripts / references. This panel agrees a mark for each application and applications are then ranked.

The Institutional Pathway Panels will then present their top applicants at a **NWSSDTP Pathway Panel**. This consists of one nominated pathway lead from each NWSSDTP institution. This panel decided which applications will go through the final committee panel.

Finally, the applications which have passed the previous two stages are presented to the **NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee** by the overall pathway lead. This committee will then decide on studentship allocation across the NWSSDTP. This NWSSDTP Studentship Committee will take place on the 21st March 2023.

b. Outcome of Application

Successful candidates will be informed by email by 28th March 2023. If you are successful in being nominated for an award, you will be asked to confirm by the 20th April 2023 whether or not you wish to formally accept the award. If you do not confirm by this date, the NWSSDTP reserves the right to reallocate the award.

The NWSSDTP Studentship Committee and the pathway leads will also agree a list of **reserve candidates**, and reserve candidates will also be informed by the 28th March 2023. If you are selected as a reserve candidate you may still be offered an award should one of the successful candidates decline their award / fail to formally accept their award.

Candidates who reach the NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee stage but are **unsuccessful** will also be informed by the 28th March 2023. Due to the volume of applications, individual feedback will not be available.

Candidates who do not reach the NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee stage should be notified by their local School PGR Administrator. If you do not receive confirmation of the outcome of your application by the 28th March 2023, this will mean your application did not progress to the final stage - please contact your relevant School PGR Administrator (contact details [here](#)) for confirmation.

c. Taking up an Award

Award holders will normally be expected to begin their programme of study in September or October 2023 and, providing we have received all necessary paperwork, holders of a full award will receive the first instalment of their maintenance grant in early October.

In certain circumstances, such as illness or where there is a need to give a period of notice to an employer, we will consider deferring the start date of a doctoral programme, normally by up to three months (subject to approval from the School PG office). Any application for postponement must be made immediately through the University in which you intend to register. You should write to the University, in advance, including supporting letters from your potential supervisor. Deferrals of twelve months or more are not permissible.

If you are unable to take up your award in the year in which it was awarded, it will be rescinded and you will have to re-apply in the competition in the following year. You will need to inform us of your decision at the earliest possible stage, in writing, by letter or e-mail.

Progression from Master's to doctoral study for 1+3/2+2/2+3 candidates will be subject to the successful completion of the Master's programme.

The continuation of doctoral awards is subject to the submission of a satisfactory annual report at the end of each year of the award and you are subject to the University and School's standard monitoring and progression processes.

d. Change in circumstances

Studentships are awarded for a particular programme of study at the University of Keele, Lancaster, Liverpool or Manchester. Therefore all requests to make changes to the awards are only considered by the NWSSDTP Academic Management Committee in exceptional circumstances and only if the reasons are fully and clearly explained.

e. Resubmitting Applications

If you are unsuccessful in one year's competition you may apply in the next year's competition, without prejudice, providing you continue to meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme.

Application Timetable

1 st February 2023	Deadline for submission of application to relevant School PGR Administrator (contact details here)
21 st March 2023	NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee
By 28 th March 2023	Successful, Reserve and Unsuccessful Candidates informed by email
20 th April 2023	Deadline for successful candidates to confirm acceptance of the award
Sep/Oct 2023	New NWSSDTP Cohort start
November 2023	NWSSDTP Induction Week

Guidance Notes for Standard Studentship Application Form

Please carefully follow the instructions below to complete your application form.

1. Studentships available

Please tick the scheme you would like to apply for.

2. Institution at which you intend to register

Please tick the University in which you intend to register.

3. Candidate's Details

We need to be able to contact you between March and September 2023. Under 'Address' you should provide the address at which you can be contacted for the majority of this period, even if this is different to the address you have given on the University application form. Should you be unavailable during this period, you may provide the name and address of someone who can correspond for you in your absence. Similarly, please give an email address and phone number which you can be contacted on between March and September 2023.

Please declare here, by ticking the box, if you wish to be considered for the Global Majority directed studentships – see definition on page 3.

4. Project details

- Mode of attendance

Part time students are only eligible for the maintenance grant on a pro-rata basis. Further information on awards and stipends can be found on page 3 above.

- NWSSDTP Pathway/School/Institution

Please indicate the NWSSDTP pathway you are applying to, which must be one of the accredited pathways as listed in Appendix 1. Also include the School and Institution with which you intend to register. If you are uncertain about any of these details, please discuss this with your School PGR Administrator (contact details [here](#)).

- Project title

The appropriate title of the project should be entered.

5. PhD Proposal

Please give details of your PhD proposal in 1500 words or less. The NWSSDTP reserve the right to disqualify applications which exceed this word limit. Referencing/bibliography should be included within this word limit.

6. Qualifications

Please enter your relevant academic qualifications. As stated above, candidates must have qualifications of the standard of a good undergraduate honours degree at first or upper second class level, and a Master's degree.

7. Relevant Experience

Please complete this section by entering the number of years of experience and give details. The assessors will use this information to establish any experience you have had which might contribute to the intended research topic or strengthen your application.

8. Supervision

Please state who your prospective supervisors are. This should have been discussed with the prospective supervisors prior to application. The supervisory fit of your prospective supervision team will be taken into consideration when the application is assessed during the competition.

9. Research training previously undertaken

The ESRC have specific expectations regarding the training a candidate should have received prior to undertaking an ESRC funded +3 (or +2) studentship, as outlined in the [ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2015](#).

The purpose of this is to raise the general level of skills and knowledge amongst social scientists by ensuring that they develop, and can apply, basic and advanced quantitative and qualitative research skills that are responsive to the needs of social science subject areas and disciplines, the broader science base and a wide range of users.

To be awarded a +3 or +2 studentship, it is expected that candidates will have already received significant core research methods training, primarily through the completion of their Master's

programme. As a guide, a candidate would be expected to have already undertaken at least 70% of training outlined below before commencing their PhD. There should then be plans in place to address the remaining <30% during the early stages of the PhD, and these plans can be outlined in question 10. If a candidate has not undertaken at least 70% of the training outlined below, they may wish to consider applying for a 1+3/2+2/2+3 programme.

Please provide details of training received in the key four areas outlined below. Please ensure that the information provided includes full details of the research methods training, including specific details of relevant modules completed and training courses attended.

- **Learning outcomes**

As a result of their training in research methods, candidates are expected to have developed the following skills and be able to apply them in practical research contexts:

- comprehension of principles of research design and strategy, including an understanding of how to formulate research questions which are amenable to empirical investigation and an appreciation of alternative approaches to research;
- competence in understanding and applying a broad range of research methods, (including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods), and the use of appropriate software for their application;
- the development of advanced research skills and techniques relevant to their field of study;
- capabilities for managing research, including data management, and conducting and disseminating research in a way that is consistent with both professional practice and the normal principles of research ethics;
- understanding of the significance of alternative epistemological positions that provide the context for theory construction, research design, and the selection of appropriate analytical techniques;
- understanding of the basics of probability, and a critical understanding of the scientific method and of the nature of reflexivity; and
- understanding of the application of good ethical practice across the entire research process.

- **Principles of research design**

Candidates must be able to understand the connection between research questions or hypotheses and the tools required to address them, and gain practical experience of applying some of those tools. More generally, candidates should have received training that enables them to demonstrate their capability to:

- define and formulate research problems and questions, and, where appropriate, formulate hypotheses that can be tested;
- understand the rationale for using particular qualitative or quantitative research methods;
- understand the relationship between empirical research and theory generation and testing (theory-evidence links);
- understand different forms of sampling, sampling error, and case selection, and potential implications for the interpretation of research findings;

- understand and apply the concepts of generalisability, validity, reliability, and replicability (recognising that there are different perspectives on how these may be defined); and
- understand the integrated or complementary nature of the relationship between methods in mixed methods research designs.

It is expected that candidates will develop more sophisticated understandings of these issues in the course of their subject-specific training in the early years of the PhD.

- **Data Collection, Analysis and Management**

The ESRC expects all +3 / +2 candidates to have developed a good level of literacy in both quantitative and qualitative methods through exposure to a wide range of methods of data collection, research design and data analysis. Students must have a good understanding of both the practice and philosophies of social science research which enables them to understand the advantages and disadvantages of core research methods and apply appropriate methods to different types of research questions. Students should be made aware of the basic approaches to both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, including different ontological and epistemological perspectives.

All students are expected to have some core training in quantitative methods and to be trained to a basic level of statistical literacy. All students are also expected to have some core training in qualitative methods and to be trained to a level that would allow them to understand and interpret a range of phenomenological or textual data. Regardless of the specific methods used in their research, all students will be expected to demonstrate competency in the skills required to manage data effectively, whether they are using existing data or creating new data.

As with research design, and depending on the subject area or discipline, students are expected to acquire, in their first or subsequent years of postgraduate study, more advanced levels of competence in quantitative and/or qualitative methods of data collection and analysis which are appropriate for their substantive and disciplinary focus.

Further details can be found on page 8 - 10 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2015](#).

- **Core subject-specific training**

As part of core subject-specific training students should be made aware of the breadth of the field of enquiry, the range of constituent specialisms and the resulting spread of research paradigms and theoretical positions. Students should also emerge from their doctoral programme with an appreciation of the way social science research is embedded in policy and practice.

The aim is to ensure that students:

- are well informed of the latest thinking and ideas in their field of enquiry – including subject knowledge, theoretical positions and research methods – from a range of perspectives
- appreciate the basis on which the knowledge in the field has been derived
- are able to use this knowledge to make a reasoned defence of the theoretical traditions and research techniques that they ultimately may have chosen (or rejected) during their research.

10. Research Training and Support Needs

Please give details of any identified training needs for your doctoral programme which will equip and enable you to undertake your proposed research project. Candidates are expected to undertake appropriate training during their PhD, and demonstrating an awareness of the training required/available will strengthen your application. State whether or not this has been discussed with your supervisors.

Please clearly indicate whether you intend to do fieldwork abroad or learn a difficult language during your doctoral programme. Please indicate the destination and the duration of fieldwork if known at this stage. Only students who specify potential fieldwork in their original application will be eligible to apply for additional fieldwork funding during their studentship. Only students who specify potential difficult language training in their original application will have the opportunity to make a case for a fieldwork / studentship extension to accommodate this.

Please discuss with your supervisor whether your project is likely to require sourcing additional funding (£1000 or more) for the purchase of specialist equipment, specific software or access to datasets, without which the project could not be completed.

11. Priority Areas

Please detail if you think your project will utilise **Advanced Quantitative Methods** and what training you will undertake during the doctoral programme to enable this. Please be sure to address each of the three criterion which are used to assess AQM. Failure to do so will significantly reduce the likelihood of AQM status being awarded.

Please complete the **Use of Datasets** section if appropriate for your project. The NWSSDTP particularly welcomes applications to this Priority Area which focus on *Longitudinal Data Analysis*.

Please complete the **Interdisciplinary research which straddles other research council remits** section if appropriate for your project. For details of the remits of all research councils please see: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/our-councils/> The NWSSDTP particularly welcomes applications to this Priority Area which focus on *Data Science*.

Further details about all three Priority Areas can be found here: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/priority-areas/>

12. CASE or Collaboration

Please only complete this section if your project incorporates a CASE or a collaborative element with a non-HEI partner organisation. There is no need to complete a separate CASE Studentship Application Form. Please note that before you can apply for a CASE award you must have discussed the collaboration with your supervisor, the proposed partner and your institution.

A letter of support from the partner, which briefly outlines the nature of the collaboration (corresponding with what has been outlined in 12b and 12c) should be included. If no contact has been made with a partner, please just apply for a standard studentship. Contributions for a collaborating partner can be in cash or in kind.

13. Additional applications

Please indicate whether you have already applied for any other funding for this forthcoming year.

14. Acknowledgment

Please sign and date the application form. Electronic signatures are sufficient.

15. Supporting Documents

You should provide two academic references, along with your application form, and copies of your academic transcripts. These may be the same references you submitted for your University admissions application, but do not have to be. Please see Appendix 2 for referee guidance – it is advised that potential referees are sent a copy of this when approached for a reference.

Supporting documents should be in Word or PDF format – please do not send image files.

Please ensure you complete and submit an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form with your application.

No further documentation (e.g. CV, personal statements, extended research proposals) is required, and any additional documents may not be considered during the application process.

APPENDIX 1: List of NWSSDTP Accredited Pathways

NWSSDTP Studentship Applications must go through an eligible NWSSDTP Pathway:

- Accounting and Finance
- Business and Management
- Criminology, Social Policy and Social Work
- Development and Humanitarianism in an Unequal World
- Economic and Social History
- Economics
- Educational Research
- Geography and Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Language Based Area Studies
- Linguistics
- Planning and Environment
- Politics
- Psychology
- Social Anthropology
- Social Statistics
- Social Studies of Science, Technology and Medicine
- Socio-legal Studies
- Sociology

APPENDIX 2: Guidance Note for Referees

General

The NWSSDTP application must be supported by two testimonials from people able to comment on the academic ability and research potential of the candidate, e.g. previous undergraduate/postgraduate study.

It is strongly recommended that the applicant's undergraduate/postgraduate tutors complete the testimonials where possible. However, the NWSSDTP accepts that University staff expected to be involved with the candidate's subsequent studies (e.g. potential supervisors) can sometimes be appropriate if they have tutored the applicant previously. It is also accepted that some students may have undertaken some relevant professional work where the testimonial writer would be able to comment on their suitability for undertaking research. If this is the case then the circumstances should be fully explained.

Specific advice re the testimonial

- Potential supervisors can be a referee – but should **not** be used for both references.
- Referees should include a comment on the academic ability of the applicant (most successful NWSSDTP candidates have or are predicted a 1st in their undergraduate and a distinction in their Master's).
- Referees should comment on the candidate's suitability for postgraduate training in general and for the particular course and research he/she proposes to undertake.
- Information on how, and to what extent, the candidate has shown academic ability in terms of:
 - a) ability to grasp concepts and reason analytically;
 - b) motivation and perseverance in achieving objectives; and,
 - c) capacity for original thought.
- Where possible, the referees should comment on the research project in relation to the applicant, the supervisors and the research environment.
- References should emphasise strengths at all times. Referees should avoid generalisations, repetitions and 'lukewarm' statements in references such as "very good student".
- Extracurricular activities should also be highlighted in references to show that the referee knows the applicant well.
- It may be useful to note the fit with ESRC's strategic priorities.