

## Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP Guidance Notes for Pathway Leads and Institutional Pathway Coordinators October 2022 Entry

The following document contains key information for Midlands Graduate School pathway leads and institutional pathway coordinators under the following headings:

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### Pathway Lead and Institutional Pathway Coordinator Role Descriptions

#### Pathway LEAD

- Oversees pathway operation at partnership level, liaising with institutional pathway coordinators as appropriate.
- Leads the cross-institutional pathway selection process, reviewing studentship applications as well as organising and chairing the cross-institutional pathway panel (one meeting per annum).
- Attends the Pathway Leaders Forum (1-2 meetings per annum) and cascades information to institutional pathway coordinators.
- Serves as Institutional Pathway Coordinator for their own institution (undertaking the duties as listed below).

#### Institutional Pathway COORDINATOR

- Oversees pathway operation at institutional level, monitoring progression of DTP students and quality of supervision and training.
- Leads the institutional pathway selection process, reviewing studentship applications and organising and chairing the institutional pathway meeting (one per annum) to select candidates to be put forward to the cross-institutional pathway selection panel.
- Participates in the cross-institutional pathway selection process, reviewing studentship applications and attending the cross-institutional pathway panel (one meeting per annum).
- Cascades DTP information to relevant colleagues in their Institution.

### Summary of Open Competition Application Process

Potential student applicants who wish to apply for ESRC DTP funding from the Midlands Graduate School must:

#### 1) Choose a Pathway and University

- The MGS has [17 different pathways across 6 different institutions](#) and not all pathways are available at all universities.
- Students are only able to submit one open competition funding application to the MGS DTP and they cannot apply for funding on multiple different pathways or pathway funding at multiple MGS DTP institutions.

## 2) Apply to their chosen University

- Students then apply to study for the relevant research degree at their chosen university by completing an application for PhD admission. Students should apply for PhD admission at this stage, regardless of whether they will be required to undertake the Masters in Social Science Research.

## 3) Complete an Application for an ESRC studentship

- We advise that applicants work with their prospective supervisors to complete their application. As part of their MGS funding application, candidates will need to upload the following documents:
  - A Project Details supporting statement (research proposal)
  - A Supporting Statement from Prospective Lead Supervisor
  - Transcripts of Previous Qualifications

As part of the 'Supporting Statement from Prospective Lead Supervisor', we ask the supervisor to provide rationale for proposed award length, a statement supporting the applicant and details of the lead and second supervisor track records. Lead supervisors must have successfully supervised at least one PhD to completion as either lead or second supervisor. Where supervisors are less experienced, mentoring plans need to be in place and there is space to describe these on the form.

The Guidance Notes that are made available for student applicants can be [found here](#). However, please find included as an Appendix, information advising applicants and supervisors how to select the appropriate proposed award length.

As part of the student's ESRC DTP funding application, the Midlands Graduate School will also consider the two references submitted in support of their PhD application at the institution (to be drawn down at the departmental/school level from their PhD admissions application during the course of the internal selection processes). If an applicant is currently a first year PhD student, they should arrange for two updated references to be sent directly to the relevant school or department at the University they are applying for funding from. First year PhD applicants have been advised to check with pathway coordinators who within each department/school should receive these references. Pathway coordinators should check within their department who is the most appropriate point of contact to receive the references (e.g., PGR administrator in department X) and make that person aware they will be receiving some references for MGS funding applications.

## New Open Competition Application Form for 2022 Entry

The Midlands Graduate School has revised the student application form for 2022 to ensure increased anonymity for applicants during the studentship selection process. The form has been split into Section One and Section Two and you can see an example of the form in a Word document [here](#) (this is a Warwick example but there is a separate form for each institution). Section One will be seen and used only by the DTP Consortium Manager to fulfill EDI reporting requirements, and DTP administrative staff to review the residential information and ensure that applicants have selected the correct fee status according to UKRI guidelines.

Pathways will receive Section Two of the form, which does not contain any personally identifying information, with the research proposal attached. The supervisor supporting statement, transcripts, and references will be received as a separate document, and should not be opened until reviewers have undertaken an initial assessment of the application form and research proposal. All documents will be titled with the applicant ID number and fee status.

## Outline of the Open Competition Selection Process

- 1) Following internal selection processes in Schools/Departments, each institutional pathway coordinator can nominate a **capped number of** candidates to the pathway selection panel. The MGS will advise the maximum number of candidate nominations to be put forward once the open competition has closed, as well as confirming the number of international candidates who can be put forward at this stage.
- 2) The pathway coordinators from all institutions offering that pathway will review, score, and collectively produce an agreed ranking of all the nominated proposals. These scores and rankings as agreed to in the cross-institutional pathway panel will then be submitted to the ESRC DTP Management Committee.
- 3) The ESRC DTP Management Committee will consider the applications that have been put forward from the cross-institutional pathway selection panels. Since scores across pathways may not be directly comparable, the Management Committee will rescore these applications, **taking into account the rank order given by pathway panels**. It is therefore important that the Management Committee are provided with justification for the pathway rankings. **Please do not give candidates joint rankings**. Any lists containing joint rankings will be returned to the pathway panel by the Consortium Manager so that candidates can be separated out.
- 4) High scoring in pathway panels is not an absolute guarantee of funding. Candidates may still be excluded at this stage, for example where proposals do not sit within ESRC remit, or candidates have not complied with application guidance on maximum length, or the MGS has reached the 30% limit on international recruitment, etc.

## Guidelines for Conducting the Cross-Institutional Pathway Panel Meeting

### Expectations:

- It is the responsibility of the Pathway Lead to organise and chair the yearly cross-institutional pathway panel meeting.
- It is the responsibility of institutional panels to check the word limits within applications and for panels to remove applications that are too long. This will also be reviewed by local administrators.
- **It is the responsibility of institutional panels to check the project remit** and that the studentship proposal falls within the ESRC's remit. If you are unsure, you should check that the project does fall within ESRC's remit **before** the pathway panel meeting by contacting the [ESRC remit team: esrcremit@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:esrcremit@esrc.ukri.org). Regarding the boundaries between the ESRC and AHRC remits, the Research Councils have produced a '[Joint AHRC ESRC Statement on Subject Coverage Interfaces between the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences](#)' which pathway coordinators may find useful. If you contact the ESRC and they confirm that a particular proposed project is within ESRC remit, please do include a copy of the ESRC's confirmation alongside the application. Failure to check remit in borderline cases, could

result in the application later being removed from the competition if it does not fall within the ESRC's subject area, and no substitute applications will be allowed.

- Previously, there has been an expectation that these pathway panels will meet in person. We would encourage this where pathway members are willing and able to do so, but these panels can take place virtually using Microsoft Teams/Zoom if members prefer.
- An administrator **must** be present to take minutes at the Pathway Panel meetings.

#### Process:

- Prior to the cross-institutional pathway panel meeting, once Institutional Pathway Coordinators have selected and nominated their **capped number of candidates** to the pathway selection panel, they should then pass on in secure manner\* the applications of the nominated candidates and copies of each nominated applicant's two references submitted in support of their PhD application, to the pathway lead for their pathway, as well as their institutional DTP administrator so they know which candidates have been nominated.
- All nominated applications should then be distributed to all other members of the pathway selection panel for scoring in advance of the pathway panel meeting by the DTP administrator who is based at the institution leading the pathway.
- We encourage academics to use the full range of marks when scoring applications, and note that there is a range of scores available within each descriptor.
- At the pathway selection panel meeting, the panel will produce an agreed ranking for the nominated proposals and will also provide an average score for each of the nominated applications, including showing the breakdown of the score components (Person & Preparedness, Project, Place).
- Cross-institutional selection panels should bear in mind whilst they are ranking candidates in their pathway that **the MGS is limited to awarding a maximum of 30% of awards to international applicants**. Panels should not discriminate against candidates based on fee status, but should be aware that if there is a significant proportion of international candidates in their top-ranked 5 or 6 for the pathway it is likely that the Management Committee will have to award to lower-ranked home students (quality permitting) in order to adhere to the 30% limit.
- As the scores and rankings are sent through to the ESRC DTP Management Committee, **it is important that the pathway selection panel provides a rationale for the pathway rankings**. Please note that if pathways put forward proposals that are later disallowed (for example if they are out of ESRC remit), the MGS Management Committee will remove the application from the competition and will not permit a substitution.
- This information should be provided in the pro forma 'Pathway Panel Nominations Score Sheet', which will be provided closer to the time and should be returned in secure manner\* to the DTP Consortium Manager ([esrcdtp@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:esrcdtp@warwick.ac.uk)) to prepare the papers for the ESRC DTP Management Committee Central Awarding Panel.

*\*Please be aware that the content of these application forms should be considered as 'Restricted' material and colleagues handling the data must abide by data protection principles. Information can either be securely shared using your individual University's file sharing systems, or alternatively documents sent via email should be password protected, with the passwords to access the documents shared via a separate communication.\**

#### Additional Guidance:

- If a pathway coordinator is a supervisor on an application, they should not score their own student's application. In these cases, the pathway coordinator can ask another academic

based in the same pathway from their institution to score the candidate on their behalf, provided that the other pathway panel members agree to this. Alternatively, the pathway panel can choose to omit this score and average the remaining scores.

- In cases where only one institution has received applications for a particular pathway, we still require the applications to be scored and ranked at a pathway level.
- In cases where an institution is part of a pathway, but has not received any applications to their pathway, we still expect the pathway coordinators from those institutions to participate in the pathway panel meetings.

**Please note that the Midlands Graduate School will not provide students with feedback on applications. The communication of all outcomes (successful or unsuccessful) will come at the end of the process for all applicants, and this will be undertaken centrally.**

**Pathways should not communicate to applicants if they have been nominated.**

## Appendix 1 – Guidance on Award Lengths

Please find below details advising applicants and supervisors how to select the appropriate proposed award length.

### Question guidance for Q2: Which scheme you are applying for:

1+3

+3

+3.5

+4

The ESRC expects all DTP researchers to be trained in the following areas:

- **Philosophy of Social Science Research**
- **Research Design, Practice and Ethics**
- **Quantitative Research Methods**
- **Qualitative Research Methods**

All six institutions in the MGS DTP offer a Masters in Social Science Research designed to meet the ESRC's compulsory core training requirements for ESRC-funded students. Although students follow different, discipline-specific pathways through these Masters programmes, four core modules are common to all pathways. A summary of each of the areas is provided below:

#### **Philosophy of Social Science Research**

By the end of this module students are able to:

- analyse the relationship between epistemology, ontology and methodology;
- apply these to their own fields of enquiry;
- examine the spread of research paradigms and alternative theoretical positions;
- apply these to broaden the scope of debates within their disciplines and field of study.

The module considers fundamental philosophical debates about what counts as 'knowledge' across the social sciences. These include the debates around structure/agency, individualism/holism, and explanation/interpretation. The module considers (natural) science as a method of obtaining knowledge, and the strengths and critiques of science, as well as thinking about whether the natural sciences can (or should) be a model for the social sciences. As part of this undertaking, the module addresses the interpretative tradition in the social sciences, including hermeneutics and phenomenology, in order to consider the importance of causality and meaning in social science research. Related questions of value-freedom and objectivity are addressed in turn. The module builds on these concerns by considering the impact of approaches such as social constructionism, critical realism and standpoint epistemology upon social science research today. The final part of the module addresses a range of radical critiques of the social sciences as they have been traditionally conceived. This involves consideration of the relation between power and knowledge by examining for example the core ideas of feminism, critical theory, and post-colonial theory.

#### **Research Design, Practice and Ethics**

By the end of this module students are able to:

- identify and address the strategic choices made in the design of a research project, including the ethical issues which need to be considered;
- formulate research questions and hypotheses (where appropriate);
- discuss the relationship between theory and evidence and the potential biases in research findings;
- understand different forms of sampling and case selection;
- demonstrate an understanding of concepts of validity, reliability and replicability and the different perspectives on how these may be defined.

Training in ethics provided through this module includes: the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics; integrity; consent; assessment of harm to researchers and participants; the independence of research; confidentiality and compliance with GDPR. The module introduces students to the concepts and varieties of social science research designs. Research design consists of choices necessary to transform a research question into actual research. These choices relate to strategies and modes of case selection, data collection and modes of analysis, and they pertain equally to qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods studies. Every research question can be elaborated in different ways; none of these will be ideal in all respects, so that design choices have implications in terms of costs and benefits. The module discusses these implications, considering the kinds of conclusions that can reliably be drawn from the different kinds of evidence produced by different designs. Key design features such as groups, timing and measurement are introduced and illustrated through a range of research designs including experimental and quasi experimental, case study design and longitudinal design. Design elements are linked into the full cycle of research activity, from knowledge synthesis through to policy or practice.

### **Fundamentals in Quantitative Research Methods**

By the end of this module students are able to:

- make informed assessments of the design and construction of quantitative data sources and their implications for analyses;
- manipulate and analyse quantitative data using statistical software (SPSS);
- apply and interpret a range of forms of statistical analysis competently, including descriptive, inferential and multivariate techniques.

The module focuses on concepts, methods and skills central to quantitative social research, including data collection approaches and concept operationalization. Building on a grounding in ideas relating to probability sampling, sampling error and statistical inference, coverage of techniques extends from comparisons of means and simple cross-tabular analyses to a discussion of multivariate analysis approaches, focusing on linear and logistic regression, but also introducing other techniques relevant to specific analytical goals (e.g. principal components analysis, cluster analysis and hazard models).

### **Foundations in Qualitative Research**

By the end of this module students are able to:

- critically evaluate the range and content of different qualitative methods as applied to textual, visual and aural data;
- explain their theoretical underpinnings and potential applications;
- demonstrate an understanding of how qualitative approaches can be used within mixed methods frameworks;
- understand the utility of appropriate software packages for analysing qualitative data;
- appreciate how qualitative methods might be used, both within their own discipline/research area and by other social science disciplines.

Given the range of approaches to be covered, this module is taught largely at the theoretical and conceptual level, exploring debates associated with the theory and practice of qualitative research. Qualitative research is examined across a range of topics, from different approaches and methods including ethnographic and observational research, discourse and conversation analysis, documentary and archival analysis, participatory research and the use of interviews. Ethics in qualitative research is specifically considered, as is the evaluation of qualitative research.

## Guidance on Award Length: Choosing Which Scheme to Apply For:

### **+3 award**

If you have (or will have) completed a Masters course by the time you begin your PhD and you have undertaken modules which cover **all of the research skill areas outlined above**, you should apply for a **+3 award**. The information you provide in question 3 on details of modules undertaken during your Masters course will be used by the DTP to determine whether your prior research methods training and core discipline skills match those required by the ESRC. It is essential that this section is fully completed if you are applying for a +3 award.

### **+3.5 award**

If you have (or will have) completed a Masters course by the time you begin your PhD and you have undertaken modules which cover **2 of the research skill areas outlined above**, you should apply for a **+3.5 award**. The information you provide in question 3 on details of modules undertaken during your Masters course will be used by the DTP to determine whether your prior research methods training and core discipline skills match those required by the ESRC. If you are awarded a +3.5 you will be expected to undertake and pass 2 MGS DTP core training modules during your first year of PhD study in order to cover the training areas which you have not previously studied.

### **1+3 award**

If you have not undertaken a Masters course, or you have completed a Masters course that did not cover the ESRC's core research skill areas outlined above, you should apply for a **1+3 award**. If you are awarded a 1+3 you will be expected to complete and pass the MGS DTP Masters in Social Science Research at your chosen university, including all four core modules before proceeding to PhD study.

### **+4 award**

+4 programmes are offered only on specific interdisciplinary pathways at the University of Nottingham (Digital Society and Mental Health and Wellbeing), where the subject-specific training that is drawn on will not be limited to one specific subject. If you have not completed a Masters course that covered the ESRC's core research skill areas as outlined above, you will be expected to complete MGS DTP core training modules during your first year of PhD study.

### **+2 award**

If you have, or will have, completed **no more than one year of a full time PhD** (or part time equivalent) by the time your award would begin, you can apply for a +2 award. Please note that you **must** already have completed all the required training as outlined above. ESRC does not permit the suspension of a PhD to undertake the required training modules, nor for them to run alongside year 2 and 3 of a PhD.