Collaborative Guidance notes for Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP applicants – October 2023 Entry

It is important that you allow yourself sufficient time to read these Guidance Notes before you complete your Collaborative application form.

Collaborative Studentship Application Form

If you are interested in applying for any of the advertised Midlands Graduate School Collaborative Studentships you will need to complete the online 'Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship Application'. **Any additional information requested as part of your application as noted in the relevant project advertisement can be uploaded as part of the online application process.**

The online application form is in two sections. Each section is a separate form, and you will find the link to Section Two on the submission confirmation page once you have completed Section One.

Section One asks for personal details which will **only** be used for equal opportunities monitoring and **will no**t be seen by reviewers at any stage of the collaborative studentship selection process. This section will be downloaded separately and seen only by DTP administrative staff at the institution to which you apply and the DTP Consortium Manager. Full details about why we are requesting this data and how it will be used are available on the MGS website.

Section Two will be used by reviewers to assess your application to undertake the collaborative project, along with any additional documents requested for each individual project (details will be available in the relevant project advertisement). If you are required to upload a CV or cover letter, please ensure that these are anonymised, and please ensure that your name and any other personally identifying information do not appear in your personal statement. Transcripts and references will be passed on to the recruiting academic shortly before interview if you are shortlisted. Your contact telephone number will be used to identify your application. Your contact details will be used by a member of administrative staff to inform you of the outcome of your application.

If you wish to apply to multiple collaborative projects, you will need to complete a separate application for each one.

Do not attempt to complete the application form until you have read the guidance notes as outlined below.

Think about how to make the best case possible. Make sure that you proofread your application before submitting it, to avoid spelling or grammatical errors.

Section One

Question 1: Applicant Details

Please ensure that you include your email address and telephone number so that we are able to contact you should you be offered an interview, and please ensure that you enter the same telephone number in both sections so that we are able to link both parts of your application together in our records. We need your date of birth for identification purposes, to ensure that you are not confused with another applicant with a similar name.

The Applicant Details section includes a number of questions which we are asking to enable us to fulfil our reporting requirement to the ESRC around diversity statistics for our overall funding applicant pool. For each category you can select 'Prefer not to say'. This information will not be made available to those who review your collaborative studentship application, will be processed only by the DTP Consortium Manager, and will be shared with the ESRC and the MGS Management Committee in an anonymised manner for the purposes of equal opportunities monitoring. Full details on how your data will be handled are available on the MGS website.

Question 2: Residency

This section must be completed in full because it will be used to establish whether you will be classed as a home or international student for the purposes of ESRC funding. This information will be seen only by the DTP administrators who will carry out initial checks, and will not be seen by those reviewing your application. Reviewers will be told only whether the application should be classed as home or international.

All applicants across all pathways are eligible to receive a stipend and tuition fees at the home fee rate.

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 an applicant does not meet any of the criteria above, they will be classed as an international student. Please note that we can award up to 30% of studentships to international students per cohort. Applicants classed as international students may be required to fund the difference between home and international fees themselves, and so will be required to confirm that they have sufficient funds available to cover any proportion of the difference that is required.

Presented below is each institution's position on what proportion of the international tuition fee will be covered for successful international applicants. This guidance is correct at the time of writing for international students beginning in October 2023.

Aston University - International students awarded funding through the MGS at Aston University **will not** be required to fund the difference between home and international fees.

University of Birmingham – International students awarded funding through the MGS at the University of Birmingham **will not** be required to cover the difference between home and international fees.

University of Leicester - The University of Leicester may be offering Fee Scholarships to a limited number of international applicants who are successful in securing studentship funding from MGS. The Fee Scholarship will be used to cover the difference between the level of home fees and international fees.

Loughborough University - International students awarded funding through the MGS at Loughborough University **will not** be required to cover the difference between home and international fees.

University of Nottingham – The University of Nottingham will be offering a limited number of Fee Scholarships to international applicants who are successful in securing studentship funding from MGS. The Fee Scholarship will be used to cover the difference between the level of home fees and international fees.

University of Warwick - International students awarded funding through the MGS at the University of Warwick **will not** be required to cover the difference between home and international fees.

Please refer to the MGS Eligibility Requirements webpage for further information and full details regarding residential eligibility requirements.

Section Two

Question 1: Qualifications

Please provide details of the institutions you have attended (or are attending), and the courses you have taken at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. You should enter **one** undergraduate and **one** Masters level degree, but there is also space on the form to add other qualifications at the same level or other relevant qualifications.

If your qualification was completed outside the UK, please tell us the name of your qualification in the **original language** (e.g. Maîtrise, and **not the English equivalent**).

Question 2: Previous Research Methods and Core Skills Training

Please outline any previous Research Methods and Core Skills Training you have undertaken as part of a Masters.

Give details of the composition of your Masters course by listing modules you have (or will have) undertaken. You must provide sufficient information for us to assess whether the Masters course included the requisite training in Research Methods and Core Discipline Skills to prepare you for an ESRC-funded research degree.

Please note that undergraduate-level training is not recognised by the ESRC to account for the core research methods training.

Guidance on Award Length: Core Training Requirements

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 Midlands Graduate School 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 the Data Protection Act. 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.

Question 3: Professional Experience that is relevant to this application

Please provide information about any employment, work or professional experience that is relevant to your proposed programme of study. This is of particular importance if your programme is practice-based, or if you have had no Masters level training but substantial professional experience relevant to the subject of your proposed research. You should use this space to give details of any professional experience that you wish the assessors to take into account.

Question 4: Other Experience and/or Awards

Please provide details of any other achievements or experience that are relevant to your application, including details of any academic prizes awarded; publications; and relevant voluntary or extracurricular activities.

Question 5: Personal Statement

In this section, provide a personal statement that outlines your motivation for PhD research and how your education and experience to date has prepared you for this research project. This should be a maximum of 1,000 words. Please do not include your name or any other identifying details in your personal statement.

Question 6: References and Referees

If shortlisted, you will also be required to provide two references in support of your Collaborative Studentship application, commenting on your suitability for PhD study. You should select referees who have the detailed knowledge required to appraise your recent intellectual development and preparedness for the project to which are applying.

Applicants who have not been in education for a period of time may choose to select a referee who is, for example, an employer.

If references are being requested as part of the relevant Collaborative Studentship advert, then these should be provided at the point of application.

7: Additional Documentation to be submitted

Transcripts

Please ensure you also include copies of the transcripts of your previous qualifications.

You should also ensure that you submit any other application materials as outlined in the studentship project advertisement to which you are applying (e.g. CV, cover letter, writing sample). These should be anonymised.

CHECKLIST

Please ensure that you:

- Complete both sections of the 'Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship Application form' as fully as possible
- Include transcripts of your previous qualifications (Question 7) and any other application materials as outlined in the studentship project advertisement to which you are applying.

Incomplete applications will not be considered.