

Strategic Joint Guidance notes for Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP applicants – October 2025 Entry

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

Strategic Joint Studentship Application Form

If you are interested in applying for any of the advertised Midlands Graduate School Strategic Joint Studentships you will need to complete the online '[Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP Strategic Joint 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 not** be seen by reviewers at any stage of the strategic joint 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 strategic joint 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 strategic joint 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. The ESRC have added a number of socio-economic factors to their annual monitoring based on the [Social Mobility Commission's](#) (SMC) toolkit, and so the MGS has incorporated the SMC questions into the application form. For all categories you can select 'Prefer not to say'.

This information will not be made available to those who review your strategic joint 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 and aggregated 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 2025.

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, **except** for those studying in the College of Health and Life Sciences Research where fee scholarships may be offered to a limited number of international applicants. The Fee Scholarship will be used to help cover the difference between the level of home fees 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.

De Montfort University – International students awarded funding through the MGS at De Montfort University **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.

Nottingham Trent University – International students awarded funding through the MGS at Nottingham Trent University **will not** be required to cover the difference between home 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.

Question 3: Placement during PhD

All ESRC-funded students who begin their studentship in or after 2024 will be expected to undertake a 3-month placement in academia (research or professional services), policy, business or third sector organisations. The placement will provide a practical opportunity to apply and develop transferable skills gained during the PhD and apply research skills and theoretical knowledge in a different context. Support will be available for successful applicants from MGS to identify or develop opportunities. For more information on placements, please visit our [Research in Practice webpage](#).

As MGS begins to build its placement offering, we are keen to hear from applicants on your preferred type of placement, and if you already have a host organisation in mind, as this will help to inform our planning and development of our offer. If you do not yet know what type of placement you would like to do then it's fine to tell us that as this question will not form part of the assessment process and is for MGS office use only.

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

In the questions below, please outline any previous Research Methods and Discipline-Specific modules you have undertaken as part of a Masters and any General Skills training. General Skills training may have been undertaken during a degree programme or whilst in employment. These skills include project management, data management and analysis, ethical issues, bibliographic skills, and maximising the impact of research. Please note that there is no expectation that candidates applying for any type of award will have covered any General Skills training, and this will be provided across the course of the studentship. We will use the information provided to make recommendations on General Skills training to be undertaken.

You should give details of the composition of your Masters course by listing modules you have (or will have) undertaken. You do not need to include details of your Masters dissertation here. You must provide sufficient information for us to assess whether the Masters course contained the requisite training in Research Methods and Discipline-Specific modules to prepare you for an ESRC-funded research degree. If available, please include a link to a page with full details of the module content.

Please see the [Summaries of research methods training](#) below for details of the kinds of modules you should include here.

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

Guidance on Which Scheme to Apply For:

If you applying for MGS funding directly from your undergraduate degree you will be required to undertake the full Masters in Social Science Research (MSSR) under the 1+3.5. Please select that you are applying for **Masters and PhD** funding.

You may be required to undertake the full MSSR under the 1+3.5 route in the following circumstances:

- If you are returning to education following a period in non-research employment and do not already hold a social science Masters degree
- If you are 'discipline-hopping' and hold a Masters degree from a non-social science discipline, e.g. Computer Science
 - This will depend upon the disciplinary norms of both a degree that you have and the social science discipline you are entering. For example, it may be that a student with an arts and humanities background will have a relevant skill set for some social science subjects and MGS pathways (e.g., Economic & Social History, Socio-Legal Studies).

If you have (or will have) a social science Masters degree which covered training in the [research methods areas summarised below](#), you will be given a standard +3.5 award*. Please select that you are applying for **PhD-only** funding.

If you have (or will have) a social science Masters degree which did not cover any/all of [these areas](#), you will be given either a +3.75 or a +4 award, to allow additional time for this training to be undertaken. If this applies to you, please select that you are applying for **PhD-only** funding.

- If your subject-specific Masters has no research training component, you will receive a +4 award (the standard +3.5 award plus 6 months to complete additional research training in the form of 3 x 20 credit modules from the MSSR in your first PhD year)
- If your Masters covers some research training but there are still significant gaps in two of the core areas, you will receive a +3.75 award (the standard +3.5 award plus 3 months to complete 2 x 20 credit modules from the MSSR in your first PhD year)
- If your Masters covers a reasonable amount of research training but there is a gap in one of the core areas, you will receive the standard +3.5 and will just need to complete one module from the MSSR in your first PhD year
- All students will be welcome to audit any MSSR modules even if the DTP does not require that you take them

*Please note 3 months of the standard +3.5 award is for students to undertake the 3-month placement mentioned in Section 1 (further details on the placements are available on [the MGS website](#)). If you do not undertake a placement, your funding will be reduced by 3 months, so a standard award would become +3.25, a +3.75 would become a +3.5, and so on.

Summaries of research methods training:

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

- **Research Design, Practice and Ethics**
- **Quantitative Research Methods**
- **Qualitative Research Methods**

All eight 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, three core modules are common to all pathways. A summary of each of the areas is provided below:

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.

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 relevant voluntary or extracurricular activities, academic prizes awarded, and publications. Your answer to this question could also include any personal challenges that you have overcome which you feel demonstrate your potential for PhD study through resourcefulness, resilience, and commitment.

Question 5: Personal Statement

In this section, you will need to provide a personal statement by answering three questions.

First, please explain your motivation for undertaking PhD study and how the completion of a PhD will help you achieve your wider goals. You could draw on previous experiences in your life which may have inspired you to consider PhD study, and look to your future goals, both personal and professional, to explain how a PhD will help you to achieve those goals.

Second, you will need to detail what skills and experiences you have which you think would help you be a successful PhD student. These skills and experiences can be gained either in academic or non-academic contexts and in either professional or general life contexts, for example any personal or professional challenges which you have faced and overcome, developing skills along the way.

Finally, please describe why you are a good fit for the project and department to which you are applying. You could mention any directly applicable experience that you have, or any seminar series or other opportunities available to PhD students in the department where the project will be based.

Question 6: References and Referees

If shortlisted, you will also be required to provide two references in support of your Strategic Joint 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 Strategic Joint 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 Strategic Joint 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.