# Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP
# Guidance Notes for Academic Applicants for Collaborative and
# Strategic Joint Studentships
# October 2025 Entry

## General Guidance Notes

For both Collaborative and Strategic Joint projects, students must be registered on one of the approved Midlands Graduate School (MGS) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) training pathways, therefore applications must indicate to which DTP pathway the project will be connected. Please refer to the [DTP Pathway Grid](#) at the end of this document to see which pathways are eligible to host ESRC DTP students. The lead supervisor must be based within the DTP pathway where the project will sit.

When applying for either a Collaborative or a Strategic Joint studentship, academics must not apply with a specific student in mind for their project. If your project is successful, then an appropriate student must be recruited to the project via an open and competitive process.

Collaborative and Strategic Joint applications are shortlisted internally at each institution and final award decisions are made by the MGS Management Committee. Applications will be scored on the project, supervisory team and either the strength of the collaboration (Collaborative) or the fit to the ESRC strategic steer/s (Strategic Joint).

To allow us to assess you application effectively, we ask that you fully complete all the sections on the application form. More specifically, please ensure that the Ethical and Intellectual Property Issues section is completed in sufficient detail. Here it is NOT enough to state that the project will go through institutional ethical review before data collection begins.

We have introduced Equality, Diversity and Inclusion monitoring to our selection of Collaborative and Strategic Joint studentships. **All** members of proposed supervisory teams should complete a separate version of the [MGS Collaborative and Strategic Joint EDI form](#) prior to submitting the application form by email, other than colleagues at collaborating organisations, who are not required to complete the form. The form is based on that which we use during student recruitment and therefore includes questions drawn from the Social Mobility Commission's toolkit. You may select 'Prefer not to say' or enter 'N/A' for any question you do not wish to answer.

The information provided will be used only for monitoring purposes and will not be seen by anyone assessing your Collaborative or Strategic Joint application during the review process. Your data will be processed only by the DTP Consortium Manager. It will be seen in an anonymised and aggregated form by the MGS Management Committee after all decisions have been made, but your information will not be personally identifiable at any point.

## Award Lengths

Whether you are applying for a Collaborative or a Strategic Joint studentship, projects must be within the ESRC's remit of supporting high-quality postgraduate training in the Social Sciences. The ESRC expects all DTP researchers to be trained in the following areas: Research Design, Practice and Ethics, Qualitative Research Methods, and Quantitative Research Methods. If your application is successful and the student you recruit has (or will have) a social science Masters degree which covered training in these areas, they will be given a standard +3.5 award. If they have (or will have) a social science Masters degree which did not cover any/all of these areas, they will be given either a +3.75 or a +4 award, to allow additional time for this training to be undertaken.

The recruited student may be required to undertake the full Masters in Social Science Research under the 1+3.5 route in the following circumstances:
- If they are applying to your award directly from their undergraduate degree
- If they are returning to education following a period in non-research employment and do not already hold a social science Masters degree

- If they are 'discipline-hopping' and hold a Masters degree from a non-social science discipline, e.g. Computer Science

When developing a proposal, you should bear in mind that the recruited student may have to undertake the Masters in Social Science Research prior to commencing the PhD project (1+3.5 award) and all involved parties (such as the collaborating organisation) should be made aware of this possibility.

**ESRC Remit**

All funded projects must fall at least 50% within the ESRC's subject remit. Applicants should be mindful of the intersections at UKRI boundaries and should check their [project remit with ESRC](#) directly before applying if their project lies at the intersection with another Research Council. 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 applicants may find useful. If you contact the ESRC and they confirm your proposed project is within ESRC remit, please include a copy of the ESRC's confirmation alongside your application.

## Project Scope

Applicants should devise a research project that is manageable and not too ambitious for a PhD project. It should be feasible to complete the project within a 3-year period, and we would not expect the planned project timetable to involve data collection/fieldwork during the final funded year of PhD study. **ESRC-funded PhD students must submit their thesis at the end of their funded period**, so please keep this in mind. We expect applicants to create a detailed project design that has a clear focus, methodological plan and theoretical framework; applications should not consist of the statement of a wider research idea that would need to be refined to constitute a PhD research project.

## Supervision

Each project must have 2 academic supervisors and it is a requirement that the lead supervisor must have previously supervised a PhD student through to completion (this can be as either lead or second supervisor).

If early career academics (ECRs) are interested in submitting an application, or an application is being devised by less experienced supervisory teams, applicants should look to include a 3rd supervisor to act as a mentor to the academics as part of the supervisory team. The applicants should provide details of a mentoring plan for less experienced supervisors and justify the inclusion of any 3rd supervisor on the project, making a note in the application as to the purpose of each member of the team. The supervisory team must be eligible to supervise an MGS student, i.e., the lead supervisor must have supervised at least one PhD student to completion. The applicants should provide details of a mentoring plan for less experienced supervisors and justify the inclusion of any 3rd supervisor on the project, making a note in the application as to the purpose of each member of the team. We would not expect the inclusion of a 3rd academic supervisor for projects led by an experienced team. **The MGS would only expect to see the inclusion of a mentor for supervisory teams on which the lead supervisor has one completion and the second supervisor has no completions.**

If ECRs are interested in being part of a **Collaborative** application but are not eligible to lead supervise, they should be included as Supervisor 2 in order to develop future supervisory capacity. They should only be included as a 3rd supervisor if there is a strong justification for doing so and if they have not yet supervised a PhD student to completion.

If ECRs are interested in being part of a **Strategic Joint** application but are not eligible to lead supervise, they should either be named as Supervisor 2, or, if they are based at the same institution as Supervisor 1, they can be included as a 3rd supervisor. Their inclusion as a 3rd supervisor should create an opportunity to develop capacity in a priority area.

**Eligibility**

All academic staff based in an accredited pathway are eligible to put forward proposals to the Collaborative and Strategic Joint competitions, provided that they meet the lead supervision criteria outlined above.

Current and former members of the MGS Management Committee should note that they are limited to involvement (as either lead or second supervisor) with a maximum of two awards through the Collaborative and Strategic Joint competitions at any one time. This limit is in place for the duration of Committee members' time on the Committee, and for three years following their departure from the Committee.

**Conflicts of Interest**

Applicants are required to declare any potential or perceived conflicts of interest with the proposed project. For both Collaborative and Strategic Joint applications, this could mean when there is a personal or family relationship between members of the supervisory team. For Collaborative applications, this could mean a personal or family relationship existing between a member of the supervisory team and personnel involved in the collaborating organisation, or a supervisor holding a position of any kind within the collaborating organisation.

## Deadlines

The application deadline for both Collaborative and Strategic Joint proposals is **Tuesday 12th November 2024.** Proposals should be submitted as an email attachment to the ESRC DTP office [esrcdtp@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:esrcdtp@warwick.ac.uk).

Academic applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application during mid-January 2025. Successful applicants will be required to draft a studentship advertisement (the DTP office will provide a template) to recruit a suitable student; advertisements must be submitted to the DTP office by Thursday 30th January 2025.

Student applications will be made using an online form managed by the Midlands Graduate School, and applications will be downloaded and processed by local DTP administrators in the first instance. Application packs will be sent to academics in an anonymised manner for shortlisting. Following shortlisting, DTP administrators will provide the contact details of shortlisted applicants, and academics will be expected to manage the interview and selection process from that point. Candidates will be required to provide copies of transcripts and references, and academics may also request additional information from candidates as part of the recruitment process, such as a covering letter or CV. Once a preferred candidate has been identified, the DTP Management Committee must approve the nomination, and confirm the appropriate award length and any required training, prior to any studentship offer being made.

## Collaborative Studentship Application Guidance Notes

The MGS has set aside some of our allocated studentships for 2025 entry specifically for collaborative awards; these are to be allocated competitively on the basis of proposals put forward by academics located within accredited training pathways.

The scheme offers funded PhD studentships on a full-time or part-time basis for eligible students (as per UKRI requirements) involving a formal collaboration with an external partner organisation which goes beyond the facilitation of data collection. Forms of collaboration can include:

- A CASE-style studentship which delivers a co-produced research idea and is co-supervised with a partner organisation
- Placements or internships in external organisations[1]
- An exchange of research data and findings – provided that there is a commitment from the collaborating agency to engage with a version of the research findings towards the completion of the project

While a particular level of co-funding (either in cash or in kind) from the proposed collaborating organisation is not mandated, we would expect a minimum level of in-kind contribution from the collaborator such as access to office space at the non-academic partner's premises, access to data and resources etc. to be made available in order for the proposed collaboration to take place. If the nature of the proposal entails time spent away based within the collaborating organisation, we would anticipate that the organisation should meet the costs of the student undertaking this.

When writing an application, applicants need to be clear as to the added value of their proposed collaboration, bearing in mind that the collaborative partner must be more than just a site for a data collection.

When developing a project proposal, academics and the collaborating organisation ought to bear in mind that the student involved in a collaborative studentship must not be viewed as an employee of the collaborating organisation and any work undertaken within the collaborator should relate to the proposal, or to enhancing a student's skills/training as related to the PhD project.

As part of the Collaborative Studentship application form you will be asked to name a co-supervisor/ mentor who is based within the collaborating organisation. This person should act as a 3$^{rd}$ supervisor, noting that a student will always require two academic supervisors who meet the supervision regulations of the university where the student will be registered.

You may discuss your proposed collaboration with your relevant Research Support Office in advance of submitting an application if you wish, but your individual university will advise if this is required at the proposal stage. All successful collaborative studentship projects will require a collaborative agreement (contract) to be put in place between the university, the collaborating organisation, and the recruited student, and the collaborating organisation will be subject to a due diligence check by your university.

For further information on ESRC support for collaboration, please visit their website: https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/esrc/training-and-development/doctoral-collaboration-with-non-academic-partners/

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[1] All MGS students from 2024 entry onwards will be required to undertake a 3-month placement. For students on collaborative awards this could be with the collaborating organisation, but this is not a requirement.

## Strategic Joint Studentship Application Guidance Notes

When considering a Strategic Joint studentship application, the lead supervisor applying for the studentship must be based in an accredited DTP training pathway at the institution where the studentship will be hosted. However, the second supervisor based in another Midlands Graduate School institution can be drawn from outside the DTP pathways. For applications aligned to the Enhanced Interdisciplinarity steer, the second supervisor must be based in a different discipline from the lead, i.e., their research would be funded by a different Research Council.[2]

When writing an application, applicants should include details as to value added from the joint supervision team, and also provide a rationale for the supervisor split.

Please note that the Midlands Graduate School cannot arrange for the transfer of fees or resources to the joint institution for a studentship (as the student will be fully enrolled and registered at the lead university). Therefore, the joint supervisor should ensure that they have consent from their relevant head of Department/School to act as an external secondary supervisor prior to making an application.

### ESRC Strategic Steers

MGS has allocated our Strategic Joint studentships to meet ESRC's strategic steers in their priority areas:

- Data Skills
- Advanced Quantitative Methods
- Enhanced Interdisciplinarity

Strategic Joint proposals will need to provide evidence of strength in at least one of these priority areas and demonstrate that it is an area of focus and importance.

### Data Skills

The focus of this steer is developing researchers with the skills to fully exploit the increasing volumes of large and complex data for research purposes. The steer includes survey data and 'big data' (social media, administrative, transactional, and geospatial data). Strategic Joint studentships can use qualitative and or quantitative approaches and should provide the opportunity for students to develop advanced data skills throughout their studentship.

New forms of data which ESRC encourage researchers to use include administrative data, including that available via ADR UK (part of ESRC), and unstructured commercial data (such as loyalty card databases), as well as data created through digital interactions between people, people and organisations, and interactions with urban environments (such as transport footfall data). These various types of data are currently a largely untapped, but information-rich, resource.

The data skills required to understand, piece together, clean and produce a robust data resource for research are varied. At one end of the 'data pipeline' are the quantitative and qualitative analytics skills needed to undertake research. But the ability to engineer data together from a range of sources, understand caveats such as potential biases (particularly where data are linked), check and monitor data integrity, as well as curate data and write efficient statistical programme code to ensure that research outcomes can be robustly peer-reviewed and that these data pipelines can be shared again in the future, should not be overlooked; these skills are critical to ensure we build a sustainable and talented data economy.

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[2] As an example, a proposal submitted by an academic in the Human Geography pathway could have a second supervisor from a Physical Geography department.

These skills will benefit researchers directly as tools to undertake their research immediately and later in their careers, but also offer new career pathways in data science beyond academia.

In Strategic Joint Proposals, applicants will need to:

- Evidence their strength in data skills
- Detail how they will support students to develop the skills to work effectively with complex large data.
- Detail how they will ensure the use of large and complex data is a substantive focus for the student's project.

**Advanced Quantitative Methods**

The aim of this steer is to provide training related to the use of advanced quantitative methods (AQM) in the social sciences. Training for students on an AQM studentship is expected to be at a level over and above the basic generic and subject-specific methods requirements *for that discipline*.

In Strategic Joint Proposals, applicants will need to:

- Evidence their strength in AQM
- Detail how they will support students to develop the skills needed to use AQM
- Detail how the proposed methods for collecting and/or analysing data are of a level that constitutes advanced quantitative methods within the specified discipline.

**Enhanced Interdisciplinarity**

MGS and ESRC recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences, and between the social sciences and other areas of research.

The principal aim of this steer is to provide support for students to tackle a project that is genuinely interdisciplinary in nature and straddles the social sciences and other research council remits. The proposed research should include substantive interaction between the relevant scientific areas and the studentship should provide training that is not constrained to one scientific approach.

Studentships steered in this area must be at least 50 per cent social science but no more than two thirds. Applications must be genuinely interdisciplinary and inclusive; they should not exclude the approaches of either Council.

In Strategic Joint Proposals, applicants will need to:

- Evidence their strengths in interdisciplinary working
- Provide details on existing interdisciplinary working that will allow the student to work effectively across scientific boundaries
- Ensure that the research sits across the social sciences and other research council remits.

**Research Council Remits**

Each of the Research Councils publishes information on its website about its current
research grants portfolio. This information can be accessed at:

- [Arts & Humanities Research Council](#)
- [Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council](#)
- [Economic & Social Research Council](#)
- [Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council](#)

- [Medical Research Council](#)
- [Natural Environment Research Council](#)
- [Science and Technology Facilities Council](#)

| | Aston University | University of Birmingham | De Montfort University | University of Leicester | Loughborough University | University of Nottingham | Nottingham Trent University | University of Warwick |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Applied Linguistics** | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Area Studies** | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Communication & Media and Museum Studies** | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **Cross-disciplinary Methodologies and Advanced Data Analysis*** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Economic & Social History** | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Economics** | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Education** | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Health and Wellbeing** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Human Geography** | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| **Living in a Digital Society*** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Management and Business Studies** | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Political Science and International Relations** | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Psychology** | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Socio-Legal Studies** | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| **Sport and Exercise Science** | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | |
| **Sustainable Development, Net Zero and Climate Resilience*** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

* These cross-cutting interdisciplinary pathways are available at all institutions via all other pathways available at that institution. I.e., at Aston, applications to these pathways can be made by academics based in the Area Studies, Health & Wellbeing, Management & Business Studies, and Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology pathways.