

Guidance notes for Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP applicants – October 2021 Entry

The deadline for applications is Tuesday 26th January 2021 (23:59 GMT)

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

Before you make your ESRC DTP studentship application you need to decide which of the available [training pathways](#) is most suitable for you, and at which University you would like to study. You must have applied for a PhD place to study at that University before making your studentship application.

Student Application Form

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

Please be aware that while you may have already submitted some of this information as part of your course application to your chosen University, we will require you to repeat it for the purposes of this form. Reviewers of the applications will only have access to the information included in this Studentship Application Form plus the two references submitted in support of your PhD admissions application. It is therefore important that you include all relevant information in this form.

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

Work with your prospective supervisors to complete your application

This will help you to identify the academics whose published work and research expertise are closest to your interests, and to find the team that will best facilitate your studies. Please remember that you will not be working with a single supervisor but with a team of at least two supervisors in the doctoral element of your award. Start the search process early by sending an outline of your PhD topic to the supervisors with whom you might like to work as a postgraduate researcher. It may take a number of iterations to refine your funding proposal and your potential supervisors will be the best people to help with this process.

In identifying your potential supervisors, use a number of key search terms to bring up different combinations of academics and expertise. Have the academics already published books and articles in the area of your proposed research or in an area that is related to some of your key ideas? Are they researching and presenting papers in your research area? Are they using a methodology that could underpin your project?

When considering applying for ESRC DTP funding, you should be mindful of whether your proposed project falls within the [ESRC's scientific remit](#). If your proposed project falls outside the ESRC's remit, then you will not be eligible to apply for an ESRC studentship. In terms of the boundaries between the ESRC and Arts and Humanities Research Council (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 you may find useful. Your prospective supervisors should be able to advise if your project is suitable to apply for ESRC funding.

Although you will need to have applied for a place to study at your chosen university, it is not necessary for you to have received written confirmation that you have been offered a place at your selected university in

order to *apply* for funding, but your application to study must be in process and in due course you will need to hold an offer from your chosen university in order for your application to be considered for ESRC funding.

Question 1. Applicant Details

Please ensure that you include the student ID/ application ID number of the application you have made for a place to study. Please ensure that these questions are answered fully. We need your date of birth for identification purposes, i.e. to ensure that you are not confused with another applicant with a similar name.

Question 2. The University, School/Department in which you intend to study and your intended programme of research

Question guidance on 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 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.

Choosing which scheme students should apply for:

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** these research skill areas you should apply for a **+3 award**. In question 5 you will be asked for details of modules undertaken during your Masters course in order for 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 a student is applying for a +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 **2** of these research skill areas, then you should apply for a **+3.5 award**. In question 5 you will be asked for details of modules undertaken during your Masters course in order for 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 2 ESRC DTP core training modules during your first year of PhD study in order to cover the training areas which you have not previously undertaken.

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 then you should apply for a **1+3 award**. If you are awarded a 1+3 you will be expected to complete the DTP Masters in Social Science Research at your chosen institution, including all four core modules before proceeding to PhD study.

+4 programmes are offered only on specific interdisciplinary pathways (Digital Society and Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Nottingham), where the subject specific training that is drawn on will not be limited to one specific subject. +4 candidates are not expected to have previously covered the core training requirements at point of application, and are not expected to have a fully developed research proposal at this stage.

NB Applications are accepted from students who will have completed no more than one year of a full time PhD (or part time equivalent) by the time your award would begin. However, if you have already begun your PhD, you must already have completed 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.

Please give the name of the University, the School/Department training pathway in which you intend to study and the names of your proposed supervisors. (Please note that not all training pathways are available in all DTP institutions – please [see here](#) for which pathways are available in each institution).

Please indicate whether you intend to study full-time or part-time by ticking one of the boxes.

Question 3: Residency

This section must be completed fully because it will be used to confirm whether you will be classed as a home or international student for the purposes of ESRC funding. 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, and that we are awaiting confirmation on what proportion of the international tuition fee will be covered by funding from the Midlands Graduate School from each institution. Applicants classed as international students may be required to fund the difference themselves, and so will be required to confirm that they have sufficient funds available to cover any proportion of the difference between the home and international fee rates that is required.

Please see below for each institutional position on what proportion of the international tuition fee will be covered for successful international MGS applicants. This guidance will be updated to confirm the fees information for the remaining institutions in advance of the open competition deadline (26th January 2021).

Aston University - International students awarded funding through the MGS at Aston University **will** be required to fund the difference between home and international fee rates from alternative funding sources. The MGS DTP cannot provide funds to cover this difference.

Loughborough University - The difference between UK and International tuition fees can be covered by a third-party sponsor, the student directly or in some cases may be available from the School to which you intend to apply. You are advised to contact the School directly to find out whether funding to cover the difference between UK and International fees might be available. Please contact the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (socsciresearch@lboro.ac.uk), the School of Science (sci-pgr@lboro.ac.uk), the School of Business and Economics (sbe.research@lboro.ac.uk), or the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences (pgr-ssehs@lboro.ac.uk).

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 Midlands Graduate School [Eligibility Requirements webpage](#) for further information and full details regarding residential eligibility requirements.

Question 4: 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 (if applicable), but there is also space on the form to add other qualifications at the same level or other relevant qualifications. If you have already started your PhD, please include the date on which your studies commenced and whether you have been studying part-time or full-time.

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 5: Previous Research Methods and Core Skills Training

If you are applying for a +3 or +3.5 programme you must hold, or have completed by the time you begin the programme, a Masters qualification with a high grade.

Please 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 contained the requisite training in research methods and core discipline skills to prepare you for a research degree.

If you are applying for a 1+3 award but have previously completed a Masters course, please also outline the content of your Masters modules here.

If you are unsure as to which award length you should be applying for please see the guidance notes above for Question 2.

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

Question 6: 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.

Please note that professional experience is not recognised by the ESRC to account for the core research methods training.

Question 7: 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 8: Project Details

This section plays a key part in the assessment of your application. That is why we recommend that you discuss the content of this section with your proposed supervisors. The assessors are looking for evidence of high quality research and strong potential for postgraduate study. Enthusiasm and interest are important but assessors seek evidence of:

- intellectual purpose and originality. What are your key research questions? How will your research project intervene in your chosen field?
- your reasons for undertaking this specific project, your approach and methodology
- a keen awareness of the research context (i.e. what debates or secondary literature does your project engage with?)

You need to present your case clearly and concisely.

The case for support should be a maximum of 1,000 words* and include:

- **An outline of your research project and its theoretical background**
- **How your project relates to previous and current research in the field**
- **The significance of the proposed research (intellectual, practical, etc.)**
- **The methodology and why it is a good fit for your project**
- **How your project relates to your previous research and experience**

1+3 programme applicants need to give an indicative answer as your research interests will develop further during the year of your Masters training. We are not looking for a refined research proposal with full methodological detail at this stage, but an indication of your probable research area, an indicative topic and a case for why this is important. You should show how this will build towards a PhD.

If you have already begun your doctoral study, please remember to refer to the research you have undertaken to date.

*You must state the project details word count at the top of your 'Project Details' attachment. You may include an additional 1 side of A4 for references and figures (this will not be included in the 1,000 word count of this section). **Please note that any project details which exceed 1,000 words will be cut off at the 1,000 word point before being sent to assessors.**

Question 9: Personal Statement

In this section provide a personal statement that outlines your motivation for PhD research and also provide a rationale for your choice of University.

Please detail how your chosen University and proposed supervision team is right for your project, for example the specific expertise, resources, seminars and research culture which could enhance your own research.

Question 10: Details of Project Partners and Collaborators

Some PhD research involves collaboration with external partners. If this is the case for your research and your project is likely to involve collaboration with an external partner please provide details of the following:

- **Name of the organisation**
- **Name and details of contact at the organisation**
- **Sector of organisation (public, private, voluntary/charitable)**
- **Nature of collaboration (e.g. internship, placement, allocated workspace)**

Question 11: Overseas Fieldwork

If you need to carry out a study or archive visit or a fieldwork trip overseas during the period of your award, state your planned destinations, the expected duration and purpose of your visit(s), and indicate how they are integral to your research. Please also provide an approximate cost for fieldwork. **If you do not mention an essential visit at this stage or fail to estimate the duration of your visit(s), funding to support this activity may not be available to you.**

Question 12: Language Training

If you anticipate that any language training will/may need to occur during the period of the project, state the language training required and indicate how it is relevant to the research project.

Question 13: Ethical and Intellectual Property Issues

You should identify and address any ethical issues relating to your research project as far as you can. Your potential supervisors will help with this. If the project will be undertaken with an external organisation, please explain the arrangements regarding disclosure of results. Will there be any restrictions on making the results public? Contractual arrangements with external organisations must be in place before the PhD research programme commences, covering financial, intellectual property and confidentiality arrangements.

If there are no ethical or intellectual property issues related to your proposed research, then please state this here with an explanation as to why this is the case.

Question 14: Referee Details

As part of your ESRC DTP funding application, the Midlands Graduate School will also consider the two references submitted in support of your PhD application at your institution. Therefore when selecting your PhD referees for your PhD admissions application, you should select referees who have the detailed knowledge required to appraise your recent intellectual development and preparedness for the programme of study you will be undertaking.

To ensure that your references are satisfactory, please make sure you contact your referees and ensure that they have all the information they require e.g. your marks from Undergraduate and Masters level study if you have them. Make sure they are aware that the reference that they are submitting in support of your PhD admissions application will also be used by the Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP in consideration of your funding application.

If you are currently a first year PhD student (whether full-time or part-time) and you are applying for funding for the remaining years (up to 2 years of full-time funding or the part-time equivalent), you should arrange for two updated references to be sent directly to the relevant school or department at your University. In this instance it is advisable that one of your referees is a current supervisor of your PhD and can therefore comment in detail on the quality and the quantity of the work you have completed to date. If you are unsure who within your department/school should receive these references, please check with the [pathway contact](#) at your institution and they will be able to advise.

Please note that your references are an important component of the application review process, and if they are not received in time then it will not be possible for them to be considered alongside the application.

Question 15: ESRC award at any other DTP for a 2021 start

Please give details here of any other applications you have made for DTP funding.

Question 16: Equality and Diversity Data Form

The ESRC are seeking demographic statistics for the overall applicant pool for the purpose of equal opportunities monitoring. In order to comply with our ESRC reporting requirements as you applying for ESRC DTP funding from the Midlands Graduate School, you should also complete our 'Equality and Diversity Data Form' available online here: www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/equaldiverdataform

For each category you can select a 'Prefer not to say' option and the information collected in this form will only be used for the purpose of equal opportunities monitoring and will be shared with the ESRC in an anonymised manner to this end.

Question 17: Uploading Supervisor Supporting Statement and other Documentation

Supporting Statement from Prospective Lead Supervisor

Please ask your prospective lead supervisor to complete this form as part of your studentship application. The form is available [here as a PDF](#) or [here as a Word Document](#).

This supporting statement forms an important part of the application and this will need **to be directly uploaded by the applicant** as part of the online funding application process. It is your responsibility to ensure that your lead supervisor completes this form. You should ensure they are aware of the funding application deadline that you need to meet.

Transcripts

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

Project Details

Here you should also upload your 'Project Details' as outlined in Question 8.

Assessment Criteria

Your application will be assessed on the following 3 criteria:

Criteria	Source of evidence	Weighting
Person and Preparedness	Qualifications Experience References	40%
Project	Originality and Significance of Research Project Clearly Defined Research Questions Engagement with Relevant Literature Research Design and Methodology	40%
Place	Fit between the project and the expertise of the proposed supervisors Fit between the project and the chosen pathway and department	20%

Application Submission

Applications need to be submitted online by **Tuesday 26th January 2021 (23:59 GMT)**.

Please be aware, you will only be able to submit **one funding application** to the MGS DTP for entry in 2021 and you **cannot apply for funding on multiple different pathways or for pathway funding at multiple MGS DTP institutions**.

You must make sure that you have completed all relevant sections of the application form and uploaded all relevant documentation by the deadline. **Incomplete applications will not be considered.**

We expect to notify successful applicants of the outcome in mid-April 2021.

CHECKLIST

Please ensure that you have:

Applied for a place to study at your chosen University	
Completed all the sections of the 'Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP Studentship Application' form as fully as possible	
Uploaded your 'Project Details' (Question 8)	
Uploaded the completed 'Supporting Statement from Prospective Lead Supervisor' (Question 16)	
Uploaded transcripts of your previous qualifications (Question 16)	
Completed the Equality and Diversity Data Form (Question 15)	
Contacted referees to ensure they have all the information they require	

Any additional information submitted with the application (for example a covering letter) will be removed prior to assessment.