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ESRC Midlands Graduate School Doctoral Training Partnership

Applicant Information Session

Prof Marek Korczynski – DTP Director
Dr Donna Palmer – Manager

Midlands Graduate School
Doctoral Training Partnership

What we will cover today

- Introduction to ESRC studentships and Midlands Graduate School Doctoral Training Partnership
- Overview of the Application Process
- Assessment Criteria
- From Application to PhD study: a Student's Experience
- Opportunity for questions

Introduction to ESRC Studentships and Midlands Graduate School DTP

Professor Marek Korczynski, DTP Director

What Is Distinctive about Being an ESRC PhD Student?

ESRC emphasises PhD study as involving a dual focus:

- The key time for developing wider and advanced skills (and being socialised into a more open-minded approach to methods and on-going training in your career).
- The contribution to new (impactful) knowledge in the thesis.

Increasing emphasis on impact on/collaboration with practitioners.

A move towards a vision of the PhD student embedded in a number of communities and networks.

What is the Midlands Graduate School (MGS) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP)?

- The MGS DTP is one of the 14 ESRC DTPs in the country
- It's a consortium of 8 Universities in the Midlands
- Students have access to training and other activities at all partner institutions

Midlands Graduate School
Doctoral Training Partnership

Aston University
Birmingham

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Loughborough University

University of Nottingham
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NTU Nottingham Trent University

WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Pathways Available – 15 at Nottingham

	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*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The Studentship Offer

- The funding is won by a competitive process (great for your CV)
  - Covers Tuition Fees (UK home fee value) and a tax-free Stipend towards living costs (£21,805 full-time 2026/27)
- You also have access to a Research Training Support Grant to cover general expenses incurred as part of your research (e.g. conference visits, fieldwork expenses)
- If you state in your application that you needed funds to undertake Overseas Fieldwork, the award will provide funds to support it
- Research in Practice provides funding and time to take up opportunities for placements inside or outside of academia to enhance personal and professional development
- Access to additional schemes such as Doctoral Event Grant scheme

Why Be an ESRC PhD Student at University of Nottingham?

- The right discipline/pathway
- The right supervisors
- Wider interdisciplinary intellectual culture
- Take part in meaningful DTP student community at Notitngham and the wider Midlands region
- Support from committed DTP staff
- The locale – campuses and city

The Application Process

Dr Donna Palmer, DTP Programme Manager

Eligibility

- Both Home and International Students are eligible for a full award
  - Tax free maintenance stipend
  - Tuition fees at home rate
  - Successful international students will be put forward for a UoN International Fee Difference Scholarship

- Home students 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

- https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/eligibility/

More on Eligibility

Eligible

- Full and Part-time study
- Application direct from undergraduate programmes
- Good honours degree at 1st or 2.1 level
- Someone who has just finished a Masters degree – ready to start a PhD
- Someone from outside academia with prior UG or PGT qualification

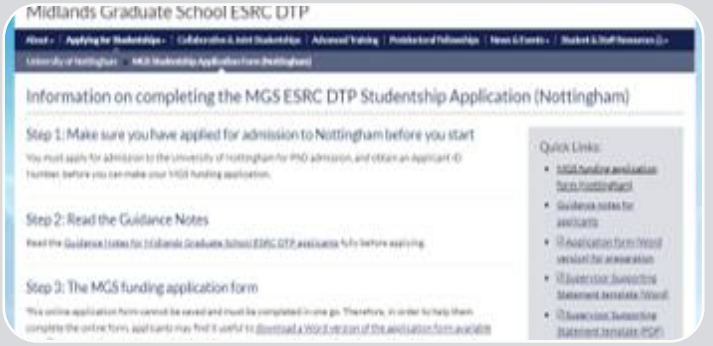
Not Eligible

- Distance learning
- Someone who is currently studying for a PhD is **not** eligible
- Someone who is in receipt of other funding
- Someone who already holds a PhD in Social Science discipline

The Applicant Journey







1. Identify

- Supervisors
- Pathway

2. Apply

- UoN Admissions
  - PhD in the School specified for your chosen Pathway
  - Ideally by 1 December
  - References must be available by 12 January

3. Submit

- MGS Funding Application
- Via MGS website
- By 12 January (12 noon)

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/

1. Pathways at Nottingham

Applied Linguistics	Area Studies	Business and Management	Cross-disciplinary Methodologies and Data Analysis	Economic and Social History
Economics	Education	Geography	Health and Wellbeing	Living in a Digital Society
Politics and International Relations	Psychology	Socio-legal Studies	Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology	Sustainable Development and Net Zero

* https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/nottingham/

1. Supervisors and Pathway

- Identify at least one potential supervisor (they can help identify the 2nd)
  - Make contact with them before you apply for funding – you need them on board. They are best placed to advise on the viability of the project you have in mind and suggest methodologies you might need. You also need to talk to your potential supervisors to ensure that they have capacity to take on a supervision, and that they are the best fit for your project
  - You will need to upload a Supervisor Support Form completed by your supervisors. You must ensure you give them sufficient time to complete the form and return it to you.
  - They need to have had at least one PhD completion as a supervisor.
  - Pathway leads will help you to identify the person with the most appropriate expertise, also try UoN Research Link
  - Advice Video on Searching for a Supervisor: Burford, J., Henderson, E. F., Kier-Byfield, S. (2023). Searching for and approaching a doctoral supervisor [video resource]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAMezgpbMSA
- Know why you're choosing them and be able to articulate it – are you aware of their latest publications, are you involved in the same research groups?
- You may find that your best supervisory team might be not be who you originally thought it would be. This is not a moment to be shy, academic supervisors expect to have discussions with potential PGR students before they apply

2. PhD Admissions to Nottingham

- Apply to relevant PhD programme* in the School
  - Recommend application is submitted by 1 December 2026
  - Application need to be submitted but an offer of place does not need to have been made by the funding deadline
  - Applicant ID will be needed for the Funding Application Form
  - We need to obtain your references from here after the MGS Funding deadline of 12 January 2027

* Which PhD programme to apply to will be 42-month duration PhD plan in the same School as your lead Supervisor

3. Funding Application Form

1. Application is via MS Forms
   a) Research Proposal (upload)
   b) Supervisor Supporting Statement (upload the completed MS Word template, completed by your prospective lead supervisor)
   c) Transcripts (upload)

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/applicationforminformation/

Tip

- Start your application early
  - The guidance notes outline every question on the application form (including the character limit) and you need to make sure you follow the guidance, this can take time.
  - Successful applicants talk about drafting and redrafting and getting other people to look at it.
  - Work offline to answer the questions (e.g MS Word) and copy and paste answers into the boxes on MS Forms.
  - Make sure you upload the correct files and name them as advised.

- Ensure you proofread for a final time and make sure you hit the ‘submit application’ button.

Reviewers will be assessing

- Details about proposed PhD project from the PhD proposal (applicant upload)
- Details about proposed supervision from the Supervisor support form (applicant upload)
- Details of prior qualifications and relevant skills and experience from the application form
- Details about why Nottingham is the best place for you from the application form

The following will not be seen by the selection panels so do not upload them

- Degree certificates
- CV
- English language qualifications
- Other certificates

Timeline After Submission

12 January 2027
- Submission deadline

Nottingham Pathway Panel
- Review and select proposals for next stage
- Some Pathways interview applicants

Consortium Pathway Panels
- Review and rank proposals in accordance with set criteria

Consortium Management Committee
- Review and rescore all proposals
- Decide final rank order

~ April
- Decisions communicated to applicants

Assessment Criteria

Professor Marek Korczynski, DTP Director

What Assessors are Looking for (the 4 P's)

Project 40% - Proposal and Supervisor Supporting Statement

- Is the project focused, innovative? Is it articulated well? Is the applicant proposing to use an appropriate research design and methodology? Does the applicant demonstrate that they know the field? Is a case made for the project's cutting-edge qualities in relation to existing scholarship?

Person 20% - Personal Statement, Previous Experiences and References

- Quality of applicant (evidence might include a first-class degree and excellent MA-level marks; or a good first degree and professional or other experience relevant to the project; or a combination of these models). Does the applicant have the right skills and knowledge to undertake the project?, Is there evidence you can put together a great, significant piece of work on time, is there evidence you 'know your stuff'?

Preparedness 20%- Personal Statement, Previous Experiences and Supervisors Supporting Statement

- Is the applicant prepared for the proposed programme of study? Do they have relevant UG and/or MA degrees? Do they have relevant language and/or IT skills? Are they familiar with, for example, the need to undertake archival work, overseas fieldwork etc.., if appropriate?

Place 20%- Personal Statement and Supervisors Supporting Statement

- Does the project have a good 'fit' with the department or School, or to particular research centres or institutes? Are there particular staff members with expertise in the proposed area, and who would make an ideal supervisory team? Is there evidence that this has been an active, well researched choice?

Your Project, Your Research Proposal

- You create the project, and tell us what you're going to do and how by writing a research proposal
- If you don't already have a link with your potential supervisors, they will probably want to see a research proposal to get an idea of what you want to do with them
- Writing a strong proposal requires considerable effort, so start as soon as possible and
  - Make sure you set aside plenty of time to do the reading that is necessary, formulate your research plan and draft and re-draft the proposal
  - Make sure your proposal clearly identifies the 'gap' in scholarship that your project will fill, that you think carefully about the methodology that you will use to address the gap. This will help you identify whether you need to include overseas fieldwork to complete your project and what other activities and training you will require
  - Remember to consider the potential ethical issues relating to your project
  - Use the references to locate your project in current research discussions
  - Don't forget dissemination and impact, public engagement and other ways of sharing the research with potential users
  - ESRC expects that students should normally submit their thesis within their funded period – proposals need to reflect this
  - Must be a project which can realistically be completed within 3.5 years

Top Tips – Your Project

- You will be writing for a scholarly but not necessarily specialist audience
  - Shortlisted applications are scored by panellists drawn from your pathway at Nottingham, and the consortium
  - The final panel comprises of individuals from across the disciplines. Not all of these people will be specialists in your discipline, but they are experienced researchers and supervisors.

- Confirm your work is within ESRC remit (in particular those at AHRC/ESRC or MRC/ESRC boundary)
  - Research overlapping social sciences and arts and humanities: joint AHRC and ESRC statement – UKRI

- Be mindful of the use of Artificial Intelligence – we want to read your work
  - Statement on the use of AI in applications is available here Postgraduate study - The University of Nottingham

Person and Preparedness

- **Qualifications and Transcripts**
- **Prior Training**
- **Previous experience** e.g. relevant employment, work or professional experience
- **Personal statement**
  - What is your motivation for undertaking PhD study and how do you think this will help you achieve your wider goals?
  - What life experiences and skills do you have that you think will help you achieve success as a PhD student? Academic and/or non academic
  - Describe why you feel that you are a good fit for your chosen pathway and department and how your supervisory team aligns to your proposed project.
- **References (obtains from Nottingham PhD Admissions System)**

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/howtoapply/

Top Tips – Person and Preparedness

- Qualifications, personal experiences and readiness for doctoral study are assessed here.
- Be honest and clear about your achievements
  - This is particularly important if you are returning to study after a period in work.
  - Make sure you include the skills you have developed that will support your undertaking this project, and if you can, explain what you did to get them. These will be an important part of the assessment of your application.
- Remember it is possible to outline any training or development that you think you need to acquire to successfully complete your PhD.

Place

Personal statement

- Describe why you feel that you are a good fit for your chosen pathway and department and how your supervisory team aligns to your proposed project.

Supporting Statement from Prospective Lead Supervisor (Upload)

Top Tips - Place

- Talk to your potential supervisors
  - They are best placed to advise on the viability of the project you have in mind and suggest methodologies you might need. You also need to talk to your potential supervisors to ensure that they have capacity to take on a supervision, and that they are the best fit for your project
  - You will need to upload a Supervisor Support Form completed by your supervisors. You must ensure you give them sufficient time to complete the form and return it to you
  - You may find that your best supervisory team might be not be who you originally thought it would be. This is not a moment to be shy, academic supervisors expect to have discussions with potential PGR students before they apply

The Best Applicants are able to show….

- They are fully aware of their field and where they fit in it.
  - Who is doing the work in your area you most identify with? Where are they?

- They know who they want to work with and why
  - Not necessarily the ‘superstar’!

- Why they want to work at the institution they are applying to
  - If you’re already at Nottingham, you need to have a good reason for staying!
  - If you’re not from Nottingham, tell us why you chose us!

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From Application to PhD study: a Student's Experience

My experience

Carri Swann, 1+3.5 (Social Policy)

Me

- Mid-career
- A research ‘consumer’ for many years
- As a practitioner, had 1,000+ questions I wanted to answer with data
- Ambitions to influence policy-making

“I think your proposed research is important, topical, urgent and potentially significant and impactful with benefits for service users and providers, and for the public good. However, the assessors for the very competitive ESRC funding will need to be convinced that what you propose is feasible, so you will need to address the above points about how you will get access to your participants and data.”

My application

Open competition, 1+3.5 years

1. Wrote up 1-page research outlines of my 3 favourite research ideas
2. Used the university's website to ~~spam~~ identify 2 possible supervisors
3. Warned my referees
4. Drafted the 1,000 word research proposal – and application form
5. Worked these up with supervisors in time for School review
6. Submission deadline January



Questions?

Final Remarks

Final Remarks

- ESRC Studentships are competitive
  - Eligibility is open to Home and International students
  - Ethos of cohort model, collaborations and training in both depth and breadth of social science research
  - Support and funding opportunities
  - Preparation for careers inside and out of academia

- Successful Applicants are able to
  - Show they are aware of the area they want to research and what they will contribute
  - Demonstrate why they need to study at Nottingham with their chosen supervisor
  - Write all of this clearly and concisely while keeping in mind the reviewers are not necessarily experts in the chosen topic

Final Remarks

- Key Contacts
  - General enquires and advice esrc-phd@nottingham.ac.uk
  - Pathway specific queries – direct to Pathway lead

- Guidance notes and FAQs are available and valuable
- The online application form cannot be saved and must be completed in one go
- Use the Word version of application form and copy to online form

- Engage with Supervisors – they can proofread and support the application

- Deadline: 12 noon, 12 January 2027
- Submit University of Nottingham admissions application by 1 December

Additional Sessions run by MGS DTP

- **Session 1: Introduction to PhD study and the Midlands Graduate School** (24 November)
  - This webinar offers a welcoming introduction to doctoral study in the social sciences, including what a PhD involves, the benefits of postgraduate research, and the funding, training, and support available through the Midlands Graduate School.

- **Session 2 - Research proposals and funding applications: Developing a strong PhD application** (25 November)
  - This practical webinar is designed to support prospective applicants in developing a strong application, with guidance on identifying potential supervisors, shaping a research proposal, and understanding the application process.

Support and FAQs

- You should ensure that you read our Guidance Notes in full
- Visit our FAQ page prior to completing your application
  - https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/howtoapply/faqs/
- You may find it useful to download a copy of the application form and draft your answers before completing the online form
  - A MS Word version is available to download

- https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/howtoapply/

Questions and Good Luck

Esrc-phd@nottingham.ac.uk