

Socio-Legal ESRC DTC Pathway

Notes for Potential Applicants for 2022 entry

The Socio-Legal Studies Pathway

Thank-you for your interest

Thank-you for your interest in the Socio-Legal Studies PhD pathway, in the School of Law at the University of Nottingham. These notes will give you a bit more of a sense of what the programme involves, and how the application process works.

The Programme

The Socio-Legal Studies pathway is part of the University of Nottingham's portfolio of programmes approved for scholarship eligibility by the ESRC. That in turn forms part of the Midlands Graduate School ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). Further information about the DTP, and Nottingham's place in it, may be found at https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/. The DTP makes the final decision as to who will receive funding from among the candidates nominated by the various constituent programmes, of which Socio-Legal Studies is one.

The full programme consists of a one-year taught master's degree focussing on social science methods, followed by a three-year doctorate. If successful, the ESRC scheme for home (UK) students funds all four years, providing both a living stipend for a total of roughly £15,000 per year and the payment of University fees at the home student rate (approximately £4,496 per year). If a candidate already has a research-based master's degree that closely matches ours, it is possible to go directly into the three-year doctoral programme. The rules are fairly precise on this, however, so applicants considering this are encouraged to contact the programme director, Professor Peter Bartlett (peter.bartlett@nottingham.ac.uk) to discuss this further.

International students (including those from EU countries) can also apply for this level of funding on the same terms. That means the scholarship will only fund University fees at the home student rate. Last year, the University provided an additional scholarship to cover the difference between home and international University fees for successful ESRC applicants, and we are optimistic that they will do so again. While this is our best advice at this time, candidates should keep apprised of developments: see <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studywithus/international-applicants/eu/future-students.aspx>.

The Master's Degree provides a foundation in social science research methods and theory, and in issues relating to mental health. Research Methods in Law is taught within the Law School, and through it students meet all other law students starting research degrees. The other core modules are taught to all ESRC-funded students through the DTP. The following core modules must be taken by all students:

Research Methods in Law (15 credits)
Philosophy of Research - Social Science (20 credits)
Research Design, Practice and Ethics (20 credits)
Foundations in Qualitative Methods (20 credits)
Fundamentals of Quantitative Methods (20 credits)
Short dissertation (60 credits)

The student is required to take an additional 25 credits of taught modules as part of the master's degree. 15-credit options on the Nottingham law LLM programme are available for this purpose. The choice of option modules is flexible, and can involve for example increased methodological training (generally in the specific methods the student will use for their doctoral research). The

methods modules are often offered through the DTP; subject-specific training is generally offered through the academic schools of the university. Alternatively, substantive training relevant to the field of study in other Schools may be pursued if appropriate. The programme supervisor, Professor Peter Bartlett, is happy to be consulted by students or supervisors if this would be helpful (peter.bartlett@nottingham.ac.uk).

In addition to the taught element, master's dissertation (60 credits) must also be completed as part of the Master's degree. Normally, this will be supervised by one or more of the student's proposed doctoral supervisors, but this is not a requirement. If, for example, an element that would be helpful to the student's work would benefit from supervision by another academic member of staff, the 60-credit dissertation might usefully be used to facilitate this. That said, the dissertation topic and supervision arrangements should be made in consultation with the potential doctoral supervisors.

Progress to the doctorate and continuation of funding for the three years of the doctorate are contingent on successful completion of the Master's to a good standard. The primary academic requirement for the doctoral element is the successful completion and defence of a dissertation of up to 100,000 words. This stream does not have set projects that we ask candidates to do. Candidates are instead required to devise a project of interest to them, within the broad scope of the stream. While inevitably the project will develop over the course of the degree, and particularly during the Master's year, a coherent research proposal is required at the point of application. Proposals must fall within the substantive remit of the ESRC. They must therefore engage with social issues (broadly defined), normally through the collection and analysis of empirical data and/or the use of social theory. The stream is open to candidates with a full range of legal interests (including criminal law and criminology, international law, civil law, law in society, functioning of civil law – we really are happy to take a broad view here!). Interdisciplinary projects are certainly welcome.

Application procedures

You would be well-advised to identify and approach a supervisor early on in the process. He or she can provide advice on development of proposals. They are required to complete parts of the scholarship application, so they DO need to know about you and your project well before the deadline. A good starting place to identify supervisors is the School web page - <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/law>.

We are happy to consider co-supervision arrangements with other schools where that is appropriate. If we are going to support you with that, though, we really do need reasonable lead time. To be realistic, supervision arrangements need to be finalised before the Christmas break, and these things take time - so if you require advice on seeking supervisors beyond the School, we do need to hear from you by early December. To that end, discuss the matter with your proposed law supervisor.

Law straddles ESRC and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) jurisdiction. If in any doubt which is the right way forward for your project, consult your supervisor.

As part of the application, you will need to complete a research proposal. Quite what that will look like will of course depend very much on your project, and this is something you should discuss with your prospective supervisors. A few tips might be helpful.

- The initial screenings of your proposal will be by socio-legal academics, but the final decision will be by a multi-disciplinary panel. The value of your work must therefore be clear both to a specialist and a non-specialist audience.
- The proposal will need to be clear as to what it is you plan to do and to find out - what you are expecting to bring to the field that is new, and how you plan to get there in practical terms. It is usual to frame this in the form of a fairly small number of 'research questions'.
- You will probably want to connect your specific topic/research questions to the field as it has developed. Sometimes that will mean putting your work into a theoretical context; sometimes it will mean referring to other literature that seems to leave a 'gap' – but what space is it that your work is going to fill?
- For an ESRC award, probably the collection and/or analysis of data is going to be a core part of the project. The research proposal should make clear what data you are going to collect, why you have chosen that data, and where the data is going to come from. **DON'T PANIC** – the methods training in the master's year will give you the skills to do the analysis, and no one expects you to have those skills before you have been trained in them. The panel members will expect you to have given serious and practical thought to what data you want to use (big statistical datasets? Interviews? Something else?) and why analysing that data will give you the answers you want to your research questions. They will also want to know that you have given some thought to where the data will come from. Are you going to analyse big data sets that already exist (and if so, which ones)? Where are you going to find the people to interview? If you have already made connections with organizations who have expressed an interest in assisting with the provision of data, DO mention it (and get a letter of support from them, if you can). That support is NOT mandatory at this stage, but if it is a big plus if the panel knows that you have a reasonable chance of being able to get the data. DO discuss this with your supervisors. You do NOT need to use a wide range of methods – often (usually?) one will be quite enough (stats? Interviews? Whatever...); but you should be clear as to why this is a sensible way forward, given what you want to find out.
- Often, data comes with ethical complications. Sometimes that involves formal ethical approval from outside sources (NHS, social care agencies, and the Ministry of Justice for example all have processes for this). Data also raises ethical issues of confidentiality (either personal or commercial), and that is particularly significant if the subject of the data is in any way vulnerable or if the data is in any way sensitive (commercially sensitive, for example). There is a space on the form to discuss these ethical questions. Do think about whether they apply to your data (and, again, prospective supervisors can advise on this).

Formal applications to the DTP competition must be made by **Tuesday 18 January 2022**: see instructions at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/mgsdtp/studentships/howtoapply/2019_entry_guidance_notes_for_midlands_graduate_school_esrc_dtp_applicants.pdf. This application is for the scholarship only. Students at this stage will ALSO need to apply formally to the academic programme, through the University web site (www.nottingham.ac.uk/pgstudy/how-to-apply/apply-online.aspx). **This should be done either before or at the same time as the ESRC application** since the references that form part of the University application are also used for the ESRC application. **Please make sure that your referees know to submit their references by the 18 January deadline.**

Please **DO MAKE SURE THAT ALL RELEVANT ATTACHMENTS ARE UPLOADED WITH YOUR SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION** in advance of the deadline. That includes relevant transcripts, and of course your research proposal. Uploading those documents as part of your University application is NOT sufficient – the scholarship rules do not allow us to use documents on your University application for purposes of the scholarship. The exception to that is your references, which are uploaded to the University application only.

Following a short-listing process, interviews of the most promising candidates will be held at the School of Law in early February. While we hope that it will be possible for candidates to attend in person, we are not in a position to reimburse travel costs. Where necessary, interviews by Skype, MS Teams or telephone are possible. Following the interviews, the top candidates will be forwarded to the DTP competition.

The decision on award of scholarships rests with the DTP. The ESRC has awarded the DTP a fixed number of studentships, and these are awarded on a competitive basis among nominees of the approved programmes within the consortium Universities. Nomination by the School of Law therefore does not necessarily mean that a scholarship will be awarded.

Offers of scholarships are expected to be made to successful applicants in mid-April. Successful candidates will have one week to take up the offer of a scholarship.

While all this sounds like rather a palaver, it is appropriate to close on an optimistic note. While we certainly cannot guarantee any results in the overall competition, socio-legal students have had a reasonable success rate in the past. Good students with good projects really should consider applying!