

Guidance notes for Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP applicants October 2023 Entry

The deadline for applications is Tuesday 24th January 2023 (23:59 GMT).

It is important that you allow yourself sufficient time to read these Guidance Notes before you complete your application form. Do not attempt to complete your application form before you have read them.

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

The application form for the Midlands Graduate School (MGS) is available on [the MGS website](#), accessed via a separate page for each institution. It 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 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 for funding, along with the research proposal that you will be required to upload. Your university student ID / applicant ID will be used to identify your application. Please ensure that your name and any other personally identifying information do not appear in either your research proposal or personal statement.

The other documents that you will be required to upload (Supervisor Supporting Statement and transcripts) and your references *will* contain personally identifying information, but these will be sent to reviewers as a separate document, using your university student ID / applicant ID to identify it, to ensure that your application and research proposal are fully anonymous during initial review.

While you may have already submitted some of this information as part of your PhD admissions application to your chosen university, we will require you to repeat it for the purposes of this form. Reviewers will only have access to the information included in Section Two, the documents that you upload, and 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 proofread your application before submitting it, to avoid 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 it does not, 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. If there is any doubt about the remit of your project, please refer it to the [pathway contact](#) at the university to which you are applying.

Although you will need to have applied for a PhD place at your chosen university, it is not necessary for you to have received written confirmation that you have been offered a place at the university in order to *apply* for funding. However, your application to study must have been submitted, 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. This offer can be conditional.

Section One

Question 1: Applicant Details

Please ensure that you include the student ID / application ID number of the application you have made for the PhD place to study at your chosen university. 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. For each category you can select 'Prefer not to say'. This information will not be made available to those who review your 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 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 2023. Any changes to this guidance will be confirmed prior to the application deadline (24th January 2023).

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.

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.

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.

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.

Section Two

Question 1: The university and School/Department in which you intend to study and your intended programme of research

Please give the name of the university and 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).

Question 2: Qualifications

Please provide details of the institutions you have attended (or are attending), and the courses you have taken at undergraduate and postgraduate level. 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 3: Previous Research Methods and Core Skills Training

Please outline any previous Research Methods and Core Skills Training you have undertaken as part of a Masters.

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 included the requisite training in Research Methods and Core Discipline Skills to prepare you for an ESRC-funded research degree.

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

Guidance on Award Length: Core Training Requirements

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 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, 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 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.

Guidance on Award Length: Choosing Which Scheme to Apply For:

+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 **all of the research skill areas outlined above**, you should apply for a **+3 award**. The information you provide in question 3 on details of modules undertaken during your Masters course will be used by 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 you are applying for a +3 award.

+3.5 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 the research skill areas outlined above**, you should apply for a **+3.5 award**. The information you provide in question 3 on details of modules undertaken during your Masters course will be used by 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 and pass 2 MGS DTP core training modules during your first year of PhD study in order to cover the training areas which you have not previously studied.

1+3 award

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

+4 award

+4 programmes are offered only on specific interdisciplinary pathways at the University of Nottingham (Digital Society and Mental Health and Wellbeing), where the subject-specific training that is drawn on will not be limited to one specific subject. If you have not completed a Masters course that covered the ESRC's core research skill areas as outlined above, you will be expected to complete MGS DTP core training modules during your first year of PhD study.

+2 award

If you have, or will have, completed **no more than one year of a full time PhD** (or part time equivalent) by the time your award would begin, you can apply for a +2 award. Please note that you **must** already have completed all 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.

Question 4: 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 5: 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 6: Project Details

This section plays a key part in the assessment of your application. We recommend that you discuss the content of this section in depth with your proposed supervisors. Reviewers are looking for evidence of high-quality research and strong potential for postgraduate study. Enthusiasm and interest are important, but reviewers 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?)

The case for support needs to be presented clearly and concisely in a **maximum of 1,000 words*** and should 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

Please do not include your name or any other identifying details in this attachment.

1+3 and +4 programme applicants need to give an indicative answer as your research interests will develop further during the year of your Masters training/first year of a +4 award. 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 will be required to confirm that the research proposal submitted is your own original work.

* 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 reviewers.**

Question 7: 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.

Please do not include your name or any other identifying details in your personal statement.

Question 8: 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 9: Overseas Fieldwork

If you need to carry out a study or archive visit or a fieldwork trip overseas during the period of your award, please provide indicative details of the following:

- Your planned destination(s)
- Purpose of your visit(s)
- The expected duration
- How they are integral to your research
- 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 10: Language Training

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

Question 11: 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 there are no ethical or intellectual property issues related to your proposed research, then please use this space to explain why this is the case.

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? Please note that contractual arrangements with external organisations must be in place before the PhD programme commences, and should include financial, intellectual property and confidentiality arrangements.

Question 12: Referee Details

As part of your ESRC DTP funding application, the MGS will also consider the two references submitted in support of your PhD application at your chosen university. 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. Please ensure that your referees are aware of this.

When selecting your referees, 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that your referees are aware that their reference will be used to support your application for a PhD place of study at your chosen university **and** by the MGS DTP to consider your application for ESRC funding.

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](#) or [local DTP administrator](#) at your institution and they will be able to advise.

Question 13: ESRC award at any other DTP for a 2023 start

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

Question 14: Uploading Supervisor Supporting Statement and other Documentation

a) 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.

b) Transcripts

You should upload copies of the transcripts of all your previous qualifications. If your transcripts are not in English, please also provide a certified translation.

c) Project Details

Here you should also upload your 'Project Details' as outlined in Question 6.

You must ensure that you complete all relevant sections of the application form and upload all relevant documentation. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Assessment Criteria

Your application will be assessed on the following three 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 24th January 2023 (23:59 GMT)**.

Please be aware, you will only be able to submit **one funding application** to the MGS DTP for entry in 2023 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 all applicants of the outcome in mid-April 2023.

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 6)	
Uploaded the completed 'Supporting Statement from Prospective Lead Supervisor' (Question 14)	
Uploaded transcripts of your previous qualifications (Question 14)	
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.