Economic and Social Research Council

Centre for Doctoral Training Plus (CDT+) in Behavioural Research - Frequently Asked Questions

This document has been prepared to support the commissioning of ESRC Centre for Doctoral Training Plus (CDT+) in behavioural research. It will be regularly updated to reflect those questions most frequently raised with ESRC. Potential applicants, and their research organisations (RO), should review this document before contacting us for advice.

Please note, this document will focus on queries raised in relation to the CDT+, however potential applicants should also refer to the Doctoral Training Partnership opportunity for further information on our revised strategy for supporting doctoral training and the expectations for the content and delivery of training.

Last updated: 05/01/23

Contents

CDT+ Aims and Objectives

How many centres for doctoral training will you be funding?
We will be funding a single CDT+.

Are there plans for another CDT+ call in the future?
The CDT+ model has been developed specifically to support the behavioural research initiative, there are currently no plans to fund another CDT+.

What do you mean by "we take a broad definition of what 'behavioural research' encompasses, which goes beyond individualistic approaches to behaviour change"?
Our definition includes research to answer fundamental questions about how and why people, organisations and groups behave in the way they do within wider societal and economic contexts. We expect a broad range of disciplinary perspectives, within the social sciences and beyond, to be involved in the investment; and outputs from the investment should be targeted towards addressing major societal and economic challenges.

Therefore, the CDT+ must support innovative training that will ensure graduates, early career researchers (ECRs) and broader audiences, have the skills they need to work across disciplinary and sector boundaries (for example, government, academic, and industry, and within and across social sciences).

The team leading the CDT+ should also bring fresh perspectives to behavioural research and demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the variety of disciplines and methodological approaches that can contribute to our understanding of behaviour.

How important is the interdisciplinary nature of the proposal?
The overarching aim of the investment (Hub and Spokes) is to encourage innovative proposals that reduce fragmentation within the field of behavioural research. For the CDT+, single discipline or narrowly focused centres are not eligible to apply. The CDT+ is expected to support innovative training with opportunities to engage with and work across a variety of disciplines, sectors and methodological approaches to develop capacity for understanding human behaviour.

The studentships, fellowships and wider training and development activities must be designed to build a critical mass of researchers with the knowledge and skills to transform our understanding of human behaviour, inform policy and practice, and be able to work flexibly across sectoral and disciplinary boundaries.

How important is it to have early career researchers (ECRs) as part of the bid?
The investment itself has a clear focus on supporting early career researchers, including through the provision of doctoral training and an early career fellowship scheme. Applicants must explain their approach to supporting researchers at this career stage and will need to explain how the proposed fellowship offering will accelerate the development of a critical mass of researchers in the field and support and encourage ECRs to develop the knowledge and skills required to pursue a career in behavioural research.

Applicants may also want to consider how the CDT+ could support career development more generally through engagement with the CDT's leadership and management structure, including how ECRs could be embedded within supervisory teams

Should those applying for the CDT+ be trying to link to the Hub application in some way, or are these completely separate bids?
These are two separate funding opportunities and will form part of an overarching ESRC investment to create a new national capability for behavioural research. Applicants applying for the CDT+ are not required to link their application to the Leadership team for a National Capability in Behavioural Research – UKRI funding opportunity, but must commit to working in partnership with the leadership team for the behavioural research 'hub' to ensure the overarching aims of the national capability are realised.

Are there specific domains or priority areas within your Delivery Plan (for instance Net Zero, Crime, Wellbeing) that the CDT+ should address?
No, we are not being prescriptive about the thematic focus of the CDT+.

Activities

Can opportunities for the PhDs be part-time? And can studentships be allocated to both home and international students, or a mixture of both?
The CDT+ is subject to the standard UKRI Terms and Conditions for training grants. It is a requirement of ESRC funding that studentships are offered on both a full and a part-time basis, with a minimum of 50% of full-time equivalent required.

Studentships can be allocated to both home and international students, but the proportion of international students appointed each year is limited to 30% of the total. Please see the policy on residential eligibility here.

Would a 1+3 model (1 year MSc in Behaviour Change plus 3-year PhD) be considered in the funding model to support equality, diversity and inclusion?
In developing their bids, applicants must ensure that they familiarise themselves with the expectations detailed in the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines. Linking a masters to a PhD might be part of that offering and is particularly important for supporting the participation of under-represented groups, but as a masters is no longer a pre-requisite for undertaking a PhD, applicants must also demonstrate how they can offer students a bespoke training experience that reflects both their prior experience and their proposed project.

With respect to the Early Career Fellowships, can these fellowships run concurrently with the PhD studentships or is the intention that these fellowships would be a follow-on opportunity for the PhD students recruited to the programme?
Whilst we're not being prescriptive about the fellowship offer, it must take place within the duration of the CDT+ and a concurrent offer would be most appropriate. Applicants for the CDT+ have the flexibility to develop the specific fellowship offer in a way that they think best meets the needs of ECRs and the aim of the overarching aims of CDT+.

In relation to the fellowships, is there an expectation for ECRs to gain experience outside academia via a placement or is there potential for this to happen the other way around (e.g. policy makers seconded to a university to conduct research)?
Placements are expected to be an embedded part of the studentships and fellowships, rather than an opportunity to support other secondment opportunities.

With regards to staff time, what is ESRC's expectation how this will be differentiated from the resourcing which hosting institutions are expected to provide for directors and training leads? Will we be permitted to employ staff to develop resources or/and are supervisors permitted to charge their time to the grant when developing resources?
We recognise that our ambitions for the range of activities that will be supported by the CDT+ go beyond what is usually expected in the leadership and management of a CDT. Therefore, applicants are expected to consider what additional resources will be required to support to the broader aims of the CDT+ beyond the doctoral training aspect.

Costs to allow the successful CDT+ to establish structures and processes to develop opportunities and processes for the non-studentship related activities can be costed into the application.

This can include staff time and it's up to the applicants to provide a breakdown and justification of costs requested and how they have allocated the proportion of funding to fellowships and other activities. We have not been prescriptive about what this may look like.

Costs associated with the doctoral element and studentships cannot be claimed, except for costs relating to the delivery infrastructure for placements opportunities.

Could you explain what is meant by executive training - is that conceived of as "fourth-level" research training or more like executive education?
We have not been prescriptive about the level of the training or additional activities beyond academia, it is the responsibility of the applicants to set out their plans to scope a flexible programme of activities that meet the aims of the CDT+. Applicants are expected to work collaboratively with government and other key stakeholders to design their training programme in a way which has mutual benefit and supports the participation of researchers in government and other sectors i.e. through master classes, workshops, specific modules or even training to support Level 7 Apprenticeships.

Whilst costs can be claimed for the development of a broader training offer beyond academia, applicants must set out their approach to developing a sustainable cost recovery strategy for government (and beyond) participation in the CDT+ training offer, especially for the development and inclusion of apprenticeship or masters level courses.

Eligibility

Can Research Organisations be involved in more than one proposal?
Organisations are only allowed to lead one CDT+ proposal but may also participate in consortia arrangements led by other organisations where the proposed training provision supports the aims of the initiative and can be fully justified. The proposed Director, or any of the staff identified for the key roles, cannot be named on more than one application.

Is there a limit on the number of research organisations which can be involved in consortia arrangements? Does ESRC have a preference for single or multi-institution bids?
We welcome proposals from both single research organisations and consortia and are not setting any limits on the number of organisations involved in a bid. All applications will be assessed against the criteria detailed in the funding opportunity, and applicants need to make a clear case for the structure and size of the CDT+ they are proposing.

For consortia arrangements, applicants must clearly justify the choice of partners and articulate the added value each partner brings to the delivery of training and evidence the quality of research environment in behavioural research. You must also carefully consider how you will deliver a consistent student experience and how you are going to develop a sense of cohort amongst students across all partner institutions.

For consortia bids, is there any expectation that the CDT+ will involve multiple organisations (HEIs) in the core supervisory team?
No, whilst we expect all students to have a supervisory team there is no expectation that that team should be drawn from different research organisations.

Would you award the CDT+ to an institution that is already part of an existing ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership, or applying to be part of a Doctoral Training Partnership?
Yes, they are concurrent but distinct opportunities. Research organisations can be part of an application to be an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership and the CDT+. As part of their bid, applicants should justify the proposed structure and, if successful, would be expected to co-ordinate and work across both investments as well as the leadership team for National Capability in Behavioural Research. Applicants should ensure they are able to meet the expected resourcing requirements.

What is the relationship between the CDT+ and ESRC DTPs that might also cover behavioural research?
DTPs provide training across a broad range of social sciences whilst CDTs provide training in focused, thematic, interdisciplinary research areas. Whilst being commissioned separately, applicants for the CDT+ will be expected to work with DTPs and other relevant investments to share good practice. As part of your application, you are expected to demonstrate your commitment to do this and have a strategy in place for how you might complement and enhance the impact of existing research and capacity building infrastructure and ESRC investments.

How long would you expect the Director and Co-Director to remain in place?
There should be a director and/or co-director in place for the full duration of the CDT+ but we appreciate that there may be some changes to undertakes those roles. Please note that any change in directors will be subject to ESRC approval. Applicants should describe their approach to successions planning.

Can you provide some guidance on whether our proposed Director and Co-Director would be eligible to lead the CDT?
We have specified our minimum expectations in terms of what resourcing requirements research organisations must provide to support the delivery of the CDT+. However, it is up to the applicants to describe and justify the approach they've taken to the CDT's management and governance structure, including the suitability of the director and the senior management team.

A co-director may be appropriate, but applicants will be expected to justify the configuration of the team, how this meets the minimum resourcing requirements, and that there are clear expectations of the workloads across roles. You should also consider what additional resources will be required to support to the broader aims of the CDT+ beyond doctoral training.

Should the identified training lead be a professional role, e.g., within the CDT+ or Doctoral college, rather than an academic leadership role?
We have not been prescriptive about this, it's for the CDT+ to determine and justify their approach.

Application Process

Does the Expression of Interest (EOI) need to detail the organisations involved in the bid, and do you mean the academic organisations or also the external organisations?
The EOI should name the director and set out which research organisations and partners that are expected to be involved in the full proposal. We appreciate that partnerships may take time to develop, which may be after the EOI submission, but we ask that you name as many partners at time of submission as possible. EOIs are not assessed and will be used to help plan the peer review process only.

All applicants should submit an expression of interest (EoI) by email by 16:00 on 9 December 2022 to pgtframework@esrc.ukri.org.

Is it possible to add partners once an EoI has been submitted?
Yes, this is possible.

Are you expecting a single application to be submitted on behalf of the Centre for Doctoral Training Plus in Behavioural Research (CDT+)?
Yes, applicants need to submit a single application through the Joint Electronic-System. You will be asked to enter the name of the research organisation responsible for submitting the proposal and the name of the proposed CDT+ Director. The proposed CDT+ Director will be the main point of contact for any correspondence regarding the proposal. For consortia proposals, the applicant should be from the lead institution.

You can find advice on completing your application in the Je-S handbook or opportunity-specific Je-S guidance (PDF, 276KB).

Funding

Can non-studentships costs only be included within the first four years of the grant? Does this mean other costs, including ECR Fellowships, must be completed by September 2027?
The three cohorts of studentships start from October 2024 and the post embedded within GCSU can be budgeted to start from October 2023 for up to 5 years All other costs should be from October 2023 for up to 4 years initially.

For the CDT+, are the directly allocated costs for academic staff to be included in the leadership/management staff costs, therefore funded @ 100% FEC?
Costs associated with the leadership and management of the CDT+ can be included at 100% fEC in recognition of the additional components required of this CDT+. This can be used to fund staff time and the delivery infrastructure for placements (including studentship placements) opportunities. Costs associated with the management and administration of the studentships cannot be claimed.

Applicants will be required to submit a Justification of Resources (JoR) providing a breakdown and justification of the costs being requested for the component parts of the CDT+.

Further information on costings and what must be included in the Justification of Resources can be found in the CDT Plus 2022 Call Je-S Guidance.

Is it one Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU) post per CDT+ application?
Yes, applications must include a single post that will be embedded within the Government Skills and Curriculum Unit (GSCU) in the Cabinet Office. Up to £750,000 (100% fEC) is ringfenced to support the post embedded within GSCU and ESRC will contribute 80% of these costs. The post should be budgeted to last up to five years and applicants must explain, within the Justification of Resources document, how this post has been costed into the application at a sufficient level to work independently and demonstrate leadership across large and complex environments.

Would ESRC continue paying the stipend etc. for the duration of placements and would the non-academic host be expected to contribute any costs?
ESRC will provide funding to cover the student's stipend and fees for up to three months, to allow them to undertake a placement within a host organisation. Host organisations would be expected to make a contribution to the additional costs associated with the placement, for example the students travel and subsistence costs. However, the CDT+ may also consider in kind contributions in exceptional circumstances (for example where the partner does not have the resources to make a financial contribution). You can find out more about our expectations for Research in Practice placements in the CDT+ funding opportunity and also Annex III of ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines Third Edition (2022).

In terms of co-funding, are you expecting applicants to match-fund studentships or fund them in full?
ESRC will fund 8 studentships per annum as part of this initiative and the CDT+ must provide funding to support at least two fully funded studentships from non-academic sources per annum for three cohorts starting from October 2024.

What is meant by the extra PhD funding? Is that a full cash commitment or can it be in-kind or in some way notional?
Additional studentships will need to be fully financially funded, and the centre will be expected to gain co-funding to support a minimum of 2 additional students per annum, as ESRC will only be providing funding for eight studentships per annum for the three cohorts. Applicants will need to provide evidence of the sources of additional funding for the 2 additional studentships, their commitment to meeting this target and how they will achieve it.

Can we use a model where each studentship is part-sponsored by a non-academic partner, so that the total number of students funded in each cohort will add up to at least two additional studentships?
At least two students per cohort must be supported by non-academic partner(s). The funding needs to be equivalent to the total cost of at least 2 studentships, but we are not prescriptive on how the contributions are made as long as funding for at least two fully funded studentships is sourced from non-academic partners in the public, business or civil-society sector. Applicant must justify their approach as part of their application.

Applicants will need to provide evidence of the sources for additional funding for the additional two (or more) studentships and indicate their commitment to meeting this target and how they will achieve it.

Do the 'non-academic' studentships require financial contributions from the partners towards student maintenance and fees and can co-funding for PhDs come from non-industry partners? For example, NHS, Charities
Yes, the additional studentships will need to be fully funded. Applicants will need to provide evidence of the sources for additional funding for the additional two (or more) studentships and explain in their application their commitment to meeting this target of support two (or more) studentships and how they will achieve it.

As this area is of considerable interest to business, public and civil society sectors, at least two students per cohort must be supported by non-academic partner(s).

How should we calculate the costs of a PhD for a partner? Should we be costing for four years of fees and stipends as well as the additional funds for fieldwork/training support and cohort development?
Yes, for the purposes of securing additional funding, costing should be based on each studentship being four years in duration (inclusive of a three-month placement) and should reflect the full notional cost of a studentship which includes funding for fieldwork/training support and cohort development.

The figures provided in the funding opportunity are a notional cost per studentship and the CDT+ should propose the different structures of awards they might offer. Applicants must refer to the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines regarding our expectations for flexibility in content and delivery that offers students a bespoke training experience. The actual funding then allocated to individual students needs to reflect any prior training as identified through a development needs analysis.

Would ESRC consider individual alumni, who are lifetime donors, to be non-academic partners in this context for the additional 2 studentships?
No. This funding needs to come from non-academic organisations in the public, private or civil society sector, rather than individuals or funding sources available via the RO.

The requirement for two studentships a year to be funded by non-academic sources will be incredibly difficult - what kind of commitment do you expect to see?
The scoping work we undertook to develop this initiative suggested that this is an area of interest to a broad range of organisations who were keen to participate. Applicants would need to evidence what co-funding they had in place at the point of application, confirmed by a letter of support from the project partner, and what their strategy was to secure additional funding. The CDT+ will only be awarded on the condition that co-funding will be secured.

Please could you confirm whether institutions would be allowed to charge a fee to external parties for accessing the training and development content beyond studentships/fellowships? Or can this be included within the costs in the application?
Yes, when aspects of the training programme are accessed by wider stakeholders this must be done on a sustainable basis, either through cash or in-kind contributions. Applicants are expected to set out their approach to developing a sustainable cost recovery strategy especially for the development and inclusion of apprenticeship or masters level courses.

Can international companies support the cost of a studentship?
Applicants should determine their approach to securing co-funding and justify their approach as part of their application. Where this includes non-UK organisations, they must demonstrate the clear added value of this approach. Please note that the CDT+ will be subject to the standard UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions.

Is it a requirement for external co-funding to be sourced for ECR fellowship scheme?
No, it is not a requirement but as there is evidence of the need for ECRs with expertise in behavioural research across government and business applicants are encouraged to explore the potential for co-funded fellowships.