



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

Doctoral Training Partnerships - Frequently Asked Questions

This document has been prepared to support the commissioning of ESRC Doctoral Training Partnerships (2024). 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.

Last updated: 17 October 2022

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Strategy

We're not currently part of the ESRC doctoral training network, can we still apply?

Yes, this is an open and competitive process.

How many DTPs are you seeking to fund?

We are not expecting the number of DTPs to increase significantly but there is scope to fund more than the current 14.

Are the DTP expected to be geographically proximate or are you looking for more thematically linked DTPs?

We don't require regional partnerships, but we do expect DTPs to support activities aimed at developing their cohorts and, as such, applicants do need to consider how they can most effectively organise the consortia that enables a cohort experience for the students and allows them to realise the efficiencies and sharing of training and practice within the DTP.

We would also encourage DTPs, particularly with the focus on place and levelling up, to think about how you might make links to your local communities and what opportunities that might present for placements as part of Research in Practice.

DTPs are expected to cover the majority of the social sciences so narrowly focused, or thematically based, applications will not be considered as part of this call.

Does a DTP have to cover all social science disciplines?

No, but DTPs are expected to cover the majority of the social sciences. Single discipline or narrowly focused DTPs will not be supported.

Can you define "disciplinary or subject areas"? Previously, the use of tightly defined Research Excellence Framework (REF) metrics effectively aligned training pathways with REF units of assessment (UoA). Could a department or school be seen as the foundation for the discipline or subject area?

It is down to individual DTPs to determine how they configure their training areas, as it was last time. They can be discipline specific or thematic and, if using REF outcomes as part of their evidence of excellence, applicants will need to confirm which UoAs are pertinent to the training provision they're proposing.

Why are you only commissioning Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs), what about Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs)?

Whilst we're only commissioning DTPs as part of this call, we will continue to use the CDT model in new and emerging areas where they meet the broader priorities of both ESRC and UKRI. For example, a [Centre for Doctoral Training Plus in Behavioural Research](#) will be commissioned in 2022/23.

What about existing CDTs and how they can be integrated into the DTP structure? Can CDTs be aligned to pockets of excellence?

Since 2017 we have funded two CDTs – [Soc-B \(Social-Biological\) Centre for Doctoral Training](#) and [Data Analytics and Society Centre for Doctoral Training](#) – and each have

received two tranches of funding. We fund CDTs to pump-prime the delivery of training in new and emerging areas where we need to build capacity. After the initial investment, we want CDTs to move to a sustainable, long term footing which would see them integrating with, and developing their provision, as part of the broader doctoral training network particularly as they remain relevant to the steers. We don't want to put constraints on how that might happen but would encourage the CDTs and relevant DTPs to consider how to take that forward.

Will ESRC scrutinise the type of non-academic partners involved in the bid and will some be more welcome than others (i.e., private sector)?

We'd welcome bids that include partners across all sectors, fundamentally we're looking for purposeful partnerships and it's down to applicants to justify their inclusion and the strengths and value they bring to the bid.

Can you provide additional information on the expected size and scale of the bids? For example, what is the maximum number of partners you would expect to see in any bid? Should we focus on a couple of key partners or seek to engage with a larger number of institutions?

We are not putting figures on the expected size of a consortium. Proposals must clearly justify the choice of partners and articulate the added value of the partnership. If your bid is likely to include a number of partners, you must 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.

We also don't have a specific number in mind for non-academic partners. For all partners you will need to make sure that you have effective mechanisms for engaging with them

Would you prefer single or multiple institution proposals?

Applications are eligible from single ROs and consortia. We do though encourage applications which include pockets of excellence and additional studentships are available to them.

How will institutions be encouraged to include a 'pocket of excellence' in their bids?

We want to support excellence in postgraduate training wherever it is found, so additional studentships will be made available for those who include what might be discipline-specific, local pockets of excellence in their proposals.

How are you defining 'pockets of excellence' if you're not using REF metrics?

Pockets of excellence refers to institutions who don't have sufficient strength across the social sciences to host a DTP but were clearly strong in specific areas. Previously we used REF metrics as a threshold, but we recognise that excellence can be demonstrated in a number of ways. This can include REF outcomes but might also include, for example, other major grant or centre funding.

We hope that they will be included in some partnerships and will allocate additional studentships to encourage this to happen. Ultimately applicants must justify the configuration of their proposal and the clear value that each partner adds to the

arrangement.

Do all bids need to include a pocket of excellence?

It is not a requirement that all bids include pockets of excellence, though we are encouraging collaborations which include them as we want to support excellent postgraduate training wherever it is found.

How many studentships will be allocated to bids including pockets of excellence?

We can't be specific about that at this time. Thirty per cent of our budget will be reserved for strategic steers, how they're allocated will depend on how many have included pockets of excellence or demonstrable strength in the areas highlighted for steered awards namely interdisciplinarity, data skills, advanced quantitative methods and the use of datasets including administrative data.

In the last round, these 'pockets of excellence' were institutions with limited representation in a DTP. One reading of the current call, is that pockets of excellence can be identified in any institution, and will attract extra studentships under the steer – is that correct?

Their representation was limited as their strength in social science was limited to a small number of areas and that has not changed in this call. When developing their bids, applicants will need to carefully consider how the pockets of excellence will complement and contribute to the strategic vision for the partnership to ensure that their inclusion is meaningful and adds value to the training provided. Additional studentships will not be allocated where the rationale for inclusion has not been well made.

Are discipline-specific centres of excellence and the current pockets of excellence different?

No, these are one and the same. Pockets of excellence may contain a number of discipline-specific areas within them.

The guidelines highlight Economics as being an exceptional case where the depth of training required is different to other disciplines – how are you anticipating that training in economics will work?

Our discussions with the Royal Economic Society (RES), and representatives from economics pathways in the current doctoral training network, have demonstrated that there is a broad consensus of the level of disciplinary training required for graduates to produce research which could be published in leading journals and make the graduates internationally competitive in the academic and professional job market.

We have been exploring how the flexibilities we've highlighted in the call can be utilised to ensure we can continue to support economics students and that they receive the depth of disciplinary training they required. We are continuing to have discussions with RES to think about how they might support the delivery of some of the interdisciplinary aspects we expect all students to have an awareness of collectively and will share the outcome of those discussions in due course.

Is economics the only discipline this would apply to?

Economics is the only discipline which has made the case at this point. That is not to say

that the same is not true of other disciplines, but there would need to be consensus, potentially facilitated by the relevant learned society, and for that case to be made consistently across DTP applications.

How can we find potential partners?

ESRC is unable to broker collaborations. Institutions will need to identify partners through their own networks.

Can you provide information on what you would expect to see in the bids in terms of the relationship between existing DTPs and new partnerships? i.e., are you expecting existing DTPs to remain in their current configurations?

This will be an open and competitive commissioning process. Existing DTPs are not obliged to apply in their current form, existing partnerships can be re-configured and applications from those currently outside of our doctoral training network are welcome. Those ROs that are currently part of the network will be expected to draw evidence from their progress to date. ROs from outside of the network should provide assurance regarding their ability to support high quality research training.

Your funding has been largely concentrated in pre 1992 institutions, to increase the diversity of the student population you need to support a wider range of institutions.

When we commissioned our DTPs in 2016, we provided additional studentships to those who included what might be discipline-specific, local pockets of excellence in their proposals. As a result, we saw a significant increase in the number of institutions which participate in our Doctoral Training Network, from the 45 institutions which participated in the Doctoral Training Centre's scheme (which preceded the DTPs) to 73. We will continue to encourage discipline-specific centres (pockets) of excellence in this exercise.

Also, as part of their EDI Strategies DTPs will also be required to set out how they will reach out to under-represented groups and support mobility between the institutions where students undertook their undergraduate studies and where they will undertake their PhD.

Your revised vision talks about PGRs being globally competitive – what do you mean by that? *NEW*

The Review of the PhD included a comparison to a number of other countries using a case study approach. This demonstrated that the UK has a very efficient PhD, for example with higher completions than some other countries. Whilst there may be areas of disciplinary differences, we want the UK PhD to remain world leading in terms of the pathways that are available to our students and the training provided to them.

Content of postgraduate training

You've made some significant changes to your expectation around core training, why is that?

One of the key findings from the [Review of the PhD](#) was that current training provision had moved too far towards a 'one size fits all' approach and which doesn't sufficiently reflect their prior experience and the needs of discipline/field. We hope that, collectively, the

changes we've made in the new version of the [Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines](#) will enable more flexibility and innovation in the delivery of doctoral training.

That's quite different to how we organise our training at present and will take time to develop, does that need to be in place by the closing date in February 2023?

We appreciate that this may require changes to the way in which training is delivered at present, particularly where courses are currently taught to large classes, but as the Review of the PhD has demonstrated we have moved too far towards a 'one size fits all' approach and that needs to be addressed.

We don't expect everything to be in place at the point of application, but applications should include what provision is either in place or planned at the point of application and explain how they will ensure it is available by the start of the grant in October 2024.

Also, in recognition of the degree of change required, we will be providing successful DTPs with funding to support the development of some of that training.

Previously DTPs have developed standardised research methods training programmes in the form of Masters in Social Science Research. The Review of the PhD found that that created an equal or level starting point for all students. Does ESRC envision that those Masters in Social Science Research programmes will largely continue as they are or that, over time, they will be replaced?

We recognise that a lot of time and effort went into the development of these courses and are not suggesting that they are removed but the Review did highlight both that we've moved too far towards a 'one size fits all' approach and, for some students, it duplicated training they'd already received. In addition, many of the students who have been allocated a 1+3 studentship have already undertaken a postgraduate qualification in the social sciences so funding them to undertake another master's degree is not the best use of our investment.

That is not to say that there won't be a place for such master's courses and they will still be part of the training offer that DTPs can provide, and some students will benefit from undertaking them, but we need to build on the strengths of those master's programmes and deliver it in a way that better meets the past experience of students.

The 1+3 framework used to locate training in the first year. What is the role of the masters as part of the new framework and should this be part of bid?

NEW

When we commissioned the current network of DTPs in 2016 applicants could specify the range of structures that not only included a 1+3 or +3 options, but also an integrated 4-year programme where training could be delivered across the duration of the studentship.

We still believe that masters training is an important component of the offer available to students, and the Guidelines provide examples of when students may need to undertake a masters. However, the Review of the PhD highlighted that we've moved too far towards a 'one size fits all' approach and, for some students, it duplicated training they'd already received. In addition, many of the students who have been allocated a 1+3 studentship have

already undertaken a postgraduate qualification in the social sciences so funding them to undertake another master's degree is not the best use of our investment. For these reasons the 1+3 masters cannot remain the main through which training is delivered. The Guidelines set out how we need our training to be more responsive to the past experience and needs of students with increased flexibility in the content and delivery of training provided.

Where master's programmes are already in place, we would expect DTPs to consider how they could evolve to meet the expectations detailed in the Guidelines. As part of this DTPs should consider how provision could serve the needs of not only those students who need to undertake full masters but students on other structures who need to supplement specific knowledge gaps - this may mean that rather than training being provided through an hour a week for one semester, it could be consolidated into a few weeks or delivered through a series of masterclasses, for example.

Can you set out how you envisage a shift from current 1+3 to a more flexible approach ie does the guidance apply largely to training outside of masters or expecting full flexibility including masters provision and/or core training requirements? *NEW*

The guidance applies to all aspects of our expectations for core training. As we have stated, we anticipate that masters training remains an important part of the training offered by DTPs but it should be one component part of the offer. DTPs will need to consider how the training they provide aligns with our expectations for increased flexibility and innovation in the delivery of training.

If a student does not already have a master's degree and needs to complete one - will this need to be an ESRC approved masters? *NEW*

We have previously moved away from accrediting individual masters courses to accrediting pathways through which there were a number of routes students could take as illustrated through the range of masters courses associated with them. For this exercise, prospective DTPs must explain in their bids how the core training will be offered and, if a student is required to complete a masters, how this will be delivered.

Why is there a need to provide both bespoke and broad training? *NEW*

We recognise that broad training offers can often duplicate training that students have already completed but there may still be a need for some students to have a broader introduction to social science research. The key driver must be the needs of the individual student and the Development Needs Analysis process should be used to identify the skills and knowledge the individual student already have and then determine what training is offered next, what pathway the student takes and the degree of specialisation

Are you anticipating that the 'new' style of training will be credit bearing (students like getting an MA/MRes or PGCert for their training as further evidence of their advanced research methods?)

We are not prescriptive about credits, that's for institutions to determine. We appreciate that this may be more straightforward as part of a master's programme, but the Review has highlighted the need to move away from a 'one size fits all approach' and a masters is no longer a pre-requisite for a +3 award.

What if a student has already completed a master's qualification but wants to enrol on a 1+3 to gain a further qualification? *NEW*

The structure of the award a student is allocated must be informed by a development needs analysis rather than the student's preference to obtain a second master's degree.

You used to expect all students to be trained in quantitative and qualitative research methods, is that still the case?

We still expect that, by the end of their PhD, all students will have an understanding of the breadth of social science methods, but we recognise that that understanding could have been gained either prior to being allocated a studentship or through training access over the course of their PhD.

Does ESRC have a definition for what is basic quantitative training and what is advanced? *NEW*

We cannot provide a definition as this will vary depending on both the specific discipline and the needs of the student highlighted through the DNA process.

Should pathways be offering vocational vs academic paths through a PhD? *NEW*

The vocational aspect should be considered through the Research in Practice component of the PhD as this would give students the opportunity to the skills valued by employers. There may be some PhD areas that may have a vocational aspect which could be built in as part of the DNA process to look at what students need to deliver their PhD and work beyond.

Can ESRC-funding be used to support professional doctorates? *NEW*

Professional Doctorates might be part of the training offered by a DTP, ESRC-funding can't be used to support them.

When will the report on the data driven skills review be published and will a training model that fully implements the recommendations of the data driven skills review be welcomed? *NEW*

As confirmed on our [website](#), we have been supporting a review of when skills and knowledge is needed for social scientists to undertake high quality, impactful data-driven research. [A report by Technopolis](#) arising from the doctoral element of this work has now been published on our website and is one of the evidence strands that was considered as part of the call's development. DTPs can certainly take that into account when developing their training offer but the onus must be meeting the expectations detailed on in the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines and ensuring that the training they offer meets the needs of students and aligns with the needs identified through the development needs analysis process.

A further report, looking at the rest of the academic lifecourse, will be published later this year.

In light of those changes, are you still placing the same emphasis on cohort-building?

Yes, being part of a cohort has been shown to be hugely beneficial to students in terms of

the support they receive from one another and the training opportunities available to them. We appreciate that students have a range of pre-existing affiliations such as their discipline, department, and institutions. Whilst we don't want to supplant these, we do want to ensure that there's a clear sense of being part of an ESRC-funded cohort too.

How can we achieve interdisciplinarity and making sure all students have a baseline of core training, and the very flexible, individual DNA approach outlined in the call?

We recognise that our students may go on to work in more challenge-led interdisciplinary environments but to do that many require a core foundation in their disciplinary area. The degree to which their core training has an interdisciplinary focus will vary and we are trying to balance getting that core disciplinary foundation with having opportunities to understand and engage beyond their disciplinary area through such activities as Research in Practice including placement opportunities.

It is also important to note that the core training requirements detailed in the guidelines, aren't specific to disciplines so, for example, a student might get high quality training in digital and data skills that would encompass several disciplines and give students the opportunity to engage with scholars across different disciplines.

Previously, the remit borders between Research Councils have been very carefully policed. Interdisciplinary research is now put forward as a key strategic steer, which appears to be a radical change in approach – is that correct?

We have always encouraged interdisciplinary training and the move away from our old system of subject-specific ESRC recognition has allowed DTPs greater flexibility in how they approach that. It's important to remember that whilst we encouraged interdisciplinarity, the studentships we fund must be predominantly social science. The last DTP call included a similar steer on interdisciplinary research and made it clear that interdisciplinary studentships could be fully funded by the ESRC if co-funding was not possible.

In addition, the terms of UKRI funding allows training grant holders to draw on funds from more than one Council to support students undertaking research that crosses the remit of different Councils.

The call notes that DTPs should indicate where they are able to make specialist training available beyond their DTPs – will ESRC set up a site to support this or is this something that DTPs must build into their bids?

We want to enable DTPs to play to their strengths and don't expect them to have specialist training in all areas so if they are able to share training across the network to complement training available through the National Centre for Research Methods and other major ESRC investments that would help increase the vibrancy of our specialist training offer.

Our aim is to work with NCRM and the DTPs to make that training more widely available and we will be looking for DTPs to identify a key contact for that work once we've completed this commissioning exercise.

Can we have a bit more information on what you're expecting in terms of specialist training – for example, day or weeklong courses – and how we can avoid duplicating the same specialisms?

How the training is delivered can be flexible - for example short courses, intensive, blended, online - pedagogically what works and is most appropriate. Once we know who the DTPs are, we will work with them to co-ordinate what training is being developed across the network.

Why are you using the term 'Development Needs Analysis' instead of training needs analysis?

We have moved to the term DNA to signal that we conceptualise development needs broadly, going beyond formal training courses to include more developmental and experiential opportunities.

Why does the call emphasise the need for DNAs when organisations already have their own processes in place?

We believe that DNA is fundamental to achieving flexible and responsive doctoral training and a more bespoke student experience. The Mid Term Review of our DTPs indicated that while there is evidence of good practice this is not always consistent across ROs and DTPs. We want to ensure that all ESRC-funded students receive a rigorous development needs assessment throughout their studies and that this is implemented across all training areas and partner organisations.

Do you expect a DNA to be undertaken before a studentship has even been awarded? How frequently should it take place thereafter?

To determine the length of award a student is entitled to, there will need to be an assessment of both the student's prior training and experience, and of the skills they will need to successfully complete their PhD.

After that, we would expect it to be reviewed annually as a minimum.

Would the DNA completed at the application stage just focus on the MA needs as it might be too early to consider the PhD elements? *NEW*

The DNA undertaken at the application stage should consider the student's needs in a holistic manner and would inform whether an MA was even required. It is important to remember that the DNA will evolve and develop across the studentship.

If funding is offered on a 2+2 structure, would ESRC offer an extension of funding should a student need a third or even fourth year for their PhD? *NEW*

No, projects should be designed in such a way that they can be completed within the funded period.

I note that DTPs will be expected to develop their own DNA approach but could be a standardised form or platform that could be used and that would permit sharing across the network?

We're mindful that institutions already have systems and structures already in place support this as part of the PhD monitoring process so we don't want to impose any additional requirements but we would be happy to work with the DTPs to identify some core

questions if that would be helpful.

Are expecting the DTPs themselves to provide training to supervisors or whether it is sufficient that it is the HEIs that provide the training to supervisors?

The call sets out our expectations in relation to supervision and that we recognise that institutions already have training in place. However, the call also confirms that we expect that supervisors will have an understanding of the aims and objectives of the DTP and are able to support students to access additional opportunities and to undertake the type of DNA process we want. This may not be entirely covered by existing training so we would anticipate that it would require a combination of the institution and the DTP.

What is the maximum amount of funding a student can be awarded?

4.5 years if studying full-time. The length of part-time awards should be calculated based on their time commitment.

What happens if they don't complete a placement?

The length of funding a student is allocated should include 3 months for a placement, if a student does not undertake a placement, they would not be entitled to receive that 3 months of funding. This needs to be clearly set out as part of the offer made to the student.

Once we've commissioned the DTPs, we'd like to work with them to develop a clear set of expectations about what students can expect from an ESRC-funded studentship and the support they will receive in return to ensure there is clarity about what we believe is an invaluable and important part of their PhD.

You've said what you expect with regards to equality, diversity, and inclusion but not what you want us to do, can you please clarify?

In the call documents we have set out some specific requirements in terms of the process for recruiting and allocating studentships. Beyond this we want applicants to set out how they will contribute to the widening participation agenda and promote postgraduate research to a diverse base of graduates. We don't want to be prescriptive because we recognise that many institutions already have pro-active recruitment strategies and we want to encourage institutions to think innovatively about how these can be developed further. As part of our monitoring of DTPs we will be looking at the demographic information we collect on students allocated funding and when concerned will expect ROs to provide evidence on how their allocation relates to the overall applicant pool. Therefore, applicants will need to consider they collect and analyse data on students.

How should DTPs allocate studentships?

The allocation of studentships will be devolved to the DTPs, apart from steered additional studentships awarded by the ESRC. Studentships must be allocated through a fair and transparent open competition that considers a student's potential and is not reliant on prior academic qualifications.

We're a current DTP and allocate our studentships through a number of competitions – open, steered studentships and collaborative awards - would we be able to continue with this approach? *NEW*

We expect studentships to be allocated in an open and transparent way but are not prescriptive about the mechanisms that should be used. Applicants are expected to describe their proposed approach to allocating awards as part of their application and justify their approach. For existing DTPs, this might include evidence drawn from being an existing DTP where relevant.

Can DTPs allocate studentships in our priority areas outside of the open competition?

DTPs can allocate a small number of studentships in priority areas, as long as the reasons for this are fully articulated in the proposal. However, the vast majority of studentships should be awarded through an open competition.

Can DTPs ring-fence awards for students in under-represented groups?

Yes. It is the responsibility of the training grant holder (the director or other lead) to ensure that such initiatives are compliant and are delivered in line with the relevant equality legislation. This includes the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and positive action under sections 158 and 159 of the Equality Act 2010. In all cases there should be a demonstrable disparity for the protected characteristic in question and the lead applicant must be able to justify the use of positive action as a preferential tool and should be able to evidence the impact against the set target category after implementation of the initiative.

Do you expect a DTPs to ringfence a percentage of awards for applicants from diverse backgrounds or just to have mechanism in place to encourage more applications from such applicants?

DTPs are expected to have a holistic strategy for addressing under-representation – and should consider the role of ring-fencing of awards within this. Ring fencing constitutes positive action so you will need to have robust evidence of under-representation and that what you are proposing is a proportionate response i.e., that you have tried other actions.

How are you defining under-representation?

We are not defining under-representation as we recognise that the profile of the student population can vary across the network. We expect DTPs to collect data on applicants and award holders and to use that evidence when developing their EDI strategies.

What is your preferred approach for monitoring socio-economic backgrounds?

We have indicated that DTPs will be asked to collect the Social Mobility Commission measures. We're not specifying a preferred way for DTPs to collect them but believe it is important to collect them particularly because of the intersectionality of socio-economic background with other characteristics.

The DTP call specification seems to prescribe the management structure and resources required; Can't ROs determine that for themselves?

Yes. Ultimately it is down to organisations to determine how to resource the governance structure, but our suggestions are based on previous experience and to ensure that organisations (particularly those who haven't been part of the network) have realistic expectations of the time commitment required to effectively manage a DTP.

So could, for example, the deputy director also be the training lead?

Yes, but we would just ask that you set clear expectations of the expected workloads.

Does all the training need to accommodate part-time provision?

Yes, all pathways need to be available on both a full- and part-time basis. Applicants must indicate within the bid if it is not possible to offer part-time across all training areas and the reasoning for this will be assessed through peer review.

What about distance learning?

Applicants can determine whether training is made available on a distance learning basis. We anticipate that most students will not be registered on a distance learning programme and, as such, will be required to live within a reasonable travelling distance of their institution. Where students can be registered on a distance learning programme, applicants will need to articulate their approach to cohort-building that includes all students.

When will the changes to the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2022 take effect from? *NEW*

Existing DTPs and CDTs have a final cohort of students commencing in 2023 under current requirements. The changes detailed in the 2022 version of the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines will apply to all studentships commencing from October 2024.

Eligibility**How many ROs can be involved in each proposal?**

We're not setting a limit on the number of ROs which can be involved in consortia applications. However, applicants will need to clearly justify the configuration and demonstrate the value added of the proposed partnership, particularly to the delivery of training and to the student experience.

Can my organisation participate in more than one DTP bid?

No, individual ROs are only allowed to be part one DTP proposal.

Does the Director need to be based at the host organisation?

It is possible for the director of a DTP to not be based at the host institution and instead be based at an institution within the partnership. However, if this approach is taken, the partnership would need to ensure that a robust governance structure is put in place. There would need to be clear oversight for the full partnership as the host organisation is responsible for the management of the training grant and accountability for the funds provided, regardless of where the director sits within the partnership.

The application documents would need to clearly set out how the partnership will ensure robust measures are in place, recognising that where there is a degree of separation between the host RO and the director, how these challenges would be dealt with. ESRC would need confidence that any issues that arise would be dealt with effectively.

A staff member from the host RO would need to be named as the grant holder/principal applicant in terms of the application as the system does not allow the main applicant to be from an RO that is not the host organisation.

Can a non-academic organisation be a partner?

Yes, non-academic organisations, such as those from industry, charities, and public sector research establishments, may also form part of consortia bids, in agreement with the lead research organisation submitting the proposal. They would be expected to contribute resources (cash or in kind) for the delivery of training and access for studentships.

Are there any expectations around co-funding? *NEW*

As with the current network, we strongly encourage DTPs to secure co-funding opportunities but we are not mandating it as a requirement of this call.

Can an overseas institution be a partner organisation in a bid?

Whilst we appreciate that ROs have, and continue to develop, links and partnerships with institutions overseas or have overseas campuses themselves, ESRC's remit only permits us to fund postgraduate training at eligible institutions in the UK. As such, overseas institutions can't be partner in a consortium. However, we recognise that some institutions have formal agreements in place with partners overseas and that there may be a benefit to students undertaking a period of their studies overseas. These cases should be clearly set out in their bid.

What level of in-kind administration and management support is ESRC expecting from HEIs? *NEW*

As part of the call documentation, we do set out expectations on the time allocations for key roles within the DTP, However, we cannot specify the level of support required from HEIs as this would depend on how the partnership is configured and the institutions involved. As such, this would be for applicants to determine as they develop their bid.

You've previously mentioned that there might be the potential for a shared database of training areas – has there been any developments on this? *NEW*

Not yet, we won't be able to take this forward until we know who the DTPs will be and what training they offer.

Are DTPs required to allow applications from international students?

Yes, but DTPs cannot allocate more than 30% of their awards to international students. The policy for international studentships is contained within the [UKRI terms and conditions for training grants](#).

Previously, you have stipulated that the completion of a masters degree was a pre-requisite for being allocated PhD funding – why has that changed?

We remain committed to ensuring that students receive core training, we recognise that this can be obtained through prior study and/or work experience.

What do you envisage will happen to existing masters?

While social science research masters will continue to make an important contribution to the training landscape, we want them to form part of a wider mixed economy so we can ensure that the training we provide is more responsive and flexible.

Metrics

In the last call you used metrics from the Research Excellence Framework (REF) as a threshold to apply, is that still the case?

No, eligibility to apply is no longer linked to REF metrics but outcomes from the REF exercise can be used to demonstrate excellence in training areas.

Why are you no longer using REF metrics to determine eligibility?

Whilst we have previously used REF metrics as a mechanism to identify pockets of excellence and ensure we supported consistently high-quality training pathways; these metrics may also impact the participation of less research-intensive institutions that have a diverse range of strengths.

REF is, by its nature, a retrospective exercise and therefore unable to take into account planned developments in provision.

We have therefore removed this requirement, with the expectation that the partnership is able to demonstrate the quality of the research environment they will provide for students at a disciplinary or subject area level using a wide range of evidence, such as:

- Research Excellence Framework (REF) metrics (output, environment, and impact)
- supervisory capacity
- completion rates
- major grant funding or centres of excellence
- other indicators they believe demonstrate the quality of the research environment.

Funding

What can the funding available from October 2023 be used for?

The pump-priming funding will be provided for two key areas.

The first is to allow successful DTPs to develop new training content and delivery approaches to support innovation. Funds could be used to cover staff time, the development of materials and/or the infrastructure to deliver the training.

The second relates to the costs to administer Research in Practice. Funds could be used to cover the staff posts required to develop the opportunities as well as support the costs associated with working in partnership with other training providers.

Is this to go towards specialised training rather than the evolution of core masters training to incorporate digital and whole project skills?

The £150K is a reflection that we are asking for changes in a number of areas of the core provision. DTPs will need to describe the status of their training at the point of application and what funding is required to support its development to meet our expectations for conceptual, general and specialist training. Therefore, funding could be used to support the opening up of specialist training, address issues of size teaching groups in the current provision or addressing digital skills (as examples).

Could the £150k be used to develop new tools for development needs analysis?

NEW

No, this funding is being made available to reflect the anticipated degree of change required for institutions to develop and deliver training that meets our expectations in relation to the innovation in the content and delivery of training.

If institutions have expertise and resources in non-social science focused/aligned departments (e.g. computing sciences or maths) and would not be aligned to a pathway, could this funding be used by these departments to create cross and interdisciplinary training in areas such as quantitative data and data skills?

NEW

We are looking for specialist training and training materials to be developed for social scientists and are not prescriptive about where that training comes from. Materials suitable for interdisciplinary training on social science PhDs can be developed outside of the proposed pathways but the studentships themselves must be in the DTP's subject areas and at least 50% social science.

If a DTP opens their training offer to the rest of the DTP network, is it possible to charge for places on this training, with students utilising their RTSG? This could make these opportunities more sustainable. *NEW*

Yes, it would be possible for charges to be made for training packages

Can the £40k Research in Practice costs be claimed in the costings for the life of the DTP? *NEW*

No, applicants can cost up to £40k each year from October 2023 for six years (one year in advance of students starting and for each annual cohort) however the continuation of funding beyond the mid-term review point would be considered as part of the review process.

Is there any plan to provide DTPs with the digital tools required to effectively manage all of the activity across the partnership? For example, studentship tracking, DNA tracking, application management, event administration? *NEW*

No, we support for DTPs to be partnership between ESRC and institutions. We expect institutions to have their own systems in place in areas such as the application process and training needs assessments so funding from the training grant should not be used to support these.

DTPs can consider using a small amount of funding to collect EDI data across all stages of the application process and this should include socio-economic data based on the measures set out by the [Social Mobility Commission](#).

Why are you only providing funding for 3.5 years, when the Review of the PhD recommended providing 4?

Whilst the Review recommended we extend PhD funding to four years, it also highlighted the potential for this to have a negative impact on the diversity of the student population if this leads to an overall reduction in the number of students ESRC could support.

The Review also suggested that simply increasing the length of the PhD may not, on its own, solve the problem of students not completing before their funding ends. It emphasised the need to ensure expectations of what can be achieved are realistic and students are

supported to develop their project management skills.

Does this mean the number of students you will support will decrease, if so by how much?

Whilst we're extending funding to 3.5 years, we hope to be able to fund the same number of students overall. By removing the expectation that a masters is a pre-requisite for a PhD we anticipate a reduced number of 1+3 awards, our Council has also prioritised doctoral training within our spending review allocation to avoid a reduction in student numbers.

Does that mean that funding is no longer available to support masters courses?

No, where a student's needs are such that they require a masters funding can be provided but we do not expect students who have already completed a masters degree in the social sciences to be allocated funding to undertake another one.

Why are you not increasing student stipends?

Stipend levels are agreed at a UKRI level. Funding and stipend levels have been identified as one of the four initial areas to address as part of the [New Deal for Postgraduate Research](#). We will work collaboratively within UKRI and across the sector to review the current levels and approach and feed in the evidence collected as part of our review.

Do we have any flexibility in terms of stipends or employed vs studentships?

Under the UKRI Terms and Conditions training grant holders already have the flexibility in providing higher stipends in where there are particular recruitment needs and this can be funded from within the training grant. As mentioned above, there is a longer piece of work underway around the New Deal that will look more fundamentally at this area.

Will the funding for overseas institutional visits (OIVs) be provided separately will we need to use the grant flexibility to cover it?

Funding is included within the notional cost of the studentship and will need to be funded from the overall value of the grant.

The funding model may disadvantage larger consortia which are geographically widespread, as it costs more to bring students together, would ESRC consider allocating student cohort and development funding according to size and spread of consortia?

As confirmed in the call, we fund studentships using a notional cost model. When developing their bids, applicants should consider how they can enable a cohort experience for the students and allows them to realise the efficiencies and sharing of training and practice within the DTP from within the funding available.

How should the DTPs evaluate how many studentships they are bidding for?

NEW

As we are no longer using an algorithm, it is for DTPs to consider how many studentships they have the capacity to support across their various disciplinary/subject areas. We cannot be precise about the likely allocations but in the call documentation we have confirmed the range of awards allocated across the current network and would not expect it to vary greatly from that.

Do we need to include costing information for the number of studentships we are applying for? Should the duration of the studentships be indicated? *NEW*
No, the notional costs have been included in the funding opportunity for information only. We are asking applicants to justify why the specific cohort size is being requested and how the DTP will support that number.

Also, the duration of the studentships does not need to be included, but applicants may wish to refer to [our response](#) to the Review of the PhD in Social Sciences where we've set out that we anticipate that 50% will be the standard +3.5 year awards and 50% will receive either a masters and PhD (4.5 years) or a longer PhD award of between 3.5 and 4 years (circa 25% of the studentships will be 1+3.5 year awards).

Can students apply for funding through this route?

No. This call is aimed at organisations, or consortia of organisations, seeking to be accredited as an ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership and is not open to applications from individual students.

Prospective students seeking funding must apply directly to a [DTP](#) or [CDT](#) in order to secure an ESRC studentship. Research organisations have strict internal processes for selecting students and as such students should contact the DTP or CDT at the earliest opportunity.

Given the expectations for more bespoke and flexible training, will ESRC's assurance checking process be revised? *NEW*

Yes, we will continue to have a monitoring and evaluation framework for the network which will include assurance checks but the current checks on +3 awards will be revised.

Activities

Do all students have to undertake a Research in Practice placement?

We are not mandating placements. Our ambition is for all students to have the opportunity to undertake a placement, with the DTPs having the infrastructure in place to offer these to all students.

Whilst we recognise that these opportunities will take time to develop, we do expect that by the mid-term review in Autumn 2026, DTPs can demonstrate that the majority of students in the first two cohorts will be undertaking a placement as part of their studentship and that moving forward have the infrastructure in place to offer all students the opportunity to undertake a placement.

We believe placements are highly beneficial for students and want them to become a standard part of ESRC studentships - with students opting out rather than in.

Placements sound great in principle, but they might be more appropriate for younger students or those with no prior work experience?

We want DTPs to develop a flexible suite of placement opportunities to ensure that students have access to an opportunity that best reflects their prior experience and their

development needs.

Therefore, students with prior non-academic work experience might get most benefit from undertaking an academic placement within a research centre; and those whose prior experience has been primarily in an academic environment would benefit from undertaking their placements within a non-academic organisation whether within the public, private or civil society sectors.

Would you expect the placement to be assessed? The academic qualification of a PhD only evaluates the thesis - how do you expect institutions and DTPs to take this into consideration as it's not something that could be done just for ESRC-funded students?

We are not requiring that the placement be an assessed part of the PhD, but we do want DTPs to consider how it will be incorporated as an important part of the PhD learning journey and skills development process. The PhD process already incorporates much more than the final viva.

There are a variety of mechanism for assessing placements such as a workplace diary, a log, or a reflective journal. Some institutions are also trying different approaches such as having a degree that is a 'PhD with a placement' in addition to the standard PhD.

We are also conscious that for some international students it is essential that placements are a core part of their programmes to ensure they stay within the terms of their visa.

Is there any expectation regarding the format or minimum time to be spent on a placement? *NEW*

We expect placements to be 3 months in duration, but they do not need to be undertaken as a single block of 3 months. A series of shorter placements may particularly suit those with other commitments.

Do placements have to be with UK based industry partners, or are international placements allowable? *NEW*

Placements can take place with a range of partners, not just from industry. Whilst international placements will be possible there would need to be clear rationale as to why the relevant skills could not be developed at a UK based organisation.

What is the likely target for non-academic placements?

We have asked that DTPs seek to have a balance of placement opportunities in academic and non-academic settings.

Is there a target for studentships involving non-academic collaboration?

Yes, at least 15% of the studentships we fund should be collaborative with non-academic organisations in the public, private or civil society sectors. This is the minimum number we would expect to see involving non-academic collaboration.

What activities count towards the target for non-academic organisations?

We're not prescriptive about the specific activity - it could be CASE type studentship, or another mechanism. However, it does have to involve substantive knowledge exchange with

a non-academic partner.

Will ESRC be running its own internship scheme?

No, we will continue to participate in the UKRI Policy Internship Scheme and, given our ambition for all students to have the opportunity to undertake a placement, we are also planning to engage with our investments and partners to develop further opportunities.

Can bespoke student-led placements be developed?

Yes.

Is there scope to increase the level of funding provided for placements - £1,000 for expenses may not be sufficient? *NEW*

We calculate the value of a training grant on the basis of a notional cost of a studentship and whilst we've highlighted that the costs include a notional £1000 towards placements, DTPs can use their funding flexibly and provide more should they wish to. DTPs may also wish to explore co-funding models with the host organisations.

Does ESRC provides funding for independent projects that are consistent with the vision of ESRC, but are not considered to be doctoral programmes? *NEW*

This call is specifically related to doctoral training, those seeking funding for research grants should visit the funding finder on the [UKRI website](#).

Process

Why are you asking for Expressions of Interest?

We are trying to gauge the likely volume of proposals to inform our planning for the peer review process.

I didn't submit an Expression of Interest. Am I still eligible to apply?

Yes, but we strongly encourage all applicants to submit an EOI.

Will we get feedback on the EOI?

No, we are using EOIs for peer review planning purposes only.

Who should submit the EOI? *NEW*

Our expectation is that the person who is intending to lead the DTP will submit the EOI. It is important to include details on the institutions involved in the proposed partnerships to help us planning the peer review and panel stages.

How will the proposals be assessed?

Proposals will be initially assessed by members of an assessor college comprised of members drawn from institutional or Learned Society nominations. They will then be considered by specially constituted commissioning panels.

There are particular strategic opportunities for DTPs based in the devolved nations – how will you ensure that the DTP assessment process is alert to these differences across the country?

We are keen to support DTPs to build on existing regional connections and/or to develop

new ones and would expect applications to set out the context in which they've developed their approach.

What if we aren't available on the date of the interview?

The interview dates are fixed and published well in advance. If the DTP director is not available, then alternative representation would need to be agreed.

How many people can attend the interview?

The director and up to three other members of the team. Where the application includes pockets of excellence, we would expect at least one of the attendees to be drawn from those partners.

Will all DTP applicants be invited to interview?

No necessarily. If an application is assessed as being uncompetitive, they will not be invited for interview.

Will we be disadvantaged by the peer review process by not previously being part of the existing DTP network?

No, we are keen to support fair competition between those who have previously held DTPs and those who have not. All proposals will need to be evidence-based and applicants will have to demonstrate track record. Reviewers will be made aware of the resources made available by the ESRC to the DTPs and CDTs to support their training activities.

So, if we're accredited as a DTP, are we guaranteed studentships for the next five years?

Not necessarily. DTPs will be allocated a number of studentships for the first three years. We will review the DTP's performance after three years to ensure that they are broadly in line with expectations and targets, both in terms of those set by ESRC and those articulated by the applicants in their proposals. If not, we reserve the right to reduce or remove the allocation.

Will the ESRC be steering studentships to particular disciplines within DTPs?

DTPs will be allocated an annual quota of studentships set for the five-year accreditation period (subject to satisfactory progress against metrics). 30 per cent of awards will be allocated strategically by the ESRC, the remaining 70 per cent will be allocated based on what has been applied for and the Panel's assessment of their application. We will provide additional studentships in advanced quantitative methods, data skills, the use of existing data sets (including administrative data) and interdisciplinary research which straddles other research council remits. Proposals will need to evidence their strength in these priority areas and demonstrate that it is an area of focus and importance to be considered for additional studentships.

The allocation of these additional studentships will initially be for three years. The priority areas will then be reviewed and we reserve the right to change steers and allocations at this point.

How will the 30 per cent of studentships in the strategic priority areas be allocated? *NEW*

This will be part of the role of the commissioning panel and they will assess the evidence provided by applicants to demonstrate their strength in those areas. strengths

Would ESRC's investment in ADR and data linkage come under the data skills steer? *NEW*

Yes, strengths in data skills and use of administrative data would form part of this steer.

Previously you've used an algorithm, why aren't you using one this time?

The algorithm was heavily weighted to REF and research income and the increasing complexity in calculating the algorithm could lead to a potential for errors. We want to focus on how the partnership meets the broad assessment criteria within the call.

Isn't asking DTPs for a figure potentially problematic? What if a large consortium claims to be able to support 100?

We have harmonised our approach with that used by other Research Councils and, whilst we can't put exact figures on the likely allocation, we have provided information on the range of the current allocations which we don't anticipate increasing significantly.

When considering how many studentships to apply for, DTPs need to carefully consider how many they have the supervisory capacity to support. The commissioning panel will be able to reduce the number applied for if they agree an application doesn't fully meet the aims of the scheme or the number applied for is not justified.

Currently ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships are awarded through DTPs, is that going to continue? If so, it would be useful for DTPs to be aware of this when applying.

Due to the degree of ambition and change required this call is focused on doctoral training. We are currently scoping a review of the Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme to determine how best to support the scheme going forward.

Completing the application

In the content and delivery of training section of the case for support you ask for capacity building in priority areas - are these our institution priorities or yours?

This is intended to address the steers within the call documentation, the information provided here will be assessed when considering if, and how many, strategically allocated studentships at DTP should receive.

Previously, applicants were asked to include training pathway documents that detailed the MA courses that align with each pathway. Is this level of detail required in the annex I attachment? *NEW*

For this call, we're asking applicants to set out how they will meet our expectations for core conceptual, general and specialist research training so are not asking for full details on the content for the masters courses as we recognise that the training requirements will vary for students and the focus is on ensuring students have the core skills required.

The annex should be used to demonstrate the quality of the research environment that

students will have access to rather than details on individual courses.

Should the Annex I document combine different HEI information under the same discipline/subject on one page; or should we submit one page per pathway per HEI? *NEW*

Applicants are asked to provide one 'Annex I statement' per discipline/area that captures the information for all partners contributing to that area. The primary purpose is to provide the evidence of research excellence in that discipline/area.

Where can I find details of sizes of all attachments, and other formatting requirements?

Please see the [Je-S guidance notes for applicants](#) for page lengths. Attachments should be in font size 11 with 2cm margins (recommended font type; Arial or Garamond). Please see the System Requirements, Formats and Safeguards section of the [Je-S Handbook](#) for further guidance.

Future plans

Will there be an interim exercise for new DTPs to be funded?

No, we won't fund any new DTPs, but we will consider requests from existing DTPs to add new training areas or partners. This will be limited to once a year and there would need to be a convincing case demonstrating how the proposed changes will add value to the existing structure.