Funding opportunity: EPSRC Centres for Doctoral Training 2023

Questions and answers from the webinar to develop full proposals held on 19 June 2023

Version 1.0 21 July 2023

1 Introduction

This document contains questions and answers to help support development of full proposals for the EPSRC CDT 2023 funding opportunity. This is based on the questions submitted ahead of the webinar on 19 June and also the questions submitted live in the webinar. We have grouped questions together where they are similar but kept much of the original text to capture the questions as they arose from participants.

Many of the answers are already in the main funding opportunity text or in the additional information and this remains the definitive source of information.

Some of the questions, such as those around part-time working, supporting students still based in a company and the detail in definitions of the Research Training Support Grant or in a "studentship", are less well defined and we have provided the answers for the purpose of this funding opportunity.

2 Contents

3 Changes in the full proposal compared with the outline proposal

Q1. Is it possible to change PI?
Yes, but this would be a big change, so please let us know now with the reasons so we can see and consider this in advance of the full proposal submission.

Q2. Is it possible to add an organisation to the bidding team?
Q3. Is it possible to remove an organisation from the bidding team?
Yes, we are expecting some changes in partners, and you may add another organisation to host students or another project partner, for example. This is one reason we have published summaries of the successful outlines.

However, removing a partner would be more substantial, so please check this with us and also check if changes in partner organisations would lead to substantial changes in focus or costs, for example.

Q4. Are you expecting any restructuring of proposed CDTs e.g. to include or merge with groups whose outline proposals were not shortlisted?
We do not have anything specific in mind, but we expect a small number of people may join other proposals. We need to agree any major changes resulting from new groups joining together before the full proposals are submitted.

Q5. Can the PI add a focus area on top of the one listed in the outline?
You need to select your primary focus area on the supplementary information form. We recognise that many CDTs will have wider relevance and we may look at this as part of the portfolio balancing process.

Q6. Are the costs fixed according to the financial information submitted for the outline round? Or is there room for some changes (e.g. increases in some areas/additional needs and decreases in others)?
Q7. How much can we vary from the funding request at the outline stage?
You may make minor adjustments to the costs.

Q8. The instructions are explicit that the EPSRC budget should not change "significantly" between outline and full stage; what are the implications for changes to the non-EPSRC budget and the HEI/non-HEI balance of funding? Do these need to be justified/flagged in the cover letter? Is there guidance of what is a "significant" change for any of these three budget categories (EPSRC/HEI/non-HEI)?
We are trying to give you flexibility, but if the changes are likely to be more than a 10 % increase to EPSRC funding and you are not sure about whether they are significant or not, please contact us to check. Similarly, if you are planning significant cost changes in any funding which reduce the funding for the CDT or significantly change the nature of the CDT, please check and seek our agreement well before the submission deadline in September.

Q9. Has the information on changes between the outline and full proposal stage changed?
No, our position has not changed. We have not set a hard limit of 10 % on cost changes and minor changes, such as an additional Co-I are welcome, but if you are making substantial changes to the people and organisations in your CDT or the focus and approach to the CDT, for example, please discuss this with us and obtain our agreement before submitting your full proposal.

Q10. As EPSRC has confirmed there isn't a 10% leeway limit on the full cost [compared with outline costs] where do we stand with re calculating staff costs as new salary rates are now out for August onwards which could take them above this.
Using the revised staff costs current at the time of proposal submission is reasonable and does not need to be checked with us unless this is part of more substantial changes in the costs overall.

4 Application format

Q11. How long is the case for support?
The case for support can be up to 12 sides of A4 and must also meet our formatting and attachment guidance set out in the funding opportunity.

Q12. Is there the usual 2-page limit on Justification of Resources (JoR)?
Yes, the limit is two sides of A4.

Q13. In the supplementary information form, some of the columns are not wide enough to display the full values (e.g. row 16). Plus the sub-totals do not contain formulae (e.g. column M and row 21. Can we have an updated version or a version that allows us to amend some of these fields?
This is being updated and a new version "EPSRC CDT Supplementary Information Form V2" will be available on the website.

Q14. I understand that there is an upper limit of 10 members for the CDT's management board. Is this 10 C-Is in addition to the PI, or 10 members in total? How strictly is this threshold going to be enforced?
Q15. We would like to include one additional member with expertise in an import application area. Is there the option to make a case for a relaxation of this threshold to include one additional member?
The limit of 10 includes both the Principal and Co-Investigators. This is a strict limit at the application stage.

Q16. Can the listed 'critical mass of supervisors' exceed 40?
40 is a guide, not a minimum or maximum.

Q17. Do we name all potential supervisors on the full proposal from all partner institutions and if this goes in the supplementary or the main proposal bit
In terms of naming supervisors, we have over 100 which will take up a lot of space. Can we rather summarise this into the research areas represented?

We do not need the names of all your potential supervisors. We are looking for evidence that you have a suitable pool of supervisors of internationally recognised excellence with a track record of doctoral supervision.

Q18. Our proposal has an organisation as a Co-Investigator who are not a university. They will contribute to the PhD supervision (as external supervisors for the Universities). Do proposed supervisors from that organisation also need to be named and will they be counted as part of the overall count of PhD supervisors?
They will count in the number or supervisors available. You can name them if you wish.

5 Costs

Q19. Does the cash contribution have to be 20% of the full costs or just the studentship costs and what does that include?
The minimum cash contribution has to be 20 % of the studentship costs. Studentship costs include stipend, fees and research training support (RTSG).

Q20. If students are taking an MSc level taught course as part of their training, can the cost of this be included?
This would need to be integrated within the overall package. We only pay doctoral fees. If the course already exists, we will not pay towards its development. If it is a new course developed for the CDT and then to be used more widely, we will fund an appropriate and justified contribution to the development.

Q21. Do self-funded students count towards non-UKRI funding? Same question for students funded by foreign governments?
No, self-funded students and individual students funded by foreign governments do not count towards the minimum non-UKRI funding. However, an agreement for a foreign government to partner in the CDT may be appropriate and please get in touch if you would like to discuss this.

Q22. Can fees be higher than the value on EPSRC's website? For example, some partner colleges charge higher fees than the standard UKRI rate.
UKRI sets a minimum value for fees. You may include a higher value, but we expect this to be no more than your usual amount for UK home students. We do not pay fees at the overseas student level. You cannot request Oxford, Cambridge or similar college fees.

Q23. When calculating that EPSRC has to contribute more than 50 % of the student costs, can you clarify whether this just includes the stipend, fees and RTSG components.
The UKRI training grant terms and conditions refer to 50 % of the total cost of the studentship. For the purpose of the CDT 2023 funding opportunity, we will interpret this as 50 % of the studentship costs (stipend, fee and RTSG).

Q24. With UK skills shortages and recruitment difficulties in mind, is there scope to ask for international fees within the studentship costings?
No, UKRI policy is that we do not pay international fees

Q25. Does the university paying for international fees count as cash contribution? Or in-kind contribution?
This does not count as leverage (see the funding opportunity for more information on cash and in-kind contributions).

Q26. Can we extend the core costs beyond 8.5 years, to enable support for part time PhDs in cohorts 4 and 5 who would go beyond the 8.5 year limit?
Yes, but please explain and justify this in your proposal.

Q27. About sub-contracting enhanced training provision: if the training provider is an independent commercial entity, set up by the university, can we include the costs of their training (entrepreneurship) as eligible costs in the bid?
Yes you can include this, but you will need to justify why this is an appropriate and cost-effective source of training.

Q28. Where PhD applicants wish to study part-time (e.g.50%) and are sponsored by their employer, what arrangements are needed for them to be supported by EPSRC without losing salary?
This is a complex area and you will need to check on what is possible in their circumstances. It is likely to be simplest if the contribution from the employer is to continue to pay their salary and UKRI costs are used for the fees, research and other training elements. If needed, you may make a payment from the grant towards their salary at the level of the stipend, but the employer would need to find the difference as well as pension, national insurance and other contributions.

Q29. How do we deal with the increase in stipend and fees. Is this to be included in the 10% change from outline to full application. Is there a new higher limit to account for the increases?
Please follow the guidance in the supplementary information provided at the end of the funding opportunity. All your costs should be based on costs for 2023-2024 and, if your proposal is successful, we will apply an uplift for future years.

Q30. Often PhDs in our area require significant consumables costs for e.g. analysis, specialist laboratory access. We have industry willing to cover these costs, but if included in the student cost calculation, it can take the industry contribution to more than 50 %. Can you confirm whether these additional consumables can be taken out from the calculation?
Where the provision is available for multiple students in the CDT, this can be costed separately and not attributed as RTSG to individual students.

Q31. Can you clarify EPSRC's expectations on the purchase of computer equipment for PhD students to use?
We do not fund standard equipment, but we will fund specialist provision for a student’s research.

Q32. Do costs for academic and/or industrial placements for students come under RTSG costs? Or can these be classed as training delivery costs?
There is flexibility here. It the cost is for a placement specifically related to the research project, it can be included in RTSG. If the placements are part of the cohort development opportunities, they can be included in centre training delivery costs.

Q33. Can there be a difference between PhD/EngD entries?
Yes, but you should explain and justify this in your case for support.

Q34. Can you clarify that staff contribution, i.e., gross salary cost associated with researchers (not for supervision) is counted as cash contribution and not an in-kind contribution?
Yes, this is a cash contribution.

Q35. Can you please give a steer on investigator's time for the centre director/PI, CoIs/co-directors
Q36. Can we have more co-directors
Q37. Is 0.2 FTE is okay for multiple co-investigators?
Time for the leadership of the CDT as PI and Co-Is needs to be realistic based on what you estimate will be delivered.
You can have co-directors and please explain this in your proposal, but we can only record one PI on the Je-S system. (We are piloting co-Project Leads on the new funding service.)

Q38. Is training development staff (i.e. a members of staff supporting teaching/training and delivering some of it) an eligible cost?
We would not normally expect to see this as a cost. It is allowable if the training is very specific to the CDT.

Q39. In raising funds, we often hear from industry that the CASE studentships are cheaper and therefore more desirable than paying higher rates for a CDT studentship. While the training programme clearly adds significant value, if we make the training available to students funded by other routes - can we charge CASE funded students for the additional training?
You may provide training courses and other development opportunities to other students outside of the CDT. If an additional cost is incurred for this, you cannot charge the CDT grant, but you can charge the RTSG or similar support funding for the other students.

Q40. Is a stipend for undergraduate students undertaking a summer research project with the CDT where the CDT students are part of running the scheme for their development an eligible cost? (similar to the DTP's vacation internships scheme)
This could be eligible, but a stipend is probably not appropriate as the activity is not part of the undergraduates' course. As in the DTPs, participants need to be paid as interns and might also need contributions for travel and living costs.

Q41. Is MRC covering "top-ups" for clinically qualified students? (paid as salary rather than increasing the stipend due to being too high for tax-free status)
MRC has not agreed to do this specifically but may provide some co-funding.

Q42. Why does "new equipment" have a restriction that at least 50% have to be devoted to CDT, but the "facilities refurbishment" doesn't?
This is in the section in the funding opportunity giving guidance on what counts as a cash contribution to the CDT. The section aims to ensure the elements proposed as cash contributions are valuable and relevant for delivery of the CDT.

6 CDT content

Q43. What evidence will reviewers look for on potential student support for CDT? Is it surveys, focus groups or something else?

Q44. I understand how to provide evidence for the need of trained people from industry, but the interest of the students is difficult to provide “evidence” for!
Q45. Could you give an example of evidence of interest by the students for the specific CDT?
We expect CDT bidding teams to be able to evidence student interest in their proposed CDT. This can be done a number of ways, but you might have input from student suggestions of the areas they would like to pursue, you might have numbers to evidence especially high and growing interest in related current opportunities, input from students in later undergraduate years or interest from people currently in employment and perhaps working in your partner organisations.

Q46. What engagement with current students will reviewers expect to see in the preparation of bids more broadly?
We have not set out the detail of our expectations here, but we would expert high quality doctoral training providers to have close engagement with students and to include their ideas and feedback in the design of their CDT.

Q47. Please could you elaborate on the types of evidence that might be included under the ‘Importance’ review criterion, e.g. for the scale of demand and future employment capacity?
There is a range of evidence you might include, but some examples are knowledge of the relevant sectors and engagement directly with them, their representative bodies and learned societies, knowledge of government and sector strategies, reviews and similar activities and knowledge of your own and wider research and innovation system information on the destinations of doctoral students.

Q48. Any comments about the section about the need for CDTs and the current struggle in recruiting home students (many of current CDTs struggle with home applications) probably due to competition with industry salaries and apprenticeship schemes?
We have received feedback from CDT advisory boards and are aware that some CDTs face in recruiting home students for a variety of reasons. You can offer enhanced stipends, part-time doctorates, wider career development opportunities, activities to attract applicants to apply for your CDT or other innovative approaches to attract and retain people.

Q49. The call document asks for 'a significant commitment to and support for the training environment by the hosts... (and partners) what type of evidence are you looking for of the commitment from the hosts?
There is information on the content of statements of support from host organisations in the funding opportunity in the section on “how to apply”.

Q50. How formal do you expect the assessment of courses that will form part of the training programme to be? (For example, are there any requirements for the number of credits or types of assessment.)
Q51. Are there any requirements around exit routes and formal qualifications for these, or is there any obligation to offer (or advantage in the review process to offering) formal qualifications for taught elements of the programme?
Q52. What if host HEIs don't have readymade assessment processes in place for doctorates beyond thesis and viva? Is the idea to develop new formal assessment formats?
Q53. A common university model is Mphi/PhD where both qualifications don't have examined elements but are accessed by dissertation. Can "assessable" be tested but not directly feeding into the qualifications?
Q54. What if home institutions only grant doctorates on the basis of thesis + viva?

Yes, you will need to develop an assessment process or use existing processes, but we are not specifying what the assessment process is. You can design this in line with your existing institution's policies and processes.

Q55. Assessable taught courses were mentioned -does that mean they must be assessed?
Yes, you must carry out an assessment, but how this is done and how it fits with the formal assessment processes you already have is your choice.

Q56. Do you have any best practice recommendations from previous CDTs regarding the number of entry points each year? Whether it works best for new students to have one opportunity to join per year, or to have two or more windows of opportunity per year as this has implications for training and cohort building
We do not have best practice, but it can become more difficult to build the cohort if students join at different times and it introduces more complexity into the CDT. If you chose to have more entry points, please explain what the aim of this is and how you are going to address recruitment and cohort development.

Q57. What level of detail on the student research training programme is required for the full stage e.g. how detailed do we need to be at module level on content and delivery, given there is a start-up phase.
Q58. What level of detail is required in the application regarding the types or training and content of what will be taught to the CDT cohorts?"
You need to provide the evidence for the funding opportunity assessment criteria. We suggest making sure that reviewers and panel members have enough detail to understand the plans for the research training programme and wider career development activities over the lifetime of the CDT, the reasons for your choices and that you have the expertise and resources to deliver this in a way that best benefits the students. You may also include plans for monitoring, gathering feedback and adapting your approach based on this.

Q59. How much detailed information should we provide on the student research projects and supervisors?
You need to provide the evidence to address the funding opportunity assessment criteria. We suggest making sure that reviewers and panel members have enough detail to understand the plans for developing and selecting research projects and enough information to evidence the quality and relevance of the pool of supervisors.

Q60. How much collaboration do you expect between different CDTs hosted at the same institution?
This is not part of our specification at this stage, but we expect to see collaboration across the CDT portfolio in areas such as RRI and EDI and also in other areas where shared learning and shared provision of some courses or other elements is beneficial and cost-effective. This might be between CDTs at the same institution or other groupings of CDTs.

Q61. Does EPSRC encourage for cohorts to engage across the diverse 4 nations of UK and if so, what extra funding is permitted for equitable access to travel and secondment opportunities?
You may include funding to support travel and cohort activities at different locations in your proposal. You have the opportunity explain and justify this in detail in your full proposal.

Q62. Does Term TGC 5.3 of the standard Training Grant T&Cs apply to each individual CDT “Part Time Study You must offer the option of studying on both a part time and full-time basis,

with a minimum of 50% of full time equivalent required". i.e. must every CDT offer a part-time option?
Yes, this will apply but you have a choice whether this is an integral part of your CDT model or an accommodation in exceptional circumstances for an individual.

Q63. How would you expect part-time students to be included within this 8-year programme?
You will need to consider how best to integrate part-time students into cohort activities. This may depend on whether you have a small number of part-time students to accommodate their particular circumstances or whether this is your model for all or part of the CDT. The length of the CDT can be extended to accommodate part-time students.

Q64. If the students spend year one doing an MRes which then awarded, they only get 3 years for the PhD, which is less than the standard 3.5 years EPSRC has moved to. In such circumstances, is it reasonable for them to get a 6-month writing up period?
Full time CDT studentships are 4 years long which is an extended time to include some taught elements, cohort working and other career development experience. We expect the students to be able to submit within their funded period. Although a CDT may draw on MSc or MRes components, we would not expect a CDT to be delivered as a separate MRes followed by a separate PhD.

Q65. Can you elaborate on how the PRISM manager concept was interpreted by the 124 CDT teams through to round 2.
We cannot comment on applications in progress in a competitive process, but we are pleased to see some PRISM colleagues named in CDT teams.

Q66. Can the facility technical assessment be for an international facility used for training purpose or should this be only for national facilities?
You may include national and international facilities. Please follow the guidance in the Je-S handbook and EPSRC facilities guidance, both linked from the funding opportunity.

Q67. The Je-S form has a heading "Academic Beneficiaries". It then says "Describe the main beneficiaries of the centre (employer sectors, etc)." This does not sound like academic beneficiaries. Please can you clarify what is wanted under this heading?
We are using the EPSRC standard template on Je-S, but under academic beneficiaries please describe all the main beneficiaries of the CDT, academic and non-academic.

Q68. Can you comment on how different you would expect a rebid to be from a previous CDT
We expect all current CDTs to evolve, so we are looking for bigger changes such as a different research focus for the students, different university or non-academic partners and new approaches to the training and development provision.

7 International

Q69. Can we have international students if colleges waive the difference between home and overseas? Is there any % limit?
Q70. Could you please confirm that 30% is the limit for recruiting international students in CDTs? I thought it was 10% limit.

The limit for international students is 30 % as set out in the guidance linked from the CDT funding opportunity. This is now a UKRI-wide limit introduced from 2021.

Q71. Is the 30% limit for international students referring to the number of students or the EPSRC contribution? For example, if there are 2 international students funded at 50% by EPSRC do they count as 1 or 2?
They would count as 2 international students.

Q72. So study visits abroad are allowed. Are internships abroad allowed?
Internships abroad are allowed if this is an appropriate component of the CDT, but you will need to consider, for example, the use of the stipend, our trusted research policy and, for international students, any visa issues.

Q73. Are there any restrictions on overseas companies supporting CDTs?
No, but you may need to consider the UKRI Trusted Research and Innovation Principles and there may be further limitations if you are invited to be considered for MoD funding. Please read the international section in the funding opportunity.

Q74. How do we include international letters of support, is it the same as other letters of support?
Yes, please follow the guidance for "project partner letters of support" and "letters of support".

Q75. Are the students allowed to have full engagement with the international partners?
It depends on what you are thinking is included in "full engagement". You need to follow the UKRI trusted research and innovation principles and meet the requirements of the UKRI training grant terms and conditions which includes a requirement for UK residency for students for the majority of their doctoral work. Students also need to benefit from cohort working in all years of their study. Please read the international section of the funding opportunity.

Q76. Can third parties participate from anywhere in the world without having any presence in the UK?
There are no requirements for project partners to have a presence in the UK. However, you must follow the UKRI principles for trusted research and you will need to explain in your case for support why working with an international partner with no presence in the UK is beneficial for the UK. Please also read the international section in the funding opportunity.

Q77. How should we report (supplementary information form) any students expected to study abroad - when different from the university where they are registered?
All students should be registered and reported to be at a UK university or research organisation. Study periods abroad may be detailed in the case for support. UKRI training grant terms and conditions include a requirement for UK residency for students for the majority of their doctoral work. Their time abroad should be short compared with their residency in the UK.

8 EDI, RRI, Trusted Research and student wellbeing

Q78. The guidance says that after successful CDTs have been awarded funding they will go through a process of developing RRI/EDI/Student Support/Environmental Sustainability plans

liaising with EPSRC. But we have to estimate costs for those plans within the bid. We're not sure what level of detail is needed within the bid.
Q79. Could you confirm to what level of detail elements that are not being assessed need to be incorporated into the proposal.
Q80. Can you clarify whether the main case should have a section entitled RRI and another entitled EDI or because of the comments about EDI plans being developed with successful CDT bids, does EPSRC want RRI and EDI to be covered in broad terms within other sections of the main case?
Q81. What should research teams should be considering in relation to the above as they work up their applications?
Q82. Should placeholders for these activities be incorporated into the proposals, but details omitted?
Q83. What will reviewers look for in terms of their resourcing?
Q84. What costs can be requested to support EDI and Research Culture activities if a plan is not required at this stage?
Q85. Some details will have to be included to enable these to be costed. Can you provide your expectations around these details?
Q86. Do we include text that is not assessed?
We suggest you mention these areas briefly and that you are allowing some staff and financial resources to cover them, but you note that they will be developed in full with the funded CDTs. You may choose to mention briefly particular activities that you expect to deliver if they require relatively high costs and need a sentence or two of explanation. You can include an initial estimate of these costs as centre delivery costs in your justification of resources. However, as these are not being competitively assessed, we suggest you do not take a lot of space in your case for support to describe them.

Q87. What is the plan for post-bid collaboration between CDTs and the EPSRC to address these items?
Q88. Could you clarify when and how these aspects are expected to be developed?
We plan to work together with the funded CDTs and other experts to share good practice and develop EDI, RRI, environmental sustainability, trusted research and support for student wellbeing approaches and plans which we will approve. We will draw on the resources, expert groups and networks we have already.

Q89. To what extent will CDTs be able to continue and build upon successful previous work in these areas?
We look forward to working with the funded CDTs to share and build on previous successful activities.

Q90. Is the implication that once detailed plans are developed, additional funding will be available to ensure these plans are deliverable?
We are not planning to provide additional funding for these activities, so it is important to include an initial estimate of costs in your justification of resources.

Q91. Can you say more about how you envision this working given that successful CDTs will have different constraints arising from their course design, existing provision, budgets, involvement of other stakeholders etc.
Differences in the CDTs are to be expected, but there are opportunities for the CDTs to work together to share good practice, previous learning and also to consider sharing course development and delivery, for example.

Q92. Will these things genuinely not be considered - presumably you would want to see these reflected in the management structures etc?
Q93. Does it mean we don't need to mention ED&I, trusted research, student support and wellbeing, etc. in the case for support or application?
We suggest you mention these areas and that you are allowing some staff and financial resources to cover them, but you note that they will be developed in full with the funded CDTs.

Q94. Plans for 'environmental sustainability' are not being assessed at the full proposal stage. However, many centres have described sustainability issues that are specific to their proposed topic area within their outline summaries. Are these subject-specific sustainability issues being assessed at the full proposal stage, even if the more generic 'environmental sustainability' is out of scope?
CDT subject-specific sustainability issues are likely to be relevant to the CDT assessment. We can check this on a case-by-case basis if you are concerned about what will be assessed and what is out of scope.

Q95. Several of the assessment criteria nevertheless reference diversity and inclusivity of the cohort in a secondary manner, e.g. "a diverse and inclusive research environment to support people in achieving world class research". Without evaluating a full EDI and RRI plan, will aspects as above be evaluated by referees or by the panel?
We will explain to reviewers and panel members that EDI and the other areas listed are not being assessed at this stage and will be fully developed with the funded CDT teams.

Q96. Why is there a different approach for EDI for the EPSRC CDT and AI CDT given that you say you are trying to stay in step?
Both funding opportunities are committed to supporting an inclusive research culture in CDTs. In the EPSRC CDT funding opportunity, we identified these areas to focus on collectively with the funded CDTs, rather than reviewers and panels trying to balance excellence in an area like EDI or RRI compared with, for example, the quality of the research environment and training programme. We will share and build on good EDI practice in both the EPSRC and AI CDIs to ensure a very high standard for the whole portfolio

9 Leverage

Q97. Please confirm that for User Need CDTs, academic partners should meet the minimum 20% contribution to studentship costs, but the total contribution from non-academic partners should be in the region of 40-50% of the CDT)?
For the user need focus area, the CDT must meet the minimum 20 % contribution to studentship costs. In many cases we are expecting to see much higher contributions from non-academic partners, but this will depend on what is appropriate for the CDT. This can include both cash and in-kind contributions. This is set out in the funding opportunity.

Q98. In the illustration of leverage for the user need focus area, is it 40-50% of the cost of the CDT to UKRI? Or is it 40-50% of the total cost of the CDT?
This is not specified as this is not a mandatory limit, but an illustration of the higher leverage expected for many proposals submitting to the user need focus area.

Q99. How strict is the requirement to include quantitative values of in-kind support from project partners? Many industrial partners are extremely reluctant or refuse to include this information
Including a value of in-kind support from your partners is optional. It is likely to make your bid more compelling if you can quantify it or explain why this is not possible and demonstrate the value of their support in another way.

Q100. How important is in cash commitment from industry? Many agree on in kind like internships etc
Cash commitments are likely to carry weight in the assessment process because they are a clear and distinct contribution. It can be harder to be sure of the real value of in-kind commitments. You should explain your partner commitments in your case for support, setting out their value and importance to the CDT.

Q101. Will additional match funding from HEI look favourably at the panel?
Additional funding helps to demonstrate the commitment of host organisations and partners and may enable you to offer more value in your CDT.

Q102. Do third party financial contributions (industry/NGOs etc) need to be guaranteed or intended?
The initial contributions in your proposal to meet the 20 % studentship costs and from key partners to enable your CDT to deliver the research and training programme you set out need to be firm. You should include a plan for ongoing partner engagement, and you may bring in new partners as the CDT progresses. This is set out in the funding opportunity.

Q103. If there is a UKRI-institution that is not contributing to fees, but to, say, a workshop, can this be contributes as in-kind?
This can be included as an in-kind contribution as long as it is part of the delivery of the CDT.

Q104. If a clinician (NHS Staff) is studying for a PhD within a university and the NHS trust still pays their salary, does that count as a direct cash contribution as the EPSRC would not be paying stipend.
This is illustrated in the funding opportunity. You can include the equivalent of the stipend as a cash contribution and the salary above the level of the stipend as an in-kind contribution, assuming they are working full time on their PhD.

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10 IP

Q105. Considering research agreements and IP issues with partners and collaborators, when is it recommended to have all these in place: for the proposal submission or before starting the project?
We expect collaboration agreements including IP arrangements to be in place before the CDT grant starts. We also expect you to have discussed this with your partners to make sure there are workable arrangements when developing your full proposal.

Q106. What would EPSRSC like to see regarding IP, can it be given to the third party for commercialisation?

Q107. Does the EPSRC have a view on the sharing of IP between project partners and the student?
Q108. What are the limits and constraints, i.e., given [at least] 50% funding is from EPSRC for each studentship, is IP ownership for a sponsor allowed or not?
We expect you to follow appropriate arrangements for the students, staff and partners, recognising their contributions in terms of funding and research. This is set out in the UKRI training grant terms and conditions section on exploitation and ownership of intellectual property.

11 Partners and letters of support

Q109. Do industry need to detail the exact amount of money provided both in-kind and in cash in their support letter?
This would be helpful in setting out the support they will provide and the level of commitment they are prepared to make. It will also make it easier for assessors to understand the industry partner's contribution to your proposal. Seeing the detail of their commitment is particularly important if this is all or part of the mandatory cash contribution required for studentship costs or a key part of their contribution to a proposal in the focus area "meeting a user need".

Q110. On the letter of support, does the supporting organisation need to specify which cohort(s) they will support?
This is not a requirement, but if you have different organisations supporting different cohorts, it will help to understand the proposal overall to include this.

Q111. We have a research institute at our university that generates external income, some of which they plan to invest strategically against the CDT. Is a letter of support from this institute something that would be attached in the letter of support section?
You can use a "letter of support" here. (The research institute cannot be added as a project partner because they are from the same institution as the CDT proposal.)

Q112. The guidance on the web says that a maximum of three project partner letters of support are allowed. What do we do if we have more than three project partners?
Q113. What is the difference between "project partner letters of support" and "letters of support"?
Q114. Is there a maximum number of allowed partners (i.e. industry and other universities)?
Q115. What letters of support should industry partners submit?
A Project Partner can be any organisation who cannot normally receive funding directly from the grant but will have an integral role in the proposed research. Organisations that are eligible to be listed as Project Partners should submit a 'Project Partner Letter of Support'. There is no limit on the number of project partner letters of support. Organisations which wish to show support for a proposal, but which are not eligible to be Project Partners, should submit a 'Letter of Support'. These are limited to three per application.

Q116. Since there is no limit on project partner letters of support, should we upload all the letters of support from industrial partners, as the evidence for their support for the full proposal?
Yes, you can include all your project partner letters of support and you need to include a project partner letter of support for each project partner you enter onto Je-S.

Q117. Is there any page limit on the letters of support?
There are no page limits for letters of support, but they are best kept brief and to the point.

Q118. If a partner offered 10k cash and 90k in-kind, this would only be a 10% cash contribution, would this letter of support not be valid?
There is no specified proportion of cash and in-kind contributions and this would be possible to include in a project partner letter of support.

Q119. Can we cost in training provided by a project partner? Or would they no longer be a project partner if they provided core training?
If you plan to use funding from the grant for one of your project partners to provide training, they cannot be submitted in Je-S as a project partner. They can submit a “letter of support” instead.

Q120. Industry will support a limited number of CDTs, not all of which will be funded. What advice can we give to our industrial partners about which bids they should support and at what level? Should they support a larger number at a lower level or hedge their bets with 1 or 2 bids and hope that the enhanced support gives them a better chance of being funded?
We advise you to work with your industrial partners to develop the best bids possible to address the funding opportunity assessment criteria and your shared aspirations for the CDT. We expect the final selection of CDTs to be very competitive.

Q121. Some companies used to add this sentence to their letters of support "This is not a legally binding commitment". Is this a problem?
This is not a problem for us as we issue the grant for a CDT to the lead university, and they are responsible for arranging collaboration agreements with all the partners.

Q122. Would you need an institutional letter of support from the head of the university like VC or Dean along with the application to be submitted?"
Q123. Our CDT has more than 3 partner universities. If we can only upload 3 project partner letters of support, does EPSRC require other partner's letters of support? If yes, how to upload the remaining partner university's letters of support?
This information is submitted as one pdf for “statement of support from the institutions”. You need to include a letter from each university. The letter needs to come from someone in a senior position able to make the commitment on behalf of the university. There is further detail in the funding opportunity.

12 MOD

Q124. Is there any update or further information on the MoD position on funding CDTs, and what they are looking for?
MoD has finalised the list of the CDTs they would like to invite to be considered for MOD funding. We will contact these CDTs and if they do wish to be considered, there will be more information provided by the MOD, although this information is similar to that already detailed in the funding opportunity. If you accept this invitation, you will not need to address the additional security requirements unless your proposal is supported with MOD funding.

Q125. Please provide more info on the 'Additional security requirements for MOD opportunity'. What is the process for submitting for security checks?
Q126. Are security checks needed for all named non-UK nationals in the application (e.g. supervisor list)?
Q127. For MOD supported CDT (s), is security clearance required for students or investigators?
Q128. For the MOD CDTs, do CDT PIs and Co-Is require security clearance? If so, at what stage is this sought - is it prior to the full application being submitted in September?
Needing security clearance will apply to everyone working on the grant. This does not have to be completed before proposal submission. The inclusion of non-UK nationals as staff associated with the CDT does need to be checked with MOD, but this can be done if your proposal is successful and selected for MOD funding. Further information will be provided by the MOD to teams if they are invited and agree to be considered for MOD funding.

Q129. For defence related CDTs we understand that Dstl staff can not engage with specific academic bids or provide preferential treatment to any one potential applicant. While it is clear that there should be no preferential treatment, is also seems clear that to maximize the value of a CDT in this area would be greatly enhanced by close engagement with Dstl to ensure that they can be fully involved in the CDT.
MOD and Dstl have chosen not to engage in detailed discussions on CDT proposal development beyond the information provided in the outline and full proposal funding opportunities and the security requirements. Dstl will engage closely with the MOD funded CDT and probably with other funded CDTs too. We advise you to set out how you expect to engage MOD and Dstl in your CDT even though you will not have a project partner letter of support in the normal way.

Q130. If we are approached by MOD, is the expectation we will accept that support for a whole CDT it might be rather restrictive regarding security suitable supervisors etc.
Yes, if you chose to be considered for MOD funding, the security considerations will apply to the whole CDT.

Q131. For MOD/Dstl involvement, without any support letters, how to go about the required leverage? Dstl has significant interest in our CDT and it leaves a large hole in leverage. Should I just leave any MoD/Dstl engagement out for now?
We suggest you set out the opportunities for Dstl engagement in your CDT in the case for support and explain your previous work with them. You need to find the 20 % studentship costs, but MOD will cover all the other CDT costs that EPSRC would have funded if your CDT is selected for MOD funding.

Q132. What is the scope for proposals to be partially funded by MOD?
This is not part of the current selection process where MOD is offering funding for one CDT. They may choose to review other CDTs for part funding as a separate activity after the selection of successful CDTs.

Q133. If the MOD funded call engages with, for example, one CDT bid, will the CDT bid still be ranked and reviewed alongside all the other bids under exactly the same criteria?
The MOD is selecting a number of CDTs to invite to be considered for their funding. The CDTs that accept this invitation will follow the same assessment process as the other bids.

13 The assessment process

Q134. How many applications did you receive at the outline stage and how many you have invited for the full stage?
These details are in the webinar presentation. We assessed 335 proposals and invited 124 teams to develop full proposals.

Q135. How many applications approximately you will be awarding? Will EPSRC support more successful CDTs than planned given the number of invited full proposal is higher than expected?
We are still hoping to fund around 40 CDTs.

Q136. Will industrial partners be asked to rank Universities/CDT bids if they are supporting multiple, like in the 2018 exercise?
No, that is not part of the process this time.

Q137. In some cases, other UK Government Departments (e.g. DESNZ) have identified areas that the UK skills base is at risk. Will UKRI take these areas into account and prioritise proposals linked to them?
The recent National Semiconductor Strategy states "Continue and enhance support for Centres for Doctoral Training in semiconductor related fields, through EPSRC" How do you foresee EPSRC delivering against this goal?
We will follow the process set out in the funding opportunity. After the interviews, we will ask our Science, Engineering and Technology Board for advice on the balance of portfolio. This will include looking at the priorities between and within the science priorities in our strategic delivery plan. Besides the case you make for the CDT in your proposal, this is the other point at which input on skills needs will be considered. There is no additional or ring-fenced funding for semiconductors or any other science area.

Q138. In the communication from students@epsrc 'at least 3 reviewers' were requested to be nominated. Will we still be asked to nominate reviewers, and will this be only 3 or more?
All successful CDT outline teams were asked to nominate three reviewers and this process is complete.

Q139. Of the nominated reviewers applicants provide, can EPSRC only use one?
EPSRC will use a review from only one nominated reviewer. Although we undertake to approach nominated reviewers, there is no guarantee that these reviewers will be able to commit to review or that we will receive a usable review.

Q140. Can we suggest reviewers from outside academia?
Yes, non-academic reviewers are welcome.

Q141. Is the reviewers form published?
We are not planning to make the reviewers form available yet, but the reviewers will be asked to use the assessment criteria set out in the funding opportunity.

Q142. Will the full set of assessment criteria be published?
The assessment criteria are published in the funding opportunity.

Q143. Could we discuss the criteria for evaluation for the "innovative approaches to CDT" strand? It seems that this could be broad ranging, how will reviews and panels get briefed and organised for that? Additionally some are likely to be heavily aligned with either EDI, RRI and environmental sustainability, which the call documents says won't be assessed.
The assessment criteria are set out in the funding opportunity. Approaches to embedding EDI, RRI and environmental sustainability in CDTs will be developed with successful centres, but this should not restrict proposals in this focus area setting out their case and plans for their CDT. We did not see this as a problem at the outline stage. If teams submitting to this focus area would like to check further, we can arrange a zoom call.

Q144. How will proposals be banded in assessment?
We expect to follow a similar process to the outline panels. We will we ask the interview panels to group proposals of similar quality together into bands. We then bring together the interview panel chairs and internal and external colleagues who have been moving between panels to observe them assessing proposals to discuss the proposed banding and moderate the banding boundaries set by panels, if necessary, to ensure consistency.

Q145. Does "balance of focus areas" mean the same proportion of CDTs for each?
No, we are not expecting the same number of CDTs to be funded in each focus area.

Q146. Does the level of match funding above 20% (from HEI or industry) make any positive difference in the assessment at the peer-review and panel?
It may help score more highly in assessment in terms of the value of the investment and also in terms of the strength of the partnership and added value of the contributions that it demonstrates.

Q147. What balance of academic and industrial expertise do you foresee for the referee pool and selection panels?
The majority of reviewers and interview panel members will probably be from universities, but we will also seek reviews from industry, government and other non-academic organisations according to the research area of the CDT.

Q148. Will reviewers see our previous bid from the 2018?
No, reviews will be based on the full proposals submitted to this funding opportunity only. If you are asking to continue or evolve your CDT, please ensure you include the learning from your existing CDT in your case for support to help make the case for ongoing funding.

14 Interviews

Q149. Can four people attend at Interview if the CDT represents a consortium of four HEIs?
Q150. How many people attend the interview, and can this be a mix of academia and industry?
Q151. Does the CDT interview team have to be selected from PI and Co-I?
Q152. If we were to know details about the interview process and expectations, that would help us to prepare for it.
Q153. Will all the applicants to the full proposal stage be interviewed or is there an initial sift?

Q154. The call guidance states that some CDTs may not be invited to interview (if reviews are not supportive). Does EPSRC envisage the majority of full stage proposals being invited to interview?
Q155. How much time will we have for the pitch at the interviews? Can all 3 participants speak, or should the pitch just be given by one person?

We will confirm the details of the interview closer to the time, but we can clarify that:

- up to three people may attend for each CDT full proposal
- this would normally include the PI and one or more Co-Is, but the choice of the team is yours
- this can include non-academic partners
- who speaks or addresses particular questions is up to you
- we are planning to invite all the teams developing full proposals to interview, but we have the option not to interview if there are substantial problems identified by the reviewers. This is unlikely, given the standard of outline proposals.

15 Miscellaneous

Q156. Does the position/rank in the published list of 124 have any value? What is the logic used for listing the invited outlines?
The published list of 124 successful outlines is not in rank order. The order is not specific.

Q157. Do full-time students have to submit within four years or is it simply that their stipend ends after four years?
We expect students to submit within their funded period. This is set out in the UKRI training grant terms and conditions. However, we allow an additional year before the submission is classified as late.

Q158. Is the funding stream for the UK all combined, or are there separate funding pots for, say, England and Scotland?
We have one budget for this funding opportunity. We have not divided the budget by the nations or regions of the UK. However, we will consider the distribution of students across the UK when looking at the overall balance of the portfolio to be funded.

Q159. How does joint funding work when a CDT is funded by EPSRC and another Research Council?
If a CDT includes the remit of another Council, we will share the proposal with the other Council and may ask for help in finding suitable reviewers and panel members. Some Councils have already offered joint funding. This will be subject to the detail submitted in full proposals and the outcome of the assessment. CDTs funded by EPSRC and another Research Councils will be awarded by EPSRC in the same way as the other CDTs funded by EPSRC.

Q160. How will the AI content (and amount of AI content) be assessed in this EPSRC CDT funding opportunity as there is a separate call AI CDT?
The UKRI AI CDT and EPSRC CDT funding opportunities have separate assessment processes. We have checked proposals with AI content submitted to the EPSRC funding opportunity are appropriate for assessment through this route.

Q161. If an institution is leading an AI and an EPSRC CDT proposal, do they need to indicate this and highlight synergies, or are both schemes completely independent?
You are welcome to highlight synergies to make the case for the bid having added value and perhaps being cost-effective. The UKRI AI and EPSRC CDT assessment processes are independent.

Q162. What's the latest thinking on having the next CDT call sooner than 5 years from now?
The EPSRC doctoral review recommended having more frequent CDT funding opportunities. When and how we do this will depend on the available budget, which will be dependent on the next government spending review and the resulting UKRI budget plans, and the outcome of UKRI collective talent work on future studentship funding approaches.

Q163. Is there a contact person/contact email/contact telephone number if applicants have queries during the application process or a couple of days before the submission? A contact would be helpful specifically if an applicant has project-specific queries.
The best contact is the email students@epsrc.ukri.org as this is systematically reviewed. Please include CDT 2023 in your subject field and please try not to leave queries to the last minute. We are receiving a high number of emails, both related to the CDT exercise and wider studentship issues.