



ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide

Version 13 – (August 2025)

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Section I: Introduction and overview of studentship administration

Summary of key changes

Version 13 (August 2025)

This guidance is intended to complement relevant UKRI guidance and focus on ESRC specific guidance. Where applicable, references are provided to the UKRI training grant terms and conditions and the UKRI training grant guidance documents. These documents can be found here [Meeting UKRI terms and conditions for funding – UKRI](#). A terminology document can also be found in the guidance on using the training grant terms and conditions document.

This guide covers both the Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) that funded new studentships between 2017 and 2023, and those supporting studentships from October 2024.

Please note, in some instances different rules apply to training grants and studentships funded prior to October 2024 and those funded after October 2024. Where applicable, this will be highlighted.

Unless stated otherwise in this document, the ESRC has adopted the UKRI Terms and Conditions of Research Council Training Grants ([Meeting terms and conditions for funding – UKRI](#))

Purpose of the Postgraduate Funding Guide

This guide is intended to support DTP and CDT directors, managers, supervisors and students in the administration of studentships and Doctoral Training Grants (DTGs) in respect of financial payments, monitoring and evaluation, and rules, regulations and procedures.

This guide is valid from August 2025 and supersedes all previous versions.

Conditions of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Training Grants apply to all ESRC Training Grants (TGs) issued after 1 February 2014. See [Terms and conditions for training funding – UKRI](#) for the most recent Terms and Conditions and associated guidance documents.

This guide is intended to complement the UKRI guidance therefore, where guidance is duplicated in the UKRI terms and conditions documents, we have removed it from this document and referenced the relevant UKRI Training Grant Condition number for your information.

As part of fulfilling its mission, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) provides studentships for the support of full-time or part-time postgraduate study. The Council takes seriously its role to support high-quality training opportunities for postgraduate students. As such, the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines set out the Council's expectations in relation to the training content expected to be in place or in development within accredited Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs).

These are set out in the following:

- [ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines \(2022\)](#) apply to DTPs and CDTs accredited from 2023 and supporting new studentships from October 2024
- [ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines \(2015\)](#) apply to DTPs and CDTs accredited in 2016 and supporting studentships allocated between 2017 and 2023.

Studentships can only be held in Research Organisations (ROs) that are part of an ESRC DTP or CDT. DTPs and CDTs have been awarded to both single institutions and to consortium arrangements as per their application for accreditation. Consortia have a lead institution that administers the grant on behalf of the consortium, but it is important to note that these guidelines apply to all ROs within the consortium. Accreditation is time limited and will be specified in the award letter.

The role of the ESRC

ESRC is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), which brings together the UK's seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England to maximise the contribution of each council and create the best environment for research and innovation to flourish. The vision is to ensure the UK maintains its world-leading position in research and innovation.

UK Research and Innovation is a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government.

ESRC's role is to:

- promote and support, by any means, high-quality research and related postgraduate training on social and economic issues
- develop and support the national data infrastructure that underpins high-quality research
- advance knowledge and provide trained social scientists who meet the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the UK, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and the quality of life
- communicate clearly and promote public understanding of social science.

Doctoral Training Grants (DTGs)

The studentships allocated to DTPs/CDTs are administered through Doctoral Training Grants (DTGs). A DTG is a grant providing funds for the training of research students leading to the award of a recognised doctoral qualification, usually a PhD.

The DTG award holder will normally be the principal applicant on the application for accreditation. Any request to change the name of the award holder must be submitted as a grant maintenance request through Je-S until ESRC confirms otherwise. DTPs/CDTs should seek prior approval from ESRC in advance of any recruitment exercise.

Submitting information through the Student Details Functionality in Je-S (SDF) and/or UKRI Studentship Data System

see also **7.2 in the UKRI Training Grant terms and conditions and guidance document**

The Student Details Functionality (SDF) in Je-S is the mechanism through which DTPs/CDTs inform ESRC of all students funded through the DTG. The Je-S system is due to be replaced from 2025/26 academic year by the UKRI Studentship Data System. So, these expectations will transfer to the replacement data collection system once in place. ESRC reserves the right

to withdraw funding if student details are not maintained. Student records should be updated within one month of any changes.

Please note it is essential that all student details are input and linked to the relevant training grant and maintained throughout the studentship and the DTP/CDT is responsible for ensuring the records are created and maintained, in partnership with the individual ROs. Details will populate outcomes systems such as Researchfish and the Gateway to Research so it is important that details are updated regularly.

Payment of studentships allocated to DTGs

The value of the DTG is calculated based on the number of students allocated to a DTP or CDT, and the notional cost of a studentship. Calculation on a notional cost basis is determined by the cost of a studentship and a range of award lengths, adjusted for applicable enhancements. Payments will be profiled over the duration of the grant and will be paid quarterly, in advance (October, January, April and July) in line with the profile.

DTPs/CDTs will be responsible for awards. They will be required to inform new students of the payment arrangements.

More detailed information on the DTG can be found in section 3.

Section 2: Key conditions and types of awards

Those receiving ESRC studentships and those responsible for supervising and organising their postgraduate studies are expected to abide by the ESRC terms and conditions as set out in this document.

Studentships can be held on research areas within DTPs, and to specific CDTs, which the ESRC has accredited for the quality and relevance of their training provision. Awards are therefore made on the assumption that the ROs within DTPs or CDTs provide adequate facilities for the research or training proposed in accordance with the requirements of the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines ([ESRC postgraduate training and development guidelines](#)), and that the policies, procedures and facilities specified in the submission to the ESRC for the purposes of accreditation will be applied in relation to each award holder. It is the responsibility of DTPs/CDTs to nominate students for awards who can meet the academic and residential eligibility requirements.

Prior to October 2025, interdisciplinary studentships could be funded by drawing funds from training grants from two councils. Studentships funded on that basis can continue those arrangements, but no new studentships should be funded on this basis.

All activity undertaken as part of the ESRC award must be carried out within the UK, except as part of overseas fieldwork which is an integral part of the study, conferences, or training. All students must reside within a reasonable travel time of the Research Organisation at which they are registered, and we would expect there to be direct contact between the student and supervisor.

Where Studentships may be held

Studentships can only be held in ROs that have been awarded ESRC accreditation as part of a DTP or CDT. The list of accredited DTPs can be found here:

[Doctoral Training Partnership \(DTP\) contacts](#) and CDTs can be found here: [Centres for Doctoral Training – UKRI](#)

Types of Studentships

See also, **Section 3: Part-time studentships**

All studentships must be available on a full or part-time basis. DTPs and CDTs can determine the type of studentship to fund. This may be a standard studentship, or a collaborative studentship funded with non-academic partner. We recognise there may be some exceptional circumstances where collaborative partners may require the research outcomes within a specified timeframe that would make part-time awards challenging. In these circumstances, DTPs/CDTs should discuss all funding options (and the options for the level of time commitment) with prospective partners.

ESRC does not fund studentships for standalone Master's degrees, Diploma studies, professional doctorates, international study, summer schools or conferences/seminar attendance (unless as part of an award).

Structure of awards

DTPs and CDTs supporting students prior to 2024 would have specified the structure of funding they support across its range of pathways. The ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2015 ([ESRC postgraduate training and development guidelines](#)), place an importance on core training in research methods to enable all social scientists to understand and use essential qualitative and quantitative techniques. The guidelines set out the minimum core skills and proficiency in the application of research methods that all students in the social sciences are expected to acquire during their studies. Examples of the typical course structures can be found in the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines.

The ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2022 ([ESRC postgraduate training and development guidelines – UKRI](#)) continue to place a strong emphasis on providing broad-based social science research training that equips researchers with the knowledge and skills to manage a successful research career and/or to contribute to society in other ways. It is expected these will be achieved through a combination of formal training, the recognition of prior learning and experiences as well as opportunities coming from being part of rich and diverse research training environments. How training provision is delivered must be student-centred and flexible.

Accredited research areas have been given the flexibility to develop the structure and provision of their programmes to fit their own situation and strengths. Any requests for approval of substantial changes should be submitted as part of the annual ESRC change request process.

It is the DTP/CDT's responsibility to determine training provision for individual students based on a rigorous, evidence-based development needs analysis (DNA) (previously referred to as a training needs analysis (TNA)), undertaken at the point of application and reviewed annually.

For studentships starting from October 2024, the actual length of a studentship should be determined based on the individual student's prior training and experience, and the needs of their research project and research area.

Eligibility

All UKRI studentships must be open to both home and international students¹. UKRI will normally limit the proportion of international students appointed each year through individual doctoral training programmes to 30% of the total. The cap does not apply to associated studentships. For ESRC, DTPs and CDTs allocating studentships in economics may allocate up to 50% of those awards to international students.

If DTPs/CDTs experience difficulties with recruitment which may mean the cap is exceeded, they should contact ESRC ahead of award decisions being made.

Full details on residential eligibility can be found in the UKRI Terms and Conditions for Training Grants - see [Terms and conditions for training funding](#)²

Institutional role in checking eligibility

see **UKRI TGC 5.2.5 and associated guidance document**

The finances and length of time ESRC studentships may cover

ESRC studentships can cover tuition fees, stipend and other expenses, depending on the student's situation and circumstances (see section 3 for further information).

For new studentships starting from October 2024, the maximum period of funding for the core studentship is 4.5 years (which would include a masters and a placement). The DTP will determine the actual length of award based on the individual student.

The ESRC will not normally support any full-time student for more than four and a half years, or the part-time equivalent based on the student's actual time commitment. Students who transfer between full and part-time during their award will have their awards adjusted on a pro-rata basis. Additional adjustments would be provided in line with the guidance on extensions detailed in section 4.

Information for students who are in receipt of other funding

See **UKRI TGC 5.2.3**

If a student already holds an award from, or is otherwise financially supported by, another organisation and the ESRC considers that award, or other form of support, to be sufficient to cover maintenance and/or tuition fees, the student will not be eligible for an award from the ESRC.

Students who receive scholarships or grants from sources where the income is clearly inadequate or not in excess of an ESRC award may apply for an ESRC studentship, (for example a bursary from the student's home country to undertake further education overseas could be used alongside the ESRC award). Please also see 'Scholarships and research work' section.

New studentships cannot be used to extend existing studentships

¹ The rules around residential eligibility were revised with effect from August 2021 and were applied from that point onwards. Funding allocated prior to that date was unaffected by this change.

² More details on international eligibility could be found here - <https://www.ukri.org/publications/eu-and-international-eligibility-for-ukri-studentships-from-2021/>

Information for students who are currently undertaking postgraduate training

The ESRC does not expect its funding to be used for students who have already completed a substantial proportion of a PhD; for example, funds should not be used to support a student entering the third year of full-time study.

Studentships should not normally be awarded to students who have already had a period of full-time postgraduate training at the same or higher level, or employment that is the equivalent of such training, unless support for them would clearly represent a good investment of public funds. The DTP/CDT is responsible for deciding whether further support for an individual would represent good investment of public funds, ensuring assessment processes take into account the individual circumstances and prior qualifications compared with other applicants for the limited number of ESRC awards.

Academic eligibility

In most cases, students will have undertaken an undergraduate course at a recognised UK higher education institution or equivalent international qualification or similar professional experience and/or qualifications³.

Whilst consideration of prior degree qualifications may contribute to an assessment of a student's potential to complete a PhD, it should not be the determining factor and institutions are encouraged to go beyond standard grade-based assessments. Prior experience and applicant potential should also be considered.

ESRC reserves the right to review applications and research projects where issues are highlighted, either by the DTP/CDT or through the assurance checking processes.

Eligibility for +3.5 year studentships

From October 2024, DTPs/CDTs can determine which of their accredited funding structures is most appropriate for individual students based on their skills and prior research training. ESRC expects that applicants embarking on a +3.5 programme would have achieved a level of research training that would allow them to proceed directly to PhD; Each DTP/CDT must have procedures in place to verify and assess an applicant's prior research training before awarding them a studentship. The ESRC will undertake regular monitoring and assurance checks on the structures awarded. If undertaking a +3.5 award, the student is expected to have a strong grounding in the core conceptual, general research and subject/field knowledge skills required to start a PhD in the social sciences.

For studentships funded prior to 2024, the duration of those studentships does not change based on the new expectations.

What subjects ESRC studentships cover

There are seven Research Councils that provide support for postgraduate studies in the UK. Each of these bodies is primarily responsible for providing postgraduate studentships for its own range of subject areas. For any ESRC award, the discipline must be primarily social science in nature. The seven award-making bodies are:

- Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) www.ahrc.ukri.org/
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) www.bbsrc.ukri.org/

³ We advise that ROs use the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) database to determine equivalence.

- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) www.esrc.ukri.org
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) www.epsrc.ukri.org/
- Medical Research Council (MRC) www.mrc.ukri.org/
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) www.nerc.ukri.org/
- Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) www.stfc.ukri.org/

The main disciplines and subject areas covered by the ESRC for studentships can be found on the ESRC website here: [Remit, portfolio and priorities – ESRC – UKRI](#). When inputting a student's details on to the SDF it is essential that one of these disciplines is selected as the primary discipline.

Some of these discipline areas fall between the ESRC and other award-making bodies' funding responsibilities depending on the exact nature of the proposed research. This will be particularly, but not exclusively, relevant to those seeking doctoral awards.

CDTs have specialist areas determined by the call. They are focused on emerging interdisciplinary priority areas where studentships are at least 50% within the social science disciplines.

Seeking advice on remit queries

DTPs/CDTs must ensure that ESRC funding is only allocated to students undertaking a PhD in the social sciences or where the field of study is predominantly social science (50% or more). ESRC reserves the right to remove or reduce funding if a studentship does not meet these criteria.

If in any doubt, potential applicants/ROs/DTPs/CDTs must submit a remit query form that includes a brief synopsis of the thesis topic and the proposed method(s) to ESRC: [Check if you're eligible for funding – ESRC](#)

Student application procedures

Students should direct their applications to the DTP/CDT that holds Research Council funding relevant to their disciplinary area. Each DTP/CDT will have strict internal processes for selecting students and students should follow the procedures outlined by their prospective DTP/CDT.

Applicants with a qualification from any subject or discipline may apply, so long as they meet the ESRC's requirements for academic and residential eligibility.

Please refer to our website for further information on where studentships can be held (<https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/esrc/funding-for-postgraduate-training-and-development/eligibility-for-studentship-funding/>).

ESRC encourages DTPs/CDTs to actively seek out ways to co-fund some of their studentships.

Once the DTP/CDT has identified the students to receive ESRC funding, the students' details should be input on the SDF by the responsible RO staff member within a month of the student start date (see above - Submitting Student Details Functionality in Je-S (SDF)).

Section 3: Financial conditions and allowances

Financial details and payments

see **UKRI TGC 4 Use of training grant**

Each DTP or CDT has received an allocation of studentships which represents the number of students that DTPs are expected to fund through the grant. Single doctoral training grants are issued and funding for new cohorts will usually be added on an annual basis, for payment to commence from October.

Grants are cash-limited from the outset and ESRC will not accept any request for additional funding, except within the provisions of the terms and conditions with respect to Disabled Student's Allowance, London weighting (where applicable), absence costs for genuine reasons (TGC 8.4) and associated studentships.

The ESRC expects DTPs/CDTs to meet the full costs of supporting their students from within the cash limit of their training grant. As outlined in the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines ([ESRC postgraduate training and development guidelines](#)), the DTP/CDT can allocate funds flexibly and may, for example, part-fund students with partners in the public, private or civil-society sectors. DTPs/CDTs may also offer increased stipend levels above the minimum level to help recruit/retain students in areas of shortage.

Apart from the annual allocation, only in unforeseen or exceptional circumstances will the ESRC agree to add additional funds to a training grant and such a request will only be approved if there are no other contingency funds or training grants to draw on.

At least 50% of the total cost of the studentship should be drawn from the ESRC DTG. Please note, that where a DTP or CDT is planning to match the funds provided by ESRC from another source, this must reflect 50% of the full notional cost (including the Student and Cohort Development funding).

Notional cost

For studentships starting between 2017 and 2023, the value of a DTG was calculated using a notional cost and an estimate of the average length of a studentship (3.5 years), based on a 50:50 split of 1+3 and +3 awards, adjusted for applicable enhancements.

The value of a DTP's training grant from October 2024 will be calculated using a spread of award durations to reflect the expectation that DTPs/CDTs will allocate a range of award lengths based on individual circumstances. These are: 3.5 years; 3.75 years; 4 years and 4.5 years. However, the DTP can use the total amount of funding flexibly and are not expected to allocate a specific proportion of awards of each of these durations.

Payments will be profiled over the duration of the grant and will be made on a quarterly basis in line with the profile.

The notional cost for 2025/26 includes:

Standard maintenance	£20,780
Fees	£5,006
RTSG	£940
Overseas fieldwork	£450
Total	£27,176

CDTs and DTPs also include funding for student and cohort development of £3330 per student, which includes £1000 to support placement activities, paid as a single payment per cohort on the DTG.

The Student and Cohort Development allowance is intended to include initiatives to enhance:

- collaboration
- interdisciplinary working
- cohort development (such as conferences and networking events)
- placement activities (including internships funded through the UKRI Policy Internships Scheme)
- Overseas International Visits (OIVs)

The funding for interdisciplinary working is intended to enable students trained in a particular discipline to engage with and understand different disciplinary approaches.

Please note DTPs and CDTs are expected to undertake the activities described in their application for accreditation.

Indexation will be applied to stipend and fee rates, as appropriate, on the date of issue. Please also see UKRI TGC 2.10.

Enhancements

In addition to notional costs, for DTPs and CDTs based entirely in London, an additional £2000 per student per annum will be included in the calculation. Those DTPs/CDTs where some, but not all, partners are in London can claim the ESRC's contribution to this allowance for students registered at their London partners. A claim should be made through Je-S or its successor by 31 October (via a grant maintenance request) once the students have started.

DTPs/CDT can also decide whether to fund an enhanced stipend for students undertaking a collaborative studentship (such as CASE) or to recruit/retain students in areas of shortage or in priority areas, but no additional funding will be provided by ESRC for this.

Managing funds in a Doctoral Training Grant

The ESRC expects DTPs/CDTs to meet the full cost of supporting their students from within the cash limit of their DTG. DTPs/CDTs may vire funding across the headings with the DTG (apart from Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)). Only in unforeseen or exceptional circumstances will the ESRC agree to adding additional funds to a DTG and such a request will only be met if there are no other contingency funds or training grants to draw on.

The ESRC will provide additional funding for Disabled Student's Allowance, London weighting (where applicable) and for associated studentships. (See below for more detail)

A final expenditure statement will be issued at the end of the grant and ESRC will seek reimbursement of any unspent funds.

All debts that arise as a result of overpayments, for whatever reason, must be actively pursued by the RO. All reclaimed monies must be returned to the training grant.

Basic stipend

The stipend (maintenance grant) is intended to cover all normal living expenses. Students registered at a RO in London receive an additional supplement of £2000 per annum on top of the basic stipend. Part-time students receive a pro-rata stipend.

ROs will need to make arrangements directly with students for payment of the stipend and additional allowances. Frequency of payments to students may vary between ROs.

When a student withdraws or suspends their studies the SDF must be updated with the revised end date or termination date together with the reason for the withdrawal or suspension. Any advance payment made to a student who has withdrawn or suspended must be repaid by the student to the RO.

Tuition fee payments

see **UKRI TGC 4.7**

Approved fees

see also **UKRI TGC 4 Use of Training Grant**

The ESRC is not responsible for the fees of students who interrupt their studies before their ESRC award expires. If these fees have been paid in advance, the RO must ensure they are reclaimed and return them to the training grant.

Students who wish to move from a part-time status to full-time or vice versa will have their fees adjusted accordingly, provided the ESRC terms and conditions are observed.

Students may become liable for the payment of fees after the termination date of their ESRC funding.

Research Training Support Grant (RTSG)

All students are eligible for a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG). This allowance is intended to be used to pay for expenses which the student/supervisor/department deem to be in direct support of a student's research.

Examples include but not limited to:

- UK fieldwork expenses
- Additional overseas fieldwork expenses (where there is a need to supplement the funding awarded for overseas fieldwork)
- UK, EU and overseas conferences and summer schools
- language training courses usually undertaken in the UK prior to an overseas fieldwork trip
- reimbursement of interpreters, guides, assistants
- survey costs for example, printing, stationery, telephone calls
- purchase of small items of equipment for example, cameras, recorders, films,
- gifts for local informants
- books and other reading material not available through libraries

RTSG funding must be pooled for flexible use across ESRC-funded students based on student needs and priorities. This might also include the purchase of small items of equipment which

students can borrow. There must be clear and transparent mechanisms in place to allocate this funding.

RTSG funds must not be top-sliced or used to fund core provision that is the responsibility of the RO/DTP/CDT.

In exceptional circumstances, DTPs/CDTs may consider requests from students to purchase laptops or other computer equipment using this allowance. Any such request must be clearly and adequately justified based on the nature of the research being undertaken and must be essential for the successful completion of the PhD. In these instances, any equipment purchased in excess of £200 should remain in the custody of the DTP/CDT following completion of the award to be utilised across the DTP/CDT.

Both the RO and the student have the responsibility to ensure that they are familiar with the procedures for making a claim.

The total amount of funding provided by the ESRC for the research training support grant (RTSG) and overseas fieldwork (OSFW) is calculated using a fixed amount per student per year but is not a personal allowance for the student and must not be administered as a personal allocation.

It is the DTPs/CDTs responsibility to ensure that funds are used responsibly, and processes should be in place to ensure that management of RTSG and OSFW funds is responsive to the needs of its students. The ESRC encourages students to discuss their needs early in their funding.

DTPs/CDTs will be responsible for awards. They will be required to inform new students of the payment arrangements.

Grants are cash-limited from the outset and ESRC will not accept any request for additional funding, except within the provisions of the terms and conditions with respect to Disabled Student's Allowance, London weighting (where applicable), absence costs for genuine reasons (TGC 8.4) and associated studentships.

Income Tax and National Insurance

See ***UKRI Training Grant Guidance TGC 4***

Part-time studentships

See ***UKRI TGC 5.3***

Studentships can be held on a part-time basis, with the time commitment ranging between 50% and 100%. The minimum time commitment is 50%. The length of a part-time studentship should be based on a pro-rata calculation relating to the student's actual time commitment and the structure of funding they have been allocated; i.e., if following a +3.5 award structure at 50% time commitment the part-time student can receive a seven-year award. The value and duration of the studentship should be recalculated on a pro rata basis for any permanent or temporary periods based on actual time commitment.

It is possible for part-time students to apply for a fixed period of full-time study where the demands of the work are such that the student would benefit from working full-time.

All ROs must ensure that part-time students compete on an equal footing with full-time students.

Fees-only awards (prior to August 2021)

Fees-only student fees are paid on the same basis as a full- or part-time studentship. Fees-only students can claim RTSG and overseas fieldwork costs on the same basis as a full- or part-time studentship but are not eligible for a stipend. Where a studentship is awarded on a fees-only basis, it must be funded entirely from the ESRC training grant and cannot be co-funded by another partner.

Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)

see **UKRI TGC 4.1** and **UKRI Training Grant Guidance TGC 4**

Claims must be submitted by 31 October annually. Guidance and a claim form is available on the UKRI website ([Get a studentship to fund your doctorate – UKRI](#))

Overseas fieldwork

Who is eligible?

Students undertaking the doctoral element of their award are eligible to apply to their DTP/CDT for overseas fieldwork expenses. Master's students are not eligible to claim this allowance.

Normally, students would be expected to undertake fieldwork on a full-time basis and part-time students can become eligible for an overseas fieldwork grant if they transfer for a fixed period to full-time status for the duration of the fieldwork. However, there may be exceptional cases where it is not possible for a student to transfer to full-time, for example a student has a disability or ongoing medical condition that prevents them from studying on a full-time basis, and exceptional requests can be considered by the DTP/CDT.

Please also see 'Change of status for part-time students for fixed periods'

Students should only make one claim for overseas fieldwork expenses in the life of the award, although this could include multiple trips. Students must obtain approval prior to undertaking any fieldwork; retrospective claims for overseas fieldwork expenses cannot be considered. The overseas allowance will not be increased to cover expenses incurred by the student whilst abroad. Students will need to speak to their DTP/CDT about how they claim this allowance.

A student's proposed overseas fieldwork should have been outlined in the project summary section of the SDF. However, if the decision to claim overseas fieldwork is made later, the SDF should be updated to show this.

If the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office advises against visiting the country concerned, the RO's Finance Office must not authorise payment of any contribution towards the fieldwork costs. We recognise that as international eligibility has been opened up for UKRI studentships, nationals of countries to which the FCDO advise against travel may wish to undertake fieldwork in their home country as part of their PhD. The DTP/CDT should contact ESRC to discuss any such requests.

What the allowance covers

A student's overseas fieldwork visit will normally last for up to 12 months. If a student can demonstrate a strong case for a visit longer than 12 months, fieldwork of up to a maximum of 18 months may be granted. Students who remain in the field for periods longer than have been formally agreed with their supervisor and the RO's Finance Office will not be able to make retrospective claims for expenses or for extensions to the period of award/thesis submission date.

Overseas fieldwork must be an integral part of the PhD and take place during the life of the award. Studentships will not be extended to reflect periods in the field.

The overseas allowance does not cover reimbursement for any loss of the supervisor's teaching time or the expenses of any family member accompanying the student.

Calculating the value of overseas fieldwork expenses

The notional cost includes an amount per student; however, it is unlikely that all students will undertake overseas fieldwork. The actual allocation of funds towards fieldwork is at the DTPs/CDTs discretion, based on the funding available within the DTG, and ESRC will not normally supplement the grant for additional fieldwork costs.

Once the allowance has been calculated, it is the student's responsibility to manage the funds allocated.

If for any reason the fieldwork is abandoned or is unsuccessful and the student returns to the UK early, the fieldwork allowance less any reasonable expenditure already incurred, should be recovered.

Placements

For studentships starting from October 2024, Research in Practice has been introduced as a core component for all ESRC-funded students. Please see the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines for further information.

One component of this is that all ESRC-funded students should have the opportunity to complete a high-quality placement in academia, policy, business or civil society organisations as part of their training.

Although the placement should not be held within the first few months of the PhD and should not take place during a Master's period, DTPs will have flexibility on when the placement is undertaken to allow them to suit the needs of the individual students within the cohort.

There must be opportunities for placements to be taken on a part-time as well as full-time basis. Placements can be physical, virtual or hybrid.

The funding for PhDs will be 3.5 years as standard and this includes funding for a 3-month placement. Students who do not undertake a placement will not receive the additional three months of funding.

Please see Annex III of the ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2022 for additional information on these placements.

Grant announcement and schedule of payments

An announcement letter and payment schedule (which is available for download via Je-S) will usually be available at least two months prior to the scheduled first payment of the grant. The grant holding RO must confirm acceptance and this notification will be taken as acceptance of the grant on the terms and conditions stated and will activate profiled payments.

Funds will usually be added to the grant annually to reflect the new cohort.

Right to terminate

The ESRC reserves the right:

- to revise or amend at any time the conditions of the grant
- to suspend or terminate a grant at any time.

In reserving these rights, the ESRC will, where possible, seek to ensure that in the event of changes or termination, reasonable notice is given to the DTP/CDT and grant holder. The minimum notice will be six months.

In appropriate cases, the ESRC will consider paying such final instalments as may be necessary to cover outstanding and unavoidable commitments.

Final Expenditure Statement

see **UKRI TGC 9, 10.2**

The UKRI Grants team supports the administration of grants on behalf of the research councils. DTPs/CDTs needing to enquire about a training grant should contact UKRI Grants at GrantsPostAward@funding.ukri.org

Section 4: Managing the studentship

Managing an award

ESRC accepts that there will be circumstances within the period of an award where it may be appropriate for the award to be extended, converted to part- or full-time status (as applicable), suspended or terminated. The funds should be managed through the DTG so that any variations to the award (except for DSA) should be funded via the grant in the first instance.

Extensions

In addition to the provision for the types of leave detailed in the UKRI Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grants (TGC 8), ESRC studentships can be extended for any of the following reasons:

- Difficult language training;
- Overseas Institutional Visits (OIVs);
- Placements (for studentships that commenced before October 2024).

Please note that for all extensions granted, it is the responsibility of the RO to amend student funding end dates on the SDF accordingly.

The total period of extension for the reasons above will not normally exceed one calendar year. These are in addition to the extensions permitted for periods of absence described in UKRI TGC 8.

Difficult language training

Up to 12 months extra support may be considered if a student needs to acquire or develop a working ability with a difficult language in order to carry out fieldwork (including UK fieldwork) or other parts of their research; this is over and above the funded length of the studentship. Students following a pre-described Master's course are not eligible to apply during this training.

Any anticipated difficult language training should be mentioned in the student's project summary within the student record on the SDF. Extensions beyond six months should only be allowed if the student needs to spend an extended period overseas in order to obtain these language skills. If the student has already undertaken a pre-described Masters course, it is expected that some progress with language acquisition will have been made and therefore it is not expected that extensions beyond six months should be made.

Extensions for difficult language training do not automatically attract overseas fieldwork costs. Overseas fieldwork costs should only be considered alongside an extension where it is not possible to learn the language outside of the fieldwork site.

Please see Annex I for guidance on the 'groupings' of languages.

Students will need to apply to their DTP/CDT regarding any request for difficult language training. The ESRC should be informed on the SDF of any extension granted within a month of the change being formally agreed. It is the responsibility of the RO to amend studentship end dates on the SDF accordingly.

Students allocated an award that incorporates language training cannot apply for a further extension for language training.

ESRC Overseas Institutional Visits (OIVs)

The purpose of the OIV scheme is to support and encourage the international engagement of ESRC funded students. The scheme funds an extension to the studentship of up to three months, plus travel and subsistence costs.

Funds should be used to provide financial support and time for students to:

- undertake additional specialist research training not available in the UK
- develop language skills
- establish research links that will be beneficial to their current or future career
- disseminate early research career findings
- attend and participate in seminars where directly relevant to their research.

Depending on the purpose and duration of the visit, an OIV may also be considered part of a Research in Practice placement.

DTPs/CDTs have considerable flexibility in administering the funding allocated for the scheme and can also use their own funds to supplement the ESRC funding. DTPs/CDTs must establish their own processes to support the scheme subject to the following criteria:

- Applications must be student-led

- Visits must be related to the completion of the student's PhD and should not commence within the first three months of the studentship period. Visits taking place in the final year of the studentship must be completed at least three months before the end date of the award and prior to the extension period being implemented.
- Applicants must be in the 'research' component of an awards and not during a masters.
- The purpose of the visits funded must not be for overseas fieldwork as this is supported through other mechanisms.
- Visits can last for up to a maximum of 13 weeks, though it is expected that DTPs/CDTs will respond flexibly to the needs of the student
- Visits must involve visiting a Higher Education institution, or an organisation with a substantive research office outside of the UK
- Visits must not be undertaken if the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office advises against visiting the country concerned
- The DTP/CDT must design a fair and transparent process for assessing applications and allocating awards.

The DTP/CDT may consider requests within an OIV application for additional costs where family members need to travel with the student for them to participate in the OIV, such as due to caring responsibilities. However, the DTP/CDT should ensure the requests are in line with any scheme maximum. Costs associated with support for disabled students may be supported through the UKRI disabled students allowance (DSA) framework.

Absence

see **UKRI TGC 8 for more details and types of leave available to students**

Institutions may have policies that allows students leave that is not included in the UKRI TGCs and, as such, will be funded at the RO (or a third party's) expense. The studentship should be suspended if a student is receiving other funding for that leave.

Transfers to different ROs and/or DTPs/CDTs

see **UKRI TGC 7.1.2 & TGC 7.1.3**

A transfer will only be considered to an accredited research area, at the time of the transfer, which is appropriate for the research project. If a student wishes to transfer to a RO and/or research area which is not accredited by the ESRC, or to a subject outside the ESRC's remit, then they will have to withdraw from their ESRC award. Permission to transfer a studentship to a different DTP must be obtained in advance from the ESRC. A transfer to another RO within the same DTP does not need ESRC approval, but the transfer must still be within an accredited research area.

To apply for a transfer to a different DTP/CDT, the following documentation must be submitted to ESRC for prior approval:

- A request from the student confirming the grounds on which the transfer is being requested and the research area, DTP and RO to which they intend to transfer
- A statement from the original DTP/CDT director relinquishing the studentship and confirming that alternative supervision is not available from across the DTP/CDT
- A statement from the new DTP/CDT director confirming their acceptance of the studentship.

ESRC expects that the arrangements for such a transfer would include the relevant funds and any necessary monitoring of academic progress, which could be facilitated through a contract/memorandum between institutions. Any allowances already agreed for a student should also be part of the transfer of funds agreement. The SDF should be updated following a student transfer. The ESRC reserves the right to withdraw funding if student details are not maintained.

Transfer between part-time and full-time registration

see **UKRI TGC 7.1.1**

A student may apply to transfer from a full-time to part-time studentship award or vice versa. Each case must be considered by the DTP/CDT on its own merits. The ESRC recommends that, where possible, changes of mode of study should take effect from the beginning of a quarter (i.e. 1 October, 1 January, 1 April, or 1 July) as this makes the calculation, payment, and reconciliation of students' funding more straightforward.

The rules governing permanent transfers are:

For studentships that started before October 2024:

- all requests to transfer to part-time in the final six months of an award, or will apply to only the last six months, must have prior approval from ESRC
- if in the last six months of the award, or will apply to only the last six months, a case may only be considered in very exceptional circumstances, i.e. health reasons that prevent studying on a full-time basis or students returning from maternity leave
- in exceptional circumstances, requests to transfer to part-time in the last six months for the purpose of taking up part-time employment can be considered subject to the student's supervisor confirmation that such a transfer would not hinder the student's ability to complete.

For all studentships:

- holders of collaborative awards will require the agreement of the collaborating partner before any request can be considered
- a transfer will not normally be allowed for acute health problems where suspension of the award is the appropriate course of action. However, where a health problem might prevent a student from permanently studying on a full-time basis, a case for a transfer to part-time can be considered
- a transfer from part-time to full-time cannot involve employment that would prevent the student from working on the PhD on a full-time basis
- a transfer from full-time to part-time will be considered where a change in domestic circumstances means that a dependent requires more of the award holder's time, or where the award holder has taken up part-time employment
- a fixed period transfer from full-time to part-time can be considered where a student wishes to undertake a fixed-term period of part-time employment relevant to their PhD.
- fixed-period transfers are unable to be considered within a pre-described Master's programme reserved for the research training element of the studentship

For transfers to part-time in the final six months, DTPs/CDTs should provide ESRC with a short statement to include the request from the student, confirmation from the supervisor and RO agreeing to the change of mode and details on how the completion of the doctorate

will be impacted. If the transfer is due to the student undertaking a period of part-time work, confirmation of the time commitment for that period of work (which should be a maximum of 50%) should be included in the request.

DTPs/CDTs should calculate the remaining length of the studentship on the basis of funding already received and the student's time commitment (minimum 50% for part-time students).

If the case for an award to be transferred from part-time to full-time status is approved, the stipend, fees and other allowances as appropriate would be offered on a full-time equivalent, depending on the period remaining on the award. Other terms and conditions will be the same as for full-time students, particularly those relating to part-time working. If a student transfers from full-time to part-time registration, they will be eligible for the normal allowances paid to part-time students.

For students funded through the DTPs/CDTs with a funding start date between 2017 and 2023, where a transfer takes place within the last six months of the award, the revised thesis submission date should be calculated on a pro-rata basis. For example, if a student has 3 months full-time left on their studentship, and wants to transfer to part-time (50% FTE, with three months remaining on the ESRC award, the revised submission date would not automatically move to two years from the funding end date. It would add an additional 3 months to the submission date and therefore be 15 months from the funding end date.

Change of status for part-time students for fixed periods

Few part-time students wish or are able to convert to full-time, but there are often benefits to be gained by the student undertaking a fixed period of full-time study such as carrying out fieldwork or detailed data analysis work, where there is a very large dataset. There might be other cases where a change of status would be appropriate: each request must be treated by the DTP/CDT on its own merits and on the strength of the case put forward.

In the case of a change of status to conduct fieldwork, the DTP/CDT should see evidence that extensive fieldwork is being proposed.

As such, part-time students will be permitted to apply for fixed periods of full-time study of between three months and one year. This must be taken as a single block, rather than at intervals. A student may make more than one such request, although students cannot be awarded more than one year in total over the whole period of the award.

In any request to their RO for a fixed-period transfer of status, the student must detail:

- what work will be done
- the benefits to them and their thesis
- an explanation of why the work cannot be done part-time
- the period of the transfer
- other relevant details for example, training required, supervisory arrangements etc
- a clear statement confirming that they have been released from their job for the period and that they will be working full-time on their PhD.

It is extremely important to note that the ESRC will not pay a stipend if a student is undertaking paid work in excess of that already permitted for full-time students. For any block of full-time study therefore, the student must take unpaid leave from their place of work.

For any approved change of status period a student will have the same terms and conditions as a full-time student and, in particular, they will need to stay within the restrictions which apply to 'other work' for the period. A stipend and full-time fees would be paid to the student on a pro-rata basis.

The length of the studentship should also be re-calculated to account for any change in status.

A transfer is unable to be considered within a pre-described master's programme reserved for the research training element of the studentship.

A part-time student's request for a change of status for a fixed period needs to be supported by their supervisor, and submitted to the DTP/CDT for a decision.

For students funded through the DTPs/CDTs with a funding start date between 2017 and 2023: Where a student has changed from full-time to part-time status, the student's submission due date should be set to 24 months after the end of the studentship unless the transfer occurs at a very late stage in the funding period. ESRC will consider those circumstances on a case-by-case basis. ROs will need to input this information into the SDF.

For students funded through a DTP/CDT with a funding start date from October 2024, the submission date will be the revised funding end date.

The SDF should be updated following a student transfer. The ESRC reserves the right to withdraw funding if student details are not maintained.

Regular monitoring of academic performance

It is the responsibility of the RO to ensure that students' progress and, in conjunction with the DTP/CDT, to withdraw funds where necessary.

ROs are expected to follow departmental Codes of Practice and internal quality-control mechanisms. All seven Research Councils subscribe to the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Programmes and therefore require ROs in receipt of Research Council funding to adhere to the QAA Code.

Students in receipt of funding for Master's training (of any length) should not be permitted to continue to receive funding for the PhD if the Master's degree is not awarded. Likewise, if at any point during the Master's or PhD studies the student is not considered of the required standard to complete the PhD, funding should be withdrawn. Where a supervisor has concerns about a student's progress it is important that these are addressed in a timely manner.

ROs have a responsibility to withdraw funding in such circumstances, in conjunction with the DTP/CDT, and to reclaim any overpaid stipend or allowances. It is not a requirement to confirm satisfactory progress to the ESRC on a regular basis but should report on student terminations within the SDF.

The ESRC would normally expect supervisory arrangements to be put in place at the outset of a studentship for individually tailored studentship projects to be developed. There should be frequent contact between the student and supervisor to review progress and identify any

ongoing training and development needs (please see the [Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines](#) for further guidance on the role of the development needs analysis (DNA).

Deferral of student start date

An ESRC studentship will normally start on 1 October. A later starting date may be possible in exceptional circumstances, for example in the case of illness, or if a student needs to give notice to a current employer.

As DTPs/CDTs receive an annual allocation of studentships, no award should be held open to allow a student to defer until the following academic year. If in those circumstances the funding for the award should come from the following year's allocation.

Studentships allocated on a 1+3.5 or 2+2.5 basis are expected to be held on a consecutive basis. Any breaks between the Master's and the PhD must be treated as suspensions, not deferrals. Suspensions between the Master's and PhD can be considered, subject to the criteria below, and must be counted in the total period of suspension.

Termination

see also **UKRI TGC 2.8, TGC 7.1.4, TGC 7.2.3**

ROs, in conjunction with the DTP/CDT, must only consider termination of a studentship as a last resort and, when a student is identified as experiencing difficulty, every effort must be made by the supervisor and institutional authority to work with the student to enable successful completion of their studies. The termination date and reason should be submitted to ESRC via the SDF.

ESRC funding is provided to support students undertaking a PhD; therefore, if a student completes their studies and submits a doctoral thesis before the end of the studentship, the student's funding should be terminated. It is reasonable, subject to agreement of the supervisor in consultation with the student, for the student to give up to four weeks' notice to complete domestic arrangements and take up to two weeks' leave.

Exceptionally, agreement to a short period of continued funding is allowable if the student has an agreed programme of study related to the publication of their research which they propose to pursue up until the next quarter payment.

Continued funding following submission of the thesis must not extend beyond the current financial quarter.

If a student takes up paid full-time employment before the expiry date of their award, the award will terminate on the date of appointment.

If an award is prematurely terminated for any reason, the student must repay any monies including stipend, fieldwork contribution, etc. overpaid to them.

Students may become liable for the payment of fees after the termination date of their ESRC funding.

A studentship may be terminated, or its conditions varied, at any time, at the absolute discretion of the ESRC.

Suspensions

See **UKRI Training Grant Guidance TGC 7 Page 15**

Studentships are intended to be held on a continuous basis. Sometimes, however, a student may need to interrupt their studies, for example as a result of their own persistent health problems or those of dependants, or to take up the opportunity of a temporary, short-term post which can be justified as being highly relevant to their thesis or research training. It is responsibility of the DTP/CDT to consider suspension requests in conjunction with the ROs and to update the SDF accordingly.

Please note that suspensions can only be considered during the funded period of the studentship.

The RO must enter the details of any approved suspensions in the SDF within one month of the suspension being approved.

Suspensions can be approved by the DTP/CDT provided that:

- the period of suspension does not exceed 12 months in any one instance (for both full- and part-time students)
- total periods of suspension do not exceed 12 months during the lifetime of the award (for both full- and part-time students)
- the student's supervisor has given their permission for the student to suspend their studies.
- for collaborative awards, the collaborative partner must also indicate their approval of any requested suspension period
- the student's supervisor certifies that the suspension of studies will not delay the submission of the final thesis by more than the length of the suspension
- the request is made in advance: retrospective requests must not be accepted.

Due to the nature of training received in the Master's year of a 1+3.5 award (and equivalent structures), a suspension taken during the master's year may need to be for a full year to allow the student to re-join their course at the stage at which they left it, i.e. to ensure that all elements of the training are successfully completed in advance of their doctoral study. However, this would depend on the structure of the course and the frequency in which training is provided.

For students with a 1+3.5 or 2+2.5 type award, suspensions can only be considered between the Master's and PhD if the request meets the criteria outlined above.

Periods of suspension are reflected in the funding end date and, therefore, the expected thesis submission date and taken into account when the ESRC thesis submission rates are calculated.

If an award is suspended for any reason, the student must repay to the RO any monies including stipend, fieldwork contribution, etc overpaid to them.

Where there is any doubt about a student's continuation of studies, a temporary 'hold' should be placed on stipend payments until the relevant issues have been resolved.

In exceptional cases, a request may be made to ESRC to consider a period of suspension of longer than 12 months, or where the total periods of suspension will exceed 12 months. A request would need to be submitted irrespective of the reasons for the previous suspensions.

ESRC will not consider requests for indefinite periods of suspension and would not normally consider suspensions for more than 24 months.

For students funded through the DTPs/CDTs with a funding start date from 2017 – 2023:

If a student interrupts their registration after their ESRC funding has finished a suspension to their studentship cannot be considered. In those instances, the RO can consider an extension to the student's submission date.

Change to project details

see *UKRI TGC 7.2 and UKRI Training Grant Guidance TGC 7*

Change to supervision

The Head of Department, School or Faculty will have appointed appropriate members of staff to act as supervisor(s) or advisor(s) to the student and be responsible for their progress. The principal supervisor must be from within the student's research area and from an RO within the DTP or CDT.

Any requested changes in supervision will need to be approved by the student's Head of Department, School or Faculty, who has the right to turn down a supervisor if they consider that they are not suitable/appropriate or has insufficient experience. ROs should consider any impact that a change of department or supervisor may have on the submission date before approving such a change.

Any new supervisors should be aware of their responsibilities towards their students as laid out in the appropriate version of the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines ([ESRC postgraduate training and development guidelines](#)) and this document.

It is the responsibility of the RO to ensure that any changes to a student's supervision are amended on the SDF within one month of the agreed change.

Thesis submission date

Councils expect doctoral projects to be designed and supervised in such a way that students are able to submit their thesis within the funded period, as defined at the outset of the project.

ESRC will not inform students of any changes to their submission date resulting from suspensions or extensions, as this will be the responsibility of ROs. When the submission date is altered on the SDF, a reason for the change should be added which will be monitored as part of the submission rate survey.

For students funded through the DTPs/CDTs with a funding start date between 2017 and 2023:

All students should aim to submit by the end of their funded period. Students will find it much more difficult to finish their thesis whilst also undertaking full-time employment.

All full-time students must submit no later than one year after their funding end date, and part-time students must submit within two years of their funding end date.

Where a student submits their thesis within the funded period of the award, the date of submission normally becomes the funding end date.

Where a student becomes pregnant or experiences problems relating to accident, illness, or exceptional personal circumstances during the course of their study, ROs can consider a case for extending their submission deadline up to a maximum of 12 months but the period of the extension should reflect the actual time lost. Any request for an extension to the submission date due to illness/pregnancy should not be considered unless the appropriate medical evidence has been provided. Extensions to the submission date cannot be granted for periods of employment (no matter how relevant they may be to the writing-up of a thesis or to career opportunities) after the award has finished.

Beyond changes resulting from suspensions and extensions, ROs can approve extensions to submission dates but only for unexpected and exceptional circumstances that have occurred since the ESRC funding has finished.

Extensions to the submission date must not be considered in retrospect.

How students apply for a submission date extension

Students must apply to their nominated contact at the DTP/CDT two to three months before the submission deadline date. Any request must be supported in writing by the student and their supervisor and be fully supported by medical evidence if based on an illness. The RO is expected to update the SDF accordingly.

For students funded through a DTP/CDT with a funding start date from October 2024:

The funding end date and expected thesis submission date are the same. This applies to all ESRC-funded students and may be different to institutional regulations. Students must be made aware of this difference in policy and that it is a condition of their ESRC funding.

Where a studentship is extended or suspended for the reasons described in this guide, or the UKRI terms and conditions, the funding end date and expected submission date should be recalculated accordingly.

We recognise that some students experience exceptionally challenging circumstances where an extension to their expected submission date should be considered.

Where an RO has explicit written permission from ESRC it may draw funding for other leave types or allowances, provided that these are offered to other similar students in the RO's University Regulations or equivalent. Extensions to expected submission dates can also be considered where an RO is continuing to provide a stipend from its own funding or other third-party funding after the end of the ESRC studentship.

Any requests to extend an expected submission date must be submitted to ESRC for approval.

ESRC monitor the aggregate submission rate for all ESRC-funded research students within each RO, with the overall rate calculated at a DTP/CDT level. DTPs/CDTs that fall below a 70% submission rate will be vulnerable to receiving a sanction which will make them ineligible to host or receive ESRC research studentships for the following one or two years.

Information requirements

see **UKRI TGC 7.2 information requirements**

Publication of results/thesis abstracts

see **UKRI TGC 11.4 & TGC 11.5**

Decisions on whether the results of a student's work are published are at the discretion of the student and supervisor.

Students are advised to refer to the ESRC Research Data Policy ([ESRC research data policy](#)) that is available on the ESRC website. ESRC-funded students are strongly encouraged to offer copies of any machine-readable data created or repurposed during the lifetime of the award for deposit in the UK Data Service. Further guidance on data deposit with the UK Data Service is available at www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/deposit-data.

ESRC-funded students who are likely to produce data of any kind as a result of their grant are recommended to read the UK Data Service data management guides (www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data).

The UK Data Service will be also pleased to offer any further advice, if required.

Any enquiry should be addressed to: www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/help/get-in-touch or UK Data Service, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ.

Ethics

see **UKRI T&Cs, TGC 3.1**

As an important source of public funding for postgraduate training in the social sciences, the ESRC has an obligation towards the public and academic community to try to ensure that such training is conducted in a professional manner and will not give rise to distress or annoyance to individuals.

It is the responsibility of ROs to ensure that appropriate ethical mechanisms are in place. The ESRC has its own Framework for Research Ethics (<https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics-guidance/>) which should be consulted. It is expected that proper consideration has been given to any ethical issues that the research project may raise.

Scholarships and research work

Students must inform their RO and DTP/CDT immediately if they receive or are applying for a grant or an award from another body to support their postgraduate work, especially in the form of payment of fees or a stipend. A student must not hold two awards for the same purpose concurrently.

Employment

see **UKRI T&Cs TGC 5.2.2**

ESRC studentship award holders are encouraged to undertake a certain amount of paid teaching or other research work during their studentship provided that they spend a minimum of 1,650 hours each academic year on their doctoral research and research training. Their programme of postgraduate training must be compatible with such work and their supervisor must approve.

This is based on recommendations about the difference between full and part time. It equates to a 37.5-hour week for 48 weeks (1,800), less eight weeks' holiday per year, reducing the figure of 1,800 hours to 1,650.

Further to this, demonstrating, teaching, or other types of employment should not be a compulsory element of research training, and ROs should seek to provide a range of development opportunities for their students.

In coming to this decision, the Council considered the following:

- It is generally assumed that payments made as part of UKRI Studentships are not regarded as income for income tax purposes. Income earned from employment duties is taxable in the normal way the Council would expect to see the contribution of research students to demonstration or teaching work formally recognised and recorded as employment by an RO, with appropriate contractual obligations and training. Remuneration costs for duties considered to be constitute employment must not be taken from the student's stipend covered by the DTG.
- research students should be given information about their entitlements and responsibilities in undertaking a postgraduate research programme at the outset of their studies.

Please note that a student cannot be paid for more than 37.5 hours a week from ESRC funds. Therefore, any additional employment beyond their full-time studentship cannot be supported from ESRC grant funding.

Students may undertake a small amount of other paid work. The ESRC does not encourage such work especially during the times when students are expected to be fully engaged in research training and thesis preparation.

Students should not be overcommitted during the period of their award. Full-time ESRC studentship award holders cannot hold either a full-time job, permanent part-time job or temporary role for an extended period, during the period of their award. Part-time ESRC studentship award holders cannot hold a full-time job.

If a student wishes to suspend their award for a period because of a temporary employment opportunity which is relevant to their area of research, the maximum period of suspension will be based on whether the employment is full- or part-time. As a result, the normal maximum suspension of 12 months will apply if the employment is full-time but may be calculated on a pro-rata basis if the employment is part-time. Please see the section on change in status for part-time students.

Student grievance and complaints procedure

All applications for ESRC studentship funding are administered through the DTPs and CDTs. If an applicant has a complaint or concern about the way in which their application has been

processed, it is essential that they raise this through the specific ROs or DTPs/CDTs (whichever is appropriate) own complaints and appeals procedure at the earliest opportunity.

In the event of a student experiencing serious problems with supervision or any other academic matter that cannot be resolved at the department level, they should follow the RO's own grievance procedures in the first instance. It is important that any concerns are raised at the earliest opportunity and preferably during the funding period, although the ESRC does recognise that in some circumstances this might not be possible or appropriate. If the matter is still not resolved, it may be appropriate to take the case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) for England and Wales; the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) for Northern Ireland. If a student wishes to appeal a decision made by the RO/DTP/CDT then they must address their appeal to the RO/DTP/CDT itself.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is committed to operating a responsive, transparent and fair complaints process and has a harmonised complaints policy for those seeking to make a complaint about our standard of service or activities. Further information can be found at <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/>

Section 5: Other expectations

Collaboration

The Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines ([ESRC postgraduate training and development guidelines](#)) emphasise the importance of collaboration with public, private, and civil-society sector organisations.

For DTPs 2017 – 2023, the expectation is that at least 30% of each cohort will be involved in some form of collaboration with other public, private or civil-society organisations. This may increase for specific CDTs, which will be confirmed in the call specification.

The ESRC is not always prescriptive about the type of collaboration but rather asks DTPs/CDTs to demonstrate that studentships are developed in collaboration with other organisations and involve substantive user engagement and knowledge exchange activity as part of the award. This could be achieved through collaborative studentships and other opportunities such as internships and placements.

The general principles of what activities count towards the collaborative target are:

- To contribute to the target collaborative activities these do not need to be co-funded, unless specified in the call specification, though there are clear benefits to securing co-funding
- Collaborations must be with a non-academic organisation in the public, private or civil-society sector
- Collaborations must include substantive knowledge exchange and not just one way engagement (for example, data collection)

For DTPs from October 2024, the expectation is that at least 15% of each cohort should support collaborative studentships developed in partnership with non-academic organisations in the public, private or civil society sector.

Whilst co-funding is not a requirement of a collaborative award, unless specified in the call specification and grant offer letter, the ESRC would encourage institutions to seek co-funding whenever possible to support collaborative elements of studentships as this will help the DTG funding go further and be more sustainable.

Monitoring and reporting

Details on the monitoring and reporting requirements for the doctoral training network can be found in the [postgraduate training and development guidelines](#).

Annex I: Difficult language training

As a rough guide to the way in which extensions for difficult language training should be interpreted, the following notes may prove useful.

The distinctions made below are not to be read as hard and fast rules, but rather as general guidelines. In practice, each case is considered on its merits. For example, a student who has a degree in Arabic is not likely to receive a nine-month extension for learning the language. At the same time, the 'Groups' listed are not treated as watertight categories, and, in certain circumstances, a student learning a Group B language may receive more than nine months.

Extensions for difficult language training do not automatically attract overseas fieldwork funding. ROs should only consider paying fieldwork costs where it can be demonstrated that the language can only be learnt in the field. Funding for difficult language extensions and overseas fieldwork must be drawn from the DTG; no additional funding will be provided.

Group A

Included in this group are unwritten languages or languages in the early stage of being analysed and for which no grammars, vocabularies, or other learning aids are available. These might include Amerindian, Papuan languages, etc. A case can be argued for 12 months.

Group B

Included in this group are:

- languages for which there are limited descriptive and learning resources available
- languages which present intrinsic difficulties for speakers of English because they are click, tonal, object-verb-subject, agglutinating, etc.
- languages that require knowledge of a non-alphabetic script, such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic and South- and South-East-Asian languages.

A case can be argued for nine months.

Group C

Included in this group are difficult languages (as defined in Group B above) which have been well described in grammars, vocabularies etc, but for which no learning aids exist, and the language will have to be learnt mainly in the field from unskilled teachers. These might include various African, Melanesian, and Amerindian languages plus some in the Indian sub-continent. A case can be argued for six months.

Group D

Included in this group are languages similar to those in Group C but for which intensive learning materials exist such as courses, language laboratory, materials, tapes, etc. A case can be argued for three months (this includes all European languages).

Annex 2: Associated studentships

Associated studentships are designed to add value to the proposed research outlined in the grant application, whilst providing a clear opportunity for a distinct and independent course of enquiry for the student.

Associated studentships are only permitted on strategic funding opportunities such as Centres and Large Grants. The specific guidance for the opportunity will confirm whether associated studentships can be supported or not.

Where permitted, associated studentships may be requested as long as:

- the grant applied for is for three years or more
- the project lead or project co-lead UK are approved to act as a primary supervisor for PhD students and are based within a DTP or CDT
- the student(s) are located in an ESRC accredited DTP or CDT and they are studying on an accredited research area.

Rules and regulations

Up to three studentships can be applied for on any single application. The studentships must be embedded within a Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) or Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) eligible to support new studentships on the date the studentship starts, be subject to the same terms and conditions as a standard studentship, and the funds managed within the training grant. Before submitting an application that includes an associated studentship the applicant must obtain a letter of support from the relevant DTP or CDT Director, confirming that the DTP or CDT will support the students for the duration of the project.

The studentship must not be a displacement of the normal research support required on the grant. Associated studentships are designed to add value to the proposed research outlined in the application, whilst providing a clear opportunity for a distinct and independent course of enquiry for the student. Through being embedded within a high-quality research team, they should offer the student an opportunity to develop their substantive research skills, alongside broader professional development. The main research grant project should still be viable without the studentship and should have distinct objectives that are not reliant upon the studentship.

If successful, the funds for the studentship will be removed from the main research grant and paid alongside standard ESRC studentships (once the student has been recruited and the funds have been requested by the DTP/CDT via a grant maintenance request). Such students will also be expected to submit their PhD by their funding end date and will be included in ESRC's monitoring of RO submission rates. Non-submission will therefore affect the RO's postgraduate submission rate.

Funding for associated studentships is awarded based on peer reviewed applications. No changes can be made to the studentship projects or the number of studentships funded, without prior approval from ESRC.

Whilst associated studentships can outlast the grant they are linked to, the majority (i.e. more than half) of the studentship must take place during the life of the grant.

Associated studentships are subject to the standard rules for ESRC studentships and should be therefore calculated on the same notional-cost basis. This includes RTSG, Overseas Fieldwork and Student and Cohort development costs.

Support can be available to meet provisions to aid students with requirements under the Equality Act 2010. Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) may be claimed separately.

Studentships are not costed under full Economic Cost (fEC) arrangements, but if awarded, the grant will meet the full 100% cost of the normal provision. The cost associated with the student(s) must be costed as part of the overall value of the application in the Project Student section of the application. This should include the student stipend, fees, research training support grant (RTSG), overseas fieldwork and Student and Cohort Development Funds. No additional costs, for example travel and subsistence, conference attendance or items of equipment should be costed into the grant. Where they are, these costs will be removed from the final award.

For each studentship the application will need to indicate:

- the name of the student, if known at the point of application
- the length of the studentship in years
- the proposed start and end date of the studentship

Associated studentships are open to both home and international students, subject to the eligibility criteria in the UKRI Terms and Conditions of Training Grants. All students will receive a full award, to include a stipend and fees at the home level.

Exceptions

Under normal circumstances students must be studying within an accredited DTP or CDT ([Doctoral Training Partnerships](#) and [Centres for Doctoral Training](#)) and in an accredited research area. Where a grant is being funded as part of a cross-council initiative, students may study within non-ESRC-accredited institutions and departments. Please refer to the funding opportunity for any such initiative to determine whether studentships can be applied for.

Applying for an associated studentship on the Funding Service (TFS)

Where funding opportunities allow applicants to apply for associated studentships, those applying will be asked to provide following information as part of their application:

- A summary statement of the PhD topic(s) to be undertaken, including the duration of each studentship and justification for the length of the programme of study. This should also include a clear statement of how this is independent from, but will add value to, the principal research objectives set out in the application.
- Proposed start and end date of the studentship(s)
- Name of main supervisor and organisation
- Confirmation that the DTP/CDT Director supports the proposed studentship arrangements

A letter of support from the DTP Director should be submitted with this application which confirms the accredited subject area that the studentship will be based in.

Submission of student details

The ESRC is concerned with maintaining a high standard of training and supervision, and for this the Council relies on the cooperation of administrators, heads of departments and others who support students. The ESRC takes seriously its role to support high-quality training opportunities for postgraduate students and believes in the consistent application of policies and practices to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate unlawful discrimination.

The ESRC expects ROs to be fair and transparent in the recruitment of students; students must be selected and treated based on their merits, abilities and potential, regardless of background or any protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act (2010). ROs are expected to comply with all equal opportunities legislation in force and where an organisation is shown to be in breach of these, ESRC is prepared to invoke sanctions.

Student details must be submitted within one month of starting through the Student Details Functionality in Je-S or, for studentships starting from October 2025, through the UKRI Studentship Data System. Details of the project should be submitted through the portal along with the student details. It is the responsibility of the RO to ensure all records relating to students are maintained on the throughout the lifetime of the award.

In line with the research grant terms and conditions, a grant maintenance request must be raised by the DTP/CDT **within three months of the students' start date** to claim costs for the associated studentships. No costs will be added until the ESRC receives confirmation that the student(s) has been recruited. ESRC reserves the right not to reimburse costs, either in part or in full, where costs are not claimed within three months.

The request should include the name of the student, the research grant reference that they are associated with, the funding start and end dates and the full cost being requested. ESRC will confirm the details and add the funding to the DTP grant. The amount added to the grant will reflect the notional cost in place at the time of nomination and the duration of the studentship requested in the original application.