



Science and
Technology
Facilities Council

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Doctoral Focal Awards in data-intensive sciences

Agenda

1. **STFC Vision**
2. **Doctoral Focal Awards overview**
3. **DFAs in the context of the Industry Strategy**
4. **Assessment criteria**
5. **Questions**

Our mission and vision

The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) **mission** is to discover the secrets of the Universe, to develop advanced technologies, and to innovate to solve real-world challenges.

Our **vision** is for the UK to be a world-leader in fundamental science, with outstanding large-scale national facilities and research and innovation campuses that are internationally recognised as beacons of excellence.

UKRI Doctoral Focal Awards

Doctoral focal awards will provide support for areas that require a concentration of studentships in combination with a highly tailored training programme and align to our current investment in Centres for Doctoral Training.

Key features will be funding for research training in specific, tightly focused themes or challenges; training programmes still supporting some tailoring of opportunities to individual needs.

[Doctoral focal awards in data-intensive sciences](#) (STFC)

[Pre-announcement: Doctoral focal award plus: innovating in data-driven research](#) (ESRC)

[Doctoral focal award: environmental evidence synthesis](#) (NERC, ESRC)

STFC Doctoral Focal Awards

Call opened: 30th June 2026

Closing date: 16th September 2026

STFC Doctoral Focal Awards overview

- STFC will support doctoral focal awards in data-intensive sciences. We determine data-intensive sciences as managing, exploiting, visualising, analysing and interpreting large, complex datasets and high rates of data flows to develop novel methodologies, techniques, tools and technologies.
- Data-intensive science DFAs will deliver tools and methodologies that can be utilised by organisations, industry and government. This may include the management of data for novel, intelligent and autonomous systems, where aligning with our remit.
- Students will be expected to undertake an original research project, which brings together data skills and expertise from our remit (astronomy, accelerator physics, solar and planetary science, particle physics, particle astrophysics and cosmology or nuclear physics) and apply them to a different sector, industrial context or both.

STFC Doctoral Focal Awards overview

- In addition to supporting projects in our Particle Physics, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics (PPAN) remit, projects will be expected to engage the broader user and employer community, including industry (especially small and medium enterprises) and other relevant organisations. These organisations should have active engagement in determining and providing the training programme and in co-supervising students, with additional input and guidance from us where appropriate.
- Projects funded will be expected to consider how skills and training can deliver outcomes towards government and industry priorities including but not limited to the [Industrial Strategy](#), [the National AI Strategy](#), and the government's [Economic Growth](#) agenda.

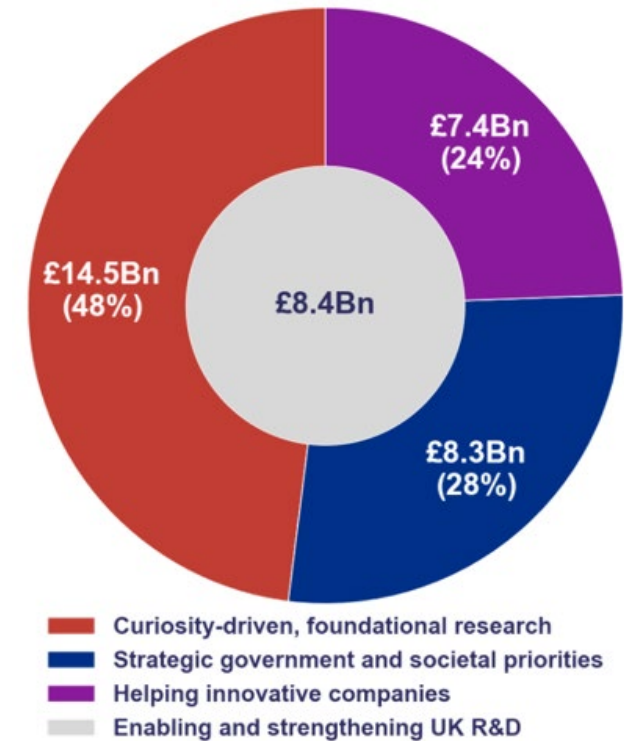
Doctoral Focal Awards in the context of the Industrial Strategy



Talent

A sustainable and attractive offer to support a skilled, resilient, connected and diverse workforce

- Investing to ensure national capability across the full breadth of disciplines
- Addressing key workforce needs for a resilient, competitive R&I system
- Strengthening porosity and entrepreneurship
- **Continue to strengthen work to ensure doctoral training remains open, attractive and sustainable**
- **Thinking boldly about the R&I workforce of the future**



[Budget allocations for UK Research and Innovation – UKRI](#)

Targeted Growth

Venture Doctorates and Enterprise Fellowships - New opportunities linking research and venture creation

- Intended to address an identified gap in support entrepreneurial researchers as well as for academics looking to spin out their research
- Will strengthen links between **research, innovation and economic growth**
- Broad remit, with alignment to **Industrial Strategy priorities**

Ambition:

Venture Doctorates: Train doctoral researchers who can turn research into ventures, IP and innovation in the UK economy.

Enterprise Fellowships: Creation of new and successful ventures, that align to IS-8 areas with the potential to grow and generate positive impact for the UK economy

Doctoral Focal Awards criteria for assessment

Demand management

- Please note that research organisations can only apply as the project lead on one submitted application but can be a project co-lead (PcL) or project partner on any number of applications. The project lead organisation will act as the training grant holder if you are successful.
- We recognize there has been confusion and have modified the call text for greater consistency and clarity.

Scoring criteria

- Vision
- Approach
- Positive culture and environment
- Capability to deliver
- Partnerships and governance

Vision

Word limit: 500

What will this training investment achieve? How will this support UK capability and capacity needs and why is it important that UKRI support this activity?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

- a clear vision, and objectives that will make a positive contribution to the scope of this investment opportunity and deliver high quality doctoral education with tracking measures
- the positive outcomes and impact for society and the economy that the investment is aiming to deliver. Describe the strategies to deliver these, grounded in a model that results in highly skilled doctoral graduates, employable across a range of sectors and careers
- how your vision aligns and will positively contribute to relevant wider strategies and priorities, including national capability and capacity needs. If relevant, describe how it will provide additionality to your existing doctoral provision

Approach

Word limit: 1,500

How will the doctoral training programme that you deliver through this grant support your vision and align with UKRI's ambitions for its doctoral investments?

Explain how your choice of training programme will:

- deliver your vision and any specific requirements set out in the funding opportunity documentation, including why this approach is necessary to achieve your expected outcomes
- embed delivery of UKRI's statement of expectations for its students so that the programme provides a holistic approach that delivers high quality doctoral research. Also, how it integrates in-depth subject knowledge, research and methodological skills, and wider skills development opportunities
- embed delivery of UKRI's statement of expectations for its students so that the programme supports students to build their understanding of what conducting high quality research involves
- embed delivery of UKRI's statement of expectations for its students so that the programme prepares globally competitive researchers, able to use their skills to thrive in a range of sectors and careers. And also, operate across interdisciplinary, collaborative and challenge-led environments

Positive culture and environment

Word limit: 750

How will you create and maintain an inclusive and supportive culture and environment for all those involved?

Explain how your choice of training programme will:

- create and maintain a positive, inclusive, and supportive environment for all students and staff involved, addressing a variety of needs and supporting good wellbeing
- champion and embed equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) for students and staff, across all aspects of the training grant, including supervision, training design and approaches, and flexible student support
- achieve the specific EDI requirements detailed in the funding opportunity documentation or that you are proposing. You should provide evidence for the specific need and value of the proposed EDI activities to achieve its intended aim, including baseline information

Capability to deliver

Word limit: 750

Who will lead and drive delivery of this application's vision?

Demonstrate that those leading the delivery of this award have:

- secured the appropriate research and pastoral capacity to support the number of studentships that you expect to deliver through this award
- a well-evidenced track record of the experience and skills needed to deliver the proposed vision, training programme, and scale
- a well-evidenced track record of contributing to a positive research culture and the wider community
- a well-evidenced track record of supporting the training and development of others, particularly previous involvement in delivering doctoral training successfully.

Partnerships and governance

Word limit: 750

How will the training grant be governed, and partnerships or relationships be supported and managed, to maximise benefit and minimise risk?

Provide evidence that partners are committed to:

- working together, with effective two-way engagement
- positively and constructively contributing to the delivery of the doctoral training programme and the training experiences of the students, with students clearly benefitting from these interactions

Within the Partnerships and governance section, we also expect you to provide evidence that there is an established, clear and effective governance and risk management structure for the training grant award that:

- is appropriate for the size and complexity of the doctoral programme and ensures continuity of the programme's capabilities
- supports continual improvement, monitoring, and evaluation
- manages the legal duties of the programme and providers
- supports UKRI's expectations to create value for society in an ethical and responsible way through relevant frameworks

Non-scoring criteria

Please be aware that the panel will review the Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI), and the Data management and sharing sections as part of the panel meeting to ensure due diligence has been undertaken, but these will not be scored.

Questions