



Scottish Graduate School of Social Science

Sgoil Cheumnaichean Saidheans
Sòisealta na h-Alba

SGSSS ESRC-Funded Student Handbook 2024/25

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We invite students to contact us regarding the information detailed within this Handbook, should they wish to see guidance explained differently, added or corrected. To do so, please email us on team@sgsss.ac.uk

1. Introduction to the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS)

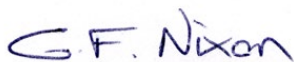
1.1 Welcome from the SGSSS Director

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to welcome you to the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS-DTP). If you are reading this message, then it is likely that you have recently been successful in one of the SGSSS-DTP studentship competitions and are now embarking on your PhD journey. Being awarded a studentship by the SGSSS-DTP is a very significant achievement and I very much hope this success will provide you with a great deal of confidence as you begin to plan your PhD studies.

Following a successful bid for further funding, which was awarded for 2024 onwards, the SGSSS-DTP is one of the 15 ESRC funded DTPs that are located around the UK, and the largest in terms of number of partner universities. Each year we fund around 54 studentships covering the full range of social sciences disciplines as well as areas of interdisciplinary research crossing over into the remit of other UK research councils. Each year we provide hundreds of hours of training covering social science methods, wider transferable skills, impact, collaboration and knowledge exchange, interdisciplinary working, and much more too. Events include our annual Summer School, which takes place each year and provides a great opportunity to meet your fellow social science PhD students from across the disciplines. Make sure you sign up for our weekly email bulletin ([Friday Digest](#)) and the SGSSS social media channels for details of upcoming events.

We want to ensure that your SGSSS PhD training adds significant value to your lifelong learning journey and delivers the experience, skills and networks that you need to fulfil this. I therefore very much hope that you will make the most out of the opportunities available to you through the SGSSS-DTP including the training events, Research in Practice, and various cohort building activities based around our Challenge Pathways. We are very keen to make sure that the SGSSS is supporting you in your PhD so please make sure you let us know about what you need from us in your PhD work. A good way to do that is by completing the annual 'Development Needs Analysis' and/or discussing your experience with our SGSSS Student Associate Officers.

We hope you find this handbook helpful as you learn more about the SGSSS; please take the time to have a read through so you are fully briefed on the many opportunities available to you. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well on your PhD journey and very much look forward to meeting you at SGSSS events throughout the year.



Professor Graeme Nixon
SGSSS Director



Professor Graeme Nixon,
Director SGSSS

1.2 What is the SGSSS

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) is an Economic and Social Research Centre (ESRC) funded postgraduate training consortium consisting of 16 Scottish Higher Education institutions. These are:

- [University of Aberdeen](#) (DTP member)
- [Abertay University](#) (DTP member)
- [University of Dundee](#) (DTP member)
- [University of Edinburgh](#) (“Host institution”, DTP member)
- [Edinburgh Napier University](#) (DTP member)
- [University of Glasgow](#) (DTP member)
- [Glasgow Caledonian University](#) (DTP member)
- [Heriot-Watt University](#) (DTP member)
- [University of the Highlands and Islands](#) (DTP member)
- [Queen Margaret University](#) (non-DTP member)
- [Robert Gordon University](#) (non-DTP member)
- [Scotland’s Rural University College](#) (DTP member)
- [University of St Andrews](#) (DTP member)
- [University of Stirling](#) (DTP member)
- [University of Strathclyde](#) (DTP member)
- [University of the West of Scotland](#) (DTP member)

Within the SGSSS there is a Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) of which 14 of the above institutions are members. This is the largest ESRC DTP in the UK offering studentships across a full range of social science disciplines. In addition, we receive funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which allows us to open up many of our training and cohort building events to any doctoral student studying in a social science discipline within Scotland.

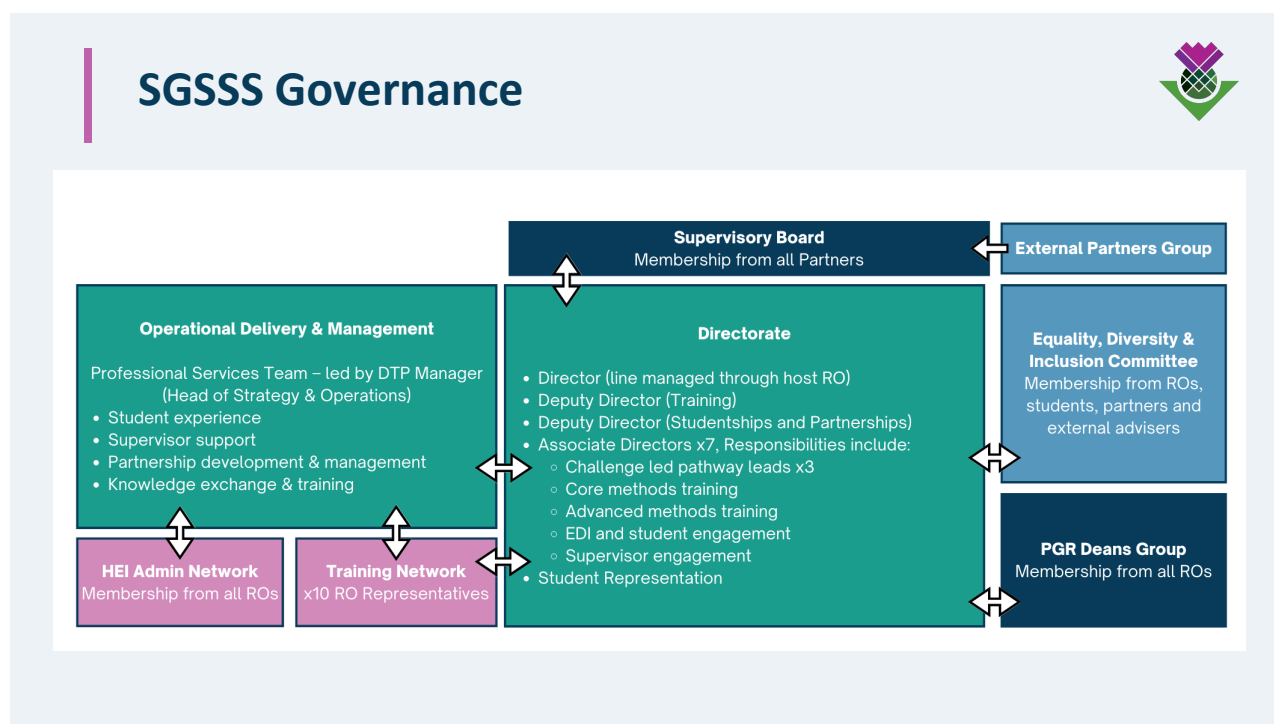
This SGSSS Student Handbook is for SGSSS-DTP ESRC-funded students; to outline the key conditions and opportunities associated with a SGSSS ESRC-funded studentship.

SGSSS is governed by the regulations of the ESRC, about which more information can be found [here](#).

1.3 Governance Structure

Due to the size and scale of SGSSS, we have a robust governance structure, which is summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. SGSSS Governance Diagram



The Directorate and Professional Services team are responsible for the everyday operations of SGSSS. They oversee the successful running and strategic development of the SGSSS in line with its objectives. This includes designing and overseeing a studentship allocation system; providing advanced training; ensuring timely financial reporting; and, overseeing the development of partnerships. Academic members of the Directorate come from across the SGSSS partnership, each having a proportion of time allocated to SGSSS. The Professional Services team is hosted by the University of Edinburgh.

Surrounding this core group are distinct advisory and working groups, who all have important roles to play to ensure SGSSS is delivering on the commitments made to ESRC. The Supervisory Board advise on sector-wide strategic issues as well key financial decisions; the Dean’s group feed into the organisation and operations of SGSSS activities; and, the HEI Administrative Network play a crucial role in connecting SGSSS with universities and students. SGSSS also have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, a Training Network working group and an External Partners Advisory Group. For a full list of current members and descriptions of the various SGSSS governance groups, please see the SGSSS website [here](#).

1.4 Challenge-led Pathways

From 2024/25 our studentships are organised around a set of key societal challenges (“challenge-led pathways”). We have six challenge-led pathways, outlined in figure 2 below: Communication, AI and New Technologies; Environment, Migration and Demographic Change; Governance and Institutions; Health, Wellbeing and Communities; Securities: Justice, Economies and Conflict; and Social Inequalities.

These challenges were developed so that they represent the kinds of social science research that our students do and to reflect the themes of the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Students who started their PhD prior to 2024/25 were allocated into these Challenge Pathways and consulted on the proposed alignment. Students who start their PhD from 2024/25 onwards select an aligned Challenge Pathway as part of their application for a studentship.

Although students are in one challenge-led pathway, they are welcome to attend events hosted by any of the other five challenge-led pathways, where it is relevant. SGSSS training incorporates consideration of these

pathways and a lot of training opportunities will build on challenge led principles. For a full description of each pathway, please see the SGSSS website [here](#).

Figure 2. Challenge-Led Pathways



1.5 Student Involvement and Representation

Associate Officers for Student Engagement convey the views of students (both ESRC funded and non ESRC-funded students) to the SGSSS and have input into many different parts of the running of SGSSS. This includes representation within our key governance structures as well as inputting on strategic initiatives such as student wellbeing and widening access. At the annual Student-Led Symposium, Associate Officers come together to create their own programme, focussing on what they see as the major issues for PhD students. Our Associate Officers work closely with [Dr Dely Elliot](#) (SGSSS Associate Director, Student Engagement and EDI) to ensure key issues are given a platform for discussion. Details and contact information for current Associate Officers are on the SGSSS website [here](#). If you are interested in becoming an Associate Officer, keep an eye out for vacancies, which will be advertised through the Friday Digest and other routes.

1.6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The SGSSS believes that all students that have the potential to progress to doctoral study should have equal opportunity to do so, and that all doctoral students should have equal opportunity to succeed in their studies.

We believe in the benefits that come from having a diverse population and are committed to facilitating the widest possible applicant pool into doctoral study. We also value the diversity of our population and work hard to ensure that our activities and processes are designed with consideration to the potential barriers to certain groups and that these barriers are minimised.

During 2020/21, Hannah Gormley (SGSSS PhD Intern) conducted research on widening access into PGR study and her [findings](#) have formed the basis of our Widening Access strategy that was approved by the SGSSS Supervisory Board in May 2021. Our Student Experience and Development Coordinator, Katherine Stephen, carried out some research with students and event facilitators over the summer of 2023 to build up new event accessibility policies.

We welcome input from our community on this important topic and we also encourage you to contact us if you have any suggestions or reflection related to the issues of EDI. Linsey Fender (SGSSS Head of Strategy and Operations) leads on our EDI work and can be contacted at team@sgsss.ac.uk.

2. Our Expectations of You

As an ESRC-funded student, you are afforded several different training and cohort-building opportunities that we hope you are excited to use. As part of your studentship, there are a few activities you are required to undertake; there are also several that we would suggest in order to make the most out of your time as a PhD student. All required activities will be prompted by an email to the address we have on record for you; if you would like to update that, please let us know by emailing us at team@sgsss.ac.uk.

Required Activities:

- ① Attendance at the SGSSS Student Induction.
- ② Yearly completion of the Development Needs Analysis.
- ③ Annual attendance at the SGSSS Summer School.
- ④ Annual attendance at Steers events, if you are a Steers student.
- ⑤ For DTP2 students (those whose funding began in October 2024 or later), attendance at monthly online skills and participation in linked Challenge Pathway sessions during academic year 24-25.
- ⑥ Attend wrap-around training related to your Research in Practice placement (at least one session before, at least one session after)

Suggested Activities:

- ⑦ Register for the [Friday Digest](#), our weekly newsletter of training, events and opportunities.
- ⑧ [Create an account](#) with your institutional email address on Social, in order to register for events.
- ⑨ Attend other SGSSS events to meet other students and gain new skills and knowledge: Challenge Pathway activities and events, Student- and Discipline-led training, Spring into Methods, the Collaboration Showcase, the Student-Led Symposium, Beyond The PhD.
- ⑩ Read on to find out more about extra funds and extension opportunities your studentship offers: RTSG, OIV, OFW and DLT.

For further details on all of these activities, please read the relevant sections of this Handbook.

3. Communication and Cohort Building

Within SGSSS, we have various methods of communication to and from our community. Each method serves its own purpose and allows for one-way promotional information to peer-to-peer interaction.

3.1 SGSSS Apply

SGSSS Apply is where students apply for RTSG funds, expense claims (for SGSSS events) and other opportunities such as internships, overseas institutional visits and funding for overseas fieldwork (information for which can be found elsewhere within this Handbook). In order to see these opportunities, ensure that your **Apply** profile is set to “current student”.

[Register for SGSSS Apply here](#)

[Check your account on SGSSS Apply here](#)

3.2 Social

Social is an SGSSS-managed platform for social science training and networking, targeted towards all current social science PhD students studying in Scotland. It is our portal for accessing SGSSS-led training and training materials, and it encourages communication and collaboration via one-to-one conversations as well as topic and discipline-based groups. With Social students can:

- Register for and attend training and cohort building events
- Find online training resources on social science topics and methods (we host a repository of recordings and materials from past events)
- Share research with the community;
- Search for researchers with similar interests and/or within their institutions;
- Start collaborative projects and groups;
- Post to personal blogs that are available to share publicly;
- Contribute to discussions;

[Register for Social here](#)

3.3 Friday Digest

The Friday Digest is our weekly summary of all training and opportunities available throughout SGSSS and the wider Social Science community. All current students with a Social account should be receiving this already. If not, you can sign up for the Digest [here](#).

3.4 Social Media

In addition to Social and our Friday Digest, students can keep up-to-date with all things SGSSS by following us on Facebook and LinkedIn, or by subscribing to our YouTube channel [here](#).

4. SGSSS Doctoral Training Programme

4.1 Training Vision

Our vision is to provide outstanding and diverse opportunities for students studying in the social sciences in Scotland, that align with the ESRC vision for postgraduate [training](#) and responds to the priorities of students as identified through our annual development needs analysis process (DNA).

Annually we offer in excess of 700 hours of training in core and specialist research methods, as well as support wellbeing and employability. Most of our training is available to all social science PhD students across Scotland providing a unique opportunity to develop wide-ranging professional networks within and beyond the SGSSS-funded cohort.

The key principles of the SGSSS approach to training are:

- **Bespoke:** flexible and adapted to fit the needs of you, your project and prepare for beyond the PhD.
- **Life-long learning.** Throughout your studentship, you will never stop learning. Training is not necessarily front-loaded during MSc/MRes year or the first year of the PhD, but is continual and adapts to the stage of the project.
- **Interdisciplinarity:** We would like you to graduate as a confident social science researcher with a range of skills, equipped to work in interdisciplinary ways to tackle the grand societal challenges we describe in section 1.4.

4.2 The SGSSS training journey

Your studentship is a training programme that in some cases lasts up to 4 and a half years (for 1+3.5 students). For those starting from 2024/25, the length of the studentship includes a 3-month Research in Practice placement (see section 6.2).

As SGSSS-funded students go through their journey (see Fig 3, next page) SGSSS offer numerous training opportunities, some of which are mandatory and you are expected to attend (marked with purple boxes); these are described further in sections 4.3- 4.9 below. Beyond this, students build a bespoke training program, drawing on training provided by SGSSS, their institutions and other providers like the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM).

4.3 Development Needs Analysis (DNA)

The journey starts with the DNA, which consists of a questionnaire and 3-way meeting before the PhD award is finalised. This records your training and professional needs and makes recommendations about the best way forward for the year ahead. This is followed-up every year with a questionnaire and optional meeting to discuss progress. The DNA form and details on how to arrange a meeting will be sent via email every summer – you do not need to do anything until you receive this email.

4.4 SGSSS Induction Event (Required)

For students not doing a full masters and in the first year of their PhD (note: this includes those with other fractional awards like 3.75 or 4 years), this event is being held on 4th and 5th November 2024.

The two-day residential event will orient students to the start of the PhD studies, and provide core training in project management and use of new technologies in research. It will connect you with others in your Challenge Pathway. The event is also an opportunity to meet other students from across Scotland, as well as the SGSSS team. You will have already been sent an invitation to register if this event applies to you.

Figure 3: Training opportunities over the duration of an SGSSS studentship

4.5 Core Skills Sessions (2024-25) (Required)

For the academic year 2024-25, we are running monthly online workshops which introduce core researcher skills you will need as you start your PhD. These are mandated by the ESRC (for students who started in October 24 onwards) to ensure your training contains certain required elements. These workshops are suitable for students either taking an ESRC-funded masters or in the first year of their PhD. The workshops are delivered by methods experts across Scotland, and are accompanied by follow-up discussion groups within your Challenge Pathways.

The timetable for these sessions is confirmed:

Date, time and format	Topic and trainer
4 th - 5 th November – induction (in person) *These topics will be repeated at summer school for those are not attending induction	Project management (Juliane Kloess, Edinburgh) AI and ethics for PhD researchers (Alasdair Stewart, Glasgow)
Weds Nov 20 th 2-4 pm (online)	Literature Review Skills for your PhD (Rowena Stewart, Edinburgh)
Weds Dec 11 th , 2-4 pm (online)	Reproducibility and Open Science (Roxanne Connelly, Edinburgh)
Weds January 15 th 2-4 pm (online)	Principles of Data Visualisation (Niccole Pamphilis, Glasgow)
Weds February 12 th 2-4 pm (online)	Communicating Research Outside of Academia (Kathy Hamilton, Strathclyde)
Weds March 5 th , 2-4 pm (online)	Developing Your Scholarly Voice (Publication) (Adina Dudau, Glasgow)
Weds April 11 th , 2-4 pm (online)	Ethics and the World of Digital Data (Ben Collier, Edinburgh)
Weds May 14 th , 2-4 pm (online)	Participatory Methods Throughout the Research Project (Taulant Guma, Edinburgh Napier)

You will be contacted to request your registration for these events, and to invite you to attend associated Challenge Pathway discussions. Registration will be through Social; this is also where all the materials will be hosted.

4.6 Summer School (Required)

The Summer School is the largest event in the SGSSS training calendar, spanning across several days and delivering advanced training in methods, wellbeing and employability as well as opportunities for networking.

Students can trace a pathway and follow a bespoke programme that meets their individual training needs. Summer Schools in recent years have been hybrid, with some in-person residential days and some online training events. All social science postgraduate students studying in Scotland are welcome to attend.

The 2025 Summer School will take place in mid-June at one of our partner institutions. More details and registration will be made available from Spring 2025 on the SGSSS website [here](#).

ESRC-funded students are expected, as a condition of their studentship, to attend the annual Summer School during the life of their studentship.

4.7 Steers events (Required)

These events are aimed at researchers on an ESRC Steer studentship (Datasets, Advanced Quantitative Methods, Interdisciplinary). It is designed to help these students meet the requirements of their Steer funding and make the most of the opportunities that the studentship offers. The 2024-25 Steer Events will take place in December 2024 and Summer 2025, with dates and invitations to be confirmed to Steers students in due course.

ESRC-funded Steer students are expected, as a condition of their studentship, to attend their annual Steer Event during the life of their studentship.

4.8 Research in Practice related training

All students are now expected to do a 3-month placement in their 2nd or 3rd year. To help you make the most of it, you will be invited to participate in training before the placement to prepare you, and a reflective evaluation session afterwards to consolidate what was learnt.

Other opportunities, in which your participation is warmly welcomed:

4.9 Student-led Symposium

The symposium is organised by our team of Associate Officers with support from SGSSS. Each year the students host the event they feel would be of most value, and traditionally the two-day symposium has focused on well-being and looking forward to postdoctoral opportunities. The Symposium will take place in May 2025 at the University of Stirling.

4.10 Spring into Methods

The Spring into Methods programme brings together doctoral researchers from across the arts, humanities and social sciences to complete specialist methods training workshops ranging from Feminist Methods to Oral History and Participant Observation. These interdisciplinary workshops are open to doctoral researchers aligned with the SGSSS or the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities (SGSAH).

The Spring into Methods workshops will be open to applications from early Spring 2025, and the workshops will take place in later Spring – keep an eye on the Friday Digest for further details.

4.11 Student-led training (SLTF)

The **Student Led Training Fund (SLTF)** supports the delivery of advanced and specialist training by students and early career researchers (ECRs). This is an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange, and for students and ECRs to share their cutting-edge skills developed through their doctoral studies with the wider community. As well as allowing students to lead on deciding what events they would find most value, student-

organisers will gain leadership and management skills, all while delivering the highest quality advanced training. The typical maximum amount that can be applied per training event is approx. £1,000.

There are two calls for applications per academic year, usually in September and February. Deadlines will be advertised through the SGSSS website and Friday Digest.

Please see [here](#) for further details on all things SLTF, including how to submit an application.

4.12 Discipline-led training (DLTF)

The Discipline Led Training Fund (DLTF) supports the delivery of advanced and specialist training led by one or more specific academic disciplines. It is developed by academics across Scotland. Although students are not eligible to run events through DLTF, SGSSS-funded students can attend any of the training free of charge.

4.13 Beyond the PhD Training

Annual “Beyond the PhD” events are designed to support students in the latter stages of their ESRC funding as they plan for their next steps after the PhD. Previous events include workshops on research careers outside of academia, completing a viva, and applications for Postdoctoral Fellowships. Eligible students will be informed of opportunities and invited to attend events, which are likely to be in late 2025.

4.14 SGSSS Mentoring Schemes

SGSSS offers mentoring opportunities, with support from the Royal Society of Edinburgh, SGSSS alumni and other senior supporters. Current PhD students are matched with a proposed mentee and given guidance on how to navigate a successful mentoring relationship.

Mentoring has been used for various purposes, including exploring research careers (inside and outwith academia), exploring the interdisciplinary potential of a student’s research, developing skills and confidence in collaborative work, and developing networks beyond immediate subject areas.

Applications for the 2024/25 Mentoring Schemes will open in Autumn 2024. More details will be made available from October 2024 [here](#).

5. ESRC Funds

5.1 Stipend

ESRC funding for students' tuition fees, maintenance stipends and research training support grants are paid by SGSSS to the institutions which have ESRC-funded students. If a student is in receipt of a full award (fees plus maintenance) they will receive stipend payments from the institution at which they are registered.

The standard stipend for full-time students in 2024/25 is £19,237 (correct at time of publishing; see also [Get a studentship to fund your doctorate – UKRI](#))

It is important students notify the HEI Administrative Lead at their institution (see [here](#) for details) of any changes to their bank details to ensure no delays to their payments. Any overpayment of maintenance stipend must be returned to the relevant institution upon notification.

5.2 Research Training Support Grant (RTSG)

All students are eligible for RTSG which is to be used to pay for expenses which the student, their supervisor or their department deem to be in direct support of the student's PhD research.

RTSG should not be considered as a personal allocation for each individual ESRC funded student, as the RTSG funding is pooled for flexible use across all ESRC-funded students, and funds are allocated on the basis of student needs and priorities.

Students who began their funded studies in the 2023/24 academic year or earlier have a notional amount of £750 per year throughout their award, and students who began their funded studies in the 2024/25 academic year or later have a notional amount of £940 per year throughout their award (amounts are set by the ESRC). However, this is a flexible, pooled amount across the whole DTP cohort and exceptions can be made where justification is given. You do not need to stick to the yearly amount within each year. For example, if you wish to attend an international conference in year three, and have not spent previous years' allocations, you may spend a larger amount for this trip.

Notional RTSG amounts are not increased to cover extensions, however students can spend their remaining RTSG during extension periods. In exceptional cases where students seek higher amounts of RTSG funding, SGSSS approval is required. Additionally, as RTSG is co-funded by SGSSS and the student's home university, HEI Administrative Leads will need to agree to any RTSG claims that are higher than the overall notional individual amount. It is advised for students to keep a record of how much RTSG funding they have claimed. If you would like to enquire about the amount you have claimed, you can ask your [HEI Administrative Lead](#).

Applications for RTSG funding should **not** be made retrospectively, but rather in advance of the activity. As there are certain situations in which an RTSG application may be rejected – for example, if the spend should be covered by your stipend or a different funding source – we would advise students not to make any purchases prior to gaining approval. Applications are made via our application system, [SGSSS Apply](#) (RTSG and SGSSS Expense Claims) and are approved via this system by the HEI Administrative Lead at a student's institution. All applications which are over £200 require a [Supervisor Statement of Support](#) from their lead supervisor and should be reflected in a student's Development Needs Analysis (DNA). Payment is then made to the student by the institution, and receipts should be returned to the HEI Administrative Lead.

Examples of RTSG expenses are:

- UK fieldwork expenses;
- UK, EU and overseas conferences and summer schools;
- Foreign language training courses usually undertaken in the UK prior to an overseas fieldwork trip;
- Reimbursement of interpreters, guides, assistants;
- Survey costs e.g., printing, stationery, telephone calls;
- Purchase of small items of equipment e.g., cameras, tape recorders, films;

- Gifts for local informants;
- Academic training courses that are not available through the student's institution, such as NCRM courses;
- Books and other reading material not available through libraries.

In certain circumstances, RTSG can be combined with funds available for overseas fieldwork, should the requirement be justifiable.

If a student is unsure as to whether they may claim for a particular item, they should contact their HEI Administrative Lead at their institution.

SGSSS regards it the responsibility of a student's institution to provide computing facilities (core provision). In exceptional circumstances, we may consider requests from award holders to purchase laptops or other computer equipment from this allowance. Such requests must be clearly rationalised based on the requirements of the research and the successful completion of the PhD. In such circumstances, any equipment purchased over £200 will remain the property of Research Organisation (RO) following the end date of the award.

Claiming Expenses for SGSSS Events

Students can claim for costs associated with attending SGSSS events, for example the Student-Led Symposium or SGSSS Summer School, and do so via the same application program located on [SGSSS Apply](#) (SGSSS Expense and RTSG Claims). These claims will not be deducted from a student's RTSG allowance. Claims must take place after the purchase has been made, and receipts uploaded as part of the application. Claims will be approved in line with the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#).

5.3 Overseas Fieldwork (OFW)

SGSSS receives an annual amount from the ESRC towards the costs of OFW undertaken by our doctoral students. Applications for OFW are for funding only, and not an extension to your funding period.

Only full-time PhD students undertaking the +3 element of their award are eligible for this allowance; ESRC-funded Masters students cannot apply for OFW until in the first year of their PhD. Part-time students are only eligible for an Overseas Fieldwork grant if they temporarily transfer to a full-time status for the duration of the fieldwork.

Only **one** claim for OFW expenses can be made during a studentship award. This one claim can consist of more than one trip overseas, as long as this can be adequately justified in the research plan.

Funding cannot be provided in the latter stages of a PhD when fieldwork should have concluded; students are expected to plan in a timely manner so that there is sufficient time post-fieldwork for analysis and writing up, and supervisors should provide a supporting statement to justify the timing of the proposed trip.

ESRC students are eligible to apply for this funding if they are:

- In the doctoral (+3) phase of their award;
- The Overseas Fieldwork was outlined in the original research application. Exceptions to this regulation will be considered on individual merit.

The purpose of the visit should be to carry out fieldwork that is essential to the successful completion of a student's thesis and be an integral part of the PhD. Applications will only be considered where the supervisor's case for support provides evidence that the Overseas Fieldwork is essential to a student's research.

Please note, as there are limited funds available for OFW, not all costs will necessarily be met, but rather a contribution towards the costs. The actual allocation of funds towards fieldwork is at the discretion of SGSSS, based on the funding available. We encourage students to apply for the full amount they will require in the first instance, as multiple applications will not be considered. Students may choose to apply for RTSG to supplement the costs associated with overseas fieldwork. Standard allowable expenses are as follows:

- **International Travel:** The expectation is that students travel economy, try to use low-cost methods where possible, and book well in advance. In order to avoid problems with monitoring costs and the possibility of overpriced quotes, students should accompany their request with screenshots of possible travel costs for a given itinerary and dates from established websites (Opodo, Expedia, etc.) or your institutional travel provider. You should check with your HEI Administrative Lead about whether you are required to use your institutional travel provider to make bookings. If you intend not to use flights for environmental reasons, you are expected to include scientific justification for your proposed alternative in your application.
- **Internal Travel:** The expectation is that students use public transport wherever possible. Where there are no practicable public transport options, or concerns exist about available transport, a separate case will have to be made for alternative arrangements.
- **Related Travel and Health Expenses:** Visas, research permits, vaccinations and insurance will typically be covered. Students should check with their own institution first for insurance as university policies should cover student travel.
- **Accommodation:** The expectation when fieldwork lasts between 6 and 12 months is that students move out of their UK address to cover overseas accommodation with their stipend. Exceptions to this rule may be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on individual circumstances and should be discussed with SGSSS prior to application. Students are to look for economically priced accommodation abroad and evidence this where possible. Please check with your institution about whether their travel policy permits AirBnB bookings prior to making an application.
- **Subsistence:** The expectation is that students cover these expenses with their stipend. Requests for partial support in cases where the cost of living is significantly higher than in the UK will be considered; the use of <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/comparison.jsp> is recommended for evidence of cost-of-living differences.
- **Research Assistance:** These expenses (e.g. translation and transcription) should be met more appropriately through other sources, e.g., RTSG. Country-specific assistance such as local informants can be funded through OFW as a contribution to overall costs, but justification is required to ensure adequate payment levels.
- **Communications and Equipment:** Students may need to buy a mobile phone sim card for the country they are visiting, however the SGSSS will not cover the cost of phone contracts, calls or internet access, etc.
- **Caring Responsibilities:** Costs of care which would otherwise not be needed will be considered as a contribution to overall costs. A brief summary of individual circumstances should be included in the application.

If a student's application for a contribution towards OFW is successful and a change of dates is required, the student must seek approval from the HEI Administrative Lead at the relevant institution where the student is registered. Students should also seek approval from the SGSSS, as changes to the research plan will likely affect costings. Increased costs are not guaranteed to be met.

Students may include visits to more than one country on their one application however it is the student's responsibility to ensure that appropriate visas etc. are obtained. Students should consult the [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office \(FCDO\)](#) guidance regarding their intended destination(s) including up to the point at which they travel, and should follow guidelines when undertaking travel. If the FCDO advises against visiting the country, or countries, specified in the student's application, payment of any contribution towards the fieldwork costs will not be authorised. All students must comply with their institution's policy on Health & Safety while undertaking fieldwork, completing any appropriate risk assessments.

Students are required to have travel insurance to cover their period of fieldwork and should request this from their institution's insurance office in the first instance. If for any reason the OFW is cut short or cancelled, the HEI Administrative Lead at the relevant institution where the student is registered must be informed immediately. The institution may wish to request a refund less any reasonable expenditure already incurred.

Students must comply with their institution's auditing processes and provide receipts upon their return from their Overseas Fieldwork– their HEI Administrative Lead will be able to provide detail on the process for

submitting expense claims. If the costs incurred are found to be less than the contribution provided, the return of said funds will be required. If costs incurred are found to be more than advised in advance, these are unlikely to be covered by SGSSS. Where costs are incurred in advance, receipts must be provided before the reimbursement of funds.

How to apply

There are no set deadlines for OFW applications; rather applications can be submitted at any time and will be assessed as and when they come in throughout the academic year. However, applications must be made **at least 3 months in advance** of the intended OFW, e.g., if an application was received on 25 January, the earliest a student would be able to commence their fieldwork would be 25 April. It may be that your travel provider can hold reservations without pay, pending approval; we would encourage the use of this where available in order to ensure lower prices.

Applications can be made through [SGSSS Apply](#), under “ESRC Training Funds”. Applications must include a supporting statement from the student's supervisor, and it is strongly encouraged to liaise with institution's HEI Administrative Leads for advice and guidance. Applications will be assessed by the SGSSS-DTP Directorate, after which students will be informed of the outcome of their application via email, typically within three to four weeks from the submission date.

OFW Application Guidance:

1. The expectation is that students will work with their supervisors and HEI Administrative Lead when completing an application and that supervisors will check for completeness. It is preferable for applications to be submitted well ahead of fieldwork start dates.
2. The SGSSS-DTP Directorate will prioritise those applications where OFW was highlighted in the original research proposal.
3. Students and their supervisors should work together to submit applications that are based on reasonable and accurate costings, including appropriate justification of costs where applicable, with as much detail as possible. To date, there has been considerable variability in supporting statements provided by supervisors; those with more detail regarding the research plan better aid in the assessment of applications.
4. Any variations from original plans in the research proposal should be explained in the application.
5. ESRC guidelines relating to fieldwork advise that one visit for no more than 12 months to be the appropriate norm – and communication with supervisors should and can be maintained via only online meeting tools (Teams, Zoom, Skype etc.), eliminating the need for a return visit during fieldwork.
6. For an application to be considered, it must include: university-provided travel insurance (or justification for other insurance); approval from the institution and supervisor; and travel to the intended destination (s) must be permitted by the FCDO.
7. The assessment is undertaken by a panel comprising the Head of Strategy and Operations and members of the SGSSS Directorate.

5.4 Difficult Language Training (DLT)

DLT applications are for ESRC-funded PhD students to apply for an extension to their PhD's funded period for the purpose of learning a difficult language as an integral part of their research.

Where undertaking DLT incurs additional costs, for example attending an in-person course or visiting the fieldwork site, students should apply for RTSG (for UK-based training) or OFW funds (for training which will be undertaken in the field, typically abroad). If OFW funds are being sought, these applications must be submitted together and should include any future fieldwork costs, as only one OFW application can be submitted during a studentship. Funding for DLT is extremely limited and UK training should be sought in the first instance.

The SGSSS-DTP will only consider paying up to one year's additional support, i.e., an extension of stipend payments, if a student has a requirement to acquire or develop a working ability with a difficult language to carry out fieldwork (including for the purposes of UK fieldwork) or other parts of their research; this is over and

above the funded length of the studentship. Students should consult with their supervisor and HEI Administrative Lead regarding any request for Difficult Language Training.

ESRC students are eligible to apply for this allowance if they are:

- In the doctoral (+3) phase of their award;
- The proposed language training was outlined in the original research application (exceptions to this regulation will be considered on individual merit).

The length of the extension is determined by the type and nature of the language to be learnt, taking into consideration the student's individual circumstances and existing skill in the language. Extensions beyond six months are only normally allowed if the student needs to spend an extended period overseas to obtain these language skills. Please consult the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) for guidance on how to calculate the length of Difficult Language Training extension.

How to apply

There are no set deadlines for DLT applications; rather applications can be submitted at any time and will be assessed as and when they come in throughout the academic year. However, applications must be made at least **3 months in advance** of the intended DLT, e.g., if an application was received on 25 January, the earliest a student would be able to commence their language training would be 25 April.

Applications can be made through [SGSSS Apply](#), under "ESRC Training Funds". Applications must include a supporting statement from the student's supervisor and should contain sufficient detail to show that their home institution agrees with the need for Difficult Language Training and should be reflected in the Development Needs Analysis (DNA). Applications will be assessed by the SGSSS-DTP Directorate, after which students will be informed of the outcome of their application via email, typically within 3 weeks from the submission deadline date.

DLT Application Guidance:

1. The SGSSS-DTP Directorate will prioritise those applications where DLT was highlighted in the original research proposal;
2. Any variations from original plans in the research proposal should be explained in the application.
3. Retrospective claims will not be accepted, including where an extension has been further lengthened once training has begun.
4. A DLT funding extension will require institutional approval for an equivalent extension to the PhD registration period.

5.5 Overseas Institutional Visit (OIV)

The primary purpose of an OIV is to support and encourage the international engagement of ESRC funded students. SGSSS wishes to encourage students to spend a period of time abroad to undertake activities and take advantage of opportunities that would not be available in their home institutions. The aim of the visit is to support timely completion of a student's PhD; to enhance employability post-PhD and to reflect on impact potential of the project.

Students should use their DNA and the [VITAE framework](#) to underpin the rationale for their proposed trip. Please note syllabus development is not included in the purpose of the award and seminar/conference attendance should be funded via RTSG.

The SGSSS will only fund an OIV, and the subsequent funded extension, for a maximum of 4 weeks. The maximum OIV award that can be awarded in 2024/25 for the cost of your trip is £3,000.

The award should be used to provide financial support to allow the student to undertake two or more activities during their OIV. Examples of appropriate activities are:

- Draft a peer-reviewed publication;

- Undertake additional specialist research training not available in the UK;
- Establish research links that will be beneficial to their current or future academic career;
- Disseminate early research findings and interpretation with experts;
- Attend and participate in expert seminars where directly relevant to the student's research.

If a student's application for a contribution towards OIV is successful, a student may not change the dates or details of the OIV without first informing the HEI Administrative Lead at the relevant institution where the student is registered. Students should also seek approval from the SGSSS, as changes to the research plan will likely affect costings.

Students should consult the [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office \(FCDO\)](#) guidance regarding their intended destination. If the FCDO advises against visiting the country specified in the student's application, payment of any contribution towards the visit's costs will not be authorised. All students must comply with their institution's policy on Health & Safety while undertaking OIVs, completing any appropriate risk assessments.

Students are required to have travel insurance to cover their period of their visit and should check with their institution's insurance office in the first instance. If for any reason the OIV is cut short or cancelled, the HEI Administrative Lead at the relevant institution where the student is registered must be informed immediately. The institution may wish to request a refund less any reasonable expenditure already incurred.

Students must comply with their institution's auditing processes and provide receipts upon their return from their OIV – their HEI Administrative Lead will be able to provide detail on the process for submitting expense claims. If the costs incurred are found to be less than the contribution provided, the return of said funds will be required. Where costs are incurred in advance, receipts must be provided before the reimbursement of funds. If the costs incurred are more than the contribution awarded, these extra costs are not guaranteed to be provided.

OIV Design

We know that some students have commitments or barriers that may prevent prolonged overseas travel. We welcome applications for hybrid or completely virtual visits, which meet the aims of an OIV. Examples may include:

- Participation in a tailored online schedule of activities developed with a host at an overseas institution that meets the OIV aims outlined above.
- Series of joint events with an overseas institution that supports international engagement whilst meeting the OIV aims outlined above.

Special Needs Support

Additional funding beyond the maximum grant is available for students and staff whose physical, mental or health-related conditions are such that their participation in an OIV would not be possible without extra financial support. Areas that could be eligible for support include but are not limited to adapted accommodation, travel assistance, medical attendance, supportive equipment, adaption of learning material, an accompanying person, etc.

FAQs

Can students stay for longer than four weeks?

Yes, however this is not recommended, and we will only grant a four-week stipend extension. If a student wants to stay longer than four weeks, they must ensure that the extended stay does not interfere with normal PhD activities and their ability to submit on time. It is acceptable for students to schedule a holiday in the country they are visiting at the end of their OIV, however the costs associated with this holiday must be covered by the

student and time used for the holiday must come out of the 8 weeks annual holiday allowance an ESRC funded student is entitled to.

Can students apply for funds from elsewhere?

Yes, students are entitled to apply elsewhere for additional funding if their costs are likely to exceed the maximum amount awarded by SGSSS.

Can students take their immediate families with them?

Yes, however their costs will not be covered by the SGSSS. If a student is traveling with their child/children on their own, or has caring responsibilities that would incur costs in their absence, they can contact the SGSSS to discuss possible support with childcare costs.

Can students attend a conference while visiting their host institution?

Yes, however this should be funded via RTSG (registration, additional accommodation and additional local travel etc.). However, if the event is a gathering of experts to which the student's PhD topic directly relates (e.g., a workshop on their topic or a consensus conference) then students may include such an event as one of their OIV activities. Such examples should be outlined clearly in their application, clearly detailing why their participation would be beneficial to their research.

How to apply

Applications for an OIV have a rolling deadline, but should be made at least **3 months in advance** of the intended visit, for example, if an application was received on 13 October 2024, the earliest a student would be able to commence their visit would be 13 January 2025.

Applications can be made through [SGSSS Apply](#), under "ESRC Training Funds". Applications must include a supporting statement from the student's supervisor and host institution. Applications will be assessed by the SGSSS-DTP Directorate, after which students will be informed of the outcome of their application via email, typically within 3 weeks from the submission deadline date.

OIV Application Guidance:

1. During the course of a studentship, students are entitled to receive OIV funding once, should their application be successful;
2. Applications must be student-led although the applications should also include a statement from both the student's supervisor and the overseas host institution;
3. Visits must be beneficial and impactful to the completion of the student's PhD and should not commence during the first or last three months of the funded period of the studentship (+3 component);
4. The purpose of the visit must not be for fieldwork.
5. If a longer visit is proposed, please note:
 - SGSSS will only fund a visit lasting four weeks. Should the student require additional funding, they must secure this via other means.
 - The maximum stipend extension permitted is four weeks. For online visits, it is not anticipated that the maximum stipend would be required, and the programme may be arranged on a part-time basis (e.g., 17.5 hours per week for four weeks equates to a two-week extension).
 - A clear plan of how the student will continue with their PhD and supervision during the extended visit must be clearly detailed within the application, supported by a rationale from the student's supervisor.
6. Visits must include a visit to a Higher Education institution or an organisation with a substantive research office outside of the UK.
7. Visits must not be undertaken if the Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against visiting the country concerned.
8. The SGSSS will not fund:
 - Registration fees at the host institution;
 - Travel insurance (this should be acquired through the student's home institution);
 - Mobile phones, sim cards or phone contracts (calls and data);

- Clothing.

5.6 Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

DSA is intended to help with additional expenditure for the costs of study-related requirements that may be incurred as a result of disability, mental health problems or specific learning difficulties that mean additional support is needed to undertake an ESRC (UKRI) funded studentship. This allowance can cover the cost of non-medical personal assistance, items of specialist equipment, extra travel costs and general expenses.

All Research Councils have adopted a harmonised approach to DSA, with additional guidance available on the UKRI website [here](#).

Institutions will undertake the assessment of need and provide costs for the student where required. The institution will then claim back eligible costs at the end of the academic year from the ESRC by submitting a completed DSA claim form to SGSSS, before the deadline of 31 October.

Students should contact the Disability Adviser or named contact on disability matters at their institution for advice.

Support for individual disability related adjustments

SGSSS collects EDI data relating to various aspects of equality, diversity inclusion, including about student disabilities. The data supplied is very helpful to SGSSS for informing actions that may encourage people with disabilities to apply and participate in PhD study. As the information supplied is only used in an aggregated and anonymised way however, it cannot be used by us to inform individual circumstances. **SGSSS encourage students to consider disclosing disabilities, or other circumstances that may require support, to their supervisors and aligned university services, for example university Disability Support Services. This will then enable appropriate and confidential discussion of what additional support measures may help you.**

For SGSSS events, we will request information on an event-by-event basis specific to the type of activity, so you can highlight any adjustments or requirements necessary to ensure your ability to participate.

6. Research in Practice

SGSSS' vision for Research in Practice is to equip Scottish Social Science students to be the next generation of research leaders. We want PhD students supported by SGSSS to be confident collaborating across sectors and disciplinary boundaries, and for our DTP to inspire change across Scotland and beyond. In delivering Research in Practice, we have committed to support students to apply research skills in new contexts, communicate with impact and proactively engage in professional development.

We are committed to developing students' understanding of impact in two ways:

- The meaningful contribution that they can make to society, the economy, and the research community through their knowledge and skills;
- The meaningful difference that their PhD will have on their own professional growth.

SGSSS run a variety of activities that boost knowledge exchange and impact while providing an opportunity for PhD students to develop their professional skills and employability alongside academic work. Please see an outline of some of these opportunities below. If students have any questions about knowledge exchange, impact and professional development within SGSSS, or would like to discuss the opportunities below in more detail, please contact the Research Impact and Partnerships Team on team@sgsss.ac.uk.

6.1 Collaborative Studentships

Collaborative PhD award holders are working on studentships that are supported by non-academic partners. The role that external partners play in the collaborative studentship will look different depending on the partner and nature of the project, and so we understand that collaborative PhD students will have different support needs. If collaborative students would like advice on the relationship with their collaborative partner, please contact us team@sgsss.ac.uk.

6.2 Research in Practice Placements and Internship Opportunities

Students who began their funded studies from October 2024 onwards will be expected to complete a 3-month (full time), 6-month (part time) research in practice placement: the funded period award includes time to do this.

Students must undertake the placement in the second or third year of their PhD study, with more than three months remaining before their funding end date (or six months for part time studentships). The placement must be separate to the PhD student's research and no placement outputs can form part of the student's PhD project. Placements must be designed to support researcher development, their sector knowledge and transferable skills, and can take place within academia or out with academia.

Full research in practice placement guidelines will be made available on our website.

SGSSS Internship programme

The SGSSS internship programme places PhD social science students with non-academic organisations to work on a project for 3 months (full-time) or 6 months (part-time). The internship scheme can be accessed by all students and completing an internship meets the research in practice placement criteria for funded students who began their studies after October 2024. For funded students who began their studies in academic year 2023-24 or before the internship scheme is an added value opportunity.

The internships are paid opportunities, with students receiving a stipend payment equivalent to doctoral stipend levels. They are designed for students to make a meaningful difference within an organisation, whilst developing their own sector knowledge and transferable skills.

Why undertake an internship through SGSSS?

Completing an internship through SGSSS is an excellent opportunity for a student to apply their research skills in a professional context, develop their transferable skills, and grow their professional network. Students have previously used their experience gained via internships to win funding through our Impact Competition (see section below) and as a route to employment.

How to apply for an internship?

There are two main routes to undertake an internship through SGSSS:

- **Partner-led Internships:** SGSSS advertises internship placements that have been designed by non-academic partner organisations. Students can apply for a placement that looks right for them and may be interviewed by the non-academic organisation.
- **Student-led Internship Scheme:** Students whereby students can approach a non-academic partner organisation to develop an internship proposal and pitch this to SGSSS. Students should contact team@sgsss.ac.uk if they are interested in setting up a Student Led Internship with a research organisation.
- Since SGSSS began, we have supported more than 500 internship placements with non-academic organisations including The Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, RBS, IOD Parc, and Environmental Standards Scotland.

Who is eligible to apply for an internship?

The SGSSS Internship Scheme is open to any social science PhD student registered at a Scottish University. However, students are only eligible to undertake an internship in their second and third years of study (provided the internship will not start in the final 3 months of their research time). Please note: we calculate years here based on a +3 full time model. Some students may have a longer studentship award, such as a +3.5, in which case you would need to evidence that you still had at least 3 months left of your research time left before the internship starts. Part-time students should calculate eligibility pro rata.

For more information on internships, please see our [Internship FAQs](#) or the internships pages on the SGSSS website [here](#).

Other internship opportunities

Additionally, ESRC-funded students can apply for an internship through the **UKRI Policy Internships Scheme**. This annual competition offers an opportunity for doctoral students to work for three months in highly influential policy organisations. Internship placements are paid at doctoral stipend levels. Students can find out more about the terms and conditions and any upcoming calls on the UKRI website [here](#).

6.3 Training Opportunities

The SGSSS training programme includes a number of sessions that are focused on supporting students to develop skills that will support collaborative work and developing impact with non-academic organisations. Our aim is to help students develop or hone skills that will create impact through academic or non-academic careers. In addition, SGSSS run training opportunities that are specific to knowledge exchange, such as the Mentoring Schemes (see section above). We also strongly encourage students to submit applications for funding to develop training that would support knowledge exchange via the Student-led Training Fund (SLTF).

6.4 Impact Competition

The SGSSS Impact Competition is an annual opportunity for social science PhD students across Scotland to demonstrate the impact from their research.

The competition invites students to submit examples of their impact in a written application which is reviewed by an expert panel. Shortlisted candidates are then invited to showcase their work at our annual Collaboration Showcase. The top entries to the Impact Competition receive funding to further develop the impact of their research.

The Impact Competition will launch in early 2025 with the results announced in May 2025. More information can be found on our website [here](#).

6.5 Collaboration and Impact Showcase

The Collaboration Showcase brings together academic and non-academic partners of SGSSS to celebrate the work that social science students are doing across Scotland and to share knowledge. Usually, more than 100 guests attend from across the third sector, public sector, private sector and academia.

Students that are shortlisted in the Impact Competition are invited to the Collaboration Showcase to showcase their work. This involves designing a poster based on their research impact and potentially presenting their work. The next Collaboration Showcase is expected to take place in May 2025.

7. SGSSS Expenses Policy

(Including travel, accommodation, internships, and other expenses.)

The SGSSS [Expenses Policy](#) sets out the rules for claiming travel, accommodation, subsistence and other expenses incurred in connection with SGSSS purposes. The policy applies to social science doctoral researchers (students) registered at a SGSSS member Higher Education institution (HEI) and academic participants of SGSSS events, meetings and training. This policy applies to all expenditure not related to the individual funding status of the student. For the avoidance of doubt, this policy supersedes any other SGSSS guidance on claiming expenses. Minor changes may be made during the year and relevant parties informed where appropriate.

To view our full Expenses Policy, please click [here](#).

7.1 Claiming Expenses for SGSSS Events

ESRC Students can claim for costs associated with attending SGSSS events, e.g., advanced training or the SGSSS Summer School, and do so via the **SGSSS Expense and RTSG Claims** program located on [SGSSS Apply](#). These claims will not be deducted from a student's RTSG allowance. For SGSSS events, it is acceptable to claim after the event, however claims must be in line with the SGSSS Expenses Policy, and if more than 3 months old will not be honoured.

Non ESRC funded students can also claim relevant expenses: see the Expenses Policy for more details.

8. Studentship Regulations

Below are a list and summary of the primary regulations relating to an ESRC-funded studentship. For full details on these regulations and more, please consult the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

8.1 Transfers

It is possible, under certain exceptional circumstances, for a student's studentship to transfer to another institution, for example if their primary supervisor moves institution and the current institution and/or subject discipline is unable to provide appropriate alternative supervision.

This will only be approved if the transfer is to an approved subject within an accredited ESRC [Doctoral Training Partnership](#) (DTP) or ESRC [Centre for Doctoral Training](#) (CDT). If a student wishes to transfer to a university and/or subject discipline which is not accredited by the ESRC for SGSSS, or to a subject outside the ESRC's remit, then they will have to withdraw from their ESRC studentship.

In order to apply for a transfer, the following documentation must be submitted to ESRC (via SGSSS) for prior approval:

Transfers within the SGSSS-DTP

Permission to transfer a studentship must be obtained in advance from SGSSS by the [Deans of Graduate Studies Network representative](#) from the HEI which the student will be leaving. To apply for a transfer, the following documentation must be submitted to team@sgsss.ac.uk at least three months in advance of the proposed transfer:

- A request from the student confirming the grounds on which the transfer is being requested, when it is being requested from and the subject discipline and HEI to which they intend to transfer.
- A statement from the SGSSS Dean's Group representative at the original HEI relinquishing the studentship and confirming that alternative supervision is not available within their HEI.
- A statement from the SGSSS HEI Administrative Lead at the original HEI confirming RTSG spend to date.
- A statement from the SGSSS Dean's Group representative at the new HEI confirming their acceptance of the studentship and acknowledging and agreeing to take over any match funded contributions from the original HEI.

Transfers from SGSSS-DTP to another DTP

SGSSS must obtain permission from ESRC to transfer a studentship to another DTP. In order to apply for a transfer the following documentation must be submitted to team@sgsss.ac.uk by the [Deans of Graduate Studies Network representative](#) from the HEI which the student will be leaving at least three months in advance of the proposed transfer:

- A request from the student confirming the grounds on which the transfer is being requested and the subject discipline and DTP to which they intend to transfer.
- A statement from the SGSSS Dean's Group representative relinquishing the studentship and confirming that alternative supervision is not available within their institution.
- A statement from the SGSSS HEI Administrative Lead at the original HEI confirming RTSG spend to date.
- A statement from the new DTP confirming their acceptance of the studentship and acknowledging and agreeing to take over any match funded contributions from the original HEI (SGSSS can broker this relationship if required).

Please see page 26 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

8.2 Extensions and Suspensions

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.

Please note that suspensions can only be considered during the funded period of the studentship. If a student interrupts their registration after their ESRC funding has finished a suspension cannot be considered.

The period of suspension cannot exceed one calendar year in any one instance, and the total periods of suspension should not exceed one calendar year during the lifetime of the award. The student's supervisor must approve the suspension, as well as the non-HEI partner supervisor in collaborative studentships. The student's supervisor must confirm that the suspension of studies will not delay the submission of the final thesis by more than the length of the suspension. Retrospective requests cannot be considered.

Due to the nature of training received in the Master's year of a 1+3 award (and equivalent structures), suspensions should be for 12 months to allow the student to re-join the course at the same point at which they left it.

Please see **Section 4: Managing the studentship** starting on page 24 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

8.3 Sick Leave and Sick Pay

SGSSS students can take up to 13 weeks sick leave within any 12 months period, and their studentship will be extended accordingly. Beyond 13 weeks, studentships should be suspended. Suspensions on account of illness cannot normally exceed 12 months and cannot be applied retrospectively.

Due to the structured nature of most Master's programmes, the above sick leave policy does not apply during the master's year of a 1+3 studentship. Students who are taken ill during the master's for more than a few weeks will normally need to request a one-year suspension and return to the programme at the same point the following year.

Please see page 31 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) and page 15 of the [UKRI Training Grant Guide](#) (TGC 8.2) for further detail.

8.4 The 'Taking Space' Policy

"Taking Space" is a funded extension designed to provide support and "breathing space" to students who are in unexpected and difficult circumstances.

SGSSS is committed to supporting our students to successfully complete their studies. We understand that there may be occasions when a short-term time off or a period of more flexible working is needed to deal with unexpected life events or when circumstances make it difficult to continue working. We also understand that there are times when it isn't that simple to just provide 'proof' about a situation.

This policy exists to support people who find themselves in unexpected and challenging situations and has been established to allow students some "breathing space" when something unexpected happens and also to provide time for the student, their supervisor, and their university, to determine the best way forward.

Examples of where the Taking Space policy may apply could be as a result of bereavement, family emergency, domestic abuse, sexual assault, hate crime, etc. This is by no means an exhaustive list and we encourage anyone having difficulties to let us know. Even if you don't anticipate needing time off, informing us of the situation will help as there may be specific resources or support available to you and if in future the challenges persist, it will help that we have a record of it.

The Taking Space Policy is not intended to replace other forms of leave and support which are already available, such as sickness absence or maternity leave. Taking Space applications predicated on medical conditions are unlikely to be funded and any such requests should fully justify why medical leave is not appropriate.

If you are faced with unexpected or challenging circumstances, please inform your [HEI Administrative Lead](#) as soon as possible. If you do not know this person or do not feel comfortable contacting them, speak to someone you are comfortable with (e.g. your supervisor) and ask them to get in touch for you. They will then communicate with SGSSS on your behalf to establish the best course of action (keeping any disclosures confidential if necessary or requested). If for any reason, you are uncomfortable sharing the challenges you are experiencing with your institution, then please contact Katherine Stephen, Student Experience & Development Coordinator via team@sgsss.ac.uk.

For a Taking Space request, your HEI Administrative Lead will be asked to provide some basic information outlining what Taking Space leave period is being requested, a brief summary of why, what support is being made available to you, and who will be involved in discussions about any changes or ongoing support that can be put in place when you resume your research, so you are set up for success. (The outcome of these discussions may mean changes to research activities, such as a reworking of your completion plan, a period of sick leave under the UKRI policy, an interruption etc.)

Taking Space requests are considered by a panel within SGSSS comprising the Director, Head of Strategy & Operations and the Associate Director (Student Engagement and EDI). The SGSSS Student Experience & Development Coordinator will oversee coordination of requests and responses. **All information received will be treated in the strictest confidence.** All data will be treated in confidence and is subject to the SGSSS Privacy Statement set out in section 10 of the Student Handbook.

If a period of funded leave is approved, the time will be recorded on Je-S records and SGSSS records simply as "Taking Space". In terms of funded leave, the policy can support, in the first instance, up to one month for "breathing space" and for discussions/putting in place arrangements for return to study. This is not a fixed amount and requests will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

8.5 Change of Supervisor

At SGSSS it is important that we are kept up to date with students' supervisory teams - this means that we need to be kept informed of all proposed permanent changes to supervisory teams. As such, it may be useful for you to see what advice (see below) we provide our supervisors on keeping us up to date.

SGSSS should be informed of all proposed permanent changes to supervisory teams. This is of particular importance because the makeup of supervisory teams is a key component of the assessment of all studentship applications and because, as funders, we need to be in a position to identify quickly which students are supervised by which members of staff.

Temporary changes due to sick leave or study leave should be discussed with HEI Administrative Leads and agreed with Heads of Subjects/Schools. Institutions should retain a record of these changes. **SGSSS does not need to be informed of this temporary change.**

Where a proposed change involves a like-for-like discipline/institutional replacement (for example, a supervisor in sociology is to be replaced with a colleague in sociology at the same institution), then this should be discussed with HEI Administrative Leads, agreed by the Head of Subject/School and by the Dean. **SGSSS should be informed of the change prior to the change taking effect.**

Where a proposed change involves a replacement with a colleague from a different subject discipline and/or institution then **a request should be made to SGSSS six weeks in advance of the proposed change** with the same discussions and agreements at a local level.

Please note, Deans and HEI Administrative Leads should remind staff within their disciplines and institutions of the policy relating to change of supervisors. This policy should also be considered in conjunction with that relating to transfer of supervisors to another institution.

Please see page 32 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

8.6 Thesis Submission

Students who start their funded period from October 2024 onwards are required by the ESRC to submit their thesis by their funding end date. There is no “writing up” or “thesis pending” period available from the ESRC for these students.

All other students (i.e. those that started their funded period before October 2024) are encouraged to submit their thesis by the end of their funded period. Full-time students who started before October 2024 **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.

Students can no longer access RTSG expenses, or apply for additional DTP funded opportunities, after the end of the studentship.

Students will have to pay for any fees, including Submission Pending fees, if relevant, incurred after the studentship ends; these are not funded by your ESRC studentship. If a student submits their thesis before the end of the studentship, the date of submission will become the studentship end date and no further payments will be made. Any overpaid maintenance will be reclaimed.

Please see pages 32 and 33 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

8.7 Part-time and Full-time Study Arrangements

SGSSS students can undertake their programmes on a part-time or full-time basis. Stipend payments will be pro rata for part-time students. Part-time students must spend no less than 50% of their working time (i.e. 18.75 hours, with 18.75 hours available for non-PhD activity) on their PhD research.

It is possible for an SGSSS student to apply to transfer between part-time and full-time studentship award, or vice versa. Students need to apply via the transfer of registration process at their home institution. 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.

Whilst it is expected that transfers would only occur **once** during the life of an award, it is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances, such as changes to domestic arrangements or undertaking fixed term part-time employment, where a student needs to revert to their original status. Such fixed-period transfers will be considered on a case-by-case basis by SGSSS and ESRC. As above, students should apply for a temporary change of status via the transfer of registration process at their institution, who will then refer this onto SGSSS to seek approval from ESRC.

The ESRC rules governing change of registration are:

- A case cannot be considered if it is made in the last six months of the award or will apply only to the last six months of the award except in very exceptional circumstances, i.e., illness or students returning from maternity leave. SGSSS must refer all such cases to the ESRC for approval, so please allow sufficient time for this to be processed.
- 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 dependant requires more of the award holder's time, or where the award holder has taken up part-time employment.
- Fixed-period transfers are unable to be considered within a pre-described Master's programme reserved for the research training element of the studentship.

Please see pages 26 to 28 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) for further details.

8.8 Maternity, Paternity, Parental and Adoption Leave

ESRC funded students are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity/adoption leave. The first 26 weeks are paid at full stipend rate. The following 13 weeks are paid at a level commensurate with employee entitlements to statutory maternity pay. The final 13 weeks would be unpaid. When undertaking this leave, "Keeping-In-Touch" days are recommended whereby a student can connect with supervisors or other colleagues for reasons of meeting or training. These should be limited to a maximum of 10 separate days across the period of leave, and should ideally be agreed in advance of the leave beginning.

Partners are entitled to up to two weeks paid Ordinary Paternity Leave on full stipend.

Partners are entitled to unpaid parental leave up to a maximum of 50 weeks.

Please see pages 25 and 26 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) and page 15 of the [UKRI Training Grant Guide](#) (TGC 8.1) for further details.

8.9 Working While Studying

Full-time ESRC SGSSS studentship award holders are permitted to undertake a certain amount of paid teaching or other research work during their studentship provided that they spend a minimum of 1,800 hours each academic year on their doctoral research and research training. Their programme of postgraduate training must be compatible with such work and their primary supervisor must formally approve this.

Where SGSSS students undertake demonstration or teaching, or other types of employment at their home institution, they should be paid for this in addition to any stipend they receive from SGSSS. It should not be treated as a compulsory element of the award or of any research training.

Students may undertake a small amount of other paid work either in term time or during holidays, but 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.

Full-time studentship award holders cannot hold either a full-time job, or a permanent part-time job, during the period of their award. Part-time ESRC studentship award holders cannot hold a full-time job.

Full-time studentship award holders cannot change to part-time for reasons of employment during the final six months of their studentship.

Please see pages 34 and 35 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) for further details.

8.10 Annual Leave

Full-time students are allowed up to eight weeks' holiday (including public holidays) each academic year as approved by their supervisor. If a studentship covers a period of less than 12 months in any academic year, a student's holiday entitlement will be reduced on a pro-rata basis.

Please see page 16 of the [UKRI Training Grant Guide](#) (TGC 8.3) for further details.

8.11 Changes of Thesis Title and/or Research Direction

Minor changes to thesis titles and research outlines do not need to be referred or approved by SGSSS. Significant changes to the title and/or focus of research need to be approved **in advance** by SGSSS. Such approval will not be given unless a clear justification is provided.

It is recognised that research outlines and proposed titles are likely to change during the Masters programme of a 1+3 studentship, prior to the commencement of the PhD. Students should still notify SGSSS of any significant changes. Only in exceptional circumstances will a major change in topic or direction be approved during a +3 studentship, or during the +3 phase of a 1+3 studentship.

Please see page 24 of the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#) and page 12 of the [UKRI Training Grant Ts&Cs](#) (TGC 7.2) for further details.

9. Post Thesis Submission

9.1 Researchfish

Researchfish® is the system that the UK Research Councils use to gather feedback from all Research Council funded researchers about the outcomes from their work. The Research Councils agreed that it was important for Research Council funded doctoral students to also be able to report on their activities and successes, how they contribute to their respective areas of research and how they engage with partner organisations and communities.

SGSSS-DTP students are responsible for providing information about the outcomes from their studentship. Once a studentship has been added to Researchfish (typically during the 3rd year of funding), students will be invited to enter and submit data every year until three years after the studentship has finished (since many outcomes occur towards or past the end of studentships). Primary supervisors should also have been given access to the studentship details on Researchfish (added as a 'team member') and will be able to help in providing the outcomes information.

Students can enter outcomes data at any time but will specifically be asked to confirm that all of their information is accurate and complete during the annual Submission Period. The Submission Period falls between early February and mid-March each year.

Research Councils will not use Researchfish data to assess the performance of individual students or review the progress of individual studentships. In addition, there is no expectation that doctoral students will necessarily have specific outcomes or outputs to report.

If any student has problems accessing their Researchfish account, please refer to the UKRI website [here](#) for guidance or contact the Researchfish support help desk at support@researchfish.com.

9.2 First Destination Data

The ESRC requires DTPs to provide data on the first employment destinations of all ESRC-funded students. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects destination data on behalf of all the research councils and Universities must ensure that they complete the research council funding fields accurately. DTPs are also required to provide some first destination data for their students as part of the annual report.

Please see page 14 of the [UKRI Training Grant Guide](#) (TGC 7.2).

9.3 Publishing Research

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 available on the ESRC website [here](#). 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 [here](#).

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 found [here](#).

9.4 SGSSS Alumni Community

Upon graduation, students will be invited to join the SGSSS Alumni Community. This network brings together students that have completed ESRC-funded PhDs in Scotland, some of whom will have continued to work in academic and some of whom will have moved on to work in the public, private or third sectors.

The SGSSS Alumni Community provides a forum for social scientists to continue coming together, to share ideas, and to contribute to the landscape of social science research. All members of the SGSSS Alumni Community receive a biannual newsletter with relevant training events and opportunities and are invited to participate in social and networking events. More information is available on the SGSSS website [here](#).

10. SGSSS Privacy Statement

The information students provide will be used by SGSSS in accordance with instructions from our Lead Institution, the University of Edinburgh.

For our full privacy statement, please visit our website [here](#).

10.1 Purpose

We may collect and process the following information:

- Information that students provide by filling in forms or surveys;
- Information in correspondence that students send us;
- Details of student visits to our website including, but not limited to, traffic data, location data, weblogs and other communication data, and the resources that are accessed.

The information provided may be used by SGSSS to:

- Administer studentships and internships;
- Maintain our IT system;
- Administer events and monitor participation in training and events;
- Provide students with support and services requested;
- Monitor equal opportunities;
- Make funding arrangements;
- To gather feedback;
- Guide strategic planning;
- To provide students with information about SGSSS news, events, activities, programmes, opportunities (requested from us or we feel may be of interest), where students have consented to being contacted for such purposes;
- Contribute to our reporting purposes.

10.2 Legal Basis

The legal basis for processing students' personal information falls under:

Consent: When students enter their information in a form, we specify the purpose and future use of this information. By submitting information to a form, students are consenting for their details to be used according to the purposes stated within each form. As this information is provided on the basis of consent, students are free to withdraw their consent for such use of their information at any time.

We also collect some personal information (like the address of a student's computer) through the use of website cookies. Users can set their preferences for these cookies through our cookie consent banner or when viewing some content. These preferences can be changed at any time.

Performance of Contract: If students apply for ESRC funding or internships through SGSSS it is necessary for us to process information for the preparatory steps needed to enter into a contract. If students are in receipt of ESRC studentship funding through SGSSS it is necessary for us to process personal information in the performance of a student's contract with us.

Legitimate Interest: We process information about academic and professional services staff and students at SGSSS member institutions because processing is necessary for legitimate SGSSS business, for example contacting students about new guidance or funding opportunities where relevant.

If an individual becomes a student rep or staff member of one of the governance meeting groups, their name and institutional contact email address will be published on the SGSSS' internal and external websites. If a

student feels the publication of this information will cause them potential harm, contravene conditions of any funding arrangement and/or be harmful for another valid reason, they should contact the SGSSS team on team@sgsss.ac.uk.

10.3 Sharing Personal Data

Information about students will be shared with:

SGSSS Member Institutions: Where it is necessary to share information about students with SGSSS member institutions, for example through cross-institution review panels or events, each Institution acknowledges its obligations as a Data Processor for the other Institutions and shall only process personal data in accordance with instructions from the Lead Institution.

Internship Host Partners: If students apply for internships with one of our host partners, e.g. The Scottish Government or Skills Development Scotland, we will share information supplied to us through an application form. Whom we share information with will be clearly stated on the application form. The SGSSS remains a data controller for all personal information collected and stored as a part of this scheme and will ensure that the necessary steps are taken to protect students' information.

The ESRC: Any information sent to ESRC that contains personal student information is sent securely, either by an encrypted email or password protected document. Any sensitive information that SGSSS and the ESRC receives to support requests from students (such as medical certificates etc.) will be destroyed once the relevant checks have been undertaken.

10.4 Event Registration

We will use personal data to allow us to process student registrations, communicate with students and obtain student feedback about events. We are processing the information for these purposes as by registering for an event, the student is entering into a contractual agreement for us to do so.

The following data will be shared with workshop organisers:

- Student contact details;
- PhD title;
- HEI where studying – for the purposes of registration and communications around the event itself;
- Special dietary requirements – for the purposes of arranging refreshments at the event.

We will hold the personal data students provide us for 18 months. If students have agreed to be contacted about future events, we will hold their personal data for as long as the individual student subscribes to the updates. If a student submits a travel expense claim, their financial data such as a payment record will be held for seven years.

10.5 Data Retention

We will hold the personal data students provided us in line with our Lead Institution's retention [schedules](#).

11. Complaints

Complaints about any aspect of doctoral studies should be routed through a student's institution's procedures. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) have published guidance for students about how to deal with complaints about universities online [here](#).

Complaints about any aspect of SGSSS's operations should be raised with the SGSSS Head of Strategy and Operations in the first instance (team@sgsss.ac.uk). We will acknowledge a complaint within three working days and normally respond within five working days.

Our aim is to respond to complaints quickly and offer a resolution, whether that is an apology, an explanation, or action that will resolve the matter. This is called a **frontline response**.

If the complaint is unresolved within the [SGSSS governance structures](#) or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the response from SGSSS, they can escalate their complaint to the next stage of [University of Edinburgh's complaint's procedure](#).

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Any complaints about how we have handled a student's data, subject access requests or any aspect of GDPR should be directed to the [University of Edinburgh Data Protection Office](#) (dpo@ed.ac.uk) who will investigate the matter. If a student is not satisfied with the response or believes we are not processing their personal data in accordance with the law, they can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

To view our full complaints procedures, visit our website [here](#).

12. Key SGSSS Contacts

12.1 SGSSS Directorate

Director	Professor Graeme Nixon
Deputy Director, Training	Dr Katherine Keenan
Deputy Director, Studentships and Partnerships	Professor Alan Marshall
Associate Director, Supervisor Support and Engagement	Professor Adina Dudau
Associate Director, Student Engagement and EDI	Dr Dely Elliot
Associate Director, Challenge Pathway Lead	Dr Yuki Kamide
Associate Director, Challenge Pathway Lead	Dr Shari Sabeti
Associate Director, Challenge Pathway Lead and PDFs	Professor Kathy Hamilton
SGSSS Associate Director, Training Lead	Dr Roxanne Connelly
SGSSS Associate Director, Training Lead	Dr Diarmuid McDonnell

12.2 SGSSS Office

Head of Strategy and Operations	Linsey Fender
Operations Manager	Ross HOFFIE
Knowledge Exchange and Partnerships Manager	Dr Victoria McQuillan
Studentships Coordinator	Andrea Torres
Knowledge Exchange and Partnerships Coordinator	Kelly Gardner
Student Experience and Development Coordinator	Katherine Stephen
Graduate School Administrator	
Team Mailbox	team@sgsss.ac.uk
Address	25 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9LN

12.3 HEI Administrative Leads

Each institution has a primary SGSSS administrative contact known as an HEI Administrative Lead. Up-to-date contact details can be found on our website [here](#). Students should contact their institution's HEI Administrative Lead for any administrative type queries they may have regarding their studentship in the first instance, e.g., to request a suspension or to inform their institution of sick leave etc.

13. SGSSS Abbreviations, Terms and Systems

AQM	Advanced Quantitative Methods
CDT	Centres for Doctoral Training
Dean	A Dean is an academic who represents their institution in SGSSS matters. All 16 institutions are represented, forming our Deans of Graduate Studies Network
DLT	Difficult Language Training
DNA	Development Needs Analysis
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DTC	Doctoral Training Centre
DLTF	Disciplinary Led Training Fund
DTG	Doctoral Training Grant
DTP	Doctoral Training Partnership
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
Handbook	SGSSS Student Handbook
HEI	Higher Education Institution, also known as a university
HEI Administrative Lead	Institutional administrative contact
Hub Lead	A member of the SGSSS Directorate who leads on Hub matters
Institution	Higher Education Institution
KE	Knowledge Exchange
OFW	Overseas Fieldwork
OIV	Overseas Institutional Visit
RO	Research Organisation
RTSG	Research Training Support Grant
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SGSAH	Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities
SGSSS	Scottish Graduate School of Social Science
SGSSS Apply	An online system used by SGSSS for students to submit applications for various opportunities, including funding and internships
SiM	Spring into Methods
SLTF	Student-led Training Fund
Social	An online community platform for SGSSS students (including alumni), as well as any and all social science researchers and academics wishing to join the platform
TNA	Training Needs Analysis
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation (the body which oversees ESRC)