Please note, there are two primary deadlines that applicants need to be aware of:

- **Thursday, 9 December 2021 at 5pm**: this is the deadline for **Stage 1 Applications**.
- **Wednesday, 9 February 2022 at 5pm**: this is the deadline for **Stage 2 Applications** (shortlisted candidates only).

All applications must be submitted via the SGSSS online application platform, [SGSSS Apply](#).

For the full Student-led Open Competition timeline, please click [here](#).
1. Overview

The guidance detailed within this document is for supervisors of students applying to the SGSSS Student-led Open Competition 2021/22.

Please note the process detailed below is entirely separate from the admissions process at your institution. The SGSSS-DTP plays no role in the institutional admissions process. Although applicants do not need to have been formally admitted in order to be considered for an ESRC studentship, some institutions require that this admissions process is complete prior to submitting an application for funding – you and the relevant Pathway Rep (within your discipline and at your institution) should advise your student as appropriate.

Should an applicant be successful in securing an ESRC studentship, the funding is conditional on the applicant obtaining an unconditional offer for entry to the institution to which they applied by the start date of the studentship funding (01/10/2021).

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the SGSSS Open Competition Guidance for Students.

1.1 Before a Student Applies

Applicants are not permitted to submit an application unless they have secured a first supervisor or supervisory team. As such, we expect supervisors to be fully aware of the projects being proposed. Student proposals typically benefit from supervisory input; however, the proposal must originate from the student and not the supervisor.

In addition, the Supervisor Statement of Support (see section 4) is worth 5 points out of a possible maximum of 25 (see section 3 for the new Marking Framework). Please ensure that you address the content requirements to ensure your student has the best chance of success. The Supervisor Statement of Support is not a reference but rather an opportunity to provide details of proposed supervision arrangements as well as broader support and training opportunities to meet the needs of the student and the proposed project.

1.2 Eligibility

As per guidance published by UKRI in 2020, a minimum of 70% of all studentships awarded by SGSSS will be made to home students, while a maximum of 30% of all studentships awarded can be made to international students. Please note, it is not a requirement for 30% of studentships to be awarded to international students, as the quality of applications will always remain the primary assessment criterion during the Competition. As of 2021, a higher international cap of 50% can be applied to the economics pathway.

Residential Criteria

To be classed as a home student, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a UK national (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have settled status, or
- Have pre-settled status (meeting residency requirements), or
- Have indefinite leave to remain or enter.

If a student does not meet the criteria above, they will be classed as an international student.

To establish if a student would be classed as a home student, we have asked that they refer to pages 4 and 5 of the UKRI eligibility guidance here.
1.3 Length of Award

The length of award depends on the extent to which you meet core methods training requirements set out by ESRC. If you are applying for a +3 studentship, you must have already met the minimum ESRC training requirements. If not then you may choose to apply for a 1+3 award instead. Please see here for guidance in determining which is the appropriate length of award for you. Please also discuss this with your supervisor(s) and your Pathway Rep before applying.

Please note, SGSSS will also conduct an audit of the training needs of all final applicants – this means in some circumstances we may determine a fractional award, such as a 3.251 or a 3.52, is required where we identify that you have some, but not all, of the core methods training required by ESRC. In some rare cases we may decide an applicant who holds a Master’s degree that is too far removed from the social sciences and/or the subject area of the research proposal, is required to undertake another Master’s programme to ensure the ESRC training requirements are met (as this is a condition of funding).

If a first year student (or part-time equivalent) is self-funding their PhD, or they are in receipt of financial support not in excess of an ESRC award3, they can apply for ESRC funding. If successful, the study already undertaken will not be considered and the studentship will start over. Dependent on the applicant’s training requirements, SGSSS may even add additional time (see above).

Part-time awards are permitted and the funding and award lengths are pro-rated accordingly, in accordance with the ESRC funding guidance.

1.4 Masters Programmes

Students who are required to undertake a 1+3 award where their selected institution does not offer an ESRC approved Master’s programme on the desired pathway are required to undertake their Master’s at another accredited institution (within the SGSSS-DTP) before transferring to their ‘home’ institution for the PhD programme. If this applies to your student, then they must upload a SGSSS Masters Arrangement Form, completed in conjunction with the relevant SGSSS Deans of Graduate Studies Network representative at the institution where the Master’s will be undertaken. Students should work with their Pathway Rep, and you as their supervisor, to facilitate the completion of the SGSSS Masters Arrangement Form.

1.5 Supervision

Applicants must have support from a first supervisor to be eligible to apply to this competition.

Students must be the lead authors of submitted proposals with guidance provided by the proposed supervisory team. Proposals should not be submitted that have been led or written by a supervisor.

First supervisors must be located at the institution to which the student is applying; however, a second supervisor/joint supervisor may be attached to the project from any of the 16 partner institutions that form the SGSSS, either with or without pathway accreditation. If you are proposing a jointly supervised project between two institutions the rationale for such an arrangement should be clearly stated within the Supervisor Statement of Support (see section 4 for details). Where supervisors are from different institutions, the Supervisor Statement of Support must be jointly written by both supervisors and refer to the research and training environment within each institution.

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1 Three years and three months.
2 Three years and six months.
3 See page 10 and 11 of the ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide for details on financial support not in excess of an ESRC award, and/or if you have undertaken one year (or less) of a PhD.
1.6 Interdisciplinary Proposals

The ESRC welcomes interdisciplinary studentships, as many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and other areas of research. For that reason, we ask students to indicate whether their proposed research is deemed interdisciplinary. To meet the criteria for this label, the proposed research should include substantive interaction between relevant disciplines and incorporate training that is not constrained to one disciplinary approach. Please discuss this with your student and Pathway Rep where relevant. Please also ensure your student specifies which other research council Doctoral Training Partnership their proposed work aligns with and, within which, training might be sought. For further information on interdisciplinary awards, please see the ESRC guidance on requirements here (page 2).

1.7 Collaborative Partner Proposals

Should the student wish to include a collaborative partner within their project, i.e. their research would be supported by a private sector company, public sector body or third sector organisation, they must include the details within the research proposal section of their application form. We ask that, in addition to the above they detail if the collaborative partner will be making a financial or in-kind contribution towards the studentship as per the various SGSSS funding arrangements. We ask applicants to liaise with you as their supervisor, as well as with their selected institution’s Dean, regarding such proposals due to the possible funding implications on the studentship. We ask that you help them navigate how to approach a potential partner and to lead on the funding negotiations on behalf of the student. Please note, a collaborative partner can be based abroad, however they cannot be an education organisation or body.

1.8 Funding Arrangements

As of 2019/20, SGSSS operates a funding model where all studentship awards are co-funded by the host institution, usually to the value of one-third, or more. Please see here for full guidance on the different types of SGSSS funding arrangements available for each studentship competition/studentship type.

Home Students

For home students, the SGSSS-DTP funding operates within the standard ESRC studentship package:

1. Tuition Fees;
2. Maintenance stipend;
3. Research Training Support Grant (RTSG);
4. Overseas fieldwork support (where applicable to the student’s project).

The ESRC studentship packages for years 2022/23 onwards are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Type</th>
<th>2022/23</th>
<th>2023/24</th>
<th>2024/25</th>
<th>2025/26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stipend*</td>
<td>£15,890</td>
<td>£16,176</td>
<td>£16,467</td>
<td>£16,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees*</td>
<td>£4,581</td>
<td>£4,663</td>
<td>£4,747</td>
<td>£4,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTSG</td>
<td>£750</td>
<td>£750</td>
<td>£750</td>
<td>£750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Fieldwork (if applicable)</td>
<td>£450</td>
<td>£450</td>
<td>£450</td>
<td>£450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These are approximations based on annual increases of 1.8%.

International Students

The funding arrangements for international students are the same as that of home students, i.e. they are eligible for the full ESRC studentship package and are not required to pay any additional international tuition fees (top up fees). This is because all of our partner institutions have agreed to waive the difference between home and international tuition fees.
Please Note: If an applicant is applying to the University of Stirling, whilst fee waivers will be offered, this will be up to an internal institutional cap of 30%. As such, applicants will be advised to seek confirmation of the funding position from the University of Stirling directly.

**Cross-Institutional Supervision**

As detailed in section 1.5 above, we will continue to support cross-institutional supervision where the arrangements are in the best interest of the student. In these cases, the lead institution will be regarded as the host institution. The expectation is that the host institution will be responsible for covering the HEI contribution. The second institution will not be responsible for any proportion of the contribution. Further, the fees due will be transferred to the host institution with no expectation of a proportion of the fees going to the second institution.

Exceptions will be made where the cross-institutional supervision partnership is with one of our four HEIs that currently do not hold studentships. For these studentships, 33.0% of fees income will go to the second institution as part of the SGSSS reconciliation process, with the remaining 67.0% going to the host institution.

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4 Abertay University, University of Highlands & Islands, Robert Gordon University, University of the West of Scotland.
2. Applications

2.1 Competition Stages and Timeline

There are four rigorous review stages during the Student-led Open Competition. Applicants will be updated after each relevant review stage until they are either awarded a studentship or their application is unsuccessful. For the full Student-led Open Competition timeline, please click here.

1. HEI Review Stage (1 October 2021 to 15 February 2022)

This stage is when institutions shortlist Stage 1 applications, resulting in students being invited to submit a Stage 2 application. Each institution can nominate four applications per pathway for which it is eligible. Of the four applications, up to two may be international applicants.

2. Pathway Review Stage (16 February to 10 March 2022)

This stage is when pathways (made up of the relevant Pathway Reps from different institutions) shortlist Stage 2 applications. Each pathway can nominate six applications per accredited pathway. Of the six applications, up to two may be international applicants. Please note, the Economics pathway is able to nominate up to three international applicants as the ESRC are allowing a higher international allocation for this pathway, i.e. the cap is 50%, rather than 30%.

3. Hub Review Stage (11 March to 6 April 2022)

This stage is when our three Hubs\(^5\) (each Hub is made up of five relevant pathways) nominate 45 applications (15 per Hub) from the nominated applications at the Pathway Review Stage. Each Hub can nominate five international applicants out of their 15 nominations.

4. Global Review Stage (7 April to 13 May 2022)

This stage is when a final review panel consisting of Deans and members of the SGSSS Directorate meet to make the final award decisions. In 2021/22, approx. 34 applications, of the nominated 45 applications, will be funded. Of the 34 studentship awards, approx. 10 can be made to international applicants. On 13 May, the outcome of the competition will be announced to applicants.

Important dates to note are:

- **9 December 2021 at 5pm**
  Deadline for Stage 1 applications. Outcome of HEI Review Stage communicated on **31 January 2022**

- **9 February 2022 at 5pm**
  Deadline for Stage 2 applications. Outcome of Pathway Review Stage communicated on **10 March 2022**

- **6 April 2022**
  Outcome of Hub Review Stage communicated

- **13 May 2022**
  Outcome of Global Review Stage communicated and awards made

\(^5\) See [here](#) for details of our three Hubs.
2.2 Overview of the Application Submission Process

Below is a high-level process for applicants submitting an application for the Student-led Open Competition is below.

Stage 1 Applications:

1. Register for SGSSS Apply as a “Prospective ESRC-Funded PhD student (SGSSS)” or “Current Non ESRC-Funded PhD Student (non SGSSS)”, depending on your individual circumstances.
2. Click here to access the SGSSS Student-led Open Competition program, or locate this on your Application Dashboard via SGSSS Apply.
3. Next, complete the “Student-led Open Competition Pre-Application Questions” section. This will let you and us know if you are eligible to apply and/or if you are a home or international student.
4. Next, complete the “Student-led Open Competition Institution” section. You can only apply to one institution, so when you select this it will become locked in.
5. Next, complete the “Student-Led Competition Applicant Information” section. This is where you will input some basic information about your research proposal, supervisory team and the studentship award you are looking to apply for, e.g. award length and if you want to study full or part-time etc.
6. Next, complete the “References” section by inputting the contact details for two referees. SGSSS will contact your referees automatically to request that they provide a reference for you. Please note, where possible your references should include an academic familiar with your work (can be, but does not have to be, a member of your supervisory team). Both references can be from academics but you may include a work reference, especially if you have been out of academia for more than 5 years.
7. Lastly, upload your completed Application Form along with your transcripts (where available) and your CV (academic where applicable). Please note, all uploads must be in pdf format.

Stage 2 Applications:

1. Once the initial HEI Review Stage is complete, applicants will be notified if they have been shortlisted or not (by 5pm on 31 January 2022).
2. Shortlisted applicants will then be invited (31 January 2022) to upload a Supervisor Statement of Support and to make any final minor amendments to their applications before the deadline of 5pm on 9 February 2022.

Please note, there are two primary deadlines that applicants need to be aware of:

- Thursday, 9 December 2021 at 5pm: this is the deadline for Stage 1 Applications
- Wednesday, 9 February 2022 at 5pm: this is the deadline for Stage 2 Applications (shortlisted candidates only).

Late or incomplete applications, at both stages, will not be considered.

After the deadline of 9 February 2022, SGSSS will work to select the best students who have applied to study within each pathway.

Unsuccessful candidates will be informed if they have not progressed to the next review stage of the competition at the end of the previous review stage. We expect decisions on who has been selected to receive studentships (and, if relevant, who is being held on a reserve list) to be communicated by Friday, 13 May 2022. If you have any queries regarding the above-described application process, please email team@sgsss.ac.uk.
3. Marking Framework (new for 2021/22)

To view the Student-led Open Competition Marking Framework 2021/22, please click here. Please note, this single Marking Framework replaces the two Marking Frameworks from prior years (1+3 and +3).
4. Supervisor Statement of Support

All shortlisted applicants are required to submit a **Supervisor Statement of Support** provided by their prospective supervisor(s). This statement is a key component of the application and of the assessment process. We suggest that supervisors refer to the Marking Framework (see section 3 above) when writing their statement, as the purpose of this statement is primarily to detail the ways in which the student will fit within the institution’s overarching research environment (i.e. within the relevant department and beyond). In particular, we are looking for clarification on how the proposed supervisory team will provide the student with an outstanding PhD experience that engages with appropriate advanced training opportunities.

Once you have completed your **Supervisor Statement of Support**, please return it to your prospective student who will upload it as part of their final, Stage 2 application. Please note, the deadline for Stage 2 applications is **5pm on Wednesday, 9 February 2022** and late applications will not be accepted.

**Supervisor statements should follow the style and content guidance provided below:**

**Style Guide**

- The statement must be in PDF format.
- The statement must display the letterhead of the supervisor’s home institution.
- The statement must clearly state the name and position of the supervisor(s).
- The statement must contain, as a subject line, the name of the student that the reference concerns (e.g. Amna Singh), the SGSSS pathway (e.g. Human Geography), and the host institution (e.g. University of Glasgow).
- Statements should not exceed two sides of A4.

**Content Guide** (statements should include all of the below)

- Proposed supervisory arrangements including second supervisor(s) and their relevance to the project, as well as contingency supervisory arrangements. Where the supervisory team is cross-institutional, the added benefits to the student and their proposed research should be detailed. Please note, if cross-institutional, the statement should be co-written and signed by both supervisors.
- A consideration of the research environment at the host institution, with specific reference to the fit between the department and the proposed topic of research.
- **New for 2021/22:** A consideration of how the supervisory team and the broader research environment supports the development of an inclusive and diverse PhD community.
- Detail of the potential research training courses/programmes offered by the host institution that would benefit the applicant; consideration of broader advanced training that will likely be required including, but not limited to, that provided by SGSSS.
- An assessment of the potential impact of the proposed research and its significance to the academic discipline(s) concerned.
- Details of the supervisory team’s experience of supervision. This should include the number of students supervised by each supervisor (including ongoing supervision) and their completion rates where applicable, i.e. we would like to know the proportion of students who have completed within four years (or equivalent for part-time students). In addition, we are interested to know of any specific research experience relevant to the student’s proposed project, including any particular methodological experience or training.
- Confirmation that the proposal is the applicant’s own work, although you many have provided advice on the content.
- Confirmation that the first supervisor has attended supervisory training within their institution within the last 5 years.
5. **Example Applications**

Please see the two examples below for what makes a good Student-led Open Competition application.

For each, we have included the full application form (slight differences to the 2021/22 form) and the **Supervisor Statement of Support**, both anonymised. Please note, that supervisor statements were written prior to expectation that supervisors outline the ways in which the research environment supports the development of a positive and diverse PhD community.

1. **PhD title: Monetary policy rules under model uncertainty**

   **Key Information**
   - **Institution:** University of Strathclyde
   - **Pathway:** Economics
   - **Hub:** Economies, Mind and Technologies

   Click [here](#) to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.

2. **PhD title: Pro-environmental Voluntary Simplicity: the Lived Experience within Family and Domestic Life**

   **Key Information**
   - **Institution:** University of Edinburgh
   - **Pathway:** Sociology
   - **Hub:** Society and Welfare

   Click [here](#) to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.