SCOTTISH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (SGSSS)
STUDENT-LED OPEN COMPETITION 2022/23
APPLICANT GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS

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

- **Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 5pm**: this is the deadline for **Stage 1 Applications**.
- **Thursday, 9 February 2023 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

This document will provide the application guidance required to submit a Student-led Open Competition application and should be read in full, prior to submitting an application.

The studentship awards made through the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS-DTP) Student-led Open Competition are co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and partner universities (institutions) and are governed by the ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide.

The SGSSS is not a University, but rather a partnership of 16 institutions in Scotland1, of which 12 are eligible to receive ESRC funding across 15 pathways. A pathway is analogous to a subject area/discipline. Not all 12 institutions are accredited for all 15 pathways. A comprehensive list of the institutions and the pathways in which they are accredited can be found on the SGSSS website here.

Each pathway has a designated representative at each institution within the pathway (Pathway Representative - Rep). Before applying to the Student-led Open Competition we ask that you contact the relevant Pathway Rep, as well as your potential PhD supervisor(s). You should discuss your research proposal with them and inform them that you wish to apply for an ESRC studentship via SGSSS. Please note, you must have engaged with your proposed supervisor(s) before applying to the Open Competition. Confirmation of this is required at application stage.

You may apply for an ESRC studentship through only one of the 12 SGSSS institutions however you may apply to multiple pathways within that one institution (up to a maximum of 5 pathways). For example, you may apply to the Education pathway at Aberdeen and the Human Geography, Environment and Urban Planning pathway at Aberdeen, but not the Education pathway at Aberdeen and the Human Geography, Environment and Urban Planning pathway at Dundee. If you apply to more than one pathway within an institution, then you must complete a separate application for each pathway and speak to the Pathway Rep for each.

1.1 Before Applying

Before applying, even if you have the support and approval of a supervisor, we would ask you to consult the eligibility criteria in order to ensure that you are eligible to receive funding from the ESRC. Please see section 1.2 below for full details.

Although you can apply for an ESRC-funded studentship before securing an offer from the institution of your choice, you must have secured an unconditional offer by the time the studentship will start in October 2023 (some institutions start their academic year in September). Please note, SGSSS play no role in institutional admissions process and each institution will have varying application processes, including when you need to secure your institutional offer. In some cases, you will have to have secured a conditional offer prior to applying for an ESRC award, whereas in other institutions you can secure an offer once you have been awarded a funded studentship. It is your responsibility to find out what the process is within your selected institution.

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

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1 See here for our member institutions.
during the Competition. In addition, some highly ranked international students may not be able to receive an award due to the 30% cap.

**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 you do not meet the criteria above, you will be classed as an international student.

To establish if you would be classed as a home student, please see pages 4 and 5 of the UKRI eligibility guidance [here](#).

Before applying, international students should make sure to read section 1.8 (Funding Arrangements) closely.

### 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 3.25\(^2\) or a 3.5\(^3\), 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 award\(^4\), they can apply for ESRC funding. If successful, SGSSS will conduct an audit of the applicant’s training requirements to determine if the student requires 2 or 3 years of funding. Those who will be beyond the very starting point of their second PhD year (or part-time equivalent) when ESRC funding would commence, i.e., when funding would start in October 2023, are not eligible for this funding.

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

### 1.4 Master’s 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 SGSSS pathway, are required to undertake their Master’s in another eligible institution (within the SGSSS-DTP) before transferring to their ‘home’ institution for the PhD programme. If this applies to you, then you must upload a [SGSSS Masters Arrangement Form](#), completed in conjunction with the relevant SGSSS Deans of Graduate Studies Network

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\(^2\) Three years and three months.

\(^3\) Three years and six months.

\(^4\) 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.
representative at the institution where the Master’s will be undertaken. Students should work with their Pathway Rep and supervisor(s) to facilitate the completion of the Masters Arrangement Form.

1.5 Supervision

You 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, including those previously submitted through a SGSSS supervisor-led competition.

First supervisors must be located at the institution to which you are applying; however, a second supervisor/joint supervisor may be part of the supervisory team if they are from any of the 16 partner institutions that form the SGSSS, either with or without pathway eligibility. If you are proposing a jointly supervised project between two institutions, both supervisors (see section 4) should jointly write the Supervisor Statement of Support. They should refer to the explicit benefits of the proposed cross-institutional arrangement. If you are interested in proposing such an arrangement, please discuss this with the relevant Pathway Rep as soon as possible.

Please note, at least one of your supervisory team must have supervised a minimum of two PhD students to completion.

1.6 Interdisciplinary Proposals (optional)

The ESRC welcomes interdisciplinary studentships since many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature. They are particularly interested in encouraging research that crosses over from the social sciences to other fields of science and to the arts and humanities. For that reason, we ask whether your proposed research is deemed interdisciplinary.

To meet the criteria for this label (please see guidance here), the proposed research should include substantive interaction between disciplinary fields and incorporate training that is not constrained to one disciplinary approach, i.e., crosses the boundaries of social sciences to other sciences, arts and humanities. Please discuss this with your supervisor and Pathway Representative where relevant and, if appropriate, indicate your proposal’s potential applicability to be considered as interdisciplinary research. Please specify which other research council Doctoral Training Partnership (or equivalent) your proposed work aligns with and, within which, training might be sought. You should read closely the ESRC guidance on requirements for interdisciplinary awards.

1.7 Collaborative Partner Proposals (optional)

The ESRC welcomes studentships with collaborative partners. ‘Collaborative’ is defined broadly and covers studentships that are supported by private sector companies, public sector bodies or third sector organisations, i.e., non-academic partners. While many proposals feature work with non-academic partners, we are interested in if your studentship will be co-funded by said partner, i.e., they will contribute financially towards the costs of your studentship (please see the SGSSS Funding Arrangements document for details). We ask that you liaise with your prospective supervisor(s) to help with discussions between you and your potential collaborative partner, if applicable.

Should a collaborative partner want to make a financial contribution towards your proposed studentship, you will need to upload a Collaborative Partner Letter of Agreement as part of your online application. The Collaborative Partner Letter of Agreement should describe how the partner will support the project and should include details of the following:

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5 This will act as a precursor to the SGSSS Collaborative Agreement, used primarily within our supervisor-led Open Collaborative Competition, and will be required if successful.
• How the research project aligns to the priorities of the partner organisation and of the nature of the collaboration already underway (for example, the role of the partner in identifying the research need and in developing the application).
• How the collaborative partner will support your supervision/development and your project.
• The agreed co-funding arrangement.
• Any agreed additional funding, i.e., this may include details of how the travel, subsistence and accommodation costs associated with your visits to the non-academic organisation will be covered.
• Any arrangements for special materials and facilities which will be made available to you.
• Any appropriate arrangements relating to Intellectual Property Rights.
• The details of any previous involvement in social science research by the collaborative partner. This should include any collaboration that has previously taken place, e.g., any former studentships they have co-funded.

If you would like to discuss and/or enquire more into collaborative studentships, how this would work and/or the application requirements, please contact SGSS at team@sgss.ac.uk.

1.8 Funding Arrangements

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 2023/24 onwards are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Type</th>
<th>2023/24</th>
<th>2024/25</th>
<th>2025/26</th>
<th>2026/27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stipend(^6)</td>
<td>£18,180</td>
<td>£18,708</td>
<td>£19,250</td>
<td>£19,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Fees(^7)</td>
<td>£4,693</td>
<td>£4,791</td>
<td>£4,892</td>
<td>£4,994</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>

Please Note: From 2019/20, each SGSSS studentship has and will be co-funded by the student’s home institution (SGSSS-DTP institutions) for a minimum of one-third (33.0%). This co-funding agreement is already in place and no action is required by students to facilitate this.

International Students
The funding arrangements for international students are the same as that of home students, i.e., you 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 you are applying to the University of Stirling, full fee waivers will be offered, however the number of fee waivers is limited to an institutional cap (30% of the total number of studentship awards).

\(^6\) All stipend figures are approximations based on a 2.9% increase year on year using the 2022/23 stipend rate of £17,668 as the starting position.

\(^7\) All tuition fees figures are approximations based on a 2.1% increase year on year using the 2022/23 tuition fees rate of £4,596 as the starting position.
Applicants are advised to seek confirmation of the funding position from the University of Stirling directly by contacting the HEI Admin Lead at ias@stir.ac.uk.

1.9 Stuart Hall Foundation Fellowships (optional)

New from 2022/23, Scotland’s two national graduate schools (SGSSS and SGSAH\(^8\)) are delighted to be working with the Stuart Hall Foundation to offer up to six Stuart Hall Fellowships starting in October 2023.

Both SGSAH and SGSSS are committed to the public function of education and to addressing the barriers which exist to accessing higher education. The Fellowships, inspired by the life and work of Professor Stuart Hall and his research legacy in the areas of race, ethnicity, cultural and structural inequalities, will be used to provide opportunities for students from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Applications for these Fellowships are sought from UK candidates from non-traditional or disadvantaged backgrounds who are under-represented at graduate level in the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences in Scotland, and with a preference for those whose planned research aligns broadly with one of Stuart Hall’s many areas of interest: cultural studies, race, ethnicity and inequalities. Applicants can apply through SGSAH and SGSSS’s DTP Open Studentship Competitions, with selected successful candidates invited to apply for a Stuart Hall Foundation Fellowship. Each Graduate School will award up to three Stuart Hall Foundation Fellowships, which will be attached to funded studentships (covering fees, stipend and a research training grant). The Fellowship can be held within disciplines across the social sciences, arts and humanities at selected Scottish HEIs which form part of the relevant Graduate School.

Recipients of these Fellowships will benefit from access to the Stuart Hall Foundation Scholars and Fellows network programme, which includes regular events and opportunities to develop their career and research profile.

If you would like to be considered for the above opportunity, please answer “Yes” to the question, “If successful, do you wish to be considered for a Stuart Hall Foundation Fellowship?”, which forms part of the online SGSSS Student-led Open Competition application form (via SGSSS Apply).

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\(^8\) Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities: [https://www.sgsah.ac.uk/](https://www.sgsah.ac.uk/)
2. Applications

2.1 Competition Stages and Timeline

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

1. HEI Review Stage (3 October 2022 to 13 February 2023)

This stage is when universities shortlist Stage 1 applications, resulting in a decision about whether students are invited to submit a Stage 2 application or not. 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 (14 February to 17 March 2023)

This stage is when pathways (made up of the relevant Pathway Reps from eligible institutions) shortlist Stage 2 applications. Each pathway can nominate six applications per eligible pathway. Of the six applications, up to two may be international applicants. Please note, the Economics pathway can 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 (20 March to 12 April 2023)

This stage is when our three Hubs (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 (12 April to 12 May 2023)

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 2022/23, approx. 30 applications, of the nominated 45 applications, will be funded. Of the 30 studentship awards, approx. 9 can be made to international applicants. On 12 May, the outcome of the competition will be announced to applicants.

Important dates to note are:

- 8 December 2022 at 5pm
  - Deadline for Stage 1 applications. Outcome of HEI Review Stage communicated on 30 January 2023

- 9 February 2023 at 5pm
  - Deadline for Stage 2 applications. Outcome of Pathway Review Stage communicated on 17 March 2023

- 12 April 2023
  - Outcome of Hub Review Stage communicated

- 12 May 2023
  - Outcome of Global Review Stage communicated, and awards made

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 to the Student-led Open Competition.

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 programme, 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 (according to UKRI guidance).

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 Open Competition 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. It is important that you complete this step as soon as possible to allow your referees time to respond before the deadline. Please see section 3 below for full details on references, including how to manage your reference requests.

6. Next, complete the “Student-led Open Competition Application Form” section. This is where you will input the 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.

7. Next, upload your transcripts (where available), as well as any confirmation of academic prizes, e.g., certificates and/or award letters, and your CV (academic where applicable) – all in pdf format. Please note, applications will be anonymised for reviewers and as such all documents you upload as part of your application MUST BE REDACTED, i.e., any documents you upload as part of your application must not contain your name and/or any identifiable information. While we ask that you attempt to redact your documents yourself in the first instance, if you require help with this process, please contact SGSSS via team@sgsss.ac.uk at least 2 weeks in advance of the application deadline, quoting your application ID.

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 30 January 2023).

2. Shortlisted applicants will then be invited (30 January 2023) 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 2023.

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

- Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 5pm: this is the deadline for Stage 1 Applications
- Thursday, 9 February 2023 at 5pm: this is the deadline for Stage 2 Applications (shortlisted candidates only).

Late or incomplete applications, at either stage, will not be considered.

10 See Appendix 1 for a full list of all questions you will be required to answer via SGSSS Apply.
11 Undergraduate transcripts and Master’s transcripts (if applicable), combined as one pdf document.
2.3 Stage 1 Application Process (further detail)

Stage 1 applications can be submitted at any point from the competition opening date, 3 October 2022, until the deadline, 5pm on 8 December 2022.

The SGSSS Apply application process can be saved and as such does not need to be completed in a single sitting. If you plan to apply to multiple pathways, you must submit a new individual application for each pathway. Please note, there is a 5 application maximum and in addition, you can only apply to a single selected institution, i.e., you can submit up to 5 applications for 5 different pathways, however all applications must be for a single institution (and the pathways must be accredited at that institution; see here for details on which pathways are accredited at each institution within SGSSS-DTP).

To register on SGSSS Apply:
- Go to SGSSS Apply and click “Register” in the top right-hand corner of the screen, completing the details as prompted.
- Once registered you will be asked to “please update your eligibility profile”. Please select either “Prospective ESRC-Funded PhD Student (SGSSS)”12 or “Current Non ESRC-Funded PhD Student (non SGSSS)”13, depending on your personal circumstances.
- You will then be asked to enter your “Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion” information. Please note, this information is kept private and is not considered by reviewers during the competition process.
- Next you will be directed to your ‘Application Dashboard’ where you should see the programme, “SGSSS Student-led Open Competition 2022/23”.

To submit application:
Once you have created your SGSSS Apply account and the competition has launched (3 October), you will be able to start a Stage 1 application. As part of this process, you will need to have the following details:
- Information regarding nationality, residency and visas;
- Institution and pathway(s) to which you are applying;
- your potential supervisor(s) name, email address and institution.

You will also be required to complete and/or upload the following as part of your online application submission. Please note, all uploads must be in pdf format only (Word documents will not be accepted).

1. Online application form (which includes a lay summary, section on preparedness and your research proposal14);
2. CV (academic where applicable);
3. All relevant Undergraduate and Master’s level degree transcripts (and translations, if not originally in English) – provisional transcripts are sufficient if you are yet to complete your degree;
4. Contact details for two referees, both provided as part of your Stage 1 application. Please note, an online reference template will automatically be sent to your referees for completion. For full details on references, including how to manage your references, please see section 3, below.
5. Details of any overseas fieldwork you propose to undertake during your research (advised within the online application form).
6. Details of any difficult language training you propose to undertake during your research (advised within the application form).

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12 You are not currently undertaking a PhD and are looking to apply for ESRC funding via SGSSS.
13 You are currently undertaking a PhD (self-funded and/or in receipt of funding less than the funding offered by ESRC) and are looking to apply for ESRC funding via SGSSS. Please note, you must be at the start of your second year (pro-rated for part-time students) at the latest when your ESRC funding would start, i.e., you would be going into your second year in October 2023.
14 See Appendix 1 for a full list of all questions you will be required to answer via SGSSS Apply.
7. A Masters Arrangement Form, if applicable.
8. A Collaborative Partner Letter of Agreement, if applicable.

Again, applications will be anonymised for reviewers and as such all documents you upload as part of your application MUST BE REDACTED, i.e., any documents you upload as part of your application must not contain your name and/or any identifiable information. While we ask that you attempt to redact your documents yourself in the first instance, if you require help with this process, please contact SGSSS via team@sgsss.ac.uk at least 2 weeks in advance of the application deadline, quoting your application ID.

2.4 Stage 2 Application Process (further detail)

If you have been shortlisted, you will be invited to submit a Stage 2 application on 30 January 2023. From this date you will have until 5pm on Thursday, 9 February to complete your Stage 2 application. All that is required at this stage is to upload your Supervisor Statement of Support and to make any final, minor amendments to your Stage 1 application.

1. Supervisor Statement of Support – this is a statement from your prospective first supervisor. If a cross-institutional supervision arrangement is being proposed, then the statement should be jointly written and signed. Full details of what is required can be found within section 3 below.

After the deadline of 9 February 2023, SGSSS will work to select the best candidates 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, 12 May 2023. If you have any queries regarding the above-described application process, please email team@sgsss.ac.uk.
3. References

Each applicant is required to provide the details of two referees during the Stage 1 application process. To do this, applicants need to click into the “Student-led Open Competition References” section within the online application process via SGSSS Apply.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the purpose of references?

We ask for references as this is an opportunity for an academic, or line manager from work, known to you to provide our reviewers with an overview of you as an individual, as well as how you perform academically (or within your workplace). In addition, a reference is a good way for reviewers to try to gauge if you are ready to undertake a PhD.

2. What is SGSSS asking within the reference template, which will be sent to my referees?

“Please provide an assessment of the applicant’s preparedness to undertake and complete a PhD and to flourish as a result of PhD funding, bearing in mind their academic work and other life experiences.”

3. Who can provide my references?

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.

4. I am applying to more than one pathway, what do I need to do regarding my references?

If you are applying to more than one pathway you must request two references for each application, regardless of if they are the same referees. The reason for this is that the application system ‘attaches’ a completed reference to the application associated with the request. Although this might seem awkward for your referee(s), the reference completion process is very straightforward (see next question for details).

5. What happens when I submit my referees’ details as part of my application via SGSSS Apply?

Once you submit your two referees’ details (full name and email address) online via SGSSS Apply, the system will automatically send them an email invite asking that they complete an online reference to support your application. They then need to follow the link detailed within the email to create an SGSSS Apply “recommender” account (this takes a few minutes), at which point they can then complete the online reference template. Once completed and submitted online by your referee, the reference will be ‘attached’ to your application automatically. You will receive an email confirming when this has been done. In addition, you will be able to see when your references have been returned via your application on SGSSS Apply. Please note, you will not be able to read your references, you will just be able to see when they have been completed.

6. When should I request my references?

As you can request your references well before you submit your full application (please see question 7 below), we encourage you to submit both of your referees’ details as soon as possible to allow them as much time as possible to respond. If you only request your references a week or so before the application deadline, this may not be enough time for your referees to respond, whereas if you do this a month before the deadline, you are giving yourself a higher chance that your references will come in by the deadline and your application can progress to the next stage.

7. I am concerned one or both of my referees might not respond to my reference request; what should I do?
As an automatic reference request will be issued to your referees via SGSSS Apply as soon as you submit their details online, it is imperative that you have sought their permission before you send them a reference request. Not only is this polite, but it will also reduce instances where your application is incomplete and thus unable to progress through to the next stage of the competition.

If you have sought permission from your referees and you are still worried one or both may not complete the reference template on time or may forget etc., you can manage your reference requests yourself via your application within SGSSS Apply. The system will allow you to send reminders to your referees as well as change who your referees are (by withdrawing your reference request and deleting it, before submitting a new reference request). We recommended you do not fully submit your application until both your references have been received, as once you fully submit your application you will no longer have the permissions to make changes to your reference requests (please note, you must submit your application by 5pm, GMT, on 8 December regardless of which references have been received).

As the application system will allow you to prepare the rest of your application, i.e., you can save your application and return as many times as you like without fully submitting it, it is possible to manage your references and have your application ready for submission well before the application deadline.

8. **What if my referee submits my reference late?**

We will allow referees an additional 5.5 days to submit references (3.5 working days) after the application deadline of Thursday, 8 December 2022. As such, referees will have until 12pm (midday) on Wednesday, 14 December 2022 to submit completed references. This deadline is final and should references still be outstanding after this secondary deadline, applications will automatically be marked as unsuccessful.

9. **I have been shortlisted after submitting my Stage 1 application and now I need to submit my stage 2 application. As part of my Stage 1 application feedback from my potential institution, I have been asked to request a new/revised reference; how do I do this?**

Should you wish to request a new/revised reference, please contact SGSSS via email on team@sgsss.ac.uk with the details, i.e., which referee you would like us to contact and why, as well as the alternative referee(s) name and email address, if applicable. SGSSS will then contact the referee on your behalf. Please note, you should seek the agreement of any referee prior to contacting SGSSS to contact them. In addition, all references will need to be received by 5pm on 9 February so you must allow SGSSS at least 5 working days to request a reference. If we request an alternative reference and it is not received in time, your original reference will remain.
4. Supervisor Statement of Support

All applicants shortlisted to submit a Stage 2 application are required to submit a Supervisor Statement of Support provided by their prospective supervisor(s). The Supervisor Statement of Support is a key component of the application and of the assessment process. We suggest supervisors refer to the Open Competition Guidance for Supervisors (specifically the Studentship Marking Framework) when writing their statement of support, as the purpose of this statement is primarily to detail the ways in which you, the applicant, will fit within your institution’s overarching research environment (i.e., within the relevant department/school/college) and how you will be supported. In particular, we are looking for clarification on how the proposed supervisory team will provide you with an outstanding PhD experience that engages with appropriate advanced training opportunities.

If you are shortlisted, i.e., invited to submit a Stage 2 application, you will need to upload the Supervisor Statement of Support as part of your Stage 2 application by 5pm on Thursday, 9 February 2023. Late submissions 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 SGSSS pathway (e.g., Economics), the host institution (e.g., University of Glasgow) and your SGSSS Apply application ID (e.g., SLOC-22-0000012345).
- Statements should not exceed two sides of A4.
- As applications are anonymised for reviewers, any mention of your name within the Supervisor Statement of Support must be redacted or replaced with “student” or “applicant”.

**Content Guide** (statements should include all 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, 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.
- 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.
A paragraph on the current and estimated progress of the applicant within their PhD, and confirmation that the supervisor agrees with the applicant’s assessment of their PhD progress (this is a question within the online application form). This point is only applicable if the applicant is already undertaking a PhD in their first year or part-time equivalent.
5. Studentship Marking Framework

To view the SGSSS Studentship Marking Framework, please click here. Please note, since 2021/22, this single Marking Framework replaces the two Marking Frameworks from prior years (1+3 and +3).
6. Example Applications

Please see the three 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 2022/23 online application form) and the Supervisor Statement of Support, both anonymised.

1. PhD title: An Economic Approach to Machine Learning and Algorithm Bias
   Key Information:
   - Institution: Heriot-Watt University
   - Pathway: Economics
   - Hub: Economies, Mind and Technologies

   Click here to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.

2. PhD title: Realising inclusive communicative practices in support services for refugees and other migrants: The role of translanguaging in a linguistically diverse third-sector organisation
   Key Information:
   - Institution: University of Stirling
   - Pathway: Education
   - Hub: Society and Welfare

   Click here to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.

3. PhD title: Between the Life and Death of a River: Contested Knowledge in a Toxic Commons
   Key Information:
   - Institution: University of Edinburgh
   - Pathway: Social Anthropology
   - Hub: People and Place

   Click here to view the Application Form and Supervisor Statement of Support.
7. Appendix 1: Project Proposal Application Questions

Below are questions you will be asked to answer online via SGSSS Apply within the “Student-led Open Competition Application Form” section of your application, relating to your project proposal. Should you prefer to download a Word version of the below to use to develop your research proposal/application responses, please click here. PLEASE NOTE, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO UPLOAD THIS APPLICATION FORM - ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE MADE USING THE ONLINE APPLICATION SYSTEM, i.e., the Word version can be used to develop your application offline and to share with your supervisors for feedback. You will be able to copy across from the Word version to the online application system (SGSSS Apply).

1. **Lay Summary**
   Please provide a lay summary that explains your project and its significance to society/academic discipline to a non-academic audience. (250 words max)

2. **Preparedness to undertake and complete a PhD and to flourish as a result of PhD funding**
   Successfully undertaking a PhD requires not only academic ability but also resourcefulness, commitment and resilience. It involves a range of skills including the ability to communicate complex ideas (about why a research question is of societal and academic importance, why it can be addressed using particular methods and why your findings matter), planning and organisation (including within changing circumstances), working with others (inside and outside of universities) to increase the chances of your research making a difference. You may find it useful to refer to the Researcher Development Framework in thinking about this question.

   Drawing on your own background (including your life experiences, journey to/through university, work experiences or volunteering) please provide a summary of why you are ready to undertake a PhD now and how you will flourish as a result of PhD funding. You might include, for example, personal challenges that you have overcome or achievements that you are proud of in your work, study or life experiences and how these map onto the skills required to flourish in a PhD programme. Challenges could include, but are not limited to, protected characteristics, socio-economic status and of being first-in-a-generation to university or care-experienced. (400 words max)

3. **Contributing to a positive and diverse PhD community**
   SGSSS aims to attract and support a positive and diverse PhD community where everyone can reach their full potential; Research and Development (R&D) is a supportive and fulfilling sector to work in; and is seen as a shared endeavour across society rather than only the concern of professional researchers. You may find it useful to refer to the UK Government’s R&D People and Culture Strategy when thinking about this question.

   Reflecting on your own background and/or proposed approach to PhD study and the opportunities which it will present, how will you support diversity and inclusion in the PhD community? (250 words max)

4. **Research Proposal**
   The research proposal must be a detailed description of the intended research topic. It will form the basis for assessing the application. The proposal should be written in a clear and concise manner. The main body of the research proposal (excluding the bibliography) must not exceed 1,500 words.

   Please also note that reviewers of this proposal will include those outwith your discipline.

   The Research Proposal MUST include the following sections:
   - **Overview** – a general introduction that succinctly sets out exactly what the project seeks to explore. This should also include the research question(s) to be addressed and the overall aim of the project.
   - **Context** – situate the research within the relevant literature/s. This should include a brief summary of research already taken in the field, addressing key works and scholars. Specific attention should
be paid to problems in the existing literature and ways in which your proposed research challenges/addresses these problems. You should also give an account of the theoretical issues relevant to your research, and whether you intend to test existing theories or develop new ones.

- **Methodology** – provide a detailed account of the methodology and/or methods that will be used. Specific attention should be paid, where relevant, to any innovative aspects of the proposed methodology.
- **An indication of ethical issues associated with this proposal** (including those that may impact on formal ethics committee approval and those requiring ongoing consideration in the field/during analysis) and proposed actions to mitigate these.
- **Impact** – a brief discussion of the implications of the proposed research for the broader discipline, any practical applications, and/or any policy relevance.

5. **Indicative Bibliography**

Enter bibliography here. References within the research proposal should be Harvard Style and the bibliography should reflect this. Please only include references referred to in the research proposal.

6. **Risk Assessment**

Please set out the aspects of your proposal that are at particular risk of non-implementation and indicate the approaches that you will take to manage such risks to ensure that your timely submission is not compromised. (250 words max)

7. **Provisional Timeline**

This section must only include an indicative timeline for your research. Any substantive discussion of your research in this box will not be considered by reviewers. Please note, your timetable should take account of the expectation that your PhD will be submitted at the end of your 3 year funded period.

8. **Interdisciplinary Proposal (optional)**

The ESRC welcomes interdisciplinary studentships since many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature. They are particularly interested in encouraging research that crosses over from the social sciences to other fields of science and to the arts and humanities. For that reason, we ask whether your proposed research is deemed interdisciplinary.

To meet the criteria for this label (please see guidance here), the proposed research should include substantive interaction between disciplinary fields and incorporate training that is not constrained to one disciplinary approach, i.e., crosses the boundaries of social sciences to other sciences, arts and humanities. Please discuss this with your supervisor and Pathway Representative where relevant and, if appropriate, indicate your proposal’s potential applicability to be considered as interdisciplinary research. Please specify which other research council Doctoral Training Partnership (or equivalent) your proposed work aligns with and, within which, training might be sought.

You should read closely the ESRC guidance on requirements for interdisciplinary awards.

If this proposal is interdisciplinary, please provide justification as detailed above. (250 words max)

9. **Collaborative Partnership (optional)**

The ESRC welcomes studentships with collaborative partners. ‘Collaborative’ is defined broadly and covers studentships that are supported by private sector companies, public sector bodies or third sector organisations, i.e., non-academic partners. While many proposals feature work with non-academic partners, here we are interested in if your studentship will be co-funded by said partner, i.e., they will contribute financially towards the costs of your studentship. We ask that you liaise with your prospective supervisor(s) to help with discussions between you and your potential collaborative partner, if applicable.
Private Sector
Depending on the size of the private sector organisation, this will determine the expected co-funding of the studentships costs as per the below:

1. Less than 10 employees would equal a 10% contribution towards studentship costs.
2. More than 10 employees but less than 50 would equal a 25% contribution towards studentship costs.
3. More than 50 employees but less than 250 would equal a 33% contribution towards studentship costs.
4. More than 250 employees would equal a 50% contribution towards studentship costs.

Public Sector
If the collaborative partner is the Scottish Government or a Scottish Public Body, then we expect co-funding to be at the rate of 33% for all studentship costs.

Charity/Third Sector
If the collaborative partner is charity or falls within the third sector, then we expect co-funding to be at the rate of 10% for all studentship costs.

If applicable, as part of an application we will require a letter from the collaborative partner called a Collaborative Partner Letter of Agreement. This acts as a precursor to a formal Collaborative Agreement (this is required if successful in this competition).

The Collaborative Partner Letter of Agreement should describe how the partner will support the project and should include details of the following:

- How the research project aligns to the priorities of the partner organisation and of the nature of the collaboration already underway (for example, the role of the partner in identifying the research need and in developing the application).
- How the collaborative partner will support your supervision/development and your project.
- The agreed co-funding arrangement.
- Any agreed additional funding, i.e., this may include details of how the travel, subsistence and accommodation costs associated with your visits to the non-academic organisation will be covered.
- Any arrangements for special materials and facilities which will be made available to you.
- Any appropriate arrangements relating to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).
- The details of any previous involvement in social science research by the collaborative partner. This should include any collaboration that has previously taken place, e.g., any former studentships they have co-funded.

If this proposal will include a collaborative partner, please upload a Collaborative Partner Letter of Agreement.

10. Additional Costs for Difficult Language Training, an Overseas Institutional Visit and/or Overseas Fieldwork

Please indicate if your proposal is expected to benefit from the following:

- Difficult Language Training
- Overseas Institutional Visit
- Overseas Fieldwork

Domestic Fieldwork
If this proposal does not involve overseas fieldwork, can you confirm that the proposed fieldwork is likely to be undertaken within the notional RTSG allowance of £750 per annum. If not, please explain why and specify any likely additional costs. Please specify how additional costs will be met. (150 words max)