



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND (SDS) AND SCOTTISH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (SGSSS) CO-FUNDED ESRC POSTGRADUATE STUDENTSHIPS

SUPERVISOR-LED SDS COLLABORATIVE STUDENTSHIP COMPETITION 2021/22

SUPERVISOR GUIDANCE

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The closing date for applications is **Friday 29 October 2021 at 12pm (midday)**. The closing date will be strictly adhered to.

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

SGSSS plans to communicate the outcome of the competition to successful and unsuccessful applicants on 2 December 2021. As such, successful applicants will be able to start recruiting students during the first quarter of 2022.

Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS-DTP) for PhD studentships commencing in October 2022

In partnership with the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS-DTP), Skills Development Scotland wishes to co-fund up to four PhD studentships in social science subjects to commence in October 2022. We are seeking proposals from academics across the social sciences from any accredited [SGSSS pathway](#) which is interested in hosting studentships.

Projects must align with the SDS proposed topics. You can find a list of the 2021/22 topics online [here](#). For further information on topics please contact Emma Hollywood (SDS Insight and Impact Manager) on Emma.Hollywood@sds.co.uk.

Please note that supervisors can submit only one application per Supervisor-led competition – that is, a supervisor may apply once to both collaborative competitions (SDS and Open) as well as once to the Steers Competition. Please note, the single application requirement applies to any position within a supervisory team – that is, an applicant cannot apply to a competition as first supervisor on one application and second or subsequent supervisor on another application to the same competition.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Background

1.1 Skills Development Scotland is Scotland's National Skills body tasked with developing the skills and learning system in Scotland for the benefit of individuals and businesses. Our vision is for a Scotland in which individuals and business are supported by a skills and learning system that helps them to reach their potential in contributing to sustainable economic growth. We aim to work collaboratively with other agencies to help Scotland to move towards the top of the OECD rankings for productivity, equality, well-being and sustainability. We have four overarching goals (detailed in our [Strategic Plan](#)):

- All people in Scotland have the skills, information and opportunities to succeed in the labour market
- Scotland's businesses drive productivity and inclusive growth
- Scotland has a dynamic and responsive skills system
- SDS leads by example and continually improves to achieve excellence

The services we provide in seeking to achieve our vision are shaped by the Scottish Government's Careers Information, Advice & Guidance (CIAG) Strategies and its Youth Employment Strategy. We work with partners across Scotland to deliver a range of services for individuals and business, including: CIAG services, National Training Programmes, Apprenticeships (Modern, Graduate and Foundation), Individual Learning Accounts, PACE services (support for those facing redundancy) and support for employers to develop the skills of their people.

New, high quality research is a critical factor in contributing to the evidence base which informs the work of Skills Development Scotland. We therefore welcome the opportunity to work with the academic community in providing these new research opportunities for talented Scottish graduates.

1.2 Skills Development Scotland wishes to co-fund up to four PhDs to start in October 2022. The overall aim of the PhD scheme is to provide new research opportunities which contribute to the evidence base for the development of skills policy in Scotland. The sponsorship of PhDs will also increase the capacity of the research community to conduct policy-focussed research relevant to the skills agenda.

Competition Timeline

Please see below a timeline with the key dates for the 2021/22 competition. Please note, before a student is appointed, the home institution will need to complete eligibility checks to establish if the nominated student is eligible for the award, and in what capacity, i.e. home or international student.

Call issued	31 August 2021
Application deadline	29 October 2021 (12pm on Friday)
Application outcomes communicated to applicants	2 December 2021
Student recruitment period launches	17 February 2022
Studentships commence	1 October 2022*

* A later start may be possible if a **student has special circumstances**.

Aims and Objectives

1.3 Skills Development Scotland is working with the SGSSS-DTP to support innovative and cross-cutting research on skills-related issues of relevance to Scotland. We aim to support research which involves rigorous and imaginative designs and methods.

1.4 ESRC funding covers both full and part-time PhD opportunities. SDS will consider proposals suitable for part-time doctoral candidates, subject to a close fit with the PhD topic (for e.g. focus on longitudinal research) and the benefits in terms of promoting wider participation in Doctoral research. Part-time candidates currently in employment will be required to provide a letter of confirmation from their employer indicating their formal agreement and commitment to supporting the individual in their PhD research. Part-time candidates in employment must work for a maximum of 0.5 FTE.

1.5 The aims of the PhD Scheme are to:

- Add to the strategic and cross-cutting evidence base which informs the development, implementation and evaluation of skills policy in Scotland;
- Increase and enhance the impact of high quality academic research on policy and delivery;
- Support research that is capable of being applied in the delivery of social policy and services;
- Develop capability amongst high-quality academic researchers to conduct policy-applied research in disciplines relevant to the Scottish skills agenda;
- Enhance ongoing relations between the academic, policy and user communities.

1.6 It is also expected that students and academic institutions will benefit through an improved understanding of contemporary issues affecting economic and social policy in Scotland with regard to skills and training. This will help to ensure better understanding of how future research can more fully make an impact on policy and delivery and of how that impact can be demonstrated and sustained.

1.7 This scheme is also intended to develop rounded social scientists from a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary training pathways. The competition is open to a variety of approaches in terms of design and methods including quantitative designs, analysis of administrative data, modelling, qualitative and ethnographic studies, action research, participatory approaches to research, and proposals that use mixed methods.

1.8 Applications are expected to consider diversity issues where appropriate in their proposals, both in terms of methodological approach and topic. Proposals are welcome which consider European and international comparative elements.

1.9 Each PhD project will have a named liaison contact at Skills Development Scotland, who will provide support throughout the PhD.

1.10 More information about the work of Skills Development Scotland can be found on its website at: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentScotland.co.uk>

SECTION 2: FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

SGSSS Funding

2.1 SGSSS-DTP funding consists of the standard ESRC studentship package: fees, maintenance, Research Training Support Grant (RTSG), cohort development and overseas travel allowance. The SGSSS funding model states that all SDS studentships awarded will be co-funded by the host institution and SDS as per the below;

SGSSS: 50%; HEI: 17%; SDS: 33%

Please Note:

- SDS do not pay towards cohort development (£4,000 per student in their first year of funding) and as such this will be split between SGSSS and HEIs as per the standard co-funding arrangement:

SGSSS: 67%; HEI: 33%

- Unlike all other collaborative contributions, SDS pay their contributions to SGSSS directly and as such, HEIs are not required to oversee these arrangements. For all other collaborative partnerships however, it is the responsibility of the HEI to agree the funding arrangements with the collaborative partner and to arrange for the funding to be paid to the HEI directly – SGSSS will only ever pay an HEI the SDS and SGSSS percentage of cost(s) for a studentship.

Please see [here](#) for full guidance on the different types of SGSSS funding arrangements available for each studentship competition/studentship type.

HEI Funding Confirmation

2.2 All applicants should seek funding confirmation (email or letter) from the home institution's [SGSSS Dean of Graduate Studies](#), confirming that the institution will meet the required financial contribution, be it an in-kind studentship or co-funded by the collaborative partner (as per the various co-funding agreement possibilities detailed above). This confirmation will need to be uploaded as part of the application submission via [SGSSS Apply](#).

Cross-Institutional Supervision

2.3 SGSSS supports cross-institutional supervision where the arrangements are in the best interests of students. 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 of the relevant funding split. 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 HEIs¹ that currently do not hold studentships. For these studentships, 33% of fees income will go to the second institution as part of the SGSSS reconciliation process (with the remaining 67% going to the host institution).

¹ Abertay University; Robert Gordon University; University of the Highlands and Islands; University of the West of Scotland

SECTION 3: APPLICATION PROCESS

Application Information

3.1 In addition to outlining a high-quality PhD proposal, applications should include a well thought out and broadly based research training programme throughout the PhD.

3.2 Applications are encouraged to demonstrate evidence of:

- Innovation and fresh thinking in the proposed research
- Clarity of proposal, outlining how the proposed project addresses the chosen topic area including clear title, aims, relevance to policy and methods
- Good research design and methods
- A sound articulation of how the potential impact of the research will be maximised through dissemination
- Building upon existing expertise and embedding the early career stage researcher in a relevant research grouping and high quality, active research environment
- Quality of proposed research skills training
- Supervisory experience including evidence of collaborative research
- High standard of ethical practice and risk management in terms of researcher safety

3.3 Applications should focus on the [specified SDS topics](#). There will be no set limit to the number of applications submitted by an institution and/or pathway, however, SGSSS will only accept one application per supervisor.

3.4 It is strongly recommended that the academic institution pay particular attention both to presenting clear objectives and research questions for the topic and to the timing and availability of data and research results. The topics provide scope for flexibility, in terms of design and methods, as well as shaping the research questions. If you would find it helpful to discuss your interests with Skills Development Scotland, please contact:

Emma Hollywood (SDS Insight and Impact Manager) on Emma.Hollywood@sds.co.uk.

3.5 In submitting your proposal, you should address Skills Development Scotland's key questions alongside the development of methodological skills. As always, the PhD should be designed to provide an original contribution to the relevant discipline.

Assessment of Applications

3.6 Assessment of proposals will be coordinated by Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish DTP.

3.7 Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- The quality of the research proposal in terms of conceptual and methodological approach, its consideration of ethics and risk and its plausibility within the time frame;
- The fit with the supervisory team and the quality of the supervisory team in relation to its capacity to support the necessary advanced training of the recruited student – consideration will be given here to the particular institutional setting and its wider national context;
- Collaborative fit – how does the proposal and its supervisory team give confidence that the practical and policy context of the proposal is understood and that the skills necessary for collaborative activity are in place and will be fostered in the recruited student.

Student Eligibility and Residential Criteria

3.8 As per [guidance published by UKRI](#) in October 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 should always remain the primary assessment criterion during the competition.

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 above criteria they are to be assessed as an international student.

Student Recruitment

3.9 Responsibility for student selection and recruitment lies with the successful institutions, although the SGSSS will assist with advertising opportunities through the DTP's network and [FindaPhD.com](#). All collaborative studentship projects should be fairly advertised and abide by the recruitment processes within the supervisor's HEI.

3.10 The ESRC is committed to equality and diversity of opportunity. All studentship opportunities should be offered as a 1+3 or +3 award and for full-time or part-time study. The 1+3 award is designed to support students that do not have a Master's degree prior to appointment.

3.11 Should your home institution not have an ESRC approved Master's programme aligned to the relevant [SGSSS pathway](#), the student will be required to undertake their Master's at another SGSSS-DTP institution where an approved ESRC Master's programme is available (before 'transferring' to their 'home' institution for the remainder of the PhD programme). If this could apply to your student, i.e. your institution does not have an ESRC approved Master's programme aligned to the pathway you are applying under, you must upload a completed [Masters Arrangement Form](#) as part of your application. This must be completed in conjunction with the relevant [SGSSS Dean of Graduate Studies](#) representative at the institution where the Master's will be undertaken.

Please Note: SGSSS will undertake a training requirement assessment for all nominated students, determining the length of the award applicable (1+3, +3 etc.). For more details on possible award lengths, please see the guidance [here](#).

3.12 The recruitment process **must** include an interview involving Skills Development Scotland.

3.13 The successful institution **must** ensure that residency criteria are met in order for a student to receive the full studentship including stipend. The lead HEI is responsible for carrying out these checks. We recommend that the eligibility check takes place after candidates have been shortlisted and before they are invited to interview.²

3.13 Please note that +3 prospective students **must** satisfy the research training requirements laid down by ESRC, and therefore the SGSSS **must** approve all student appointments before they are confirmed. Once

² The ESRC residency criteria are available here: <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/skills-and-careers/studentships/postgraduate-funding-guide/>

you have identified a student you would like to appoint, please have them complete the coversheet and equal opportunities forms and return them to the SGSSS along with a CV before confirming their appointment.

3.14 Please note that all full-time students funded through the Scottish DTP must submit no later than one year after their funding end date.

SECTION 4: SUPERVISION AND PROGRAMME SET-UP

General Information

4.1 To complement the academic supervisors, the student will have access to a PhD Sponsor at Skills Development Scotland. The SDS Sponsor will be a senior member of staff who has knowledge and experience of the PhD topic area and will provide advice and support to the student in relation to the requirements of the PhD topic, opportunities for engagement with the policy community and support to disseminate research outputs. The SDS Sponsor will also attend formal, annual reviews of the PhD with the student and supervisor.

4.2 The SDS PhD Programme Coordinator will also provide a key point of contact for academic supervisors and students and will facilitate mutual support and networking between PhD students and SDS stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the skills policy environment. The SDS Sponsors and PhD Programme Coordinator will work in consultation with academic supervisors and will arrange:

- At least one face-to-face support meeting with the PhD student per annum;
- At least one visit to the student and their supervisor(s) at their academic institution per annum;
- At least one event per annum where all PhD students receiving SDS funding will be invited to present to, and discuss their work with, SDS staff.

4.3 The academic supervisors remain responsible for guiding the research to a successful conclusion, including agreeing the methods, milestones and outputs. Academic supervisors should encourage good communication between the researcher and Skills Development Scotland and help with links with wider academic networks. It is strongly recommended that academic outlets pay particular attention both to the expected outcomes from the research and the timing and availability of data and research results.

4.4 It is expected that students and their academic supervisors will cooperate with the overall scheme aims and activities, and meet reasonable expectations to participate in scheme events and contribute research findings to publications and other outputs.

4.5 All students will be expected to adhere to the standard rules laid out in the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

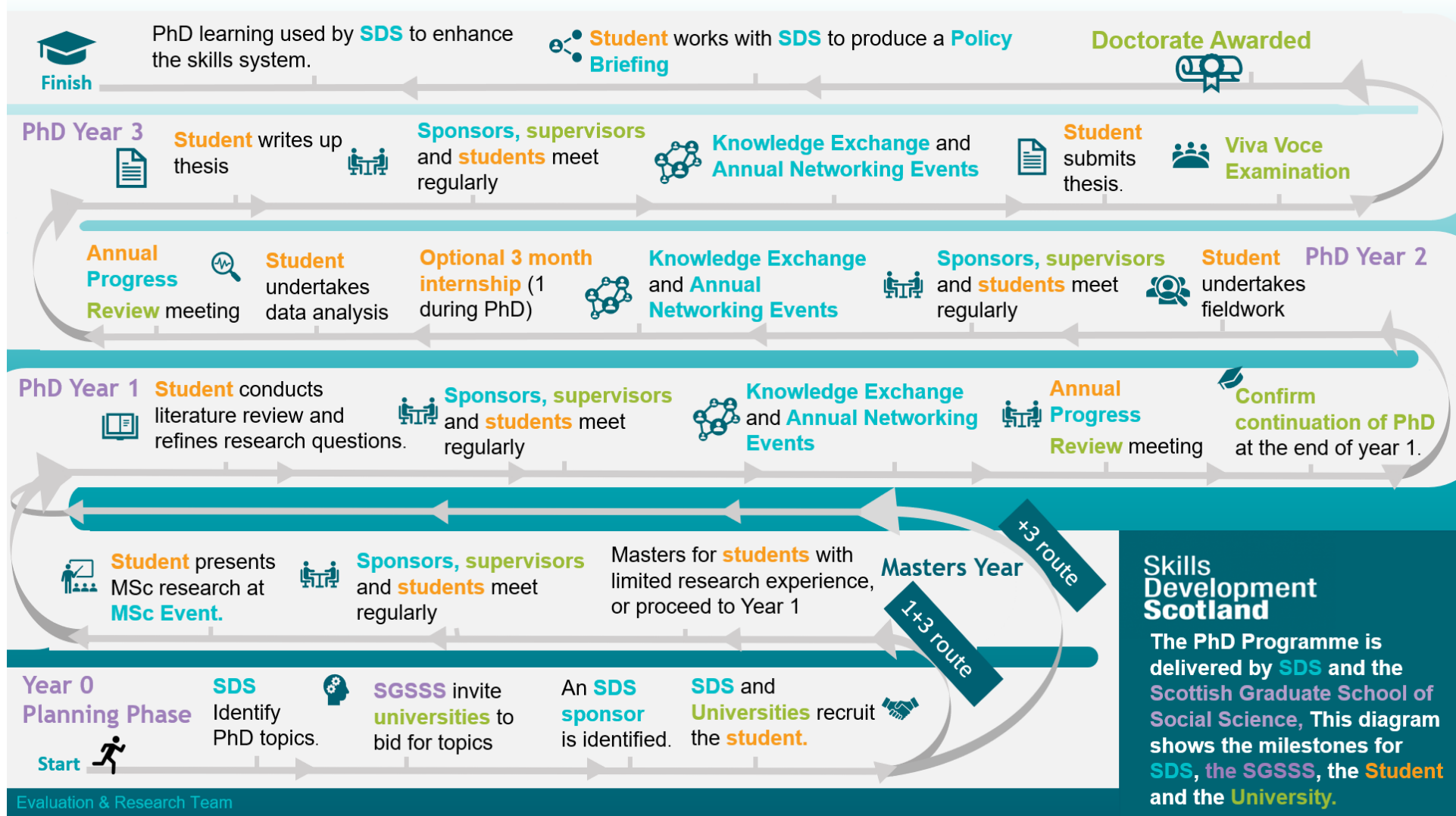
4.6 All PhD students undertaking these PhDs will be encouraged to apply for Skills Development Scotland internships which may be available during the second or third year of their study. Students may also take up Overseas Institutional Visit funding opportunities offered by the ESRC and apply for other internships during the course of their study with permission from both the academic supervisors and Skills Development Scotland.

4.7 The possibility exists for overseas fieldwork to be included in research proposals where appropriate. Where overseas fieldwork is included in proposals, applicants should follow appropriate ESRC guidelines.

4.8 Please see the below diagram for the SDS Collaborative PhD journey. You can also see example projects and learn more about the SDS Collaborative PhD programme [here](#)

Figure 1: The Student Journey

Please see below the student journey on the SDS Collaborative PhD Programme. In addition to the training and development opportunities students have access to through SDS, they will also be able to access the variety of training opportunities that are run by the SGSSS-DTP, including the annual SGSSS Summer School, the SGSSS internships scheme, and the SGSSS Final Year Conference.



SECTION 5: APPLICATION FORM

Notes on completing the [Application Form](#) (click to download)

5.1 Application submissions must focus on one of the [SDS proposed topics](#) with potential supervisors applying only once. The topics provide scope for flexibility in terms of shaping the research questions, design and methods. Academics are encouraged to discuss their proposals with Skills Development Scotland. The PhD student will also have considerable freedom to develop their ideas and the approach to the PhD in the course of their study.

5.2 In the [application form](#), applicants are invited to set out their preferred theoretical and methodological approach to the topic. Skills Development Scotland will be interested in relevant findings arising from the student's work throughout the course of the PhD, however, the main focus of the PhD will be high quality academic work and the application form should reflect this.

5.3 Applicants from any relevant social science discipline (from an accredited [SGSSS pathway](#)) are invited to apply for a PhD studentship award.

SECTION 6: SGSSS SDS COLLABORATIVE COMPETITION MARKING FRAMEWORK 2021/22

Score	Research Proposal (OUT OF 10)	Supervision & Training (OUT OF 10)	Collaboration (OUT OF 5)
<i>Descriptors: Please note that the descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so</i>			
10	<p>An excellent proposal and scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. All components – overview, context, methodology, and impact – will be well thought out and clearly expressed.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PLUS</p> <p>Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>Fulfils criteria 9 to 7 below</p>	<p>Supervision arrangements represent a near-perfect fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes an experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field.</p> <p>The supervision combination meets directly the student’s training needs. The destination HEI offers high-quality specialist training. The research fits well with the wider department/school/faculty. The supervisory team demonstrates an excellent degree of preparedness for supervising PhD study.</p>	
9	<p>Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>Fulfils criteria 8 to 7 below.</p>		

8	<p>Proposal contains clear awareness of the potential impact of the research.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>Fulfils criterion 7 below.</p>	<p>Supervision arrangements represent a very good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes an experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field.</p>	
7	<p>A well-defined proposal with researchable questions, appropriately identified sources, an awareness of the theoretical and empirical background to the research and an appropriate methodology cognisant of ethical issues. The proposal should display an awareness of the research of the economic and societal relevance feasible within 3 years of a funded PhD including appropriate risk assessment.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p>The supervision combination meets the student’s potential training needs very well and has very good plans for advanced training. The destination HEI offers high-quality specialist training. The research fits well with the wider department/school/faculty.</p>	
6	<p>A good and promising proposal but with identifiable weaknesses. Some, but not all, components of the proposal will be problematic, ill- expressed, or show a lack of knowledge.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PLUS</p> <p>A good proposal with only minor but still identifiable weaknesses. The research question will be clear, the methodology appropriate and clearly presented, and most of the appropriate literature identified.</p>	<p>Supervision arrangements represent a good fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes an experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field. The supervision combination meets the student’s potential training needs and has good plans around advanced training. The destination HEI offers high-quality specialist training. The research fits well with the wider department/school/faculty.</p>	

5	A promising proposal that suffers from several weaknesses. The methodology is appropriate but ill-expressed. The proposal is only weakly grounded in relevant literature.	SEE ABOVE (Descriptor represents a score of 5 to 6)	The proposal represents an ideal fit with topic requirements and demonstrates excellent understanding of the policy context. Strong consideration has been given to how the collaboration with SDS (and other relevant partners) will operate throughout the PhD.
4	A proposal with one serious weakness or several minor ones, which suggests gaps in knowledge and a weak grasp of the proposed methodology and its suitability.	Supervision arrangements represent an adequate fit with the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. The supervisory team includes an experienced supervisor with some expertise in the field.	The proposal represents a very good fit with topic requirements and demonstrates very good excellent understanding of the policy context. Strong consideration has been given to how the collaboration with SDS (and other relevant partners) will operate throughout the PhD.
3	A proposal with significant weaknesses in multiple components, little appreciation of possible methodologies, and/or awareness of relevant literature.	The supervision combination meets directly the student's potential training needs and has adequate plans around advanced training. The destination HEI offers good quality specialist training. The research fits with the wider department/school/faculty.	The proposal represents a good ideal fit with topic requirements and/or demonstrates good understanding of the policy context. Some consideration has been given to how the collaboration with SDS (and other relevant partners) will operate throughout the PhD.
2	A problematic proposal that would need considerable additional work before being fundable. All components of the proposal will require further work and/or demonstrate little or no background or interest in their subject.	The supervision combination meets directly the student's potential training needs and has adequate plans around advanced training. The destination HEI offers good quality specialist training. The research fits with the wider department/school/faculty.	The proposal represents an adequate fit with topic requirements and/or demonstrates only limited understanding of the policy context. Limited consideration has been given to how the collaboration with SDS (and other relevant partners) will operate throughout the PhD.
1			The proposal represents a poor fit with topic requirements and/or demonstrates poor understanding of the policy context. Little consideration has been given to how the collaboration with SDS (and other relevant partners) will operate throughout the PhD.