Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS)

2024/25 Supervisor-Led Skills Development Scotland Collaborative Competition Supervisor Guidance

Scottish Graduate School of Social Science

Sgoil Cheumnaichean Saidheans Sòisealta na h-Alba

Skills Development Scotland

Contents

The closing date for applications is **23rd October 2024 at 5pm**. 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 **12 December 2024.** As such, successful applicants will be able to start recruiting students during the first quarter of 2025.

Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (SGSSS-DTP) for PhD studentships commencing in October 2025

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 2025**. We are seeking proposals from academics across the social sciences from any accredited challenge-led pathway (see more below) which is interested in hosting studentships.

Projects must align with the SDS proposed topics. You can find a list of the 2024/25 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, supervisors can only submit one application per supervisor-led competition – that is, a supervisor may apply once to the Open Collaborative, the Skills Development Scotland Collaborative and 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. **Any application submitted to a supervisor-led competition must not be repurposed as a student-led application, with any applications to the Student-led Open Competition which are assessed to be resubmissions of a supervisor-led application being withdrawn from the competition.**

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 Background

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.

Skills Development Scotland wishes to co-fund <u>up to four</u> PhDs to start in October 2025. 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.

1.2 Competition Timeline

Please see below a timeline with the key dates for the 2024/25 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	20 September 2024
Applicant webinar (SDS competition, only) **To attend, use this link and use the passcode: THQ5kLTg**	4 September 2024, 11 a.m.
Application deadline	23 October 2024 (5pm on Wednesday)
Application outcomes communicated to applicants	12 December 2024
Student recruitment period launches	13 March 2024
Studentships commence	1 October 2025*

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

1.3 Aims and Objectives

1.3.1 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.

1.3.2 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.

1.3.3 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.

1.3.4 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.

1.3.5 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.

1.3.6 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.

1.3.7 Each PhD project will have a named liaison contact at Skills Development Scotland, who will provide support throughout the PhD. It is expected that the PhD student, supervisor and named liaison within Skills Development Scotland will meet throughout the project to support the student and ensure that SDS understands project progress.

1.3.8 More information about the work of Skills Development Scotland can be found on the SDS website.

1.4 Institutional eligibility

Of the 16 institutions in Scotland that are partners of SGSSS, 14 are eligible to receive ESRC funding across 21 Units of Assessment (UoA). Each UoA is analogous to a subject area / discipline. Not all 14 institutions are eligible to hold studentships in all UoAs. A comprehensive list of the eligible institutions and UoAs can be found on the SGSSS website here. The two institutions who are not eligible to for funding (Queen's Margaret University and Robert Gordon University) are eligible for any training programming offered by SGSSS.

Each university will hold and update a register of eligibility.

To be eligible to be first supervisor in any SGSSS competition, supervisors will
- Meet any institutional requirements of first supervisors that are not covered below. Contact your HEI Admin lead for this information
- Have undergone supervisor training within your institution within the last 5 years
- Hold a research and teaching or research only contract expected to last for the duration of the proposed PhD project
- Work in a department/school/subject area that is administratively aligned to an eligible UoA for your Higher Education Institution
- Be a research active Social Scientist with output (papers and/or research funding) that is aligned to your unit of assessment

In order to audit supervisor eligibility, as part of the application process, we ask all first supervisors to provide details of a paper or funded research project that adopts a social science perspective. For more on these questions, please visit this page.

1.5 Challenge Led Pathways

From 2024 our studentships will be organised around a set of key societal challenges (challenge-led pathways). These challenges were developed so that they represent the kinds of social science research that our students do and to reflect the themes of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We will ask you to identify in your application form which challenge-led pathway you feel the project best fits with.

1.5.1 What does it mean to be part of a challenge-led pathway?

We want our pathways to give students the opportunity to develop capacity for interdisciplinary connections within the social sciences and beyond. In practical terms, we want our students to be able to communicate key disciplinary concepts and methods emerging from their own disciplines and specific research proposals to other researchers and to those outside academia. We also want students to learn from one another about new methods and theories and knowledge exchange networks. Each challenge pathway will be made up of students at different stages of their research and from different disciplines but with a broad interest in elements of a particular challenge. Training will be organised to encourage peer-to-peer learning and to bring in expertise from non- academic partners. Students from any discipline can apply to any challenge pathway.

1.5.2 What are the challenge-led pathways?

We have 6 challenge-led pathways. Below we set out a brief description of what they cover and give some examples of the kinds of research that our students are already doing. All social science methods are welcome for each challenge pathway and each challenge can be explored from perspectives across the social sciences – for example, the issues might be explored from a sociological, psychological, management, socio-legal, political, historical, linguistic, human geography, social anthropological, policy or economic stance – or in combination with another discipline outside the social sciences. Students on the pathway will come together virtually and face-to-face to share peer-learning on theoretical, conceptual and methodological issues with a focus on communication of ideas beyond the discipline. The prioritisation of learning would come from students' own development needs and those created collectively through early cohort development.

1. **Communication, AI and New Technologies**

This challenge pathway is interested in processes, challenges and solutions associated with how we communicate with each other and how new technologies (including but not limited to AI) are reshaping our world and our interactions with it. We will take a broad approach to the terms above and the pathway may include research looking at, for example: patterns and mechanisms of language, communication and interaction in changing worlds, employment, and industrial implications of smart technologies; lived experiences of health-care technologies; addressing pedagogical and communicative challenges of AI.

2. **Environment, Migration and Demographic Change**

This challenge pathway is concerned with global and local processes relating to environment, migration and demographic change including problems and solutions pertaining to the green economy and biodiversity. The scope for the challenge-led pathway is correspondingly broad and might cover research including, for example: anthropological study of community experiences, differences in the psychology and behaviour of relevant groups, the challenges of longitudinal analysis of demographic data, the concept of the circular economy, sociological theories of othering, the politics and economics of just transitions.

3. **Governance and Institutions**

This challenge pathway is interested in how institutions form, operate and impact on lives globally, nationally, and locally. Institutions are meant in the broadest sense to include international bodies, corporations and religions, governments, arms-length institutions of the state, civil society organisations, formal and informal movements. These might be studied separately or in comparison.

4. **Health, Wellbeing and Communities**

This challenge pathway brings together interests in research about distributions of health and wellbeing across the lifespan; how mental and physical health and wellbeing are understood, experienced, challenged and strengthened at multi-scalar levels. The pathway is also concerned with the social, political and economic functioning of communities.

5. **Securities: Justice, Economies and Conflict**

This challenge pathway is concerned with the societal challenges thrown up by processes relating to justice, economies and conflict at global, national and local levels; on inter- and intra-state problems and resolutions. The scope for the challenge-led pathway is correspondingly broad and might cover research including, for example: comparative studies of justice systems in relation to specific areas of legislation; histories of conflict resolution in particular geographies; studies of macro-economic shocks.

6. **Social Inequalities**

This challenge pathway brings together interests in a range of social inequality problems separately or intersecting) at global and national and local levels and in actions to resolve these. The scope for the pathway is broad and could cover, for example, research on the following kinds of topic: understanding changing patterns of inequality using big data; the lived experience of particular populations; evaluations of the contribution of specific solutions; critical analyses of social frameworks to better understand inequality problems.

1.5.3 How do I choose a challenge pathway?

We recognise that many applications will align with more than one challenge pathway. In discussion with your collaborative partner, you should decide which pathway fits best with the project. You will not be disadvantaged by your choice of pathway. There is no quota system in place for each pathway so you don't need to be concerned about the likely 'popularity' of any given challenge. Our intention is that the challenge pathways will be as broad and inclusive as possible, so you don't need to be concerned that your application will be judged a poor fit – what we want to hear is what you think the contribution of this PhD will be to the challenge area. Students will be able to switch pathways in year 1 of their studentship if they feel it is the wrong fit, and they can also attend events held by other pathways if these are of particular interest and there is space.

1.5.4 What happens if I cannot choose any challenge pathway?

Because the challenge pathways were developed partly through a bottom-up process, looking at the research of our existing students, we are confident that the vast majority of likely proposals will fit at least one pathway. If, however, after reflection, you are unable to find a pathway description that fits your proposed work then you can signal this to us – you will not be penalised for this in the review process – the marking framework does not assess challenge fit. In your student's at-award Development Needs Analysis you will be able to discuss with us which pathway might offer the most fruitful learning conversations for you and your student.

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 HEIs[1] 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).

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[1] For DTP 1: Abertay University, University of Highlands & Islands, Robert Gordon University, University of the West of Scotland; for DTP 2: Queen Margaret University and Robert Gordon University.

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.

3.6   **As of 2024 intake, all ESRC funded students will be expected to submit their PhD within the funded period – that is, the ESRC will no longer recognise the thesis-pending or 'writing-up' year. To support student wellbeing and to ensure that our universities are not penalised for non-completion (the ESRC reserves the right to withhold awards from institutions which do not comply), it is vitally important that plans are feasible within the funded component of the PhD). This will be scrutinised by assessors.**

The research of the PhD must be done in 3 years. ESRC provide an additional 0.5 years but this is not for PhD research it comprises research in practice (+ training) and new skills that ESRC wish PhD students to be exposed to.

Assessment of Applications

3.7   Assessment of proposals will be coordinated by Skills Development Scotland and the SGSSS.

3.8   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

3.9   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

3.10   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 first supervisor's HEI.

The ESRC is committed to equality and diversity of opportunity. All studentship opportunities should be offered as a 1+3.5 or +3.5 award and for full-time or part-time study. The 1+3.5 award is designed to support students that do not have a Master's degree prior to appointment. Please note that the standard length of a PhD to 3.5 years includes expectations around training, in particular a 3-month (full time) placement or part time equivalent. Fractional awards are also possible. The length will be finalised at the DNA meeting.

3.11   Should your home institution not have an ESRC approved Master's programme aligned to the relevant REF Unit of Assessment (UoA), 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+3.5, +3.5 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[2].

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.[3]

3.13   Please note that +3.5 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.

3.14   **As there is a 30% cap on recruiting international students, these studentships will be awarded on a first come, first served basis[4].**

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[2] Emma Hollywood, SDS Insight and Impact Manager (Emma.Hollywood@sds.co.uk).
[3] The ESRC residency criteria is available within the [ESRC Postgraduate Funding Guide](#).

[4] As the proportion of international students appointed each year is a maximum of 30% of the total studentships, some qualified and/or highly ranked international students may not be able to receive an award due to the 30% cap.

SECTION 4: SUPERVISION AND PROGRAMME SET-UP

General Information

4.1   SGSSS and SDS support applications from academics at any stage in their careers, i.e., from early career researchers to more experienced supervisors. What we do ask however, is if an academic is applying as the first/lead supervisor, that they have one or more members on the supervisory team that are experienced in supervising PhD students to completion, i.e., a supervisor with at least two PhD completions. External Partners may be listed as third supervisors.

4.2 From 2024, all PhD supervisors in receipt of ESRC funding will be expected to participate in a SGSSS-led Development Needs Analysis (DNA). This DNA process is designed to help SGSSS identify training, support and networks that will support our successful supervisors and students. As part of the application, you will be asked to identify any training needs that you feel you have to support the project. We will also ask you whether you have ideas at this stage about the placement that your student could undertake, although there is no expectation that projects will come with a placement pre-agreed as this will ultimately be a choice for the student.[5] If successful, we will invite the supervisory team and student to a meeting with SGSSS before the research begins to discuss the project and learn more about how the DTP can support you.

4.3   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.

4.4   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.

4.5   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.

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[5] As above, from 2024 it will be expected that ESRC funded students be given .5 as part of their award (standard length: 3.5). Within the .5 period (6 months), students will undertake a placement as part of their PhD (3 months) and take part in new aspects of training that were not covered in previous guidelines (such as emerging methods, generic research management skills and research in practice training) (3 months). The placement will be the equivalent of 3 months full-time, and could be a research post out with academia, a research post with a different University or research centre within academia, or a non-research post within academia (ie. with a professional services team).

4.6   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.

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

4.8   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. There is an expectation that all funded students will complete the equivalent of a 3 month full time internship, either within Skills Development Scotland or elsewhere (for more on this, [visit this link](#)). 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.

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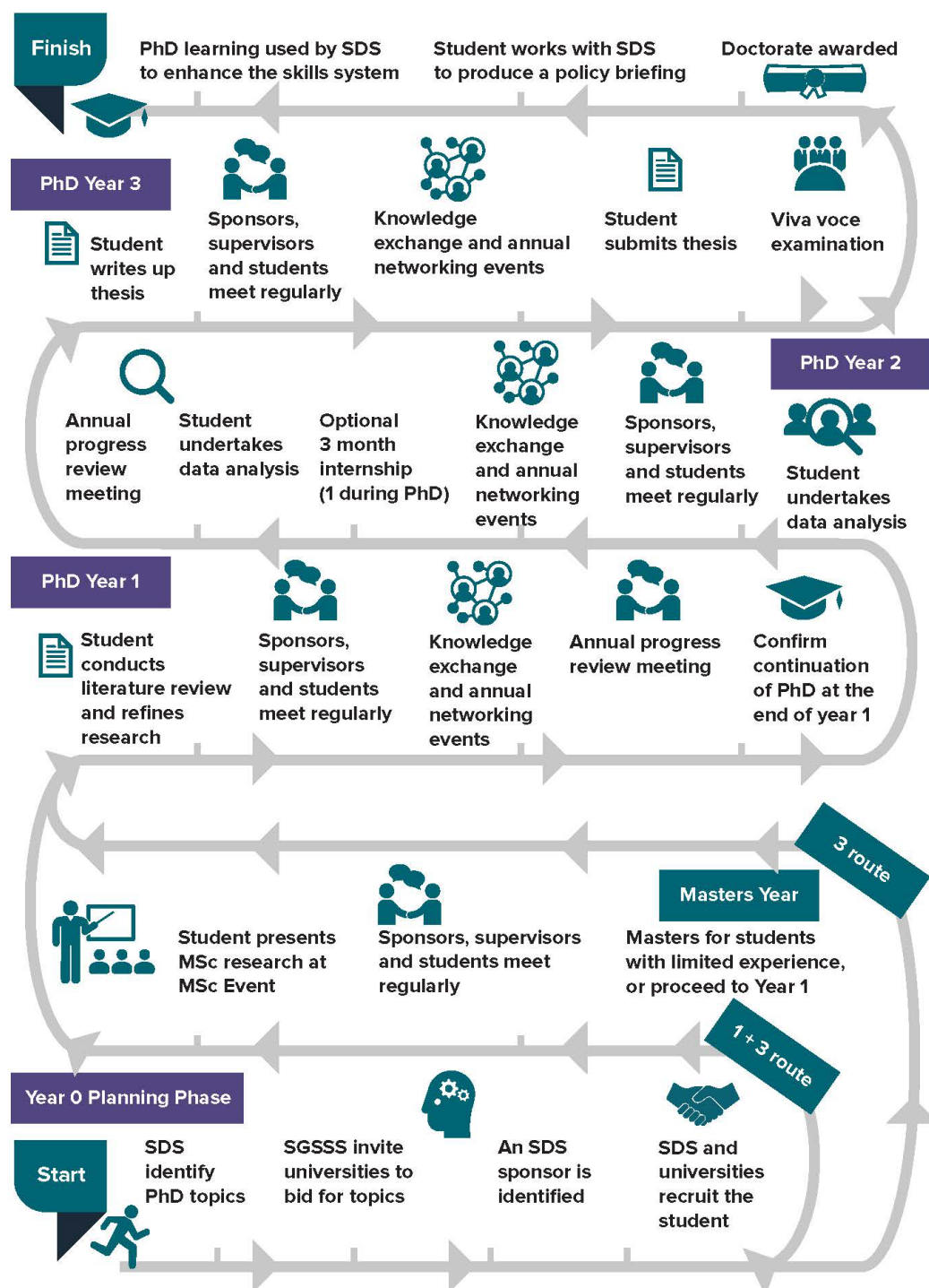
4.9   Please see the below diagram for the SDS Collaborative PhD journey. You can also see example projects and learn more about the SDS Collaborative PhD programme [here](#).

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.

Milestones for SDS, the SGSSS, the student and the university

The following SDS PhD roadmap provides an outline of the SDS PhD journey, students' engagement with SDS, and their key milestones and achievements.

Finish

PhD learning used by SDS to enhance the skills system

Student works with SDS to produce a policy briefing

Doctorate awarded

PhD Year 3

Student writes up thesis

Sponsors, supervisors and students meet regularly

Knowledge exchange and annual networking events

Student submits thesis

Viva voce examination

Annual progress review meeting

Student undertakes data analysis

Optional 3 month internship (1 during PhD)

Knowledge exchange and annual networking events

Sponsors, supervisors and students meet regularly

PhD Year 2

Student undertakes data analysis

PhD Year 1

Student conducts literature review and refines research

Sponsors, supervisors and students meet regularly

Knowledge exchange and annual networking events

Annual progress review meeting

Confirm continuation of PhD at the end of year 1

Student presents MSc research at MSc Event

Sponsors, supervisors and students meet regularly

Masters Year

Masters for students with limited experience, or proceed to Year 1

3 route

1 + 3 route

Year 0 Planning Phase

Start

SDS identify PhD topics

SGSSS invite universities to bid for topics

An SDS sponsor is identified

SDS and universities recruit the student

24.25_SD

SECTION 5: APPLICATION FORM AND SUBMISSION

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 REF Unit of Assessment) are invited to apply for a PhD studentship award. Please review section 1.4 above for more on the institutional eligibility. Liaison with the relevant [SGSSS PGR Lead](#) is encouraged.

5.4   Applications should be submitted by prospective first/lead supervisors meet the criteria listed in pg. 5 (see section 1.4 for more). SGSSS and SDS supports applications from academics at any stage in their careers, i.e., from early career researchers to more experienced supervisors. What we do ask however, is if an academic is applying as the first/lead supervisor, that they have one or more members on the supervisory team that are experienced in supervising PhD students to completion, i.e., a supervisor with at least two PhD completions.

5.5   Applications must be submitted via *[SGSSS Apply](#)* by **Wednesday, 23 October 2024 at 5pm**.

SECTION 6: SGSSS SDS COLLABORATIVE COMPETITION MARKING FRAMEWORK 2024/25 (click [here](#) to download as a standalone document)

Score	Research Proposal (OUT OF 10)	Supervision & Training (OUT OF 10)	Collaboration (OUT OF 5)
	Descriptors: Please note that the descriptors can be used with discretion where there is a good case to do so		
10	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. PLUS Proposal is exceptionally good in all of its components. AND Fulfils criteria 9 to 7 below	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 at least one experienced supervisor with recognised expertise in the field (SGSSS is very supportive of the inclusion of a less experienced supervisor for capacity building reasons). There is excellent fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team demonstrates excellence in their commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and in their existing plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. They have also engaged very well with the identification of their own development needs.	
9	Proposal is highly original and innovative, at the cutting edge of developments substantively and methodologically. AND Fulfils criteria 8 to 7 below.		

8	Proposal contains clear awareness of the potential impact of the research. AND Fulfils criterion 7 below.	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 at least one experienced supervisor with a strong reputation for research in this field. There is very good fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team demonstrates very good commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and in their existing plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. They have also engaged well with the identification of their own development needs.
7	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.	
6	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. PLUS 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.	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 at least one experienced supervisor with a good reputation for research in this field. There is good fit between the research and the wider department/school/college. The supervisory team demonstrates good commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and have articulated their existing plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. They have also engaged with the identification of their own development needs.

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.		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 are appropriate though the fit is not as strong as it could be but at least one supervisor has some experience in the area of the proposed research in relation to methods, substantive topic area and academic/policy networks. There is some fit between the research and the wider department/school/college although the relationship might be rather weak. The supervisory team demonstrates some but not strong commitment to helping the student address their development needs over the course of the PhD and have some plans to meet these within and outside the home HEI. Their identification of their own development needs is weak .	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 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.	There is a poor fit between the proposal and supervisor experience and/or the wider department/school/college AND/OR consideration of likely development needs (supervisor and student) and how they will be addressed is cursory/generic.	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.