

The Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS) Internships Scheme

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The SGSSS internships scheme is a paid, professional internships scheme. We place PhD social scientists with non-academic organisations for 3 months (full time) or 6 months (part time). The scheme enables PhD students to learn more about the knowledge and skills that are required in research careers out with academia. It supports PhD students to develop transferable skills, whilst making a meaningful difference for one of SGSSS' partner organisations.

Since the scheme's inception, more than 400 internship placements have taken place with partners including The Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland, RBS and The Young Foundation.

There are two main routes into the internships scheme:

- The student-led scheme, whereby students can approach a new partner to develop an internship proposal and pitch this to the SGSSS.
- The open competition, whereby researchers apply for an internship project devised by one of our existing partners. This competition runs biannually for Autumn Term and Summer Term placements.

Additionally, SGSSS sometimes advertises new opportunities on an ad hoc basis.

This FAQ document is designed to support researchers planning to apply to an internship placement through the SGSSS, and should also be useful for students currently undertaking an internship. Please contact the team on team@sgsss.ac.uk if you have further questions.

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1. What is the benefit of doing an SGSSS internship?

Collaboration is increasingly important for both academic and non-academic careers. Undertaking an internship through the SGSSS will give you an opportunity to step back from your research and academia, and understand the needs of a partner organisation as well as their working environment. This affords the chance to build transferable skills and sector knowledge that will enhance your CV, whilst also giving you the space for a fresh perspective on your PhD research.

Our Interns say:

“The internship has changed my perspective on future career plans. I now understand that there are other environments where you can utilise your research skills outside academia. I’ve really enjoyed working in government and would now definitely consider this as a good option for a future career.” – PhD Intern with Scottish Government

2. Are internships paid positions?

All students undertaking an internship through the SGSSS will receive a stipend that is commensurate with [UKRI doctoral stipend levels](#). For 2023/24, the doctoral stipend is £18,622 – this equates to £4,655.50 in total for a 3 month (full-time) or 6 month (part-time) internship.

The internship stipend is administered by the PhD intern’s University, through our HEI Admin Lead contact. This will be processed differently, depending on your funding status. Please see a summary below.

- For full-time ESRC-funded students, there will be no interruption to your funding – you will receive your funding as normal, and SGSSS will extend your funding end date by 3 months at the end of your PhD.
- For part-time ESRC funded students, you can in some instances continue the PhD alongside your part-time internships, provided that you have no other working commitments. In this case, your funding would continue as normal during the internship and your funding end date would not be extended.
- For non-ESRC funded students, your institution will administer monthly payments during your internship to the amount of the stipend level. Any regular funding will typically pause for the duration of the internship and resume once the internship is complete.
- Please note: international students with a student visa can only complete an internship part-time alongside full-time study. This means that your internship stipend would supplement existing funding arrangements and your end date for your PhD would not be extended.

3. Who is eligible to do a SGSSS internship?

- Applicants must be eligible to work in the UK.
- Applicants must be registered for a PhD at a Scottish university in a social science discipline.
- Applicants must be in their 2nd or 3rd year (or part-time equivalent) at the date of the start of the internship. Final year students need to have more than 3 months left of their PhD when the internship starts.
- Please note that UK public sector bodies, such as the Scottish Government, have additional nationality and eligibility requirements. Applicants that do not meet these criteria are not eligible to apply for internships with these organisations. **Please [check your eligibility](#) before you make an application.**

4. I hold a Student Visa, am I eligible to apply?

If you hold a student visa and would like to undertake an internship, you can only do so on a part-time basis alongside your normal study. Wherever possible, we offer internship placements as part-time or full-time, to enable you to do this. Part-time internships would be calculated as 17.5 hours per week.

Please note: It is your responsibility to ensure that undertaking a placement would not contravene the terms of your visa or funding arrangements before making an application. Some Universities and/or funders place restrictions on the number of hours that a full-time PhD student can work each week.

All international students will also need to make sure that they meet UK civil service nationality criteria if applying for a public sector placement (see above).

5. Why am I not eligible for the scheme if I am in my 1st / 4th year (or part-time equivalent)?

- It is expected that a student completing an internship will have the requisite experience and skill-set in order to complete the work. It is felt that students in their first year (or first and second year for part-time students) will benefit more from focusing exclusively on their PhD studies and building up the requisite core skills.
- However, when you are coming towards the end of your first year (or part-time equivalent), you can apply for an internship that would start during the second year of your studies. For example, you can apply in the summer of your first year for a placement that would start during your second year.
- For students in their fourth year of study (or part-time equivalent), it is normally envisaged that this period will facilitate the writing-up portion of the PhD and may include your viva voce and any subsequent corrections. During this period, it would not be advisable to interrupt or impede progress, and some funders specifically do not allow it. We therefore do not permit students in the fourth year of their study (or within 3 months of that period) to undertake an internship.

6. How do I apply for a SGSSS internship?

Student Led Internships Scheme: contact the team on team@sgsss.ac.uk. We will be able to offer you guidance and support, and will share the proposal document that you and the placement partner would need to complete.

Open Internships Competition: we advertise the competitions and any bespoke internship opportunities throughout the year. Applications will need to be made through our online application platform [SGSSS Apply](#). To get a notification of upcoming opportunities, make sure you have signed up for the weekly [SGSSS Digest](#).

The online process for SGSSS Apply involves:

- Inputting information such as personal details, period of PhD study, pathway or discipline;
- Selecting the chosen internship host and title;
- Providing a description of the skills and experience you can bring to this internship (max 1000 words);
- Providing a short statement on your reasons for applying, what you'd hope to gain from an internship and how this fits with your PhD or career plans;
- Upload your CV (2 pages max);
- Uploading a Statement of Support from your Supervisor. Your supervisor will need to be aware of the timeline in order to contribute meaningfully to your application within the deadlines.

We strongly advise applicants to complete the application process at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline. If you have any questions about this process, please contact us at team@sgsss.ac.uk.

7. Can I apply for more than one internship?

You can apply for more than one internship in the same call. However, in each call a student can only accept and undertake one internship.

For Scottish Government internships, you can apply for up to 4 placements within Scottish Government. There is also an opportunity to apply to a "general pool", whereby you could be allocated to any of the advertised projects. You can highlight on the [SGSSS Apply](#) application form your preferences from the listed internships.

If you have previously completed an internship through SGSSS and would like to apply for a second internship, you are able to do so provided that you still fit eligibility criteria. In some cases, preference may be given to applicants who have not already completed an internship through SGSSS.

8. None of the internship projects advertised are connected to my academic research, should I apply?

We strongly encourage students to choose opportunities to work outside the area of their PhD topic in order to gain wider experience. It is important to note that PhD internships cannot contribute to your PhD study – the intellectual property from an internship will belong to your host organisation, and no data or resources that are developed through the internship can be utilised for your PhD.

In any case, students are encouraged to carefully consider the information requested in the application form and pay particular attention to setting out their expertise in particular research methods to address the desired skills listed. Applicants are usually not required to have academic experience in the policy area of the internship unless specified in the project description.

9. Can I work on my PhD at the same time as doing an internship?

- Part-time students can work on a part-time internship at the same time as working on their studies part-time, provided that you do not have other work commitments. Please see Question 10 for further information.
- Full-time students are expected to focus on the internship and suspend PhD study. It is also expected that PhD interns will not undertake any teaching commitments whilst on their placement. Previous PhD interns have felt the benefit of stepping back from their PhD and gaining new perspectives.
- The above is different for full-time international students who hold a Student Visa, as you will not be able to suspend study. This means that you can only undertake internships part-time alongside full-time study and must remain enrolled in your PhD. See Q.4
- In some cases, for example if the student was changing the status of their studies to part-time anyway, there may be a strong argument for a full-time student doing an internship part-time and continuing their studies part-time. Such requests would be considered on a case by case basis and would require the approval of your University and Funder.

10. I am a part-time student, can I undertake an internship on a part-time basis?

Yes, provided the internship is advertised as a part-time option: not all projects can be offered part-time because they are time-sensitive.

- Part-time internships last for 6 months and you would be paid the stipend pro rata. Part-time hours are usually calculated as 17.5 per week.
- You must be in your third, fourth, fifth or sixth year of part-time study (equivalent to second or third year full time) when you start the internship, with more than 6 months left when you start the internship.
- Please note, all students who are undertaking an internship are expected not to undertake additional work or teaching for the duration of the placement in order to remain focused on fully participating in and benefiting from this opportunity.

11. What type of expenses can I claim during my internship?

Students can claim up to a maximum of £2,400 for expenses for an internship. These expenses are designed to cover exceptional costs that you would not have incurred if not undertaking an internship. For example, if a PhD student needs to relocate more than 30 miles to undertake the internship, we can recompense accommodation costs.

Full details about what can and cannot be claimed can be found in the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#). Please note that all expense claims relating to internships must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Admin Lead](#).

12. I am based more than 30 miles from my internship location. Can the SGSSS support me to commute or relocate for the duration?

The SGSSS wants to ensure that students are not subject to greater expense by undertaking the internship – for example by having to pay rent in two places at the same time. Students who live more than 30 miles from their internship location can claim up to a maximum of £2,400 (for a three month full-time internship or part-time equivalent) to cover reasonable additional travel and accommodation for the period of the internship.

Please note, internships taking place remotely may still require you to be located within the United Kingdom (such as internships with the Scottish Government). If you will not be residing in the UK at the time of placement, please ensure that you discuss this with the SGSSS team prior to submitting an application.

For full details of what can be claimed, please see the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#). All expense claims relating to internships must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Admin Lead](#).

13. I need to relocate and rent a property for the duration of the internship – can I receive funds in advance?

SGSSS will support you to relocate if you live more than 30 miles from the internship location, and if there is not a hybrid model that will enable you to undertake it without relocating. You will need to provide a signed tenancy agreement stating the property's address, the duration of the lease and the price per month. Students are to ensure that rental amounts are not excessive. We will not pay for students staying with family.

For full details of what can be claimed, please see the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#). All expense claims relating to internships must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Admin Lead](#).

14. I need to book travel and a season ticket is very expensive – can I receive funds in advance?

Yes - you will need to send a price projection/a link to the stated cost on the travel website. Please purchase weekly or monthly season tickets for public transport wherever possible in order to claim back for travel.

Please note that students are expected to use the most economical method of travel. You will need to provide receipts to your institution for the travel you have purchased in order to claim for these expenses.

For full details of what can be claimed, please see the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#). All expense claims relating to internships must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Admin Lead](#).

15. I have children and taking up an internship would entail increased childcare costs – will this be taken into account?

Yes – a student may claim up to a maximum of £2,400 for reasonable travel/accommodation and additional childcare costs. It is reasonable to be able to claim for costs related to childcare that are additional as a result of participating in the scheme (i.e. additional costs directly related to scheme participation, not costs that you would have carried anyway). Costs will be reimbursed as long as childcare is booked with a registered scheme/ care supplier etc. and on provision of receipts or invoices.

For full details of what can be claimed, please see the [SGSSS Expenses Policy](#). All expense claims relating to internships must be claimed from your institution. For further information on how to claim at your institution, contact your local [HEI Admin Lead](#).

16. My internship host requires me to apply for Disclosure Scotland – can I recover this cost?

Yes, your host should reimburse you for this cost if it is necessary for the internship.

17. Am I entitled to annual leave during my internship?

For a full-time internship, PhD interns are entitled to six days leave plus any public holidays that arise during the internship. This is pro rated for part time students. Flexi-time working can be discussed and agreed with the local line manager. Leave and flexi-time working are at the discretion of the local line manager, based on the terms of the Placement Agreement you will sign when you start your internship.

18. What happens if I am unwell during the internship?

If you are unwell during the internship and are not able to work, you need to inform the host organisation and the SGSSS before the start of work that day. You will then need to inform the host organisation and the SGSSS when you are able to start working again. You can contact the SGSSS by emailing:

team@sgsss.ac.uk.

SGSSS will support absence for medical reasons for up to 3 weeks during a three-month full-time internship. This is calculated pro rata from UKRI guidelines on sickness and absence. If an absence exceeds 3 weeks, SGSSS is likely to advise that the internship should be terminated and payments will cease. It may be possible to resume the internship at a later date but only in cases where the host and SGSSS agree that the internship still aligns with the host's requirements.

19. I have personal circumstances that make me unsure if an internship is possible, is there someone I can speak to?

Yes, please contact the SGSSS team at team@sgsss.ac.uk if you would like discuss a specific circumstance that may be making you feel unsure whether an internship is possible. This may include (but is not limited to) caring responsibilities, disability and/or need for flexible/remote working patterns. Many of our partners can offer flexibility, and we encourage you to reach out to us to discuss this further prior to making an application.

20. Where can I find further information?

- SGSSS Expenses Policy: https://social.sgsss.ac.uk/files/documents/sgsss-expenses-policy_july-2021.pdf
- HEI Admin Leads: <https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/about-us/#HEI-Admins>
- Current Internship Opportunities: <https://www.sgsss.ac.uk/internships/current-opportunities/>