

**North West
Social Science
Doctoral Training
Partnership**



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

CASE Studentship Guidance for October 2027 Entry

Please read this guidance document in full before completing and submitting the CASE Studentship Application Form.

Introduction

North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership (NWSSDTP) collaborative 'CASE' Studentships provide an opportunity for PhD students to gain first-hand experience of work outside an academic environment, with the student working on a doctoral project supported by both academic supervisors and a supervisor from a non-Higher Education Institution (HEI) partner organisation. CASE studentships used to be 'Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering', but the acronym now indicates collaborative studentships more broadly.

Contents

Application Process	2
Non-HEI Partner Organisation Eligibility	2
Pathways	3
Priority Areas	3
Recruiting and nominating a student	4
Studentship Structure	5
Student Residential Eligibility	5
Student Academic Eligibility	6
Financial Basis of the Studentship	6
Research in Practice placements	7
Formal Agreement	8
Guidance Notes for CASE Studentship Application Form	8
APPENDIX 1: List of NWSSDTP Accredited Pathways	15

Application Process

The NWSSDTP CASE studentship competition is a two-stage process.

The **first stage** is the proposal stage, where an academic and a non-HEI partner organisation collaborate to put together a proposal for a CASE Studentship and submit a CASE Studentship Application Form to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk. All the proposals are reviewed and assessed within the relevant pathway (see [Appendix 1](#)), then awards are made by the NWSSDTP CASE Allocation Committee.

The deadline for submitting the CASE Studentship Application Form is 26th October 2026.

If the proposal is successful, the **second stage** of the process will require the academic and the non-HEI partner organisation to recruit a suitable postgraduate candidate to undertake the project. The project will need to be advertised and a selection process undertaken in formal consultation with the relevant Institutional Pathway Representative. When a suitable candidate is recruited, the academic lead (the primary supervisor) must notify the NWSSDTP.

The deadline for the submission of the CASE Student Nomination Form is 1st April 2027.

Please note that prospective PhD students cannot apply directly to this competition, but may wish to apply via the NWSSDTP Standard Studentship Competition: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/>, within which they can propose their own collaborative project with a non-HEI partner organisation.

Non-HEI Partner Organisation Eligibility

Collaborating partners can be private sector companies, public sector bodies or voluntary organisations based in the United Kingdom.

In exceptional cases, organisations based overseas may be eligible, but they must have an established UK link (e.g. UK-based research and/or production capability) and be able to provide the student with an opportunity to gain skills not currently available in the UK.

A private sector company is defined here as being at least 50% privately owned with a 'wealth creation' base in the United Kingdom. Certain public sector bodies, e.g. UK owned companies in which the government holds more than a 49% stake but which generates at least 60% of

its income from outside UK government or other UK public sector sources, are also included in this definition.

In identifying an appropriate collaborating partner(s) and reaching an agreement on the arrangements for the research project, applicants should consider:

- The description of the research project(s),
- The arrangements for joint-supervision (with the partner and possibly across DTP institutions),
- The arrangements for seeking ethical approval and for agreements on intellectual property arising from the research,
- The means of identifying an appropriate student (see guide on eligibility).

Pathways

CASE Studentship Applications must go through an eligible NWSSDTP Pathway (please see [Appendix 1](#) for a list of accredited pathways). Prospective applicants **must** contact the relevant Institutional Pathway Representative prior to submission of any CASE application, to discuss the project: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/about/pathway-leads/>

If the application is successful, the Institutional Pathway Representative should be involved in the recruitment process (i.e. sit on the interview panel) and sign off on the choice of candidate on behalf of the NWSSDTP.

Priority Areas

The ESRC have awarded the NWSSDTP 9 steered awards each year in the following Priority Areas:

- Advanced Quantitative Methods (3 awards)
- Data Skills (3 awards)
- Interdisciplinary research which straddles other research council remits (3 awards)

We strongly encourage applicants to identify if their proposed project fits into a Priority Area, as this may strengthen their application and will be considered positively in terms of fit with a priority area. Further details on the Priority Areas can be found in the Guide to NWSSDTP Priority Areas: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/priority-areas/>

Recruiting and nominating a student

If a CASE Studentship Application is successful in the first phase of the competition, they will be invited to recruit a student to undertake the project.

It is permissible for a postgraduate candidate to be connected to the project from the outset. To allow full assessment of the candidate alongside the project itself, a CASE Student Nomination Form (<https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/collaboration/case-studentships/>) must be submitted with the CASE Application Form by the 26th October.

If a specific candidate was not mentioned on the CASE Studentship Application Form, a formal recruitment process must be undertaken to find a candidate. Please note that it is mandatory for the relevant [Institutional Pathway Representative](#) to be involved in the selection process.

NWSSDTP CASE Studentships can be advertised on FindAPhD.com or jobs.ac.uk. Availability of funding for such adverts should be discussed with Schools/Faculties in advance, as there is not funding available from the NWSSDTP for advertising studentships. Academics should also utilise their own contacts and disciplinary mailing lists for publicity purposes.

After recruitment concludes, the final nomination paperwork must be submitted to the NWSSDTP Academic Management Committee for assessment by a panel **before any offers of funding are made**. This is to ensure that CASE candidates' responses to Preparedness for Postgraduate Research and Development Needs Analysis questions receive the same level of scrutiny and recognition as students recruited via the Standard competition.

Due to the UKRI cap on international candidates, where an international candidate is the first choice for a CASE project, a reserve home candidate should also be nominated. The Academic Management Committee will reserve the right to request additional information about nominees where needed and, if necessary, prioritise home reserve candidates for projects if the UKRI cap may otherwise be exceeded. Nomination outcomes will be confirmed by the 21st April.

Should an academic applicant be successful in gaining a CASE award but fail to recruit a suitable candidate, the NWSSDTP has the right to withdraw the award from the project and potentially reallocate the funds.

Studentship Structure

CASE Studentships can be held either on a full time or part time basis. CASE Studentships will usually just be for doctoral study, but a case can be made for master's + PhD funding where the identified or recruited ideal student does not already have a social science master's qualification. Candidates would not usually be expected to work with the non-HEI partner organisation during their master's year.

Student Residential Eligibility

NWSSDTP Studentships are open to both Home and International (including EU and EEA) candidates. Please note that NWSSDTP Studentships will only fund tuition fees up to the Home rate. This is £5,238 in 2026/27 (exact rate for 2027/28 subject to confirmation from UKRI). International tuition fees are usually substantially higher than this sum. All NWSSDTP universities have committed to waiving increased tuition fees for international NWSSDTP students. International students recruited to NWSSDTP Studentship will not be expected to pay any additional tuition fees themselves.

Please also be aware that the NWSSDTP is only permitted to award a maximum of 30% of its studentships - a maximum of 18 awards - to international students per annum.

To be classed as a home student, candidates 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 candidate does not meet the criteria, they will be classed as an International student.

This will not apply to Irish nationals living in the UK whose right to study and to access benefits and services are preserved on a reciprocal basis under the Common Travel Area arrangement. Such applicants will be classified as Home students.

You must refer to the UKRI Terms and Conditions for Training Grants for full details

<https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/grant-terms-and-conditions/>

Student Academic Eligibility

Candidates applying for master's + PhD funding are usually expected to have previously undertaken an undergraduate course, while candidates applying for PhD funding only will usually have undertaken both an undergraduate and a master's course. Typically, candidates will have undertaken these courses at a recognised UK Higher Education Institution (HEI), although applications with qualifications from outside the UK are welcome. It will be necessary to ascertain whether such qualifications equate to a UK honours degree, and at what level. The NWSSDTP bases its assessments of qualifications attained outside the UK on the British Council's NARIC guide. For non-UK qualification transcripts not in English, an official translation must be provided with the application form.

Financial Basis of the Studentship

An NWSSDTP Studentship consists of:

- Payment of academic fees, at the standard UKRI Home rate (£5,238 in 2026/27, exact rate for 2027/28 subject to confirmation from UKRI).
- Maintenance Stipend (£21,805 in 2026/27, exact rate for 2027/28 subject to confirmation from UKRI)
- Access to a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) for reimbursement of research related expenses including - but not limited to - conference attendance, training courses and payment of participants.
- Opportunity to apply for additional funding towards:
 - Fieldwork costs (usually only permitted when need for fieldwork is outlined at this initial application stage)
 - Overseas Institutional Visits
 - [Research in Practice Placement](#) Expenses (where appropriate)

Contribution from the non-HEI partner organisation

There are no compulsory financial contributions from the non-HEI partner organisation. If a non-HEI partner organisation wishes to contribute financially, one typical arrangement would be the contribution of £4,000 a year (£2,000 to the student, £2,000 to the relevant school/pathway). This is just one example - the most appropriate financial arrangement for

each project should be discussed and agreed with the partner prior to the submission of the application.

There are positive benefits to financial contributions from the partner as the stipend would be increased and as such is likely to attract higher quality candidates, particularly where experience of employment as well as an appropriate academic background is being sought. It can also provide better financial stability reducing the risk to the project from a student failing to complete their studies.

It is expected that non-HEI Partner will usually meet any costs associated with internal company requirements (e.g. DBS checks or specialist training) for the student to be allowed access to sites and/or systems.

In kind contributions would be resources such as office space at the non-HEI partner organisation's offices, provision of specialist training courses, access to data and resources, for example. Supervision costs from the non-academic partner do not count as an in kind contribution as this is a basic expectation from the partner.

If the partner wishes to contribute financially, details of payments/invoices should be arranged in advance with the school where the student will be based, and the details of the process should be part of the formal agreement with the partner.

Please note that the financial and/or in kind contribution of the partner organisation will be assessed during the competition on a case by case basis, taking into account the relevant sector and scale of the partner organisation.

Research in Practice placements

Please note that all NWSSDTP students will be expected to undertake a three-month [Research in Practice placement](#) in academia, policy, business or a civil society organisation during the course of their studentship. This will give them the practical opportunity to develop their transferrable skills and apply their research skills in different contexts. An additional three months of studentship funding will be allocated to enable this.

It is permissible for CASE Students to complete this placement requirement with the same non-HEI Partner as their CASE Studentship. However, the placement project must be entirely distinct from the content of the CASE Studentship PhD project. CASE students may instead

choose to undertake an internship with a different non-HEI Partner, or an academic Research Assistantship. **Ideas for potential placements do not need to be proposed at this stage.**

Formal Agreement

Once a student has been appointed, a signed formal agreement must be produced between the non-HEI partner and the University at which the student will be based. The academic applicant (i.e. the primary supervisor) is responsible for pursuing this, with the support of their relevant University's contracts team.

This agreement must be finalised and sent to the NWSSDTP prior to the commencement of the student's programme in October 2027.

Please submit any queries about NWSSDTP CASE Studentships to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk

Guidance Notes for CASE Studentship Application Form

1. Candidate Details

The CASE Studentship Application should be submitted by the academic who will be the first supervisor on the proposed project, not the non-HEI partner organisation or the prospective student.

Please detail which of the 21 NWSSDTP Pathways the project comes under (see Appendix 1 for a list of eligible pathways). The Institutional Pathway Representative for this pathway should be informed about the application as early as possible prior to submission.

Please detail the University (Keele University, University of Lancashire, Lancaster University, University of Liverpool, or University of Manchester) and the School or Institute where the PhD student would be situated, if the application were successful.

2. PhD Project Proposal

Please outline the overall goals and timeline of the proposed research project.

The panel will have the discretion to 'mark down' an application where the project proposal is not clear and concise. The NWSSDTP reserve the right to disqualify proposals that exceed the word limit. It is also important that applicants give a detailed account of probable

methodology that will be employed and the timetable for the research, so that the panel can assess whether or not the proposed research is feasible in the time scale given.

It is also important to make clear the social science content of the proposal, to enable the panel to make a clear decision that the field of study falls within the remit of the NWSSDTP.

It is expected that the description should include:

- The research questions being asked

This should be well developed in terms of the research questions which will be asked and the approach and techniques to be used. It should be achievable within the proposed timescale (i.e. three years funding plus one year for submission of the thesis).

- How the project will be approached, with particular reference to the methodologies and techniques which may be employed

The methodologies/techniques and planned timescale should be appropriate to the project so that the outcomes will have wider relevance than purely addressing the needs of the non-HEI partner.

- The anticipated outcomes from the project, in terms of its contribution to knowledge and understanding, new methodologies and techniques, data etc.

The project should contribute to the successful creation, development and application of new techniques or ways of working, or relate to the broader environment in a way that improves the effectiveness and efficiency of individuals and organisations. It should contribute to the ESRC's mission to provide trained social scientists that meet the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and the quality of life. It should also fulfil the aim of a collaborative studentship in providing a real opportunity for a student to gain first-hand experience of work outside the academic environment.

The benefits and outcomes of the research should not be confined solely to the collaborating partner and therefore the envisaged intellectual as well as commercial benefits should be emphasised.

- Plans for dissemination of outcomes

The completed research should be published as widely as possible, to both academic and non-academic audiences.

Intellectual Property Rights

An official agreement between the academic and non-HEI partner concerning the distribution of proceeds from commercially valuable research is considered an essential element of any CASE studentship. It is expected that an agreement including IPR will need to be completed, and a copy sent to the NWSSDTP, prior to the recruited student's commencement of studies. It is important to note that the responsibility for safeguarding the student's rights is deemed to rest with the HEI. Failure to address this issue will severely weaken an application. At the very least, consideration to the IPR should be shown in the proposal whereby it is evident that the student will be protected by the IPR agreement.

Ethics

The important question of ethical approval, in relation to the proposed research project, must be fully addressed. You should demonstrate that considerations of the following have been made:

- honesty to research staff and subjects about the purpose;
- methods and possible uses of the research (or risks involved);
- confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents;
- independence and impartiality of researchers to the subject of the research.

If you intend to refer to a professional code of ethics governing research in your area, this should be specified.

Fit with ESRC Strategy and Priorities

Please detail here how this project and the collaboration fit with ESRC Strategy and Priorities. Please see <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/esrc/who-we-are/strategy-and-priorities/> for more information about the ESRC's current strategic priorities.

3. Priority Areas

Please see the section on Priority Areas above, Page 3. We encourage applicants to identify if their proposed project fits into a Priority Area, as this may strengthen their application and will be considered positively in terms of fit with a priority area. Further details about all three Priority Areas can be found here: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/priority-areas/>

4. Project Partner

Please detail the name and address of the collaborating organisation, and provide a brief description of the main activities of their organisation. This information will be used during the allocation process to place the proposed project in the context of work of the collaborating partner. It is particularly important to have this information about smaller organisations which do not have a high profile and whose activities may not be widely known outside the sector in which they operate.

Formal collaboration agreement

Please indicate if a formal agreement already exists between your institution and the non-HEI partner organisation. It will not disadvantage your application if a formal agreement has not been signed.

Previous Collaboration between applicant and the non-HEI Partner

Please provide details of any previous experience of collaboration between the partners making this application, and between the partners and any other relevant organisations.

CASE Partner Involvement

Please explain how the collaborating partner will be involved in the management and supervision of the research project. In particular there should be formal arrangements for the confirmation of supervision and management of the project in the light of changes in key personnel for the project. The extent of this involvement should be discussed and agreed between the collaborating partners in the first instance and then with the chosen student when the nomination process has been completed. The non-HEI partner will be expected to provide an induction programme for the student similar to that provided for new employees and, during the tenure of the award, the student will also be requested to spend time on the

organisation's premises. During this period the student must be engaged in activities which comprise an integral component of the research to be presented in the thesis.

The information provided should also include: special materials and facilities which will be made available to the student (provided by the non-HEI partner free of charge), a description of the work to be undertaken at their premises, a proposed timetable showing the duration and frequency of visits, and an indication of the part of the organisation to which the studentship will be attached.

There should be real measurable benefits to the non-HEI partner from the outcomes of the project. Expectations of how these will benefit the organisation should be made clear.

Financial Contribution

Non-HEI partner organisations can contribute financially towards the cost of each project they support, but this is no longer a requirement. Please see the 'Contribution from the non-HEI partner organisation' section above for more extensive information concerning the financial implications of the awards. While financial payments are not required, the value of the in-kind contribution should be detailed here.

5. Supervisory Arrangements

Collaborative students can place higher demands on the time of supervisors than standard research studentships. Applicants should provide details of the current supervisory workload for each proposed supervisor and, where three or more research students are being supervised, explain the arrangements that are in place to ensure that an appropriate level of supervision will be available to the proposed collaborative studentship.

The expertise of the academic supervisor/department relevant to the project must be shown. It is important that the proposed project is clearly within the research strengths and expertise of the department and the proposed supervisor(s). A list of three recent publications relevant to the project is important, to demonstrate that those involved in management and supervision are currently active in the area of the proposed topic.

Supervision Details

CASE students are expected to be jointly supervised by a member(s) of staff from the university and an employee of the non-HEI partner organisation. The supervisors will be expected to agree the arrangements for the delivery of formal research training, regular formal progress meetings and briefing meetings with the student, throughout the period of research. Those involved in the allocation process will therefore be looking for evidence of a formal structure that will also be responsive to the needs of the individual student.

6. Training and Additional Funding Needs

Please detail how the student's training needs will be identified, met and monitored throughout the period of the award. Please include any specific training which had already been identified as required for the project.

It should also be noted in this section whether the project might entail fieldwork or substantial additional funding (more than £1000) to purchase specialist equipment, software, or access to datasets which is critical to the success of the project.

7. Recruitment and Selection Process

Please refer to the Student Eligibility section above when considering your recruitment strategy. Detail the procedure you intend to undertake for recruiting a suitable student, should the proposed project be successful. It is permissible to already have a student in mind at the proposal stage.

If there is already a student in mind for the project, this student should be named on the application form at this stage and a CASE Student Nomination Form – with references and academic transcripts – for the nominated candidate should be provided.

If a student is not named on this form, then the project lead must go through an advertising and recruitment process if successful. Please note that it is mandatory for the Institutional Pathway Representative to be involved in the selection process (i.e. to sit on the interview panel) and to sign off on the choice of candidate.

The NWSSDTP should be notified of the choice of student by the submission of the CASE Student Nomination Form and supporting documents by the **1st April 2027**.

Equal Opportunities Forms should be collated from **all** applicants and sent to the NWSSDTP to aid Equity, Diversity and Inclusion monitoring and reporting to the ESRC.

8. Letter of support from the non-HEI Partner Organisation

Please include a letter of support from the partner organisation which indicates their support for the collaboration and which briefly outlines their understanding of the work to be undertaken, as well as their commitments to the project.

THE CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS TO BE SUBMITTED IS 26th October 2026.

Please submit your application to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk

APPENDIX 1: List of NWSSDTP Accredited Pathways

CASE Studentship Applications must be submitted via an eligible NWSSDTP Pathway:

- Accounting and Finance
- Biosocial Research
- Business and Management
- Criminology, Social Policy and Social Work
- Development and Humanitarianism
- Economic and Social History
- Economics
- Educational Research
- Geography and Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Language Based Area Studies
- Linguistics
- Planning and Environment
- Politics
- Psychology
- Social Anthropology
- Social Data Science and Artificial Intelligence
- Social Statistics
- Social Studies of Science, Technology and Medicine
- Socio-legal Studies
- Sociology