



Pathway Representatives and Leads Handbook 2026-27

The North West Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership ([NWSSDTP](#)) is an Economic and Social Research Council ([ESRC](#)) funded postgraduate training consortium. The NWSSDTP is one of 15 DTPs in the UK and brings together the Universities of [Keele](#), [Lancashire](#), [Lancaster](#), [Liverpool](#) and [Manchester](#). The University of Liverpool leads on the management and administration of the consortium. Studentships are available across the full range of social science disciplines, and students have access to research expertise and training across the five constituent universities.

This document is for academic staff appointed as a Pathway Representative or Lead, to outline the key responsibilities of the role. The document may also be useful to other members of academic and administrative staff involved in the NWSSDTP. Pathway Representatives and Leads are encouraged to also familiarise themselves with the information available to NWSSDTP-funded students. The key sources of information are the NWSSDTP Student Handbook and the [Current Students](#) pages of the website.

The NWSSDTP is governed by the regulations of the ESRC and its Postgraduate Funding Guide, the full version of which can be found at: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/esrc-postgraduate-funding-guide/>

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Supporting Roles and Key Contacts

Institutional Administrative Contacts and Academic Leads

Each institution within the NWSSDTP has its own academic lead, nominated administrative contact and senior Strategy Board member:

University of Central Lancashire

- Academic Institutional Lead: Dr Emily Cooper
- Administrative Contact: Clare Altham
- Strategy Board Representative: Professor StJohn Crean

Keele University

- Academic Institutional Lead: Professor Kate Cushing
- Administrative Contact: Donna Bailey
- Strategy Board Member: Professor Donna Lee

Lancaster University

- Academic Institutional Lead: Professor Céu Mateus
- Administrative Contact: Alex Macpherson
- Strategy Board Member: Professor Malcolm Joyce

University of Liverpool

- Academic Institutional Lead: Katia Balabanova
- Administrative Contact: Dr Julie McColl
- Strategy Board Member: Professor Georgina Endfield

University of Manchester

- Academic Institutional Lead: Professor Admos Chimhowu
- Administrative Contact: Carole Arrowsmith
- Strategy Board Representative: Professor James Evans

NWSSDTP Office

The University of Liverpool leads the management and administration of the consortium, and the central NWSSDTP office is based at Liverpool. The NWSSDTP team are:

- NWSSDTP Director: Dr Laura Radcliffe
- NWSSDTP Deputy Director: Professor Bethan Evans
- NWSSDTP Manager: Hayley Meloy
- NWSSDTP Coordinator: Dr Julie McColl
- NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator: Amy Connolly
- NWSSDTP Administrator: Sarah Elsdon

NWSSDTP Office Email: nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk

Appointment of Pathway Representatives and Leads

Each pathway at each institution will nominate a named contact, the “Pathway Representative”. The Pathway Representative will be responsible for disseminating information within their local departments, working with students and colleagues on studentship competition applications and supporting further NWSSDTP activity as appropriate. The Pathway Representative will be appointed by the appropriate Head of Department/School for the discipline, in consultation with the outgoing Pathway Representative and the Institutional Academic Lead. It would normally be expected that only one person per pathway at each institution will undertake the role, but it is advisable to pre-arrange cover in the event of an illness or sabbatical leave.

One Pathway Representative from across the institutions will be identified as the “Pathway Lead” for each pathway. Pathway Leads will be responsible for coordinating pathway activity and for representing their pathway at Studentship Allocation Committees and any cross-institutional Pathway Fora. Pathway Leads will be selected by the Pathway Representatives themselves, in consultation with the NWSSDTP Manager or Director if necessary. It is expected that the role of Pathway Lead will normally rotate between institutions every two to three years.

Pathway Representatives and Pathway Leads will not be employed through the NWSSDTP, but will remain employees of their nominating institution. Any adjustment to pay and conditions and/or additional access to resources are subject to negotiation between the individual and the employing institution. Expenses associated with NWSSDTP activity and events should be covered by the employing institution.

Overview of NWSSDTP Studentship Competitions

The NWSSDTP allocates 55-60 postgraduate studentships each year, to prospective candidates at the five NWSSDTP Institutions. These studentships are allocated through two annual competitions: a supervisor-led CASE Competition (usually taking place in October-December) and a student-led Standard Competition (usually taking place in February-April). Pathway Representatives and Leads are integral to the recruitment and selection process for both competitions.

The **CASE Studentship Competition** considers applications from supervisors who are proposing projects to be co-supervised with a non-HEI Partner. The ESRC expects 15% of the NWSSDTP's Studentships to include a collaborative element with private, public or third sector organisations. CASE Studentship Application paperwork:

<https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/collaboration/case-studentships/>

The **Standard Studentship Competition** considers applications from postgraduate candidates who are proposing their own research projects, and who apply for either Master's + PhD funding, or PhD only funding. Standard Studentship Application paperwork:

<https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/>

Financial basis of a NWSSDTP Studentship

A 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 (£21,850 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
 - Placements

Students opting to study part-time will receive a pro rata maintenance grant of the equivalent of a full-time award.

Students will receive additional Disabled Student Allowance where appropriate.

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, but international tuition fees are usually substantially higher than this sum. All NWSSDTP institutions have committed to waiving increased tuition fees for international NWSSDTP students, so recruited international students 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/>

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.

Candidates must be planning to study in an ESRC recognised pathway (<https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/pathways/>). The supervisory fit of the prospective supervision team will be taken into consideration when the application is assessed during the competition.

For the Standard Studentship Competition, candidates should have submitted an admissions application to the University of their choice prior to submitting their funding application to the NWSSDTP. For the CASE Studentship Competition, recruited candidates will not receive formal notification of their funding award until their admissions application is successful.

Structure of Awards

Candidates may apply for funding towards both a Master's programme and a PhD programme, or a PhD programme only. The NWSSDTP does not fund standalone Master's programmes. Master's funding will normally only be approved for applicants who do not already have a social science research Master's qualification.

It is permissible for current PhD students who have already commenced their PhD to apply for funding for the latter two years (four years part-time) of their programmes, provided they will not have completed more than one year (two years part-time) of their programme by 1st October 2027.

The standard length of a PhD Only studentship is three and a half years full-time (part-time pro rata). This is expected to consist of three years researching and thesis writing, three months training and development, and three months undertaking a Research in Practice placement (see [Page 26](#) below). However, where a candidate may require more than three months training and development, a longer PhD Only studentship may be approved, of either three years and nine months (including six months training and development) or four years (including nine months training and development).

The NWSSDTP reserves the right to suggest that a PhD Only applicant is instead offered a Master's + PhD studentship, if the training and development needs are deemed to require more than nine months support. It is therefore crucial that candidates complete the Development Needs Analysis section of the Application Form as fully as possible, as this will be used to conclude the length of funding awarded.

Development Needs Analysis

As noted above, the standard length of a NWSSDTP Studentship will be three and a half years (+3.5) which is expected to consist of three years researching and thesis writing, three months training and development, and three months undertaking a Research in Practice placement (see [Page 26](#) below). As part of the assessment of the application form, Pathway Representatives (in the first instance) should review the information provided in the Development Needs Analysis section of the Application Form and conclude if the training

needs of the student can be met within three months. If the training needs are more substantive than that, this should not disadvantage the candidate's application, but the Pathway Representative should note on the application cover sheet that the candidate should be considered for a +3.75 (three years and nine months, including six months training and development) or a +4 (four years, including nine months training and development).

Programmes Eligible for Funding

A full list of programmes eligible for funding can be found on the NWSSDTP website: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/how-to-apply/pathways/>

Pathways can request the addition of new programmes to this list by the 30th June each year.

Priority Areas

The ESRC have allocated the NWSSDTP 9 steered awards per annum 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/>

Selection Process

Pathway Representatives and Leads are responsible for assessing all eligible applications submitted to either the CASE or Standard Studentship competitions.

Applications will initially be assessed by an **Institutional Pathway Panel**. This stage can be omitted in the CASE Competition for any pathways which receive a small number of applications, as long as all Pathway Representatives agree to this. The Institutional Pathway Panel should be convened by the Pathway Representative and should consist of at least three

senior academics from within the relevant subject pathway within the institution. Each application should be judged on its own merits based on the information provided in the application form and supporting documents. The panel should agree a score for each application and then rank the applications.

The Institutional Pathway Panel should then present their top applicants to an **NWSSDTP Pathway Panel**. This should be convened by the Pathway Lead and should consist of all the Pathway Representatives for that pathway. It is expected that the pathway panel will be constituted by a face-to-face meeting. In exceptional circumstances remote electronic meetings are acceptable provided that all pathway representatives are in prior agreement with this course of action. This panel will review the applications, agree which applications will go through to the final stage, and agree a ranking for those applications.

The internal scores awarded at the Institutional Pathway Panel and the academic merit of shortlisted applications should be discussed. The panel should avoid 'joint' ranks, even when two or more candidates have the same score, as these are very likely to be queried - and the Pathway Lead asked to differentiate - at the final stage.

Finally, the applications which pass the previous two stages will be presented to the **NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee** by the Pathway Lead. The Studentship Allocation Committee will then decide on studentship allocation across the NWSSDTP.

Roles and Responsibilities of Institutional Pathway Panel Members

Institutional Pathway Panels should be organised by the Pathway Representative in each institution. These panels will usually consist of a Panel Chair (the Pathway Representative) and at least two further Panel Members (senior academic colleagues from within the relevant pathway). This stage may be omitted during the CASE Competition, if all Pathway Representatives agree, when only a small number of applications are received (i.e. where there are so few applications for the pathway, it is feasible for the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel to review them all without prior filtering being necessary).

Panel Chair (usually the Pathway Representative in the institution)

The role of the Pathway Panel Chair is to preside over the Institutional Pathway Panel, ensuring that it completes the assessment according to the ESRC NWSSDTP awards assessment criteria, whilst ensuring that the universities are compliant with ESRC rules and regulations. The chair must try to ensure that the overall strategic aims of the pathway, schools and universities are considered when making the final judgement on selection. In addition to this role, Panel Chairs also function as panel members (see below).

Panel Members (academic colleagues from within the pathway)

The role of a panel member is to use their professional judgement to assess the quality of an applicant's submission according to the ESRC NWSSDTP assessment criteria. They should reach a collective decision, and award a single score for each submission received by their Institutional Pathway Panel.

Roles and Responsibilities of NWSSDTP Pathway Panel Members

NWSSDTP Pathway Panels should be organised by the Pathway Lead. These panels should consist of one representative from each institution, usually the Pathway Representatives.

Panel Chair (usually the Pathway Lead)

The role of the Pathway Lead is to act as chair, presiding over the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel and ensuring that it comes to a unanimous decision regarding the candidates that are to be put forward, and the order in which they are ranked. The Pathway Lead will also be responsible for:

- ensuring a cover sheet is completed for each candidate who is to be put forward to the final committee,
- forwarding all documents for final candidates to the NWSSDTP central office,
- presenting the chosen applications at the NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee and answering any questions the committee has about the individual candidates.

In addition to this role, the Chair will also function as a Panel Member (see below).

Panel Members (usually the Pathway Representatives from each institution)

The role of the Pathway Representative is to present the applications brought forward from their own Institutional Pathway Panel, assess these objectively in conjunction with the applications brought forward from the other institutions, and co-operate with other panel members to produce a list of ranked applications to be taken forward to the NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee.

Conflicts of Interest

Where a Pathway Representative or Lead is the primary applicant on a CASE Studentship Application within their pathway, they should excuse themselves from the selection process entirely and arrange for a colleague to cover the role. Pathway Representatives and Leads do not need to excuse themselves when they are the primary supervisor on a Standard Studentship Application. If a Pathway Representative or Lead has another potential conflict of interest (e.g. a personal or familial relationship with an applicant) they should declare this to their fellow Pathway Representatives at the outset of the allocation process, to agree how best to proceed. Advice can be sought from NWSSDTP Institutional Leads or the NWSSDTP Director if needed.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The NWSSDTP is committed to supporting greater equity in doctoral recruitment and widening participation for underrepresented groups. Following two years of successful implementation of Global Majority (GM) ring-fenced studentships, we are refining our strategy to focus more directly on the areas of greatest, persistent underrepresentation.

From the 2026 entry competition onwards, we will ring-fence:

- Two studentships for applicants who identify as Black British
- Two studentships for applicants who identify as Asian British

These changes are data-led and reflect the persistent underrepresentation of these groups within our cohort, despite progress made in other areas.

Applicants will be able to self-identify on the NWSSDTP application form if they wish to be considered for a ring-fenced award. There is no expectation that applicants provide additional justification or explanation.

In parallel, the NWSSDTP is also working towards a *minimum* 20% Global Majority candidate award rate across all studentships. We encourage eligible applicants to apply and welcome applications from across the Global Majority community. Final award decisions will take this target into account.

The NWSSDTP defines ‘Global Majority’ as a collective term for people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/or have been previously referred to as ethnic minorities. The term challenges marginalisation by acknowledging that globally, these communities constitute the majority.

We remain committed to increasing participation across the wider Global Majority community and to continuously reviewing our policies in line with equal opportunities monitoring data to ensure they are achieving meaningful and equitable outcomes.

It is expected that Pathway Representatives and Leads will actively consider matters of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion while undertaking the ranking and selection processes, as well as pay due attention – and calling out where necessary – the impact of unconscious bias within the review process. Pathway Representatives and Leads are also expected to contribute to the wider discussion of EDI matters across the NWSSDTP. UKRI’s strategy, principles and expectations in relation to EDI is outlined in their equality, diversity and inclusion strategy here: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukris-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy/>.

Supervisory Experience

The proposed primary supervisor - for either CASE or the Standard Competition - will normally be expected to have a track-record of successfully supervising PhD candidates to completion. If there are compelling reasons to propose a less experienced primary supervisor, such reasons should be explicitly set out and explained on the application form. In such

circumstances, it will also be necessary to propose an experienced secondary supervisor who will be expected to assume substantial supervisory responsibilities in addition to serving as a mentor to the proposed primary supervisor for the duration of the project. Where such arrangements are being proposed they should also be explicitly highlighted by the institution on the cover/ranking sheet that accompanies the application.

Assessment Procedure

Please note that the deadlines for both the CASE and Standard Competitions should be strictly adhered to by Pathway Representatives and Leads, and any applications that come in after the deadlines cannot be accepted. **Similarly, no changes should be made to applications after the deadline by Pathway Representatives/Leads or applicants.**

The panels will assess the application paperwork, adhering to the below criteria. Panel Members and Chairs will be asked to complete a coversheet for each application received by their pathway panel. For the Standard Competition, this will require scoring each candidate from 1-10 (10 being the highest) on both the applicant's 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research' and their research proposal. For the CASE Competition, this will only require a ranking to be agreed.

The Institutional Pathway Panel should decide which candidates will be taken forward to the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel. It is the responsibility of the Pathway Representatives to ensure that all documentation regarding the candidates going forward (coversheets, applications etc.) is circulated to other panel members prior to the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel. If an Institutional Pathway Panel doesn't take place during the CASE Competition, it is still the responsibility of the Pathway Representative to ensure that all documentation regarding the candidates going forward is circulated to other panel members prior to the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel.

On the basis of the Institutional Pathway Panel guidance, the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel should decide upon their potential allocation of ESRC awards, as well as agreeing a reserve list. It is the responsibility of the Panel Chair to take note of the meeting, ensure that the final ranked

list is collectively agreed by the panel and subsequently report the outcome to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk by the relevant deadline. A new cover sheet should be completed for the applications going forward, which records the NWSSDTP Pathway Panel scores, ranks and reflections.

In the Standard Competition, each pathway (unless otherwise notified) may submit a **maximum of four** applications to the final NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee. Pathways should strive for at least one of those four applications to be from a Global Majority candidate, but pathways may not submit additional applications on the basis of Global Majority. Pathways may only submit additional applications in relation to our ring-fenced studentships i.e. they may propose one additional application from a Black British candidate and one additional application from an Asian British candidate beyond the four core applications.

There is currently no limit on the number of applications each pathway can put forward for the CASE Competition, although the NWSSDTP reserves the right to apply these should the need arise.

Professional Services colleagues will check independently that all successful applications meet ESRC and universities' residential and academic criteria before compiling rankings and applications to forward to the overall NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee.

The members of the NWSSDTP Studentship Allocation Committee (NWSSDTP Director, NWSSDTP Deputy Director plus the five Institutional Academic Leads) will review all the forwarded applications prior to the Allocation Committee. Pathway Leads will attend the Allocation Committee to answer questions from the committee. The committee will then reach a decision regarding the allocation of funding on the basis of the application paperwork, supporting documents and the additional information provided by the Pathway Leads.

Assessment Criteria for the Standard Studentship Competition

Pathways will score each candidate a mark on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest, 1 the lowest) on each of two criteria:

- a. The candidate's **Preparedness for Postgraduate Research**.
- b. The quality of the **research proposal**.

This will result in a cumulative score out of 20 to aid ranking of candidates within pathways. Detailed criteria are given below. In deciding on borderline candidates, panels may wish to make a judgement on pathway 'fit' – i.e. is this the sort of work that belongs in this particular pathway, in terms of library/archival resources, supervisory expertise, etc.

'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research' (PPR)

This will be judged by the following core criteria:

1. Motivation for Research
2. Problem Solving, Perseverance and Initiative
3. Project and Time Management
4. Personal Development
5. Working with Others

N.B. These criteria have been adapted from the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (which was created using empirical data, collected through interviewing researchers to identify what makes an excellent researcher), alongside a consideration of the third edition of the ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines (2022).

Detailed criteria are provided below, to ensure that panels use approximately the same scoring in decision making. These criteria should be used flexibly. In doing so, please keep in mind the following:

- If applicants **have not followed a traditional academic path** but are able to demonstrate how they meet the 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research' (PPR) criteria in other ways, this should not negatively impact their score.

- If a PhD candidate has **performed well at MA level but less well at UG**, but the latter is explained by the applicant or referees as the result of life circumstances, more weight should be given to the former.
- Similarly, the significance placed on **the ranking of the particular awarding institution** should be weighed up in light of other circumstances highlighted throughout the application form but particularly under question 5, keeping in mind that socioeconomically advantaged students are more likely to attend an elite institution.

Detailed criteria:

Assessors should look for evidence of each of the five criteria, outlined in more detail below. **These criteria might be evidenced by strong grades** from Master's and/or undergraduate study and other academic achievements, **but could also be effectively evidenced by employment history, engagement in community activities or other personal lived experience**. These criteria should be considered in relation to both preparedness to successfully complete the specific project proposed, as well as grounding and motivation to effectively utilise this NWSSDTP studentship funding opportunity to flourish as future successful researchers beyond this particular project.

Assessors should be aware that opportunities and resources may be much more limited for some applicants than others and should, therefore, consider the opportunities that applicants have and have not had available to them, as well as any challenges faced. Assessment should consider what individuals have managed to achieve (both academically and in relation to other described achievements) in direct relation to their personal circumstances.

Assessors can look for evidence of meeting each of these criteria across the studentship application but are particularly likely to utilise Question 5, alongside academic transcripts and references provided, to form a more complete picture of the applicant's 'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research', ensuring academic grades form only a part of the whole picture.

Assessors should base their assessment and scoring on:

- The extent to which each of the criteria is expressed and evidenced in response to Question 5 (which could include evidence within and/or outside academic settings). Applicants have been guided to explicitly refer to each of the 5 PPR criteria under Question 5 and to explicitly link all discussions back to their preparedness for postgraduate research.
- Grades on relevant research and/or self-reflective modules. Where grades are lower than that of another applicant, these may be compensated depending on further details provided in answer to Question 5.
- Scores may be enhanced (but not reduced) by the extent to which referees express and evidence that the candidate meets the criteria. Please note that, while referees can comment on applicants mitigating circumstances, referees may not have full access to, or awareness of, such circumstances. A lack of acknowledgement by referees of particular circumstances that have been described by the applicant should not negatively impact scoring. However, if applicants miss relevant points that referees highlight, these can be considered to enhance their scores.

'Preparedness for Postgraduate Research' – to what extent does the application demonstrate:	
1. Motivation for Research	• Enthusiasm and a strong motivation for research? • Enthusiasm and a strong motivation for their specific research topic? • A desire to make a positive difference in the world, which they have explicitly linked to their own postgraduate research?
2. Problem Solving, Perseverance and Initiative	• Perseverance and a problem-solving approach in the face of challenges or setbacks? • Resourcefulness and initiative in terms of making efficient or even creative use of (potentially limited) resources? • The seeking out, identification and utilisation of support and advice available to them? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?

3. Project and Time Management	• An ability to set goals, intermediate milestones, and prioritisation of activities? • Capacity to manage their own time effectively, to complete projects or tasks, and to adapt plans if and when necessary? • A commitment to seeing plans through, recognising risks, and building contingencies? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
4. Personal Development	• Self-reflection and awareness of personal abilities, including recognising the transferable nature of skills, their own current boundaries, and where further development is needed? • Seeking and effectively utilising feedback? • Development of a strategy to address additional needs in terms of knowledge, skills, and expertise? • Commitment to continued learning and development? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research?
5. Working with Others	• Experience of working with others effectively? Perhaps including existing links to communities they intend to research? • A commitment to being mindful of their own personal actions and their influence on others, while seeking to show respect for individual differences? • Awareness of explicit links between experiences/skills developed in this area and postgraduate research? • An intention to actively engage with opportunities offered by the NWSSDTP, including giving back to the community, should their application be successful?

Scoring:

Scoring Bracket:	Indicators:
7-10	A strong application demonstrating excellence across the five core criteria above with clear links to how this supports their preparedness for Postgraduate research. This would usually be expected to include evidence of strong enthusiasm for research generally, and for their own research topic alongside an evident desire to make a positive difference in the world utilising their research. An applicant scoring in this bracket will also be expected to provide compelling evidence of perseverance, creative use of opportunities and resources available to them, and a demonstrably strong ability to set achievable goals that they are able to effectively plan, adapt where necessary, and ultimately realise. They are also likely to include good evidence of effectively and collaboratively working with others, in a way that demonstrates a desire to support others and give back to communities, alongside a sensitivity to, and genuine appreciation of, individual differences and inclusive practices. The intention to engage, and likely benefits of engaging, with the various opportunities that the NWSSDTP has to offer should also be apparent and convincing. A mark of 10 should be reserved for a particularly compelling and convincing case suggesting that this is a candidate who is especially well prepared for the challenges of postgraduate research and will almost certainly attain evident tangible benefits for themselves and others from engaging with all this funding has to offer. Marks of 7-9 will also indicate candidates who are very well prepared for the challenges of postgraduate research.

3-6	A promising application with some limited weaknesses or areas that require further detail or evidence. Applications scoring within this bracket will demonstrate either strength across some of the five core criteria, but with a more limited demonstration across one or two areas <u>or</u> will demonstrate a moderate level of alignment with all five of the above criteria. For instance, a candidate with scores falling in this range might demonstrate a strong motivation for research and their own research topic, and strong evidence of personal development, but with limited evidence of successfully collaborating with others or making effective use of opportunities to adapt in the face of challenges. Alternatively, candidates scoring in this bracket may evidence some degree of motivation for research and their own research topic, moderate evidence of resilience, some evidence of project and time management skills, a more surface level consideration of their own personal development, and some discussion of collaboration with others. In such cases further detail or specific examples might be limited, and/or there may be room for stronger links to be made in terms of how points and examples included support their preparedness for postgraduate research. Applications within this range are potentially supportable.
1-2	An application with strong limitations or evidence gaps highlighted across all or the majority of the five core criteria above. An application scoring within the bracket would require considerable further development before it could be firmly supported.

Quality of the Research Proposal

The assessors will look for evidence of an ability to articulate a research project, a coherent and well-thought-out plan for doctoral study, and a good awareness of the place of their research within the current field whilst bearing in mind the current stage of the applicant in

their research program. Subject panel members should be aware that PhD Only applicants may have more detailed and cohesive proposals than Master's + PhD applicants. Likewise, applicants who have already commenced the PhD may have a more developed proposal.

Scoring:

Scoring Bracket:	Indicators:
7-10	Coherent proposal scoring well in terms of both cogency and originality. The proposal evaluates and succeeds in the following areas: quality and feasibility of the research question, engagement with the field, methodology and critical appreciation of sources. A mark of 10 should be reserved for an exceptionally eye-catching and original proposal, but marks of 7-9 will indicate strongly supportable projects.
3-6	A promising proposal with some limited weaknesses that need to be addressed. Projects in this range are potentially supportable.
1-2	Problematic proposal – would need further work before it could be firmly supported.

Assessment Criteria for the CASE Studentship Competition

Pathways are not required to 'score' CASE Studentship Applications, and as such there is no detailed scoring criteria. However, the applications do need to be assessed and ranked.

There is often no candidate associated with a CASE Studentship Application, so it is not possible to take account of **Preparedness for Postgraduate Research**. It is possible to take account of quality of the relationship with, and contribution from, the non-HEI Project Partner. Pathways should take account of the demonstrable quality of the relationship with, and contribution from, the non-HEI Partner including (but not necessarily limited to):

- evidence of reciprocal benefits for the Department/University - student - supervisor - non-HEI partner;
- a strong track-record of previous collaboration between the Academic Lead and the non-HEI Partner;

- evidence of existing relations and/or collaboration between the Academic Lead and the non-HEI Partner;
- the nature and quality of the contribution being offered by the non-HEI Partner (to the proposed research, supervision, training);
- evidence of the non-HEI Partner's involvement in and contribution to the conception, design and planning of the proposed research.

The Letter of Support from the non-HEI Partner should contain evidence of the above but Pathways should also look for corroborating evidence across the entire proposal.

The quality of the **research proposal** in a CASE Studentship Application Form should be assessed along similar lines as discussed above for the Standard Studentship Competition.

Nomination of Students for CASE Studentships

If a CASE Studentship Application is selected for funding and the project does not already have a student attached, 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.

Pathway Leads attending the Standard Studentship Allocation Committee

Each Pathway Lead will be asked to speak about the applications put forward by their pathway. They will have ten minutes at most. The members of the Standard Studentship Allocation Committee will have read the cover sheets provided and the applications in full. As such, there is no need to reiterate the details of the research proposal itself. However, it will help the committee to know (as relevant):

- How the pathway reviewed the applications, and how they arrived at the ranking;
- Were there any clear distinctions between the rankings i.e. is there a significant gap in quality between the second and third ranked applications, or was the quality of the applications largely consistent;
- Comments on supervisory/departmental arrangements and fit;
- Timeliness / relevance of the project within the specific field;
- Fit with ESRC Strategy and Priorities: <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/esrc/who-we-are/strategy-and-priorities/>;
- Any mitigating circumstances/relevant background information for candidates whose academic track record does not appear 'excellent' on paper.

This is not an exhaustive list but provides an indication of the kind of information that will be helpful to the Standard Studentship Allocation Committee.

Pathway Leads attending the CASE Studentship Allocation Committee

Each Pathway Lead will be asked to speak about the applications put forward by their pathway. They will have ten minutes at most. The members of the CASE Studentship Allocation Committee will have read the cover sheets provided and the applications in full. As such, there is no need to reiterate the details of the research proposal itself. However, it will help the committee to know (as relevant):

- How the pathway approached the review of the applications, and how they arrived at the ranking;
- Were there any clear distinctions between the rankings i.e. is there a significant gap in quality between the second and third ranked applications, or was the quality of the applications largely consistent;
- Comments on supervisory/departmental arrangements and fit of the individual applications;
- Timeliness / relevance of the project within the specific field;
- Fit with [Priority Areas](#);
- Strength of the partnership with the non-HEI organisation
 - Does this tie in to any wider university strategies or projects?;
 - Is this an existing partnership, or the development of a new initiative?;
- Is the financial contribution appropriate, for the type of partner organisation and the project?
 - A third sector partner would not necessarily be expected to provide funding, but is the in-kind contribution sufficient?;
 - If a large private sector company isn't providing any cash contributions, is there a good reason?
- If a student has already been identified, why are they the right student for the project and how involved have they been in the development of the project?

This is not an exhaustive list but provides an indication of the kind of information that will be helpful to the CASE Studentship Allocation Committee.

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 their studentship. This will give students the practical opportunity to develop their transferrable skills and apply their research skills in different contexts. An additional three months' studentship funding is allocated from the outset of the award to enable this. This three months' additional funding will be rescinded for any candidate who does not complete an eligible placement by the end of the third year of their PhD.

This placement could take the form of an internship with a non-university partner or an academic Research Assistantship within a university. The placement must be an independent, defined project that is separate from the PhD thesis project. Candidates can propose their own placement ideas during the PhD or can apply to one of a series of placements which are designed by the NWSSDTP each year. More information about the Research in Practice Placement Scheme can be found here: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/ripps/>. Ideas for potential placements do not need to be proposed at this application stage.

Postdoctoral Fellowships

The ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship (PDF) Scheme is aimed at providing a career development opportunity for those in the immediately postdoctoral stage of their career, to provide the opportunity to consolidate their PhD through developing publications, their networks, and their research and professional skills.

The ESRC awarded funding to the NWSSDTP to support four Postdoctoral Fellowships per annum between 2024 - 2029, hosted at one of the NWSSDTP institutions. Details of the scheme can be found here: <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/pdf-scheme/>

Pathway Fora

There will be meetings of all Pathway Representatives at each institution at least twice a year - once in the Autumn, and once again in the Spring. This will be organised by Institutional Academic Leads and Nominated Administrative Contacts. Updates from the central NWSSDTP

team will be presented, as well as there being an opportunity for discussion of local institutional matters. Pathway Representatives should attend both of these fora, or arrange for a suitable colleague to attend to represent the pathway.

Pathway Events

Pathway Representatives and Leads can apply for funding from the NWSSDTP for the organisation of pathway events and training. **The NWSSDTP expects each pathway to hold at least one event a year for its students, either solo or jointly with another pathway.**

A solo pathway can apply for up to £500 towards an event. The NWSSDTP encourages cross-pathway events, so an event which incorporates two pathways (in the organisation and in attendance at the event) can apply for up to £750, and three or more can claim for £1000. The NWSSDTP also encourages the involvement of non-HEI Partners in training and events, so any event which incorporates a non-HEI Partner in the delivery can apply for an additional £250 on top of the standard maximum claim amount.

Pathway events (solo or joint) should incorporate students from across the consortium. Pathway events can be opened to students who are not funded by the NWSSDTP, as long as NWSSDTP-funded students are also in attendance. For application paperwork and full details, please see <https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/guidance-for-staff/>

Methods North West

Methods North West provides interdisciplinary and innovative methodological training for researchers across the North West. It highlights the depth and breadth of the North West's methodological expertise in the social sciences, bringing together training initiatives from all five of the NWSSDTP partner institutions:

- links@keele
- methods@lancashire
- methods@lancaster
- engage@liverpool

- methods@manchester

Methods North West runs a series of online and in person methods sessions (aimed primarily at doctoral students) throughout the year. NWSSDTP students are encouraged to engage with the training available. The majority of training opportunities available through Methods North West are open to all PGRs, not only students who are funded through the NWSSDTP.

Further information on upcoming training from Methods North West can be found here:

<https://www.methodsnorthwest.ac.uk/>

NWSSDTP CASE Studentship Competition Schedule for 2027 Entry

26th Oct
2026

- Deadline for **Candidates** to submit completed CASE Studentship Applications to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk

29th Oct
2026

- **NWSSDTP Office** collate and forward applications to Pathways

- Pathways must undertake a review and (where relevant) selection process which involves all institutional pathway representatives. The nature of this review is at the discretion of the pathway, although a similar process to the standard studentship competition is recommended

18th Nov
2026

- Deadline for **overall Pathway Leads** to forward their decisions and completed cover sheets to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk

7th Dec
2026

- NWSSDTP CASE Studentship Allocation Committee

by 11th
Dec 2026

- Communication of results to Pathways and Candidates by **NWSSDTP Office**

- **Successful Candidates** - whose projects do not already have a nominated student - to undertake recruitment, with support from the **Institutional Pathway Representatives**. Advertising should be supported by local School and Faculty offices.

- The **Institutional Pathway Representative** should review and formally sign their approval of the shortlisted candidate(s) on the CASE Student Nomination Form prior to submission. Where an international candidate is being nominated, a nomination form for a Home reserve candidate should also be reviewed and shortlisted.

1st April
2027

- Deadline for **Successful Candidates (Primary Supervisor)** to nominate shortlisted candidates by submitting the CASE Student Nomination Form to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk. Nomination forms will be reviewed alongside the standard studentship applications at the 14th April allocation committee.

21st April
2027

- Confirmation of CASE Nomination outcomes.

NWSSDTP Standard Studentship Competition Schedule for 2027 Entry

22nd Feb
2027

- Deadline for **Candidates** to submit applications to [School Administrators](#)

By 25th Feb
2027

- **School Administrators** (a) check eligibility and University admissions application status, (b) combine documents into a single PDF per Candidate, then (c) forward to the relevant [Institutional Pathway Representatives](#)

w/c 8th
March 2027

- Institutional Pathway Panel (to be arranged by **Institutional Pathway Representative**)

w/c 15th
March 2027

- Overall NWSSDTP Pathway Panel (to be arranged by **overall Pathway Lead**)

19th March
2026

- Deadline for **overall Pathway Leads** to forward final Candidates' full applications, cover sheets and rankings to nwssdtp@liverpool.ac.uk

By 23rd
March 2027

- **Institutional Pathway Representatives** (or their supporting **School Administrators**) should notify those Candidates who have not been put forward to the final Allocation Committee.

14th April
2027

- NWSSDTP Standard Studentship Allocation Committee (**overall Pathway Leads** to attend remotely via zoom)

by 21st
April 2027

- Successful, Reserve and Unsuccessful Candidates informed by email of outcome by **NWSSDTP Office**
- Pathways notified of results by **NWSSDTP Office**

26th April
2027

- Deadline for Formal Funding Offer Letters to be sent by HEI **DTP Nominated Contacts**

5th May
2027

- Deadline for **Candidates** to confirm acceptance of award. The NWSSDTP reserves the right to re-allocate awards after this date, if acceptance is not confirmed.