Research in Practice Placement Scheme Guidance

Please read this guidance document in full before submitting any queries or requests regarding placements to the NWSSDTP Office.

Introduction

All NWSSDTP students whose funding commenced after September 2024 are expected to complete a three-month (13 week) placement during their PhD. This is an integral part of the NWSSDTP Studentship. The guidance below outlines the opportunities available, the regulations governing the RiPPS scheme, and the process for applying for a placement.

NWSSDTP students whose funding commenced before August 2024 are not eligible for this scheme, but can apply for funding to undertake an internship which they have organised themselves (for more information, see Internships).

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What is 'Research in Practice'?

'Research in Practice' is the ESRC's approach to developing students' core employability skills including:

- Ability to apply research skills in different research contexts
- Ability to collaborate across sectoral and disciplinary boundaries
- Communication with impact, developing networks, entrepreneurship and leadership skills
- Ability to proactively engage in their own personal development and career direction, while increasing awareness of the breadth of career opportunities available

What counts as a 'Research in Practice' Placement?

Type of placement

Placements will have a **strong research element** and generally take the form of either:

a) non-academic placement with a non-HEI (i.e. a non-university) organisation, including private, public and charity sector organisations. (The host partner may use the phrase "internship")

or

b) an academic placement within a university: either a research assistantship or a professional services project.

The type of Research in Practice placement a student undertakes will depend on a self-assessment, as part of the annual Development Needs Analysis (DNA). In considering previous experience and career aspirations, students will identify the types of placement that have the capacity to add to their skill development. For more details on the DNA, see the DNA page on the NWSSDTP website, and the *Development Needs Analysis and the 'Research in Practice' Placement* section of this guidance.

Distinction between placement and PhD

Ideally, students should undertake any academic placements outside of their own university. Academic placements may **not** be undertaken with a student's own supervisory team, research team or home department.

Placements should be distinct, independent projects from the student's PhD research, although it may be within a complementary area. While newly acquired or developed research skills can be utilised after the placement, **it is expected that outputs (e.g. data, reports, papers) from the placement are not included in the PhD thesis.**

Duration

Normally, full-time students are expected to complete one 13-week placement **or** two shorter placements which total 13 weeks. Due to a shorter work week, part-time students will complete the equivalent duration, i.e. 26 weeks, or two shorter placements which total 26 weeks. Effectively, all students will be on placement for a total of 65 days.

What type of research activities can be considered for a 'Research in Practice' Placement?

Placements can include various activities that contribute to a student's development. The following activities are commonly included in Research in Practice Placements (list is not exhaustive):

- Literature reviews and evidence synthesis
- Qualitative or quantitative research
- Cataloguing/archiving of artifacts/collections
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Stakeholder (staff/user/visitor) engagement and consultation
- Knowledge exchange and impact activities
- Evaluation and learning projects
- Strategic research and insight generation for decision-making and policy writing
- Report writing and research communication
- Research project development and planning

When is the Research in Practice Placement?

Students should undertake their Research in Practice Placement during their PhD. Students on a 1+3.5 studentship are not eligible while enrolled on their masters course. The placement should be completed at least six months before the expected end date of the studentship. The latest start date is dependent on whether the placement is being completed on a full or part-time basis.

Students should discuss and agree with their supervisors when to undertake the placement. It may be helpful to consider whether doing a placement early in the PhD will help develop skills that will be utilised during the PhD project, for example if particular methodologies will be introduced during the placement. However, there may be reasons why taking the placement later is preferable, for example, if it is better for this to happen after fieldwork has been completed.

What options are there for flexible working?

Mode of attendance

Placements can be completed online (remotely), in person or on a hybrid basis, as per the advertised placement description or as negotiated with the host partner. Before agreeing arrangements, students should check that travel costs are sufficiently covered by RiPPS Expenses (see *Placement Expenses* section).

Part-time options

Both part-time and full-time students can choose to undertake a part-time placement. For both part-time and full-time students, we recommend a 50:50 or 60:40 split between placement and PhD studies when completing the placement part-time. The duration of part-time placements should be adjusted accordingly to total 65 days.

Contact the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator if you would like to discuss any other part-time arrangements before submitting your placement application.

What options are there for finding or arranging a 'Research in Practice' Placement?

NWSSDTP students may choose to:

a) develop their own placement opportunity, with the support of their supervisor
b) apply to one of a suite of opportunities the NWSSDTP organises and publicises
c) apply for a placement from an approved external scheme
d) apply for a placement externally advertised by another DTP or scheme

The process students should follow for each option is slightly different and is described in the individual sections below.

Students who complete two shorter placements totalling 13 weeks, should follow the process for each shorter placement separately.

a) Developing your own placement opportunity

Placement discussions

Students may co-design a placement with a host partner, with the support of their supervisor. Students can use their own contacts, ask supervisors for ideas, or contact organisations whose work they are interested in.

Students should explain to their potential placement provider the details of the Research in Practice Scheme, share the Information for Placement Providers link, and discuss the work the student could be involved in, including objectives and possible outputs.

Once placement details have been agreed, students should complete the RiPPS Self-Sourced Proposal Form and submit it, along with a Letter of Support from the host organisation, to ripps@liverpool.ac.uk by one of the following deadlines each year: 15 January, 15 March, 15 May, 15 July, 15 September, 15 November.

Self-Sourced Placement Proposal Form

The RiPPS Self-Sourced Placement Proposal Form requires students to briefly outline their own PhD research, give the details of the placement arrangements, provide a case for

support, a costing for the placement, and a statement of approval from their PhD supervisor.

In the case for support, applicants should provide as much information as possible about the work they intend to undertake during the placement, why this is the most appropriate host for such a placement, and what they hope to gain from the experience in terms of relevance to their doctoral research skills, research training, or career development.

Placements should be **distinct, independent projects from the student's PhD research**, although it may well be within a complementary area.

For students on a CASE Studentship, the CASE partner can also be the placement host but there must be a separate placement project outlined which is **distinct** from the PhD project. Placements are not designed to cover fieldwork or data collection. See the relevant section of the website for fieldwork information.

Letter of support

Please ask your proposed host partner to provide a letter of support which:

- confirms they have read the NWSSDTP Placement Provider Guidance
- includes the name of the key contact at the host partner who will support the proposed placement project
- confirms the details of the proposed placement project that will be undertaken
- clearly outlines the student's status within the organisation and details the support they will receive - this should include their induction process covering essential topics such as health and safety protocols, any risk assessments or security checks that will need to take place, and any additional resources or points of contact to support their integration and well-being during the placement.
- confirms, where relevant, that any necessary ethics approvals have been secured
- confirm that the student has been made aware of any relevant AI policies, including whether they will be expected to use or limit their use of GenAI.
- confirms their alignment to the NWSSDTP's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion commitments and details any reasonable adjustments that will be made if you are a disabled student or a student who faces barriers to inclusion for other reasons.

Placement Approval

Outcomes of applications will be announced within three weeks. Proposals should be received at least two months before the placement is planned to commence. Students should not start their placement before they receive approval from NWSSDTP, so they should plan accordingly in advance of their proposed placement start date. All applications will be reviewed by the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator.

Overseas placements

As the ESRC is a UKRI Council, it is encouraged that placements be UK based. It is permissible for students to arrange an overseas placement where there is a **strong** rationale and a lack of comparable opportunity in the UK. In addition, due to the limited funding available to support each placement (maximum £1000), an overseas placement will typically only be feasible when undertaken as an 'add on' activity before or after Overseas Fieldwork or an Overseas Institutional Visit (OIV). In such circumstances, students will need to submit separate applications for the overseas activity and the RiPPS placement, adhering to the deadlines for each activity. However, as the NWSSDTP may need to consider both applications together, a decision may take longer than usual. The activities should be distinct and not a continuation of each other.

b) Applying to one of a suite of opportunities the NWSSDTP organises and publicises

Finding opportunities

Students who wish to apply to one of the placement opportunities developed by the NWSSDTP should review the list of possibilities on the RiPPS Vacancies page. Placement opportunities are announced every three months, at the beginning of November, February, May and August. Students will have one month to complete and submit a RiPPS Expression of Interest Form (by the beginning of December, March, June and September respectively), outlining their interest in the placement.

Prior to promotion, the NWSSDTP will have risk assessed each project and established if the placement provider aligns with the NWSSDTP's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion commitments.

Expression of Interest Form

Students should read the placement description attached to the online vacancy thoroughly before completing the RiPPS Expression of Interest Form.

The RiPPS Expression of Interest form requires students to:

- confirm which project they wish to be considered for
- provide details of why they are interested in a specific project
- the skills/experience they would bring to the placement
- include a supporting statement from their supervisor

Shortlisting/interview process

The RiPPS Expression of Interest Form will be reviewed by the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator and the placement provider. Where there are multiple applications, the placement provider will most likely meet a shortlist of students online for a short interview before finalising their decision. In some circumstances they may fill the position based solely on the content in the RiPPS Expression of Interest Form.

Students will be informed of the outcome of their application within three weeks.

c) Applying for a placement from an approved external scheme

The following are currently approved external schemes:

- UKRI Policy Internships Scheme (usually opens in June)
- Open Innovation Team (usually opens in January)
- British Library PhD Placement Scheme (usually opens in January)

In such cases, students should follow the process and application deadlines outlined in the specific scheme. Any student who is successfully selected to undertake one of these placements should notify the NWSSDTP at ripps@liverpool.ac.uk as soon as possible. The

NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator may require some additional information regarding the placement details.

Whilst some of these schemes have long lead-in times, placements should still occur during the timeframe for completing a Research in Practice Placement (see *When is the Research in Practice Placement*? section)

d) Applying for a placement externally advertised by another DTP or scheme

Occasionally the NWSSDTP is informed of opportunities via other regional DTPs or schemes. These opportunities are posted on the Externally advertised placements page.

Students should follow the process and deadlines outlined in the vacancy information or placement description. Any student who is successfully selected to undertake one of these placements should notify the NWSSDTP at ripps@liverpool.ac.uk as soon as possible. The NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator may require some additional information regarding the placement details.

Development Needs Analysis and the 'Research in Practice' Placement

Each year of the studentship, students will complete a Development Needs Analysis (DNA) form in consultation with their supervisor, reflecting on their individual training and development needs. More information about the DNA is available on the Development Needs Analysis (DNA) page of the website.

The DNA includes a section where students reflect on their individual needs and priorities with regards to their Research in Practice placement. Students should discuss with their supervisors:

- the kind of placement they think will most benefit them; a placement with a non-HEI partner or an academic placement within a university
- what kind of organisation or university would be most appropriate for their purpose
- what training they feel they may need to be prepared for the placement and make the most of the opportunity

- whether they will seek to co-design their own placement with a host, apply to one of the suite of opportunities developed by the NWSSDTP, apply to one of the approved external schemes, or apply to an externally advertised opportunity.

This discussion will help students prepare for their own placement. The content of this section of the DNA will also be collated across the cohort to inform the suite of placement opportunities the NWSSDTP develops.

Payment for Research in Practice Placements

Since September 2024, all NWSSDTP studentships already include three months of funding (stipend and payment of tuition fees) intended to support the student throughout the placement period. Students will not be paid an additional salary by NWSSDTP for completing the placements. Students self-sourcing their own placement should only arrange unpaid placements.

Any student who has not completed a three-month placement at least six months before the expected end date of their studentship, will have their studentship shortened by three months.

For example, if a full-time student started a +3.5 studentship on 1 October 2024, their original funding end date will be 31 March 2028. If they do not complete a three-month placement by 30 September 2027, their funding end date will be brought forward to 31 December 2027.

Where funding is shortened, students will be given 6 months' notice before the **original end date**. In the example above, the student would be notified by email by 30 September 2027 that their new end date is 31 December 2027 instead of 31 March 2028.

Around the outset of their third year, students who have not already arranged or completed a placement will receive a reminder about the scheme.

Placement Expenses

Whilst on placement, students continue to receive their stipend. In addition, all students can apply for retrospective reimbursement of **up to** £1,000, typically for travel or occasional accommodation costs related to the placement. Students should choose the most economical options reasonably possible.

Provisional costs should be included on the placement application so that the NWSSDTP can confirm whether the expenses being sought are covered by the fund.

Costs typically covered:

- Bus and train fares (economy/standard class)
- Mileage (see note below) although public transport is encouraged where possible
- Accommodation costs, where the student is unable to commute from home

Costs typically not covered:

- Costs relating to the project, such as website or transcription fees
- Software/hardware costs
- Membership fees
- Subsistence costs, except in certain circumstances (see note below)

Students undertaking two shorter placements totalling 13 weeks may access a total of £1,000 over both placements, and not per placement.

Mileage

While the NWSSDTP encourages students to use sustainable public transport wherever possible, mileage can be reclaimed at the rate in the RTSG Guidance (currently 45p per mile). As part of their breakdown of expenses, students should provide the start and end postcodes for the journey and make it clear how many one way or return journeys have been made. The mileage will then be calculated using the AA Mileage Calculator on the day the claim is processed.

Subsistence costs

Food or 'subsistence' costs are generally not eligible for reimbursement as students will continue to receive their stipend and this should be used to cover subsistence needs as far as possible. However, the NWSSDTP appreciates that food costs when travelling will likely be higher than day-to-day life. When a student is travelling and staying away from home (within the UK or overseas) for a period less than one month, up to £20 per day can be claimed against RiPPS expenses to cover additional food costs. When a student is travelling and staying away from home for more than one month, additional funding for food will typically not be approved as it is expected that students will secure self-catered accommodation, thereby limiting increased food costs. We are happy to consider exceptional cases when a student will be staying for more than one month in an overseas country where food costs are particularly high, or where allergies/intolerances require a particular diet which proves more expensive when travelling. Costings should be indicated on the Self-Sourced Proposal Form.

Submitting your claim

Once a placement has been approved, expenses can be reimbursed in two ways:

- Monthly Reimbursement: submit a monthly expenditure form detailing placement-related expenses, along with supporting documentation to verify expenses.
- Lump-Sum Reimbursement: apply for a single reimbursement of all placement-related costs at the end of the placement, along with supporting documentation to verify expenses.

The claim form for expenses can be found on the RiPPS website. Proof of purchase is needed to support all reimbursement requests.

In certain cases, funding may be available in advance of the placement. Students wishing to be considered for this should contact ripps@liverpool.ac.uk to discuss further.

Exceeding the expenses limit

Please note that it is only in **extraordinary circumstances** that the NWSSDTP will be able to reimburse more than £1,000 in placement expenses. Extraordinary circumstances would usually be unforeseeable and unavoidable.

Students should contact the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator as soon as possible if they believe their expenses could exceed £1,000. Students may be asked to provide evidence to support their claim.

Students should carefully consider the funding limit to ensure feasibility of their placement **before** submitting a proposal or Expression of Interest. Students are encouraged to explore remote or hybrid work options if they wish to undertake their placement outside of their region, as the high cost of public transport is not an extraordinary circumstance.

Misaligned placement costings

If the provisional placement costs outlined in the Self-Sourced Proposal Form or the Expression of Interest do not seem to feasibly match the placement arrangements, the NWSSDTP may ask the student to confirm whether other grants or funding is covering the shortfall before approving the placement. The NWSSDTP wishes to avoid a situation where a student starts a placement and is subsequently unable to complete it due to a lack of funds.

‘Research in Practice’ Training

As part of the Development Needs Analysis process students will be asked to reflect on their placement plans and what training they may require to make the placement experience a success.

All NWSSDTP students are strongly encouraged to take part in training sessions related to the placement programme, which will equip students to maximise the benefits of their placement experiences.

Further details including workshop dates and how to register will be publicised each academic year.

Reporting

Students will remain registered with their institution and maintain student status throughout the period of the placement. This will mean that they will be expected to maintain contact with their supervisor while undertaking the placement, although it will be understood that progress on the PhD will have slowed or paused while working on the placement project.

Within one month of returning from the placement, students will be expected to complete an End of Placement Report (downloadable from the RiPPS website). A letter or email from the placement provider, with brief comments on the impact of the student's placement, is also required. These should be submitted to the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator at ripps@liverpool.ac.uk. The RiPPS placement will not be considered complete until this report is submitted.

Where students complete two shorter placements totalling 13 weeks, separate End of Placement reports and placement provider's reports will be required for each.

Where students undertake a part-time placement of 6 months or more, the NWSSDTP may contact the student part way through the placement for an informal check in.

Students can contact the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator if issues arise during the placement that can't be resolved directly with the placement provider.

Leave

Bank holidays

Students should observe bank holidays in line with the placement provider's organisation, without having to make up time.

Annual leave

Students are expected to avoid taking annual leave, other than the odd day, during their placement. If a week or more is planned, the end date of the placement should be extended to cover the leave. Students should liaise with the placement provider, following the

organisation's leave procedure where possible, and update the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator of the new placement end date.

Medical leave

If students need to take medical leave during their placement, they should inform their placement provider, following the organisation's leave procedure where possible. If more than a few days are needed, please also inform the NWSSDTP. Please refer to the medical leave guidance in the NWSSDTP Student Handbook for further information about medical leave for NWSSDTP students.

Further Guidance

If NWSSDTP students or their supervisors have any queries relating to the above guidance or would like advice about placements more generally, please email the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator, Amy Connolly at ripps@liverpool.ac.uk.

Students can book a 1-2-1 to talk through their placement arrangements ahead of completing the relevant application process, and this is especially recommended for self-sourced, part-time, or overseas placements. Bookings can be made directly online via Microsoft Bookings or by emailing the NWSSDTP Placement Coordinator.